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## **CICP Policy Brief No. 8**

### **ASEAN and Dialogue Partners**

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## **ASEAN and Dialogue Partners**

ASEAN, created back in 1967, has gone through different challenges and been tested by certain events, for instance the current border dispute between Cambodia and Thailand. During the cold war, it was regarded as a regional mechanism to contain the spread of communism. After the cold war especially after 1999, it has been developing to be an inter-governmental organization represents and serves the common interests of all the ten member states geographically located in a defined Southeast Asian region.

The fundamental objective of ASEAN is to stay neutral and independent from the superpowers' competition and interference. The grouping of small and medium size countries with one voice on regional and global issues can raise the political and diplomatic leverage and bargaining power of the group vis-à-vis other countries and regions.

Since the world order is being shaped by multilateralism and cooperationism, ASEAN has emerged to be a driving force in promoting regional cooperation and integration in the Asia Pacific region. Such central role results from the increasing complexity and unpredictability of regional political security environment emanating from both traditional and non-traditional threats, poverty and development gap, socio-cultural diversity, low level of strategic trust between China and US, and the absence of strong strategic and political linkage among the Northeast Asian countries.

ASEAN is naturally impelled by such regional realities to lead regional cooperation and integration process through creating a common comfortable platform for the regional countries in confidence building and strengthening regional institutions in shaping the behaviors of the states. The key question for ASEAN is how to maintain and maximize the benefits from such role.

Improving relations and cooperation with the key dialogue partners reflect ASEAN's commitment to implement open and extended regionalism. The multilayered regional institutions and mechanisms centering on ASEAN have proved to be sustainable and effective although at a slow pace.

### ***Security cooperation with dialogue partners***

ASEAN, with the hope that security institutionalism can reduce and neutralize threat perception and strategic mistrust, has engaged actively with the dialogue partners at both bilateral and multilateral levels. ASEAN has established a chain of mechanisms including the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), East Asia Summit (EAS), and ASEAN Defense Ministers Meeting Plus (ADMM Plus). The ASEAN Maritime Forum is going to be another important forum on maritime security cooperation between ASEAN and its dialogue partners from the EAS.

These existing security mechanisms and institutions are overlapped and intertwined. They can complement each other well if we can clearly map out different functions and objectives of each mechanism and redesign it in a way that can support each other. More effective collaboration among the mechanisms can generate more concrete results.

Other instruments include the Declaration on the Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality (ZOPFAN-1971), The Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC-1976), the

Treaty on the Southeast Asia Nuclear Weapon-Free Zone (1995), and the ASEAN Political Security Blueprint (APSC-2003), ASEAN Charter (2008). These are the pivotal political security documents directing intra-state relations within ASEAN and extra-state relations between ASEAN with its dialogue partners.

For instance, The Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality (ZOPFAN) Declaration committed all the ASEAN Member States to "exert initially necessary efforts to secure the recognition of and respect for Southeast Asia as a Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality, free from any manner of interference by outside Powers." Moreover, ZOPFAN called on all of Southeast Asian countries "to make concerted efforts to broaden the areas of cooperation which would contribute to their strength, solidarity and closer relationship."

ASEAN needs support from the dialogue partners in professional development and capacity building of the security forces and stakeholders including civil society organizations (CSOs), security sector governance and reform with strong oversight mechanism and participation from civilians, and joint efforts in addressing non-traditional security threats. ASEAN has opened more security cooperation space for the dialogue partners to work together in different areas.

To further strengthen security partnership with the dialogue partners, ASEAN needs to improve some procedures in decision-making process and policy implementation with acceptable transparency level. Transparency, information sharing including intelligence, clarification of strategic intentions, and candid discussion can improve confidence and trust between ASEAN and its partners. From this, ASEAN can play more important role in mediating regional conflicts.

### ***Economic cooperation with dialogue partners***

As the speed of globalization and regionalization is faster than the speed of domestic economic reforms, some countries in ASEAN need technical and financial support from different development partners from both within and outside the region. Poor hard and soft infrastructure is the key issue for the developing countries to accelerate their economic reform process and regionally integrate their economic structure.

Development gap is the most challenging stumbling block in moving towards an ASEAN community. The limited capacity of ASEAN member states to assist each other to reduce the gap, demands more support from the dialogue partners. Japan and China are the two main doers in helping the less developed countries like Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, and Vietnam (CLMV) to catch up with other countries.

The Initiative for ASEAN Integration (IAI) is the most important document attempting to reduce development gap in the region. As a chairmanship of ASEAN in 2012, Cambodia has worked hard to push forward the implementation of the IAI Work Plan 2 with emphasizing on the required support from ASEAN-6 to ASEAN-4.

Infrastructure connectivity in ASEAN and East Asia can only be supported by the dialogue partners of ASEAN especially China, Japan, South Korea, and India. Bilateral and multilateral Official Development Assistance (ODA) can be integrated into realizing the Master Plan of ASEAN connectivity, which is going to be expanded to ASEAN Plus Connectivity.

Since the intra-regional ASEAN trade and investment is still low, ASEAN still rely much on the markets of the dialogue partners. Regional free trade arrangements between ASEAN and dialogue partners have facilitated trade in goods and services. Rising China and India potentially become the big markets for certain ASEAN economies. The creation of extended regional production and services network within East Asia contributes to reduce the production cost, transaction cost, and sustainable chains of supply and demand. ASEAN single market with more than 600 million peoples and an integrated production network attracts more investment from the dialogue partners.

### ***Dialogue partners and ASEAN community building***

In order to realize an ASEAN community, it requires huge efforts from within ASEAN itself and outside ASEAN. The engagement of the dialogue partners is necessary to concretize the three pillars of the ASEAN community.

Different dialogue partners have different level of engagement in different areas with ASEAN. For Australia, China, India, Japan, and South Korea, they emphasize more on economic cooperation and integration while the US and Russia focuses more on comprehensive strategic linkages and EU pays more attention to socio-cultural integration through good governance, democratization and human rights promotion and protection particularly the engagement of civil society organizations in constructing people centered ASEAN.

### ***What ASEAN needs to do more?***

As the core of the expanded regionalism, ASEAN needs to strengthen its unity and have one voice on regional issues; further strengthen and empower regional institutions and mechanisms with the focus on efficiency and effectiveness based on acceptable procedures of decision making process; move faster in narrowing the development divide and creating an effective regional conflict resolution with the integration of confidence building measures and preventive diplomacy; strengthen people's participation in tailoring and implementing policy guidelines of the ASEAN community blueprints.

Bilateral relations between each member state of ASEAN with the dialogue partners need to be part of the overall ASEAN-Plus cooperation framework. National interests need to be balanced with regional interests. Close consultation within ASEAN on common position on foreign policy vis-à-vis the dialogue partners need to be improved in order to avoid misunderstanding since some countries in ASEAN are perceived to be closer to the US and others are closer to China.

Since nationalism and high sense of national sovereignty remain a key constraint and risk to ASEAN, domestic political changes in ASEAN member states should be managed in a way that will not negatively impact on the construction of an ASEAN community.

Starting from its internal strength, ASEAN can engage more effectively with the dialogue partners. ASEAN needs to strengthen its capacity in initiating vision and concrete ideas, steps to enhance institutionalized security and economic cooperation within itself and with the dialogue partners. The principles of sovereignty and non-interference need to be implemented more flexibly in order to empower regional institutions.

The collective identity and norms of ASEAN created over the years on understanding regional common regional security and economic interests need to be integrated and nurtured by the strengthening of the institution. Institutionalization of ASEAN needs to go along with national institutional reform in each member state of ASEAN. Good governance and democracy should be the key principles of ASEAN institutionalization process.

The role of civil society organizations and private sector needs to be strengthened with the political support from the state actors in order to move ASEAN forward with peoples' interests and engagement. By assuming the chairmanship of ASEAN this year, Cambodia has a responsibility to provide a platform for the peoples of ASEAN to interact and engage with the governments.

The creation of the ASEAN Institute for Peace and Reconciliation and the ASEAN Declaration on Human Rights can strengthen peace and stability in the region. It is expected that ASEAN leaders can reach consensus on these issues this year. Any new mechanisms and institutions created within the ASEAN framework need to be open and inclusive to the peoples of ASEAN.

The dialogue partners of ASEAN can play significant in building and strengthening the ASEAN centered regional institutions through technical cooperation, development partnership, confidence building, mutual respect and trust, and equality.

The regional sensitive issues such as the South China Sea need to be addressed properly by taking different interests and strategic motivations into account. The increasing tensions over the South China Sea can divide the ASEAN family and then stir regional tensions. The regional code of conduct is necessary to build trust and confidence between the claimant states. So under the Cambodian chair, ASEAN needs move faster in realizing the code.