
ASEAN way ' at the crossroads

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Since its formation in 1967, ASEAN has become a regional cooperation initiative that has demonstrated its dynamic persistence in the context of international politics, which is increasingly fast-changing.

Nearly a half century after its creation, ASEAN has become what one writer has called 'one of the most enduring inter-governmental organizations outside Europe' (Beeson, 2007: 216).

Outside the European Union (EU), regional cooperation is seen as having the ability to adapt to external dynamics on one side, and to accommodate itself to changes that are taking place at an internal level on the other side. The durability of ASEAN as a regional cooperation initiative creates a dynamic region both economically and politically.

In terms of dealing with traditional issues such as security, economic and regional cooperation, ASEAN has demonstrated its capacity. There has been almost no significant turmoil in the region that would indicate open conflict among members.

One characteristic that is always displayed by this region in management of cohesion and cooperation among members is the presence of the state as a pivotal actor.

The emergence of the state as an actor determining ASEAN cooperation could not be separated from the historical and cultural construction of this region as one of the important enclaves of Asian values. From this comes the kind of patterns of conflict resolution and integration models that are known as the 'ASEAN Way' .

According to Acharya (2001), the ASEAN Way is defined as: '... a process of regional interactions and cooperation based on discreteness, informality, consensus building and non-confrontational bargaining styles' .

The choice of the ASEAN Way seems to be based on the desire to accelerate the development of regional economic growth.

On the other hand, this choice is certainly not free from fundamental problems that afflict almost all the people of Southeast Asia, especially in terms of political rights, participation and also their position in the construction, which is often marginal.

However, the dynamics of ASEAN do not only take place in the context of state-to-state relations. Currently there is an 'œexplosion'• of non-traditional issues, or what we could call a '˘ time-bomb of ECOSOC right.'™The emergence of economic, social, and cultural rights is expected to begin to supplement traditional issues in Southeast Asia.

This is an obvious consequence of the Southeast Asian regional dynamics that appear in the globalization arena. Meanwhile it is also a direct result of Southeast Asia'™s position as an important zone for the expansion of multinational and transnational companies.

The principle of non-interference in the domestic affairs of other countries that had been held by ASEAN as a kind of regional etiquette is now receiving criticism in many circles.

Meanwhile, there is a perceptual collision over a large number of issues such as upholding human rights, articulation of marginalized people (identity) and democracy.

The limitation of a state-centric approach leads to representation problems. In new issues such as the environment, the state perspective will be determined more by political and technocratic calculations. However, in the handling of problems such as smog, the problem is much more complex. Local aspects such as the world view of the forest community, and the economic and social problems faced in rural communities, are far from the imagination of the state.

The legitimacy of the state to represent environmental issues also often becomes problematic. Cross-border communities in the forest that are directly adjacent to neighboring countries, for example, the Borneo forest has many habituÃ©s. The forest has become a medium of identification beyond the administrative boundaries of a state.

On the issue of human rights, for example, ASEAN civil society networks actively proposed the ASEAN Human Rights Body. The agency is trying to adopt a similar

institution to what was established in Europe. However, the proposal is still ongoing because of the perceptual differences and visions of human rights enforcement among ASEAN countries themselves.

These two issues '€" the environment and human rights '€" give an overview of the aspects of state sovereignty, which are actually still in effect and starting to experience change. Perhaps because the issue of human rights is still directly related to the power of a number of countries in the region, countries use '€œrespect for the sovereignty'€• to avoid conflict.

Meanwhile, for environmental issues, the idea does not seem strong enough to use. Even in environmental issues, mainstreaming is actually carried out by the civil society, and the state follows all of the design, scope and actions of the civil society.

The presence of non-state actors in Southeast Asia is increasingly impossible to ignore. Various elements of civil society have grown even in countries that are considered less democratic, such as Malaysia and Brunei Darussalam.

They build advocacy in their respective countries with regard to new problems such as the effects of development, establishing regional networks and building a number of initiatives in addressing new issues (Terrence and Elies, 2011).

The ideals for the formation of the ASEAN Community 2015 appear to be an elitist project. It is time for ASEAN to better accommodate new voices that are articulated by the new political generation in Southeast Asia.

Development issues in the future will bring an explosion of the social participation of civil society groups in Southeast Asia. It seems the conflict resolution and state domination in the design of the new ASEAN regionalism must begin to be replaced by a more representative approach.

Southeast Asia is an area of growing civil society groups, as a result of human migration in Southeast Asia, which is increasingly fast, easy and open. The ASEAN Community is not merely a new arena for the circulation of capital from international capitalism, but also a new social space for the people of Southeast Asia themselves.

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