



European Union Humanitarian Diplomacy in Addressing the Humanitarian Crisis Caused by the Anglophone Conflict in Cameroon

Medyakay Ethaniel Sasselah; Indra Wisnu Wibisono; Christian Herman Johan de Fretes

Department of International Relations, Faculty of Social and Communication Science, Satya Wacana Christian University Salatiga, Indonesia

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Abstract

Since late 2016 to early 2017, the Anglophone conflict between the Anglophone separatists and the Cameroonian government has caused a major humanitarian crisis in the region. This conflict was caused by the social and political marginalization of the Francophone-dominated government towards the Anglophone community in Cameroon. Decades of marginalization that evolved into a wide-scale armed conflict are concrete proof of the eroded aspect of human security, especially political security of the Anglophone community, which caused a domino effect that eventually threatens other aspects of human security. In response to this humanitarian crisis, the European Union conducts humanitarian diplomacy to reestablish regional stability and peace. This study employs the international liberalism theory to gain a deeper understanding of the European Union's intervention in the conflict and its efforts to resolve the humanitarian crisis by reestablishing political security in the context of human security, as well as the challenges it faces. This study will use a qualitative approach by examining data from multiple sources, including journals, web articles, and news related to the conflict, to analyze and better understand the humanitarian crisis caused by the conflict and the European Union's efforts to address it. This research concludes that although the humanitarian diplomacy conducted by the EU can relieve some of the humanitarian crisis, but EU's principle of institutional liberalism and its heavy reliance on soft power constrain the EU from taking hard action to solve the root of the conflict.

Keywords: European Union; Anglophone Conflict; Humanitarian Crisis; Humanitarian Diplomacy; Political Security

Introduction

Conflict can be defined as a struggle for power, wealth or resources between individuals, groups or states (Galtung, 1969). The outbreak of a conflict will certainly present violence that can threaten human security around the conflict area. Human security is a security concept introduced by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Human Development Report that focuses on protecting individuals and communities from threats that can threaten human well-being. This concept contains seven important dimensions that influence each other, namely: economic security, food security, health security, environmental security, individual security, community security and political security. (United

Nations Development Programme, 1994). The outbreak of a conflict can threaten each of these dimensions, resulting in various problems such as casualties, psychological trauma for victims involved in the conflict and the loss of their homes. Conflict can also arise when a particular party or community within a country feels that they are being treated unfairly or that their grievances as a community are not being heard by their government. If the state has a government that is not strong enough to handle this issue, then the group or community has the possibility to rebel, either through protests or using armed force to gain or reclaim their rights, thus causing conflict between the government and the community which results in threatening the security of people around the conflict area (Kaldor, 2007).

The outbreak of a conflict can occur for many reasons, from political interests, ideological differences to ethnic or cultural diversity. Africa is one of the continents that has various types of ethnicity, religion and natural resources. This diversity has been one of the drivers of a large number of internal conflicts for a long time. By the end of 2024, it is estimated that 30% of African countries (15 out of 49) are experiencing armed conflict, with root causes such as economic inequality, colonial legacies and community marginalization. (Africa Center for Strategic Studies, 2017). One of the countries in Africa that is facing conflict due to the marginalization of certain communities within the country is Cameroon. This conflict is called the Anglophone Crisis or also known as the Ambazonia War, which started in 2017.

Anglophone is a term used for people or communities who speak English, but live in a country where English is not their primary language. In this case, these are the people living in the Southern Cameroon region, also known as the Anglophone region. This conflict has a long history that stems from the country's colonial history, which was divided between the main colonial powers, France and Britain. After Germany's defeat in World War I, the League of Nations divided the region between Britain and France in 1919. The British administered the small area now known as Southern Cameroon (formerly British Cameroon), and the French administered the larger area now known as Northern Cameroon (formerly French Cameroun). Then, in 1960, North Cameroon gained its independence from France as République du Cameroun, but when Southern Cameroon wanted to gain its independence, the British government in Southern Cameroon only gave two options: joining Nigeria or with North Cameroon (French Cameroon) whose government was still influenced by France at that time, without giving Southern Cameroon the option of full independence. Eventually, Southern Cameroon decided to merge with North Cameroon, forming the Federal Republic of Cameroon. However, the federation system was dissolved by President Ahmadou Ahidjo in 1972, who then centralized power in the hands of the predominantly French-speaking (Francophone) North Cameroonian government in Yaounde, resulting in the Anglophone region being marginalized politically and economically. (Konings, P., & Nyamnjoh, 2003).

This decision made by President Ahmadou Ahidjo has led to the dominance of francophone influence in monopolizing state institutions and seats in the central government. This has resulted in the marginalization of Anglophone communities in North Cameroon, both in government decision-making and the implementation of French-language policies in public facilities such as schools and courts, thus slowly fading their identity as Anglophone communities in Cameroon. (Mate et al., 2022). This marginalization of the Anglophone community in Northern Cameroon intensified when Cameroon was under the leadership of President Paul Biya for 43 years, starting from 1982 to the present. Tensions between the Cameroonian government and the Anglophone community in Southern Cameroon reached its peak in 2016, when mostly lawyers and teachers from the Anglophone community staged a peaceful protest to demand the implementation of English into the legal and education system. The protest was met with a harsh response by the Cameroonian government, arresting the leader of the protest and forcibly dispersing the protest, even shutting down the internet to prevent the protest from becoming known to more people or the international community (International Crisis Group, 2017). Due to the harsh response given by the Cameroonian government, the Anglophone community finally issued a declaration of independence of their region on October 1, 2017. This was responded to very harshly by the

Cameroonian government with military action that killed 40 people, and approximately 100 people were injured.

The violent response by the Cameroonian government turned a peaceful protest into an armed separatist movement demanding independence for “Ambazonia”, which declared itself an Anglophone state on October 1, 2017. Of course, the Cameroonian government responded with a large-scale military operation that left 40 people dead and approximately 100 injured. The conflict was filled with state military brutality against both Anglophone separatists and civilians, while attacks by Anglophone separatists on security forces and Cameroonian cities also exacerbated the atrocities that also harmed civilians. The Cameroonian government's refusal to recognize the conflict as a civil war, coupled with the separatists' resistance to the government, has made the war a perpetual cycle of violence, with both sides using their history and identity to justify their actions in the conflict (Amnesty International, 2018).

This protracted conflict has not only led to regional instability, but to a large number of humanitarian crises. The crisis is characterized by violence between separatists and the government, affecting the security of civilians, forcing civilians to flee because of the conflict, and attacks on public facilities that should not be attacked or used in conflict that are important to civilians. Since the start of the conflict, it is estimated that more than 6000 people have been killed, 1.8 million people need humanitarian assistance, approximately 580,000 people have been displaced by the conflict, and more than 70,000 people have fled to Nigeria (Human Rights Watch, 2024). The conflict also undermined the social fabric of the community and threatened the security of both Anglophone and Francophone communities. In Anglophone regions, separatists imposed weekly “ghost towns”, which resulted in the cessation of public activities, paralyzing the local economy and delaying the opening of schools (Cameroon Concord, 2024). In addition, military operations run by the Cameroonian government increased the number of mass arrests and burnings of villages accused of supporting separatist movements (Human Rights Watch, 2019).

Several external actors have attempted to mediate this conflict through various means, one of which is through humanitarian diplomacy. Humanitarian diplomacy can be used as a tool to negotiate with two or more parties to the conflict to ensure safe access and delivery of humanitarian aid within the conflict area. In the case of the Anglophone conflict, humanitarian diplomacy became one of the important tools to ease the humanitarian crisis by delivering humanitarian aid amidst the conflict between the Anglophone separatists and the Cameroonian government that was still skeptical of accepting interference from external actors. One of the actors that played an important role in conducting humanitarian diplomacy in Cameroon was the European Union. European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (ECHO), one of the divisions within the European Union, was given the responsibility to coordinate any assistance needed by Cameroonian civilians in the midst of the Anglophone conflict. ECHO was chosen to be in charge because they have one of the main tasks, which is to provide assistance to overcome humanitarian crises both within and outside the European region. The EU's involvement in this conflict is not only motivated by strategic interests, but also by the humanitarian values they uphold. The stability of the African region is a priority for the EU due to the potential for the conflict to spread to neighboring countries such as Nigeria and Chad, which are still facing armed conflict. In addition, the EU's humanitarian diplomacy is driven by its commitment to maintaining human security and protecting human rights as part of its foreign policy identity.

The Anglophone conflict in Cameroon stems from the marginalization of Anglophone communities by the government of Cameroon, which is dominated by Francophone communities. Tensions reached a breaking point in 2017 when peaceful protests turned into armed conflicts, resulting in serious humanitarian crises such as a large number of fatalities, displaced civilians, and the destruction of critical community infrastructure. Humanitarian diplomacy by the European Union through the allocation of funds and mediation of ceasefires is an attempt to address the humanitarian crisis in the region. However, these efforts faced challenges such as government access restrictions, separatist mistrust, and politicization of aid. This research journal was created to analyze the effectiveness of the

European Union's humanitarian diplomacy in the Anglophone conflict in Cameroon, analyze the challenges faced by the European Union in conducting humanitarian diplomacy, and provide an in-depth analysis of the European Union's humanitarian diplomacy from the perspective of political security and institutional liberalism theory.

Theory

Institutional liberalism is a branch of international liberalism theory that focuses on the role of international institutions in forging cooperation through structured frameworks, shared understandings, and multilateral coordination. According to Keohane, international institutions play an important role in forging cooperation between states by establishing rules, norms, and frameworks to reduce transactional costs and defuse and resolve conflicts (Keohane, 1984). Indicators of institutional liberalism are characterized by multilateral coordination, rule-based governance, norm reinforcement, and sustained institutional involvement in conflict areas. In this theory, state cooperation through an international institution allows states to achieve better outcomes in addressing a humanitarian crisis.

For the EU, a supranational organization built on institutional integration, these principles guide its intervention strategy in Cameroon. The EU uses its institutional framework to coordinate aid, fund UN agencies, and promote dialogue, reflecting liberalism's focus on structured collaboration. For example, the EU directs 80% of its €230 million humanitarian aid (2017–2023) through multilateral partners like WFP and UNICEF, increasing reach while following principles of neutrality. This institutional approach aims to go beyond bilateral politics and promote stability through shared rules.

Concept

Humanitarian Crisis

According to the European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (ECHO) defines a humanitarian crisis is a forgotten crisis where civilians receive little to no international assistance (European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations, 2024). Humanitarian crises arise when there is a threat to the security, well-being, and lives of large numbers of people. Humanitarian crises can be characterized by various factors such as natural disasters, armed conflicts, economic crises, and political and social crises. In the case of the Anglophone conflict in Cameroon, this crisis occurred due to a peaceful protest regarding the marginalization of the Anglophone community by the Francophone community in Cameroon, which developed into an armed conflict in the region in 2017. This conflict is considered a humanitarian crisis because it has violated various dimensions of human security from the moment the conflict erupted.

This research will use this concept to focus on the humanitarian crisis happening in Cameroon during the Anglophone conflict, such as displacement, starvation, and constant attacks from both the Cameroonian government and the Anglophone separatists that violate basic human rights. This concept will also be used to give an in-depth explanation of how this conflict constitutes a multidimensional human security emergency. For example, the collapse of political security caused by the state's violent suppression of protests, including extrajudicial killings and internet blackouts, shattered trust in governance (Amnesty International, 2018). This triggered a domino effect that threatens other dimensions of human security: personal security dissolved through mass displacement and targeted violence, community security crumbles as separatist-enforced school boycotts deprived 700,000+ children of education, and economic security worsens with multiple farmlands abandoned in conflict zones (Ngalame, 2019). The crisis persists because these dimensions are interlocked; political exclusion fuels violence, which perpetuates displacement and starvation.

Political Security

Political security is one of the seven dimensions contained in the concept of human security proposed by UNDP in 1994. Political security is one of the main pillars of human security because, in addition to ensuring security in government structures, political security also includes ensuring the protection of human rights, freedoms, and liberties. Political security is one of the main pillars of human security because, in addition to ensuring security within the government structure, political security also includes ensuring the protection of human rights, civil liberties, and justice for the whole society. In addition, political security includes the protection of certain individuals or communities from oppression by the state in any form, as well as giving people the freedom to have a voice to vote and be elected. Basically, political security adheres to the principles of human rights, so that it not only provides protection within the government structure, political security can also creates an environment where individuals or a community can express themselves without fear (Nourbakhsh & Baghbanno, 2023). In addition to providing protection, political security also includes preventing and dealing with political violence and conflicts, both internal and external, that can threaten the stability of the state and the security of individuals and communities in the region. These threats can include terrorism, armed war, and insurgency.

This research will focus on the erosion of political security, stemming from decades of political and social marginalization of the Anglophone community, caused a large-scale humanitarian crisis in the region. The exclusion from governance and state repression has transformed legitimate grievances into an armed conflict, which triggers mass displacement, human rights violations, and widespread violence that is a direct threat to human security. EU intervention in the conflict to restore peace and solve the humanitarian crisis will also be analyzed through the political security concept. This approach will help analyze the limitations of the EU institutional liberalism framework, which heavily relies on humanitarian and soft diplomacy.

Humanitarian Diplomacy

Humanitarian diplomacy is one of the tools used to negotiate with two or more parties in conflict to ensure the safe access and delivery of humanitarian assistance in areas experiencing disasters or being in conflict. Humanitarian diplomacy is carried out through various indicators such as fund allocation, ceasefire negotiations, accountability advocacy, and cooperation with regional NGOs (OCHA, 2024). Humanitarian diplomacy is carried out to provide a space for dialogue for the various parties involved to discuss solutions that ensure the delivery of humanitarian assistance and protection for civilians. Humanitarian diplomacy is based on the principles of humanitarian law and human rights standards, therefore, it is one of the responses carried out to overcome humanitarian crises and reduce suffering to create peace during natural disasters and armed conflict situations. Humanitarian diplomacy can be carried out in various forms, such as cooperation between humanitarian organizations to ensure the distribution of humanitarian assistance, assistance in the form of funds devoted to humanitarian assistance in conflict areas and direct negotiations with the parties involved to ensure access to humanitarian assistance in conflict areas and encourage dialogue between parties involved in the conflict to find peaceful solutions.

This research will focus on EU intervention through humanitarian diplomacy in the Anglophone conflict in Cameroon, as a way to solve the humanitarian crisis happening in the region. This research will analyze the EU institutional liberalist approach, which prioritizes multilateral cooperation and aid coordination, and normative advocacy in addressing the conflict's root political security dimension that caused the humanitarian crisis in the region. By analyzing the gap between humanitarian relief efforts and unresolved governance failures, the research will analyze the EU's capacity to leverage its diplomatic tools to foster inclusive political solutions and solve the humanitarian crisis happening in the region. .

Methodology

This research will be conducted using a qualitative approach, which focuses on understanding human behavior and social phenomena through data such as texts, journals, observations, books, interviews and internet news. According to Cresswell (2014), qualitative research is conducted as an attempt to answer "how" and "why" questions by analyzing words, images or behavior. This approach is suitable to explore the complexity of EU humanitarian diplomacy, the dynamics of political security in conflict areas. A descriptive approach will also be used to describe EU funding mechanisms, aid delivery challenges and the impact of conflict on civilians.

The research will also combine basic and applied research. Basic research will be used to expand theoretical understanding, particularly the relevance of institutional liberalism theory to humanitarian diplomacy conducted by the European Union. On the other hand, applied research seeks to solve practical problems, such as the challenges of delivering EU aid in conflict zones. This type of research will enable an in-depth analysis of the conflict, providing detailed insights into the challenges and impact of EU humanitarian diplomacy in the Anglophone conflict in Cameroon.

Results and Discussions

Humanitarian Crisis in Anglophone Conflict

According to the European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (ECHO) defines a humanitarian crisis is a forgotten crisis where civilians receive little to no international assistance (European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations, 2024). Humanitarian crises arise when there is a threat to the security, well-being, and lives of large numbers of people. Humanitarian crises can be characterized by various factors such as natural disasters, armed conflicts, economic crises, and political and social crises. The Anglophone conflict in Cameroon is an armed conflict resulting from the marginalization and oppression of the Anglophone community by the Francophone community in the region, both in social and political settings. The Anglophone communities, who were fed up with this marginalization and oppression, finally voiced their regional independence in October 2017. This, of course, was responded to strongly by the Cameroonian government with military aggression, which resulted in the protest evolving into an armed conflict. The armed conflict that has been going on since 2017 has resulted in various humanitarian crises in the region, such as a large number of people forced to flee, human rights violations, limited health services, infrastructure collapse, and food scarcity. Since the outbreak of the conflict, as many as 900,000 civilians have fled to other areas within Cameroon to escape the conflict, and more than 60,000 Cameroonian refugees have fled to Nigeria as refugees (U.S Committee For Refugees and Immigrants, 2025). Civilians who are forced to flee face challenges such as food shortages, homelessness, and vulnerability to exploitation by parties to the conflict.

In addition to a large number of Cameroonian civilians being displaced, the conflict has also resulted in the collapse of health services in the region. Since the start of the conflict, a large number of health facilities such as hospitals and clinics have been unable to operate optimally due to back-to-back attacks, looting, lack of necessary medical equipment, and lack of manpower (Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition, 2023). The collapse of health care infrastructure in the region has weakened the viability of communities, increasing dependence on external agencies. Food scarcity has also been one of the humanitarian crises experienced by the people of Cameroon. As a result of the conflict, a large number of farmers in the Cameroon region have been displaced, disrupting farming in some of the main food-producing areas. Because of this, a large number of people ended up leaving their land, increasing food scarcity in the Cameroon region (Bread For The World, 2024). In addition, a large number of human rights violations committed by the Cameroonian government military and Anglophone separatists have further exacerbated the humanitarian crisis in the region. During this conflict, the Cameroonian government military has carried out a large number of torture, arbitrary arrests and killings, and executions of Cameroonian civilians perceived to be supporting or cooperating with the Anglophone

separatists (Amnesty International, 2018). On the other hand, Anglophone separatists also carried out various killings, torture, and kidnappings of civilians. A large number of attacks carried out by Anglophone separatists were carried out against civilians such as students, teachers, and laborers. In addition, they also carried out attacks on public facilities such as schools, hospitals, and carried out attacks in the city of Buea to disrupt the holding of the Africa Cup of Nations soccer tournament held in Cameroon on January 12, 2022 (Human Rights Watch, 2023). In addition, the weekly suspension of activities by Anglophone separatists for the Anglophone region, known as the “ghost town”, has crippled the local economy and hindered civilians' access to needed food and medical services. (Cameroon Concord, 2024).

Humanitarian Crisis and Political Security in the Area of Conflict

This conflict poses a direct threat to the human security concept that was introduced by the UNDP in 1994, which focuses on protecting the needs of individuals and communities and not just the territorial security. The UNDP argues that human security is held by 7 main dimensions or pillars, such as economic security, food security, health security, environmental security, personal security, community security, and political security (United Nations Development Programme, 1994). In the Anglophone conflict in Cameroon, the armed conflict is a direct threat to human security in the region, especially in the area of political security, which is supposed to ensure security and human rights within the region. Political security, one of the seven dimensions contained in the concept of human security, ensures the security of governance structures as well as the protection of human rights, civil liberties, and justice for all people. In addition, political security encompasses the protection of individuals or communities from state oppression in any form, as well as ensuring people have the freedom to express their views, vote, and be elected. Essentially, political security upholds the principles of human rights, providing not only protection within the government structure but also creating an environment where individuals or communities can express themselves without fear. (Nourbakhsh & Baghbanno, 2023). Political security is the dimension that must first be addressed, as it encompasses a large number of humanitarian dimensions that are threatened in the Cameroon region. The humanitarian crisis taking place in Cameroon can be seen as a result of the lack of political security in the region. The Cameroonian government's longstanding oppression of the Anglophone community, as well as its failure to provide its citizens, especially the Anglophone community, with the basic right to have a voice in the social and political order, has led to a lack of political security in Cameroon (Agwanda et al., 2022), became one example of the weak political security in the region, especially towards the Anglophone community. This failure was one of the main reasons why Cameroon eventually split into two actors in the conflict, the Anglophone separatists and the Cameroonian government.

In addition, the Cameroonian government's failure to uphold and protect human rights for citizens within the region has resulted in a deepening sense of distrust in the government and increased radicalization. Another factor that further threatens political security in Cameroon is the military response by the Cameroonian government in response to Anglophone separatist demands. On the other hand, Anglophone separatists demanding independence for “Ambazonia” also carried out successive attacks on government structures, public facilities such as schools and hospitals, and assaulted civilians whom they perceived as supporting or cooperating with the Cameroonian government. (Amnesty International, 2023). Attacks from both sides of the conflict in the region threatened the human rights of large numbers of Cameroonians and made it difficult for them to access justice, leaving them at the mercy of external actors. This is a direct example of how the lack or absence of political security in a region can lead to conflicts that result in humanitarian crises.

In order to respond to the plethora of humanitarian crises occurring in Cameroon as well as to prevent further escalation of the conflict, there is a need for intervention by external actors such as states or international institutions that can serve as neutral parties and provide the necessary humanitarian assistance to civilians affected by the conflict. In the Anglophone conflict, one of the international institutions that carried out humanitarian intervention was the European Union. The European Union is

one of the international institutions that aims to promote and directly contribute to building peace, maintaining security and assisting development around the world. The EU also upholds the observance of international law and the protection of human rights around the world (European Union, n.d.). The European Union's efforts to overcome the humanitarian crisis that occurred, as well as to prevent escalation between conflicting parties, are through humanitarian diplomacy. Humanitarian diplomacy conducted by the European Union is an effort to strengthen multilateralism, institutional capacity building, and the promotion of norms to respond to threatened human needs and the roots of political instability.

European Union as Humanitarian Actor

The European Union is an international institution that has various objectives in the international world, especially in maintaining peace. In order to maintain that peace, the EU plays an important role as a humanitarian actor in the international community.

This is proven through the missions carried out by the European Union that as written in article 3 of the Lisbon Treaty, such as promoting peace, protecting and improving the quality of the international world, monitoring and enforcing international law, contributing to peace and maintaining security, and protecting human rights (European Union, 2016). International institutions play an important role in forging cooperation between states by establishing rules, norms, and frameworks to reduce transactional costs and defuse and resolve conflicts. (Keohane, 2012). And this role can be seen by the EU intervention in the Anglophone conflict in Cameroon, by focusing on humanitarian aid, promoting international norms, and establishing cooperation with other international institutions, and also regional bodies.

The EU's role in international affairs can be understood through the theory of institutional liberalism. This theory focuses on the role of international institutions in forging cooperation, multilateralism, and promoting norms such as human rights and democracy. As a supranational institution, the EU operates under the principles of institutional liberalism, which prioritizes diplomacy and soft power to resolve conflicts and restore peace in conflict zones. In the Anglophone conflict in Cameroon, the EU is one of the important actors advocating for peace dialogue as well as the provision of humanitarian aid in Cameroon. The EU channels its humanitarian aid through one of its agencies, which has special duties in the humanitarian field, namely ECHO (European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations). Through ECHO, the EU also establishes cooperation with other international institutions, like the UN, to distribute multiple humanitarian aid in areas experiencing conflict.

In line with institutional liberalism, the EU seeks to cooperate with regional bodies such as the African Union and other international institutions such as the UN to achieve conflict resolution outcomes. In addition, the EU's allocation of €27.6 million in 2024 for humanitarian aid in Cameroon to address the number of refugees and food shortages, along with cooperation with regional bodies to promote peaceful dialogue and uphold human rights in the region, is a direct implementation of the theory of institutional liberalism (European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations, 2025a). The intervention carried out by the European Union can also be seen as a humanitarian diplomacy effort carried out to overcome the humanitarian crisis that occurred due to the Anglophone conflict.

European Union Humanitarian Diplomacy Towards the Humanitarian Crisis

Humanitarian diplomacy is one of the tools used to negotiate with two or more parties in conflict to ensure the safe access and delivery of humanitarian assistance in areas experiencing disasters or being in conflict. Humanitarian diplomacy is carried out through various indicators such as the allocation of funds for the provision of humanitarian assistance, ceasefire negotiations, accountability advocacy, and cooperation with regional NGOs. This humanitarian diplomacy is carried out to provide a space for dialogue for the various parties involved to discuss solutions that ensure the delivery of humanitarian assistance and protection for civilians. In Anglophone conflicts, the European Union conducts humanitarian diplomacy through various fields, such as allocation of funds for providing humanitarian assistance and sending humanitarian personnel through ECHO, financial assistance to multiple country

and international institution, such as UN, to the delivery of humanitarian assistance to civilians in conflict areas, cooperation with regional bodies to find peaceful solutions, and providing space and encouraging parties to the conflict to conduct peace dialogue. The European Union mainly provides its humanitarian assistance through one of its humanitarian divisions, the European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid (ECHO). In 2024, the EU allocated approximately 27.6 million euros for humanitarian assistance in Cameroon. This fund is used for humanitarian assistance in the form of food, health services, shelter for refugees, education, protection, and clean water for Cameroonians who are experiencing a humanitarian crisis. (European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations, 2025b). In addition, the European Union also provides financial support to several programs or organizations that provide humanitarian assistance. One of these forms of support is the contribution of 4.2 million euros that the European Union gave to the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) through ECHO, to improve the response to the dwindling food needs in the Cameroon conflict area (World Food Programme, 2022).

In addition to providing humanitarian assistance to Cameroonians trapped in conflict areas, humanitarian diplomacy conducted by the European Union can also be seen as an attempt by the European Union to restore human security in the region, especially in the field of political security. One of the efforts that the EU made was to pass a resolution back in 2021 about a motion for a resolution in Cameroon regarding the Anglophone conflict. In this resolution, the EU encourages peaceful dialogue between the Cameroonian government and Anglophone separatists to avoid the worsening of the humanitarian crisis in the region (European Parliament, 2024). In the resolution, the EU also issued various other statements such as, stopping the Cameroonian government's oppression of the Anglophone community, prohibiting the use of excessive or lethal force by both parties against civilians or political opponents, prohibiting attacks on humanitarian workers in conflict areas and encouraging several regional bodies such as the African Union, to pressure and mediate between the Cameroonian government and Anglophone separatists to develop and implement peaceful solutions to overcome the crisis. The EU's encouragement of regional bodies such as the African Union to mediate the peace dialogue, although it has not produced any real evidence, is in line with the theory of institutional liberalism, where multilateral platforms can be used to solve problems and rebuild trust in the government. In addition, the EU also supports peace mediation by Switzerland, even though it was rejected by the Cameroonian government in 2022 (Sahli et al., 2022). In addition, the EU is also working with the United Nations (UN) to monitor human rights violations in the region and pressure the parties to the conflict in Cameroon to adhere to international norms and respect human rights. This is a direct reflection of the theory of institutional liberalism, where norms based on human rights are used to defuse a conflict to prevent its recurrence (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998)

Overall, humanitarian diplomacy conducted by the European Union can be seen as a concrete implementation of the theory of institutional liberalism. Institutional liberalism focuses on the role of international institutions in establishing cooperation through structured frameworks, shared understanding, and multilateral coordination. According to Keohane, international institutions play an important role in forging cooperation between states by establishing rules, norms, and frameworks to reduce transactional costs and defuse to resolve conflicts. (Keohane, 2012). The EU's cooperation with other humanitarian institutions such as the UN through the UN World Food Programme, to ease the humanitarian crisis in the region and working with one of the regional bodies such as the African Union, is a direct reflection of how international institutions can work together to ease conflicts while achieving peaceful solutions.

Challenges of European Union Humanitarian Diplomacy

In the EU's humanitarian diplomacy in the Anglophone conflict in Cameroon, there are many challenges that complicate the EU's work to address the humanitarian crisis and restore human security in the region. The EU's reliance on aid as an approach is a hindrance because it limits the EU's power to act more decisively in this conflict. The Cameroonian government's refusal to ratify the Rome Statute also poses a major challenge. The Rome Statute is an international treaty made by the International Criminal

Court (ICC), by ratifying the Rome Statute, the state gives the ICC the authority to investigate, prosecute and punish crimes committed within a country. (International Criminal Court, 2021). By refusing this ratification, the Cameroonian government indirectly shields perpetrators of crimes within the country from ICC scrutiny, thereby allowing impunity for crimes committed by the Cameroonian government and Anglophone separatists (European Parliament, 2021). Restrictions on the distribution of humanitarian aid in Cameroon by both the Cameroonian government and Anglophone separatists also complicate the EU's ability to deliver needed humanitarian aid in conflict areas. Attacks by armed groups against humanitarian workers are one of the obstacles for the European Union to provide humanitarian assistance, accounting for 282 cases of attacks that have occurred in the education sector in 2024.

The divergent interests of the actors in the conflict also pose a major obstacle for the EU to conduct humanitarian diplomacy, complicating the resolution of the humanitarian crisis and the restoration of human security in the region. The Cameroonian government, led by President Paul Biya, does not consider the Anglophone region to be autonomous and describes the conflict as an act of terrorism rather than a negotiable political dispute. The Cameroonian government sees Anglophone autonomy as a threat to its centralized, Francophone-dominated governance model. One example is that the "special status" granted by the Cameroonian government to the Anglophone region is perceived as failing to give significant powers or resources to the Anglophone region, which deepens the marginalization of the Anglophone community (International Crisis Group, 2023). This made it difficult for the EU to mediate, as the Cameroonian government saw the intervention of the EU and other external actors, as well as the EU's push for peaceful dialogue between the two sides, as a threat to Cameroon's sovereignty. It also makes it difficult for the EU to deliver aid to the conflict area, as it is perceived as supporting Anglophone separatists (Amnesty International, 2018). On the other hand, Anglophone separatists do not trust the EU's neutrality in this conflict. In addition, factional divisions within the Anglophone separatists have prevented the EU from deciding which parties to include in peace discussions with the Cameroonian government due to differences of opinion between factions.

Both sides of the conflict saw the EU's humanitarian assistance as a threat to their actions, making it more difficult to deliver aid into the conflict area. In addition, the neutrality of the EU is also seen by the Cameroonian government as cooperation with the Anglophone separatists, while the Anglophone separatists consider the EU to ignore the atrocities committed by the Cameroonian government. In addition, the Cameroonian government's role as a guardian of regional stability makes the EU hesitant to impose sanctions for fear of instability in Cameroon's neighboring countries. This forced the EU to conflate humanitarian principles with politics, thus weakening its image as a neutral mediator. In addition, because the EU operates on the principles of institutional liberalism, it limits its action in conflicts in the region. The EU's reliance on soft power, such as the encouragement of the Cameroonian government and Anglophone separatists to enter into a peace dialogue and the financial support for the Swiss-led peace dialogue in 2019, has yielded minimal results, due to the lack of trust of the Cameroonian government and Anglophone separatists in the external mediator (International Crisis Group, 2019).

Conclusion

The Anglophone conflict in Cameroon is concrete evidence that a humanitarian crisis happens when one or multiple dimensions of human security are eroded or unfulfilled. The decades-long period of social and political marginalization of the Anglophone conflict in Cameroon has evolved into a wide-scale armed conflict that threatens human security in the region. The conflict has created a large number of humanitarian crises that require intervention by external parties. The intervention by the European Union through humanitarian diplomacy is a response to address the humanitarian crisis in the region. Through cooperation with regional bodies along with several other international institutions such as the African Union and the United Nations, the EU has allocated a large amount of funds for humanitarian assistance, demanding protection for civilians and strengthening international norms.

Humanitarian diplomacy conducted by the European Union can be seen as an effort to restore political security in the region so that a solution can be reached to overcome the humanitarian crisis that occurred. This can be seen through how the EU uses its role as an international institution to encourage peace dialogue between the Cameroonian government and Anglophone separatists through various resolutions issued. The EU's humanitarian diplomacy to solve the humanitarian crisis in Cameroon during the Anglophone conflict directly reflects the principles of institutional liberalism theory, which emphasizes multilateral cooperation, norm-based governance, and the role of international institutions in maintaining stability to resolve a conflict.

However, the EU's institutional liberalism principle fundamentally became one of the reasons that constrain its humanitarian diplomacy. By prioritizing consensus-based multilateralism and heavily relying on soft power through humanitarian aid, and also avoiding coercive measures against Cameroon's government, the EU inadvertently reinforces the Cameroonian government's impunity and marginalization of Anglophones. Consequently, humanitarian aid functions as a palliative, temporarily alleviating suffering while the conflict's root causes fester. The EU's theory-driven commitment to soft power thus perpetuates a cycle where aid sustains survival but cannot catalyze transformative peace, revealing a fatal misalignment between institutional liberalism's methods and the political imperatives of human security restoration.

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