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Successful Interorganizational Cooperation?

Analyzing the EU-ASEAN Relationship

Topic and Research Question

This master thesis aims at presenting a critical review of the relationship between the European Union (EU) and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). Although the cooperation is acknowledged for establishing interactions in the fields of politics, economy and developmental issues, it also experiences criticism regarding inter alia its slow decision making processes. Furthermore, the Asia Europe Meeting (ASEM) is challenging for the cooperation as it provides an interregional platform for discussions and negotiations. Doidge (2004) even rises the question, whether or not a specific EU-ASEAN dialogue, alongside of ASEM, is still needed. Taking up on this thought, the research question of this thesis is as follows: *In the light of criticism and interregional fora such as ASEM, can the relationship between the EU and ASEAN be termed as a successful interorganizational cooperation and hence is it worth maintaining?*

The research agenda International Relations (IR) provides an extensive literature concerned with IOs, however research taking an interorganizational approach is rare. Therefore the theoretical considerations of this master thesis are also aimed at contributing to the field of IR.

State of the Art

The literature on the EU and ASEAN reveals that the relationship offers a variety of research agendas. Besides the economic cooperation, studied by Jetschke and Portela (2013), the differences as well as opportunities have been uncovered (Ørstrøm, 2007; Lim, 2012). Furthermore, Petersson (2006) and Manea (2008) discussed controversies regarding the issue of human rights. Rüländ (2001; 2010; 2011) and Dent (2004) focus on the interregional interactions of the two organizations. As classic IR theories concentrate on the relations between IOs and states, researchers turned to the field of Interorganizational Relations for theoretical underpinning. Brosig (2011) for example uses Resource Dependence Theory (RDT) to study the policy overlap of African IOs and Haugenik (2007) applies a developmental model to analyze the relationships between the UN, NATO, EU and AU in peace operations. An interorganizational approach to the specific EU-ASEAN cooperation could not be found in the relevant literature.

Methodology and Approach

As no common theory exists at present, Interorganizational Relations is an umbrella term for different approaches such as RDT, Network Theory, Life Cycle/Stage Theory and insights from Regime Theory. In order to apply interorganizational theories to the interaction of two IOs, it has to be clarified first of all whether or not the specific organizations can be seen as actors in the international system. Regarding the supranationality of the EU and the legislative competence of the European Commission, the EU possesses actorness. Although ASEAN preserves the sovereignty of its members and does not set binding rules or imposes sanctions, the creation of norms, the alteration of perceptions and the ASEAN Charter bestow actorness on the organization. To analyze the relationship an integrated theoretical framework was developed, composed of insights from different Interorganizational Relations theories. The framework is divided into three categories: Preconditions and Motivation, Polity and Policy and Success Indicators.

Categories	
Preconditions and Motivation	Polity and Policy
(a) Environment	(a) Type of Relationship
(b) Legitimacy	(b) Policy Domains and Goals
(c) Access to Resources	(c) Policy Implementation and Coordination
(d) Domain Consensus	
Success Indicators	
(a) Balance of Power: Process and Indicator	
(b) Distinctive Goals and Effective Implementation	
(c) Outcome and Mutual Gain	
(d) Respect and Committed Leaders	

The empirical results of the first two categories are tested against the selected indicators in order to identify the possible success of the interorganizational cooperation.

Main Facts

The empirical results show that several factors determined the initial relationship building. For the EC and ASEAN the containment of Communism was an utmost concern. Furthermore did both organizations see the benefits of exchanging resources and conducting trade with each other. While ASEAN was eager to gain legitimacy by being acknowledged by the EC, the Community saw the chance to strengthen its position in the Southeast Asian region.

The relationship developed from informal dialogues in the early 1970's to formal interactions and finally to formal cooperation by signing the Cooperation Agreement in 1980. The Agreement did not undergo any reformation and still builds the legal basis of the cooperation. Attempts to change the Agreement were hindered inter alia by divergent views regarding the issue of human rights.

The interactions between the EU and ASEAN moved from an economic oriented relationship to a cooperation interested in diverse policy fields. Over the years, four major policy domains have developed: political-security; economic; socio-cultural; and developmental fields are pursued. The main goals of the interorganizational cooperation include regional integration, the accession of the EU to the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC) and a possible EU-ASEAN Free Trade Agreement.

For the three decades of the cooperation, little information on implementation techniques could be found. However, it could be uncovered that most of the policy domains and goals are defined at the ASEAN-EU Ministerial Meetings (AEMM) and transferred by the Joint Cooperation Committee (JCC) into implementation strategies. According to the available literature it had to be assumed that as far as monitoring mechanisms are concerned, reports on the implementation processes are submitted to the ASEAN Secretariat who itself reports to the European Commission.

Results

The interorganizational cooperation between the EU and ASEAN is oftentimes still viewed as a *donor-donee* relationship, implicating an overly imbalanced power situation. Yet the cooperation has experienced different phases of power balance over the years. The end of the Cold War, the signing of the Maastricht Treaty by the EC and the economic rise of the Southeast Asian

region had a considerable impact on the power situation. At present the power distribution is relatively balanced, as ASEAN can counter the differences with the EU in size and financial background, with its vast growing markets, natural resources, and geographical position, which opens the door for the EU to the wider Asian region.

The EU and ASEAN work with a mix of precisely defined, ill-conceived and rather vague goals. The aspired Free Trade Agreement between the EU and ASEAN comes closest to a super-ordinate goal. The results of the analyzed program APRIS display, that the EU and ASEAN are capable to detect problems in the implementation process and react accordingly.

Trade between the two regions has developed extensively and the two organizations became important trading partners. ASEAN's own regional integration profits from the EU's financial and technical assistance, while the EU found a supplier of natural resources as well as a market for its own products and a chance for closer insights into the Asian region as a whole.

The empirical data for the last indicator shows the need for enhanced intercultural understanding and training. It seems that little attention is paid to the different historical backgrounds, cultures, traditions and negotiation techniques of the two regions.

According to the fact that three out of four success indicators display a rather positive picture, the relationship can indeed be termed as a successful interorganizational cooperation.

References

All references can be found in the full version of the MA thesis available at <http://othes.univie.ac.at/>

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