Norms or Geopolitics: The European Union’s Impact on South Asia

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**Abstract**

This paper will explore the European Union’s activities comparatively in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh in order to analyze the EU’s influence in the regional politics as well as on the domestic politics of these states. The main focus will be the interaction between the EU and these states’ political actors in normative terms. What normative impact can the EU exert, given the region’s post-colonial apprehensiveness and its geos distance from Europe? This paper will argue that despite the recent internal political and economic upheavals which create uncertainty about the EU’s future as global player, the EU’s normative power in these South Asian states remains intact. In fact, the EU has become a key Western power whose political muscle in the region is utilized by these states in order to influence both domestic and regional political dynamics and economics. The EU’s contemplation on imposing sanctions on Pakistan for human rights violation in Baluchistan comes after India raising this issue to EU. This indicates that India is actively exploiting EU global and regional influence to further isolate Pakistan both regionally and globally. For Bangladesh, the Union’s support or opposition impacts domestic politics.

**Introduction**

As the political penetration of the European Union in the national politics of its member states has increased over the decades, its influence on global affairs has increased as well. European integration has become a model for economic and political cooperation for the developing states of South Asia. Like the United Nations, the EU has become a strong promoter of sustainable economic development and human security in this region. Some scholars go as far as to identify the EU as a normative power. Amitav Acharya sees non-state entities like the EU gradually becoming one of the pillars of the post-American, multipolar world order (Kuo, 2016). Others point to the internal dissonance among the member states that highlight the EU’s flaws, contributing to its incapability to become one of the global powers. Some scholars like Knud E. Jørgensen (2009) argue that EU’s lack of firepower is one of the contributing factors that hinders the exercise of its power. The EU has expanded in its responsibilities in recent years, however. The same Eurozone crisis and Brexit that led some to question the EU’s sustainability can be seen as challenges that improve and strengthen the EU. As John McCormick (2012) argues, the EU has faced challenges before and the Union emerged stronger than ever afterwards. However, the question here is not about whether or not the EU is a success or a failure. It is about assessing the EU’s power, specifically its normative power and how that is exercised outside of the EU.

The first section of this paper will discuss scholars’ discussion on the EU’s normative power and power in general. Then the second section of the paper will focus on the EU’s activity in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. The focus on this section will be the actions or policies undertaken by the EU in the areas of development or human rights (to analyze EU’s normative power), trade (to analyze the EU’s material power) and EU’s influence in the domestic politics of these states and the wider regional politics (to analyze its political power). The conclusion will elaborate on the EU’s future in these states.

**Section 1**

To be a normative power, there has to be some common ground on the factors or characteristics that constitute a particular norm. The basis of these factors and characteristics usually stems from a common cultural identity. However, the EU is a heterogeneous entity and its member states have diverse cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds. Furthermore, the idea of a “European identity” is an obscure one and some would argue that it does not exist. How can scholars argue that EU has normative power?

Ian Manners is a strong proponent of the EU as a normative power. In his article “The European Union’s Normative Power in Global Politics,” Manners (2012) asserts that, at the global stage, the EU is a normative power more than anything else. In order to understand the EU’s normative power according to him, we need to examine the EU’s principles, actions to promote its principles and the impact of EU’s actions to promote its principles. In this article, Manners is looking at the EU at a theoretical level, isolated from its interaction with the real world. In the real world, external factors can influence the Union’s power and how it chooses to exercise it. These factors may even deviate the Union from its principles. Manners (2006), in his article “European Union Normative Power and the Security Challenge,” argues that since 9/11, the EU has moved away from its normative approach to world politics and has become more militarized. The War on Terror (WoT) is best tackled through a normative approach that addresses terror at multi-levels, and the EU should go back to this according to him. The WoT, in this case, would be the real-world factor that deviated the Union from its principles on the surface. Manners does not seem to take that into consideration.

However, two questions emerge from Manners’s argument. First, although the WoT is an external factor that shifted the exercise of the EU’s power, was it completely external? The attack also led to a shift within the member states’ policies and interests. Multiple EU member states became strong allies of the U.S.A during the start of the campaign in Afghanistan. The shift, as Manners argues, to militarization of EU happened not only externally but also internally.

Secondly, can we say that the militarization of the EU is at conflict with its normative values? As Manners (2006) says, the EU has become a security actor in the field of “human security,” which is concerned with freedom from want, fear and human dignity. If the EU promotes the freedom from fear, then combating terrorism is one of the manifestations of this fight against fear.

This means that in order to uphold its principles, the EU has to resort to material aspect of its powers. Manners does take material incentives into account while assessing EU’s normative power. He gives the example of the EU’s promotion of labor standards through trade, which is a combination of its labor standards and material incentives (Manners, 2012). This sentiment is echoed by Mark A. Pollack in “Living in a Material World: A Critique of ‘Normative Power Europe.’” Unlike Manners, Pollack’s (2012) impression of the EU is not as idealistic. He argues that the EU succeeds in promoting human rights when it provides material benefit: access to the EU market. In addition, the EU’s promotion of environmental standard benefits those who can already meet these standards the most, according to Pollack (2012). Access to the EU’s market is not only beneficial to those who are offered this incentive, it is also beneficial to the Union. Therefore, according to Pollack’s logic, even providing material incentives can sometimes be beneficial to the EU.

If the EU is not as idealistic and there is interest in its actions, then it would make coordination among its member states nearly impossible, since everyone would be self-interested. Eiko R. Thielemann looks at burden sharing among the EU member states in the article “Between Interests and Norms: Explaining Burden-Sharing in the European Union.” He argues that despite interests, norm-based approaches can nonetheless offer an explanation of EU’s burden-sharing, like in the area of forced migration. Thielemann (2003) looks at two approaches to understand burden sharing. First is the logic of expected consequences (cost-benefit rationale, where the actor’s preference is formed outside of the institutional context) and second, the logic of appropriateness (the actor’s action is guided by identity and roles shaped by institution). He looks at European states accepting refugees as an example to make his argument. In regards to refugees, the EU has few provisions where if a state is overburdened with refugees, other states will share, but no more mention is made of compulsory binding rules (Thielemann, 2003). There are other soft non-binding rules. The European Refugee Fund on one hand indicates that states are sharing the burden. However, upon closer look, Thielemann (2003) argues that the hard bargaining that characterized the establishment of the ERF indicates that the cost-benefit approach is also at play. In other words, neither interest nor norms can be discarded. Both politics and norms are contributing factors in the Union’s policies and its actions.

John McCormick looks at norms, economic, material and political power. His book *The European Superpower* looks at the changing nature of political power and argues that the EU is a civilian superpower. The EU has a different attitude towards power and firepower relative to the U.S. According to him, although the EU lacks firepower like the U.S., it still has the resources to become the 2nd largest military in the world. All it lacks is political follow through. However, it does bring political leadership and unlike the U.S., the EU is more contemplative and deliberative before taking action, according to McCormick (2007).

McCormick’s assessment on the Union’s lack of firepower is a counterargument to those who see the gun-less EU as a weaker entity relative to those with guns. However, if the EU has the potential to become a military power, then why does not it do so? McCormick’s (2007) answer to this question is that the EU has a different approach to power. When it comes to terrorism, the U.S. and the EU have different approaches. The former relies more heavily on military solutions while the latter is more focused on the root causes of terrorism, according to McCormick (2007). European Parliament’s Party of European Socialists’ 2004 report, which McCormick (2007) cites, further supports his conclusion. However, as Manners (2006) demonstrates, there are some military elements to the EU’s approach to terrorism. In addition, the U.S.’s approach to counter-terrorism is not solely about military. Despite heavy U.S. military presence in Afghanistan, for example, there have also been efforts to “win the hearts and minds” of the Afghans by taking on civilian infrastructure projects.

Some of the authors mentioned here analyze the EU’s normative power internally and among its members. All of these members have had direct or indirect involvement in the making of these rules and norms. Granted there is some variance in the degree to which the members adhere to these norms. There may even be disagreements or different interpretations of these norms. However, power is essentially about making someone do something that the person otherwise would not do, according to Kenneth Waltz. Therefore, normative power should not only have some effect within the group that made up the norms, but also on those that did not. How effective is the EU’s normative power outside of the member states? This paper will look at EU’s influence on South Asian states of India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. Clearly, these states are far from Europe, therefore, there is a greater chance for any influence of the EU to be on its own accord, which might not be the case even for a non-EU European state. The non-EU European states may also share similar socio-economic and cultural heritage as the EU member states, which is not the case for these South Asian countries when compared to the EU member states. Plus, these non-EU European states are in close proximity to the EU. Therefore, if the EU has any normative influence in these South Asian countries, it might indicate that such EU norms have wider appeals. Additionally, if we want to consider the EU as a global power, we have to look at its reach and influence outside of the Union, power and exercise of power on developing states. Aside from being developing states, India, Pakistan and Bangladesh test the EU in different ways. Both India and Pakistan are nuclear powers and old rivals, therefore, they test the Union’s influence in the security arena and its potential role as a mediator. India is a regional power which allows one to examine the Union’s performance in dealing with a regional power. Pakistan, for its part, is a weak democracy and it plays a crucial role in the fight against international terrorist organizations, thus, testing the Union’s role as both a normative and security actor. Bangladesh lacks the military capabilities of India and Pakistan. However, looking at the EU’s role in Bangladesh allows one to examine how the Union deals with (or can deal with) a relatively smaller and weaker country. The three case study countries of this paper have unique qualities and factors that allow a deeper analysis of EU’s power and its status as a global power.

**Section 2**

**EU and India**

Aside from choosing to analyze EU’s influence in India for geographic reasons, there are other reasons that make India a good choice to study. Even though India is a developing country, it is also a regional power. If the EU is a global power, then its influence should not only be evident in weaker, developing states, but also among regional powers. India’s status as a nuclear power adds a security implication to the EU’s relations with India. The Union’s consistent support for non-proliferation and disarmament has the potential to pose a conflict of interest with India, who is not a party to the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). Therefore, this creates an interesting challenge for the EU to interact with the world’s largest democracy, the ideals of which the EU promotes wholeheartedly.

To begin, India did not always have the best perception of the European integration. Due to its experience as a British colony, India looked at the European integration with reservation. Winand, Vicziany and Datar (2015) see India’s perception of the European integration bordering on suspicion during the 1940s and 1950s. The Indian government saw the EU project and its free market as a threat to the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) and another way for the colonial powers to have an advantage in the global economy (Winand et al., 2015). During this time, India saw the genesis of a European Union as a union of colonial powers and its free market as a way for them to further exploit the former colonies in the developing world.

In regards to the EU’s stance on India’s nuclear weapons, there is lot more to be desired. The 1998 nuclear tests in India (and also in Pakistan) were condemned by the EU. The Union’s response, however, was merely declaratory in nature (Winand et al., 2015). A decade later, such condemnation was reversed during the 2008 U.S.-India Civilian Nuclear Agreement. During the negotiation of this agreement, Germany and other EU member states expressed their enthusiasm (Winand et al. 2015). This reversal not only shows contradiction, but also a lack of coherent policy by the EU in regards to one of South Asia’s nuclear power. In addition, the EU showed a lack of leadership by complying with the U.S. policy (tilting away from Pakistan and toward India) in this matter rather than upholding its non-proliferation values. Granted the nuclear agreement is about civilian use of nuclear power. However, India has a nuclear rival across the border and in the past, it has not shied away from flexing its nuclear muscles.

On the other hand, then Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh actively sought German Chancellor Angela Merkel’s and the other EU member states’ (like France) approval on this agreement (Winand et al., 2015). Meaning the EU’s support does impact the legitimacy of the agreement. What is surprising is that as Prime Minister Singh lobbied for Germany’s approval, Pakistan’s Foreign Minister was there to persuade Germany to not support the nuclear agreement (Winand et al, 2015). Such support for India’s nuclear power, however, tilted the regional power balance in India’s favor, to the dismay of Pakistan (Jamal, 2015) and China (Winand et al., 2015).

India’s disputed region Kashmir has been a security concern for decades. There have been multiple armed conflicts between India and Pakistan over Kashmir. One such is the Kargil War in 1999, which threatened a nuclear war between the two rivals. There have been numerous attempts, both bilaterally between India and Pakistan and multilaterally, to resolve the conflict. The EU, for its part, encourages the peaceful solution to the conflict. The EU encourages negotiation over Kashmir and promotes democracy based on Article 33 of the European Parliament resolution on EU-India negotiation (Khorana, Garcia, 2013). Following this, the Indian Foreign Secretary proposed a visit to Pakistan for talks over Kashmir (Khorana, Garcia, 2013). Khonara and Garcia (2013) speculate whether resolving this regional conflict is part of the Free Trade Agreement (FTA) negotiation between the EU and India that has been in a stalemate for years. If it is, then it is certainly a bold step by the Union to have a greater political presence in the region. The Union is utilizing its trading leverage to bring about a diplomatic solution to a persistent regional problem. However, as the recent military spat between the two rivals shows, this diplomatic initiative was not very fruitful. On the other hand, if the EU did set Kashmir is a condition for the FTA agreement, then India’s willingness to visit Pakistan for a diplomatic talk was not out of sincere desire to end this decade-long conflict, but due to its own economic interests. In other words, the Union’s economic allure and political pressure are significant enough for India to agree to visit its old rival.

In non-security related areas, the EU has left its footprints in India. It has responded to natural disasters, providing relief and aid in the affected areas. As for direct aid, due to India’s economic growth, the EU is gradually phasing out direct aid (The European Year for Development, 2015). There are areas where the Union is aiding India’s development. The EU-India Skills Development Project is one such example. Launched in 2012, under this project, the EU will provide €6 million over the next 4 and a half years (European Union, 2012). According to then EU Ambassador to India João Cravinho, this project is part of the “Europe 2020” strategy (European Union, 2012). Through this project, the Union is aiding India’s economic and social development.

Trade is another area where the EU has (or can potentially have) great impact not only in Indian domestic politics but also in its society. The overdrawn impasse over the FTA is the result of mismatch of interests between the EU and India, according to Khorana and Garcia (2013). Both India and the EU have different priorities. India is resistant to open up its economies and reduce tariff as desired by the EU. There is also resistance to open up the service industry to the EU, which would be the biggest aspect of the FTA deal. But currently, India’s service industry, namely the telecommunication industry is riddled with bureaucracy and lacks any national treatment (Khorana, Garcia 2013). Furthermore Khorana and Garcia (2013) argue that, if India opens up its retail industry to the Union, then the small street vendors would suffer as a consequence. According to Eberhardt and Kumar (2010), the FTA negotiation is driven by big corporates and the negotiation is not open to the public. These small street vendors without Indian government’s protective measures, would be unable to compete with big supermarkets run by big corporates. Therefore, an agreement on FTA between EU and India can potentially be life changing for many small Indian entrepreneurs. The lengthy negotiation over FTA is thus, not only due to a mismatch of interests, but its repercussion on Indian society may also be a factor for the Indian government to drag out the talk.

Aside from the policy based impact that the EU has on India, politics within the EU has impact in the region. The EU’s recent shake up with Brexit created a mix of doubt and possibilities for India. India is the third largest investor in the U.K., and Indian companies employ around 100,000 in that country (Francombe, 2016). Therefore, the decision to leave the EU creates uncertainties for Indian companies there. During her visit to India on November, 2016, British Prime Minister Theresa May and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi discussed such concerns. While there are uncertainties generated by Brexit, some in India see this as an opportunity. Sunil Mittal the Chairman of Bharti, one of India’s largest business conglomerates, sees Brexit as an good chance for India to have greater business openings in the U.K. Bharti argues that since the U.K. will soon leave the EU and its market, it look will for large markets abroad and India can be that market (Daily News & Analysis 2016). This can potentially impact not only trade relations between the U.K. and India, but also between the EU and India by reducing the EU’s access to India’s market. The risk of such reduction can open up spaces for negotiation between the Union and India.

**EU and Pakistan**

The EU’s relation with Pakistan can pose both challenges and opportunities. The Union has been a promoter of democracy around the world for many years. Pakistan has experienced multiple military coups over the years. Therefore, looking into the EU’s effort to promote democracy in Pakistan can help us analyze its political and normative power and its effectiveness. In addition, with the WoT, and confirmed presence of international terrorist networks (by the elimination of Osama bin Laden), Pakistan is a key player and ally in international politics and security. Therefore, the EU’s counter-terrorism efforts in Pakistan will help us analyze how big of a security player the Union is.

For Pakistan, the EU is its biggest trading partner and one of its giver of development aid. Pakistan and the EU (then the European Community) began their diplomatic relationship in 1962 (Delegation to Pakistan, 2016). Since then, Pakistan has received aid in the areas of food and development from the EU. Between the years 2002-2006, Pakistan received €93.6 million in aid from the EU (Korski, 2007). By 2009, the European Community Humanitarian Office (ECHO) had given €443 million, especially to areas in Pakistan with food insecurity and malnutrition, like Sindh Province for example (Delegation to Pakistan, 2016).

However, in current years, especially in the light of WoT and military campaign in Afghanistan, the Union’s aid to Pakistan increased due to security concerns. With the rise of terrorist activities and deterioration of quality of life for many Pakistanis in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), the EU has raised concerns over Pakistan’s lack of social development. The Pakistani government and the military have been trying to quell the tension in these regions. Then there are external factors that are exacerbating the tension in the FATA regions. Afghan support for a separate Pashtunistan for example aggravates the government’s security concerns (Jamal, 2016). There are obviously factors at work here that originate in Afghanistan, discussions on them however, fall outside the scope of this paper. Nevertheless, the origin of terrorism as perceived by Modi and Afghan President Mohammad A. Ghani, is Pakistan. As the Heart of Asia Conference took place in Amritsar, Modi and Ghani talked about terrorism in the region (The Hindu, 2016) with a focus on Pakistan. The EU was also part of this conference among other organizations and states. Nonetheless, the EU sees the lack of social development in Pakistan having detrimental effects on the efforts to end insurgency in Afghanistan (Cassar, 2009). The EU has thus taken on various humanitarian efforts in Pakistan following its logic to tackle terrorism by tackling the root socioeconomic causes of terrorism. The EU has recognized Pakistan as a strategic partner in the region, as evident in the regularly held strategic dialogues. These dialogues cover issues that range from security, to trade, human rights and democratic development.

Aside from being security partner, Pakistan is also a trade partner to the Union. One of the biggest trade development between the EU and Pakistan has been the Generalized Scheme of Preference (GSP) plus status. This program is designed to reduce export duties for developing states. After the 2010 flood in Pakistan, it received such reduction on export duties, after which Pakistan was officially the given the GSP plus status in 2014 (European Commission, 2013).

In the promotion of democracy, the EU has played a supporting role in Pakistan’s election. The EU has deployed many election observer missions around the world. In Pakistan, the Union has observed elections held in 2002, 2008 and also in 2013. The fact that the Union was invited to deploy such mission for multiple elections in Pakistan mean two things. First, for Pakistan, the EU recognized as an unbiased actor, and a strong promoter of democracy to oversee its election process. The approval of such an unbiased, democratic promoter of Pakistan’s elections can provide the newly elected government with both recognition and legitimacy (thereby bringing some level of political stability). On the other side, by needing such observance missions, it also means that Pakistan still has some ways to go in terms of becoming an established democracy. Second, such observance missions show concrete actions taken by the EU to promote democracy in Pakistan.

In the promotion of human rights, the EU has a mixed record in Pakistan. In the light of recent violence in Balochistan, and human rights violations, the EU has been considering imposing sanctions on Pakistan. European Parliament’s vice-president Ryszard Czarnecki recently said that “I told the European Union during our human rights debate that if our partner countries do not accept human rights and standards, in this situation we should react and seek sanctions, like some moves in economic field” (Chaudhury, 2016). So far, such threats has not been carried out. Czarnecki expressed sharper criticism of the Pakistani military, comparing it to Hitler’s goons as it commits genocide in Balochistan (ANI, 2016). What is interesting is that while expressing such criticisms, Czarnecki praised Prime Minister Modi for bringing up the Baloch human rights issue to the EU. This situation can have two possible meanings. First, India views the EU as a credible advocate of human rights to bring in such concerns. Second, Prime Minister Modi is now bringing in external actors like the EU to become players in the regional politics (since there has been increased tension, and military skirmishes between India and Pakistan over Kashmir recently). He is trying to isolate Pakistan from international community and bringing in diplomatic pressures to weaken Pakistan. The Union, on the other hand, is playing its part in the regional politics. Even though Czarnecki is expressing such harsh criticism due to human rights violations by Pakistani military, but by openly praising Modi, he is eroding the Union’s neutral image.

**EU and Bangladesh**

Bangladesh is different from India and Pakistan. It is not a regional power. It does not have the strategic or security importance relative to Pakistan. Bangladesh has had democratically elected governments in the past. However, like Pakistan, Bangladesh too has experienced military coups and the condition of elections and political culture overall leave a lot to be desired. Additionally, some recent events point to the emergence of terrorist activity. The government’s treatment of opposition political party and civil society raises questions on the condition of human rights and civil rights within the country. Therefore, The EU’s role as a global actor should not only be scrutinized in India and Pakistan, who are bigger players in the regional politics, but also in a small (yet densely populated) states like Bangladesh. Based on the political, economic and security conditions, there are many grounds on which the EU can get involved in Bangladesh.

The EU is one of Bangladesh’s main trading partners. Around 12% of Bangladesh’s total trade is with the EU and from 2011 to 2015, Bangladesh’s export to the Union increased from €10.8 billion to €17.6 billion (Delegation of the EU to Bangladesh, 2016). From the EU’s perspective, Bangladesh was its 35th largest trading partner in 2015 (European Commission, 2016). Textile and frozen foods are some of the key export items to the Union.

When it comes to trade relations and the EU’s push for its principals like labor rights, the 2013 Rana Plaza tragedy was a critical event. The event has prompted the Union to push for workplace safety and labor rights in Bangladesh’s. A little over a month after the incident, the EU, the International Labor Organization (ILO) and Bangladesh government issued a joint statement where both Bangladesh government, ILO and the EU (represented by the European Commission) committed themselves to a Sustainability Compact. The Sustainability Compact calls for labor rights reform, the right to form unions, improve occupational safety and improve structural integrity of garment factories (European Commission, ILO and Government of Bangladesh, 2013). The EU for its part will provide assistance to rehabilitate those disabled due to the incident, and find areas to provide assistance to the government for the improvement of working conditions (European Commission, ILO and Government of Bangladesh, 2013). Although it is a valiant effort by the EU to improve garment workers’ working conditions, however, one has to wonder whether various European companies and even the EU was aware of such safety violations and labor rights issues before the incident. If so, then why did the Union wait until Rana Plaza to push the government to adopt such measures?

Despite such actions, there are still many factories that lack minimum safety standards. In September of 2016, a boiler explosion at a packaging factory killed 15 people (France-Presse, 2016). At a recent press event on November 2016, U.S. Ambassador to Bangladesh Mercia Bernicat admitted more has to be done to improve workplace safety (Star Business Report, 2016). Clearly, workplace safety is still a big concern. Aside from the Sustainability Compact, the EU continues to keep the issue relevant and on its agenda. In 2015, Commissioner for Trade Cecilia Malmström, remembered the Rana Plaza incident upon its third year anniversary and also reiterated the objectives that the EU has for labor conditions in Bangladesh (Malmström, 2015).

 While it is good to keep the issue alive, the EU can take firmer measures to improve working conditions for Bangladeshi garment factory workers. Setting a clear agenda and time table creates an urgency and gives the issue a higher priority. The EU may even consider trade sanctions if certain improvements are not met in a certain time frame. These sanctions can even target certain Bangladeshi garment companies in order to induce key violators to comply with the labor and safety standards as set forth by the Sustainability Compact and the ILO. Although there are regular reports that track areas of progress and improvement on the Sustainability Compact, there has to be more urgent reason for compliance with international labor standards. On a positive note, the European Parliament has adopted a non-binding resolution to reduce textile workers’ exploitation in April of 2017 (Plenary Session, 2017). This move however, has been met with criticism in Bangladesh. Bangladesh's Commerce Minister Tofail Ahmed thinks that foreign buyers always single out Bangladesh’s labor safety issues, rather than point out such issues in other textile exporting countries (Banglanews24, 2017). His comments imply that the government sees the Union’s move as an unfair policy against a smaller, weaker state.

Along with the garment industry, Bangladesh exports frozen food to various EU member states. After the garment industry, frozen food, especially shrimp, is the biggest export item for Bangladesh. From 2014 to 2015, Bangladesh exported $355.03 million worth of frozen shrimp and fishery items (BFFEA, 2015). In 1997, the EU imposed a ban on Bangladesh’s shrimp exports. The ban happened due to unsanitary practice and the use of banned chemicals (Nupur, 2010). The ban led to heavy losses. The Bangladeshi economy lost $14.7 million in revenues due to the ban (Alam, Pokrant, 2009). And after the ban, the industry practice changed drastically.

The garment industry and the shrimp industry differ in many ways. The shrimp industry is a profitable one Bangladesh which often require relatively less capital, unlike the garment industry. Therefore, it is an attractive industry for many small entrepreneurs in Bangladesh. Another contrast is where the two industries are concentrated. The garment industry is mainly concentrated in bigger cities (like Dhaka) or areas that are closer to commercial hubs. The shrimp industry, by its nature, need areas with water sources (which can be hard to find in bigger cities). So the shrimp industries thrive in rural areas. Due to high demand from Western countries like the EU member states and the U.S., coupled with lower startup costs, the shrimp industry boomed in the 1990s.

However, after the Union’s ban, the shrimp industry had to change its practice in many ways. Producers had to use plastic holding containers instead of bamboo baskets and transport the shrimp in proper vehicles with refrigeration rather than in rickshaws (Alam, Pokrant, 2009). The government also had to invest on better lab equipment as well as hire qualified technical personnel in these labs (Alam, Pokrant, 2009). Therefore, the shrimp industry became more professionalized as a consequence of the ban.

On a social level, many women employed in the industry lost their jobs. Since the shrimp industry is in rural areas, the ban meant fewer job opportunities for people in these areas. As a result, some migrated to the cities, traveling back and forth to maintain two household (Alam, Pokrant, 2009). This not only increased their living costs, but also disrupted their family life.

Aside from internal migration that disrupt rural and urban life, Bangladesh faces the challenge of immigration. The inflow of Rohingya refugees fleeing persecution from Myanmar has been a chronic problem. The EU has been aiding in various relief programs since 1994, such as providing €30.87 million in aid to Bangladesh between 2007 and 2015 (ECHO Factsheet, 2016). In the light of the recent Rohingya influx, Foreign Minister A.H. Mahmood Ali requested international help at a meeting attended by ambassadors of U.S., China, India and the EU (IANS, 2016). However, aside from providing aid, the EU has pressured the Bangladeshi government on this issue. In December 2016, at the biennial meeting between the EU and Bangladesh, the Union urged the government to not to deport Rohingya refugees (Bruxelles, 2016)

As the Rohingya population continue to face persecution by the Myanmar military, the solution is not pouring more aid in the problem but moving towards a political solution. If the problem persist without a long-term solution, then the situation can go elsewhere. The Rohingya population, as they face violence in Myanmar and marginalization in Bangladesh, they may resort to radical paths, which will threaten national security in both Myanmar and Bangladesh and the region in general. Bangladesh, which has experienced its own terrorist activities in recent times, if some sect of the Rohingya population become radicalized, it will no longer be a refugee issue. Therefore, this is an area where the EU can play a bigger role than it has been so far. The diplomatic pressure evident at the biennial meeting last year, should be continued.

A good example of the EU’s diplomatic pressure was seen during the January, 2014 general election in Bangladesh. The political climate surrounding the election was extremely tense. The opposition political party BNP (Bangladesh Nationalist Party), boycotted the election due to concerns over the election’s free and fair nature. The Union, along with the U.S., declined to send election observers in order to force the parties to come to an agreement (Bangladeshnews24.com, 2013). Although the election was held as planned, however, it lost its legitimacy. The opposition parties continue to mention the Union’s and the U.S.’s refusal as a way to critique the government and its legitimacy, adding to the domestic political tension in Bangladesh. In this instance, the Union’s norm based action continues to impact domestic politics.

**Conclusion**

The EU has been active in these three South Asian countries. The EU has a strong trade relation in these countries. For all the three states covered, the EU is one of their biggest trading partners and a good source for these countries to earn foreign currency. The EU is one of the big aid donors and partners for development. Although the Union is gradually reducing its direct aid to India, however it has other forms of development programs active in the country, the EU-India Skill Development Project for example. In Pakistan and Bangladesh, the EU has more direct forms of aid for individual well-being and for social and political development.

In the political and security arena, the EU has mixed results. On one hand, the Union’s image as a promoter to democracy and human rights is credible enough for the three states in the case studies to request its attention and assistance in some of the region’s and their own domestic problems. In some of its short-term endeavors, like election observance missions in Pakistan, the EU has been successful. However, when it comes to the region’s thornier problems, like the Kashmir conflict and the Rohingya crisis, the EU has not achieved much success or even has been hesitant to get involved more deeply.

On the region’s security issues like Kashmir and the nuclear rivalry, EU’s actions in these cases has been partial and showed weakness a global leader. While promoting its normative values like upholding human rights, the Union has gotten entangled in regional power politics. Modi attracting the EU’s attention to Balochistan is an attempt to isolate Pakistan from the international community and the EU is playing into this. While sanctions can be an effective tool to induce human rights compliance and should not be discarded as an option, the Union has to be careful imposing them on a strategic ally like Pakistan. More importantly, the EU has to do this on its own accord and not because India brought it into attention.

As for Bangladesh, it is an area where the EU can potentially become more involved. The Union has been aiding Bangladesh in various social development projects and in environmental issues. However, as the recent terrorist attack at Dhaka’s Holey Artisan Bakery has shown, international terrorist groups have infiltrated this country. Combined with the Rohingya refugee issue (if left unresolved), Bangladesh will play greater role in the region’s security environment in the future.

Finally, the European Union is a global power. India, Pakistan and Bangladesh all see the EU as a valuable market for their export products. In addition, the Union is among the partners for social development and promotion of human rights in these states. While encouraging human rights and diplomacy, the EU shown partiality in some cases. While in other instances of human rights abuse, it has shown hesitancy, limiting itself to declaratory support. The EU should not be indecisive in promotion of human rights in this three states. Its reservoir of normative, economic and political power as a global actor should be used to the fullest.

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