

SECURITY – A LOST SINGULARITY IN SOUTHEAST ASIAN REGIONALISM. DONALD EMMERSON’S ALTERNATIVE ARRANGEMENT OF HARD CHOICES

Review of the Book: Emmerson Donald K. (2009), *Hard Choices: Security, Democracy and Regionalism in Southeast Asia*, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (ISEAS), Singapore;

Ioana-Bianca Berna,

PhD, Associate Assistant, National School of Political and Administrative Studies, Bucharest, Romania.

E-mail: bianca.berna@yahoo.it

Hard Choices: Security, Democracy and Regionalism in Southeast Asia is embarking in the similar possibilities of discussion regarding democracy, the main regional attendings of democracy and of democratic consolidation, and the progress of achieving the mission OF signing off a democratic model in Southeast Asia.

The bouncing of ideas from this theme has always received plenty of attention from the patrons of analytical thought and it almost seemed an exhausted subject. Yet, Donald Emmerson shows us, that the Southeast Asian democratic model is not a discarded ideational cart.

This book appeals exactly to the other end of the scale and amplifies the focus on the relationship between democracy, regionalism and the current earnings of stability, security and defense in Southeast Asia. Donald Emmerson is part of the vault of entrusted and well-respected analysts of the Southeast Asian region¹. The book nails the topics of identity-fostering, through the prism of stability and security, very well brought up. Identity-fostering has the tendency to concentrate efforts of assurance and of confidence in the bilateral relations between the regional states. Ascertaining comfortable, well-pleasing relations between the regional states is also a subject that is connected with the process of democratic proliferation in Southeast Asia.

¹ Like all the depots of trustworthiness, Donald Emmerson has always left room for contending and debate in its writings; Donald Emmerson does not give a well-delineated answer to the question of optimism or negativism regarding the future embrace between **security, regionalism and democracy** in Southeast Asia; He treats the reality of recent history with a clever sharpness to resolve detail, almost in the same manner as he pays reflection to the realities of past history in Southeast Asia; In the storehouse of the perceived divide between theory and practice in International relations, the qualities impersonated by Emmerson are a huge point of advantage and of acceptable morals;

Emmerson, like others, seems to approach the process of democratic consolidation in Southeast Asia as a readying for contagion. Remedying the democratic domestic environment is also variable dependent on the relations built among the regional states. The arguments put forward by Emmerson in his book are just not ideas in research. They emerge from a self-discipline of theoretical scans and of communication exercises, meant to make the result endings of these scans approachable to the un-prepared reader. With this end in view, Emmerson refines the difference between regionalism and regionalization as a higher-order concern. Both regionalism and regionalization are processes that are meant to create identicalness within the different units of a region².

In Emmerson's view, regionalism is a process of connection, via the interwoven links between states, societies and economies, whilst the processing system of regionalization, includes the interactions and transactions, made for that purpose: „Regionalism is a process. It is the intentional bringing together of physically more or less proximate states, societies, or economies, in various ways and to varying degrees, for ostensibly common purposes and activities—forming or nourishing a shared identity, improving conditions and solving problems, or projecting influence beyond the region whose nature is thereby purposely created or shaped[...]Regionalization is, in contrast, a process whereby transactions and interactions across national borders, undertaken without the intent of forming a region in its own right, of and for itself, nevertheless facilitate that result. Decisions by firms in one country to invest in, import from, or export to one or more neighboring countries may thus be regionalizing without being regionalist”.

It is a very important remark to observe on the book, as it is one of the main articulations that follow the progressive synchronous density between regionalism and regionalization and the proliferation of democracy³. Within the effect of democratic arrangements, Emmerson discusses the average grasp of democratic principles, as they are and have been adopted by the regional states. The espousal of the voluntary acceptance of democracy within the domestic environment of the regional states is also analitically repected through the standpoint of diversity and through the means of its

² Emmerson's work does not begin the theoretical denunciation of *regionalism* and *regionalization* with the pre-ordained intent of classifying an absolute participation, within the two processes, of the state as a contributory actor; Instead, as Emmerson compares, *the process of regionalism* is a process of multiple participation, much like *the process of democratization*, including actors from different arrays of decision-making, like the civil society organizations;

³ Emmerson offers a proofread regarding the evolution of *regionalism* and the dealings of *regionalization*, by establishing a feeler between their cumulative successive changes and the embrace of democracy within the different states of Southeast Asia;

equipment, that hits solidly the evolution of structures and of the institutional underpinning in Southeast Asia. Has the transportation of comity in decision-making and of consensualism been able to colligate a close relation to the proliferation of democracy?

The development of the normative bedrock that the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) has endowed the region with, has not yet managed to explore and select enough proceeds for an obvious difference to occur, as far as the democratic proliferation in Southeast Asia is concerned. ASEAN`s footing has been directed to confidence-building among its members and its enfold of consensualism⁴ has been designed to channel a collective intake of all the measures that were meant for implementation, without letting any state feel excluded.

Nonetheless, in spite of capitalizing on democratic festering, through the engagement of consensualism, ASEAN has not been able to accrue maturational democratic enhancement in Southeast Asia. Integration, within Southeast Asia, under the auspices of ASEAN, is not approached as a distinct subject in the book. However, the means of seving of ASEAN Way are given a thorough look into by Emmerson. Is Emmerson a pessimist or an optimist regarding the ASEAN Way? No matter how vainly blunt the question is, it is very difficult to come up with a clear-cut answer, under whose auctions of employment, one can see definiteness.

What Emmerson analyzes, with utmost perseverance, is the fact that there has been a noticeable failure of expectation regarding ASEAN. He indicates that ASEAN still remains an intergovernmental body of decision, calling it - an incumbents` club. High hopes are not even placed on the adoption of ASEAN`s Charter.

Non-interference - as a norm and as an understructure of action - has been at the forefront of ASEAN`s decisions and of ASEAN`s optical position towards current events. Despite the fact that not a grand transformative power is placed upon the adoption of ASEAN`s Charter, regarding its future evolutions and, especially, the recourse to the norm of non-interference⁵.

Is non-interference everyone`s truth in Southeast Asia? Emmerson appears to be answering this question, when acknowledging the fact that ASEAN`s Charter has the influence to make the organization more above-board to interference. Certainly, as Emmerson clings to reassuring, consensualism will prolongue its stay in decision-making. However, there is some room left for making accessible settlements, through variations of inter-state polling, that would allow, eventually, some flexibility.

⁴ No matter how debilitating for its institutional growth;

⁵ After all, as far as **ASEAN** was concerned, non-interference was the hardest truth, available to skepticism;

Emmerson does not see at all the laws and norms of the regionalism created by ASEAN as passing and transitory. What he sees as more than evanescent are the effects of the democratic phylogeny in Southeast Asia, which he sees as destabilizing: „To the extent that the Association does try to become more widely participatory, it may face a trade-off between regionalism as predictable cooperation managed by states and democracy as institutionalized uncertainty involving societies. Meanwhile, to the extent that the EU’s experience with regionalism by referendum has any influence on ASEAN insiders, it is likely to make them more elitist, not less”. So diverse and manifold can the reactions to the applied existence of democracy - as a system of government - that antagonisms may easily appear: there are states that can make progress towards democratization more easily than other states⁶.

By and large, Southeast Asia cannot give accurate testimonials for the clasps of democracy⁷. It is a region, in Emmerson’s appreciation that strives in undemocratic tenure. There is quite a vivid depiction of this appreciation, underlined by Emmerson’s own words: „If the theory of democratic peace argues for democracy as a precondition of security on the grounds that democratic states do not fight one another, one might even say that regionalism in Southeast Asia has vindicated the opposite doctrine: an autocratic peace theory in which authoritarian states jointly and wisely avoided war”.

The eyeshots on democratization and the many visions upon democracy and how it should be positioned underline a trustworthy attention to detail from Emmerson’s part. He quotes, in this regard, Edward Friedman: „Edward Friedman has observed that “while the potential for democracy is universal, its practice is idiosyncratic”.

The landscape of security is seen by Emmerson as stapled with the purviews on democracy and regionalism, as an inter-related network of adress. Emmerson, with all the restraint of a reliable analyst, strictly avoids to give an unwelcoming plot summary regarding the prospects of democratization in Southeast Asia. Clearly regionalism made

⁶ There is discouraging evidence that **democratization** can be produced within the same scope, and within the same intensity in each regional state; **Democratization** is, therefore, seen as a counter-remedy exhausted against the attempts acquired towards heterogeneity; Moreover, **democratization** not only will mark the status of development of different regional states, in comparison to others, but will also usher in profound contempt, if interference will adjoin measures taken towards **democratization**;

⁷ The illiberal practices used all too often by the regional governments, the delicate position that the grassroots democracy has within **the process of democratization**, as well as the unfriendly communion between government and civil society organizationS (which currently tends to ammeliorate!) denoted a protracted lack of composure between societal forces that had to function in order for democracy to be measurable;

its debut, without a pre-conceived notion of what democracy should like or even if it had to be implemented in Southeast Asia.

Taking a step further in the complex structure of the semi-democratic environments of the regional countries of Southeast Asia, has been quite operose. But, there are still plenty of reasons to attend with some acquiescence of improvement the efforts made in the direction of democratization: „Security, democracy, and regionalism are interdependent. During the first two or even three decades of ASEAN’s existence, Southeast Asia’s small political elite operated within autocratic or, at best, semidemocratic environments. Hence, they were able to follow and implement narrowly defined national interests in a manner largely unconstrained and unchallenged by competing political actors, civil society groups, or critical media. Political liberalization and democratization have fostered greater openness and also more complexity in the making of foreign and security policy. Electoral competition, the stepped-up influence of parliaments and nonstate actors such as NGOs, greater transparency, and wider access to more independent sources of information all now play a part”.

The sources of the receipt of democratization have to be found in the relative clemency of comfort that has arisen after the creation of ASEAN. This offered a momentous opportunity for the regional states to learn peacehooking and to concentrate less on dispersing vulnerability in order to protect themselves from other regional states. Nevertheless, more issues of hope producing can be on the way, as Emmerson avows. ASEAN is not an agent of any kind, that can content its member with satisfactory and less than satisfactory credentials. As Emmerson sees it, eventually, some form of interference will be projected: „As a matter of practice, ASEAN must directly address the failure of constructive engagement. Some degree of more active interference is warranted, simply because of that failure. Simon Tay has noted correctly that while there has been some intervention in ASEAN, it has not “developed consistently and comprehensively into a full political dialogue. To advocate the maintenance of the noninterference norm out of concern that ASEAN may not hold together does not give adequate credit to a history in which political and economic interdependence have sustained a regional institution and cemented regional security”.

The allowance hired up for this state of facts in Southeast Asia, as far as democracy is concerned is stirred up by the ideological concerns of Asian Democracy – an earnest and conscious activity to portray Asia’s cultural distinctiveness⁸. By the motions of Asian Democracy, Asia has to undertake democratic principles, in stark allegiance to the security and cultural environment of the states, that have complied to

⁸ Begetted by East Asian actors;

this implementation. Consequently, Asian Democracy is envisioned as a mark of distinctiveness and exceptionalism. In spite of this fact, given the domestic solicitudes of certain case studies- that Emmerson analyzes – democracy is not direct proportional to stability and inner security. By canvassing the examples of Thailand, Philippines and Indonesia, Emmerson points out that democracy in these countries with a separatist background, will infallibly be the generator of more instability, with the electoral empowerment of separatist governments⁹.

Adding termination to the arguments presented, not all is trialed by effulgence, and yet not all is skilled by deception, as far the triad of regionalism-security-democracy is concerned. The absolute loyalty to the doctrine of non-interference is, in Emmerson's words, strictly Westphalian¹⁰. It is a logical abstraction that needs to express other finalities, tentatively different. For this purpose, infrangibility should be restricted. Viewed apart from these influences that need modifying, Donald Emmerson's book introduces a contradistinguished command of regionalism, by placing it in interdependence with security and as well as democracy. Although of novel introduction in the mechanisms of regionalism, democracy can be a self-sufficing peculiarity of both security and regionalism, through the transactional interplay of regionalization.

⁹ Also, *the human rights doctrine* will spur *the same yoyo effect* on the stability and security preservation of the three states in question;

¹⁰ Extensively discussed by Emmerson, throughout the book, in the case of Myanmar.