



ASEM Outlook Insights: Security and Conflict in Asia and Europe

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Abstract

As the theme of the 9th Summit of the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) in 2012 in Vientiane, Laos, 'Friends for Peace, Partners for Prosperity', recognized, there is a direct link between peace and prosperity. Both the Asia-Pacific and Europe still face many challenges when it comes to peace and security, and both regions would benefit from stronger cooperation, not just between their respective countries at the intra-regional and inter-regional levels, but between the regions and in particular the different Regional Inter-Governmental Organizations (RIGOs).

Much progress could be made if the Asia-Pacific and Europe would cooperate: in redefining their concept of security; in promoting regionalism to counter negative effects of recent focus on national interests; and in striving for the establishment of multi-stakeholder infrastructures for peace. Security risks have become cross-regional and affect all of us. The responses and solutions to them should be doing so too.

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Introduction

As the theme of the 9th Summit of the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM)¹ in 2012 in Vientiane, Laos, 'Friends for Peace, Partners for Prosperity', recognized, there is a direct link between peace and prosperity. Human security and economic growth influence each other, even though this process is not always linear. In Europe and Asia, current developments are showcasing and confirming this correlation. Both regions would benefit from stronger cooperation, not just between their respective countries at the intra-regional and inter-regional levels, but between the regions and in particular the different Regional Inter-Governmental Organizations (RIGOs).

The many references related to peace and security in the final Chair's statement from the ASEM 9 summit², held in November 2012 in Laos, indicate that both regions acknowledge the variety of security challenges that both are facing, and that cooperation would be in their self-interest and mutually beneficial. However, such cooperation would require both an upgrade of the current concept of regionalism, a rethinking of what security means and how it can be attained. The following article sets out reflections on why this is necessary

1 The 51 ASEM Members are Australia, Austria, Bangladesh, Belgium, Brunei Darussalam, Bulgaria, Cambodia, China, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, India, Indonesia, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Korea, Laos, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malaysia, Malta, Mongolia, Myanmar, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Pakistan, the Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Russia, Singapore, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Thailand, United Kingdom, Vietnam, the European Union and the ASEAN Secretariat. For more information see www.aseminfoboard.org

2 For a copy of the ASEM9 Chair's statement and other ASEM documents, see www.aseminfoboard.org

and suggestions on how to move towards such cooperation within the context of the Asia-Pacific and Europe.

Security in the Asia-Pacific and Europe

The world is currently seeing a shifting of power balance within and between different regions. Part of this is the steady rise of the Asia-Pacific region³, as a pivotal area global power, which is confirmed by power-plays by many countries, both from the region itself and outside, to establish or confirm their role or dominance in the region.

Already during his first term as President, Obama showcased the clear interest of the USA in the Asia-Pacific, as was made apparent by his choices in official trips abroad. Former Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, spelled it out by stating that 'The 21st century will be America's Pacific century'. Now, with Obama's second term in office, he has even more clearly indicated his focus on the Asia-Pacific region, as has been made apparent, amongst others, by the increased military deployment and more frequent military exercises in the region. Europe, in the meantime, has caught up with the recognition of the Asia-Pacific as more than just a trade partner, but its policy towards the region is still taking shape.

Part of these power-plays – especially those that take on a military form – are contributing to increased tensions that are

3 The article refers to the "Asia-Pacific" as the wider area of Northeast, Southeast, South Asia and the Pacific

resulting in, amongst others, the escalation of territorial disputes and increases in defence and military spending.

Meanwhile, Europe is faced with a need to rethink its role in the international community. There is no common agreement on whether Europe's influence on global security is strengthening or diminishing, but it is certain that it is changing. The Euro crisis has laid bare a development of recent years that the old continent can no longer assume its global leadership, but instead will need to redefine its own role. The changes in global relevance play out not just regionally, but are forcing individual Governments to engage in similar exercises of self-reflection.

Part of this rethinking relates to the involvement of the European Union (EU) and European countries in the rest of the world, ranging from the involvement through peacekeeping missions to the spending of development aid. More than half of global development aid comes from EU countries, but many of them are currently cutting their development cooperation budgets, forcing them to reconsider both the strategy and policy behind the funding, and in parts what the countries want to accomplish with their aid. Meanwhile, regional powers in the Asia-Pacific, namely China and India, are increasing their development cooperation spending in the region.

While not all security risks and threats are equally present between the two regions, cooperation would provide for opportunities to address some of the challenges set out above related to the position and role of the two regions in the international community.

This is not to say that it is all negative when it comes to security and peace in the Asia-Pacific and Europe. The Global Peace Index of 2013⁴ showed once more that Europe remains by far the most peaceful region in the world with seven countries featuring in the top 10. However, some European countries have seen a decline in peacefulness amid challenging economic circumstances, such as Spain, Italy, Greece and Portugal. Asia Pacific, on the other hand, features as the third most peaceful region. Here it needs to be recognized that South Asia is taken as separate from Asia Pacific, and has been consistently ranked as the least peaceful region throughout the 6 years that the Index has been produced. More so, it should be pointed out that the Asia-Pacific region taken as a whole shows great disparity between the ranking of individual countries. While New Zealand ranks 3rd with Japan in 6th, other Asian countries such as Myanmar, in spite of progress in democratisation, ranks 140 out of 162, while the Democratic People's Republic of Korea is 154th and Afghanistan has even tumbled to last place.

Both regions would benefit from promoting regionalism and mutual solidarity. Such cooperation needs to move beyond a simple focus on trade and economic benefits. As the current crisis of the EU shows, a mere financial or economic focus does not hold. In that sense the rewarding of the Nobel Peace Prize to the EU amidst all this uncertainty was a reminder of the true accomplishment of European regionalism, being that of creating a safe and peaceful region. The Asia-Pacific and Europe embarking on a similar exercise would open the door to developing alternative means of ensuring security and stability both within and between the two regions. The Aceh Monitoring Mission (AMM) of the EU and the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN), which monitored the implementation of the peace agreement and

⁴ See the full report of the Global Peace Index 2013 at www.visionofhumanity.org

was conducted between 2005 and 2012, was a positive example of the two regions cooperating on peace and security.

Redefining Concepts and Understanding of Security

The reality of security itself has also changed. Both the Global Peace Index of 2013 and the recent report by The Asia Foundation, 'The Contested Corners of Asia', confirm a trend in the last decades that the world is moving away from large scale inter-state wars to organized internal conflicts. Additionally, trends of the last six years, according to the Global Peace Index, show that the world has become less peaceful. Three main factors have contributed to this trend, namely;

Internal peace indicators measuring safety and security have deteriorated, including an increase in the number of internal conflicts; The peace gap between countries under authoritarian regimes and the rest of the world is becoming larger; and Countries that suffer from recession have decreased in peace at a greater rate than the rest of the world. According to the report of The Asia Foundation⁵ Southeast and South Asia alone saw 26 internal conflicts in the last 20 years, affecting half of the countries in these regions.

Armed conflicts and insecurity are increasingly linking different places around the world to each other. Examples of this can be seen in the trafficking of arms across borderlines such as the drugs trade financing conflicts, refugee flows to escape violence and the global war on terror.

⁵ See the full report of The Asia Foundation on <http://asiafoundation.org/program/overview/subnational-conflict>

However, generally contemporary security infrastructures and resulting measures remain focused on national actors, in particular Governments.

Such a state-centric perspective of security also remains dominant in the Asia-Pacific and Europe, although markedly more dominant in the Asia-Pacific. The perception remains that military responses to impending conflict are the most effective means of ensuring security and stability. This vision is further strengthened by a public discourse, echoed by the media, that focuses on the glamorization of war, the appeal to nationalistic feelings, demonization of the other, creation and manipulation of perceived threats and use of language such as the 'war on terror', terrorism, and national interest and security. Both this political and public discourse is reinforcing the logic of military responses being the only way to make people secure.

The rapid escalation of tensions between Manila and Taipei, after fisherman Hung Shih-cheng was shot dead by Philippines Coast Guard in May of 2013⁶, is an example of this. The explanation on the side of the Philippines was that the incident was a case of 'self-defence'. This coupled with the threat from Taipei to send warships and coast guards to the disputed area on a regular basis, are both indications of an inherently defensive strategy, while at the same time confrontational disposition of both governments. The subsequent emotional and nationalistic public discourse in both countries did not help the governments to propose a more diplomatic solution.

⁶ To learn more about the dispute, check out some of the news coverage of the events <http://www.washington-times.com/news/2013/may/20/taiwan-philippines-dispute-erupts-after-fishermans/?page=all>, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-22685422> and <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/may/19/south-china-sea-dispute-taiwan>

This militarised understanding of security is a result of an enduring increase in defence spending throughout the region. According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) Yearbook of 2013⁷, Asia and Oceania⁸ saw military expenditures rise by 3.3 per cent in 2012. This however is not a trend that is equal throughout the region. China, for example, the second largest military spender in 2012 increased its expenditure by 7.8 per cent, while India decreased its spending by 2.8 per cent.

Notably, there seems to be a correlation between countries that saw increases in defence spending and those that have seen territorial disputes flair up in recent years. This immediate reaction to invest more on defence in response to real or perceived threats further emphasises the assumption that only military measures can assure security.

While, according to the same SIPRI report, there has been a decrease in security expenditure in most of Europe – since 2008, 18 of the 31 countries in the European Union or European NATO countries have cut military spending of more than 10 per cent – this is by no means inspired by a structural belief in alternatives, but more so by a need for rigorous austerity measures. Moreover, these cuts in military spending have triggered debates between the traditional partners in security, the USA and Europe, questioning the dedication and investment in the combined efforts from Europe's side. So far Europe has failed to convincingly argue that safety and security can also be maintained through alternative approaches.

7 See the full SIPRI Yearbook for 2013 on <http://www.sipri.org/yearbook/2013>

8 The report referred to "Asia" and "Oceania" as separate regions and does not refer to the "Asia-Pacific" region. Oceania in this context refers to Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific Island states of Melanesia, Micronesia and Polynesia.

At the same time, the involvement of European countries in different international peace and security missions – like the involvement in Libya and Mali – show that such international undertakings stem more from national Governments' motivations than a continental European perspective. Some even argue that, like in the case of France, such missions are often more inspired by national interests than a genuine concern for the well-being of the affected people in conflict areas.

This continuous viewing of security from a traditional military and state-centric perspective stands in the way of making any actual long-term, sustainable progress when it comes to peace and conflict prevention. There is only so far an arms race can go without incidents happening or violent confrontations being triggered. To put it simply, if one were to walk down a street carrying a baseball bat, the most likely scenario is that it will prompt fear or aggression, causing others to do the same.

It is time to look for alternative responses, highlighting that militarization brings insecurity, and that the formulation of models of non-military solutions are necessary. What is ultimately needed is recognition that current security measures will be ineffective and unsustainable in the long-term and that a radical rethink of what is meant by 'security' is long overdue.

There is a real opportunity for the Asia-Pacific and Europe to take a proactive stance and a lead in developing and implementing alternative means of ensuring security and stability. Two aspects will be essential to take into consideration when doing so. On the one hand, Europe and the Asia-Pacific must enter this dialogue while recognizing the shifting power relations between the two regions in comparison to the past. On the other hand,

instead of focussing on the types of threats at play, the alternative concepts of security should be defined in terms of responses and goals, in particular a holistic and comprehensive approach towards security. Threats and risks are mere consequences of underlying causes, focussing on them will never truly address the issues.

One of people's primary needs is to feel safe and secure, both physically and economically. Part of that desire is the need to believe they have some level of control of their environment and destiny in this case their safety and security. The need to feel you can participate in your own society, which takes shape through democratic structures and elections. It is on this level of human perspective that concepts and understanding of security should find their inspiration.

Human Security seems an appropriate starting point, not just because it offers a more appropriate appreciation of security, but also because of the recent acceptance of a common understanding of the concept by the UN General Assembly in October 2012, which outlines:

“The right of people to live in freedom and dignity, free from poverty and despair. All individuals, in particular vulnerable people, are entitled to freedom from fear and freedom from want, with an equal opportunity to enjoy all their rights and fully develop their human potential. Human security calls for people-centred, comprehensive, context-specific and prevention oriented responses that strengthen the protection and empowerment of all people and all communities. (..)”⁹

9 The UN General Assembly Resolution A/RES/66/290 referring to human security, see http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=%20A/RES/66/290

Although there is now a growing consensus on the understanding of human security, and to some extent the importance of it, much work still remains to be done when it comes to the implementation of human security policies. To start off with the need to translate the concept into actual and concrete policies and strategies that would assure a multi-stakeholder and comprehensive approach towards creating and maintaining security. Working on this together would be a good opportunity for the Asia-Pacific and Europe, not only to strengthen the relations and build confidence, but also to lead the international community in creating effective and sustainable security measures.

Nationalism versus Regionalism

As always in times of difficulty, the current global financial crisis has put solidarity and unity amongst people under pressure. Some even claim that we are seeing somewhat of a narcissistic epidemic¹⁰, which translates into an overly strong focus on oneself and self-entitlement, but also leads to frustration and anger amongst those that are not getting or feel they do not get what they deserve.

Here a distinction should obviously be made between those that are truly being hit hardest by the financial crisis, through for example becoming unemployed or losing all their savings, and an overall observation that materialism and individualism might have gone too far.

10 See “The Narcissism Epidemic – Living in the Age of Entitlement” by Jean M. Twenge and W. Keith Campbell (2009) or a recent article by Jean M. Twenge in which she gives a list of various recent publications related to narcissism <http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/the-narcissism-epidemic/201308/how-dare-you-say-narcissism-is-increasing>

Especially in Europe this is contributing to an already existing increase in nationalism and populism as well as lessening popularity of the EU. Elections in many countries have seen a strong rise in nationalistic and populist parties, with some of these even changing their anti-immigrant programmes to a strong anti-EU discourse, as seen in the last elections in Finland and the Netherlands, as well as the continuing debate in the United Kingdom on membership of the Union.

The financial crisis in some places is already moving beyond just that, and leading to political instability and general unrest, in some cases even violence. There is a clear relation between the European recession and the political crisis in Italy, the demonstrations and riots in Greece and some would even argue the riots in Stockholm in May of 2013. The Global Peace Index of 2013 showed a clear correlation between the economic recession and some of the hardest hit European original sovereign debt crisis countries, Portugal, Ireland, Italy, Greece and Spain. All of these saw a decline in peacefulness, particularly related to 'increases in the perceptions of criminality', 'likelihood of violent demonstrations', 'increasing political instability' and 'number of deaths from organised conflict'.

Not surprisingly, at the same time, several separation movements are gaining in strength, as seen in Catalonia and Scotland. Obviously, these are not new, but revitalized feelings of unfairness intensify sentiments of differentness and desires for separation.

In the Asia-Pacific, in the meantime, a seeming unwillingness or inability of many Governments to deal with minority groups in a peaceful manner remains. Of the intra-state conflicts in the Asia-Pacific mentioned previously, a large majority includes a dispute

of the national Government with a minority group. Most of these conflicts have run for a long time. Examples include tensions in Southern Thailand, West Papua, Northeast India and Myanmar.

With a positive exception of the Framework Agreement on the Bangsamoro of October 2012¹¹ and the on-going peace talks between the Government of the Philippines and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), many countries seem to hold on to the belief that only through oppression and dominance, the integrity of a country can be upheld. More so, in many of these conflicts there seems to be at least a perception of an increase in militarisation. Another commonality that can be identified in these disputes is a focus of national sovereignty, in Southeast Asia this is often referred to as the "ASEAN way", which ensures non-intervention and inhibits any involvement of neighbouring countries or Regional Inter-Governmental Organizations.

The many territorial disputes that continue to stand in the way of the strengthening of regional cooperation, in particular in East Asia, are another example of the inability of Governments to look beyond their national interest and realize the potential of regional cooperation.

11 The Framework Agreement on the Bangsamoro, which was signed by the Government of the Philippines and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) on 15 October 2012, is a preliminary peace agreement to end a conflict that has already lasted some 30 years. It was a positive step towards peace in a process of negotiations that for a long time was only highlighted by stalemates, resumptions of fighting and general misunderstanding. In a region that sees many intra-state conflicts similar to that in Mindanao, it shows that it is possible to come to the end of a conflict through dialogue and mediation if both parties commit to it.

This unpopularity of regional cooperation and emphasis on national sovereignty, both in the Asia-Pacific and Europe, stands in the way of the realization that nowadays security and stability concerns cannot be isolated from regional or global trends. Governments, but at times more importantly populations, need to acknowledge that challenges and solution for issues ranging from economic, trade, security and conflict prevention, go beyond the national arena and are not solvable within the boundaries of just one country. Both in the Asia-Pacific and Europe to find a future of peace and prosperity, as ASEM leaders have recognized, regional and inter-regional cooperation has become essential.

More particularly, it is understood that quite a few of these issues are better dealt with on a regional level than on a national or global level. They are inherently more similar in neighbouring countries, than they are on the other side of the world. While shared historic and cultural resemblances can function as stimuli for necessary confidence building processes to come to effective cooperation.

Recent months have seen a lot of discussion on the common security strategy of the EU. While the Common Security Defence Policy - CSDP (formerly known as European Security and Defence Policy - ESDP) was launched in 1999 as an integral part of the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP). It has been ten years since the EU leaders agreed to the European Security Strategy (ESS).

With this anniversary inevitably comes a discussion of the potential need for review. Not only does it seem time for a review purely based on the time that has lapsed – the USA has had three different Security Strategies in the same period – but the security reality that the strategy aims to

address has changed significantly both within and outside of Europe. In line with the general Euro-scepticism that has been increasing recently, there have also been some questions around the need for such a common security strategy at all. Such thinking would not just be denying the historic accomplishment of the EU, but also of the reality of today's world.

In spite of the current instability of the EU, regionalism in Europe has proven to be a trajectory towards peace and stability in a region that previously had been troubled by wars and instability. The basic principle of cooperation and mutual economic dependency, is still working. One could even argue that it is specifically on the national level where the main problems with addressing contemporary security challenges can be found. As is being argued in the Final Integrative Report of Changing Multilateralism: the EU as a Global-Regional Actor in Security and Peace, or EU-GRASP¹², the current crisis of multilateralism stems more from an inability of nation-states to respond to increasingly globalizing challenges, and less so with the actual reality of the continuous need for regional cooperation, including when it comes to European security.

Obviously, it is impossible to replicate the construction of the EU. The EU followed a particular trajectory which was deeply grounded in the European history and strongly related to the political will, interests and personal views of different particular European leaders. Other regionalisation processes, as those in Southeast Asia, South Asia and the Pacific have done, will need to follow their own paths as suited to culture, history and the particular leadership of specific individuals.

12 See the full report of EU-GRASP here <http://unu.edu/publications/policy-briefs/the-eu-as-a-global-regional-actor-in-security-and-peace.html>

In the Asia-Pacific challenges related to the effective use of regionalism to address security concerns are two-fold. On the one hand the Asia-Pacific lacks an effective regional architecture for conflict prevention. Northeast, South and Southeast Asia and the Pacific are strongly interlinked in their security challenges. Mutual interests or strained relations criss-cross across the region, not necessarily respecting defined regional boundaries. The influence of countries like China, India, and Japan reaches far beyond their direct neighbours, while at the same time there are similarities in sources of conflict throughout the region, like for example increases in inter-religious tensions in both Southeast and South Asia.

On the other hand, there is consistency within individual regions themselves. Although progress has been made related to overall regional cooperation, much work remains to be done to come to regional structures that effectively prevent and solve conflicts. For example, ASEAN clearly has made many steps in increasing regional cooperation, but has been less successful in areas of security and dispute resolution. The struggle during the ASEAN Summit towards the end of 2012 in coming to a united stance in relation to territorial disputes showcased that cooperation on security and conflict is still very sensitive¹³.

At the same time Northeast Asia lacks clear regional cooperation structures. The Six Party Talks are arguably the closest the region has to such a permanent regional engagement

infrastructure. Yet, the Six Party Talks are in themselves an example of how more formalized regional cooperation structures might be the key to progress on resolving long-running intractable conflicts, like the one on the Korean peninsula. With the sensitivity of the conflict and nuclear non-proliferation being the main focus of the talks, the stakes for engagement might at times be too high for regional engagement, while talks on less controversial issues might be doable.

ASEM represents a great opportunity to tackle a lot of these challenges. Not only does it bring together many countries in the Asia-Pacific beyond their regional infrastructures, it also provides a direct chance for exchanges between the Asia-Pacific and Europe on their respective experiences with regionalism.

Cooperating on Challenges that Cross Borders

Certain trends and developments that are likely sources for conflict and insecurity in the coming time are clearly cross-border. Where it is always disputable to defend the position that an armed conflict or security threat is only a national concern, when it comes to certain challenges like the consequences of climate change and the related struggle for natural resources, it is completely irresponsible. They do not only provide an opportunity to build up regional and inter-regional cooperation structures, but demand it.

Climate change for example – and in particular its consequences – is a source for armed conflict in many places around the world. From conflicts related to the loss of land in the Pacific, to the predicted wars over water, it can only be expected that insecurity related to climate change will

13 The 2012 ASEAN summit held in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, was the first ASEAN summit where a joint communique was not issued as differences of opinion over territorial disputes led to difficult negotiations. The dispute and lack of a communique was reported widely at the time. See - <http://www.thehindu.com/news/international/asean-summit-breaks-up-in-acrimony/article3635340.ece> and <http://csis.org/publication/china-reveals-its-hand-asean-phnom-penh> for some selected analysis of the summit.

become even more determining in the future. The many consequences in the Asia-Pacific of natural disasters in the form of typhoons, flooding, drought and earthquakes put entire communities at risk. At the same time, violence and armed conflicts are a further cause of contamination and stand in the way of effective implementation of policies to counter climate change. They are causing movement of people, resulting in migration and internally displaced persons (IDPs). Given humanity's continuing inability to handle such movements, these once again cause further tension and conflict. They form a vicious circle of negative mutual influence.

Yet there are many strategies and policies that can and should be undertaken. Civil society organizations all over the world are working to battle both armed conflict and climate change. Looking at the interrelatedness of both not only gives way to new insights, it opens the door for new possibilities to make a difference. For example in those instances where the challenges or consequences of climate change are so enormous that it forces opposing parties in a conflict to cooperate, creating the first steps to relationship building.

The 2004 tsunami helped Aceh to come to a peace agreement. Although the tsunami was only a piece of a much larger puzzle that brought the Indonesian Government and Gerakan Aceh Merdeka (GAM) back to the negotiation table, it does provide an example of a situation where the destructive power of a natural disaster – though in this case not linked to climate change – created a scenario where opposing parties in a very long-running conflict needed to work together to alleviate the local suffering and repair the damaged region.

It would of course be unacceptable to conclude that such horrific disasters as the 2004 tsunami are a blueprint to follow for other armed conflicts. Especially when it comes to natural disasters and violent conflict, a lot of

progress has been made in recent years to develop early warning systems. Unfortunately, such early warning alerts have been given little attention and often fall flat due to a lack of political will to act. They do not stand a chance if there is no conscious effort to develop and implement such strategies and policies beyond the borders of individual countries. As various United Nations Summits have showcased, Governments have been everything but forthcoming when it comes to pro-actively addressing such cross-border sources of conflict and insecurity as climate change¹⁴.

Not only is it needed for the Asia-Pacific and Europe to recognize the need to act preventively instead of only responding once these issues are causing conflicts, but there is an opportunity for them to take cooperation on these shared concerns as a test for future cooperation on more sensitive security matters. ASEM provides a perfect platform to start a dialogue and process of consensus building on this as well as that it would fall squarely within the ASEM leaders' ambition of being friends for peace and partners for prosperity.

Regionalism and Multi-stakeholder Cooperation

When rethinking both the definition and strategies of security, another aspect to take into account will need to be the realization that many different stakeholders have a role to play. One of the actors that is increasingly called upon to play a greater role in security

14 The UN Climate Change Conferences that have been organized yearly since 1995 within the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change tend to disappoint in relation to the expectations that build up before the leaders come together. The conference in Copenhagen in 2009 aimed to develop an ambitious agreement beyond 2012, when the Kyoto Protocol expired, in the end did not manage to produce a binding agreement. The failure was in part the result of a stand-off between traditional developed and developing countries on who should carry responsibility for climate change.

and armed conflict are Regional Inter-Governmental Organizations (RIGOs), a development, which fits with the establishment of ASEM and the broader desire to improve cooperation between the Asia-Pacific and Europe. Bringing together members-states from a region, gives them an added advantage to facilitate engagement, dialogue and cooperation between members on issues related to conflict and security.

The long-standing Thai-Cambodian conflict over the Preah Vihear temple reignited in 2008. When Cambodia protested to the UN Security Council in 2011, the Council called upon ASEAN to mediate the conflict. Contrary to what had been expected, ASEAN took up the challenge and announced it would attempt to mediate the conflict. Even though this stance was highly influenced by the chairmanship of Indonesia at the time, and while results so far have been slow, it indicates the recognition both globally and within Southeast Asia of the potential for RIGOs to play a more pro-active role in peace and security.

However, for effective means of security and conflict prevention to be successful a multi-stakeholder approach will need to go beyond the mere inclusion of governmental institutions. This becomes particularly clear when reflecting on the potential role of civil society organizations (CSOs). There is a need to pro-actively engage with and listen to people, the general public that Governments are supposed to be representing and defending. Given the difficulty of directly 'talking to the people', CSOs can play a crucial role in ensuring the input of on the ground people into the functioning of Governments and RIGOs.

It is essential that this input from the general public comes in through CSOs in all stages and levels of policy development and project implementation in relation to peace and security, for example in electoral missions, humanitarian interventions and education. At the same time, the legitimacy and insights that both Governments and RIGOs would gain from direct engagement with people, would also assist them in further clarifying policies and strategies to address new challenges and risks related to security and conflict.

Overall this understanding has already resulted in an increased willingness of RIGOs to cooperate with civil society. The EU, ASEAN, the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) and even the South Asian Association of Regional Cooperation (SAARC) have all opened their doors more to CSOs, be it in different degrees. A positive example of such cooperation between Governments, RIGOs and civil society can be found when it comes to National Regional Action Plans on women, peace and security. The Pacific Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security (2012-2015) for instance was developed in full consultation between the PIF Secretariat, Government representatives, UN agencies and civil society.

Similar initiatives can be found throughout the Asia-Pacific and Europe and could serve as a blueprint for the development of more permanent infrastructures for multi-stakeholder cooperation. Something which will be undoubtedly necessary to effectively and sustainably address security and conflict concerns in and between both regions.

Conclusion

Peace and prosperity are undeniably intertwined. The Governments involved with ASEM have long recognized this, and underscored it once more with the 9th Summit of 2012. Many challenges remain when it comes to security and conflict prevention in the Asia-Pacific and Europe, but much progress could be made if the two regions would cooperate in:

- redefining their concept of security,
- promoting regionalism to counter negative effects of recent focus on national interests,
- striving for the establishment of multi-stakeholder infrastructures for peace.

In the end it comes down to this: security risks have become cross-regional and affect all of us. The responses and solutions to them should be doing so too.

About the Author

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About the Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (GPPAC)

The Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (GPPAC) is a global member led network of civil society organisations (CSOs) who actively work on conflict prevention and peacebuilding. The network consists of fifteen regional networks of local organisations with their own priorities, character and agenda. These regional networks are represented in an International Steering Group, which jointly determines our global priorities and actions for our conflict prevention and peacebuilding work.

For more information go to www.gppac.net.