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## 50 YEARS OF ASEAN: COOPERATION IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

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### *Abstract*

*The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) has earned its place as an important player in international relation especially in the Asia Pacific region. ASEAN has dramatically changed in 50 years, thus it is important to discuss the progress of cooperation established among member states. The aim of this essay is to discuss security, economy and environment cooperation between member states. By the end of the essay, we will have an understanding towards what extend the cooperation established in ASEAN, in its half-century anniversary.*

*Keywords: Southeast Asian, ASEAN, Cooperation, Achievemen*

### INTRODUCTION

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) celebrated its 50 years of anniversary last August. This Organization was formed on 8 August 1967, by Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand. In 1999, ASEAN had an enlargement by double its previous member with the join of Brunei Darussalam, Viet Nam, Lao PDR, Myanmar, and Cambodia. In their relations with one another, the ASEAN Member States have adopted the fundamental principles such as non-interference and nonuse of force which is written in the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia (TAC) of 1976 (ASEAN, 2023).

Since its establishment, ASEAN has undergone a remarkable transformation. During the Second Indochina War, the five original members of ASEAN were categorized as western camp because they shared the anti-communist identity. Thus, the main objective of ASEAN was to avoid the “domino effect” because communist ideology has been increasingly popular and would expand to Southeast Asia if not contained (Keling et al., 2011). Not to mention the conflict between Malaysia-Philippines and Malaysia-Indonesia that had to reconcile. These reasons showed that originally ASEAN was found to address political issues on the regional basis. This was summarized in 1967 ASEAN Declaration by the slogan 'to ensure the political stability and peace' (Artner, 2017). Now, ASEAN's scope has evolved, not only about politics and security, it also includes a broad range of economic, social issues and even environmental cooperation.

During their 50 years of relationship, ASEAN member faced many challenges and obstacles. There are big differences among ASEAN members with each country consist of a variety of ethnic groups speaking many different languages and have diverse religions. In addition to the Cambodian conflict that

challenges ASEAN's political cooperation. Member states also had to deal with a series of crises including the disastrous 1997 Asian Financial Crisis (AFC) and the Global Financial Crisis of 2008–9 (Stubbs & Mitrea, 2017). In spite of the challenges ASEAN faced, ASEAN proves its durability as a regional organization. All of the ten members are still holding their commitment in ASEAN. Through the ups and downs of the regional and international landscape from 1967 until 2017, ASEAN has managed to stick together and overcome the challenges that have come its way.

ASEAN's achievement is not only that its success in maintaining peace and stability in the region but also in economic development. In 1967, ASEAN only represented 3, 2% of world GDP. The half-century later, ASEAN represented 6, 2% of world GDP in 2016 almost doubles the share in 1967. The standard of living in ASEAN increased with nominal GDP per capita averaging at US\$4,021 in 2016. While in 1967 the five original members had an average nominal GDP per capita of just US\$122. The ASEAN population also experienced social progress and contributed to poverty reduction. The proportion of the ASEAN population living with less than US\$1.25 purchasing power parity (PPP) per day fell from 47% in 1990 to 14% in 2015. ASEAN now represents almost 7% of total world trade and is collectively the world's 4th largest trade powerhouse after the major world economies of the European Union, the USA, and China (ASEAN Secretariat, 2017b).

It also worth to mention the progress ASEAN has made with other organization or states in various fields. There is ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) on security matters. ASEAN+3 (Japan, South Korea, China) as a device to connect Northeast and Southeast Asia economic matters in the aftermath of the 1997 financial crisis. More, there are various ASEAN+1 dialogues with important states, the ASEAN-Europe Meeting (ASEM) and the last is East Asia Summit (EAS). Here we can see the progress ASEAN has made in building relationship with other countries not only the one near the Southeast Asia Region but also including Western Countries (Simon, 2008).

Along with the development of the relationship between member states of ASEAN in 50 years, cooperation between member states has increased. It can be seen in numerous agreement sign in various fields such as security, economy and environmental cooperation. The next section of this essay will explain more about the progress of the cooperation happened between member states of ASEAN.

## **Findings And Discussion**

### **ASEAN Community**

If we want to talk about the progress of cooperation between member states, firstly we need to discuss ASEAN Community. The idea of building a community on a shared vision, outward looking, living in peace, stability and prosperity, bonded together in partnership in dynamic development and in a community of caring societies was adopted by ASEAN leaders on the 30th Anniversary of ASEAN. This Idea was written in The ASEAN Vision 2020. At the ASEAN Summit in 2003, the ASEAN Leaders agree that an ASEAN Community shall be established and four years later ASEAN leaders agree to accelerate the establishment of an ASEAN Community by 2015. The ASEAN Community is comprised of three pillars, namely the ASEAN Political-Security Community, ASEAN Economic Community and ASEAN

Socio-Cultural Community. The latest progress is the adoption of ASEAN Community Vision 2025 consists of specific action lines and strategic measures to realize the targets identified (ASEAN, 2023).

### **ASEAN's Strengthen Security Cooperation**

Since its establishment, ASEAN is in progress to promote regional peace and stability in the relationship among countries of the region. In the earlier year of its inception, ASEAN was “reluctant to institutionalize multilateral defense cooperation because it wanted to avoid becoming a military alliance or a defense pact”. Thus, they prefer to limit their security cooperation on a bilateral form (Albek, 2015). The progress has been made when ASEAN member agreed to adopt the ASEAN Political-Security Community (APSC) during the 14th ASEAN Summit in 2009 Blueprint which provides a roadmap consisting 145 action lines and timetable to establish the community by 2015 (ASEAN, 2015). APSC is served as guidance for bringing ASEAN's political and security cooperation to a higher plane. This agreement was designed to uphold previous political and security agreement which play a pivotal role in conflict resolution such as Declaration on Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality (ZOPFAN), the Treaty of Amity and Co-operation in South East Asia (TAC) which is a key code of conduct governing inter-state relations in the region, and the Treaty on the Southeast Asian Nuclear Weapon Free Zone (SEANWFZ) which preserves our region free of nuclear weapons. The APSC “will ensure that the peoples and the member states of ASEAN live in peace with one another and with the world at large in a just, democratic and harmonious environment.” (ASEAN Secretariat, 2017a).

Seven years of implementation of APSC Blueprint 2009-2015 has strengthened the foundation of the APSC “by deepening and expanding ASEAN political and security cooperation and strengthening ASEAN capacity in responding to regional and international challenges”. To ensure the continuity of this cooperation, ASEAN adopt the APSC Blueprint 2025 aims to elevate ASEAN political-security cooperation to an even higher plane as an integral part of the ASEAN Community Vision 2025 (ASEAN Secretariat, 2009).

There are various mechanism and agreement in security that already made and implemented in fifty years of ASEAN, but we cannot discuss all in this essay. We need to focus on a recent event that happens in ASEAN. The world has been talking about Rohingya crisis. *Reuters* released a [report](#) documenting Myanmar's army operations that killed hundreds of Rohingya and caused some 75,000 of them to flee to Bangladesh in November 2016 (Antoni Slodkowski, Wa Lone, Simon Lewis, 2017). The Burmese government suspected of conducting systematically and increasingly oppression toward Rohingya through violent immigration crackdowns, denial of basic rights and various human abuses (Lego, 2017).

As we already know that ASEAN has a non-interference principle which means that other member states cannot intervene in the situation that happening in Myanmar. However, ASEAN's political and security culture and cooperation have evolved in the past 5 decades. In the past, there are days when a mere mention of a domestic issue would be immediately labeled as interference. This transformation can be seen on how Aung San Suu Kyi, Myanmar State Counselor and Foreign Minister, handling the crisis. On 19 December 2016, Aung San Suu Kyi held a meeting in Yangon to brief the ASEAN member states on recent developments in the northern. She voluntarily provides first-hand information on this issue that makes Myanmar became “the first ASEAN country to officially host a ministerial-level retreat to discuss sensitive internal matters – something that was once taboo in ASEAN” (Pitsuwan et al., 2017). As such, we can see that the progress that happening in ASEAN member states relationship dealing with security issues.

## ASEAN's Evolving Economic Cooperation

Although since beginning ASEAN already discuss about establishing economic cooperation, but it was only in the mid-1970s ASEAN actively promoting this goal by formulated and implemented various schemes of economic cooperation. In 1992, ASEAN member states have taken great strides to form the ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA) by the year of 2008. But in October 1998, they shortened the target year to 2002 in order to enhance the attractiveness of the region as a recipient of Investment (Yoshimatsu, 2002). One of the purposes of this agreement is to reducing import tariffs for industrial products, agriculture products, and capital goods to 0-5 percent. Even though many researchers argue that AFTA was ineffective and weak but it was succeeded to cut the averages tariffs among ASEAN-6 states (original member with Brunei) members from 12.75 in 1993 to 4.435 in 2000 (Ravenhill, 2010).

ASEAN make a progress by adopting The Hanoi Plan of Action (HPA) as a six-year implementation program for ASEAN Vision 2020. The intention of the plan is to proceed with regional integration and liberalize trade in goods, services, investment, and capital. The HPA is considering more specific and stronger than AFTA. Under the HPA, ASEAN average tariff level in ASEAN-6 continued to fall to 1.87% by 2003. However, HPA is still lacking serious dispute settlement mechanism (Ravenhill, 2010).

Additional strengthening of ASEAN economic cooperation came about with the ratification of ASEAN Charter in 2008 by all members. This agreement endorsed the acceleration of ASEAN Economic Community by 2015. The aim of AEC is to turn Southeast Asia into a “fully integrated production base for transnational capital by eliminating intraregional barriers to trade and investment and creating the trans-boundary infrastructure to connect national markets.” (Jones, 2016). There have been a number of achievements by implementing AEC 2015 which is an effective preferential tariff rate is virtually zero for ASEAN-6. More than 70% of intra-ASEAN trade is conducted at zero most-favored nation tariff rates, and less than 5% are subject to tariffs above 10% (WTO, 2011). Nevertheless, Research Institute for ASEAN and East Asia (ERIA) found that the AEC was still far from completion even though trade tariffs had fallen. ERIA believes that AEC is not fully implemented yet because “Non-tariff barriers (NTBs) to trade and investment remained significant; trade and Investment facilitation was limited; not one regional infrastructure project was on track; and regional regulations were frequently either not being translated into domestic rules or not properly enforced (ERIA, 2012).

ASEAN failed on realizing AEC by the end of 2015 deferring 105 of its 506 measures. ASEAN announced that the AEC had been ‘established’ but not actually realized yet. For that ASEAN moved the deadline to 2025 by adopting the AEC Blueprint 2025 at the 27th ASEAN Summit in November 2015 (East Asia Forum, 2017). According to the ASEAN Secretariat, The AEC blueprint 2025 provides broad directions through strategic measures to guide the next phase of ASEAN economic integration from 2016 to 2025. It addresses “more difficult areas of reform, including reducing non-tariff barriers, simplifying rules of origin, and accelerating and deepening the implementation of trade facilitation measures” (Jayant Menon, 2017). Overall, The AEC Blueprint 2025 sets higher ambition to enhance participation in global value chains through the deepening of existing integration. The remaining question is will 2025 be the final deadline for the ASEAN Economic Community?

## ASEAN Cooperation on Combating Haze

One of the most striking tests for ASEAN's political will is to combat air pollution caused by the periodic burning of large forested areas in Indonesia, East Malaysia, and Brunei. The problem is not only affecting population health but also interfere with children education. In some countries, they also suffer for economic cost because the business cannot open or working properly. The first initiative to combat air pollution happened in 1992 when widespread forest fires in Kalimantan Indonesia prompted complaints from Malaysia and Singapore. It let ASEAN make a joint committee to study the haze and set up a meteorological network for early warning. The recurrent haze in 1994 and 1995 force ASEAN to take further action by produced the ASEAN Cooperation Plan on Transboundary Pollution. It articulated several measures to improve the regional cooperation on cross-border pollution. Due to ASEAN's norm of informality, this plan did not have a legally binding effect on member states. As a result, this regime has a limited impact on national actions and what happened next is the 1997 forest fires and haze crisis (Aggarwal & Chow, 2010).

Indonesia is to blame for the 1997 haze crisis, not only because of the sheer magnitude of the fire but also the conflict of interest that Suharto regime had with the timber industry. This crisis made ASEAN adopted a Regional Haze Plan (RHAP). RHAP set the deadline for member states to developed national plans for preventing haze by March 1998. These plans include the restriction on slash-and-burn practice during the dry season and strengthen regional early warning and monitoring system. The effectiveness of the plan is depending on member states enforcement of laws against the slash-and-burn practice, sadly there was little actual change (Aggarwal & Chow, 2010).

The human and economic cost caused by the haze age pressure to ASEAN to come up with the solution. In June 2002, all ten ASEAN members signed the ASEAN Agreement on Transboundary Haze Pollution. This agreement will come into force if the member states already ratified it. This purpose of this agreement is "to prevent and monitor trans-boundary haze pollution as a result of land and/or forest fires which should be mitigated, through concerted national efforts and intensified regional and international co-operation". This agreement obligate member states to respond promptly to control fires and haze pollution and use necessary legislative administrative measures to implement their obligations under this Agreement (*ASEAN AGREEMENT ON TRANSBOUNDARY HAZE POLLUTION*, 2002). The lack of enforcement provision such as sanction for non-compliance reveals the same weakness that this agreement has with RHAP and the ASEAN Cooperation Plan on Transboundary Pollution.

The beginning of the implementation of this agreement was not going well. Only six member states ratified this agreement in 2003. It took Indonesia twelve years to finally ratify this agreement in 2014. The ratification by all members brings a split of hope towards combating haze pollution. Indonesia President Jokowi Dodo, show his country seriousness on dealing with haze pollution. The ratification of the ASEAN Agreement on Transboundary Haze Pollution was not only a formality. He shows the political will to solve a problem which has been around for decades and succeeded in doing it. Indonesia's efforts to combat haze pollution recent years was acknowledged and praised by Malaysian Prime Minister Najib Razak at a joint press conference on November 2017 "It has been almost two years since Malaysia was last enveloped by (transboundary) haze," Najib said, as quoted by todayonline.com. "This reflects the seriousness of the Indonesian government in putting an end to any (open-burning) activities, which could trigger haze" (Indonesia Expat, 2017). The steering committee on trans-boundary haze pollution also said that roadmap

towards achieving a haze-free region by the year 2020 is on track. However, ASEAN Secretary-General Le Luong Minh reminds us that there is no room for complacency because if we look at the weather patterns in the last two years, it's been very abnormal. Thus, we must continue our efforts to implement haze control measures.

Through the explanation above, we can see that environmental cooperation between member states in the last five decades has progressed. From the lack of political will to forming ecological 'we-feeling' and finally taking serious measures to combat haze pollution. The road does not end here, ASEAN must continue its efforts to make sure there will be no more Haze crisis in the future.

## Conclusion

Based on the explanation above, cooperation between ASEAN member states evolves from time to time. However, there is something that needs to be improved. In security cooperation, member states need not only actively talking about community security but also taking appropriate practical actions, therefore it's not going to be a mere concept. In economy cooperation, ASEAN member states need to make sure the establishment of AEC proceed according to the plan and no more delaying. In environment cooperation, ASEAN member states need to implement the agreement on the regional level and has effective law enforcement on illegal logging and man-made fire. Thus, the cooperation established between member states of ASEAN still has a long way to go. If ASEAN wants to make sure that the ASEAN Community established on time, all members should work together and give their best effort.

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