

ASEAN COMMUNITY – ISSUES AND PROSPECTS

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Abstract. *The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) was founded and operates on the principle and goal of promoting regional cooperation in Southeast Asia in an egalitarian and partnership-based spirit, thereby contributing to peace, progress, and prosperity in the region. The article summarizes the ASEAN Community's formation, the roadmap for its development, and its accomplishments, while also highlighting the obstacles that must be overcome to achieve the set goals by 2020 and in the future.*

Keywords: *ASEAN, goals, achievements, issues, cooperation.*

1. Introduction. In an era of globalization, the interdependence of economies requires more active cooperation from countries, including ASEAN members. ASEAN's objective is sustainable development, which includes ensuring security and stability at home and abroad, not just among ASEAN members but also between ASEAN and other countries. After 50 years of existence and development, ASEAN has developed into a cohesive political and economic entity that plays a critical role in promoting regional and global peace, stability, and cooperation. The ASEAN Development Strategy is based on three pillars: political, economic, and sociocultural security.

2. Overview of the ASEAN Community's formation

The ASEAN Community is a strategic initiative of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations that was first mentioned in 1997, following the adoption of ASEAN Vision 2020 [1]. Afterward, at a summit in Indonesia in 2003, Bali Concord II was adopted under the theme "Towards the ASEAN Economic and Security Community"[2]. Under the Bali Concord, by 2020, an ASEAN Community based on three main pillars: the Political-Security Community (APSC), the Economic Community (AEC), and the Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC) will transform ASEAN from an "association" into a "community". The ASEAN Community has three main features: (1) it is an intergovernmental organization in which Member States enjoy equal sovereignty, make decisions by consensus, share

rights and responsibilities; (2) it promotes broad and close cooperation in the fields of security - politics, economic, socio-cultural, and foreign affairs; (3) it has a comprehensive legal apparatus, adhering to the fundamental principles of the ASEAN Charter.

Overall, the establishment of the ASEAN Community in 2015 marks a watershed moment in the ASEAN integration process, with significant implications for the Association, the region, and each member country.

3. Content and roadmap for building the ASEAN Community

This is detailed in the roadmap for building the ASEAN Community for the period 2009 - 2015 [3].

3.1. ASEAN Political Security Community (APSC)

The 9th ASEAN Summit in Bali in 2003 adopted the Declaration of ASEAN Concord (Bali Concord II), in which the APSC was identified as one of the three pillars of the ASEAN Community with the goal of "bringing ASEAN together to political and security cooperation to a new level, so that ASEAN member countries can live peacefully with each other and with the rest of the world in an atmosphere of equality, democracy and harmony" [4]. The APSC's Comprehensive Plan, adopted at the 14th ASEAN Summit in 2009, identified three critical components: the establishment of a community based on shared values and standards; the construction of a region of cohesion, peace, and self-reliance with shared responsibility for comprehensive security (including military and non-military

threats to each country); towards a dynamic and open area with the external world's interconnectedness and interdependence [5]. ASEAN fosters political cooperation by upholding friendship and cooperation rules, preserving a nuclear-weapons-free zone, and adhering to international standards in the South China Sea. Additionally, ASEAN places a premium on promoting dialogue to encourage mutual understanding, thereby resolving conflicts, and maintaining regional peace.

3.2. ASEAN Economic Community (AEC)

"Creating a stable, prosperous and highly competitive ASEAN economic region, including facilitating the flow of goods, services, investment, and attracting free capital flows, promoting economic development, and reducing poverty and socio-economic inequality by 2020" [6] is the goal of the "ASEAN Vision 2020" and the "ASEAN Consensus Declaration" (Bali Concord II). To accomplish these goals, the AEC was established and quickly became a pillar of the ASEAN Community. The Vientiane Action Plan, which is part of ASEAN's second six-year medium-term plan (2004-2010) for implementing ASEAN Vision 2020, clarified the AEC's objective of increasing competitiveness through faster integration to promote ASEAN economic growth and development. One of the highlights of implementation progress is that ASEAN has effectively reduced tariffs on the items on the tariff reduction list to 0-5 percent since 2010 for the original six member states and to 0-5 percent in 2015 for the four subsequent member states, thereby creating an open market free of tariff barriers [7]. In other words, the ASEAN Economic Community is a regional economic integration model based on enhancing ASEAN's existing economic integration mechanisms and adding two new components: labor mobility and free movement of capital.

3.3. ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC)

ASCC was established to contribute to developing a people-centered ASEAN Community; towards a shared, inclusive, harmonious, and open society where people's lives, living standards, and welfare are enhanced. The ASCC is expected to mitigate some of the

adverse effects of globalization, urbanization, modernization, and industrialization. In recent years, ASEAN specialized collaboration has been increasingly focused and expanded through cultural and social cooperation programs and projects. Besides that, ASEAN members also place a premium on preserving and promoting the region's traditional cultural values.

4. Achievements, prospects, and challenges

4.1. Achievements

The establishment of the ASEAN Community at the end of 2015 is critical for the association and each member state, as it strengthens cooperation among ASEAN countries. One could argue that ASEAN has succeeded in establishing three pillars, contributing to maintaining a peaceful, secure, and stable environment, creating favorable conditions for cooperation and development in the region. More precisely, the pillar of Political-Security Community has aided members in cooperating more closely, with numerous significant signs of progress toward mutual trust, the sharing of norms and codes of conduct for preventing and managing conflicts, and thus strengthening their capacity to address security challenges. Additionally, countries have "established and adopted cooperation mechanisms and principles such as mutual respect for the independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity of all states, non-interference in one another's internal affairs, and peaceful resolution of disputes" [8]. Furthermore, the Political-Security Community has demonstrated a willingness to collaborate on several domestic issues in recent years, including the prevention of illegal drug trafficking, transnational crime, and counterterrorism. In particular, in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, which is currently spreading throughout Southeast Asia, ASEAN's cooperation mechanisms emphasize the importance of assisting member states in preventing and containing the epidemic.

Besides this, the economic pillar fosters close cooperation within the intra-regional economy, steadily progressing toward the goal of establishing a single market and a unified production base, promoting highly competitive and uniform development, and

strengthening connectivity with major economies worldwide in preparation for full integration into the global economy. Economic links within the ASEAN Economic Community have become solid, forming a vital buffer zone for ASEAN to withstand major external economic shocks. After more than five years of establishing the ASEAN Economic Community and implementing the ASEAN Community Vision, ASEAN has risen to become the world's fifth largest and most dynamic economic region, with a gross domestic product of approximately 3.2 trillion dollars in 2019, up from less than 30 billion dollars initially [9]. Due to its rapid growth, ASEAN is expected to reach 4 trillion dollars in GDP by 2022 [10].

The ASCC has laid the groundwork for enhancing people's quality of life, promoting equality and social justice, protecting the environment, and pursuing sustainable development goals. Numerous plans to address people's social security concerns have been implemented. According to the 2020 ASEAN Secretariat report, all ASEAN member states have seen significant improvements in the Human Development Index [11].

In short, the ASEAN community has performed well based on comprehensive political-security, economic and socio-cultural integration. The benefits of cooperation in ASEAN can be summarized with a focus on peace, prosperity, and the well-being of the people.

4.2. Prospects

The ASEAN community also has many prospects for the future development and consolidation of all three pillars.

First, integration fosters economic activity among the region's countries. Existing economic cooperation programs provide a solid foundation for further economic integration progress. ASEAN has a sizable potential market, and the establishment of the ASEAN Economic Community will transform the region into "one of the world's largest markets, with a population of more than 650 million as of 2020" [13]. The establishment of the ASEAN Economic Community provides opportunities for ASEAN member states to expand their economies, close the economic inequality, increase their attractiveness to inves-

tors and tourists, lower transaction costs, and improve business conditions.

Second, in terms of security and politics, bilateral and multilateral disputes between member states have been resolved in part, and the Association's development practices have established solid foundations for a regional security link. The Master Plan for the ASEAN Political-Security Community for the near future, which the countries have unanimously adopted, aims to advance the attained accomplishments, strengthen solidarity and unity within the bloc, build a rules-based ASEAN community, and strengthen the Association's capacity to address security issues quickly and effectively, as well as ASEAN's centrality in the region.

Third, cooperation and association programs have enabled member states to develop a more nuanced understanding of peoples' cultural identities and traditions, which is critical for establishing ASEAN socio-cultural ties. Promoting cultural cooperation creates the conditions for economic cooperation and improves mutual political understanding. In other words, cooperation in these areas will help establish new communication channels, thereby laying the groundwork for resolving numerous sensitive issues in politics and defense security.

ASEAN has mechanisms in place to foster cooperation, which is constantly improved. The ASEAN Charter was adopted, community councils were established, and Master Plans and Outlines for political security, economic development, and socio-cultural development are being implemented, all of which serve as the fundamental building blocks for the ASEAN Community's development.

4.3. Challenges

In light of the rapidly changing and unpredictable regional and international environment, strategic competition between major countries has intensified, and the ASEAN community has faced numerous significant challenges, both old and new, from within and without. Specifically, the implementation and progress of the plans set out for the three pillars of ASEAN in member states are uneven. Inconsistency in any of the three major pillars can obstruct the process of establishing

an ASEAN Community capable of economic, political, and social cohesion.

The APSC's strategy, in particular, raises some complex issues regarding fundamental principles such as non-interference in one another's internal affairs, which continues to spark debate over solidarity, and intra-bloc cooperation. On the other hand, member states are concerned that the APSC's policies could affect their relations with other countries, particularly large ones. For example, China is currently Southeast Asia's largest trading partner and the region's primary investor. However, security challenges associated with the South China Sea tensions place significant strain on ASEAN countries' ability to maintain peaceful stability while also pursuing the common goals.

There are also certain impediments to the AEC's formation. To be more precise, institutional differences and policies represent a significant obstacle. The ASEAN market is a synthesis of the markets of all member countries based on the principle of unity in diversity, which means that there are still differences between member states, let alone those that wish to pursue their own interests. The global economic environment is unstable; protectionist tendencies have not diminished, undermining multilateral and regional cooperation as competition intensifies. Additionally, the absence of a leading economy and a powerful common currency thwarts the AEC's efforts to advance the region's development.

The ASCC establishment process is not immune to the difficulties inherent in regional integration. On the one hand, the benefits are enormous when parties work cooperatively toward a common goal. However, certain countries have historical and cultural contradictions and differences as a barrier to collab-

oration. In other words, political and ideological divisions among ASEAN member states can exacerbate political polarization or perpetuate ASEAN societies' precarious conditions. Besides, the existence of multiple levels of democracy and an excessive diversity of religion and ethnicity will obstruct sociocultural connections in this community.

ASEAN has been confronted with unprecedented challenges over the last two years, most notably the widespread outbreak of Covid-19. The pandemic has had a significant impact on the stability and social development of ASEAN member states, resulting in revenue losses for businesses, job losses for workers, and the economy and society entering a recession. The disease outbreak has exacerbated several of the region's underlying sociopolitical challenges, escalating poverty and straining social inequality. These are not issues that a single country can resolve; they require the cooperation and increased cooperation of all member states in the region and the effective deployment of international organizations' assistance.

5. Conclusion

To conclude, the establishment and effective operation of the ASEAN Community requires the consensus and efforts of all member states. The successful establishment of the ASEAN Community for sustainable development and prosperity will further strengthen ASEAN's role and position as a catalyst to maintain and promote political stability and socio-economic development in the region. Given numerous opportunities and challenges, the coordination and solidarity of member states will be vital in overcoming obstacles, leveraging prospects, and establishing a dynamic and progressive regional community.

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СООБЩЕСТВО АСЕАН – ПРОБЛЕМЫ И ПЕРСПЕКТИВЫ

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Аннотация. Ассоциация государств Юго-Восточной Азии (АСЕАН) была основана и действует в соответствии с принципом и целью содействия региональному сотрудничеству в Юго-Восточной Азии в духе равенства и партнерства, способствуя тем самым миру, прогрессу и процветанию региона. В статье кратко излагается процесс формирования Сообщества АСЕАН, дорожная карта его развития и его достижения, а также освещаются препятствия, которые необходимо преодолеть для реализации поставленных целей к 2020 году и в будущем.

Ключевые слова: АСЕАН, цели, достижения, проблемы, сотрудничество.