

CUET · POLITICAL SCIENCE · CLASS XII · CODE 323

Contemporary Centres of Power

CUET unit: Contemporary World Politics — Alternative Centres of Power (EU, ASEAN, China, Japan, South Korea)

By UniDrill · NCERT-grounded study material

WWW.UNIDRILL.IN

The logo for UniDrill, featuring the word "UniDrill" in a sans-serif font. "Uni" is in a light blue color, and "Drill" is in a light orange color. The logo is centered on a white background.

Snapshot

- The end of bipolarity in the early 1990s opened space for alternative centres of political and economic power that could limit US dominance.
- In Europe, the European Union (EU) emerged from a step-by-step process of economic integration that began after WWII and became a supranational political-economic bloc.
- In Asia, ASEAN evolved as a contrast to the EU — informal, consensus-based, non-confrontational — celebrated as the 'ASEAN Way'.
- China's economic rise after the 1978 reforms under Deng Xiaoping (the 'open door' policy, SEZs, gradual privatisation) reshaped Asian and world politics.
- Japan and South Korea are presented as further alternative centres, while India–China relations form a strategic case study.

Detailed Notes

2.1 Core concepts

After the collapse of the Soviet bloc, the world looked uni-polar with the United States as the sole superpower. **Alternative centres of power emerged** so that US dominance could be checked. Three case studies dominate — the European Union, ASEAN and rising China — supplemented by shorter boxes on Japan and South Korea (NCERT Overview, p. 15).

The European Union is traced as the longest-running experiment in supranational integration (NCERT §European Union, pp. 16–19). European integration after 1945 was aided by the Cold War. The United States extended massive financial help under the **Marshall Plan**; it created **NATO** as a collective security architecture for the West; and to manage the Marshall aid it set up the **Organisation for European Economic Cooperation (OEEC)** in **1948**. Political cooperation took a first step with the **Council of Europe in 1949**. Economic integration deepened with the **European Economic Community (EEC)** formed by the **Treaties of Rome in 1957**, and acquired a political dimension with the establishment of the **European Parliament**. The collapse of the Soviet bloc accelerated the process: the **Maastricht Treaty of 1992** transformed the EEC into the **European Union**, laying the basis for a **common foreign and security policy**, cooperation on justice and home affairs, and a single currency. The EU has since evolved from a primarily economic to an increasingly political union, with its own flag

(twelve gold stars on blue), anthem, founding date and currency (the **euro**, introduced in **January 2002** in twelve EU members). Attempts at a Constitution for the EU, however, **failed**.

The EU's **economic clout** is formidable: a projected GDP of about **\$19.35 trillion in 2024**; the euro can challenge US dollar dominance; share of world trade much larger than that of the United States (NCERT pp. 17–18). Its **political and diplomatic influence** is considerable: **France**, an EU member, holds a permanent UN Security Council seat; several EU members serve as non-permanent UNSC members; the EU has at times influenced US policy (for example, on Iran's nuclear programme) and engages China on human rights and environmental issues through structured dialogue. The EU's **military profile** is significant: its combined armed forces are the **second largest in the world**; defence spending is second after the US; France holds around 335 nuclear warheads; and the EU is the world's second most important source of space and communications technology.

But the EU also faces **internal limits**. **Euroscepticism** is widespread — **Britain under Margaret Thatcher** stayed out of the European Market in the early years; **Denmark and Sweden** resisted the Maastricht Treaty and the euro; and **Britain voted to leave the EU in 2016 ("Brexit")** with **51.9%** of the vote (NCERT pp. 18–19; Timeline p. 18).

The Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) was established in **1967** by Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand, through the **Bangkok Declaration** (NCERT §ASEAN, pp. 19–22). Its objectives are to accelerate economic growth, social progress and cultural development; a secondary objective is regional peace and stability based on the rule of law and the principles of the UN Charter. **Brunei Darussalam, Vietnam, Lao PDR, Myanmar (Burma) and Cambodia** joined later, taking ASEAN's strength to **ten members**.

Unlike the EU, ASEAN has little appetite for supranational structures. It celebrates the '**ASEAN Way**' — a form of interaction that is **informal, non-confrontationist and cooperative**, with deep respect for **national sovereignty**. In **2003**, ASEAN agreed to establish an **ASEAN Community** with three pillars: the **ASEAN Security Community**, the **ASEAN Economic Community**, and the **ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community**. The **ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF)**, established in **1994**, coordinates security and foreign policy across a wider Asia-Pacific membership.

ASEAN has notched real diplomatic achievements — mediating the end of the Cambodian conflict, helping resolve the East Timor crisis, and articulating **Vision 2020** for an outward-looking role. The ASEAN Economic Community aims to create a common market and to improve the **ASEAN Dispute Settlement Mechanism**. India has signed **Free Trade Agreements with Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand**; the **ASEAN-India FTA came into effect in 2010**. India's '**Look East**' policy (since the **early 1990s**) and '**Act East**' policy (since **2014**) have deepened ties with ASEAN.

The rise of the Chinese economy is the most consequential case study (NCERT §Rise of the Chinese Economy, pp. 22–24). After the People's Republic of China was

founded in **1949** under **Mao Zedong**, the economy followed the Soviet model — state-owned heavy industry funded by surplus from agriculture, import substitution, and severance from the capitalist world. By the early 1970s, the crisis of the state-controlled economy mirrored that of the USSR — per capita income was very low. In **1972**, China ended its isolation by establishing relations with the **United States** (Nixon's visit). In **1973**, Premier **Zhou Enlai** proposed the '**four modernisations**' — agriculture, industry, science and technology, and military. In **1978**, **Deng Xiaoping** announced the '**open door**' policy and economic reforms.

Crucially, **China did not adopt 'shock therapy'**. It followed its own path: **privatisation of agriculture in 1982, privatisation of industry in 1998**; trade barriers were eliminated only inside **Special Economic Zones (SEZs)** designed to attract foreign capital and technology; the state continued to play a central role throughout. China became the most important destination for **FDI** in the world; it **acceded to the WTO in 2001**; large foreign-exchange reserves allowed it to invest abroad. The downsides — **unemployment of around 100 million**, poor female employment conditions, environmental degradation, corruption, and stark urban-rural and coastal-inland inequality — are equally acknowledged.

India-China relations form the strategic case study (NCERT §India-China Relations, pp. 25–26). Historically the two civilizations had little political overlap; the slogan '**Hindi-Chini bhai-bhai**' was briefly popular in the 1950s but was spoilt by China's takeover of **Tibet in 1950** and the **1962 border conflict** over **Arunachal Pradesh and the Aksai Chin region of Ladakh**. Diplomatic ties were downgraded until **1976**; **border talks resumed in 1981**; **Rajiv Gandhi's December 1988 visit** gave decisive impetus to improvement. Agreements on peace and tranquility on the border were signed; four border posts were opened for trade; **bilateral trade grew from \$338 million in 1992 to over \$84 billion in 2017**. Even India's **1998 nuclear tests**, partly justified by citing the China threat, did not stop economic interaction. The recent downside is attributed to border disputes, the **China-Pakistan Economic Corridor**, and China's support for Pakistan in the UN on terrorism.

Two shorter boxes follow. **Japan** has been an OECD member since **1964**; was the world's third-largest economy in 2017; is the only Asian member of the **G-7**; is the only nation to have suffered nuclear-bomb destruction; is the second-largest contributor to the UN regular budget (about 10%); has had a security alliance with the US since **1951**; **Article 9** of the Japanese Constitution renounces war as a sovereign right; and although military expenditure is officially 1% of GDP, Japan is the **seventh-largest military spender** globally (NCERT §Japan box, p. 27). **South Korea** is divided from North Korea along the **38th Parallel**; the Korean War of **1950–53** crystallised the division; both Koreas joined the UN on **17 September 1991**; rapid growth from the 1960s to the 1980s is called the '**Miracle on the Han River**'; South Korea has been an OECD member since **1996**; its HDI rank was 18 in HDR 2016; and it is the **11th-largest economy** and the **10th-largest military spender** globally (NCERT §South Korea box, p. 27).

2.2 Definitions to memorise

Term	Definition	Page
Marshall Plan	US-led massive financial aid plan for reviving Europe's economy after WWII	16
OEEC	Organisation for European Economic Cooperation, established 1948 to channel Marshall aid	16
NATO	Collective security structure created by the US for post-war Europe	16
EEC	European Economic Community, formed 1957 by the Treaties of Rome	16, 18
Maastricht Treaty	1992 treaty establishing the European Union; basis for common foreign/security policy and the euro	16, 18
Schengen Agreement	1985 agreement abolishing border controls among EEC members; one visa allows entry into most EU countries	17, 18
Euro	Common currency of the EU, introduced in 12 EU members in January 2002	16, 18
Brexit	2016 UK referendum (51.9%) to exit the EU	18
ASEAN	Association of South East Asian Nations; established 1967 by 5 founders via Bangkok Declaration	19–20
Bangkok Declaration	1967 declaration that established ASEAN	20
ASEAN Way	Informal, non-confrontationist, cooperative style of interaction; respect for national sovereignty	20
ASEAN Community (2003)	Three pillars: Security, Economic, Socio-Cultural	20
ARF	ASEAN Regional Forum, established 1994; coordinates security and foreign policy	21
Four Modernisations	Agriculture, industry, science and technology, military — proposed by Zhou Enlai in 1973	23
Open Door Policy	Deng Xiaoping's 1978 policy of economic reforms inviting foreign capital and technology	23
SEZs	Special Economic Zones where trade barriers were eliminated for foreign investors	23
Shock Therapy	Rapid market transition path which China deliberately did NOT follow	23
Hindi-Chini bhai-bhai	Slogan symbolising India–China friendship in the early post-independence years	25
Article 9	Provision of the Japanese Constitution renouncing war as a sovereign right	27

Term	Definition	Page
Miracle on the Han River	Term for South Korea's rapid economic development between the 1960s and 1980s	27
Lisbon Treaty (2009)	Reformed EU institutions; came into force December 2009	18
Look East / Act East	Indian foreign-policy framework towards ASEAN (1990s; 2014)	21–22
1962 Sino-Indian Border Conflict	Over Arunachal Pradesh and Aksai Chin	25
38th Parallel	Line dividing North and South Korea	27
G-7	Group of seven advanced economies; Japan is the only Asian member	27

2.3 Diagrams / processes to remember

- **European Union flag** — circle of twelve gold stars on blue; twelve symbolises perfection, completeness and unity (p. 16).
- **European Union Map** — older members vs new members (p. 17), useful for distinguishing original 1957 EEC six (France, West Germany, Italy, Belgium, Netherlands, Luxembourg) from later joiners.
- **Timeline of European Integration** — 1951 Treaty of Paris (ECSC) → 1957 Treaties of Rome (EEC, Euratom) → 1973 UK/Denmark/Ireland join → 1979 first European Parliament elections → 1981 Greece → 1985 Schengen → 1986 Spain/Portugal → 1990 German Unification → 1992 Maastricht (EU) → 1993 EEC renamed EC → 1995 Austria/Finland/Sweden → 2002 euro introduced → 2004 ten new members → 2007 Bulgaria/Romania → 2009 Lisbon Treaty → 2012 EU wins Nobel Peace Prize → 2013 Croatia joins (28th member) → 2016 Brexit referendum (p. 18).
- **Map of East Asia and the Pacific** — locate ASEAN members and the ASEAN Secretariat (p. 20).
- **ASEAN flag** — ten stalks of paddy bound together; circle for unity (p. 20).
- **'China then and now' cartoons** — symbol of socialist road vs Shanghai skyline; Great Wall + dragon (pp. 15, 23–24).
- **Process map** — Post-Cold War need for alternative centres (§Overview) → EU origins and integration (§European Union) → ASEAN, ASEAN Way, ARF and Community (§ASEAN) → China's economy (§Rise of the Chinese Economy) → India-China relations (§India-China Relations) → Japan and South Korea (boxes).

2.5 Key Articles / Treaties / Events

Reference	Source / Subject	NCERT cite
1947 — Marshall Plan announced	US aid for European recovery	p. 16

Reference	Source / Subject	NCERT cite
1948 — OEEC established	Channelled Marshall Plan aid	p. 16
1949 — Council of Europe	First step in European political cooperation	p. 16
1949 — NATO established	Collective security architecture	p. 16
1951 — Treaty of Paris (ECSC)	European Coal and Steel Community	p. 18
1957 — Treaties of Rome (EEC, Euratom)	Founded the EEC	p. 18
1967 — Bangkok Declaration	Established ASEAN with 5 founders	p. 20
1985 — Schengen Agreement	Abolished border controls in much of Europe	p. 18
1992 — Maastricht Treaty	Established the European Union	p. 18
1994 — ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF)	Coordinates security and foreign policy	p. 21
2001 — China accedes to WTO	Integration into global trade order	p. 24
2002 — Euro introduced	Single currency in 12 EU states	p. 18
2003 — ASEAN Community agreed	Three pillars: Security, Economic, Socio-Cultural	p. 20
2009 — Lisbon Treaty	Reformed EU institutions	p. 18
2010 — ASEAN-India FTA	Free trade agreement enters into force	p. 21
2016 — Brexit referendum	UK votes 51.9% to leave the EU	p. 18
Article 9, Japanese Constitution	Renunciation of war	p. 27
1962 — Sino-Indian border war	Over Arunachal Pradesh & Aksai Chin	p. 25

2.4 Common confusions / NTA trap points

- EEC vs EC vs EU: EEC (1957) was renamed European Community (EC) in **1993**; the European Union was established by the **Maastricht Treaty of 1992**. Distractors often swap these dates.
- Founding of ASEAN (**1967**, Bangkok Declaration, **5 founders**) vs founding of ARF (**1994**) vs creation of ASEAN Community (**2003**) — three different dates.
- The '**four modernisations**' were proposed by **Zhou Enlai (1973)**, not Deng Xiaoping; Deng announced the '**open door**' policy (**1978**).
- **Privatisation in China**: agriculture (**1982**), industry (**1998**) — easy to flip.
- The 1962 India–China conflict was over **Arunachal Pradesh** and the **Aksai Chin region of Ladakh**, not Tibet.

- Schengen abolishes border controls (single-visa entry) — students confuse it with the Maastricht Treaty (which set up the EU).
- The euro was introduced in **12** EU members in **January 2002** — not in all members and not in 1999 (which was the accounting introduction date).
- **EU armed forces are the SECOND largest** in the world — not the largest. Defence spending is second after the US.
- **France** (not Germany) is the EU's permanent UNSC member.
- **Brexit referendum 2016 — 51.9%** for Leave; trap items inflate to 60%+.
- **South Korea + North Korea joined the UN together on 17 September 1991** — distractors split the dates.
- **ASEAN has THREE pillars**, not four — no separate "Political Community."

Practice MCQs

PYQ Alignment

This chapter is a high-yield CUET topic — historical milestones of European integration, the founding details of ASEAN (year, founders, Bangkok Declaration, ARF, 'ASEAN Way', three pillars), the chronology of Chinese reform (Zhou Enlai's four modernisations, Deng's 1978 'open door', SEZs, WTO accession in 2001), and the India–China 1962 conflict + recent downside are recurring testing zones. Expect 2–3 chronological-order and statement-based questions, 1 match-the-following on EU treaties, and 1–2 direct factual questions on ASEAN/China per CUET cycle.

CUET 2023 — Actual PYQs from this chapter

Q.28 (CUET 2023) Which country was a founder member of ASEAN?

- A) India B) China C) Russia D) Indonesia **Tests:** Contemporary centres of power (EU, ASEAN, China) **Answer:** Not in extracted key

Q.29 (CUET 2023) Which of the following is NOT a pillar of the ASEAN Community?

- A) Security B) Economic C) Political D) Socio-Cultural **Tests:** Contemporary centres of power (EU, ASEAN, China) **Answer:** Not in extracted key

CUET 2024 — Actual PYQs from this chapter

Q.24 (CUET 2024) Which of the following countries have not accepted Euro as the common currency?

- A) Denmark and Sweden B) Spain and Portugal C) Greece and Germany D) France and Austria **Tests:** Contemporary centres of power (EU, ASEAN, China) **Answer:** Not in extracted key

Q.25 (CUET 2024) The ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) established in 1994 coordinates:

- A) Trade and Finance B) Friendship and Solidarity C) Security and Foreign Policy D) Investment and Labour **Tests:** Contemporary centres of power (EU, ASEAN, China) **Answer:** Not in extracted key

Q.26 (CUET 2024) Which nation adopted an 'Open Door' policy and economic reforms in 1978?

- A) South Korea B) China C) USA D) Japan **Tests:** Contemporary centres of power (EU, ASEAN, China) **Answer:** Not in extracted key

CUET 2025 — Actual PYQs from this chapter

Q.27 (CUET 2025) Which country's development is known as the "Miracle on the Han River"?

- A) Japan B) China C) South Korea D) Indonesia **Tests:** Contemporary centres of power (EU, ASEAN, China) **Answer:** Not in extracted key

Q.28 (CUET 2025) Which treaty was resisted by Denmark and Sweden as a Euro-skeptic response?

- A) Bangkok Declaration B) Maastricht Treaty C) Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty D) Warsaw Pact **Tests:** Contemporary centres of power (EU, ASEAN, China) **Answer:** Not in extracted key