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50 Years of Regional Integration in ASEAN

Ludo Cuyvers¹, Lurong Chen² and Philippe De Lombaerde³

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Abstract

This article offers a brief overview of the development of ASEAN in its 50 years of existence. It covers the early motivations and developments since the late 1960s, the acceleration of integration and creation of the ASEAN Free Trade Area in the 1990s, and – more recently – the development of the ASEAN Economic Community, the ASEAN Political-Security Community, and the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community.

Keywords: ASEAN, regional integration, ASEAN Economic Community

1. Introduction

In its 50 years of existence, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) has become an essential part of the (socio-)economic, regulatory and political environment in which businesses in Southeast Asia operate. At the same time, for many multinational companies from East Asia and beyond, production, assembly or distribution sites in ASEAN have become important nodes in their production networks and links in their global or regional value chains.

ASEAN was established on 8 August 1967 in Bangkok by the five original member countries, namely Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand. The Bangkok Declaration came only ten years after the Treaty of Rome, which laid the foundation of

¹ Centre for ASEAN Studies, University of Antwerp, Belgium; North-West University (Potchefstroom Campus), South Africa; and United Nations University Institute for Comparative Regional Integration Studies (UNU-CRIS), Bruges, Belgium. Email: ludo.cuyvers@uantwerpen.be.

² Economic Research Institute for ASEAN and East Asia (ERIA), Jakarta (Indonesia). E-mail: lurong.chen@eria.org.

³ NEOMA Business School, Rouen (France); and UNU-CRIS, Bruges (Belgium). Corresponding author. E-mail : philippe.de-lombaerde@neoma-bs.fr.

European economic integration. Brunei Darussalam joined on 8 January 1984, Vietnam on 28 July 1995, Laos and Myanmar on 23 July 1997, and Cambodia on 30 April 1999. This special issue presents therefore a stocktaking exercise of 50 years of the ASEAN integration process and a reflection on its future development. They are conducted by experts with different backgrounds and focusing on a variety of aspects of the economic integration process, as well as its political and international context in order to better understand the relevance of ASEAN for business activities in Southeast Asia.

2. The early days

At the establishment of ASEAN, the aims and purposes were on the one hand to bring about cooperation in the economic, social, cultural, technical, educational and other fields, and on the other hand, in the promotion of regional peace and stability through abiding respect for justice and the rule of law and adherence to the principles of the United Nations Charter. As Baharumshah, Onwuka and Habibullah (2007) have rightly stressed, one of the fundamental objectives of ASEAN was to unify the Southeast Asian countries to resist the communist ideology from China, and that the creation of ASEAN was a response to hostile external developments such as the escalating and expanding Vietnam War and the reverberations from the Cultural Revolution in China.

In the beginning, the five ASEAN pioneer countries pursued particularly political goals, striving for peace and security in the Southeast Asian region. They learned to trust each other, to develop the habit of working together and to foster trust and goodwill. During the 1st ASEAN Summit in Bali on 24 February 1976 the member countries signed the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC) in Southeast Asia. The importance of this Treaty resides in the definition of the basic principles for their mutual relations, for instance the settlement of differences or disputes by peaceful means and the non-interference in the internal affairs of one another (ASEAN Secretariat, 1976).

According to the Bangkok Declaration of 8 August 1967, the aims of the Association are:

1. To accelerate economic growth, social progress and cultural development in the region through joint endeavours in the spirit of equality and partnership in order to strengthen the foundation for a prosperous and peaceful community of South-East Asian Nations;
2. To promote regional peace and stability through abiding respect for justice and the rule of law in the relationship among countries of the region and adherence to the principles of the United Nations Charter;
3. To promote active collaboration and mutual assistance on matters of common interest in the economic, social, cultural, technical, scientific and administrative fields;
4. To provide assistance to each other in the form of training and research facilities in the educational, professional, technical and administrative spheres;
5. To collaborate more effectively for the greater utilization of their agriculture and industries, the expansion of their trade, including the study of the problems of international commodity trade, the improvement of their transportation and communication facilities and the raising of the living standards of their peoples;
6. To promote South-East Asian studies;
7. To maintain close and beneficial cooperation with existing international and regional organizations with similar aims and purposes and explore all avenues for even closer cooperation among themselves.

Although economic cooperation between the countries of South-East Asia is mentioned explicitlyⁱ, until the early 1990s ASEAN was not showing an impressive record of economic achievements. ASEAN's success, at that time, was to be found primarily in international politics. Thanks to ASEAN, for instance, the member countries could take a common political

stance regarding Cambodia and the events in that country following the overthrow of the *Khmer Rouge* regime.

In fact, economic cooperation between the ASEAN countries was neglected until 1976, the First ASEAN Summit of Heads of Government. But even after 1976, doubts remained with the policy makers in the ASEAN countries about the benefits of economic cooperation. These doubts were justified. By and large, the ASEAN countries were hardly, if at all, complementary economies, and followed widely differing development strategies, from free trade in Singapore, to export promotion strategies in Thailand and Malaysia, and to import substitution in Indonesia and the Philippines. We must wait until the economic liberalisation policies in Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines and Thailand in the second half of the 1980s, to find the economic policy priorities between the ASEAN-countries as sufficiently converging, to allow for the next steps in economic cooperation (Akrasanee and Stifel, 1992: 29-37; Naya and Imada, 1992: 55-58).

3. ASEAN Free Trade Area

From the start of the 1990s, the ASEAN countries armed themselves against several changes in the international environment, that were perceived as a threat. Among these changes mention should be made of the decline in foreign investment in the ASEAN countries (due to foreign investment diversion to China and some other Asian countries), and regional integration in the European Union (EU) (the European Single Market, the European Economic Area, the EU association agreements with Central and Eastern Europe) and North-America (the US-Canada Free Trade Agreement, NAFTA), of which the trade and investment diversion effects were feared (Naya and Imada, 1992: 56).

The Fourth ASEAN Summit of Heads of Government that was held in Singapore on 27-28 January 1992, is a milestone in the history of the ASEAN. It was decided at this summit to reform the institutional framework of ASEAN, and to create the ASEAN Free Trade Area

(AFTA) by 2008. The institutional reforms entailed: (1) the creation of a formal governing body, the “ASEAN Heads of Government” that would be convened every three years, (2) a transformation of the ASEAN Secretariat and the extension of its competence, and (3) the dissolution of the former “ASEAN Economic Committees” and the delegation of all matters related to economic cooperation within ASEAN to a “Senior Economic Officials Meeting” (SEOM).

With the aim of the liberalisation of intra-ASEAN trade, but according to key witnesses even more to stimulate investment in the region, the AFTA agreement was concluded, providing for a carefully staged trade liberalization during a period of 15 years (starting 1 January 1993), a period which afterwards was reduced to 10 years.

It will be clear that the decision to arrive at the AFTA, as well as the timing and instruments, was a political decision at the highest level. Once this decision taken, the respective national administrations were responsible for the implementation, which due to lacking accompanying guidelines was often slow (Cuyvers and Pupphavesa, 1996: 8). According to Dee (2007), AFTA did not create much preferential trade.

The ASEAN leaders adopted on 15 December 1997 the ASEAN Vision 2020 (ASEAN Secretariat, 1997), a long-term road map to lead the member states to the year 2020. They envisaged the Southeast Asian region to be an ASEAN Community by 2020 with the causes of conflict eliminated and all disputes solved by peaceful means. In the Bali Concord II, adopted on 7 October 2003, ASEAN leaders formally expressed their intention to establish an ASEAN Community made up of three pillars, namely an ASEAN Economic Community (AEC), an ASEAN Security Community (ASC) and an ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC). Like with AFTA before, the target date of the establishment of the ASEAN Community was advanced to 2015 (ASEAN Secretariat, 2007).

4. ASEAN Economic Community

At the 13th ASEAN Summit on November 20, 2007, the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) Blueprint was agreed. The establishment of the ASEAN Economic Community is the ultimate goal of economic integration as originally outlined in the ASEAN Vision 2020. The AEC is meant to be a single market and production base with a free flow of goods, services, investments and a freer flow of financial capital. The AEC should also promote equitable economic development, reduce poverty and socio-economic disparities, and strengthen the ASEAN institutional mechanisms, including the improvement of the Dispute Settlement Mechanism (ASEAN Secretariat, 2003).

On 12 December 2005 in Kuala Lumpur, the ASEAN leaders committed themselves to establish the ASEAN Charter, to serve as a legal and institutional framework of ASEAN to support the realization of its goals and objectives. Moreover, it gave a legal statute to ASEAN and aimed also to protect the region's environment and human rights. The ASEAN member states signed the Charter on 20 November 2007 at the 13th ASEAN Summit in Singapore. However, the institutional framework of ASEAN has remained very weak. One of the results is the lack of integration-supportive institutions at the ASEAN level, which in turn is due to its member states' aversion to strong regional institutions for decision-making, co-ordination and monitoring. And this is unlikely to change any time soon.

In spite of all progress in ASEAN regional economic integration which was only possible by adhering to the "ASEAN Way"ⁱⁱ, i.e. adopting a flexible approach to integration and opting for not giving in on issues of national autonomy and independence, it became increasingly clear in the early 2010s that "2015" was too ambitious and it was soon acknowledged that the 2015 deadline could not possibly be met. The so-called successor blueprint adopted in November 2015 laid out the work for regional integration in the next 10 years. It was stated that "2015" should instead be regarded as a "benchmark for progress", rather than a target year. At that time, and still today, many non-tariff barriers remain. In fact,

ASEAN's much-heralded flexibility has too often been an excuse by individual countries for non-compliance with their commitments. Today, ASEAN's levels of intra-regional trade, investment or migration/mobility are close to global averages and suggest therefore that further deepening of the economic integration process is certainly possible. What sets ASEAN apart from other regions is rather its external openness (Chen, Cuyvers and De Lombaerde, 2017).

5. ASEAN Political-Security Community

The second pillar of the ASEAN Community is the ASEAN Political-Security Community (APSC). Security cooperation in ASEAN is based on the principles of the 1976 Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia (TAC). The TAC stipulated the peaceful settlement of all intra-regional disputes as part of ASEAN's political cooperation (Shoji, 2008: 20). After the end of the Cold War and the resolution of the Cambodian conflict, ASEAN countries were increasingly confronted with China's territorial expansion, to which the group responded by initiating a region-wide security dialogue encompassing the Asia-Pacific region and the establishment of the ASEAN Regional Forum at the ASEAN Ministerial Meeting of July 1993 (Shoji, 2008: 21-22). With the reduced national defense budgets due to the Asian financial crisis of 1997, dramatic political changes in member countries and the terrorist attacks in the world, as well as in ASEAN countries in 2001 and after, voices within ASEAN for closer security cooperation became louder. Discussions relating to the formation of the APSC began in 2003, stemming from Indonesia and from the 2003 Declaration of ASEAN Concord II (the Bali Concord II), which called for the establishment of the ASEAN Security Community. This was followed by the Vientiane Action Programme of 2004, which put forward the policy challenges to be overcome, and the establishment of the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting. Indonesian proposals for the establishment of an ASEAN peacekeeping force were shelved by the other member countries as being in contradiction with the principle of sovereignty. In the Vientiane Action Plan, adopted in November 2004, five strategic thrusts of the ASC were

adopted: political development; shaping and sharing of norms; conflict prevention; conflict resolution; and post-conflict peace-building (ASEAN Secretariat, 2004). However, in the discussions relating to the ASEAN Charter, any change in the non-interference principle of ASEAN (for resolution of internal problems of a member) was opposed (Shoji, 2008: 30-31). Finally, at the January 2007 ASEAN Summit in Cebu (Philippines), it was agreed that the ASC would be formed by 2015, five years earlier than originally planned. Subsequently, it was announced in the chairman's statement of the November 2007 ASEAN Summit in Singapore that the ASC should evolve into a "Political-security Community."

In the build-up of the ASEAN Community by 2015, an ASEAN Political-Security Community Blueprint 2009-2015 was adopted. It aimed at deepening and expanding political and security cooperation within ASEAN and strengthening ASEAN's capacity in responding to regional and international challenges. This was followed by the APSC Blueprint 2025.

Notwithstanding the Blueprints for achieving the APSC, the ASEAN initiatives of regional security dialogues through the ASEAN Regional Forum (since 1994) and the ASEAN Defense Ministers' Meeting Plusⁱⁱⁱ (since May 2010) have successfully evolved into platforms for policy coordination (Baviera, 2017: 11). But within ASEAN it seems that there is still a long way to go. The Council has not been established, conflict resolution remains with the member states, and commitments are not binding. ASEAN has created a "regional security partnership" rather than an ASEAN security community (Boisseau du Rocher, 2017). As Baviera stated: "Translating such a vision into reality at the regional level presumes, in some cases, major normative and behavioural transformations amongst domestic elites and social groups, and ASEAN thus far contributes little to encouraging such changes amongst its member states, constrained in part by the principle of non-interference in internal affairs" (Baviera, 2017: 17). Consequently, the creation of the APSC will imply, not only institutional reforms at the regional level, but in particular also evolving policies and practices in the member countries in support

of human rights and fundamental freedoms, as well as good and democratic governance, and of regional identity. However, considering present day geopolitical challenges in Asia, some have doubts whether ASEAN is the appropriate platform to establish a regional security community (e.g., Boisseau du Rocher, 2017: 51).

6. ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community

The third pillar of the ASEAN Community is the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC). Maramis (2017: 179) calls the ASCC “by a wide measure the most adaptive, re-engineered, and reinvented pillar of the ASEAN Community.” To promote better quality of life for the peoples and their communities in ASEAN, the ASCC aims at cooperation between the member states in areas such as culture and information, education, sports, social welfare and development, but also labour, women and gender, environment, poverty eradication, disaster management, and science and technology. With such a varied area to cover, it will come as no surprise that the community building process has often baffled both researchers and the general public, giving rise to a large number of initiatives from study days and conferences to action plans and reports. The ASCC was initiated by the Philippines at the 6th ASEAN Summit (Hanoi, December 1998) to complement the ASEAN Economic Community (Amador, 2011: 15). At the 13th ASEAN Summit (Singapore, November 2007), the Leaders agreed to develop a blueprint for the ASCC for which the Philippines drafted a Plan of Action. The Roadmap for an ASEAN Community 2009-2015 contained an ASCC Blueprint in which it was stated that “[t]he primary goal of the ASCC is to contribute to realising an ASEAN Community that is people-centred and socially responsible with a view to achieving enduring solidarity and unity among the nations and peoples of ASEAN by forging a common identity and building a caring and sharing society which is inclusive and harmonious where the well-being, livelihood, and welfare of the peoples are enhanced” (ASEAN Secretariat, 2009: 67). The ASCC Blueprint 2015 listed actions to be taken in the field of human development, social welfare and protection,

social justice and rights, ensuring environmental sustainability, building the ASEAN identity; and narrowing the development gap in ASEAN.

The ASCC Blueprint 2025, that followed the previous one, envisions an ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community, where people feel the benefits of being part of ASEAN, and that is inclusive, sustainable, resilient and dynamic. Former President Fidel Ramos of the Philippines stated: “The ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community is at once the easiest and the most difficult for the ASEAN Leaders to organise. The lesson of the European Union teaches us that elite arrangements – made over the heads of ordinary people – have limited effectiveness. There is no way an ‘ASEAN Community’ can be built without engaging the interests of ordinary ASEAN peoples” (Ramos, 2017: 43). Therefore, building the ASCC is increasingly about creating an ASEAN identity. The problem is that, in practice and by design, this is top-down identity building with the governments of the member-states determining the end-state, objectives and processes (Amador, 2011: 30, see also Quayle, 2013:110-111).

7. Contents of this special issue

In the articles of this special issue, the authors, coming from various disciplines, have investigated the progress that has been made in Southeast Asian regional integration under the aegis of ASEAN. The first three articles evaluate the depth of the economic integration process and reflect on the state of the ASEAN Economic Community, i.e.; the extent to which ASEAN has become/is becoming an integrated market. **Pelkmans** presents an assessment of the AEC, which has aimed at building a ‘single market’ while ‘enhancing the production base’ for global and regional value chains since its formal enactment in 2003, thereby adopting a double approach: a conceptual one, and a pragmatic one. The author also assesses the 2025 Blueprint and finds that the pragmatic conduct of the economic integration process, thereby avoiding stronger common/supranational rules, might well have a cost in terms of the internal dynamics of ASEAN but that this cost is small compared to the importance of the extra-regional drivers

of economic growth in ASEAN, and too small to expect major policy reorientations. **Degelsegger-Márquez and Remøe** have a closer look at science, technology and innovation policies in ASEAN, and the extent to which the regional governance level adds value. The authors show that STI cooperation within ASEAN remains relatively weak and they find a mismatch between national and intergovernmental STI policies and dynamics. They identify multilateral research funding and cooperation in patent regimes as examples of new regional cooperation in this field. **Laplace, Lenoira and Roucollea** focus on another aspect of ASEAN's single market, namely the single aviation market. As various concerns have been raised in ASEAN members states, the authors investigate the economic impact of liberalizing air transport and the effects of new (multilateral) agreements with partner states. They show potentially considerable effects on economic growth in the region. They also show a declining market share of ASEAN airlines vis-à-vis Chinese airlines in the context of ASEAN's external liberalization program.

The next two articles look into the bridges between the business and economic aspects of integration, on the one hand, and more political aspects, on the other. **Cuyvers** addresses the issue of the persistent 'development gap' between Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam (CLMV) and the other ASEAN members, and observes that efforts to reduce that gap have been limited. He further shows how this is related to the dominant "ASEAN Way" to organize interstate relations and cooperation in the region. The author calls for more intra-regional redistribution of wealth via the direction of more development funds to these countries, which could be pooled from the Asian Development Bank, other regional and multilateral financial institutions, and national financial institutions. **Jetschke** addresses the question why states commit to the regional protection of human rights in an environment of low/unequal degrees of democracy. The author argues that the willingness to commit to human rights is affected by

large amounts of transnational refugees. Given the costs of receiving refugees, commitment to human rights is used as a signal to repressive countries of origin of the refugees.

Finally, the last two articles look at ASEAN in its international and global context. **Chen and De Lombaerde** focus on the relationship between globalization and regionalization in the case of ASEAN and inquire whether ASEAN is different from other regions on this point. The authors find that ASEAN member states have shown rising economic globalization indicators on average, even if there is considerable variation. They also find that extra-regional trade is relatively more important for ASEAN and that, even if intra-regional trade shares have gone up, they did not do so more than in other regions. Statistics on trade in parts and components and on GVCs show relatively intense production sharing patterns, both intra-ASEAN and extra-ASEAN. Investment flows seem to echo the findings based on trade flows. From a comparative perspective, regional integration in ASEAN reveals three core features that are intertwined: gradualism, open regionalism, and market-driven regionalization. The final article of this special issue by **Rüland** focuses on how ASEAN member states project the ‘ASEAN brand’ internationally. Using data derived from United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) proceedings, the author concludes that an explicit overarching ASEAN role conception is missing. At the same time, he identifies areas in which collective role conceptions could be built, including: “advocate for developing countries,” “promoter of peace,” or “institutional reformer.”

Notes on contributors

Ludo Cuyvers is emeritus professor in international economics of the University of Antwerp (Belgium), where he is still Director of the Centre for ASEAN Studies, and professor extraordinary at the North-West University (Potchefstroom Campus, South Africa). He is also Associate Research Fellow at UNU-CRIS, Bruges (Belgium), and visiting professor at the

NIDA Business School, Bangkok (Thailand). For three decades Ludo Cuyvers has been doing research on economic development in East and South East Asia. He published two books, five textbooks and scholarly articles in many peer-reviewed international journals, and edited four volumes with international publishers. He was consultant for the Belgian and Flemish government, the European Commission, the ILO and the Department of Trade and Industry (South Africa), and director of international development co-operation projects in Thailand, the Philippines, Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos.

Lurong Chen is an Economist at the Economic Research Institute for ASEAN and East Asia (ERIA) (Jakarta, Indonesia). He received his PhD in international economics from the Graduate Institute, Geneva. His current research interests are centered on Asian regionalism, digital trade, global value chains, regional integration, and trade in services. His recent book, *Emerging Global Trade Governance: Mega Free Trade Agreements and Implications for ASEAN*, was published by Routledge in 2018.

Philippe De Lombaerde is currently Associate Professor of International Economics at Neoma Business School (Rouen, France). Previously, he has worked as Associate Director at United Nations University (UNU-CRIS), Associate Professor of International Economics at the Universidad Nacional de Colombia (Bogotá, Colombia), lecturer and researcher at the University of Antwerp, and researcher at the NIDA Business School (Bangkok, Thailand). He has published widely on comparative, Latin American and Southeast Asian regionalism; on trade and investment policy; and on globalization and regionalization indicators.
https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Philippe_De_Lombaerde

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ⁱ Apparently, the Bangkok Declaration is not mentioning economic integration as a goal, at a time when this was very fashionable in Latin America, as evidenced e.g., by the agreements on the Central-American Common Market of 1961, the Latin American Free Trade Agreement of 1960 and the Andean Pact of 1969.

ⁱⁱ The major principles of the “ASEAN Way” are spelled out for the first time in the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC) of 1976. The TAC was adopted by the Heads of State/Government at the 1st ASEAN Summit in Bali, Indonesia, on 24 February 1976. The “ASEAN Way” relates to interstate relations based on respect for national sovereignty, non-interference in the domestic affairs of other states and conflict avoidance. As a result, the ASEAN member countries are reluctant to agree on measures that would restrict their sovereignty, such as e.g. the creation of a supranational institutional body. The “ASEAN Way” involves a decision-making approach which has its roots in the Malay cultural practices in village communities and is based on consultation and consensus building (Narine, 2002, 31).

ⁱⁱⁱ The ADMM-Plus is a platform for ASEAN and its eight Dialogue Partners to strengthen security and defence cooperation.