Responding to (de)democratisation in ASEAN: strategies of civil society organisations in times of autocratisation

Civil society organisations (CSOs) promoting democracy are the focus of numerous studies, many of which explain how different organisations facilitate democratisation or how their participation in governmental organisations is managed, e.g. how these organisations regulate the access or include CSOs into decision-making processes. The core of my research is inspired by these studies, whereas the main goal of the proposed research is to analyse what strategies are implemented by CSOs and how consciously they are used to maximise their impact on the governmental organisation, and how these strategies change and are adjusted in a response to the deepening processes of de-democratisation. The research focuses on the example of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

My aim is to analyse both sides' perception of the cooperation:
(1) From the governmental organisation's perspective: how CSOs are engaged to work with the association and how their roles are perceived, what strategies are employed to aware of different strategies political elites are and what strategies they apply to control CSOs; (2) From the CSOs' perspective: how they assess their impact on the organisation and how the different types of cooperation change their knowledge on the organisation, if and how aware are CSOs of different strategies they may apply to influence the organisation, and how deliberately CSOs implement different strategies to increase their influence on the association and democratise it.

Investigating this will allow me to answer the main research questions: how CSOs influence the governmental organisation in the context of its democratisation and liberalisation, and how CSOs adapt their activities in times of autocratisation.

This research relies on the new data to be gathered in this research – interviews with ASEAN staff and political elites, and CSOs, both registered and non-registered by ASEAN, which operate in so called 'created spaces'. A comparative approach, that is a comparison of registered and non-registered CSOs, allows investigating whether control over CSOs brings desirable outcomes and benefits to the governmental organisations, as well as to compare strategies of two types of CSOs.

The research will discuss the important issue of the opening up of international organisations and inclusion of transnational actors, but most often under strict political control or simply through 'insincere commitments', including the recent crisis of democracy. Therefore, research results may be of importance to political elites, decision-makers, and most importantly, to civil society organisations.