

Model Asian Union

Topic: Discuss a detailed plan for the integration of Asia

SUBMITTED BY:

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1. Is Asian Union Possible?

Asia is a region of truly complicated and complex nature. Unlike Europe where the region largely has similar characteristics, one can easily notice the stark differences in political systems, economic status, culture, religion, ethnicity, different interpretation of history and more. Amongst such differences, it is also true that efforts of integration in Asia has only been possible on lower levels of integration and a much slower process compared to that of European Union.

Yet, such reality does not necessarily prove that Asian Union is impossible. We emphasize that despite its different nature compared with the process of European integration, Asian Union is still possible. Although the process of integration may be different and slower than that of Europe, **Asian Union can be realized in its own distinctive 'Asian way' of integration.**

2. Asian Union Model

In this proposal, we emphasize that the road to Asian Union, as for the current situation, should not take a radical approach of creating a brand new model of Asian Union. Instead a gradual approach of taking existing form of integration and making institutional reforms and creating policies to make it more efficient and effective is crucial. The ultimate goal is to make a **'viable environment for future integration'** which is essential for future success of an Asian Union. The current APT (ASEAN+3) is an excellent place to start with, an organization which well-reflects 'sovereignty sensitive' characteristics of East Asian countries.

Therefore, our model will be focused on gradualism, taking APT and the same purposes, aims and principles that it has, and making the necessary changes to make it more effective as mentioned above.

3. Evolution of Regional Integration in East Asia

The evolution of integration in East Asia can be traced back to the end of the Cold War. While ASEAN was created in 1967, **political/security cooperation** was stimulated by the instability and power vacuum created when United States and Soviet Union retreated from the region. The subsequent creation of ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) including North East Asia countries symbolize such efforts.

Economic areas of cooperation was also catalyzed by the Cold war where East Asian countries saw the need to form a bloc for more leverage, and the Asian Financial crisis of 1997 created the need for North East Asian countries to join to form an ASEAN+3 (South Korea, China, and Japan).

In summary, integration evolved from US centered 'hub-and-spokes' system to balancing nature of regional powers and finally to a current stage of 'multilateral cooperation'.

4. Current Problems of East Asian Integration

Despite the efforts to achieve integration in East Asia, one cannot deny the fact that such efforts have fallen short of the challenges and expectations for a deeper integration.

One main reason for a slow integration in Asia, as stated above, is the **inherently different characteristics of East Asian countries** including different political systems, different level of economic development, different religions, different ethnicity, and last but not least different interpretation of history, remain unresolved. On top of such differences, East Asian countries share a common experience of colonialism in which these countries are very sensitive in the topic of sovereignty. This is the main reason as to why integration in Asia prefers a lower level of integration, one that is based upon the mutual respect for independence, sovereignty, equality, territorial integrity and non-interference on domestic issues.

The second problem is the **'institutional fatigue'** created within the region. As Asia prefers lower levels of integration, the process has been a long and gradual deepening integration with numerous different groups being created and merging, in return creating a complex and complicated map of regional interaction. On top of this, **lack of confidence** between major powers created **'intra and inter balancing'** of the countries adding to the complexity. As more groups are overlapping in their memberships and largely in their areas of focus and discussion, countries are losing the impetus for a deeper integration leading to 'institutional fatigue'.

We see that these two factors 'inherent differences in the characteristics of the countries', and 'institutional fatigue' are the main problems hindering integration in Asia and our primarily focus will be to tackle these two problems.

5. Strategy

The key to making integration possible in East Asia lies primarily on expanding **functional areas of cooperation** before proceeding with higher levels of integration. Providing and increasing tangible benefits in the lower levels of the society will be an essential factor in expanding cooperation to build confidence and creating a viable environment for **deeper levels of integration**. Simultaneously with the expansion of functional areas of cooperation, making **institutional reforms** to make them more efficient and effective is also important which in turn will create synergy effect in the two areas.

In order to solve the problems that we have identified, and tackle those issues, our main strategy is a 'Two-Track' system, where we will implement two simultaneous efforts of reformation on institutional level and expansion of functional areas of cooperation for building confidence amongst the countries ultimately leading to synergy effects of these two areas.

A) Institutional reforms

Institutional reforms will include separation and merging of different numerous groups within ASEAN+3 with overlapping memberships, areas of focus and agenda. We will set a detailed plan with a clear target and deadline of making institutional reforms in 1) political/security areas, including ARF and ADMM+, and EAS (2) economic areas focused on

further integrating bilateral FTAs through concentration and specialization of RCEP (Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership). Such efforts will allow for the countries to overcome ‘institutional fatigue’ by allowing being able to focus clearly on smaller number of groups with specific areas, not overlapping with other areas of focus.

B) Expansion of functional areas of cooperation

The general principles of expanding functional areas of cooperation lies in expanding broader levels of cooperation in lower sectors of society to provide tangible benefits and building confidence amongst countries. We will focus on improving human security through creation of new cooperating areas including environment, natural disasters, epidemics, and maritime security. The following policy recommendation is merely a symbolic example of the many new innovative programs that we have prepared. We would further like to discuss upon the education, cultural exchanges, poverty reduction programs, and plan for management of funds for social security that we have prepared in further rounds.

B-1) Creation of ASEAN Civil Society Liaison Center (ACSLC)

The ASEAN Charter acknowledges the importance of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and its role in the ASEAN community. It is an undeniable fact that the path towards an “Asian Union” cannot be achieved without the peoples. Issues such as development, labor, migration, environment, disaster management, education, youth empowerment, among others, are best understood by CSOs that have direct experiences and information in the field. In order to achieve the ASEAN vision of integration and community building, “ASEAN-led” productive engagement and dialogue “from below” is crucial.

ASEAN Civil Society Liaison Center (ACSLC)

By establishing regional offices in all ASEAN states, the ACSLCs will help towards channeling diverse civil society inputs to the ASEAN Secretariat and other ASEAN processes. The work of the ACSLCs will include creating regional permanent forums and workshops, guided by an issue-based approach. Accompanying each programmatic cycle, ensuring a sustained and focused discussion among stakeholders.

ACSLCs will also provide a platform for public hearings and consultations in order for civil society to provide inputs and creative solutions to the functional cooperation areas of ASEAN. The engagement of civil society with ASEAN is a logical extension and is complementary to its work at the sub-regional, national, local and community levels. What becomes policy at the ASEAN level becomes policy not only at the ASEAN member country level, but also has implications on the lives of local communities and individual citizens. Therefore, the work of the regional ACSLCs, channeling civil society to ASEAN leaders, will contribute to positive changes at the local, national, and regional levels.

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