



The Habibie Center

The Habibie Center ASEAN Studies Program ASEAN BRIEFS

Vol. 3 / Issue 3 / January 2016

ASEAN Community, Quo Vadis?

SUMMARY/BRIEF

2015 marks a new milestone in Southeast Asian regional integration as the ASEAN Community – comprising of a political security community, an economic community and a socio-cultural community - is formally established. This edition of ASEAN Briefs examines ASEAN accomplishments and failures in the context of the establishment of the ASEAN Community. Have all aspects in each of the community pillars been achieved? Where do they fall short? Is the ASEAN Community 2015 a success or a failure? Has ASEAN been a real community beyond mere formality? This ASEAN Briefs also provides a set of policy recommendations that ASEAN policy-makers can adopt to implement the ASEAN Community agendas and pursue the ASEAN Vision 2025.

ASEAN Briefs is a regular publication about current developments on ASEAN regionalism, especially in the Political-Security, Economic as well as Socio - Cultural Pillars.

The Habibie Center
ASEAN Studies Program ASEAN Briefs

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Introduction

On December 31, 2015, the ASEAN Community was formally established. This is a commitment from all ten ASEAN member states to conduct their political relations cohesively through the ASEAN Political Security Community, integrate their economies through the ASEAN Economic Community and bond together in the form of caring societies through the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community.

Certainly, ASEAN has made remarkable achievements. Most importantly, ASEAN has been able to serve one of its most fundamental purposes, “to manage conflicts among its members constructively and peacefully” by combining formal diplomatic and conflict management methods with more informal methods, including second-track diplomacy.¹ Its ability to endure periodical changes of world order, from Cold War to post-Cold War, marks ASEAN’s ability to always adapt with new challenges and opportunities.

The ASEAN Community 2015, however, reflects the need of ASEAN member countries to go beyond the mere purpose of conflict management; to transform the regional institution so it can benefit each and every member state not only strategically but also economically through even closer economic integration. Moreover, it reflects the ambitious commitment to build a common identity of ASEAN and a region-wide society that is caring and sharing, living in an inclusive and harmonious environment.

Progress notwithstanding, there are a number of issues that ASEAN still fall short in its transformation into a full-fledged community. This edition of *ASEAN Briefs* reviews this particular ASEAN integration stage by examining the accomplishments and failures of ASEAN; what ASEAN has and has not achieved so far. In this sense, commitments made, particularly as stipulated in a number of documents that serve as the basis of ASEAN Community, are weighed against the on-the-ground reality.

Now that the ASEAN Community is formally established, ASEAN member states have embarked on a new agenda “to consolidate our Community, building upon and deepening the integration process to realize a rules-based, people-oriented, people-centered ASEAN Community, where our peoples enjoy human rights and fundamental freedoms, higher quality of life and the benefits of community building, reinforcing our sense of togetherness and common identity, guided by the purposes and principles of the ASEAN Charter”, an agenda called *ASEAN Vision 2025*.

1 Kamarulzaman Askandar, Jacob Bercowtch, and Mikio Oishi, “The ASEAN Way of Conflict Management: Old Patterns and New Trends,” *Asian Journal of Political Science* 10, no. 2 (2002): 22.

This edition of *ASEAN Briefs*, thus, will conclude with a set of policy recommendations for ASEAN policy-makers to further consolidate and implement ASEAN Community agendas and pursue *ASEN Vision 2025*.

There are many issues that deserve to be discussed with regard to ASEAN regional integration. This *ASEAN Briefs* does not in any way intend to be an exhaustive review of ASEAN’s performance. Resource availability and space limitation does not allow us to do so. This *ASEAN Briefs* thus highlights what we regard as three of the most fundamental issues in the realization of ASEAN Community, namely: democracy and human rights; regional stability and ASEAN centrality; equitable and beneficial economic integration, and; ASEAN common identity.

Taking Stock of ASEAN Community

Democracy and Human Rights

The ASEAN Community 2015 reflects the regional spirit to embark upon the democratization wave that swept through the region more noticeably after the 1990s. Hence, the notions of democracy and human rights appear vastly in the documents that guide the establishment of the ASEAN Community. The Declaration of ASEAN Concord II (Bali Concord II), for instance, states that “the ASEAN Security Community is envisaged to bring ASEAN’s political and security cooperation to a higher plane to ensure that countries in the region live at peace with one another and with the world at large in a just, democratic and harmonious environment.”² The ASEAN Charter that was adopted in 2007 pronounces that all ASEAN member states adhere to the principle of democracy, the rule of law and good governance, respect for and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms.³ The commitment was reinforced in the ASEAN Political Security Community Blueprint 2009.⁴

The irony is that this formal recognition of the need for democracy and the promotion and protection of human rights came at the same time when democracy itself was fading in Southeast Asian countries. As noted in a report written by Joshua Kurlantzick in 2014, “since the late 2000s, Southeast Asia’s democratization has stalled and, in some of the region’s most economically and strategically important nations, gone into reverse.”⁵ There is still no exact timetable for democratic elections

2 ASEAN, “Declaration of ASEAN Concord II (Bali Concord II),” 2003.

3 ASEAN, “Charter of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations,” 2007.

4 ASEAN, “Roadmap for an ASEAN Community 2009-2015” (The ASEAN Secretariat, 2009).

5 See Joshua Kurlantzick, *Southeast Asia’s Regression From Democracy and Its Implications* (New York, 2014).

in Thailand after the military coup in 2014. In Malaysia, the ruling government is tightening its control on opposition voices while trying to retain its power in the face of corruption allegation. In Cambodia, Hun Sen has been ruling the country for 30 years, since the fall of Khmer Rouge regime, making him the longest-serving non-royal leader in Asia. Even in Indonesia, whose democratization in late 1990s inspired the spread of democracy throughout the region, democracy is struggling as the military is creeping back to politics and the corruption eradication movement faces resistance from conservative elements from the former New Order regime.

In 2005, Freedom House, a monitoring organization, ranked two Southeast Asian countries, Philippines and Thailand as “free” while others either “partly free” or “not free.” In 2015 report, none of the Southeast Asian countries are considered “free.”⁶

In the area of the promotion and protection of human rights, the development is also disappointing. Progress has obviously been made in terms of institutional responses in this relatively new area of cooperation. For instance, the ASEAN Inter-Governmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR) was established in 2009. There have been demands, however, to improve AICHR’s terms of reference since its current mandate does not help AICHR to fulfil its purpose to promote and protect human rights in ASEAN.⁷

In countries like Myanmar, the rights of minority groups are still subject to persecution and unjust treatment.

Last but not least, despite attempts to intensify regional cooperation, ASEAN’s desire to have a rule-based community adhering to good governance is also not yet fulfilled. According to the Transparency International’s Corruption Perception Index 2014, for instance, most of the ASEAN member states still rank very low. Among the lowest are Cambodia and Myanmar that rank 156 out of 175 countries monitored by the organization.

Regional Stability and ASEAN Centrality

ASEAN’s merit as a regional institution has often been measured in terms of its success in managing conflict between its members. Given the political and cultural diversities, as well as unresolved boundary issues among its members, this is indeed a remarkable achievement.

6 “Freedom in the World 2015,” *Freedom House*, 2015, <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/freedom-world-2015#.Vozf9RV97IU>.

7 See for instance Yuyun Wahyuningrum, *The ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights: Origins, Evolution and the Way Forward* (Stockholm, 2014). Yuyun Wahyuningrum has been one of the most active Indonesian human rights activists advocating for the review and expansion of AICHR mandates.

As noted by McVey, “[The] question to be posed is not so much of why there is armed separatism in Southeast Asia as of why there is not more of it.”⁸

The modern history records that only eight major interstate conflicts took place among ASEAN members.⁹ While diplomatic relations were strained and armed skirmishes occurred sometimes, none of these conflicts escalated into a major war. The success is attributed to the unique ASEAN conflict management approach that combines formal methods with informal, non-official dialogue; the so-called ASEAN Way of conflict management.¹⁰

ASEAN’s aspiration to expand the geographical scope of the ASEAN Way, however, has been yielding more mixed results so far. ASEAN has not yet been able to regulate the behavior of extra-ASEAN major powers and “exercise and maintain its centrality and proactive role as the primary driving force in an open, transparent and inclusive regional architecture.”

While ASEAN’s role in setting up the environment for managing broader regional conflicts through a number of initiatives such as East Asia Summit (EAS) and ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) is not to be disregarded, the significance of those institutions has been recently questioned. Regional powers have been increasingly inclined to take unilateral actions, sometimes provocatively. China is building up military facilities in the disputed Spratly Islands and has started testing them; U.S. carried out freedom of navigation operation (FONOP); Japan is abandoning its anti-war constitution. Even ASEAN member states themselves appear to be frustrated with the lack of thrust in the institutional mechanism in settling disputes/conflicts as shown by recent moves by the Philippines to file a lawsuit against China’s claims over South China Sea to the international arbitration. The latest nuclear test carried out by North Korea demonstrates that the problem of denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula has not yet been resolved and poses a great threat to regional stability.

Meanwhile, the ARF, the primary ASEAN-driven dialogue and consultation regional forum on political and security issues has been stuck in the confidence building measures (CBM) stage in its three-stages

8 Ruth McVey, “Separatism and Paradoxes of Nation-State in Perspective,” in *Armed Separatism in Southeast Asia*, ed. Joo-Jock Lim and S. Vani (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (ISEAS), 1984), 3.

9 Askandar, Bercowtch, and Oishi, “The ASEAN Way of Conflict Management: Old Patterns and New Trends,” 24. Note that Cambodian-Vietnamese War between late 1970s until early 1990s took place when neither of them were ASEAN members. Even so, ASEAN’s informal way of conflict management, especially through Indonesian mediating role, was arguably influential in solving the conflict.

10 Askandar, Bercowtch, and Oishi, “The ASEAN Way of Conflict Management: Old Patterns and New Trends.”

(CBM-preventive diplomacy-development of conflict resolution mechanisms) approach to peace and security in the broader region. More than two decades since its founding, the ARF increasingly appears as little more than a talk-shop without concrete design and execution of resolving most demanding regional security issues.

Territorial disputes over the South China Sea, involving China and four ASEAN member countries (Brunei, Malaysia, Philippines, Vietnam), probably remains the most significant challenge to the regional peace and stability. The call for a rule-based, peaceful management and resolution of the disputes through “full implementation of the DOC for peace and stability in the South China Sea” has not been fulfilled. The DOC calls ASEAN member states and China to “exercise self-restraint in the conduct of activities that would complicate or escalate disputes and affect peace and stability including, among others, refraining from action of inhabiting on the presently uninhabited islands, reefs, shoals, cays, and other features and to handle their differences in a constructive manner.”¹¹ China’s land reclamation projects in the South China Sea, thus, can be seen as a clear violation of the DOC. Worse, it demonstrates the lack of authority and the grim prospect of ASEAN-led institutional initiatives to maintain regional peace and stability as stipulated in the ASEAN Community documents.

It appears that regional security dynamics have become more immune to ASEAN’s institutional initiatives. In other words, ASEAN’s centrality, or even ASEAN’s relevance, in the upcoming new regional security architecture is diminishing.

This is hardly surprising, though. The success of ASEAN Way in moderating intra-regional conflicts and significantly reducing the likelihood of war does not necessarily mean that extra-ASEAN parties would voluntarily and easily subscribed to the norms. After all, countries outside ASEAN have not been too familiar with the idea of solving problems through informality and organizational minimalism as held by ASEAN. It requires a long, sustained and intense interaction and socialization process for these norms to be accepted by extra-ASEAN parties. ASEAN’s aspiration to regulate the behavior of extra-ASEAN parties, particularly the major powers, therefore, remains a challenging task. Indeed, “the ASEAN Way of soft institutionalism and dialogue process seemed ineffective in laying the foundations of an Asia Pacific regional order.”¹²

11 “Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea,” *Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)*, 2002, <http://www.asean.org/asean/external-relations/china/item/declaration-on-the-conduct-of-parties-in-the-south-china-sea>.

12 Amitav Acharya, *Constructing a Security Community in Southeast Asia: ASEAN and the Problem of Regional Order* (London: Routledge, 2001), 6.

Equitable and Beneficial Economic Integration

As ASEAN evolved from a regional institution dealing primarily with political and security issues, economic agenda became another pillar of the ASEAN Community. The ASEAN Economic Community, as stipulated in the AEC Blueprint, is built upon four elements –a single market and production base, a highly competitive economic region, a region of equitable economic development, and a region fully integrated into the global economy- containing 17 “core elements” and 176 priority actions to serve as a guide.

Remarkable progress have been made to achieve these goals. ASEAN economic growth and expansion have evidently yielded tangible benefits to the Southeast Asian people. In 2012, ASEAN’s GDP per capita reached \$3,748, more than double the year 2000 figure of \$1,172. In 2000 14% percent of Southeast Asian people lived below poverty line. The share has fallen to just 3% in 2013 thanks to strong income growth over the last decade. Furthermore, the establishment of the AEC could increase regional aggregate output by 7% annually and generate around 14 million new jobs by 2025 if it is fully implemented.¹³

According to the *ASEAN Annual Report 2013-2014*, by end-2013, 81.79% of the 229 AEC prioritized key deliverables targeted by 2013 have been implemented.¹⁴

The most notable progress in this regard is tariff reduction; average tariff rates in the original five member countries of ASEAN (Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand) have been virtually zero since 2010.¹⁵

Nevertheless, there are areas that are still lacking in the pursuit of this ambitious goal of “the realization of the end goal of economic integration ... which is based on a convergence of interests of ASEAN Member Countries to deepen and broaden economic integration ...”¹⁶

The utilization of the tariff reduction agreements, for example, has been relatively low as shown by the fact that ASEAN intra-regional trade remains stagnant from 2000 to 2012.¹⁷ Businesses, in other words, are still hesitant to embark upon the trade liberalization arrangements given the presence of a number of non-tariff barriers in most ASEAN member states, such as

13 “Taking ASEAN to the People,” *The Strait Times*, 2015, <http://www.straittimes.com/opinion/st-editorial/taking-asean-to-the-people>.

14 Jayant Menon and Anna Cassandra Melendez, *Realizing an ASEAN Economic Community: Progress and Remaining Challenges*, ADB Economics Working Paper Series (Metro Manila, 2015), 1–2.

15 *Ibid.*, 42.

16 ASEAN, “Roadmap for an ASEAN Community 2009-2015.”

17 Jonathan Woetzel et al., *Southeast Asia at the Crossroads: Three Paths to Prosperity*, 2014, 37.

the restrictions on investment and foreign ownership, non-harmonized standards/regulations and inefficient customs procedures.¹⁸

Meanwhile, the services sector has seen less liberalization compared to goods. ASEAN, for instance, has agreed on the liberalization of only eight types of professions so far (architecture, accountancy, surveying, engineering, medical practitioners, dental practitioners, tourism and nurses). The liberalization of services sector is further hampered by a number of “flexibilities” stipulated explicitly in the arrangements. While these flexibilities are meant to cater to the development gap among ASEAN member countries, they could potentially impede the goal of regional economic integration in the long run.

Domestic impediments, such as restrictions on land ownership and work permits and examinations, still continue to work against the free flow of services. In countries like Singapore and Indonesia the prospect of freer influx of foreign workers has risen concerns among the local population. If left unchecked, this condition could potentially create societal tension. Finally, migrant workers protection remains at the top of the priority list of issues that should be addressed.

Unlike other regional groupings, the AEC started with a major gap in economic development among its members. Indonesia, for instance, accounts for 35% of ASEAN’s total economic volume, while Lao is only 0.5%. In terms of GDP per capita, there is a huge gap between Singapore and Brunei with US\$53,000 and US\$27,000 respectively while Myanmar, Cambodia and Lao PDR register with barely US\$1,000 GDP per capita. The problem of integrating less-developing economies like Myanmar, Cambodia and Lao PDR, therefore, remains a challenge for ASEAN in order to establish an equitably beneficial regional economic integration. Despite positive domestic economic and political development in these countries, they are still behind in terms of economic development compared to other member countries.

ASEAN remains one of the most globally integrated regions in the world. According to the MGI Connectedness Index – which measures countries’ global integration based on their inflows and outflows of goods, services, finances, people and data and communication relative to their size of economies- five ASEAN member states are among the 50 most globally connected countries in the world (Singapore [4th], Malaysia [18th], Thailand [36th], the Philippines [45th], Vietnam [48th]). ASEAN, collectively, also has five bilateral trade agreements – with Australia and New Zealand, China, India, Japan and South Korea. An FTA across ASEAN and those six trading partners, the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), is also under negotiation. If implemented, the RCEP could create the world’s biggest

18 Ibid., 43.

trading bloc. The web of FTAs in ASEAN is also supported by bilateral and multilateral trade agreements signed by individual ASEAN member countries. Singapore, Brunei, Malaysia and Vietnam, for instance, are participating in the Trans-Pacific Partnership.

The openness of ASEAN economies is a huge potential in term of capturing a larger share of the world’s trade in goods and services. Nevertheless, the challenge to harmonize and consolidate the overlapping trade agreements remain a challenge. The AEC Blueprint stipulates that ASEAN integration into the global economy would be achieved through “enhanced participation in global supply networks” and the establishment of a “coherent approach towards external economic relations.”¹⁹ This very coherence of approach, however, remains unnoticeable. This demonstrates the difficulties of actually converging ASEAN member states’ individual national interests in terms of economic relations.

ASEAN Identity

Compared to the APSC and the AEC, the supposedly “lower politics” of ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC) has received lesser attention from the policy-making circles as well as the media. While in actual fact, the ASCC is the heart of the ASEAN Community. It is where what would later be the ground for *ASEAN Vision 2025* is stipulated. Indeed, “ASEAN identity is the basis of Southeast Asia’s regional interests.”²⁰

Despite the progresses that have been made, however, it has to be admitted that we have not reached the point of a people-centered and people-oriented ASEAN. The majority of decisions are made without any meaningful involvement of civil society. There are still concerns over how institutional developments benefit the wider society of ASEAN. It is not clear, for instance, how the AEC would be economically beneficial for the society and, as noted before, how it can narrow the economic gap within and between ASEAN member countries.

Moreover, the “we feeling” of ASEAN is still missing. People from the remote areas of Indonesia, for instance, are still not aware of the existence of their fellow ASEAN citizens in Lao PDR for example, not to say in contact with them. A common identity of ASEAN is still not there. The level of direct interaction at the societal level remains low.

The task of establishing the ASEAN identity is indeed difficult. It does not only involve political commitment among leaders, “but also asks the people how they think of themselves as citizens, and whether they see themselves sharing one identity consisting of diverse

19 ASEAN, “Roadmap for an ASEAN Community 2009-2015.”
20 Ibid.

cultures and heritage, tied together by history.”²¹ Without a sustained commitment and any political embodiment of a clear and realistic direction of ASEAN regional integration which is truly based on and oriented to the people, this vision would remain just that, a vision, without meaningful realization.

What Next for ASEAN?

Weighing the formal commitments, in particular ones stipulated in the basis documents of ASEAN Community 2015, we have come to establish that there is still a wide gap between the political commitments and on-the-ground reality with regard to ASEAN regional integration agenda. Against this background of ASEAN accomplishments and failures, it is the time to ask “What next for ASEAN?”

At the 27th ASEAN Summit in Kuala Lumpur, November last year, besides formally established ASEAN Community, ASEAN leaders endorsed the a new set of post-2015 commitments under the *ASEAN 2025: Forging Ahead Together*. The document actually comprises of five parts: *Kuala Lumpur Declaration on ASEAN 2025: Forging Ahead Together*, *ASEAN Community Vision 2025* as well as new blueprints for all three pillars of ASEAN Community.

Under this vision, ASEAN member states agree to build political-security community that is united, inclusive and resilient; an economic community that is highly integrated, cohesive, competitive, innovative, dynamic, with enhanced connectivity and sectoral cooperation, resilient, inclusive, people-oriented, people-centered and integrated with the global economy; and a socio-cultural community that engages and benefits the people, is inclusive, sustainable, resilient and dynamic.

Similar to the basic documents of ASEAN Community 2015, *ASEAN 2025* is full of jargons which would justify pessimistic voices with regards to their actual implementation.

First and foremost, it is unclear how these new commitments will build upon the achievements of the ASEAN Community 2015 and how the flaws will be addressed. It lacks strategic planning and priority, and is easily criticized as just another face-saving document without any clear and realistic direction to follow it up.

Moreover, it would be a disappointing shame for all ASEAN member states if this document was created only to satisfy the necessity to have a post-2015 document as the deadline for the establishment of ASEAN Community 2015 was approaching. It is necessary, therefore, to ensure that the *ASEAN Vision 2025* and the new blueprints of three ASEAN pillars not remain

²¹ Pham Quang Minh, “In Search of an ASEAN Identity,” in *Culture, Power and Practices: The Globalization of Culture and Its Implications for Asian Regional Transformation* (Bangkok: API Regional Coordinating Institution, 2011), 171.

just that –declaration and blueprints without concrete implementation.

Lacking also is the acknowledgement that ASEAN has failed to achieve some of its commitments in good time. The formal process of the establishment of the ASEAN Community and post-2015 regional integration proceeded as if everything went smoothly. We believe that this is partly because of the long-held norms in ASEAN to delay resolving rather sensitive problems and let the formal process continue with the lowest common denominator acceptable to all member countries.

Many argue that this norm of “sweeping the problems under the carpet” is an inseparable part of the ASEAN’s modus operandi; the so-called ASEAN Way which emphasizes informality and organizational minimalism. The ASEAN Way for sure has been helpful in managing and solving inter-states conflicts among ASEAN member countries. These very norms, however, have also contributed to the lack of concrete progress in ASEAN regional integration. The principle of non-interference, which in ASEAN held extremely to the extent that expressing concerns or dissatisfaction over fellow member countries’ certain policy considered inappropriate, has hindered ASEAN’s attempt to respond the democratic deficit in countries like Myanmar or Thailand. We believe that a balance should be found between a traditional interpretation of the ASEAN norms and principles and the need to progress the regional integration meaningfully and concretely.

As ASEAN agreed in the *ASEAN Vision 2025*, regional security-political development is advancing in an undesirable direction. The revisionist actions carried out by regional major powers continue to endanger regional peace and stability. Transnational challenges, such as climate change and terrorism, remains daunting tasks that increasingly consume ASEAN member countries’ resources and attentions.

In short, in realizing the commitments of the ASEAN Community 2015 and in pursuing the agenda of the *ASEAN Vision 2025*, we urge ASEAN to take concrete and meaningful actions.

Policy Recommendations

The ASEAN Community 2015 is certainly a major milestone in the regional integration process. Immense resources allocated in the last decade have undoubtedly been fruitful as a number of commitments stipulated in the basis documents of the ASEAN Community 2015 have been achieved.

It is also, however, a time for reflection. An objective assessment, by weighing formal commitments stipulated in the basis documents against reality on the ground, reveals that there are still a lot to do before we can claim that the ASEAN Community 2015 is a success story.

The formal establishment of ASEAN Community 2015, with all the strengths and flaws, therefore, gives us an opportunity to reflect the nature of our regional institution and contemplate the most desirable yet realistic direction of regional integration.

It is indeed an immensely difficult task to change the course of the regional institution that had been previously focusing merely on politico-security aspect into a non-zero-sum business like economic integration, particularly given the different approaches and level of economic development its member countries have. Even harder is to transform the region whose long history of transnational interaction was interrupted by colonialization and forced-national borders into a community with a common identity. Building a certain identity, indeed, requires intense and sustainable people-to-people interaction. It should not be too surprising that this ambitious goal has not been achieved in this current timeframe of ASEAN Community 2015.

However, the *ASEAN Vision 2025*, made right after the formal establishment of ASEAN Community 2015, has failed to acknowledge these flaws. Against that background, we hereby provide policy recommendations for ASEAN policy-makers to address some of the most demanding issues with regard to the regional integration.

An ASEAN Review

As described above, there are a number of issues that ASEAN should work on in order to establish a truly rules-based, people-centered and people-oriented community. *ASEAN Vision 2025* fails to acknowledge the flaws of the ASEAN Community 2015. We believe that ASEAN cannot afford to continue the practice of “sweeping the problems under the carpet” for the sake of superficial progresses. In fact, progress made upon concealment of weaknesses is not progress at all.

This edition of *ASEAN Briefs*, thus, recommend ASEAN policy-makers to compose and widely publish an objective and comprehensive review on the progress of ASEAN regional integration, including items that have and have not been achieved in all three pillars of ASEAN Community 2015. The review should be carried out by an independent working group outside of the ASEAN structure in order to secure independency and objectivity.

Besides the progress of ASEAN community building, the review should contain a reexamination of fundamental norms and values of the organization. In this regard, there should be an examination on the role and function of the so-called ASEAN Way as it has often been the root problem that hinders progressive resolution of some of the most demanding issues in ASEAN. More creative interpretation of the ASEAN Way should be contemplated.

Moreover, the review should reexamine the agenda-setting mechanism in ASEAN to enable the formulation and implementation of long-term planning. The role of the summit as the highest decision-making body in ASEAN should be retained, as it is intrinsic in the inter-governmental nature of ASEAN. This, however, should be supplemented by a new mechanism to make sure that the summit host country does not dominate the agenda-setting. The establishment of an ad hoc consultative committee for each annual summit, comprising of representatives from all ASEAN member countries, tasked to determine the agenda for the particular summit would be an option.

The composing and publishing of the review is indeed a fundamentally different practice compared to what ASEAN has been doing in the past and thus not an easy task. One might criticize that it would transform ASEAN into a finger-pointing organization, in contrast to face-saving culture ASEAN has been retaining since its establishment. This is, however, necessary as the willingness to admit the flaws while embracing the strengths would show ASEAN’s readiness to fully embark upon the next stage of regional integration. This is also important for the wider community to be kept updated on what ASEAN is working on and to have a sense of belonging to the regional institution. This is why it is important, in any way possible, to make sure that the review is balance, objective, realistic and does not tend to alienate certain member countries. Rather, the review should be directed to find a common ground and resolution to the exposed and scrutinized deep-rooted problems of ASEAN.

An ASEAN Consolidation

ASEAN should continue and intensify its role as a primary conflict management institution in the region. Given the new geopolitical challenges and security complexity in the region involving external powers, it is indeed more crucial than ever before for ASEAN to retain this role. ASEAN, however, should be more cautious and well-planned when it comes to engaging external parties. ASEAN cannot hope that external parties would easily embark upon the ASEAN way of conflict management as it appears to have been done until today. For doing so, and failing to achieve meaningful results in terms of conflict management in the broader region would only make ASEAN way of conflict management look weak and ASEAN’s role itself as a driver of a new regional security architecture irrelevant. Indeed, for external parties to subscribe to ASEAN norms and values, a sustained and intense interaction and socialization process is required. It would take time and ASEAN should not rush it.

We thus recommend ASEAN policy-makers to consolidate ASEAN approaches in geopolitical issues affecting the region, including through developing an intra-ASEAN code of conduct on maritime disputed areas before engaging external parties. Not only enhancing ASEAN

internal cooperation, ASEAN consolidation of security approaches would also enable it to have more strategic bargaining position in engaging external parties. The current state of diversity ASEAN member states' stances on the South China Sea disputes, for example, is not helping the early conclusion of the Code of Conduct. If ASEAN was able to have an intra-ASEAN version of the CoC, it would put more pressure on China to accede to the CoC.

Not only on security and geopolitical issues, ASEAN should also continue and intensify the consolidation of the regional economic integration. In this regard, economic interdependency among its member states should be increased. For only through an increased economic interdependence, ASEAN member states, particularly the least developed ones that have often been the loopholes for external pressure on ASEAN, would find the relevance and significance of ASEAN as a working regional institution.

Therefore, we recommend ASEAN policy-makers to continue and intensify the efforts to increase the level of intra-ASEAN trade and to foster dialogue and communication among ASEAN member countries' on their individual approaches to external economic relations in order to harmonizing and consolidating intra- and extra-ASEAN trade arrangements.

Moreover, the divergent economic performances among ASEAN member countries should be treated as a strength instead of weakness; through a coordinated and well-planned economic approaches, ASEAN could be transformed into a cross-border production network "that can fully exploit the diverse range of comparative advantages across ASEAN member states."²² Furthermore, "companies can draw upon the different competitive advantages of the various ASEAN economies in their operations—for example, conducting labor-intensive activities in Myanmar and Vietnam, doing more complex assembly in Thailand and Malaysia, and conducting high-end research and development (R&D) activities in Singapore."²³

Increased interdependency would also hopefully spill over into political realms and, hence, broader regional integration by increasing incentives for the member countries to solve disputes in a peaceful manner.

An Intensified People-to-People Interaction

As the basis of the region's interests, nurturing an ASEAN identity should be the focus of ASEAN regional integration in the upcoming future. The establishment of a common ASEAN identity, as has been formally agreed by ASEAN leaders, should guide the future direction of ASEAN regional integration.

22 Woetzel et al., *Southeast Asia at the Crossroads: Three Paths to Prosperity*, 44.

23 Ibid.

And, again, this is not an easy task. As noted before, interaction and socialization of norms have played significant role in altering the collective identity and interests of ASEAN member countries. This is how the so-called ASEAN Way became the collectively adapted norms of conflict management. This is how war and the use of force becomes illegitimate means of problem solving in ASEAN. This is how ASEAN security community is forming.²⁴ When we talk about the socialization and internalization of peaceful norms in ASEAN, however, we essentially talk about elites. Again, to be sure, the elitist approach of peaceful norms socialization has been helpful in preserving stability and order among ASEAN member countries. Yet, when it comes to the commitment of establishing a people-centered and people-oriented organization, the scope of interaction, socialization and internalization process should be deepened and expanded to cover the wider society of ASEAN. In other words, it is just not only the leaders and elites who should be socialized with the idea of common identity of ASEAN. It is about the interaction and socialization of 600 million people of ASEAN. From the corner of Myanmar to the most eastern part of Indonesia; from the prosperous community in Singapore to the least developed society in Lao. They are the ones who should have the "we feeling" of ASEAN.

We thus urge ASEAN policy-makers to take necessary actions in facilitating communication and interaction among ASEAN people in order to bring their relations to the higher level. A sustained and intense interaction between people from different ASEAN member countries is a foundation for building new shared values and norms stipulated in the *ASEAN Vision 2025*. A freer mobility of people within ASEAN, therefore, is necessary. As far as specific recommendations are concerned, we recommend ASEAN policy-makers to take measures such as early conclusion of agreement on the visa waiver for ASEAN nationals and common ASEAN visa for non-ASEAN nationals; concession travel for students and senior citizens within ASEAN countries; accelerate the establishment of ASEAN connectivity built upon supporting infrastructure, and; more resources allocation for joint-cultural projects. Finally, if ASEAN is to become a truly people-centered and people-oriented organization with a common identity, it should be all about the people.

24 See Acharya, *Constructing a Security Community in Southeast Asia: ASEAN and the Problem of Regional Order*.

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The Habibie Center was founded by Bacharuddin Jusuf Habibie and family in 1999 as an independent, non-governmental, non-profit organisation. The vision of The Habibie Center is to create a structurally democratic society founded on the morality and integrity of cultural and religious values.

The mission of The Habibie Center are **first**, to establish a structurally and culturally democratic society that recognizes, respects, and promotes human rights by undertaking study and advocacy of issues related to democratization and human rights, and **second**, to increase the effectiveness of the management of human resources and the spread of technology.

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About ASEAN Studies Program

The ASEAN Studies Program was established on February 24, 2010, to become a center of excellence on ASEAN related issues, which can assist in the development of the ASEAN Community by 2015. The Habibie Center through its ASEAN Studies Program, alongside other institutions working towards the same goal, hopes to contribute to the realization of a more people-oriented ASEAN that puts a high value on democracy and human rights.

The objective of the ASEAN Studies Program is not merely only to conduct research and discussion within academic and government circles, but also to strengthen public awareness by forming a strong network of civil society in the region that will be able to help spread the ASEAN message. With the establishment of ASEAN Studies Program, The Habibie Center aims to play its part within our capabilities to the ASEAN regional development.

About Talking ASEAN

Talking ASEAN is a monthly public dialogue held at The Habibie Center in Jakarta. Covering a wide array of issues related to ASEAN, Talking ASEAN addresses topics of: Economic Integration, Socio-cultural, & Democracy, human rights and regional peace, among others. Featuring local and visiting experts, Talking ASEAN is one of a series of twelve dialogues regularly held each month and open to a target audience consisting of ASEAN officials, foreign ambassadors & diplomats, academics, university students, businesses, and the media.

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