

Journal of Contemporary European Research

Volume 10, Issue 2 (2014)

The European Union as a Normative Actor and its External Relations with Southeast Asia

Naila Maier-Knapp *University of Cambridge*

Citation

Maier-Knapp, N. (2014). 'The European Union as a Normative Actor and its External Relations with Southeast Asia', *Journal of Contemporary European Research*. 10 (2), pp. 221-235.

First published at: www.jcer.net

Abstract

It is commonplace that the European Union (EU) attempts to diffuse human rights and the other 'essential elements' to its external partners. It is also commonly known that these attempts frequently face accusations of inconsistency and double standards from without as well as within the EU. The aim of this article is to assess why the EU has readily promoted norms and values in some instances and not in others through the examination of the EU as an actor in the case of transboundary and newly emerging security challenges in Southeast Asia. This article suggests that the EU has displayed a demand-oriented and issue-specific shift in its strategy to effectively diffuse norms. This is not a capitulation of norms and values on the part of the EU. Rather, it is the re-strategisation of its normative identity in its external relations to match the domestic and international realities.

Keywords

ASEAN; Normative actor; Norm diffusion; Transboundary challenges; EU-ASEAN relationship

The diffusion of norms has evolved to a major field of study and significantly expanded the International Relations body of literature. Notably, scholars of the European Union (EU) have contributed to this growing area of research both theoretically and empirically. Whether through the analysis of internal and external processes of Europeanization or the study of EU-centred interregionalism, the EU has been the exemplar of an international actor that has based its agency on norms and values (e.g. Börzel and Risse 2000; Rüländ 2002b; Featherstone and Radaelli 2003; Bulmer and Radaelli 2004; Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier 2005; Lucarelli and Manners 2006).

In particular, the EU's legal agreements with third parties worldwide have been a prominent avenue to diffuse norms and shape the international environment. In recent years, the EU's attempts to project its normative identity to the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) countries have included the Partnership and Cooperation Agreements (PCAs), which aim to 'upgrade its relationship with ASEAN countries' (EUROPA Press Release 25 June 2010). Within the PCA, the EU has incorporated its normative dimension mainly through the "essential elements" clause.¹

The PCA negotiations with selected Southeast Asian governments show that the EU has readily promoted its norms and values in some instances, but not in others. They suggest that the EU is not always norm-guided like prominent international role concepts of the EU in world affairs would like us to believe (Duchêne 1972; Manners 2002; Nye 2004; Aggestam 2008). For instance, Singapore and Malaysia proceeded with the bilateral Free Trade Agreement (FTA) negotiations with the EU without the ratification of the essential elements clause. By contrast, the Philippines and Indonesia – which require greater economic adjustments – had to wait for the PCAs to be concluded before they were considered for FTA negotiations. Similarly, Thailand was struggling to find a solution on the conclusion of the PCA, because the EU allegedly made use of its economic leverage and insisted on the inclusion of the essential elements into the agreement (Maier-Knapp 2011: 60, 64-55 and 71).

This introductory discussion of the case of the PCA negotiations demonstrates that debates on the EU as an actor in Southeast Asia need to pay attention to the gap between theory and empirical evidence. In this context, we need to re-consider particularly the utility of existing international role

concepts of the EU as a normative actor, who is norm-driven and a promoter of norms. The introductory case qualifies claims that the EU is ‘neither a military nor purely economic [concept], but one that works through ideas and opinions’ (Diez 2005: 615). It exhibits the EU as a normative actor who is not always consistent with its normative agenda, to some extent. Thus, it puts into perspective the applicability of role concepts – including the prominent “normative power” concept by Ian Manners – that characterize the EU as a normative actor who performs its foreign policy in accordance with its normative standards (Manners 2002: 244-245).

The negotiations with Thailand, show that some EU officials suggested that the EU will be more flexible on some essential elements to overcome deadlocks (Maier-Knapp 2011: 68). Thus, can we consider the EU a normative actor at all, if its norms are flexible and systematically context-dependent? Additionally, we can question whether normative actors have to employ appropriate and non-coercive means which are in line with their non-coercive norms. We can further ask whether there is some form of tacit coercion, if a power asymmetry underlies behavioural patterns. Should the emphasis be on the means and to a lesser extent on the motivations and ends, as proponents of the “civilian power” EU concept would suggest (Duchêne 1973)? Along these lines, a former official from the European Delegation in Singapore has characterized the EU as a non-coercive power in Southeast Asia *per se* and said that, ‘the EU has established itself as a civilian and economic power in Singapore’ (Interview with former European Delegation official in Singapore 19 November 2008).² Most importantly for this article, this introductory case of the PCAs has shown that the EU varies as a normative actor in Southeast Asia and that this variation appears mainly contingent on the socio-economic situation of the counterpart. That is, the extent to which the EU’s normativity unfolds in its external relations is highly dependent on the power asymmetries or conceptions of hegemony (Diez 2013).

Against this backdrop, this article is interested in providing a better understanding of the EU as a contemporary normative actor in Southeast Asia. It further seeks to discuss the variation in the EU’s normative behaviour through empirical case studies, premising normative behaviour as norm-guided behaviour and normative rhetoric. The empirical discussion builds on the socio-economic asymmetry as the integral underlying shaper of power imbalance and normative variation.³ It correlates socio-economic asymmetry with a specific frame of risk and vulnerability that facilitates the distinction of the EU as a normative or rationalist actor in the region.

Transboundary and newly emerging security issues are useful in defining the EU as a normative actor.⁴ In particular, normative motivations of the EU become clearer against the backdrop of these challenges, as evident in the international response to the recent devastation of Typhoon Haiyan. They invite us to take greater account of contemporary empirical findings of risk and resilience in Southeast Asia in order to better understand the EU as a normative actor. It is expected that crises pre-define objectives and motivations. The level of urgency, self-protective/material cost-benefit calculations, and long-term vision of the EU in structuring the international environment act as the central motivational categories. The objectives and motivations are associated with the normative dimension mainly in the following manner. The first and third categories presume that the EU frames its norms and values to attain normative objectives. The second motivational category refers to the EU as an interest-oriented actor who applies norms instrumentally, notwithstanding the underlying normative and long-term vision that the EU has. It is presumed that the empirical cases will display instances where norm- and interest-driven motivations cannot be disentangled.

The dividing lines between interest-oriented and normative behaviour are blurry, and there have been indeed other scholarly approaches attempting to reconcile this divide through analytical categories that supersede the traditional dichotomies of the normative actor debate in regard to altruism-vs.-self-centrism or strategic use of norms-vs.-appropriate use of norms (Smith 1994: 25; Jørgensen 2004: 12-13). Reconciling this divide may allow the construction of role concepts that

better describe the EU in a holistic manner. However, this does not generate new and differentiated insights into capturing interest-driven or norm-guided motivations that inform the EU's behaviour in specific settings.

Finally, it is important to note that only actors are capable of identifying risk, politicising and articulating (security) interests and motivations,⁵ choosing means and defining objectives to begin with (Rüland 2002a: 10; Bretherton and Vogler 2006: 17). Therefore, this article premises the EU as an actor *ex ante*. This circumvents the discussion of the EU as an actor *per se*, which has been sufficiently done elsewhere (Sjöstedt 1977; Rhodes 1998; Cannizzaro 2002; Telò 2009).

TRANSBOUNDARY AND NEWLY EMERGING SECURITY CHALLENGES

'...[W]e should move on from classifying or categorising the EU – and celebrating its distinctiveness – to debating what it actually does and what it should do in international relations.' (Smith 2005: 17)

So far, scholarly attempts to understand the fluid nuances of the EU as a normative actor in Southeast Asia have been only a handful (Algieri 2007; Rüland 2001; Petersson 2006; Manea 2008). Research has focused on the case of Myanmar to highlight the diverging normative foundations between the two regions. However, as demonstrated through the introductory case, the ideological debate is entrenched in the EU-ASEAN relationship and implies that the socio-economic asymmetry is the starting point for the EU-ASEAN interaction and its ideological debate. This fosters an understanding of socio-economic progress as a means of influence. In fact, until recently, the EU has prominently employed this lever to make an example of Myanmar.

Over the past decade, the EU's official criticism of Myanmar has become nuanced and mitigated since Myanmar's recent attempts to transform. In the last few years prior to Myanmar's most recent opening, the EU has been reframing Myanmar increasingly as the origin of Southeast Asia's regional instability on the basis of the many security challenges stemming from this country (European Commission 2003: 42). This subtle shift in rhetoric avoided antagonising Myanmar directly and attenuated the degree to which the EU alienated ASEAN.

From a scholarly viewpoint, this rhetorical shift puts into perspective the extent to which the case study of Myanmar can provide holistic insights into the EU as a normative actor in the ASEAN region. This emphasises the significance of transboundary and newly emerging security challenges as a case study, since the EU as a contemporary normative actor in Southeast Asia finds particular expression through issues related to socio-economic asymmetries. Thus, the EU as a normative actor is observable through many more ways than the prototype case of Myanmar. Ultimately, the case of Myanmar is only one of many frames that is based on the socio-economic asymmetry as an integral shaper of the EU's engagement with Southeast Asia.

Generally speaking, transboundary and newly emerging security challenges have become an important frame for the EU to express its normative agenda in the contemporary EU-ASEAN relationship. They appeal to popular understandings of compassion and appropriateness, and tie into broader global normative dynamics including humanitarian assistance and multilateralism. This frame is convincing because it targets the emotional realm. At the same time, it manages to be persuasive, because of its apolitical and technical nature; which makes it an effective means in gaining universal approval through reason. Therefore, a timely discussion of the EU as a normative actor in the region has to acknowledge the implications of these transboundary and newly emerging security challenges in Southeast Asia.

These challenges heighten Southeast Asia's vulnerability and increase European engagement. On the one hand, the EU and its member states should be more willing to help. On the other, there should be a greater necessity on the part of Southeast Asian countries to welcome external assistance. In situations of an economic or security crisis, a reflective process could be triggered and lead to the questioning of one's normative standards (Acharya 2004: 247). The actor is not necessarily forced or persuaded by external actors, but realises that, given this new situation, it needs to adapt. This may imply inventing or actively integrating foreign and competing norms into local normative settings (Acharya 2004: 269). In these instances, these transboundary and newly emerging security challenges are subject to the interpretation by the affected as well as non-affected actors, and embedded in normative contexts that have ramifications on the cooperative efforts of the actors. The immediate assistance from external partners is generally short of cost-benefit calculations and coercive action. It tends to relate to basic human needs and rights.

Employing this kind of frame for EU action acknowledges that the EU is demonstrating greater sensitivity to domestic pressures in Southeast Asia. This suggests an evolutionary perspective of the EU as an international actor and an understanding of the growing impact of global interdependence on individual actors. This perspective presupposes that actors learn and that the EU's normative identity is now well-known to fellow international actors (Interview with ASEAN member state official in Singapore 21 November 2008). This is further suggestive that the EU could afford to be less explicit on its norms and values in the official negotiations. It is expected that the EU's normative agenda will still find considerable realisation, even without explicit and pro-active promotion. This assumption originates in the belief that processes of socialization provide pre-existing understandings and meanings of what the EU is. This does not mean that the EU is distancing itself from its normative agenda and pursuing an approach favourable for economic competitiveness. Rather, one could interpret that the EU is adopting a strategy that is suitable for an emancipated and established international actor with sufficient economic leverage – still at its disposal.

The remainder of this article substantiates the preceding paragraphs with empirical evidence. It builds on the assumptions from this section and the introduction and provides a chronological discussion of the EU as a normative actor in Southeast Asia through selected cases of transboundary and newly emerging security crises and challenges. It begins with an outline of European perspectives and initiatives in the case of the Asian financial crisis of 1997/98. This is followed by the case of the avian influenza outbreak in 2003. Pursuant to this, the article highlights the increasing significance of non-state actors and demand-orientation and exemplifies these elements through the example of the German aid-implementing agency *Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit* (GIZ) and the Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade (FLEGT) scheme in relation to Southeast Asia's forestry. The empirical discussion ends with the case of the Aceh Monitoring Mission (AMM) in the aftermath of the Boxing Day Tsunami.

These cases have been selected, because they provide evidence and unique insights into the variation of the EU as a contemporary and evolutionary normative actor in Southeast Asia. They allow us to induce nuances of the EU as a normative actor that link between the theoretical and empirical realms. Overall, they suggest that the EU has displayed a demand-oriented and issue-specific shift in its strategy to effectively diffuse norms. This is not a capitulation of the normative identity on the part of the EU, and indeed an explicit normative agenda is still pursued. Rather, it is the re-strategisation of its norms and values to match the domestic as well as international realities. In fact, the EU seems to be re-packaging its normative agenda more subtly and effectively.

TRANSBOUNDARY AND NEWLY EMERGING SECURITY CHALLENGES IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

The Asian financial crisis in 1997/98 showed cracks in the official proclivity of the ASEAN states towards the “ASEAN Way” and triggered enhanced regional cooperation in the banking and financial sectors, extending existing intra-regional swap arrangements from 1977. This re-focus on the regional integration process attracted European interest and, vice versa, the EU as an exemplar of regional integration received greater attention from ASEAN. To some extent, EU interest stemmed from the fear that the crisis could impact the European financial markets. Overall, it was understood that the crisis was localised and its impact on Europe was downplayed (Bridges 1999: 458; Robles Jr. 2008: 47). In the early stages of the crisis, self-protection was not the primary motivation. The EU member states were slow to react. Mainly those European countries that have lent loans were actively seeking to be paid back. There were immediate funds channelled through the international financial institutions aimed at assisting ASEAN states in complying with conditionality. However, it was only when the economic powerhouse Japan was hit that the crisis became an economic threat to Europe.

The EU has shown its support to Southeast Asia during the crisis in many ways. Principally, this support was expressed in the form of declaratory speeches of solidarity and compassion. The EU and its member states also provided substantial material help to Asia (Gilson 2004: 193-194). Trade barriers were not raised and large amounts of financial assistance were made available by individual EU member states. Assistance targeted immediate social and financial recovery, but also accounted for long-term best practice-sharing and continuous open markets. Within the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM), the trade and investment pledge inhibited Southeast Asian protectionism. By 1998, the EU increasingly realised that ASEM could serve as a vehicle for Europe to guarantee and gain better access to Asian markets (Kerr, Perdakis et al. 1999: 74).

This aspect fits into the second motivational category, devised in the Introduction. The EU is an interest-oriented actor, applying norms instrumentally, notwithstanding the underlying normative and long-term vision that the EU has. In the instance of the trade and investment pledge, the EU’s rhetoric of assistance and friendship also served the EU’s own purpose in safeguarding export to Asia. Solidarity has not been the only calculus, and self-protection and -preservation have been closely linked to solidarity. In general, normative objectives are intertwined with material interests and reinforce each other. In this light, the trade and investment pledge was an emergency mechanism on the one hand. On the other, it was an instrument of political strategy, as noted by William Kerr and colleagues.

Initiatives to improve region-to-region dialogue and cooperation in the aftermath of the Asian financial crisis also involved the objectives of mutual understanding and learning as part of EU’s long-term assistance in the financial sector. This “learning” by the Europeans is not necessarily about what the Asian side is doing, as this is “limited” and the dialogue partners are usually informed about each other’s measures (Interview with EU official in Brussels 9 February 2009). It is rather ‘a little bit knowing about the new measures and what they have got in the pipeline...and then it is learning why they are not doing more, what their concerns are and what they aim to achieve realistically’ (Interview with EU official in Brussels 9 February 2009). Thus, the dialogue becomes a normative tool and an end in itself. It is a mechanism to improve better understanding and sustain Southeast Asian interest. When the EU shares its experience or gives advice, its goal is also to move Asian integration towards a direction that serves Europe (Interview with EU official in Brussels 9 February 2009). The ECFIN official explained,

I think so in a way. It is not so much about defending Europe [but] trying to shape what is going on at the global level in a way that is either more favourable, but also already underway in Europe [and] convincing Asia through ASEM that what Europe is doing is good. (Interview with EU official in Brussels 9 February 2009)

This suggests that, even within putatively technical sectors of cooperation, the EU will try to promote norms as a means to create lasting structures that are conducive to cooperation and influence. At the same time, it is noteworthy that the Asian financial crisis was a missed opportunity to strengthen Asia-European ties in order to re-shape the international financial institutions, to some extent (Interview with EU official in Singapore 18 November 2008).

This crisis put the Southeast Asian region on the EU's map. Since then, European officials and publics have redefined and rethought Southeast Asia politically (Umbach 2004: p.10). With the September 11 attacks and the outbreak of various pandemic diseases in the early 2000s, this emerging politicised perception towards Southeast Asia sharpened. For example, the avian influenza outbreaks in the early 2000s were such an instance displaying East Asia's vulnerability and risk to food safety in Europe. The successful management of the intra-regional avian influenza outbreaks within the EU in 2003 and the geographical distance to Southeast Asia mitigated politicised perspectives, to some extent. However, once infected, migrating wild birds were found in Turkey, European leaders showed greater concern. This was many months after the outbreak in Asia and suggests that the initial motivation to act in response to the outbreak in Southeast Asia was not contingent on threat perceptions and contagion. On the one hand, intra-regional activities built on pre-existing mechanisms of risk management. On the other, the EU's extra-regional response to the avian influenza outbreaks in Southeast Asia needs to be seen as part of a global response and an extension of domestic calculations of preparedness.

When the avian influenza broke out in continental Southeast Asia at the end of 2003, the EU as the largest importer of poultry from Southeast Asia was quick to offer assistance and ban imports from affected countries. In early 2004, EU Health Commissioner David Byrne visited the avian influenza-affected countries in Southeast Asia. Despite the Commissioner's visit and promise of continuous assistance, there was a lack of transparency towards the EU (The Nation 20 January 2004). This jeopardised food safety within the EU. Once Thailand's efforts of concealment were uncovered, the EU sought immediate food safety.

Overall, the EU aimed at creating sustainable and transparent structures that enhanced the resilience outside of Europe. The EU possessed issue-specific expertise, financial capacity and the goodwill to project its level of preparedness to other regions. In Southeast Asia, the EU was engaged in ASEM and the ASEAN Regional Forum. These fora addressed the avian influenza concern through various declarations, workshops, seminars and one stockpile initiative. In addition to this, the European Commission and individual EU member states offered direct technical and financial assistance aimed at capacity-building. Commonly, technical assistance is embedded within specific normative contexts and, therefore, it allows an implicit projection of norms. At the same time, the EU acted upon its normative profile directly in Southeast Asia by addressing the issue of gender and avian influenza through one European Commission-funded study. The extent of active EU norm diffusion for the purpose of developing long-term resilience in Southeast Asia appeared tacit and focused on supporting initiatives that influenced sanitary, agricultural and industrial practices.

Various Directorate Generals (DG) were involved in the outward-oriented protective measures. Underlying the outward-oriented initiatives was the conviction that this outbreak can be utilised as a 'good vehicle for regional integration, sustainable development, democratization...[and] to make something more lasting' (Interview with EU official 4 November 2009, Brussels). This statement displays similarity with the understandings of normativity expressed by the ECFIN official in the preceding case study of the Asian financial crisis. The EU holds many long-term normative objectives, which aim at creating lasting liberal-democratic structures and shaping behaviour. This aspect is particularly interesting in regard to pandemic preparedness in Southeast Asia, because pandemic preparedness in this region relies on military manpower and capabilities as active components of pre-emption and preparedness (Associated Press 11 November 2005).

The EU aims to uphold its multilateralist and liberal-democratic norms in its external relations. At the same time, it seeks to have a subtle normative impact and devises assistance that does not undermine state sovereignty. There are new types of initiatives that manage this tension more effectively. These projects indicate that the EU and its member states are re-packaging norms and exhibiting greater demand-orientation. For example, within the forestry sector of some Southeast Asian countries, there are initiatives that seek to stimulate norms of participation and pluralism within ASEAN implicitly.

In this context, an interesting case is the engagement of GIZ within the ASEAN Secretariat. GIZ⁶ has been engaged in developing the double-tiered capacity development project, known as the ASEAN-German Regional Forest Programme, with ASEAN since 2003. This project seeks to strengthen both the role of the ASEAN Secretariat and the intergovernmental cooperation level of the member states within the forestry sector. As part of this project, GIZ has managed to persuade the ASEAN member states to create an external non-governmental advisory group to the ASEAN Senior Officials Group. The external non-governmental advisory group to the ASEAN Senior Officials Group delivers to improving participatory elements within the ASEAN process and upholds the sanctity of the states, *inter alia*, through the creation of the Peer Consultation Framework, intergovernmental coordination (GIZ and ASEAN Secretariat).

The endorsement of this external non-governmental advisory group by the ASEAN states required intensive liaison and persuasion. The negotiations were lengthy and showed that the proposal for this civilian body was watered down to meet the normative reality of the Southeast Asian negotiation partners. Despite the difficulties in persuading the ASEAN counterpart and the reliance on the member states for enforcement, GIZ staff have argued that 'having this body is better than not having it at all' (Interview with GIZ staff in Jakarta 26 May 2010).

Regional projects sponsored by European partner countries and implemented by state-affiliated development agencies such as the GIZ are sensitive to the regional objectives of ASEAN and have shown greater demand-orientation. On the one hand, they promote certain societal values. On the other, they are an attempt to adapt to ASEAN's intergovernmental settings. They are a balancing act and attempt to be inclusive of stakeholders from all levels of society. This complements ASEAN's community-building process that aims at greater people-orientation and builds on the power of socialisation and knowledge-building/-sharing. In the long-run, this supports emancipation processes within society.

Demand-orientation and flexibility amongst European donors appeals to ASEAN states. In particular, partnerships like the FLEGT scheme are attractive, since they offer significant economic incentives. Initially, the FLEG initiative was based on conditionality and offered minimal market benefits to attract the interest of developing countries. Many development agencies and stakeholders were sceptical about the success of FLEG in bringing meaningful change to combating illegal logging in the absence of economic incentives for greater enforcement (Thang 2008: 5). The revamped FLEGT scheme includes greater economic benefits and, specifically, incentivises political and business elites through guaranteed EU market access for exporting timber and wood products, the control over certification licensing and stakes in the carbon market.

FLEGT has a comparative advantage over previous forms of development cooperation that influence forest governance, because it emphasises country-ownership. It provides a guideline for European agencies not to force efforts against the ideas and wishes of the partner country (Thang 2008: 5). The economic and political dimensions are interdependent and designed to be mutually reinforcing. FLEGT explicitly links economic incentives and normative objectives. This market- and state-driven, top-down and reward-oriented scheme complements, but also competes with existing bottom-up non-governmental certification schemes that build on consumer pressure. FLEGT mainly relies on

the role of the sovereign in the legality verification process, although accredited auditors and civil society are involved in giving permits and checking the certification process.

Parallel to the FLEGT agreement negotiations, the EU has begun to conduct FLEGT supporting activities. In Indonesia, the FLEGT office liaises and coordinates with the European Delegation in Jakarta. It has been involved in information-sharing and good governance projects on the grassroots level. FLEGT is inclusive of the people dimension and advocates for responsible governance and greater stakeholder participation of local communities in managing the forestry sector (Interview with FLEGT official in Jakarta 24 May 2010). For example, FLEGT emphasises legality verification over certification, minimising external certification criteria and encouraging responsible governance. In this context, the extent of European interference into Southeast Asian processes of enforcement appears limited to the harmonisation of legalities. When the EU buys from a non-FLEGT Voluntary Partnership Agreement (VPA) country, it needs to apply numerous controls for certification. These controls are avoided when the VPA is signed. On the one hand, as aforementioned, this acts as an incentive to sign the VPA and adhere to its conditions. On the other, it creates space for criminal activity and does not curb companies trading with illegal timber from non-VPA countries, which could buy licenses from signatory countries.

FLEGT is not a panacea for Southeast Asia's timber sector. The inclusion and implementation of participatory elements is desirable, but the realisation of these ultimately rests with the domestic authorities. Furthermore, it will only have a greater impact when its bilateral nature between the EU and selected individual ASEAN member states is superseded by a region-to-region scheme. This could ensure that even re-exported products are certified. This, however, premises that Southeast Asian countries manage to launch some form of regional cooperation in the jealously guarded timber sector; which is, furthermore, not a source of revenue for every ASEAN country.

An important case study of the EU-ASEAN relationship that also shows the operational ambiguities of realising the EU's normative agenda is the AMM. It is the most significant instance of European assistance to Southeast Asia associated with contemporary transboundary and newly emerging security challenges. The EU responded immediately when the Boxing Day Tsunami struck. The European Commission's Humanitarian Aid Office (ECHO) support was under way within 24 hours. Considerable financial support for immediate humanitarian assistance was made available. The severity of this natural catastrophe even overruled concerns about Indonesia's human rights record and three Rapid Reaction Mechanisms (RRMs) were activated to assist Indonesia.

In the introduction, it was assumed that the EU may frame its norms and values to attain normative objectives. The immediate launch of the RRM after the Boxing Day Tsunami hit Southeast Asia's coastlines confirms this. The RRM was drawn upon as an immediate response based on urgency and humanitarian perceptions, without lengthy political deliberation. Whilst normative behaviour was consistent with the objectives and motivations, it conflicted with other norms and values of the EU. One of the RRM supported the peace process in Aceh and brought about the AMM. The AMM was launched on the basis of the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the Indonesian Government and the Free Aceh Movement. The tasks specified in the MoU reflected the EU's human rights concerns, to some extent. However, the focus was on operation effectiveness and, seemingly, the EU's norm and values were de-emphasised during the implementation phase (Schulze 2007). The European Commission attempted to compensate this shortcoming with complementary flanking projects.

The EU's quick-in-and-out approach and its lenient stance on democratisation and human rights have been considered favourably by Indonesian counterparts. Furthermore, the circumvention of multilateral frameworks seemed justified in light of Indonesia's wariness towards the involvement of the United Nations, ASEAN, the United States of America and Australia. This does not mean that the EU only displays rhetorical commitment to multilateralism and other norms and values. The EU acts

in accordance with the given situation. If an approach via other international organizations appears inappropriate, the EU will take responsibility on the basis of an official mandate.

One European Commission official explained that the success of the AMM and the ongoing peace are not necessarily the result of compromises of the EU's normative identity. Rather, they are suggestive that any form of human rights surveillance and intervention would have jeopardised the mission. 'Let's say, it is not a contradiction in first place. It is a Realpolitik, a recognition of Realpolitik. You aim for goals. You have a certain vision....We thought human rights, democracy [etc.] are important' but 'normative influence was limited from the outset notwithstanding a vision that we have' (Interview with EU official in Brussels 5 February 2009). EU officials have argued that the main purpose of the AMM was to safeguard an unproblematic transition from an unstable, violent situation to a stable peace where human rights and the rule of law were implemented. AMM personnel was neither in the position to promote human rights during the negotiation nor the peace process. First and foremost, it was Indonesia's problem and not the EU's problem. The EU was not actively negotiating in Helsinki. It only consented to Ahtisaari as the mediator. Ahtisaari was paid by the EU but he did not represent the EU. He might have wanted a stronger focus on human rights during the process, but this was his personal ambition and not to be mistaken as the EU's official rhetoric (Interview with EU official in Brussels 5 February 2009).

EMPIRICAL INSIGHTS AND ANALYTICAL PURPOSE

The empirical discussion illustrated various normative facets as well as the extent to which the EU's normative agenda is re-packaged within the EU's region-to-region, bilateral and EU-affiliated engagement. It proceeded in three parts that examined selected transboundary and newly emerging security challenges and the EU's responses. In the first part, through the discussion of the European response to the Asian financial crisis and the avian influenza outbreak, it was established that these challenges raise awareness and the level of politicisation between the EU and ASEAN. Furthermore, it appears that the EU will seek to become involved in mitigating vulnerabilities, both on the basis of compassion and interdependence.

The case of the Asian financial crisis has highlighted the extent to which the dialogue with Southeast Asia has become a goal in itself. Interaction enhances mutual understanding and reciprocal normative influence. The case has further shown that the EU and its member states provided various forms of assistance ranging from tangible financial support to rhetorical pledges. It was mentioned that these activities also allowed Europe to gain economically and shape the economies in Asia, to some extent. Similarly to the case of the Asian financial crisis, the discussion of the avian influenza and the European response reconfirmed the EU's mixed motivations. The discussion noted that some activities addressed normative issues directly. Normativity was traceable both within the motivations and the manner the activities were implemented. Norms guided behaviour, but also served as a rhetorical means.

The second part looked at the two cases of bilateral interaction within the forestry sector. They showed how European actors are adapting their conditions of assistance to suit the ASEAN normative context. This showed particular sensitivity to sovereignty and non-interference. Demand-orientation, economic incentives, normative flexibility and the inclusion of non-state actors have been integral to this approach. The examples of the forestry sector suggested that the EU has toned down its normative agenda and is increasingly seeking to link this agenda with tangible benefits that could attract sustained Southeast Asian interest and see the EU's agenda realised in the long run.

The third section discussed the AMM in the aftermath of the Boxing Day Tsunami. This discussion underlined the discrepancy between the EU's vision of the world and the realisation of this vision

within operations that take place far away. Domestic contexts play a vital role in discerning EU behaviour and normativity. Some scholars have suggested that the success of the AMM benefitted significantly from the Common Security and Defence Policy's de-emphasis of European core values when implementing the MoU and the incorporation of the normative agenda into so-called flanking projects of the European Commission. Whilst in all case studies the EU promoted and shared its normative standards, it appeared to be aware of the sensitivities of an explicit approach. Confrontation was circumvented and cooperative progress was ensured through the re-invention or re-packaging of the normative agenda in the form of best practice-sharing and incentivised projects. The EU has a vision of how its international environment ought to be. However, the operational reality diverges significantly from this.

This article has been a fruitful exercise in differentiating the EU's normative motivations and objectives. Firstly, we now have a greater awareness of the implications of transboundary and newly emerging security challenges on the EU's interaction with Southeast Asia. Secondly, we have gained more nuanced insights into the EU as a contemporary normative actor. In addition to this, we have a better understanding of what is meant with re-strategising and re-packaging EU norms. That is, throughout the empirical discussion, it became clear that the EU was conscious about the sensitivities within the counterpart and, seemingly, scaled down its normative rhetoric and demands. What it mainly did, was tone down and reframe its norms in order to make their diffusion effective and pertinent to shaping the political culture of ASEAN and ASEAN states in the long-run. When the EU and EU-affiliated actors opt for technical cooperation with flexible political conditions or prioritise incentivised projects, one could say that the EU has only redefined its strategy and re-packaged its norms. Based on the empirical discussion, the focal point of this contemporary re-packaging has been best practice-sharing⁷ as a subtle and embedded means of normative diffusion.

Furthermore, one could make the case that we may be witnessing the EU as an established actor, who has passed its phase of nascence and self-assertion in the international system. Today, fellow international actors are aware of what the EU stands for normatively (Interview with ASEAN member state official in Singapore 21 November 2008). Thus, the de-emphasis or re-strategisation of the normative identity to meet demand-orientation and attain economic competitiveness does not signify a compromise of the EU's normative identity. Instead, it is a natural progression of an international actor, who has become peer-recognised and does not want to risk being constantly at loggerheads with other actors. The latter is particularly acute in light of the Eurozone crisis and the need for economic competitiveness in Asia.

CONCLUSION

In their quest to theorise the EU and its normative dimension in international affairs, many scholars have created impressive abstractions of what the EU essentially is and does. This article acknowledges this, but proceeded from the conviction that contemporary insights into the EU in Southeast Asia and the EU's variation as a normative actor in the region cannot be captured adequately through abstract concepts. The empirical study of transboundary and newly emerging security challenges needs to find greater scholarly recognition as an important frame for analysis.

This article focused on a handful of selected transboundary and newly emerging security challenges/crises and European responses to these. This facilitated a nuanced understanding of the variation in norm-guided actions and normative rhetoric of the EU. Insights into the EU's normative motivations, objectives, means and actions were gained through the discussion of the case studies. Particular emphasis was placed on the motivations of action. It was confirmed that the level of urgency, self-protective/material cost-benefit calculations and long-term vision of the EU are useful motivational categories in capturing the EU as a normative actor. It seemed that the EU was

commonly driven by a mix of motivations, making it difficult to disentangle the extent to which the EU's normativity actually unfolded. The EU is not always straightforward in pursuing its normative agenda. It is sensitive to domestic contexts and demand-oriented. At the same time, the EU attempts to live up to its normative standards. In complicated domestic contexts, it will prefer toned down and subtle pathways and adapt to its domestic and international settings. Whilst this risks identity conflicts, to some extent, it avoids tensions with dialogue partners. This means that the variation in normative behaviour is constant, because the inclusion of norms into the EU's interaction with the counterpart is a fluid balancing act. If the variation is considered the norm and if the normative frames are ever-evolving and becoming more subtle, the EU cannot be accused of undermining its normative dimension *per se*. Rather, the EU continues to ethicise its international environment differently through forms of implicit diffusion. On the one hand, the EU has to restrain its normative self-understanding and -awareness in order to manage effective relations with other international actors. On the other, it is aware of its identity and the perceptions of it by others.

Finally, this article proposed that the EU has become a peer-recognised international actor. The EU's concurrent phase of evolution as an international actor does not negate the EU as a normative actor. However, it suggests that, in light of the EU's intra-regional pressures and the importance of the external environment, emphasising the normative dimension of the EU may be inadequate. Placing emphasis on its norms and values in its external relations may be pertinent to certain points in time only; when the EU was a new international actor and its dependency on other external actors lower. At the same time, whilst the socio-economic asymmetry constituted an important premise and entry point for interaction to develop, it also became clear that we cannot reduce the variation in normativity to this and need to acknowledge the significance of normative realities within the counterpart. In conclusion, we can say that the EU's interaction with and within Southeast Asia in the context of these case studies has confirmed the EU as a nuanced normative actor, who is constantly searching for new pathways of influence. Transboundary and newly emerging security challenges have been a useful frame in this article, because they provided evidence on how the EU is an evolving normative actor and re-packaging its normative agenda in Southeast Asia.

Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank the Centre for History and Economics of the University of Cambridge and the SEATIDE project for facilitating the writing of this article.

Correspondence address

Naila Maier-Knapp, Centre for History and Economics, Magdalene College, Cambridge CB3 0AG, United Kingdom [nm574@cam.ac.uk]

¹ The 'essential elements' clause consists of the core values of the EU. Generally speaking, these are human rights and liberal-democratic principles. Since 1992, the EU has systematically incorporated this clause in its bilateral trade and development relations. In the Communication: A New Partnership with Southeast Asia in 2003, the EU proposed to include this clause in all negotiations with the ASEAN member states.

² In view of the former official's academic background, it is assumed that she is familiar with the civilian power concept as defined by François Duchêne. Furthermore, her statement confirms that, to some extent, these scholarly role concepts of the EU as a normative actor are still finding their way into the EU's official rhetoric and self-awareness.

³ In this article, the EU's behaviour refers to the sum of interactions from the EU system with Southeast Asia. This consists of the activities of the European Commission, EU member states and EU-affiliated agencies, although the primary focus is placed on the agency of the European Commission. Furthermore, it should be noted that the socio-economic asymmetry is not the sole variable impacting on an actor's capacity to persuade and influence. However, it is the central one in shaping understandings of vulnerability and resilience in relation to transboundary and newly emerging security challenges.

⁴ This feature is the central lead for understanding the EU as a normative actor in the empirical discussion.

⁵ The empirical narrative places emphasis on understanding an actor's motivations, because this is essential when judging the sincerity of the employment of norms and normative jargon.

⁶ Whilst GIZ is not accounted for in traditional accountings and this article's definition of the EU as an actor, it is indeed an extension of Germany's international agency, given its role as a contractor, bound to the principles of Germany's Ministry for Development Cooperation. Hence, it should be subsumed within this article's definition of the EU as an actor, which includes the activities of and affiliated to the member states.

⁷ The pathway of best practice-sharing to develop a culture of particularism and participation was exemplified through the ASEAN-German Regional Forest Programme.

REFERENCES

- Acharya, A. (2004). How Ideas Spread: Whose Norms Matter? Norm Localization and Institutional Change in Asian Regionalism. *International Organisation*, 58 (2): 239–275.
- Aggestam, L. (2008). Introduction: ethical power Europe?. *International Affairs*, 84 (1): 1-11.
- Algieri, F. (2007). Unequal Treatment: democracy promotion of the EU in Myanmar/Burma and China. In A. Jünemann and Michèle Knodt (eds) *Externe Demokratieförderung durch die Europäische Union*. Baden-Baden: Nomos: 169-184.
- Associated Press (2005). China reports new bird-flu outbreaks, CTV. Available at: www.calgary.ctv.ca/servlet/an/local/CTVNews/20051111/bird_flu_china_051111?hub=MontrealHome. Accessed on 12 June 2013.
- Börzel, T. and Risse, T. (2000). When Europe hits Home: Europeanisation and Domestic Change. *European Integration Online Papers*, 4 (15). Available at: www.eiop.or.at/eiop/pdf/2000-015.pdf. Accessed on 20 May 2013.
- Bretherton, C. and Vogler, J. (2006). Conceptualising Actors and Actorness. In C. Bretherton and J. Vogler (eds), *The European Union as a Global Actor*. New York: Routledge: 12-36.
- Bridges, B. (1999). Europe and the Asian Financial Crisis: coping with contagion, *Asian Survey*, 39 (3): 456-467.
- Bulmer, S. and Radaelli, C. (2004). The Europeanisation of National Policy?, *Queen's Papers on Europeanisation*. Belfast: Queen's University Belfast.
- Cannizzaro, E. (2002). *The European Union as an Actor in International Relations*. The Hague: Kluwer Law International.
- Diez, T. (2013). 'Normative Power as Hegemony', *Cooperation and Conflict*, 48 (2): 194-210.
- Diez, T. (2005). Reconsidering "Normative Power Europe." *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, 33 (3): 613-636.
- Duchêne, F. (1973). Die Rolle Europas im Weltsystem: Von der regionalen zur planetarischen Interdependenz. In W. Hager and M. Kohnstamm (eds), *Zivilmacht Europa: Supermacht oder Partner?*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp: 11-35.
- Duchêne, F. (1972). Europe's role in world peace. In R. J. Mayne (ed), *Europe tomorrow: sixteen Europeans look ahead*. London: Fontana: 32-47.
- EUROPA Press Release (2010). EU and Philippines initial Partnership and Cooperation Agreement. *EUROPA*. Brussels.
- European Commission (2003). *A new partnership with South East Asia*, Brussels. Available at: www.trade.ec.europa.eu/doclib/docs/2004/july/tradoc_116277.pdf. Accessed on 23 May 2013.
- Featherstone, K. and Radaelli, C. (2003). *The Politics of Europeanisation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Gilson, J. (2004). Trade relations between Europe and East Asia. *Asia Europe Journal*, 2 (2): 185-200.
- GIZ and ASEAN Secretariat (2009). *ASEAN-German Regional Forest Programme*, Jakarta: GIZ and ASEAN Secretariat.
- Interview with ASEAN member state official in Singapore (21 November 2008).
- Interview with EU official in Brussels (9 February 2009).
- Interview with EU official in Brussels (5 February 2009).
- Interview with EU official via telephone to Brussels (4 November 2009).
- Interview with EU official in Singapore (18 November 2008).
- Interview with former European Delegation official in Singapore (19 November 2008).
- Interview with FLEGT official in Jakarta (24 May 2010).
- Interview with GIZ staff in Jakarta (26 May 2010).

- Jørgensen, K.E. (2004). Theorising the European Union's Foreign Policy. In T. Christiansen and B. Tonra (eds), *Rethinking European Union Foreign Policy*. Manchester: Manchester University Press: 11-35.
- Kerr, W.A., Perdakis N. and Yeung, M. (1999). *Regional Trading Blocs in the Global Economy: the EU and ASEAN*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.
- Lucarelli, S. and Manners, I. (2006). *Values and Principles in European Union Foreign Policy*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Maier-Knapp, N. (2011). The Case of the European Union Partnership and Cooperation Agreement Negotiations with Thailand, *Australian and New Zealand Journal of European Studies*, 2 (2): 58-72.
- Manea, M.G. (2008). Human rights and the interregional dialogue between Asia and Europe: ASEAN-EU relations and ASEM. *The Pacific Review*, 21 (3): 369-396.
- Manners, I. (2002). Normative Power Europe: a contradiction in term?. *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 40 (2): 235-258.
- Nye, J.S. (2004). *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*. New York: Public Affairs.
- Petersson, M. (2006). Myanmar in EU-ASEAN Relations. *Asia Europe Journal*, 4 (4): 563-581.
- Rhodes, C. (1998). *The European Union in the World Community*. Boulder: Lynne Rienner.
- Robles Jr., A.C. (2008). *The Asia-Europe Meeting: the theory and practice of interregionalism*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Rüland, J. (2001). The EU as an Inter-regional Actor: the Asia-Europe Meeting. In S. Y. Chia, S. Chirathivat, F. Knipping and P. H. Lassen (eds), *Asia-Europe on the Eve of the 21st Century*. Singapore: Institute for Southeast Asian Studies: 43-56.
- Rüland, J. (2002a). The European Union as an Inter- and Transregional Actor: Lessons for Global Governance from Europe's Relations with Asia. *The European Union in International Affairs*. Canberra: Australian National University.
- Rüland, J. (2002b). Inter- and Transregionalism: Remarks on the State of the Art of a New Research Agenda. *National Europe Centre Paper*, 35, Canberra: Centre for European Studies.
- Schimmelfennig, F. and Sedelmeier, U. (2005). *The Europeanisation of Central and Eastern Europe*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Schulze, K.E. (2007). Mission Not So Impossible. The Aceh Monitoring Mission and lessons learned for the EU. *International Policy Analysis*, Berlin: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung.
- Sjöstedt, G. (1977). *The External Role of the European Community*. Farnborough: Saxon House.
- Smith, K.E. (2005). Still 'civilian power EU'?. *European Foreign Policy Unit*, London: London School of Economics.
- Smith, M. (1994). Beyond the Stable State? Foreign Policy Challenges and Opportunities in the New Europe. In W. Carlsnaes and S. Smith (eds), *European Foreign Policy: the EC and changing perspectives in Europe*. London: Sage: 21-44.
- Telò, M. (2009). *The European Union and Global Governance*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Thang, H.C. (2008). *Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade in Asia: an update*. Rome: Food and Agriculture Organisation.
- The Nation (2004). *Bird Flu Not Here: EU Commissioner*. Available at: www.nationmultimedia.com/page.news.php3?clid=2&id=106798&usrss=1. Accessed on 23 May 2013.
- Umbach, F. (2004). EU-ASEAN Political and Security Dialogue at the Beginning of the 21st Century: prospects for interregional cooperation on international terrorism,. In C. Dürkop (ed), *Panorama: Insights into Southeast Asian and European Affairs*. Singapore: Konrad-Adenauer Stiftung: 9-22.