

# ASEM AND THE BRIDGING OF THE HUMAN SECURITY GAP

*Martyn de Bruyn*

*Department of Political Science  
Northeastern Illinois University  
5500 N St. Louis Ave  
Chicago, IL 60625  
Tel: (1) 773-442-5653  
Email: mdebruyn@neiu.edu*

## **Abstract**

The European Union, recognizing the need to contribute to global security in the post-Cold War era, but lacking the capacity to act in international crisis situations, developed the European Security Strategy in 2003. The European Security Strategy, while not directly referring to the term human security, identifies key threats, such as terrorism, organized crime, and state failure, and unequivocally states: “Europe should be ready to share in the responsibility for global security and in building a better world.” Additionally, it states that cooperation between the EU and regional organizations such as ASEAN, MERCOSUR, and the African Union “make an important contribution to a more orderly world.” Given The EU’s extended commitment to human security, to the promotion of its values around the world, and to collaboration with other regional organizations, it is only natural that The EU, in its relations with ASEAN and a wider range of Asian states in ASEM (Asia Europe Meeting), promotes human security. ASEAN member states have also been engaged in discussions on human security. However, the focus has been exclusively on freedom from want (development) issues. The concept of freedom from fear, and the responsibility to protect (R2P), poses a critical challenge to ASEAN’s fundamental principles of independence, sovereignty, non-interference, and territorial integrity. This paper addresses the following two key concerns: (a) What is the rationale for human security promotion by the EU and ASEAN in the ASEM interregional cooperation framework? (b) While both The EU and ASEAN recognize the importance of the human security approach, their understanding of the concept of human security is distinctly different. Therefore, this paper investigates under what conditions The EU and ASEAN can come to a common understanding of human security.

## **Keywords**

ASEAN, EU, ASEM, Human Security

## Introduction

“The European Union is entrusted with the task of developing a common foreign and security policy to enable it to protect its interests and values as well as playing a constructive role in world politics.”

- European Commission, 1994

“Only by refocusing state security, and regional security, on genuine human security will we ever be protected from calamities beyond our control. And in the end human security is nothing more than the fulfillment of state responsibility, because the state is organized in order to protect and promote the welfare of its own citizens.”

- Dr. Surin Pitsuwan, Former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Thailand and Secretary-General of ASEAN 2008-2012, 2006

The quote above from the European Commission’s 1994 Asia strategy highlights both the European Union’s focus on Asia in the post-Cold War era and its early ambitions as international player in world politics. This ambition will have developed in the decade thereafter into a more coherent foreign policy guided by the principles of human security. The quote above from Dr. Surin Pitsuwan shows a genuine understanding of the human security approach, and how it complements, and not undermines, more traditional state security. Human security has, however, not become the norm in international politics, or even in relations between Southeast Asia and Europe. Human security and the role of Europe as human security advocate has, instead, become important in furthering European Union ASEAN relations as equal partners beyond development aid and trade.

Human security or non-traditional security is based on the principle that it is impossible to protect human freedom and welfare exclusively through military security. Human security is often presented as comprised of freedom from fear, freedom from want, and freedom to live in dignity (United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs 2014). Freedom from want includes poverty reduction, sustainable development, environmental protection, and health care. Freedom from fear consists of the protection of civil liberties, human rights, and cultural and social rights. Freedom to live in dignity refers to the bottom up approach of human security, which aims to empower communities. Human security is considered people-centred security as it places human beings—rather than state or regime security—at the focal point of security considerations. The European Union (EU) and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) have both recognized the need for addressing human security concerns as part of their overall security strategy, and have discussed interregional cooperation that enhances human security as part of the Asia-Europe Meetings (ASEM).

The purpose of this article is to address the following two key concerns: (a) What is the rationale for human security promotion by The EU and ASEAN in the ASEM interregional cooperation framework? (b) While both The EU and ASEAN recognize the importance of the human security approach, their understanding of the concept of human security is distinctly different. Therefore, this paper investigates under what conditions The EU and ASEAN can come to a common understanding of human security. Seeking to shed light on the different interpretations of human security in ASEAN and the EU, this paper explores whether continued dialogue and cooperation between these two parties in the ASEM framework bridges the gap. In the next section I will discuss a brief history of the human security approach.

### **The Human Security Approach**

The human security approach was first formulated in the United Nations Human Development Programme's (UNDP) 1994 Human Development Report. The report identified seven areas that contribute to global insecurity, including economic security, food security, health security, environmental security, personal security, community security, and political security (United Nations Development Program, 1994). The Human Security Unit at the United Nations has formulated five principles that encompass the human security approach. Human security is people centered, that is, the survival, livelihood and dignity of people is at the heart of the approach, and trumps national security concerns. Human security is comprehensive, as threats to security, i.e. economic and environmental security, are often interdependent. Human security is context-specific, as solutions need to be tailored to local needs and realities. Human security is prevention orientated as it aims to mitigate the effects of insecurities and to prevent future threats. The final principle of human security is protection and empowerment. Top down processes such as early warning mechanism and good governance, are combined with bottom up processes such as the improvement of local capacities and networks (United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 2014).

The United Nations Development Programme has developed the Human Development Index (HDI) as a measure to assess the quality of human development. The index consists of life expectancy, education, and per capita gross national income measures. States that score high on the HDI, called "very high human development", have an average life expectancy at birth of 80 years, 16 years of expected schooling, and 40,000 in per capita gross national income. In contrast, states with "low human development" have an average life expectancy at birth of 59 years, 9 years of expected schooling, and 3,000 in per capita gross national income (United Nations Development Program, 2014). ASEAN has greater diversity in its human development scores with Singapore and Brunei Darussalam scoring in the

“very high human development” category while Myanmar is placed in the “low human development” category. Singapore and Brunei Darussalam score higher on the HDI than many EU member states, and significantly higher than Romania and Bulgaria, the only two EU member states that do not fall in the “very high human development” category (United Nations Development Program, 2014). The HDI is not an exact measure of human security, but states with “very high human development” are certainly more capable to address human insecurities than states that score lower on the index. Given that most ASEAN member states score on the lower end of the HDI scale there is a real benefit for those states to bolster their human security capacity by working together with The EU.

The human security approach is based on the idea that state security and the security of individual citizens do not always align. In many states, especially in the developing world, the regime is stable and there are no threats in terms of military security, but people face many threats in their daily lives due to the lack of adequate housing, health care, or due to serious environmental pollution. In these cases, the long-term stability of the state is at risk, especially when the fragile peace is tested through natural or man-made disasters. As a comprehensive approach to security, the human security approach in essence addressed the insecurities that people face in everyday life. It is believed that the collective security of individuals also enhances state security. The United Nations Trust Fund for Human Security has been critical in the promotion of the human security approach within The United Nations and internationally. Projects that have been supported by The Trust Fund range from conflict prevention and peace building missions to addressing the threats of climate change, human trafficking, urban violence, and poverty (United Nations Development Program, 2014). In addition to The United Nations, some individual states were also early promoters of the human security approach, including Canada, Japan, and Norway. The European Union did not develop an independent foreign and security policy until a decade after the publication of the 1994 UNDP Human Development Report that launched the human security approach. While the strategic vision of the European Union was clearly influenced by the human security approach, initially, Europeans preferred the term comprehensive security to human security.

In the case of ASEAN, there was little interest in the human security approach until natural disasters, including the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami, made it evident that the stability of the state is dependent on its ability to respond to crisis situations. The lack of state capacity to adequately address the consequences of the tsunami forced Southeast Asian leaders to broaden the scope of national security beyond military or regime security, so to include the health and well-being of the population. The crisis of the tsunami exposed the inability of the regime to provide basic security to its citizens at a critical time. Regimes affected by the tsunami realized that the

capacity to respond to crises, such as natural disasters, is as critical to their survival as their ability to respond to military threats. In the next section I will discuss the understanding and development of the human security approach in The EU and ASEAN.

### **Understanding Human Security in the EU and in ASEAN**

The European Union, recognizing the need to contribute to global security in the post-Cold War era, but lacking the capacity to act in international crisis situations, developed The European Security Strategy in 2003. The European Security Strategy, while not directly referring to the term human security, identifies key threats, such as terrorism, organized crime, and state failure, and unequivocally states: “Europe should be ready to share in the responsibility for global security and in building a better world” (European Commission, 2003). Additionally, it states that cooperation between The EU and regional organizations, such as The Association for Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), Mercado Común del Sur (MERCOSUR, Southern Common Market), and The African Union (AU), “make an important contribution to a more orderly world” (European Commission, 2003). The European Security Strategy concludes that EU foreign policy and crisis management needs to become “more active, more capable, and more coherent” (European Commission, 2003). The EU’s commitment to a holistic approach to global security is also evident in The Lisbon Treaty. Article 3(5) inscribes the EU’s commitment to promoting its values, including peace, security, sustainable development, solidarity, and human rights, to the wider world. In article 21 the treaty confirms the EU’s commitment to build partnerships with regional, interregional and global organizations that share the principles of the rule of law, human rights, and human dignity (Lisbon Treaty, 2009).

The ASEAN is committed to the promotion of non-traditional security in managing international crises. The declaration of ASEAN Concord II specifically states that ASEAN “subscribes to the principle of comprehensive security as having broad political, economic, social and cultural aspects”(ASEAN, 2003). ASEAN has collaborated with UNESCO in organizing workshops around the theme of human security, addressing such threats as illicit drug trafficking, human trafficking, arms smuggling, and various forms of economic crimes. In a 2009 joint declaration, ASEAN defence ministers confirmed the increased serious nature of non-traditional and transnational security threats to regional and international peace (ASEAN, 2009). Scholars, however, have been critical of ASEAN’s commitment to human security, especially as the majority of ASEAN member states consider human security a challenge to ASEAN’s fundamental principles of independence, sovereignty, non-interference, and territorial integrity. According to critics, ASEAN’s interpretation

of human security places the sole emphasis on “freedom from want,” i.e. human development, while “freedom from fear” and “freedom to live in dignity” are being neglected due to the importance given to regime security over individual security (Acharya, 2001; Caballero-Anthony, 2004; Gerstl, 2010).

Given the EU’s extended commitment to human security, to the promotion of its values around the world, and to collaboration with other regional organizations, it is only natural that The EU in its relations with ASEAN and a wider range of Asian states in the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) promotes human security. The foreign ministers discussed human security cooperation in ASEM in June 2011 at their biennial summit in Hungary. The foreign ministers’ conference entitled “Working together on non-traditional security challenges” and the eight biannual ASEM meeting in Brussels in October 2010 entitled “Greater well-being and more dignity for all citizens” both emphasized a commitment to interregional cooperation in non-traditional security (ASEM, 2011). During the 2013 foreign ministers meeting in Delhi, India non-traditional security challenges were again an integral part of the discussion. Transnational crimes, such as drugs and illegal arms trafficking and human trafficking were important topics of discussion. Climate change and the commitment to The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) also deserved separate mention on the chair’s statement (ASEM, 2013). At the 2014 ASEM summit in Milan, Italy, leaders also acknowledged the importance of continued cooperation in the area of non-traditional security. Although scholars remain skeptical of the willingness of ASEAN member states to commit to the human security approach, there is ample evidence that non-traditional security continues to be important in the discussions at ASEM (ASEM 2014). One of the main reasons why scholars doubt the sincerity with which ASEAN member states commit themselves to the human security approach is the long tradition in Asia of the principles of sovereignty and non-interference. Whereas European nations have pooled their sovereignty in the European Union for the sake of common security, ASEAN member states have remained reluctant to introduce measures that limit self-rule. In 2012 The United Nations General Assembly adopted a resolution formulating a common understanding of human security (United Nations General Assembly 2012). This common understanding is important not only for internal UN usage, but also because it sets human security apart from The Responsibility to Protect (R2P). The 2005, The UN World Summit Outcome Document commits states to protect their populations from genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity, and ethnic cleansing. Under The R2P, the international community must use all adequate measures, including the use of force, when a state fails to protect its population from these aforementioned crimes (United Nations General Assembly, 2005).

Human security does not mandate states to intervene to prevent or halt serious human rights abuses in other states. Human security, unlike The R2P, does not challenge state sovereignty, it encourages states to increase its capacity to serve and protect its citizens. The fact that the human security approach cannot be used as a tool for international interventions or regime change has mitigated the anxiety about the motives for its promotion. ASEAN member states can use the language of human security without fear of undermining their regime. European states can promote human security without fear of being seen as neo-colonial imperialists. In the next section, I will discuss the changing nature of EU-ASEAN cooperation.

### **EU-ASEAN Cooperation**

The European Community (EC)'s first acts of political cooperation with ASEAN date back to the early 1980s when representatives of both institutions discussed critical Cold War security issues, such as the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and Vietnam's invasion of Cambodia. Disagreement over human rights issues, however, halted further cooperation in the late 80s and early 90s. In 1994, the European Commission published its New Asia Strategy, recognizing the growing importance of Asia as a trading partner of the European Community (Yeo, 2009). The Commission realized that The European Community had to catch up with the United States in enhancing its economic presence in Asia (Yeo, 2008). The United States had been instrumental in establishing the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) to promote free trade across the Asia-Pacific region. The Asia Europe Meeting (ASEM) was initiated by the government of Singapore with the purpose of bringing The EU into the region as counterbalance to The United States and APEC (Yeo, 2008). The first ASEM Summit in Bangkok in 1996 began as an informal meeting of heads of government so to strengthen economic ties between ASEAN and The EU. Strong trade relations already existed between The United States and Southeast Asia, and between The European Union and The United States, but relations between The EU and ASEAN were the missing link (Yeo 2008, 108; Gaens 2009).

ASEAN countries were interested in focusing the first ASEM meeting on encouraging European businesses to invest in Southeast Asia in human resource development and technological transfers. ASEAN members also wanted increased market access in Europe. Europeans were keen on securing ASEAN member states' support at the first World Trade Organization (WTO)'s ministerial meeting on issues such as intellectual property rights and investment code. It was not in ASEAN member states' interest to be tied to the EU preferences at The WTO, and a compromise agenda had to be agreed upon. The compromise was that the meetings would be informal in character and comprehensive in scope, focusing

on common interests in economic and political affairs (Yeo, 2008). While the focus of ASEM was mostly economic in nature, the Asian financial crisis in 1997 spurred on political cooperation in addition to economic assistance. The financial crisis deflated the economic benefits of EU-ASEAN cooperation, and increased cooperation with the Northeast Asian states of China, Japan and South Korea, in the form of ASEAN plus three (Yeo, 2009). The financial crisis also highlighted the importance of institutional development and political cooperation among ASEAN members.

Political cooperation between ASEAN and EU members took root in the aftermath of the financial crisis. Political cooperation became even more significant after the crises of the Bali terrorist bombing (2002), the SARS outbreak (2003), the outbreak of avian influenza (2003), and the Indian Ocean tsunami (2004). These crises impressed on the Southeast Asian governments the recognition that, in addition to socioeconomic development, citizens are in need of a type of security that includes environmental protection, food security, adequate health care, and adequate shelter, that is to say, human security (Curley and Thomas, 2004; Gerstl, 2010). The crises do not lead to the widespread adoption of human security norms in ASEAN, as policy makers continue to view security issues through the lens of traditional realist notions of national security. However, these crises did refocus Southeast Asian leaders on a perspective of state capacity that transcends mere economic growth and the protection of national interests narrowly defined. Southeast Asian countries began to look into various aspects of human security. This is especially true since these crises were all transnational, and all, with the exception of the tsunami, were linked to globalization (ASEAN UNESCO Human Security Workshop, 2006). During the Asian financial crisis, ASEAN governments were able to set aside the strict policy of non-interference, and through “flexible engagement” enabled the organization to prevent domestic issues from becoming a threat to regional stability (ASEAN UNESCO Human Security Workshop, 2006). During the SARS outbreak, health ministers of ASEAN plus three coordinated activities and shared information with each other and with the World Health Organization (WHO), which resulted in Southeast Asia being SARS free in just two months (ASEAN UNESCO Human Security Workshop, 2006; Curley and Thomas, 2004). During the Indian Ocean tsunami, ASEAN was involved in coordinating the relief effort, including the disaster relief assistance from the United States, The European Union, and Japan. ASEAN’s member states proposed a 2005 UN Resolution on emergency relief, rehabilitation, reconstruction and prevention, that was adopted by consensus. This established the use of military and civilian personnel in disaster relief operations, The ASEAN Humanitarian Assistance Centre, and The ASEAN Disaster Information Sharing and Communication Network. Finally, ASEAN members created The ASEAN Committee of Disaster Management that became responsible for setting up a tsunami early warning system in The Indian Ocean



(ASEAN UNESCO Human Security Workshop 2006).

Political cooperation continues to gain in importance as ASEM broadens the issues on its agenda, from trade and investment, to human rights, counter-terrorism, transnational crime, the digital divide, and disaster management. Dialogue on non-traditional security threats has become a principal part of Asia-Europe Meetings. The perspective of The European Union in Southeast Asia has changed from one that focused almost exclusively on foreign aid and trade to one that includes political and security cooperation. The development of The EU as a security actor will be discussed in the following section.

### **The EU as Security Actor in Asia**

Although the EU has many connections in Asia at the bilateral and multilateral level, it is not seen as a major security actor in the region (Gaens, 2009). The EU is a member of The ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) that was founded in 1993 mainly to discuss regional security issues. The ARF also plays an active role in confidence building and preventative diplomacy in Asia Pacific (ARF, 2011). The ARF is geared towards more traditional forms of security, as many of the meetings focus on maritime security, counter-terrorism, cyber terrorism, and peacekeeping. ARF defense official meetings are scheduled the most frequently, approximately every three months since 2002. In the aftermath of terrorist attacks in The United States and Indonesia, The ARF, APEC, and ASEAN, have shifted their attention from inter-state tensions to fighting terrorism, and, to some extent, to non-traditional security (ASEAN UNESCO HS Workshop, 2006). There were over twenty meetings dealing with non-traditional security at The ARF between 1998 and 2014. The discussed topics included disease prevention, narcotics control, transnational crime, climate change, and the threat of biological weapons (ARF, 2014).

There is significant overlap in the memberships of The ASEAN Regional Forum and Asia Europe Meeting, but The ARF also includes states not in ASEM, such as The United States, Canada, North Korea, Bangladesh, Papua New Guinea, Sri Lanka, and East Timor. ASEM also differs from The ARF in that all EU member states and The European Commission take part in its meetings while in The ARF only The EU, through its high representative for foreign affairs and security policy, is represented. The terrorist attacks in The United States, Indonesia, Spain, and The United Kingdom also led to stronger security cooperation between The EU and ASEAN. Solely economic interests no longer drive ASEM, where human rights, good governance, and regional stability, appear on the agenda (Yeo, 2009).

ASEAN has welcomed EU assistance with non-traditional security threats such as terrorism, development assistance, humanitarian assistance, and peacekeeping

(Yeo, 2009). The first direct involvement in non-traditional security in Asia by The EU was The Aceh Monitoring Mission (AMM). The EU, Norway, and Switzerland, together with five contributing states from ASEAN - Thailand, Malaysia, Brunei, Philippines, and Singapore - monitored the implementation of the 2005 peace agreement between Indonesia and The Free Aceh Movement. The AMM was not a military mission and the monitors did not carry weapons while on patrol or during inspections of both parties' fulfillment of the details of the peace agreement. The role of The AMM was to provide assistance with the implementation of the peace agreement and not to engage in negotiations between the parties. The mission came to an end in December 2006 when its assigned goals had been completed (AMM, 2011). The AMM was the first human security mission in Asia in which the focus was "freedom from fear," as opposed to "freedom from want." In order to gain support from the government of Indonesia and from ASEAN member states, The AMM was strictly impartial. The territorial integrity of Indonesia, and the fact that Aceh would remain part of Indonesia, was agreed upon in advance. This allowed The EU to engage as human security actor in Asia while ASEAN member states, especially Indonesia, did not have to surrender their principled stand on sovereignty and non-interference. Through the positive experience of The AMM, The EU came to be considered as a (human) security actor in Asia. In the next section I will discuss the delicate balance between human security promotion and ASEAN's principles of state sovereignty and non-intervention. I will show that the apparent contradiction between these values, as often cited by scholars, does not denigrate the future of non-traditional security promotion.

### **Human Security in ASEM: The Case of Myanmar**

Although human security has been introduced in the relationship between The EU and ASEAN, and has been discussed under the name of non-traditional or comprehensive security, it has not replaced traditional military security as the main security paradigm in ASEAN. ASEM has been mainly an exercise in confidence building, and institutional development has had limited success in capacity building. Leaders from ASEAN member states and The EU meet more frequently than ever, and the scope of their discussions has never been so inclusive. Yet it is difficult to point to concrete examples where human suffering has been alleviated, or where crises have been averted because of increased state capacity. Furthermore, public awareness of ASEM in both ASEAN and EU member states is extremely low (Yeo, 2008). Political cooperation has mainly taken place at the EU-ASEAN level and at the bilateral level. ASEM is unable to compete with bilateral links between, for example, The EU and China. ASEM has been successful in increasing trade and investment, which was, after all, the main expectation of the Asian participants. ASEM has led to some cooperation in multilateral forums, such as the WTO, which

was important for the Europeans.

The European Commission, in its 2001 paper, “Europe and Asia: A Strategic Framework for Enhanced Partnership,” placed greater emphasis on political and security dialogue with ASEAN plus three members. The focus of the Commission’s paper is on human rights, democracy, good governance, rule of law, and trade and investment. The engagement strategy of The EU is constructive rather than confrontational in nature, meaning that The EU will engage in debate with Asian states about ways to enhance good governance and human rights without the immediate threat of sanctions. An excellent illustration of this constructive and pragmatic approach by The Commission is the way in which The EU dealt with Myanmar in ASEM (Gaens, 2009). When Myanmar joined ASEAN in 1997 it also became eligible to participate in ASEM meetings. The EU, however, opposed participation by Myanmar because of continued human rights violations by its military regime. Despite a travel ban on government officials and the freezing of assets of the government, The EU External Relations Council agreed in 2004 to allow lower-level Myanmarese government officials to participate in ASEM (Gaens, 2009). Supported by ASEAN members and China, Myanmar participated in ASEM in the summit in Vietnam in 2004. In 2005, however, the Dutch government, citing the EU visa ban against senior Myanmar officials, denied visa to officials who wanted to attend the economy ministers’ ASEM meeting in Amsterdam. The Dutch decision highlighted the fact that not all EU governments were completely on board with the constructive engagement approach. ASEAN members and China put more pressure on the government of Finland to allow Myanmar to participate in the 2006 Helsinki Summit. The Dutch government was not the only dissenting voice on the Myanmar’s participation in ASEM. The European Parliament passed a resolution in 2004 strongly condemning The EU foreign ministers to allow Myanmar to participate in the 2004 Vietnam Summit. The Parliament’s resolution states the conditions for full ASEM membership were the release of Aung San Suu Kyi and The National League for Democracy (NLD) leadership, allowing NLD and other political parties to operate freely, and the start genuine dialogue with pro-democracy and ethnic groups in Myanmar (European Parliament Resolution on Burma/ASEM, 2005). Since none of these conditions had been met at the time the Parliament insisted that Myanmar should not attend the Vietnam Summit. Notwithstanding the strong language in the Parliament’s resolution, Myanmar has been allowed to participate in all ASEM meetings, with the single exception of the economics ministers’ meeting in Amsterdam in 2005. Under the 2006 EU common position, senior officials from Myanmar are permitted to visit EU member states when engaging in a dialogue to promote democracy, human rights and the rule of law (HRW, 2007). At the 2007 Foreign Ministers Meeting in Hamburg, Germany’s foreign minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier said: “This [ASEM] is a level of influence that we can and should use to an even greater degree in international politics” (HRW, 2007).

In April, 2010 Prime Minister Lt. Gen. Thein Sein and 27 cabinet ministers resigned their military commissions and formed the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP). Thirty-seven parties contested the November 2010 elections in which widespread irregularities were reported. The USDP won 80 percent of the seats in the bicameral parliament (HRW, 2011). Just six days after the November 2010 election, Aung San Suu Kyi was released from house arrest. The EU suspended travel and financial restrictions on four Myanmarese ministers and 18 vice-ministers in the new government on April 2011 (Johnston, 2011). The move was seen as recognition by The EU that reform in Myanmar has been significant and is ongoing. In June 2011, the new government created a National Human Rights Commission that promptly published a letter appealing for the freedom of prisoners of conscience (Mydans, 2011). In September 2011, the government of Myanmar announced that it is suspending a \$3.6bn hydroelectric dam project led by a state-owned Chinese company. It is significant that the government was willing to cancel a deal with its longtime ally China (Pilling, 2011). Additionally, the government has proposed a law that would permit the formation of trade unions, and in an interview with Radio Free Asia Tint Swe, director of the Press Scrutiny and Registration Department, announced that press censorship should be abolished in the near future (Banyan, 2011).

During The ASEM Foreign Ministers' Meeting (FMM) in Gödöllő, Hungary, in 2011, the ministers discussed recent developments in Myanmar, including the 2010 elections. The NLD did not participate in the election because the government-run Union Electoral Commission (UEC) released a new electoral law barring any person serving a prison sentence from party membership. This effectively excluded Aung San Suu Kyi, still under house arrest, and most of the leadership of the NLD party from running in the election. The foreign ministers stressed the need for Myanmar to engage and cooperate with The UN and to enter into dialogue with all parties in an "inclusive national reconciliation process." The foreign ministers' further state their "readiness to remain constructively engaged in achieving the aims of national reconciliation and of improving the economic and social conditions of the people of Myanmar" (FMM10 Chair's Statement, 2011). The ministers reiterated their commitment to the sovereign and territorial integrity of Myanmar and their view that the future of Myanmar lies in the hands of its people. The language in the FMM Chair's statement was exactly the same as the Chair's statement of the 2010 ASEM Summit in Brussels. The language, and even the term constructive engagement, is a compromise that tries to weave into the human security narrative of The EU and ASEAN's continued commitment to the principles of sovereignty and non-interference.

Reform has continued in Myanmar, albeit at a slow pace. In 2013 the European Union lifted its restrictive measures imposed on Myanmar with the exception of

its arms embargo. The EU is also providing assistance for the reform of the police force, the establishment of the Myanmar Peace Center, and The Myanmar Crisis Response Center (European External Action Service 2013). In 2014, Myanmar hosted The 25th ASEAN Summit and The ASEAN Foreign Ministers Meeting as rotating chair. At The 2014 ASEM Summit, the successful outcome of these milestones for Myanmar were officially commended in the chair's statement. The EU's constructive and pragmatic engagement with Myanmar, which stands in sharp contrast to the conditionality approach it employs in the European Neighbourhood Policy, has resulted in tangible reform in Myanmar. These developments cannot be directly credited to ASEM, as almost all assistance from The EU to Myanmar comes through its bilateral relations, however, without the frequency and depth of relations that have developed with ASEAN member states through ASEM, The EU might not have been successful in engaging Myanmar at all.

### **Concluding Remarks**

ASEM is not the place where specific human rights abuses in participating member states are debated. ASEM is also not the place where strong and binding resolutions on the prevention of human rights abuses are drafted. ASEM is, however, a place for continued dialogue, even with notorious human rights violators. Continued dialogue, or constructive engagement, had led to an explosion in summitry. ASEM leaders at various levels are meeting frequently enough to be able to understand each other's positions and limitations. The FMM Chair's statement announced the hosting of new meetings organized by a wide variety of members on a variety of specialized topics. More than 20 different meetings are scheduled in 2015, including the hosting of the foreign minister's meeting in Luxembourg, the transportation ministers meeting and the education ministers meeting in Latvia, as well as senior officials meetings and ASEM seminars ranging from renewable energy to food security and water management (ASEM Infoboard, 2014). The progress made at the ASEM meeting has not led to immediate and substantial human security improvements in Asia. The EU was traditionally seen in Asia as a major player in the areas of development and aid, but insignificant in terms of security relations. Constructive engagement has somewhat changed this perception as security is no longer viewed as only state security or military security. The rationale for the EU's human security promotion is that it promotes a norm that The EU has internalized. The norm of human security provides The EU with more significance as an international actor. The more countries or regional organizations that adopt the norm, the more significant The EU as international security actor becomes. The European Security Strategy can be seen as a European alternative vision to the unilateral foreign policies coming out of The United States. In terms of military capabilities, The EU is certainly not a major international actor, but human security has become a "symbolic signpost" of

EU foreign policy in which The Union can promote its values and still be seen as a capable actor in international crises situations (Kaldor, Martin, and Selchow, 2008).

The conditions under which The EU is most successful in spreading the notion of human security are not easily assessable. Political cooperation with ASEAN states increased after a series of crises led government officials to understand that transnational problems deserve a transnational solution. Political cooperation has not ironed out the differences in interpretation of non-traditional security. Many Asian states continue to stress sovereignty and non-interference principles over universal human rights concerns. Constructive engagement on different stages has contributed to the success of getting EU partners to meet and discuss non-traditional security threats. ASEM has provided The EU with the recognition in Southeast Asia as an honest broker and a partner in development and capacity building in terms of non-traditional security. As the case of Myanmar shows, ASEM remains a forum for communication and the sharing of ideas and best practices. The actual assistance to Myanmar comes in the form bilateral agreements and the work of The EU-Myanmar Task Force. ASEM provides the European Union with an independent voice in its international relations with Southeast Asia. Even if ASEM will not change Southeast Asia nations' realist perspective on international relations, it is changing the way they perceive European Union foreign policy.

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