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ECONOMIC RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ASIA AND EUROPE:
CASE STUDIES OF SINGAPORE’S EXPORTS TO
CHINA AND THE EU

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Abstract

1 Inter-regional trade negotiations between the EU and ASEAN have not met with much success since they were first tabled in the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) in 1996. This has led to separate discussions between the EU and individual ASEAN member countries to establish bilateral free trade agreements (FTAs). Singapore was the first ASEAN country to formalise a bilateral FTA with the EU, initialled in 2014 as the EU-Singapore Free Trade Agreement (EUSFTA). At the same time, Singapore has also developed a close trade relationship with China by establishing a China-Singapore Free Trade Agreement (CSFTA) in 2008. Despite the obvious significance of the EUSFTA and CSFTA, there has been little systematic research on the export-growth nexus in Singapore. Thus, this paper examines whether Singapore’s exports to China and the EU are beneficial for its economic development. Empirical findings indicate that there is unidirectional causality between exports to China and economic development, consistent with the export-led economic development hypothesis. Nevertheless the findings also show that, in line with the neutrality hypothesis, there is an independent relationship between exports to the EU and economic development. These findings have considerable implications on Singapore’s international trade policy and practices.

Keywords: export, economic development, free trade agreement (FTA), Singapore

Introduction

In January 2017, US President Donald Trump intentionally weakened inter-regional linkages between Asia and North America by signing the Presidential Memorandum to withdraw officially from the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP). Prior to that, the TPP was considered as the “biggest” trade deal in the history of inter-regionalism, containing an ambitious plan to create a rule-based economic integration and strengthen cooperation within the Asia-Pacific region. Under these circumstances, inter-regional economic ties between Asia and Europe,
initiated by the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) in 1996, could become more important than ever.

The ASEM cooperation mechanism consists of 51 partner countries and two institutional partners, i.e. the EU and the ASEAN Secretariat. More specifically, the promotion of trade and investment is entrusted to three closely-connected organizations: first, the Asia-Europe Business Forum (AEBF), a meeting of ASEM business leaders aiming to promote inter-regional business partnerships; second, the Senior Official’s Meeting on Trade and Investment (SOMTI), a meeting of senior trade officers to strengthen economic partnerships, including FTAs; and thirdly, the Finance Ministers’ Meeting (FinMM), where the objective is to coordinate inter-regional monetary and financial policies.

However, numerous trade negotiations in the ASEM have yet to produce any concrete results in creating a comprehensive regional free trade agreement (FTA) between ASEAN and the EU. In fact, no formal discussions on the ASEM-FTA have taken place since 2006 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Thailand, 2015). This failure to develop a collective FTA has led to separate discussions between the EU and individual ASEAN member countries to establish bilateral FTAs. In this regard, Singapore was the first ASEAN country to formalise a bilateral FTA with the EU, initialled in 2014 under the name of the EU-Singapore Free Trade Agreement or EUSFTA (Sanderson, 2015). The country has been a very active advocate of trade liberalisation and played a crucial role as a trade hub in the ASEAN region. On the other hand, it has also established a close trade relationship with China by establishing a China-Singapore Free Trade Agreement (CSFTA) in 2008. In spite of this, there has been little systematic empirical analysis on the export-growth nexus in the country, particularly with respect to its international trade with the EU and China.

Against this background, the current study examines the effects of Singapore’s export on its economic growth, given the present state of ASEAN-EU trade relationship and its own bilateral ties with the EU and China. The justification for studying Singapore is that it is the first ASEAN member to establish a bilateral FTA with the EU. This move could be seen as Singapore’s individual effort to re-activate its trade relationship with Europe, due to a lack of progress achieved through ASEM. Hence the first research question is: Does Singapore’s “first mover advantage” with the EU bring positive effects on its economic growth? At the same time, China has been a dominant trade partner for Singapore since the late 2000s. Thus the second research question is: Have Singapore’s exports to China been beneficial for its economic growth?

The paper consists of six sections. Following this brief introduction, the second and third sections will discuss related literature in international trade and investment between ASEAN and the EU, as well as trends in Singapore’s exports to the EU and China. The fourth section will explain the data collection and data analysis procedures adopted in the current study, while the fifth presents its empirical findings. The paper concludes with some policy implications and recommendations for future research.

**ASEAN-EU International Trade and Investment**

ASEAN as a group represents the EU’s third largest trading partner, after the US and China (European Commission, 2017). More than €246 billion of goods and services were traded between ASEAN and the EU in 2014. On the other hand, the EU is ASEAN’s second largest trading partner after China, accounting for around 13% of ASEAN’s trade (European Commission, 2017). The EU’s main exports to ASEAN are chemical products, machinery and
transport equipment. The main exports from ASEAN to the EU are machinery and transport equipment, agricultural products as well as textiles and clothing. Besides that, the EU plays an important role in financing regional trade-related projects such as the ASEAN Regional Integration Support from the EU (ARISE PLUS); COMPASS (Statistics and Integration Monitoring); ASEAN Project on the Protection of Intellectual Property Rights (ECAP III); ASEAN Air Transport Integration Project (AATIP) and the Enhanced Regional EU-ASEAN Dialogue Instrument (e-READI).

The EU is also by far the largest investor in ASEAN, accounting for 22% of total foreign direct investment (FDI) inflows to the region. From 2012 to 2014, European companies had invested an average of €19 billion annually in ASEAN (European Commission, 2017). Three quarters of the EU’s FDI of US$19.6 billion into the region were concentrated in the services sector (UNCTAD & ASEAN, 2016), where Australia, the EU and Japan were the largest investors in wholesale and retail trade activities. FDI into ASEAN extractive industries also had a strong EU presence. Japan, ASEAN, the Republic of Korea and the EU, in that order, accounted for 64 per cent of total FDI inflows into the manufacturing industry (UNCTAD & ASEAN, 2016). This high level of European investment in ASEAN is evident through the regional expansion of European multinational corporations (MNCs) such as BASF, Continental, Infineon, Nestlé, L’Oreal and GN ReSound (UNCTAD & ASEAN, 2016).

Although FDI flows from the EU to ASEAN declined by 20 per cent from $25 billion in 2014 to $20 billion in 2015 (UNCTAD & ASEAN, 2016), the European share out of the top ten investors in ASEAN rose from 71 per cent to 75 per cent in the same period. In the 2014 list, Luxembourg was ranked fourth, followed by the United Kingdom (previously EU member country) at fifth place. Meanwhile, France and the Netherlands were positioned at number nine and ten. In 2015, the Netherlands, United Kingdom and Denmark were ranked fifth, sixth and ninth, respectively, while Luxembourg and France dropped out of the ranking (UNCTAD & ASEAN, 2016).

In the early years of ASEM, inter-regional trade negotiations between ASEAN and the EU were considered an important agenda. Following the establishment of a single European market in 1992, a number of Asian countries expressed their concern that the EU was increasingly becoming an “economic fortress” with protective barriers for non-member countries. To overcome the shortcomings of “closed regionalism”, ASEM has the potential to serve as a multi-faceted platform for “open regionalism” to promote balanced economic and business activities between Asia and Europe. For Europe, Asia can be an important market for their products. For Asia, Europe provides alternative sources of investment and advanced technology. To this end, the Asia-Europe Vision Group (AEVG) had proposed to set up a comprehensive ASEM free trade area by 2025 (Park, 2004).

There have been numerous suggestions and policy dialogues on a long-term economic objective to establish an ASEM-FTA. However, a comprehensive FTA has not been discussed in ASEM meetings for more than ten years. Despite their mutual interest in trade liberalisation, initial EU-ASEAN negotiations were not successful due to challenges in setting common standards among ASEAN’s ten-member countries, as a result of their diverse political systems and the size of their economies and populations (Morales, 2017). On its part, ASEAN is trying to build an integrated economic market under the name of ASEAN Economic Community (AEC). Yet again, there are many challenges to be overcome in the implementation of this ambitious plan. For example, violence and human rights conditions have been a serious problem in some ASEAN states such as Myanmar and Laos. In other countries, such as
Malaysia and Indonesia, ensuring fair wealth distribution is a major concern. These issues have created an obstacle in ASEAN-EU negotiations, given the EU’s emphasis on human rights and economic equitability in its trade policies (Morales 2017). Due to the lack of progress in ASEM, some ASEAN countries have individually attempted to form bilateral FTAs with the EU. Leading this initiative is Singapore, resulting in a Singapore-EU FTA agreed text in 2014, followed closely by Vietnam in 2016.

Other ongoing trade issues between ASEAN and the EU include strict conditions imposed by EU on certain export goods from ASEAN, such as palm oil from Malaysia and Indonesia. On 4 April 2017, the European Parliament adopted the Resolution on Palm Oil and Deforestation of Rainforests, which aims to reduce the negative impact of deforestation due to unsustainable or illegal palm oil production. There are two controversial proposals in the Resolution which involves: first, the development of a new, single certification scheme for palm oil and palm oil products by 2020; and second, the phasing out and replacement of palm oil used in biofuels with EU-grown vegetable oils by 2020 (Singapore Institute of International Affairs, 2017). If enforced, ASEAN palm oil producers, particularly Malaysia and Indonesia, will be significantly affected. The EU palm oil market accounts for 17 percent (4.37 million tonnes) of Indonesia’s and 13 percent (2.09 million tonnes) of Malaysia’s palm oil exports respectively, and affects the livelihood of various communities within ASEAN that depend on palm oil production. These include migrant workers from Myanmar who work on palm oil plantations, as well as Indonesian and Malaysian smallholders who contribute about 40 percent of global palm oil production (Singapore Institute of International Affairs, 2017). In response, Malaysia has sent a delegate to the European Parliament to negotiate its position with respect to the Resolution and affirmed its commitment to sustainable practices in palm oil production. The Malaysian government’s decision to make it mandatory for local palm oil producers and processors to adopt the Malaysia Sustainable Palm Oil (MSPO) certification was welcomed by the European Parliament (Mah, 2017).

**Singapore’s Exports to China and the EU**

Figure 1 depicts trends in Singapore’s exports to China and the EU from 1975 to 2017. As the figure clearly indicates, its exports to China were relatively low in the 1970s. The total value amounted to only US$4 million in 1975, gradually increasing to US$54 million in 1979. By contrast, Singapore’s exports to the EU amounted to US$199 million in 1975 and increased to US$652 million in 1979.

However, by the late 2000s, China had overtake the EU as a leading trade partner of Singapore. The total amount of Singapore’s exports to China grew rapidly from US$1,061 million in 2000 to US$4,106 million in 2005, to US$7,518 million in 2008. During the same period, Singapore’s exports to the EU rose slowly from US$4,465 million in 2000 to US$6,456 million in 2005, to US$9,016 million in 2008. In the third quarter of 2009, the total value of Singapore’s exports to China (US$6,969 million) exceeded its exports to the EU (US$6,638 million) for the first time. China’s dominant position in Singapore’s international trade relationship was further reinforced in the 2010s. The total amount of Singapore’s exports to China increased from US$8,206 million in 2010 to US$11,368 million in 2015, to US$12,276

Source: International Monetary Fund (2017)

The shifting trends in Singapore’s exports to China and the EU, as elaborated above, have raised the question of whether the country’s current export practices have a positive effect on its economic development. In this study, focus is given on the relationship between the amount of exports and Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Details of the data collection and data analysis procedures adopted in the study are described in the following section.

**Data and Methods**

This paper has selected Singapore as a case study to examine the country’s exports to China and EU and its contribution to economic growth in Singapore for the period of 1975Q1-2017Q3. Statistics on Singapore’s exports to China and the EU were obtained from the database on the Direction of Trade (International Monetary Fund, 2017). On the other hand, GDP figures were sourced from Statistics Singapore (2017). All data on exports and income were transformed into natural logarithms.

For the purpose of empirical analysis, three econometric methods were employed, namely the Phillips-Perron (PP) unit root test, the Johansen cointegration test and the Granger causality test. In the first stage of empirical analysis, the Phillips-Perron unit root test was based on the following equation (Phillips and Perron, 1988):

$$\Delta y_t = \beta_0 + \alpha y_{t-1} + \epsilon_t$$  \hspace{1cm} (1)

where $y_t$ is variable of interest, $\beta_0$ is intercept, $\alpha$ is slope coefficient for the lagged dependent variable, $\epsilon_t$ is disturbance term. The PP statistic was calculated as follows (Phillips and Perron, 1988):

$$pp = t_a \left( \frac{\gamma_0}{f_0} \right)^{1/2} - \frac{T(f_0 - \gamma_0)(se(\alpha))}{2 f_0^{1/2} s}$$  \hspace{1cm} (2)

where $t_a$ is $t$-statistic of $\alpha$ in Equation (1), $\gamma_0$ is residual variance, $f_0$ is the long-run residual variance, $T$ is number of observation, $s$ is standard error of regression and $se(\alpha)$ is standard error of $\alpha$ in Equation (1). The PP test is a nonparametric unit root test which modifies the ADF statistics (Dickey and Fuller, 1979). In this PP statistic, the presence of serial correlation does not affect the asymptotic distribution of $t$-statistic (Phillips and Perron, 1988). The bandwidth length is determined by the Newey-West method.

In the second stage of empirical analysis, this study relied on the Johansen cointegration test to examine the long-run relationship between variables. Johansen (1991) proposed a Vector Autoregression (VAR) for the analysis of cointegration. The Johansen test is based on the following VAR:

$$y_t = \mu + \sum_{i=1}^{p} \beta_i y_{t-i} + \epsilon_t$$  \hspace{1cm} (3)
where $y_t$ is $k$-vector of variables, $p$ is lag order, $\mu$ is intercept, $\beta_i$ are slope coefficients and $\varepsilon_t$ is error term. Equation (3) can be transformed into:

$$\Delta y_t = \mu + \Pi y_{t-1} + \sum_{i=1}^{p} \Gamma_i \Delta y_{t-i} + \varepsilon_t$$  \hspace{1cm} (4)

where $\Pi$ is coefficient matrix for the lagged dependent variables and $\Gamma$ is the coefficient matrix for the lagged differenced dependent variables. Furthermore, the coefficient matrix $\Pi$ can be written as:

$$\Pi = \alpha \beta'$$  \hspace{1cm} (5)

where $\alpha$ is the vector of adjustment parameter and $\beta$ is the vector of cointegrating equation. In this study, the maximum eigenvalue method was used to estimate the Johansen test statistic. Due to the limited number of observations, the lag order was set up as one in the current study.

In the third stage of empirical analysis, the Granger causality test was employed to analyze the causal relationship between variables. The Granger causality test could be based on the following equations (Granger, 1969):

$$GDP_t = \mu_1 + \sum_{i=1}^{p} \beta_{1i} EXP_{t-i} + \sum_{i=1}^{p} \beta_{2i} GDP_{t-i} + \varepsilon_{1t}$$

$$EXP_t = \mu_2 + \sum_{i=1}^{p} \beta_{3i} GDP_{t-i} + \sum_{i=1}^{p} \beta_{4i} EXP_{t-i} + \varepsilon_{2t}$$  \hspace{1cm} (6)

There were two null hypotheses in the current study. The first null hypothesis of no causality from exports to economic development can be formulated as:

$$\beta_{11} = \beta_{12} = \ldots = \beta_{1p} = 0$$  \hspace{1cm} (7)

The second null hypothesis of no causality from economic development to exports can be formulated as:

$$\beta_{21} = \beta_{22} = \ldots = \beta_{2p} = 0$$  \hspace{1cm} (8)

The Granger causality test was used to test four alternative hypotheses that would explain causal relations between variables. The first hypothesis is on export-led economic development (ELED). According to this hypothesis, exports can be considered as a source of economic development. The ELED hypothesis would be substantiated if the empirical findings could point to the presence of a unidirectional causality from exports to economic development. The rejection of the first null hypothesis (Equation 8) and non-rejection of the second hypothesis (Equation 9) would provide empirical evidence to support this hypothesis.

The second hypothesis concerns development-led export expansion (DLEE). In other words, economic development will lead to export expansion. The DLEE hypothesis would be substantiated if the empirical findings could identify the presence of a unidirectional causality from economic development to export expansion. The rejection of the second hypothesis
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(Equation 9) and non-rejection of the first hypothesis (Equation 8) would provide the empirical evidence for this hypothesis.

Next, the third hypothesis is related to the feedback effect between exports and economic development (FEED), whereby there is a mutually reinforcing relationship between exports and economic development. The FEED hypothesis would be substantiated if the empirical findings showed a bidirectional causality between exports and economic development. The rejection of both the first hypothesis (Equation 8) and the second hypothesis (Equation 9) would provide empirical evidence to support this hypothesis.

Finally, the fourth hypothesis is on the neutrality between exports and economic development (NEED). According to this hypothesis, there is a neutral relationship between exports and economic development. The NEED would be substantiated if there were no causal relationship between exports and economic development. The non-rejection of the first hypothesis (Equation 8) and the second hypothesis (Equation 9) would provide empirical evidence for this hypothesis.

Findings and Discussion

The current study employed three different econometric methods, namely the Phillips-Perron (PP) test, the Johansen test together with the error correction model (ECM), and the Granger causality test to examine the impact of Singapore’s exports to China and the EU on its economic development. In the first stage of empirical analysis, the PP test was used to examine the unit root process of the time-series data on exports and income. The empirical findings from the PP test are reported in Table 1.

Table 1: Results of PP unit root test

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Intercept</th>
<th>Intercept and trend</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>EXPC</td>
<td>0.347[1]</td>
<td>-5.066[7]***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ΔEXPC</td>
<td>-17.020[1]***</td>
<td>-16.798[0]***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ΔEXPEU</td>
<td>-14.143[8]***</td>
<td>-14.592[8]***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: *** indicates the significant level at the 1 percent
Numbers in bracket indicate the optimal bandwidth which is determined by Newey-West method

As the results clearly indicate, the PP test failed to reject the null hypothesis of unit root for economic development (GDP) at level. On the other hand, the PP test rejected the null hypothesis for the same variable at first difference. The PP test also failed to reject the null hypothesis of unit root for the exports to China (EXPC) but rejected the null hypothesis for the same variable at first difference. Similarly, the PP test failed to reject the null hypothesis of unit root for the exports to EU (EXPEU) but rejected the null hypothesis for the same variable at first difference. Despite some minor differences, empirical findings from the PP test indicated that exports to China, exports to the EU and economic development at level could be considered as the unit root process. Furthermore, findings also indicated that these three
variables at first difference could be considered as nonstationary process. This means that these variables are integrated of order one, $I(1)$, implying that standard statistical methods, such as linear regression, can be used efficiently to examine the relationship among these variables.

In the second stage of empirical analysis, the Johansen cointegration test was used to examine the long-run relationship between exports and economic development in Singapore. Empirical findings from the Johansen cointegration test for the analysis of exports to China ($EXPC$) and economic development ($GDP$) are reported in Table 2. As shown in the table, the maximum eigenvalue statistic for the first null hypothesis of no cointegrating equation is greater than the five percent critical value. This means that the Johansen test rejected the first null hypothesis and indicated the presence of one cointegrating equation. Furthermore, the maximum eigenvalue statistic for the second null hypothesis of one cointegrating equation is also more than the five percent critical values. This indicates that the Johansen test failed to reject the second null hypothesis and confirm the presence of two cointegrating equations. In other words, the results of the Johansen cointegration analysis suggested that there would be no significant cointegrating relationship between exports to China and economic development in Singapore.

Table 2: Results of Johansen test ($EXPC$ and $GDP$)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of cointegrating equation</th>
<th>Eigenvalue</th>
<th>Maximum Eigenvalue</th>
<th>5 percent critical value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>0.097</td>
<td>17.146*</td>
<td>14.264</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At most 1</td>
<td>0.021</td>
<td>4.239*</td>
<td>3.841</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: ** indicates the significant level at the 5 percent

The results of the Johansen cointegration test for the analysis of exports to EU ($EXPEU$) and economic development ($GDP$) are reported in Table 3. The maximum eigenvalue statistic for the first null hypothesis of no cointegrating equation is smaller than the five percent critical value. This means that the Johansen test rejected the first null hypothesis and indicated the non-existence of one cointegrating equation. Furthermore, the maximum eigenvalue statistic for the second null hypothesis of one cointegrating equation is also more than the five percent critical values. This indicates that the Johansen test failed to reject the second null hypothesis and show the presence of two cointegrating equations. In other words, the results of the Johansen cointegration analysis indicated that there would be no significant cointegrating relationship between exports to EU and economic development in Singapore.

Table 3: Results of Johansen test ($EXPEU$ and $GDP$)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of cointegrating equation</th>
<th>Eigenvalue</th>
<th>Maximum Eigenvalue</th>
<th>5 percent critical value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>0.044</td>
<td>7.654</td>
<td>14.264</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At most 1</td>
<td>0.025</td>
<td>4.409*</td>
<td>3.841</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: ** indicates the significant level at the 5 percent

In the final stage of empirical analysis, the Granger causality test was used to examine the causal relationship between exports to China ($EXPC$) and economic development ($GDP$). The empirical findings from the Granger causality test are reported in Table 4. The results of the test rejected the null hypothesis of no causality between exports to China ($EXPC$) and economic
development (GDP). Furthermore, the Granger causality test failed to reject the null hypothesis of no causality from economic development to exports to China. This suggests a unidirectional causality between exports to China and economic development in Singapore.

Table 4: Results of Granger causality test (EXPC and GDP)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Exports to China (EXPC) would cause economic development (GDP)</th>
<th>Economic development (GDP) would cause expansion of exports to China (EXPC)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>19.812***</td>
<td>0.205</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: *** indicates the significant level at the 1 percent

The Granger causality test was also used to examine the causal relationship between exports to the EU (EXPEU) and economic development (GDP). The empirical findings from the Granger causality test are reported in Table 5. The Granger causality test failed to reject the null hypothesis of no causality between exports to the EU (EXPEU) and economic development (GDP). Furthermore, the Granger causality test also failed to reject null hypothesis of no causality between economic development and exports to the EU. These findings indicate an independent relationship between exports to the EU and economic development in Singapore.

Table 5: Results of Granger causality test (EXPEU and GDP)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Exports to EU (EXPEU) would cause economic development (GDP)</th>
<th>Economic development (GDP) would cause expansion of exports to EU (EXPEU)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0.204</td>
<td>0.771</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Conclusion

In 2015, Singapore became the first ASEAN country to have successfully established a bilateral free trade agreement with the EU, following failed ASEM negotiations for a comprehensive ASEAN-EU FTA. Singapore has also formed a strong bilateral trade relationship with China over the past two decades. Hence the current study was concerned with the effects of Singapore’s exports to the EU and China on the country’s economic development.

To examine the relationship between Singapore’s exports to the EU and China, and its GDP, the current study employed three econometric methods, namely the PP test, the Johansen test and the Granger causality test, for its empirical analysis. In the first stage of the analysis, the PP test was used to examine the unit root process of time-series data. The unit root test indicated that time-series on exports and income can be considered as a nonstationary process. In the second stage of analysis, the Johansen test was used to examine long-run relationships between the two variables. The cointegration test suggested that no such relationship exists between them. In the final stage of analysis, the Granger causality test was used to examine causal relationship between the variables. The causality test identified the presence of a unidirectional causality between exports to China and economic development in Singapore, in line with the export-led economic development hypothesis. However, the causality test showed no causal relationship between exports to the EU and economic development in the country. In other words, there is an independent relationship between exports to the EU and economic development, in line with the neutrality hypothesis. These findings can be interpreted such that
Singapore’s exports to China are positively related to its economic development, while its exports to the EU are not.

The above findings are consistent with Singapore’s export practices since 2005, whereby a stagnation of its exports to the EU was concurrently replaced by its exports to China. As demonstrated earlier in Figure 1, Singapore’s exports to the EU did not substantially increase after the EU economic crisis in the mid-2000s. On the other hand, Singapore’s exports to China increased sharply during the same period.

The current study has two main policy implications. First, due attention should be given to the Chinese market to maximise the economic effects of exports to China on Singapore. Meeting the needs of Chinese consumers is a significant factor which can stimulate Singapore’s economic growth. Traditionally also, the country has played the role of regional hub for Chinese products in ASEAN. Thus it may heighten its efforts to strengthen this regional position and increase further its total exports to China in the future. One such effort could be the setting up of a special free trade zone through the CSFTA to attract more foreign investments from China. Second, Singapore should also take account of the fact that there is a neutral relationship between exports to the EU and its economic development. Although the EU was a dominant trading partner for Singapore for two decades (1970s to 1990s), exports to the EU have not contributed significantly to its economic growth. This has been worsened by a stagnation of its exports to the EU since the 1990s. However, this situation may be a temporary, short-term trend since some EU countries, such as Germany, have recorded very high growth in the 2010s. With the signing of the EUSFTA in 2015, strategies should be developed by Singapore to ensure that future exports to the EU could produce more positive effects on its economic development.

This study has two main limitations and recommendations for future research. First, there is a lack of sufficiently long dataset on ASEAN exports and GDP. Further research in this area will benefit from a longer set of data. Second, econometrics as a method for data analysis is still undergoing improvements. With some advancement in recent years, more sophisticated methods such as unit root test with structural break or Fourier approximation could be employed in latter studies. This may offer a better insight on the relationship between exports and economic development, both for ASEAN and beyond.

References


NEW GLOBAL UNCERTAINTIES AND ITS MEANING FOR EUROPEAN UNION INTEGRATION?

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Abstract
The concept of European Union integration has been at the forefront of much discussion on what the future of the European Union project would be. At various junctions, especially in crisis times, the concept of integration would be code for a balance sheet on its progress and future challenges. The uncertainties that have merged since the British referendum decision to leave the European Union in June 2016, has provided a new framework for the future of European integration. It has seen the first departure of a member, and not an insignificant member, from the Union alongside destabilizing features in the world order. The dismissive approach from the Trump administration and the volatility of US foreign policy has put many in the EU on tender hooks. Moreover, European Union member states have had to contend with a volatile Euro-sceptic electorate, which has blamed the European Union for a crisis of expectations. The election results in 2017 in The Netherlands, and the victory of Macron in France, provided for some, reason to believe that not all was lost. The leadership of the European Union has taken a sober approach towards the current crisis and has refrained from submission to this pessimism. Though locked in negotiations with the UK over Brexit, its release of the White Paper on the future of the European Union issued in March 2017 was an attempt to insure that Brussels and the EU was not ruling from on–high without member state buy in. It was a document which was partially defensive (only mentioning Brexit once) but at the same time seeking a guide on whether, and how, to approach future European Union integration.

Keywords: European Union, integration, Brexit, EU White Paper, global uncertainty

Introduction
European integration is a much-discussed concept and code for describing the state and progress of the European Union (EU). In effect, everything related to the European Union in both its growth and its crisis is about its integration or lack thereof. As the European Union (and its predecessors) since its foundation years of the early 1950s, grew in size and depth, the matter of its progress and integration became equally important. The growth of the EU proceeded in grouped accessions from its original six (Germany, France, Italy and the Benelux countries) founding members. In the 1970s the UK, Ireland and Denmark acceded followed by the 1980s accession of Greece, Spain and Portugal. In the 1990s Austria, Sweden and Finland joined making by the mid-1990s a solid and cohesive grouping of 15 western European member states. With the end of the Cold War in Europe and the reunification of Germany, it was only natural that the EU turned its attention to the new market economies previously in the orbit of the former Soviet Union. This included eight nations from Central and Eastern Europe as well as the two island states of the Greek section of Cyprus and Malta. The accession in 2004 of these mostly eastern European nations however was a major extension of the European Union and in the view of some “a bridge too far” for the European Union. The countries had
come from a different political economy and the levels of economic development were both different and not synchronised. The emergence of these Eastern European states represented the most significant and differentiated merger with states that had little in common with Western economies and developed democratic States. This would be a major watershed.

The aim of this paper is to address and critically analyse the state of European Integration in the current global turmoil and uncertainty. The paper will examine the Juncker White Paper on the Future of Europe (2017) and the alternatives provided by this perspective. The paper addresses the options facing the European Union with all this debate and obstacles facing and what might lie ahead. The paper will seek to offer alternatives to what the EU might wish to pursue for its future as standing still appears no longer to be an option. Some of the turmoil facing the European Union is partially of its own making and certainly a function of its existence. It would be inaccurate to apportion all the blame for the global turmoil to the outcome of the US elections and the new Trump administration. The Brexit referendum outcome, the Dutch and French election results are testimony to this. This paper seeks to make the case that the European Union integration will struggle to deepen if it is incapable of re-assessing its direction, membership and scope of its jurisdiction. Moreover, it needs to decide to deepen more or pull right back. While European integration has always been the daughter of European post-war peace, today this message is sounder fainter and weaker. Pursuing the slow road of integration does not seem to be working as it might have done some decades ago. Trying to convince the less convinced is now showing signs that this approach does not work either. Is it that there needs to be even deeper Federalism or pull back to a much lower common denominator such as the Single Market?

**European integration models versus the realities**

Over the decades significant attention has been provided by scholars to the theories of European integration. The theories kept ever increasing and so did the expectations. In one analysis entitled Civitas it underscored why these theories could be important:

“Theories are important as they help us to understand how the EU works, and having a better understanding of how the EU has developed allows us to hypothesise about what the EU might be like in the future. It is also important to be familiar with the different approaches people take when explaining European integration, as whatever is written is always grounded in a particular set of assumptions which should be taken into account when reflecting on what has been said” (Civitas 2015).

These European integration theories alluded to included federalism, intergovernmentalism, neofunctionalism, Liberal Intergovernmentalism, (New) Institutionalism, Multi-level Governance and finally post functionalism. According to one scholar post-functionalism “is the newest theoretical approach to European integration... as it advocates an increased empirical and theoretical focus on public attitudes and party politics in the individual member states...” (Tosun et al 2014: 200). Why this is important is “because these factors can effectively constrain the ability of governments to shape European integration” (Tosun et al 2014: 200). Is this the reason for the backlash felt in some of the member states?

All theories have undergone decades of commentary and scholarly dissection. This paper has no desire to delve into their use and application. Many in the field of European Studies as well as practitioners within the European Union would possibly question the value of the models presented as guides to understanding the European Union (Blair 2010: 5). Some models served
well for certain periods but today in wholesale crisis we struggle to latch on to any the European models of understanding which can answer the crisis being felt and that the economic and social crisis are essentially the causes for the disaffection and Euroscepticism. As other scholars have noted: “Somewhat remarkably, however, integration theories have not put too much emphasis on the implications of crises and exogenous shocks... and the crisis would be expected to be an obstacle rather than an opportunity for further integration” (Tosun et al 2014: 199).

European integration and more specifically European jurisdiction of responsibilities until the 1990s did not extend to ‘core state powers’ (Gentschel & Jachtenfuchs 2016). Much of the responsibilities in the hands of Brussels were aspects of governance which interfered little with the important day to day matters of member states. EU affairs played out in both the European domain as well as within the member states seemed quite innocuous with little interference with member state political priorities. This changed with the Single Market (1992) and especially with the Maastricht Treaty and new areas of sovereignty deficit for member states. This was most felt with the enormous step taken by the EU with the achievement of the single currency and the Economic and Monetary Union.

As Brussels now emerged as a real facet of political direction so too would the concern about sovereignty of the nation states, and with growing levels of “Euroscepticism” also saw the end of the ‘permissive consensus’ (Lindberg & Scheingold, 1970) which had been the modus operandi give way to ‘constraining dissensus’ (Hooghe & Marks, 2005). As this consensus was evolving a political disconnect also emerged. Bellamy and Kroger (2016) noted that rather than a democratic deficit in operation of the EU institutions, the concern was more of a political disconnect between the politics and institutions of national parliament and the those of the European Union (2016, p. 125). Of equal concern and development was another feature of European integration or its lack of, was the notion of “differentiated integration”. Again EU scholars such as Bellamy and Kroger in another work recognised that not all states could move in the same direction at the same time – differentiated speed meant some do more while others do less. In European integration code, this had another expression known as “Two speed” or even “Three speed” Europe.

From the 1990s, despite moments of “honey moon” respite, the European project proceeded along a” two steps forward one step back” trajectory. A reunified Germany, a Maastricht Treaty and the Economic and Monetary Union while major milestones in the development of the European Project were also those that would differentiate between the member states bringing out the cracks in the union. These were the measures, which brought out the different Europe’s and their respective economic positioning. This included the southern Mediterranean flank. At the same time in different portions, certain features of the European Union played their divisive role. These included the concern over sovereignty, economic decline back in the member states and the rise of right wing concern over growing levels of inward migration. At the same time Germany’s assertiveness became more noticeable as Germany’s financial prowess became discernible in the EUs monetary policy and approach towards economic management.

The 2004 accession of the Central and Eastern European states was a daring leap into expansion of the European Union as it had never done. This growth to the east however also triggered strong reactions within the existing European community. As the EU moved towards a stronger governing framework, the proposed Constitution, it received aftershocks when the proposed constitution was voted down in France and The Netherlands. It was a warning to the EU community that a step too far had been made and that backtracking was in order. Some level
of weariness began to set in and the contrast between the new member states and the Western
group emerged quickly. The US initiated Iraq war and its desire to expand the coalition
attracted a number of the new European Union members from Eastern Europe. This war was
never seen with sympathy from the major European Union members such as Germany and
France though the UK was a prominent member of this Iraqi coalition. Another crack appeared
in the EU foreign policy approach and another reason for a stronger and unified approach.
Speaking with one voice was now seen as an obligatory next step amidst the global ridicule
that the EU suffered in this period.

The global financial crisis and its consequences to European integration

As the EU fought off criticism about its fragmented security and foreign policy approach
towards the world, as well as the concern about perceived inflation after the introduction of the
single currency, the final blow came with the global financial crisis in 2008. The onslaught of
the GFC, which was defined as being the most serious since 1929, caught especially those
European economies with large public debt, low growth rates and high unemployment. Other
economies that had poorly structured and secured banking systems also were in this mix such
as Ireland. Overall, however the ones most affected included the Southern Mediterranean flank
what the Economist referred to as the PIIGS countries – Portugal, Italy, Ireland, Greece and
Spain. The response of most European governments at the time was to tackle these winds of
crisis with even more austerity. As described by some scholars:

“In many European countries, this triggered severe sovereign debt crises beginning in early
2010, often followed by the implementation of tough austerity measures or programmes for
structural reforms of the welfare state and labour market with countries like Greece, Portugal, Spain, Ireland and Italy and the Baltic States representing the most prominent examples” (Armingeon & Guthmann 2013: 1).

While the US financial crisis was caused by the over extension of the banking credit system
involving private financial and mortgage institutions, the situation in the European Union was
primarily related to public debt and especially to high levels of budget deficits. This was
especially felt by lesser performing economies such as the Greek, the Portuguese, the Spanish
and the Irish. The test case however would be that of Greece which was facing debt levels of
bankruptcy proportions. One scholar observed that the Greek economy was built on excessive
budget deficits over the previous three decades and that between 2001 and 2009 the Greek
government took out substantial loans to sustain GDP growth (Kouretas 2015). Greece’s
admission into the Eurozone in 2001 and as such an adherent of the single currency also
allowed it greater access to private debt markets. This result in 2009 with private creditors
holding all of the Greek public debt, which by then had reached in 2008 alone the unsustainable
level of 130 per cent of GDP.

At the same time, the neighbouring European economies were only slightly better but all were
facing bond level interest, which were deemed to be of bankruptcy proportions. The austerity
responses by the member states, supported and encouraged by the European Commission,
created even more difficulties and distress. Unemployment grew and growth rates began
rapidly declining. In the case of Greece, it’s GDP from 2010 to 2015 declined by almost 50 per
cent. As one scholar observed:

“Austerity policy has caused the unemployment in the Eurozone to rise to 11 per cent, the
highest level since 1995. In Greece and Spain, rates are above 20 per cent; half of all young
people in the two countries are without work…Austerity policy is thus also contributing
decisively to further undermine the European Social Model” (Busch 2013: 5).
In the midst of the economic crisis, the European Union had unfinished business with the failure of the Constitutional Convention and the attempt to modernise the EU's governance system. The Lisbon Treaty talks, recommendations and conclusions offered some resolution to the democratic deficit as well as a stronger executive system for the European Union. The fragmented decision making structure of the European Union, exemplified by the divisions on a range of issues including foreign policy, highlighted the EU's weaknesses. The 2009 Lisbon Treaty ratification provided greater levels of power to the European Parliament, some response to new structures, firmer institutions and a firmer unified voice with the establishment of the permanent presidency of the EU and the High representative for Foreign Affairs. As an aside, the Lisbon Treaty also added without much discussion and debate the possibility of an exit clause from the European Union, which had never been seriously considered or expected. This would of course play a more prominent role with the British exit referendum in June 2016.

The legitimacy of the EU institutions addressed in the Lisbon Treaty was also code for crisis aversion and “democratic deficit” a much used association but poorly acted on. The intention of the EU leadership was to seek through Lisbon Treaty a way to improve dialogue with the populace in the EU in what was seemingly an already restless audience. While it is normal to speak of crisis within the European Union, the first serious sounding of alarm occurred in the middle of the global financial crisis. Scholars of European Integration first flagged:

“The European Union is currently experiencing its deepest crisis since it came into existence. The euro is undergoing the acid test and threatens to pull the single market into the abyss along with it. Collapse of the European Union, which due to successful integration since 1987 had seemed scarcely possible, can no longer be ruled out” (Busch et al 2013: 3).

Though much of the world was easing away from the global financial crisis by 2012, the southern European member states continued to go deeper into economic difficulties. Greece had reached catastrophic proportions and bailout proposals were being prepared by the EU. The situation would only deteriorate in the coming years with the final showdown with the Greek Syriza government in 2015 with an imposed bailout package which shook the moral foundations of Greece questioning not only its attitude towards the European Union but its ability to sustain the bailout clauses. It was the 12 billion euro bailout that the Greek Prime Minister initially recommended rejection through a hastily proposed referendum, which was initially a wholesale rejection of the package and later and under duress reluctantly accepted. It was an agreement Tsiparis said asking the Greek people to “abandon [their] dignity” (Reuter 2015). This crisis remains current to this moment.

The European Parliamentary Elections in 2014

Even before the European Parliamentary elections took place in May 2014, murmurs of concern were alive in terms of the populist responses already emerging in member state elections. Now it was the turn of the European Parliament. The 2014 European Parliamentary (EP) elections was the largest of its kind with more than 12,000 candidates from almost 450 parties competing for 751 seats. This involved over 400 million voters from the then 28 member states (Treib 2014: 1541). Democracy within the European Union was already in crisis on the back of the global financial crisis and already reflected in the results of elections in numerous member states. As one commentator observed:

“… in the EU between 2007-2011 … we find strong evidence that the way the crisis has thus far been handled politically (through the imposition of austerity policies from above and by
largely neglecting national arenas of democratic decision making) seems to have made things worse for democracy in Europe”. (Armingeon & Guthmann 2013: 17).

The results of the European Parliamentary elections were themselves telling. Beginning with the electoral turnout, it continued to remain at its historic low with 43 per cent of the eligible voters casting their votes. This turnout was at the same level as the previous election in 2009. Turnout in the elections had declined in every EP election since the first election in 1979. It became more telling when in the last four elections - 49.8 per cent in 1999; 45.5 per cent in 2004; 43.2 per cent in 2009 and 43 per cent in 2014. What made these figures look even worse was that some individual member states showed little or no interest in the elections at all? In some countries such as Poland and Croatia the turnout was at low levels of 23 and 25 per cent respectively (Europarl 2014). While the turnout was disconcerting, the actual vote, as the Financial Times noted was even more troubling when it wrote that the “European parliament is about to become noisier, more unruly, more confusing and more difficult to deal with” (Spiegel & Carnegy 2014). What this meant was that many 5representatives from fringe organisations, right-wing-nationalist parties were gaining access to the EP. The results in the UK were a clear testimony to these developments. The United Kingdom Independent Party (UKIP) received 27 per cent of the EP vote and collected 24 seats. Labour and the Conservatives trailed with 25 per cent of the vote picking up 20 seats while the Conservatives collected 23 per cent of the votes with 19 seats. The UKIP party had managed to become the largest party represented in the EP from the UK! Across other member states, the result produced a large array of Eurosceptics in the European Parliament who were not there before. It turned out that in 23 out of the 28 member states Eurosceptics won seats in the elections in 2014 (Reib 2014). The only member states which did not produce Eurosceptic parties included Estonia, Luxembourg, Malta, Romania and Slovenia. The total number of Eurosceptic parliamentarians sitting in the parliament after this election was 28 per cent an increase from 20 per cent in the previous elections in 2009 (Treib 2014).

While this figure sounds alarming not all Eurosceptics are the same. The ideological divide has not always clear and the use of the term Eurosceptic has some limitations encompassed within and the fact that in the European case they are divided between left and right. What may help an understanding of the force of Euroscepticism is in the view towards the European Union and its permanence. Not all the Eurosceptics were for its abolishment. Where alarm bells sounded was that this category of political formation has significantly grown since the 2009 elections. The biggest winners in the Eurosceptic camp were on the political right including the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP), The French Marine Le Pen National Front with 24.9 per cent and the Danish People’s Party, which topped the polls in their respective country (Trieb 2014). Much of the discussion on the cause for this result is the terrain of much debate. One stream of argumentation is that the EU elections are not about the EU but about the member states and therefore about national issues. This argument is also used as a justification for the lower turn out in voters and the elections whereby they use these elections to send a protest vote and message to respective leaderships of their member states (Marsh & Mikhaylov 2010).

The results in European Parliament would equally send out messages on the question of austerity. Eventually most EU leaders began to see the limits and dangers of an ongoing austerity philosophy such that even:

“Angela Merkel now seems to agree that austerity has run its course. When Italy’s prime minister, Matteo Renzi, together with other European leaders, led a fresh charge against the
ill-fated policy after the European elections, Berlin caved in surprisingly quickly” (Schui 2014)

In the case of Italy having been hit hard by the global financial crisis and in no position to introduce stimulus packages for the ailing companies and sectors, saw the precursor of what would happen in the European Parliament only months later. In 2012-13 elections in Italy saw the wholesale defeat of its Prime Minister Mario Monti well known for his strong leadership in the European Commission as Commissioner for Competition. In 2011, he replaced the discredited Silvio Berlusconi as Italian Prime minister and quickly sought to address Italy’s economic difficulties and especially its out of control public debt. By this Monti assumed that that austerity was the only solution – a lesson he had mastered in the Commission and one that was general parlance within German EU circles. After carrying out disastrous policies of government cutbacks and monetarist initiatives his election campaign and election results showed an electorate tired of austerity and in need of stimulus and government support (Benvenuti 2016). He lost the elections resoundingly, which saw not only the return to government of the Democratic Party but also the strong presence of the eclectic and anti-establishment 5 Star Movement.

With Merkel, Hollande and Renzi forcing the situation, a new climate of anti-austerity began to take over the discourses and Renzi, to the displeasure of Merkel was acclaiming the reform program of SPD leader Schroder in 2003 approach as a way forward. Whatever the merits of this reform agenda, what was set in motion was a stop to the unabated charge towards austerity and political signs were telling the politicians that uncertainty might become the norm. However the pro-austerity approach had already created its damage and the elections would be the place in which this displeasure would be delivered.

The watershed year: 2016

Freezing time in global politics, the year 2016 will be a watershed as much for the EU as it is for the global order. While concern about democratic deficit, Euroscepticism and rising nationalist right wing forces manifested through the global financial crisis, the Greek economic crisis and the migration emergency in 2015 had been a managed concern for European integration, the Brexit referendum outcome and the US Presidential election result pushed this state of control matters over the edge. What were previously issues of concern that might happen had now become stark reality. The previous crises of European integration were in various ways addressed, fumbled through or simply forgotten over the decades. The hiccups around the Maastricht Treaty ratification, the failure of the EU draft Constitution to be approved by member states such as France the Netherlands were tactfully sidestepped. The events of 2016 were major obstacles with deep ramifications and non-easy solutions. The new global reality was having its effect and the EU was totally conscious of the could no longer dismiss or postpone some of the more salient issues facing it. In particular, the global reality had changed considerably and the openness and tolerance towards European integration was quickly disappearing.

In 2015 David Cameron, the then British Prime Minister feeling the pressure from his right wing faction within the Tory Party sought to placate their anti-EU sentiments by putting on the British political agenda a referendum on whether the UK should remain or not in the European Union. It was not lost on anybody that 41 years prior, Britain had already experienced a referendum on whether to remain in the European Economic Community (EEC) in 1975 which resulted in a remain response in the EEC by a comfortable majority. At the time of the
announcement, some felt that this was a risky venture by Cameron and he was outing Britain’s credibility and membership in the EUU for the sake of rumbling in the right wing of the Tory Party. Some hoped it was a commitment he would renege on as it was wagering a lot on just to placate some loud noises in the Tory Party and as a way to undermine the workings of the United Kingdom Independence party (UKIP). It was a risk Cameron lost big time when soon after the results of the referendum Cameron announced his resignation and plundered the UK into a political crisis of massive proportion.

As the UK awoke to the new reality of what the referendum had decided, political crisis, leadership bids and an unchartered journey was about to begin. The UK was split along generational lines, some regional lines and to some extent class lines. Moreover breaches were created with the soft border between Northern Ireland and Ireland now created alarm in the possible undoing of the peace progress between the two parts of Ireland. The shock of the Brexit caused much paralysis and uncertainty as speculation took over and catastrophic scenarios received much attention as each side began contemplating what this Brexit might mean. Only month later Donald Trump won the 2016 Presidential race to the White House and after complimenting the UK for having made the decision to exit the EU it set about attacking many of the EU assumptions thereby opening up the Trump mode of rule. Trump’s other remarks about NATO and the EU being a “German vehicle” did not make the mood within the European Union any better as European Union integration tumbled further down and confidence continued to fall. Many in the EU concluded that the Trump approach towards the Trans Pacific partnership (TPP) and the NAFTA would produce a new negative phase of discussion with the European Union and the TTIP seemed almost dead in the water. The Trade Commissioner for the EU Commission declared a holding pattern for the TTIP an everybody tried to work out what the US would do.

On the EU side, the Brexit result was a shock bringing frustration and resignation to a long period of UK marginalisation and exceptionalness. There was a sense of defeat and hurt though each member state leader restated the need to press ahead with European integration. While many feared what could come with the British, there was a desire not to dwell and hope it would not come. Despite some initial knee jerk anger, the EU settled into a position of rational negotiations for the triggering of Article 50 from the Lisbon Treaty and the establishment of a Brexit structure to negotiation with the British for their departure. As this was progressing, two elections in the Netherlands and France provided alternative messages about the immediate future of the EU. In The Netherlands, the Party for Freedom (PVV) led by Geert Wilders threatened the traditional People's Party for Freedom and Democracy led by Rutte for government losing by little. In the case of France two months later, Emmanuel Macron won a stunning victory against all parties and in the run off against Marie Le Pen. His victory was interpreted at the French level as an overturning of the weak and indecisive approach of his predecessor of Hollande and at the European level a sense of relief for the European project. Moreover, the Macron saw the revival of the Franco-German leadership dialogue which had momentarily gone into disrepair with new ideas for a renewed vision.

Prospects for further European Integration: The White paper plan of action

Even before the results of the Dutch and French elections, The European Union faced another anniversary of importance – The sixtieth anniversary of the Rome Treaty in March 2017. The event was celebrated in Rome but its celebrations did not stop at looking at the past. Given its brush with massive political turbulence through Brexit and the Trump elections, the
anniversary saw the initiative of the European Commission led by its President Jean-Claude Juncker emerged with a White Paper on the future of Europe. It was a comprehensive summary of what the EU was living and it asked: “What future do we want for ourselves, for our children and for our Union? It reminds us that: “Europe’s place in the world is shrinking” (European Commission 2017, p. 8). It acknowledged there was a “tense global context” and that ”Europe cannot be naïve and has to take care of its own security. Being a “soft power” is no longer powerful enough when force can prevail over rules” (p. 9). It also referred to the “…The return of isolationism has cast doubt over the future of international trade and multilateralism” (p. 9) clearly indicating the new Trump administration and that “shaping globalisation”… “…will be a growing challenge”. Surprisingly but not really, the background to the White Paper made only an indirect reference to Brexit when it said “And last year, one of our Member States voted to leave the Union” (European Commission 2017, p. 6).

The context of the White Paper was itself quite daring in its breadth but the recommendations were of a simplicity and openness which was breathtaking. The approach by the Commission was not to seek out some complex set of indecipherable set of targets to put to the member states but a referendum of member states on where to go next. It proposed the establishment of an agreement for the EU for its future direction for 2025. It was remarkably logical and asked the member states to make a choice about the direction, speed and priorities of the EU for the next period. It divided the choices into five. The first option was to carry on the same. This meant that there would be the maintenance of the single market including its strengthening. The EU should pursue trade agreements and where possible improve the functioning of the Euro as the single Eurozone currency. There would be continued cooperation on external borders and of course much work to do around the EU’s system of asylum seekers. The expectation was that there would be progress on security and foreign affairs with one voice as well as closer defence cooperation between member states and with other states. There would be budget improvements and less complexity on decision making of EU matters. Speaking with one voice on foreign affairs and closer defence cooperation. The other scenarios were progressively more committal and more in the direction of federation. They included scenario 2, “Nothing but the single market”. Scenario 3 included “Those who want more do more” while scenario 4 stated “Doing less more efficiently and number 5 which said “Doing much more together” (European Commission 2017). The European Commission provided the platform for each member state to debate within its own institutions on what was best for their country and for an orderly discussion to come up with an idea of the level of integration. The White paper opened an honest and widespread debate on how Europe should evolve in the years to come. This call was to open up debate within the EU, member states and citizens and looking for some collective answer for the December 2017 European Council meeting. The Commission did not want to be seen as forcing the hand of the member states and putting words into their mouths. This was a decision by the member states as to what level of commitment to the European Union their nation would accept. The purpose here was to avoid the political backlashes that would be faced about “power in Brussels”.

Some of the preamble of the White Paper noted that the 2008 global financial crisis had had a disastrous effect on many member states. In particular, the paper highlighted the impact and severity on youth to the extent that there was a risk of a generation being less well off than their parents. The White Paper noted that the European Union was witnessing an ageing population and was almost the oldest in the world. Other worrying features of the European Union included the nature of changing occupations and the inability of the EU to stay with these changes as well as the pressures driving immigration which it stated would increase. In terms of the governance of the European Union, the White Paper noted that there had been too often
walls put up where they should be down and the problems of trust had emerged which were previously insignificant. Moreover, there was a growing gap of trust between institutions in both the EU and the member states and a growing gap between what is promised and what is delivered. With this White Paper, Juncker wants to reignite the debate over the future of EU integration (Cleppe 2017).

**The new US rhetoric and its meaning for the European Union?**

The EU Commission White Paper was prepared very much with the new Trump Administration in mind. While it never named Trump, or his antics, the document was mindful of the new messages coming from the Twitter messages on the EU, Germany, NATO and the like. At the same time the document wanted to acknowledge that the world had changed but the EU had not kept abreast of these changes. The White paper provided a critical examination of the changes in Europe, its people, its economies with a little changing European Union. It was not blaming anyone or anything but itself for its shortcomings but knew that only the EU member states could change this reality. Repercussions from the Trump election have altered many of the European goalposts in place since the end of the Second World War. The statements by Trump about the obsolete nature of the NATO and the burden which the US was carrying and by de fault that the EU was not carrying, shook the European member states and its union to the realisation, as Juncker noted, to the realisation that “NATO will continue to provide hard security for most EU countries but Europe cannot be naïve and has to take care of its own security” (European Commission 2017, p. 8). It was clear that the issue of security and defence and the European Union had suffered shortcomings and many facets of the European Union’s functioning in this area required urgent correction and addressing. Thus the statements of Trump essentially speeded this process and made the EU assume a reality check of proportions it had not properly contemplated. This was also witnessed in the climate change and environment sector with the withdrawal of the US from the Paris Climate Accords. The European Union response was to ignore the US position and embrace the parameters and quotas with China the very next day.

**What next for the EU?**

The areas of great global uncertainty which have impacted the European Union project of integration can be clearly articulated around the Brexit repercussions, the arrival of a new Trump US administration and the divisive nature of the arrival of mass immigration from troubled and war torn areas of the Middle East and Africa. Migration along with other areas of high level sovereignty concern has widened the existing cracks within the EU and especially from the centre and right wing governments within the European Union.

While 2016 was a de facto watershed, the elections in The Netherlands, France, Germany and Australia all posed threats to a cohered response with Brexit overshadowing all EU activity. However, the impact of Brexit and the new US administration can be seen as double edged sword. They have a negative initial impact but can be the sources of newly found inspiration and energy to make the leap required for this project to a new level of integration. As one scholar has noted: “Brexit may be good for European integration” (Umland 2016). There is much that can be said for this approach. The EU is a unique project in which domestic priorities have been combined and sovereignty voluntarily pooled to better serve national and collective interests. The EU leadership, inspired by the arrival of Macron is proceeding with a renewed
Franco–German alliance evidenced by the unprecedented joint cabinet meeting between these two governments in June 2017. The stalemate elections in Germany in September 2017 provided concern for the Merkel German leadership of the European Union integration as well as the first time presence of far right Alternative for Germany (AfD) in the Bundestag. This was equally noted with the high level support for the centre-right candidate in the Australian elections in October 2017 making clear to the established parties that they need to be concerned about their political direction. Fear and scare mongering about migration clearly played a role in the election outcomes here.

There is even discussion of establishing a joint Eurozone finance minister as well as a possible Eurozone budget. The threats by the US to withdraw its global leadership, through a desire for more protectionism and not want to engage with China is an opening for the European Union to make its bid for global leadership. This it can only do as a united and combined regional bloc. As in the past, the crises facing the European Union are often the call to arms to make the next leap. This might be exactly that moment.

**Conclusion**

European integration has been for decades a roller coaster with good and not so good moments. Generally the difficult times have always been justified as a necessary evil but that better times would always prevail. From a more serious standpoint European integration took strategic directions which would be de facto potentially problematic. The last years of European integration however have created significant uncertainty and concern. The Juncker White Paper is a testimony to the gravity of feeling and the need for a decisive but legitimate project with which to proceed. The solutions from the top has exhausted its capital and now more than in any previous moment the feeling is that there needs to be member state buy in in a way that was never requested before. There is no one silver bullet to overcome the obstacles like there is no one factor bringing down the EU. While the position of the European Commission is to be cautious and allow the member states to make their call, the leadership of Germany and France appear to have made that decision.

The period of global political uncertainty will not come to an end any time soon. As economic prosperity only slowly improves, and who knows for how long, many of the desperation calls and right wing vacillations in the polls will always remain a warning of concern. In the meantime, the Brexit result and the new US administration have propelled the leaders of the European Union to break the mould of “business as usual”. While the results from the White Paper are not expected to emerge until late December 2017, the expectation is that there will be more decisive steps for deeper and greater integration by the leading members even if this means with fewer members. This may mean European Integration of the few but committed and peripheral membership by the less committed. The European Union, and its key leaders appear to have few other choices.

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ASEAN’S PRINCIPLED PRAGMATISM AND THE EVOLVING NORMATIVE SECURITY STRATEGY ON THE SOUTH CHINA SEA

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Abstract

The South China Sea dispute has been considered as one of the crucial tests for ASEAN due to factors such as member-states' weak national resilience, China’s hegemonic expansion and non-traditional security issues involving economic activities and environment, making it a significant political-security agenda for the regional institution at the age of fifty. The overall purpose of this article is to explore the core assumptions regarding ASEAN principled-pragmatism and the evolving role of ASEAN normative security strategy underlying the concepts of ASEAN Way, neutrality, multilateralism and centrality relating to the South China Sea dispute. Based on the conceptual frameworks, we show that ASEAN’s principled-pragmatism is imperative in determining the ten member states foreign policies underlying the expectation of ‘low cost-high benefit’, ‘low cost-low benefit’ or ‘high cost-low benefit’. We further argue that the aspects of threat perception, economic dependency and national resilience are necessary not only to explain the extent of how ASEAN could reach the condition of ‘win-win’ in its framework, but to also help elucidate the Association's viability as a regional organisation in managing the multifaceted interests in its political-security paradigm.

Keywords: ASEAN, South China Sea, principled-pragmatism, normative security strategy, political-security

Introduction

As a regional institution, the initial role of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations’ (ASEAN) half a century ago could be simply understood as a platform to encourage "meaningful communications between neighbours who have minimal knowledge about each other in the thick of ultra-nationalistic security ambitions" (Makaruddin and Mohamad 2004:15). This attempt was considered a remarkable success, as evidenced through the myriad of multilateral engagements and extensive member-states cooperation underlying the crucial aspects of political-security, economy and socio-cultural architypes. However, as the Association cemented its standing as a regional grouping in these key areas, its strategic role was once again brought into focus following the fallout of fundamental global challenges of the twenty-first century in climate change, food security, unemployment, refugees and occurrences of pandemics and epidemic diseases. At the most critical juncture, ASEAN, in particular, is currently facing perilous tests in relation to its centrality on the South China Sea dispute, which immensely determines the adjournment of the 'long-promise' towards the creation of ASEAN Political-Security Community. In this sense, the article argues that it is significant to understand the mechanisms that ASEAN utilise to strategically manage the South China Sea dispute.
On the whole, the South China Sea dispute is characterised as complex and difficult due to the zero-sum nature of the competing legal claims and its association with nationalist sentiment with the varied cast of claimants (Ba 2011:271). Specifically for ASEAN countries, the South China Sea is profoundly associated with issues regarding the rule of law, the establishment of the Code of Conduct and confronting Beijing's hegemonic ambition in the region. For this reason, the measures undertaken by ASEAN countries signify the pre-determined expectations in regards to the regional desire to achieve an effective and lasting form of win-win agreement that could satisfy all the parties' interests. However, when it comes to the conflict in South China Sea, the current regional approach is rather manifestly positional due to China's status quo as the Great Power, the low degree of regional resilience among ASEAN member states as well as the involvement of other major powers. Given the concern, the article seeks to analyse how ASEAN and its member-state deal with the conflict in South China Sea underlying the concept of principled-pragmatism.

Principled-pragmatism, hypothetically suggests that the solution underlies the principality of moral conscience and at the same time is realistic by taking account the full economic, social and political dimension in the conflict (Juncos 2017:6). In terms of foreign policy, principled-pragmatism by no means is entirely new or unique. Principled-pragmatism is one of the key features in the 2016 European Union Global Strategy (EUGS), which aspires to bridge the reality gap between the EU's conventional role underlying the democratic principles that seems to be less relevant and ineffective outside its neighbourhood. That is why the EU's principled-pragmatism suggests that it needs to develop a more flexible and low-key that are based on technical engagement, joint interests and shared ownership in some sectoral areas for a constructive policy.

For ASEAN, the term "principled-pragmatism" has never been formally addressed in its official statements, by the regional diplomats or any of the ten countries' leaders. The nearest examples that might show how ASEAN is often described as pragmatic in its approach underlying the political-security, economic and socio-cultural interests. In the context of South China Sea, the countries' responses to China's increasing assertiveness in the contested water depend on the individual state's priority. Vietnam is seen as more vocal due to its status as claimant and the myriad of physical confrontation in its claimed seas, while on the opposite end, Cambodia is considered as 'neutral' and 'under the Chinese control'. The indictment is mainly due to its frequent disagreement to the strongly worded joint-statement against Chinese militarization activities in SCS during the non-issuance of 45th AAM joint-communique and in many other regional meetings.

Here we examine what principled-pragmatism means for ASEAN by looking at the approaches of the Association and its member states in regards to the dispute in SCS. In this sense, the article proposes that the combination of "low cost-high benefit" expectation can be conserved in the dispute. For example, "low-cost" method means diplomatic engagement to manage the multidimensional interests in SCS, but at the same time, the measures are realistic to the fact that the Association is unable to fully contain the foreign powers' "high-benefit" in SCS. Our presumption is that there is a genuine expectation in the region that ASEAN by no possible means would adopt high-cost methods like military alliance or collective arbitration ruling, nor it can effectively use low-cost methods like multilateralism, to reach a win-win agreement with all claimants in SCS. It also relates to the article's deeper interest relating to the concept of ASEAN principled-pragmatism, in which it seeks to analyse the extent of member countries'
responses to the SCS dispute that are depending on the weight of its economic, social and political-security benediction.

Research Background

The approach proposes that principled-pragmatism underpin two basic commitments which are principled; "the rule of law or legal orientation towards the shared local experience that is basic and necessary to the societal knowledge and action" (Snyder and Vinjamuri 2012:434). The growing shift towards this approach can be seen through ASEAN procedural operation that is becoming a more rule-based institution through the enforcement of ASEAN Charter in 2008 as well as the establishment of the current Blueprint for the three ASEAN core pillars. While pragmatism, as understood from the political studies accentuates the credit system of which "thoughts and actions should be readjusted accordingly just as our interaction with the environment is impending and unavoidable" (James in Kloppenberg 1996:102). It is called as being pragmatic when the "belief can be secured or even protected, in response to the interference of the world" (Went 1994:384). For ASEAN to be more pragmatic it needs to be using the means of multilateral networks to improve the bargaining chip when dealing with one another and more critically, the Great Power.

In this context, by ASEAN being principled-pragmatic, the Association is challenging the tacit presupposition of much of the critics by showing "the accurate representation of reality, rather than "what is better for us to believe" which has been the automatic and empty excuses made by the member-states when it comes to consolidating their interests (Tavits 2007:154). It is important for ASEAN to make a sharp distinction between being principled-what is contributed by ASEAN for regional security and being pragmatic- what is "decided and given" internally and externally.

These insights lead us to further reflect on ASEAN's founding commitment on national resilience in its economic and social factors to maintain the regional sovereignty, given the fact that ASEAN itself is no stranger to confrontation and wars. Therefore, as understood in ASEAN context, ASEAN Way tries to balance its normative and rule-based approaches underlying the primary objective of developing the state resilience (Ba 2012:125, Acharya 2013:69).

Regarding its relation to the principles of ASEAN Way, principled-pragmatism is a method for implementing policy and highly familiar within the realist or liberal strategists to find is a middle way for addressing foreign policy and security. In this sense, principled-pragmatism cannot be called a theory as it focuses on the process, the dynamics of internal change, rather than ultimate objective. It is also worth mentioning that principled-pragmatism is by no means the ultimate way for ASEAN to pursue its objective but rather using its limited material resources to reconcile on a more justified, meaningful interactions.

In a much practical sense, principled-pragmatism may help ASEAN to decide its foreign policy whether to balance, bandwagon or hedging in response to China and other major powers in the South China Sea, taking into account the degree of threat perception and economic prospect in each relationship. For this reason, the way ASEAN member state is being principled-pragmatic in choosing their strategies in SCS relies on its expectation in regards to the extent of ‘cost' for ASEAN and the extent of ‘benefit' for the great powers. Principled-pragmatism is also realistic in the sense that it is not trying to apply a free security concept- that ASEAN could be devoid of external enemies in such a critical case like SCS. It
matches the ‘common sense’ of the world politics to feel insecure, because even big powers like the US still feel threatened with outside interference. Thus, this maintains that ASEAN can be principally pragmatic by nurturing a distinct way of conducting its internal and external relations underpinning an informed identity construction (Acharya 2004).

Core assumptions relating to ASEAN principled-pragmatism

In the region of Southeast Asia, there is a local understanding that state sovereignty can only be maintained by giving a particular emphasis on multilateral institution at the regional levels. In this sense, the structure of ASEAN is designed to increase the salience of norms, in order to respond to such conflict" (Alagappa 2003:77). The personification of this statement can be seen in the form of the Association’s conventional practice underlying its normative security strategy which are the concepts of ASEAN Way, neutrality, multilateralism and centrality. The reason is that throughout its fifty years of operation, these are the locally accepted normative behaviours that guide the ten member states’ expectation on how ASEAN can reach certain condition of ‘win-win’ in its political-security, economic and sociocultural framework (Acharya 1998:67).

The consequence of having such normative principles embedded in its structure creates a sense of pre-determined expectation within the countries, concerning to what extent one can signify the regional desire that is to achieve an effective and lasting form of agreement. In this context, it should be noted that by being principled pragmatic it does not mean ASEAN member-state is being wholly ignorant of what is critical to regional stability. The idea is that principled-pragmatism put forward a condition where the response to a particular problem is based on the regional moral behaviour and realistic thinking regarding each party’s multidimensional interests.

There are several key determinants relating to the extent of ASEAN principled-pragmatism which are threat perception, regional resilience-ruled based focus and ‘we-feeling’ identity. First, in Southeast Asia, the threat perception varies depending on three broad scopes of intra-ASEAN, inter-ASEAN and the rulings elites. For some scholars, the threat perception in the region can be associated to all three scopes, depending on “whose security is threatened and the nature and gravity of the threat” (Emmerson 2009:5). For instance, there were incidents at SCS where states seek to assert or defend its resource interests as seen in the case of Phú Khánh basin between Vietnam and China and there was also the obscurity over maritime entitlement of features in SCS hinders the states’ security interests such as in the case of China’s objection over the Freedom of Navigation Program led by the United States.

In this particular point, it is important to identify ASEAN’s unique ability to response to external threat through the systems of conflict management as pointed out by Mikio Oishi, which are the mediation regime system (MRS) and the alliance system (AS). Oishi explains mediation regime system functions to absorb tensions and shocks using the regional norms and practices of multilateral diplomatic engagement in order to ensure nonaggressive actions taken by the opposing parties, while through the alliance system, ASEAN seeks to control Beijing’s involvement using balancing and deterrence against China and United States (Oishi 2017: 11). Both systems can be considered as principled pragmatic in a way that ASEAN manages not only to consolidate “the reciprocally conflicting positions of the parties but also to allow dissipation of tension underlying the constitutive functions that open the possibility of better management of the dispute” (Oishi 2016: 13-14). It is also should be noted that the ASEAN’s ability to absorb and cope with shocks relating to Great Powers’ involvement in SCS can be
considered as effective, considering that there are series of shocks that ASEAN had faced over the last three decades namely the 1988 Spratly Skirmish, the US’s controversial exercise of Freedom of Navigation Operation (FONOP) and the failure to issue a joint communique during the 2012 ASEAN Ministerial Meeting.

The second factor that might determine ASEAN principled-pragmatism is regional resilience and ruled-based focus. Resilience, in the straightforward term, refers to “the ability to resist sudden shocks and recover from them” (Fjader 2014:119). In the setting of regional grouping, there are three forms of society resilience that can be applied; first, “adaptation towards the maintenance of status quo, second, keeping the shock as marginal to safeguard the existing structures or policies and third, ability to renew and transform by diversifying multiple structures” (Fjader 2014: 121).

For ASEAN, it is relatively presumable that the Association is currently at first level and the second level by looking at the stable security nature of regional status quo with its members actively committing to the grouping and how ASEAN has been managing series of threats while engaging with great powers. The regional efforts towards building a more resilient community can be seen in ASEAN Political-Security Blueprint by 2025 which focuses on rules-based community.

In another perspective, ASEAN’s current rapid economic transformation is not just necessary to improve the ten countries’ infrastructure development but also to fuel the growing appetite of external powers’ strategic political and economic interests. The history has also shown that during the Second World War, the Southeast Asia region became the theatrical concourse for the world’s superpowers to fight for the golden land for natural resources like rubber and to assert political ideology and military superiority. In this context, the construction of regional resilience should accentuate states' vulnerabilities and insecurities due to the visceral issues of socio-cultural, economic and geopolitical security that will always be the factors in the intra-states inter-state political environment (Christopherson et al. 2010:5).

The third determinant factor to ASEAN's principled-pragmatism is the ‘we-feelings’ identity. The ‘we-feelings' identity is essentially the manifestation of ASEAN's sense of belonging to one region, or notion of having shared destiny to produce a form of ownership and togetherness that lubricates the relationship between both people and the governments of ASEAN (Baba 2016:95-97). Applying Constructivism to understand the idea of ‘we feelings’ in ASEAN, it can be interpreted through the idea of ‘mutual consciousness of identity'. Wendt explains that 'mutual consciousness of identity emphasises on the "share destiny of others, define interests with regards to other states, and possibly will develop a sense of community" (Wendt 1994: 386).

Central to this analysis is that the ‘we-feelings’ identity also favours the ASEAN Way of handling conflicts through the consensus-making process and underscores the regional communitarian aspects where “ideational construction to create a new state identity that enabled member-state to pursue its interest in ASEAN” on fundamental shared interests for maintenance of sovereignty and a similar vision of regionalism and regionalisation” (Acharya 2014:25). This can be seen during the post-Cold War era where some of the Southeast Asia countries shared attachment in political and social beliefs in the form of status quo, cultural commonalities and historical experience despite the odds they faced.
When looking at the concept of principled-pragmatism in ASEAN and the European Union, it gives several compelling indications in terms of how the both organisations are getting similar in their approach relating to their political-security framework. First, the EU was previously known of its conventional approach of ‘naming-and-shaming’, ‘sanctioning’ and demanding convergence on its terms in order to implement the European-wide rules over the opposing parties. There were internal severance over issues of Euro, refugees, migrants, terrorism, environment and other transnational challenges. Even worse, the EU’s approach in perpetuating the liberal international order has also unintentionally contributed to the reinforcement of the regime relating to the case of Syria, Turkey and Russia as well as had resulted in the deteriorating peace in the nearby neighbourhood, as seen in Egypt, Syria, Libya, Mali, Somalia, South Sudan and Yemen.

In this context, the concept of principled pragmatism that is applied in the EU’s political-security vision can be seen through its emphasis of ‘pragmatism philosophy’, of which the Union realistically uses a broader lens to connect and understand the world, and not as how it would like to see it. As explained by Tocci in ‘A Stronger Europe in a Fragile World’, the notion of principal pragmatism helps the EU to distinguish what is acceptable to the Union’s core values and principles by weighing the practical consequences of acts and a focus on local practices and dynamics. The current example is how the EU is being principled pragmatic to develop traction according to its values and interest with the other countries. For instance, in the case of South China Sea legal dispute, the European Union had been careful to comment on Beijing’s weak adherence in upholding international law despite the active Chinese militarization of South China Sea islands.

According to the statement of all 28 EU governments after the arbitration, the bloc recognised the court ruling in The Hague and the support on “committed to maintaining a legal order of the seas and oceans. Rather than using affirmative languages such as support or welcome in regards the tribunal’s decision, the EU decided to only recognise the Court’s ruling. The logical reasons for the Union’s broad, general statement on the dispute are namely due to the extensive Chinese investment in its own land, the intensified Beijing’s lobbying activity towards individual governments of EU to neutralize the bloc’s involvement in the SCS dispute as well as to maintain its neutral position and political interests with the United States and ASEAN member states. In this context, the EU is being principled by identifying the significance of international law in parallel to its longstanding values, yet is pragmatic in terms of consolidating the 28 governments’ interests and the Union’s diplomatic advantage in relation to China.

It relates to how ASEAN was criticized by the EU and the international community for being politically blind when it officially accepted Myanmar into the regional grouping in 1997 despite its human rights record. But, the role of ASEAN and its constructive engagement policy can be seen imperative in democratising the regime’s commitment to reform in its political and economic sectors, by contributing experiences and resources, and working with the people and government of Myanmar (Renshaw 2013:37).

Second, ASEAN recognition of democratic principles and rules-based community in its political-security agenda reflects the member-states' commitment to undertake greater institutionalisation efforts so that ASEAN can retain its role as a driving force in regional dialogue and cooperation. It is because the establishment of ASEAN Charter in 2007 and its current morality-based approach underlying the legal principles such as the UNCLOS in SCS has transformed itself from a loose grouping of sovereign nation states to an intergovernmental
organisation with a legal identity. Indeed, without preparing to incorporate rules and identity in its formal framework, ASEAN will be merely based on geographic proximity.

But it also should be noted that although the Western idea of legality and institutionalism are well-acknowledged in the region, it might not be to the extent of the EU’s practise of supranational authority which requires the shifting of decision-making from the national capital to a regional bureaucracy. The reason is because the particular move is highly relevant to better understand the extent of ASEAN principled-pragmatism as it strikes a balance between preserving member-states' fundamentals due to “the high sensitivity and states and private non-state actors reluctance to make hard obligations” (Deinla 2017:38). In this sense, although the operationalisation of principled-pragmatism in both groupings might be different due to core factors like institutional frameworks and capacity, the regional objectives and guiding norms, it would be safe to assume that the notion of principled-pragmatism is likely to be desirable and imperative as an instrument to guide their decision-making.

**ASEAN principled-pragmatism in the South China Sea**

The article would suggest that the current level of ASEAN principled-pragmatism approach in South China Sea conflict could be seen in the form of ASEAN member-state considering solutions to be in the areas that are ‘low cost to them and high benefit to China’. It also focuses on the practical modus vivendi between ASEAN countries such as through the joint development area to reconcile the different maritime interests and prevent an overly contentious situation.

One of the most fitting examples to illustrate the general implication of ASEAN’s principled-pragmatism in South China Sea dispute would be the failure to issue a joint communiqué on SCS during the 2012 ASEAN Foreign Ministers’ Meeting in Phnom Penh. A week after the incident, ASEAN member states came out with “ASEAN's Six-Point Principles on the South China Sea” as a result of the unceasing efforts of member states like Indonesia to repair the damage (Thayer 2013:78).

There are two reasons to explain this observation. First, the response reflects the real setting of ASEAN's acceptance of the regional vulnerability given its ‘low cost' approach, due to the large gap of political, economic and socio-cultural integration in the Southeast Asia region (Ba 2016:50). Second, the particular disagreement gave institutional experience of 'high benefit to China', when it allowed the greed of individual states to be placed over the regional interests. It results in the marginalization of the “perceived role of ASEAN as a neutral entity to neither serve the interests of Beijing or other dominant powers (Storey 2016:135).

In this sense, what was primed as ASEAN’s clashes or disunity by the Western media, should be seen as the Association’s ability to be realistic in its low-cost approach because ASEAN did not force or throw out a superficial joint-statement just to satisfy the public checklist and allowing itself to stay in its long-term illusion of ‘security community’ (Chang 2016:341). Rather, ASEAN principled-pragmatism shines as it chose to face the short-term crisis to seek options whereby those differences can be made compatible and is based on the freedom of the will of the countries involved.
The Code of Conduct

The article would consider the Association’s effort to produce the Code of Conduct of Parties (COC) in the South China Sea as a form of principled-pragmatism in a bid to defuse the tensions between ASEAN claimants and China. It is because, through this effort, ASEAN managed to assert its interest in maintaining centrality in regional security affairs and hold all the parties' commitment to negotiate realistically to provide guidelines for the future code (Thayer 2013:81). Under this logic, ASEAN cautiously holds onto its ‘high benefit and low cost' approach by investing on the expected gain and not just a quick fix for short-term political settlement.

By keeping this expectation in mind, the current standard of ASEAN’s principled-pragmatism is less on ‘who owns what’, due to the bottleneck exhaustion of using legal solution, but rather ‘who does what’ which is relating to the islands militarization in SCS. Under this concern, ASEAN believes this issue can be addressed only by doing what the Association does the best for fifty years, which is keeping the opponent close. In this aspect, the painstaking process of creating the Code of Conduct is not solely because ASEAN wanted it to be legally binding given the China's problematic culture of compliance, but the prime agenda of COC is to ‘meaningfully' interacting and communicating with China.

The term ‘meaningfully' here means to gain further information pertaining to its activity in SCS and as a collective way to remind China that ASEAN is aware of its behaviour. But the Association often choose to 'save Beijing’s face’ in respect to its competing status quo in the international system (Swee-Hock et al. 2005:194). Besides, ASEAN is also trying to position the member countries' source of comfort in the conflict, by focusing on territorial sovereignty, peaceful dispute settlement and a time-off in SCS militarization, or else outside interference might be more attractive for ASEAN than staying on Beijing's course. This also includes ASEAN’s principled pragmatism way of managing conflict that is by taking advantage of the politics of ambiguity, which encourages parties to maneuver around the flashpoints and subsequently allow shock deflection and tensions to be dissipated (Oishi 2017:10).

In this sense, the effort to create a Code of Conduct should be seen as realistic for ASEAN because it allows the SCS dispute to be discussed underneath an ASEAN-centric umbrella. It pulls diversity of political interests into a regional bargaining power, taking into account its small states status quo and the limit of legal primer in SCS dispute (Thayer 2013: 82). Should there be no code of conduct as proposed by ASEAN, there might be no other localised instrument, or perhaps Beijing might put forward its own version Code of Conduct in SCS, as evident in its economic approach, which might put ASEAN in a zero-sum geopolitical disadvantage (Simon 2008:278).

The discussion also explains the scholars' presumption of the possibility of ASEAN members being socialised by China, rather than the other way around. To which this article would put forth the concept of ASEAN’s principled-pragmatism where member-states using the regional weight to pursue their national interests as an extension of states' vulnerabilities (Jones and Smith 2007: 61). It suggests that ASEAN's principled-pragmatism approach relating to the legal ruling in SCS might be different if ASEAN possesses a solid form of regional resilience. The constant regional belief is that the ultimate logical solution to this conflict should follow the guidelines given by UNCLOS or the tribunal ruling. Yet, it could only be done effectively if there are joint efforts by the international community to diversify the legal methods as well as to enforce the ruling outcome of UNCLOS.
**ASEAN individual member-states’ principled-pragmatism approach to SCS.**

In studying the role of ASEAN and its principled-pragmatism approach in SCS conflict, it is highly imperative for scholars to first analyse the foreign policy for each member-state. It is because although ASEAN has gained international attention as a single regional group, the nature and durability of ASEAN security framework reveals that the Association remains essentially a product of state-centric decision making. It means that the state-centric approach embedded in ASEAN normative security appears to address the multifaceted interests of the ten individual governments, underlying several factors like geopolitical position and domestic priority. All these factors should be considered to explain why ASEAN principled-pragmatism approach in the troubled water might pose a distinct or new interpretation of the South China Sea realities.

The first level of ASEAN's principled-pragmatism would expect a ‘Low cost-High benefit' from the SCS conflict, of which the particular ASEAN countries pose similarities in terms of with not having any claims in the territorial dispute and enjoy a good security and economic relationship with China. The countries that might fit in this description are Cambodia, Laos and Myanmar primarily due to their high political, economic and military engagement and the close geographical location with China where these countries undertook massive projects like the Lancang-Mekong Cooperation. In this case, the growth of China's relative capabilities and its culture of weak law enforcement is favourable to the countries, which is why their foreign policy are often 'neutral' pertaining to SCS to mitigate all forms of risks that might arise and negatively impact their bilateral relations (Kuik 2016:505). Therefore, these countries focus on return-maximising regarding positive economic expectation and with little preparation for risk contingency in relation to China's assertiveness in SCS.

Taking Cambodia as the example, the country disagrees with Vietnam over the usage of strongly worded joint-statement pertaining the South China Sea dispute. Looking at the issue from the Cambodian shoes, it is both principled and pragmatic because first, it is a neutral entity with no expected gain from the territorial conflict. Thus, it is highly important for Cambodia to prevent any actions that can make the situation even tenser or to the extent of war. As what Prime Minister Hun Sen indicated before, "the South China Sea is not an issue between ASEAN and China" (Parameswaran, 2015). The idea here is that the SCS dispute should not complicate ASEAN-China relations as there are bounty areas of cooperation that both sides can fundamentally benefit from such as in trade, investment, education, tourism and joint efforts in fighting against non-traditional security issues.

Second, Cambodia is also using its right to have a different political view under the consensus based setting. During the recent AMM meeting for instance, Cambodian Foreign Minister Prak Sokhonn equates the joint-statement regarding the SCS dispute as "making a palatable ASEAN-based soup with each country would like to add their own ‘ingredients' (Dara, 2017). In this context, rather than letting the broth spoil by listening to all, it is also principled pragmatic for all parties to take the middle road and take a step back. It should be noted that ASEAN member-state, including the five founding countries, has never signed up to the ASEAN's membership thinking that it would act as a dispute-settlement mechanism. All the past territorial disputes in the region were resolved through bilateral mechanisms and subsequently the International Court of Justice. In this sense, the best role that ASEAN could fulfil is to be a dispute-avoidance mechanism in the SCS dispute.
Next, the second level of being principled and pragmatism in the South China Sea conflict is the ‘Low cost-Low benefit’ in which these countries do not take any confrontation that requires military offence but rather cautious in addressing the dispute via public statements. Contrary to the first example, the second group usually partakes a hedging strategy in response to the China's assertiveness in the SCS by focusing on getting return-maximising in terms economic pragmatism and preparing for risk-contingency through indirect-balancing or forging defence cooperation with other countries (Kuik 2016: 507). The countries might cajole Beijing for economic assistance, but prepare the military for the worst. With this expectation, the member states are trying to minimise or lower China’s hegemonic benefit in SCS dispute.

The countries that might fit in this description are either claimant or non-claimant states like Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, Singapore and Brunei. These countries also hold strategic geopolitical interests in the South China Sea such as its freedom of navigation and natural energy, which is why the maintenance of maritime stability is more important. The article will specifically look at the example of Malaysia's principled-pragmatism approach in SCS dispute underlying the 'Low cost-Low benefit' expectation. Predominantly, there have been two dominant narratives in Putrajaya in its response to SCS dispute. The first discourse is that Malaysia has been seen as "playing it safe" through its neutral and independent posture and strategic diversification foreign policy to ensure its claim in SCS (Parameswaran 2015:6). Specifically in this view, the conflict in South China Sea is seen as an ASEAN’s problem that requires diplomacy and restraint as it is not simply a matter of Malaysia’s sovereignty.

The second overture involves a stronger mode of opposition through its public statement and even directly to the Chinese ambassador in response to foreign ships incursion in Malaysia’s lawful water in SCS, to which the country would take legal action if its sovereignty is being threatened (Hellendorff 2016: 292). It is because there were increasing intrusions by the Chinese PLAN vessels since 2013 around James Shoal and other areas within Malaysia's EEZ. The article views the grand narratives of Malaysian foreign policy in SCS dispute as principled pragmatic in two ways. First, Malaysia makes certain that it will always favour positive economic relationship but at the same, places its national sovereignty at the top of its foreign policy. The underlying message is that Malaysia is aware that China presents more of an opportunity than a threat to its interests and it would be counter-productive to strain the deep bilateral ties simply due to the SCS dispute. Second, Malaysia took a cautious step to balance the rhetoric in SCS dispute as it is wary over internationalising the issue in other platforms than are not ASEAN as it might draw greater major power rivalry in the region (Hellendorff 2016: 293, Kuik 2013:456). It is because even without it having to move aggressively, it has a ‘loud' neighbours like the Philippines and Vietnam that have been a useful buffer to project the regional dissatisfaction to Beijing.

The last example of the member-state principled-pragmatism in SCS underscores the ‘High cost-Low benefit' expectation. The countries that expect high cost-low benefit from the SCS conflict would pursue a combination of direct-indirect engagement and balance towards China. The countries would position themselves as the weaker states in the power disparity setting, in the interest of defending their national interests and preserving regional stability. The operationalisation of high cost-low benefit also means that these countries might spend on soft balancing such as bringing up SCS issue in multilateral forums and hard balancing for a deterrent purpose by increasing defence spending and strengthening law enforcement to deter China's hegemonic control.
The countries that might fit in this description is Vietnam and the Philippines. What makes this group different from the previous two groups is that they have several direct encounters with China's naval force in the disputed area, they have the large overlapping claims with Beijing and the strong anti-China sentiments in their countries. They also signed a trilateral Joint Maritime Seismic Undertaking (JMSU) agreement in 2005 but failed due to the issue of sovereignty. These personal experiences hence shaped their current strategic foreign policy approach towards SCS. It should be noted that the article considers the Philippines fit in this group because of its long history of being assertive in SCS through ASEAN–multilateral platforms, the tribunal ruling and active engagement with the United States. Currently, it might temporarily halt its posture following the ‘low cost-high benefit’ expectation due to the ASEAN chairmanship and Duterte’s hectic domestic priority.

Firstly, the Socialist country is known for its direct and indirect engagement with China and fellow ASEAN members to seek for best political settlement to solve the dispute. In this context, Vietnam established direct engagement with China through high-level visits and cooperative measures relating to maritime issues such as hot line, fishery and preventative mechanism in the sea. But at the same time, Vietnam pushes indirect engagement with other ASEAN countries to engage China in an ASEAN-based multilateral framework.

What is principled-pragmatic about this approach is that Vietnam uses both engagements on a complimentary basis to consolidate the opinions of various interest groups within China as well as the perspectives of the claimant and non-claimant ASEAN member-state relating to the contested water, for Vietnam to comprehensively assess the situation in SCS. Vietnam also practices soft balancing by engaging with the great powers through active military procurements from Russia, the United States and India (Amer 2014:33). It adopts hard balancing by expanding its defence capacity and improving law enforcement capability. While these approaches might induce the tendency to execute direct military confrontation under a tense situation, Vietnam has been cautious by justifying that the established relationship with external power as just formal diplomatic relations and the modernization of armed force to protect its long coast and large maritime zone. The idea of principled-pragmatism here is that Hanoi being logical to protect its sovereignty, considering its experiences of being threatened by China and how it often got ignored by other ASEAN member states for political support.

**The extent of principled-pragmatism in ASEAN-China relations**

There are some core assumptions discerning China's primary objectives in SCS. It is firstly important to acknowledge that China positions the South China Sea as a ‘core interest' on its national agenda, meaning that it is considered as "non-negotiable" and on par with Taiwan and Tibet. Some scholars also assert that Beijing wishes to gain control of the SCS is due to the strategic shipping lanes and energy security (Andrews-Speed 2014:24-28). The reason is that accessible trading and fossil fuels are considered as the lifeblood of China's gigantic economy. There is an insatiable thirst for these non-renewable resources grows even more in the current years, by looking at how Beijing's economic policies mostly consist of Renminbi being thrown over the lands, the skies and the oceans across many nations where it is possible to reach.

The core examples are the "One Road One Belt" (OBOR) initiative and the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP). The implication is particularly significant in the SEA region, where the countries are highly in need of high-level infrastructures and foreign capital. It is one of the hefty ways that Beijing has kept all 10-member countries from merging against it despite the explicit danger of China's maritime assertiveness in SCS. In a much deeper
sense, China is also interested to setup military and commercial facilities along its sea lines of communication from West Asia to China passes through several choke points such as Malaccan Strait and Lombok Strait, known as the "String of Pearls" (Lam 2015:118). The string of Pearls is an act of containment against any military attempt by the United States and its alliance in the region. It is in parallel to the recent development that includes China's modernisation of military forces, the formation of artificial islands and increase of ports and airfields access.

Next, scholars also relate the Beijing's fundamental interests in the SCS with historical power projection. China's power projection come from the notion of 'Son of Heaven' mandate and the sense of self that sees itself as a victim of the international system due to the deep historical injury of One Hundred Years of National Humiliation as a result of foreign powers occupation. In this context, the Chinese leadership perceives South China Sea as a significant place where it can expansively project the idea of a Great, modern China, making the SCS a matter of national identity and regime security. It is also why part of China's goal in SCS is to project People's Liberation Army Navy as true blue water navy to keep the United States out of the Asia Pacific by dominating the Indian Ocean and Pacific Ocean (Koda 2017:4).

The extent of principled-pragmatism towards ASEAN –China relations can be seen in the way ASEAN has been dealing with China in South China Sea by using the Code of Conduct and the fact that China is taking the outcome of the framework seriously as its behaviour might be affected. In this sense, ASEAN is also using the advantage of the member-states' bilateral ties with other external powers in the political-security, economic or sociocultural aspects, which make it “hard for one great power to manipulate the Association unilaterally, given the gridlock of power” in the region (Emmers 2014:61). The idea is that despite the great power competition in SCS, the players are all linked through mutually beneficial relationships. Therefore it is principled pragmatic for ASEAN to address the issue regionally as it can minimise the pressure of Great Power and making conflict seems undesirable.

Another way ASEAN is being principled pragmatic when dealing with China is by utilising the international law to manage the maritime resource rights. Although UNCLOS cannot forcefully impose its legal verdict to the ratified countries, it is highly necessary for the claimant states in the region to justify its claim using its jurisdiction. It is because UNCLOS provides transparency regarding the conflicting claims between the claimants, which is vital to prevent a self-determined position by any of the claimants to "might makes right". In this sense, UNCLOS helps to legitimise the actions of ASEAN claimants like Vietnam and the Philippines to criticise China's brutal development in SCS via range of platforms.

Conclusion

This article has examined the central assumptions concerning ASEAN principled-pragmatism and the evolving role of ASEAN normative security strategy underlying the concepts of ASEAN Way, neutrality, multilateralism and centrality in response to the South China Sea dispute. It has discovered that the concept of principled-pragmatism helped to explain the country’s foreign policies following their variegated expectations of ‘low cost-high benefit’, ‘low cost-low benefit’ or ‘high cost-low benefit’ relating to the international law, threat perception, economic dependency and the level of regional resilience.

The article helps to explain that despite the common criticism that ASEAN countries only put emphasis on the individual interests over regional unity in the South China Sea dispute, it is veritably an act of principled-pragmatism that calculates the weight of both normative and
material factors in determining the approach. In this sense, ASEAN principled-pragmatism sought to illuminate specific meanings of state sovereignty and regional shared norms like non-use of force and how it might be incorporated to form the strategies of balancing, hedging or bandwagon against China and other major powers. Not only did these elements are paramount to yield distinctive meanings for each member-state in the pursuance of regional stability, but also realistic to the level of power disparity in the Asia-Pacific region.

However, it is inexplicable to presume that the concept of principled-pragmatism has a direct stabilising effect to the SCS dispute. It is because as the majority of ASEAN countries turn to China for investment and consequently give ‘high benefit' through the enhanced positional negotiation power, China is also capitalising the hegemonic freedom to be more assertive by militarizing the seas and threatening other claimants sovereignty in SCS. In this context, ASEAN principled-pragmatism might have worsening impact on SCS although none of the countries would want to see military conflicts in the troubled water.

At the same time, there are also positive developments relating to the operationalisation of principled-pragmatism in the South China Sea. First, despite the recurrent maritime incidents in SCS, ASEAN countries do not view each other as a threat and often focus on the bigger picture by focusing of modus vivendi to solve maritime issues. Second, ASEAN countries look at alternative ways based on moral rationalism through legal actions and realistically through low-cost measures to avoid provocation in SCS. One of the examples is by renaming their EEZs according to the local reference such as Indonesia’s “North Natuna Sea”. Correspondingly, this article suggests that by adhering the idea of principled-pragmatism, it might encourage ASEAN countries to come forth with efficient approaches in SCS. It also includes the fact ASEAN has never take sides on the merits of a certain claim, nor it is attempting to resolve the disputes. Thus, it gives flexibility for the countries to ‘pick’ any measures.

To this end, the article would offer several suggestions in the aspects of political, economic and sociocultural underlying the concept of ASEAN principled-pragmatism in South China Sea dispute. The concern here is to make certain that the Association will remain viable not just when dealing with external powers but most importantly, to be more significant for the ten member-countries prospective relations. First, concerning the political framework, the core problems with ASEAN current security approach are the lack of institutional leadership and limited material domain, making many nations increasingly leaning towards bigger power for economic sustenance. In this context, ASEAN can consider an ‘ASEAN minus X’ decision-making relating to the critical matters in SCS in cases like illegal territory trespassing. The upside point is that it would give flexible rooms for claimants to take charge of the matter while non-claimants able to opt-out, which can solve problems like victim-blaming and sweeping issues under the rug just because one particular country decides to disagree. A more concrete way for ASEAN to deal with SCS dispute would include using its diplomatic strength to open up discussion and enhance cooperation with other major regions over the issues of maritime security, territorial management and international law, which has been the centre of commitment for most countries especially when it comes to safeguarding one’s sovereignty against the huge influence of major powers like China. This way, ASEAN might be able to stabilise its position in the region and to uncover new relationship that is based on rules-based security order. It is also vital to do as to lessen Beijing’s control over ASEAN’s relationship with external parties like the European Union, which might be cautious to cooperate with ASEAN in SCS matters due to China’s dominating political and economic statecraft in the region.
Regarding the economic factor, the article put forward the core assumption that ASEAN principled-pragmatism in SCS is largely determined by the threat perception and regional resilience due to the ASEAN countries' dependencies on the major powers. In this context, it is suggested for ASEAN to form regional stratagems by establishing a specific framework to face Beijing’s hegemonic economic arrangements such as through the special networking plan to lessen the financial dependency when dealing with the One Belt One Road initiative. While the framework might not diminish the substantial worth of China’s economic assistance, it should be done for the ten countries to form regional mechanisms to improve the Association centrality and to prevent China's ‘high benefit' from using its influence to destabilise the region.

Concerning the socio-cultural aspect, ASEAN needs to push forward the sense of ‘we-feelings' identity relating to the South China Sea dispute, following the focal point of the rules-based community and people-centred aspiration. It can be done by pushing through the idea of regional ownership for critical issues in cases of clashes in SCS, where all parties should be encouraged to submit to the courts of international arbitration. It is because for ASEAN to be more principled-pragmatic in addressing the contemporary security threats in SCS, the countries’ participation in ASEAN should not be like what it used to be known for, such a membership in an exclusive regional elite club. The setting now should involve a greater public connection by taking approaches that give higher publicity.

These suggestions capitalise on the long-lasting narrative that the member states of ASEAN would find each other for a ‘sense of comfort', only when they realise that there are critical issues in the Southeast Asia neighbourhood that might affect their national sovereignty. It should be noted that the article does not attempt to solve the maritime dispute in SCS but focusing on the significant ways to develop stronger regional resilience in the face of threatening security threats in the contested water.

Looking forward, the article believes that it is indispensable to take into account the principled-pragmatism expectation or raison d’être of ASEAN countries regarding the way they view and conduct their regional and international affairs pertaining the South China Sea dispute. The view should encircle the significance of ASEAN normative security strategy underlying the notions of ASEAN Way, neutrality, multilateralism and centrality and how these approaches can be enriched to advance the Association's role in managing South China Sea dispute. Further hitherto, the article underlines that the lasting prospect of “safe and peaceful times” in the South China Sea should calibrate a more tangible enforcement based on the international law and realistic measures that can scrutinise the present and speculate about the future of both traditional and non-traditional security matters in the contested waters.

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THE POLITICS OF NATIONAL SOVEREIGNTY VS. EU MEMBERSHIP IN HUNGARY

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Abstract

The paper takes a critical look at the National Consultation process in 2017 in Hungary to analyse the ongoing conflict between Budapest and Brussels. The Hungarian Government has been hostile to various EU policies arguing that they violate the sovereignty of Hungary. This paper seeks to refute this argument by showing that Hungary has the sovereignty to withdraw from the agreements, the obligations of which it refuses to honour. Rather, the Government is engaging in the politics of sovereignty, i.e. creating a sovereignty dispute in order to secure short-term political objectives, such as political survival. This dangerous trend can be observed in the populist politics of an increasing number of states, including the United Kingdom and the United States, and it presents a tangible threat to any order based on international law. The regimes in question use the politics of sovereignty in order to renge on their international obligations.

Keywords: Hungary, European Union, sovereignty, asylum, refugee crisis, national consultation

Introduction

It is a cold October morning when a thick envelope arrives from the Government of Hungary. The envelope contains the questionnaire of the 2nd National Consultation (NC) or Nemzeti Konzultáció in Hungarian, for 2017 as well as a signed letter from Prime Minister Viktor Orban. The letter states that Hungary is under attack from foreign forces who seek to undermine the sovereign authority of the state and endanger Hungarian citizens. It is a colourful and well-produced package, with a particularly unflattering image of George Soros included on its front page. It is also predominantly nonsense.

This paper asks a simple question: Is Hungarian sovereignty under attack? To answer this, one has to dissect the points contained in the 1st and 2nd National Consultations presented in 2017, albeit focusing on the first as the second is largely dominated by the Government attacking a non-existent plan. One has to understand what the Government considers an attack on the country’s sovereignty by the European Union. Then one has to examine what the situation actually is, what the EU actually has said and done. Sovereignty in the international system is a complicated matter, certainly more complex than what the National Consultation allows space for. Hungary’s sovereignty is not under a genuine attack, rather the Government follows the suit of the Conservative Party in the United Kingdom and Donald Trump in the United States as it engages in the politics of sovereignty to secure its own political objectives. A critical discussion on the issue at hand is especially necessary as the state of the European Union
continues to be fragile (Simms, 2012) and the politics of sovereignty constitutes a considerable risk of fracturing the political will necessary to maintain the union.

**Consulting the nation in 2017**

National Consultation is not a new thing in Hungary, despite it being an irregular occurrence. In theory its function is to offer an opportunity to ordinary citizens to voice their opinions on important issues of government policy. In practice, the format of the questionnaire is too restrictive to serve as a platform for meaningful policy discussion. Rather it is an opportunity for the Government to solicit support from its base and to reassure its legitimacy as it seeks to battle Brussels on various policy issues. NC 2017 posed six questions to the electorate (Index, 2017):

1. **Brussel is preparing for a dangerous move. It seeks to force Hungary to abolish government policy concerning utility prices.**
   - In your opinion what should Hungary do?
     1. Protect the current utility policy. We should insist that Hungarian utility prices should be controlled by Hungary.
     2. Accept Brussel’s plan and allow big corporations to determine utility prices.

2. **In the recent periods terror attacks followed one another in Europe. Despite this Brussels seeks to force Hungary to allow the entry of illegal migrants.**
   - In your opinion what should Hungary do?
     1. For the safety of the Hungarian people illegal immigrants should be place in the custody of law enforcement until a decision is made regarding their status.
     2. We should allow free movement to illegal immigrants in Hungary.

3. **By now it is clear that illegal immigrants heading to Hungary are aided or encouraged by not only human traffickers but certain international organizations in breaking the law.**
   - In your opinion what should Hungary do?
     1. Aiding or encouraging illegal migration – through human trafficking or by promoting illegal immigration – should be criminalized.
2. Accept that international organizations exist that encourage the violation of Hungarian laws without consequence.

There is a growing number of organizations supported from abroad that operate in Hungary with the intent to influence domestic affairs. This poses a risk to our sovereignty.

In your opinion what should Hungary do?

1. We should require them to register, clearly stating which country or organization they work on behalf of and what the purpose of their operations is.
2. We should let them to continue their risky operations without oversight.

Increasing employment in Hungary has been successful in recent years because we adopted our own path. Brussel, however, is attacking measures aimed at creating new employment opportunities.

In your opinion what should Hungary do?

1. Issues regarding the wellbeing of the economy should be decided upon domestically by the Hungarian people.
2. Brussel should determine what course the economy should follow.

Hungary is committed to the reduction of taxes. Brussel is further attacking the country over it.

In your opinion what should Hungary do?

1. Insist that the reduction of taxes should be decided upon domestically by the Hungarian people.
2. Accept that Brussel dictates the level of taxation.

The questions themselves are fairly leading and they give the appearance of the Government’s position being the correct one. After all, nobody is in support of terrorism, dangerous illegal immigrants or paying more for utility bills. The second National Consultation adopts a yes or no question format, focusing on whether one would support particular elements of the so-called ‘Soros Plan’. The questionnaire asks the followings (Magyarország Kormánya / Government of Hungary, 2017b):

Soros György arra akarja rávenni Brüsszet, hogy Afrikából és a Közel-Keletről évente George Soros seeks to persuade Brussel to accept at least one million migrants from
legalább egymillió bevándorlót telepítsen be az Európai Unió területére, így Magyarországra is. Soros György brüsszeli vezetőkkel együtt azt is el akarja érni, hogy az EU tagállamai, így Magyarországi is, bontsák le a határvédelmi kerítéseket, és nyissák meg a határokat a bevándorlók előtt. A Soros-terv részé, hogy a nyugat-európai országokban összegyűlt bevándorlókat Brüsszel kötelező ossza szét, különös tekintettel a kelet-európai országokra. Ebben Magyarországnak is részt kellene vennie. A Soros-terv alapján Brüsszel elkellene köteleznie minden tagállamt, így Magyarországot is, hogy minden bevándorlónak fizessen 9 millió forint állami segélyt. Soros György azt is el akarja érni, hogy a migránsok enyhébb büntetést kapjanak az általak elkövetett büncselekményekért. A Soros-terv célja, hogy az európai országok nyelve és kultúrája hátérbe szoruljon, annak érdekében, hogy az illegális bevándorlók integrációja hamarabb megtörténjen. A Soros-terv része, hogy politikai támadást indítsanak a bevándorlást ellenző országok ellen, és kemény büntetésekkel sújtásak őket. Ignoring the fact that George Soros is not a representative of the European Union and that the so-called Soros Plan is an opinion piece by a private individual, taking these questions and those of the first national consultation show a deepening concern from the Government regarding national sovereignty in the context of the refugee crisis afflicting Europe. It is clear that the government fears that Brussels seeks to violate Hungarian sovereignty to force the unlawful settlement of millions of migrants in Hungary.

The basics of the European refugee crisis

The conditions in Syria are not conducive to the pursuit of a happy and particularly safe existence. These conditions have prompted the mass exodus of people seeking to escape the Syrian civil war, many of whom seek shelter in Europe motivated by the EU’s reputation for high living standards and robust social safety net. This is fairly straightforward. Unfortunately, there are numerous other regions on the globe where people are unhappy with their state of existence and would prefer to migrate to Europe. They are mixed with Syrian refugees and this creates the core of the conflict surrounding the European refugee crisis. The prevailing international law concerning asylum seekers is based on the 1951 United Nations Refugee Convention and the 1967 United Nations Protocol on Refugees. The Convention defines a ‘refugee’ as a person who (UNHCR, 1951/67)
owing to wellfounded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it

Hungary and other EU member-states are signatory parties of this convention. According to the convention such a person is entitled to certain protections from members of the international community, most importantly safe shelter and assistance from receiving states. Hungary has an asylum process adhering to the relevant UN protocol. Assistance is provided to anyone who is:

… a person whose life and liberty are threatened in his/her country of origin on account of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, or whose fear of being subject to persecution is well founded, and who currently resides in the territory of Hungary and submits an application for asylum.

The only requirements are that (a) the person contacts the relevant government agency immediately upon arrival and (b) submits him/herself to the relevant procedures (identification process and a maximum of 6 months of detention depending on court order).

The European Union has its own common process to handle refugees called the Dublin regulation. (EUR-Lex, 1990) At the core of the protocol are two key components: (a) asylum seekers are processed in their country of arrival and (b) asylum seekers are resettled throughout the EU based on a quota system. A clear goal of the convention is to share the burden facing Europe: asylum seekers are distributed within the EU based on the means of the host country. Importantly Brussels does not simply leave the Schengen border countries to fend for themselves as the convention ensures that each member-state has to contribute to the solution of the crisis.

The problem is derived from the fact that not everyone seeking entry into Europe is a refugee. Looking back at the two National Consultation questionnaires, one can see that the Government references migrants, predominantly illegal migrants, rather than refugees or asylum seekers. It is the Government’s contention that a large portion of people arriving to Europe are not legitimate asylum seekers but rather economic migrants not entitled to the aforementioned protections exploiting the refugee crisis for personal gain. Hungary refuses to accommodate the resettlement of such people under the Dublin process. The problem is further compounded by the fact that a large number of refugees and economic migrants have exploited lax border security to slip into the European Union illegally and are already within the borders of the Schengen area.

At the core of the Government’s arguments is a fundamental misrepresentation of both the UN and EU asylum process. Anyone can seek asylum and under international law their application has to be processed. This means that Hungary and the EU has to process people whether they are refugees or economic migrants. However, neither the relevant UN conventions nor the Dublin process extends protections to economic migrants. If a person is found to have tried to exploit the asylum process in order to bypass immigration, then asylum status is not granted and the person is deported. The European Union does not require Hungary to settle economic migrants, only refugees, which is an obligation of Hungary independently from the European...
Union based on Budapest being party to the relevant UN agreements. The Dublin process merely provides a common solution to a problem that has been deemed by EU member-states, including Hungary, to be beyond the capabilities of any single country.

Based on this, the position of the Government becomes clearer. The refugee crisis has created an extraordinary influx of people. Hungary alone had to deal with as six fold increase from 2014 to 2015 in asylum seekers. (Bevándorlási és Menekültügyi Hivatal/b) Processing such an amount of people would require extraordinary effort. Furthermore, there are concerns that due to the chaos created by the increase in people there is a pressure to rubber-stamp applications rather than determining whether someone is really entitled to asylum, allowing economic migrants to receive refugee status. The Government’s solution is to remove itself from the problem by sealing the country’s borders. Hungarian border fortifications facilitated an 81 percent reduction in the number of asylum seekers from 2015 to 2016. (Bevándorlási és Menekültügyi Hivatal/b) At the same time the Government refuses to cooperate with the Dublin process, especially when it comes to quotas for the resettlement of refugees. Looking at the country itself, the Government’s resistance is understandable. Hungary is a relatively small country with modest economic means. Furthermore, it is a demographically homogeneous country. 85+ percent of the population is ethnic Hungarian, with almost 15 percent being unidentified. The largest minority (Romani) is a mere 3 percent. (CIA) The overwhelming majority is either Christian or non-religious. Besides Christianity and Judaism, no other religion has a major presence in the country. A melting pot the country is not. The resettlement of a large number of asylum seekers presents fears that it would alter the demographic composition of the country and negatively impact the social fabric of existing communities, especially those outside major urban centres. Integrating asylum seekers would be also difficult: Employment opportunities and funds for welfare are in short supply. Even if the EU offers significant assistance to resettle refugees, it would only create the perception of creating a ‘privileged class’ that was extended assistance the EU and Hungary does not extend to its own citizens. 9 million HUF is more than what most Hungarians earn working for years. The idea of accepting extraordinary numbers of refugees is unsurprisingly highly unpopular domestically.

While it allows the maintenance of the status quo, the key problem with this approach is that it violates international law. By shutting out the refugee crisis, Hungary is failing to meet its international obligations both to the European Union and the international community at large. Hungary does not have the right under international law to determine whether someone is a refugee or a migrant without a due asylum process. Furthermore, as Hungary takes steps to disincentivize asylum seekers it only diverts the flow of people increasing pressure on other EU states to handle them.

The coercive powers of the European Union

Key central elements of the two National Consultation questionnaires are the Government’s perception of attack and its fear of punishment. This references the EU’s infringement procedures. The EU’s primary enforcement powers are vested in the European Court of Justice. As a member-state of the European Union the rules and laws created by the EU through its various legislative organs and procedures (e.g. the European Council and the European Parliament) are legally binding. Non-compliance triggers the aforementioned infringement process (European Commission/a), which ultimately leads to the ECJ engaging in adjudication and potentially determining fines for non-compliant states. This is a fairly straightforward
process and common to numerous international organizations. International agreements that establish some sort of bureaucracy tend to establish dispute resolution organs. This is true, for example, for the World Trade Organization (WTO) or the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). The main difference is that, while most of these IGOs are highly specialized, the EU has a much more broadly defined scope, hence it tends to regulate more diverse issues. Within the EU infringement procedures are not extraordinary by any standards, at the moment the EU has some 2700 active infringement procedures. Once again, it is important to note that Hungary has voluntarily joined the European Union, and thus voluntarily submitted itself both to its binding laws and the jurisdiction of the ECJ.

The perception of diminishing sovereignty

The Hungarian Government interprets the above discussed issues as a threat to Hungarian sovereignty. The argument itself is fairly straightforward: Hungary seeks to pursue a certain policy direction. The European Union argues that this policy is not in accordance with existing laws and raises the possibility of a fine. The Government interprets this as a coercive influence that undermines the independence of Hungarian policy formulation, hence an attack on Hungarian sovereignty. However, such an interpretation is based on an absolutist interpretation of national sovereignty.

The issue of sovereignty, especially how it works in the context of the international community, has inspired a long academic discussion with many distinguished scholars offering their interpretation. The idea of absolute sovereignty, i.e. the idea that states can govern exclusively and without interference within their borders, has been criticised for decades. Nayar (2014) highlights that sovereignty continues to be a complicated subject as two contradictory forces – the growing porosity of state authority and the reactionary resurgence of statism – shape contemporary discussion of sovereignty. Similarly, Campbell, Kumar and Slagle (2010) highlights that while discussions of sovereignty in the 1990s focused on declining state authority, in the post-9/11 era one can observe a resurgence in focus on state authority and control. At its core, sovereignty is based on the principle of non-intervention: one state does not possesses the right to intervene in the affairs of another (Krasner, 2001). This is a popular interpretation of sovereignty, and is enshrined for example in the key principles of ASEAN, a regional block that considers non-interference one of its cornerstones. However, such an interpretation is both vague and narrow considering to scope of activities a state undertakes. On the one hand, it fails to adequately define what constitutes intervention, e.g. whether criticism qualifies as interference. On the other, it ignores the fact that states do not act in a vacuum and that domestic and foreign cannot always be neatly separated. A state's domestic policies can have international implications in which case such a definition disregards the rights and interests of other states. In response to this, many sought to refine the concept of sovereignty. Janice E. Thomson argues that sovereignty should not be viewed as control but as authority. (Thomson, 1995) From a laymen perspective this might be considered a distinction without difference, but from a technical standpoint there is a meaningful difference. Control assume that the government can directly affect all aspects of life within its territory and sovereign control would assume that it can do so unchallenged. This was demonstrated to be untrue as technology empowered various agents to defy state control when it comes to the flow of capital, people and information. In contrast, sovereign authority means that the state is the only one with the legal right to intervene in society coercively. Essentially this approach substitutes rule setting to control. This chips away of the myth of absolute state sovereignty that failed to stand the test of time. More relevant to the discussion at hand is Oona Hathaway’s
examination of the conflict between international delegation and state sovereignty. (Hathaway, 2008) She highlights that, while international treaties limit state sovereignty, the criticism of this trend often neglects to discuss the benefits of international cooperation such treaties make possible. Essentially, the argument is that states voluntarily accept some foreign interference in exchange for the benefits of international cooperation. Unfortunately, such a view is not represented in the Government’s approach to sovereignty which boils down to the colloquialism of ‘my way or the highway’.

One challenge for discussing this particular case is that much of the discussion focusing on the conflict between national sovereignty and what Kyl, Feith and Fonte (2013) describes as a ‘transnationalist challenge’ is concerned about entering into agreements. This is not the case in this particular scenario as Hungary has willingly and voluntarily entered the agreements already with seemingly little concern of how they will affect its sovereignty, hence this case falls beyond the limits of the typical discussion on U.S. sovereignty and Washington’s unwillingness to enter into certain international agreements. The case of Hungary is more reminiscent of the trend shown by Donohoe (2013): attitudes towards what constitute acceptable limits on sovereignty change over time. One could reason that such trends are motivated by waning and waxing optimism towards the utility of such arrangements, especially when the – sometimes unanticipated – costs of these arrangements materialize.

In the particular case of Hungary one would be hard-pressed to prove that Hungarian sovereignty has been violated. Rather, the issue at hand concerns Budapest honouring its international obligations. Hungary has voluntarily joined both the relevant UN Conventions and the European Union. As part of the process Hungary has been aware of the both the benefits and the obligations associated with the agreements. The current refugee crisis is not qualitatively different from issues covered by relevant UN conventions and the Dublin process, merely differ in scale. Thus, Hungary’s obligations remain the same. The threatened EU infringement process is not as much a coercive influence to force Hungary to do something new as an expression of Brussels expectation for Hungary to do something it has already agreed to. Focusing on the refugee issue prevailing international law is clear: The 1951 UN Refugee Convention and the 1967 UN Refugee Convention requires the European Union and Hungary to process asylum seekers. The Dublin Process established the method for this on a continent-wide scale and is binding to members of the European Union as it is a result of a common decision. Under the process Hungary is obliged to (a) process asylum seekers arriving into the country and (b) comply with the resettlement of refugees across Europe or monetarily contribute to exempt itself from that. This is not a matter of opinion, this a matter of existing international law.

The argument that Hungarian sovereignty is under attack is further undermined by the fact that the Government has the sovereign authority to withdraw from all relevant agreements if it feels that the obligations imposed by these treaties no longer correspond to the country’s interests, assuming that that it can muster sufficient support for such a step in the Hungarian Parliament – in which the Government enjoys a majority. The BREXIT sought after by London creates a clear precedent that if a country no longer feels that EU membership is in its best interest, then there is a process to exit the Union. Hungary is free to pursue its own ‘HUXIT’, regardless of how terrible the acronym is. However, it is clear that the current FIDESZ Government shows little interest in an actual exit from the European Union, which would likely turn out to be a disaster for the country. EU membership has conferred significant benefits to Hungary and the Government is eager to preserve these. Furthermore, any such move would likely encounter
significant popular resistance, especially if pursued without a popular vote. It merely wishes to renge on the obligations part of its membership.

Essentially the authority of the Hungarian state to independently determine policy is not substantially threatened as it has clear options to defy policy directions it does not agree with. This goes beyond a reasonable interpretation of sovereignty. The problem is that Budapest is unsatisfied with the fact that it cannot do so without suffering the consequences of its actions. Once upon a time, before reality inconveniently started to rear its ugly head, BREXIT was heralded as Britain having its cake and eating it too. Budapest desires something similar: Hungary wants to enjoy the benefits of international cooperation, benefits it feels entitled to, without accepting the costs of international cooperation, seeking to pick and choose whether to honour obligations based on political convenience. While such a desire is understandable, any form of acquiescence would create a dangerous precedent.

The sovereignty to defy obligations: the end of the international legal order

Law work differently on the domestic and international levels. In a domestic context laws are based on the disproportionate power of the state. In an international context a higher level of trust is involved as laws exists between sovereign agents in the absence of a higher enforcement power. International cooperation is based on states’ trust that they will each honour their obligations. Take the idea of collective security: one state trust another that it will provide aid in case of a conflict, but there is little tangible guarantee that the other state will do so. Naturally states also have a desire to renge on their obligations or conflicts otherwise arise from the interpretation of international agreements. Hence states create various institutions, such as international courts, to resolve such issues. But at its core, all of this is based on trust: states can choose to defy agreements and international courts as sovereign agents. Countries such as the United States (defying the U.S. vs Nicaragua ruling of the International Court of Justice) and the People’s Republic of China (defying the Permanent Court of Arbitration regarding the submissions of the Philippines) have established precedents for this.

This is exactly where the dangers present themselves in the issue discussed above. Hungary has agreed to certain rules – the UN Refugee Convention and the Dublin process – but seeks to renge on these rules unilaterally without exiting the agreements. If Hungary is allowed to do so it creates a precedent that this is acceptable, which in turn will encourage other states to do so. Other Eastern European states, most prominently Poland, has already joined the path set by Hungary. This erodes the relevance of existing international law. To use a light-hearted example, the ‘pirate oath’ is a central theme of the first Pirates of the Caribbean movie. It is presented as the law governing pirate life until one of the characters breaks it with the argument that it is not as much an oath as a recommendation, depriving it from any pragmatic relevance as it is no longer a code to adhere to. International law is the pirate code of international community and it is effective as long as everyone respects it. However, it loses much of its effectiveness if it is allowed to degrade into a mere recommendation. Naturally one does not talk about the immediate implosion of all international law. But incidents such as these represent a real risk of rot setting in the foundation of the international legal order. If they are not countered then over time the entire system risks collapse. It is with good reason that states that are non-compliant with international law are labelled as rogue states and vigorously opposed and punished by the community at large.
The politics of sovereignty

The sections above showed that there is little merit to the Government’s claims that Hungary’s sovereignty is under a substantial attack. Yet the Government has invested significant resources to conduct two National Consultation campaigns on the subject, as well as investing its own credibility into this fight. The question then is why the Government would do that. The answer is that the Government is engaged in the politics of sovereignty, the theatrical display of being under attack, in order to achieve its own domestic political goals.

Populist politics are on the rise as they present a convenient avenue to garner support from the general public. Unfortunately for the discussion at hand the general public tends to have a simplistic view of sovereignty, especially when filtered through the lens of popular nationalism. This is largely unavoidable as the international order becomes increasingly complex and an increasing number of cooperative regimes beyond the understanding of the average citizen are created. Hathaway notes the problems arising from transferring power from local authorities to a culturally and physically distant powers. (Hathaway, 2008) One can combine this with the fact that the average person holds a rather unsophisticated view of state sovereignty and it is not hard to see why the politics peddled by Government are popular. And they are popular. In case of the first National Consultation of 2017, the respondents expressed overwhelming support for the government’s position:

Questions #1: 99.1% supports that the government’s policy on utility price reduction needs to be protected and that the government should insist that utility prices need to be determined domestically.
Question #2: 99.3% supports that illegal immigrants should be detained by the authorities until their refugee status is approved.
Question #3: 99.2% supports that supporting illegal immigration, e.g. through human trafficking, should be criminalized.
Question #4: 99.1% supports that NGOs receiving foreign funding should register with the government and reveal their foreign benefactors.
Question #5: 99.1% supports that economic policy should be decided upon domestically.
Question #6: 99.1% supports that the government should insist that tax rates should be determined domestically.

A total of 1,688,044 questionnaires were sent back to the government. (Magyarország Kormánya / Government of Hungary, 2017/a) In 2014, FIDESZ needed slightly above 2.2 million votes to maintain a stranglehold on the Hungarian Parliament. It is clear that there is a large group of people receptive to the Government’s rhetoric.

The politics of sovereignty allows the Government to present a simple political narrative to appeal to the sensibilities of a nationalist/conservative base. Instead of Paul Revere warning that the British are coming, it is the Government on horseback spreading the news that Brussel is coming, and that they are coming for the freedom, security and welfare of the Hungarian people. There is qualitatively little difference between this and the U.S.’s continued refusal to join mundane international agreements in fear of UN black helicopters. It is important to note that the Hungarian Government is not alone in its reliance on the politics of sovereignty. The Conservative Party in the United Kingdom employed it to gain and maintain power through appealing to pro-BREXIT constituents. Similarly, Donald Trump often employs the technique of threatening to withdraw from international agreements, whether it is the Paris Climate Accord, the Iran nuclear deal or the North American Free Trade Agreement, to appeal to a
nationalist crowd who views such agreements as a constraint on U.S. sovereignty regardless of their pragmatic value.

In the politics of sovereignty one can observe a trend similar to that of securitization: certain policy issues are elevated to the level of a fight for sovereign rights in an attempt to remove them from normal political discourse. They are used as a rallying cry and citizens are expected to fall in line to fend off supposed threats to sovereignty. Interestingly the second National Consultation 2017 does not ask whether one believes in the existence of the ‘Soros Plan’. It is treated as an unquestionable fact. The questionnaire only offers to options: one is either in support of the Government’s fight for sovereignty or one is a traitor supporting the selling out of the country to foreigners. This is not far removed from the ‘with us or against us’ mentality of the War on Terror.

In the end, by employing the politics of sovereignty the Government is exchanging long-term stability for short-term political goals. Essentially, causing long-lasting damage to the foundation of a cooperative international order is viewed as an acceptable cost to garner support for the next election. Unfortunately the quality of politics is largely determined by the quality of the electorate: as long as the politics of sovereignty remains an effective tool, one should expect political powers to try to exploit it, regardless of costs. In this instance one can see the unfortunate failure of the European Union to demonstrate to large segments of society how the Union benefits them and why its continued existence is to their best interests. Whether the EU leadership likes it or not they have to descend from the ivory tower of Brussels and fight for the survival of the EU in the trenches, capturing the hearts and minds of previously neglected constituents. The alternative is the continued ramping up of populist rhetoric and gradual degradation of the Union.

The politics of sovereignty in economic policy

The politics of sovereignty is not limited to the refugee issue. It is also employed in the context of economic policy. As shown above, the first National Consultation in 2017 has dedicated significant space to the idea that Hungary is under attack due to its economic policies. The central components of the Government’s economic policy are the implementation of social welfare programmes and a focus on trickle-down economics. First, the government has significantly revised the tax code in order to reduce the financial burdens faced by the electorate. The original tiered personal income tax system was abolished in favour of a flat-rate system. Originally the rate was set as 16 percent, regardless of income, however it has been further lowered to 15 percent in the following years. (Jogtár, 2015) Similarly, the Government has recently reduced corporate tax to a flat 9 percent from 10 percent (small and medium enterprises - SMEs) and 19 percent (large corporations). There are two points to note concerning these moves. One, the Government seems to favour an American-model of trickle-down economics: One key goal of the reduction of taxes is the expectation that the money saved will be reinvested by both citizens and corporations, e.g. through increased consumption of goods. Two, the Government is adopting an aggressive strategy to attract multinational corporations (MNC) by undercutting corporate tax rates in other member states. MNCs play a crucial role in the economies of the region, the arrival of a new manufacturing plant or logistical centre creates hundreds and thousands of jobs, as well as promote infrastructural and urban development. The government is eager to capture the attention of such MNCs by offering more favourable conditions compared to neighbouring states.
Second, the Government seeks to limit utility prices in order to ensure that further disposable income is available, especially to families, which can be reinvested through consumption. Utility prices in Hungary have risen sharply and were eating up a significant portion of a family’s total income, inflicting significant burden on lower income households. Consider the following example: A single person household doing administrative work could earn 150 000 Hungarian Forint (HUF), which is significantly above the minimum wage. The heating bill alone living in the capital could mount up to at least 20 to 30 000 HUF during the winter (October/November to March/April depending on weather). Paying for utilities, rent or loan repayment for a residence and fuel could leave families with little to no funds for discretionary spending. The Government sought to tackle this issue with its ‘rezicsökkentés’ programme (translates to utility price reduction). The method by which the programme achieves its goal is by mandating that the utility bill for a yearly period cannot be more than 93.5 per cent (in the case of natural gas) of the bill for the same usage during the previous yearly period. (Jogtár, 2013) The specific reduction is mandated by law each year. While the method employed might look needlessly complex, it was adopted with a clear goal: to prevent utility providers from using any technicality to pass on the costs to consumers. Furthermore, the Government has been particularly hostile to foreign energy providers as it perceives them to syphon funds out of the country: High utility bills not only tie up financial resources, negatively impacting consumption, but much of the profits are repatriated by foreign utility providers, benefiting their home countries rather than Hungary. It is hardly surprising that a nationalist party such as FIDESZ finds such a state of affairs to be egregious.

Third, the Government considers increasing employment to be crucial, instead of relying on welfare spending, especially as many people have lost their jobs during the economic crisis. Once again, the Government adopted an aggressive strategy of significantly increasing the country’s public works programme to make a dent in unemployment. From 2013 to 2016 alone the number of people employed by the public works program grew from 115 thousand to 180 thousand, (Közponzi Statisztikai Hivatal / Central Agency for Government Statistics) and the program in general has ballooned significantly compared to its pre-economic crisis size. People enrolled in the public works programme primarily do menial labour seeking to benefit their community, often part-time, and usually for below the minimum wage, e.g. collecting rubbish, repairing public spaces, etc. The unemployment system has been redefined to push people towards public works rather than seeking unemployment benefits.

The EU has been critical of most of these measures. However, looking at these criticism one cannot observe the malice perceived by the government. The European Union at its core is based on a simple principle: Europe is strongest when states cooperate. A fractured Europe cannot offer effective solutions to common concerns and a shared rule-setting is necessary to protect the interests of European citizens. In the absence of common institutions much of Europe would be preoccupied with competing with each other, losing much of the continent’s potential for global influence. Unsurprisingly, Brussels has not been receptive to the Government’s rhetoric of following its ‘own way’ in opposition to common EU policies. The EU has formulated a number of criticisms towards the Hungarian policies discussed above. In the economic realm the EU is not primarily opposed to the spirit of the welfare policies as the government would like one to believe, but rather is critical of their execution, voicing fears that they might exert a disruptive influence on the common European economy. A central component of EU economic policy is to avoid another Greece, i.e. the financial meltdown of a member-state due to unsustainable economic policies. In regards to the expansion of the public works programme, the EU is primarily critical of its potential to distort the Hungarian labour market. While the government heralds the programme as a solution to high unemployment, the
EU views it as an attempt to hide the dire state of the labour market. While the programme does offer some income to people in desperate need, it does not offer a sustainable, long-term solution. The public works programme offers little opportunity to develop skills that would be valuable on the labour market, and thus it does very little to facilitate peoples’ transition from the programme back to the regular labour market. Essentially by eradicating the statistical perception of unemployment the Government reduces pressures to adopt systemic reforms. Combine this with the mismanagement and corruption associated with large government projects and the programme becomes problematic. Once again contrasts can be drawn between Malaysia and Hungary: Malaysia responded to its own employment issues with the expanding of the civil service. Both the expansion of the public works programme and the civil service create a ballooning government workforce of questionable economic value. From a narrow moralistic viewpoint it makes sense that people prefer recipients of government assistance to contribute back to society through painting fences and collecting rubbish. However, funds could be more effectively used if the programme focused on skill training and facilitating re-entry into a competitive labour market.

Expanding government spending for welfare programmes also puts a pressure on the government to match it in increased revenues. The inability to do so was a strong contributor to the Greek financial meltdown. Combining populist welfare spending with a trickle-down economic model is contradictory. While the Government expands the public works programme and offers various benefits to families, it also has reduced most taxes and offers tax breaks to selected groups, such as young married couples or families with multiple children. To make up for the revenue lost, the Government has introduced a host of special taxes, often targeting specific industries. There is a tax targeting energy firms. There is a special banking tax that is sometimes popularized as a punitive measure against banks profiting at the expense of the voters, especially following the collapse of the foreign currency-based lending market. There is also a tax targeting telecommunication businesses and insurance firms. (PWC) These special taxes often target business sectors unpopular by the electorate or those viewed to profit unfairly on basic necessities as part of the Government’s populist programme. Unsurprisingly the EU has been critical of these special taxes, voicing concerns that they negatively impact investment into the Hungarian economy. Furthermore, special taxes create an unfavourable precedent even for companies that are not affected by them. Any corporation investing into Hungary can reasonably wonder whether it is their industry that receives such taxes next if they fail to tow the government line or run afoul of public opinion. Reduced investment carries the risk of unbalancing the Hungarian economy in the long run. At the same time the trickle-down model used by the government is not without risks on its own. The Government cut tax rates expecting that the money saved will be reinvested into Hungary and that it will improve tax compliance. However, there is no guarantee that it will achieve such a goal. It is reasonable to expect that tax breaks to the lower and middle classes will contribute to higher consumption, which the government can take advantage of through atypically high value added tax (VAT) rates in Hungary. But large corporations and high income individuals have proven time and time again that they do not conform to the expectations of the trickle-down model, taking advantage of the tax breaks without reinvesting the gains. Furthermore, from a Europe-wide perspective Hungary’s aggressive tax policy could intensify the race to the bottom that can be seen in Eastern European countries desperately trying to attract large corporations. While in the short run the move might benefit Hungary, in the long run it gives power to corporations, a direction the EU has been pushing against recently, as seen for example in the case of invalidating tax breaks offered by Ireland. While the Hungarian economy is not unravelling at the moment – the Government successful reduced government debt – it is not surprising that the EU is critical of its execution as a faltering Hungary would exert a negative influence throughout the EU’s
interconnected economy. Such criticism is further warranted by the fact that the EU has invested heavily into propping up the Hungarian economy. It is a contradictory stance to demand to follow one’s own way while receiving funds from the very organization it seeks to defy.

But moving away from the abstract, one can demonstrate how the Government’s economic policies directly interfere with common European projects. The European Union is in the process of creating a Europe-wide common energy infrastructure. As one expects this is a monumentally complex undertaking. The blueprint for this project can be seen in EU Parliament and Council Regulation 347/2013. (EUR-Lex, 2013) The key goal of the project is to create an integrated and modern common energy infrastructure that eliminates inefficiencies present within the current fragmented nation-based infrastructure. One issue for such a project is financing: who and in what manner should pay for such an infrastructure. The EU prefers to limit direct government investment, favouring private sector financing, i.e. to incentivize privately owned energy firms to build this infrastructure. The goal is to execute the project without significantly increasing government expenditure. However, private corporations are self-interested entities. Investment into national energy markets is conditional on the profitability of said markets. And this is why the EU is primarily concerned about the Government’s utility policy. By cutting the profitability of the Hungarian energy market the EU anticipates a reduction in private investment, especially when it comes to financing new infrastructure projects. A 2014 overview of the EU energy markets highlights that the Government’s utility pricing policy has contributed to reduced investment and the mothballing of non-critical assets in Hungary as private sector players are discouraged from committing resources to a hostile market environment. (European Commission, 2014) Furthermore, the perceived move of the Hungarian energy markets move towards a more centralized government-owned state is antithetical to the EU’s development plan that favours the privatization of the industry. And energy companies are also targeted by the aforementioned special tax, further reducing the attractiveness of the Hungarian market. Hungary’s ‘own way’ goes against a common strategy seeking to solve a continent-wide problem that is well beyond the Government’s narrow domestic view.

Once again one can observe that, while the Government appeals to popular nationalist sentiments to quash EU criticism, the issue cannot be satisfactorily reduced to the EU merely meddling in the domestic affairs of Hungary. Hungary has voluntarily joined the European Union exactly because of the Union’s ability to coordinate on the European level and it explicitly endorsed or became signatory to the Europe-wide plans against which it seeks to rebel now. The dangers of this process are the same as discussed above in the context of the refugee process, i.e. the potential undermining of the credibility of EU agreements and thus the EU’s ability to coordinate on the supranational level.

Conclusion

Hungary has been dealing with major issues, whether it is the refugee crisis or economic planning. There is room to debate on both issues, e.g. the procedures by which the EU awards refugee status need to be reformed to accommodate the interests of all member-states. However, the Government chooses to pursue its ‘own way’, often contrary to existing international law. At the same time it deflects all criticism by employing the politics of sovereignty to paint any criticism as an attack. This is a largely unproductive process that removes much needed space for discussion on whether Hungary is on the right track on the
first place and where it can do better. The nationalist fervour surrounding the issue makes productive discourse rather difficult as critics are perceived as foreign agents.

Besides the damage it inflicts on Hungarian political discourse, the politics of sovereignty also undermines the very foundation of the current international legal order by seeking to normalize the notion that international agreements can be reneged at will and often unilaterally. It is not a facilitating factor for mature discussion of international issues. And as evidence shows, there is rarely a happy end to these politics. Whether one considers the economic damage suffered by the United Kingdom or the policy chaos of the Trump White House, one has no reason to be optimistic about the effects of such populist politics.

In the end the only thing one can do is to correct the record. Facing the fantasies of populist policies one’s only refugee is the realm of cold hard facts. And the cold hard fact is that there is no concentrated effort to undermine Hungarian sovereignty, only calls to hold the country accountable for its own promises and agreements.

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PUBLIC UNDERSTANDING AND EVALUATION OF INFORMATION RELATED TO OBESITY HEALTH RISKS IN SWEDEN AND MALAYSIA

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Abstract

This study examines and compares the awareness of weight-related issues of Swedes and Malay Malaysians, as well as attitudes to health risks related to being obese and preferences for and evaluation of different information channels. A questionnaire was distributed to respondents from these two socio-culturally distinct countries and the responses were analyzed using descriptive statistics. The findings of the study show both similarities and differences between Swedes and Malay Malaysians. Respondents in both countries show an awareness of where to turn to for information and the health problems linked to obesity. Both similarities and differences are found in preferences for information sources and usefulness of information. In the Swedish data, social media, family and friends and expert talks were considered both easy to understand and trustworthy and the information obtained from these sources is evaluated as very useful while blogs were seen as easy to understand but not trustworthy. In the Malaysia data, blogs, Youtube/Vimeo and social media are considered the easiest to understand but less likely to be trustworthy. In both countries, public health care institutions and governmental agencies are rated as trustworthy, but low in understandability. In Malaysia, expert talks to the public and private institutions are also seen as trustworthy. Daily newspapers, leaflets, radio/TV, and alternative medicine is seen as neither easy to understand nor trustworthy by the respondents in both countries. The outcomes of this study provide insights into the obesity attitudes of Swedes and Malaysians and their preferences for information sources. The results can contribute towards better understanding of cultural influences in the planning of health services in both countries.

Keywords: obesity, Sweden, Malaysia, information sources, trust, culture

Introduction

In Sweden and in Malaysia, as in other countries, health problems related to overweight and obesity are growing. Public awareness of health issues and ability to critically take part of
information from multiple information sources dealing with food intake, weight and health is therefore increasingly important for preventing and treating obesity. Information can be gained from government and health care institutions, newspapers, Internet pages, social media etc. The Internet in general, and social media in particular are growing resources for health information, which are reshaping traditional health care by offering constant, cost-effective support for people.

According to Seidell and Halberstadt (2015), the global figure for obesity and overweight is approximately 30 per cent of the population and in 2030 it may have increased even to about 50 per cent. This causes an increasing prevalence of a number of obesity related illnesses – a global problem (Gallus et al., 2015). A closer look at the statistics for the two countries in this study (Sweden and Malaysia) reveals that the number of obese Swedes is about 14 per cent and rising, the number for overweight is 50 per cent for men and about 33 per cent for women.

Statistics for Malaysia, (WHO report in 2010) reported that it was the country with the highest percentage of obese people in the ASEAN region. Almost 45 per cent of Malaysian men and almost half of the women are overweight or obese. Childhood obesity rates are on the rise from less than 10 per cent ten years earlier to almost 14 per cent in 2008 with increasing numbers of diabetes, hypertension and obesity related illnesses (The Malaysian Insider, 2014).

Since a healthy lifestyle depends on continuous choices in everyday life, it is important to try to understand what can influence these choices, i.e. how people acquire and apply information about health and health risks. This is a complex individual process in different situations of life with different influencing factors. Healthy choices require information. ‘Health literacy’ is a term used for how people acquire, understand and use health information, leading to practical effects on their health, according to WHO (2013) (cf. also Wagner et al., 2009; Mårtensson and Hensing, 2012). The ability to handle the flow of relevant information, the ability to decide what information can be trusted and what cannot and the ability to understand what information can be applied generally versus in specific cases depends on critical evaluation of sources (Grönlund, 2014).

Three relevant background facts for studying health literacy are (i) the flow of information about health, food and exercise that reaches people today, (ii) the difficulty in deciding which information is trustworthy and which is propaganda or commercial advertising in disguise, and (iii) the difficulty in deciding what information is generally applicable and what is correct information concerning a specific individual case. It appears important to provide not only information, but also abilities to critically evaluate information and identify reliable sources of advice as well as tailored information targeting specific needs.

In general, studies of places where health information is found suggest that it is in school, from parents and from health care staff, but also increasingly from the internet (blogs, online journals, social media, YouTube), radio and TV (cf. Brown et al., 2007; Rich, 2011; Kim and Yon 2012; Chang et al., 2013; Chou et al., 2014; Corcoran and Renwick, 2014). At the same time, the Internet is today the most easy to use, but also provides much incorrect information. The Internet overwhelms users with information, which can be confusing and difficult for many to evaluate as trustworthy or not. Thus, the issue of deciding which information is trustworthy is becoming more and more important (cf. Grönlund, 2014).
Research aims

The purpose of this study is to investigate the awareness of health risks and the preference for and evaluation of different sources of information about health and obesity in Sweden and Malaysia, as representing two widely different societies, in order to address a global problem from two local perspectives.

The specific aims of this study are:
- to examine the Swedes and Malay Malaysians’ awareness of weight-related issues such as Body Mass Index (BMI), knowledge and use of weight-related diets and health risks related to being obesity
- to examine the Swedes and Malay Malaysians’ preferences for sources of information about weight-related diets and exercises and their evaluation of these sources in terms of understandability, trustworthiness and usefulness of information provided

Potentially influencing factors such as gender, level of education, and self-estimated weight are taken into account.

Methodology

This study employed a mixed method approach (a combination of quantitative and qualitative) where the quantitative element was extracted from the questionnaire and analysed using descriptive statistics while the qualitative was represented by defining the taxonomies of categories found in the open-ended section of the questionnaire.

Procedures

A questionnaire was distributed to respondents from these two socio-culturally distinct countries and the responses were analyzed using descriptive statistics. A questionnaire which consisted of 21 open and closed questions (see Appendix 1) was piloted with about 30 Swedish and 30 Malaysian respondents and appropriately modified in terms of format and sequencing of questions.

In Sweden, data collection was done via the Internet, by distributing a link with the questionnaire to a number of convenience sampled Facebook groups, with an invitation to participate in the study. The selected Facebook groups included groups focused on different hobbies, sport, health and travelling, dieting and exercising, buying/selling, different occupations, home interior, politics and job searching, thus reaching a wide variety of potential respondents i.e. applying snowball sampling via Facebook (cf. Baltar and Brunet, 2012). The data collection in Sweden was done in line with ethical guidelines for social science research. In Malaysia, the questionnaire, which was in both digital and paper formats was distributed via convenience sampling at a university campus and through various forms of social media such as Facebook and Twitter. The University of Malaya Research Ethics Committee-Non Clinical approved the questionnaire and prior consent was sought from the respondents during data collection and procedures followed.

Thus, although the samples cannot be treated as representative random samples of the Swedish and Malaysian population, based on the findings of earlier research, they can be considered representative of a group of people in Sweden and Malaysia, who generally come from urban areas and who actively engage in the use of social media.
Participants
In Sweden, a total of 185 people participated in the study and reported were living in Sweden and having Swedish as their first language (100 women and 85 men). In Malaysia, 200 people (100 male and 100 female respondents) responded either to the English or Malay version of the questionnaire. As the Malaysian sample consisted of only Malays who make up about 60 per cent of the population in Malaysia, this study therefore cannot be generalized to all Malaysians, which also include Chinese (25 per cent), Indians (8 per cent) and other indigenous ethnic groups (7 per cent) (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2012).

Table 1: Demographic profile of participants: Gender, Age, Education level, Weight status

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondent characteristics</th>
<th>Sweden</th>
<th>Malaysia</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N (total sample size)</td>
<td>185</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender n, (per cent)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>85 (45.9)</td>
<td>100 (50)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>100 (53.1)</td>
<td>100 (50)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age range n, (per cent)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Under 30 (0-30)</td>
<td>61 (33)</td>
<td>156 (78)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Above 30 (31 and above)</td>
<td>124 (67)</td>
<td>40 (20)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Education level n, (per cent)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Below university</td>
<td>107 (58)</td>
<td>53 (26.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University degree and higher</td>
<td>78 (42)</td>
<td>146 (73)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Self estimate on body weight n, (per cent)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Underweight/normal</td>
<td>118 (64)</td>
<td>113 (56.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overweight/obese</td>
<td>67 (36)</td>
<td>83 (41.5)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As can be seen in Table 1, the Malaysian Malays sample has more young respondents than the Swedish sample. There is almost an equal distribution of gender in both samples. The Malaysian Malays sample includes more university degree respondents than the Swedish sample. The body weight was underweight/normal a little over 50 per cent with underweight/normal weight (56.5 per cent for the Malaysian Malays sample and 64 per cent for the Swedish sample). The Malaysian Malays sample is also slightly more overweight (41.5 per cent) than the Swedish sample (36 per cent). The data for the Malaysian sample does not always sum up to 100 per cent, as not all participants filled in their data for all variables.

Analysis

The questions in the questionnaire focus on 2 themes:
- Awareness of health risks related to being overweight/obesity
- Preferences for information sources and evaluation of these sources

Responses to the yes-no and multiple-choice questions were calculated using Excel, taxonomies of categories were made for the analysis of the responses to the open questions, based on the semantic similarity of the given responses.
Results

Awareness of health risks related to being overweight/obesity, body mass index (BMI), knowledge and experiences of weight-related diets

The responses to the open question about health risks related to obesity are shown in Tables 2(a) and 2(b).

Table 2 (a): Health problems linked to obesity in Sweden

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Health risks</th>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Sweden</th>
<th>N of replies for each category</th>
<th>per cent of total replies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Heart disease</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>169</td>
<td>13</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High blood pressure</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>168</td>
<td>13</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diabetes</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>165</td>
<td>13</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depression</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>151</td>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sleeping problems</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>139</td>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infertility</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>131</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irregular periods</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arthritis</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asthma</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Breast cancer</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Migraine</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grand total</td>
<td></td>
<td>1271</td>
<td>100</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 (b): Health problems linked to obesity in Malaysia

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Health risks</th>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Malaysia</th>
<th>N of replies for each category</th>
<th>per cent of total replies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Diabetes</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>168</td>
<td>21</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High blood pressure</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>161</td>
<td>20</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heart disease</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>151</td>
<td>18</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depression</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irregular periods</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infertility</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sleeping problems</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In general, the respondents in both countries show a high awareness of risks related to being overweight/obese. As can be seen from Tables 2(a) and 2(b), heart disease, high blood pressure and diabetes and depression rank the highest in both countries. In terms of differences, the Swedes mention sleeping problems and infertility more frequently than the Malaysian Malays. When asked about BMI (Body Mass Index), the vast majority of the respondents in both countries know what BMI is i.e. 99 per cent in Sweden and 96 per cent in Malaysia. Of that majority, more than 80 per cent of people in Sweden and 83 per cent in Malaysia know what their own BMI is (see Table 3).

Table 3: Do Swedes and Malaysian Malays know their own BMI?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Health risks</th>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Malaysia</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N of replies for each category</td>
<td>per cent of total replies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arthritis</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asthma</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Migraine</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Breast cancer</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grand total</td>
<td></td>
<td>802</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3: Do Swedes and Malaysian Malays know their own BMI?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Sweden</th>
<th>Malaysia</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>per cent Yes</td>
<td>per cent No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weight</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Underweight/</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Normal weight</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overweight/obese</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

However, it is notable that the level of knowledge of the diets Glycaemic Index/Glycaemic Load (GI/GL) and Low Carbohydrate High Fat Diet (LCHF) differs markedly with only a total of 11.7 per cent and 9.6 per cent in the Malaysian Malays sample who know what GI/GL and LCHF are, compared to 90 per cent and 98 per cent in the Swedish sample.

The percentage of those who eat according to the plate model in Sweden is 25 per cent and 20.5 per cent among Malaysian Malays. (see Table 4). The plate model is divided into three parts, whereas two of the parts are big sized (filled with vegetables and root vegetables and carbohydrates such as pasta, rice, potatoes or bread) and the third part is small filled with proteins such as fish, meat, eggs or legumes.
Table 4: Do Swedes and Malaysian Malays eat according to the plate model?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Sweden per cent</th>
<th>Malaysia per cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weight</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Underweight/</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Normal weight</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obese</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Another question explored use of weight related diets. Half of the Malaysian Malays respondents had tried a weight-related diet with equal numbers of males and females. In Sweden, 47 per cent of the males and 72 per cent of the females had tried a weight-related diet. Among the ones who had tried a weight-related diet, 54.3 per cent of the Malaysian Malays and 75 per cent of the Swedes were from the overweight and obese group.

Preferences for and evaluation of information sources
The majority of respondents (91 per cent) report knowing where to turn to for information if they need advice concerning diets and/or exercise. In Table 5, the preferences of the respondents are presented. The information sources are grouped in accordance to the ranking from highest to lowest.

Table 5: Preferences for information sources

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Sweden (per cent)</th>
<th>Malaysia (per cent)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Family and friends</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>Family and friends (86)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Social media</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>Blogs (79)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Radio/TV (79)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Journal articles</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>Social media (78)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Blogs</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>Journal articles (74)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Expert talks</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>YouTube/Vimeo (73)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Radio/TV</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>Leaflets (69)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 YouTube/Vimeo</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>Newspapers (68)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Alternative medicine</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Public institutions (62)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 Government agencies</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Expert talks (58)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 Public institutions</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Governmental agencies (55)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 Private institutions</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Private institutions (52)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 Newspapers</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Traditional medicine (50)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 Leaflets</td>
<td>22</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Malaysian and Swedish samples are similar in that they have the same types of preferred information sources. Family/friends, social media, journal articles and blogs rank as the most preferred sources for both. Government agencies and public and private institutions rank among the lowest in both countries. Differences can, however, be seen in the preference for leaflets, newspapers and radio/TV where Malaysian Malays show a much higher preference for these sources than Swedes.

Table 6(a): Ease of understanding and trustworthiness in Sweden (the 5 highest ranked in bold)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Easy to understand</th>
<th>Trustworthy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>Sweden</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public institutions</td>
<td>5 per cent</td>
<td>13 per cent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private institutions</td>
<td>3 per cent</td>
<td>8 per cent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government agencies</td>
<td>5 per cent</td>
<td>11 per cent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daily newspapers</td>
<td>5 per cent</td>
<td>1 per cent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journals</td>
<td>12 per cent</td>
<td>9 per cent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leaflets</td>
<td>2 per cent</td>
<td>1 per cent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blogs</td>
<td>14 per cent</td>
<td>7 per cent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expert talks in public</td>
<td>11 per cent</td>
<td>15 per cent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radio/TV programs</td>
<td>5 per cent</td>
<td>3 per cent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family/friends</td>
<td>12 per cent</td>
<td>11 per cent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YouTube/Vimeo</td>
<td>7 per cent</td>
<td>3 per cent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social media</td>
<td>14 per cent</td>
<td>12 per cent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traditional (alternative) medicine</td>
<td>5 per cent</td>
<td>6 per cent</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6(b): Ease of understanding and trustworthiness in Malaysia (the 5 highest ranked in bold)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Easy to understand</th>
<th>Trustworthy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Malaysia</td>
<td>Malaysia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public institutions</td>
<td>8.7 per cent</td>
<td>17.2 per cent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private institutions</td>
<td>6.9 per cent</td>
<td>11.4 per cent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government agencies</td>
<td>6.5 per cent</td>
<td>13.5 per cent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daily newspapers</td>
<td>8.3 per cent</td>
<td>6.3 per cent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journals</td>
<td>7.0 per cent</td>
<td>10.8 per cent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leaflets</td>
<td>6.9 per cent</td>
<td>3.8 per cent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blogs</td>
<td>11.0 per cent</td>
<td>3.8 per cent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expert talks in public</td>
<td>7.6 per cent</td>
<td>9.1 per cent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radio/TV programs</td>
<td>7.2 per cent</td>
<td>5.3 per cent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family/friends</td>
<td>8.0 per cent</td>
<td>6.6 per cent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YouTube/Vimeo</td>
<td>9.6 per cent</td>
<td>4.5 per cent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social media</td>
<td>9.3 per cent</td>
<td>3.1 per cent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traditional (alternative) medicine</td>
<td>3.0 per cent</td>
<td>4.7 per cent</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In Sweden (see Table 6(a)), expert talks in public, family and friends, and social media were seen as both trustworthy and easy to understand, while public institutions and government agencies were trustworthy, but not easy to understand and journals and blogs were easy to understand, but not trustworthy.

In Malaysia (see Table 6(b)), only public institutions were seen as both trustworthy and fairly easy to understand. Newspapers, blogs, YouTube/Vimeo and social media were seen as easy to understand, but not trustworthy. Private institutions, government agencies, journals and expert talks were seen as trustworthy but not easy to understand.

The participants were asked to evaluate the information about diets and exercises obtained from different sources, presented in Table 7:

Table 7: Usefulness of information; ranked list in order of usefulness. The numbers are presented in the table as means of rankings on a 5 step Likert scale, from 1 (least useful) to 5 (most useful).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Information</th>
<th>Means total Sweden</th>
<th>Means total Malaysia</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Public institution</td>
<td>2.17</td>
<td>4.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government agencies</td>
<td>2.18</td>
<td>3.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private institution</td>
<td>2.18</td>
<td>3.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expert talks</td>
<td>2.97</td>
<td>3.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journal articles</td>
<td>2.85</td>
<td>3.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newspaper</td>
<td>1.96</td>
<td>3.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radio/TV programs</td>
<td>2.40</td>
<td>3.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family/friends</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>3.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leaflets</td>
<td>2.04</td>
<td>3.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blogs</td>
<td>2.95</td>
<td>3.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YouTube/Vimeo</td>
<td>2.52</td>
<td>3.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social media</td>
<td>3.14</td>
<td>3.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alternative (traditional) medicine</td>
<td>2.13</td>
<td>2.99</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For Sweden, social media, family/friends, expert talks, blogs and journal articles are considered to provide the most useful information, while newspapers, leaflets, alternative medicine and public/private healthcare institutions as well as governmental agencies rank lowest. For Malaysian Malays, public institutions, government agencies, private institutions, expert talks and journal articles rank the highest in terms of usefulness of information. Lowest ranked for the Malaysian Malays are You Tube/Vimeo, social media and traditional/alternative medicine.

Respondents were asked some open-ended questions concerning governmental agencies and the answers are given below. The questions concerned whether the respondents had read anything provided by governmental agencies concerning what to eat and if so, where, if it was easy to understand and if it was useful or not (plus motivation). They also concerned if the respondents applied the advice and if so they were asked to give examples. Further questions concerned what information influenced the respondents the most, how it influenced them, and what would make them change their eating habits.
In answering the question ‘Have you read anything provided by governmental agencies on what you should eat?’; there were 84 Yes responses (52.4 per cent) from Sweden and 94 Yes responses (47 per cent) from Malaysia.

The following question asked whether it was easy to understand the information. The majority of both groups, who had read official information found it easy to understand, a total of 74 for Sweden and 76 for Malaysia. To the question ‘Was the information you read from government agencies useful for you?’ the respondents could add none, one or more than one specifications. In terms of usefulness of information, the Malaysian Malays mentioned that the materials were informative and easy to understand and Swedes listed responses such as ‘useful’ for information about food contents, information in the debate and ‘useful’ for food and health recommendations and clear information. Responses from the Swedes, who chose to specify/motivate their responses are listed below:

Positive (yes-responses):
- Useful for facts about food contents, facts in the debate (14)
- Useful for food and health recommendations (6)
- Clear information (5)
- You can read them and do the opposite to be healthy (2)
- No specification given (2)

Negative (no-responses) were specified as being:
- Outdated (15)
- Wrong (13)
- Biased/Can not be trusted/Commercial (7)
- Would make me ill/more ill/Dangerous for certain diagnoses (7)
- Don’t know/ Yes and no / Maybe/ (6)
- Not written by experts (4)
- Too general (3)
- Difficult to understand/Boring/Unclear (3)
- Already know the information (2)

The Malaysian Malays listed the below responses:
- Informative (32),
- Easy to understand (14)
- Other (21) e.g.: Advice from my mother, Unsure, As a health guideline, From an accurate source

However, among the Swedes who actually read information from government agencies, there were many negative comments, as can be seen above. Two of those who found the information useful even claim that they did so, because you can do the opposite (of what the agencies advice) to be healthy. Outdated, wrong, not expert, too general, not trustworthy, dangerous, and difficult are some of the negative judgments. On the other hand, the lower number of respondents who found the information useful, appreciated that they could look up recommendations for healthy food and especially the contents of different types of food and also thought the information was clear. This looks like contradictory opinions and that is probably precisely what it is. The responses can be directly linked to the ongoing Swedish debate on what is healthy food, where many of our respondents seem to be adherents of the LCHF (low carbohydrate high fat) type of diet, while the government agency web pages stick
to their low fat and varied food recommendations, which also a minority of our respondents do, some of which have used the information in their professions.

As to whether they act on these sources, the Malaysian Malays in general reported taking action, being more compliant compared to the Swedes (Table 8). For the Malaysian Malays, those with no university education tended to be more compliant (77.2 per cent compared to 52 per cent) while for the Swedes, no significant difference could be observed (19 per cent compared to 25 per cent).

Table 8: Following advice

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Sweden per cent</th>
<th>Malaysia per cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age groups</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Under 30</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30 and above</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>175</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Women</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weight</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low/normal</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Some examples of how the information was applied by the Swedes and Malaysian Malays in response to following advice from these sources are listed below:

Applications by the Swedes:
- Eating what the body needs (14)
- Vegetarian food (4)
- No sugar (4)
- No salt (4)
- Exercise (3)
- The plate model (2)
- Ecological food (2)
- Food during pregnancy (2)
- Food for children (2)
- How often you can eat fish (1)
- No fat (1)
- Do not follow advice (4)

Applications by the Malaysian Malays:
- Diet (33)
- Exercise (6)
- Pregnancy (2)
- Other (6) eg: Follow what have been suggested, Always look after your health
The Malaysian Malays and Swedes differed greatly in citing factors that would make them change their eating habits. While for the Malaysian Malays, the main factors would be health (N=64), and weight and physical concerns (N=40), the Swedes mentioned provision of new information (N=39), health consciousness (N=37) and psychological factors (N=34) as main reasons. Other factors for the Malaysian Malays included familial and religious concerns, for the Swedes consequences of being overweight (N=13) and the working conditions or consequences of these conditions. (N=12). (170 Malaysians (85 per cent) and 150 Swedes (81 per cent) answered this open question.

Discussion and Conclusion

The findings of the study show that the respondents in both samples have a high awareness and knowledge of the risks of being overweight/obese. Heart disease, high blood pressure, diabetes and depression were the most chosen alternatives. This probably reflects the results of the Swedish public health policy on awareness-raising in the population (Public Health Agency of Sweden, 2013). Also in Malaysia, there has been an effort to raise the awareness of the public concerning being overweight or obese, the Ministry of Health Malaysia has organized a series of campaigns on, for example, the importance of carrying out health checks, counseling sessions by nutritionists and the Komuniti Sihat Perkasa Negara [Healthy Community makes a Strong Country] program which is an intervention program for those who are obese (Ministry of Health Malaysia, 2015; Toon, 2014). The issue of obesity remains a global problem, because it has a significant impact on the health index, affecting development in many areas: economic, socio-cultural and mortality/survivability of civilizations in the modern world.

The majority of the Swedish respondents were well informed concerning specific diets, ‘the plate model’ and weight-related and weight loss terminology (BMI, LCHF, GI/GL). As many Swedish respondents also report being on a diet for weight loss, this explains their awareness of weight-related issues. Most of the Malaysian Malay participants knew their own BMI, but a vast majority were not familiar with terms for specific diets related to weight loss, such as LCHF and GI/GL. This indicates that these terms LCHF, GI/GL) are more frequently used in Sweden than in Malaysia, perhaps because of a greater focus on diets for weight loss in the media.

In both samples, the women tend to be more concerned and aware of health issues with more of them reporting that they know their BMI compared to the male respondents. In addition, not surprisingly, the respondents with self-reported overweight/obesity conditions use weight-related diets more than the normal/underweight respondents. This reflects a general trend of women being more concerned about their appearance; body dissatisfaction is ubiquitous among girls and women (Robert-McComm, Norman and Zumwalt, 2014). In addition, women are in general more health conscious than men (Arganini et al., 2012).

For Sweden, the findings reveal that the Internet and social media are important sources for health related information and they compete with official information from Swedish health care. As Internet access in Sweden is high, Internet resources are easily accessible for dieters, compared to the public and private health care institutions. Furthermore, it can also be concluded from the data that some printed information (brochures and daily newspapers) are also becoming less attractive. Almost all respondents report knowing where to turn for information concerning diets and exercise, which also reflects a high health awareness of population in Sweden.
In comparison, for Malayan Malaysians important sources of information for health issues were recommendations from friends and family. By getting feedback and support from these sources, they become more confident about their decision-making process. Malaysia’s Internet penetration stands at 67.5% per cent (World Bank, 2015) giving rise to the increase in accessibility of social media as a tool for information sourcing. However, traditional print media such as leaflets and newspapers are still preferred as they are widely circulated; 2,995,685 as of January–June 2015 (Audit Bureau of Circulations Malaysia, 2015) and read throughout the nation states.

Some of the Swedish respondents report ignoring and criticizing public/private health care institutions and government agencies, brochures and daily newspapers. Judging from the comments, the information provided on government agencies websites is seen by some respondents as outdated and already known, which raises the issue of the authorities addressing current trends in weight-related issues. The Swedish data reflects two opposing tendencies. Governmental agencies keep ‘the plate model’ and controlling calorie intake as their instructions for weight loss, which a group of the respondents in this study are critical of them and relatively few persons are using them. At the same time, a report from 2013 from the Swedish agency for health technology assessment and assessment of social services (SBU, 2013)\(^1\) indicates that a low-carbohydrate diet, such as LCHF, is more effective weight loss than today’s conventional advice about calorie intake, which is what a group of the respondents report to favor. (The long term effects of LCHF on other aspects of health, are, however, so far not known, hence the official policy).

Knowing where to access science-based and accurate information is essential for managing a diet and a healthy lifestyle. In the Swedish data, social media, family and friends and expert talks are considered both easiest to understand and most trustworthy; the information obtained from these sources is evaluated as most useful, which explains why the respondents choose them. Journals and blogs are considered among the easiest to understand, but are less of the rated as the most trusted. Not all nutrition information found on blogs is seen as accurate and research-based, which results in them being less trustworthy.

For the Malaysian Malays, none of the information sources is seen as both very easy to understand and very trustworthy. Only public institutions are seen as very easy to understand and to some extent trustworthy. Blogs, YouTube/Vimeo and social media are considered the easiest to understand but less likely to be trustworthy. Social media is, thus, judged as easy to understand in both countries, but less trusted in Malaysia, while the Malaysian respondents are more positive to the ease of using blogs and YouTube/Vimeo. This difference could be due to the younger sample population in the Malaysian data who prefer to go online in search of information but still remain cautious about what they have read.

In both Sweden and Malaysia, public health care institutions and governmental agencies are seen as high in trustworthiness, but low in understandability, which can be an additional factor why many of the respondents do not turn to these resources. In Malaysia, expert talks to the public and private institutions are also seen as very trustworthy. Daily newspapers, leaflets, radio/TV, and alternative medicine is seen as neither easy to understand nor trustworthy by the

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\(^1\) SBU is an independent national authority, tasked by the government with assessing health care interventions from a broad perspective, covering medical, economic, ethical and social aspects (http://www.sbu.se/en/About-SBU/).
respondents in both countries. Interestingly, in the Malaysian Malays data, this also applies to private healthcare organizations. Similar tendencies can be seen in evaluation of information.

In general, the Swedish respondents choose what to use and follow, according to their beliefs, which are, in turn, based on information sources, where the Internet (i.e. social media, blogs), journals and newspapers play a very important role; this which might override that of the official information and recommendations for a probably increasing subgroup of people in Sweden. A relatively low confidence in official health information in a considerable subgroup of respondents points to a potential problem (i.e., trend setters adopting non-official recommendations, which may or may not entail health risks). This is a conscious choice based on their own information seeking and it is a challenge for the official information sources to address this group and the findings on which they base their choices in a way that can regain their confidence. More relevant research and more discussion are needed, also involving national agencies and institutions.

Governmental sources can develop standardised health policies by leveraging on similitudes while the local healthcare providers of health care/medicine and food can be more conscious of what preferential differences may be inherent and what may be unique in different societies. For instance, these findings could be applied in Malaysia by placing more emphasis on information about health and exercise, as well as the wider context of eating healthy food and keeping a normal weight. In Sweden, the diet trends could be tackled more clearly by the national health agencies, in order to keep the confidence of citizens and an explanation about why and how results of research are disseminated could be made known.

The Malaysian Malay respondents are also at liberty to choose the type of information that is of interest to them. Considerable factors such as family/friends, blogs and radio/TV, social media and also journal articles are important sources to look for information. Although obtaining sources from governmental agencies, public and private institutions are the least preferred methods compared to the new media, the respondents seem to trust the facts provided by these institutions. The dissemination of information however from these institutions should be more widespread and simplified so as to be easily understood by more people. The situation in Malaysia is markedly different from that in Sweden where more participants seem to trust less of the official information and recommendations and make choices based on their own findings and conclusions.

In conclusion, the spectrum of information sources is fairly broad and interest in seeking information about health, food and weight is considerable in both countries. This indicates that there are relatively strong possibilities for empowering the public to take action to combat problems arising from being overweight and obese. This would require new strategies to be undertaken by government agencies and clinics taking into account the whole spectrum of other sources that people turn to for information. The diversity in sources for health information also points to a need for critical reading by the users and access to transparent evaluation of health information. Understanding different cultures and the preferences of different communities is important in adopting strategies that will have a big impact on the different communities. The outcomes of this study provide insights into the obesity attitudes of Swedes and Malaysians and their preferences for information sources. The results can contribute towards better understanding of cultural influences in the planning of health services in both countries.
Acknowledgements

The data collection in Sweden was done in line with ethical guidelines for social science research. The University of Malaya Research Ethics Committee-Non Clinical approved the questionnaire and prior consent was sought from the respondents during data collection and procedures followed.

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Opinion

THE US WITHDRAWAL FROM THE PARIS CLIMATE AGREEMENT: WHAT LIES AHEAD AND WHO FILLS THE VACUUM?

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Today, the US pulled out of the Paris Climate Agreement, citing that it would undermine its economy, take away jobs, pose litigation risks, and put the US in a permanent disadvantageous position vis-a-vis other countries. By doing so, President Trump was fulfilling his election promise to support the nation’s coal industry, and had the Trump administration not exited the accord, it would have come into imminent direct conflict with the promise he made to the people during the campaign. Hence, the exit was expected.

Trump’s argument is that even if all signatory nations fully complied with the Paris agreement, it would only reduce global warming by a tiny fraction of a percentage by 2100, a gain which could be wiped out in just 14 days of carbon emission by China. The Trump administration saw no benefit in an accord that required billions of dollars in Green Climate Fund commitment to support developing nations, while requiring the US to shut down its own coal plants and at the same time allowing countries like China and India to continue and even build new ones. However, these claims appear to be exaggerated, as it was the past US Obama administration that had submitted an individual plan for the steps it would undertake to tackle greenhouse gas emissions, and not something that was imposed by Paris. Under that pact, the countries could alter their plans if a country’s internal circumstances demanded such flexibility.

The ASEAN region has suffered from the impacts of global warming, which has affected its biodiversity, health, and energy and water security, among other things. The ASEAN nations signed the Paris agreement on 22 April 2016 and through INDCs (Intended Nationally Determined Contributions) pledged to regularly communicate the steps they would take (or have taken) to reduce the effects of climate change in their countries. The ASEAN nations have noted that climate change should be in accordance with broader Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). SDGs, an initiative of the UN, consists of 17 goals that include ending hunger and poverty, ensuring healthy lives, providing quality education, combating climate change, and preservation of forests and oceans.

Back in America, withdrawal has found support. Just a few days back, 22 Republicans in a joint letter had urged Trump to withdraw from the accord, as they felt that in its current format it undermined US interests. However, those in favour of the accord (and most are) have rejected’s Trump rationale and have rather emphasised that while keeping the climate safe, clean energy would also improve the economy and create millions of jobs. Additionally, it would be cheaper than conventional energy sources. However, the Trump administration feels that the US needs all forms of energy in addition to renewable sources to meet its energy demands should the economy grow by over 3 – 4%. Trump is ready to renegotiate the agreement, but with Macron and others coming strongly against it, renegotiations are unlikely.

1 Written on June 1 2017, the day US exited the Paris Climate agreement. The Opinion piece was originally hosted on the AEI website. First published here.
Given all this, the big question remains: Without US support, what will be the fate of the Paris Climate Agreement? Which country will now take the lead?

The Paris Climate Agreement (Paris 2015, or CoP 21, CMP11), within UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), is an unprecedented global effort in combating the deleterious effects of climate change. The agreement opened for signing on 22 April 2016 and has been since signed by 195 nations and ratified by 148 as of June 2017.

While global greenhouse gas emissions have increased manifold since the 1900s, carbon emissions alone have risen by 90% since the 1970s. The fallout from these emissions has resulted in thinning of polar ice, rising sea levels, global warming, and unpredictable weather conditions, leading to incalculable economic and health risks. China and USA are among the highest polluting nations, contributing about 38% collectively to global greenhouse emissions. The Paris effort is intended to limit global warming to under 2% above pre-industrial levels by gradually cutting down on carbon emissions and ultimately heading towards a 0% carbon emission. Utilization of other forms of renewable and clean energy such as solar, wind, geothermal energy is central to the idea.

US has now joined the league of just 2 other nations – Syria and Nicaragua - that have not signed the accord. The US’s exit may be an opportunity for other countries to come together more closely. But this has to be cautiously undertaken; in the past, the US has provided firm and definite leadership in major world matters. The US is one of the largest contributors to the Green Climate Fund, and its exit would surely hurt the budget of USD 100 billion per year promised by the developed world to the developing (especially the least developed) nations. Thus, global effort is likely to be severely hampered due to the US pull-out.

In the absence of US, the China is now expected to play a more dominant role. However, China is the world’s largest polluter and is still a developing nation. The world cannot have much hope that China, in terms of contribution to the Fund, would manage to singlehandedly fill the void. However, a close EU-China climate change alliance is in the works now and together they might fill the void. The US exit also affords China an opportunity to exert more world influence, which it has bolstered further with its OBOR and other initiatives. The ASEAN itself is unlikely to make any sudden moves. A shift in power centrality towards China may be good news to the ASEAN, which has been over the past few years strengthening its relations with China, and is likely to look to China for leadership (w.r.t. Climate) in the region.

The exit does not mean that US would manage to immediately free itself from the arrangement. Should any country wish to opt out, the accord requires it to remain in the pact for 3 years and then additional 1 year before they can finally exit. Hence, it won’t be until 2020 that the US finally gets out. In case the leadership changes in the next US elections, scheduled in 2020, the equation may again change, so it’s still a wait-and-see situation.

Trump is treading a dangerous path; his protectionist policy is isolating the US from the rest of the world. The exit of the US from the accord would bring a setback to multilateralism as well. The US since the 1940s has led the world through multilateralism in matters of peace and security, trade, human rights, and environmental protection. These have brought immense benefits in the form of a successful international economy. Trump’s “America first” policy cannot succeed unless it is interwoven with the shared values of this highly interconnected world. The US exit has nonetheless shaken the system, and only time will tell if the resolve gets stronger or if greater cracks in governance emerge.
Opinion

GROWING MARITIME DISPUTE BETWEEN CROATIA AND BOSNIA

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Since Hugo Grotius’s famous *Mare Liberum* of 1609 the accessibility of the international waters (free naval regime) has been the international custom observed by all (civilized) nations. Ever since, the so-called Freedom of the Seas Doctrine has gradually elaborated on the notion of territorial waters, continental shelf, economic zones and its demarcation distances. As the technological breakthroughs made economic exploitation possible and military offences probable, the international community repeatedly tried to codify the customary rules into the text of the comprehensive universal legally binding instrument. Not before after WWII, which was extensively fought on the seas by nearly all major belligerent parties, the critical momentum has been built. The first two negotiation rounds have been conducted in 1950s leading to the successful closure of the UNCLOS I (1956) and UNCLOS II (1958, 1960). With over 160 participatory states and after nine consecutive years of heavy negotiations, the UNCLOS III was closed in 1982 (entering into force by 1994).

Without a wish to recapitulate on all details stipulated by the UNCLOS, let us only make a brief reference to the zones. The UNCLOS recognizes the right of the states to extend the national territory by several maritime zones from their respective coastlines.\(^1\) Thus, the international instrument differentiates:

- **Internal Waters** (land-coast – baseline) – no passage prior to explicit permission;
- **Territorial Waters** (from baseline up to 12nM seawards, with the possible extension for additional 12nM of so-called **Contiguous Zone**) – innocent passage right;
- **Inner Sea** (archipelago states only) – innocent passage right;
- **Prolongation of the Continental Shelf /PCS/** (territorial extension for up to 150nM seawards from baseline based on a confirmed geo-morphological proof) – innocent passage right;
- **Exclusive Economic Zone /EEZ/** (from baseline up to 200nM seaward, upon the UNCLAS ratification) – innocent passage right;
- **PCS and EEZ** (up to 350nM seawards from baseline approved by the CLCS 10 years after the UNCLAS ratification);
- **High Seas** (beyond the limits of 200nM/350nM) – open for free passage and exploitation to all states.

The recognition of the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) and PCS (prolongation of the continental shelf) by the UNCLOS surely obliges the Mediterranean/Adriatic states to grant innocent passage right to all foreign vessels. However, it firmly awards the littoral states since both zones are exclusive belts for any economic activity, be it seabed exploitation (ore, gas, oil, other minerals, and the like) or exclusivity in the fishing rights (marine biota).

\(^1\) The basis is the drawing of baselines along the coastal lines - either by following the low water mark or by following the general direction of the land-coast.
The UNCLOS established the CLCS (Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf) as the standing (scientific) panel of the instrument to deal with the claims beyond the 200nM parameter. The CLCS is mandated to examine the maritime claims per individual state requests. Recommended deliberations of the CLCS are becoming final and binding if no contradictory claim is lodged (art.76). In case of disputes, the final settlement is subjected either to the Hague-based ICJ or to the Intl. Tribunal for the Law of the Sea.

**Bosnian case**

The bilateral international agreement on the state border between Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Republic of Croatia, known as the Agreement on the Border between the two states, or more familiarly, as the Tudman-Izetbegović Agreement, signed in Sarajevo on 30 July 1999 between the then President of the Republic of Croatia, Franjo Tudman, and the Chairman of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Alija Izetbegović, represents in its 23 Articles, conditionally, "a valid act since it has been applied until a new one is made" (V.D. Degan, 2013). This Agreement could also be perceived to contain a transitional or provisional solution, since it has never been ratified by any parliament and does not serve its ultimate purpose - the permanent establishment and determination of the land and sea border between the two neighbors. In this regard, it can even be argued that the Republic of Croatia de facto abandoned the execution of this Agreement when its official authorities decided to embark on the building of a permanent construction at sea. This all supports the fact that the issue of delimitation and demarcation at sea, especially in the area of the Bay of Neum and the Mali Ston Bay, is still permanently undefined and unsettled and thus requires, in our opinion, a serious step towards opening an official dialogue with Zagreb with the involvement of EU institutions, since the Republic of Croatia is a member of the European Union.

The second difficulty should be addressed together with the first. It would be especially important to define the sea boundary, regarding the tip of the Klek Peninsula and the uninhabited islets, Veliki and Mali Školj or, more precisely, the rocks in the Mali Ston Bay, which are part of a unique geomorphologic unit, together with the Klek Peninsula. If we draw the line of equidistance for purposes of delimitation of two states whose shores in one bay lie or are opposite to one another (the Peninsula of Klek and Pelješac), which is in accordance with the international law of the sea, as well as Article 4 (3) of the bilateral Agreement which, inter alia, prescribes that border at the sea stretches "the median line of the sea area between the land of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Republic of Croatia", it could be claimed that the disputed area would belong to Bosnia and Herzegovina. Closely connected to this, the question of Bosnia-Herzegovina's access to the High Seas or international waters of the Adriatic Sea and other world seas should be addressed, where no country in the world has territorial sovereignty, nor does it exercise any sovereign rights. High sea areas are world seas and oceans which are outside any state territory and provide a regime of free navigation and overflight, as well as other freedoms inherent to the High Seas. On this part of the planet, according to general customary international law, all countries in the world, under certain circumstances, exercise their jurisdiction over vessels flying the flag of their country.

For these reasons, the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea from 1982 (UNCLOS) (ratified both by the Republic of Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina) states in Art. 7 (6) of the Convention that, in declaring its straight baselines, from which the width of the territorial sea is measured, the coastal State may not cut off the territorial sea of another coastal state from the High Seas or the exclusive economic zone. As things stand currently, in order to get from
the waters of Bosnia and Herzegovina by vessel to the High Seas, it is necessary to pass through the internal waters and the territorial sea of the other coastal state, so that, in crossing the line that represents the outer boundary of the territorial sea, one leaves the sovereign territory of the Republic of Croatia. Further into the High Seas, the Croatian Protected Ecological and Fishing Band (ZERP) has been declared and covers the sea area in the Adriatic Sea from the external border of the territorial sea in the direction of the open sea to its outer boundary, determined by the general international law, and temporarily follows the line of demarcation of the continental shelf established by the Agreement between Italy and the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia concerning the Delimitation of the Continental Shelf between the two Countries in the Adriatic Sea from 1968.

In fact, it is essential for Bosnia and Herzegovina to secure a specific route, that is to say, a corridor, which will physically connect its waters with the High Seas, since it is in an unfavorable geographic position, due to its sealed coastline. At this level, it is state practice to support coastal states to limit the width of their territorial sea, due to the undisputed flow or passage of the other coastal state to the High Seas, in accordance with the above-mentioned UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, which represents a codification of this branch of international law. Examples of this are the Republics of Estonia and Finland in the Gulf of Finland in the Baltic Sea, in relation to the Russian Federation (St. Petersburg area), and the Republic of France in relation to the territorial sea of the Principality of Monaco in the Mediterranean Sea.

Hence, Bosnia and Herzegovina should not accept the guarantee of the neighboring state that Bosnia and Herzegovina will have the right only to innocent passage for all vessels to and from Neum or, in the case of some other ports in the state territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina, since Neum is extremely unconducive to the construction of a larger port which would be open to international traffic - we predict that a port of this type and category could be built on the Klek Peninsula, whose waters are much more suitable, especially in respect of access and sea depth, for the construction of an international port. This is because the right to innocent passage of a vessel is linked to the territorial sea, not to the internal waters of the coastal state. This should have been precisely defined in accordance with the principles and rules of international law, preferably by a bilateral international agreement between the two neighboring states, namely, the existence, the position, the proper width and the legal regime of such a corridor or waterway, which would probably be through the Neretva and the Korčula Channel, to move all vessels to and from Bosnia and Herzegovina. The legal regime of such a corridor should be explicitly articulated in writing, together with the rights and obligations of both contracting parties, all in accordance with international law.

Therefore, it could be understood that there is a noticeable difference between the right to innocent passage of foreign ships through the territorial sea of a coastal state and the formation of a corridor with a special legal regime. The latter would most likely pass through Croatian territory, as it would be unrealistic to expect that the Republic of Croatia in the area of such a corridor remains without its territorial sovereignty and integrity. This is regardless of the fact that it not very legally rightly inherited from the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, by its Maritime Code, the straight baselines under the conditions of more sovereign states whose coastlines are touched and lean on one another in the same sea area. Namely, the disputed area in terms of the declaration of these straight baselines is from the Cape Proizd (near the island of Korčula) all the way to the southwestern tip of the island of Vodnjak, near some of the more famous Paklinski islands (along the island of Hvar), as this act simply contributed to the "closure" of Bosnian and Herzegovinian waters. We have written "most likely to pass" since it
is hard to imagine that in the area of the Neretva and Korčula Channels, with a width of not less than 1-1.5 nautical miles, that condominium (shared sovereignty) can be established or that an international legal regime be determined completely outside Croatian sovereignty.

Finally, in support of the assertion that any coastal state should have unimpeded (not just innocent passage, which is subject to various restrictions on the part of the coastal state) access to the High Seas, there is the final determination of the arbitral award of the Permanent Court of Arbitration in The Hague in the case the Republic of Slovenia and the Republic of Croatia of 2017, according to which the Republic of Slovenia, through the so-called junction of 2.5 nautical miles wide, i.e. the physical link of its territorial waters with the high seas area of the North Adriatic was awarded a corridor from their waters, where Slovenia enjoys full sovereignty to the High Seas, where many freedoms are guaranteed to all countries of the world, both coastal and non-coastal, as well as to those with an unfavorable geographic position regarding access to the sea, as in the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Namely, as the Chairman of the Arbitration Council in this very case, G. Guillaume, stated in the public statement of the arbitral award, "the junction between the Slovenian territorial sea and the High Seas is a space where ships and planes have the same right of access to Slovenia as well as in the High Seas. The Court identified the area of the Croatian territorial sea that is adjacent to the Italian waters within which a special legal regime would be applied. The corridor is approximately 2.5 nautical miles wide, and located immediately next to the border, according to the Treaty of Osimo, within Croatian territorial waters. A special legal regime should guarantee the integrity of the Croatian territorial sea, and Slovenian free communication between its waters and the High Seas." It follows that the free communication of a coastal state between its waters and the High Seas is not the same as its right/obligation to innocently pass through the waters of another coastal state. It should, therefore, be concluded that the first term refers to the freedom of navigation and over flight to a little more extent than that provided by the institute of the innocent passage of foreign ships to territorial sea, which is only a necessary passage, since every foreign vessel must navigate through this area on the shortest conventional route, without disruption or delay. Moreover, this accessory or connecting corridor would have a kind of limitation of Croatian sovereignty and jurisdiction, since it would be in the spirit of this particular legal regime that would go in the middle of the Neretva and Korčula Channel. It would be worth questioning, moreover, whether Croatian internal waters should be left where they are now. The same question appeared to have been posed by a legal scholar from Croatia – “the question remains whether the waters of Croatia delimited by the territorial sea of Bosnia and Herzegovina can continue to be considered as having the legal status of internal waters.” (B. Vukas, 2006).

Accordingly, a maritime corridor with a specific legal regime needs to be differentiated widely, or clarified in detail, so it does not necessarily represent identical international legal categories with the right to innocent passage of foreign ships and the right of transit passage. These latter terms are characteristic of the very specific maritime zones and parts of the sea which are not the subject of our current exploration and explication.

When all interconnected notions finally acquire their coherent power in terms of consistency, then will be the time to discuss continuing the construction of a permanent artificial installation on the sea, called the Pelješac Bridge (mainland – Pelješac Peninsula). Having understood that the Republic of Croatia only wants to connect two parts of the mainland, that is, the northern and southern ends of their country with a high-quality road link, this modern traffic connection should not endanger, or be detrimental to, the interests of their neighbors. Therefore, for the purpose of solving the traffic difficulties of the Republic of Croatia, the continuation of the
construction of the Pelješac Bridge should be permanently solved by settling the so-called previous issues elaborated earlier - the permanent maritime delimitation on the Adriatic Sea as well as the permanent determination of the land border through a bilateral international frontier treaty, which will be applied equally and in good faith by both signatory parties and which will, above all, be confirmed in both the Croatian Parliament and the Parliamentary Assembly of Bosnia and Herzegovina, where the Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties of 1969 would be applicable in the event of any dispute as to its application, and the interpretation of certain provisions thereof. In addition to this, as mentioned above, it is necessary to establish in an internationally appropriate manner the legal regime and the width of the future corridor, which will represent, inter alia, a junction between Bosnian and Herzegovinian waters and the High Seas of the Adriatic.

Hence, only after the final determination of all the aforementioned, and after a thorough, concrete and legally binding determination of the legal regime of the corridor above which the permanent bridge will be built, the scientific and professional processing of the project known as the Pelješac Bridge must be approached. This should meet all the technical characteristics of bridges that have already been built over water within the international legal regime, i.e. international waterways, such as the Fatih Sultan Mehmet Bridge and the Bosporus Bridge in Istanbul that cross over the waters of the Bosporus strait which is under international legal regime, or the Oresund bridge (although most of the international maritime traffic takes place above the underwater tunnel) linking the Kingdom of Denmark and the Kingdom of Sweden and which is also located over the international waterway. This means that if the agreement between the two neighboring coastal states in this part of the Adriatic Sea could be achieved, in the sense of completing its construction and opening it for all road traffic, the bridge of these dimensions must have a certain minimum navigation height and a minimum range between the pillars, or at least the central ones, so that big ships could also sail into the Neum waters.

Bosnia and Herzegovina somehow tend to always delay consideration of certain questions. If this continues, there is a great chance that there will be no single institutional response, with the result that the position of Bosnia and Herzegovina in relation to this important international legal issue will remain very vague and indeterminate. Additionally, there is a very long internal tradition which does not encourage political cooperation, and a lack of understanding of things that are of fundamental significance to the whole country, not just to one of its constituent peoples.

However, in expectation of any kind of determination on the part of Bosnia and Herzegovina, with or without the Pelješac Bridge, the problem of the permanent "drawing" of the borderline between the two countries, both on the sea and on the land, will remain. The question of the access corridor or the connection of Bosnia-Herzegovina's waters with the High Seas will not be sorted out alone. So, is it wise to wait for the international community or the Office of the High Representative in Bosnia and Herzegovina (if it is still here?!) to take steps to protect the international interests of this state?

This is an opportunity to see the strength of the Bosnian-Herzegovinian diplomacy which will once again demonstrate its position on the international stage. There is certainly a consistent lack of unity, resulting predominately from the less than satisfactory territorial organization, and attempts to build a state on the basis of ethnicity. This lack of unity is reflected in the impossibility of coming to clear institutional views on the part of the official state government. There may again be the emergence of a culture of conflict and non-cooperation at the Parliamentary Assembly of Bosnia and Herzegovina (which could, adopt the declaration, as a political act, with precisely defined conclusions), the Council of Ministers and the Presidency.
But if dialogue is opened, perhaps after formal disagreement through a diplomatic note to the Republic of Croatia, the latter will surely have the advantage, or at least a better negotiating position, due to its European Union membership. This fact may well be crucial (since the European Union also recognizes the interest in land consolidation of its territory, so that its members can better monitor and control their state territory, with the goal of Croatia’s entry into the Schengen area) to the success of the negotiations as a diplomatic mean of settling one international dispute, which surely here does exist, at least with respect to the territorial title. Finally, it is worth mentioning that an international dispute does not need to be specifically proclaimed, the essence is in the existence of a disagreement with respect to essential facts, or in their apparently different interpretations.

If there is an international dispute between two coastal states that share the eastern coast of the Adriatic Sea - that is not debatable - it is now best to choose the most appropriate and effective means of settling the dispute with, if possible, mutual interest as its aim. In this respect, it would be best to choose the most appropriate means for peaceful settlement of disputes from a large palette of diplomatic and legal means that are equally available to each state. Based on the foregoing, a dispute can be brought before the ICJ in The Hague, the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea (ITLOS) in Hamburg, or it can be "easily" settled through ad hoc arbitration, i.e. special arbitration tribunals. But for the decision, which is the only outcome of these legal proceedings, it is necessary to wait for years, since such international legal processes can be very long-lasting and, above all, extremely expensive. In any case, Bosnia and Herzegovina will surely need to find a modus operandi in solving the above-mentioned issues with its western neighbor. This could be found in the Joint Team of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Republic of Croatia for Negotiations on the Implementation of the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea and the Delimitation at Sea or, perhaps, on a general level, in a body that will be composed on a parity basis, such as the Inter-State Diplomatic Commission for the Determination of the Border Line, which should, inter alia, settle the border dispute over the Danube River between the Republic of Serbia and the Republic of Croatia, still, so far, with little success. All this graphically demonstrates the complexity of the international law of the sea, particularly in the area of delimitation.
TWENTY-FIVE YEARS OF INDIA-ASEAN TIES: AN ASSESSMENT

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Abstract

India has more than two millennia old ties with the Southeast Asian countries, with a series of waves shaping its engagements with the ‘East’. However, India’s engagement with ASEAN begun only after the end of the Cold War. Since the launch of the Look East policy in 1992, by the then Indian prime minister P.V. Narasimha Rao, to 2018, when India and ASEAN have entered the twenty-sixth years of dialogue relations, their partnership has come a long way crossing several milestones. In the past twenty-five years, India has not only been able to re-socialise itself in the politico-security regional architecture of Asia, but has also been able to successfully join several regional groupings related to security, trade and economic cooperation. India’s engagement with ASEAN has been elevated with Prime Minister Narendra Modi – led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government’s announcement of upgrading Look East Policy to the Act East policy at 12th India-ASEAN Summit in Nay Pyi Taw, Myanmar in November 2014. India-ASEAN dialogue partnership completed twenty-five years in the year 2017. The same year, India and ASEAN also completed fifteen years of Summit level partnership and five years of their Strategic Partnership. This paper assesses twenty-five years of India’s engagement with ASEAN by analysing the level of institutional engagement between the two.

Keywords: India-ASEAN relations, Look East policy, Act East policy, Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), ASEAN Regional Forum, Expanded ASEAN Maritime Forum (EAMF).

Introduction

In 2017, India and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) completed twenty-five years of their relationship, which had started with India launching the Look East policy in 1992 under the leadership of then prime minister P.V. Narasimha Rao. Over the years, the Look East policy has crossed several milestones in strengthening the India-ASEAN relations. In the process the Look East policy also underwent different phases; starting from phase I (1992 to 2002), to Phase II (2002-2014), and eventually transforming into the Act East policy- its current avatar, which was launched by Narendra Modi-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government in 2014. In the past quarter-a-century, India-ASEAN ties have achieved major feats, which have also led to wider acceptance of the Look East/Act East policy as one of the finest foreign policy success stories of India in recent years.

1This section draws from author’s paper entitled “India’s Act East Policy and Southeast Asia” presented at the Institute of China Studies, University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, on January 18, 2018.
The contrast between 1992 and 2018 is fairly visible: Before 1992, India was not a member of any Asian politico-security architecture or a multilateral security related forum; today it is an active member of the East Asia Summit (EAS), which is widely accepted as the highest table on politico-strategic issues (or the fulcrum of Asian Security Dialogue as Professor S.D. Muni terms it)\(^2\), the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), and the ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting (ADMM) Plus, and the Expanded ASEAN Maritime Forum (EAMF) (Mishra, R. 2018).

Ironically, in the late 1980s, and early 1990s, India was perceived by many Southeast Asian countries as a threat - a factor which played a key role in the launch of the Look East policy (Naidu, 2000). In order to allay the apprehensions of countries such as Indonesia and Australia, India included the ‘maritime socialisation’ as an active component of the Look East policy in its initial years.

The contrast on economic issues is even sharper: From being an insulated moribund economy, which was on the verge of collapse in 1991, India is now a trillion-dollar economy with an active role to play in finalisation of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) negotiations, a mega-regional trade pact which involves the ten ASEAN countries and their six dialogue partners, namely: Australia, China, India, Japan, New Zealand, and South Korea. India has already implemented the ASEAN India Free Trade Agreement on Trade in Goods and Services, while also having finalised [bilateral] Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement (CECA) with Singapore, South Korea and Malaysia, and is actively working on CECA/CEPA negotiations with Australia and New Zealand (Mishra, R. 2018).

**Historical Background**

While it seems fine to analyse India-ASEAN relations by way of looking at a span of twenty-five years, it would be unfair to confine India’s engagement with the Southeast and East Asian region to a small period of quarter-a-century. Cutting across domains of social milieu, India’s impact on the ‘East’ has been indelible on almost all the countries of the Southeast and East Asian region- from literature to linguistics; art to architecture; drama to dance, and; from religion to rituals, India’s influence has been incredible. Such has been India’s civilizational influence that before the term Southeast Asia came into vogue, the region was called as (in addition to British East Indies which anyway represented less than half of the region), Hinduised states of Southeast Asia, Greater India, Farther India, India beyond the Ganges etc. In the classical Indian literature, countries of the Southeast Asian region have been frequently mentioned as- Suvanbhoomi, Balidipa, Jambudwipa, Brahmadesh etc.

The cultural impact of India on the ‘East’ has been duly recorded in the ancient Indian and Southeast Asian art, architecture and literature. The Indian and Southeast Asian inscriptions also bear testimony to that. Buddhism is one of the most profound contributions of India to the Southeast and East Asian region. Even today, thousands of devout Buddhist pilgrims visit important Buddhist sites in India, including, but not confined to Sarnath, Bodh Gaya etc., to pay tributes to the Lord Buddha. To protect India’s collective heritage and historical monuments, the Archaeological Survey of India under the overall monitoring of the Ministry of External Affairs, has been tirelessly working to restore the ancient heritage sites in Southeast

Asia: The Angkor Wat temple (Cambodia), Vat Phou temple (Shiva temple in Laos), Borobudur (Indonesia), and the Ananda temple in Bagan (Myanmar) are just to name a few. Indonesian Wayang- the puppet shows which are based on the two great Hindu epics Ramayana and Mahabharata- are the collective heritage of the peoples of India and Southeast Asia. Linguistic experts have proved it abundantly that Sanskrit has shaped and influenced the overall persona of almost all the Southeast Asian languages (except Vietnamese which has more Chinese influence). Ramayana is one of the most popular epics in the Southeast Asian region. Moreover, it is a part of the popular culture of Southeast Asia, with each country having its own variant.

During the Colonial period, India’s linkages were cut-off, and it was the Colonial oppressors who had determined the overall nature of India’s interaction with the region. However, by the middle of the twentieth century, the intellectuals and freedom fighters of India such as Rabindranath Tagore, Rash Behari Bose, Subhash Chandra Bose, Jawaharlal Nehru, and Mahatma Gandhi immensely contributed to India’s re-linking with the ‘East’. From the point of view of freedom struggle, India’s engagement with countries falling on its east was remarkable. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru’s contribution to the anti-Colonial movements in Southeast Asia can never be overstated in that regard. He successfully organised the ‘Southeast Asia Day’ at Lucknow in October 1945, moved several resolutions in the Congress meetings in support of Indonesian freedom struggle. The relationship moved to the next level with India and Indonesia playing key roles in Asian solidarity, manifested through the Bandung Conference, which was held in 1955. India’s contribution was best explained by none other than Soekarno himself, who, on the eve of proclamation of the United States of Indonesia said, “On the eve of the rebirth of our nation, I am trying vainly to measure the gratitude the Indonesian people owe to India and to her Prime Minister personally for the unflinching and brotherly support in our struggle in the past” (Mishra, R. 2017).

In terms of framing the regional, multilateral agenda, India had played a substantial role from 1940s until 1960. For instance, much before the ASEAN was formed in 1967, India played a key role in bringing Asian and African countries together through organising the Asian Relations Conference in 1947 and 1949, and the Bandung Conference in 1955. That India was not considered an outsider to Southeast Asia, or even a part of separate identity distinct from Southeast Asia (South Asia) is evident from the fact that India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka were part of the team of Bandung Conference conveners, collectively called as The Conference of Southeast Asian Prime Ministers (Acharya, 2017). Thus, by virtue of being in close proximity to Southeast Asian region, countries of the region have always ranked high in India’s diplomatic calculus, and even in terms of forming and shaping their regional institutional architecture.

As Acharya, A. (2017) argues, “The first important ideas about constructing Asia’s regional architecture after the Second World War came from India- more precisely Jawaharlal Nehru. It was India’s first prime minister who articulated the earliest vision of a regional order that emphasized Asian unity, advancement of decolonization and anti-racism, and rejection of great power intervention. He hosted two of the initial intra-regional gatherings of Asian leaders, called the Asian Relations Conferences (ARCs), in 1947 and 1949. He was perhaps the most influential ideational force behind the holding of the Asian-African Conference in Bandung, Indonesia, in 1955” (Acharya, 2017). When the ASEAN was formed in 1967, India did show interest in joining ASEAN. In May 1967, then External Affairs Minister of India, M. C. Chagla
visited Malaysia and Singapore. In Singapore, he remarked, “We will be very happy to have bilateral arrangement with Singapore, with regard to trade, commerce and economic cooperation. But if Singapore chooses to join any regional cooperation, we will be happy to join such a grouping, if other members want India to do so” (Saxena, 1986). Nevertheless, despite India’s interests, it could not join the ASEAN during the Cold War period. For India any military pact, such as the one formed by Southeast Asian countries in the form of Southeast Asia Treaty Organisation (SEATO) was not detrimental to peace in Asia. On the other hand, ASEAN countries were not keen to work with India on Non Alignment Movement (NAM), and some of them were also apprehensive of India’s naval ambitions in the 1980s. New Delhi’s support for Vietnam following the Cambodian conflict in 1978 etc., further drifted India and much of Southeast Asia apart. Essentially, compulsions and constraints of the Cold War politics put India away from Southeast Asia and “from being a major champion of Asian regionalism, India almost became a political and diplomatic non-entity- if not a pariah- in Southeast Asia by 1980s’ (Acharya, 2017). Though one cannot deny the fact that then prime minister Rajiv Gandhi had taken several steps to not only normalise the relations with China and Southeast Asia but also tried to reach out to Japan. However, his attempts were obstructed by the Cold War politics and limitations of India’s inward looking economy.

Nevertheless, India has always been cognisant of the importance of countries on its eastern flank. India’s eastern front, which includes Southeast Asia and the Asia-Pacific, is vital for India’s deep cultural roots, extended territorial expanse (Andaman and Nicobar Islands), common land and maritime boundaries, vast sea lanes of communication and growing economic engagement (Muni and Mun 2012). Former prime minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, during his Singapore lecture in 2002 highlighted this point. He said: “I speak today on ASEAN and the Asia-Pacific...This region is one of the focal points of India’s foreign policy, strategic concerns and economic interests...It is a fundamental fact of geography that India is in the immediate neighbourhood of Association of Southeast Asian Nations” (ASEAN, 2002).

India-ASEAN Dialogue Partnership

The end of the Cold War brought about several key changes in regional and global politics, and compelled countries across the world to change their foreign policy priorities to suit the new global realities. India, after the disintegration of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), found itself relatively isolated- a reality which compelled India to open-up to other countries and look for new friends and partners. With the launch of economic reforms in 1991, India began to look towards its eastern neighbours for trade and economic linkages. With that objective in mind, the Look East Policy was launched by Rao in 1992. At that point of time, the main objectives of the Look East Policy were threefold. First: To engage the countries of the Southeast Asian region. Given the size of the region and the economic potential of the ASEAN region, it became vital for India to engage these countries. Second: to institutionalise relations with the countries through the ASEAN mechanism. Third: to carve its own place in the rapidly rising region amid China’s growing strategic and economic footprints in the region. Since the initiation of the policy, these points have been the cornerstone of India’s engagement with the Asia’s most economically dynamic region (Naidu 2004, Pant 2011).
Factors such as the disintegration of the USSR, rise of the Asian Tigers, China’s expanding influence in India’s neighbourhood including Myanmar, and growing insurgency in the Northeastern states of India, led New Delhi to inject a new vigour to its policy towards eastern neighbours. This was driven equally by the imperatives of India’s opening up of economy and foreign exchange crunch of 1991 (Rai, 2012). The beginning of India’s formal dialogue with ASEAN begun on January 28, 1992 in Singapore during the fourth ASEAN Summit where India was granted the status of a sectoral partner. In December 1995, India graduated to the status of a Full Dialogue Partner of ASEAN. Further on in that series, India and ASEAN became Summit partners in 2002, and finally turned into Strategic Partners in 2012. Over the past twenty-five years, India and the ten member countries ASEAN have engaged each other in as many as thirty dialogue mechanisms, India-ASEAN Summit, East Asia Summit, and seven Ministerial meetings in a wide range of sectors. According to Ministry of External Affairs statistics, “India participates in a series of consultative meetings with ASEAN under the ASEAN-India Dialogue Relations, which include Summit, ministerial meetings, senior officials meetings, and meetings at the experts level, as well as dialogue and cooperation frameworks initiated by ASEAN, such as the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), the Post Ministerial Conference (PMC) 10+1, the East Asia Summit (EAS), Mekong-Ganga Cooperation and Bengal Initiative for Multi-sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC), which help contribute to enhancing regional dialogue and accelerating regional integration” (Ministry of Eternal Affairs, Government of India, 2017). Nine out of ten ASEAN countries were visited by Indian President, Prime Minister or Vice President since May 2014 (Kaur, 2017). While India has expanded the scope of the Act East Policy by including almost all the countries in its eastern neighbourhood, India-ASEAN relations remain at the core of the Act East Policy. During his address at the India-ASEAN Summit in September, 2016 in Vientiane, Laos, Prime Minister Modi reiterated this point and said, “ASEAN is central to India's 'Act East' policy” (Narendamodi.in 2016). In terms of dialogue relations, Table 1 depicts the major milestones achieved over past twenty-five years.

Table 1: Trajectory of India’s Institutional Engagement with ASEAN

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<tr>
<th>S.No.</th>
<th>Institutions</th>
<th>Date of Joining</th>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>India-ASEAN Sectoral Dialogue Partnership</td>
<td>1992</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>India-ASEAN Full Dialogue Partnership</td>
<td>1996</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>ARF Membership</td>
<td>1996</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>India-ASEAN Summit-Level Partnership</td>
<td>2002</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>Treaty of Amity and Cooperation</td>
<td>2003</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>ASEAN-India Framework Agreement on Comprehensive Economic Cooperation</td>
<td>2003</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>East Asia Summit membership</td>
<td>2005</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>ASEAN-India Trade in Goods Agreement (Signing)</td>
<td>August 13, 2009</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>ASEAN-India Trade in Goods Agreement (Entered into force)</td>
<td>January 1, 2010</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting (ADMM) Plus membership</td>
<td>2010</td>
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<td>S.No.</td>
<td>Institutions</td>
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<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Expanded ASEAN Maritime Forum (EAMF) membership</td>
<td>2012</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>India-ASEAN Strategic Partnership</td>
<td>2012</td>
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<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>ASEAN-India Trade in Services and Investment Agreements (signed)</td>
<td>September 8, 2014</td>
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<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>ASEAN-India Trade in Services and Investment Agreements (entered into force)</td>
<td>July 1, 2015</td>
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<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (negotiation state, yet to be finalised) negotiation partner</td>
<td>2012</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Compiled by the author, based on various government sources

**ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF)**

ARF was the first regional grouping formed under the ASEAN umbrella. It was set up in 1994 as a dialogue mechanism for deliberations on regional security issues. In 1995, the ARF agreed to an evolutionary approach to effectively tackle security issues and adopted a 3-stage process namely, first stage – Confidence Building Measures (CBMs); second stage – development of preventive diplomacy; and third stage – elaboration of approaches to conflicts (*Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, 2012*). ARF, till date, is the largest grouping in terms of total number of members in an ASEAN driven regional body. It has 27 member states including the ten ASEAN member countries (Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam); the ten ASEAN Dialogue Partners (Australia, Canada, China, European Union, India, Japan, South Korea, New Zealand, Russia, and the United States of America); and seven other countries, namely, Bangladesh, North Korea, Mongolia, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, Timor Leste and Sri Lanka.

India became a member of ARF in 1996. Highlighting the importance of ARF, the Ministry of External Affairs states (2012), “India’s participation in the ARF demonstrates its increasing engagement in the Asia-Pacific region, both in the politico-security and economic spheres and underlines our commitment to the objective of sustaining regional peace and stability. Its participation is consistent with our “Look East” policy, and development of closer links with the ASEAN as a full-dialogue partner. The ARF provides a venue for constructive dialogue on political and security cooperation in the region, with the ASEAN continuing to play a central role in the process” (*Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, 2012*).

However, criticising ARF for its waning influence, Professor G.V.C. Naidu (2000) states, “As far as the ARF and security of the Asia Pacific is concerned, except the initial enthusiasm to join the multilateral process so that it would not be left out of the developments of this important region, there does not seem to be much deliberation or thinking that has gone into the whole process of multilateral Institutionalism and its role in the future”. While it is true that ARF has not proved itself to be an effective forum for dealing with the major security challenges, it, nonetheless, provides an important multilateral platform for deliberations on issues of regional importance with India as one of its key members.
*East Asia Summit (EAS)*

The East Asia Summit is a manifestation of an idea originally propounded by Mahathir Mohammad, the former prime minister of Malaysia, in December 1990. What Mahathir had proposed as the East Asian Economic Group (EAEG), finally materialised as the East Asia Summit in 2005 with the adoption of the Kuala Lumpur Declaration. With the establishment of the East Asia Summit, “which has been seen by historically minded Indian policy makers as a redefined derivative of the old Nehruvian strategic concept of “Eastern Federation”, the scope of stronger Asian regionalism has certainly gone up” (Muni and Mun, 2012). In 2005, EAS comprised ASEAN and its six dialogue partners: Australia, China, India, Japan, South Korea, and New Zealand. With the inclusion of Russia and the US, EAS now has 18 members. The decision to establish EAS was taken during the tenth ASEAN Summit and ASEAN Plus Three (China, Japan and South Korea) Summit, 2004 in Laos. India was one of the founding members of the EAS. However, India’s membership to the EAS was initially opposed by China and a few other members. China opposed India’s membership because it was apprehensive that India was invited to counterbalance against China. There was another reservation by countries which just wanted it to be a mechanism between ASEAN member states and East Asian countries. However, India’s membership was made possible with the support of countries such as Indonesia, Singapore, and Thailand.

India’s participation in the EAS allows it to engage not only the ASEAN countries but other major powers too. Muni (2006) argues that, “India’s stakes in building East Asian Community are indeed deep and there is a growing realization in the region that India’s participation in EAS is a positive factor”. From India’s perspective, the eagerness to join the EAS was underscored by clear strategic and economic motives and the fact that India is one of the major players, both economically and strategically, in the region makes it all the more important for the member countries of the EAS to focus attention towards India (Zamir, 2014).

*ASEAN Defence Ministers’ Meeting (ADMM) Plus*

India is one of the founding members of ADMM Plus, which was initially confined to the ten ASEAN members as the ASEAN Defence Ministers’ Meeting (ADMM). Consistent with the ADMM guiding principles of being an open and outward looking grouping, the second ADMM in Singapore in 2007 adopted the *Concept Paper* to establish the ADMM-Plus, which was a platform for ASEAN and its eight Dialogue Partners to strengthen security and defence cooperation for peace, stability, and development in the region (*ADMM Plus-ASEAN, 2017*). The Inaugural ADMM-Plus was convened in Ha Noi, Viet Nam, on October 12, 2010 where the member countries decided to keep working together on five priority areas of cooperation, namely: Maritime security, counter-terrorism, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, peacekeeping operations and military medicine (*ADMM Plus-ASEAN, 2017*).

So far as India’s role and participation in the ADMM Plus is concerned, past seven years bear testimony to the fact that ‘India is no longer shying away from playing a role on the regional and international stages and is willing to don a bigger role in regional politics. It is showing traits of a responsible stakeholder in the regional security dynamics’ (Mishra, R. 2016). India has been playing an active role. In 2016, India hosted the *Exercise Force 18*, a six-day long joint multilateral exercise, conducted under the framework of the ADMM Plus, which was held
in March, 2016 at the Aundh military station at the headquarters of the southern command of the Indian Army at Pune. The Exercise Force 18 was themed around ‘Humanitarian mine action’ and ‘peacekeeping operations’ (Mishra, R. 2016). Later, India participated in the ADMM Plus Exercise on Maritime Security and Counter Terrorism at Brunei and Singapore in May 2016. In consonance with its Act East Policy and Indian Navy’s constant endeavour to enhance maritime security in the Indo-Pacific, Indian Naval Ship (INS) Airavat arrived at Brunei for the exercise (Public Information Bureau, 2016).

Expanded ASEAN Maritime Forum (EAMF)

As the name itself suggests, the Expanded ASEAN Maritime Forum (EAMF) owes its origin to the ASEAN Maritime Forum. The first AMM meeting was held on July 28-29, 2010 in Surabaya, Indonesia. Comprising the ten ASEAN member countries and their dialogue partners (all members of the EAS), the EAMF is a Track 1.5 dialogue mechanism. The first EAMF was held in Manila, Philippines on October 5, 2012. The EAMF was convened in response to the statement of the ASEAN and EAS leaders who encouraged a “dialogue involving EAS participating countries to utilize opportunities and address common challenges on maritime issues building upon the existing ASEAN Maritime Forum (AMF),” (ASEAN Maritime Forum, 2017), wherein they also “positively noted the proposal of convening an expanded AMF, back-to-back with the future meetings of the AMF, to include countries in the wider East Asia region” (ASEAN Maritime Forum, 2017). So far, five EAMF have taken place including the last EAMF meeting, which was organised in Jakarta, Indonesia in December 2017.

Economic Ties: Free Trade Agreements and Beyond

One of the major objectives of the Look East Policy was to strengthen economic ties with the ASEAN member states. According to Ministry of External Affairs of the Government of India (2017), ASEAN is India’s fourth largest trading partner today, accounting for 10.2 percent of India’s total trade, whereas India is ASEAN’s seventh largest trading partner. Between “1993 and 2003, ASEAN-India bilateral trade grew at an annual rate of 11.2 per cent, from US$ 2.9 billion in 1993 to US$ 12.1 billion in 2003. At the tenth ASEAN-India Summit in November 2012, the Leaders set the target of US$100 billion by 2015 for ASEAN- India merchandise trade. In 2015, however, the total merchandise trade only reached US$ 58.7 billion, decreasing by 13.29 per cent from that of the previous year of US$67.7 billion. During the same period, foreign direct investments (FDI) from India increased significantly by 164 per cent from US$606 million in 2014 to US$1.6 billion in 2015” (Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, 2017). It is widely believed that full implementation of the FTA in goods between India and the ASEAN bloc will help boost trade between India and ASEAN (Economic Times, 2018).

India is a huge source of tourism for the ASEAN region. In 2015 alone, 3.3 million Indian tourists visited ASEAN, which showed an increase of 6.5 per cent from 3.1 million in 2014 (ASEAN Tourism Statistics Dashboard, 2017). The ASEAN-India Agreement on Trade in Service and Investments, to be initially implemented between seven ASEAN states and India, entered into force on July 1, 2015 after a hiatus of almost a decade. The FTA in services is definitely a step forward on promoting trade and economic cooperation through better linking
of economies of ASEAN with India. The FTA in services suitably complements the ASEAN-India Free Trade Agreement in Goods and Services which had come into force on January 1, 2010, and is likely to plug the trade gaps between India and ASEAN. In the absence of FTA in services, India was not able to optimally utilize its core competencies in trade, majority of which lie in the services sector. The Table 2 below shows the overall trade between India and the ten ASEAN members between 2012 and November 2015.
<table>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Export</td>
<td>Import</td>
<td>Total Trade</td>
<td>Export</td>
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<td>ASEAN</td>
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<tr>
<td>Brunei</td>
<td>40.02</td>
<td>814.80</td>
<td>854.82</td>
<td>32.95</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cambodia</td>
<td>112.28</td>
<td>11.90</td>
<td>124.18</td>
<td>141.26</td>
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<tr>
<td>Indonesia</td>
<td>5,331.31</td>
<td>14,879.49</td>
<td>20,210.80</td>
<td>4,905.76</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lao PDR</td>
<td>28.91</td>
<td>138.64</td>
<td>167.56</td>
<td>49.89</td>
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<tr>
<td>Malaysia</td>
<td>4,444.10</td>
<td>9,951.06</td>
<td>14,395.15</td>
<td>4,196.32</td>
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<tr>
<td>Myanmar</td>
<td>544.66</td>
<td>1,412.69</td>
<td>1,957.35</td>
<td>784.58</td>
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<tr>
<td>Philippines</td>
<td>1,187.19</td>
<td>504.00</td>
<td>1,691.18</td>
<td>1,418.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Singapore</td>
<td>13,619.31</td>
<td>7,486.38</td>
<td>21,105.84</td>
<td>12,509.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thailand</td>
<td>3,733.17</td>
<td>5,352.61</td>
<td>9,085.78</td>
<td>3,703.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vietnam</td>
<td>3,967.37</td>
<td>2,314.78</td>
<td>6,282.15</td>
<td>5,439.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total of ASEAN</td>
<td>33,008.31</td>
<td>42,866.36</td>
<td>75,874.67</td>
<td>33,181.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India’s Total</td>
<td>300,400.68</td>
<td>490,736.65</td>
<td>791,137.33</td>
<td>312,610.30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Source:** Annual Report, 2013-14, 2016-17, Department of Commerce, *Ministry of Commerce and Industry, Government of India*
Most of the ASEAN member countries and India have agriculture as the mainstay of their economy. To further widen and deepen bilateral cooperation in that area, India and member countries of ASEAN have institutionalised cooperation at the ministerial level called the India-ASEAN Ministerial Meeting in Agriculture Cooperation and Forestry. An annual ASEAN-India Agriculture Ministers Meeting (AIMMAF) has been formalized, and since 2011 three meetings have been held. The fourth ministerial meeting was held in New Delhi in January 2017. The ASEAN-India ministerial meeting gains salience in view of the fact that both India and ASEAN member states are monsoon system economies; with most of them still dependent on agriculture and all of them vulnerable to the vagaries of climate change and price volatility of food supplies. Thus, the need to gain more resilience in fighting food vulnerability and resultant sustainable development of agriculture, food processing, agro-marine processing, and forestry becomes a top priority for policymakers from India and ASEAN countries alike (Mishra, R. 2018a). Additionally, Climate change and the vagaries of weather oblige India and ASEAN not only to share their best practices but also join hands for finding viable long-term solutions. “Both ASEAN member countries and India need to effectively address the challenge of putting agriculture back as the backbone of their bilateral trade as also improve the overall standard of their farmers. Agricultural trade is a key driver of rural prosperity and economic well-being, and should play a more important role in shaping the trade relations between ASEAN and India” (Mishra, R. 2018b). ASEAN and India have several such platforms in other domains such as tourism, science and technology, renewable energy etc.

**ASEAN- India Business Council (AIBC)**

Realizing that India-ASEAN cooperation cannot attain its full strength without the participation of industry captains, the ASEAN India Business Council (AIBC) was set up in March 2003 in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia at the ASEAN-India second Senior Economic Official Meeting. AIBC is essentially a CEOs group institutionalised by the Ministry of Commerce, Government of India. The AIBC aims to provide inject the much-needed industry perspective so as to widen and deepen the economic linkages between ASEAN and India. To meet the objective of strengthening India-ASEAN trade and commercial ties, the AIBC holds the AIBC Business Forum, which focusses on significant areas such as: Promoting Regional Connectivity - Infrastructure & Digital; Youth, Innovation & Technology; Healthcare & Pharmaceuticals; Women Entrepreneurs; Education & Skill development; Developing New Markets (FICCI, 2018)

**Regional Comprehensive Partnership Agreement (RCEP)**

In order to move forward in terms of integrating with other Asian economies, India decided to join the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) in 2012. So far as RCEP itself is concerned, it was conceptualized in 2011. The formal launch of RCEP took place in Phnom

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1 This section draws from author’s earlier work, “India-ASEAN Cooperation in Agriculture and Forestry”, Commentary, *External Services Division, All India Radio*, January 16, 2018, http://airworldservice.org/english/archives/category/commentary
Penh, Cambodia in November 2012 during the East Asia Summit meeting. The RCEP involves the ten ASEAN member countries, and their six partners, namely, China, Japan, South Korea, Australia, New Zealand, and India. Later, in 2013, it was decided by the members to set up the RCEP Trade Negotiations Committee as the apex negotiating body for RCEP. “The RCEP is an ambitious project which for the first time intends to bring in Asia’s three biggest economies: China, India and Japan, into a regional trade arrangement. Concomitantly, the proposed trade area will be the largest in terms of population, with a combined GDP of around US$ 19 trillion and when fully established, it will become the largest trade bloc in the world” (Mishra, R. 2013). RCEP is a vital component of ASEAN vision of realising the ASEAN Economic Community.

India’s ASEAN Policy: From Look East to Act East

At his first India-ASEAN Summit address in 2014, India’s Prime Minister Narendra Modi ‘upgraded’ Look East policy into the Act East Policy. He remarked, “A new era of economic development, industrialisation and trade has begun in India. Externally, India’s Look East Policy has become Act East Policy... Today the world and the region need a strong India-ASEAN partnership. That is why we believe that we are entering in a new era in the India-ASEAN partnership” (Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, 2014).

Clearly, since 2014, India’s engagement with countries of Southeast Asia, Northeast Asia, Mongolia, Australia, New Zealand, PIC (Pacific Island Countries), and regional and sub-regional organizations thereof, have been included within the ambit of the Act East policy. Sometimes, deepening engagement with Bangladesh is also included as a part of the Act East policy (Business Standard, 2014). The emerging concept of Indo-Pacific has further widened its scope, with the US and Japan actively supporting and encouraging India to play a bigger role as an international stakeholder. Narendra Modi hinted at widening the scope of India’s eastward engagement by reaching out even to the western shores of the US, thus signaling that India’s eastward engagement should reach up to the US. On January, 2015 addressing the India-U.S. Business Summit, Modi said, “when I look towards the East, I see the western shores of the United States” (Press Information Bureau, Government of India, Prime Minister's Office, January 26, 2015). Since 2014, the Act East policy has been projected as India’s flagship policy to engage countries of the East; with a definite objective to move India’s eastward engagement to the next level by making it wider, more multi-dimensional and action oriented. As stated by General V. K. Singh, the Minister of State in the Ministry of External Affairs, in response to a parliamentary question in March 2016, “in the second half of 2014, LEP was upgraded to Act East Policy” (Lok Sabha, 2016). Since 2014, the government has been projecting Act East policy as a fine blend of India’s diplomatic outreach, economic and trade partnerships, and strategic collaboration with countries of the Southeast Asia and wider Asia-Pacific region.

Following the trends set during the Look East policy years, Act East gives high priority to ASEAN and its member countries. That ASEAN is and will remain central to India’s eastward engagement is also evident from the fact that in 2013, during the eleventh India-ASEAN Summit in Brunei, the former prime minister Manmohan Singh had announced that India would establish its Permanent Mission and a separate Ambassador to ASEAN. Subsequently, India’s Permanent Mission to ASEAN was established, and was officially inaugurated by the current External Affairs Minister, Sushma Swaraj on April 23, 2015.
In terms of making sense of India-ASEAN engagement, the year 2017 holds a special place. In 2017, ASEAN completed fifty years of its existence. The same year, India and ASEAN completed twenty-fifth anniversary of their dialogue relations, fifteen years of summit-level partnership, five years of India-ASEAN strategic partnership, and of course, if seen in continuity from 1992, the Look East policy itself has completed twenty-five years.

At the symbolic level, in order to bring the relationship to the next level, India invited the Heads of States from all ten ASEAN countries as Chief Guests for the 2018 Republic Day parade. During the Commemorative Summit held on January 25, 2018, the Delhi Declaration was also signed, which will serve as the roadmap for India-ASEAN ties. With the objective to sync their priorities for greater mutual benefits, India and the ASEAN member countries had adopted the ASEAN-India Plan of Action, 2016-2020 in August 2015, to focus on the three pillars of politico-security, economic, and socio-cultural cooperation and take new initiatives in widening and deepening cooperation in these areas. The three pillars i.e. ASEAN political, economic, and socio-cultural community, are central to ASEAN’s medium to long-term priorities.

The Road Ahead

Several key factors have shaped India-ASEAN ties from the beginning, while some of the factors are still shaping its course. In that context, following are some of the key direct or indirect shapers of India-ASEAN relations which will influence the broad contours of the relationship.

The rise of China has been a major factor shaping India’s engagement with ASEAN. China’s rise as an economic giant and its increasing trade with the ASEAN countries has given India all the more reasons to step up its collaborative efforts vis-à-vis ASEAN (Hong, 2006). An increasingly assertive China has become a shared concern, yet neither India nor ASEAN will publicly address the dichotomy of their dependence on China. “With China-ASEAN ties under stress due to Beijing’s aggressive territorial claims, New Delhi has been trying to fill the void by emphasizing its credentials as a responsible regional stakeholder—freedom of navigation but also access to resources in accordance with principles of international law” (Pant & Deb, 2017). For India, the key challenge has been to prove that it is economically competitive and strategically reliable— a challenge which will only get more intense and crucial with time.

The Non-Traditional Security Challenges, whether related to the terror networks in the region or those pertaining to terror finance, pose grave challenges to India and ASEAN. Both India and ASEAN member countries have to tirelessly work together on that front. For the multicultural societies of Southeast Asia, such as Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand etc., this is as prominent a challenge as it is for India.

Being the littoral countries of Bay of Bengal and the Indian Ocean region, India and the ASEAN member countries are vulnerable to common challenges especially those emanating from the Oceans: natural disasters, human trafficking, narcotics, gun running, and maritime piracy. While India and ASEAN have been working together in meeting the challenges effectively, more coordinated efforts will be needed as India and ASEAN move forward.
For both ASEAN and its dialogue partners, keeping economic growth intact and the idea of regional economic integration appealing, would perhaps be the major challenges in times to come. However, if these twin challenges are met successfully, that can open a new range of opportunities for the entire region. RCEP is an important tool in that regard. It is beyond doubt that RCEP has the potential to further integrate India into the regional economic and trade architecture. However, with RCEP, there still exist some bottlenecks. India’s Foreign Secretary, Dr. S. Jaishankar’s comments before the Department Related Parliamentary Standing Committee on Commerce underscore that “though larger FTAs are important for getting preferential access to the markets, it is important to be cautious about the manner in which such arrangements work out in respect of our imports as well as on our efforts to increase the share of manufacturing sector in our economy” (Haidar & Arun, 2017).

For long, India was criticised for focussing obsessively on its western neighbour and ignoring its eastern neighbours. That has substantially changed over the past twenty-five years. India has become an active participant in the region. Stronger ASEAN is in India’s interest for several reasons. The ‘three Cs’: Commerce, Connectivity, and Culture are poised to play a key role in that regard. In that context the revival of the Nalanda University holds immense importance. Nalanda was a great source of learning for countries across Southeast and East Asia during the ancient times. India has, with active support of countries such as Japan, Singapore, Australia, South Korea and Indonesia, resurrected and revitalized the Nalanda University to make it once again the hub of knowledge and higher learning in the world.

For the ASEAN and its member countries, India is not perceived as a threat anymore. Common interests and threats emanating from the same sources bind India and ASEAN together. During the fifteenth India-ASEAN Summit held in Manila, Philippines in November 2017, a range of initiatives were taken, which have the potential to bring India-ASEAN relations to new heights (Indian Mission to ASEAN, 2018):

a) Enhance our strategic partnership by designating security and economic cooperation in maritime domain as a focus area.
b) Offer of joint exercises and fleet review by navies of ASEAN countries and India.
c) Offer of coordinated patrols to address traditional and non-traditional maritime threats and undertake exercises to effectively coordinate our response to natural disasters.
d) Offer of stepping up our economic cooperation in shared maritime domain by enhancing maritime connectivity and by working towards a Protocol on Blue Economy.
e) Organize a Start Up Festival in India to encourage digital commerce among ASEAN-India youth.
f) Organize an ASEAN-India Pravasi Bharatiya Divas on the theme, “Ancient Route, New Journey: Diaspora in the Dynamic ASEAN-India Partnership”
g) Host a Business Summit and an ASEAN India Business Council event in January 2018.
h) Host ASEAN India Connectivity Summit in India.
i) Host the first working group meeting on Civil Aviation at New Delhi.

Connectivity- digital, physical, economic, and people-to-people- all remain essential in shaping India’s relations with ASEAN. When the Look East policy was started, one of the reasons pertaining to the Northeastern states of India was that India was under dire need of curbing insurgency in the region. The support of Myanmar was of key importance at that point. A
decade later, when the Phase II of Look East policy begun, the situation in India’s Northeastern states had improved. Initiatives such as Kaladan Multimodal project, India-Myanmar-Thailand trilateral highway were conceptualized and launched at that time. However, the region, which was marred by decades of insurgency and neglect, could not get back on the track in such a short time. It would be an exaggeration to state that the level of physical, digital and economic connectivity in the Northeastern states of India is the same as mainstream India. Over the past twenty-five years, however, the situation has improved, just as the rest of India and the level of economic growth and development of other states has also improved since 1991.

Nevertheless, a lot needs to be done to bring the Northeastern states of India to the level where they could attempt to link with countries of the ASEAN region. Here, an element of logical fallacy catches the analysts who wish to compare Look East with the Act East policy. The fundamental difference on this count is that Look East is assessed for what it delivered over a period of twenty-two years, within its limited role in shaping domestic agenda in the age of coalition governments.

The Act East however, is more akin to a promissory note, the real action of which is yet to be seen. Nevertheless, on the basis of initial trends it can be said that Northeastern states are attracting more attention of the central government of India than ever before, regardless of reasons electoral or developmental. “The North East of India has been a priority in the Act East Policy. AEP provides an interface between North East India including the state of Arunachal Pradesh and the ASEAN region” (Press Information Bureau, 2015).

The ASEAN-India plan of action, 2016-2020, which is the third plan of action in the series, jointly designed lists out a clear roadmap for India and ASEAN to work together. Through mechanisms such as ASEAN-India Fund, ASEAN-India Science & Technology Fund, ASEAN-India Green Fund, ASEAN-India Project Development Fund, India has been working on some of these ideas, while some still need to be implemented comprehensively.

While India and ASEAN have certainly benefitted from each other in the past twenty-five years, they are yet to become the Central pillars in shaping each other’s future. The time has come to earnestly strive for achieving long-term tangibles gains.

References


Author Guidelines

Submission of articles for Vol. 5, Number 1 (January 2019 issue) could be done until 15th Aug 2018. Please e-mail your manuscripts to: aei.insights@um.edu.my

Scope of Journal: Articles of bi-regional interest covering Asia and Europe which may involve topics related to: ASEAN, ASEM, East Asia, EU, geo-politics, geo-strategies, global governance, international co-operation, international organisations, political economy, regional values, regionalism, social issues in bio-diversity, and sustainable development.

Manuscript Style: Authors should format submissions in Times New Roman with a 12-point font size and single-spaced. Manuscripts should follow the American Psychological Association (APA) guidelines. For details of the APA style, kindly refer to http://www.apastyle.org/

Manuscript Length and Language: Article length should be 6,000–8,000 words and include a concise abstract of 200–300 words. Papers must be written using UK English.

Contents of Manuscript: Manuscript layout: 1. Title page, 2. Abstract and key words (up to five key words), 3. Main text, 4. References. Please use footnotes and place tables and figures at the end of the paper.

Contents of Title Page: The title page should include the following information: 1. Title of the manuscript, 2. Name of author(s), 3. Full address of author(s), 4. Telephone and Fax numbers, 5. Email address. The name of author who will handle correspondence should be mentioned in the title page.

Acknowledgement: All sources of research grants sponsored by an organisation should be acknowledged within the manuscript.

Reference Style:
Please follow APA Citation Style (Available in Endnote® citation manager software)
a) In-text citation
In-text citations should consist of surname(s) of author(s) and publication year.
For example:
Malaysia has suffered from colonial rule (Ahmad, 2014). Ahmad (2014) suggested that Malaysia has suffered from colonial rule.

b) Book
Author, A. (publication year). Title of book. Location: Name of publisher.
For example:

c) Chapter in Book
For example:

d) Article
For example:

e) Conference proceeding
For example:

f) Conference presentation
For example:

\( g \) Thesis
Author, A. (publication year). Title of thesis (Doctorial/Master’s thesis). Name of Department, Name of University
For example:

h) Internet material
For example: