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# The ASEAN Conundrum: Facing Competing Regional Constructs

**Sophie Boisseau du Rocher**



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It is a truism to say to claim that for various reasons Southeast Asia is experiencing unsettling and challenging times. These developments impact on the structural parameters that have shaped the region for the last fifty years. In the words of a veteran observer and participant in ASEAN two track diplomacy: “the new normal for the time being is uncertainty”<sup>1</sup>. There is obviously great power competition and a power shift occurring that is acutely felt in the region with an apparently more distant and disengaged US, a closer and more aggressive China, a neglected, yet reliable Japan, a more assertive India and (seen from Southeast Asia) a highly paradoxical European Union. The proliferation of regional initiatives illustrates these new power relations in East Asia as well as the need for ASEAN to redefine its balancing position. For example, the recent emergence of the “Indo-Pacific” concept is potentially placing Southeast Asian countries individually - and the Association as a regional entity - at the centre of a potential strategic theatre. There is also the on-going dynamic of economic growth and socio-economic development that has changed both the behaviour and expectations of the peoples of ASEAN, the behavior and levels of interdependence between states and societies, between states themselves and in relation to foreign partners. Moreover, trade and investment links have strengthened certain external factors to the detriment of others and new infrastructure projects could potentially have the same transformative impact. While, arguably, ASEAN has produced a shared sense of belonging among the peoples of Southeast Asia<sup>2</sup>, and has enhanced public awareness of shared regional common goods, it has in our view, nonetheless both failed to produce a community of shared values and, also, to bring about a convergence of political trajectories. Furthermore, the disconnection between the goals set and the resources allocated to meet them partly explains the limits to regional solidarity and the weaknesses of institutional mechanisms<sup>3</sup>. These are just some of the many factors of integration / disintegration at play impinging on ASEAN’s much vaunted centrality in the wider East-Asian / Asia-Pacific / Indo-Pacific region. Thus, to grow as an Association and to consolidate and protect its position, we will argue that ASEAN has to find a new *modus operandi*.

Studying whether ASEAN will be comforted, or weakened, by centrifugal or centripetal forces within the region (of Southeast Asia) or how ASEAN can adjust to a new configuration of forces, is crucial at this watershed moment in its history, namely its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary. This is so, not only because the current management of these conflicting forces will set the future course of the Association’s trajectory, but, also because a great deal of global significance can be learnt from how ASEAN copes with addressing them. Work Package 5 will focus on ASEAN as an institution, its place, role and functions in the process of Southeast Asian integration. Its goal is, on the one hand, to investigate forces from within and outside the region that drive regional integration such as connectivities (mobility of people, of knowledge,

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1 Jusuf Wanandi quoted by Johanna Son *After 50, ASEAN's To-Do List is Far from Easy*, Reporting ASEAN, ASEAN news, <http://www.aseannews.net/50-aseans-list-far-easy/>

2 Amitav Acharya, “The Evolution and Limitations of ASEAN Identity” in *ASEAN@50 • Volume 4 Building ASEAN Community: Political–Security and Socio-cultural Reflections*, Eria, 2017, accessed at [http://www.eria.org/ASEAN\\_at\\_50\\_4A.2\\_Acharya\\_final.pdf](http://www.eria.org/ASEAN_at_50_4A.2_Acharya_final.pdf)

3 David Martin Jones and Michael L. R. Smith “Making process, Not progress: ASEAN and the evolving East Asian Regional Order”, *International Security* 32 (1) Summer 2007: 148–184

ideologies, infrastructure, goods, capital...). On the other hand, we will also investigate the centrifugal forces at play, involving paradoxically the same factors. Our purpose is to deliver new knowledge on the structural challenges that are in the process of transforming the Association's institutional system and the the ensuing conceptual framework within which it functions. In short, CRISEA's WP5 will provide a fine-grained micro/macro analysis of the competing regional forms of integration/disintegration that are being faced in Southeast Asia as a whole, and by its regional institutional expression, ASEAN in particular.

ASEAN, as an institution, has provided an organisational framework, principles and tools to achieve growth and peace despite multiple obstacles, such as mistrust amongst its members, extreme diversity and disparities, rivalries, domestic tensions and the divisive impact of extra-regional actors during the Cold War period<sup>4</sup>. It has been instrumental in shaping contemporary Southeast Asia and also enabled its member-states to engage the world in a more efficacious way<sup>5</sup>. None of these goals could have been achieved without the dynamism and the institutional framework provided by the Association. For example, none of its ten members, with the possible exception of Indonesia, could have been able to reach a global audience without the Association. In bringing together its member-states and encouraging discussion and common actions, ASEAN's usefulness has been proven over the years, particularly as the original five founding members achieved a certain level of growth and stability. This has had direct repercussions on regional cooperation patterns preparing the Association for its enlargement (widening) in the late 1990s. Moreover, thanks to ASEAN's capacity to deal simultaneously with micro as well as macro challenges, Southeast Asia has seen its integration deepened while, concomitantly, helping each member to focus on its own weaknesses and challenges. In the words, once again, of Jusuf Wanandi, reprising the Indonesian concept of *Ketahan Nasional* (national resilience) developed during the early years of Suharto's New Order regime: "if each member nation can accomplish overall national development and overcome internal threats, regional resilience can result in much the same way as a chain derives its overall strength from the strength of its constituent parts<sup>6</sup>."

However, today, it could be argued ASEAN is facing a crisis of confidence: some weaknesses persist while new ones have emerged disturbing the equilibrium of the *status quo*. As will be demonstrated in this WP, numerous future challenges will call into question the rationale and the practices of ASEAN whilst, at the same time, relations between its member states remain both volatile and unpredictable. For a lengthy period ASEAN has been perceived as an anchor in a fast-changing environment, yet, today, it is now confronted with coping with

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4 Arnfinn Jorgensen-Dahl *Regional Organisation and Order in Southeast Asia*, New York: St Martin's Press, 1982 and Werner Levi "Political Culture and integration in Southeast Asia" in Paul Tharp *Regional International Organizations: Structures and Functions*, New York: St Martin's Press, 1971, p. 76

5 M. Rajendran *ASEAN's Foreign Relations: The Shift to Collective Action*, Kuala-Lumpur: Arenabuku, 1985.

6 Jusuf Wanandi, "Security Issues in the ASEAN Region," in Karl D. Jackson & M. Hadi Soesastro (eds), *ASEAN Security and Economic Development*, (Research Papers and Policy Studies no. 11), Berkeley CA: Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California, 1984, p. 305.

its intrinsic weaknesses and limitations, and therefore, its capacity to address the challenges generated by a shifting geopolitical landscape. Whether the Association is able to cope with these challenges with the current tools at its disposal remains an open question.

## **I - ASEAN AS A TRANSFORMATIVE VECTOR IN SHAPING CONTEMPORARY SOUTHEAST ASIA**

ASEAN, we believe, has contributed to shaping contemporary Southeast Asia as a peaceful and prosperous region through a number of ways:

1. First, as a tool for political *rapprochement* in building confidence between nation-states previously estranged in a turbulent region. Indeed, this was the first goal in creating ASEAN<sup>7</sup>.
2. Second, as a vector in bringing about economic convergence and cooperation to transform Southeast Asia into an area of rapid development, something that became possible only once peace and stability were guaranteed.<sup>8</sup> Today, if an enlarged ASEAN<sup>9</sup> were a single country, it would be the sixth largest economy in the world with a combined GDP of \$2.55 trillion (ASEAN Stats, 2016).
3. Thirdly, ASEAN functions as a kind of diplomatic springboard in the concert of nations,<sup>10</sup> providing its members with a diplomatic resonance and leveraging Southeast Asia's unique geopolitical position in order for its voice to be heard in the global arena.

Looking through the conceptual prism of Western international relations theories, the academic community has had difficulty in discerning the factors behind ASEAN's ability to survive in a somewhat hostile international environment. In fact, the Association's longevity - it is one of the oldest macro-regional organisations in the contemporary international system - is rooted in its own unique *modus operandi*, commonly referred to in Southeast Asia parlance as "the ASEAN way". Indeed, these patterns of behaviour are specific to the Association and are difficult to compare with those pertaining to other regional organizations. This explains why ASEAN has embarked upon an atypical path of institutional development. In order to succeed in a context of entrenched competing sovereignties, ASEAN has had to respect the primacy of domestic political projects in implementing basic rules and, above all, in establishing basic norms

7 Russell Fifield "National and Regional Interests in ASEAN: Competition and Cooperation in International Politics", *ISEAS Occasional Papers* n° 57, Singapore, 1979.

8 Ludo Cuyers, Philippe de Lombaerde et Stijn Verherstraeten "From AFTA towards an ASEAN Economic Community and Beyond", *CAS Discussion Paper* n° 46, 2005 and John Ravenhill "Fighting Irrelevance: An economic community 'with ASEAN characteristics'" *The Pacific Review* 21 (4), December 2008: 49-88.

9 To the initial five countries that signed the Bangkok Declaration in 1967 (Singapore, Thailand, Malaysia, Philippines and Indonesia), have been added Brunei in 1984, Vietnam in 1995, Laos and Myanmar in 1997, and Cambodia in 1999.

10 Lau Teik Soon "ASEAN Diplomacy: National Interest and Diplomacy", *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 25 (1-2), 1990: 114.

of behaviour: WP 5 asks the question as to whether these rules are still salient and effective in the current regional and global environment and in a context of growing interdependence between nation-states?

## A – ASEAN’S AS A SUI GENERIS REGIONAL ORGANIZATION

Soon after its foundation, analysts stressed the uniqueness of the ASEAN processes and mechanisms; mostly due to its founders’ own choices. However it is also the product of international conditions<sup>11</sup>. This specificity of ASEAN is still salient: it means the spirit of the Association, or the “ASEAN way”, must be fully taken into account, if one wants to anticipate the future. Though they have evolved, ASEAN organizational norms have never been called into question: they have to be taken into consideration for any common action within the Association.

### *Voluntary cooperation*

If ASEAN had attempted to institute constraining membership rules its members would probably not have sought to join it. The Bangkok declaration of 1967, which established the Association and was signed by the Foreign Ministers of the five founding countries, was not a treaty with legal obligations: it was a framework agreement (a declaration of intent) exhorting the member countries to work together and to cooperate in order to enhance national resilience.<sup>12</sup> For lengthy period, until the Charter of 2007, ASEAN was to be a kind of diplomatic community with no legal constraints and even, no stated goals except a broad future-oriented perspective of “enhancing stability, security and prosperity”<sup>13</sup>. Even Preferential Trading Agreements (PTAs) were signed on a voluntary basis whereby each country could volunteer a list of products for preferential treatment<sup>14</sup>. The Association initially lacked a legal personality or legal standing under international law<sup>15</sup>. Even if, as mentioned above, the Charter of 2007 conferred on ASEAN a legal personality<sup>16</sup>, the basic idea behind this document was that ASEAN is not, and should not be, a binding association because member-states are still unwilling to delegate

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11 Jörn Dosch & Manfred Mols “Why ASEAN cooperation cannot work as a model for regionalism elsewhere, A reply”, *ASEAN Economic Bulletin I* (2), November 1994: 212 – 222.

12 “If each member nation can accomplish an overall national development and overcome internal threats, regional resilience can result much in the same way as a chain derives its overall strength from the strength of its constituent parts.” Jusuf Wanandi, “Security issues in the ASEAN region” in Karl Jackson & Hadi Soesastro (eds) *ASEAN Security and Economic Development*, Berkeley CA: University of California Press, p. 305.

13 Hans Blomqvist even argued that “the absence of overly ambitious goals at the outset” was a main reason for ASEAN’s cohesion and survival, H. Blomqvist “ASEAN”, *ASEAN Economic Bulletin*, 10 (1), July 1993.

14 Sahathavan Meyanathan & Ismail Haron “ASEAN Trade Co-operation: A Survey of the Issues”, in Nordin Sopiee ed. *ASEAN at the Crossroads*, Kuala Lumpur: ISIS Malaysia, 1987, p. 24.

15 Paul Davidson, *ASEAN: The Evolving Legal Framework for Economic Cooperation*, Singapore: Times Academic Press, 2002.

16 Chun Hun Lin “Charter: Deeper Regional Integration under International Law?” *Chinese Journal of International Law*, 9 (4) December 2010: 821–837 and Simon Chesterman *Does ASEAN Exist? The Association of Southeast Asian Nations as an International Legal Person*, New York: University School of Law, 30 July 2008.

any ounce of sovereignty<sup>17</sup>. Moreover, even today, the notion of supra-nationality is taboo for member-states. It was not until 1976 that ASEAN, under strong pressure from external events, concluded its first formal agreement, the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC)<sup>18</sup>.

### **Rationale, Rules and Practices**

From this basic principle and reality – newly-acquired sovereignties should not be endangered by the Association and individual states prevail – result rules and practices: ASEAN has been built to support, enhance and defend the member-states' sovereignty; a common goal that justifies reconciliation, accommodation and cooperation with one another. Indeed, ASEAN's consensual and non-confrontational mechanisms – a “conflict-avoidance formula” for some<sup>19</sup> - and the non-binding nature of its institutional structures have been necessary when the aims and ambitions of the Association at its inception are given due cognisance. These involve facilitating the political and economic development of each member-state and bringing stability to the relations between its member states<sup>20</sup>. To enhance this stability, ASEAN's emphasis on non-intervention is paramount<sup>21</sup>. Therefore, ASEAN is an intergovernmental organization with few commitments and no constraints. All decisions are made based on the principle of consensus, implying that member-states cannot impose laws or actions on each other. Rather than imposing its own rules and objectives, ASEAN must convince member-states of its added-value: as long as no common agreement is reached, decisions are postponed. The 'ASEAN way' involves informal diplomacy, consensual decision-making, restraint in expressing public criticism and a lack of sanctions in case of non-compliance<sup>22</sup>.

### **A light institutional structure**

The 'ASEAN way' also emphasizes informal interaction and minimal institutional development<sup>23</sup>. ASEAN has a rather simple and informal setup, given that no clear indication was provided for it in the 1967 Bangkok declaration and therefore it has been elaborated gradually. In 1967, the structure was still completely dependent on the member-states: an annual meeting of Foreign Ministers, a permanent committee, ad-hoc committees and an ASEAN Secretariat in each member-State. In 1976, after the Bali Summit, greater organizational efficiency was sought: a summit of Heads of States was to be convened “if and when necessary” (this type of summit became triannual in 1992, and annual in 1995). An ASEAN Secretariat was set up,

17 Michael Leifer, *ASEAN and the Security of Southeast Asia*, London: Routledge, 1989, p. 104.

18 After the dramatic events in Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos in 1975, the Treaty - signed in February 1976 - committed the member-states to the fundamental principles of (i) respect of national sovereignty and territorial integrity, (ii) non-interference in internal affairs, (iii) rejection of the use or threat of force and peaceful settlement of disputes.

19 David Martin Jones and Michael L.R. Smith “Making process, not progress”, *International Security* 32 (1), Summer 2007, p. 150.

20 Sophie Boisseau du Rocher *ASEAN et la construction régionale en Asie du Sud-Est*, Paris: L'Harmattan, 1998, pp. 9 – 12.

21 Jurgen Haacke *ASEAN's Diplomatic and Security Culture: Origins, Development and Prospects*, London: Routledge, 2003, p. 5.

22 Kevin H.R. Villanueva & Rosario G. Manalo “ASEAN Consensus: The Intangible Heritage of Southeast Asian Diplomacy”, in *ASEAN@50*, Volume 4, *Building ASEAN Community: Political–Security and Socio-cultural Reflections*, Jakarta: ERIA, 2017 pp. 88 – 122.

23 Rodolfo Severino *Southeast Asia in Search of an ASEAN Community*, Singapore: ISEAS Press, 2006, pp. 1–37.

based in Jakarta, and the establishment of a High Council (whose rules of procedure were adopted only 25 years later, in 2001, in a typical ASEAN way) was also considered. Ministerial meetings were progressively convened and broadened to cover every sector of cooperation. After 50 years, the Secretariat's structure, still light when compared to the EU, consists of some 300 bureaucrats and runs on an annual budget of US\$ 20 million. It organizes and coordinates some thousand meetings per year. Nevertheless, no transfer of authority or sovereignty to the Secretariat has been considered.

"Grand theories" in international relations, such as realism (and also subaltern realism), liberalism, neo-realism, neo-liberal institutionalism, as well as constructivism have been invoked to explain ASEAN<sup>24</sup>. Each, in its own way can partly explain one or the other aspect of the ASEAN regionalization process, but the hypothesis in our present research is that it might also lead to an "epistemic fallacy" when invoked in an attempt to compare ASEAN with the EU. Such theories were derived from the European experience while the context, intrinsic logic and processes of ASEAN regionalism have actually been quite different. From this perspective, WP5 researchers will challenge "social constructivist" theorization through our case studies which focus on actors in order to make sense of "the ASEAN way". In our view ASEAN is primarily a process of interaction and as such, it diffuses norms<sup>25</sup>. The tools used by ASEAN to create and promote such norms (enmeshment and/or diffusion) might not be currently identified in the diffusion and socialization literature. This is also the case for integration.

## **B - WHAT DOES THE ASEAN WAY OF ASEAN INTEGRATION MEAN?**

ASEAN has established itself as "a platform for integration". But what do ASEAN member-states mean by integration<sup>26</sup>? Understanding this point is necessary because the terminology used is often confusing and produces illusionary results and recurrent misunderstanding with serious consequences. Integration is understood in our approach as a trajectory that brings together dispersed units into a more cohesive entity. Southeast Asia's complex, and overlapping identities, in terms of ethnicity, religion, economic development and political regimes do not contribute *per se* to building a sense of 'togetherness' at the national and the regional level<sup>27</sup>. Defining national borders, settling border conflicts resulting from the post-colonial tensions that have torn apart the region and achieving national integration has been a three-fold challenge that required overriding attention. In the sensitive context of nation-

24 Amitav Acharya & Richard Stubbs "Theorizing Southeast Asian Relations: an Introduction" *The Pacific Review*, 19 (2), 2006: 25-134; Nicolas Busse, "Constructivism and Southeast Asian security" *The Pacific Review*, 12 (1), 1999: 39-60; Kai H. "Does ASEAN Matter? International Relations Theories, Institutional Realism, and ASEAN" *Asian Security*, 2 (3), 2006: 189-214.

25 Laura Allison-Reumann, "The Norm-Diffusion Capacity of ASEAN: Evidence and Challenges", *Pacific Focus*, 32 (1), April 2017: 5-29.

26 After some early use of the term, it became taboo in the Association itself until the early 1990ies

27 Kristina Jönsson, "Unity-in-Diversity? Regional Identity-building in Southeast Asia", *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs*, 2/2010: 41-72.



building, coordinating intra-regional relationships - while coping with the effects of the Cold War - was a necessity in order, precisely, to protect the State, and above all, the core interests of the different political regimes. The theory of subaltern realism argues that concerns with nation-building are the most significant factor shaping the foreign policies of developing world nation-states. This theoretical perspective highlights the context of ASEAN consisting of states, dominated by domestic political concerns, but functioning cooperatively within a regional organization **as long as their major domestic political priorities are not challenged** by that organization<sup>28</sup>. For ASEAN integration means cooperation, not a dilution of sovereignty, common and mutual interests are better served through cooperative endeavours. This explains why promoting incremental regional economic integration in the form of the ASEAN Industrial Schemes (AIP), the ASEAN Industrial Joint-Ventures (AIJV), the ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA, 1992) or the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC, 2015) has been possible, while political integration is still off limits for ASEAN. The prospect of political integration would spread fear of a reduction and/or even a surrender of national sovereignty and independence. The non-interference principle in internal affairs has been the axiom of ASEAN<sup>29</sup>: until now, there has been no creation of a new political centre, and no transfer of decision-making power to such a body.

In its first years of existence, ASEAN was qualified as a “club of foreign ministers” seeking to implement a new “spirit of cooperation”<sup>30</sup>. The first summit of the heads of government in Bali in 1976 was the result of events external to ASEAN (namely the impact of Communist victories in Laos, Vietnam and Cambodia) and not the result of an internal maturation. A study by Monte Hill based on a quantitative assessment of ASEAN’s community formation argued that after ten years of existence “there appears to be no movement whatsoever toward regional community formation among the five ASEAN countries in that first period of its existence”<sup>31</sup>. At that stage, the drive for regional integration was to a large extent reflected in the need of the postcolonial elite to ensure regime survival<sup>32</sup>. It was only afterwards, after years of growth and development that a web of economic and societal interactions would emerge.

This approach to integration offers some key insights both into ASEAN’s evolution and, also, its limitations. Even, Southeast Asia’s potential transition from a ‘sovereignty-bound’ form of cooperative regionalism (which could be qualified as ‘regional internationalism’) towards more integrative regionalism (‘new regionalism’<sup>33</sup>) still subsumes integration within the interests of the individual (member) nation-states. Seen in this light, constructivists exaggerate the intensity of a

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28 Mohammed Ayoob, “Subaltern realism: international relations theory meets the third world” in Stephanie G. Neuman (ed.), *International Relations Theory and the Third World*, New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1998, pp. 31—54.

29 Lee Jones, “ASEAN and the Norm of Non-Interference in Southeast Asia: A Quest for Social Order” <https://www.nuffield.ox.ac.uk/politics/papers/2009/Jones.March2009.pdf>

30 Russel Fifield *National and Regional Interests in ASEAN: Competition and Co-operation in International Politics*, Singapore: ISEAS, 1979.

31 Monte Hill, “Community formation within ASEAN”, *International Organisation*, 32 (2) Spring 1978: 569 – 575.

32 Amitav Acharya *The Quest for Identity: International Relations of Southeast Asia*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001, p. 140.

33 Bjorn Hettne, “Beyond the ‘new’ regionalism”, *New Political Economy* 10, 2005, pp. 543 – 571.

distinct ASEAN identity. Until today, ASEAN can be better defined as a “Concordance System”, that is “an international system wherein actors find it possible to consistently harmonize their interests, compromise their differences and reap mutual rewards for their interactions”<sup>34</sup>.

### **The ASEAN integration trap**

The transformation towards “stability, security and prosperity” has brought considerable changes and has demonstrated the value and utility of ASEAN as a community: each member-state has experienced a process of development and modernization. However, as the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis demonstrated, ASEAN, while contributing to a peaceful context in which interaction takes place, has not sought to address several weaknesses and deficiencies through creating transactional mechanisms.<sup>35</sup> The national and regional turmoil at that time has nonetheless indicated the need for a more institutionalized, formal and binding arrangement to correct the potential distortion engendered by multiple interactions on a broad span of policy issues and concerns. Ample academic evidence has shown that ASEAN as a group has been powerless to stem, or even just reduce, the spill-over effects of the crisis<sup>36</sup>. The relevance of ASEAN's sovereignty regime has been called into question. Indeed, on functional topics such as man-made forest fires in Indonesia with their spill-over effect on regional haze (Singapore, Malaysia and Brunei), ASEAN has been largely useless. Despite the implementation of an ASEAN Agreement on Transboundary Haze Pollution signed in June 2002 and the creation of a monitoring system in 2013 it has proved unable to address the issue effectively being constrained by the sacrosanct principle of non-intervention. Indeed, the principle of non-interference has hindered ASEAN and its member states from responding to regional crises<sup>37</sup>. Moreover, even when an agreement is signed, the compliance mechanisms are too weak to contribute to the resolution of the issue if one member has no interest in reaching a settlement.

Reflections and debate on a way to produce a less vulnerable - and better coordinated - ASEAN without compromising Westphalian principles, has generated controversy within ASEAN itself, with only Thailand and the Philippines being the most active promoters of reforms at various times). Expecting ASEAN to gain greater efficiency and, thus, more credibility appears unreasonable as long as the Association lacks the prerequisite institutional and financial resources. Nonetheless, this state of affairs has not stopped ASEAN's efforts to prove it can still remain relevant. Nonetheless such efforts prove to be, by essence, illusory as can be demonstrated by referring to the ASEAN Charter: there is a gulf between what ASEAN professes to be and what it is. The ASEAN motto “One Vision, One Identity, One Community” has hardly

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34 Donald Puchala, “Of blind men, elephants and international integration”, *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 10 (3), March 1972: 277.

35 Sophie Boisseau du Rocher, “La crise sans fin de l'ASEAN”, *Etudes*, 2004 / 10, 401: 297 – 309.

36 Lee Jones, *ASEAN, Sovereignty and Intervention in Southeast Asia*, Basingstoke UK: Palgrave Macmillan: 2012.

37 Daniel Heilmann, “After Indonesia's Ratification: The ASEAN Agreement on Transboundary Haze Pollution and its Effectiveness as a Regional Environmental Governance Tool”, *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs* 3/2015: 95–121.

taken root among the 625 million citizens. *De facto* regional integration has occurred, but *de jure* regional integration involving ASEAN has been marginal to the process.<sup>38</sup>

This is particularly obvious following enlargement when the new members - Vietnam (1995), Laos, Myanmar (1997) and Cambodia (1999) - blocked the consultative process on norms and values. We would argue that they joined the organization for what it used to be in 1967, and not for what it had become after thirty years of development<sup>39</sup>. Two conditions needed to be fulfilled for membership: be a Southeast Asian nation-state and subscribe to the Bangkok declaration of 1967. Because of the new members determination to maintain their own national postures, abetted by an institutional incapacity to approve any changes that is not unanimously agreed upon, the spirit of subaltern realism still prevails. As a result no satisfactory solution has been found to bridge divisions within the Association. In enlarging, and thus both widening and heightening the diversity of its membership, ASEAN the choice was made to maintain a very loose form of governance. Objectives of enhanced institutional integration, which had been galvanized by the 1997 crisis, remained distant aims, indefinitely postponed by the newcomers.

Indeed, enlargement has amply demonstrated the contradictory views on integration within, and amongst, its members. ASEAN-driven regionalism has remained far from creating a model of formal integration, given its institutional nature and its mode of governance. Amongst elites in Southeast Asia, "social practice and interactions" have deepened and induced a new sense of "we-ness," a practice of socialization that over time constructs new and more inclusive identities and transforms networks at the intersection of public and private interests. Not only in order to reduce the "developmental gap" but also to take advantage of it, through ASEAN<sup>40</sup>, member-states and private actors were decisive in achieving growth in the 'last-frontier' economies<sup>41</sup>. Southeast Asian actors have experienced a functionalist evolution where integration is based on common interests, promoted by member-states as much as by private actors. From that perspective, enlargement was a promising move towards "one Southeast Asian family". As ASEAN's Vision 2020 asserts, Southeast Asia has become progressively bound "by a common regional identity"<sup>42</sup>. From the enlargement and the 1997 crisis onwards, the interplay between formal and informal governance, and between public and private actors, have both become crucial in understanding ASEAN's evolution.

Simultaneously, these intra-ASEAN interactions experienced the competition with multiple emerging regional community constructs not mechanically linked to ASEAN.<sup>43</sup> If ASEAN, as a common market is an attractive proposition for member-states, it is not the only one as

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38 See Richard Higgott on the distinction between *de facto* and *de jure* regional integration. Richard Higgott, "De facto and de jure regionalisation: The double discourse of regionalism in the Asia-Pacific", *Global Society* 11 (2) 1997: 165-183.

39 Sophie Boisseau du Rocher, "L'ASEAN et les nouvelles règles du jeu", *Revue Internationale de Politique Comparée*, 8 (3) 2001: 395 – 417.

40 Through the "Initiative for ASEAN Integration" launched in November 2000.

41 Mark McGillivray & David Carpenter (eds) *Narrowing the Development Gap in ASEAN: Drivers and Policy Options*, London: Routledge, 2013.

42 ASEAN Secretariat, Vision 2020, <http://www.aseansec.org/1814.htm>.

43 R. Moorthy & G. Benny "Is an "ASEAN Community" achievable?", *Asian Survey*, 52(6), 2012: 1043-1066.

new initiatives and networks have appeared, notably under China's impulsion<sup>44</sup>. Indeed, Beijing is trying to establish new global/regional nexuses, thus challenging the international Western-based order while institutionalizing *rapprochements* with neighbouring regions. Some analysts have even established a correlation between ASEAN's under-achievement and ineffectiveness, and the rise of an increasingly assertive China that has instrumentalised a potential ASEAN integration dilemma<sup>45</sup>

### **The ASEAN integration dilemma**

The 'ASEAN dilemma' refers to the absence of an efficacious and credible answer to the many challenges because of the integration trap the Association has set itself: no credible decisions can be effectively implemented towards greater integration because the consensus-based decision-making system is resistant to change. Intergovernmental in nature, the decision-making rules require unanimity, as opposed to the support of a majority, or even a qualified majority. This trap produces misunderstanding and frustration. Misunderstanding because, while using the same terminology as the European Union, ASEAN cannot give it the same meaning. Frustration, because the mere use of certain term creates expectations<sup>46</sup>. Yet, ASEAN and ASEAN member-states have never sought to cope with differences between the expectations of its member states vis-à-vis ASEAN and expectations of its civil societies in relation to ASEAN. If arguments can be made about the economic and financial aspects of ASEAN integration in a very functional way, this is not the case in other areas. In the political arena, the discrepancy between the level of flows and interactions - and the regional mechanisms to support them - illustrates how (certain) ASEAN member-states lack motivation to pursue the integration process. This low level of enthusiasm reveals the absence of a true willingness to escape from the integration trap as well as an incapacity to deal with issues of sovereignty. Despite declarations, programs and a substantial increase in interaction at all levels, the present political and administrative practice of ASEAN does not demonstrate any real progress towards greater integration. Is a continued inability to escape from this trap sustainable in the current regional context and global environment?

To reduce the gap between aspirations and capacity and to provide an answer to the integration dilemma, the ASEAN Charter adopted on 20 November 2007 at the Thirteenth Annual ASEAN Summit in Singapore was envisioned as a "constitutional document embodying fundamental principles, goals, objectives and structures of ASEAN cooperation capable of meeting the needs of the ASEAN Community and beyond" (Chairman's Statement 2005).

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44 Ponciano Intal, "The institutions behind East Asia's transformation," *East Asia Forum*, March 2017 and Michael J. Green & Bates Gill, eds., *Asia's New Multilateralism: Cooperation, Conflict, and the Search for Community*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2009.

45 Mark Beeson "Multilateralism in East Asia: Less than the Sum of Its Parts?," *Global Summitry* 2 (1, June 2016: 54 – 70.

46 One is reminded here of Christopher Hill's explanation of the 'expectations-capability gap' in European foreign policy i.e. the gulf between the hope/assumption that the EU should be able to act in a certain way and the means to be able to in fact do so. Christopher Hill, Michael Smith & Sophie Vanhooacker (eds) *The International Relations of the European Union*, 3rd edn, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017.

Yet, the draft recommendations of the ASEAN Eminent Persons Group had been watered down as political support for the most innovative recommendations was not forthcoming. For example, the Group of Eminent Persons was asked not to alter the consensual decision-making approach<sup>47</sup>. While ASEAN was given a legal personality, the mechanisms of the Charter only marginally enhanced regional co-ordination such as by instituting bi-annual summits, the establishment of a new ASEAN Co-ordinating Council and the creation of a Human Rights Body without any enforcement capability. The terms of its operation were to be determined by the ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Meeting. A Committee of Permanent Representatives composed of ambassadors accredited to the ASEAN Secretariat in Jakarta (CPR) was instituted to provide both co-ordination and continuity. No constitution, no parliament or central regulatory body was created and ASEAN remains, therefore, essentially an inter-governmental entity with its modes of decision-making essentially unchanged. The Charter was certainly not the milestone in ASEAN's history it was announced to be, even if it did strengthen ASEAN as a more rules-based organization.

A further question is if the ASEAN Community - based on the three pillars stipulated in the Bali Concord II - Economic (AEC), Political-Security (APSC), Socio-Cultural (ASCC) - , will meet a similar fate. Despite its launching in 2015 with much fanfare and with a stated goal of achieving an open, dynamic and resilient integrated regional community with a common identity by the year 2020, progress has been underwhelming. Community building has been patchy, often taking a back seat when faced with the domestic priorities of member-states. On many occasions, the Association appears stuck at functioning at the inter-governmental level a situation inherent in the contradictions of an Association founded to protect the Nation-State, yet, by dint of the evolution in the international environment, now called upon to pursue and frame regional integration.

From the very beginning, the implementation of the ASEAN Community lacked clarity. The 2009 – 2015 Roadmap of the ASEAN Community (signed in March 2009) defined only vague goals and broad strategies such as that of "the ASEAN Community 2015 is a community of opportunities"<sup>48</sup>. One interesting feature is the stated aim of creating a people's ASEAN raising the question of whether the Community intends to solve, in its own ASEAN way, the ASEAN integration dilemma. The "new" ASEAN Community aims to bring member states apparatuses and societies closer together. But does this process mean a transformative type of integration? As at its foundation in 1967, institutional decisions today do not generate in themselves trajectories of integration. ASEAN's member-states are still struggling with the multiple, diverse and domestically-rooted identities of Southeast Asia in a context of stronger external pressures in the larger Asia-Pacific/ Indo-Pacific and global environment. Research in Work Package 5 will attempt to demonstrate how, ASEAN is a tool in the pursuit of each of

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47 Mely Cabbalero-Anthony "The ASEAN Charter: An Opportunity missed or one that cannot be missed?" in Malcolm Cook & Dalit Singh (eds) *Southeast Asian Affairs*, Singapore: ISEAS, 2008, p. 75.

48 ASEAN Community, ASEAN Secretariat, <http://asean.org/storage/2012/05/7.-Fact-Sheet-on-ASEAN-Community.pdf>

its member-states' own interests. As a consequence, its pragmatic international role is that of a lever for collectively promoting individual national objectives.

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Nearly fifty years after its creation observers as well as practitioners still question the real level of integration of its members, given the limited political vision displayed by its membership elites, and its durability in its present limited form. Its self-proclaimed centrality provides an opportunity to challenge its significance<sup>49</sup> and threatens its own relevance. Some observers are pessimistic about ASEAN's ability to bind the group together or, at least, to continue playing a leading role in regional cooperation. ASEAN is not immune from internal divergences, external manipulations (from China or the United States) or the competing pressures coming from other institutions such as the East Asian Summit (EAS) or the ASEAN Plus Three, amongst others. Also, new types of connectivity and streams of emerging regionalization supported by external donors - such as the Asian Development Bank (ADB) or the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) - redefine the roles of existing entities. What does ASEAN centrality mean in a transitional, polycentric, context where the Association is but one among several competing actors? For some member states, ASEAN is not the number one choice when external partners choose their priority interlocutor. How does ASEAN impose its centrality in potential patterns of cooperation currently under discussion? In between forces of integration and disintegration, how does ASEAN navigate? Those are these essential questions which do also affect the nature and the level of cooperation with external partners, namely the European Union.

Yet, from another perspective, it could be argued that ASEAN identity - be it political, economic or cultural - may be of another nature and emanating from different commonalities than those usually used to analyse regional integration most frequently by reference to the EU integration model. Innovative research, such as that proposed in this CRISEA Work Package, by both revisiting fundamental assumptions - as well as examining vectors of identity-building, along with a closer look at ASEAN practices - may help us to improve our understanding of the 'ASEAN way'. In our view the putting into practice of the recommendations in the EU Commission's 2015 document entitled "*The EU and ASEAN: A Partnership with a Strategic Purpose*" will be ameliorated by a new understanding of the existential and constituent logics behind ASEAN's adjustment to a new international order.

Within WP 5's conceptual framework, ASEAN can be viewed as a fine-tuned mechanism at three levels - national, regional and global – with a priority given to the national level. But this predominance does not exclude taking into account pressure at the regional and global levels. China is probably the external partner that has best understood the potential for influence in the subtlest way, using its leverage in numerous ways to impact on factors of integration and disintegration within Southeast Asia. It could be asked if these actions weaken or, paradoxically, strengthen ASEAN. Researchers in WP 5 are fully engaged in analysing these contrarian forces faced by ASEAN.

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49 Termsak Chalermpananupap, "La 'centralité' de l'ASEAN : concept et mise en œuvre", *Politique étrangère*, 2 :2017: 53 – 66.

## 2- RESEARCH TOPICS:

At the heart of all CRISEA research and across all five of CRISEA's research Work Packages is the hypothesis that Southeast Asia is facing competing, complementary and conflictual regionalisms. Researchers in WP5<sup>50</sup> have adopted a pluralist perspective on regional integration to demonstrate how, and to what extent, ASEAN centrality is internally and externally contested. They also address the question as and how, and why, the perception and reality of ASEAN's development as a regional entity is challenged from many quarters. The current crisis of legitimacy of institutions at all levels engendered by globalization and its ramifications in Southeast Asia, further underlines the difficulties facing the ASEAN integration model in a rapidly evolving global environment.

WP 5's research project is divided into four research modules (RM):

1. ASEAN's centrality in a new power configuration.
2. The challenge to ASEAN due to the emergence of new regional architectures.
3. Transborder interactions: questioning borders and challenging ASEAN.
4. Competing integration with new domestic / foreign interfaces: the cases of Timor Leste and Myanmar.

These four research modules will adopt a pragmatic disciplinary approach in order to elucidate convincing elements so as to reassess ASEAN's evolution. Furthermore, they seek to be policy relevant.

1. What forces compete to integrate the SEA region and how do they interact?
2. What sources of legitimacy underpin the diverse forces of regionalization in Southeast Asia?
3. To what extent is ASEAN-led regional integration perceived by the peoples of Southeast Asia as part of the problem or part of the solution?
4. What are the transformative forces at play and, to what extent, is ASEAN integration at risk?

### MODULE I: ASEAN'S CENTRALITY IN A NEW POWER CONFIGURATION

Is ASEAN "centrality" a fiction, a myth or a reality<sup>51</sup>? Has the notion been conceived by ASEAN elites as a kind of smokescreen to draw attention away from its lack of cohesiveness

50 Those are Sophie Boisseau du Rocher (Centre for Asian Studies, IFRI, Paris), Natthanan Kunnamas (Chulalongkorn University), Moe Mama (University of Mandalay), Małgorzata Pietrasiaik (University of Lodz), David Camroux (Sciences Po, Paris), Marissa Paderon (Ateneo de Manila University), Françoise Nicolas (Center for Asian Studies, IFRI, Paris), Elsa Lafaye de Micheaux (University of Rennes), Dominik Mierzejewski (University of Lodz), Filemeno Aguilar (Ateneo de Manila University), Nathalie Fau (University Paris-Diderot), Andrea Valente (University of Lisbon), Will Doig (University of Columbia, tbc), Paulo Castro (University of Lisbon), Nuno Mendes (University of Lisbon), Thida Tun (University of Mandalay), Aye Aye Myat (University of Mandalay), and Aye Aye Kyawt Kyawt Khine (University of Mandalay).

51 Amitav Acharya, "The myth of ASEAN's centrality", *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, 39 (2) August 2017: 273 – 279.



and, thus, to regain some significance?<sup>52</sup> ASEAN's centrality is challenged as the Association is not immune from internal divergences, external manipulations (from China /the United States...) or the pressures of other institutions. Given its limited capacity, how does ASEAN manage to have its ostensible centrality included in the ongoing negotiations for new architectures? Maintaining centrality in a rapidly changing international environment, compels ASEAN to address challenges to its very same self-proclaimed centrality. Module 1 on ASEAN's centrality in a new power configuration will assess the roles of the United States, China, Russia, EU, Australia, India and Japan's vis-à-vis the ASEAN integration process and vis-à-vis the institution itself. How does the emerging regional power configuration affect ASEAN centrality?

Great power competition can be felt also at the ASEAN Secretariat in Jakarta. Sophie Boisseau du Rocher will address the question as to how the strategies of ASEAN's main partners influence the Association and how do these strategies compete or converge in comforting ASEAN and its centrality. In other words, the ASEAN headquarters is the scene of conflicting strategies, affecting the essence as well as the tactics of the Association. The research of Małgorzata Pietrasiak will more specifically engage with Russian strategy under President Vladimir Putin to engage Southeast Asia and ASEAN, notably through its proxies, Vietnam.

Not only major world powers, but also minilateral cooperation between regional powers, has also been significant in contesting or comforting ASEAN centrality. The quadrilateral framework between Australia, India, Japan, and the United States, revived by President Trump at the November 2017 APEC Summit will be examined as a case study to assess the significance of this cooperation. David Camroux will study the broader Indo-Pacific regional architecture and its potential to challenge ASEAN centrality. In this light Indonesian President Joko Widodo's suggestion that Australia should become an ASEAN member is more than anecdotal.

## **MODULE 2 ON THE CHALLENGE OF NEW ARCHITECTURES**

Another way of posing this central and yet sensitive question of ASEAN's role and influence in an evolving East Asian architecture is to ask the question whether ASEAN's struggle to maintain its unique role in East Asia can succeed when faced with new attractive mechanisms and architectures? The pressure of the forces of globalization (i.e. trade, production networks, injection of foreign aid and investment) has led to a gradual institutionalization of ASEAN. Multi-level governance became the norm in individual ASEAN states and the ASEAN Community (beginning with the ASEAN Economic Community). At present new forms of connectivity, streams of emerging regionalization supported by external donors like the Asian Development Bank (ADB) or the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) redefine these roles. Indeed, the basic question now is: what does ASEAN centrality mean and what does it contribute in a transitional polycentric context where the Association is but one, among several, competing actors? Will ASEAN sustain,

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52 Termsak Chalermpananupap "The genesis of ASEAN Centrality", *ASEAN Focus*, n° 5 October 2017, p. 12.



or counter, the forces of globalization at the local, national and regional levels, and particularly in a time of Chinese predominance?

Module 2 investigates ASEAN's effort to be central in the governance of regional trade, finance and energy. Can its influence be progressively dissolved in broader, and more efficient, forms of governance? More specifically, Marissa Paderon will evaluate the risk for ASEAN of being marginalized by other free trade agreements, such as the Comprehensive and Progressive Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP), the former TPP without, for the moment, the US, or the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (RCEP). Françoise Nicolas, another economist, will examine the evolution of intra-regional FDI and the impact of external direct investment on intra-regional trade and on economic integration as a whole. Do these FDI inflows facilitate integration, given that one of the objectives of ASEAN (as a group) is to enhance the development of intra-regional investment (in particular under the ASEAN Investment Area). However, the role of FDI originating from outside the group is extremely important. Françoise Nicolas's research will examine the impact of external or intra-regional FDI on economic integration within the group.

Elsa Lafaye de Micheaux will focus on Chinese investment examining the question as to whether China's industrial investments in ASEAN are strengthening, or undermining, ASEAN's *de facto* economic integration. Other researchers will examine the role of two major currencies for international transactions in the region: the United States dollar (USD) and the Chinese Renminbi (RMB), in ASEAN capital markets, regional financial architecture, and the ASEAN financial mechanism to assess their challenges to the centrality of ASEAN in the financial sphere.

### **MODULE 3 ON TRANSBORDER INTERACTIONS CHALLENGING ASEAN'S BASIC PRINCIPLES**

Globalization and geopolitical shifts have changed trans-border interactions and their implications for international systems. Researchers in the third module will explore these changes, both at the intra-ASEAN level and externally to ASEAN's borders. Researchers in this RM will ask if new transnational connectivities lead to competition or cooperation, or both? It is their impact on integration/disintegration processes that highlight the diversity of approaches and strategies in negotiating, ignoring or instrumentalizing ASEAN. For example, Dominik Mierzejewski will examine the cooperation framework of the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS), and special economic zones within the region. It is at the sub-national level, that China's image as a constructive player in Southeast Asia, and with ASEAN, has been shaped. Two sub-national actors will be taken into consideration: Yunnan Province and the Guangxi Autonomous Region. Yunnan Province plays the role of an economic corridor in China's energy policy; and from this perspective, the role of a bridgehead. The particular meaning of bridgehead is of multidimensional importance as it concerns minority issues, people to people relations, the internationalization of the renminbi and its importance due to energy security

and trade relations. This particular case serves as a crucial locus to define China's ASEAN policy that should be analysed from on the basis of inductive reasoning, rather the deductive thinking. While a 'big picture' analysis tends to conclude that China's strategy towards ASEAN and local governments are part of an overall strategy controlled from Beijing's actions, this research disputes that conclusion. The focus of the research is on the role of local governments in China's relations with ASEAN now recognized as an important part of China's public diplomacy

Looking at another type of flow, Filemeno Aguilar will study labour mobility and demonstrate its importance for ASEAN's integration both as impetus and obstacle for economic integration. He will conduct research on labour mobility and inter-states ASEAN dynamics involving the Philippines and Indonesia, as migrant origin states, and Singapore and Malaysia as migrant destination states. His research includes an examination of the 2007 ASEAN Declaration on the protection and promotion of the rights of migrant workers and the member-states' commitment to implement it.

For ASEAN leaders, improved connectivity, especially through transport links, is an essential condition for economic growth and integration in Southeast Asia. Transport links provide, not only physical access to resources, but also enable producers to take advantage of opportunities in domestic and foreign markets, leading to economies of scale and specialization. They also enable consumers to have access to a variety of competitively priced goods, encourage investment, promote social integration and spur trade and economic growth. Furthermore, enhanced ASEAN connectivity narrows the development gaps in the region. Enhancing ASEAN's connectivity is designed, not only to reduce business transaction cost, time and travel costs, but, also, to connect the "core" and the "periphery" in ASEAN. ASEAN's connectivity plan takes as its starting point the hypothesis that there exists an obvious link between building infrastructures, the dis-enclosing of territories and their organisation into networks. Nathalie Fau's research tests this hypothesis with regard to maritime transport infrastructure. Being a region surrounded by sea, ASEAN depends to a great extent on seaborne transport for much of its trade. Facilitating seaborne trade and the movement of cargo across maritime supply chains within ASEAN and beyond ensures that the region remains competitive and attractive to investors. The research will distinguish between elements and signals of integration (corridors, barter trade, illicit networks...) and those leading to disintegration (infrastructure disparities, nationalism, rising competition, the role of international shipping lines...) in order to assess the impact of maritime connectivity on the ASEAN process.

Andrea Valente's research will focus on explaining the dynamics of ASEAN integration vs disintegration through a resource nationalism lens in the fields of energy, security, and cooperation in ASEAN. Energy security underpins almost every pillar upon which the ASEAN community is being built. It is right at the intersection of the economic, social, political and military spheres. Unlike the official narrative, and this is one of the main assumptions underlying this project, deepening cooperation has proved to be difficult and has fallen far behind expectations. Resource nationalism is a plausible explanation as to why states have failed to cooperate. An analysis of the shortcomings of ASEAN energy security cooperation may, therefore, add to

debate on the integration vs disintegration process(es).

The last case study in our Work Package will examine the impact of Chinese grand strategy, the Belt and Road Initiative” (BRI) on ASEAN. It will evaluate how the Chinese effort to strengthen the trans-border connectivity with Lao PDR will influence Laos and how this new geo-economic and geo-political articulation will affect Lao perspectives on ASEAN, including the need to continue further integration within the Association and to ensure its centrality? The context is described as an “institutionalization of economic integration increasingly driven by the extroverted nature of Asian economies”<sup>53</sup>, which promotes economic cooperation in the Greater Mekong region. It will address several issues on Chinese strategy across Laos: local development, economic appropriation and exploitation of resources? What does the railway reveal about Chinese strategy on a larger scale? How does the geographical corridor position give Laos a new status within ASEAN and have the potential to transform ASEAN's internal balances? How does it have the potential to redefine ASEAN's rules and practices, notably towards China? The study will also explore how a decisive rapprochement through the railway around the Greater Mekong Subregion may have the potential to compete with ASEAN, even if for now it is rather a neutral institution that serves as an intermediary to reduce competition and streamline cooperative development.

#### **RESEARCH MODULE 4 ON COMPETING INTEGRATION WITH NEW DOMESTIC / FOREIGN INTERFACES**

This module addresses the cases of Timor Leste and Myanmar. Module 4's contributions will show how ASEAN is challenged by dissident voices as its development as a regional entity is called into question from internal as well as external actors. Researchers in this module will examine how ASEAN's centrality is internally (with Myanmar) and externally (with Timor-Leste) contested.

Timor-Leste is a small country in which the elites built much of their status and power through outside networks. The social ‘distinction’ is displayed through a narcissism of small differences in which ‘outside’ resources are brought ‘inside’ in a continuous competing and translation process. A *small state*, and particularly a small island state, is constrained by several factors. Thus, there is an effort to compensate and overcome these constraints through constant negotiation. Timor-Leste is an example of this negotiation in the global realm, through both its strengths and weaknesses which must be taken into account. The East-Timorese application to join ASEAN can be analyzed as a test-case to examine *polarization* and *fragmentation* in the competing regional (des)integration process. It can be interpreted as disruptive of an ASEAN's ‘*standard of civilization*’.

P. Castro Seixas & N. Canas Mendes’ research will seek to describe and explain the framework of East Timorese plural external interests by analysing the bilateral and multilateral

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53 P. André, “Between hegemonic ambitions and cooperation needs, the difficult question of regional integration in Asia”, *Chinese World*, 37 (1), 2014, p. 27.

networks and their influence in the process of an ASEAN candidacy. There is a plurality of external interests that express the position of a small country in-between giants as a political and sociological disjuncture. The research elaborates on diverse international/regional integration options (ASEAN, the Commonwealth, etc). The critical issues emerging from Timor Leste's application for membership are to ask if the country is prepared to join the organization, if its admission to ASEAN will be a factor in slowing down the pace of ASEAN integration and what will be the positive effects for the region and for Timor-Leste itself. Such questions are, moreover, linked with extra-regional dynamics, as Timor-Leste is at the crossroads of various regions.

In becoming a member of ASEAN in 1997, Myanmar governments – operating within an evolving hybrid political system - have had both to respond to the changing circumstances in the country's regional strategic environment, as well as having to reform Myanmar's internal political system in order to comply with ASEAN norms. However, most of the studies on Myanmar integrating ASEAN and its norms fail to explain how Myanmar leaders both evaluated, and responded to, the pressure from fellow ASEAN members to implement a new form of governance. Pre-existing studies mostly focused on ASEAN itself, and notably on ASEAN's flexibility in applying its non-interference principle in dealing with Myanmar's democratization process<sup>54</sup> or on the negotiations allowing humanitarian aid to flow into the country when Cyclone Nargis hit Myanmar in 2008<sup>55</sup>.

Moe Mama's research and that of her colleagues in Mandalay will adopt a domestic angle and explain how Myanmar leaders considered the pressure from fellow ASEAN members and why they decided to adjust their political system to meet ASEAN standards and accepted ASEAN's assistance during the natural crisis. Research will focus on the vision of Myanmar's leaders and their perception of ASEAN's role in the above-mentioned issues; in depth interviews with state and non-state actors in Myanmar will focus on both domestic perceptions, as well as domestic responses to ASEAN's role in this transitional period. It will include examining the communal crisis in Rakhine State. The Rohingya issue is a crisis that has an impact on ASEAN integration since, as former Indonesian Foreign minister Marty Natalegawa put it, "ASEAN hasn't provided a bridging situation. In fact, ASEAN itself has been divided."<sup>56</sup> Field research will explore how ASEAN as an organization and individual member states responded to the Rakhine disaster and how this issue has had an impact on ASEAN's integration process.

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54 Marchi, Ludovica, *ASEAN vis-à-vis Myanmar: what influences at play?* London: The London School of Economics and Political Science, Centre for International Studies, 2014

55 Amador III, Julio Santiago "Community Building at the Time of Nargis: The ASEAN Response", *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs*, 28 (4) 2009: 3-22.

56 ASEAN must go further than aid on Rakhine State: Marty Natalegawa, <https://frontiermyanmar.net/en/asean-must-go-further-than-aid-on-rakhine-state-marty-natalegawa>