Community-Building in ASEAN?:
A Theoretical Approach to Regional Institutionalisation in Southeast Asia*

Eduard Alan Bulut
Fatih University, eduardalan@gmail.com

Abstract

This paper touches upon the recent developments in a regional institutionalisation movement in Southeast Asia. Specific case of ASEAN is considered from the perspective of two integration theories, neofunctionalism and intergovernmentalism, by syllogising significant points from ASEAN policies. The main goal of the paper is to come up with some plausible inferences about the future of regional institutionalisation movement by focusing on ASEAN’s developmental process. Recent actions clearly show that the political aspect of the Association is gradually assuming importance and the façade of ASEAN has undergone a sea change with further integration and enmeshment in economic and political spheres. More importantly, the issuance of ASEAN Charter gave the signs of “shift of the axis”. The paper argues that ASEAN is proceeding towards an EU-style community with this Charter, though there are some voices rejecting this argument. Enabling the establishment of new administrative bodies, the Charter will help to accelerate the “community-building” process. The economic and political conditions are changing in the region, so are the policies and structure of the Association. Key elements of neofunctionalist theory have taken considerable stride and the Association has given further pushes to deepen and widen the on-going integration. Currently, the Association is on the way of building a community that will embrace the Southeast Asian diversity. ASEAN would like to create this community by bridging the development gap between the member states and by uniting ASEAN people under a single flag, motto, anthem, emblem and, most especially, ASEAN identity.

Keywords

ASEAN, Neofunctionalism, Intergovernmentalism, Regional Integration, Southeast Asia, ASEAN Charter

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Introduction

In the aftermath of the World War II, there came out a wave of regional institutionalisation movements in different parts of the world. Having witnessed the catastrophic end of notorious wars at the beginning and half of the recent century, surviving countries launched the quest for initiatives to lay the foundations of regional institutions for the purpose of assuring stability and peace in the long-run. Several attempts emerged and they have made progress to a significant extent. In the same vein, there have been some initiatives in the Asia-Pacific region, such as the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization and the Asian-Pacific Council. However, those in Asia fell short of this goal, therefore initiatives, in the end, proved to be inefficient. Unlike other regional institutionalisation attempts in Europe or in the Americas, those in the Asia-Pacific region disbanded without attaining their objective of promoting long-term peace and stability in their home region.

The underlying reasons of their failure vary, yet there are some outstanding factors that affected their initiatives unfavourably. Firstly, inexistence of any binding cultural, historical, religious, political and economic background is one of the paramount reasons. Comparison to other attempts reveals the significance of these elements in regional integration. To illustrate, as far as the regional institutionalisation in Europe is considered, there are some unifying values embedded within the society and culture. Of them, the Greek tradition of democracy, the Roman tradition of rule of law and justice and the Judeo-Christian tradition of universal humanism are the basic common values that almost all member states share or appreciate. However, in the Asia-Pacific region, there are not such sets of values and traditions that can embrace a large territory, hosting the most populous settlements. Secondly, historical antagonism is another factor that affected the process negatively. Historical antagonism inherited from the colonial experience raised “not only the domestic political cost of external balancing to a formidably high level, but also a strong concern for relative gain and even a vicious security dilemma”. (Hwang, 2003) Thirdly, the fear of domination by big powers was another concern that influenced the process unfavourably. Most countries had the idea that if a regional institution was established, it would be dominated by an external power by intervening in their domestic affairs, which could be a kind of threat against their national sovereignty and authorities.

However, despite the fears of domination, historical antagonism and the lack of some common values, only one initiative has survived: the Association of South East Asian Nations, or briefly, ASEAN. This paper touches upon the recent developments in a regional institutionalisation movement in Southeast Asia. Specific case of ASEAN is considered from the perspective of two integration theories, neofunctionalism and intergovernmentalism, by syllogising significant points from ASEAN decisions and policies. The very hypothetical question that this paper revolves around is whether ASEAN is on the way of a community building like the EU. If so, is it through neofunctionalist or intergovernmentalist way?

The main goal of the paper is to come up with some plausible inferences and possible prospects for the future of this regional institutionalisation movement in Southeast Asia by focusing on ASEAN’s development process. In this regard, a rough comparison to another similar successful example, the European Union, will help to show how much creditable these inferences and prospects could be. In order to make the
arguments comprehensible, elaboration of ASEAN will precede the discussion part, in which the development path of the regional institutionalisation movement is discussed and references are made to a successful example, the European Union.

As the length of the paper does not allow for every critical and central term to be covered herein, explanations of key terms such as neofunctionalism and intergovernmentalism, or the ASEAN Way will not be explained under a separate sub-title, nor the relationship between them. Therefore, within the scope of this paper, there will not be a theoretical section that outlines the basic assumptions of these theories and how they relate to each other. The reader is assumed to have basic knowledge about the rough assumptions of these two integration theories.

**Insight into ASEAN Case**

Founded on August 8, 1967, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations was created by the initiatives of five countries: Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand, Malaysia and Singapore. In the following decades, Brunei Darussalam, Viet Nam, Lao PDR, Myanmar and Cambodia joined the Association. With the goal of ensuring peace and stability in their home region in parallel to the promotion of economic growth and social development, these states united under the umbrella of ASEAN. Hosting approximately 600 Million people, ASEAN has a high nominal gross domestic product figure and GDP per capita.¹

The ultimate aim of this initiative is to accelerate the economic growth, social progress and cultural development in the region in order to achieve peace and stability. When the member states gave their consent for the initiative, they unanimously agreed to comply with the principles set forth in the UN Charter and to adhere to the Rule of Law in practice. Cooperation and collaboration in most spheres of life, from economic, cultural, social, educational issues to technical one, is central to this regional formation. At the heart of all objectives lies the will to provide mutual assistance in know-how and technology transfer so as to accelerate their industrialisation process and to expand their trade volume. Achieving commitment on these objectives, the member states agreed to maintain close relations at international and regional levels.

Signing the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia, the member states adopted a set of principles in order to strengthen their partnership. This set of principles drew the line between member states and highlighted some essential expectations from each other. National issues came to the fore and the states asked for “mutual respect for the independence, sovereignty, equality, territorial integrity, and national identity of all nations”.² Based on this respect, it was emphasised to maintain national existence of all members free from external interferences or intervention in domestic affairs. To avoid domination, the line of equality inter pares and non-interference policy were accentuated in this binding set of principles. Even though the non-interference policy of member states received sharp

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¹ According to the recent statistics (2009), gross domestic product of ASEAN at current prices is US$ 1,496,341.3 Mil in total and, with approximately 600 Million-population, the gross domestic product per capita at current prices corresponds to US$ 2,532.5. ASEAN Official Website, ASEAN Statistics, Selected Key Indicators. Updated as of February 15, 2011. Available at http://www.aseansec.org/stat/Table1.pdf, last access on April 30, 2011.

In the following years, the Association underwent a change, which was accompanied by the proclamation of the ASEAN Community plan. According to this plan, ASEAN Community would be based on three main pillars: Political-Security Community, Economic Community and Socio-Cultural Community. Then the Association launched the Vientiane Action Programme to put their plan into practice. The decisions taken by the Association for deeper and wider integration were the clear signals of change in their original vision at the beginning. Considering the radical changes in neighbouring countries and world politics, it was not surprising for the Association to undergo a sea change.

The rise of the Chinese economy, firstly, is a major reason all by itself for such change of mission. Production and export of China have increased dramatically in recent decades and it continues to grow with high growth rates. The economic aspect of its rise is not the only concern for the Association because there is another essential point: the political influence. Secondly, the concern for the future is doubled with the rise of the Indian economy, which is as threatening as the Chinese economy. According to Goldman Sach predictions, Indian gross domestic product in current prices will have overcome that of Germany by 2015 and of Japan by 2035, thanks to which it will rank the third largest economy in the world. (Wilson and Purushothaman, 2003: p. 3) Similarly, ASEAN members expect that Indian economy will keep rising and it will be a strong regional power in the forthcoming decades. This economic power will enable India to play an important role not only in the region, but also in the world. Thirdly, as the Cold War period came to an end, the relations between the states at global level changed and globalisation gained a significant momentum. Changing relations and globalisation led the countries to interact with each other and to integrate more than they used to. Last but not the least, ASEAN member states were seized with the fear due to the Asian financial crisis in 1997. At varying severity levels, countries in Asia, in general, were affected by the notorious crisis. ASEAN member states, severely hit by the crisis, took some lessons from their bad experience and decided to alter their course of policy. In this regard, it would not be wrong to call this experience a turning point in ASEAN’s institutionalisation and integration history. Because of these reasons, member states adopted a novel constructive policy to establish a community with the goal of preventing any possible financial crisis. They aimed to protect the region and association from future crisis by strengthening the economic cooperation within the community. Moreover, the constructive diplomacy, inherent in this community idea, could help the mem-

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3 In Asian economic discourses, main focus is generally on Chinese economy, rightfully, and the rise of Indian economy is ignored, or it does not receive as much attention as Chinese economy does. However, it should not be sneezed at that the Indian economy ranks the fourth in purchasing power parity, according to the statistics.
Member states cope with increasing competition in all spheres in the region. Thus, bearing in mind the growing economies and political powers and the possible external intervention, the member states altered their route towards a political formation in which they could act collectively.

Launching the ASEAN Charter, the Association introduced a new dimension to the structure and future of their regional institution. The launch of this charter has put the member states under a new legal framework that makes the Association a legal entity. With this Charter, legally binding among the member states, new units emerged within the body of the Association and initiatives for a community gained impetus. It is evident from this document that the Association does not want to keep the status quo of the institution, but to re-structure it by introducing a binding constitution-like document to pave the way for building a real community that is people-oriented and rule-based. (Wanandi, 2006) Thanks to this re-structuring, new legal personality will act more single-mindedly with further integration and consolidation by paying obeisance to common goals, including respect for the rule of law and human rights. In spite of the fact that the member states undersigned the principle of non-interference, the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights, established to hold the member states accountable to the newly-adopted Charter, will supervise the adherence and report non-compliances, if necessary, in case of violation.

As far as the development process of ASEAN, as a regional institutionalisation movement, is considered, it is possible to see the profound transformation from a loosely organised movement to a rule-based and people-oriented community with a constitution-like charter in effect. It is indisputable that the Association has been moving away from its original goals and assuming new roles both regionally and internationally. The initiative, originally starting with economic and technical cooperation and integration, has yet taken another turn, and it has assumed a political and legal role. More importantly, it seems that more innovative and transformative decisions to achieve a real community are yet to come. Apparently, the decisions, taken and to be taken, will contribute much to further deeper and wider integration in every respect. Although there are some arguments claiming that such a community in Southeast Asia is unfeasible and even no more than a myth, ASEAN member states proceed on this route and they have taken a significant stride to date. In this regard, while the Association is seemingly proceeding in accordance with the Hass’ integration theory, neofunctionalism, there are concrete steps that remind of Hoffman’s theory of intergovernmentalism. At this very point, it is critical to question on which truck the Association is: neofunctionalism or intergovernmentalism? Bearing in mind the original intensions set during the infancy of the movement and the steps taken in the course of time, it is conceivably plausible to come up with different ideas that are open to discussion. The primary goal of this paper is to question in which way the ASEAN is proceeding by making references to the previously-developed integration theories. Inquiring what the new units imply, what recent actions mean and what the future hold for ASEAN and for its community idea will be the starting point to make a sound assessment about this process and possibilities.

Discussion

Central to regional institutionalisation, economic integration is the starting point of
such movements. In the areas of low politics and in key strategic economic sectors, integration kicks off and the process of regional institutionalisation proceeds. The initiatives, first, start in the domains of low politics, which is politically the most suitable and practical option. Otherwise, creating a body that necessitates the involvement of high politics will not be politically suitable, as it can cause conflicts and frictions at the onset; therefore, it is necessary to minimise such frictions that may arise in the due course of time through economic prosperity. Initial steps in the domains of low politics will automatically help to build up mutual trust and confidence for further decisions in high politics, so it will be more effective in building up this baseline. It would not be wrong to state that these preliminary steps are one of the characteristics in the infancy of regional integration according to neo-functionalist and intergovernmentalist approaches. Major differentiation on the way of either theory comes into the picture later. In this context, ASEAN member states took their first steps and they united in order to promote their economic activities.

Signed in 1967, ASEAN Declaration was not a baseline for an institution, as it was loose in content. Only a decade later could the Association get into a treaty\(^4\) that would constitute the baseline of an institution for regional integration. The fundamental principles worded in this treaty drew the lines between the member states, or formed the ASEAN way. The principles in consideration are in favour of intergovernmentalist approach, as the emphasis is on non-interference policy. In Chapter I, the member states lay stress on territorial integrity and national identity of all nations and on non-interference in the internal affairs of one another. This phrase itself, non-interference, reveals the limits of cooperation between the member states and discloses the extent of consciousness among the members in creating a new formation. It is evident from the principles set therein that the member states are conscious of launching the economic integration initiative, yet unconscious of its prospective political aspect, though the main drive of their integration was political. On the grounds of their unconsciousness, it took time for the Association, compared to other regional integration examples, to deepen its regional integration and to move forward from low politics to high politics.

The concept of ASEAN way is another point that is worth emphasizing in order to guess the nature of international affairs of member states during infancy period. Making decisions unanimously if possible and quitting collective action if unanimity is out of question, was, and is in most cases, a characteristic of ASEAN. This way of functioning indicates an intergovernmentalist approach, as the member states think that they are not supposed to take their decisions unanimously by consulting one another. In case of difference of opinions, they enjoy their own way and act accordingly, as the inexistence of a higher body to steer their decisions allows them to enjoy this flexibility.

On the other hand, it seems this trend will change in the future, not soon but in the long run, since the new formations give the signal of a shift. With the introduction of ASEAN Community in 2003, the Association ushered in a new formation which is structurally and organisationally different than the original one. According to this community idea, the institution will base upon three pillars: ASEAN Political-Security Community, ASEAN Economic Community and ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community. Apparently, apart from economics which was cen-

\(^4\) Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia (TAC) signed in 1976.
tural to the original purpose, the political and socio-cultural elements claim their place in the agenda of the regional institutionalisation movement. Bearing the neofunctionalist strategy in mind, one may argue that the institution is assuming new responsibilities in other domains. These preliminary steps remind of the spread of neofunctionalist ideas because, according to this theory, integration starting in the areas of low politics and in economic sectors will eventually necessitate political integration, which is the inevitable side effect of economic integration. As the economic activities increase among the sectors, informal actors will get into more economic activities. This enmeshment accompanied by further integration will inevitably necessitate the role of politics in bringing order to informal system. The Monnetian idea of embodying ideas into the realm of politics to have lasting change accelerates this process efficiently. The politics of ASEAN member states already began to proceed in this way; furthermore, they agreed to cooperate in security issues as well. These efforts clearly show that the political aspect of the Association is gradually assuming importance and the façade of ASEAN undergoes a sea change with further integration and enmeshment in economic and political spheres.

Broadening the scope of cooperation and integration, ASEAN member states adopted the Initiative for ASEAN Integration (IAI) in order to narrow the development divide and enhance ASEAN’s competitiveness as a region. As a developing indicator of ASEAN integration, IAI can be classified as Haas “push” for further and deeper integration. According to Haasian neofunctionalist theory, automaticity in economic integration requires a measure of political activism that should give a ‘push’ in the right direction. (Haas, 1968) Steering and coordination from a higher authority will help the institution to undergo deeper and wider integration process, which may become linear, in some cases, in due course of time.

Several further pushes that make the influence of neofunctionalist “spill-over” more apparent followed the IAI in the following years. Self-Certification Scheme, Single Window and Committee on Conformance, Quality and Standards are the other recent pushes to give some impetus to the process. With the goal of facilitating the trade of ASEAN-origin goods, Self-Certification Scheme was launched. Thanks to this Scheme, it became possible for the certified exporters to self-certify the origin of their exports. Piloting, initially, in three member states, the authorities aimed to put the Scheme into effect in other member states. Likewise, ASEAN Single Window is a scheme launched in order to expedite border clearance of goods, to reduce the cost of doing business for traders in ASEAN countries and to promote trade and investment within the Association. ASEAN Committee on Conformance, Quality and Standards is another programme launched to harmonise the standards and to accelerate the registry of regionally-traded goods. It is evident from these initiatives and schemes that the spill-over effect and economic enmeshment is in progress. Lindberg’s definition of spill-over effect describes the ongoing devel-

5 Jean Monnet says “Institutions could embody and solidify ideas into the realm of real politics and thereby promote real and lasting change”.

6 Not a supranational body in ASEAN case, but the governments. Actors in economic sectors act in accordance with this direction and coordination as steered by their governments.

7 Spill-over effect is one of the most important concepts in neofunctionalist theory. Haas says that the creation and deepening of integration in an economic sector would create pressures for further integration within or beyond the sector.
opment in Southeast Asia’s regional institutionalisation so well that it fits in this integration process. Lindberg defines it as “[a] situation in which a given action related to a specific goal, creates a situation in which the original goal can be assured only by taking further actions, which in turn create a further condition and a need for more action.” (Lindberg, 1963: p. 6) As far as the increasing number of efforts made by actors both in economic sectors and governments are taken into account, the whole picture verifies that spill-over effect will play a consolidative role in the future of ASEAN. Moreover, it is not hard to foresee that the member states will get into more initiatives and schemes, apart from those launched to date, in order to strengthen their economies and affairs. These small but firm steps are clear indicators of further actions to come.

More importantly, the issuance of ASEAN Charter gave the signs of ‘shift of the axis.’ It would be plausible to argue that ASEAN is proceeding towards an EU-style community with this Charter, though there are some voices rejecting this argument. One of such arguments came from the Secretary-General of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations at the European Policy Center, Rodolfo C. Severino, in response to the question: Will ASEAN be like the EU? 

Generally referred to as the ASEAN Constitution, the Charter has changed the nature of regional integration efforts and has begun to move the Association away from its original goal. Signing the Charter, ten member states came to an agreement on certain issues that altered the organisational structure of ASEAN. In one respect, the Charter resembles to the Single European Act in that it serves as a firm foundation in achieving the ASEAN Community by attributing it a legal status. Enabling the establishment of new administrative bodies, the Charter will help to accelerate the “community-building” process.

While, apparently, the Association advances towards an EU-style community, there are some opposing ideas in this regard. According to the Malaysian Deputy Secretary General of the Ministry of International Trade and Industry, Rebecca Sta Maria, the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) does not aim to be a Customs Union or a common market like the European Union. What the AEC aims is to realize a competitive and dynamic region which allows free circulation of goods, capital and workforce and free flow of investment and service. Different from a common market, AEC member states will have the flexibility to sign trade agreements individually and to keep their policy making in economic issues. In terms of legally binding economic or trade agreements, the member states may resort to ASEAN way and they may claim that the AEC is not ready to form a common market. However, from the perspective of identity formation for a real community, the Charter defines ASEAN identity under the Article 35 reading that “ASEAN shall promote its common ASEAN identity and a sense of belonging among its peoples in order to achieve its shared destiny, goals and values”. Furthermore, a motto, flag, emblem, day and anthem are the other attention-grabbing elements to build a community. Besides economic terms, these social elements are included in the Charter in order to form a sui generis identity that will help to provide solidarity and to nour-
ish it by minimising the differences under a single flag and anthem. The motto itself declares its ultimate goal of “one vision, one identity and one community”. As far as these efforts and statements are considered, it will be hard to claim that ASEAN still proceeds on its original path and continues to focus merely on economic integration. It is understood from the officially ratified documents that the Association has assumed new responsibilities and has set new goals to achieve. The functioning or structure may not be identical with other examples, but it is an undeniable fact that ASEAN has changed the course of their regional integration initiative.

Another preliminary sign of shift implicitly lies in some proposals within the Charter. The establishment of a human rights body and monitoring for the compliance with the policies that are determined by the ASEAN dispute settlement mechanisms are the outstanding points that imply such change. Of fundamental principles, the non-interference policy has importance and this policy has been reiterated in almost all documents issued by the ASEAN because member states feel sensitivity in this crucial issue and they do not want anyone to interfere in their domestic affairs. This intergovernmentalist approach has constituted the basis of their relations and, in a sense, it was considered to be a major obstacle in achieving a real integration in the region in political terms. However, the Association came up with new proposals in the Charter that drop a hint of a change in this major policy.10

Article 1411 of the Charter, ASEAN Human Rights Body, paved the way for the establishment of the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights, which is a new organ under the body of ASEAN.12 With the Article 27,13 ASEAN shows that

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10 In Wikipedia, there is a reference to this point saying that “Some of the proposals include the removal of non-interference policy that is central to the regional group since its formation in the 1960s, and to set up a human rights body.” They preferred using the phrase “removal of non-interference policy” which sounds a bold statement for the time being. Politically it may not be easy to ‘remove’ this backbone completely, but it may undergo a change through amendment.

11 See ASEAN Charter, Article 14: ASEAN Human Rights Body

1. In conformity with the purposes and principles of the ASEAN Charter relating to the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms, ASEAN shall establish an ASEAN human rights body.

2. This ASEAN human rights body shall operate in accordance with the terms of reference to be determined by the ASEAN Foreign Ministers Meeting.

12 Even though this new organ has been severely criticised for being a ‘pipe dream’ on the grounds of not having any ‘tooth’ to have full implementation, one should pay sufficient attention to this progress. Member states are aware of violations of human rights in the region, that is why they came up with this idea; otherwise, there would be no need to such initiative. As if all countries undersigning numerous international human rights declarations, including that of the UN, comply with all principles, it is expected from ASEAN member states to usher in a new age and from this infant organ to work wonders abruptly. In this case, it should not be the ASEAN’s new organ, but the UN and its mechanism to criticise in the first place, as it is more internationally recognised and legally binding. Bearing in mind the primary goal of ASEAN to promote human rights and to increase awareness in human rights issues, the critics should, in the simplest term, appreciate this initiative for the good of ASEAN peoples and cooperate to raise awareness in human rights issues by taking participative role. Creating a public opinion to encourage the governments to assemble a ‘tooth’ to this ‘paper tiger’ can be an alternative approach to be more constructive.

13 See ASEAN Charter, Article 27, Compliance

1. The Secretary-General of ASEAN, assisted by the ASEAN Secretariat or any other designated ASEAN body, shall monitor the compliance with the findings, recommendations or decisions resulting from an ASEAN dispute settlement mechanism, and submit a report to the ASEAN Summit.

2. Any Member State affected by non-compliance with the findings, recommendations or decisions resulting from an ASEAN dispute settlement mechanism, may refer the matter to the ASEAN Summit for a decision.
the institution cares about “compliance” with the decisions and policies. It is stated therein that the Secretary-General of ASEAN, assisted by the ASEAN Secretariat or any other designated body, will play a monitoring role to see the compliance, and in case of non-compliance, the matter will be brought up to ASEAN Summit for a decision. On the condition that a body has the right to monitor compliance with the decisions on a certain issue in a member state and if the relevant body can bring any non-compliance case to the Summit, would it still be right to claim about the continuity of non-interference policy? By the same token, monitoring the implementation of ASEAN principles concerning human rights in member states and bringing up such issues to the agenda is also a sort of proof to argue that the non-interference policy of ASEAN has undergone a change. The important point of this change is that it will pave the way for further political integration and remove the barriers standing on the way of “transfer of loyalties”. (Risse, 2004) According to neo-functionalism, political integration is the process in which the actors are persuaded to shift their loyalties, expectations and political activities towards a new centre and act as required by this new centre. For the time present, it is extremely early to talk about such transfer, but in due course of time, it will be politically necessary for the member states to do so in order to see their bodies and organs function efficiently.

Resembling ASEAN to European integration, Krause argues that ASEAN was held together by political fear, rather than economic purpose. (Krause, 1999: p. 5) Having the same reasoning with Krause, Angresano confirms that the “EU and ASEAN share in common that they initiated integration for such non-economic reasons”. (Angresano, 2004: p. 923) As for the differences between the EU and ASEAN, he puts that:

“[I]n contrast to the EU, there was no “Asian” solidarity, so that from its inception ASEAN was not established to pursue supranational objectives. ASEAN leaders insisted that economic and political matters be kept separate. Consequently, economic interests of ASEAN members remained national. ... This attitude is reflected in ASEAN’s organizational structure. From its inception ASEAN, as an administrative body, has been quite decentralized so as not to interfere with member nation desire for political independence. Given that ASEAN was not established with any supranational objectives, its institutions have been consciously kept diffuse, decentralized, and under national control.” (Angresano, 2006: p. 919)

The important point in Krause and Angresano’s argument is that the underlying reason of integration in ASEAN is primarily political and they may take further actions to achieve their political goals. Angresano supports his argument by stating that “partly driven by the need to defuse the North Korean threat, ASEAN leaders have been taking steps towards developing a more regional consensus group that would include China, Japan and South Korea”.14 It can be inferred from this argument that as the economic and political conditions change in the region, so do the policies and structure of the Association. The point that is worth emphasising in this argument is that ASEAN has been proceeding towards developing a more “regional consensus group”. Based on this idea, will it be reasonable to ask whether “unanimity” will be replaced by “consensus”?

Conclusion

Considering the developmental path of ASEAN’s regional institutionalisation and integration, it is hard to explain its nature

14 See Angresano, p 921.
with a single theory. Depending on the changes in world economies and politics, the Association has undergone significant changes and has assumed new roles by broadening its sphere of influence. Although there are bold statements favouring the intergovernmentalist approach in functioning, new decisions and proposals made by the Association in its recent documents has given the signal of changes. More importantly, key elements of neofunctionalist theory have taken considerable stride within this period and the Association has given further pushes to deepen and widen the ongoing integration. Currently, the Association is on the way of building a community that will embrace the Southeast Asian diversity. ASEAN would like to create this community by bridging the development gap between the member states and by unifying ASEAN people under a single flag, motto, anthem, emblem and, most especially, ASEAN identity. It is evident from all these goals that ASEAN has been drifting away from its original formation and it has gained a new personality with new organs and targets. In spite of the fact that the documents and discourses reflect an intergovernmentalist approach in their policies, the actions taken by the politics and various developments throughout the integration process paint another picture.

Taking into account the sensitivity of member states to preserve their non-interference policy and their will to build an EU-style community, a system that can accommodate both theories may emerge as it did in the EU. While most of the developments in economic and political spheres in the EU reminds of neofunctionalist theory, there are some mechanisms and bodies that favour intergovernmentalist approach. Or, ASEAN may develop its own way of integration that is different from those prescribed for Europe. After all, these theories are not “one-fit-for-all”; therefore, it is not necessarily considered for either of these theories to fit well with ASEAN regional integration and institutionalisation movement. ASEAN may come up with its *sui generis* path and proceed accordingly. Those to shape the structure and to decide whether to deepen integration in ASEAN are the governments themselves. The final outcome of integration and further actions will be determined by the political will and economic objectives of the member states.

One may argue that the comparisons with the EU may look a little unfortunate, at least for the time being, given the Union’s current problems. Given the failures in adopting the European Constitution, and the financial crises and disagreements over policies, it can be asked what chance ASEAN would have, if the European Union is struggling, especially given the European Union’s role as the standard bearer of successful regional integration? This critical question seems to be a good research subject that could be handled after being convinced of ASEAN’s community-building efforts like the EU. Therefore, further studies may question the chances that ASEAN could have, given the struggles and bottlenecks in the European Union.

All in all, it is the ultimate expectation of all to see a people-oriented institution to serve for the good its people and for their enlightenment. It is an irrefutable fact that human beings have been exploited over centuries under various political systems as stated by Levi-Strauss above. Therefore, people look for a change in this trend and seek solutions that will provide them with various needs, rights and liberties. As far as the creation of regional integrations and institutionalisations is concerned, there lies something good for human beings at the heart of such initiatives. The European Union has, apparently almost, achieved this
goal, increased the standards of its people and favoured their enlightenment by offering various opportunities and by cherishing universal values. In parallel, degree of values assigned to human has increased significantly and exploitation of man has been minimised to an extent. Evidently, apart from the European Union, no other regional institutionalisation initiative has been as successful as ASEAN to date. Similarly, various circles have the same great expectations from ASEAN. Yet, further political actions will (dis)prove Levi-Strauss historic interpretation.
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