

Chapter 2 - The EU in the non-European world: The case of ASEAN and Myanmar

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Introduction

This insight into the European Union's (EU) external action is set within the observation of the EU as a global actor (Bretherton and Vogler 2006; Zielonka 2008; Gowan and Brantner 2011; Kissack 2015). The EU has always regarded its interregional relations with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) as a perfect opportunity to boost its international visibility (Reiterer 2006; Jetschke 2009; Chaban et al 2013). Accordingly, it has made substantial efforts to keep this relationship functional and productive, despite several disagreements over a range of, primarily normative and political aspects (human rights, good governance, the rule of law), but also in respect to economic and security cooperation (Holland and Chaban 2010). The repressive military regime in Myanmar proved the hardest test for the EU's diplomatic skills in its interaction with ASEAN (Ruland 2000; Manea 2008; Marchi 2014; Dosch and Sidhu 2015).¹ This chapter explores the EU's attempts to bolster its presence in the Global South through its relations with ASEAN and Myanmar.

The chapter argues that, in the attempt to pursue that goal, the EU exposed the two opposed ambitions of trying to behave consistently with the normative commitment and human rights (HR), and of following the pull of its strategic interests in deepening the cooperation with Myanmar and ASEAN to enhance its external influence in the region. It interrogates, through theoretically-led analyses, the EU's normative power (Manners 2002), the diffusion approaches within regionalism and interregional relations (Borzel and Risse 2009, 2012), and norm socialisation within Europeanisation research (Checkel 1999) with the aim of inspecting how these approaches may help to explain the argument. It embraces foreign policy analysis (FPA) for its intuition concerning 'who gains' from this cooperation (Hill 2003).

The chapter is structured into four main parts in addition to the introduction and conclusion: the literature, the conceptual framework, the introduction of the case study, and the analysis. In weighing the EU's foreign policy, critical perspectives on

EU action on Myanmar and ASEAN are used, specifically from HR groups, civil society actors, and local media. Sources from the European Parliament (EP), the UN, the European Commission, and Myanmar institutions, i.e. the Union Election Commission (together with the Ministry of Planning and Finance, and the Myanmar President Office, as reported in Myanmar media), as well as interviews conducted in 2018 in Rakhine State, and elsewhere in Myanmar,² plus secondary sources, contribute to this investigation. The chapter deals with several questions: how has the EU managed its relations with ASEAN despite their difference with regard to dealing with Myanmar? Was the EU-Myanmar's interaction successful in supporting Myanmar? To what extent has the EU failed with regard to the Rohingya crisis? And, has the EU succeeded in enhancing its visibility in the Global South through its relationship with ASEAN and Myanmar?

The literature: the EU as global actor and its relations to Southeast Asia

How have analyses of the EU as a global actor characterised European foreign policy under the pull of becoming more visible in the external sphere? Several scholars (Bretherton and Vogler 2006), by exploring the EU's 'presence', 'opportunity' and 'capability' in the field of international politics (p. 15), have concluded that its capacity as a global actor varied from policy area to policy area (p. 222), while others (Zielonka 2008) argued that, in the global arena, 'where actors d[id] not share European norms and the EU ha[d] limited power', the norms were spread less effectively (p. 471). The challenge that the EU faced then was, primarily, 'how to export rules and norms for which there [was] limited demand among the existing and emerging global players' (p. 472). Further studies (Kissack 2015) maintain that the emerging powers in the Global South have hampered the promotion of HR within the international institutions (Gowan and Brantner 2011), and that, as reflected by the Global South's increasingly influence in global politics, the area has experienced globalisation as a diminishing of the Westphalian sovereignty, which has given them a voice and stature in the last 20 years (pp. 1394, 1402).

Researchers who have discussed ASEAN and Myanmar within EU studies have shaped their argument in several distinctive ways, with some discussing the idea that, by politicising Myanmar through the EU's normative influence, European foreign policy alienated ASEAN and its member states (Maier-Knapp 2015, 18). Others

supported the claim that ASEAN's critical perception of the EU's sanctions on Myanmar derived from the two regional actors' differing membership concepts, and argued that this ASEAN's perception has severely impaired the interregional relations (Schembera 2016, 1022). The indication that ASEAN's provocative interaction with the EU, in relation to HR, undermined 'the possibility of maintaining an interregional dialogue that [wa]s not confrontational' was the conclusion of another study (Manea 2008, 369). Analogous was the observation that the 'values and human rights debate' on Myanmar within EU-ASEAN relations [was] the greatest obstacle to any future political cooperation between the two regional groups (Petersson 2006, 563).

Analysts of Myanmar within EU studies criticised the European foreign policy on Myanmar as one guided by an excessive faith in the expected transformation, thus relinquishing its role as a credible 'normative great power' (Dosch and Sidhu 2015, 106). Others declared that the EU 'has gone against many of the treaties in order to keep its relationship with Southeast Asia' (Petersson 2006, 563), while further studies had adopted the suggestion that 'Europe and ASEAN should together find a way to consolidate both the socio-political transitions in Southeast Asia and the validity of European values' (Boisseau du Rocher 2012, 165). Yet, among these emphases on foreign policy of the EU as a global actor and aspects of EU/Southeast Asia/ASEAN/Myanmar's interactions, there remains scope for an investigation that demonstrates the diplomatic skilfulness of the EU global actor's contradictory policy in the Global South, and how the EU displayed this within its relations with the Association and Myanmar.

The debates on the EU as a global actor and FPA

How would theoretically-driven debates on the EU as a global player clarify the different types of action that distinguish the EU in this case study? The normative power perspective, diffusion approach, norm socialisation and foreign policy analysis are explored under these terms. The EU normative power as a global actor (Manners 2002) celebrates the EU's identity and ideational impact role, boosts the idea of the exemplary power, and supports the EU's difference that arises due to its historical context (war and genocide), hybrid polity (pooling resources to preserve and

strengthen peace and liberty) and political-legal constitution. This notion of Europe sparked discussion between the many influences of the EU (opinion, economic and military) (Carr 1962, 108), emphasised the *idée de force* of the Community (Duchêne 1973, 2), and highlighted the EU's association with a 'willingness to disregard Westphalian conventions' (Manners 2002, 239). Its followers maintain that this approach's force is enhanced by the Copenhagen Declaration on European Identity (1973) as well as EU legislation (TEU, art. 6, art. 11, and TEC, art. 177) in the form of respecting the principles of democracy, the rule of law, social justice and human rights. They argue that the essence of the EU 'predisposes it to act in a normative way in world politics', and conceptualise the EU as a 'changer of norms in the international system' (Manner 2002, 238-41, 252).

Concerning our case study, this representation of Europe is reductive of the reasons that drove the EU's policy towards perceiving its interests (geopolitical, economic and trade) as goals that it sought to pursue in Southeast Asia. The EU's practical action was characterised by contradictions and incoherence (Smith 2006). Its foreign policy might aim at normative commitments in assisting Myanmar in its transition towards democratic governance, but at the same time it engaged in promoting its image through various forms of cooperation. Aspects of a normative EU, concerning its policies, will appear in this investigation, however, the intuition of a EU global actor, predisposed to act in a normative way in world politics and teaching by example, fits badly with the Rohingya crisis.

The EU global player explained by the diffusion approach recognises the relevance of European integration as the EU's efforts to promote the circulation of ideas also beyond the European region. This vertical dissemination is combined with other interacting processes of diffusion originated by societies, communities and organisations. These entities tend to mimic and simulate each other, through spontaneous mechanisms that lead to the acquisition of new knowledge. This perspective represents a EU which 'perceives itself as a model for effective and legitimate governance' to be replicated elsewhere by other regions. This approach assumes that the EU's ideas (procedures and practices) are copied across the globe, including its attempts at regional integration in Asia (Borzel and Risse 2009, 16).

The EU global actor structured by the diffusion research challenges ASEAN, its member countries and Myanmar, since ASEAN nations largely reject the label of emulators of the EU, which this approach senses as a result of the diffusion

performance. Furthermore, the EU global actor so rationalised makes it difficult to justify why autocratic regimes, such as that of Myanmar and other countries in the ASEAN group, are reluctant to dismiss and forgo aspects of their Westphalian sovereignty (Jetschke and Murray 2012, 187; Acharya 2003). Moreover, if there were some enthusiasm for combining diffusion approach and European neighbourhood policy studies (Spendzharova and Vachudova 2012; Noutcheva and Duzgit 2012), the EU's transformative power in Asia was recognised as being much more limited than in the European neighbourhood (Borzell and Risse 2012, 15; Jetschke and Murray 2012). Then, this approach would be only partially helpful in illustrating the EU's attempted leverage on ASEAN and Myanmar.

The EU as a global actor in norms socialisation within the Europeanisation research is helped by constructivism in upholding the EU's vocational role as an agent of cooperation and in placing emphasis on the interactive messages and processes related to the delivery of norms (when this occurs). The European External Action Service (EEAS) is a fundamental structure leading to socialisation. Processes of interaction can change and mould interests. Social constructivist accounts explain changes as the actors' motivation to accept normative prescriptions (Checkel 1999, 83). They investigate how international norms 'provide agents with new understandings of interests'. The altered 'behaviour is, then, recognised as governed by new logics of appropriateness (Checkel 1999, 90), or might be informed by the logic of consequence, or moral justification (March and Olsen 1998; Eriksen 1999). However, intense contact makes it difficult to separate what originally belongs to a regional group, or to the other (Carta 2006).

This chapter, hence, to reveal the conflict at the very centre of the EU's foreign policy in the Global South, adopts the foreign policy analysis approach to the EU's action on ASEAN and Myanmar, since the FPA enquires into the motives and causes of the behaviour of global actors and regions. FPA pays attention to the processes whereby European foreign policy develops, attempting to connect its understanding of the political developments and practices to questions such as '*who benefits?*' (Hill 2003, 11). How can the FPA contribute to assess the EU's achievement in enhancing its external image? The argument that claims that the EU has a twin focus on its normative commitment, and, at the same time, on following its strategic interests in deepening its cooperation with ASEAN and Myanmar in order to extend its impact in the region commands an exploration of these two attitudes and policies. The analysis

grows via an emphasis on: (1) the EU's normative Myanmar policy, and (2) the EU's promotion of cooperation with ASEAN and Myanmar. The EU's normative Myanmar policy implies the action of an agent that prioritises humanitarian concerns and seeks to promote good governance, defend human and unprotected rights and uphold all issues that are intended to project the image of a normative actor. The following case study seeks to emphasise the EU's reinforcement of its scope in the Global South, and the compromising of its position as a response to its own constitutive, self-built conflict.

FPA presenting the case study

The EU, as a global actor with ambitions to extend its reach to the non-European world, regarded its relations with ASEAN and interactions with Myanmar as healthy processes. To realise its aspiration, the EU needed to come to terms with the opposing demands of its normative self-identity and reward-driven action, and may have crafted certain strategies in order to pursue its aim.

The EU's compromised position

The year 2007 coincided with the period which best captured a positive upturn in EU-ASEAN relations and also EU-Myanmar relations entering more concretely into the EU documents (European Commission 2007). The EU and its member states decided that they were ready to debate Burmese matters with their Myanmar counterparts at any possible meeting, including regional, ministerial ASEAN-EU and ASEM, the Asia-Europe Meeting (European Commission 2007, 20). During that year, HR in Myanmar was at its lowest level, culminating in the military regime's severe repression of the society's pro-democracy calls during the Saffron Revolution, which lasted for several months. The EU and ASEAN reacted differently to the events in Myanmar (European Parliament 2007). Despite both ASEAN's annoyance with the EU for not recognising the normative commitment as a principle for assessing Myanmar, and the EU's frustration at conflicting with ASEAN on this regard, the two regional actors enhanced their dialogue to an unprecedented level. The Nuremberg Declaration and the Plan of Action to implement it, together with the EU-ASEAN Summit, held in Singapore in November 2007,³ marked a heightened EU-ASEAN dialogue.

This incident was not the only example of how the EU sought to calibrate the interrelations with ASEAN notwithstanding the fact that its own distinct behaviour regarding Myanmar irritated the Association. Later, in 2009, the Myanmar court's verdict extended by 18 months Suu Kyi's house arrest, to which the EU reacted with intensified targeted sanctions against the members of the judiciary (EU Council, 2009/615/CFSP). Sanctions were opposed by ASEAN, making it unthinkable that the two groups could resume relations. The EU attempted to enhance their relationships, and, with ASEAN's regional efforts marking a step towards adopting the ASEAN Charter (2008), the EU and its member states started to establish formal diplomatic relations with their regional partner (EEAS 2009). The EU succeeded in its task of preserving their partnership.

The challenge to ASEAN of the EU's diverse policy on Myanmar resurfaced in 2011, after the November 2010 elections were accompanied by faulty party registrations and defective laws. European foreign policy updated the list of persons and entities subject to restrictive procedures and re-extended the sanctions (EU Council, 2011/239/CFSP). Interrelations were balanced; the policy of the Association of delivering the ASEAN's Human Rights Declaration (2012) embodied an official commitment that the EU believed was associated with its own influence (Dosch and Sidhu 2015, 105).

Overcoming the divergences with ASEAN regarding how to treat the HR record of Myanmar demanded a compromise. Also, ASEAN focused on maintaining good relations with the EU. In 2007, the local media greeted ASEAN's success by reporting that the EU was ASEAN's third largest trading partner, accounting for 14 per cent of its total annual trade (*The Irrawaddy*, 16 March 2007). Both regional actors benefitted from their interaction.

Myanmar and the EU's scope in the Global South

When the EU set its foreign policy favourably towards Myanmar, President Sein had recently visited Brussels, in March 2013, demonstrating that the country's diplomacy and external policy had changed. European foreign policy had, already in the previous years, taken advantage of Myanmar's restructuring (the 2012 by-elections and the semi-civilian government) inviting European companies to explore new opportunities for trade and investment in Myanmar (EU Council, 2011/504/CFSP, paragr. 7). In that same year, 2013, the EU reinstated the Generalised System of Preferences under

the Everything But Arms initiative (EBA) and withdrew the sanctions (p. 11). As Myanmar enjoyed duty free and quota free access to the EU market, on its terms also the EU market obtained the ability to expand towards Southeast Asia. The ambition of ‘Building a Lasting EU-Myanmar Partnership’ (EU Council, March 2013), and the ‘Transitional Strategy’ for Myanmar covering the period 2014-2016 (EU Council, July 2013) were a symptom of the EU having achieved the goal of underpinning its relations with Myanmar.

The substance of the EU’s further 2016 policy was clarifying to Myanmar that ‘statelessness, discrimination and human rights violations’ were challenges that, ‘if ignored, could put progress in jeopardy’ (European Commission 2016, 15). This discourse was even more vital because Myanmar’s governance of HR was regrettable, with the government diverging several times from its aim to conform to international law and democratic rule (EEAS HR Dialogue 2018). Among these divergences was the violence against the Rohingya, the burning of villages, killings, and the refusal to consider how legally to accept this group within the country as a whole. The 2016 strategy was the preliminary to the later EU action on Myanmar, framed within ASEAN, which marked an important step because, by using the regional framework, the EU believed that it was leading Myanmar to integrate its policy within the Association and, most vitally, this helped the strengthening of the EU interregional relations.

The EU’s diplomatic and political connection with ASEAN was boosted to the point that the EU-Myanmar ties and EU-ASEAN dialogue became intertwined. This evolution was visible in the ARISE programme, concluded in 2017, and in the ASEAN Regional Integration Support programme, which enhanced the process of ASEAN economic integration by removing custom and transport barriers and freeing up the flow of goods in ASEAN and Myanmar (European Commission 2018b, 15). These programmes were intended to uphold the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) to which Myanmar was a party. In enacting its policy on Myanmar, the EU continued to make reference to ASEAN; the ARISE Plus-Regional programme (April 2018), including Myanmar, was set along these lines (European Commission 2018b, 15). More diffusely the multiannual programme, up to 2020, declared Myanmar ‘eligible for regional programmes...implemented through ASEAN’ (European Commission MIP, 4-5; EEAS 2018). Integrating Myanmar into the dialogue with

ASEAN reinforced the interregional interactions, and facilitated the EU's penetration into the region.

The analysis

To explore the EU's aspired success in its efforts to enhance its external image in terms of HR defender and promoter of cooperation, the chapter draws on critical observations.

(1) Critical perceptions of the EU's normative Myanmar policy

Recently, civil society organisations have accessed greater opportunities in Myanmar by contributing to the public discussion of political issues. Their involvement has resulted in several remarkable successes (e.g. the Myitsone dam). Their action reverberated outside the country, and both environmental and HR activists have engaged in offering support (Harvey 2011). Yet, constraints still lay ahead, with challenges regarding the EU. Stress on the EU by 21 civil society organisations, from both inside and outside Myanmar, demanding 'stronger steps to stand for the Rohingya', appeared to indicate that there were more expectations from the European foreign policy as an HR advocate (Burma Campaign 2018). Yet individuals, such as Myanmar citizens, looking externally and admitting 'we need encouragement from all of you', symbolised a call for support to an agent which was generally recognised as a good governance promoter (*The Irrawaddy* 16 March 2018). Progressive forces in Myanmar had difficulty in identifying the normative image, commenting that the EU's 'focus has turned to other priorities' (PVM 2018). Similarly, the lament that in Myanmar 'we are still unprotected under the law' added a further blow to the EU's normative performance concerning the Rohingya in particular, and to the assistance provided to Myanmar's democratic transformation in general (*The Irrawaddy* 16 March 2018).

Myanmar citizens

The citizens' opinions in Myanmar over the Rohingya crisis exposed the failure of the European foreign policy. A young student in Mrauk-U, in northern Rakhine State, commented that the Rohingyas were dangerous people but, since they were kept separate from the non-Rohingyas and enclosed in villages, there was no risk of

violence erupting outside their areas (Interview (A), 2018). A young affiliate to a political party different from the NLD, the party in government, similarly maintained, when interviewed in Thandwe, in Rakhine State, that the Rohingyas were hostile, and that it would be best to let them living together in separate spaces (Interview (B), 2018). Another individual, when questioned in Matupi, Chin State, claimed that the people in Myanmar needed neither to have their land grabbed by ‘others’ nor for their women to change religion due to living with non-Myanmareses: ‘we are losing our identity and becoming something different from what we originally were’ (Interview (C), 2018). An additional view provided by a European social worker, employed by an international humanitarian organisation, opined that the people in Myanmar followed the narrative made public by the government, suggesting that ‘they very well [went] along with it’ (Interview (D), 2018).

Yet, a different landscape emerged from discoursing in Sittwe, Rakhine State’s capital, trying to address how a balance among humanitarian and societal risks might be possible. An interviewed Church minister made clear that several Muslim Rohingyas were living in the town, cooperating with the government’s institutions and liaising well with their non-Rohingya neighbours (Interview (E), 2018). A diverse perception was offered to a grey scenario. These discourses reinforced the sense of a lack of common solidarity, which was a basic ingredient for supporting the country’s anticipated transition. The point that these conversations emphasise regards the truth that the EU failed to build a new shared culture among the people of Myanmar open to accept the ‘other’ and ready to defend unprotected rights.

EU-Myanmar dialogue on HR

The Rohingya crisis in the north Rakhine State constituted a deep setback regarding the EU’s role as an agent of HR. The EU has been assisting both Myanmar and Bangladesh for many years (European Commission 2018a) and has been increasing its contribution in the form of aid, recently providing EUR40 million (May 2018), but aid was not the solution (Dosch and Sidhu 2015, 101; Marchi 2017; Wansai, 2018, 12; IPAC Report 2018, 11). It imposed sanctions on Myanmar officers over Rohingya offensives (25 June 2018), but the efficacy of these has been widely debated (Portela 2010; Yee 2017; Ajmani et al 2018). Based on a resolution, the European Parliament demanded that Myanmar’s government and parliament should find an appropriate path to legal rights and citizenship for the Rohingya and other Muslim communities

(European Parliament 2018/2756RSP, 14 June 2018). Yet, inspectors appointed by the UN concluded that the top military commanders in Myanmar should be investigated and prosecuted for the ‘gravest’ crimes against civilians under international law, including genocide (UN 27 August 2018). European support at the meetings co-chaired by the EU Special Representative for HR, held annually from 2014 onwards and which shaped the EU-Myanmar’s dialogue on HR, delivered no acceptable output concerning these communities. The EU’s normative image confronting the Rohingya crisis was blurred.

Myanmar institutions

The Myanmar institutions, nevertheless, expressed their opinions about the EU’s attentiveness to HR: the beneficiary organisations stated, in the words of the Union Election Commission’s Director General, Maung Oo, that the EU’s assistance had helped to ‘strengthen electoral and democratic processes in Myanmar and [that] much progress ha[d] been made’. In the run-up to the 2020 general election, the Ministry of Planning and Finance demanded further EU intervention ‘to strengthen the institutional, political and civic capacity in institutions critical to sustaining Myanmar’s democratic transition’ (*Myanmar Times* 11 July 2018).

Overall assessment

Critical perceptions of the EU’s normative Myanmar policy highlighted three factors: the EU’s central failure, the lessons to be learnt, and the suggestion that the EU’s role in supporting Myanmar’s transformation was still alive. (i) The EU’s position concerning the Rohingya was complicated by the multi-dimensional factors connected to the Rohingya problem: the fact that the country was under transformation, the military’s holding of the highest decision-making power, Burmese intolerance of non-Burmeses, the fear of terrorism infiltration, the incapacity to redefine the concept of sovereignty, and, yet, understanding the international order as one ruled by Westphalian concepts. The EU failed in its attempt to convince Myanmar that international law and good governance were to be observed in resolving the crisis. (ii) The lessons to be learnt for the EU were hinted at by the HR advocates and groups’ claims. Re-adjusting the on-going EU-Myanmar HR dialogue by extending it to local communities and engaging with civil society in building up a sense of common solidarity and culture of ‘otherness’ provided the starting points. These tasks were to

contribute to a more robust Myanmar's transition towards democratisation and to a more targeted EU action to underpin the successful advancement of Myanmar's renovation. (iii) Yet, the beneficiaries' apparent credit of the EU support for Myanmar in its transition towards democratic governance was an encouraging perception. The extent to which the recipients and local institutions requested the EU to continue to sustain the democratisation process in Myanmar was a documented sign of the EU's contribution to Yangon and to the region.

(2) Critical perceptions of the EU's cooperation with ASEAN and Myanmar

Economic and trade dialogue and political activists groups

Building upon its heightened relations with ASEAN⁴ and 'partial' EU-ASEAN convergence over Myanmar⁵ and enhanced by its desire to bolster its sway in the region, European foreign policy attempted to negotiate a EU-ASEAN Free Trade Agreement (FTA) in 2007, the talks on which began a few months following the launch of the 2006 EU Global Strategy. The EU-ASEAN FTA failed to materialise (March 2009). The EP was the only institution demanding the exclusion of Myanmar from the interregional FTA, although opinions close to the Commission reported that the latter had disclosed that 'we will not try to fix all the problems in the negotiations because that could lead to a failure of the process' (Robles 2008, 558). If the EU opted for the interregional policy at a time when it was renewing its sanctions on Yangon (2006) (Robles 2008, 553) and HR degenerated throughout the Saffron Revolution (2007), this meant that the EU was divided between the choice to respect its normative identity and its strategic aims in the region. Increasing its presence in the economic area, where the EU felt that China, Japan and the US already had strong influence, was an understandable goal (Yeo 2013, 3), to which the development of trade and European entrepreneurship in the region attempted to respond.

Various criticism emerged from activist and civil society groups in Southeast Asia on the EU's FTA initiative: a non-EU Western diplomat described the EU as 'tone deaf' accusing it of being unable to perceive the differences between the parties (*Myanmar Times* 1 November 2018), and a few voices observed that 'binding economic agreements at a time of a global economic crisis' was inopportune (FTA campaign, 2009). Other groups demanded the reclamation of peoples' right to information and participation against the tide of secrecy hounding the negotiation. A further denunciation declared the FTA's approach a strategy to benefit Singapore and

Malaysia, two ASEAN countries that were already gaining from the EU trade and investment (Bilaterals.org, 2012). These comments persisted, with several sources suggesting that, ‘while ASEAN states [were] hoping to gain additional access in the EU, [by contrast] the agreement [was] expected to have a much bigger impact in strengthening business opportunities for European Transnational Corporations in the region’ (Bilaterals.org, 2012).

European entrepreneurship was, in fact, encouraged to explore opportunities in Southeast Asia, particularly in Myanmar, following a policy that was promoted by the Commission and its Vice-President Tajani. The EU-Myanmar Task Force was presented as a concrete answer and assistance to the process of democratic and economic transition in Myanmar. The mechanisms available to the EU in terms of economic development and investment were proposed to Yangon with a discourse that attracted the attention of EU businesses and stakeholders who met in Myanmar and discussed cooperation (European Commission 2013).

Commentaries on the EU-Myanmar’s connection stressed the extent to which cooperation facilitated European entrepreneurship: for example, the EU funded 90 per cent of the Euro-Cham Myanmar project in December 2014 that served as the voice of European business in Myanmar (Eurocham Myanmar, 2018); another example related to the sponsorship of the EU Myanmar Centre which assisted European business and supported individual small- and medium-sized enterprises in their efforts to initiate new activity (EU Myanmar Centre, 2018); and a further instance indicated that economic development in Myanmar attracted European attention to the extent that, in December 2017, 70 European companies were active in the country and their presence was predicted to grow (*Myanmar Times* 15 December 2017). If these examples are an indication of the EU following its ‘calculated’ purposes in the region, the UN assessment of Yangon’s governance of the Rohingya as a ‘textbook example of ethnic cleansing’ (UN 2017) shed light on how the EU appeared to resolve its intrinsic conflict concerning the normative (sanctions) and the EU bolstering policies.

Myanmar institutions

In 2018, the President Office, in Myanmar, released statements that could be linked to the effects produced by EU cooperation. The data publicised showed that, according to the Asian Development Outlook 2018, Myanmar’s GDP rose from 5.9 per cent in FY 2015-2016 to 6.8 per cent in FY 2016-2017. Vice President U Myint Swe

explained that this growth had been induced by increased investment, a rising economic sector and higher exports combined with improved consumer spending. Swe clarified that Myanmar accounted for US\$ 6.6 billion investments from EU states, as of April 2018, which made up 8.68 per cent of all foreign direct investments (President Office 2018). These attainments, joint with the forecasted rise in GDP of 7 per cent in the coming year, were a prospect that the EU had no reason to disregard as an actor that contributed towards enhancing that achievement through its policy.

Overall assessment

This assessment of the EU's cooperation with ASEAN and Myanmar stresses three main findings: the EU's gains, the EU's 'own diplomatic practice', and the EU's role *vis-à-vis* Myanmar. (i) The 'EU prioritising itself through its policy' was a belief raised not only by civil society and activist groups commenting on the EU-ASEAN FTA, but also matched the Southeast Asian perceptions that the EU-Myanmar interactions encouraged European entrepreneurship in the country. (ii) The EU's 'conflicting diplomatic practice' emerged openly to observers: with the EU promoting the interregional FTA that included cooperating with Myanmar, while it renewed its sanctions; and with the EU engaging in economic, development policies with Yangon at a time when the latter was performing as an ethnic cleansing actor. The EU exhibited its own attitude towards dealing with the divergent appeals to humanitarian principles and to the rewards from cooperation. (iii) The EU's role towards Myanmar was vindicated by the beneficiaries who announced the country's advances in terms of development, trade and economics.

On the whole, concerning the EU's management of its relations with ASEAN, despite their difference regarding dealing with Myanmar, our investigation showed the EU's ability to control both actions, sanctioning Yangon and deepening cooperation with ASEAN, as observed in 2007 and in the following years. The differences in both partners' approaches were reciprocally accommodated and dealt with within their overall cooperation structure. The post-2015 election period even exposed how both actors assisted Yangon through backing several support programmes and negotiating a convergent attitude towards developing Myanmar. The EU displayed its capability to maintain its interregional relations with ASEAN at a sensible, balanced level. Concerning whether the EU-Myanmar's interaction was

successful in supporting Myanmar, the investigation highlighted Myanmar's attestations of the EU's attainments in assisting its transition, and also explained the EU's unsuccessful efforts to influence Myanmar regarding compliance with the international laws with regard to the Rohingya. The way in which the EU enhanced its visibility in the region is summarised in the conclusion.

Conclusion

This chapter explored the EU's attempts to reinforce its reach to the Global South through its interactions with ASEAN and Myanmar. The FPA's focus on the EU as a global actor offered three main results. First, the EU suffered a major failure. With regard to the unsettled question of the Rohingya, the EU uncovered its inability to convince Myanmar to engage in a lawful, humanitarian solution to the crisis. It displayed no influence, or inspiration. The EU exposed a weakened normative image to the region. Second, the EU managed to increase its visibility via several indicators. Maintaining interregional relations with ASEAN at a balanced level was essential, together with taking advantage of Myanmar's restructuring, and underpinning diplomatic and political relations with Yangon. Also, intertwining the EU-Myanmar and EU-ASEAN dialogue was a meaningful strategy. Likewise, Myanmar's request to persist in backing the democratisation achievements and the certified economic accomplishments provided further evidence of EU prominence. The EU displayed gradual progress in terms of penetrating the region and steadily boosting its image as a development actor in the Global South. Finally, by outlining the EU's efforts to live up its chances of influencing global politics, this chapter laid bare the EU's overall practical skill in simultaneously compromising between two contradictory goals, of attempting to respect its pledge to democratic values and HR, and of following the pull of its strategic interests in increasing cooperation in order to enhance its presence in the region. The chapter showed how this constitutive conflict of the EU's global policy emerged in the case of ASEAN and Myanmar.

Notes

¹ The crises that also characterised the EU-ASEAN interaction lie beyond the scope of this chapter.

² All of the interviews have been conducted under the agreement that the anonymity of the interviewees will be maintained in accordance with the Chatham House Rules.

³ Such a summit documented the EU-ASEAN good relations: it commemorated the ‘establishment of official relations between the EU’s Permanent Representatives Committee (COREPER) and ASEAN in Brussels in February 1977, the Cooperation Agreement between Member Countries of ASEAN and European Community signed on 7 March 1980, the ASEAN-EU Joint Declaration on Cooperation to Combat International Terrorism endorsed on 27 January 2003 and the Nuremberg Declaration on an EU-ASEAN Enhanced Partnership endorsed on 15 March 2007’. Joint Declaration of the ASEAN-EU Commemorative Summit, Singapore 22 November 2007.

⁴ Relations were supported by the 2007 agreements on the Nuremberg Declaration and the Plan of Action.

⁵ ‘Partial’ convergence was suggested by the EU agreeing to examine Burmese questions with their Yangon’s equivalents at ASEAN-EU, ASEM and other ministerial meetings (European Commission 2007, p. 20).

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