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The EU Promotion of Security Cooperation in the Non-European World: The case of ASEAN and Myanmar

Dr Ludovica MARCHI (PhD)

This paper explores the EU's attempts at the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) to encourage Myanmar directly, or indirectly via the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), to connect with security cooperation. The EU was an advocate of security cooperation and behaved as a sponsor by encouraging others to adhere to it. The paper argues that both ASEAN's assumption of responsibility and Myanmar's taking on of multilateral security options were linked to the EU's policy at ARF. In order to demonstrate this, the paper, first, provides an historical insight into the EEC/EU's relations with ASEAN, in 1980, leading to the EU's participation in the ARF in 1993. Furthermore, it focuses on the EU's messages at the Forum when the EU and ASEAN co-chaired the ARF meetings. Meetings co-chaired by both were held between 2004 and 2008. The investigation relates to the ARF as to a framework where interactions develop, and uses Cyclone Nargis that ravaged Myanmar in 2008 to assess Myanmar and ASEAN's conduct. In evaluating Yangon and the Association's behaviour, the paper is helped by explanations provided by social mechanisms, an appropriateness logic and observations derived from interviews conducted in Southeast Asia and Brussels. The choice of Cyclone Nargis is justified by the dialogue and training activities in the ARF being concerned with crisis management and disaster relief. The investigation concludes highlighting the EU's role with regard to the Forum and the promotion of security cooperation in the non-European world. Archival primary sources inform this paper which covers the interaction between the EU and Myanmar before the outbreak of the Rohingya crisis, which gave EU policies towards Myanmar a new dimension.¹

Introduction

This paper deals with the EU's ambition to inspire others, particularly Myanmar and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN),² to embrace multilateral security cooperation. That ambition originated in the EU's conviction that interaction, or

¹ I am grateful to Jan van der Harst for having organized the conference on 'Europe and East Asia since 1945: an historical survey', University of Groningen, 14-15 June 2018, which created interesting debates which also enriched my paper.

² ASEAN was established on 8 August 1967, in Bangkok, by the five original member countries: Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand. Later, other nations joined: Brunei Darussalam (8 January 1984), Vietnam (28 July 1995), Laos and Myanmar (23 July 1997) and lastly Cambodia (30 April 1999).

cooperation, produces a combined effect that is greater than the sum of the separate effects that single entities might offer. This belief characterised the essence of the EU and was taken by the EU to the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), which was established in 1993, and which was the leading platform in Asia for dialogue and cooperation on security. Beside its appeal as a context focused on dialogue and security cooperation, ARF was of great interest to the EU, bringing together nations across the Asia-Pacific region: the ten members of ASEAN and Australia, China, India, Japan, New Zealand, Russia, South Korea and the United States, plus the EU. It was within the ARF framework that the EU, for the first time, co-chaired a meeting with Myanmar in early 2014, which it hosted in Brussels.³ The meeting concerned the Defence Officials' Dialogue and Inter-sessional Support Group on Confidence Building Measures and Preventive Diplomacy. It was planned to discuss various aspects related to security cooperation in Asia including 'humanitarian assistance and disaster relief'.⁴ Since diffidence and restraint from joining action with other organisations or states particularly in the security field proved to be the norm in Yangon,⁵ that development concerning the EU and Myanmar's common security endeavour calls for an understanding of when a EU's linkage to Myanmar's security might have originated.

This exploration will be conducted via the connections of the EU with ASEAN. Since ARF's inception, it was agreed that ASEAN would be the primary driving force and would chair the annual meeting. Hence, the EU's quest to promote Myanmar's security cooperation is explored via examining the meetings that the EU co-chaired with ASEAN. The ARF Inter-sessional Group on Confidence Building Measures and Preventive Diplomacy for both 2004/05 and 2006/07, and the ARF Workshop on Confidence Building Measures and Preventive Diplomacy in Asia and Europe, in 2008, were co-chaired by the EU. Combined, these meetings portray the perception of the EU's support for multilateral solutions to security problems. Also, they allow the EU's ARF policy to be related to the position of Yangon and ASEAN concerning Cyclone Nargis' violence

³ Myanmar has, however, been meeting EU representatives on security matters also prior to this meeting, within the ARF and in other fora.

⁴ EIAS [European Institute for Asian Studies], *EU Quietly Hosts ASEAN Regional Forum Meetings*, EIAS Policy Brief, Brussels, 2014.

⁵ Formerly known as Rangoon, Yangon is the biggest city, whereas Naypyitaw is the country's capital.

against Myanmar in 2008. Since the ARF's dialogue and many of the training actions regarded crisis management and disaster relief, Cyclone Nargis is a pertinent case to assess Yangon and the Association's behaviour. The meetings are inspected through the co-chair's summary reports or joint declarations with the Association.

The paper focuses on the ARF as a setting where interactions of several interests occur. Interests may include the promotion of one's own identity as well as the publicisation of multilateral security options, or the encouragement to undertake security responsibilities. They may involve communicating the value of integration, or supporting the belief that no single country can address, by itself, threats that transcend borders, or solve the root causes of crises. All of these ambitions and aspirations the EU attempted to forward at the ARF, in its endeavour to motivate Yangon's interest in security cooperation. Ambitions and aspirations, ultimately, represented the EU's desire and goal of expanding its influence outside its own region.

Tracing the EU's efforts, at the ARF, directly or indirectly to induce Myanmar's junta to cooperate in the area of security, this paper explores how the EU relates to the Forum in an historical context, thus considering the European Economic Community's (EEC) relations with ASEAN before the founding of the ARF. Next, it examines the EU's messages and policy at the Forum, and, later, enquires whether ASEAN and Myanmar were, possibly, interested in the EU's ARF discourses, and investigates the response that the destructive Nargis has generated in ASEAN and Myanmar. Supported by social mechanisms⁶ and observations obtained from the interviewees, the paper analyses ASEAN's conduct in the event of Nargis, that eventually led to the EU's principles being expressed at the Forum. Helped by the interviewees' comments and the appropriateness logic,⁷ the paper explains Myanmar's behaviour in the aftermath of the cyclone's crisis, which is connected with the EU's ARF policy. The EU's role at the ARF as well as with regard to ASEAN and Myanmar and the promotion of security cooperation outside its own region, in the non-European world, concludes the paper. This investigation is mainly based on archival primary sources and interviews with officials from the European

⁶ J.T. CHECKEL, *Social Construction and Integration*, in *Journal of European Public Policy*, 6(1999), 4, pp. 545-60.

⁷ J.G. MARCH, J.P. OLSEN, *The Institutional Dynamics of International Political Orders*, Arena Working Paper No. 5, Oslo, 1998.

External Action Service and the European Commission, both in Brussels, and also with security policy analysts in Singapore, a Myanmar's historian, an officer from the ASEAN Secretariat, ASEAN leaders close to the ARF organization and ASEAN leaders in general, all in Southeast Asia. The paper focuses on interactions between the EU and Myanmar preceding the outburst of the Rohingya crisis, which added a new dimension to EU policies towards Myanmar.

1. The EU and the Forum:

The historical context

As an historical context to the EU and the ASEAN Regional Forum, we cannot undervalue that, when the EU engaged in the ARF in 1993, its relationship with ASEAN was already strong. In 1972, informal ties with ASEAN were firstly established by the Council of the European Economic Community. In 1977, their relations were formalised at the 10th ASEAN Foreign Ministers Meeting, and institutionalised with the signing of the ASEAN-EEC Cooperation Agreement in March 1980. The agreement was decided as a follow-up to the friendly relations between the member states of the Community and the member countries of ASEAN, and was rooted in their commitment to strengthen economic growth.

The agreement affirmed the parties' purpose to contribute to a new phase of international economic cooperation. By this, they meant to give substance to the determination to open their markets, and not only to deepen but also to differentiate their commercial and economic interactions in order to meet each other's needs in terms of comparative gain and common advantage. Accordingly, the agreement took into account the differing degrees of development of the Association's member countries, and, in spite of their diversities, it specified that the partners were equal. The belief in a new phase of international economic cooperation was strengthened by the desire to promote new trade patterns, procedures linking the commercial operators of the two regions, and innovative practices that would boost exchanges and support measures for overcoming the barriers. Facilitating the entry to the markets of both regions appeared to promise positive effects. In terms of imports and exports, the ASEAN countries were the fourth major trading partners of the EEC's member states. Between 1980 and 2000, the number of interactions

grew by 33 per cent each year and expanded from EUR 14 billion, in 1980, to EUR 105 billion by 2000.⁸

The ASEAN-EEC agreement aimed, above all, to provide an element of balance in international relations, thus underlining its political dimension. Such a breadth was encouraged by the EEC's recognition of the rise of ASEAN as a cohesive group which contributed to the stability and peace in Southeast Asia.⁹ This acknowledgment crucially advanced the political aspect of their interactions. Balance in international affairs meant that security needed to be considered. An emphasis on security materialised in 1993 as soon as ASEAN proposed a multilateral setting in the Asia-Pacific region, where the participants would collectively build up a dialogue on regional and sub-regional security. The ASEAN Regional Forum¹⁰ was a purposeful working relationship that the EEC/EU embraced with enthusiasm, particularly because it was the only measure in Asia providing an arena for wide-ranging exchanges on security issues. As a dialogue partner, the EEC/EU participated since the ARF's first meeting in 1994, abiding by the instruction that discussions were consensus-oriented and that conflictual debate was to be avoided. The EU's priority was deemed to support the efforts by the Asian countries to enhance the security in the region.¹¹

The EU wondered why, while 'global military expenditure' plummeted by 20 per cent in 1993, by contrast such disbursement flourished in East Asia alone. Territorial disagreements combined with rapid economic growth and ambitious armament programmes, suspicions of the other and the fragility of multilateral organisations regarding political consultation were features that easily led to conflicts. These imbalances encroached on the objectives of the Common Foreign and Security Policy

⁸ COOPERATION AGREEMENT between the European Economic Community and Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand – member countries of the Association of South-East Asian Nations, Official Journal of the European Communities, No L 144/2, 10.6.80. European Union External Action, Treaties Office;
<http://ec.europa.eu/world/agreements/SummartOfTreatyAction.do?step=0&treatyId=373> [last accessed 14.09.2018].

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ The ARF establishment was agreed in Singapore in July 1993, and its inauguration a year later in Bangkok.

¹¹ The communication from THE COMMISSION of the European Communities TO THE COUNCIL, Towards a New Asia Strategy (COM(94) 314 final, Brussels. 13.07.1994), pp. 4, 9;
<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=celex%3A51994DC0314> [last accessed 14.09.2018].

(CFSP) of the EU.¹² The EU's action centred on deterrence and arms control as vital components of the CFSP.

In accordance with the Common Foreign and Security Policy, the EU felt naturally committed to providing support for conflict prevention, crisis management and disaster relief, with Myanmar and the Indonesian and the Philippine archipelagos being at the top of the list.¹³ Analogously, the EU believed in the importance of the rapid evolution of the ARF¹⁴ to the extent that developing abilities connected with confidence building, preventive diplomacy and conflict resolution appeared likely to bring about benefits and create a greater capacity for dealing with demanding situations. It hoped that co-chairing the Intersessional Group meetings with ASEAN could expedite the ARF's progress. Through attempting to add substance to this informal multilateral dialogue, the EU gained the ASEAN's attention, as expressed through a common declaration in which the two regional groups advanced their joint pledge to promote 'stability in the Asia Pacific region, with ASEAN as a driving force'.¹⁵ The EU may have sought a dual commitment to conflict prevention and crisis management, as a kind of guarantee that ASEAN, too, felt that responsibility. Moreover, by stressing the fact that ASEAN was the driving force, it may have sought to strengthen ASEAN's duty in this regard. The EU considered these areas, conflict prevention and crisis management,¹⁶ as obligations that it could share with ASEAN for combined action, believing it useful to explore a common discourse with the ASEAN countries on these matters.

In fact, the EU insisted on pointing out its engagement to deepening this dialogue. It declared that 'confidence building' and 'crisis management' were expected to enrich the EU's security discourse with ASEAN in the form of knowledge transfer and the

¹² Ibid., p.11.

¹³ 'Europe and Asia: A Strategic Framework for an Enhanced Partnership', Communication from the Commission, COM (2001) 469. Brussels: Commission of the European Communities, 4 September 2001, p. 21; https://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/sites/devco/files/communication-europe-asia-strategic-framework-com2001469-20010904_en.pdf [last accessed 14.09.2018].

¹⁴ European Commission (2004) 'A New Partnership with South East Asia', Communication from the Commission, COM (2003) 399. Brussels: Commission of the European Communities, 2004, p. 13; http://trade.ec.europa.eu/doclib/docs/2004/july/tradoc_116277.pdf [last accessed 14.09.2018].

¹⁵ COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION, C/07/54, Nuremberg, 15 March 2007 7588/07 (Presse 54) Nuremberg Declaration on an EU-ASEAN Enhanced Partnership, p. 3; europa.eu/rapid/press-release_PRES-07-54_en.pdf [last accessed 14.09.2018].

¹⁶ The communication from THE COMMISSION...(13.07.1994), op. cit., p. 11.

exchange of best practices.¹⁷ In mentioning confidence building, the EU was referring to procedures focused on the development of skills and attitudes in groups and individuals with regard to the formation, management and maintenance of processes which were locally meaningful. By citing crisis management in its civilian aspects, the EU was relating to the entire range of non-military operations that were required in crisis situations, which included disaster relief and civil protection.¹⁸ Finally, by disaster relief, the EU indicated those measures arranged to ensure a coordinated response in order to increase the local resilience of the people affected by natural or man-made disasters.¹⁹ Through stating these plans, it anticipated that the EU would become involved with the other ARF participants, particularly ASEAN and Myanmar, to promote self-reliance and confidence in common operations.

In contributing to the ARF, the Union sought to develop ways to make its own particular input felt. It estimated that ‘the European experience gained from establishing and operating the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) may be of a certain relevance’ in this regard.²⁰ This proposition conveyed the view that multilateralism, sharing security problems and endorsing cooperation, and also supporting progress in the full respect of freedom, equality and justice were on the EU’s agenda. This implied that the EU intended to spread around, and share with the ASEAN member countries, its own expanded concept of security, which included political, human, social and economic dimensions. The EU was inspired by the purposefulness of the ARF also concerning its specific interest in transmitting all of these principles and values to that distant region, and appeared to be attempting to enhance its aspiration to promote security cooperation outside the European world.

Hence, both the EU and ASEAN built a dynamic partnership in the non-traditional security field. In 1996, when the criteria for participation were adopted, it was decided

¹⁷ *2007 Plan of Action to Implement the Nuremberg Declaration on an EU-ASEAN Enhanced Partnership Adopted by Head of State / Government*, ASEAN/EU Commemorative Summit, Singapore, 27 November, p. 2.

¹⁸ J. HOWORTH, *Security and Defence Policy in the European Union*, Palgrave, Basingstoke, 2014, 2nd ed., p. 71.

¹⁹ *Disaster relief measures*, Centre for Strategic and International Studies, Washington DC; <http://csis.org/programs/international-security-program/asia-division/cross-strait-security-initiative-/confidence-b> [last accessed 16.07.2018].

²⁰ The communication from THE COMMISSION...(13.07.1994), op. cit., p. 11.

that all ASEAN countries were automatically members of the ARF. The norms established that all new entrants should ‘agree to abide by and respect fully the decisions and statements already made by the ARF’.²¹ Whereas new participants had to demonstrate to have an impact on peace and security – in terms of peace among the many ethnic groups, societal freedom and respect for peoples’ rights, Myanmar led by the military leadership could not guarantee such a responsibility. Therefore, after it became ASEAN member in 1997, Myanmar’s inclusion in the ARF could promise no obligation regarding its contribution to peace and security.

Several groups and sub-groups, where the EU was a dialogue partner, were organised coherently with ARF’s working method both for discussion and training reasons. The convening of the groups was at the inter-governmental level. The meetings were, among others, the Inter-Sessional Support Group on Confidence Building and Preventive Diplomacy which reflected the three stages of development of the ARF’s activities: confidence-building, preventive diplomacy and approach elaboration to conflicts.²² The Inter-sessional Meetings on Cooperative Activities also included disaster relief. The meetings shaped a dialogue on security perceptions and provided defence policy papers.

With the Amsterdam Treaty in 1997 and the Lisbon Treaty in 2007 becoming effective in 2009, the post of the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice-President of the European Commission (HR/VP) was created. The HR/VP was in charge of the EU’s external branch, the European External Action Service (EEAS) and represented the EU and its member states at the Forum. The EEAS and EU member states have taken part in several ARF work strands and cooperated with ASEAN in drawing and adopting ARF statements. The EU contributed to the Forum where Myanmar joined as a full actor in its capacity. The EU’s determination to share consultations on regional, political and security matters, in the ARF, was also supported by the goal of promoting other actors, and, specifically, Myanmar’s engagement in security cooperation.²³

²¹ ASEAN Regional Forum; <http://aseanregionalforum.asean.org/about.html> [last accessed 16.07.2018]

²² *Chairman Statement of the 2nd Meeting of the ASEAN Regional Forum*, Brunei Darussalam, 1 August 1995; <http://aseanregionalforum.asean.org/library/arf-chairmans-statements-and-reports/133.html> [last accessed 16.07.2018].

²³ L. Marchi, Interview with official (A) of the EEAS, of the Crisis Response and Operational Coordination, Brussels, June 2014.

2. The EU's ARF policy

The EU's policy on Myanmar developed through the Common Foreign and Security Policy sanctioning the military junta since 1991 and through the EU-ASEAN dialogue.²⁴ ASEAN was a moderator of any possible EU overtone admonishing Myanmar and demanding transformations. EU-ASEAN's relations suffered when Myanmar joined ASEAN in 1997, and when it was accepted to ARF. ASEAN's accomplishment of the vision of the ASEAN founders and project of successful regionalism had called for these inclusions.²⁵ To assess the EU's ARF policy that could be related to convincing Myanmar's military junta to connect with security cooperation, the meeting in Potsdam, in 2005, is investigated, since it offers a direct reference to Myanmar's government in the conclusive EU-ASEAN's declaration.

In Potsdam, at the ARF Inter-Sessional Support Group on Confidence Building Measures, co-chaired by the EU on 21-23 February, representatives of Myanmar's junta sought to convince the participants, including the EU representatives, that the course of their country's reform was on track, and specifically the implementation of the Seven Step Roadmap to Democracy.²⁶ The Roadmap promised to address security issues, and was seen to offer an opportunity to implement 'ceasefire strategies' in Myanmar.²⁷ The Seven Step programme was a matter of such interest to the EU that Yangon's compliance would have moderated the EU's sanction policy. Its observance also engaged ASEAN, firstly, because of its true support for a transition in Myanmar and also because it was believed to soothe the international agitation with the military junta which affected the Association itself.

The EU's belief in the Forum's influence?

Possibly, in Potsdam, to break down the wall that separated the processes under way in ASEAN as a whole (the integration efforts of ASEAN's regionalism) and Myanmar (the

²⁴ For a thorough account of the EU's policy on Myanmar, see L. MARCHI, *Obstinate and Unmovable? The EU vis-à-vis Myanmar via EU-ASEAN*. *Australian and New Zealand Journal of European Studies*, 6-1(2014).

²⁵ A. ACHARYA, *Regionalism and the emerging world order: sovereignty, autonomy and identity*, in: S. BRESLIN et al. (eds), *New Regionalism in the Global Political Economy: Theories and Cases*, Routledge, London, 2002, pp. 20-33.

²⁶ *Co-Chairs' Summary Report of the meeting of the ASEAN Regional Forum Inter-Sessional Support Group on Confidence Building Measures*, Potsdam, 21-23 February 2005.

²⁷ L. JONES, *Explaining Myanmar's regime transition: the periphery is central*. *Democratization*, 1-23(2014), p. 16.

vocal intention to comply with the Seven Step reforms), the EU delegates focused on what they conceivably thought to be the success of multilateral participation (that the EU privileged and supported) in approaching security situations. The EU officials concentrated on threats to non-traditional security, particularly crisis prevention. They indicated that a combined process of multilateral inputs and arrangements, rather than a single country's efforts, more easily antagonised complex situations. Governments acting unilaterally were putting themselves at a disadvantage. To that scope, the officials explained the concept of the (at that time) European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP), which was described as that process which aimed at strengthening the EU's 'external ability to act through the development of civilian and military capabilities in conflict prevention and crisis management'.²⁸ The idea of the role played by the EU in preventing and easing crises emerged as a model of the action that ASEAN, its members, Myanmar included (and ARF participants) could provide to the region when such support seemed necessary to the group. It was an encouragement to take up responsibilities.

The EU's further insistence

In Helsinki, in 2007, at the other ARF Inter-Sessional Support Group on Confidence Building Measures and Preventive Diplomacy co-chaired by the EU on 28-30 March, the EU sought to promote confidence building practices through discussing the Organisation of Security and Cooperation in Europe's (OSCE) 'potential for strengthening ties with the ARF'.²⁹ Already at a previous meeting that it co-chaired in Phnom Penh on 26-28 October 2004, i.e. the Inter-Sessional Support Group on Confidence Building Measures, the EU had succeeded in promoting the inclusion of the 'need to maintain informal contacts' with the OSCE in the ARF's official position.³⁰ The EU's message, at that time, focused on showing the two groups' constructive and productive interaction. The EU shared experience of good governance, democratic transition, human rights and minority rights with the OSCE. In Helsinki, the EU's multilateral influence featured more

²⁸ *Co-Chairs' Summary Report...*, Potsdam, 21-23 February 2005, op. cit.

²⁹ *Co-Chairs' Summary Report of the meeting of the ASEAN Regional Forum Inter-Sessional Support Group on Confidence Building Measures and Preventive Diplomacy*, Helsinki, 28-30 March 2007.

³⁰ *Co-Chairs' Summary Report of the meeting of the ASEAN Regional Forum Inter-Sessional Support Group on Confidence Building Measures*, Phnom Penh, 26-28 October 2004.

intensely through the explanation to the ASEAN nations, and there within, Myanmar, of the OSCE's expansion, progress, structure and activities.³¹

The same endeavour was pursued at the successive co-chaired event in Berlin on 12-14 March 2008, the ARF Workshop on Confidence Building Measures and Preventive Diplomacy in Asia and Europe. There, 'transparency' and 'information' were examined and used as examples of practices that could develop and characterise security behaviour among the countries of Southeast Asia and other ARF participants. These practices were posited as fundamental to a policy associated with an 'open' dialogue on security. The representatives of the EU argued for the adoption of a common security concept together with the development of politically binding standards and the gradual institutionalisation of cooperation as processes offering a solid and durable basis for security collaboration.³²

The Berlin meeting contributed towards explaining how several steps were appropriate for building up useful partnerships: the upgrading of communication conceivably via a reliable network among the ARF participants, the institution of information exchange systems, and the improved cooperation on non-traditional security such as health issues, haze or yellow dust. To these propositions, the development of information exchange mechanisms, and also the establishment of a crisis room, or some other kind of early-warning instruments, were added. The co-chairs stressed that anyone should be part of the implementation phase and become a leading actor in fostering confidence building and preventive diplomacy in Europe and the Asia-Pacific region.³³ However, the fundamental question of whether or not some of these discourses were going to have consequences among the regional players, specifically ASEAN and Myanmar, remained crucial.

3. Seduced by the EU's ARF talks?

As co-chair of the ARF meetings, the EU underscored the multilateral character of its position on security, stressing its experience and seeking to inspire others. As an actor that has aimed to activate the diverse potential, principles, and competences of its

³¹ *Co-Chairs' Summary Report...*, Helsinki, 28-30 March 2007, op. cit.

³² *Co-Chairs' Summary Report of the ARF Workshop on Confidence Building Measures and Preventive Diplomacy in Asia and Europe. Berlin, 12-14 March 2008.*

³³ *Ibid.*

partners³⁴ while operating in the ASEAN Regional Forum, the EU has sought to provide suggestions concerning security cooperation, confidence building and disaster relief.

Yet, concerning ASEAN, the EU and OSCE's argument that the gradual institutionalisation of cooperation underpinned their common action contrasted with ARF's and ASEAN's distinctive loose character as a collective security arena for dialogue. It antagonised ASEAN's low institutionalised cooperation approach.³⁵ In addition, as an official from the EEAS interviewed in Brussels confirmed, the suggested commitment to an open security dialogue, made distinctive by 'transparency and sharing information', was out of step with the secrecy with which security and defence choices were made in the ASEAN group.³⁶

Regarding Myanmar, with the obligation that it established in the 2008 constitution to preserve the nation's sovereignty and, more specifically, the sovereignty of its decision-making in the field of security, Myanmar was conceivably indifferent to the messages addressed by the EU at the Forum. Myanmar's leadership declared a commitment to implementing the Seven Step Roadmap to Democracy, which meant that Myanmar was forced to embrace a multifaceted process with numerous preparations and arrangements. A full sequence of actions was required: convening a National Convention to draft the constitution; taking steps to establish democracy after the National Convention was concluded; drafting a constitution based on the principles laid down by the National Convention; organising a national referendum to approve the redrafted constitution; holding free and fair elections for a Parliament; and building a modern and democratic nation through the support of the leaders elected by Parliament.³⁷ Incentives to change, promoted by the EU, in favour of Myanmar's transformation were there, spelled out at

³⁴ *The EU's comprehensive approach to external conflicts and crises, Joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council*, JOIN(2013) 30 final, Brussels, 11 December 2013; http://www.eeas.europa.eu/statements/docs/2013/131211_03_en.pdf [last accessed 16.07.2018].

³⁵ *The ASEAN Regional Forum, A Concept Paper*, 2006. Document series 1994-2006. However, ASEAN was engaged in building a security community among its members, including Myanmar, and the EU-OSCE's experience of cooperation could offer inputs to that Association's project.

³⁶ L. Marchi, Interview with official (A)..., Crisis Response and Operational Coordination, Brussels, 2014, op. cit.

³⁷ M. CABALLERO-ANTHONY, *Myanmar's 2010 Elections: Boon or Bane for ASEAN's Political and Security Community?* In: *Democracy and Discontent: The 2010 Elections in Myanmar*, AIIA Political Commentary, The Australian Institute of International Affairs, Canberra, 2010, pp. 25-32, 26-7; www.internationalaffairs.org.au/.../democracy-and-discontent-the-2010-... [last accessed 16.07.2018].

ARF, ready to be taken up by the military junta. Yet, the fulfilment of the transformation was still a neglected project.

The encouragement to incorporate fundamental freedoms, minority rights and democratic transition into the indivisibility of the security concept, as it has been embraced by both the EU and OSCE, was an example of the expectations of the junta's steps towards democracy. That progress was, however, irreconcilable with the thinking of Myanmar's administration.³⁸ Also, as an interviewed official from the EEAS implied, in the unfortunate case of a crisis occurring in the region, there was no chance that Myanmar's authorities would provide assistance to their ASEAN partners, or accept ASEAN's assistance.³⁹ This issue was interpreted as indicating that Myanmar's authorities felt engaged in focusing on in-house matters and feared that external interventions would interact with their system of governance. Henceforth, the junta leadership developed a kind of isolated policy which diverged from the multilateralism communicated by the EU.

Accordingly, on the key question of whether ASEAN and Myanmar were persuaded by the EU's discourse and promotion of EU's values at ARF, there were zero expectations that the EU's proposals would be absorbed by the two. Neither ASEAN nor Myanmar was believed to be willing or able to adapt to the EU's address and adopt a multilateral cooperation policy that was coherent with the EU's suggestions. However, their willingness or ability to develop or accept joint multilateral options can be tested. The reaction to Cyclone Nargis, that occurred at around the same time as the ARF Workshop on Confidence Building Measures and Preventive Diplomacy in Asia and Europe, co-chaired by the EU in Berlin, provides this test.

4. Nargis' generation of political responses

In May 2008, Cyclone Nargis ravaged Myanmar's Irrawaddy Delta causing huge destruction and loss of life. Initially, with regard to Myanmar, the government was overwhelmed by the magnitude and complexity of the disaster relief problems. The

³⁸ C. ROBERTS, *ASEAN's Myanmar Crisis: Challenges to the Pursuit of a Security Community*, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore, 2010; N. FARRELLY, *Discipline without democracy: Military dominance in post-colonial Burma*, *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, 67, 3, (2013), pp. 321-326.

³⁹ L. Marchi, Interview with official (B) of the EEAS, of the Crisis Response and Operational Coordination, Brussels, June 2014.

junta's attitude, particularly at the beginning of the crisis, in refusing external help, did little to diminish the difficulties. The EU, and other external agents, was barred from being an actor by the military government's inflexible non-interference policy.⁴⁰ ARF did not enter into action in spite of reports that '... it may have been that ARF Senior Officials were among the first to meet soon afterwards Nargis had struck'.⁴¹ However, it was the Association that was the predominant actor in the cyclone's circumstance.

ASEAN's activity was vital in networking with the government in Myanmar and other international actors that were ready to assist. It made possible the constitution of the ASEAN Humanitarian Task Force, led by the ASEAN Secretary General. The Task Force operated through the Tripartite Core Group (TCG: the Government of Myanmar, ASEAN and the UN), coordinated the relief work and delivered assistance. It was the first ASEAN-led mechanism that involved ASEAN member states individually and collectively, in addition to the international community and the UN. Its recognised value was to have built a regional response to a local problem.⁴² Acting as a bridge between the junta and the donor nations' funding, through the TCG, ASEAN allowed, for example, the financing and development of the Commission's Post-Cyclone Nargis recovery and preparedness plan over three years, starting in 2009.⁴³

Concerning Myanmar, what resulted from the ASEAN Humanitarian Task Force's intervention in the country was a softened non-interference stance by the military junta. The change in the government's approach to policy-making was tangible, and was also confirmed by Brussels, where Commissioner Ferrero-Waldner acknowledged the opening up of an 'unprecedented dialogue' with Myanmar's government.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ See: A. SELTH, *Even Paranoids Have Enemies: Cyclone Nargis and Myanmar's Fears of Invasion*, *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, 30, 3, (2008), pp. 379-402.

⁴¹ J. HAACKE, N. MORADA, 2010. *The ARF and cooperative security: more of the same?* in: J. HAACKE, N. MORADA (eds) *Cooperative Security in the Asia-Pacific: the Asean Regional Forum*, Routledge, Basingstoke, pp. 219-232, 228.

⁴² *Chairman's Statement of the 15th ASEAN Regional Forum...*, 2008, Singapore, op. cit.

⁴³ *Commission welcomes launch of Post-cyclone Nargis recovery and preparedness plan for Myanmar/Burma*, European Commission Press Release Database, Brussels, 9 February 2009; http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-09-231_en.htm?locale=en [last accessed 16.07.2018].

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

5. ASEAN's reaction to Nargis examined:

Responding to the EU's call for undertaking responsibilities?

The social mechanisms

It might be useful to inspect how the unexpected development of ASEAN providing crisis support for the Nargis-hit Myanmar came about. The dynamics activated by social mechanisms might help us to understand how this new outcome could have materialised. Social mechanisms suggest that there are processes whereby actors acquire new interests and preferences through contact with other contexts, either discursive structures or norms.⁴⁵ Three points discuss this view: 'group learning', 'ability to persuade' and the 'crisis' and 'policy failure' dynamics.

Group learning

There was no lack of transformative discourses at the ARF meetings through which to promote 'group learning' and dispense norms, as vehicles of new interests.⁴⁶ The Inter-sessional Support Group on Confidence Building Measures, the Peacekeeping groups, and those related to Search, Rescue and Disaster Relief, received growing support from the personnel from the EU External Service. These officials were from the Crisis Response and Operational Coordination section.⁴⁷ Also officials from the European Commission's department, providing emergency assistance and relief to the victims of natural disasters and armed conflict outside the European Union, were in contact with the ARF groups. Frequent exchanges with the European Commission's Humanitarian Aid Office (ECHO) personnel for assistance and long-term follow-up were, likewise, confirmed.⁴⁸ Relations among these personnel and the groups' participants indicate that communication spread and competence and knowledge were disseminated. The working clusters, training and security exercises, and other groups met several times during 2004-2008. As the interviewed EEAS officials acknowledged, it was inevitable that interactions were going to develop new interests. The purpose of the frequency and

⁴⁵ J.T. CHECKEL, p. 548, op. cit.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ L. Marchi, Interview with official (B)..., Crisis Response..., Brussels, 2014, op. cit.

⁴⁸ L. Marchi, Interview with official (C), Rapid Response Coordinator, European Commission, Brussels, June 2014.

thickness of the networking was to promote new learning.⁴⁹ This result is congruent with the belief that ‘where a group met repeatedly, and where there was a high density of interactions among participants’ new interests were most likely to be generated.⁵⁰

Ability to persuade

Contributing to acquire new preferences and goals, the ‘ability to persuade’ was not a minor factor. The EEAS and ECHO personnel, those from OSCE and the EU co-chairs, were recognised as having sway over the attendants during training and assistance in the practical exercises. Whether this result was due to their personal ability or to other reasons would seem unclear. Though, the interviewed ASEAN leaders close to the ARF organisation⁵¹ and security policy analysts⁵² have acknowledged that the persons involved in the Forum’s activities, in most cases, had an enhanced persuasive capability, which they accredited to the authority of their position. The interviewed maintained that the persuasive ability provided guidance, and that guidance had the power to influence the actors’ inclinations.⁵³ Also this result matches the suggestion that, when the persuader was an authoritative member of the in-group to which the person possibly or prospectively being persuaded belonged or wanted to belong (e.g. representative of ASEAN or of its member states), persuasion was most likely to materialise.⁵⁴

Crisis and policy failure

Also the crisis and policy failure dynamics is able to develop new interests and roles. Since it was agreed to give shape to the ASEAN Regional Forum, ASEAN set the norm that its group was to remain in a higher ranked position compared to the other participants’, due to its role as originator of the Forum. Interviewed ASEAN leaders⁵⁵ suggested that during the ‘crisis’ of the cyclone that hit and damaged the Irrawaddy delta,

⁴⁹ L. Marchi, Interview with official (A)..., Crisis Response..., Brussels, 2014, op. cit.; L. Marchi, Interview with official (B)..., Crisis Response..., Brussels, 2014, op. cit.

⁵⁰ J.T. CHECKEL, p. 549, op. cit.

⁵¹ L. Marchi, Interviews with ASEAN leaders (D) close to the ARF organisation, Canberra, September 2013.

⁵² L. Marchi, Interviews with security policy analysts (E), Singapore, February 2014.

⁵³ L. Marchi, Interviews with ASEAN leaders (D) close to the ARF organisation,... Canberra, 2013, op. cit.; L. Marchi, Interviews with security policy analysts (E),..., Singapore, 2014, op. cit.

⁵⁴ J.T. CHECKEL, p. 550, op. cit.

⁵⁵ L. Marchi, Interviews with ASEAN leaders (F), Macau, May 2013.

the ASEAN group was discouraged. Sensing the emergency on its shoulders, the group felt an added responsibility. The role of dealing with the crisis emerged as an obligation. The entire region was in a humanitarian and environmental depression, and all ASEAN nations were bound to suffer consequences.⁵⁶ No doubt, the foreign policy of Myanmar's junta was evidence of 'policy failure'. Refusing the help of external donors, whose ships had been left for weeks anchored in the Andaman Sea,⁵⁷ the lack of capability to provide assistance to its people was unquestionable. 'Crisis' and 'policy failure' were evident in the context within which the ASEAN's relief operation took place.⁵⁸ These reasons connect with the account that the development of new purposes, commitments and roles was more likely 'where the group felt itself in a crisis or was faced with clear and incontrovertible evidence of policy failure'.⁵⁹

New motivations, sense of duty and norms

The discussion concerning the actors developing new interests and preferences via interactions with other settings was supported by several justifications that the interviewees provided. The frequency and intensity of the groups' networking generated new ambitions and motivations; the persuasive capability of those involved in the Forum's activities had the power of influencing the preferences within the groups; and the duty to assume a leading role in assisting Myanmar was supported by the critical situation and, also, by the perception of Myanmar's policy failure. Altogether, these explanations offered reasons for the unexpected reaction of ASEAN in offering support to Myanmar's crisis.

The interviewees shed light on a further scenario which agrees with the indication that social dynamics created new drives which grew *via* contact with other contexts.⁶⁰ The officers from the EEAS Crisis Response and Operational Coordination section, and from

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ A. SELTH, *op. cit.*

⁵⁸ Southeast Asian security policy analyst (G), questioned in Singapore (February 2014), believed that the intervention in Indonesia's Aceh region, in collaboration with the EU, in 2005, was of support to the ASEAN's new initiative. The commentator suggested that the Aceh Monitoring Mission served as a formative preparation and facilitated the institution of the Humanitarian Task Force and the Tripartite Core Group to organise the aid that focused entirely on Myanmar (Interview (G), 2014).

⁵⁹ J.T. CHECKEL, p. 549, *op. cit.*

⁶⁰ Ibid, 548.

the European Commission's Humanitarian Aid Office stated that their own activity within the groups and sub-groups had the purpose of transmitting new norms, with the aim that these norms would be assimilated and lead to others' undertakings.⁶¹ Hence, the EEAS officers suggested that conveying new norms, such as the encouragement to cooperate delivered by the EU at the Forum, to the task of having them understood and absorbed, was enabling, if not promoting, the development of individuals or groups' new endeavours. Ultimately, the interviewees backed the proposition that, by providing support to Myanmar in a time of crisis, the EU's call to undertake responsibilities was essentially respected by ASEAN.

**6. Post-Nargis Myanmar's behaviour examined:
Inspired by the EU's confidence-building dialogue and
the call for multilateral security efforts?**

It may be, similarly, useful to consider how the other new development that emerged in connection with Nargis' violence, the Myanmar junta's softened non-interference stance, became possible. To interpret this position, it might help to observe that the strategic calculation of rational bargaining of a government's protection and defence of what it perceives as its national interest confronts, but frequently, also, becomes reconciled with the position of other states on the same policy issue.⁶² In the post-Nargis situation, the strategic calculation of rational bargaining by the Myanmar's junta challenged the position of the other actors, specifically ASEAN, and the ASEAN Secretariat which was willing to network with the Myanmar's government. The rational bargaining challenge was, firstly, manifested by the junta's rejection of external help, and its protection of the political order that it held dear, and the defence of what it perceived to be the national interest.

Late dynamism for change: An appropriateness logic

Only subsequently, a different logic emerged which was manifested by late forces for change. An interviewed Myanmar historian believed that the ethical dimension of the responsibility to protect its own people was a true response which became more definite

⁶¹ L. Marchi, Interview with official (B)..., Crisis Response..., Brussels, 2014, op. cit.; L. Marchi, Interview with official (C), Rapid Response Coordinator..., Brussels, June 2014.

⁶² J.G. MARCH, J.P. OLSEN, *The Institutional Dynamics...*, 1998, op. cit., 950.

only successively.⁶³ Also, the collective norms of the ASEAN group to reduce the risk to security (as established in the ARF's Concept Paper of 1995) was another motivation leading to change that was confirmed by an officer of the ASEAN Secretariat.⁶⁴ A further motive was proposed by a Singaporean security analyst:⁶⁵ the collective norm of avoiding undermining the efforts of the ASEAN group to strengthen regionalism in Southeast Asia. Another explanation, by the same expert, held that the pressure felt by the junta to comply with the Seven Steps programme (combined with the need to be more accommodating *vis-à-vis* ASEAN's offer of networking) acted as an incentive to support the new reasoning.⁶⁶ An additional motive was suggested by a further security analyst,⁶⁷ i.e. the confidence factor justifying Myanmar's junta's reliance that the mission was to remain under its own control; the interviewee contended that the Myanmar government's control of the operation was key to its acceptance.⁶⁸ This assertion simply recalls the EU's efforts, at ARF, to develop confidence-building dialogues and generate a reliance on security and humanitarian operations.

An evolutionary process built up Myanmar's behaviour. Interviewees offered suggestions, and several issues arose: the ethical dimension together with the collective norms of the ASEAN group to control security, a new-born attention to the ASEAN's efforts to bolster regionalism, and the obligation to conform to the Seven Steps agenda. Also the understanding that cooperation with ASEAN was overdue, and, in particular, the trust that the mission was to remain under the junta's own control contributed to the shifted position. All of these observations justified the new logic that inspired Myanmar and was identifiable as a logic of appropriateness.⁶⁹

When asked whether Myanmar's acceptance of assistance from ASEAN (and other actors) might have had a relation with the EU's attempts to involve Yangon in multilateral security efforts, the interviewees assisted once again. The interviewees' observations helped to realise that the incentives to change, which they highlighted, were

⁶³ L. Marchi, Interview with Myanmar historian (H), Yangon, July 2014.

⁶⁴ L. Marchi, Interview with Officer (I) of the ASEAN Secretariat, Macau, May 2013.

⁶⁵ L. Marchi, Interview with security analyst (J), Centre for Non-Traditional Security Studies, S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore, February 2014.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ L. Marchi, Interview with security policy analyst (G), Singapore, February 2014.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ J.G. MARCH, J.P. OLSEN, pp. 951-2, op. cit.

aspects of the policy that the EU proposed at the Forum. Undoubtedly, the ethical dimension of the responsibility to protect its own people was distinct to the EU, and similarly the belief in the value of collective regional security. Likewise, the trust in reinforcing regionalism in Southeast Asia was key to both the EU's idea of security and participation in the ARF. Also the duty of Myanmar's junta to engage in reforms had always been demanded by the EU. Certainly, the principle of continuing cooperation among the regional partners was an attitude that the EU recommended at all times. Finally, the motivations supported by the interviewees made clear a connection with the EU's encouragement of Myanmar to participate in multilateral security solutions.

Conclusion

This paper's observation of the historical context concerning the EEC/EU's relations with ASEAN in their economic and political aspects and the ARF highlighted the EEC/EU's security interest in the Forum. The paper's emphasis on the EU's efforts at the ARF meetings co-chaired by the EU to persuade Myanmar to rely on security cooperation underscored the role played by the EU. Importantly, this role was conveyed by the EU's attempts to activate the various energies, drives and abilities of its ARF partners, ASEAN and Myanmar, such as a sense of duty and a greater capacity for cooperation. It was stressed by the EU's promotion, in that arena, of its own identity, distinctiveness and uniqueness, and supported by its ambition, and belief, that others could benefit from the EU's own experience, and correspond to the EU's practices. It was emphasised by the EU taking every opportunity to confirm the relevance of the ARF framework, and was evidenced by the EU publicising, there, the multilateral attributes of its policy in the security area. With its focus on the ARF as a venue where interactions develop and grow, the paper showed how the prospect of transmitting messages at the Forum, combined with the aspiration or determination to convince others to conform to the behaviour addressed by the EU, were important dimensions of the EU's policy. Such dimensions characterised the EU's goal of expanding its influence outside its own region. Also, the paper showed how both ASEAN undertaking responsibilities and Myanmar accepting multilateral security options featured the EU's influence and contribution to ARF as well as the EU's promotion of security cooperation in the non-European world.