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## **REGIONAL DEMOCRATIZATION: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF EU AND US EFFORTS IN CENTRAL ASIA AND SOUTHEAST ASIA**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The EU and US are established liberal democratic powers, having a shared political and intellectual tradition. As such, the promotion of democracy is critical to their foreign policies in areas they deem to be of strategic importance to their core interests. Further, the EU and its democratization efforts as part of its foreign policy and strategic interests can be viewed through the 'Fortress Europe' concept and hegemonic stability theory. For the EU and the US, Central Asia and Southeast Asia are the major areas for democracy promotion efforts, respectively. Through a qualitative analysis of related EU and US policies published in open sources and organized according to the

logic of the democratization process, EU and US democratization efforts could be characterized as an oscillation between core interests and values promotion. This was attributed to the loss of appeal due to socio-political-economic issues in the EU and the US, combined with a relative lack of success, and competition between entrenched elite power structures and alternative political ideologies. The critical point is that both the regions of Central Asia and Southeast Asia are postcolonial areas in which Western democracy efforts are being realized through the existing structural level for spreading “soft power” to influence internal policy. The key findings for both regions are being interpreted from the postcolonial perspective: “democratization” is the process that needs to be revised as some cultural and metropolitan dominance in both regions prevails in everyday social life. For example, the power of the Russian language in Central Asia does not make regional elites follow the democratic rights of the indigenous population struggling for their national identity in a postcolonial era, as Central Asian elites and society do not wish to examine the current Russia-Ukraine conflict in the region. In the case of Southeast Asia, the area was not influenced by communism at the level Central Asia was. The area is quickly adaptable to the external (in this case, the US) democratization efforts for making a society with liberal values and multicultural diversity that makes them different from other Asian countries. Moreover, the English language in the region is more often associated with access to the best education and Western values.

**Keywords:** EU, US, democratization, Central Asia, Southeast Asia, post-Soviet area, rule of law.

## INTRODUCTION

The EU and US share deep liberal democratic roots in Enlightenment values and shared history. The European Enlightenment thinkers such as John Locke, Thomas Hobbes, Immanuel Kant, Denis Diderot, Baron de Montesquieu, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau are considered among the pioneers of liberal democracy. Their ideas were picked up and expounded by American thinkers such as Thomas Jefferson, John Adams, and Benjamin Franklin, thus by and large historically creating a shared intellectual tradition for the rule of people agenda efforts.

Liberalism promotes individual liberty by guaranteeing equality of opportunity within a tolerant society (Ball et al., 2017). However, in

its most fundamental sense, democracy means ‘rule of the people.’ It does not include the executive rule of law or constraints, judicial independence or review, civil liberty, property rights, religious freedom, media independence, or minority rights (Rhoden, 2015). The latter concepts are later additions to the fundamental idea of democracy, and taken together these form the core principles of liberal democracy (Ibid). For example, In Russia and its former Central Asian colonies at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the words “liberalism” and “liberal” have become an abnormal political curse. Still, this foul-smelling disorder of speech strangely bypasses highly controversial internal government policies. In the relationship between the authorities and society, all the screws are tightened so that the political bureaucracy in Russia and its former Central Asian colonies can reach those values that are being expanded. However, at the same time, in other systemic areas, for example, finance, state policy remains moderately liberal. In the social sphere, with abnormal zeal, it tries to introduce all the worst that was in obsolete formalistic neoliberalism. This eclecticism could be quietly attributed to the properties of postmodernism, if not for its grave consequences for life, not to mention the zero perspectives. In this sense, the notion of “democratic efforts” from the regional perspective seems promising, as the region is surrounded by such actors as China, Russia, Iran, and Afghanistan. These are the countries which have controversial concepts on the classical democratization process, in that Central Asia used to be the proverbial pie in the colonial struggle between Russia and Britain historically. When communism was introduced to Central Asia this changed the notion of “democracy” in the region. However, the collapse of this ideology in the 1990s brought about a promising interaction with Western actors and a willingness to cooperate in democratizing society with liberal values.

As the EU is a supranational entity and the US is a state, both play different but distinct roles in the international area. The EU is a regional power with global economic reach, while the US is a hyperpower with global military reach (Fabbrini, 2007). Thus, they have different concepts of national security and foreign policy in a meaningful sense. The ‘Fortress Europe’ concept best describes the EU’s security thinking, with its central premise of restraining mobility for some to enable freedom for others (Engelbert et al., 2019). It is a metaphor referring to the need to delimit the existing immigration opportunities in line with the European integration process and the increased harmonization in how EU member states organize regular

immigration and asylum, and control irregular migration (Barbulescu, 2015). However, this shift in policy has been criticized for being to the disadvantage of developing nations, refugees, asylum seekers, and people with low incomes. It goes against basic democratic values, as well as the rule of law and respect for human rights (Albrecht, 2002). Democracy in the EU and the US is now experiencing great systemic changes, one of the symptoms of which are the so-called “angry citizens”. This new social category does not trust, sometimes justifiably, sometimes not, the traditional parties and the media, a change which has increasingly been active in supporting public forces and movements that claim to be a “real alternative” to the establishment.

Hegemonic stability theory best describes the notion of security of the US. It contends that the distribution of power among states is the primary determinant of the character of the international system and that a hegemonic distribution of power, wherein one state has the preponderance of power, is the most conducive to the establishment of a stable, open global system (Webb & Krasner, 2009). Since the collapse of Communism in the 1980s, every US administration has worked to preserve US pre-eminence and foster an international order conducive to US interests, reflecting a single-minded determination to preserve US hegemony on a global scale (Bacevich, 2002). Proponents of US hegemony argue that such a stance benefits US interests and the international system, and that hegemony significantly reduces security competition by rendering the balance of power inoperable (Schmidt, 2019). However, critics say that US hegemony is untenable, as it is complicated to maintain global domination for any period of time. It is necessary to pursue active balancing against emerging powers such as Russia and China (Ibid). Such terms as “Balance of Power”, “Politics of Power”, “Interdependence of the world”, as well as “balance of interests” – are common interests which form the basis of international relations in the third millennium. Therefore, there is no doubt that the cardinal changes that have occurred in individual countries and in the world have changed the fate of nations and peoples. This development could not but leave their imprint on the many aspects of the system of interstate relations as an integral entity, nor not affect its systemic qualities, the specifics of the manifestation of the laws of functioning and the development of the system of interstate relations as a whole. The breakthrough of several states outside the industrial society, the collapse of the world socialist system, and the increasingly apparent inter-civilizational contradictions and differences with all its acuteness,

will surely raise the question of the need to identify new, previously on the periphery or, for the time being, hidden qualities of the system of interstate relations. It is necessary to determine these impacts on the processes associated with the relationship of states and the methods of civilizational development and global security. In connection with the formation of a new world architecture, the issue related to the problem of strengthening international security and forming a new system of international relations is becoming more acute today.

Democracy promotion is a critical component of EU and US foreign policy. As the EU crystallized into its present form, democracy promotion became concrete goals guiding its foreign policy actions and tools, which in turn justify the EU's projection as a 'normative power' and a 'civilian power' (Ferreria-Pereira, 2010, p. 290). In contrast, US proponents of democratization as a part of foreign policy have often long expressed interest in supporting democratic governance and related rights in other countries to project American values, enhance US security, and promote US economic interests (Lawson, 2019, p. 1). Thus, the foreign policy interests of both actors are determined, first of all, by the needs of their socio-economic development, the extrapolation of which to the sphere of international relations does not always correspond to the particular needs of other countries, or the system of international relations as a whole. As a result, depending on the nature of the interaction of foreign policy interests of both actors, the following types of foreign policy interests of various subjects of the system of international relations can be distinguished as follows:

- non — overlapping interests, i.e., interests of states, the implementation of which does not affect the interests of other states
- confrontational interests — their implementation is unthinkable without infringing on the interests of other states
- similar interests — in this case, the implementation of the foreign policy interests of one state is in line with the interests of another
- joint (shared) interests — their implementation is possible only based on the collective actions of two or more states through coordinated efforts
- divergent interests — as a consequence of the realization of joint interests when the subsequent goals do not coincide but nevertheless, do not contradict each other

Further, the EU and the US have different approaches to promoting democracy in regions they deem strategically important. Their approaches in promoting liberal democracy are also guided by their respective security concepts. EU democratization efforts in Central Asia can be seen through the idea of Fortress Europe. In contrast, similar US efforts in Southeast Asia aim to preserve US hegemony in the larger Indo-Pacific region.

The purpose of the present paper is to compare the level of democratic institutional efforts put in by the EU in Central Asia and the US in Southeast Asia by observing the dynamics of these efforts. The paper focuses on the event analysis in terms of the EU and the US in their regions (Central Asia and Southeast Asia) to determine the level of influence of these powers from the democratization perspective. The EU represented the choice in Central Asia due to the close geographical location that divides both regions via Russia, which used to colonize Central Asia for centuries, resulted Central Asia's democratization efforts after the collapse of Communism. The other choice represented by the US in Southeast Asia is that during the Cold War and even today, the US has an active presence in the region after both the European and US decolonization of nation states in the region.

As mentioned above, the research methodology used in this study is a qualitative analysis of related EU and US policies. The data collected has been supported by open sources and organized according to the logic of the democratization process. The basis of the study is the general scientific principles of research objectivity and reliability, which is confirmed by articles from primary sources, concrete facts, and scientific data, considering the peculiarities of the political, economic, and other aspects of EU and US policy and strategy in the respective regions. The principle of prompt data reflection made it possible to study the issues under investigation and highlight the strengths of EU cooperation with Central Asian states and the US with Southeast Asian states, as well as aspects requiring further elaboration.

The application of a systematic approach used throughout the paper has allowed considering the EU foreign policy activities in Central Asia and the US in Southeast Asia as a complex of interrelated elements constantly interacting with each other with the data to form the most suitable ways of its comparison. This approach has succeeded

in identifying the peculiarities of the EU approaches towards Central Asian actors at various stages of the evolution of its policies and strategies, and in determining the degree of efficiency of their results. The same approach is used in examining the US approach towards Southeast Asia actors.

Historically-descriptive and politically-descriptive methods were also used in the paper for the systematic and general analysis of the primary data source. The comparative historical method and systemic analysis, are structured and have interpreted the main periods of the formation of EU policy in Central Asia, established the causal relationships, and identified the critical trends of development between the EU and Central Asia, as well as the US and Southeast Asia.

The comparative analysis made it possible to determine whether the strategy used by the EU in Central Asia and the US in Southeast Asia with its general and distinctive features have been successful. This method is also used to examine the scientific approaches of various researchers on the issues under consideration. Methods of comparative analysis were applied to identify the dynamics of EU interaction with Central Asia, as well as the US with Southeast Asia. This is carried out within the framework of a democratization and regional balance perspective.

The study of the democratization efforts of the EU in Central Asia and the US in Southeast Asia is also based on the dialectical method of research, which consists of the perception of relationships as universal systems of processes and phenomena, even opposite ones; as they are all in unity and continuous development. It also makes it possible to identify and compare factors and conditions for the genesis and modernization of EU and US policies and strategies in the respective regions.

The various situation analysis methods used have created a coherent picture of the objects and phenomena under consideration. In particular, including observation, analysis of documents and sources, and expert analysis. Thus, with the help of the relevant theoretical and methodological frameworks, the evolution of the democratization policies and strategies of the EU in Central Asia and the US in Southeast Asia, as geopolitical and economic factors, contributed to its formation in terms of comparative analysis of two actors in related regions.



## **The Notion of “Regional Democratization Perspective”**

The initial difference between non-Western and Western democratic societies, based on which one can try to write out the specifics of the non-Western political process, one first try to determine the systemic specifics of Eastern societies as a part of the non-Western democratic world. Lucian Pye and Mary Pye (1985) have mapped out the conceptual paths to this concept in their book entitled “Asian Power and Politics: The Cultural Dimension of Politics”. Having done this and having determined the correct methods for comparing the political systems of diverse types of democratic societies, one will be able to trace the evolution of the political systems of the East, outline ways to determine regional specifics and isolate certain models of basic ideology about certain types of political systems and political processes from regional democratic perspectives. Such an analysis can show the specifics of the political culture of the region, in particular Central Asia and Southeast Asia, and explain how the specifics of political culture can influence the particulars of the political system itself in the respective regions. However, a change of power with insufficient transformation of socioeconomic structures can lead either to the reproduction of the old design in a modified form, for example, in the case of Turkmenistan in Central Asia; or to results that were not predicted during the change of power, for example, in the case of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan to some extent in Central Asia.

It must be said that the regional specificity is well distinguished in analyzing the dichotomous type (West/East). However, the dichotomous opposition of this type itself has only analytical and partly intuitively applied sense.

First, one might want to designate two approaches in identifying the specifics of non-Western/Eastern societies, allowing for the determination of the specifics of their political process. These two approaches are now worked out in sufficient detail by internal oriental studies. According to the first approach, pre-antique Western and Eastern political structures were identical. Since antiquity, political structures have been divided into Western and Oriental. In Western societies:

- have a structuring character market / private property relation.
- commodity production dominates there.
- there is no centralized power.



Accordingly, there was a democratic self-government of the community, which later developed into the structure which in today's Western societies is called "civil society". In Western political science, David Landes expounded these views in his 2015 book entitled, *The Wealth and Poverty of Nations*. Most brightly and clearly, but differently than D. Landes, in Russia's oriental studies, these provisions were formulated by Leonid Vasiliev in his 2007 books, namely *General History: Ancient East*, and *Antiquity and General History: East and West in the Middle Ages*.

Within the framework of the concept espoused, this type of democratic society was subject to rapid structural modifications, which caused its rapid evolution into the side of highly competitive societies in terms of the functioning of the political and administrative system.

In societies of the second type – Eastern/Oriental – private property had no dominant role. Still, public and state property dominated. It was held that power was equivalent to property, and vice versa, while in Western-style societies since the Venetian Republic, there has been a division of property (money) and power, which could be "simply" hired, and its primary function was the control function.

In Eastern societies, there were no rules of law that protected private property relations (Roman law), there prevailed a state-communal form of farming, and the state was the force of this farming dominated society, not vice versa. However, although society created alternative structures of opposition to the state/authority (family, clan, community, caste, guild, sect, fraternity, etc.), they were inscribed in their particular part into the system of the state (caste composition of state institutions in India; clan, community in China, whose leader was closely connected with the state system or was its lower part - a particular official). Due to the indicated specifics of the political structure, this type of society has always strived for internal stability and conservative stability, they consolidated only what corresponded to the norms of corporate/community ethics, and because of this, they constantly reproduced political structures of the same type. This explanation clarified why Eastern societies do not become Western-style democracies and what needs to be done to make them such. By this logic, in the West, the engine of innovations, including political innovations, was the individual who was a citizen-owner; in contrast, in the East, the community, which accepted only that which

corresponded to the norms of communal/corporate ethics or tradition, i.e., that which reached to the collective, and not to the individual/individualistic experience.

According to these conceptual provisions, democratic modernization, i.e., the approach to modernity, was determined like Westernization. This means that there is an inevitability of the movement of all state formations in a natural-historical way towards the Western development model.

### **EU Efforts in Central Asia from the Regional Democratization Perspective**

The strategic importance of Central Asia is based on its natural resources and strategic location at the crossroads of trading routes and political interests between Asia and Europe (Apokins, 2015). Further, Central Asia is the EU's second-largest trading partner, and the EU acts as a mediator and donor in cooperation projects aimed at modernization and reform (Ibid, p. 11). That said, the EU has a stake in the stability, security, and prosperity of Central Asia since cross-regional political and economic developments may, directly and indirectly, impact the EU. The EU enlargement brought Central Asia along with the Black Sea and Southern Caucasus regions closer together, as the Central Asian energy reserves were crucial to the EU's energy security (The EU and Central Asia, 2007). As such, democratization has always been a component of the EU's strategy to engage Central Asia, alongside other core issues such as trade, energy, and security (Cornell & Starr, 2019). At the same time, Central Asia has never been at the center of the European foreign policy agenda. In the 1990s, when the region's countries gained independence, Central Asian leaders who were the main actors, were watching the European integration model with interest. They tried to launch those similarities, whereas the EU was busier with internal problems and the need to build relations with the countries of the former socialist bloc. The Afghan crisis should have increased interest in Central Asia. However, at that time, it was not a priority topic for European countries, especially considering the outbreak of the war in Yugoslavia. The EU's first Central Asian Strategy was adopted only in 2007, after the expansion of its interests to the East, when the post-Soviet space was at the borders of the EU. The increased attention to the region can also be attributed to the protracted anti-terrorist operation of the international coalition in

Afghanistan. Military missions of France and Germany were located on the territory of Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, respectively, and the region was considered a transit zone for the supply of troops to Afghanistan. Finally, the Russian-Ukrainian gas conflicts prompted the EU to think about the problem of diversifying energy imports, and Central Asia was a potential source of them.

The EU collaborates closely with the OSCE (Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe) to promote democratization, institution-building, and human rights in Central Asia (The European Union, n.d.). One of these joint democratization between the EU and the OSCE is the Rule of Law Initiative for Central Asia which aims to create a joint policy space between the EU and Central Asia by fostering legal reforms and addressing regional challenges such as weak judicial systems, policy and capability gaps in law enforcement, modernization of commercial legislation, and accountability (EU Rule of Law Initiative for Central Asia, n.d). The program seeks to reinforce human rights, the rule of law, and democracy in Central Asia following European and other international standards (Central Asia Rule of Law Program, n.d). All EU strategies are linked to form common principles for solving problems in security, energy, transport, and the digital network. The EU has achieved the most success in cooperation with Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan. The EU is interested in solving security and energy problems in partnership with these states. At the same time, it automatically opposes the deepening of integration processes in the post-Soviet space. In the new strategy, Central Asia is considered a critical region in the interaction between East and West, and the overall goal of the European Union is related to the concept of sustainability. At the same time, EU officials continue to justify strengthening their positions in Central Asia, which was reflected by the fact that they ambitiously call the Union a “key partner” of the countries of the region in solving problems of the environment, the rule of law, internal reforms related to governance, and border control. The EU officials still view the development of the Central Asian countries as a volatile but positive transition process to a democratic model. At least, the officials express such an optimistic attitude in the evolution of the region’s states. Accordingly, the EU strategy does not consider historical aspects or traditions but relies on the idea of the positive advancement of states toward democracy and an open society.

Further, the EU aims to assist Central Asia in transitioning from the Soviet model of centralized authoritarian government and planned economy to a pluralistic democracy with a free market. To that end, EU efforts have centered on promoting poverty reduction, education, and good governance, rather than aggressively promoting immediate political change (Ibid). As such, one of the priorities of the EU in the region is to raise educational standards, since most of the population in this region is less than 25 years old, which represents a precious potential for the future development of the area (European Union and Central Asia). The EU has several educational programs to promote its democratic values in the region, such as its Erasmus Mundus program, vocational education and training, and the Central Asia Research and Education Network (Ibid). These programs form the keystone of the EU's efforts to impart democratic values to young Central Asian professionals and elites, thereby shaping the region's intellectual and bureaucratic landscape according to its principles. The educational systems of countries in Central Asia began to deteriorate after the collapse of the Soviet Union. In all five countries in the region, to varying degrees, there needs to be more high-quality, practical education.

Widening the gap between the needs of employers and the level of professional student training has made corruption and mismanagement ubiquitous. This state of affairs hinders the development of human potential and long-term economic stability. The field of education is one of the keys to cooperation with the EU and Central Asia. The EU promotes large-scale system-wide reforms in higher education to bring it into compliance with the Bologna Process (its purpose - intergovernmental cooperation in higher education in Europe in its broader geographical interpretation). However, the Central Asian authorities have not implemented most of the EU-proposed reforms in the region. First, since Central Asia is not a priority in EU foreign policy, more than political and financial resources were needed. Secondly, local regimes were forced to implement reforms, which they saw as threatening their influence. Thirdly, many participants reluctantly embraced concepts considered foreign to local social and economic realities.

In Central Asia, the EU focuses on Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. In Kyrgyzstan, the EU assists the Kyrgyz government in reforming state governance and judicial reform,

educational reform, and poverty alleviation (Multi-Annual Indicative Programme for the Kyrgyz Republic 2014-2020). In assisting the Kyrgyz government in democratic transition, the EU provided support funding to the Kyrgyz Constitutional Council in 2010, launched a new program for democratization through electoral reform. The program has become operational in 2016, and has supported a judiciary reform and strengthened the rule of law program since 2014 (EU-Kyrgyz Republic relations, n.d). The EU systematically called on Kyrgyzstan to develop democratic principles and holds parliamentary elections in 2020 following international norms. In addition, the EU favors reforming the Kyrgyz judicial system, strengthening inter-ethnic ties and respect for human rights. The EU allocated 184 million euros to Kyrgyzstan between 2014-2020. These funds were allocated for three areas. Seventy-two million euros were earmarked for education and agriculture, and 38 million euros for human rights promotion.

In Tajikistan, the EU's approach to democratization is tied with development, complementing health, education, and rural development, while ensuring complementarities with regional and global programs supporting cross-cutting issues like improving governance and public finance management, promoting democracy and human rights, working on common security challenges, and giving new impetus to political, trade and economic relations and reforms (Tajikistan Multi-Annual Indicative Program, 2016). In addition, the EU is working to enhance appreciation of human rights in Tajikistan through an enhanced dialogue on human rights that have been held since 2008 and by organizing a civil society seminar that brings together non-government organizations, academics, and practitioners from the EU and Tajikistan to discuss issues on the approach towards civil society organizations and political opposition parties (EU-Tajikistan Relations, n.d). The Delegation of the European Commission to the Republic of Tajikistan was founded in Dushanbe in 2003, and in May 2004, it was officially accredited as a diplomatic mission. The human rights dialogues between the EU and Tajikistan provide a platform for discussing issues of mutual interest and contribute to enhancing human rights cooperation in multilateral forums such as the OSCE and the UN. EU officials meet annually with their counterparts from the Tajik government to address human rights concerns in Tajikistan. As part of its engagement with civil society, the EU delegation discusses critical human rights issues with representatives of civil society in

Tajikistan. In addition, the EU organizes an annual seminar for civil society representatives, each time discussing a new topic.

The EU-Turkmenistan Partnership and Cooperation Agreement forms the policy framework for EU democratization efforts in Turkmenistan. The Agreement integrates democracy, human rights, good governance, and the rule of law throughout its provisions (EU-Turkmenistan Partnership and Cooperation Agreement, 2019). Also, the annual EU-Turkmenistan Human Rights Dialogue institutionalized democracy and human rights as a critical component in EU-Turkmenistan relations. It served as a platform wherein to discuss human rights in Turkmenistan, as well as its implementation, the situation of civil society, fundamental freedoms, conditions in detention and torture prevention, cooperation with international bodies, in particular UN special procedures, as well as individual cases of human rights concern (EU-Turkmenistan, n.d). EU-Turkmenistan bilateral relations were given a regional perspective in the 2007 document “EU and Central Asia: Strategy for a New Partnership”, which outlines the EU’s overall cooperation objectives, policy measures, and priority directions for work in Central Asia. In June 2010, the European Council and the European Commission published their joint progress report on implementing the EU Strategy for Central Asia. The strategy has helped to strengthen cooperation and political dialogue between the EU and Turkmenistan.

Similar to the efforts in Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan, EU democratization efforts in Uzbekistan are focused on the rule of law and criminal justice reform, the improvement of social services, in particular mother and child health, inclusive education, rural development, strengthening of civil society and local actors, and support for small and medium enterprises (Multiannual Indicative Programme for Uzbekistan 2014-2020). Furthermore, the EU has supported Uzbekistan’s 2016 political reforms, which aim to improve the country’s business climate, judicial system, labor conditions, and administrative accountability and efficiency (EU-Uzbekistan Relations, n.d). However, concerning the five Central Asian states, the EU did not come up with the format of relations, due to limited resources, which are insufficient to conduct a full-fledged global policy in this area. Moreover, in this regard, the EU loses to other international players operating in the post-Soviet Central Asia, for

example, Russia, which has solid bilateral and multilateral (EAEU, CSTO) agreements with the Central Asian republics; China which has been actively promoting the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in the region, interacting commercially with the Central Asian republics; and countries in the “C5 + 1” format (Foreign Affairs ministers of the five Central Asian states plus the US Secretary of State), the US, and even Turkey with its “Council for Cooperation of Turkic-Speaking States”.

However, the European Union retains a stable interest in Central Asian energy resources, which predetermined united Europe to develop trade and transport corridors in post-Soviet Eurasia. Since 1994, a program of international cooperation between the EU and partner countries on the organization of the Europe-Caucasus-Asia transport corridor - TACIS (Technical Assistance for the Commonwealth of Independent States). Up to 2007, this program has served to define the many areas of activity of the EU in the post-Soviet space, Central Asia.

### **US Efforts in Southeast Asia from the Regional Democratization Perspective**

While the US has always been a Pacific power, the Asia-Pacific was only sometimes the highest priority in the scale of US interests. The Obama Administration was the first to elevate the Asia-Pacific as a US primary global, regional strategic priority, marking a stark departure from previous US administrations, which prioritized transatlantic ties, the Middle East, and Latin America (Shambaugh, 2013). In this sense, Obama decided, even in the initial period of his presidency, that the US as an Asia-Pacific power, should shift the balance of its foreign policy and play a more significant role in the Asia-Pacific region in the long run.

The US supports ASEAN countries making claims to the islands in the South China Sea. Thus, Obama stressed in his speech that Washington and these countries “share the goal of building a regional order in which all countries play by the same rules”. However, US democratization efforts may be viewed as forwarding its hegemonic goals in Southeast Asia, with strategic partnerships, diplomatic engagements, training and education arrangements, and military assistance programs by its hegemonic leadership in ideas, institutions, and material capabilities (Kiprizli & Kaya, 2019).



The Asia-Pacific's strategic geography and location prompted the US Pivot to Asia. The region which holds half of the world's population, is considered a key engine of global growth, and hosts key US allies and emerging powers (Clinton, 2011). Further, the US is seen as leading a concert of individual like-minded nations acting on the principle of enlightened self-interest alongside Western liberal democracies as a driving force of progress in the region (Morrison, as cited in A Free and Open Indo-Pacific, 2019). However, the US faces several challenges in promoting its democratic views in the Asia-Pacific, such as its own internal inequalities and social strife, systemic racism, and antagonistic states seeking to promote alternative modes of global governance (Interim National Security Strategic Guidance, 2021). In recent years, in the rhetoric of US politicians and officials, up to the level of the president, the traditional term Asia-Pacific region has been replaced by a new label, the Indo-Pacific region. Changes in terminology are increasingly visible changes in the foreign policy of the U. S. as a whole. However, how profound, and lasting will the change be? According to critics, the US response to the rapidly changing balance of power in the Asia-Pacific region, sometimes literally in a matter of years, has long been far from reality. Moreover, it began long before Trump came to power. Thus, all previous administrations in power after 1991 have shown a reluctance to intensify reforms in the world economy and trade, as well as the institutions that underlie the current economic world order.

ASEAN is critical to US economic growth for the coming decades, and its regional centrality, promotion of rules and norms, including the peaceful resolution of disputes and respect for international law, in turn, help to uphold the rules-based order in the Indo-Pacific (Searight, 2017). Further, there is a congruence between US democratic values and ASEAN principles, such as openness, transparency, inclusivity, a rules-based framework, good governance, respect for sovereignty, non-intervention, complementarity with existing cooperation frameworks, equality, mutual respect, mutual trust, and mutual benefit and respect for international law (ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific, 2019). Moreover, the U.S.-ASEAN strategic partnership is founded on common objectives, such as strengthening democracy, enhancing good governance and the rule of law, and promoting and protecting human rights and fundamental freedoms (Joint Statement on the ASEAN-U.S. Strategic Partnership, 2015). The U. S. is a traditional military-political and economic partner of the founding

countries of ASEAN (Singapore, Thailand, Philippines, Indonesia, and Malaysia). ASEAN-U.S. Dialogue Partnership relations, as well as ASEAN-EU relations, were established in 1977. In 2015, these relations were elevated to a strategic partnership at the ASEAN-USA summit in Kuala Lumpur.

At the ASEAN level, education and exchange programs are central to imparting US democratic governance practices to Southeast Asian elites and future leaders. U.S.-educated Southeast Asian elites can serve as influencers on behalf of US interests. The Young Southeast Asian Leaders Initiative (YSEALI) is the US government's flagship program to train future ASEAN leaders steeped in US democratic values, form a regional network of U.S.-trained specialists, and strengthen ties between the US and Southeast Asia (About YSEALI, n.d.). In addition, US development assistance to ASEAN under the 2020 Regional Development Cooperation Agreement enables both to implement congruent democratic values regarding good governance, human rights, and the rule of law (USAID & ASEAN, 2020). As part of the US "Pivot" towards the Asia-Pacific region, proclaimed during the second presidential term of Barack Obama, the U. S. paid increased attention to ASEAN. At the same time, the emergence in US foreign policy of new strategic lines of interaction with individual countries of the association also applies. For example, as Indonesia is the largest regional country and democratic Muslim state - Obama seemed to be an essential partner. Relationship with Vietnam, after the US embargo on arms sales to Vietnam was lifted in 2016, also acquired a new quality from both an economic and a military-political point of view. In Myanmar, after the transfer of power from the military regime to the civilian government (2010), Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton met with the leader of the Myanmar Democratic Movement, Aung San Suu Kyi, who in 2016 took up the post of Minister of Foreign Affairs. In 2016, the US hosted a special U.S.-ASEAN summit intended to re-emphasize the central importance of the association for American foreign policy in Asia and the democratization process in this country.

The US also expended democratization efforts in individual Southeast Asian states. However, given the diversity in Southeast Asia's political systems, US democratization efforts vary throughout the region. For example, the aftermath of the 2021 coup in Myanmar, which ousted the country's civilian government and resulted in a military takeover, prompted the US to enact sanctions against the

Tatmadaw, alongside diplomatic pressure and other tools to force the junta to return to democratic practices (U.S. Relations with Burma, 2021). These sanctions included visa restrictions and the freezing of US bank assets of high-ranking Tatmadaw generals, prohibitions on US businesses from dealing with Myanmar, and restrictions on US exports to Tatmadaw-controlled business conglomerates such as Myanmar Economic Holdings Limited and Myanmar Economic Corporation (Lewis, 2021).

In Thailand, the threat of violence against opposition protesters, allegations of corruption, and the undermining of democracy and royal authority were instrumental in the overthrow of Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra and the imposition of military rule in 2006 (Ockey, 2007). This was followed by another coup in 2014, which removed Prime Minister Shinawatra's remaining influence, consolidated military rule, and shifted Thai politics to an authoritarian direction (Baker, 2016). In response to the 2014 coup, the US withheld USD 4.7 million worth of security assistance, canceled several high-level engagements and training programs for the Thai military and police, halted the 2014 iteration of the CARAT exercises, which was underway when the coup happened, and canceled the annual Hanuman Guardian military exercises for that year (Marciel, 2014).

In Indonesia, the collapse of Suharto's New Order in 1998 paved the way for democratization. (Democratisation in Indonesia, 2000). Also, Indonesia's status as ASEAN's de facto leader and having the largest Muslim population in the world were key factors behind the significant improvement of U.S.-Indonesia relations, culminating in the signing of a Comprehensive Partnership in 2010 that fostered high-level engagement on democracy and civil society (Murphy, 2012). Later, the Comprehensive partnership was upgraded to a Strategic Partnership that emphasizes common democratic principles in addressing bilateral concerns with regional significance (Joint Statement on the ASEAN-U.S. Strategic Partnership, 2015).

The Philippines has a complicated relationship with the US, being a former colony of the latter and a treaty ally. Despite the Philippines being under US rule from 1898 to 1946, US democratization efforts in the country have been unsuccessful due to the domination of elections by the elites, poverty, failure of land and economic reforms, focus on form rather than substance of governance, and the central

government's lack of legitimacy in the eyes of the country's diverse ethnic and cultural groups (Sherill, 2006). Nevertheless, the US still supports the Philippine government's efforts to strengthen democratic governance, underpinned by the country's strategic importance and military ties encapsulated in the 1952 Mutual Defense Treaty (U.S. Relations with the Philippines, 2020).

## ANALYSIS

An analysis of EU efforts in Central Asia and US efforts in the Pacific from the democratization perspective can be organized through the following four logics of influence, i.e., control, material incentives, normative suasion, and capacity building (Magen & McFaul). In addition, these processes can also be viewed in conjunction with the 'Fortress Europe' concept and 'hegemonic stability' theory. A comparative analysis of EU democratization efforts in Central Asia and US democratization efforts in Southeast Asia is accomplished within the framework of the following four logics of influence:

1. Control involves the de facto abolition, or suspension, of a state's Westphalian and domestic sovereignty – though not necessarily its international legal sovereignty (Krasner, 1999, as cited in Magen & McFaul). It also includes the effective seizure of state institutions and coercion by a foreign power which then seeks to transform the controlled state's domestic structures (Ikenberry & Kupchan, 1990, as cited in Magen & McFaul, 2009). Historically, control as a logic of democratization was only exercised in warfare, where a state defeats and occupies its rival (Magen & McFaul, Ibid). While the EU has exercised the logic of control in Congo, Kosovo, and Bosnia and Herzegovina, it has not done so in Central Asia. In contrast, the US has done so in Southeast Asia during its colonial rule of the Philippines. However, as the Philippine experience shows, not even direct tutelage from a democratic power such as the US can guarantee the success of democratization without the perceived prerequisites of democracy being present, such as a solid and diversified economic base that requires collaborative effort and innovation, thereby requiring an open civil society, pluralistic political space, and accountable government institutions. In the context of hegemonic stability theory, democratization in the form of control allows a hegemon to influence and access strategic countries under the guise of military alliances

upholding common democratic values. This dynamic is evident in the Philippines. The US has left its institutional, cultural, and organizational scaffolding within the Philippines to keep it ready to re-establish its military bases should tension with China make such a military 'assistance' becomes a necessity.

2. Material incentives have positive and negative senses. In a positive sense, material incentives come from foreign assistance and development aid, designed to push states into adopting democratic governance practices (Magen & McFaul, 2009). In a negative sense, material sanctions are sanctions designed to induce hardships and social unrest, and to isolate a targeted state, thereby resulting in regime change or acquiescence to some external demands (Hart, 2000; Hufbauer et al., 1990; Smith, 1995, as cited in Magen & McFaul, 2009, ). Development aid and foreign assistance feature heavily in the EU's democratization efforts in Central Asia, and it can be rationally inferred that this aid comes with certain political conditions. In a positive sense, these material incentives for democratization strengthen Central Asian states' institutions and increase the people's living standards. The belief is that democratization leads to development. This situation, it is assumed will eventually reduce the possibility of people from Central Asia illegally migrating into the EU. However, in the context of the recent 2021 fall of Afghanistan, material incentives for democratization in Central Asia can have a negative sense. This is because Central Asian states enabled by EU foreign aid in exchange for adopting democratic principles can enact strict border controls and harsh migration policies, for example preventing Afghans from fleeing Taliban rule by going to the EU.

Similarly, US democratization efforts in Southeast Asia are tied to military assistance through its Foreign Military Financing program. Military assistance as a material incentive for democratization gives the US another lever of control when fostering dependence and, at the same time, influencing military elites. One of the implicit conditions of US military assistance is that aid recipients enter a U.S.-dominated military logistics chain for better pricing, availability of weapons, and access to technical support. In exchange, these military aid recipients surrender large portions of their foreign and defense policies to US interests. Further, suspending military aid can disgruntle military elites in recipient countries with personal stakes in their dealings with the US, such as education, bank accounts, properties, family members,

and professional contacts. Notably, the US suspended military assistance programs to Thailand in 2014 and the Philippines in 2018 due to undemocratic and authoritarian government practices. Solid cliques of U.S.-trained officers and personnel directly or indirectly may pressure their governments to acquiesce to US interests to continue receiving military aid and maintain privileges tied to the US, as the US will insist that democratization is one of the conditions to continue getting assistance.

3. Normative suasion as a logic of democratization is founded on a constructivist understanding of international relations. It assumes that external actors can facilitate the internalization of democratic norms, policies, and institutions by targeting domestic agents through social processes of induction, argumentation, deliberation, and complex learning (Koh, 1997; Risse et al., 1999; Risse, 2003, as cited by Magen & McFaul, 2009). Further, the viability of normative suasion as a logic of democratization rests on the appeal of liberal democracy as a form of government. In Central Asia, the EU seeks to shape the political landscape through soft power, such as education programs and supporting civil society. Similarly, the US tries to shape ASEAN at the organizational level by training the next generation of Southeast Asian regional elites. However, the paradox with the EU practice of democratization in Central Asia is that, on the one hand, it tries to promote its democratic norms and create contiguous policy and legal space in Central Asia. However, at the same time, it adopts restrictive migration and border control policies and measures. It is also notable that the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific, which was written in response to the US Free and Open Indo-Pacific, does not mention democracy directly, which may reflect a congruence rather than a confluence of values, ASEAN's efforts to maintain its centrality in Southeast Asia, and hesitancy to be drawn into great power rivalry.

Moreover, the democratic decline in the EU and the US diminishes the appeal of liberal democracy. It makes no sense that these epitomes of democracy are trying to get other states to follow their ideals. These democracies could not even abide by their democratic standards. In both the EU and the US, the rise of populism, xenophobia, economic inequalities, racism, and right-wing political parties work against the ideological appeal and very tenets of liberal democracy and the credibility of their democratization efforts.

4. Capacity building as a logic of democratization assumes that compliance with international norms is primarily achieved through knowledge sharing and strengthening domestic capacities (Chayes & Chayes, 1995, as cited in Magen & McFaul, 2009). Education and training form a crucial component of EU democratization efforts in Central Asia and the US in Southeast Asia, as these programs aim to build a core of skilled bureaucrats trained in democratic principles. These trained and skilled bureaucrats will in theory, provide the necessary human capital to run democratic institutions, whereby growth would be enabled and encouraged by corresponding economic reforms which in turn, will provide the resources to build such institutions. However, it should be noted that the Central Asian and Southeast Asian political spaces have features that may go against democratization efforts. A common feature of Central Asian states is that upon independence, they inherited a Soviet-style bureaucracy wedded to indigenous autocratic rule, with elements of ethnonationalism and Islamic rule led by strongman leaders. As such, EU capacity-building efforts for democracy may not fit into the regional political architecture, if they are not enabled by strongman rule and supported by state institutions that operate under elite capture. In connection with the Fortress Europe concept, state institutions co-opted by elites and enabled by capacity-building programs can enable regional strongmen to implement ethno-nationalist policies, which would discriminate against minorities and migrants, even before the latter could reach the EU. Similarly, US capacity-building efforts in Southeast Asia in the form of education and training create a corps of US-trained academics, bureaucrats, and military officers who are beholden to the US and have a strong incentive to act on behalf of US interests upon assuming positions of power in their respective countries. These beneficiaries of US favor will continue to maintain privileged positions in their respective societies, irrespective of whether they adhere to democratic practices themselves, or are even actually able to do so in their own political spaces.

## **CONCLUSION**

Given the above analysis of the strategic efforts of the EU in Central Asia and the US in Southeast Asia from a democratization perspective, some general conclusions can be drawn. First, the EU and US efforts oscillate between state/regional interests and values promotion. Both



actors are willing to set aside democratic values when their respective overriding core interests are threatened, namely preserving a common European cultural identity in the case of the EU and maintaining its strategic military interests in the case of the US. In both cases, Central Asian and Southeast Asian leaders in weak states may be willing to go through the motions of democratization processes while not disturbing the fundamentals of the socio-political systems that keep them in power. Such leaders will continue to enlist foreign support and aid to secure their hold on power via regime recognition or material assistance.

Further, it can also be argued that the appeal of democratic institutions has diminished due to the decline of democracy in the EU and US. In the EU and US, anti-democratic trends such as the rise of right-wing parties, xenophobia, populism, economic inequalities, and Western-specific attempts to stretch the fundamentals of liberal democracy, may have all served to diminish the credibility of democratization efforts in Central and Southeast Asia. Furthermore, the limited successes of liberal democratic institutions in those regions may also be construed as a pragmatic argument against the viability of liberal democracy outside the EU and the US.

Moreover, liberal democracy is just one of many political ideologies in today's multipolar international system. Emerging powers often try to carve out spheres of influence and export their ideologies to those areas. Those ideologies include Neo-Ottomanism from Türkiye, Velayat-e Faqih from Iran, Sovereign Democracy from Russia, and China's New Asian Security Concept. Liberal democracy, as promoted by the EU and the US, must contend with the worldviews, philosophical depth, intellectual rigor, ideological and cultural appeal, and practical applicability of emerging and future political ideologies.

The democratizing impulses of the EU in Central Asia had already lost their intensity by the beginning of the new millennium when it became clear that classical Western-style democracy in the countries of the region could entail political legalization of Islamist movements and stir up national strife, which would not provide Western investors with the stability that a moderately autocratic and European-friendly regime can provide. Therefore, in recent years, the EU has been openly and increasingly guided by its fundamental interests in its foreign policy towards the region's countries.

Moreover, these interests are long-term and broader. The EU's interest in the Central Asian space is not territorial. The EU would prefer to turn this space into an energy rear of the EU, similar to the role of the Persian Gulf for the US, to transform the Central Asian states, as far as possible, into a stable buffer between the EU and countries like Iran and Afghanistan. However, as this is done so as not to bear any military-political responsibility for the security of this buffer, the move does not endow the buffer countries with the much binding status of "neighbor".

When pursuing its democratization interests in Central Asia, the EU will inevitably face other influential players, namely Russia, China, and the U.S. The implementation of European strategies will depend on how well the EU succeeds in acting as a cohesive political entity since its members will not be able to compete with the powers mentioned above. The key to EU success in Central Asia in spreading its democracy in the region – is in its possible political consolidation and unification, in the development of effective instruments of joint foreign policy.

The countries of Southeast Asia felt relieved after the departure of former President Donald Trump. Now, anxiously, they await the return of their most preferred set of US instruments – namely, the recognition of the central role of ASEAN, support for multilateral institutions, and more transparent investment and economic activities. However, there is no need to rush to feeling a sense of optimism. The deep internal political split in the US and the inability to ditch overnight Trump's foreign policy baggage has made Washington a less reliable and predictable partner for ASEAN.

The arrival of J. Biden rightly raises the question of whether Trump's foreign policy principles and instruments will be dismantled in Asia or whether there will be continuity on several vital issues. Moreover, his predecessors entered Asia with their own particular branding - and Indo-Pacific reversal under Trump. The ASEAN countries themselves would be happy to see the continuity of the Biden administration with Obama's policies. However, one has to admit that there are specific prerequisites for this.

First, representatives of the democratic wing are more inclined to promote multilateral diplomacy and engage in various interaction

formats. The newly-elected president himself has already decided to return to some institutions that were unpopular with Trump. It is characteristic that Biden does not turn away from the renewed project of the Trans-Pacific Partnership, as his predecessor did, and remains interested in the possible involvement of Washington in the Agreement in the future.

Secondly, Biden's personnel appointments add to the optimism of ASEAN. This is about the "Asian king", as foreign media call him, Kurt Campbell. He is considered one of the principal architects of the Obama pivot to Asia and will now coordinate all Asian politics. At one time, Campbell played an essential role in the accession of the US to the East Asia Summit, advocated strengthening allied relations with Thailand and the Philippines, and built closer defense, trade, and economic ties with Indonesia, Vietnam, and Malaysia.

Multiple factors caused Central Asia and Southeast Asia to be out of the focus discussed above. For example, both regions are postcolonial: the notion of "democratization" is the process that needs to be revised as some cultural and metropolitan dominance in both regions have prevailed in everyday social life. Another illustrative example is that the dominance of the Russian language in Central Asia does not make regional elites uphold the democratic rights of the indigenous population struggling for their national identity in a postcolonial era. This is also clearly the case when Central Asian elites and society did not wish to examine the current Russia-Ukraine conflict in the region. However, it is not the case when the Russian minority rights are being violated at the state level in Central Asia. In the case of Southeast Asia, the region was not influenced by Communism at that level as Central Asia was. The region is quickly adaptable to the external, in this case, the US democratization efforts in creating a society with liberal values and multicultural diversity that makes them different from other Asian countries. Moreover, the English language in the region is associated with access to the best education and Western values.

Both regions are *developing* according to the UN: the economic reforms implemented in both regions since their independence brought into the people's welfare. For example, when Kazakhstan declared its independence at the end of 1991, ex-president Nazarbayev declared that Kazakhstan would be the "Central Asia Tiger" following the *Tiger Cub Economies* collectively, which is referring to the economies

of the developing countries of Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam, the five dominant countries in Southeast Asia. However, the lack of transparency and the high rate of corruption did not allow Kazakhstan to achieve the goal of being a true leader in Central Asia for social welfare. Despite its natural resources-driven economy, the country has failed to achieve its goal of becoming the “Central Asia Tiger”. However, there is a successful adaptation story, as follows: this is the Lee Kuan Yew’s Singapore model of economic and democratic reforms carried out in Kazakhstan; it seems to be successful with its specific non-western democratization and digitalization of all social life of Kazakhstanis, especially the system of e-government is realistic and stable, unlike the previous system in practice which was initiated by Nazarbayev’s reforms from 1991 until 2019.

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