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Note from the Editors

Ana E. Juncos, University of Bristol, Emma J. Stewart and Richard G. Whitman, University of Bath.

In the first article in this issue of *CFSP Forum* Sorin Denca returns to the topic of Romanian foreign policy that was the subject of an article published two years ago. Denca considers the extent to which EU membership has impacted on Romania's foreign policy. Karolina Pomorska continues in a similar vein in her assessment of the extent to which Poland has been successful in uploading its national foreign onto the EU foreign policy agenda. In the final piece in this issue Clara Portela analyses elite perceptions of the EU in South-East Asia.

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Romania and EU Foreign Policy

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Two years ago, *CFSP Forum* featured a short article by David Phinnemore, assessing the development of Romania's foreign policy nine months after EU accession.[1] As a new member state, he argued, Romania was facing two important challenges within the EU. The first was to make sure that its foreign policy preferences were reflected in EU policies. At least with regard to two major foreign policy priorities (the policy towards the Republic of Moldova and the Black Sea region), Romania was expected to have a hard time shaping EU policies. The second challenge was to drive out any concerns with regard to Romania's reliability as a partner in the building of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP)/European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP). In this case, at stake was the dissenting position of Romania on the 'supervised independence' for Kosovo proposed in the Ahtisaari plan and formally endorsed

[1] David Phinnemore, 'Expectations and Experiences in EU External Relations: The First Nine Months of Romania's EU Membership', *CFSP Forum*, 5(5), 2007, pp. 17-19.

by the EU, as well as the staunch support of Romania for US foreign policy (although not in the Kosovo case).

In this paper, I look at recent developments in Romania's foreign policy with regard to three of the policy challenges identified by David Phinnemore: the Republic of Moldova, the Black Sea region and Kosovo. Before that, however, I shall make the point that the conduct of Romania's foreign policy can be better understood if the nature of the CFSP and the changing behaviour of the other new member states are taken into consideration. In terms of CFSP, the EU member states continue to pursue their national foreign policy irrespective of what they are doing within the EU.[2] The EU's unity was shattered on various key occasions by the member states themselves, despite their previous commitments to act in unison. The transatlantic divide over the United States-led war in Iraq was a major instance when the soon-to-be member states found themselves in the awkward position of choosing between the US–led camp and the 'core' Europeans (i.e. France and Germany), to use the term coined by Jürgen Habermas and Jacques Derrida, in a famous rejoinder to Donald Rumsfeld's distinction between 'old' and 'new' Europe.[3] There was nothing new in the fact that there were differences between the member states. The lesson learned for the candidate countries was that even if EU foreign policy is in general 'common', this is far from always being the case. Moreover, in exceptional circumstances, as the Iraq crisis highlighted, the pursuit of national interest is legitimate even if it goes as far as to undermine the EU's unity as a foreign policy actor.

The diversity of preferences and its potential to undermine the ambitious goal of unity was, therefore, a proven fact even before the 2004 and 2007 enlargements. Prior to accession, the rhetoric of the candidate countries about their innate Europeanness, shared norms and values, common heritage, and sense of belonging had obscured, to a certain extent, the emphasis on local specificities, and unique historical experiences of trauma or deliverance. In a region where history was a zero-sum experience, where the gains of one country meant necessarily a loss for another country in terms of borders and people, the perception of what is the national interest is deeply rooted in the past. If before accession the national interest was defined more in terms of self-identification with Europe and Euro-Atlantic values, formal accession had removed the previous qualms in regard to the reiteration of a uniqueness that had to be preserved within the European melting pot. Accordingly, the new member states were not reluctant to oppose what they perceived as touching upon the national interest, no matter how the national interest was defined. Poland is probably the most visible example from among the new member states, blocking for instance the signing of a new EU-Russia agreement due to the Russian ban on Polish meat products and pushing for a new Eastern Partnership of the EU[4]. However, this assertiveness is also visible in other cases, such as the obstruction by Slovenia of Croatia's accession talks due to territorial disputes, Slovakia's minority policy that troubles bilateral relations with Hungary, or the obstinate

[2] Ben Tonra and Thomas Christiansen, 'The study of EU foreign policy: between international relations and European studies', in Ben Tonra and Thomas Christiansen (eds), *Rethinking European Union foreign policy* (Manchester: MUP, 2004); Anand Menon, *Europe. The State of the Union* (London: Atlantic Books, 2008).

[3] Jürgen Habermas and Jacques Derrida, 'February 15, or What Binds Europeans Together: A Plea for a Common Foreign Policy, Beginning in the Core of Europe', *Constellations*, 10(3), 2003, pp. 291–297.

[4] For a detailed discussion about Poland and the Eastern Partnership, see Pomorska, the current issue of CFSP Forum.

stance of Slovakia, Romania and Cyprus on Kosovo's independence.

Romanian Foreign Policy After Accession

To turn now to the specific case of Romania, it should be noted that the formal accession was neither certain, even after the conclusion of the negotiation talks, nor straightforward, due to the supplementary safeguard clauses on Romania's membership status. For some observers, the decision to let Romania (and Bulgaria) enter the EU in 2007, although incompletely prepared, was made because it would have been unacceptable for Western governments and the EU to break previous political commitments on supporting the completion of the Central and East European enlargement[5] From this point of view, the control and verification mechanism requested by the European Commission and imposed on Romania and Bulgaria was a small price to pay in exchange for the greater good of full membership.

The introduction of the mechanism theoretically had the potential to hinder the exercise of full-membership. From a legal-formal point of view, however, there was no direct link between the conduct of foreign policy and the monitoring by the European Commission of the Romanian government in the field of judicial reform and anti-corruption. In spite of this, the very existence of the mechanism was seen as pointing towards a second-class membership that negatively affected the prestige and credibility of the country, including in the area of foreign policy. In reality, Romanian official discourse did not refer to the mechanism as a constraining factor. The speeches of President Băsescu addressed to Romanian diplomatic corps on several occasions have not made any connection between the two aspects.[6] On the contrary, accession changed the tone of the official discourse. Even if no new major objective was introduced and, as David Phinnemore pointed out, Bucharest's preferences were well known within the EU before accession, the order of priorities changed as well as the emphasis placed upon some of them. The foreign policy objectives where the change in emphasis was most visible are the relationships with the Republic of Moldova, the policy towards the Black Sea, and the role of Romania itself on the European and international stage. What remained unchanged, however, was the reference to the key role of the US and NATO for European security.

Romania's Policy Towards Moldova

In the case of Romania's policy towards the Republic of Moldova, the former privileged relationship was given a new significance. The nature of the relationship between the two countries is defined now through the formula '*one nation – two states.*'[7] This emphasis on Romania's interest towards the Republic of Moldova is also made utterly clear in numerous official speeches: the historical links between the two countries are highlighted, as well as the political and moral duty that Romania has towards its Eastern neighbour. The President stated bluntly that

> 'the relationship with the Republic of Moldova will be a priority of my mandate as president of Romania. The European future of the Republic of Moldova had to be

[5] For the general argument, see Frank Schimmelfennig, 'The Community Trap: Liberal Norms, Rhetorical Action, and the Eastern Enlargement of the European Union', *International Organization,* 55, 2003, pp. 47-80.

[6] Various speeches of the President of Romania, Traian Băsescu at the meetings with Romanian diplomatic corps and the heads of foreign diplomatic missions in Bucharest (19 January and 3 September 2007, 23 January 2008 and 21 January 2009), available online at http://www.presidency.ro/index.php?_RID=.

[7] The *National Security Strategy of Romania*, 2007, available online at http://english.mapn.ro/documents/.

assumed as a moral commitment of the entire Romanian society. The identity of language, culture and traditions is the gift of history. The protection of this identity is, however, our duty.'[8]

Accordingly, Romania wants to play the role of the 'advocate' of Moldova's European integration.

From a formal point of view, Moldova has not been offered the promise of EU membership and it is unlikely to see such a move in the near future. However, Romanian officials would like to see Moldova included in the group of Western Balkan countries, which have a clear prospect of EU membership.[9] To date, this position has not borne fruit, insofar as the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) and the recent Eastern Partnership provide a more convenient way to organize the relationship between the EU and its Eastern neighbours. Also, the prospects of signing an association agreement, replacing the current partnership and cooperation agreement with the aim of gradually bringing Moldova and the EU closer together, has been postponed due to the post-electoral deterioration of the political situation in Moldova.[10] The street protests following the election held in April 2009 prompted the Communist authorities and President Voronin to accuse Romania of interference, and consequently to expel the Romanian ambassador and 24 journalists, and to impose visa restrictions for Romanian citizens. Romania's government has strongly denied all allegations, while using the EU framework (i.e. the European Parliament and the Council) to put pressure on the Communist government in Chisinau. The European Parliament adopted a resolution condemning the excessive use of force by the Moldavian police and the human right violations, while welcoming the cautious attitude of the Romanian authorities.[11] Within the Council, Romania pushed for the signing of a new comprehensive EU-Moldova agreement to be conditional on the abolition of the visa regime unilaterally imposed by Chisinau[12] (a position that was eventually adopted by the Council in June).[13] The position adopted at the EU level probably played a role in the Moldavian early parliamentary election on 29 July, won by a coalition of pro-European integration parties, committed to abolishing the visa regime for Romanian citizens as soon as the government is formed.[14]

Romania's Policy Towards the Black Sea Region

Another key priority of Romania's foreign policy is the Black Sea region. Romania's interest in the Black Sea region is not new - its regional involvement dates back to the early 1990s, the most notable example being its membership

[8] Address of the president of Romania, Traian Băsescu, at the meeting with the heads of foreign diplomatic missions in Bucharest, 18 January 2005.

[9] EU Observer, 'Romania lobbies for EU entry "perspective" for Moldova', 31 January 2007; Address of the president of Romania, Traian Băsescu, at the meeting with the heads of foreign diplomatic missions in Bucharest, 02 September 2009.

[10] Council of the European Union, 'Council Conclusions'. 2896th General Affairs and External Relations Council, Doc. 14136/08, 13 October 2008.

[11] The EP Resolution has also criticized the Romanian president for his initiative to speed up the procedures for granting Romanian citizenship to Moldavian citizens, considering that are contrary to the efforts to reduce bilateral tensions. See European Parliament, 'European Parliament resolution on the situation in Moldova', 30 April 2009, Strasbourg.

[12] Nine o'Clock, 'EU foreign ministers want Moldova to give equal visa treatment to all EU citizens', 16 June 2009.

[13] Council of the European Union, 'Council Conclusions', 2950th General Affairs and External Relations Council, Doc. 10938/09, 15 June 2009.

[14] Hotnews, 'The democratic coalition from the Republic of Moldova: We'll take out the visas for Romanians as soon as we'll be governing', 10 August 2009.

in the Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (OBSEC). However, Romania's ambitions became greater after integration into NATO and with EU accession. The aim was to 'internationalize' the Black Sea, in other words, to support a greater role for the EU in the region. This is also one of the main objectives of the National Black Sea Strategy adopted in 2006. The organization of the Black Sea Forum for Dialogue and Partnership[15] in June 2006 aimed to demonstrate the active interest of Romania in the region and the role it wants to play, as well as to raise the visibility of the issue and to place it high up on the EU's agenda. To a certain extent, the attempts to increase EU involvement in the Black Sea have been successful, with the European Commission elaborating a new initiative, the so-called 'Black Sea Synergy – a New Regional Cooperation Initiative.'[16] However, the Black Sea Synergy is not a new strategy, as Romanian diplomacy would have liked, but it is developed within the framework of the ENP and aims to be complementary to the EU's initiatives in the Black Sea region.[17]

Several developments have taken place since the Commission's communication: the European Commission was granted Observer Status of the OBSEC[18], the Black Sea Synergy was officially launched in Kiev in February 2008, a European Parliament resolution recognised the need for Romania, Bulgaria and Greece, as EU member states in the region to play a leading role, and the second round of the Black Sea Forum of NGOs took place.[19] However, the ambition of Romanian foreign policy to 'internationalize' the Black Sea region did not match the initial expectations. The steps forward are only incremental and limited to areas of lesser political significance. For instance, the objective of Romania to see NATO's vessels patrolling the Black Sea failed due to the opposition of both Russia and Turkey. At the same time, the regional initiatives of naval cooperation in the Black Sea region, dominated by Russia and Turkey, proved totally irrelevant during the Russian-Georgian war over South Ossetia.[20]

The conflict illustrated once more the explosive potential present in the Black Sea region and the fact that the existing arrangements of regional cooperation are of little use. On the other hand, the EU played an active role in mediating a cease-fire. However, the active shuttle diplomacy of French President Sarkozy, holding the EU presidency, has been followed by a more cautious approach by the EU Foreign Ministers, visible in the initial design, deployment locations and mandate of the EU Monitoring Mission to Georgia, consisting of 200 civilian personnel. The Romanian team consists of 20 representatives, serving within Field Office Tbilisi/Mtskheta, under Swedish command.[21]

Kosovo's Independence

Turning to the third challenge discussed here, Romania was part of the dissident group of countries with regard to the support of a united EU front on Kosovo. The position of Romania in 2006, when the negotiations conducted by the UN Special Envoy were underway, was in support of a large degree of autonomy

[15] The official objective of the Black Sea Forum was to create a regional platform designed to intensify the dialogue and cooperation within the Black Sea region.
[16] The EC's communication on the Black Sea Synergy was issued on 11 April 2007.
[17] It is about the pre-accession process for Turkey, the ENP, the strategic partnership with Russia and the EU's sectoral programmes in the region
[18] This was one of the objectives of the Black Sea Synergy, reflecting also the preference of Romania.

[19] http://www.blackseango.org/pagini/index.php
[20] V. Socor, 'Addressing Naval Imbalance in the Black Sea After the Russian-Georgian War', *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, Volume 5, Issue 227, 2008.
[21] http://www.mae.ro/index.php?unde=doc&id=12960.

for Kosovo, but not an approach advocating statehood and changing existing borders. The argument was that a large degree of autonomy was a European approach and did not create any dangerous precedents.[22] There was a clear awareness of the fact that there was little chance of finding a position that represented the will of the majority of the member states (not only the largest and most powerful members, such the UK, France and Germany, but also smaller yet influential countries like the Netherlands). During 2006, at a time when Romania was not yet a full member of the EU, bilateral consultations had been conducted with Slovakia and Greece, where the question of Kosovo's status was discussed. It became clear that Romania, as a future member, shared these countries' lukewarm approach to a unilateral solution on Kosovo.

The mandate given by the Supreme Council of National Defence to the Foreign Minister on the eve of the EU Foreign Ministers meeting in March 2007 was based on this approach, which had been reiterated throughout 2007, both within the EU framework and in bilateral meetings, such as at the meeting of Foreign Minister Cioroianu with Serbian ambassadors in Belgrade, in December 2007: 'any solution of the status of Kosovo should be in line with the international law in force and should be accepted by both parties. We support a negotiated settlement, endorsed by the UN Security Council.'[23] At the same time, Romanian officials expressed from an early stage (i.e. early 2007) that Bucharest intended to support EU efforts in Kosovo in the post-conflict stage.[24] In January 2008, the concrete nature of the support was defined: Romania was ready to send a contingent of 175 gendarmes and policemen as a contribution to the EULEX mission.[25]

It was hardly a surprise that when Kosovo declared unilaterally its independence from Serbia, in February 2008, Romania, alongside Slovakia and Cyprus from among the new member states, put the national interest before the common interest, namely a unified European position. The position of the majority of EU member states of supporting Kosovo's independence may be interpreted as contradicting the provisions of the European Security Strategy on the support of international law. The European Security Strategy states that: 'The fundamental framework for international relations is the United Nations Charter. The United Nations Security Council has the primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security.' The inconsistency between this commitment and the reality of the political decision, by-passing the UN Security Council, while justified on the ground by the *sui-generis* character of the Kosovo case, was hardly an incentive for Romania to side with the majority of EU member states in upholding a united front.

The views expressed by the Romanian President on several occasions made clear that the unilateral declaration of Kosovo's independence raised potential conflicts elsewhere, such as the frozen conflicts in the post-Soviet space, especially the pro-Russian regime in the Transdniester separatist region of Moldova. When the war in Georgia over South Ossetia broke out in the summer

[22] Address of the president of Romania, Traian Băsescu, at the meeting with the heads of foreign diplomatic missions in Bucharest, 20 January 2006.

[23] Address of foreign minister Adrian Cioroianu at the meeting with Serbian ambassadors, Belgrade, 12 June 2007.

[24] Romanian MFA, 'The Meeting of the General Affairs and External Relations Council (GAERC) in Brussels', Press release, 12-13 February 2007.

[25] Address of the President of Romania, Traian Băsescu, at the meeting with the heads of foreign diplomatic missions in Bucharest, 23 January 2008.

of 2008, President Băsescu did not hesitate to blame the 'great powers' and to say that this was the direct consequence of the decision on Kosovo. Many observers linked the position of Romanian officials with the concern that the ethnic Hungarians in Romania might invoke Kosovo as a precedent for similar demands. At the same time, Romanian officials have made it clear on various occasions that the unilateral declaration of Kosovo's independence cannot be interpreted as the existence in international law of provisions for collective rights for national minorities or granting them the right of secession.[26]

There was practically no controversy with regard to how Romania should react to the unilateral declaration of independence, with the notable exception of the Democratic Union of Magyars in Romania (similar to the situation in Slovakia). The vote in the Romanian Parliament, on 19 February 2008, on the recognition or not of the new entity was overwhelmingly against independence (357 against, 27 in favour). The same argument used by the representative of the ethnic Hungarian party in Slovakia was employed by Markó Béla, the moderate leader of the Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania (DAHR). He declared in a press conference that 'sooner or later Romania, as a member state of the European Union, will have to recognize Kosovo as a new independent state.'[27] On the other hand, he argued that the only precedent to be drawn from the Kosovo case was in terms of the need for international actors to get involved in strengthening the rights of ethnic minorities.[28] Even if this was a moderate position, not shared by the more radical representatives of the community of ethnic Hungarians in Romania, it stirred up angry reactions from Romanian political parties. At stake was the fact that DAHR was a member of the governing coalition, alongside the Liberal party. Unsurprisingly, there were voices asking for the DAHR to step down from the government.

Conclusion

To conclude, the observations made by David Phinnemore in his article two years ago have been largely confirmed by political developments. Indeed, Romania faced significant tests in the foreign policy field, such as the relationship with the Republic of Moldova, the Black Sea region and the independence of Kosovo. In the first case, EU unity was beneficial, Romania having its own position backed by the weight of the entire block. In the last case, however, Romania's position has contributed to the break up of EU unity in what was perceived as a test case for EU ambitions to act in concert. The non-recognition of Kosovo independence had sources in the idiosyncrasies of Romanian politics, particularly in the way in which historical experiences are filtered and infused into the current conduct of foreign policy. The cases discussed here reflect an instrumental view of how the national interest is to be advanced and defended within the EU. Previous experiences, both before and after accession, have shaped the perception that EU foreign policy is a tool for the member states in the pursuit of their national preferences. The 2004 and 2007 enlargements of the EU demonstrated that the trend of further diversification goes along with an increased awareness of the national interest among the new member states. This trend is likely to further challenge the EU's ambitions to act coherently.

[26] Statement of the Prime Minister Tăriceanu to the Romanian Parliament following the declaration of Kosovo's independence and the GAERC Meeting in Brussels, 19 February 2008.
[27] IPS News Agency, 'Kosovo: Romania 'Schizophrenic' Over Independence', 18 February 2008.
[28] Ibid.

Poland and the EU's New Eastern Neighbours: Europeanisation and Policy 'Uploading'

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In May 2009 the representatives of the European Union (EU) and its member states met with the Eastern neighbours in Prague for the Eastern Partnership (EaP) Summit. This event held a special importance for Poland. European policy towards the Eastern neighbours has always been of strategic importance for Warsaw. Its diplomats have undertaken recurrent attempts to project their policy preferences to the EU-level in this area. This projection is sometimes referred to as the 'bottom-up' dimension or 'uploading' in the Europeanisation literature (as opposed to 'national adaptation' or 'downloading'). It is the aim of this short article to review the projection of national preferences by Polish diplomacy in the EU's negotiations on the relations with its new Eastern neighbours. The first, general part, of the article is followed by examples from the policies towards Ukraine and Belarus respectively.

From Eastern Dimension to Eastern Partnership

After enlargement, it became evident that Eastern Europe was a number one priority and 'the most important strategic challenge for Poland'[1] regarding its contribution to EU external relations. One of the first ideas championed by Poland even before it officially became a member of the EU was creating an independent 'Eastern Dimension.'[2] The Polish Minister of Foreign Affairs, already in 2003, spoke in favour of the EU having 'a coherent, comprehensive framework of its Eastern Policy that should be flexible enough to enable the individual development of relations with each of the countries concerned without prejudicing their final formula'[3], while the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) presented a first non-paper on the topic.[4] Polish officials argued that relations with the Eastern neighbours should be differentiated, depending not only on values and the progress of reforms, but also on the aspirations concerning relations with the EU. The government also argued that the assistance instruments should be flexible and delivered even in the case of the 'disappointing performance of authorities of the countries concerned.'[5]

[1] W. Cimoszewicz 'Europe Enlarged but Open', Statement at the OECD Council, Paris, 22 April 2004.

[2] For more see: P. Buras and K. Pomorska, 'Poland and the European Neighbourhood Policy', *Foreign Policy in Dialogue*, vol. 6 no. 19, 2006, pp. 34-43; M. Natorski, 'Explaining Spanish and Polish Approaches to the European Neighbourhood Policy', *European Political Economy Review*, no. 7, 2007, pp. 63-101; M. Natorski, 'Poland's adaptation to CFSP: success or failure?', *OBS Working Paper* no. 61, 2004, Barcelona: IUEE.

[3] W. Cimoszewicz, 'The Eastern Dimension of the European Union. The Polish View', Speech at the Conference 'The EU Enlargement and Neighbourhood Policy', 20 February 2003, Warsaw.

[4] Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Non-paper with Polish proposals concerning policy towards new Eastern neighbours after EU enlargement, 2003, Warsaw.

[5] Ibid. This argument was clearly designed to accommodate Belarus within the assistance programs that would often be of benefit to Poland as well, such as those focused on managing the Polish-Belarusian border.

Nonetheless, Polish ideas were not included in the documents outlining the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP). Therefore, the attitude towards that EU policy has been lukewarm from the beginning and Polish diplomats were assigned the goal of putting the problems of the region onto the EU's agenda. As relations between the EU and its Eastern neighbours were developed through the ENP framework, it soon became a central element in the lobbying game for the shape of the future policy.

The initial idea behind the November 2002 *New Neighbours Initiative* (NNI), involving just three states, was much closer to Polish foreign policy than its successor, the ENP. In spite of this, the development of the policy and the initial Action Plans were officially welcomed as 'the first steps in the right direction.'[6] In this respect, Poland wished to interpret the ENP as a phase that would eventually bring the Eastern neighbours closer to the EU, but which would not stop there but also lead to potential membership. This was a very different perception from the initial assumptions behind the ENP, which was supposed to be a policy that did not tackle the membership perspective at all and was even perceived by some as a substitute for enlargement. The former Prime Minister of Poland, Marek Belka claimed that 'the Eastern neighbourhood of the Union, till recently, had been treated […] as a domain of the few most important western-European capitals, that were taking care of their special, separate, bilateral relations with Russia and hence remaining in the traditions of their diplomacies for centuries.'[7]

Polish lobbying led to the Eastern Dimension concept being discussed again in mid-2006. The desirability of using one *common* framework was questioned in the light of the inability to find *common* solutions regarding technical matters on a wide range of issues related to visa facilitation, free trade areas, flow of capital or finally the European perspective. The initiative of creating and Eastern Dimension had been discussed within the Visegrad Group since the summer of 2007. In December, European Council Conclusions invited the upcoming Presidencies to work on the development of the 'both southern and eastern dimension' of the ENP.[8]

Finally, the Poles together with the Swedish, tabled a joint proposal at the GAERC meeting on 26 May 2008 for the creation of the so-called 'Eastern Partnership' (EaP). It was aimed at six Eastern neighbours of the EU: Ukraine, Moldova, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia and Belarus. In the long-term, the approval for the initiative would serve the Polish goal of opening the door for prospective EU membership for its Eastern neighbours, finally differentiated from the EU's Southern neighbouring states. As emphasized by Polish Minister of Foreign Affairs, Radoslaw Sikorski, the countries encompassed by the initiative were 'European neighbours', while the

[6] Interview with the author (no. 26).

[7] M. Belka, Międzynarodowy Klub Dyskusyjny "Polityki" – Tezy wystąpienia Premiera Marka Belki, 16 marca 2005, Wrocław, available on the official website of the prime Minister's Office: http://kprm.gov.pl/print.php?id=4756_13570.htm.

[8] European Council, Brussels European Council. Presidency Conclusions, 16616/07, 2007, Brussels, p. 21.

countries in the South were just 'neighbours of the EU.'[9]

Additional impetus to the initiative was given by the conflict between Georgia and Russia in August 2008 and the EU's response during the Extraordinary European Council in September 2008. This was taken further and in December 2008 the Commission released a communication that eventually led to the Eastern Partnership Summit that met in Prague in May 2009. As admitted by the Polish officials, their proposals were rather more modest than revolutionary, with the initiative having a political meaning. As consensus among the member states is needed to change anything in issues related to visas or accession prospects, the 'step by step' approach was preferred, while the main novelty may be seen in encouraging multilateral cooperation between the countries in the region.[10]

First Successes and Disillusionments of Polish Diplomacy: Ukraine

One of the issues Poland was determined to bring to the Council's table was the future of the EU's relations with its immediate Eastern neighbours: Ukraine and Belarus. Polish policy towards Ukraine was predominantly built upon the geopolitical assumptions and the perceived necessity to counter-balance Russia in the region, or of 'repelling neo-imperial tendencies (real or perceived) on the other side of its eastern border.'[11] This thesis was evident in a claim by former President Aleksander Kwaśniewski, who stated, using rather direct language, that Russia was re-claiming its geopolitical role in the world, 'but why should it also re-gain 50 million Ukrainians?'[12]

The long-term strategic goal of endorsing Ukrainian EU membership underlines Polish policy inside the EU. This is closely related to 'upgrading' the level of EU-Ukraine relations. As an official from the Polish MFA claimed: 'It is true that Russia wished to be treated differently and we have no problems with that. But, we would not like to see a country such as Ukraine being treated worse, when it comes, for example, to regional or economic policies.'[13] The Polish position is that Ukraine should be allowed to negotiate its entry to the EU 'as soon as it is ready to do so'[14], contrary to, for example, the position of France. This is why any possible end or substantial transformation of the ENP, allowing for more privileged relations with Ukraine is appreciated by the Polish side.

The unexpected events in Ukraine, prompted by the presidential elections in November 2004, proved to be the first real test of whether Polish decision-makers would decide to take part in events on just a bilateral basis or whether they would go to Ukraine 'with Europe.' It ought to be recalled that Europeanisation is usually least expected

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[9] A. Lobjakas, 'EU: New Initiative Suggests East is Edging Out South in Neighbourhood Tussle', *RFE/RL Newsline*, 28 May 2008.
[10] Interview with the author (no. 48), Brussels, July 2009.
[11] K. Lang, 'Poland and the East', *SWP Comments 23*, http://www.swp-berlin.org/en/common/get_document.php?id=1301, 11 July 2005, p. 1.
[12] A. Kwaśniewski, An interview for *Polityka* on 18 December 2004, available on the President's official website: http://www.prezydent.pl/x.node?id2512106 (last accessed on 10 July 2006).
[13] Interview with the author (no. 5).
[14] Interview with the author (no. 26).

in relation to countries or issues of special national importance for the member states. There are examples of 'ring-fencing' (not involving the EU in these matters) or in other words, retaining the issues as '*domaines reservés.*'[15] This could be expected to happen with Polish-Ukrainian relations and particularly in relation to the way that Poland chose to deal with the Orange Revolution.

For more than a decade, Poland had established good contacts in Ukraine, including advisors to political parties, and therefore had access to reliable and updated information from the region. President Aleksander Kwaśniewski was asked to facilitate the talks by both sides of the 'Orange' conflict on 23 November 2004.[16] He provided an important answer to why Poland made such a great effort in order to engage the EU High Representative Solana in Ukraine. He asserted:

> The Polish contribution, conducted without any restrictions, could lead to the situation when the world would consider the idea of re-running the elections as the Polish action. (…) For Poland it was risky to take sides in a conflict with Russia here, Poland over there, Ukraine in the middle, with the splendid isolation of the EU. Therefore, without any delay, I started talks with the High Representative Solana, our MEPs exerted pressure and he understood he had to act.[17]

In light of the above, the willingness to 'internationalise' the events in Ukraine and involve the EU, may be understood in different ways. First, the involvement of the EU was perceived as a 'legitimising' factor for Polish national foreign policy. As the EU became involved, the Polish action could no longer be perceived as the mere pursuit of Polish geo-strategic goals. The Poles used the EU as an 'extension' to pursue a policy strategic to its national security. At the same time, however, they intended to raise their profile within the EU.

As Kwaśniewski explained,[18] even though some member states were irritated that Poland supported the Ukrainian case so strongly, at least they appreciated that Poland was 'not just one of the new member states that was busy only arranging its offices in Brussels – they also knew how to behave in this new environment.' Such a perception was confirmed not only by external observers[19] but by a diplomat from a lower level of decision-making, the Polish expert from the Council Working Group dealing with Eastern Europe. This clearly shows that 'uploading' was an important matter for the Poles in the case of Ukraine and the Orange

[15] Ian Manners and Richard Whitman (eds), *The Foreign Policies of European Union Member States*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), pp. 11 and 266.
[16] A. Kwaśniewski, An interview for *Polityka*, op. cit.
[17] Ibid.
[18] A. Kwaśniewski, An interview for *Tygodnik Powszechny*, available on the President's official website: http://www.prezydent.pl/x.node?id=2542166 (last accessed on 31 August 2009).
[19] Schneider, E. and Saurenbach, C. (2005) 'Kiev's EU ambitions', *SWP Comments 14*, http://www.swp-berlin.org/en/common/get_document.php?id=1232 (11 July 2006), p. 3.

Revolution. The EU was perceived by decision-makers as an important forum in which to raise the problem, instead of just dealing with it at the national level, and this is an important element in the Europeanisation process.

As a direct result of the Orange Revolution, the Poles and Lithuanians tried to pursue their long-term strategic goal and bring the issue of prospective membership for Ukraine to the EU table. As early as December 2004, the Polish Prime Minister Włodzimierz Cimoszewicz called for making a clear membership offer to Ukraine.[20] However, the idea still had too few supporters within the EU and therefore could not be implemented. Even though most reactions to the Polish role were positive, there were those who accused the Poles yet again, of 'revanchism' in Europe[21] and 'acting under the US influence', as the President of the European Parliament put it in reported private conversation.[22]

Polish participation in the Orange Revolution has been one of the biggest successes of its Eastern policy to date. However, the aftermath remains a mixed record for the Poles with a rather disillusioning experience of not being able to convince their partners to grant Ukraine the prospect of membership. At the same time, events showed how the CFSP was perceived by the Polish elites and how they tried to use it in pursuit of national policy goals. The public discourse reveals the belief that the European platform can provide legitimacy and sometimes also 'weight' to the national policy. Even though, as shown by the example of Ukraine, it comes with the cost of compromising one's own goals, the trade-off was perceived as worth accepting.

Reducing the 'Misfit' in the Case of Belarus

Belarus has also been a high item on the Polish political radar. There are several factors that underpin the Polish stance towards Belarus and which distinguish Poland from many of its EU partners. First of all, Poland holds direct borders with three post-Soviet states (Ukraine, Belarus and Lithuania) – direct neighbourhood requires sustaining some form of cooperation in areas such as border management, human transit, ecology and security.[23] The condition for effective border management is cooperation with the Belarusian border control authorities. Secondly, there is a large Polish minority in Belarus and that itself requires the Polish government to retain contacts with the Poles in Belarus. Finally, economic cooperation is quite substantial despite the political tensions. Therefore, Polish Eastern policy predominantly aims at supporting the sovereignty of the former Soviet

[20] Mathias Roth, 'European decision-making on the EU-Ukraine Action Plan after the Orange Revolution: the role of the new member states' in K. Kosior and A. Jurkowska (eds) *Beyond the borders: Ukraine and the European neighbourhood Policy* (Rzeszów: University of IT and Management, 2007), p. 57.

[21] C. Normann, 'Poland's involvement during the Orange Revolution in Ukraine: Between a Mediator and an Advocate' in K. Kosior and A. Jurkowska (eds.) *Beyond the borders: Ukraine and the European neighbourhood Policy* (Rzeszów: University of IT and Management, 2007), p. 171.

[22] A. Wilson, *Ukraine's Orange Revolution* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2005), p. 190.

[23] Interview with the author (no. 27).

republics, reforms and modernization 'in line with the European scenario.'[24]

Polish policy prior to accession was divergent from the official EU stance. Therefore, one would expect after the initial (coercive) adaptation, attempts to 'upload' the policy goals and influence the European policy so that it would converge with national policy. The Poles have always treated the EU's approach to Belarus in an emotional fashion, repeatedly criticising the EU for not doing enough. As claimed by one MFA official:

> apart from the political gestures since 1997, the EU has not decided to arrange relations with Belarus so that both sides would be satisfied. Instead, it took an approach of not accepting the undemocratic changes over there and reducing contacts to a minimum.[25]

The general belief that the policy towards Belarus should be conducted as independently as possible from relations with Moscow is complemented by the wish to encourage the EU to play a more 'pro-active' role in Belarus. One of the most well-known Polish experts has repeatedly criticised EU policy for being merely reactive to the policy of Lukashenka, which puts the latter in a comfortable situation. Instead, it was suggested that something should be done without waiting for a move from the Belarusian side.[26]

The most important issues that Polish diplomats have attempted to promote in the EU are: providing stronger support for political opposition, including specific persons; introducing more flexible instruments for financing aid programmes; increasing people-to-people contacts, especially through visa facilitation for Belarusians travelling to the EU; expanding the visa ban on the authorities and those involved in election frauds, as well as those involved in the repressions of the Union of Poles in Belarus (UPB). They also insisted that the EU needed to implement long-term planning in relation to its neighbour.

A case of policy adaptation took place in the area of formal contacts between the officials. It was EU policy that contacts at the ministerial level would be avoided, whereas, as admitted by Polish diplomats, this was not respected by the Polish side before joining the EU.[27] Nevertheless, after the accession this rule had to be fully implemented as part of the *acquis politique*.[28] Therefore, the Poles began a diplomatic campaign to change the EU's policy and soften its approach. Polish officials clearly saw the practical advantages of retaining formal contacts, but at the lower level[29] and developing cooperation with medium level officials and local authorities. The 'uploading' efforts brought results when the Council Conclusions from 22-23 November 2004 were negotiated.[30] Poland argued against abolishing ministerial contacts completely and instead argued for minimizing them,

[24] Ibid.
[25] Interview with the author (no. 5).
[26] M. Wągrowska, *Białoruś i jej sąsiedzi, Conference proceedings* (Warsaw: Centre for International Relations, 2006), p. 9.
[27] Interview with the author (no. 5).
[28] Ibid.
[29] Interview with the author (no. 26).
[30] GAERC, *General Affairs and External Relations Council Conclusions*, Brussels, 22-23 November 2004, Brussels.

which was accepted by the other member states. This case shows a clear circular nature of the Europeanisation process. First, Warsaw had to adjust its policy conduct to EU requirements, which created a misfit. As a result, once inside the Union, Polish diplomats made repeated efforts to reduce the misfit and introduce change in the Union's approach.

The Poles have always treated the issue of solidarity within the EU very seriously. Once a member, their expectation was that the other member states and the Commission would provide them with support in the case of conflicting situations with third parties. In practice, this did not seem to happen automatically. On the contrary, bringing bilateral problems into the EU forum was not always appreciated. This may be illustrated with the example of harassment of the Union of Poles in Belarus (UPB) and the way the problem was successfully elevated by Polish diplomats to discussions in the Council of the EU in the autumn of 2005.

Since 2005, the UPB has entered into a phase of conflict with the Belarus government, which did not recognise its authority. The Polish elites saw the necessity of involving the international environment into what can be well-perceived as a bilateral conflict. The Polish MFA issued a statement claiming that the cause of the crisis lies not in difficulties or problems in bilateral relations but in actions taken by the Belarusian authorities against their country's own citizens about the position of the UPB as the largest independent NGO in Belarus. The Poles subsequently argued in the Council that the case should not be considered by the EU as a minority issue, but should rather be seen in a broader context of a human rights violation by Lukashenka's regime. This was eventually accepted by other member states and included in the documents.

Conclusion

This article has illustrated a few attempts of policy uploading by the Polish diplomacy inside the EU. Even though not all of them were successful, Polish decision-makers decided to be active in the Council and use it as an arena for the 'internationalisation' of some national strategic goals. It shows that the shift in perceptions of the CFSP from a constraint to an opportunity for national foreign policy has occurred in favour of the latter. This is despite the often-expressed criticism of the CFSP as being ineffective and 'blurred' as a result of a compromise between the 27 member states.

Because of the strategic importance of the two Eastern neighbours, one could expect that Poland would attempt to 'ring-fence' these special relationships and keep them as a *domaine reservé* for bilateral relations. It was rather, however, the opposite that was noted. While in the case of Belarus, the Poles continued expressing quite harsh criticism of the EU's approach, they became actively involved in trying to change the current EU approach. In the case of Ukraine, the decision to go to the Orange Revolution with the EU, instead of limiting the participation to bilateral relations, is the best example of the Europeanisation of Polish foreign policy. At the same time, the issue of prospective EU membership for Ukraine remained a good example of a national long-term goal that Poland has been pursuing within the EU. As the goal itself

remained unchanged, there was a shift in strategies to a more pragmatic 'small-steps' approach. This has subsequently let to the establishment of the EaP, which has marked at least a symbolic success for Warsaw, which could now be turned into practical tool of cooperation.

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The European Union as a Human Rights Advocate: Elite Perceptions in Southeast Asia

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The role the European Union (EU) in the promotion of human rights and democratic rule outside its borders has attracted a great deal of attention both from scholarly and policy circles. EU efforts to strengthen these values internationally extend to a variety of tools, such as conditionality in the provision of trade preferences, aid to civil society in third countries, and diplomatic campaigns in support of specific human rights, to name but a few. The advocacy of human rights and democracy is not only a foreign policy of which the EU publicly prides itself: it is considered a central feature of European identity. However, little is known about how these policies are perceived outside the European continent. How prominent are EU pro-human rights policies in the image of the EU abroad? Do third countries regard the EU as the 'benevolent' power it considers itself to be?[31] Do they, on the contrary, view EU advocacy of human rights as interference in their internal affairs?

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[31] C. Portela, 'Community Policies with a Security Agenda: The Worldview of Commissioner for External Relations and European Neighbourhood Policy Benita Ferrero-Waldner', *RSCAS Working Paper* 2007/10 (San Domenico di Fiesole : Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies, 2007).

The present contribution examines the perception of the EU among stakeholders in Southeast Asia. This region is of particular interest because EU policies of promoting human rights and democratic governance have been pinpointed as an inhibiting factor in EU-Asian relations.[32] Back in the mid-nineties, some countries in the region challenged the universality of the human rights promoted by Western powers, thereby sparking a debate on the distinctiveness of 'Asian values.'[33] Moreover, a Southeast Asian state has been hit by one of the most stigmatising tools of European foreign policy: Burma/Myanmar is subject to an EU sanctions regime on the grounds of the leadership's refusal to hand over power to a democratically elected government and the persistence of human rights violations in the country. While the 'Asian values' controversy soon subsided, disagreements over how to respond to breaches of human rights and democratic rule in Burma persist until today.

Southeast-Asian lack of support for European policies towards Burma/Myanmar was evidenced by disagreements between the European and Asian partners over participation of Burma in Asia-Europe Meetings (ASEM).[34] Only after the repression of the monks uprising of September 2007 did Southeast Asian condemnation come close to EU official rhetoric.[35] Thus, the Burmese question embodies the tension between the principles of sovereignty and non-interference on the one hand and the protection of human rights and democratic principles on the other. Against this background, this short piece explores how Southeast Asian elites perceive the role of the EU in human rights promotion. It looks at some empirical evidence on stakeholders' perceptions in three Southeast Asian countries: Thailand, Singapore and Vietnam. The piece analyses the attitudes of stakeholders from four different elite groups – civil society, political, media and business elites – educated groups with often first-hand exposure to the EU. Unlike government representatives, these groups largely enjoy independence from the official government position. By examining the attitudes of stakeholders towards the human rights role of the EU, we expect to ascertain how the image of the EU and the notion of human rights are configured in these countries. Finally, the present piece intends to illuminate the poorly understood role of the EU outside its traditional areas of influence. Data were obtained from a database compiled by Dr Martin Holland and Dr Natalia Chaban from the University of Canterbury in the framework of the project 'The EU in the eyes of Asia.'[36] The database comprises strictly anonymous survey data from a questionnaire which did not include questions specifically on human rights or on Burma. Thus, the data feature spontaneous answers which capture the genuine prominence of these issues for respondents.

Thai Perceptions

Thai stakeholders emphasise the importance of the EU as a trading block. Thailand is aware of some degree of dependence on the EU. A Thai civil society member recognised: 'Thailand…depends on the EU in terms of

[32] G. Wiessala, 'Catalysts and Inhibitors – The role and Meaning of Human Rights in EU-Asia relations', CERC Working Paper1/2007.
[33] G. Langguth, 'Asian values revisited', Asia Europe Journal, 2003 (I).
[34] L.H. Yeo 'EU-ASEAN Relations and Policy Learning' in R. Balme and B. Bridges (eds) Europe-Asia Relations: Building Multilateralisms, (London: Palgrave, 2008).
[35] C.R. Hughes 'New Security Dynamics in the Asia Pacific: Extending Regionalism from Southeast to Northeast Asia', *The International Spectator*, vol. 42(3), 2007.

[36] Data for Thailand and Singapore were collected in 2005-06, while data for Vietnam were collected in 2008-09. See www.euperceptions.canterbury.ac.nz.

economy and trade and perhaps investment.' The EU is often regarded as benevolent, especially by civil society members: 'The EU is like a good friend for Thailand - a friend who can help in time of trouble.'[37] The role of the EU as a donor of humanitarian assistance contributed to the prestige it enjoys: 'The EU is great power in terms of humanitarian aid and supporting minority groups…[it] played a big role in providing aid to developing and poor countries and countries affected by natural disaster.'[38] The overall role of the EU in the human rights domain is seen in a positive light, as it is even described as a *great power* 'in terms of human rights and democracy.'[39] Asked about the issues he would like to see tackled in EU-Thailand relations, an industrialist claimed: 'I would like to see activities that…promote cooperation in the areas of investment, education, regulations and law [and] human rights.'

Burma was predominantly mentioned in the framework of the post-Nargis humanitarian relief efforts: 'after the cyclone Nargis in Burma and the earthquake in China, the EU has contributed financially to Burma and China.'[40] Perhaps the provision of humanitarian aid to Burma is emphasised because the EU's disapproval of the Burmese government is well know: 'the EU plays a major role in international politics such as human rights issues particularly in the Myanmar issue.'[41] Thai civil society acclaims the fact that EU aid is disbursed in a humanitarian emergency in spite of political disagreements: 'the EU helps not only Thailand but other poor countries.'[42] The ASEM stand-offs over the participation of Burma is hardly noticed due to the scarce appreciation of the forum. A political stakeholder commented: 'I don't think [ASEM] has any impact on Thailand at all. From what I know ASEM is just a forum in which countries come to talk but [make] no commitment.'

Singaporean Perceptions

Singapore's high level of wealth and standing as a commercial hub puts it on equitable terms with the EU in the economic domain. This situation has consequences for the perception of the EU's role in human rights: the existence of a political role is typically overlooked. The image of the EU as being exclusively about trade found in the Thai case is exacerbated in the case of Singaporean elites: the EU is influential 'mainly in the economic arena.'[43] A Singaporean civil society respondent went as far as claiming: 'The only variable is the economy.' The EU is widely respected as a major trading and investment partner: 'In some industries, individual member countries are world leaders'; 'it has lots of potential in terms of economic leadership.'[44] However, its trade policy is sometimes presented in a negative light: 'they are only outward looking when it comes to economic opportunities',[45] or even viewed as threatening by some respondents who point to the risk of adoption of economic protectionism by the EU.[46]

Their attitudes reveal that Singaporean stakeholders engage intensively with the EU. Its role in environmental protection is openly lauded: 'The EU has got very strong emphasis on environmental issues. They take the Kyoto Protocol very seriously'.[47] Stakeholders across all professional groups express admiration for the regional integration model offered by the EU. A civil society respondent described the EU as a 'great

[37] Civil society respondent, Thailand.
[38] Ibid.
[39] Ibid.
[40] Ibid.
[41] Business respondent, Thailand.
[42] Ibid.
[43] Civil society respondent, Singapore.
[44] Political respondents, Singapore.
[45] Media respondent, Singapore.
[46] Political and civil society respondents, Singapore.
[47] Civil society respondent, Singapore.

experiment.' These laudatory attitudes co-exist with more negative assessments. Some point to the difficulty of acting together: 'It failed its most recent test in the break-up of Yugoslavia and has had nothing important to offer in global affairs for the past decade.'[48] In the same vein, a civil society member uttered: 'some parts [are] greater than the whole.'[49]

In the field of human rights, the EU is regarded as a strong actor, even as 'a leader'[50]: 'on issues like human rights, democracy and press and religious freedom the EU is…powerful'; 'the EU does play some leadership role in international politics, in areas of humanitarian assistance, human rights.'[51] The EU is often described with the term 'normative', a notion which denotes an unusual familiarity with the scholarly discourse on European foreign policy: 'The EU is powerful in the normative realm'[52]; 'the EU is an economic, diplomatic and normative leader.'[53]

A number of respondents brought up the question of Burma and its membership in the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) as an obstacle in bilateral relations. A political respondent named 'economic protectionism and Myanmar in ASEAN' as the most significant issues in EU-Singapore relations, thereby putting the Burmese question on a par with the abovementioned fear of protectionist policies. The contentious Burmese membership of ASEAN was discussed by a civil society respondent: 'we do not have major issues with the EU, not even on trade; [the] only major political issue is Myanmar's membership in ASEAN.' The same respondent recognises the difficulty of solving this problem: it's 'hard to kick them out of ASEAN!'

Vietnamese Perceptions

Vietnamese stakeholders display some degree of scepticism regarding the EU's ability to become a world leader and to compete economically with the US: 'It is difficult for the EU to become a leading political actor in international politics as the member states do not often agree with each other about political and military issues.'[54] However, Vietnamese stakeholders display a conspicuously positive attitude towards the EU. A business respondent characterised the EU as 'a new union satisfying all the requirements of the twenty-first century.' The perception of the EU's power is unusually enthusiastic: 'the EU is one of the most important actors in solving international issues'[55]; 'the EU leads the world by global policies, especially with developing countries by commerce policies. As a main source of development aid and economic power, the EU plays an important role in shaping world order.'[56]

The remarkably positive view of the EU among these elites can be explained by the fact that Vietnam is currently experiencing growth thanks to its shift to a market economy. The role of the EU is hailed as an entity crucially partaking in this bonanza. An industrialist claims: 'some businesses [attempting to] expand to the American market…neglected the EU market. However, they have just realised this and focus on maintaining and developing…EU markets.' The ASEM process, hardly noticed elsewhere in the region, is regarded as a vehicle aiding the burgeoning economy of Vietnam: 'The ASEM process improves the position of Vietnam in its relations with the EU. This process also helps the EU know

[48] Civil society respondent, Singapore.
[49] Ibid.
[50] Political respondent, Singapore.
[51] Media respondents, Singapore.
[52] Political respondent, Singapore.
[53] Civil society respondent, Singapore.
[54] Business respondent, Vietnam.
[55] Ibid.
[56] Political respondent, Vietnam.

more about the potential of Vietnam and create a greater belief in Vietnamese capacity in the market economy.'[57] The troubled relationship with the US also aids the image of the EU. According to a civil society respondent, 'relations between Vietnam and EU members are not historically negative and complicated in comparison with America and China.' Eastern Europeans countries, formerly socialists and nowadays newcomers to the EU, are viewed as 'old friends'[58]; 'Because of their traditional ties with Vietnam, they will help to foster relations between Vietnam and EU.'[59]

References to the role of the EU in promoting human rights were particularly scarce. A civil society respondent pointed out that democracy and human rights issues in current Vietnam-EU relations have the most impact on Vietnam. Political stakeholders do not regard them as an obstacle to the upgrading of the relations, again as a result of the implicit comparison with the US: 'Vietnam-EU relations are now developing regardless of plenty of controversies over democracy and human rights, which are less intensive than those with the United States.'[60] A Vietnamese journalist complained that EU news became difficult to sell when it concerned European Parliament actions about religious freedom and human rights.

Colonial Legacies?

Does the memory of colonial ties constitute a prism through which Southeast Asian stakeholders view the EU's attempts to promote democracy and human rights? Different attitudes can be detected in the perceptions of stakeholders, which appear to be primarily determined by the professional activity of the respondent. A Singaporean political stakeholder, while somewhat distancing herself from the objectives promoted by the EU, admires its means of influencing third countries: 'The EU…has not sought to impose a certain mindset on others…yet at the same time the EU does strongly advocate certain things like…human rights and environmental issues.' By contrast, a senior member of the Singaporean media feels that the colonial past constitutes an impediment to European-Asian relations: '[W]e see Europe as comprising of countries that were former colonial powers and there is this aversion to Europeans because of this. The Europeans think that because they were former colonial powers they have a special place in the hearts of Asians. On the contrary I think that Asians look at Europeans with a lot of suspicion.' Allegations of neo-colonialist attitudes are pervasive among journalists: 'There is…a lingering, if perhaps slowly dying, belief that western culture is somehow superior.'[61] Perhaps the exception is Vietnam, where historical ties with Europe are often alluded to in a positive light: 'Vietnam and EU have traditional relations of commerce and culture.'[62]

Conclusion

The analysis reveals that the dispute surrounding the Burmese participation in ASEM is not a significant concern to stakeholders. While there is awareness of the EU's advocacy of human rights and democratic principles, EU criticism of the Burmese situation does not feature prominently in the minds of the elites. Thus, the disagreement appears to remain circumscribed to diplomatic circles.

In the perception of the EU by Southeast Asian stakeholders, the applauded role of the EU in human rights is not connected with the diplomatic quarrels over Burmese participation in ASEM.

[57] Business respondent, Vietnam.
[58] Political respondent, Vietnam.
[59] Civil society respondent, Vietnam.
[60] Political respondent, Vietnam.
[61] Media respondent, Singapore.
[62] Business respondent, Vietnam.

Both issues are consistently framed as separate questions. While some respondents complained about 'neo-colonial' undertones in the EU's efforts at promoting democracy and human rights, they did not allude to the Burmese question. Whenever Burma surfaced among the concerns of the interviewed stakeholders, it was portrayed as an irritant in EU-ASEAN relations. Respondents did not connect diplomatic difficulties explicitly to the EU's human rights policies and omitted references to human rights, sovereignty, or to an alleged value clash. In turn, the numerous respondents who mentioned the vocal human rights policy of the EU seldom made explicit reference to Burmese membership in ASEAN. No concerns about the impact of sanctions on the Burmese population were recorded.

Stakeholders did not regard the disagreements surrounding the Burmese situation as an issue directly affecting bilateral relations: 'there is no direct conflict of interest with the EU'; 'I can only presume that the relationship must be quite cordial. I have not read any adverse reports.'[63] Singaporean elites, while generally characterised by a pronounced scepticism vis-à-vis the EU, display a diverse picture of EU perceptions throughout the four elite groups. Vietnamese stakeholders, dazzled and encouraged by flourishing trade with Europe and the rapid development of the economy, hardly notice the Burmese issue. Among Thai elites, the absence of strong opinions on the EU-Burmese dispute might be due to the poor appreciation of the ASEM process, but it certainly owes a great deal to the EU's generous humanitarian assistance to Burma. Thai civil society feels there is little reason to protest about an actor which does not *cause* suffering to the population, but rather *alleviates* it. The modest engagement of the elites with the Burmese issue is symptomatic of an almost exclusive preoccupation with domestic arenas and the main geo-strategic powers in the region (US and China), perhaps coupled with a weak common ASEAN identity. From that perspective, both Burma and the EU tend to be 'secondary coordinates' in the stakeholders' worldview.

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[63] Civil society respondents, Singapore.