

Why ASEAN Could Stay Strong?

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Abstract

How confident are ASEAN as a regional organization? Will ASEAN turn into a mere coffee-talk forum? This article evaluates the bases for ASEAN and demonstrates that ASEAN has reasons to stay strong as regional cooperation. Rather than denying tensions, this article agrees that there are tensions among members but it also recognizes such challenge as the one that unites ASEAN members together. There are some dilemmas among members of ASEAN that does not left much room for members but to cooperate with each other: the dilemma of risking higher tensions among members, the dilemma of risking the benefits of existing pooling of resources, the dilemma of improving connectivity among members and the dilemma of facing global pressure on good governance and liberal democracy.

Keywords: ASEAN, regionalism, dilemma, commitment, diplomacy

Introduction

How sustainable is ASEAN (Association of South East Asian Nations) as a regional organization? The confidence in ASEAN used to be high, but the recent case of failure of ASEAN to issue a joint communique at the 45th ASEAN Ministerial Meeting in Phnom Penh had raised serious doubts on the centrality of ASEAN in the hearts of ASEAN members. At some levels, it brought concern externally too on how competent ASEAN is as an organization to handle disagreements on sensitive issues. No confidence means lesser confidence in working coherently as a regional cooperation, which means ASEAN could become mere groups of coffee-talk between members. Is ASEAN that close to jeopardy?

ASEAN may be like any other regional groupings; created based on agreements on members to uphold certain values and

maintained because of certain common interests. Its dimensions of cooperation are also similar, socio-cultural engagement, economic cooperation, political and security building measures. But these are not the sole ties between ASEAN members.

This paper evaluates the bases for ASEAN to stay strong as regional cooperation. It argues that ASEAN is not built and maintained based on consensus and agreements alone but also on dilemmas and common challenges. The current developments in regional setting and global power shift have significance too in how members see and cooperate with each other. Of course, there is always a potential for severe unusual circumstance that would challenge ASEAN unity, but current unfolding of events do not suggest such path. All would be discussed in light of principles of diplomacy, current events and historical ties between country members.