

Editorial: Dialogue + Cooperation 3/2007

Dear Reader,

This year marks the 40th anniversary of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). In 1967, the five founding members – Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand initiated a regional integration process which now embraces the whole of Southeast Asia. In the second half of the 1990s, the original five, together with Brunei, which joined the association in 1984, admitted four countries as new members – Vietnam in 1995, Myanmar and Laos in 1997 and Cambodia in 1999. In October 2003, the ten member states set out a plan to establish an ASEAN community, consisting of three pillars – an ASEAN Security Community, an ASEAN Economic Community and an ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community. To put these three pillars on a sound foundation, in 2007 at the 13th ASEAN Summit in Singapore, the ASEAN members adopted a Charter, turning ASEAN into a legal entity and enhancing its sphere of competence. Although the Charter is so far the most visible expression of the members commitment towards regional integration and institution building, it is only one, albeit remarkable, step on the way towards an integrated ASEAN community.

In honour of ASEAN's 40th anniversary, the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies and the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Office for Regional Cooperation in Southeast Asia conducted a conference on "Ideas and Institutions: Building an ASEAN Community?" on 31 July - 1 August 2007, in Singapore. Participants were high-ranking politicians, academics and civil society representatives. This edition of D+C presents selected papers which stimulated the debate of the conference.

Rodolfo Severino focuses on the three pillars of the ASEAN communities. Although he recognises that positive developments have taken place in each of the three areas, he also maintains that ASEAN still has a long way to go to become a real community. He emphasises the fact that ASEAN, despite having developed norms of conduct for inter-state relations, still lacks common standards for the treatment of citizens by their respective states. As a former ASEAN Secretary-General, he also points out that the authority of the ASEAN Secretariat is still limited.

Hiro Katsumata observes that the ASEAN members have been setting out a number of plans to reform their association, thereby announcing their readiness to pursue liberal agendas such as human rights and democracy. However, their implementation of these liberal reform plans has been slow. He concludes that the member countries are prioritizing the announcement of their reform plans over its implementation, so as to manifest their adoption of legitimate international norms.

Lay Hwee Yeo examines the development of a security community, with a particular focus on preventive diplomacy (PD) mechanisms. She concludes that ASEAN needs to develop a comprehensive PD system, which comprises mechanisms for early warning, early action and peace building.

Edy Prasetyono analyses regional security, maintaining that ASEAN has been successful in building confidence and preventing conflicts between its members, and in engaging external powers. However, there are a number of unresolved issues, on both the internal and external dimension, especially concerning maritime boundaries and sea lanes, which need to be addressed.

Rajesh Basrur examines ASEAN's efforts to tackle the threat of terrorism involving the use of weapons of mass destruction (WMD). He warns that, despite the protective measures which are currently in place, the threat of WMD terrorism in Southeast Asia should not be underestimated, and therefore more concerted efforts should be undertaken.

Pushpa Thambipillai explores the contribution of external powers to the community-building process in Southeast Asia, and argues that their role has been vital to the development of regional cooperation. Particularly in terms of trade and investment, the ASEAN members heavily rely on external partners.

Alice D. Ba focuses on ASEAN's expansion of its regional scope, arguing that this expansion was the "institutional adaptation" to changes in its relations with external powers, including China, Japan and the US. Although this adaptation helped ASEAN to sustain its institutional relevance, it has brought about a new set of challenges, in terms of the promotion of Southeast Asian interests vis-à-vis larger actors. She concludes that ASEAN should become more coordinated and integrated in order to face these challenges.

K. S. Nathan points out that the US has largely been sceptical of ASEAN and ARF, and thus places a greater emphasis on bilateralism than on multilateralism, in its dealings with the Southeast Asian countries. He considers the ASEAN Charter as an attempt to overcome the institutional and legal obstacles to US-ASEAN relations.

See Seng Tan underlines the relevance of Track 2 diplomacy to ASEAN's deep engagement of China. He believes that although the symbiosis between official and unofficial tracks has been tenuous at times, the role of Track 2 diplomacy in confidence building and norm diffusion remains germane to ASEAN's continued engagement of great powers.

Hidetaka Yoshimatsu shows that, in response to the economic rise of China and India at the global level, the ASEAN member states have taken initiatives to incorporate business interests into the ASEAN economic integration progress. Nevertheless, he points out that the extent to which business interests are reflected in the governments' policies should not be overestimated, partly due to the organizational weaknesses of business associations.

Dennis D. Trinidad focuses on business people's role in facilitating ASEAN economic integration. He argues that macro/global factors would be irrelevant for economic integration unless they were accompanied by positive response from the domestic business community.

Peter W. Preston, using the example of Shin Corporation and Temasek Holdings, demonstrates that economics, politics and national identity are intermingled, and that the promotion of economic integration cannot be separated from the issues of politics and national identity.

Christopher Roberts considers the prospects for the development of a regional identity in Southeast Asia on the basis of the results of surveys and interviews which he conducted in all the ten ASEAN countries. He concludes that especially due to the emergence of a possible democratic/authoritarian divide, the process of embedding a sense of community will probably occur over the course of many decades rather than by ASEAN's current goal of 2015.

Braema Mathiapparanam assesses the status of women in Southeast Asia and the efforts made at the ASEAN level to enhance it. She acknowledges that ASEAN has taken some initiatives to improve women's status, but states that the situation is still nowhere close to bridging the gender gap in terms of leadership, economic participation and several other indicators.

Noel Morada reflects on the ASEAN People's Assembly's (APA) activities since 2000, arguing that the APA process contributes to community building in Southeast Asia. However, he points out that the long-term sustainability of the APA remains questionable, as ASEAN has not provided sufficient material support to the assembly. In addition, the interface between the ASEAN Summit and APA has not yet been institutionalized.

All papers and statements reflect the opinions of the individual authors. Since they have been written before the tragic events which erupted in Myanmar in September 2007, they do not take into account the latest developments in ASEAN. The Singapore office of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung would like to express its sincere appreciation to the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies for giving permission to re-print this collection of papers which has also been published as RSIS Monograph No. 11: "People's ASEAN and Government's ASEAN". Furthermore, FES wishes to thank all the authors and contributors to this edition.

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