

Our main purpose of creating this Asian Union starts from acknowledging the problem that Asian countries face an indescribably wide range of problems in their domestic spheres and yet, these huge problems are not being sufficiently met through their domestic policies. We believe this is primarily because governments lack the ability to formulate effective policies to address such issues and implement these policies. Hence, our envisioned Asian Union will have the unique feature of a think-tank establishment and a deadlock-solving institution. In our perspective, the Asian continent is blessed with people brilliant in almost all the necessary fields of study and practice, but the big challenge is *coordinating* these efforts on a regular basis in order to effectively address problems. This proposal wishes to contribute to the betterment of *life* in Asia by going one step further than mere institution-building. The most important for this Union is to build it and work it in a way that people in Asia feel the Union to be actually relevant for a better life. It is for this reason that this proposal focuses on a policy-formulating think-tank and implementation-guaranteeing deadlock solution.

1. Membership of the Asian Union

1.1. Membership Criteria

In order to address the problems Asia faces, the Union needs to integrate different nation-states with differing systems of political governance and values. Our principle of “As-Open-As-Possible” (AOAP) is that the purpose is the ideal of confronting the very diverse issues the Asian region confronts and thereby bringing the standard of living of human life here to a degree hard to imagine in the current *status quo*. Much thought has been given as to how to restrict or limit the criteria for membership for those nation-states who wish to become member states to this Asian Union; however, as the purpose clearly states, if integration is for the purpose of tackling those issues in Asia that are yet to be solved, the criteria had to be as open as possible, as least as possible. In this light, the underlying principle of membership into this Asian Union is the AOAP, an open principle, where nation-states who wish to join are welcome to do so, under two very necessary conditions:

- a) They cannot be members or pending members of either the European Union or the African Union, and need to be located in the Asian continent. This is to prevent any kind of clashing common policies or decision implementation process that may differ from Union to Union.
- b) At least 85% of the citizens in the nation-state in question need to reside within the continent of Asia. This is to ensure relevance of policymaking within the Asian Union.

Yes, this means that other values such as political governance form and economic status are not counted. The purpose and the approach here is to be, once again, as open as possible.

1.2. Eligibility for Membership – Regional Selection

The Asian Union will integrate the Central, Northeast, Southwest (states that are not perceived as the Southeast), and Southeast (including the ASEAN), excluding Oceania and Russia. However, Australia and New Zealand will be given the permission to observe the council discussions. The following are the justifications for some of the prospective questions.

- A. Southeast Asia (including the ASEAN)
 - i. Southeast Asia already has an international region based community, ASEAN, but the reason the Asian Union should incorporate Southeast Asian countries is because 1) ASEAN traditionally concentrates on mainly economic issues, and 2) the international trend is calling for a union that incorporates a larger scope of countries as can be seen from the ASEAN +3 Summits.
 - ii. The ASEAN +3 Summits are not broad enough - they include the more economically developed countries (MEDCs) of the Asian continent and exclude the least economically developed countries (LEDCs).
- B. Oceania (Australia and New Zealand)

- i. Australia and New Zealand can partially be considered as Asian countries since they are geographically close and demographically have many Asian immigrants residing. However, they have very slim grounds of similarities with the rest of the Asian countries both culturally and historically and thus are not granted full memberships.
- ii. Nonetheless, Australia and New Zealand are allowed to be present and observe the council discussions. This is because their regional nearness and demographic similarities may put them in a position where the decisions made by the Asian Union will have heavy influence.
- C. Russia: Russia lacks demographic, historical, and cultural similarities with the rest of the Asia. More than 80% of the Russian population is deemed to reside in the European continent.

2. Structure of the Asian Union¹

2.1. Institutions of the Asian Union

The Union will be divided into three institutions to ensure healthy checks and balances.

- A. Institution for Agenda Setting (IAS)
 - i. Selects the agenda and identifies the problems that need to be addressed in the “Institution for Specific Policy Formation.”
- B. Institution for Specific Policy Formation (ISPF)
 - i. Initiates active discussions about the agenda that the “institution for agenda setting” has selected and provide systematical solutions.
 - ii. Establishes a policy transferability think-tank². The basic idea is that experts from diverse countries and fields would be recruited either on a permanent basis (short-term basis is also possible depending on the characteristic of the project in question) to regularly debate and design policies to solve and mitigate the confronting problems.
- C. Institution for Deadlock Settlement (IDS)
 - i. Reviews the process of solutions proposed by the ISPF, and provides alternative measures for situations that face deadlocks. The principle here is to start from a framework all parties can agree to. In the case of climate change issues, it is witnessed that the parties were not able to agree on carbon dioxide reduction plans but were able to agree on reducing social vulnerability through infrastructure development.
 - ii. Mitigates possible disputes that rise from the deadlocks between the member states.

2.2. Leadership of Asian Union

There will be four ‘leaders’ of the Asian Union: One president that leads the Asian Union as a whole, and one head representative for each of the three institutions.

- A. Method of Selection
 - i. Democratic elections will be held.
 - ii. Commission for election led by the incumbent president will be established 6 months prior to the election, and the candidates will be required to register at least 4 months before the election.
 - iii. Anyone who wishes to run cannot be holding an office at the time of registration.
 - iv. Serving for more than one term of office is prohibited in the cases of all 4 leader seats.
 - v. Two representatives of one nation successively leading the union/institution are also

¹ To prevent any sort of confusion regarding the material at hand, this section will be written in clearer subsections.

² Policy transferability think-tank: an organization that studies and researches how a policy worked to solve a problem and expands the scope of its application to an international level. Countries may actively learn and utilize the basic framework of successful policies from other countries.

not permissible.

- B. Term of office
 - i. The president serves 5 years; the heads of the institutions serve 4 years.
 - ii. Having different terms of office for the president and the heads allows more effective transition of leaders thereby promoting stability and preventing administrative chaos.
- C. Nationality of the leaders
 - i. All four leaders (three heads and the president) should not have the same nationality.
 - ii. No more than two leaders should be from the same regional group³.
 - iii. We recognize that countries from the same regional group share considerable socioeconomic and cultural similarities. Having majority of the leaders coming from the same regional group may result in either intentional or unintentional exclusionism.
 - iv. The reason we allow two people from the same region to be in the position of the leaders is, however, because we also acknowledge that two different countries may pursue two radically different interests despite their regional nearness.

Setting limits for each regional group conveys a symbolic meaning. Countries that are classified under the same regional group will be able to lighten the deeply rooted animosity which is often more of an emotional conflict than an actual tangible friction.

3. The Needs and Feasibility of the Asian Union

3.1. Needs for an Asian Union

The purpose of this Asian Union is to increase the standard of living for human life in Asia, but not limited to economic well-being. The problem with current cooperation regimes in Asia is that focus is much too absorbed by *economic* cooperation. If the market model is the main focus of the Asian Union, its need is rather largely weakened, as there already exist numerous institutions, regimes, agreements, and links with exclusively *economic* goals.⁴ The problems Asia faces should not be mischaracterized as mere market conflicts. Public policy formation of governments needs to be able to mitigate problems, but alone, a government does not possess the necessary knowledge and transfer research capital to venture into this.

The primary need for an Asian Union in this light is characterized by the Policy Transfer Think-tank which is to be established under the Institution of Specific Policy Formation. The main idea here is that governmental-level policy transfers are incomparably more adept at problem mitigation than currently existing cooperation such as economic agreements and temporary bilateral policy discussions at best. Nation-states of different regions can share their experiences of policy success and failure while nation-states confronted with similar problems can forge a network of solution, such as refugee care policy and legal cooperation network in cracking down human trafficking dealer crime groups. The Asian Union can effectively help prevent or mitigate risks where individual nation-state's domestic measures are simply not sufficient.

Conventional and new risks are growing. In the early 1990s, Ulrich Beck wrote that the risks of the late-modernity are fundamentally different from those posed by the scarcity society. The "new risks" are borderless, knowledge-dependent when trying to solve, and are caused by multiple responsibilities. This means that individual governments trying to solve international, transnational issues with domestic policy measures simply do not suffice.

The social risks Asia faces differ depending on the region:

a) The Northeast confront a problem of transition from economic tigers to stable welfare states, with suicide rates of the elderly and adolescents skyrocketing and making the top among OECD members;

³ We have categorized the countries according to the regions that they are from: Central, Northeast, Southwest, and Southeast Asia.

⁴ The Chiang Mai Initiative, Asian Development Bank, and Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation are characteristic.

- b) The Southeast are wrought with human trafficking issues;
- c) The Central face physical conflicts, characterized as resource wars and “holy crusades;” and
- d) The Southwest are also facing resource conflicts, particularly those concerning water shortage and related environmental damage.

Policy development and transfer will focus on not only economic factors of poverty but even more on the aforementioned policy areas, such as welfare, human rights abuses, religious conflicts, energy shortage and the environment. “Project Social” would be the right way to summarize the main purpose of this integration.

3.2. Feasibility of the Asian Union – Plausibility of Members and Policy

The feasibility of the Asian Union can be interpreted in two different approaches. First is why nation-states would voluntarily wish to become a member state. Second is how the Asian Union would escape the critique over ineffectiveness. On the issue of the basis for voluntary choice to be a member state, nation-states have a two-fold incentive structure. First is the merit of a coordinated program. This merit is well-witnessed in the case of the European Union, where coordinated policies – such as those concerning health risks, genetically-modified food, common foreign and security policy – enable member states to rely on the Union for a safety net to help out on policy implementation as well as a fall-back net in case anything turns out to have an unexpected side-effect. Second, by enabling a coordinated knowledge and policy transfer through an exclusive think-tank establishment, governments will be absolutely better representatives of their people. This is a definite national interest to be fulfilled – mitigating the gravest problem the nation-state faces.

Next, the question of how the Union would be reasonably effective points to the Institution for Deadlock Settlement. The problem with existing international conferences is that nation-states fail to come to a consensus and the conference falls into a deadlock, unable to achieve anything in the end. Such was the case for the Doha Development Agenda, not to mention the current challenge of greenhouse-gas (GHG) reductions debate concerning the precautionary principle. Current existing organizations are, in a sense, flawed because they do not possess any kind of measure to undo the deadlock. To give a brief example to illustrate the point, in the case of the aforementioned precautionary principle debate, this enormous global issue is stuck in a gridlock because attention is all consumed in the black-hole question of reducing emissions and only that. The Institution for Deadlock Settlement would, in this case, turn the attention to something that all parties could agree upon – reducing the social vulnerability of ill-equipped societies in case a disaster strikes them.

3.3. In Sum

Risks – both conventional and new – are growing and yet individual nation-states are insufficient in effectively addressing them. The formation of an Asian Union means two important points: a) this Union can and will specifically focus on issues the Asian region mainly faces and b) with an organized and coordinated Union, the limitations of current methods of cooperation can be overcome.

References

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