

**EIAS Expert Roundtable Discussion**  
*Closed-door*

**“EU Perspectives on the Latest Developments in Myanmar”**

*20 September 2022*

**REPORT**

On 20 September 2022, a Closed-door Expert Roundtable Discussion on “*EU Perspectives on the Latest Developments in Myanmar*” was held at EIAS in Brussels under the Chatham House Rule. The aim of the discussion was to exchange views on the current situation in Myanmar, economic developments, human rights concerns and potential political solutions. Xavier Nuttin, EIAS Senior Associate and Member of the Advisory Board chaired the roundtable. Felix Haas, Managing Director of Progress Asia Ltd. (Myanmar) shared his perspectives on recent developments by means of introduction and to kickstart the discussion, after which an interactive exchange and debate followed.

The conflict in Myanmar, triggered by the military coup in February 2021, continues to escalate. Following the declaration of the *defensive war* made by the National Unity Government (NUG) on 7 September 2021, the People’s Defence Forces (PDF) were formed with the purpose to resist the military. This has not only shifted the conflict across the country, but also intensified the situation as the military deployed brutal violence against the growing opposing forces.

While the EU has faced criticism for being rather quiet on Myanmar’s crisis, the discussion highlighted many ways in which the EU has been active and continues to search for new effective measures to direct the current situation towards a political settlement of the dispute. So far, the EU has adopted four rounds of sanctions, targeting Myanmar’s military, with an attempt to restrict their access to resources and influence. The progress has been monitored on a consistent basis to help revise and identify new courses of action that may be taken if the situation deteriorates further. Furthermore, although there have been a number of meetings between the EU and the NUG, which have been made available to the public, there are ongoing discussions between the EU and its like-minded partners aimed at increasing the level of engagement and cooperation with the NUG.

Meanwhile, the European Parliament has voted on a resolution regarding the crisis, and is likely to have another vote in relation to the upcoming EU-ASEAN 45th Commemorative Summit in December 2022, which will also include some specific elements on Myanmar. Similarly, the ASEAN Parliamentarians for Human Rights (APHR) is at the final drafting stage of its proposal, including their conclusions on Myanmar’s development, which will be presented in Brussels in October 2022, and likely to be officially announced sometime before

the EU-ASEAN Commemorative Summit in December. Participating experts in this roundtable discussion argued that these measures have served as a powerful sign that Europe cares. Unfortunately, Europe's efforts as a diplomatic actor in Myanmar may not always be as visible on the global stage.

Nevertheless, there are always ways in which the EU can improve and increase its level of engagement in Myanmar. The invited experts agreed that the EU's people-to-people contact is an advantage that should be continued. However, such interaction must be established with the civil society inside and outside Myanmar. The EU should also consider investing in strengthening the political foundation in the country. This would imply investing in training future elites, equipping them with the necessary skills that will enable them to make a change once they return. This was described as an effective and necessary measure for a regime change.

The discussion also highlighted some future events that are likely to happen next year. Following the end of the State of Emergency on 31 January 2023, an election is expected to be held before the end of August 2023. However, considering the current developments in Myanmar and signs of failure to implement the conditions provided by the State of Administration Council in the beginning of the military coup, having a fair and inclusive electoral process will prove to be difficult.

In conclusion, the future of Myanmar remains to be seen, however, the situation is likely to intensify over the next few years. Yet, the Ukraine crisis has shifted the world's attention and priorities, and consequently Myanmar is failing to get the attention it may deserve. Therefore, it is imperative to continue to keep Myanmar on the political agenda for the EU to continue to engage with like-minded partners, and enhance its support for ASEAN, —especially under the upcoming Indonesian Presidency— which is considered to be the vital actor to mediate in the conflict, to make sure that the world does not forget about Myanmar and its people.

*Report written by Simmi Saini, EIAS Junior Researcher*