THE POWER OF THE EUROPEAN UNION IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

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ABSTRACT
As part of a broader EU strategy for cooperation in the Indo-Pacific, the EU has been pursuing more proactive policies and closer ties with the Southeast Asian region. In the context of the EU's increasing presence in Southeast Asia, this paper aims to explore the power of the EU in the region from both theoretical and practical lenses. In order to achieve that, the paper firstly discusses Edward Carr's conception of power and how it can be applied to determine the types of power of the EU. It then explores the EU's influence in Southeast Asia and how it is compatible with the types of power identified, namely market power, normative power, and security power. The paper finally offers some concluding views on the extent to which the EU exercises its power in Southeast Asia and finds that the credibility of the types of power identified is highly dependent on views and perceptions of the region.
Keywords: *European Union, EU, Southeast Asia, ASEAN, Power, Economic Power, Normative Power, Security Power.*

1. Introduction

Over decades of existence and development, the European Union (EU) has always been and remains a uniquely economic-political entity that has attracted scholarly attention worldwide not only because of its supranational nature but also because of its increasing influence on the international stage. There have been various discussions, disagreements, and confusions as to what kinds of power the EU possesses, whether such powers are increasing or on the wane in particular contexts, and how the EU can most effectively exercise them. As the international context has grown more competitive and turbulent, it has become more challenging for both scholars and the EU itself to define its global role in general and its type of power in particular.

As mentioned, discussions of the power of the EU account for a large proportion of the research on the international role of this actor. Among which, more than one concept has been put forward to assess the type of power that is most suitable for the EU: Decades of European integration have demonstrated the significant position of the EU as a trading partner, an internal market, and one of the world's biggest economies, which explains why many scholars view the EU as a "trade power" (Meunier & Nicolaidis, 2006), a "market power" (Bradford, 2012; Damro, 2012) or an "economic power" (Donici et al., 2010). Considering the EU's acceptance of the necessity of cooperation with others, and its concentration on non-military - which includes economic, diplomatic, and cultural - instruments to pursue national and international objectives, numerous papers and articles insist that the EU should be characterized as either a "soft power" (Volpi, 2011), "normative power" (Manners, 2002; Manners, 2006; Whitman, 2011; Kolimowska, 2015), or "civilian power" (Ozer, 2012). Moreover, there are other authors who argue that the EU has become and remains a "middle power" in both size and position, as it is unable to compete militarily as a world power, and often finds itself between the superpowers (Haine & Salloum, 2021). One of the less popular views on the subject believes in the EU's ability to leverage military power, or more broadly, its ability to become an influential security actor in international affairs, thus arguing that to a certain extent, the EU can exercise "military power" (Ramadani, 2015; Berisa et al., 2023). Some more optimistic views suggest that the EU could well become a "global power" (Maull, 2007) or even a "superpower" (Moravcsik, 2009) not only in international economic relations but also as a political, diplomatic, and security player.

The simultaneous existence of such multiple names, with meanings that may be similar or completely different, to refer to the

EU's power has shown the complexity and controversy not only in understanding the concept of power, but also in perceiving the EU's influence in specific contexts, and on specific actors. One of the typical examples is the diverse views on the role and position of the EU in Southeast Asia, which will be analyzed further in this paper.

Relations between the EU and Southeast Asia have evolved on many fronts in recent years due to several converging interests. On 16 September 2021, the EU strategy for cooperation in the Indo-Pacific was adopted to increase the EU's engagement in the region, as "the futures of the EU and the Indo-Pacific are inextricably linked given the interdependence of the economies and the common global challenges" (European Commission, 2021). As part of the wider Indo-Pacific, Southeast Asia has vital geostrategic importance and presents both significant opportunities and challenges for the EU. Therefore, forging the EU's closer engagement in Southeast Asia region in general, and with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in particular, has been a central part of Europe's strategy (Kliem, 2022). Even though the EU already has a long-standing partnership with ASEAN that was officially formalized in 1977, the Indo-Pacific strategy is still considered an important turning point that marks the EU's increasing presence in Southeast Asia.

With the EU pursuing more proactive policies and closer ties with the Southeast Asian region, understanding the types of power that the EU has and the circumstances in which the EU can successfully exercise such powers in the region will be of particular importance to scholars and policymakers from both sides. The paper therefore firstly discusses Edward Carr's conception of power and how it can be applied to determine the types of power of the EU. It then explores the EU's influence in Southeast Asia and how it is compatible with the types of power identified, namely market power, normative power, and security power. The paper finally offers some concluding views on the extent to which the EU exercises its power in Southeast Asia and finds that the credibility of the types of power identified is highly depend on views and perceptions of the region.

The Power of the EU: From Theoretical Perspectives

Scholars on international relations in general and European studies in particular keep having different views in their analyses of power. However, most views are more or less based on the common understanding that power is the ability to control and make others do things they otherwise would not, or to prevent them from doing things we do not want them to do. One of the most common classifications distinguishes between hard power and soft power.

While hard power employs means of military force or other coercive strategies such as threats of force or economic sanctions to achieve desired outcomes, soft power seeks to achieve desired outcomes not with force, but rather through the power of attraction or persuasion (Nye, 1990). When applied to international relations, the US is often seen as an example of hard power, while the EU is more associated with soft power.

Nevertheless, with the growing complexity of the international context, there have been many reconceptualizations and reclassifications in the theory of power, especially when it comes to the power of the EU. The concept of "soft power" seems no longer sufficient and accurate when talking about the EU's role and influence in international politics. Instead, as mentioned above, scholars have talked about various types of power that the EU potentially possesses. However, within the scope of this paper, three types of power in international politics that are famously distinguished by Edward Carr - a historian and classic realist, namely military power, economic power, and power over opinion, will be analyzed and applied to the specific case of the EU's presence in Southeast Asia.

Military Power

The first type of power is military power, which is emphasized by realists in general and Carr in particular as the essential feature for the state. For realists, power is

crucial to ensure the survival and security of the state and has traditionally been defined narrowly as military power (Schmidt, 2021). Since realists associate power with military force, it is common for those who embrace such a realistic approach to be more pessimistic about the EU's global role. Indeed, if the ability to act globally depends on the ability to exert military power, then the EU is losing its capacity and power while other actors are gaining (Major & Molling, 2016).

The EU's military weakness is not anything new. In 1991, the then-Belgian Minister of Foreign Affairs famously retorted that "Europe was an economic giant, a political dwarf, and a military worm". For a long time, this saying has often been cited both by academia and politicians to emphasize the EU's limited military power. Even though the EU leadership has pushed for a common defense policy for years, and as stated in Article 42 (1) of the Lisbon Treaty, the EU is given "the operational capacity based on civil and military assets", there is no EU army and defense remains exclusively a matter for member states, while the EU relies heavily on the US and NATO for such matters.

As part of the Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP), by 2023, the EU has launched and run over 40 civilian and military operations, of which only 15 are military, yet none has been conducted in Southeast Asia (EEAS, 2023). Despite being actually prepared for military action and having the means to reach independent military capabilities, the EU seems reluctant to use them. Besides, since national interests are on the way, it is still far from having the EU member states consent to creating a European army. Hence, it is reasonable not to believe that the EU can possibly have a strong military power, as it places too much emphasis on civilian means and is too state-centric to form and support a collective military power (Basdeki, 2016). Moreover, the fact that the EU has only been active in Southeast Asia through diplomatic and civilian means that indirectly enhance security also implies that even if a European army was possible, military initiatives would potentially not be part of the EU foreign policy in such region.

Economic Power

The second type of power is economic power. While realists see the importance of economic power principally in its supporting role for military power, liberals argue that military power has lost its importance in contemporary international politics - as globalization and market integration is strongly underway in every part of the world - and thus see the economic power as the fundamental vehicle of power. From this liberal perspective, the size of the EU's internal market can be seen as a source of power that the EU can leverage to strengthen its global influence (Damro, 2012).

In fact, the EU itself has always been aware of such power of its. In the joint statement by the presidents of the European Commission, the European Parliament, and the European Council in 2020, the EU leaders strongly emphasized that the EU can deal with global crises and issues while no country alone can because it has "the largest internal market in the world" and a "considerable, collective economic power in discussions with allies and partners" (European Commission, 2020). Decades of European integration have generated the control of the EU over access to Europe's large internal market. Since the 1958 Treaty of Rome, the EU has enjoyed exclusive competence in external customs and trade policy, possessing the sole right to determine tariffs and negotiate external trade agreements. The deepening of EU integration has subsequently expanded the EU's jurisdiction and built the EU's capacity to manage and control the market. Being described as an "economic giant" and the largest trading power in the world, the EU has not only the jurisdiction and capacity to control its large internal market but also the power to regulate global markets (Donici et al., 2010; Bradford, 2012; Damro, 2012).

The importance of the EU's economic power, or "market power" has been widely recognized by scholars on EU external action, who assert that the EU's ability to leverage its internal market or its economic strength externally forms the core of its international

power, as it allows the EU to affect other countries' policies and positions through its capacity to manipulate market access. Given these central characteristics, the EU as a market power has undoubtedlye gained popularity among both politicians and academics concerned about the EU's global role.

Power over Opinion

According to Carr's conceptual division of power, the third type of power is power over opinion. He believes that in the pursuit of power, though military and economic artifacts will be used, it is the art of persuasion that is essential for a political leader along with propaganda to obtain power (Carr, 1988). In other words, power over opinion is associated with, and can even be seen as, the power of attraction or persuasion. Both liberals and constructivists believe in such a type of power, which is based on the ability to attract and persuade. Scholars today sometimes refer to it as "soft power" or "cultural power", yet in the EU context, the concept of "normative power" is more commonly used and acknowledged due to the common views that the EU's power rests on persuasion and the ability to shape discourses (Manners, 2002; Manners, 2006; Whitman, 2011; Kolimowska, 2015).

The normative power concept has been widely discussed since the early 2000s when it was developed by Ian Manners. In his work, Manners chooses to conceptualize "Normative Power Europe" and refocus on the ideations and power of norms, which the EU has been using in order to extend itself internationally. The notion of a normative power Europe is therefore associated with the EU's international identity, which is, according to the EU itself, formed by the principles of democracy, rule of law, social justice, and respect for human rights (Manners, 2002). Such principles were first made explicit in the 1973 Copenhagen Declaration on European identity and were later constitutionalized in the Treaty on European Union. Furthermore, in the 2003 European Security Strategy the EU refers to itself as a "formidable force for good in the world" (Council, 2003). In 2004, the EU launched its European Neighborhood Policy with a view to living up to its image as a 'force for good' in its dealings with neighboring countries (European Commission, 2004). Two decades later, the EU has still been forging such an international role as a 'force for good' - a champion for democracy, human rights, multilateralism, free trade, climate change action, and sustainable development.

It is quite certain that the EU identifies itself as a normative power, and at least tries to act in a manner befitting it's given conception, through the codification of its norms as binding agreements. For instance, it influenced its member states through the assertion of a certain number of core values and principles in its constitutive treaties, such as respect for human rights, freedom, democracy, equality, or the rule of law; when dealing with third countries, either through trade or technical assistance, the EU specifies conditionality clauses that bind the recipients to practice its norms (Manners, 2006). Some other notable examples that demonstrate the significance of the EU's norms are its insistence that new members must comply with its constitutional norms, which can be seen through the EU's political conditionality to Turkey's democratization as part of the accession process; as well as the breaking of the deal between EU and Russia on the South Stream because of the conditionality demands of the EU (Basdeki, 2016). Despite the fact that to some extent there is a possibility of the creation of an autonomous European armed force, as well as the controversies and conflicting views surrounding whether the EU can be assessed as a normative power (Hardwick, 2011), it seems hard not to acknowledge the EU's desire and effort to diffuse its norms worldwide through diplomatic, economic and civilian means. Thus, this paper argues that it is possible to consider the EU as a normative power and understand its limits in the international arena.

Security Power: A New Type of Power for the EU?

As analyzed, this paper agrees with the views of many scholars, as well as the EU itself, that the EU possesses and exercises effectively two out of three types of power according to Carr's classification: economic power and

power over opinion, which can be translated into “market power” and “normative power” in the EU context. It is quite certain that the EU’s power in Southeast Asia is not military power. However, this paper argues that there is a third type of power that should be recognized when considering EU foreign policy in general and its Indo-Pacific strategy in particular: A type of power that does not focus on military instruments and activities but also aims to ensure a vital element that, according to the mainstream understanding of international relations, is often associated with and defined by military power, namely security.

In the traditional realist explanation, security is concerned only with the security of the state from external threats in the military realm, hence increasing the military power of states are necessary requirement to ensure their security in the international system. However, it is now widely acknowledged that the concept of security consists of much more than that, which includes freedom from both traditional military and non-military dimensions of threats (Shameer, 2017). Such a wider view of security is also affirmed by the EU in its Indo-Pacific strategy, in which the EU acknowledges new security challenges, as well as seeks to promote open and rules-based regional security architecture and assist its partners in the region in coping with both traditional and non-traditional security issues (European Commission, 2021). Such perception of the EU about its role in global security lays the ground for a new type of power that the EU potentially has in the region, which is “security power”.

Looking at an extensive amount of pre-existing literature relating to the development of the EU as a security actor (Hwee, 2009; Renard, 2014; Viilup, 2015), it is quite certain that the EU's security power is neither something new nor a concept that only exists in theory. In fact, despite being recognized first and foremost by the international community for its economic and normative power, the EU has actually been putting much effort into developing and strengthening its role as a security actor since the 1990s with the creation of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP). With the adoption of the European Security Strategy in 2003, the EU identified a range of security threats and challenges, established principles, and set clear objectives for advancing the EU’s security interests, all of which have been reinforced even more in the following years (Council, 2003). Entering into force in 2009, the Lisbon Treaty officially strengthened the EU’s security role by creating the post of the EU High Representative and the European External Action Service (EEAS), which give the EU “one representative” and “one voice” in foreign policy. With such developments, along with the Indo-Pacific strategy that extends the EU’s influence in Southeast Asia beyond economic domains, the EU can now act as an evolving security actor with the ability to respond coherently to regional crises. However, questions still remain about whether or not the EU can exercise security power through its engagement in Southeast Asia.

To Practical Assessments: The EU’s Influence in Southeast Asia

As part of the wider Indo-Pacific, Southeast Asia has vital geostrategic importance for the EU, hence forging closer ties with Southeast Asian countries and increasing presence in the region has recently been one of the EU's strategic priorities. Considering the EU’s important role in Southeast Asia as not only a strong economic player but also a major development aid donor, one could be quite certain about the significance of the EU in the region. Such an optimistic view is further confirmed when looking back at the longstanding relations between the EU and ASEAN, which is a solid foundation for the EU's increasing influence in Southeast Asia. Since its official establishment in 1977, despite many ups and downs, both regions have developed a comprehensive dialogue that encompasses both economic and political components.

One consideration that should be taken into account when assessing the power of the EU in Southeast Asia, as well as in any other region, is that the type of power the EU represents does not depend merely on objective resources it has, or how it identifies itself. Since power is the ability to control and influence others, subjective perceptions of

those "others" can say a lot about whether or not someone actually has power over them. For instance, insofar as the EU is able to gain acceptance by Southeast Asian countries or ASEAN as one of the most important trading partners or a role model, then it would have market power or normative power respectively. Without such acceptance, there is not enough credible basis for such power claims. In other words, even though the EU sees itself as a global power, it is not necessarily how it is seen in target countries (Fischer, 2012). Therefore, closer attention will be paid to perceptions of Southeast Asian countries, or ASEAN, about the EU's power in the region.

The EU as a Market Power

For decades, trade has been a major growth engine for Southeast Asia. The region shares, in varying degrees and at different points, some of the world's highest rates of economic growth and can be described as a force for the global economy. As a region that comprises fast-growing economies, Southeast Asia is now not only a dynamic market that ranks as one of the top economies in the world but also a hub for foreign direct investment (FDI) and manufacturing (Djalal, 2022). Hence it is no surprise that on economic grounds, Southeast Asia has emerged as the EU's priority on its policy agenda.

The ASEAN countries as a whole are in fact the EU's third-largest trading partner outside Europe, after the US and China, with trade in goods amounted to €272.4 billion in 2022 and €252.5 billion in 2023. As a longstanding dialogue partner of ASEAN since 1977, the EU has also emerged as a major development partner for ASEAN and stands as the region's third largest trading partner and FDI investor, with its FDI stocks into ASEAN accounted for €400.1 billion in 2022 (European Commission, 2024).

In order to ensure better access for the EU to the dynamic ASEAN market, negotiations for a region-to- region free trade agreement (FTA) between the EU and ASEAN were launched in 2007. However, in 2009, after seven negotiating rounds, both sides agreed to pause negotiations and give way to a bilateral format of negotiations (ASEAN, 2024). Negotiations with Singapore and Malaysia were launched in 2010, with Vietnam in 2012, with Thailand in 2013, with the Philippines in 2015 and with Indonesia in 2016. So far, the EU has completed negotiations for FTAs with Singapore and Vietnam, while negotiations with Malaysia and the Philippines are currently on hold (European Commission, 2024). Such FTAs between the EU and ASEAN countries can serve as building blocks towards a future region-to-region agreement, which remains a long-term objective for both sides.

According to the State of Southeast Asia Survey, the EU has also been viewed as the fifth most influential economic power in the region, ahead of middle powers such as Australia, India, South Korea, and the United Kingdom (Seah et al.,2024) (see Table 1).

Table 1: Country/regional organization viewed as the most influential economic power

Country	ASEAN		Australia		China		The European Union		India		Japan		Republic of Korea		The United States		The United Kingdom	
	2023	2024	2023	2024	2023	2024	2023	2024	2023	2024	2023	2024	2023	2024	2023	2024	2023	2024
ASEAN	15.0%	16.8%	2.7%	0.5%	59.9%	59.5%	4.2%	2.8%	0.7%	0.6%	4.6%	3.7%	1.0%	1.0%	10.5%	14.3%	1.3%	0.8%
BN	10.0%	18.2%	5.8%	1.3%	44.2%	63.6%	7.5%	1.3%	4.2%	1.3%	12.5%	2.6%	2.5%	0.0%	6.7%	7.8%	6.7%	3.9%
KH	19.4%	11.1%	0.7%	0.5%	75.4%	59.8%	1.5%	4.8%	0.0%	1.1%	0.0%	1.1%	0.0%	0.0%	2.2%	20.1%	0.7%	1.6%
ID	19.0%	28.3%	0.0%	1.1%	71.1%	54.0%	1.7%	1.1%	0.0%	0.0%	3.3%	5.3%	0.0%	2.3%	5.0%	7.9%	0.0%	0.0%
LA	29.9%	8.1%	16.8%	0.0%	20.6%	77.5%	16.8%	4.4%	0.0%	0.0%	6.5%	0.6%	1.9%	1.3%	5.6%	8.1%	1.9%	0.0%
MY	12.1%	16.9%	0.8%	0.0%	65.3%	66.7%	2.4%	0.4%	0.0%	1.3%	2.4%	4.4%	1.6%	0.4%	13.7%	9.3%	1.6%	0.4%
MM	4.3%	6.9%	0.9%	0.0%	72.2%	59.8%	1.7%	5.8%	0.9%	0.5%	5.2%	5.8%	0.0%	1.6%	13.9%	19.6%	0.9%	0.0%
PH	25.3%	26.0%	1.0%	0.0%	36.4%	30.7%	2.0%	3.7%	0.0%	0.5%	7.1%	8.8%	1.0%	1.9%	26.3%	27.9%	1.0%	0.5%
SG	10.6%	14.7%	0.5%	1.1%	70.7%	59.7%	1.4%	0.4%	1.0%	0.4%	1.9%	2.6%	0.5%	0.0%	13.5%	20.5%	0.0%	0.7%
TH	8.3%	8.5%	0.7%	1.0%	74.3%	70.6%	2.8%	3.5%	0.7%	0.5%	3.5%	2.5%	0.0%	1.5%	9.0%	11.4%	0.7%	0.5%
VN	11.0%	29.0%	0.0%	0.0%	69.1%	53.0%	4.4%	3.0%	0.0%	0.5%	3.7%	3.0%	2.2%	1.0%	9.6%	10.5%	0.0%	0.0%

Source: The State of Southeast Asia 2024 Survey Report

Of course, the statistics reveal several issues behind Southeast Asian perceptions of the EU's market power. Firstly, perceptions of the EU as the most influential economic power in Southeast Asia remain low with 2.8% of regional respondents, especially in comparison with the top three significant economic players in the region, namely China (59.5%), ASEAN (16.8%) and the US (14.3%). Secondly, there is a lowering in perceptions of the economic influence of the EU, as 4.2% of the regional respondents welcome the EU's growing economic influence in 2023, but only 2.8% hold the same view in 2024. However, putting these aside, the EU still maintains its role as one of the most influential economic partners in the region.

In short, despite the absence of an FTA with ASEAN, the EU maintains a robust economic presence in Southeast Asia. As ASEAN's third-largest trading partner and third-largest source of FDI, the EU has been asserting its economic position in the region, which remains the most important factor shaping the EU's role and influence in Southeast Asia. From the Southeast Asian perspective, the EU is also ranked as the fifth most influential economic power in the region. Therefore, the paper argues that the EU has somewhat effectively exercised its market power in Southeast Asia.

The EU as a Normative Power

The EU's normative power in Southeast Asia is firstly expressed by the ability to serve as a normative cooperative model within the international community. The European integration embodies an unprecedented experience of the peaceful and successful emergence of a regional economic and political entity. Such accomplishment confers upon the European Union a high credibility for the rest of the world. The EU hence has undoubtedly inspired other regional integration projects, and the ASEAN is no exception (Cohen-Tanugi, 2021).

Similar to market power, the EU's normative power is quite visible in Southeast Asia. The Indo-Pacific Strategy contains explicit expressions of the EU's leadership vision, in which the EU promotes itself as a normative power in the region - a defender of multilateralism, good governance, human rights, and the universally agreed commitments to achieve the goals of the Paris Agreement on Climate Change and the Sustainable Development Goals. In pursuit of its vision, the EU has elaborated its idea-based leadership by specifying seven priority areas in the Strategy - sustainable and inclusive prosperity; green transition; ocean governance; digital governance and partnerships; connectivity; security and defense; human security - that it puts on the agenda with the goal of shaping the norms, rules, and practices that it wants to see prevail in these areas (European Commission, 2021). On the external front, as part of its Indo-Pacific Strategy, the EU has sought to cooperate with like-minded Southeast Asian partners to create stable relations, set standards, and project international norms, such as sustainable development, social justice, good governance, the rule of law, and human rights. These shared values, including multilateralism and commitment to a rules-based order, remain the cornerstone of the ASEAN-EU strategic partnership (Michalski & Parker, 2024).

It is shown in the State of Southeast Asia Survey that the EU consistently remains the most reputable global actor committed to "doing the right thing" in the wider interests of the global community (see Table 2). The region's levels of trust towards the EU remains high (41.5%) in 2024, despite having significantly dropped by 9.5 percentage points in comparison with the statistics in 2023. The region's positive view towards the EU is largely attributed to its leadership in championing human rights, climate change, and international law, which is often associated with its normative power role (Seah et al.,2024) (see Table 3).

Table 2: Levels of trust in the EU to "do the right thing" in the wider interests of the global community

Country	No Confidence		Little Confidence		No Comment		Confident		Very Confident	
	2023	2024	2023	2024	2023	2024	2023	2024	2023	2024
ASEAN	5.2%	7.1%	23.9%	27.8%	19.9%	23.7%	40.3%	35.7%	10.7%	5.8%
BN	3.3%	10.4%	15.8%	36.4%	48.3%	35.1%	21.7%	16.9%	10.8%	1.3%
KH	0.7%	7.9%	10.4%	29.1%	2.2%	15.9%	36.6%	40.2%	50.0%	6.9%
ID	12.4%	14.0%	35.5%	40.0%	14.9%	14.7%	33.1%	27.2%	4.1%	4.2%
LA	0.9%	8.8%	5.6%	16.9%	28.0%	40.0%	63.6%	27.5%	1.9%	6.9%
MY	4.0%	9.8%	27.4%	32.9%	21.0%	25.8%	40.3%	28.9%	7.3%	2.7%
MM	15.7%	5.3%	46.1%	27.0%	21.7%	26.5%	14.8%	34.9%	1.7%	6.3%
PH	2.0%	2.8%	22.2%	22.3%	14.1%	11.6%	51.5%	54.4%	10.1%	8.8%
SG	5.8%	5.5%	27.9%	37.7%	15.4%	19.4%	41.8%	33.3%	9.1%	4.0%
TH	2.8%	4.5%	26.4%	22.4%	18.1%	24.9%	44.4%	43.3%	8.3%	5.0%
VN	4.4%	2.0%	21.3%	13.0%	15.4%	23.0%	55.1%	50.5%	3.7%	11.5%

Source: The State of Southeast Asia 2024 Survey Report

Table 3: Reasons to trust the EU

Country	I respect Europe and admire its civilisation and culture		My country's political culture and worldview are compatible with the EU's		The EU has vast economic resources and the political will to provide global leadership		The EU is a responsible stakeholder that respects and champions international law		The EU's stance on environment, human rights, and climate change is an asset for global peace and security	
	2023	2024	2023	2024	2023	2024	2023	2024	2023	2024
ASEAN	5.4%	9.4%	6.4%	4.8%	19.1%	25.8%	30.9%	28.3%	38.1%	31.7%
BN	10.3%	21.4%	17.9%	0.0%	15.4%	14.3%	12.8%	28.6%	43.6%	35.7%
KH	8.6%	7.9%	3.4%	6.7%	7.8%	42.7%	33.6%	14.6%	46.6%	28.1%
ID	4.4%	9.6%	2.2%	3.6%	24.4%	25.3%	28.9%	31.3%	40.0%	30.1%
LA	4.3%	12.7%	7.1%	9.1%	20.0%	25.5%	25.7%	18.2%	42.9%	34.5%
MY	5.1%	2.8%	8.5%	2.8%	11.9%	28.2%	30.5%	29.6%	44.1%	36.6%
MM	0.0%	20.5%	0.0%	0.0%	26.3%	26.9%	47.4%	33.3%	26.3%	19.2%
PH	8.2%	7.4%	6.6%	5.9%	29.5%	31.6%	24.6%	22.1%	31.1%	33.1%
SG	4.7%	5.9%	5.7%	9.8%	12.3%	7.8%	44.3%	42.2%	33.0%	34.3%
TH	0.0%	2.1%	9.2%	7.2%	19.7%	20.6%	28.9%	25.8%	42.1%	44.3%
VN	8.8%	3.2%	3.8%	3.2%	23.8%	34.7%	32.5%	37.9%	31.3%	21.0%

Source: The State of Southeast Asia 2024 Survey Report

As part of its Indo-Pacific Strategy, the EU has expanded cooperation with like-minded countries in the region, set standards, promote good regulatory practices, create open and rules-based regional security architecture, and safeguard freedom of navigation through capacity-building initiatives. All of which have translated into greater confidence among Southeast Asian countries in the EU's capacity to champion global free trade and maintain a rules-based order, with the EU ranking above other middle powers in the region across both measures (Seah et al., 2024).

As the statistics indicated, it is quite clear that beyond its economic clout, the EU is also recognized as a strong normative actor in Southeast Asia. However, if like-mindedness is the main measure of collaboration in the region, then it is likely that the norms and principles to which the EU is committed may narrow the number of eligible partners among Southeast Asian countries (Djalal, 2022). Given the resurgence in recent years of repressive actions in Southeast Asia, the EU's engagement in the region as a normative power will certainly not without challenges.

The EU as a Security Power

It is worth noting that even though the early years of the partnership were mostly underpinned by development and economic cooperation, the EU seemed to recognize its security role in the Asia region from very early on. The 1994 European Commission's

Communication on "Towards a New Asia Strategy" revealed the fundamentally "economic-oriented" approach of EU towards Asia. There was no mention of the EU as a security actor; however, its objectives of contributing "to the development and consolidation of democracy and the rule of the law, and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms in Asia" can easily be associated with EU's security role in the region (European Commission, 1994).

Nearly a decade after introducing the 1994 Communication, the 2003 European Commission's Communication on "A new partnership with South-East Asia" identified six strategic priorities of the EU towards ASEAN, which clearly and directly refer to the EU's engagement in security matters in Southeast Asia. Some notable phrases taken out were "supporting regional stability and the fight against terrorism", "promoting human rights", and mainstreaming issues such as "migration and asylum, trafficking in human beings, money laundering, piracy", "organized crime and drugs" (European Commission, 2003). From this point on, security issues have become an important component of the partnership, as the EU began to recognize and prioritize its certain role in Southeast Asian security.

However, compared to the EU's relatively clear role as a market power and a normative power in Southeast Asia, the EU's security power in the region remains rather ambiguous. A perception studies carried out in 2009 throughout the East Asian region reflects limited knowledge of the EU. In most Southeast Asian countries, the EU is most commonly associated with being a trade giant, an economic power, and an economically oriented actor rather than a security actor (Hwee, 2009). This is understandable because the EU has since the 1990s underlined the need to strengthen its relations with Asia in general, and ASEAN in particular, in view of the economic dynamism of the region (European Commission, 1994), hence trade and investment has become the main driving force in the EU-ASEAN partnership over the years.

It was not until 2020 that the EU extended its influence in Southeast Asia beyond economic and normative domains, as its relations with ASEAN elevated to a strategic level, followed by the release of the 2021 Indo-Pacific Strategy which allowed the EU to gear up engagement in Southeast Asia. Nevertheless, a widely held assumption seems to still prevail in the way ASEAN perceives the EU, which is the EU's engagement in the region is largely driven by economic considerations, and thus while the EU can be a reliable economic and development partner, there is not much prospect of it playing any major security role in the region (Hussain, 2021). Such acknowledged prevailing perceptions regarding the EU are also acknowledged by Josep Borrell, High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy: "If we want to be a geopolitical actor, we also have to be perceived as a political and security actor in the region, not just as a development cooperation, trading or investment partner".

Besides, the discourses from the 2003 Communication also demonstrate that the EU has been perceived security in a much broader context than the traditional, realist state-centric view of national security which mainly focuses on territorial defense. The EU tends to put much importance on a wide range of non-traditional security threats such as migration and human rights. The concept of human security was reflected and emphasized even more in the 2003 European Security Strategy. The Strategy adopts a "security is a precondition of development" approach, not only linking security and development but also structuring the overall strategy based on preventive engagement and effective multilateralism which seriously takes human security into account (Council, 2003).

However, for both ASEAN and its member states, sovereignty still remains a vital issue and is aggressively guarded by the countries, and security is still primarily viewed in the most traditional concept of national security. Even though ASEAN recognized the serious danger of non-traditional threats, ASEAN's security policy has touched the non-traditional security issues; it still tends to categorize those threats as domestic concerns, and generally shows slow progress on the

development and application of such policies in reality (Jati, 2016).

Because of such incompatibility between the way the EU and ASEAN view security, the perception among Southeast Asian countries about the EU's lack of role in regional security can be partly explained by the lack of significant military capabilities of its own. As already mentioned, despite the EU's efforts in carrying out over 40 civilian and military operations under CSDP, no military operation has ever been conducted in Southeast Asia, which implies that the EU has a tendency to enhance security in the region in a "softer" and more indirect way, hence is less likely perceived as a "hard" or "traditional" security actor. Furthermore, it seems quite clear in the EU context that hard security is still a domain better suited to the EU's most capable member states due to their sovereign capacities which can rapidly raise their profile as security actors in third countries (Suorsa, 2021).

In addition, when viewed from the traditional and realist lens to assess security matters, ASEAN seems to have a tendency to refer to the EU's engagement as an attempt to balance the influence of other major powers in the region. Such thinking limits ASEAN's acceptance of the EU as an active security actor (Hwee, 2009). The fact that ASEAN is not mentioned in the 2003 European Security Strategy also served to reaffirm the limits of the EU's security influence, or the EU's hesitation to exert such influence. Even though the EU is viewed quite positively in Southeast Asia, economic engagement does not necessarily translate into security influence, and it is clear that difficulties and challenges still remain for the EU to step up its security role in the region.

2. Conclusion

Over decades of existence and development, the EU has attracted scholarly attention worldwide over the types of power it possesses in international politics. With the adoption of the EU strategy for cooperation in the Indo- Pacific, the EU recognized the opportunities Southeast Asia presents and has been forging closer engagement in the region. Therefore, identifying types of power of the EU, as well as examining the EU's ability to influence developments in Southeast Asia reveals some important details about the future of the EU's engagement in the region.

The first thing to be clarified concerns the type of power most relevant for the EU in the context of Southeast Asia, which is first examined through a theoretical lens, based on the three types of power that are famously distinguished by Edward Carr, namely military power, economic power and power over opinion. The paper shares the traditional realist view that the EU being a strong military power is not likely to happen, as it places too much emphasis on civilian means and lacks of significant military capabilities of its own. However, as analyzed, the EU possesses sufficient objective resources as well as institutional and legal capacity to successfully exercise economic power and power over opinion, which can be translated into "market power" and "normative power" in the EU context. Furthermore, the paper argues that the EU's strategic objectives, together with the EU's perception of its role in global security lay the ground for the third type of power that the EU potentially has in Southeast Asia, which is "security power".

The second thing to be taken into account is that, although it may be true that the EU possesses objective resources of power and identifies itself as one, social power is more heavily based on perceptions of receiving subjects. Closer attention paid to perceptions of Southeast Asian countries therefore reveals a lot about the EU's power in the region. For example, perceptions of the EU as the most influential economic power in Southeast Asia, despite being in the top five, remain low compared to the top three significant economic players in the region. This can be partly explained by the norms and principles the EU specified in conditionality clauses that potentially narrow the number of eligible trading partners among Southeast Asian countries. For the same reason, seven rounds of negotiations for the EU-ASEAN FTA had to be cancelled after just two years, and if political disagreements over human rights records were the main obstacles to an agreement, this FTA will remain stalled for much longer. Ironically, it

is the EU's effort to act as a normative power in the region that hinders its role as a market power here. The third comment is about the EU's role and influence in Southeast Asia, which is still mainly defined by its market power and normative power. In which, the economic aspect remains the most important factor shaping the region-to-region partnership. On the other hand, the security aspect of the EU's power, although long shaped through official discourses and documents, has only been promoted and expanded since 2020, marked by the elevation of the relationship between the EU and ASEAN to a strategic partnership. In spite of that, a widely held assumption seems to still prevail in the way ASEAN perceives the EU, in which the Southeast Asian countries consider the EU as a reliable economic and development partner, yet there is not much prospect of it playing any major security role in the region.

The fourth conclusion concerns the EU's security role in Southeast Asia. Despite cooperative projects on several security challenges, the EU's security power in the region still remains rather ambiguous. In most Southeast Asian countries, the EU is most commonly associated with being an economically oriented actor rather than a security actor. To explain such prevailing perceptions regarding the EU, there are at least three reasons as analyzed in the paper. First, trade and investment have traditionally become the main driving force in the EU-ASEAN partnership for decades, and it was not until 2020 that the EU extended its influence in the region beyond economic and normative domains. Second, there is an incompatibility between the way the EU and ASEAN view security, while the EU has viewed security in a much broader context, Southeast Asian countries still primarily view security in the more traditional and realist state-centric view, hence have the tendency to associate the EU's security role with military power which is clearly not its strength. Third, while the EU structures its overall strategy based on preventive engagement and effective multilateralism which seriously takes non-traditional security into account, ASEAN's security policy still tends to categorize those non-traditional threats as domestic concerns and are thus not willing to welcome any external interference.

Finally, regarding the future of EU's engagement in Southeast Asia, even though ties between two regions have seen an uptick in recent years due to several converging interests, the EU's engagement in the region has not been and will not be without challenges, especially given the diverging views in the region. There are periodic economic issues that remain unsolved, like the EU's ongoing trade disputes with several countries in the region which can lead to trust levels in the EU amongst Southeast Asian nations degrading over time. Besides, persistent concerns about human rights violations, democratic backsliding, and governance deficit in certain Southeast Asian countries continue to underscore the inherent tensions between the EU's normative aspiration and its pragmatic engagements in the region. Such inherent misalignment regarding democracy is a persistent point of contention due to the diverse governance system in the region, leading Southeast Asian countries to consistently resist EU's democracy and human rights policies. Moreover, as the lack of coherence is still the biggest challenge to the EU's consistent presence and policy in international relations, the perception of a disunited and conflict-ridden Europe can have ripple effects in Southeast Asia and hence weaken the EU's power in the region.

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