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ASEAN's an Example of Pioneering Regional Integration



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Introduction

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) has been an excellent example by integrating Southeast Asia, not only for economic growth but also for building mutual understanding. It is

ASEAN that witnessed its formation when a few countries, namely ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations), signed its founding declaration in Bangkok, Thailand on



August 7, 1967. After that, ASEAN gained vigorous strength and influence in Southeast Asia. With the integration experience of five years, ASEAN has provided a robust economic background, as well as the stability of countries in the region and the establishment of mutually understanding relations between the Southerners and Southeasterners. ASEAN formed by five archipelagic countries, namely Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand in 1967.

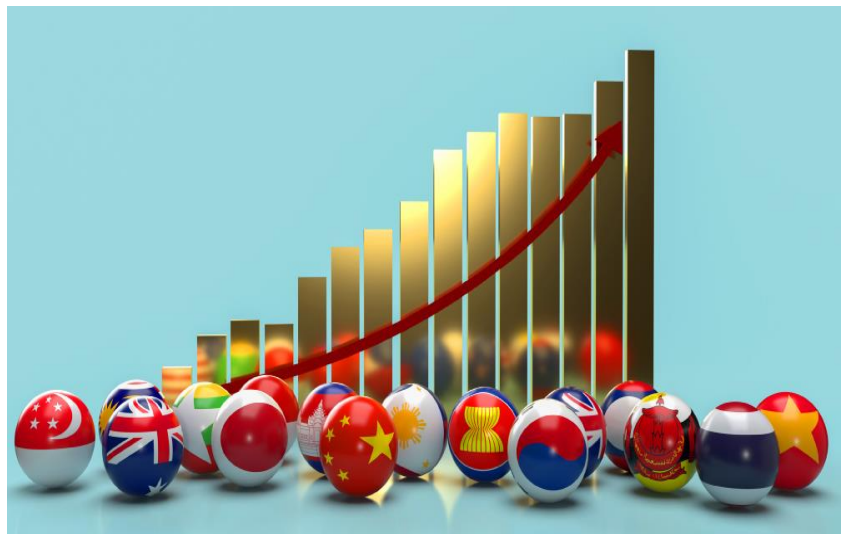
ASEAN values non-interference in the internal matters of each nation, but respect for all members and resolving conflicts in peaceful ways are the basic principles. After the enlargement of the ASEAN bloc, with the addition of former Eastern Bloc countries Vietnam, Laos, and Myanmar in 1997, followed by Cambodia in 1999, and Brunei's



alignment with Malaysia in 1984 through membership, the association witnessed a diverse influx of nations, each bringing varying degrees of experience and knowledge. As they joined one by one, their collective presence underscored the importance of providing comprehensive information to facilitate peaceful conflict resolution within the region. The array of perspectives brought forth proved to be both insightful and thought-provoking. Despite ongoing efforts to solidify shared values and security measures, ASEAN continued to strengthen with each new member, marking a significant stride towards regional unity and resilience.

ASEAN Free Trade Area

The creation of a Free Trade Area by the ASEAN (Association of South East Asian Nations) led to long-term economic cooperation that eventually resulted in increasing economic growth because of the ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA) which dates back to 1992 and provides tariff concession to member states. Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam, are the ten South East Asian countries members of the AFTA, the short form of ASEAN Free



Trade Agreement. By removing tariffs and trade barriers for a more level playing field



and improving regional competition, it is the target of this regional economic block to foster trade among these several nations with their multiple cultural heritages. The ASEAN Free Trade Agreement of 1992 had an auspicious beginning, its signing coming in the 4 major cities of Jakarta, Bandung, Penang, and Kuala Lumpur at the outset of its momentous journey. The formation of a free trade area among all the ASEAN members to be achieved by a progressive abolition of intra-regional tariffs was the original task of ASEAN as an organization. This aim was achieved by the removal of a majority of trade barriers between the ASEAN member countries. It was why intra-regional trade was promoted throughout the region. However, the specified target did not allow for a sudden removal of customs duties on the imports into the country. The tariffs were lowered in phases within 15 years. While ASEAN's tariff elimination policy date was in 2008, it took an additional three years for their goal to be achieved. Strictly speaking, by 2008, the majority of products had already been reached by the six ASEAN founding states: Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand. Until 1995, when Vietnam decided to change its policy of isolation, it was a defining juncture in AFTA that would be remembered in AFTA history.

ASEAN Political-Security Community

As the other most prominent sign of comparable efforts by the Southeast Asian states, APSC demonstrates the will of these countries to produce stronger integration in the region; and maintain peace, and stability. Established in 2009, the ASEAN Political-Security Community (APSC) stands as one of the three fundamental pillars of the ASEAN Community, alongside the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) and the

ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC) agreements, representing a vital instrument for regional integration and cooperation. Upon achievement of this goal, its primary objective is to strengthen the political ties among ASEAN members, alongside enhancing its economic significance and fostering collective responsibility within the region. The ASEAN Political-



Security Community (APSC), which laid the groundwork for the ASEAN Charter in 2008, comprises immutable principles designed to guide the association. Embedded within the Charter are ASEAN's core principles and action plans, serving as the cornerstone for legal processes within the association. The primary role of the APSC is to establish a framework for implementing the Charter's designated responsibilities. Tasked with upholding democratic values, human rights, and facilitating the consolidation of democracy, the APSC holds authority vital for fostering regional stability and progress. APSC's key objective is to maintain that democratic and legal powers are instilled in the member states of such an organization. APSC is a device of the ASEAN Governance that gives accountability, widens uniformity among member states, and speaks for the interests of the private sector. One of the important factors that support the successful



development of the AEC within the ASEAN Community is the official recognition and commitment to adhering to democratic principles by the member states.

Therefore, inter-governmental organizations look for pragmatic results in conflict resolution and peace-keeping. The ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), created in 1994, is a notable area in which most of the development is observed by the ARF space. China, Russia, and the United States, comprising one-third of the total ARF members' demography are the principal parties at the ARF. Through the group, the countries offer each other an opportunity to publicly raise, or discuss their common concerns which is a step towards resolving political and security challenges. Also, it is here that relationships are built, cooperation grows and those that share the region do it in an atmosphere that is conducive to open discussion and where their security concerns are meaningful and with adequate regional deliberation. The Treaty on Amity and Cooperation (TAC) is one of the APSC's biggest steps towards domestic and international peace and cooperation. It served as a treaty that was signed for the first time in 1976. Nevertheless, it had undergone another review in pursuit of strengthening the regional ties among the nations the latter part was organized by the APSC. For TAC, its partners should include member countries and the state outside world to trigger robust collaboration, unity, and peace. ASEAN's Intergovernmental Cooperation, which is used in the diplomatic strategy of the organization, can be seen as a model of good governance that has been around for a long time and the framework has been used by many countries outside the region, demonstrating its influence and reach. APSC has been able to identify such challenges and also proposals for solutions to global issues such as piracy, human trafficking, and

terrorism. ASEAN member states work to address global issues through initiatives that include counters, building capacity, and intelligence sharing. Corresponding actions to the ASEAN Convention on Counterterrorism, namely the ACCT, are also pursued.

ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community

APSC efforts are focused only on the engagement of both peaceful and problem-solving processes. China, Russia, and the United States are ARF members, out of 27 professional. The group ensures the communication of political and security concerns among state



members and further promotes deliberation and dialogue on such matters. On top of this, the peace forum is where trust is created between various stakeholders, cooperation is fostered, concerns about regional security are discussed, and appropriate actions are taken. TAC is the most shining glorious achievement of the APSC. The treaty was agreed upon for the very time in 1976. While it was the purpose of the treaty to strengthen the ties between the countries in the region at the beginning, the way the treaty was drafted was changed under the auspices of ASEAN Plus Three. The Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC) endeavors to unite member nations and foreign entities under a single umbrella, fostering strong bonds, unwavering solidarity, and enduring peace. It is a cornerstone of ASEAN's diplomatic strategy, it stands as a pivotal instrument with



widespread applicability beyond the region, attesting to its profound significance and global resonance. Also, the organization of APSC has attributed much to the fact that it has played a pivotal role in coping with global issues such as drug trafficking, piracy, and terrorism. The Asian countries which are the signatories of ASEAN combat these challenges using cooperative operations, capacity building, and intelligence partnership. Credible steps like ACCT the Affiliation of Southeast Asia Nations Convention on Counterterrorism are undertaken.

Besides, ASCC works toward the protection of the status of all human rights and privileges of citizenship, including the principle of human rights. It aims for the development of such aims and objectives as promoting the ideals of human-centered "applause" of the fundamental Charter principles of the UN and the further incorporation of additional international human rights instruments. The ASEAN Human Rights Declaration forms the principle for the ACWC formation. The cultural diversity and heritage preservation remain among the ASCC vision strategies. The representation of the birth of numerous cultures, languages, and customs is ASEAN's most shrinking asset. Thus, the ASCC stands as the stage for unveiling and preserving this coinciding diversity. Preservation of ASEAN's cultural background has become a matter of concern for people, and organizers have had two important initiatives at their disposal the ASEAN Prize for Literature and the ASEAN Cultural Heritage Digital Archive. It has been established that member states of ASEAN are very susceptible to natural disasters affecting the ecosystem, and the ASCC is on the move working with other member states to improve the management of disasters, environmental protection, and activities that can



mitigate climate change other than the ASEAN Agreement on Disaster Management or disaster prevention.

Conclusion

ASEAN stands for the principles of both unity and diversity throughout the region and it is promoting these. Since ASEAN commenced its operations in 1967 which were destined to build a stable and relatively strong community that has culminated in the promotion of peace, stability, and well-being among all member states.. ASEAN had arguably realized its start-up destination of business partnership and now more than just that, it has become an embodiment of diplomacy and multilateralism. It shows the resilience of its standing against various natural calamities ranging from earthquakes to economic setbacks or political uncertainties. Such resilience is proof of its right to exist. ASEAN's main instrument to settle regional issues has been the ASEAN way which also underlines unity through consensus, dialogue, and the respect for national sovereigns. This is because the ASEAN economy is a big one it has GDP measured at more than \$3 trillion with a population exceeding 650 million people. In the past, the economy of this region could be only described as an assortment of mangoes and volcanic lavas. The open integration efforts like the ASEAN Community have notably allowed the intra-regional run of trade, good investment movement, and of course easier movement of skilled labor. Hence, within all ASEAN communities, ASEAN plays a pivotal role as the foremost player among Southeast Asian countries on the international stage.