

Learning to Coexist: Russia-ASEAN Ties from Enmity to Enmeshment

Andrea PASSERI
University of Bologna, Italy

Raimondo NEIRONI
Catholic University of Milan, Italy

The Journal of Northeast Asian History
Volume 16 Number 1 (Winter 2019), 7-42

*Copyright © 2019 by the Northeast Asian History Foundation. All Rights Reserved.
No portion of the contents may be reproduced in any form without
written permission of the Northeast Asian History Foundation.*

Learning to Coexist: Russia-ASEAN Ties from Enmity to Enmeshment

Abstract

Over the course of their mutual history, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and Russia have progressively moved from a background of enmity and distrust to a framework of burgeoning cooperation. To a large extent, this gradual shift has embodied a direct by-product of the Association's deliberate efforts to envelop Moscow in a growing net of interactions, so as to socialize the Kremlin in the highly distinctive normative architecture centred on the 'ASEAN Way' and turn it into a responsible regional stakeholder. Accordingly, by drawing upon Evelyn Goh's conceptualization of 'enmeshment strategy' the present article sheds light on the tools and initiatives put in place by the Association not only to engage Russia and maximize the positive returns of a cordial relation with Moscow, but also to influence its conducts, perceptions and regional agenda in a way that is consistent with the ideas of 'inclusive regionalism' and 'ASEAN centrality' professed in Southeast Asia. In doing so, the analysis will be structured around a three-staged periodization, covering the long era of animosity under Soviet rule (1967-1989), the embryonic and tentative exchanges established after the end of the Cold War (1989-2004), and the blossoming of the Russia-ASEAN partnership that materialized during the second, third, and fourth terms of the Putin presidency (2004-2019), which also coincided with the unravelling of his ambitious 'Asian pivot' aimed at countering Moscow's increasingly strained relations with the West. As a result, the article argues that the remarkable trajectory experienced over the course of the last two decades by the ASEAN-Russia dyad provides a further evidence of the successful legacy achieved by the Association's enmeshment blueprint in turning a former 'outsider' of Southeast Asian politics into a staunch supporter of regional stability.

Keywords: Russia, ASEAN, Enmeshment, Cooperation, 'ASEAN Way'

Learning to Coexist: Russia-ASEAN Ties from Enmity to Enmeshment*

Andrea PASSERI
University of Bologna, Italy

Raimondo NEIRONI
Catholic University of Milan, Italy

I. Introduction: ASEAN's Great Power Diplomacy and the Practice of 'Enmeshment'

Long considered as a peripheral spot within the overall picture of great power relations, Southeast Asia currently enjoys a sense of centrality in diplomatic circles around the globe that has absolutely no parallels in history. Quite unanimously, the credit for such an astonishing transformation of the sub-region in what is increasingly labelled as '*the geopolitical epicentre of our time*' or '*the place where giants meet*' has been accorded to ASEAN, a highly distinctive intergovernmental organization that in recent decades spearheaded the establishment of a network of institutionalized interactions both within its ranks and towards a wide range of external interlocutors.¹ In particular, the main source of ASEAN's uniqueness stems

* This article reflects the joint outcome of the efforts of both authors. In practice, though, Andrea Passeri wrote the paragraphs 1, 4, and 5; while Raimondo Neironi wrote the paragraphs 2 and 3.

¹ Ernest Z. Bower et al., "Southeast Asia's Geopolitical Centrality and the U.S.-Japan Alliance," Working Paper, Center for Strategic and International Studies, June 2015: 8. See also Andrea Passeri and Antonio Fiori, "Where Giants Meet: the Sino-American Soft Competition in Southeast Asia. The Cases of Myanmar and Vietnam," in *The Chinese Challenge to the Western Order*, ed. Antonio Fiori and Matteo Dian (Trento: FBK Press, 2014): 105-22; Ekaterina

from its absolute faith in a pretty unique model of regionalism, which stands in stark contrast with the blueprints and mechanisms pertaining, for example, to the European Union (EU), inasmuch as it has been historically led by a group of small and medium powers through a very low level of formalization, as postulated by their conceptualization of ‘soft institutionalism.’² According to Amitav Acharya, the impetus displayed by ASEAN in assuming the driver’s seat in East Asian regionalism and in advancing its characteristic recipe for institutionalised cooperation has emanated from the Association’s deep-rooted aversion not only in acting as a passive imitator of notions borrowed from abroad, but also in surrendering its propulsive role to external great powers that could monopolize the stance and agenda of regional multilateral groupings.³

As a result, since its very genesis in 1967 the Association has given birth to a normative and procedural framework, also known as ‘ASEAN Way,’ whose initial task was to act as an intestine conflict-avoidance tool based on informal and consensual consultations, as opposed to overtly legalistic and adversarial decision-making processes.⁴ With the end of the Cold War, however, the grouping was forced to totally rethink its stance and aspirations in the international arena, so as to cope with an increasingly multipolar regional scenario marked by numerous pushes and pulls, as epitomized by the rapid ascendance of the People’s Republic of China (PRC). Consequently, the overarching values ingrained in the ‘ASEAN Way’ came to be used also in the attempt of building bridges vis-à-vis a list of great powers encompassing China, the U.S., Japan, India, and Russia. As illustrated by Laura Allison-Reumann’s seminal investigation on ASE-

Koldunova, “Russia’s Involvement in Regional Cooperation in East Asia. Opportunities and Limitations of Constructive Engagement,” *Asian Survey* 56, no. 3 (2016): 532-33.

² Peter J. Katzenstein, *A World of Regions: Asia and Europe in the American Imperium* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005); Min-hyung Kim, “Why Does a Small Power Lead? ASEAN Leadership in Asia-Pacific Regionalism,” *Pacific Focus* 27, no. 1 (April 2012): 111-12.

³ Amitav Acharya, “How Ideas Spread: Whose Norms Matter? Norm Localization and Institutional Change in Asian Regionalism,” *International Organizations* 58 (Spring 2004): 244-52.

⁴ Donald E. Weatherbee, *International Relations in Southeast Asia. The Struggle for Autonomy* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2009, second edition): 128-29.

AN's attitudes and modus operandi as a 'norm-entrepreneur,' the paradigm endorsed by the Association to establish an inclusive and interdependent network of intergovernmental institutions in East Asia during this critical juncture revolved around two central tenets: the concept of 'cooperative security,' aimed at bringing about an open template of regionalism animated by a wide array of stakeholders, and the ideal of 'ASEAN centrality,' which postulated that the Association and its set of basic rules had to be retained as the cornerstones of future multilateral initiatives.⁵ By the same token, ASEAN member States looked also adamant in voicing several important vetoes, as for their rejection of adversarial, confrontational, and zero-sum patterns of interstate interaction, while professing a strong attachment to the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of their political counterparts.

Against this backdrop, it can be argued that ASEAN's tireless endeavours to include and socialize foreign great powers in its institutional architecture have thus underscored a clear emphasis on the transmission of prescriptive norms, so as to indicate what standards of action were regarded as proper or suitable according to the Association's 'logic of appropriateness.'⁶ To a large extent, the prescriptive norms embraced by the grouping have been disseminated through persuasive and non-coercive instruments, stemming from the practice of ASEAN-sponsored 'institution-building' that entered a whole new era in 1993 with the establishment of the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), as the first avenue erected by the Association with the deliberate purpose of engaging the main protagonists of East Asian politics. Since then, the ARF has been entrusted with the task of providing an informal and flexible venue for dialogue and cooperation with countries like the PRC, the U.S., Japan, Russia, Australia, South Korea, and Canada, plus several latecomers as in the case of India. Subse-

⁵ Laura Allison-Reumann, "The Norm-Diffusion Capacity of ASEAN: Evidence and Challenges," *Pacific Focus* 32, no. 1 (April 2017): 6.

⁶ For a detailed analysis on the 'logic of appropriateness' and its persuasive tools, see: James G. March and Johan P. Olsen, *Rediscovering Institutions: the Organization Basis of Politics* (New York: Free Press, 1998).

quently, this push acquired even greater momentum in the aftermath of the 1997-1998 Asian financial crisis, which further persuaded the Association to strengthen its steering role with the rest of the region by giving birth to a variety of brand-new, ASEAN-led institutions. Hence, after having backed the emergence of the 'ASEAN+3' (APT) format in 1997 to further bolster its ties with Tokyo, Beijing, and Seoul, the Association reached another important milestone in 2005 with the setting-up of the 'East Asia Summit' (EAS), and in the following year the proliferation of ASEAN-backed regional institutions led to the inception of yet another platform, based on the 'ASEAN Defence Ministers Plus' (ADMM+) meetings.

Each of these venues, most notably, has been attentively tailored to fit with the 'ASEAN Way' and its underlying norms, values, and world-view, as for those ingrained in the 'Treaty of Amity of Cooperation' (TAC) inked by the Association in 1975 in the attempt of creating an embryonic set of conflict-avoidance rules. Due to the activism displayed by ASEAN in its socializing endeavours within the ranks of regional institutions, various scholars have thus scrutinized the advancement of the Association's institution-building agenda as a crucial pillar of the grand strategy put in place by this peculiar grouping to cope with an increasingly multifaceted security dilemma.⁷ In the words of John D. Ciorciari, for example, ASEAN's multilateral diplomacy and binding engagement have proved extremely relevant to achieving a positive 'entanglement' of the aforementioned plethora of great powers within a growing network of regular interactions, which proved as an essential prerequisite for the materialization of what he refers to as the 'complex balance of the external influences' operating in Southeast Asia's geopolitical perimeter.⁸ Likewise, others have portrayed the Association's quest to erect an open, diversified, and cooper-

⁷ Michael Leifer, "The ASEAN Regional Forum," *The Adelphi Papers* 36, no. 302 (1996); Muthiah Alagappa, *Asian Security Order: Instrumental and Normative Features* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003); John D. Ciorciari, "The Balance of Great-Power Influence in Contemporary Southeast Asia," *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific* 9, no. 1 (January 2009): 157-96.

⁸ John D. Ciorciari, "The Balance of Great-Power Influence in Contemporary Southeast Asia," 157.

ative security environment as a deliberate effort to establish a series of mutual counterchecks, so that key regional actors like China, the U.S., Japan, India, and Russia could act as responsible stakeholders by ‘keeping an eye on each other.’⁹

Amongst the various tools experimented by ASEAN in order to advance its institution-building agenda and dissuade the recourse to power politics, the most successful one is certainly embodied by the practice of ‘enmeshment.’ According to Evelyn Goh, who formulated the most exhaustive elucidations of the concept, the idea of enmeshment primarily refers to:

the process of engaging with an actor or entity so as to draw it into deep involvement into a system or community, enveloping it in a web of sustained exchanges and relationships, with the eventual aim of integration. In the process, the actor’s interests are redefined, and its identity possibly altered, so as to take into greater account the integrity and order of the system.¹⁰

As a result, an enmeshment strategy transcends the ordinary goals of engagement, since it seeks to achieve way more than a temporary convergence of interests amongst the actors involved. Its ultimate target, in fact, lies in the subtle and progressive modification of the perceptions and behaviour of the counterpart, at least when it comes to the definition of few shared rules aimed at building a workable relation marked by a certain level of mutual trust. Additionally, the case of ASEAN seems to confirm that this specific blueprint unleashes its best dividends when pursued towards multiple targets simultaneously, under the banner of a ‘omni-enmeshment’

⁹ Evelyn Goh, “Southeast Asian Perspectives on the China Challenge,” *Journal of Strategic Studies* 30, no. 4-5 (August/October 2007): 827.

¹⁰ Evelyn Goh, “Great Powers and Southeast Asian Regional Security Strategies: Omni-Enmeshment, Balancing and Hierarchical Order,” *RSIS Working Papers*, no. 84, S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, July 2005: 9.

approach.¹¹ Furthermore, the practice of enmeshment brought about by the Association has also displayed a multi-layered nature, encompassing both bilateral and multilateral levels of interaction, which have complemented the initiatives endorsed by ASEAN as a whole in the establishment of a wide array of strategic partnerships with external interlocutors.

Concerning the implementation of enmeshment, the theorization proposed by Evelyn Goh entails the attainment of three consecutive steps.¹² First and foremost, the actual unravelling of similar initiatives involves the effort of identifying and reaching out to the external actors, who might embody the main targets of the whole campaign. In the case of ASEAN, this was achieved through the genesis of brand-new forums such as the ARF, which served the purpose of ‘inviting’ the aforementioned list of great powers in the open form of regionalism erected by the Association itself. Accordingly, the embryonic overtures voiced by ASEAN since the early 1990s represented an important act of ‘legitimate inclusion,’ inasmuch as they acknowledged the stakes and roles of foreign great powers in the management of Southeast Asia’s security scenario. The stage was thus set for the opening of the second stage in the omnidirectional ‘charm offensive’ ignited by the Association, which revolved around the consolidation of ‘institutionalized interactions’ with these interlocutors as a way to entangle them in the intergovernmental frameworks sponsored by ASEAN. Finally, the strengthening in mutual cooperation and trust that descended from the multiplication of contacts during multilateral summits and the inking of preferential economic agreements has been conducive to the achievement of the final phase of the omni-enmeshment strategy unleashed by the Association, rooted in the adoption of a ‘cooperative security’ paradigm shared by all the parties involved.

Yet, the multi-vector emphasis ingrained in ASEAN’s foreign policy does not find an equivalent picture in the literature, which has been exten-

¹¹ Evelyn Goh, “Great Powers and Hierarchical Order in Southeast Asia. Analyzing Regional Security Strategies,” *International Security* 32, no. 3 (Winter 2008): 121.

¹² Evelyn Goh, “Great Powers and Hierarchical Order in Southeast Asia. Analyzing Regional Security Strategies,” 130-31.

sively hegemonized by the evolving ties cultivated by the Association with the PRC.¹³ Due to this inherent bias, the remarkable trajectory enjoyed by the former in socializing a set of second-tier powers such as the Russian Federation has received little or no attention at all by the scholarly community, with few notable exceptions aimed at scrutinizing the prospects of engagement between the two sides.¹⁴ Nevertheless, the ASEAN-Russia dyad is perhaps amongst the best suited in order to test the overall extent and ultimate by-products of the Association's enmeshment strategy, especially if one considers the tangible progresses experienced in their bilateral ties since ASEAN's very genesis in 1967. In fact, the relationship with Moscow has gone a very long way during the last decades, moving from a condition of reciprocal enmity and distrust in the Soviet era to the framework of a burgeoning partnership, marked by Russia's progressive 'entrapment' in the web of ASEAN-sponsored multilateral institutions. In doing so, most notably, the Association has successfully persuaded the Russian counterpart that it was also in Moscow's best interest to contribute to the establishment of a stable, open, and truly multipolar security architecture in East Asia, thus discouraging the adoption of unilateral and confrontational policies.

Building upon these premises, the following article sheds light on the process of gradual metamorphosis enjoyed in the bilateral relation between ASEAN and Russia, arguing that its success in transitioning from a state of friction and discord to an unprecedented era of fruitful dialogue and 'win-win' cooperation stands out as one of the most significant accomplishments produced by the Association's omni-enmeshment campaign. In or-

¹³ See Alice Ba, "China and ASEAN: Renavigating Relations for a 21st-century Asia," *Asian Survey* 43, no. 4 (July/August 2003): 622-47; Carlyle A. Thayer, "ASEAN, China and the Code of Conduct in the South China Sea," *SISIS Review* 33, no. 2 (Summer-Fall 2013): 75-84; Cheng-Chwee Kuik, "How Do Weaker States Hedge? Unpacking ASEAN States' Alignment Behaviour Towards China," *Journal of Contemporary China* 25, no. 100 (2016): 500-14.

¹⁴ See Paradorn Rangsimaporn, "Russia's Search for Influence in Southeast Asia," *Asian Survey* 49, no. 5 (2009): 786-808; Elena S. Martynova, "Strengthening of Cooperation Between Russia and ASEAN: Rhetoric or Reality?," *Asian Politics & Policy* 6, no. 3 (2014): 397-412; Ekaterina Koldunova, "Russia's Involvement in Regional Cooperation in East Asia. Opportunities and Limitations of Constructive Engagement," *Asian Survey* 56, no. 3 (2016): 532-54.

der to test its main claim, the investigation relies on a three-staged periodization that is designed to illuminate the key junctures, turning points, and milestones faced by ASEAN-Russia relations during their half-century long journey. The first phase, accordingly, looks at the faltering start endured by both sides during the Cold War era (1967-1989), as the Soviet embroilment in Indochina and its traditional prejudices towards ASEAN as a 'fifth column' of the West hindered any possibility of kick-starting even basic contacts between the Kremlin and the freshly-formed Association. Still, the systemic changes brought about by the dissolution of the USSR and the end of the bipolar confrontation pushed both actors to totally re-frame their roles, aspirations, and modus operandi in the international arena. As far as ASEAN is concerned, such a profound reassessment culminated in the aforementioned launch of a 'cooperative security' blueprint, centred on the Association's ability to advance an open and multipolar format of regionalism.

Consequently, this massive shift laid the foundations for the appearance of ASEAN's embryonic enmeshment initiatives directed at the Russian Federation, which kick-started an unprecedented period of tentative contacts (1989-2004) that will be extensively analysed in the second phase. Precisely as postulated by the incremental and piecemeal nature of enmeshment, this phase was inaugurated by the Association's initial overtures aimed at acknowledging Moscow as a 'dialogue partner,' which, in turn, paved the way for the emergence of a powerful act of 'legitimate inclusion' symbolized by Moscow's 2004 accession to the TAC. Moreover, during the following year the two sides also held the first ASEAN-Russia Summit, so as to further convey the idea that Moscow was no longer considered as an outsider of Southeast Asian politics. Since the mid-2000s, after having secured the Kremlin's commitment to regional governance through an expanding range of institutionalised interactions, the Association's enmeshment strategy has focused on the realization of its third step, aimed at forging a shared and cooperative security blueprint with the Russian Federation. In particular, Moscow's involvement in Southeast Asia's multilateral realm has grown significantly in concomitance with Vladimir Putin's third (2012-2018) and fourth (2018-) presidential terms, as epitomized

mized by Russia's 2012 chairmanship of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum. Subsequently, the 'divorce' from the West triggered in 2014 by the Ukrainian crisis has further persuaded the Putin administration to cultivate Moscow's political status and diplomatic reach in East Asia with a sense of urgency and a degree of dynamism that have no parallels in the country's history.¹⁵

Hence, the third and final phase scrutinizes the major breakthroughs emerged in the ASEAN-Russia relation under the banner of Putin's much-publicized 'pivot eastward,' that has been explicitly tailored with the goal of bolstering both the increasingly intimate Sino-Russian relation and Moscow's cooperative ties with the Association. With regards to the latter, the Kremlin's socialization in the normative framework of the 'ASEAN Way' has reached unprecedented heights between 2016 and 2018, following the celebration of the commemorative summit held in Sochi for the 20th anniversary of the Russia-ASEAN 'dialogue partnership' and the subsequent elevation of their bilateral ties to the rank of a full-fledged 'strategic partnership.' This upgrading, grandiosely announced in November 2018 during the 3rd ASEAN-Russia summit organized in Singapore, has therefore testified that after 22 years of growing interactions the two sides are finally eager to reap the benefits of the final stage of enmeshment, embodied by the adoption of a shared 'cooperative security' blueprint. As a result, the inking of the strategic partnership can serve as a further reminder of Moscow's consolidated commitment to the prescriptive norms at the core of the ASEAN-led model of regionalism, centred on the aforementioned concepts of 'ASEAN centrality' and 'open regionalism,' which proved essential to erase the scars of the Cold War era by moulding a whole new *modus vivendi* with the Association. Unsurprisingly, similar trends are nowhere more visible than in the gradual evolution of Moscow's posture in the South China Sea conundrum, which has gradually shifted from outright neutralism to a cautious support of several arguments voiced by regional

¹⁵ Anton Tsvetov, "After Crimea: Southeast Asia in Russia's Foreign Policy Narrative," *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 38, no. 1 (April 2016): 57-64.

States in their confrontation with the PRC, as epitomized by Putin's repeated calls to uphold the ASEAN-backed 'Declaration on the Conduct of the Parties in the South China Sea' (DOC).

II. ASEAN-USSR Ties in the Soviet Era (1967-1989): from Reciprocal Diffidence to an Incipient Form of Dialogue

Throughout the Soviet era, Moscow's relations with the freshly established ASEAN remained negligible and subject to mutual sentiments of suspicion and distrust, pushing some scholars to notice that there was no other area of the world just like Southeast Asia where the Kremlin had failed to exert political influence in the same way as it had showed its military capabilities.¹⁶ Still, the interest of the USSR towards the sub-region dated back to the Leninist era, and it had gained further momentum in the late 1950s when Nikita Khrushchev spearheaded the launch of a new foreign policy doctrine devoted to the Third World. At that time, however, Moscow's key interlocutors in Southeast Asia were represented by the Communist movements involved in a series of national and anti-colonial struggles, which received an extensive support from the USSR also in light of the growing ideological rift unleashed between the Soviet Union and the PRC for the leadership of the Marxist camp. As a result, ASEAN States tended to regard Moscow's free-riding and confrontational policies as a relevant source of regional tensions, and this idea was largely reconfirmed in the late 1960s by the Soviet increasing embroilment in the Indochinese conundrum, where the USSR stepped-up its role as a key diplomatic and military partner of North Vietnam. A further evidence of this course was brought about in 1969 by the Association's reticence in backing Brezhnev's diplomatic initiative centred on the so-called 'Asian Collective Security Proposal.' The idea, tentative and vague, was largely unsuccessful also due to

¹⁶ Ronald D. Palmer, "The Soviet Union and Southeast Asia," *The Washington Quarterly* 9, no. 4 (1986): 169; Robert C. Horn, "Soviet Influence in Southeast Asia: Opportunities and Obstacles," *Asian Survey* 15, no. 8 (August 1975): 656-57.

China's vehement reaction, which inhibited other Asian states from taking the project into consideration.¹⁷

By the same token, during its formative years the Association often attracted harsh critical remarks from the Kremlin, which dismissed it as an organization merely aimed at disguising a pro-Western strategic alignment, as previously epitomized by the case of the 'Southeast Asian Treaty Organization' (SEATO).¹⁸ To a large extent, the episodic and largely insufficient interest displayed by both sides in sketching-out the framework of a more cooperative relation was also a by-product of their exiguous economic ties. Between 1954 and 1979, the ASEAN perimeter ranked lowest in terms of Moscow's economic assistance amongst the non-aligned regions of the Third World, with the notable expectation embodied by Sukarno's Indonesia.¹⁹ On top of that, and in spite of their self-proclaimed faith in a neutralist and equidistant diplomacy, the wide majority of Southeast Asian States had anchored themselves either to the U.S. through a flurry of bilateral security agreements, as symbolized by the Thai and Filipino accessions to the Manila Pact, or to their formal colonial overlord, by inking a series of *ad hoc* arrangements with the UK which granted access to their military facilities.²⁰ Moreover, Moscow's adventurism well beyond its sphere of influence during the Afghan War (1979-1989) further hindered any prospects of dialogue with ASEAN, and the overall mood of the Kremlin's interactions with the Association became even gloomier due to Brezhnev's support for the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia. The net effect of these moves, cou-

¹⁷ Arnold L. Horelick, "The Soviet Union's Asian Collective Security Proposal: a Club in Search of Members," *Pacific Affairs* 47, no. 3 (Autumn 1974): 276.

¹⁸ Fedor Mediansky and Dianne Court, "The Soviet Union in Southeast Asia," *Canberra Papers on Strategy and Defence*, no. 29, Strategic and Defence Studies Centre, Australian National University, 1984: 7.

¹⁹ Fedor Mediansky and Dianne Court, "The Soviet Union in Southeast Asia," 41.

²⁰ In 1971, as a further example of this course, Britain signed the 'Power Defence Arrangements' (FPDA) with Malaysia, Singapore, Australia, and New Zealand. The FPDA were to replace the Anglo-Malaysian Defence Agreement (AMDA), under which London was then responsible for the defence of the Federation of Malaya. For a detailed investigation, see: Ralf Emmers, "The Five Power Defence Arrangements and Defense Diplomacy in Southeast Asia," *Asian Security* 8, no. 3 (2012): 271-86.

pled with a stark recrudescence of the Sino-Soviet rivalry, thus persuaded the ASEAN's 'founding fathers' to preserve their traditional scepticism vis-à-vis the USSR and its allegedly subversive behaviour in the international arena, whilst inhibiting the Soviets from building a comprehensive diplomatic initiative in favour of the non-Communist countries of Southeast Asia.

Yet, by the time Gorbachev assumed office in March 1985 East Asia was emerging 'as a centre of world power equal to, if not greater than, that of Western Europe,'²¹ whereas the USSR had faced since the mid-1970s deteriorating economic performances which required far-reaching reforms. Consequently, the emergence of a 'détente' with the region immediately acquired a central significance in the framework of the 'new political thinking' sponsored by the freshly installed Chairman of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU). As a result, between the mid-1980s and the last CPSU Congress (July 1990) held before the dissolution of the USSR Gorbachev endeavoured to reshape the traditional and largely unsuccessful posture of Moscow towards East Asia, so as to adapt it to the new contingencies that were taking shape both domestically and in the international arena. In his own view, as explicitly mentioned during a famous speech given in Vladivostok in July 1986, the Soviet Union had to act as an 'Asian power with Asian responsibilities,' through the progressive framing of a *modus vivendi* with China, the two Koreas, and Southeast Asian countries.²² As a matter of fact, this historic shift meant that the Kremlin desisted from treating the ASEAN perimeter primarily as a battleground in the global confrontation between revolutionary and conservative forces, while starting to look at Southeast Asia as a remarkable opportunity to rekindle the Soviet sluggish economy and get access to modern commodities and technologies.

In plain opposition with the legacy of Brezhnev, who had targeted his

²¹ Donald S. Zagoria, "The Kremlin Looks Bad in East Asia," *Journal of East Asian Affairs* 3, no. 1 (Spring/Summer 1983): 114.

²² Roger Buckley, *The United States in the Asia-Pacific since 1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002): 178.

foreign policy efforts towards India and the socialist regimes located in Indochina, the new course brought about by Gorbachev thus showed an unprecedented interest in normalizing Moscow's heretofore strained exchanges with the Association and in giving birth to an embryonic form of dialogue between the two sides.²³ On the other hand, Gorbachev's willingness to secure a diplomatic thaw with China, which was symbolized by his State visit to Beijing in May 1989, added further momentum to the reshaping of the Kremlin's posture and image in the entire region, as it strongly contributed to further open the doors of the Asia-Pacific to the Soviet presence. Emblematically, Gorbachev's Vladivostok speech also coincided with a visible attenuation in the Soviet traditional rhetoric that sought to portray ASEAN as a subtle version of SEATO, which was replaced by a much more cooperative attitude in supporting a series of political initiatives put forward by ASEAN States, as in the case of Malaysia's plan to turn Southeast Asia into a 'Zone of Peace, Freedom, and Neutrality' (ZOPFAN), unburdened by the presence of proxy wars and foreign military bases.²⁴

In March 1987, moreover, the Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze travelled to Thailand and Indonesia for the first State visit of a Soviet leader since the early 1960s, and its incipient 'shuttle diplomacy' across Southeast Asian capitals proved quite successful in persuading the wide majority of ASEAN countries that the USSR could be effectively tamed and enveloped in a growing net of institutionalised interactions. Even more importantly, the recalibration of Moscow's foreign policy in the region entailed a relevant change of posture also in terms of the Cambodian conundrum: in fact, with the Indochinese country dragged in a vicious cycle of war and instability the prospects for a lasting diplomatic breakthrough between the USSR and ASEAN remained quite remote. The Kremlin, as already mentioned, had long stood out as a key source of military and finan-

²³ Stephen M. Young, "Gorbachev's Asian Policy: Balancing the New and the Old," *Asian Survey* 28, no. 3 (March 1988): 319-20.

²⁴ Sheldon W. Simon, "Superpower Cooperation in Southeast Asia," in *The Cold War as Cooperation. Superpower Cooperation in Regional Conflict Management*, ed. Roger E. Kanet and Edward A. Kolodziej (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1991): 359.

cial assistance for Vietnam, and the Association considered the Cambodian issue as a key test to grasp the real extent of the political overtures voiced by Gorbachev. Accordingly, when the latter opted to utilize its leverage in the attempt of persuading Vietnam to identify a lasting arrangement with China over the future of Cambodia, Moscow's popularity in the region finally started to experience a positive trend, which was further reconfirmed in late September 1989 as Hanoi started to withdraw its troops from the war-torn neighbouring country.

Hence, it can be argued that the restructuring of Soviet-Vietnamese relations and the toning down in the ideological fervour of Moscow's diplomacy, together with the Kremlin's pull-out from Afghanistan and positive contribution to the Cambodian peace process, paved the way for the opening of a whole new era with ASEAN countries, as the two sides managed to absorb also the major shock ignited by the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the bipolar confrontation. From its standpoint, the Association utilized the embryonic diplomatic rapprochement experienced with the USSR between 1985 and 1989 to sketch out a more coherent and consensual position towards the Soviet claim to embody a 'responsible East Asian power.' In doing so, most notably, ASEAN member States were progressively overcoming their long-standing fears rooted in the Kremlin's support for the communist parties still active all across Southeast Asia, which had been often considered as 'fifth columns' mobilized both by Moscow and Beijing to destabilize the sub-region.²⁵ As a result, when Gorbachev expressed for the first time an explicit call to become a 'dialogue partner' of the Association on the sidelines of his far-reaching speech given in May 1988 in Krasnoyarsk, ASEAN proved extremely receptive. In the meantime, Shevardnadze had also voiced the idea of an 'All-Asian Forum,' which reflected a flexible and inclusive blueprint of security cooperation amongst East Asian stakeholders modelled around the 'Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe' (CSCE) and its 'Helsinki process.' Ar-

²⁵ Muthiah Alagappa, "Soviet Policy in Southeast Asia: Towards Constructive Engagement," *Pacific Affairs* 63, no. 3 (Autumn 1990): 337-40.

guably, similar moves were designed to showcase the Kremlin's unprecedented resolve in equipping its foreign policy with a 'device to disarm Asian critics of Soviet policy and to attach an aura of responsibility to Soviet involvement throughout the Asian continent,' and both the concept brought about by Shevardnadze and the example provided by the CSCE stood out as two important references for the actualization of the 'ASEAN Way' in the post-Cold War era.²⁶

In the aftermath of the 'All-Asian Forum' initiative, as also noted by Robyn Lim, the Association thus started to employ a subtler and more accommodative approach towards Moscow, aimed at encouraging the Soviet aspiration to act as a responsible power while safeguarding the ASEAN's 'driver's seat' in East Asian regionalism.²⁷ With such an epochal change of attitude, the stage was set for the unravelling of ASEAN's enmeshment strategy vis-à-vis the Russian Federation, which, in December 1991, inherited the control of vast portions of the former USSR.

III. A New Dawn? The Genesis of ASEAN's Enmeshment Strategy towards the Russian Federation (1989-2004)

Since the very onset of the dissolution process that led to the Soviet collapse, ASEAN progressively desisted from perceiving Moscow as a noteworthy security threat, and the dynamic of incipient dialogue established between the two sides during the Gorbachev era gained further momentum. Accordingly, in February 1990 the then Prime Minister of the USSR Nikolai Ryzhkov became the first Soviet Premier to travel to Thailand and Singapore, which had formerly embodied one of the staunchest critics of Moscow's presence and involvement in Southeast Asian affairs. The visit turned into a ground-breaking event, since it laid the foundations for Rus-

²⁶ Leszek Buszynski, *Gorbachev and Southeast Asia* (Abingdon: Routledge, 1986): 607.

²⁷ Robyn Lim, "Implications for Southeast Asia," in *The Soviet Union as an Asian Pacific Power: Implications of Gorbachev's 1986 Vladivostok Initiative*, ed. Ramesh Thakur and Carlyle A. Thayer (London: Westview, 1987): 82-83.

sia's participation as an observer to the 24th ASEAN Ministerial Meeting held in Kuala Lumpur in July 1991. At the end of the summit, most notably, the status of bilateral ties between the Russian Federation and the ASEAN bloc was formally elevated to the rank of a 'consultative partnership,' as the Association's member States grew increasingly convinced that Moscow could be effectively enveloped in the expanding network of institutionalised exchanges that was taking shape in the post-Cold War East Asian scenario. Similarly, from the Kremlin's perspective the growing interest towards the multilateral realm showcased in Kuala Lumpur proved that Russian diplomats were increasingly aware of ASEAN's relevance as the key hub for Asian regionalism, inasmuch as they began to look at the strengthening of Moscow's interaction with the Association as a major precondition to expand Russia's influence in the whole Asia-Pacific.²⁸

Yet, it must be also highlighted that throughout the 1990s the Russian Federation was in shambles both economically and strategically, after having rapidly dissipated the superpower status of the USSR. As a result, when it came to the conceptualization and implementation of a comprehensive foreign policy for East Asia, the Kremlin encountered inevitable difficulties and constraints. On top of that, the country's external projection still assigned a paramount priority to Europe, even though a peculiar strain of Moscow's political establishment started to revamp the idea of Russia as a 'Eurasian power': this vision gained further traction between 1996 and 1998 with the designation of Yevgeny Primakov as Foreign Minister of the Russian Federation, who sponsored the launch of a multi-vector diplomacy shaped by a growing emphasis on Moscow's Eastern partners.²⁹ As far as ASEAN was concerned, the policy of multipolarity brought about by the 'Primakov doctrine' thus acted as an additional catalyst behind a mutual

²⁸ Dmitry Gorenburg and Paul Schwartz, "Russia's Relations with Southeast Asia," *Russie.NEI Reports*, no. 26, Institut Français des Relations Internationales (IFRI), March 2019: 15, https://www.ifri.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/gorenburg_schwartz_russia_relations_southeast_asia_2019.pdf. Accessed November 4, 2019.

²⁹ Vladimir N. Kolotov, "Main Trends of Russia's Foreign Policy in Transforming East and Southeast Asia," Brookings, April 1, 2008, <https://www.brookings.edu/opinions/main-trends-of-russias-foreign-policy-in-transforming-east-and-southeast-asia/>. Accessed November 4, 2019.

rapprochement based on an analogous worldview between the two counterparts, which foresaw the emergence of multiple centres of power all across East Asia.³⁰ In July 1996, moreover, the 29th ASEAN Ministerial Meeting convened in Jakarta celebrated the upgrading of Russia-ASEAN ties into a full-grown ‘dialogue partnership,’ precisely as contended by the three-staged theory of enmeshment. Since then, Moscow was therefore acknowledged by the whole Association as a key target of its great-power diplomacy in the post-Cold War era, whose main aim resided in the consolidation of a complex balance of the external influences operating within the region.

Against this backdrop, the inking of the dialogue partnership paved the way for several breakthroughs in the fields of cultural and scientific cooperation, as symbolized by the establishment of a series of embryonic exchange programs involving students, scientists, and technicians from both sides. In addition, two-way trade between Russia and ASEAN skyrocketed by 716 per cent between 1993 and 1996, notwithstanding the fact that Moscow’s trade share still ranked lowest amongst the Association’s dialogue partners.³¹ Yet, both actors also appeared reciprocally disillusioned and embittered at times. Russia, in particular, had to witness throughout the entire Yeltsin presidency (1992-1999) a quite disappointing trend not only in terms of the trade structure with ASEAN countries, which was dominated by natural resources, raw materials, and arms deals, but also in the sphere of foreign direct investments (FDIs), as the 1997-1998 Asian financial crisis further hampered the attractiveness of Russia’s Far Eastern *oblasts* for international investors.³² On the other hand, ASEAN member States became increasingly mindful that in spite of Primakov’s own influence the Yeltsin administration was still hegemonized by a pro-Western

³⁰ Vadim Kononenko, “From Yugoslavia to Iraq: Russia’s Foreign Policy and the Effects of Multipolarity,” *UPI Working Papers*, no. 42, The Finnish Institute of International Affairs, 2003: 6-7.

³¹ Paradorn Rangsimaporn, “Russia’s Search for Influence in Southeast Asia,” 795.

³² Peggy F. Meyer, “The Russian Far East’s Economic Integration with Northeast Asia: Problems and Prospects,” *Pacific Affairs* 72, no. 2 (1999): 218-23.

camp, centred on the figure of the former Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev, who claimed that Europe had to be firmly retained as the primary epicentre of the Kremlin's foreign policy. Unsurprisingly, his emphasis on the emulation of the democratic and market-driven regimes of the West raised numerous eyebrows within the Association, where this particular recipe was largely regarded as doomed to failure (Bazhanov and Bazhanov 1993: 101-02).

The permanence of certain residual elements of mutual scepticism and distrust, however, did not prevent the two sides from gradually enlarging the scope and frequency of their interactions, and the growing commitment displayed by the post-Soviet establishment in implementing a foreign policy based on multilateralism, cooperation, and dialogue convinced ASEAN to reciprocate similar overtures. In fact, the road that led to the ratification of the dialogue partnership in 1996 had been punctuated since its very genesis by a series of gradual and incremental steps, conducive to Russia's progressive 'entrapment' in the intergovernmental network erected by the Association. In 1992, more specifically, Moscow had entered the ranks of the 'Pacific Economic Cooperation Council' (PECC), and it had also joined the ARF since its very inauguration in 1994, thus emerging as one of the potential partners of the 'cooperative security' blueprint framed by ASEAN after the end of the Cold War era. Four years later, moreover, the Russian Federation was also welcomed as a full member of APEC, so as to contribute to a coordinated response against the regional financial meltdown.³³ With the Kremlin's participation as a 'founding father' of the ARF, ASEAN States were thus acknowledging Russia's stakes in South-east Asia, as well as its positive contribution to the soft form of regionalism spurred by the Association: in 1996, as a further evidence of such course, Moscow's status as a 'consultative partner' of the Forum was officially up-

³³ Against this backdrop, it should be highlighted that Moscow's increasing involvement in ASEAN-sponsored institutions also benefitted from the accession among the ranks of the Association of its long-standing partner Vietnam, which materialized in 1995. For an exhaustive analysis, see: Tsuneo Akaha, "Russia and Asia in 1995: Bold Objectives and Limited Means," *Asian Survey* 36, no. 1 (1996): 100-08.

graded to a full membership.³⁴

As argued by Ziegler, the decision to acknowledge Yeltsin's Russia as a regional great power notwithstanding its profound weaknesses was largely rooted on one hand in the Association's perception of Moscow as a useful countercheck to the U.S. and China, and, on the other, in the imperative of rewarding both the Kremlin's incipient overtures and its 'desire for recognition and relevance' in East Asia.³⁵ From the Russian perspective, instead, this mounting inclusion in ASEAN-sponsored venues reflected the common geopolitical quest endorsed since the end of the Cold War by both actors, especially in inhibiting the ascendance of an hegemonic power in the region, while also confirming Moscow's self-defined status as a major diplomatic stakeholder.³⁶ As already recalled, this commonality of views started to flourish during Primakov's tenure as Foreign Minister in the late 1990s, before entering a whole new era with Vladimir Putin's first presidential mandate (2000-2004). In fact, with NATO's eastward enlargement towards the Baltic and Central European States the pro-Western camp of the Russian establishment had suffered a major blow, and the Asian 'near abroad' acquired an even greater emphasis within Putin's foreign policy discourse.³⁷ In line with this view, the first directives issued by the President in June 2000 along the pages of the new 'Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation' looked at the formulation of a more comprehensive and concerted strategy to nurture Moscow's political and economic standing in East Asia, which postulated a systematic use of arms and energy deals as the pivotal tools of Russia's diplomacy in the region.³⁸

³⁴ Noel M. Morada, "The ASEAN Regional Forum. Origins and Evolution," in *Cooperative Security in the Asia-Pacific. The ASEAN Regional Forum*, ed. Jürgen Haacke and Noel M. Morada (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010): 16-17.

³⁵ Charles E. Ziegler, "Russia in the Asia-Pacific: A Major Power or Minor Participant?" *Asian Survey* 34, no. 6 (June 1994): 543.

³⁶ Tsuneo Akaha, "Russia and Asia in 1995": 100.

³⁷ Astrid S. Tuminez and Mark Hong, "Russia in Southeast Asia: A New 'Asian Moment'?" In *ASEAN-Russia: Foundations and Future Prospects*, ed. Victor Sumsky, Mark Hong, and Amy Lugg (Singapore: ISEAS, 2012): 50-51.

³⁸ Mihoko Kato, "Russia's Multilateral Diplomacy in the Process of Asia-Pacific Regional

By the same token, the new course also doubled-down on the efforts displayed by the Yeltsin administration to further integrate the Russian Federation into the ASEAN-led institutional network and thus avoid its marginalization from nascent venues.³⁹ In other words, with the Association's metamorphosis into an inclusive regional bloc aimed at fostering a multipolar post-Cold War scenario, the Kremlin realized that in order to maintain its clout as a great power with a truly global reach, it had to be acknowledged as one of the main targets of the omni-directional diplomacy unleashed by ASEAN since the birth of the ARF. Accordingly, in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks the two sides started to endeavour on a shared platform to contrast terrorism, which officially materialized in 2004 with the 'ASEAN-Russia Joint Declaration on Combating International Terrorism' and the 'ASEAN-Russia Workplan on Countering Terrorism and Transnational Crime,' whilst also launching a series of diplomatic initiatives such as the 'Partnership for Peace, Security, Prosperity and Development in the Asia-Pacific Region' inked in June 2003. The latter, in particular, showed that the process of 'legitimised inclusion' of the Russian Federation in Southeast Asia was finally ready to hit its final milestone, represented by the Kremlin's accession to the TAC, inasmuch as it reaffirmed Moscow's progressive socialization with the notion of 'open regionalism' and 'ASEAN centrality' professed by the Association. As a result, after having secured five months earlier a formal endorsement by the Russian Parliament, in November 2004 Moscow officially joined the treaty and became the 5th external signatory, along with China, Japan, India, and Pakistan, to enter the 2nd stage of the enmeshment strategy propelled by the ASEAN grouping.

Integration: The Significance of ASEAN for Russia," in *Eager Eyes Fixed on Eurasia. Russia and Its Eastern Edge*, ed. Iwashita Akihiro (Hokkaido: Slavic-Eurasian Research Center, 2007): 144.

³⁹ Elena S. Martynova, "Strengthening of Cooperation Between Russia and ASEAN: Rhetoric or Reality?" 399.

IV. The Road towards the ASEAN-Russia Strategic Partnership and Putin's 'Pivot to Asia' (2004-2019)

Since the mid-2000s, thanks to the act of 'legitimate inclusion' triggered by the Russian accession to the TAC, Moscow's multilateral clout in South-east Asia started to acquire more substance, and the embryonic enmeshment measures pursued over the course of the previous decade under the banner of the ASEAN-Russia 'dialogue partnership' gave way to a more intimate and institutionalised relation. In fact, with the grouping's enlargement towards the Indochinese States and the birth of innovative venues, the Association's normative architecture based on the idea of 'soft institutionalism' had reached a whole new level of sophistication and distinctiveness, encompassing various layers of dialogue as well as unprecedented spheres of cooperation in areas such as people-to-people exchanges and transnational security.⁴⁰ Against this backdrop, a major breakthrough that marked the inauguration of the 2nd stage in the enmeshment strategy unleashed by ASEAN vis-à-vis the Kremlin materialized in December 2005, following the first ASEAN-Russia Summit held in Kuala Lumpur. The event, in particular, paved the way for a joint declaration aimed at charting the roadmap for the establishment of a 'progressive and comprehensive partnership' amongst the two sides, which was officially laid out in the 'Comprehensive Programme of Action 2005-2015' (CPA) adopted during the summit.⁴¹

The plan called for a gradual enlargement in the functional scope of the cooperation initiatives sponsored by the two actors, especially in terms of security, trade and investment, energy, and infrastructural development.

⁴⁰ Ekaterina Koldunova, "Russia's Involvement in Regional Cooperation in East Asia. Opportunities and Limitations of Constructive Engagement," 535.

⁴¹ ASEAN Secretariat. *2005 Joint Declaration of the Heads of State and Government of the Member Countries of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and the Head of State of the Russian Federation on Progressive and Comprehensive Partnership*, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, 13 December 2005, <https://cil.nus.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/2005-Joint-Declaration-Of-ASEAN-and-Russia-1.pdf>. Accessed November 5, 2019.

Yet, Russia's bids to enter the ranks of the newly born EAS and 'Asia-Europe Meeting' (ASEM) were put on hold for the subsequent five years, due essentially to Moscow's still negligible footprint in the region from an economic standpoint. This choice produced a certain sense of delusion and frustration in Russian diplomatic circles, inasmuch as Southeast Asia was regarded at that time as a pivotal fulcrum of the 'multipolar world' envisioned by the Kremlin since the launch of the 'Primakov doctrine' in the late 1990s.⁴² On top of that, Russia felt entitled to a different treatment also because it had already endorsed the 'ASEAN Way' through the inking of the TAC, which stood out as the official prerequisite to accede the growing network of regional platforms backed by the Association. Nevertheless, Moscow's increasingly receptive attitude with ASEAN was largely reconfirmed also during Medvedev's four-year presidential interlude (2008-2012), as the impact of the global economic crisis further convinced the Kremlin to revamp the Russian Far East by turning it into the country's 'launchpad' towards the prosperous markets located in East Asia.⁴³ In 2010, accordingly, ASEAN opted to finally open the doors of its brand-new institutions not only to the Russian Federation, but also to the U.S., following Washington's decision to sign the TAC as postulated by the strategy of multilateral engagement brought about by the Obama administration.

Consequently, the 2nd ASEAN-Russia summit held in Hanoi at the end of October formalized Moscow's accession both to the EAS and ASEM, while commemorating the positive legacy of the dialogue partnership kick-started in 1996. In the occasion, the two sides also pledged to meet the goals listed in the CPA by further strengthening their economic interdependences, so as to nurture the positive trend experienced by two-way trade during the period 2005-2010, which had more than doubled

⁴² Paradorn Rangsimaporn, "Russian Perceptions and Policies in a Multipolar East Asia under Yeltsin and Putin," *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific* 9, no. 2 (2009): 214-16.

⁴³ Natasha Kuhrt, "Russia and Asia-Pacific: Diversification or Sinocentrism?" in *Russia's Foreign Policy. Ideas, Domestic Politics and External Relations*, ed. David Cadier and Margot Light (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015): 175-77.

from around US\$ 5 billion to US\$ 12.5 billion.⁴⁴ More generally, the Association's choice of opening the membership of the EAS and ASEM to a wide list of external stakeholders, as it had already happened with the ARF, highlighted that the grouping was de facto doubling down on its omni-enmeshment campaign towards multiple poles of the international system, due to the increasingly uncertain and competitive security environment emerging in East Asia under the shadow of an incipient Sino-American rivalry. In this regard, ASEAN's response was thus consistent with the idea of 'going global' by opening the doors of its freshly-established venues to several latecomers of Southeast Asian politics, as an antidote to the pushes and pulls generated by major phenomena as the global economic meltdown and China's rise to the rank of global superpower. Additionally, the Association's renewed impetus in asserting its centrality as a true champion of multilateralism was also a by-product of the growing competition unleashed by alternative formulas of interstate cooperation that were taking shape in the region, as epitomized by the Rudd and Hatoyama initiatives that sought to raise Australia and Japan's credentials as key mediators and norm-entrepreneurs in the Asia-Pacific. Hence, pressured once again by the shadow of its marginalization as the key norm-maker in East Asia's regionalism, the Association decided to reward Moscow as a staunch supporter of the concept of 'ASEAN centrality,' whilst equipping its enmeshment blueprint with additional tools to consolidate institutionalised exchanges with the Kremlin.⁴⁵

Building upon these accomplishments, in 2012 Moscow's commitment to frame a productive partnership with ASEAN laid the foundations for Russia's first-ever APEC chairmanship, as the city of Vladivostok was selected to host the forum's annual meeting. During the summit, most notably, Moscow's agenda-setting and honest brokerage received vast praises

⁴⁴ Victor Sumsy, "The Enlargement of the East Asia Summit: The Reasons and Implications of Bringing Russia in" in *ASEAN-Russia: Foundations and Future Prospects*, ed. Victor Sumsy, Mark Hong, and Amy Lugg (Singapore: ISEAS, 2012): 71.

⁴⁵ Victor Sumsy, "The Enlargement of the East Asia Summit: The Reasons and Implications of Bringing Russia in," 74-75.

by the Southeast Asian delegates, who acknowledged the important contribution provided by the Russian Federation in rekindling the idea of ‘regional connectivity’ after the sudden slowdown produced by the global economic crisis.⁴⁶ In parallel, Putin’s return at the helm of the country’s government ignited an escalation of tensions with the West marked by the Ukrainian conundrum in 2014, and also by Moscow’s military embroilment in the Syrian war over the course of the following year, which acted as a real game-changer in terms of Russia’s political projection in East Asia. Since then, the Kremlin has therefore turned its eyes eastward with an unparalleled degree of activism, in order to offset Western sanctions and keep the Russian economy afloat. As could be expected, this process has persuaded Moscow to ignite a powerful ‘charm offensive’ towards China and the ASEAN grouping, as the potential surrogates to its increasingly strained relations with the U.S. and the EU, while also entailing visible efforts to rediscover once again the country’s ‘Eurasian identity.’ Accordingly, at the start of 2015 the Kremlin’s rebalancing policy (also known in the Russian political jargon as Putin’s ‘pivot to Asia,’ or ‘turn to the East’) has gained additional momentum with the launch of the ‘Eurasian Economic Union’ (EAEU), a brand-new multilateral organisation that in the subsequent year started to make inroads in Southeast Asia by inking a free trade agreement with Vietnam.

Then, as ASEAN-Russia ties were moving towards the full attainment of the 2nd stage of the enmeshment campaign through the enhancement of institutionalised interactions and the realization of the CPA, the 20th anniversary since the birth of the dialogue partnership provided an ideal opportunity to further showcase Moscow’s unwavering socialization in Southeast Asia’s multilateral realm. This special milestone, most notably, has been celebrated in the ‘Commemorative ASEAN-Russia Summit’ held in Sochi in May 2016, under the emblematic catchphrase ‘Moving Towards a Strategic Partnership for Mutual Benefit.’ At the end of the two-

⁴⁶ Ekaterina Koldunova, “Can Russia Be a Leader in East Asian Economic Integration?” *East Asia Forum*, August 17, 2016, <https://www.eastasiaforum.org/2016/08/17/can-russia-be-a-leader-in-east-asian-economic-integration/>. Accessed November 2, 2019.

day meeting, the eleven State delegations that gathered on the Black Sea formulated the ‘Sochi Declaration,’ which reaffirmed the remarkable breakthroughs brought about between 2005 and 2015 thanks to the roadmap delineated by the CPA, whilst also reiterating an unyielding attachment to the prominence of both the EAS and the ARF as key regional security forums, in line with the notion of ‘ASEAN centrality.’⁴⁷ On top of that, the summit has also introduced a new action plan for the period 2016-2020, calling on both parties to step-up their diversified partnership in the framework of the Association’s community-building efforts, culminated a few months earlier with the genesis of the ‘ASEAN Economic Community’ (AEC). In the occasion, moreover, the Kremlin has sought to revamp its standing as ‘honest broker’ in the sphere of East Asian regionalism by voicing once again Putin’s concept of ‘integration of integrations,’ which looks at the establishment of a cooperative network of formalised interactions between ASEAN, the Kremlin-backed EAEU, and China’s signature blueprint centred on the ‘Belt and Road Initiative’ (BRI).⁴⁸

Similar moves clearly hinted that the two actors were laying the foundations for the opening of the 3rd and final phase of the enmeshment campaign officially kickstarted in 1996, as they endeavoured to further refine a shared conceptualization of ‘cooperative security.’ From an official standpoint, this massive landmark has been pompously presented to regional and global audiences alike in November 2018, under the banner of the 3rd ASEAN-Russia summit held in Singapore. The meeting, most notably, has celebrated the visible improvements achieved over the course of the past two decades in the progressive transformation of Moscow’s attitudes and perceptions towards the Association, by formally elevating the pre-existing dialogue relations into a full-fledged ‘strategic partnership.’ Unsurprisingly, the joint declaration issued by the Kremlin and the ASEAN Secretariat to motivate the upgrading of their mutual ties stands out as the

⁴⁷ Ian Storey and Anton Tsvetov, “ASEAN and Russia Look to Achieve their Full Potential,” *The Straits Times*, June 2, 2016. <https://www.straitstimes.com/opinion/asean-and-russia-look-to-achieve-their-full-potential>. Accessed November 3, 2019.

⁴⁸ Ekaterina Koldunova, “Can Russia Be a Leader in East Asian Economic Integration?.”

epitome of the founding values and operating axioms at the core of the ‘ASEAN Way,’ which have been gradually endorsed by Russia as defining features of its own diplomatic projection in Southeast Asia. The statement, in particular, portrays the strategic partnership between the two actors as forged on a series of prescriptive norms, as for the pledge to safeguard the multipolar structure of the regional security environment by upholding the pivotal notions of ‘ASEAN centrality’ and ‘open regionalism.’⁴⁹ Likewise, the document also depicts in very positive terms Moscow’s constructive role not only in contributing to the management of a complex, inclusive, and stable balance of the external influences operating in the Association’s geopolitical perimeter, but also in displaying a tangible commitment to erase the scars of the Soviet legacy.

Still, for those involved in the assessment of the enmeshment campaign pursued by ASEAN one of the most revealing features incapsulated in the joint declaration revolves around the shared position sketched-out by the two sides on the South China Sea issue. In such regard, the document expresses an unconditional support both for the principle of freedom of navigation and for the aforementioned DOC, while envisioning its future metamorphosis into a binding yet consensual code of conduct. The inclusion of this specific reference, which was absent in the joint statements issued in 2005 and 2010 at the end of the first and second ASEAN-Russia summits, does not embody a sharp departure from the neutralist and low-profile posture showcased by the Kremlin on the South China Sea dispute, which has attracted repeated criticism amongst Southeast Asian governments either for being quite ambivalent or too lenient towards the PRC. Yet, the mention also hints Moscow’s growing willingness to conform with the norms and values embraced by the Association in coping with the South China Sea conundrum, as indicated by Putin’s restraint in backing Beijing’s historical claims based on the so-called ‘nine-dashed line.’⁵⁰ For

⁴⁹ ASEAN Secretariat. *Joint Statement of the 3rd ASEAN-Russian Federation Summit on Strategic Partnership*. Singapore, 14 November 2018, <https://asean.org/joint-statement-3rd-asean-russian-federation-summit-strategic-partnership/>. Accessed November 5, 2019.

⁵⁰ Vitaly Kozyrev, “Russia-Southeast Asia Relations: In China’s Shadow?,” *The Asian Forum*, April

some scholars, this slight re-orientation may actually imply the emergence of a deliberate hedging policy vis-à-vis the PRC, entrusted with the task of recalibrating Moscow's overdependence on Beijing as its paramount diplomatic interlocutor through the cultivation of a more diversified portfolio of regional partnerships, centred in particular on countries such as Vietnam and Malaysia.⁵¹

Regardless of its underlying rationale in the framework of China-Russia relations, when analysed from the Association's perspective the Russian incipient tilt towards ASEAN on the South China issue and its growing endorsement of the arguments postulated by the 'ASEAN Way' seem to provide the final testaments of the extremely successful legacy unleashed in this particular instance by the practice of enmeshment. After 22 years of burgeoning institutionalised interactions, conducive to the transformation of a former 'pariah' of Southeast Asian politics into a reliable advocate of the current status-quo, the ASEAN-Russia partnership has therefore witnessed the genesis of a consensual, albeit embryonic, security blueprint to safeguard regional stability, rooted in the promotion of a non-confrontational and rule-based logic of appropriateness. In its relations with the Association, most notably, the Kremlin has apparently found a like-minded interlocutor who shares an analogous worldview both diplomatically and in terms of domestic politics, as symbolised by their similar attachment to the concepts of multipolarity, non-interference, and 'sovereign democracy,' which can be seen as the Russian equivalent to the centralized model of government postulated by the so-called "Asian values."⁵² This common mindset, in turn, has paved the way for a socialization process that persuaded the Kremlin to set aside its prejudices towards ASEAN

19, 2016, <http://www.theaseanforum.org/russia-southeast-asia-relations-in-chinas-shadow-2/>. Accessed November 4, 2019.

⁵¹ Tony Rinna, "The China Factor in Russia-Vietnam Security Ties," *Foreign Policy Journal*, January 5, 2016, <https://www.foreignpolicyjournal.com/2016/01/05/the-china-factor-in-russia-vietnam-security-ties/>. Accessed November 4, 2019. See also Alexander Korolev, "Russia in the South China Sea: Balancing and Hedging," *Foreign Policy Analysis* 15, no. 2 (2019).

⁵² Elizabeth Wishnick, "Russia: New Player in the South China Sea?," *PONARS Eurasia Policy Memo*, no. 260, Institute for European, Russian and Eurasian Studies (IERES), July 2013.

by taking a series of binding commitments especially in terms of the management of regional security challenges, even at the cost of casting some shadows behind its ‘quasi-alliance’ with the PRC.

V. Concluding Remarks

The historical investigation conducted in the previous pages has sought to illuminate a quite remarkable and yet generally overlooked phenomenon, by looking at the visible blossoming of diplomatic ties experienced by the Russia-ASEAN dyad since the early 1990s. In such perspective, the diachronic analysis of the evolving relations nurtured by the two actors seems to strongly validate the central claim of this study, which contends that the progressive shift from a condition of enmity and distrust to the framework of a flourishing partnership responded to a deliberate strategy put in place by the Association, with the final aim of enmeshing Moscow in the behavioural code of the ‘ASEAN Way.’ After the faltering start of the Soviet era, the Kremlin’s socialization in the soft and inclusive form of regionalism sponsored by the Association has thus represented a successful application of the great-power diplomacy pursued by ASEAN in order to achieve a complex balance of the external influences operating in Southeast Asia. As indicated by Evelyn Goh’s three-staged theory of enmeshment, this process has first entailed an act of ‘legitimate inclusion’ towards various regional stakeholders, conducive to their admission to brand-new venues such as the ARF, the EAS, and the ASEAN+3. Subsequently, the endorsement of the ‘rules of the game’ enshrined in Russia’s accession to the TAC has paved the way for a further blossoming of institutionalised and multi-layered ties between the two sides, aimed at inducing restraint, cooperation, and a greater degree of predictability in the Kremlin’s regional stance. Similar achievements, in turn, have laid the foundations for the formulation of a shared roadmap towards the genesis of a full-fledged Russia-ASEAN partnership, rooted in the adoption of a ‘cooperative security’ paradigm and symbolized by the aforementioned CPA. Undoubtedly, the common quest embodied by both sides in supporting a multipolar world has gained an additional propellant with Putin’s return at the helm of Russian politics

and Moscow's 'divorce' from the West, marked by Russia's military intervention in the Ukrainian and Syrian war. Since then, the 'turn eastward' pursued by the Kremlin's foreign policy has further fostered its cooperative relation with ASEAN, as clearly epitomized by the evolution of Russia's posture in the South China Sea dispute, which is increasingly characterized by a cautious support of the arguments claimed by several ASEAN States in their long-standing dispute with the PRC.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Acharya, Amitav. "How Ideas Spread: Whose Norms Matter? Norm Localization and Institutional Change in Asian Regionalism." *International Organizations* 58 (Spring 2004): 239-75. doi: 10.1017/S0020818304582024.
- Akaha, Tsuneo "Russia and Asia in 1995: Bold Objectives and Limited Means." *Asian Survey* 36, no. 1 (January 1996): 100-08. doi: 10.2307/2645561.
- Alagappa, Muthiah. "Soviet Policy in Southeast Asia: Towards Constructive Engagement." *Pacific Affairs* 63, no. 3 (Autumn 1990): 321-50. doi: 10.2307/2759522.
- Alagappa, Muthiah. *Asian Security Order: Instrumental and Normative Features*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003.
- Allison-Reumann, Laura. "The Norm-Diffusion Capacity of ASEAN: Evidence and Challenges." *Pacific Focus* 32, no. 1 (April 2017): 5-29. doi: 10.1111/pafo.12089.
- ASEAN Secretariat. 2005 *Joint Declaration of the Heads of State and Government of the Member Countries of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and the Head of State of the Russian Federation on Progressive and Comprehensive Partnership*. Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, 13 December 2005. <https://cil.nus.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/2005-Joint-Declaration-Of-ASEAN-and-Russia-1.pdf>.
- ASEAN Secretariat. *Joint Statement of the 3rd ASEAN-Russian Federation Summit on Strategic Partnership*. Singapore, 14 November 2018. <https://asean.org/joint-statement-3rd-asean-russian-federation-summit-strategic-partnership/>.
- Ba, Alice D. "China and Asean: Renavigating Relations for a 21st-century Asia." *Asian Survey* 43, no. 4 (July/August 2003): 622-47. doi: 10.1525/as.2003.43.4.622.
- Bazhanov, Eugene and Natasha Bazhanov. "Russia and Asia in 1992: A Balancing Act." *Asian Survey* 33, no. 1 (January 1993): 91-102. doi: 10.2307/2645291.
- Bower, Ernest Z., et al. "Southeast Asia's Geopolitical Centrality and the U.S.-Japan Alliance." *Working Paper*. Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), June 2015.
- Buckley, Roger. *The United States in the Asia-Pacific since 1945*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.

- Buszynski, Leszek. *Gorbachev and Southeast Asia*. Abingdon: Routledge, 1986
- Ciorciari, John D. "The Balance of Great-Power Influence in Contemporary Southeast Asia." *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific* 9, no. 1 (2009): 157-96. doi: 10.1093/irap/lcn017.
- Goh, Evelyn. "Great Powers and Southeast Asian Regional Security Strategies: Omni-Enmeshment, Balancing and Hierarchical Order." *RSIS Working Papers*, no. 84, S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, July 2005.
- Goh, Evelyn. "Southeast Asian Perspectives on the China Challenge." *Journal of Strategic Studies* 30, no. 4-5 (August/October 2007): 809-32. doi: 10.1080/01402390701431915.
- Goh, Evelyn. "Great Powers and Hierarchical Order in Southeast Asia. Analyzing Regional Security Strategies." *International Security* 32, no. 3 (Winter 2008): 113-157. doi: 10.1162/isec.2008.32.3.113.
- Gorenburg, Dmitry and Paul Schwartz. "Russia's Relations with Southeast Asia." *Russie.NEI.Reports*, no. 26, Institut Français des Relations Internationales (IFRI), March 2019. https://www.ifri.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/gorenburg_schwartz_russia_relations_southeast_asia_2019.pdf.
- Horelick, Arnold L. "The Soviet Union's Asian Collective Security Proposal: a Club in Search of Members." *Pacific Affairs* 47, no. 3 (Autumn 1974): 269-85. doi: 10.2307/2755766.
- Horn, Robert C. "Soviet Influence in Southeast Asia: Opportunities and Obstacles." *Asian Survey* 15, no. 8 (August 1975): 656-71. doi: 10.2307/2643383.
- Kato, Mihoko. "Russia's Multilateral Diplomacy in the Process of Asia-Pacific Regional Integration: The Significance of ASEAN for Russia." In *Eager Eyes Fixed on Eurasia. Russia and Its Eastern Edge*. Edited by Iwashita Akihiro, 125-51. Hokkaido: Slavic-Eurasian Research Center, 2007.
- Katzenstein, Peter J. *A World of Regions: Asia and Europe in the American Imperium*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005.
- Kim, Min-hyung. "Why Does a Small Power Lead? ASEAN Leadership in Asia-Pacific Regionalism." *Pacific Focus* 27, no. 1 (April 2012): 111-34. doi: 10.1111/j.1976-5118.2012.01078.x.
- Koldunova, Ekaterina. "Russia's Involvement in Regional Cooperation in East Asia. Opportunities and Limitations of Constructive Engagement." *Asian Survey* 56,

- no. 3 (2016a): 532-54. doi: 10.1525/as.2016.56.3.53.
- Koldunova, Ekaterina. "Can Russia Be a Leader in East Asian Economic Integration?" *East Asia Forum*, August 17, 2016b. <https://www.eastasiaforum.org/2016/08/17/can-russia-be-a-leader-in-east-asian-economic-integration/>.
- Kolotov, Vladimir N. "Main Trends of Russia's Foreign Policy in Transforming East and Southeast Asia." *Brookings*, April 1, 2008. <https://www.brookings.edu/opinions/main-trends-of-russias-foreign-policy-in-transforming-east-and-southeast-asia/>.
- Kononenko, Vadim. "From Yugoslavia to Iraq: Russia's Foreign Policy and the Effects of Multipolarity." *UPI Working Papers*, no. 42, The Finnish Institute of International Affairs, 2003.
- Korolev, Alexander. "Russia in the South China Sea: Balancing and Hedging." *Foreign Policy Analysis* 15, no. 2 (2019): 263-82. doi: 10.1093/fpa/orx015.
- Kozyrev, Vitaly. "Russia-Southeast Asia Relations: In China's Shadow?" *The Asan Forum*, April 19, 2016. <http://www.theasanforum.org/russia-southeast-asia-relations-in-chinas-shadow-2/>.
- Kuik, Cheng-Chwee. "How Do Weaker States Hedge? Unpacking ASEAN States' Alignment Behaviour Towards China." *Journal of Contemporary China* 25, no. 100 (2016): 500-14. doi: 10.1080/10670564.2015.1132714.
- Kuhr, Natasha. "Russia and Asia-Pacific: Diversification or Sinocentrism?" In *Russia's Foreign Policy. Ideas, Domestic Politics and External Relations*, edited by David Cadier and Margot Light, 175-188. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015.
- Leifer, Michael. "The ASEAN Regional Forum." *The Adelphi Papers* 36, no. 302 (1996): 1-65. doi: 1080/05679329608449362.
- Lim, Robyn. "Implications for Southeast Asia." In *The Soviet Union as an Asian Pacific Power: Implications of Gorbachev's 1986 Vladivostok Initiative*, edited by Ramesh Thakur and Carlyle A. Thayer. 75-88. London: Westview, 1987.
- Martynova, Elena S. "Strengthening of Cooperation Between Russia and ASEAN: Rhetoric or Reality?" *Asian Politics & Policy* 6, no. 3 (2014): 397-412. doi: 10.1111/aspp.12117.
- Mediansky, Fedor and Dianne Court. "The Soviet Union in Southeast Asia." *Canberra Papers on Strategy and Defence*, no. 29, Strategic and Defence Studies Centre,

Australian National University, 1984.

- Meyer, Peggy F. "The Russian Far East's Economic Integration with Northeast Asia: Problems and Prospects." *Pacific Affairs* 72, no. 2 (1999): 209-24. doi: 10.2307/2672120.
- Morada, Noel M. "The ASEAN Regional Forum. Origins and Evolution." In *Cooperative Security in the Asia-Pacific*. The ASEAN Regional Forum, edited by Jürgen Haacke and Noel M. Morada. 13-35. Abingdon: Routledge, 2010.
- Palmer, Ronald D. "The Soviet Union and Southeast Asia." *The Washington Quarterly* 9, no. 4 (1986): 169-73. doi: 10.1080/01636608609443777.
- Passeri, Andrea and Antonio Fiori. "Where Giants Meet: the Sino-American Soft Competition in Southeast Asia. The Cases of Myanmar and Vietnam." In *The Chinese Challenge to the Western Order*, edited by Antonio Fiori and Matteo Dian. 105-22. Trento: FBK Press, 2014.
- Rangsimaporn, Paradorn. "Russia's Search for Influence in Southeast Asia." *Asian Survey* 49, no. 5 (2009a): 786-808. doi: 10.1525/as.2009.49.5.786.
- Rangsimaporn, Paradorn. "Russian Perceptions and Policies in a Multipolar East Asia under Yeltsin and Putin." *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific* 9, no. 2 (2009b): 207-44. doi: 10.1093/irap/lcn027.
- Rinna, Tony. "The China Factor in Russia-Vietnam Security Ties." *Foreign Policy Journal*, January 5, 2016. <https://www.foreignpolicyjournal.com/2016/01/05/the-china-factor-in-russia-vietnam-security-ties/>.
- Simon, Sheldon W. "Superpower Cooperation in Southeast Asia." In *The Cold War as Cooperation*. Superpower Cooperation in Regional Conflict Management, edited by Roger E. Kanet and Edward A. Kolodziej. 341-67. Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1991.
- Storey, Ian and Anton Tsvetov. "ASEAN and Russia Look to Achieve their Full Potential." *The Straits Times*, June 2, 2016. <https://www.straitstimes.com/opinion/asean-and-russia-look-to-achieve-their-full-potential>.
- Sumsky, Victor. "The Enlargement of the East Asia Summit: The Reasons and Implications of Bringing Russia In." In *ASEAN-Russia: Foundations and Future Prospects*, edited by Victor Sumsky, Mark Hong, and Amy Lugg. 70-79. Singapore: ISEAS, 2012.
- Thayer, Carlyle A. "ASEAN, China and the Code of Conduct in the South China

- Sea.” *SAIS Review* 33, no. 2 (Summer-Fall, 2013): 75-84. doi: 10.1353/sais.2013.0022.
- Tsvetov, Anton. “After Crimea: Southeast Asia in Russia’s Foreign Policy Narrative.” *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 38, no. 1 (April 2016): 55-80. doi: 10.1353/csa.2016.0003.
- Tuminez, Astrid S. and Mark Hong. “Russia in Southeast Asia: A New ‘Asian Moment’?” In *ASEAN-Russia: Foundations and Future Prospects*, edited by Victor Sumsky, Mark Hong, and Amy Lugg. 45-57. Singapore: ISEAS, 2012.
- Weatherbee, Donald E. *International Relations in Southeast Asia. The Struggle for Autonomy*. Second Edition. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2009.
- Wishnick, Elizabeth. “Russia: New Player in the South China Sea?” *PONARS Eurasia Policy Memo*, no. 260, Institute for European, Russian and Eurasian Studies (IERES), July 2013.
- Young, Stephen M. “Gorbachev’s Asian Policy: Balancing the New and the Old.” *Asian Survey* 28, no. 3 (March 1988): 317-39. doi: 10.2307/2644490.
- Zagoria, Donald S. “The Kremlin Looks Bad in East Asia.” *Journal of East Asian Affairs* 3, no. 1 (Spring/Summer 1983): 113-52.
- Ziegler, Charles E. “Russia in the Asia-Pacific: A Major Power or Minor Participant?” *Asian Survey* 34, no. 6 (June 1994): 529-43. doi: 10.2307/2645339.