

# Myanmar and the International Community

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After several events hosted by the LSE dedicated to Myanmar: the seminar '*Myanmar: Democratisation and Foreign Policy*' (SEAC, 12 March 2014), '*Myanmar: politics, pragmatism and foreign policy*' (IRD and the Global South, 22 April 2015), '*Myanmar's 2015 Elections: hopes, expectations, and certitude*' (IRD and the Global South, 23 April 2015) and '*Myanmar on the Brink*' (Saw Swee Hock Southeast Asia Centre, 5 October 2015), a workshop on Myanmar which also included the European Union as an actor vis-a-vis Myanmar as well as Southeast Asia was overdue.

All invited speakers confirmed their commitment and contributed with their paper/presentation. Non-LSE speakers were: Dr Sophie Boisseau du Rocher (PhD, Centre Asie, Ifri, Paris), Professor Michael Reiterer (PhD, EEAS Asia-Pacific, Brussels and University of Innsbruck), Dr Lee Jones (PhD, Queen Mary University), Tanja Gohlert (Euro-Burma-Office, Brussels), Professor Ian Brown (PhD, SOAS), Dr Matthew Walton (PhD, St Antony's College, University of Oxford), Dr Ma Khin Mar Mar Kyi (PhD, Lady Margaret Hall, University of Oxford), Julian Kirchherr (PhD candidate, St Antony's College, University of Oxford) and Tom Berliner, Overseas Development Institute (ODI), London. All of these speakers have conducted fieldwork in Myanmar. IR staff Professor Karen Smith, Dr Jurgen Haacke and Dr Natalya Naqvi, also contributed as Chairs.

## Aims and Objectives

Myanmar national elections were held on 8 November 2015, and the workshop aimed to create some reflections on Myanmar.

Accordingly, the workshop responded to the following:

- To conduct an integrated research-debate combining the area of the European Union's external relations and Southeast Asia-led studies. This was achieved through joining the efforts of CIS, EFPU and SEAC, all within IR LSE;
- To add to the general on-going focus on Myanmar, the dimension of a discussion which included the EU. The EU is too often neglected as an actor, which has been constructively operating in Myanmar towards its governance's transformation. Attention has been paid to this aspect;
- Furthermore, the US and China are usually debated in relation to Myanmar and their balancing power in the region, whereas the EU is left aside. The way in which these three powers interact with Myanmar, considered against the background of both the balancing power context and the power politics race in the Pacific Southeast Asian region, was a supplementary aim. Attention has also been paid to this too;
- To discuss Myanmar's 'dynamics of change' and 'inertia to change' as intertwined processes in the country;
- To explore the shortcomings and the windows of opportunities rising in Myanmar;
- To comment on Myanmar elections in general, and, also, notably, with the contribution of a Myanmar citizen who has been an International Election Observer.

## Seminar Themes and Structure

The challenges that the workshop debated were organised along three main trends:

### Diplomacy

- the diplomatic network and processes which have been activated by the EU, their limits and success seeking to induce Myanmar to reconsider past positions;

- the relevance of EU diplomacy in the Asia-Pacific region where Myanmar is located; the United States and China interacting with Myanmar, between diplomacy and cooperation, and power politics in the region;

### **Politics and Economics**

- the question of whether Myanmar is still a disciplined democracy;
- the experience of the lengthy process of 'developing' peace in Myanmar offered by an 'actor' who has been engaged in such a project for years;
- the tests that Burma's economy faces;

### **Culture, Civil Society and Human Rights**

- Buddhists' discourses in Myanmar to defend their violence against non-Buddhists;
- how transformative research in Myanmar promises to meet several challenges;
- interaction among activists against dams construction and Chinese dam developers in Myanmar;
- the case of whether it is true that 'major political and technical challenges can be overcome' in order to reach the most marginalised, when holding a census in Myanmar.

[For a full workshop programme, please download the PDF.](#)

## **Benefits to CIS and LSE**

The workshop reflections on Myanmar will bring about a publication. Having reunited scholars who conducted original research on Myanmar's affairs, the debate has generated novel analysis. Successive elaboration on the basis of the comments arisen at the event will lead to an edited publication.

## **Attendance**

Participants were requested to register before the workshop, but many more turned out at the event, and attendance was high with a presence of around 60 people. Attendees were from several universities, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Chatham House and the *Centro Militare di Studi Strategici*.