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ASEAN Demystified –
A neorealist alliance of
postcolonial states

Supervised by Professor Wolfgang Wessels

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ABSTRACT

Comprising ten Southeast Asian countries, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) is the most prominent regional organisation in the region. ASEAN is the EU's fifth-largest trading partner, and its geopolitical importance continues to rise amid the US-China power contestation. However, ASEAN remains highly ambiguous to many scholars. Not only does ASEAN fundamentally differ from the EU in many aspects, but theoretical and empirical analyses of ASEAN in clear, objective perspectives have been considerably scarce. Thus, this thesis aims to disambiguate ASEAN's decision-making procedures and institutional architecture using neo-functionalist and neo-realist approaches. What are ASEAN's designed functions? How effective is ASEAN in achieving them? What is the relevance of ASEAN today?

The low level of trade interdependence among the member states and the overlapping, multiple free trade agreements in the region show that ASEAN is not a functionalist economic integration project. Also, ASEAN participates in multiple political associations, such as the ASEAN Regional Forum and the Asia-Pacific Economic Co-operation, each serving as power balancing and hedging arenas. The neorealist view explains that ASEAN is a stability-seeking alliance of weak, postcolonial countries in a multipolar world.

The thesis finds that ASEAN is built around the organisation's consensus-based decision-making process and the principle of non-interference in domestic affairs of the member states, collectively known as 'the ASEAN Way'. In-depth case study of the ongoing Myanmar coup crisis reveals that the ASEAN Way is not unique to the region or is strictly adhered to without exception. The consensus-based decision-making process has been a key characteristic of the European Council, and the principle of non-interference is deeply embedded in international law, e.g. Article 2, UN Charter. Furthermore, I argue that the only function served by the ASEAN Way is reinforcing the regime stability of member states. All other values for democracy and the protection of human rights—enshrined in the ASEAN Charter—are secondary.

The thesis concludes by asserting that theories of European integration are indeed valuable for the study of regional integration in Southeast Asia because the newly independent post-colonial states are going through very much the same process that their European counterparts experienced centuries ago. It is thus suggested that other modern theories of regional politics, such as the regional security complex theory and historical institutionalism, could be used in future research of transnational relations in Southeast Asia and perhaps even in other regions with little to no regional integration progress.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), established in 1967, is the oldest and most prominent regional organisation in Southeast Asia (Smith 2004:417). Comprising Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam, over six hundred million people call ASEAN home. Together, the ASEAN member states (AMSs) have been enjoying an average year-on-year Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth of 4.9% in the 2014-2019 period (ASEAN Stats n.d.), as compared to the 2.8% global average and 2.0% European Union (EU) average for the same period (World Bank 2021). The region boasts a rich abundance of national resources and an adequately educated, inexpensive workforce. Furthermore, ASEAN continues to showcase its strategic geopolitical importance even as some 25% of global trade passes through this region (Freeman 2003).

Since gaining independence from European colonialists after Second World War (WWII), the ten Southeast Asian countries have enjoyed an unprecedented time of peace and prosperity in the recent decades. While many factors could have contributed to the region's peace and prosperity, ASEAN deserves undivided attention as a rightful unit of analysis. The member states constantly engage with one another in policy discussions and are now implementing a more integrated common market. Being small, weak powers on the international scene, ASEAN member states frequently use ASEAN as a collaborative platform to make their collective action more effective and amplify their voice vis-à-vis international actors. Moreover, many agree that ASEAN has positively affected securing peace in the region and helping forge a common regional identity for its people.

However, ASEAN remains somewhat mysterious and poorly understood by many, both in and outside the region. Two significant reasons may explain this problem. Firstly, while being one of the oldest surviving regional organisations today, ASEAN has not achieved a high level of policy cohesion politically or economically. Its vital function has been reinforcing national sovereignty and ensuring regime stability of the member states. However, ASEAN states have seldom taken a common stance on pressing issues on the international stage; the AMSs remain divided on many transnational issues, such as the territorial disputes over the South China Sea. Overall, ASEAN exhibits common features of a security alliance rather than a regional integration project, meaning that any attempt to decipher ASEAN as a regional integration project or treat it as a unified policy entity is bound to face tremendous logical and diplomatic challenges. Secondly, while ASEAN does not show common features of a typical regional integration project, such as a

common market, ASEAN itself and member states continue to maintain the rhetoric that ASEAN is an integration project. Granted, Southeast Asian economies continue to proliferate, but their intra-regional trade interdependence remains relatively low, with China, the USA and the EU maintaining their positions as ASEAN's top three trading partners. The ambitious ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) suffers significantly from both the lack of common implementation instruments and the existence of overlapping, multiple trade agreements alongside it. This complex arrangement means that ASEAN is yet to show evidence of real success, such as trade diversion from the rest of the world (Setyastuti et al. 2018).

The result is that not only do AMSs maintain differing views of what ASEAN should be and do, but ASEAN's narrative often deviates from its actual actions, further undermining its effectiveness, credibility and relevance. At the same time, external actors have difficulty deciding how to deal with ASEAN in economic and diplomatic contexts, leading to failed policy decisions in Southeast Asia.

1.1 Research Question and Structure of Thesis

Hence, this thesis aims to answer the question: *What is ASEAN?*

The question is worded as simplistic as possible for clarity's sake, with anticipation that answers to this question would remove the clouds of complexity and confusion so that ASEAN's stakeholders (within Southeast Asia) and external actors (ASEAN's diplomatic partners) are better informed on how to deal with ASEAN and what to expect of it realistically.

Before going any further, we need to recall that the subject in question is an abstract entity; although ASEAN is an association of ten Southeast Asian countries, it is not a total sum of its member states. ASEAN is a representation of its member states, but how much representative capacity it carries and in what aspects need to be clarified. In a similar vein, much debate ensued in the earlier analysis of the European Union, with many scholars concurring that focusing on a particular aspect would only result in narrowly informed, obscured understanding of it, much like several blind men going on to feel different parts of an elephant (Puchala 1972). Furthermore, as an abstract entity, the perception of ASEAN varies significantly depending on the vantage point and the viewer's political and economic interests. An unbiased, meaningful understanding of the regional organisation demands a holistic approach from multiple perspectives (Canovan 1988). Hence, the question *'What is ASEAN?'* needs to be deconstructed for critical analysis from multiple

angles. The second chapter explores international relations (IR) theories relevant to answering this question, followed by the third chapter detailing the methodology and design of the thesis. The thesis then examines the following three sub-questions that derive from the key research question, each corresponding to a separate section of the fourth chapter:

1. *What is ASEAN as a regional organisation?* — Comprising ten member states, ASEAN qualifies as a regional organisation, but what kind? We will consider ASEAN's historical context and institutional evolution to uncover ASEAN's intended and incidental design and function. This section offers a comprehensive overview of ASEAN's institutional architecture, emphasising its decision-making and policy implementation procedures.

2. *What is ASEAN as an economic integration?* — Economic growth in Southeast Asia has been remarkable in the past several decades. However, how much of the region's economic success is attributed to ASEAN's role as a regional organisation? This section examines ASEAN's successes and shortcomings as an economic integration project. Some references will be made with the EU, among others, for comparative analysis.

3. *What is ASEAN as a political security integration?* — There has been no full-scale war in the region as long as ASEAN has been in existence. However, how much credit should go to ASEAN? This section assesses ASEAN's role as a political security integration project. It also explores other possible contributors to the long-lasting peace in the region.

The fifth chapter then examines the ongoing 2021 coup d'état in Myanmar for a case study. By analysing the historical and political dynamics that gave rise to the current events, the thesis uncovers vital features of the nation-building process common to most Southeast Asian countries, explaining why ASEAN's primary function is to reinforce national sovereignty and ensure regime stability members. All other functions—even those enumerated in the ASEAN Charter, such as economic integration, promoting democracy, and fundamental rights—are secondary. We also compare ASEAN's response to the current situation with similar events in the past to elucidate what future actions ASEAN can and is likely to undertake.

In the sixth chapter, the thesis undertakes an in-depth examination into ASEAN's *modus operandi*, also known as the ASEAN Way, to uncover why ASEAN's rhetoric has been inconsistent with its actions and why ASEAN member states hold onto varying interpretations and expectations of ASEAN. Identifying the critical reasons behind

ASEAN's duality, the analysis presents ample evidence to explain ASEAN as a neorealist alliance of small, weak states in an increasingly multipolar world. The thesis then concludes by asserting that theories of European integration are indeed valuable for the study of regional integration in Southeast Asia because the newly independent post-colonial states are going through very much the same process that their European counterparts experienced centuries ago. It is thus suggested that other modern theories of regional politics, such as the regional security complex theory and historical institutionalism, could be used in future research of transnational relations in Southeast Asia and perhaps even in other regions with little to no regional integration progress.

1.2 Literature Review

During its early formative years, ASEAN's primary role was ensuring peace in the region. Amid the bipolar power struggle between the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) and the United States of America (USA), the ASEAN leaders' primary concerns were to keep their countries away from the devastating effects of the Cold War and to bring the persisting domestic political unrest under control. Hence, before the end of the Cold War, ASEAN's role was relatively straightforward. It was essentially a security alliance of newly independent states. The Southeast Asian economies remained small, albeit steady growth, and ASEAN showed no visible political or economic integration at the regional level.

However, when the Cold War ended, ASEAN quickly enlarged to include five more countries, three of whom had just emerged from the devastating Indochina War. This enlargement amplified the existing diversity of ASEAN's membership. The collapse of the USSR signalled the beginning of the USA-dominated unipolar world order. The ASEAN member states, who previously stood together to fight against communist insurgencies, now had to embrace new members who still practiced communism. At the same time, the world saw a sudden emergence of regional organisations, including the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), Mercosur (Southern Common Market) and the EU. It was a significant global trend that ASEAN needed to react to in a meaningful way (Kim 2011). These drastic changes, both endogenic and exogenic, meant that ASEAN had to reform itself for new aims and purposes.

In addition to these changes, the AMSs continued their steady economic growth and emerged as crucial international trading partners. Hence, ASEAN became considerably visible on the world map, becoming a frequent subject of international relations studies by

politicians, policy experts and academicians worldwide. However, interestingly, a significant portion of the analyses concerning ASEAN began to congregate at either end of a spectrum, those who criticise ASEAN's ineffectiveness and lack of institutional capacity as an integration model on one side and those who speak in favour of ASEAN's success in ensuring peace and prosperity in Southeast Asia on the other, the two groupings that Ravenhill (2009:220) labels ASEAN sceptics and ASEAN boosters.

ASEAN sceptics lay their arguments primarily within the realist and neorealist theoretical framework. One of the most notable scholars in this school is Leifer (1989), who employed the realist perspective to explain that the Southeast Asian countries came together under the ASEAN banner to safeguard the integrity of their national sovereignty even though their domestic situations and political preferences varied significantly. Leifer's critical assessment revolves around ASEAN's response to the Kampuchean crisis, the decade-long turmoil that engulfed modern-day Cambodia just after the Vietnam War. He notes that the AMSs usually failed to act in unity and, when they did act together, their core principle of non-interference was either ignored or undermined. Hence, even though ASEAN managed to play the role of a diplomatic party, it never exercised a central significance. Another renowned ASEAN sceptic is Jones (2016), who noted that ASEAN's economic integration was not progressing as scheduled, and its success was still a distance away because, among many reasons, firstly, the progress monitoring of the AEC was largely dependent on highly inaccurate and unreliable self-reporting of member states. Secondly, the project's narrative was clouded with ambitious, self-amplified political rhetorics of member states rather than the reflection of actual collective progress. And thirdly, no real economic benefits, i.e., trade diversion, emerged because the active utilisation of trade preference mechanisms remained difficult for private sector enterprises, and non-tariff barriers to trade continued to increase, despite the recent decrease in tariffs barriers.

On the other hand, two of the most prominent ASEAN boosters are Acharya and Stubbs (2009), who warn that most analyses concerning ASEAN were not theoretically informed. Using the constructivist perspective, they argue that ASEAN member states emerged from very diverse economic, political, social and cultural backgrounds, and ASEAN's regionalism method differed significantly from, for instance, the EU. The central argument is that ASEAN's way of doing things "based on discreteness, informality, consensus building and non-confrontational bargaining styles" is more adequate for the less-developed Southeast Asia countries than "the adversarial posturing, majority vote and

other legalistic decision-making procedures in Western multilateral organisations" (Acharya 2009:64). Asserting that ASEAN should be credited for its longevity, the long-lasting regional peace, ASEAN's role in concluding the Kampuchean crisis, and ASEAN's role in positively engaging with China to keep the rising power included in the multilateral global order, Acharya (2007) argues that imposing Western theoretical standards on ASEAN may not be appropriate.

Acharya and Stubbs have been monumental in their constructivist contribution to theorising ASEAN, with many Asia-based scholars expressing their appreciation for the positive effects of ASEAN's unique set of norms. An intriguing yet extreme example of this is the argument forwarded by Mahbubani and Sng (2017). They assert that ASEAN's peace-seeking tendency has ensured the continued peace and prosperity in the region and served as an indispensable catalyst for China's peaceful rise. Although they argue that ASEAN is a modern miracle that deserves the next Nobel Peace Price, their argument remains self-reinforcing rhetoric without clearly distinguishing the different roles of the individual states, ASEAN institutions, and the broader global political dynamics.

Funston (1999) also notes that one should not use a Western theoretical approach to dismiss ASEAN as a failure for two main reasons quickly. Firstly, it is argued that ASEAN proved its ability to rise to new challenges during the many cross-border conflicts in the 1970s that involved Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia and the Philippines. Secondly, many critical judgements against ASEAN are prone to uninformed misunderstandings. Delving into detailed accounts of ASEAN's role in making the member states' voices heard in the international arena and forging cooperation during the Asian financial crisis, among other things, Funston warns that labelling ASEAN a failure could simply be the result of a misinformed analysis.

Meanwhile, other scholars tend to take a middle-ground between the realist ASEAN sceptics and the constructivist ASEAN boosters. Davies (2018), for instance, notes ASEAN's enigmatic nature, saying that the more one looks, the harder it is to attribute the region's success to ASEAN in a convincing way. He acknowledges that ASEAN's normative aspect, particularly the coming together of the Southeast Asian leaders, diplomats and experts, and the rhetorics and narratives surrounding those meetings, may yield more positive effects than realists would suggest.

Narine (2009) also notes the wide range of academic spectrum concerning ASEAN, on which realists tend to downplay the institutional role of ASEAN while constructivists overestimate ASEAN's normative contribution over the lack of material progress. Hence,

he takes on a more comprehensive approach to explain the realist-constructivist divide by using subaltern realism, a theory drawing from three classical traditions: classical realism, historical, sociological studies of state-building in Europe and the normative insights of the English School of international relations. According to Narine (2009:371), subaltern realism assumes that developing world states are weak, i.e., institutionally and politically limited in their capacity to assert authority, and therefore resort to practising a form of realism, motivated primarily by their nation-building concerns.

Despite the segregation of scholars in two major camps, with others lingering somewhere in between, most appear to accept that the EU and ASEAN are two very different beasts. The question is more on how to make sense of the difference. The dominant realist argument seems to hint that ASEAN needs to emulate some features of European integration to be more effective in creating a common market. This is not necessarily because the European model is the most advanced in the world but because the European experience, which had many ups and downs in its own right, offers vital lessons applicable elsewhere despite contextual differences. On the other hand, many constructivists seem to contend with ASEAN's *modus operandi*, claiming that it is more pragmatic, flexible and fair than the EU's hard institutionalism. However, as we shall see in the following chapters, the constructive narrative warrants a careful, objective and critical examination because a clear distinction must be made between facts and rhetorics that deviate from facts due to distortions in the subjective interests of stakeholders.

Hence, despite the existence of many earlier attempts to theorise ASEAN, this thesis aims to address this theoretical gap surrounding the realist-constructivist divide by critically dissecting ASEAN into objectively verifiable research units: the institutional, economic, political and normative aspects of ASEAN integration. In doing so, rather than adopting one particular theory and trying to test whether ASEAN fits that theory, I will examine the hard facts, evaluate the narratives and interpretations of policy actors, scholars and the press, and then test the logics of relevant theories to verify which theory explains ASEAN the best.

2. THEORIES

In trying to understand the nature, function, and expectations surrounding a political entity, such as ASEAN, it is crucial to determine the scope and aspect of the study. Using appropriate theoretical models is crucial not only because every organisation is unique—though the degree of such uniqueness is a matter of another debate—but because taking

every event, policy action, and press release at face value offers no real benefit in generating a common pattern of behaviour concerning the organisation and its stakeholders. Hence, the usability of a theoretical model must pass a three-prong test:

1. The model must fit into the critical observations of the real-world phenomena within the scope of interest. A model is considered a good fit if the phenomena check out all or most of the critical assumptions and logics of the model.

2. Bearing in mind that each theoretical model also has a primary area of focus, we must ensure not to commit the error of obscurely distorting the selected model in usage, such as trying to use a constructivist approach to explain hard power interstate relations.

3. The model must be able to generate a considerable level of simplicity.

Because the whole point of using a theoretical model is to identify a grand recurring pattern that can explain the underlying dynamics behind the actual phenomena, the selected model must be able to simplify the real-world events into analysable units reliably. This process, however, inevitably means that specific details would be lost, and analysis at very low timeframes may turn out to be less reliable. In short, as great as the number of regional organisations in existence, so great is the number of theoretical models that can explain them in a perfect fit. Hence, in this field of comparative regional studies, where we attempt to understand the dynamics of a particular regional organisation by drawing common mechanisms that are also found to be applicable elsewhere in the world, it is simply not possible that one theory can explain every feature and every problem of ASEAN.

As was briefly seen in the preceding section, some scholars have argued that ASEAN cannot be adequately explained using Western IR theories because of the vast differences between Southeast Asia and Europe, particularly in regards to the different domestic political structures and economic development levels, as well as social and cultural differences. Some also take on the position that the current international order consisting of nation-states as key actors is a European postcolonialist invention. Any attempt in using classical Western theories to explain the phenomena occurring outside Europe is likely to be inadequate and invasive. Likewise, several Western scholars have argued that the European integration model cannot be applied elsewhere primarily because of the EU's *sui generis* nature, its unique institutional character that does not fit into the traditional understanding of IR. According to this argument, European integration is an

experience unique to Europe, and hence the theories that emerged in European studies, by design, can explain the European experience but may render ineffective in trying to explain other regional integration projects (Van Langenhove 2013).

Nonetheless, many scholars have used theoretical models of European studies to explain regional integration projects outside Europe. Mattli (1999), for instance, used two fundamental logics of European integration, namely that regional integration can be successful if the member states are economically interdependent so that the perceived economic gains are significant, and if the political leaders are willing and able to accommodate demands for regional institutions. Schneider (2017:12.3) uses a similar approach to build a broader theoretical framework that emphasises the decision-making calculus of political leaders who must carefully calculate whether they can remain in office without pursuing further regional integration or whether benefits of regional integration, such as increased trading with other members states, are helpful in their regime survival (see Figure 1). Such analytical frameworks prove to be useful not only in projecting whether a given regional integration organisation is likely to succeed but also in explaining why specific institutional designs are adopted, one such question being why ASEAN governments chose to pool authority among themselves in member-state bodies rather than delegating it to an independent body, as in the EU.
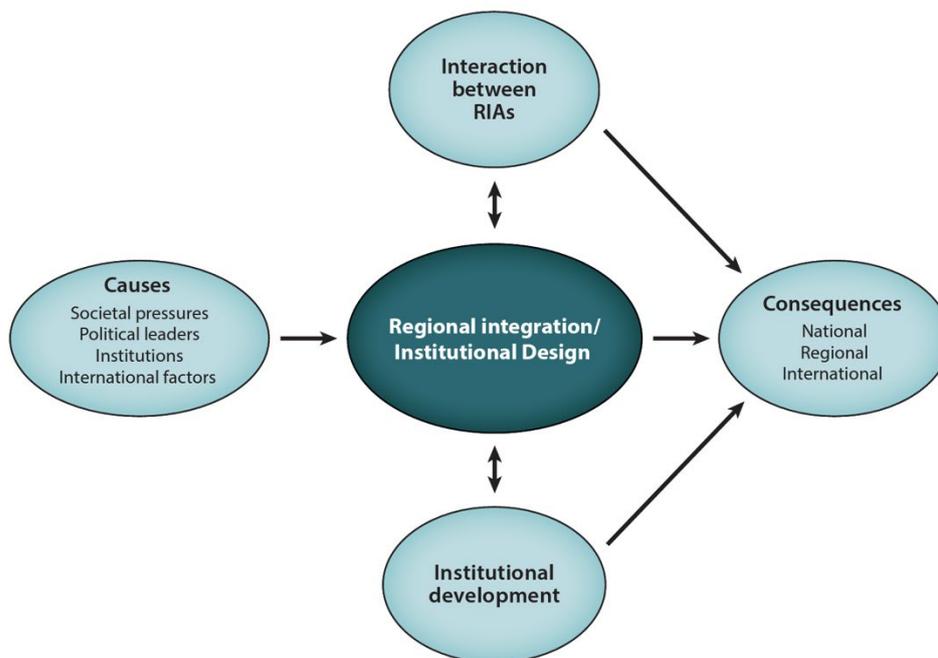

Figure 1. An Analytical Framework for Regional Integration Research

(Schneider 2017)

The analytical perspective used in this thesis is grounded on the fundamental assumption that, while significant differences exist between the EU and ASEAN, there are human behavioural patterns common to all regional organisations. A considerable portion of this thesis is devoted to identifying and verifying such commonalities across the EU and ASEAN. At the same time, an equal amount of effort is given to recognising and analysing conditions and features that are genuinely unique to ASEAN. This is why the use of classical integration theories is essential in this thesis. This thesis employs neorealism and neofunctionalism, two classical integration theories that have been fundamental in European integration studies. For a cohesive comparative utilisation of these theories, the thesis uses the ALIS-schema, enumerating assumptions, logics, institutions and strategies of each theory, where:

- Assumptions are major underlying premises of a theory,
- Logics build upon the assumptions and elaborate on the dynamics of resulting interaction,
- Institutions refer to the roles and functions assigned to primary institutions of the regional organisation (RO), and
- Strategies are the practical derivatives of the theory that can be useful in developing scenarios of future development.

2.1 Neorealism

Neorealism is based on the classical realist assumption that human nature is inherently self-serving and evil. In a constantly warring world, where every man stands for himself, a Hobbesian social contract, much like in the form of a Leviathan, is required to stop everyone from killing all others. When used in the study of the interaction between states, realism is highly applicable in the Westphalian system, characterised by the self-determination and independence of each state, the equal sovereign power of each state in the international system, and the principle of non-intervention in the internal order of other states. In the view of Morgenthau (2005), the constant struggle among nations can be minimised, but not eliminated, only through the endless competition among the nations, because there is no higher authority above the nationhood. Neorealism, forwarded by scholars such as Kenneth Waltz and John Mearsheimer, share the same assumption that states are key actors in the anarchic international system, main differs from classical realism in the aspect that states are primarily concerned with maintaining security for their survival rather than maximising their power against all others, i.e., security dilemma. This

assumption places a heavy emphasis on the international order dominated by superpowers and the importance of balancing of power.

Strategies
- Regional legitimacy based on nation state
- Limited sovereignty transfer to regional organisation
- Allow veto structures to safeguard national interests

Assumptions
- Negative assumptions about human nature (*homo homini lupus*)
- Natural state of conflict and war (*bellum omnium contra omnes*)

(Neo-) Realism

Logics
- Security dilemma
- Zero-sum game
- Balance of power
- 3 forms of balancing: *antagonistic, cooperative, integrative*

Institutions
- Nation-states as 'real actors' (principals)
- Institutions as 'agents' - no autonomous power of their own
- Heads of state/government as most important decision-makers

Figure 2. (Neo-) Realism ALIS Schema

Simply put, in the presence of competing superpowers, often with unprecedented military might, smaller states must align themselves in an arrangement that can ensure their security. Balancing is one option, whether small states, often through alliance-building, form a bloc of comparative power that another superpower cannot quickly squash. Another option is bandwagoning, where states align themselves with a perceived aggressor, thereby minimising the possibility of devastation. There are three primary forms of balancing:

1. Antagonistic balancing is essentially a continued competition for power in the escalation ladder, exemplified by the US-USSR power game during the Cold War.
2. Cooperative balancing describes a cooperative performance of competition among a group of states who have not entirely abolished competition as long as differences among them are not too significant to prohibit cooperation for their state survival.

3. Integrative balancing occurs when the participating countries narrow the divergences to a level where cross-border institutionalisation becomes possible.

The neorealist view understands the European integration project, which initiated to secure peace after WWII, as a form of integrative balancing among the participating European states. Neorealism also explains that Europe was granted a time of relative peace to experiment with regional integration and economic growth during the Cold War period. Neither the US nor the USSR, who continued to amass their military capabilities, could stage full-scale attacks on the other because neither could be entirely sure of the outcome, considering the existence of nuclear weaponry (Mearsheimer 1990). However, since neorealism's fundamental assumption lies in the principal role of the nation-state, it should be remembered that the European project was possible only because it served the member states' national interests. Even though a portion of national sovereignty was pooled for economic integration, the nation-states still dictated what kind of integration would be possible. Hence, integration began only with 'low politics' such as trade and agriculture, where policy integration was perceived as less infringing on national sovereignty than other 'high politics' areas such as defence and foreign affairs (Hoffmann 1966). Another important aspect of the neorealist explanation is that: *"if states share a common interest and undertake negotiations on rules constituting a collaborative arrangement, then the weaker but still influential partners will seek to ensure that the rules so constructed will provide sufficient opportunities for them to voice their concerns and interests and thereby prevent or at least ameliorate their domination by stronger parties"* (Grieco 1995:35).

2.2 Neofunctionalism

Neofunctionalism, which has been fundamental in explaining the success of European integration, is another theory used in this thesis to test ASEAN's functional design and effectiveness. Classical functionalism emerged as a response to the catastrophic devastation of the two World Wars. David Mitrany (1994), regarded as the central author of functionalism, argued for an alternative to the state-centric world order, where governments would strive to meet the everyday needs of their citizens rather than acting as self-serving principals, with the development of 'functional' and 'technical' international agencies replacing 'political' and 'security' international organisations. The key assumptions are that humans are, rather than being self-centred and evil, rational and cooperative and that collective problem-solving leads to greater societal welfare in a

positive-sum game. Taking on the functionalist assumptions, neofunctionalist scholars such as Ernst Haas emphasised the importance of EU institutions, particularly in regards to the shift of loyalties, whereby states increasingly forego the option of making decisions independently of each other but instead choose to delegate the decision-making process to new central organs and, at the same time, political actors are invariably persuaded to shift their expectations and political activities to a new centre (Lindberg 1963:6).

Strategies
· L'Europe des projets
· Monnet Method

Assumptions
· Human begins are essentially cooperative and act rationally
· Rejection of the state and power concept
· Rational interest in solving jointly common problems

(Neo-) Functionalism

Logics
· Form follows function
· Spill-overs (three forms)
· From single market to political union
· Expertocracy
· Transfer of loyalty and sovereignty

Institutions
· Technocracy (e.g., European Commission, ECB)
· Close interaction between administration and interest groups

Figure 3. (Neo-) Functionalism ALIS Schema

Another essential feature of neofunctionalist analysis is the notion of spillover, the way in which the creation and deepening of integration within one economic sector create pressure for further economic integration within and beyond that sector (Haas 2004). Spillovers may come in one of the three primary forms:

1. Functional spillover refers to the phenomenon whereby the effective implementation of one policy area, such as a single market, requires policy coordination in other areas, such as health and safety. Collective decision-making

initiated in one particular area thus tends to more collective decision-making in other related areas.

2. Political spillover refers to the process whereby policymakers and expert groups are continually exposed to the supranational learning and decision-making process and gradually lean towards preferring supranational institutions for greater policy effectiveness and legitimacy.

3. Cultivated spillover focuses on the autonomous role of new supranational organs that take on greater importance as guardian of common interests while serving as a mediator between varying national interests.

2.3 Constructivism

Another theory occasionally referenced but not employed as a critical theoretical framework in this thesis is constructivism. Constructivism emerged in EU studies only in the late 1990s as an alternative to the existing integration theories that tended to narrowly. Claiming that reality is socially constructed, constructivism opposes the rationalist perspective employed by neorealism and neo-functionalism and states that human behaviour is embedded in social structures. Although constructivists do not outright dismiss reality as an illusion, they emphasise the importance of norms and ideas that influence each individual to decide what actions are deemed right and appropriate, i.e., the logic of appropriateness. Constructivism is not a full-fledged integration theory, but it does offer valuable insights into explaining certain aspects of regional integration. One notable example is the notion of the Normative Power Europe which explains that the EU not only follows a specific set of norms within its institutional behaviour but also has a tendency to influence external polities to adopt and emulate the common EU norms such as democracy and the protection of fundamental rights (Manners 2002).

3. METHODOLOGY

The research question 'What is ASEAN?' is in itself multifaceted and multilayered, just as ASEAN is. Uncovering the top layer of ASEAN's ambiguity, we must dissect ASEAN into smaller, identifiable research units rather than trying to digest the whole organisation in one sitting. Hence, the thesis will dissect ASEAN into four significant aspects: ASEAN's institutional design as a regional organisation, ASEAN as economic integration, ASEAN as a political security integration, and ASEAN's overarching norm.

Next, each smaller research unit will be examined in three perspectives: history and design, intra-ASEAN interaction, and extra-ASEAN environment. Throughout this process, deliberate efforts will be made to distinguish the actual role played by ASEAN against any other factors that are directly attributable to ASEAN member states or third countries that act independently of the ASEAN framework. A similar distinction will also be made between ASEAN's actual actions against any rhetoric, whether originating from within the ASEAN framework or put forward by ASEAN member state leaders, which may interfere with an objective analysis of facts.

3.1 Hypothesis and Variables

The primary hypothesis this thesis aims to test is: *Despite the recent attempts for closer integration, ASEAN remains primarily a neorealist security alliance of weak, small, postcolonial states.*

Independent variables are various components and aspects of ASEAN, including its institutional architecture, decision-making procedures, ASEAN's exclusive competences, the effectiveness of the ASEAN Economic Community, the effectiveness of the ASEAN Political-Security Community, and the function of the ASEAN Way. As tested against the neorealist and neofunctionalist theoretical models, the *dependent variable* is the nature of ASEAN as a regional integration project and the resulting implications for its member states and external actors. The theoretical and empirical analysis data include academic and journal publications, ASEAN official statements, national government statements and announcements of ASEAN member states, external actor statements, civil society organisation statements, and news articles. For the most part, the thesis uses qualitative literature review while one whole chapter is devoted to a case study of the ongoing coup d'état situation in Myanmar.

This case study is an invaluable component of this thesis because it deals with the most recent government statements, news reports, and scholarly debates concerning a domestic political situation that has recently emerged and is still ongoing. The 2021 Myanmar coup d'état is vital in ASEAN studies for three fundamental reasons. Firstly, it marks a sudden regime change in an AMS and dramatically alters the context upon which other AMSs interact with Myanmar and how ASEAN's response is communicated to the actors outside ASEAN. Secondly, the dynamics and implications of the coup form a constituent part of Myanmar's incomplete nation-building process, which all other AMSs also have experienced, albeit with some differing outcomes. The story of power

contestation within the national borders and the reinforcement of national sovereignty through diplomatic endorsement at the ASEAN level is a recurring theme in all ten AMSs. Hence, the Myanmar case study is vital in revealing the domestic and regional dynamics that underline the interaction among AMSs and ASEAN's role in the global order. Lastly, in addition to overturning a democratically elected government, the Myanmar military group has killed over 800 civilians and illegally detained over 5,300 persons over a four-month period between 1 February and 30 May 2021. This is by far the gravest act of violence committed by a military group against civilians in Southeast Asia's recent history. Hence, how the other AMSs engage with the Myanmar junta, either bilaterally or through the ASEAN framework, to reverse the course of illegitimate violence and render humanitarian assistance to the citizens is of great interest for students of ASEAN regional integration.

3.2 Theoretical Approaches

This thesis employs neorealism and neofunctionalism because both theories are positivist in design. As long as adequate empirical data exists, the applicability of either theory can be objectively verified. Each theory contains a set of critical assumptions and logics, which can be tested against empirical evidence to verify whether ASEAN's nature is neorealist or neofunctionalist in a given context. For instance, when analysing the policy implications of the AEC, if evidence exists to support that the policy decisions concerning the AEC are based on the AMSs' concerns of security dilemma in a perceived zero-sum-game and if progress towards the AEC shows signs for balancing or bandwagoning of power, the economic integration aspect of ASEAN can be said to take on the neorealist model. On the other hand, if the AEC meets most of the neofunctionalist logics with evidence to support the existence of spillover effects, the emergence of technocracy or expertocracy, and some transfer of loyalty and sovereignty to a new centre, then ASEAN's economic integration can be said to be neofunctionalist in nature.

It should also be mentioned that neorealism and neofunctionalism are two theories that originate from European studies. It is not the primary aim of this thesis to make parallel comparisons between the two regional organisations and evaluate whether ASEAN excels or underperforms compared to the EU. The thesis does make occasional references to the EU but only to simplify and verify the theoretical assessment of ASEAN. One of my assumptions is that, even though Europe and Southeast Asia have very different historical and cultural backgrounds, there is some universality in IR theories. How much of human

behaviour is genuinely universal and how much is unique to each region is a matter of another debate. Nonetheless, it is expected that nations and their citizens share a certain level of similar behavioural patterns around the globe, especially because every country is subject to the exact effects of the global order, i.e., globalisation and the steady rise of regionalisation. Therefore, analysing ASEAN with classical IR theoretical models is expected to separate empirical elements from the non-empirical and explain the ASEAN phenomenon is well-established terminologies and concepts free of ambiguity.

3.3 Design Limitations

Undoubtedly, there is no avoiding ASEAN's dualistic nature; ASEAN's rhetoric and reality do not always coincide. Nevertheless, some explanations will still be necessary to elucidate why such hybridity exists. Likewise, the claims and arguments of numerous academicians who emphasise the importance of constructivist and normative aspects of ASEAN will need to be recognised and considered appropriately. The thesis does make a modest attempt at addressing this constructivist aspect of ASEAN, particularly in the section examining the nature and implications of the ASEAN Way. However, I have decided to maintain a rationalist view using both neorealism and neofunctionalism as my key theoretical frameworks for this thesis.

It is not my intention to undermine the usefulness of constructivism or disregard all constructivist explanations concerning ASEAN. Developed initially as a social theory, constructivism has helped broaden the view of the existing rationalist IR theories. Since the fundamental questions of IR concerning the nature of conflict and cooperation among states in the anarchical world are better answered with both empirical and non-empirical explanations, the usefulness of constructivism ought not to be dismissed from the onset (Fearon & Wendt 2002). Nevertheless, many scholars remain critical of constructivism due to its lack of meta-theory, as manifest with 'the near absence' of distinctive testable hypotheses and methods to test such hypotheses against alternative theories or a null hypothesis of random state behaviour (Moravcsik 1999:670). For this reason, trying to bridge the rationalist-versus-constructivist gap is beyond the scope of this thesis. The two perspectives are essentially two different perspectives, looking at the same subject from different vantage points.

Hence, as is an inherent limitation of any analysis involving IR theories, this thesis may be limited in arriving at one single grand theory to explain everything surrounding ASEAN. A theory, by definition, is a model that seeks to simplify only a specific aspect of

a subject. Like a net thrown into the water, a theoretical model can capture not the whole but only a limited portion of a sample. Also, all polities, including ASEAN, are moving targets. A theoretical perspective that seemingly explains the subject at one specific time or context may prove inapplicable at another time (Hoffmann 1959).

Furthermore, more often than not, theories tend to be placed in a feedback loop with the polity in question. While a theory can be used to explain why a polity behaves in a certain way, it is also possible that the polity intentionally adopts a particular theory to decide the course of its actions. This increases the chance of theoretical self-prophecy, a situation where theoretical analysis does not contribute to the informed projection of the polity's future actions, but instead, the polity intentionally takes actions to match its theoretical expectations.

In short, this thesis will use literature review and case study to assess various sub-components of ASEAN, to determine whether ASEAN is essentially neorealist or neofunctionalist. The thesis seeks to elucidate the complexities surrounding ASEAN by using two well-established integration theories. However, the thesis is not entirely free from the structural limitation of analyses that use IR theoretical frameworks, particularly given that a considerable portion of academic discussion concerning ASEAN is in the constructivist school, a position that can only be fully appreciated non-rationalist perspective.

4. ASEAN
4.1 Historical Context
Situated between the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean, the region we now call Southeast Asia has played a significant role throughout history. In terms of geography, the tall-standing Tibetan mountains shield the region from torrential downpours in the north, taming the much-needed water into many steadily flowing rivers, including the Mekong, which continue to feed millions with abundant rice plantation to this day. On the other hand, the region's equatorial location has allowed consistent, predictable oceanic currents, making it possible for populations in the region and passing merchants to traverse the region without much effort. This geo-climate setting has allowed the region to flourish. However, with most of the inhabitable land scattered across the seas in the south and isolated by high mountains in the north, the civilisation that emerged in the region flourished in relative peace without infringing upon one another, evidenced by the vast diversity of ethnicity, languages and culture we see today.

However, the arrival of Europeans began to change many aspects of the traditional lifestyle in the region. The Portuguese and the Spanish arrived in the 16th century, conquering Malacca and the Philippines, respectively. Over the following centuries, the Dutch colonised modern-day Indonesia, British Malaysia and Myanmar, and the French Indochina, which corresponds to modern-day Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam. While the tactics used varied from one territory to another, the colonisation process yielded similar results across the region. Western scientific ideas and commercial practices were imported into the region. The Europeans introduced a host of foreign species, such as rubber and coffee, which originated in South America, to grow in massive plantation complexes. Naturally, European colonisation put Southeast Asia on the world map, turning the region into a vibrant economic hub, attracting settlers from other regions. Examples of such colonialism-induced migration include the Chinese diaspora, who began to control commercial hubs across the region, and the Southern Indians, who the British used for the much-needed manpower in plantations and construction in the colonies.

Before colonisation   After WWII
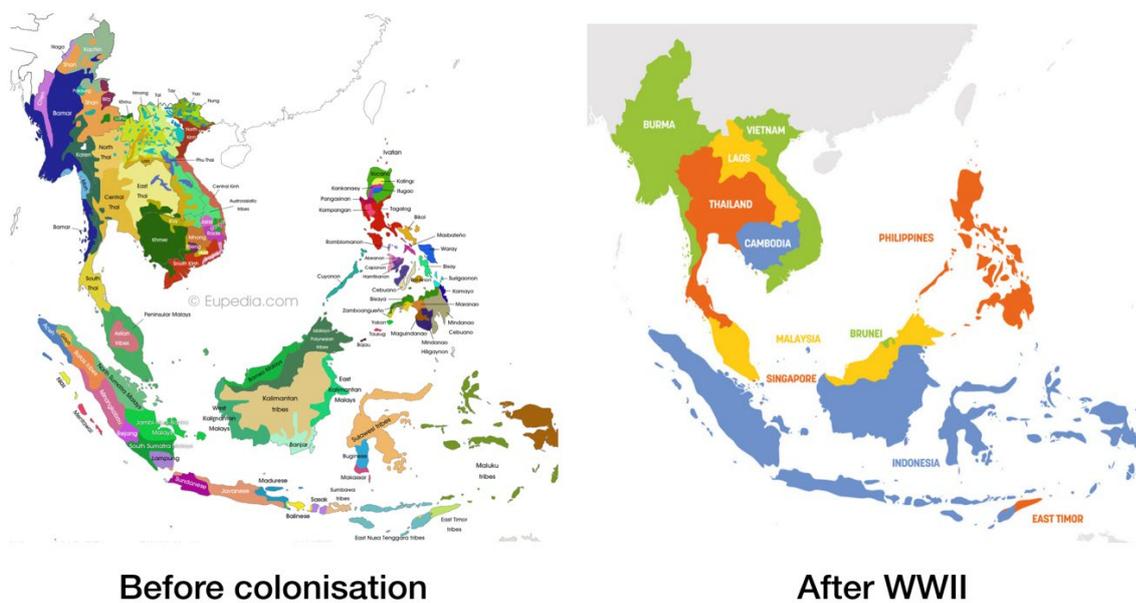
Figures 4. Emergence of National Borders across Southeast Asia
(One Family Project 2017)

As Europeans began to draw rigid borders across the region—which would later become permanent national boundaries after the end of WWII (see Figure 4)—and assimilate the local settlements into distinct administrative and educational bureaucratic arrangements, those ethnic groups that previously considered themselves different and

unrelated were now artificially made to interact in greater proximity and frequency. A subtle sense of shared identity began to form in each of the colonies; traditional settlements scattered across thousands of islands in the southern part of the region, for instance, began to identify themselves collectively as the Dutch East Indies. The sudden Japanese invasion in all Southeast Asian countries during WWII served as another important milestone in Southeast Asian history. Not only did these non-Western soldiers drive the Europeans away, but they inflicted violence and oppression on the locals at unprecedented scales. Nationalism—an idea of European origin—began to take root quickly as people organised themselves within territories previously grouped by Europeans. Resistance against the Japanese military intensified towards the end of WWII. When the Europeans returned after WWII, the local sentiment had changed drastically. The people wanted independence.

In all Southeast Asian countries, except Thailand, which was never colonised, postcolonial independence movements were a long and devastating struggle. The most famous example is perhaps the Indochina Wars across modern-day Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam. The Wars underwent three distinct phases. During the First Indochina War (1946-1954), the Vietnamese nationalist Viet Minh forces fought to drive away from the Japanese and the French. The result, however, was decided at the 1954 Geneva Conference, with Vietnam being divided into two halves: Soviet-backed North Vietnam and US-backed South Vietnam. The Second Indochina War (1955-1975), commonly known as the Vietnam War, marked the devastating clash between North Vietnam-based Viet Cong forces, seeking to 'liberate' South Vietnam and create a united communist Vietnam, and the democratic South Vietnam Army supported by the US, South Korea, the Philippines, Australia, Thailand, and other anti-communist allies. After killing some four million souls, the war came to an end only when the US withdrew. However, unrest in Indochina continued onto the Third Indochina War (1975-1991), involving Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, Thailand, and China, each aiming to consolidate their influence in the region.

Communism was an essential factor in all Southeast Asian countries during their early nation-building years. In Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam, communism took root due to the Indochina Wars, as seen above. In other maritime countries, communism also acted as a real force. For instance, in Indonesia, the Soviet-backed Communist Party of Indonesia (PKI), founded as early as 1914, served as an essential contributor to the nationalism and independence of Indonesia. The PKI's popularity grew steadily, garnering a significant 16% share in the 1955 elections and attracting three million members by 1960. However, in 1965, the PKI allegedly staged a coup d'état, a failure of which led to the bloodiest mass

killings in Indonesia's history, leading to the death of more than a million casualties and the eventual dismissal of the PKI. Similar power contestation took place in every Southeast Asian country. The narrative differs depending on which elite group or ideology triumphed in each country. As long as the Vietnam War continued, communism was seen as a critical source of national instability in Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia and the Philippines. While it still remains a matter of debate whether communism was purely expansionist and acted as a destabilising force rather than a constructive one in these countries, the fact remains that communism lost power contestation in these countries.

On 8 August 1967, heads of the five Southeast Asian states gathered in Bangkok and signed the ASEAN Declaration, also known as the Bangkok Declaration, establishing the Association of Southeast Asian Nations. While the Declaration provides a long list of the organisation's aims and purposes (see Box 1), the most prominent area of common interest was ensuring regime stability against all contesting powers, including communism.

It should also be noted that the year 1967 proved to be a crucial timing. Indonesia saw the 1965 mass killing and the complete purging of the communist PKI, after which General Suharto emerged as the acting president in March 1967. Suharto's rise to power ended Indonesia's ongoing territorial disputes with Malaysia and Singapore and ushered in the politically and economically stable period known as the New Order. Suharto eventually became Indonesia's longest-ruling dictator until May 1998. In the Philippines, the liberalist Macapagal lost the 1965 presidential election to Ferdinand Marcos, who emerged as the longest-serving president until February 1986, establishing the so-called constitutional authoritarianism. As for Malaysia and Singapore, after a lengthy, cumbersome decolonisation process, the former British colonial territories of Malaya, Singapore, North Borneo and Sarawak were merged on 16 September 1963, establishing Malaysia.

However, the newly independent country continued to undergo a series of unrest, particularly with the 1964 Race Riots in Singapore, which led to 23 deaths and hundreds more injured. The racial tension between the politically dominant, more populous Malays and the economically dominant but less populous Chinese persisted throughout Malaysia for much of the 1960s, serving as a critical reason for Chinese-dominant Singapore to be separated from Malaysia in 1965. The domestic political climate remained fragile in Singapore and Malaysia, but the relative stability allowed Singapore to prosper under the long-lasting political dominance of Lew Kuan Yew, who served as Prime Minister until November 1990. The situation in Malaysia stabilised only in September 1970, with the appointment of Abdul Razak Hussein as the country's second Prime Minister, who is today

known as the Father of Development. During the same time frame, Thailand was still witnessing series of communist insurgencies and steady popular support of the Communist Party of Thailand, which began to decline only in the 1980s.

Box 1. ASEAN Declaration - Aims and Purposes of ASEAN
1. To accelerate the economic growth, social progress and cultural development in the region through joint endeavours in the spirit of equality and partnership in order to strengthen the foundation for a prosperous and peaceful community of Southeast Asian Nations;
2. To promote regional peace and stability through abiding respect for justice and the rule of law in the relationship among countries of the region and adherence to the principles of the United Nations Charter;
3. To promote active collaboration and mutual assistance on matters of common interest in the economic, social, cultural, technical, scientific and administrative fields;
4. To provide assistance to each other in the form of training and research facilities in the educational, professional, technical and administrative spheres;
5. To collaborate more effectively for the greater utilisation of their agriculture and industries, the expansion of their trade, including the study of the problems of international commodity trade, the improvement of their transportation and communications facilities and the raising of the living standards of their peoples;
6. To promote Southeast Asian studies; and
7. To maintain close and beneficial cooperation with existing international and regional organisations with similar aims and purposes, and explore all avenues for even closer cooperation among themselves.

In short, political power contestations across Southeast Asia began to settle down, and the countries enjoyed relative stability by the late 1960s. Thus, the five founding countries—excluding the other mainland countries fighting the Vietnam War—came together to sign the ASEAN Declaration to ensure regime stability by agreeing to

cooperate towards the continued suppression of communism and agreeing not to exacerbate cross-border conflicts between one another. National leaders' expectations of ASEAN as a sovereignty-reinforcing, regime-stabilising organisation are better evidenced in the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia (TAC) of 1976, which lays down the principles or code of conduct for ASEAN member states as below:

1. Mutual respect for the independence, sovereignty, equality, territorial integrity, and national identity of all nations;

2. The right of every state to lead its national existence free from external interference, subversion or coercion;

3. Non-interference in the internal affairs of one another;

4. Settlement of differences or disputes by peaceful manner;

5. Renunciation of the threat or use of force; and

6. Effective cooperation among themselves.

While still maintaining the purposes and principles mentioned above, ASEAN underwent three fundamental changes after the end of the Cold War. Firstly, ASEAN's membership grew to ten states with the addition of Brunei in 1984, Vietnam in 1995, Laos and Myanmar in 1997, and Cambodia in 1999. This enlargement amplified the organisation's diversity; the four last states to join the association are among the poorest in the region, and Vietnam and Laos are still practising communism. At the same time, the end of the Cold War meant that ASEAN's primary purpose was no longer about resisting communist insurgencies but forging common regional interests, such as economic growth, in a unipolar world.

Secondly, ASEAN national leaders adopted the ASEAN Vision 2020 in 1997 and, subsequently, signed the 'Cebu Declaration on the Acceleration of the Establishment of an ASEAN Community by 2015' in January 2007. The ASEAN Community comprises three pillars: Economic Community (AEC), Political-Security Community (APSC), and Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC). The AEC, in particular, aims to create a single market and production base by eliminating all intra-regional trade tariffs and enabling free movements of goods, services, skilled labour and investment.

Thirdly, the ASEAN member states signed the ASEAN Charter at the 13th ASEAN Summit in November 2007. Coming into force on 15 December 2008, the Charter turned ASEAN into a legal person and laid out its institutional framework and details for the governing norms, rules, and values (see Annex 1).

It is remarkable that the ASEAN Charter, besides reiterating the organisation's existing purposes and principles, enumerates several new priorities, such as establishing a single market and protecting human rights. This change indicates that ASEAN leaders are willing to transform the organisation into a globally influential economic actor and norm-setter, akin to the role played by the EU. The fact that drafting of the Charter took 13 task force meetings over a two-year period and required the input of expert recommendations put forth by the ASEAN Eminent Persons Group (EPG) indicates that ASEAN was quite serious about the institutional reform.

4.2 Institutional Architecture

Against this historical background, let us now examine the institutional architecture of ASEAN (see Figure 5). In essence, the ASEAN institution is purely intergovernmental. There is no supranational ASEAN institution with exclusive competence. The heads of states and governments of AMSs are the key decision-makers at the ASEAN Summit. While there can be interim ad-hoc meetings, the regular Summit meets twice a year, with one of them serving as a venue for broader regional policy discussions. Hence, AMS heads of the states and governments take advantage of this formal arrangement to meet with ASEAN's key external dialogue partners, including China, Korea, Japan, the USA, Australia and New Zealand, who constantly engage with ASEAN in overlapping regional arrangements such as the ASEAN Regional Forum, ASEAN Plus Three, and ASEAN + Closer Economic Relations. Of course, these external actors do not directly interfere with ASEAN's internal decision-making process.

Since the ASEAN Summit, as a collection of the heads of states and governments, is the supreme decision-making body, detailed policy formulation and implementation is delegated to subordinate councils within ASEAN. Three of the councils correspond to each of the ASEAN communities: the Political-Security Community (APSC) Council, the Economic Community (AEC) Council, and the Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC) Council. The APSC Council consists of foreign ministers and ministers of similar responsibilities from the AMSs. Similarly, the AEC Council includes trade ministers, commerce ministers and ministers of similar responsibilities, while the ASCC Council is headed by education ministers, culture ministers, tourism ministers and ministers of similar responsibilities. One more council is also headed by the foreign ministers and ministers of similar responsibilities, the ASEAN Coordinating Council. While the three other Councils are responsible for promoting policy integration and harmony in their respective fields, the

ASEAN Coordinating Council's essential functions include providing policy support for the ASEAN Summit and ensuring policy cohesion across the three communities. Under each of the three community councils, there are multiple ministerial and sectoral bodies responsible for specific policy fields. The APSC includes eight, the AEC sixteen, and the ASCC nineteen ministerial bodies, further divided into smaller policy-specific sectoral committees and meetings. In short, every top leadership position within ASEAN is filled by a minister of a member state government.
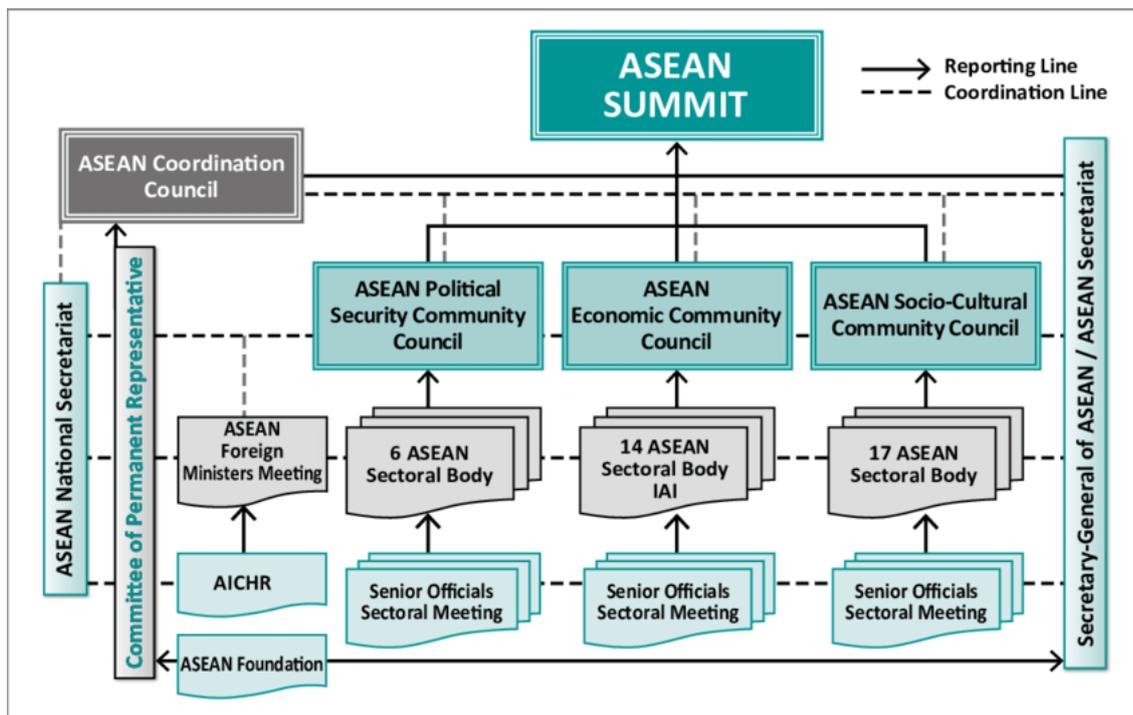
Figure 5. ASEAN Organisational Structure (Wahyuningrum 2012)

Forming an essential part of ASEAN but not represented by incumbent ministers of AMS governments is the ASEAN Secretariat. Headquartered in Jakarta, the ASEAN Secretariat is responsible for providing greater efficiency in coordinating ASEAN organs and for more effective implementation of ASEAN projects and activities (ASEAN n.d.). The head of the Secretariat is the Secretary-General, appointed by the ASEAN Summit for a non-renewable term of office of five years, selected from among the ASEAN Member States nationals based on alphabetical rotation. Directly supporting the Secretary-General are four Deputy Secretaries-General, two of whom are nominated by member states on a rotational basis for a non-renewable term of three years, while the remaining two are openly recruited based on merit for a term of three years, which may be renewed for another three years (Art. 11(6), ASEAN Charter). Three of the Deputy Secretaries-General

are directly responsible for implementing the three ASEAN communities, while the fourth Deputy Secretary-General of ASEAN for Community and Corporate Affairs is responsible for providing strategic direction and guidance on research, public affairs and outreach programmes for the ASEAN Community.

On the surface, the ASEAN Secretariat bears some resemblance to the European Commission (EC), mainly because the ASEAN Secretary-General and the Deputy Secretaries-General are persons of different nationalities and are not incumbent ministers of national cabinets. But that is where the similarities stop. For instance, ASEAN Secretariat does not have any power to propose legislation, whereas the EC is the only body capable of initiating legislation within the EU. By design, the representative power and policy authority of the ASEAN Secretariat is limited, particularly in four aspects.

Firstly, although the Secretariat has the administrative capacity to recruit and maintain its human resources, its top leadership positions are appointed by member state governments and filled by persons perceived to be cooperative in upholding national interests. Because there is no ASEAN equivalent of the European Parliament (EP) or the European Citizens' Initiative, ASEAN citizens are not given the opportunity to directly express their preferences concerning the composition or policy direction of the ASEAN Secretariat.

Secondly, the Secretariat's role is, at best, administrative. All critical decisions are made by the heads of states and governments at the ASEAN Summit and by the national government cabinet ministers in their respective ministerial and sectoral ASEAN bodies. The actual down-to-earth policy implementation also passed back to the respective ministries of member state governments. Because ASEAN policy implementation is essentially at the discretion of each member state and no effective means of enforcement or sanction exist, the Secretariat's role in the implementation is limited to progress monitoring and reporting.

Thirdly, the ASEAN Secretariat is severely underfunded and understaffed. The ASEAN Secretariat employs around 300 persons with a budget of about $20 million (Laksmana 2017). Compared to the EC, which employs around 60,000 persons with a budget of €10.3 billion, or $12.6 billion (European Commission n.d.), the Secretariat is 200 times less staffed and 630 times less funded.

Lastly and perhaps most importantly, the presence of the ASEAN Coordinating Council severely undercuts the Secretariat's institutional capacity. The Secretary-General's primary responsibilities include facilitating and monitoring progress in the implementation

of ASEAN agreements and decisions, participating in the ASEAN Summit, the Coordinating Council and other top-tier meetings, and representing ASEAN externally (Art. 11(2), ASEAN Charter). On the other hand, the Coordinating Council's role is to prepare the ASEAN Summit meetings, coordinate the implementation of agreements and decisions of the ASEAN Summit, coordinate with the ASEAN Community Councils for policy coherence and efficiency, coordinate the ASEAN Community Councils' reporting vis-à-vis the ASEAN Summit, and consider the reports of the Secretary-General on the work of ASEAN, the functions and operations of the Secretariat and other relevant bodies (Art. 8(2), ASEAN Charter). The Charter provisions prioritise the Coordinating Council, comprising foreign ministers of AMSs, literally as a coordinating body over the administrative-only Secretariat.

There are two other noteworthy ASEAN organs within the ASEAN framework: the ASEAN Foundation and the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR). The ASEAN Foundation's key role is to promote greater awareness of the ASEAN identity, people-to-people interaction, and close collaboration among the business sector, civil society, academia and other stakeholders in ASEAN (Art. 15(1), ASEAN Charter). The AICHR, on the other hand, has been established to promote and protect human rights and fundamental freedoms (Art. 14(1), ASEAN Charter). It should be noted that the AICHR is not a judicial body; it does not decide on human rights-related cases. Also, because its representatives are appointed by their respective national governments, and it reports directly to the ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Meeting, the AICHR's propensity severely leans in favour of the governments. Since the AICHR is neither a decision-making body nor directly supported by civil society organisations (CSO) or ASEAN citizens, it is seriously restricted, particularly, in protecting citizens' rights from oppression and violence inflicted by their respective governments. Furthermore, because the day-to-day implementation of human rights policies is delegated back to the respective government agencies in each member state without viable means of enforcing proper implementation, the AICHR tends to function as a talk shop, without a viable opportunity to advance the protection of human rights at the regional level.

Outside the formal ASEAN framework, there are some 75 entities accredited as being associated with ASEAN. These include various business organisations, academic institutions, and CSOs not directly incorporated within the ASEAN institutional architecture for transnational policy formulation or implementation. Interesting examples are the ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Assembly and the Council of ASEAN Chief Justices

that serve as intergovernmental venues of social learning for parliamentarians and chief judges, respectively, but not as decision-making or policy-informing bodies for ASEAN. Given the European experience, it could be argued that ASEAN may follow a similar path of institutional evolution and allow these intergovernmental bodies to be upgraded as supranational institutions. However, the plausibility of such development is a matter of a whole new debate that demands careful analysis of domestic and regional conditions in Southeast Asia.

Overall, the decision-making process within ASEAN is always based on consensus, consultation and unanimity. There is no majority voting. Any country has veto power. However, even when a decision is made, it is not binding because there is no sanctioning mechanism to ensure enforcement. There is also no central court like the European Court of Justice (ECJ) to decide on non-performance or impose penalties. In many ways, the ASEAN Summit is very similar to the European Council (EUCO), especially in its early days. Both institutions did not get formalised until many years into the existence of the ROs. The EUCO, like the ASEAN Summit, enjoyed the status as the sole decision-making body until the EC and the EP were empowered. Also, for a significant portion of the EU's history and to some extent even today, the EUCO has heavily utilised decision-making by consensus in defence of member state national interests.

How, then, is the ASEAN institutional architecture explained with integration theories? As previously mentioned in the chapter on research methodology, this thesis employs neorealist and neofunctionalist views as a simplified but consistent yardstick for measuring ASEAN's function and progress as a regional integration project. Hence, the thesis analyses specific aspects of ASEAN by testing the objectively verifiable elements of ASEAN against the key assumptions and logics of each integration theory.

In the context of European studies, neofunctionalism is primarily focused on economic integration and the subsequent spillover into other sectors, particularly in regards to political union. Thus, in our current study of ASEAN institutional architecture, we will examine other non-economic assumptions and logics of neofunctionalism. The fundamental assumption of neofunctionalism that humans are essentially cooperative and act rationally to collaborate in solving common problems is satisfied, at least apparently, by the ASEAN institutional setup. The very existence of the RO, complete with formal declarations specifying the purposes and principles in the spirit of cooperation, is undoubtedly an indication of ASEAN's neofunctionalist tendency. However, with virtually all components of the RO dominated by national governments and most of the policy

implementation process placed in complete discretion and control of national governments, neofunctionalism is hardly a satisfactory fit for the ASEAN phenomenon. Most of the inter-state interaction remains intergovernmental, leaving little room for the emergence of genuine expertocracy (Ravenhill 2008:483). Furthermore, there is no visible transfer of loyalty and sovereignty. ASEAN is perceived as another representation of AMS governments, and the ASEAN Secretariat's hosting city, Jakarta, is not seen as a newly emerging centre of regional identity.

Similarly, it is not immediately clear whether ASEAN's institutional architecture satisfies neorealism's primary assumption that humans are inherently evil and constantly in conflict and war against one another. Neorealism's logics on security dilemma, zero-sum game and balance of power also appear less relevant in this analysis of ASEAN as a regional organisation. Nevertheless, it is evident that the institutional architecture, in terms of ASEAN's procedures and competences, is deliberately designed so that nation-states can continue to act as principal actors. At the same time, the regional institutions are kept as agents, with no autonomous power of their own. The fact that ASEAN's supreme decision-making body is the ASEAN Summit, somewhat similar to the EUCO in its early years, strongly indicates that ASEAN as a regional organisation is more neorealist than neofunctionalist. These observations can be visually confirmed by the schematic representations of the European institutional architecture in Figure 6. The neorealist perspective fits neatly into ASEAN's institutional setup, where the ASEAN Summit—in place of the European Council—acts as a principal and all other organs, such as the ASEAN Secretariat, serve as the Summit's agents.
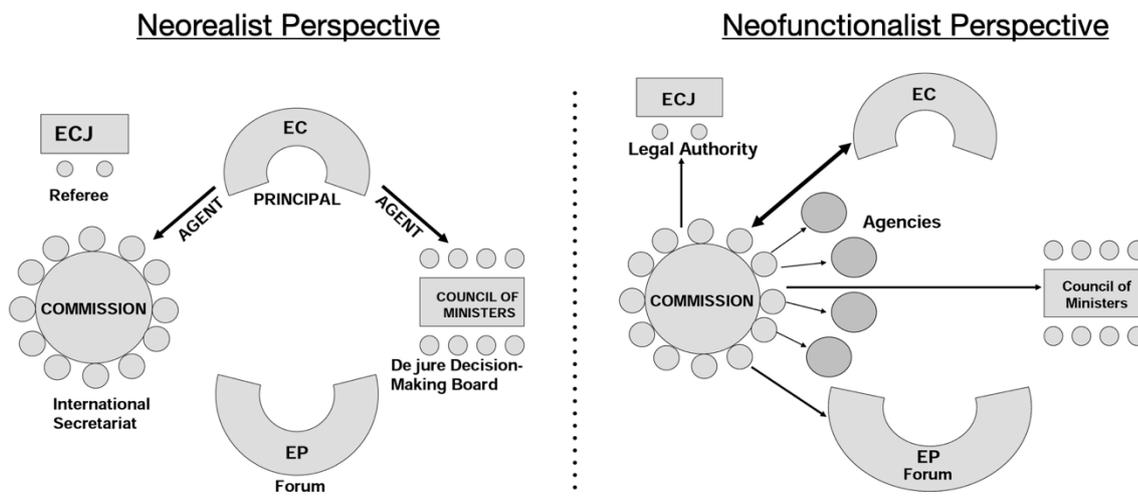

Figure 6. The Institutional Architecture (Wessels & Schäfer 2007)

4.3 ASEAN as an Economic Community

With the rapid economic growth of Southeast Asian countries and the long-lasting peace in the region following the end of the Cold War, the necessity of economic integration continued to increase for ASEAN. The ongoing implementation of the AEC is nominally decreed by Article 1(5) of the ASEAN Charter, for 'creating a single market and production base, which is stable, prosperous, highly competitive and economically integration with effective facilitation for trade and investment in which there is free flow of goods, services and investment.' One of ASEAN's early attempts for economic integration, going as far back as 1992, was the ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA) that, among other things, harmonised the tariff on goods traded between AMSs within a 0-5% range under the Common Effective Preferential Tariff (CEPT) scheme and facilitated less restricted intra-ASEAN movement for goods originating from within ASEAN, in most cases, as long as at least 40% of the total value is sourced within ASEAN under the newly adopted rules of origin. On the other hand, the AEC represents a significant upgrade from the existing AFTA framework as it initially sought to eliminate the tariff on goods traded between AMSs by 2015. To date, the AEC's goal for eliminating tariffs on intra-ASEAN trade has been mostly met, and some progress has been made in mutual recognition of qualifications for a select number of occupation groups, including engineers, nurses, and architects. However, internal frontiers remain, and cross-border movements of goods, whether originating from inside or outside ASEAN, are subject to customs inspection.

To be sure, the AEC never aimed to abolish internal frontiers. Nevertheless, one must wonder how the proposed ASEAN single market can come into full effect with the national borders still restricting free movements. Also, the AEC Blueprint (ASEAN 2015) does not indicate any intention of implementing a customs union, characterised by, among other things, a uniform scheme of tariffs on all extra-regional trade in goods and a duty-free flow of all intra-regional trade in goods. Despite the improvements introduced by the AFTA and later by the AEC, all competences and authority concerning the implementation of the AEC belong to respective national governments, and ASEAN holds no competence of its own, severely limiting the effectiveness of the AEC. In fact, since the introduction of the AEC, tariff barriers to trade have decreased gradually, but non-tariff barriers have risen much quickly, undercutting the progress made thus far (see Figure 7). Devoid of a central court or an effective sanctioning mechanism, ASEAN's role remains purely administrative. Progress towards economic integration is essentially determined by the willingness and capacity of AMS governments.

ASEAN: Average intra-regional tariff rates

Source : Oxford Economics / ASEAN Secretariat

ASEAN: Non-tariff measures in force

Source: Oxford Economics / UNCTAD
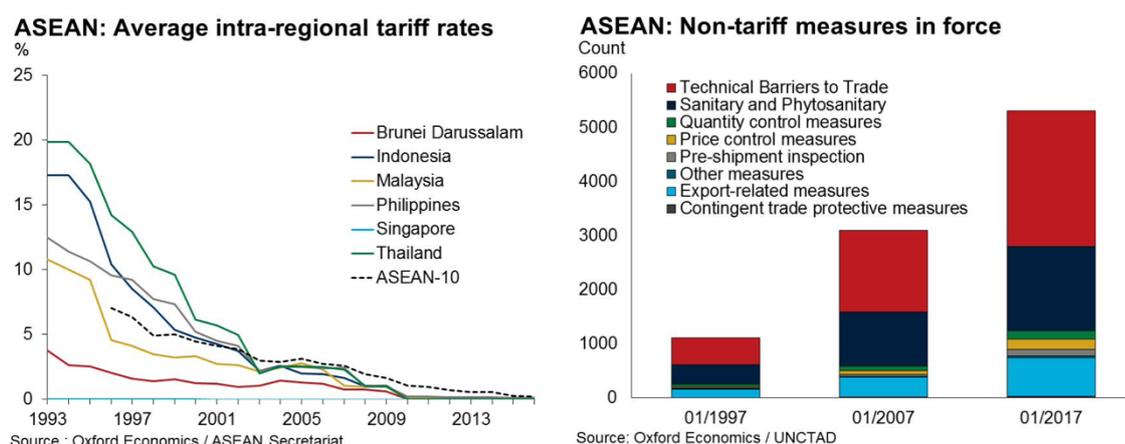
Figure 7. Progress towards ASEAN Economic Community (Tanjangco 2017)

There is a dedicated mechanism to address and settle intra-ASEAN disputes concerning trade and commerce. ASEAN's Enhanced Dispute Settlement Mechanism (EDSM) closely resembles the Dispute Settlement Understanding of the World Trade Organisation (WTO), but with two significant differences. Firstly, the EDSM allocates a significantly shorter timeframe than the WTO counterpart during which the dispute can be settled. Secondly, any dispute the EDSM fails to settle could be taken up to the ASEAN Summit for reconsideration, subjecting the case to the tedious, time-consuming consensus-based decision-making process involving the heads of states and governments. Hence, the EDSM has been regarded as ineffective by many. In fact, of the several prominent trade disputes that occurred between AMSs in recent decades, all were taken up to the WTO and other international tribunals, leaving the ASEAN mechanism completely unused (Ewing-Chow & Yusran 2018).

Despite the limitations of the AEC, ASEAN states have been experiencing enormous economic growths in recent decades, their overall global trade volumes have been increasing, and so with one another in absolute terms. However, regional trade interdependence, calculated as a proportion of intra-ASEAN trade in goods against ASEAN's trade in goods with the entire world, has been falling steadily (see Figure 8). Here, it should be noted that China, the US, the EU, Japan and Korea play a hugely important role as ASEAN's trade partners. As early as the 1960s, ASEAN has been an integral part of the international production network (IPN) dominated by Japan-based multinational corporations. And as the centre of economic gravity shifted over time, ASEAN countries continued to serve as an essential manufacturing base and an indispensable source of natural resources for regional economic networks dominated by

Taiwanese and South Korean corporations, and most notably by Chinese firms in the last two decades. A few Southeast Asia-based companies are emerging as commanders of their own IPNs in the region, but their impact is still significantly smaller than their Northeast Asian counterparts. Hence, the main driver of ASEAN economic integration remains those IPNs controlled by third countries, rather than market integration among AMSs (Ewing-Chow 2013:284).
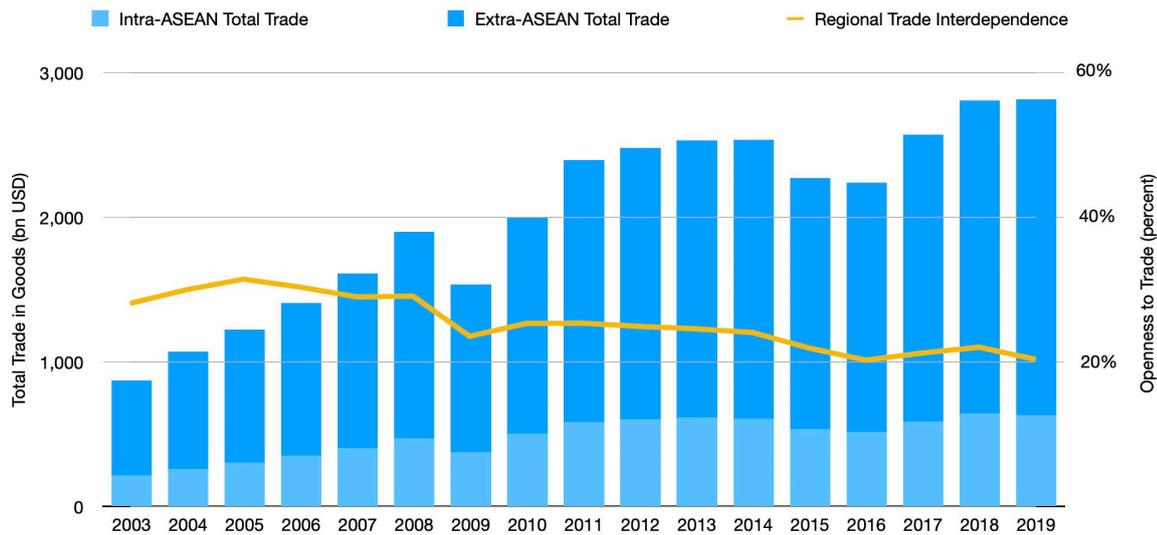
Figure 8. Regional Trade Interdependence between ASEAN States
(Data from ASEAN Stats)

Another critical obstacle to economic integration in Southeast Asia concerns the presence of multiple overlapping, competing free trade agreements (FTAs) in the region. As Baldwin (2008) explains, the AFTA essentially functions as some 45 separate bilateral agreements between various Southeast Asian countries. Also, because each AMS still retains the competence to sign any trade deals with third countries irrespective of the ASEAN framework, many do so. The result is the so-called Noodle Bowl Syndrome, undermining ASEAN's centrality as a regional economic integration project (see Figure 9). The existence of so many trade deals, each with competing preferential treatment clauses, creates a general confusion and difficulty, particularly for private sector enterprises to know clearly which set of trade deals would grant them the most benefits in any given situation. For example, the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) signed in December 2020 between South Korea and Indonesia had the effect of increasing Korea's access to the Indonesian market, as measured by the number of commodity categories, from 80.2% previously set by the Korea-ASEAN FTA to 92.1% (KITA 2021).

Noodle bowl syndrome
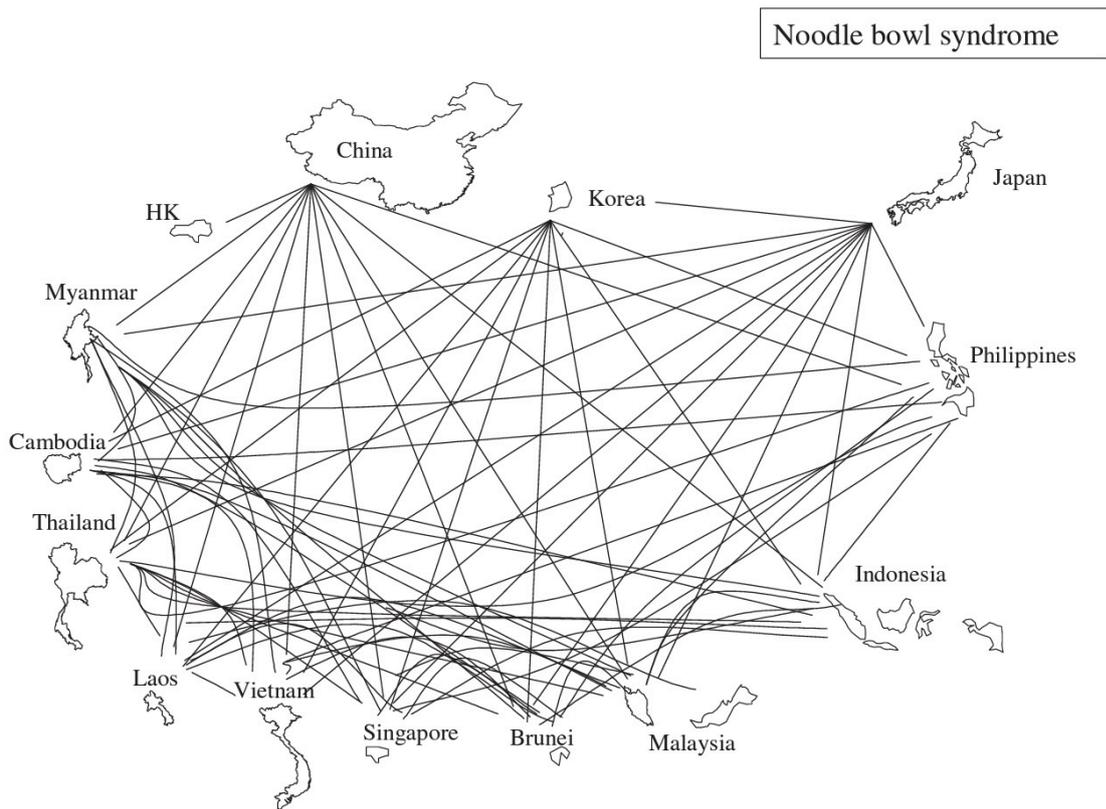
Figure 9. The East Asian "Noodle Bowl" Syndrome, as of January 2006 (Baldwin 2008)

All of the observations above inevitably point in one direction: ASEAN is unlikely to achieve an effective single market. ASEAN is institutionally limited in pushing forward with the AEC fundamentally because it does not have the means to abolish internal frontiers, harmonise rules concerning non-tariff barriers to trade, authoritatively decide on intra-ASEAN trade disputes or effectively manage the competing aspects of overlapping trade deals in the region. AMS national economies continue to grow, constantly increasing both intra-ASEAN and extra-ASEAN trade volumes in absolute terms. Nevertheless, regional trade interdependence has been falling steadily, implying that the AEC has not generated significant trade diversion.

For comparison, Europe is by far the most integrated regional market in the world. Indeed, economic integration has played a vital role in European integration since the 1950s, following the establishment of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC). The European leaders believed it necessary to make the European states economically interdependent on one another to make it immaterial and undesirable to wage war against one another. However, it must be recalled that the abolition of European internal frontiers

happened only in 1995, nearly three decades after the establishment of the European customs union. More often than not, the EU member states were reluctant to transfer their national sovereignty to the supranational EU institutions and lose a firm grip on their own fate. Completing the European single market was made possible because the EU leaders could convince the national political leaders and citizens that the benefits of an integrated market would far exceed the gains of national sovereignty kept intact (Grin 2003).

Aside from the removal of internal frontiers, the success of the European single market heavily depended on the harmonisation of rules and regulations to allow fair and equal treatment for goods, services, capital and persons of various national origins within the region. This is done, for example, by the EU institutions legislating and implementing EU law, to be followed by all EU institutions, public and private organisations and individuals within the EU. Any disputes concerning EU law would be decided by the European Court of Justice (ECJ), which played a crucial role in removing all forms of direct and indirect discrimination against goods based on the country of origin, such as through the landmark cases such as Dassonville (Case 8/74), Cassie de Dijon (Case C-120/78) and Keck (Case C-267/91). The presence of regional harmonised rules concerning the single market means that all European companies compete on a level playing field without prejudice on nationality. The single market has also eliminated most forms of state aid, prohibiting national and local governments from favouring local firms over other European ones with subsidies and restrictive public procurement requirements, effectively placing all enterprises, even state-owned ones, under equal terms of market competition.

Then, given that ASEAN has a limited institutional structure and legal framework for implementing an effective single market, how can its grand ambition for the AEC be explained? Why does ASEAN continue to emphasise the AEC Blueprint without making the necessary institutional reforms? How do IR theories explain this phenomenon?

Neofunctionalism has been indispensable in explaining the European market integration, notably because the European experience exhibits the 'form follows function' pattern, along with visible spillovers, the emergence of expertocracy and the significant transfer of loyalty and sovereignty to the newly created centre. In ASEAN, however, the AEC has created all the 'forms' in place without meaningfully effective 'functions'. There are no signs of spillovers from one specific field of economic cooperation into other policy sectors, understandably because the AEC is yet to yield significant results. While some expertocracy does appear to be forming, national governments are still very much in the

driver's seat. Moreover, there is no explicit transfer of loyalty and sovereignty to a newly emerging centre.

On the other hand, the fact that nation-states continue to behave as real actors while minimising any autonomous capacity of ASEAN institutions indicates that ASEAN as an economic community fits into the neorealist view. More importantly, the steady growth of domestic economies, often confused as attributable to ASEAN institutions, is actually the result of the relative peace during the Cold War and the US-dominated unipolar world order after the Cold War. External actors, particularly Japan, Korea, China, the EU and the US, have been important catalysts for the establishment of production networks in the region and the steady economic growth of AMSs. Furthermore, each AMS retaining their power to enter into bilateral and multilateral trade deals with third countries, which tend to correspond to higher trade volumes than with fellow AMSs, indicates that AMSs are self-seeking rational actors. The formation of complex, overlapping trade deals may also be indicative of AMSs' preference to engage top trading partners, i.e. superpowers, in manageable but safe romances, as a means of hedging against potential dangers of the neorealist world.

4.4 ASEAN as a Political Security Community

As noted earlier, ASEAN first emerged in the late 1960s as an intergovernmental association of newly independent post-colonial states who had a common and urgent agenda to forge some level of regional peace. Ample evidence supports that ASEAN does serve as a virtual arena of diplomatic discourse and policy discussion among ASEAN member states, particularly for transnational issues of importance for the region. ASEAN provides important venues of transnational policy discussion among ministers and government officials of various sectors and levels, as well as among the heads of states and governments. Facilitated by the ASEAN Secretariat, various ministers of AMSs come together to socialise their policy issues, according to their relevance in three of the ASEAN Communities. ASEAN countries also come together for various social and cultural events that occur bilaterally and multilaterally among AMSs or within the formal ASEAN framework. As such, ASEAN serves not only as a venue of policy discussion but an environment of constant social learning, yielding some positive effect into the formation of a shared regional identity (Busse 1999:59).

However, most importantly, ASEAN is not the only arena of policy discussion in the region. AMSs participate in multiple overlapping policy dialogue arrangements with

third countries, such as the US, China, Japan, Korea, and Australia. These cooperative frameworks including, ASEAN Plus Three, the East Asia Summit, the Pacific Economic Co-operation Council, Asia-Pacific Economic Co-operation, and the ASEAN Regional Forum, have unique functions in specific policy fields (see Figure 10). Naturally, the presence of such a complex web of regional organisations surrounding ASEAN is often criticised for aggravating policy coherence, undercutting ASEAN's policy priorities and increasing divergence between AMSs, particularly in regards to regional organisations where not all AMSs are parties. On the other hand, ASEAN supporters argue that ASEAN's engagement in multiple regional organisations elevates ASEAN's role as a central actor in the region, ensuring that ASEAN's key trade partners are constantly engaged in constructive dialogue with AMSs.
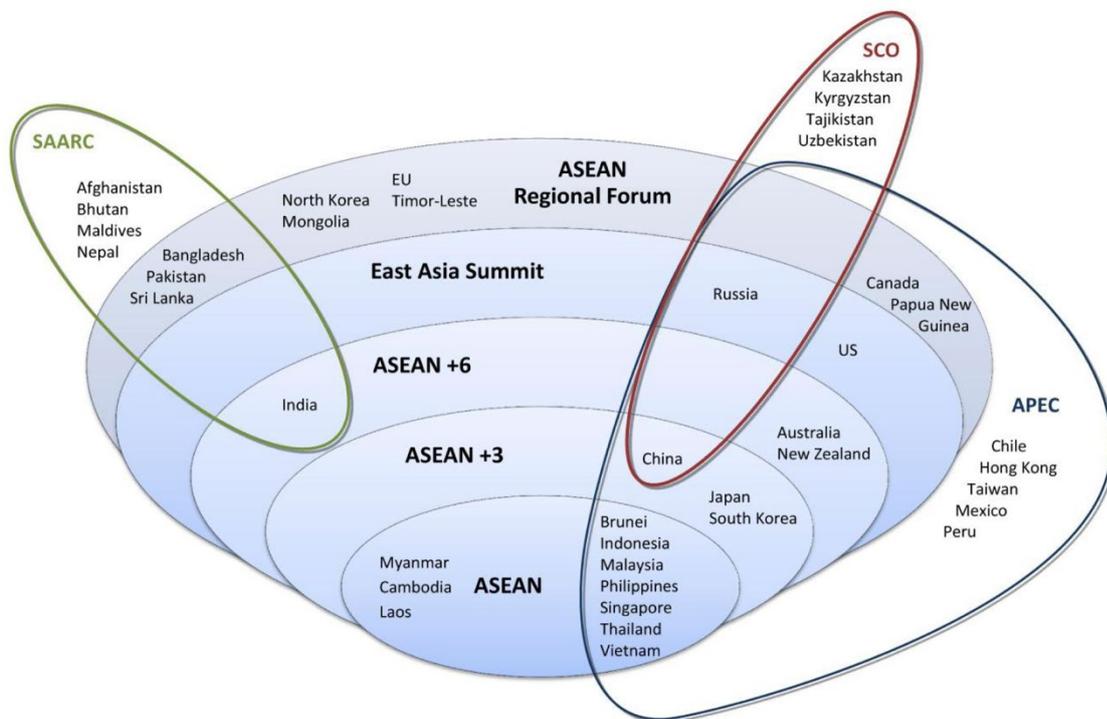
Figure 10. Main Regional Organisations and Frameworks involving East Asia (Missiroli et al. 2017)

While a similar overlapping, multilayered arrangement can also be found in Europe, the main difference is that ASEAN does not have any supranational power in itself, on top of the unanimous decision-making process based on consensus and consultations, making ASEAN crawl at the pace of its slowest member (Grinsburg 2005). As mentioned, ASEAN also lacks the institutional capacity for policy implementation and

enforcement. ASEAN's representation is neither exclusive nor binding, and ASEAN actions carry real power only when national governments explicitly endorse them. Compare this with the functioning of the European Commission, where the Commission President and the College of Commissioners play a crucial role in decision-making and policy implementation procedures at a considerably high level of autonomy from their respective national governments.

So, why do regional organisations participate in overlapping, multilayered security arrangements? One explanation is that consensus-based unanimous decision-making tends to be extremely slow and tedious. Naturally, those member states who wish to move faster and do more are compelled to team up with like-minded countries to form independent policy groups. Again, it should be noted that while this pattern is very pronounced in Southeast Asia and East Asia as a whole, this is a common feature virtually in all regions around the world, including Europe. A striking similarity can also be found between the EU and ASEAN in regards to the Cold War. A dominant neorealist explanation is that Europe achieved such a high level of regional integration because of the bipolar balancing of power between the USSR and the USA, allowing a reasonable degree of stability and peace in Europe, albeit of a high-tensioned nature (Mearsheimer 1990). The neorealist perspective goes on to explain that, with the end of the Cold War, the EU needed to secure its stability by enlarging to include the formerly socialist European countries and achieving an even higher level of regional integration, whether through monetary (c.f. the Treaty of Maastricht) or normative (c.f. the Treaty of Lisbon) means.

A similar pattern can be found in ASEAN, which initially started as a security arrangement at the height of the Cold War, allowing the member states a high degree of stability for reinforcing their national sovereignty. And, when the Cold War ended, ASEAN was faced with the need to enlarge to include former/present communist countries and establish a stronger normative identity for the organisation. Another explanation for ASEAN's apparent prominence in East Asia is that none of the superpowers had the urgent need to assert balance-tipping influence in the region after the Cold War (Kim 2012). Hence, it should be recognised that the most crucial contributor to ASEAN's institutional evolution after the Cold War is the shift in geopolitics rather than the improved role of ASEAN or its member states.

Considering the role of ASEAN as a regional policy platform and ASEAN's participation in multiple overlapping regional cooperation arrangements, neorealism appears to fit the picture better than neofunctionalism. As considered in the previous

section, ASEAN is generally limited in its institutional capacity to take on a genuinely functionalist role. In both intra-ASEAN and extra-ASEAN aspects, the security cooperation among East Asian countries tends to be purely intergovernmental with no signs of functional spillovers or visible transfer of loyalty and sovereignty. Instead, the current political-security arrangement of ASEAN supports the neorealist view that AMSs are doubtful of other countries' intentions and are left with no option but to hedge themselves for peace and security. As will be discussed in the later chapters, evidence shows that this tendency of AMSs to engage in multiple regional organisations is essentially a way of concurrent power balancing and bandwagoning (Leifer 2005). From a Southeast Asian country's perspective, a superpower like China is not entirely a friend or a foe. Dualistic, hybrid viewpoints crosscut essentially all foreign relations involving Southeast Asian states, and therefore, the only viable way of guaranteeing one's long-term survival is to engage with as many superpowers as possible in as many regional forums as possible. Such is the neorealist nature of ASEAN security arrangements in an increasingly multipolar world.

5. CASE STUDY: 2021 MYANMAR COUP D'ÉTAT

For a practical example exhibiting ASEAN's function and effectiveness as a concerted mechanism of regional policy coherence, the thesis examines a case study of the ongoing coup d'état in Myanmar. On 1 February 2021, Myanmar's military, led by General Min Aung Hlaing, arrested President Win Myint, State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi, along with all ministers and deputies and parliamentarians, and declared a year-long state of emergency. The Myanmar military, also known as the Tatmadaw, declared the November 2020 general election results invalid, accusing the National League for Democracy (NLD) and other non-military parties of nationwide election frauds. The coup d'état was met by massive resistance of the public, who were dismayed to see the newly elected parliamentarians and government officials put in illegal detention just a day before they were due to be sworn in for their office. Pro-democracy protests persisted against the military rule, to which the Tatmadaw responded with indiscriminate armed violence of terror against the people nationwide, leaving over 800 civilians during the first four months of the coup d'état.

Some history is necessary for an informed understanding of the current situation. Like most other Southeast Asian countries, the territory currently occupied by Myanmar was previously home to multitudes of diverse ethnic groups who did not share a common

identity. It was only with the arrival of the British that these ethnic groups were brought under the collective control of the colonialists, followed by a short, brutal Japanese occupation at the end of WWII. The end of WWII marked a sudden rise of nationalist movements in all Southeast Asian countries, including Myanmar. When the Japanese surrendered at the end of WWII, the British army returned to reclaim Burma but was met with significant resistance by the nationalist Burmese army, led by General Aung San. Eventually, the Burmese army succeeded in resisting the British, and Burma became an independent state but with significant military control. One problem is that Myanmar's nation-building process did not always go smoothly. The central government never managed to exercise complete control over all ethnic territories, unsurprisingly because Myanmar's national borders are essentially a postcolonial heritage that did not take ethnic diversity and history into account. Still, with no shared identity to bind all these ethnic groups together, conflicts persisted between various ethnic groups, some possessing heavily weaponised armies and fully autonomous governments that operate outside the central government's influence. By many measures, Myanmar remains the least successful in nation-building among all ASEAN member states.

Throughout Myanmar's modern history, the central military regime oppressed all forms of democratic movements and ethnic groups that resisted and contested military rule. The most devastating clash between the junta and pro-democracy protesters in Myanmar's history took place in 1988. Millions took to the streets in protest, only to be assaulted by the junta, leaving as many as 10,000 dead. During this 1988 Uprising, the NLD led by Aung San Suu Kyi emerged as the most popular political party. However, the military crackdown on civilian protesters intensified, crippling all democracy activist groups, including the NLD, and placing Aung San Suu Kyi under house arrest for 15 years. The military continued ruling the country until 2011, when the military-backed Union Solidarity and Development Party took power. In the 2015 general elections, NLD took control, commanding 60.27% and 57.95% of the seats at the Amyotha Hluttaw (upper house) and the Pyithu Hluttaw (lower house), respectively, of the bicameral legislature of Myanmar. Five years later, the NLD maintained an impressive level of popular support at the November 2020 general elections, commanding 61.6% and 58.6% of the seats in both houses. All this while, the military maintained a share of 25% in both houses as guaranteed by the 2008 National Constitution.

Even with the NLD commanding in power, Myanmar never achieved democratisation in its truest sense because the military has always had a hand in the

government. Over the decades, the military also amassed enormous wealth by controlling the nation's natural resource extraction, such as oil and gas, as well as significant infrastructure businesses, including transport and telecommunications. The military directly owns and controls Myanmar Economic Holdings Limited and the Myanmar Economic Corporation, serving as parent companies for over 133 firms in various industries, including beer, tobacco, transportation, textiles, tourism, and banking (The Economic Times 2021). Military-owned businesses also control Myanmar's exceedingly lucrative jade and ruby trade. It has been reported that, as the largest producer of jade in the world, Myanmar amassed $31 billion a year, making up nearly half of the country's GDP (Heijmans 2015). Interestingly, international sanctions on the military do not seem to have been quite effective, as most of the jade supply goes into unregulated, illegal trade with China.

The fact that the NLD's power in the national government was severely limited, despite widespread support, is evidenced by Aung San Suu Kyi's apologetic stance concerning the junta's oppression against the Rohingya when she was called to testify at The Hague (BBC 2019). The military continued to hold political dominance over the NLD, which did not have complete freedom to criticise the ethnic cleansing at the international court. Furthermore, when the NLD won the 2020 elections once again in a landslide victory, the military decided that it could not take it any longer and declared the election results invalid. Some scholars have predicted that such coup d'état was inevitable because the ever-popular NLD front might amend the 2008 Constitution, ending the guaranteed power-sharing by the military, and secondly, because the military feared losing its billion-dollar national assets and continuous streams of revenue.

This essentially sets the stage for the recent events that have been taking place in Myanmar since 1 February 2021. However, it should be mentioned that all AMSs went through and are going through essentially the same struggle since independence. Every Southeast Asian country experienced devastating power contestations, be it the military versus the civilian or the authoritarian versus the democratic. Southeast Asia's diverse political configurations visible today essentially show who emerged as the victor in each country. In essence, Southeast Asian countries emerged as postcolonial states, witnessed a sudden power vacuum and the rise of nationalist movements, and underwent devastating and lengthy power contestations, often influenced by superpowers such as the USSR and the USA.

Naturally, Southeast Asia has seen many coups take place. Notable examples in the past include the 1997 Cambodian coup d'état and the 2014 Thai coup d'état. In both instances, Hun Sen and Prayut Chan-o-cha, respectively, used their undivided control over the powerful military as an advantage to crush the democratically elected governments. They both colluded with or coerced the existing monarchs for their legitimation. Furthermore, while maintaining the state of emergency, both military generals dismissed and crippled existing opposition parties, ran as candidates in military-supervised general elections, only to emerge as uncontested heads of governments. It is noteworthy that ASEAN states could not narrow the divergent political stances concerning Cambodian and Thai coups. Instead, guided by the principle of non-interference, the organisation deemed those coups as domestic affairs of each country and took no collective action. ASEAN was only concerned with containing the instability within the originating country's national boundaries and maintaining regime stability in all other countries.

Furthermore, ASEAN's inaction indicates that it was not genuinely concerned with the infringement against democracy or the killing of civilians in those countries undergoing coup d'état. In all successful coup attempts in Southeast Asia, whoever emerged victorious at the end would be recognised as the head of the state or government by the ASEAN leaders. There is no exception to this pattern.

The same pattern is emerging with the current Myanmar situation. Among the first to respond to the situation was Deputy Prime Minister Prawit Wongsuwan, who called the military takeover only a matter of internal affairs (Bangkok Post 2021). On 10 February, Washington announced sanctions against several Myanmar military officials, soon followed by more sanctions from the USA, the UK and the EU. On 2 March, ASEAN foreign ministers held an informal meeting to discuss the Myanmar situation but failed to speak with one voice in condemning the junta's systemic violence and disrespect for democracy (Chong & Thongyoojaroen 2021). Only Indonesia, the Philippines, Singapore and Malaysia condemned the junta and called for the immediate release of political detainees. On the other hand, Thailand, Vietnam and Laos sent delegations to the Myanmar Armed Forces Day celebration on 27 March. These mainland Southeast Asian states maintained that the Myanmar military coup d'état was only a matter of domestic affairs that no other states should interfere with (Chong & Thongyoojaroen 2021).

Then on 24 April, the ASEAN Summit met at the ASEAN Secretariat in Jakarta, where Min Aung Hlaing was given full respect as a representative of Myanmar. As expected, absent at the ASEAN Summit meeting was anyone from the Committee

Representing Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (CRPH) or the National Unity Government (NUG), which claim to be rightful representatives of the Myanmar citizens, or the broader pro-democracy Civil Disobedience Movement. The ASEAN Summit not only recognised Min Aung Hlaing as the head of the state but also arrived at the famously appeasing five-point consensus.

The five-point consensus confirms that ASEAN only wants to ensure that the domestic instability of Myanmar does not exaggerate to the point of spilling over to other ASEAN member states (see Box 2). While some of the more democratic member states, including Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, and the Philippines, have reportedly called for the immediate release of political prisoners in Myanmar, this demand was never formally adopted into the five-point consensus. Instead, the consensus carries no normative substance of condemnation against the junta or respect for democratically elected members of the parliament. Furthermore, the consensus does not detail the exact timeline of future actions to be taken or any direct consequences to non-adherence, rendering the junta complete discretion over a situation that essentially constitutes a crime against people and democracy. Nevertheless, the official ASEAN stance is that the Summit meeting has been widely successful, with the Malaysian Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin commenting, "It's beyond our expectation" (Allard et al. 2021).

Box 2. Five-Point Consensus (ASEAN Secretariat 2021)

On the situation in Myanmar, the (ASEAN) Leaders reached consensus on the following:

- First, there shall be immediate cessation of violence in Myanmar and all parties shall exercise utmost restraint.
- Second, constructive dialogue among all parties concerned shall commence to seek a peaceful solution in the interests of the people.
- Third, a special envoy of the ASEAN Chair shall facilitate mediation of the dialogue process, with the assistance of the Secretary- General of ASEAN.
- Fourth, ASEAN shall provide humanitarian assistance through the AHA Centre.
- Fifth, the special envoy and delegation shall visit Myanmar to meet with all parties concerned.

Unsurprisingly, just two days after Min Aung Hlaing returned to Myanmar, the national news announced that the junta would consider implementing the five-point consensus only after some stability is achieved in the country. In the same news, the junta allocated dozens of pages detailing election frauds alleged committed by the NLD and other civilian political parties, proclaiming that it would hold military-supervised national elections in the near future. Meanwhile, no visible change has taken place in regards to the military's violence against civilian protesters.

Members of Myanmar's pro-democracy camp, as well as many ASEAN experts and scholars taking more progressive positions, have called for ASEAN's decisive actions, such as suspending Myanmar's ASEAN membership, lobbying the help of the UN and other influential superpowers to enforce sanctions on the junta and initiate the responsibility to protect (R2P) process in defence of civilian lives, and mediating a negotiation process between the junta and the pro-democracy camp for the immediate restoration of peace and democracy. However, unfortunately, ASEAN failed to meet all of these expectations. ASEAN not only lacks the legal criteria and procedures concerning the suspension or expulsion of membership but, as an intergovernmental association abiding by the principle of consensus-based decision-making and the principle of non-interference, ASEAN has no intention of placing onerous restrictions on Myanmar, as long as the domestic crisis is contained within the country. This is one of the key differences that sets ASEAN apart from the EU. The EU's Copenhagen Criteria requires that, for a country to be admitted as an EU member and maintain its membership, it must meet a long list of economic as well as sociopolitical requirements, particularly with an emphasis on the country's practice of and commitment to the market economy, the rule of law, respect for human lives and democracy. ASEAN has no regulations of similar nature; the ASEAN Charter does mention democracy and human rights as the organisation's essential values but fails to detail what effective mechanisms are in place to uphold those values against perpetrators.

Unfortunately, the 24 April 2021 ASEAN Summit Meeting was not the last instance showcasing ASEAN's ineffectiveness and the irreconcilable divide among its members. At the 17 May UN General Assembly (UNGA) meeting concerning Resolution A/75/L.82 on "The responsibility to protect and the prevention of genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity", only three ASEAN member states (Malaysia, Philippines and Thailand) voted in favour and Indonesia voted against, while six others abstained or did not vote (Alexandra 2021). This indicates that AMSs are

structurally divided in their policy priorities, with the division inhibiting meaningful progress of ASEAN as a whole and the AMSs failing to speak with one voice in the international arena, further undermining the centrality and credibility of ASEAN as a policy actor. Furthermore, in a letter dated 19 May, nine AMSs—Myanmar being the only excluded—called for the UN to water down the proposed resolution on arms embargo against Myanmar (Allard & Nichols 2021). This move serves as evidence that ASEAN is primarily concerned with the stability of the Myanmar regime regardless of its continuing violence against civilians. It is also thought that China, a primary weapons exporter to Myanmar, has been able to assert substantial influence over ASEAN countries to its advantage.

The Myanmar coup d'état serves as the most recent empirical case showing that ASEAN member states remain significantly divided regarding what should be done at the regional level. ASEAN lacks normative and institutional capacity to push forward in any one particular direction. ASEAN is good at avoiding conflicts and maintaining peace between the member states, but nothing else. Showing no clear evidence of progress toward effective economic integration or policy coherence at the regional level, ASEAN remains a neorealist alliance weak postcolonial states whose primary concern is reinforcing and legitimising their nation-building process.

6. THE ASEAN WAY

As we have seen in the previous chapter, ASEAN consistently shows a defined pattern of behaviour. In institutional, economic and political aspects, ASEAN continues to serve as an intergovernmental arena of diplomatic discourse where national governments maintain key roles without conferring any significant authority to the ASEAN Secretariat or any of the transnational bodies associated with ASEAN. I have noted multiple times that this state-centric structure and behaviour is not unique to ASEAN but commonly observed practically in all regional organisations worldwide, including the EU, where elements of intergovernmentalism continue to prevail despite the tendency of steady progress towards supranationalism.

Hence, this chapter provides further analysis of the ASEAN Way, a set of features that are thought to be unique to ASEAN, including the principle of non-interference in domestic affairs, decision-making based on consensus and consultation, peacekeeping, conflict avoidance, flexibility, pragmatism and gradualism. To be clear, the ASEAN Way has never been an official term, and various interpretations exist concerning its actual

nature and content. Nevertheless, the term has been used conveniently to refer to certain organisational elements that are primarily thought to be unique to ASEAN (Beeson 2009b) and critical contributors to the organisation's success (Jayakumar 1998).

6.1 Inherent Problems of the ASEAN Way

Over the recent decades, the ASEAN Way emerged as an important theme in ASEAN and AMS official statements and academic discourse. However, the notion of the ASEAN Way contains two inherent logical limitations at the conceptual level.

Firstly, the argument that ASEAN has several unique features involves a rationally impossible hypothesis to prove. Even if one makes a deliberate effort to define the ASEAN Way as narrowly as possible—for example, by limiting its reference to ASEAN's consensus-based decision-making process, non-interference in domestic affairs, and conflict avoidance—proving that specific characteristics are unique to one organisation in the world requires that those characteristics cannot be found in all other organisations throughout human history. Whereas proving $A = A'$ or $A \neq A'$ is a relatively simple process, proving that A is an exclusively unique feature of A' requires simultaneously proving $A = A'$ as well as $A \neq B'$, $A \neq C'$, and so on. The difficulty is further compounded by the fact that this validation process must be repeated for each subset of the key concept, and all of the validations must coincide, i.e., consensus-based decision-making process, non-interference in domestic affairs, and conflict avoidance all must be proved to be features of ASEAN but no other regional organisation. However, as discussed in the preceding chapters, ASEAN exhibits neorealist characteristics as a security alliance of small states, a typical pattern for a vast majority of international organisations, including the UN.

Secondly, the notion that the ASEAN Way has been an essential contributor to the long-lasting peace and prosperity in Southeast Asia is also subject to a few conceptual challenges. It needs to be verified whether ASEAN and its member states have played causal roles in the region's peace and prosperity. This requires that every possible cause for the region's relative success be tested, measured and then compared against each other to determine which causes are more significant contributors.

However, the problem concerning the above two logical limitations is that the pro-ASEAN narrative continues to revolve around the uniqueness and success of the ASEAN Way, while a majority of Western scholars remain highly critical of ASEAN. Solving this

problem inevitably requires a careful dissection between rationalist and constructivist perspectives, a gap that remains unclosed by existing theoretical frameworks.

Now, regarding the content, the ASEAN Way can be assessed from an institutional perspective regarding the decision-making process and the non-interference principle. Foremost, ASEAN's historical context should be considered. Just as the Southeast Asian states were emerging as newly independent postcolonial states, they had to find a way to minimise and avoid interstate conflicts and wars among themselves to secure a stable environment to reinforce their nation-building process. Given the domestic instability and institutional fragility, engaging in interstate conflict potentially meant the collapse of all states in the region (Bercovitch & Oishi 2010: 30, 32). Hence, the logical course of action was to agree among the like-minded states to restrain interstate conflicts and strictly exercise non-interference into the domestic affairs of each other. What seemed the central theme of the existing international order, as enshrined in the UN Charter, quickly became an indispensable *modus operandi* for the Southeast Asian states and evolved into the ASEAN Way as we know it today.

As previously mentioned, the critical argument supporting the concept of ASEAN success according to this narrative is that there have been no full-scale wars between AMSs since the establishment of ASEAN. This argument is further augmented because most AMSs have enjoyed uncontested strong state power and remarkable economic growth in recent decades. In short, the untampered political stability and robust economic growth of ASEAN member states are seen as evidence for the success of ASEAN. Naturally, the ASEAN Way is thought to be fundamental in explaining this success.

As seen previously, the problem with this argument is that the key contributing factor to the steady economic growth in the region is the IPNs pioneered and dominated initially by Japanese firms and now by Korean, Chinese, European and American firms, taking advantage of proximity to abundant natural resources and inexpensive workforce in the region. In other words, little compelling evidence exists to prove that ASEAN's institutional framework was the most important reason for the economic success of its member states, particularly considering the lack of functionalist progress in the AEC.

Similarly, in the political security aspect, the USSR-USA bipolar struggle during the Cold War and the USA-dominated unipolar stability after the Cold War played the most fundamental role in regional peace. The security dialogues amongst ASEAN member states and security-related policies within the ASEAN framework undoubtedly played

some role. However, the more far-reaching, fundamental factor to regional peace can be attributed to the global power-balancing order rather than regional efforts.

It should also be mentioned that the ASEAN Way is not unique to the region. The EU, in its early days, exhibited many features similar to the ASEAN Way. As the EU's key motivation was to avoid another full-scale continental war and regional integration was only a byproduct of this peace-seeking process, the member states have always been reluctant to confer their national sovereignty to the EU. From the beginning, the most important decision-making body has been the European Council (EUCO), represented by the heads of states and governments of the EU member states. The primary mode of decision-making at the EUCO was consensus-based unanimity rule, particularly during its early decades. This method ensured that national governments had control over policy decisions at the EU level. Before internal frontiers were abolished, harmonisation of rules and regulations remained minimal, meaning that each country enjoyed a relatively high level of national competences.

However, those mechanisms to ensure primacy of national sovereignty over supranational institutions were gradually removed as the European integration process gained pace, particularly with the EU's growing market power which demanded a higher level of policy integration starting in economic fields and later spilling over into technical, environmental and even human rights aspects. The continued enlargement (widening) from the original six states in the 1950s to 12 by 1986, and then to 28 by 2013 also required treaty reforms (deepening) to ensure a higher level of policy coherence across the member states. Over the decades, the EUCO's dominance as key decision-making body was gradually replaced with the rising importance of the European Commission and the European Parliament, now with the Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) directly representing the nationals of member states. The consensus-only, unanimity-based decision-making process of the EUCO also became increasingly disused, as the Treaty of Lisbon, coming into effect in 2009, introduced the qualified majority voting method, requiring 55% of the members of the Council, comprising at least fifteen of them and representing member states comprising at least 65% of the population of the EU (Art. 16(3), The Treaty on European Union). The emergence of various independent European institutes and agencies, in addition to the European Court of Justice and the European Central Bank, also meant that the effective and unbiased functioning of the EU was given a higher priority than preserving the national sovereignty and the principle of non-interference.

The UN also remains the most notable example of a consensus-based decision-making body. The consensus-based decision-making process and veto power in the UN Security Council are heavily criticised as significant obstacles to the UN's meaningful progress throughout its history. The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) is another regional organisation that practised a very similar set of rules in the recent past (Yukawa 2012). Elements of the ASEAN Way are identical to the general rules for the Peace of Westphalia, which are embedded and actively operating in the general international order today. Against this background, it is absurd for ASEAN to claim the ASEAN Way as its exclusive treasure. On the other hand, the consensus-based decision-making method is an exceedingly common feature found in many international and regional organisations, including the EU, as seen in the previous chapter.

6.2 The Principle of Non-interference

The principle of non-interference, often referred to as the principle of non-intervention in international law, also demands a careful examination as a vital feature of the ASEAN Way. As mentioned previously, the principle of non-interference has been an essential feature of the post-Westphalian international system and is deeply embedded as an operating norm of many international organisations, including the UN. The 1970 Declarations on Principles of International Law concerning Friendly Relations and Cooperation among States per the Charter of the UN provides: *'No State or group of States has the right to intervene, directly or indirectly, for any reason whatever, in the internal or external affairs of another State. Consequently, armed intervention and all other forms of interference or attempted threats against the personality of the State or against its political, economic and cultural elements, are in violation of international law'* (UN General Assembly 1970).

This provision is central to the functioning of international law in an anarchic world, where the principle of non-intervention is essentially a mirror of the state-centric reality where the integrity of national sovereignty is of paramount importance. For instance, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) ruling on the 1984 Nicaragua case emphasises the importance for each state to decide its matters freely (Nicaragua, para 205). Interestingly but not surprisingly, Articles 2(2) and 28 of the ASEAN Charter affirm that the principle of non-intervention, coupled with the principle of national sovereignty, stand as ASEAN's central values, in the same way they are for the UN.

The principle of non-intervention, however, is not free of controversial debate, particularly considering Article 2(7) of the UN Charter, which provides that intervention is permissible on the grounds of Chapter VII, i.e. action concerning threats to the peace, breaches of the peace, and acts of aggression. In essence, the superpowers, particularly those holding permanent seats at the UNSC, get to decide when intervention with a sovereign state becomes legitimate, per their interpretation of the given context. Such is the principle's ambiguity— and thus fragility, as became highlighted, for instance, when the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) intervened with Kosovo in 1999. In short, influential members of the international community constantly act in exception to the principle, intervening with national sovereignty of weak states in situations that they claim as necessary for the safeguarding of peace and humanitarian needs of the people involved but, more often, actually in situations that serve their national interests.

Interestingly, a similar pattern can be observed in ASEAN. Although many scholars concur that the principle of non-interference is a crucial norm for ASEAN, the truth is that ASEAN states have frequently acted in violation of the principle in safeguarding their national interests and upholding the credibility of ASEAN (Jones 2010). A top-level Singaporean diplomat has admitted, *'frankly, we have been interfering mercilessly in each other's internal affairs for ages, from the very beginning'* (Jones 2010:481). ASEAN's former Secretary-General Rodolfo Severino (2006:94) also noted that ASEAN's application of non-interference 'has not been absolute' but is instead governed by 'pragmatic considerations.' Furthermore, several realist scholars have observed that ASEAN interfered in Myanmar even though it claimed to be 'bound by the cherished principle of non-interference' (Ganesan 2006:132). The following three historical events affirm this.

Firstly, after having played a significant role in adding legitimacy to the newly formed Cambodian government, helping Cambodia restore its constitutional monarchy, and succeeding at keeping communist Vietnam's expansionist threat at bay in the early 1990s, ASEAN states began making active efforts of turning 'battlefields into marketplaces' (Innes-Brown & Valencia 1993). However, Cambodia's ruling regime remained unstable for several years until Hun Sen succeeded in a coup d'état in 1997 that overthrew the anti-communist faction of the government that ASEAN previously supported. In the wake of state-wide violence, Western states cut aid to Cambodia, and ASEAN deferred Cambodia's planned accession into the Association. Nevertheless, ASEAN's interest in Cambodia remained clear; Cambodia's stability had to be restored in

order to ensure ASEAN's stability. Hence, after a series of negotiations with Hun Sen, ASEAN intervened, setting up the state, the rules, the conditions (Jones 2010:490) and supervising the 1998 general elections even though Hun Sen's victory was predestined, as his rivals were stripped of all political capacity well in advance (Peou 1998).

Secondly, faced with increasing pressure for democratisation following the devastating effects of the Asian Financial Crisis of 1997, President Habibie offered a referendum on independence in East Timor in 1999 (O'Rourke 2002). However, contrary to Habibie's initial intention of granting regional autonomy, the Timorese pushed forward for their independence, only to be met with a violent crackdown by the Indonesian military, leaving some 1,400 civilians dead. As the Indonesian government quickly became the subject of criticism by the international community, Malaysia, Thailand, and Singapore persistently urged the government to accept the UN peacekeeping force to stabilise the crisis (Mahbubani 1999:19-21). Subsequently, Malaysia, Thailand, Singapore and the Philippines contributed at least a fifth of the peacekeeping forces in East Timor, with generals from all the four Southeast Asian countries serving as commanders of the UN Transitional Authority in East Timor and the United Nations Mission of Support to East Timor until East Timor's declaration of independence on 20 May 2002.

Thirdly, ASEAN states' interest in turning Myanmar's battlefields into marketplaces surged especially following the Asian Financial Crisis. While Western powers remain largely doubtful of Myanmar's junta, ASEAN states made a concerted effort of domestic reforms by exporting capital, offering policy advice, training junior Burmese officials and admitting the country to ASEAN (Jones 2008:273-5). However, when the Myanmar junta oppressed the pro-democracy movement and adopted an anti-reformist position in 2003, Western powers questioned ASEAN's credibility in Myanmar. ASEAN leaders subsequently attempted to engage with the junta, with the then Malaysian Prime Minister warning that Myanmar could be expelled from ASEAN membership if the junta did not immediately release the pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi. However, ASEAN's diplomatic engagement with Myanmar during this period remained largely ineffective, the only concrete action taken against Myanmar being its preclusion from holding the ASEAN chairmanship in 1998.

The three cases above show that ASEAN states interfered with one another's domestic affairs when necessary for national interest and the perceived regional peace. One act of interference was often a follow-up to another act of interference earlier in history. As the complexity of interdependence between AMSs increases, the scope of affairs that are

exclusively of domestic nature is decreasing rapidly. The complex web of political and economic ties between the countries means that instability in one country can quickly escalate to border disputes, involuntary dislocation of refugees, drug trafficking and organised crimes that can affect all neighbouring countries. The geographic proximity also means that the member states are exposed to many common problems, not only of global ramifications such as the rising sea levels regarding global warming but also subregional issues. One such example is the haze caused by Indonesian farmers who use fire to clear fields, posing a severe health hazard to their neighbours in Malaysia and Singapore and a substantial navigational hazard in the heavily travelled Straight of Malacca. China's assertive territorial claims in the South China Sea also urgently requires concerted efforts of ASEAN states, possibly requiring the enactment of region-side regulations to safeguard the integrity of national sovereignty and regional peace in the Sea.

All this points in the direction of indicating that ASEAN, though claiming to adhere to its ASEAN Way, has not always been consistent and remains an intergovernmental association of self-serving nation-states, without significant progress as a regional integration project.

6.3 ASEAN's Constructivist Narrative

Despite the limitations, nevertheless, constructivist scholars in the region continue to put forward ASEAN's success narrative, emphasising the shared identity, norms, and values that ASEAN helped to forge at the regional level (Smith 2004:432). However, validating such claims requires that theories other than constructivism do not offer convincing explanations to the success, or the absence thereof, of ASEAN, which is not the case. According to Khoo (2004), this constructivist pro-ASEAN narrative is flawed, mainly because various problems surround the use of norms as independent variables in explaining the nature of ASEAN regional integration as a dependent variable. The critical problem is that the constructivist approach adopted by scholars such as Acharya (2001) is tautological in nature. By focusing on certain norms that scholars choose arbitrarily for the sole intent of presenting ASEAN as a credible, relevant RO, these scholars not only fail to acknowledge the material results effected by ASEAN but also fail to consider the consequential effects of ASEAN's inconsistency in upholding the said norms or effects of so-called negative norms (Jervis 1998: 974). They also tend to ignore the plausibility of other rationalist theoretical frameworks that may more accurately explain the effects of ASEAN norms with objective empirical evidence.

Regardless, when we search for empirical evidence supporting ASEAN's success as a regional policy tool, we only find a long list of examples such as Cambodia, Myanmar, the South China Sea, the Mekong, the haze, and the Rohingya refugee crisis where ASEAN failed to exhibit meaningful collective solutions. In fact, AMSs finding themselves in territorial disputes with one another almost always take their cases to external tribunals rather than invoking the existing Dispute Settlement Mechanism within the ASEAN framework, examples including the Ligitan and Sipadan dispute between Malaysia and Indonesia and the Pedra Branca dispute between Singapore and Malaysia, both cases decided by the ICJ in May 2008 and December 2002, respectively (Khoo 2004:44). This is evident in issues of all nature, be it political, economic, social or environmental. ASEAN has not shown effectiveness in neo-functionalist, institutionalist or constructivist views. It is an intergovernmental grouping of vulnerable countries in a neo-realist world. If constructivist claims on ASEAN's success is valid, there must be a strong, uncontested ASEAN identity and accompanying norms with visible, tangible manifestations which are non-existent at the moment. The level of trust between ASEAN member states is relatively low, according to recent surveys (see Figure 11). On the contrary, total military spending in all ASEAN countries has been increasing in recent decades (see Figure 12), supporting that these countries are in neo-realist arrangements in their relationship with third and third countries (Hartfiel & Job 2007:6).
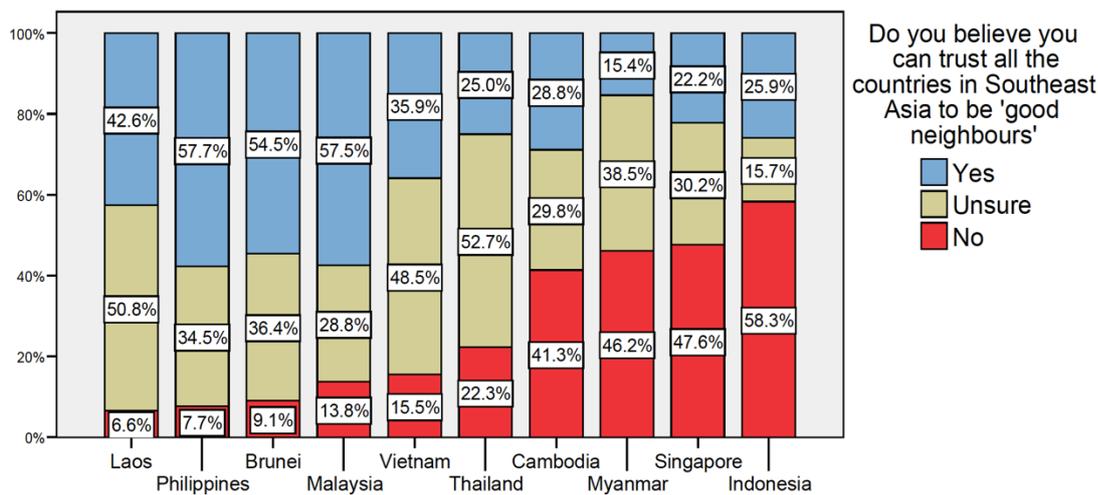
Figure 11. Grassroots Trust in Southeast Asia (Roberts 2007)
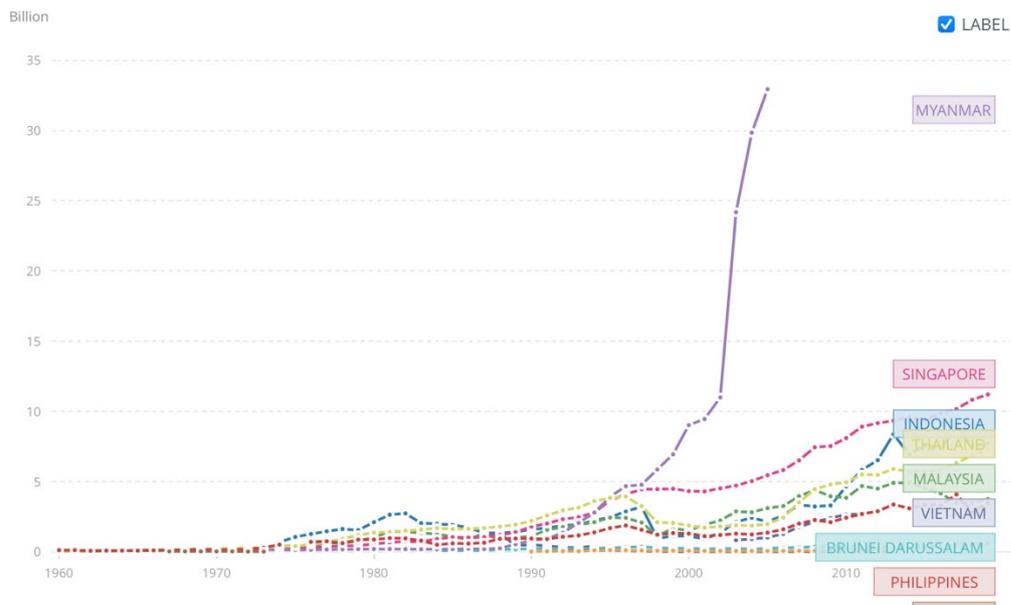
Figure 12. ASEAN Members Military Expenditure in Current USD, 1960-2019 (World Bank)

At the same time, the surveys also show that citizens of each member state have different concerns in the region. Each country has different self-interests, and divergence among the ASEAN member states continues to widen, making uniformly coordinated action very difficult. Such divergences are more pronounced between mainland states versus maritime states, between poorer states versus wealthier states, newer member states versus older member states, and more authoritarian versus more democratic states. The mainland states tend to be more concerned with their national sovereignty than with regional integration, mainly because of their relatively slow start into the nation-building process. These countries maintain a more protectionist approach in their economic development and lean towards the pro-China stance. This explains the overlapping multilayered cooperation mechanisms in and outside ASEAN, such as ASEAN minus X and ASEAN plus X, where individual AMSs enter into ad-hoc cooperative partnerships with one another to pursue their interests without getting slowed down by other disagreeing AMSs. Other broader economic and political cooperative frameworks such as the APEC and the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) serve the same purpose by shifting the centre of institutional gravity outside the severely restricted ASEAN framework. In all significant transnational issues such as the South China Sea and the Myanmar situation, ASEAN member states struggle to speak with one voice, even at the UNGA meetings.

In the absence of objectively verifiable evidence to support the existence of a common ASEAN identity and common ASEAN norms, constructivist arguments remain nothing but an idealist tautology. Describing ASEAN as a set of nations that 'agree to disagree' serves little purpose in IR studies because such an interpretation cannot be used to reliably predict ASEAN's future actions apart from the high likelihood that ASEAN states will continue to act only in discord with one another. In this regard, ASEAN's recent declarations and protocols that seemingly advocate for deeper and broader integration will remain no more than rhetoric, further proving that ASEAN is essentially a realist institution (Jones & Smith 2007).

Furthermore, for the validity of the constructivist narrative to be given any more serious consideration than rationalist theories, such as neorealism, there has to be concrete evidence to prove that ASEAN member states show a general tendency to act according to the logic of the logic appropriateness rather than the logic of consequences. By definition, realists are expected to follow the logic of appropriateness, carefully assessing different courses of actions, choosing whichever provides the most efficient means to their ends. On the contrary, the logic of appropriateness describes constructivists who act out of habit or decides what to do by posing the question, 'how is a person in my role supposed to act in this circumstance? (Fearon & Wendt 2002:60)' However, as this thesis has repeatedly observed, ASEAN states do not appear to share common norms or the same interpretation thereof. Instead, their actions are always carefully calculated to evaluate their gains in competition against everyone else, even those within ASEAN. Constructivist views in ASEAN studies have gained a firm ground only because ASEAN stakeholders intentionally use constructivism to mask ASEAN's inefficiencies. As a former Singaporean foreign minister has stated, *"perceptions can define political reality; if we continue to be perceived as ineffective, we can be marginalised as our Dialogue Partners and international investors relegate us to the sidelines"* (Jayakumar 2000).

6.4 Reasons behind the Divergence

So, what explains ASEAN's behaviour? Each member state has a unique set of national interests and a differing view of desired outcomes at the regional level. The critical importance here is that ASEAN seldom acts in unison for the reasons enumerated above. Again, ASEAN is essentially an alliance for small, weak states in a neo-realist world. Many explanations can be offered regarding the drifting divergences among AMSs.

Firstly, there is an institutional explanation. Jetschke and Rüland (2009), renowned sociological institutionalists, suggest that newer regional organisations tend to emulate older, successful ones. According to this narrative, ASEAN is thought to be emulating the EU (Jetschke 2013). Ample evidence points in this direction, with striking similarities between the EU's Treaty of Lisbon and the ASEAN Charter, which, both incidentally signed in late 2007, formally incorporated normative values such as democracy and respect for human rights into the ASEAN framework. The close resemblance between the two, in terms of institutional development timeline, warrants a special attention (see Annex 2). In fact, a number of ASEAN leaders have stated that the EU served as an inspiration for ASEAN (Allison-Reumann & Murray 2017). However, due to the lack of supranational capacity, ASEAN's primary role remains to reinforce national sovereignty.

Secondly, there is a cultural explanation. Before the arrival of Islam, Hinduism served as the dominant religion and cultural framework for most of the population living in Southeast Asia. Many aspects of this Hindi belief system may serve an essential role in explaining life in traditional Southeast Asian communities and nations. One example is a strategic notion known as the *mandala* system where there are multiple layers of concentric circles, with the layer closest to self represents foes, and the outer layers represent friends (Jetschke & Rüland 2009:189). The implication is that there are no permanent friends or permanent foes. Furthermore, a friend's friend could be your enemy and vice-versa. History does affirm this notion to a certain degree.

Another fact to note is that all AMSs traditionally have grown rice as a staple food. Rice requires a heavily centralised bureaucracy for building and maintaining irrigation systems, keeping a calendar, pooling and distributing workforce. Thus, community-centred living with a heavy emphasis on the elite-dominated social order has been a critical feature in all rice-growing Asian cultures, many elements of which continue to this day. This may explain why Weberian traditional leadership, instead of rational-legal leadership, took root in ASEAN states.

These cultural explanations do make sense, and backtesting them with the current social phenomena in Southeast Asia do reveal intriguing findings. However, such a social structure of minority elites ruling over majority peasants was present in all older civilisations, including the Feudal Age Europe. Hence, cultural and historical explanations are somewhat limited in explaining the political and regional arrangements that are seemingly unique to Southeast Asia.

What, then, explains the political behaviours of the Southeast Asian countries? One prominent feature is that Southeast Asians always had to align themselves strategically according to who exercised power over them. Such strategic alignment occurs at the national level and among various ethnic and tribal groups within a nation. For instance, in Myanmar, which is not too different from all other Southeast Asian countries, even when the NLD was in power during the last decade, ethnic minorities could not shift their loyalty to the Burmese-dominant political party. All across Southeast Asia, people tend to have a low level of trust for powers perceived to be foreign to them.

Democracy, for instance, is perceived as a Western foreign ideology. Myanmar is only one of the many Southeast Asian examples where democracy outright failed. While Brunei remains an absolute monarchy, Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam and Thailand are hegemonic authoritarian states where there are no contested elections. The other four states—Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia and the Philippines—are either competitive authoritarian states or electoral democracies where direct elections are held but with limited possibility of regime change. Liberal democracy, as defined by the presence of a government of the people, by the people, for the people, as well as safeguards for the coexistence of pluralistic political views of all people, simply does not exist in Southeast Asia (see Figure 13).
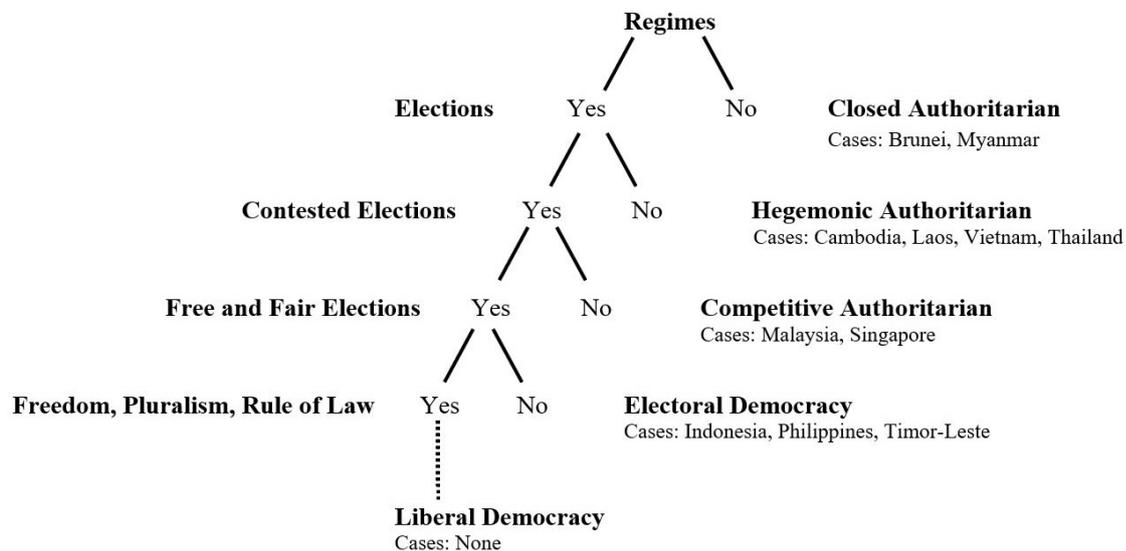
Figure 13. Political Regimes in Southeast Asia by Various Dimensions of Democracy (Morgenbesser 2021)

Across Southeast Asia, the adoption of democracy remains a lengthy and costly process amid the devastating power game between various political factions. At the same time, Western ideologies—Western not just because these ideologies were invented by Europeans but mainly because they were brought into the region by the European imperialists during the colonial period—are viewed as individualistic, self-serving, and destructive to the prevailing Asian social order (Solidum 2003). However, even then, different Asian leaders hold different interpretations of what constitutes true democracy.

The dialogue between Lee Kuan Yew, former Prime Minister of Singapore, and Kim Dae-jung, a renowned human rights activist who later became President of South Korea, is a case on point. Lee, though Cambridge-educated, argued that Western democracy could not be practised in Asia because it is incompatible with underlying Asian values and social structure. Placing a heavy emphasis on the role of the family as a basic unit of society, he even asserted that democracy in Asia could work better if older men with a family are given two votes each because they are likely to be more careful with their votes than capricious younger men. In Lee's view, the so-called Asian democracy was superior to the Western version because it respects the elderly and values the stability of social order, setting the environment conducive for steady economic growth, as has been evident in contemporary Singapore (Zakaria 1994). On the other hand, Kim Dae-jung rebutted that democracy was a universal aspiration arising from a common human experience irrespective of culture. Kim supported his argument using a historical account of traditional Confucianism under which the king was held accountable to the people, and the civil service system was based on meritocracy. He also cited examples of democratisation movements in many Asian countries, reasoning that it was in human nature to strive for political rights and democratic social order regardless of nationality or culture (Kim 1994).

However, the bottom line is that each country has a different view of democratic norms and experienced a distinct evolution of those norms in its history. Across Southeast Asia and the whole of East Asia, each country currently enjoys a different level of democracy in a uniquely different arrangement due to the ongoing lengthy power struggle. However, more importantly, the level and shape of democracy in a given Southeast Asian country are also dependent on the role of superpowers, i.e. strategic, military and political proximity to the USA, the USSR or China, which in turn dictated the shape and form of economic development in that country.

In short, historical, social, cultural explanations may be possible regarding the divergences in the national preference of ASEAN member states and how the regional agenda setting is determined. However, the most compelling of all is still the neo-realist theoretical framework that explains Southeast Asian countries as weak, small states that seek strategic alliance amongst themselves in a world that was bipolar during the Cold War and is becoming increasingly multipolar ever since. Not being able to streamline national preferences into an agreeable, enforceable regional agenda, the only option remaining for these states is to hedge against superpowers—by simultaneously balancing and bandwagoning with them—in a sovereignty-reinforcing regional arrangement. The fact that interstate war remains highly unlikely among ASEAN states actually serves as evidence that ASEAN lacks the meaningful capacity for implementing a liberal or ideational community (Jones & Jenne 2015:27).

Ironically, possibly the most accurate account of this reality concerning ASEAN in the 21st century is given by Stanley Hoffmann in his famous article 'Obstinate or Obsolete?' (Hoffmann 1966). As he observed the limited nature of regional integration driven by sovereignty-seeking European states in the late 1960s, Hoffmann saw that the international political order, pinned down by the principle of national self-determination, gave shape to the relationship of major tension between the superpowers. Due to the rise of nationalism, particularly in the light of multitudes of newly independent states, the arena in which superpowers could directly confront each other diminished quickly, significantly increasing the survivability of smaller states under the umbrella of the nuclear stalemate. Criticising that the ongoing European integration was driven by nothing but self-seeking sovereign states and that such pattern would persist into the future, Hoffmann noted that European states would continue to collaborate only in low politics, i.e. policy areas such as trade and agriculture that presented a low risk to national sovereignty, but not in more infringing high politics. Consider this key passage, from which only the words *Europe* and *European* have been substituted with *ASEAN*:

"Not only is there no general will of an ASEAN people because there is as of now no ASEAN people, but the institutions that could gradually (and theoretically) shape the separate nations into one people are not the most likely to do so. For the domestic problems of ASEAN are matters for technical decisions by civil servants and ministers rather than for general wills and assemblies. The external problem of ASEAN are matters for executives and diplomats. … In other words, ASEAN cannot be what some nations have been: a people that creates its state; nor can it be what some of the oldest states are and

many of the new ones aspire to be: a people created by the state. (Hoffmann 1966:909-910)"

7. CONCLUSION

Thus far, this thesis has considered the research question, 'what is ASEAN?' In order to elucidate ASEAN as a regional organisation, I have used various theories derived from European studies, such as neorealism, neofunctionalism, and some aspects of constructivism. This thesis has examined ASEAN in terms of its historical context, institutional architecture, economic integration and political security integration. The thesis also drew some crucial observations from the 2021 coup d'état in Myanmar to inform and address the relevance of ASEAN today. Some interesting observations were also made in regards to the ASEAN Way. We have looked at some of the inherent problems with the notion of the ASEAN Way itself. Also considered were the implications of the principle of non-interference and the reasons behind the growing divergences among the ASEAN member states (AMSs).

It was noted repeatedly throughout this thesis that the ASEAN model of regional integration differs from the European one in that ASEAN is a neorealist alliance of small and weak countries. Primarily concerned with regime stability, the AMSs intentionally avoid supranational institutional development. The most visible regional effort remains economic integration, but not towards a single market we see in Europe. The focus is still on keeping the economic engine of the countries running by creating a conducive environment for foreign and regional investors to make use of the means of production in the region. At the same time, there is clear evidence that AMSs continue to make a conscious effort in ensuring that no single superpower dominates the region. Evidence indicates that the AMSs are actively engaged in balancing against and bandwagoning with various superpowers.

None should err by saying that ASEAN is simply weak, small, and unsuccessful compared to the EU (Beeson 2009a). It should be recognised that both the EU and ASEAN were formed to ensure peace in their respective regions. ASEAN replicated many aspects of the European model, mainly because the EU had an earlier start with significantly important results. However, ASEAN also chose to build its own character, mainly because of the limited institutional resources in the region. The newly independent post-colonial states had a mediocre administrative framework and economic means; they focused on nation-building, with little resources remaining for transnational institutions. Geopolitics

were also important. Even as Europe was affected by the Cold War, the key difference is that actual fighting went on in Indochina for decades as a part of the Cold War. Southeast Asia enjoyed little stability, and the nation-building process was greatly hampered and delayed because of the Cold War.

We have also considered the pro-ASEAN narrative of many scholars and politicians in Southeast Asia. It is important to note that, in the constructivist perspective, the pro-ASEAN narrative itself serves two essential functions. Firstly, because ASEAN has little functionalist capacity for regional integration, ASEAN needs another venue to assert its relevance. However, more importantly, not only because ASEAN lacks the institutional capacity for regional integration but because its member states are still engrossed with their nation-building process requiring both rationalist and constructivist framing for regime stability within the respective countries, the same constructivist framing is used at the regional level to reinforce the legitimacy of respective national leaders. In this view, the pro-ASEAN narrative reveals ASEAN as a self-justifying and self-reinforcing framework (Jones & Smith 2007:181). Hence, what matters is not the content of policy decisions but the act of diplomatic engagements that take place at the regional level and the constructivist narrative that renders legitimacy at the ASEAN level (Johnston 1999:324).

For many reasons discussed here, ASEAN cannot be analysed in direct parallel with the EU because of the stark differences in their histories, cultures and geopolitics. Yet, the most important difference is the timing and context for the emergence of nationalism in these regions. The Europeans had several centuries of understanding and redefining their concept of the nation since the Reformation. The newly emerging political order placed the traditional rulers under a new set of responsibilities and obligations, even to the point of having many kings removed through revolutions. The newly enlightened populace gradually heightened their demands for fair and equal treatment through a long and devastating series of struggles.

On the other hand, the modern Southeast Asian nation-states emerged only several decades ago, based on the notion of nationalism first introduced by European colonialists. Southeast Asians are going through a series of revolutions and struggles—much similar to those Europeans had to endure for hundreds of years—at a greater intensity and in a highly compressed timeframe. All Southeast Asian countries show signs of the incomplete, still ongoing nation-building process. Coup after coup in countries like Myanmar and Thailand

demonstrate that the political, social and administrative orders are still being formed, and the people are continuing to fight for their lives and rights.

Nonetheless, references to the EU are still useful firstly because both the EU and ASEAN are two of the oldest regional organisations, with ever-increasing prominence in their regions (Bafoil & O'Mahony 2013). The most important takeaway from this research has been that those theories used to explain European integration are equally valuable in explaining the regional integration in Southeast Asia. Despite the contextual differences, the countries in Southeast Asia are going through essentially the same experience their European counterparts went through earlier; the same mechanisms are at play. A wholistic understanding of ASEAN does not require the invention of new theories. Constructivism does seem to play a more significant role in contemporary Southeast Asian studies than neorealism or neofunctionalism, for example, in the formation of the new ASEAN identity. And yet, constructivist ideas have always played a role in the building of every nation, and the EU continues to build on the so-called European identity and European values.

ASEAN remains a highly relevant topic of research, mainly because of its growing economic and geopolitical importance. Whereas this thesis employed neorealism and neofunctionalism to elucidate the nature of regional integration in Southeast Asia, I believe that two other theoretical perspectives may prove essential in future studies. The first is the regional security complex theory (RSCT), developed by Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver (2003). Since ASEAN exhibits essential features as a security community, the RSCT could be used to validate and further explain security relations among AMSs and between ASEAN and third countries. More focused research in regional security would be indispensable in explaining why ASEAN and its members act in specific ways and forecasting their future path. The second is historical institutionalism which focuses on the importance of history in the revolution of institutions (Pierson 1996). Building on the assumption that historical rules and regularities influence the gradual transformation of policies and institutions and that rationally-motivated preferences of actors are insufficient to explain policy outcomes, historical institutionalism may prove helpful in explaining unique features of regional integration in Southeast Asia and hence contribute to the formulation of informed future projections.

The findings and ideas discussed in this thesis may also be used to study other regions around the world, particularly where meaningful regional integration is yet to take place, such as Northeast Asia. China, Japan and Korea have traditionally been doubtful and sceptical of each other. Although there have been some discussions for possible free trade

deals concerning those three countries, no real regional integration has occurred. Despite sharing many similarities with Southeast Asia, this region has several unique features, particularly because there were no European colonies here but, instead, a strong sphere of influence of the Japanese Empire from the early Twentieth Century to the end of WWII. The existence of military dictatorship in North Korea and the continuing standoff between the People's Republic of China and the Republic of China have attracted many scholars with astounding findings. And yet, research based on regional integration theories may point towards a solution of greater peace and cooperation in the region.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AEC	ASEAN Economic Community
AFTA	ASEAN Free Trade Area
AICHR	ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights
AMS	ASEAN Member State(s)
APSC	ASEAN Political-Security Community
ASCC	ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
CEPA	Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement
CEPT	Common Effective Preferential Tariff
CRPH	Committee Representing Pyidaungsu Hluttaw
CSO	Civil Society Organisations
EC	European Commission
ECJ	European Court of Justice
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
ECSC	European Coal and Steel Community
EDSM	Enhanced Dispute Settlement Mechanism
EP	European Parliament
EPG	Eminent Persons Group
EU	European Union
EUCO	European Council
FTA	Free Trade Agreement(s)
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
ICJ	International Court of Justice
IPN	International Production Network(s) / Integrated Production Network(s)
IR	International Relations
MEP(s)	Member(s) of European Parliament
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NLD	National League for Democracy
NUG	National Unity Government
PKI	Partai Komunis Indonesia / Communist Party of Indonesia
R2P	Responsibility to Protect
RCEP	Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership
RO	Regional Organisation

TAC	Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNGA	UN General Assembly
UNSC	UN Security Council
USA	United States of America
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
WTO	World Trade Organisation
WWII	Second World War

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ANNEX 1. Articles 1 & 2, ASEAN Charter

Signed 20 November 2007, Singapore

ARTICLE 1. PURPOSE

The Purposes of ASEAN are:

1. To maintain and enhance peace, security and stability and further strengthen peace-oriented values in the region;

2. To enhance regional resilience by promoting greater political, security, economic and socio-cultural cooperation;

3. To preserve Southeast Asia as a Nuclear Weapon-Free Zone and free of all other weapons of mass destruction;

4. To ensure that the peoples and Member States of ASEAN live in peace with the world at large in a just, democratic and harmonious environment;

5. To create a single market and production base which is stable, prosperous, highly competitive and economically integrated with effective facilitation for trade and investment in which there is free flow of goods, services and investment; facilitated movement of business persons, professionals, talents and labour; and freer flow of capital;

6. To alleviate poverty and narrow the development gap within ASEAN through mutual assistance and cooperation;

7. To strengthen democracy, enhance good governance and the rule of law, and to promote and protect human rights and fundamental freedoms, with due regard to the rights and responsibilities of the Member States of ASEAN;

8. To respond effectively, in accordance with the principle of comprehensive security, to all forms of threats, transnational crimes and transboundary challenges;

9. To promote sustainable development so as to ensure the protection of the region's environment, the sustainability of its natural resources, the preservation of its cultural heritage and the high quality of life of its peoples;

10. To develop human resources through closer cooperation in education and life-long learning, and in science and technology, for the empowerment of the peoples of ASEAN and for the strengthening of the ASEAN Community;

11. To enhance the well-being and livelihood of the peoples of ASEAN by providing them with equitable access to opportunities for human development, social welfare and justice;

12. To strengthen cooperation in building a safe, secure and drug-free environment for the peoples of ASEAN;

13. To promote a people-oriented ASEAN in which all sectors of society are encouraged to participate in, and benefit from, the process of ASEAN integration and community building;

14. To promote an ASEAN identity through the fostering of greater awareness of the diverse culture and heritage of the region; and

15. To maintain the centrality and proactive role of ASEAN as the primary driving force in its relations and cooperation with its external partners in a regional architecture that is open, transparent and inclusive.

ARTICLE 2. PRINCIPLES

1. In pursuit of the Purposes stated in Article 1, ASEAN and its Member States reaffirm and adhere to the fundamental principles contained in the declarations, agreements, conventions, concords, treaties and other instruments of ASEAN.

2. ASEAN and its Member States shall act in accordance with the following Principles:

    (a) respect for the independence, sovereignty, equality, territorial integrity and national identity of all ASEAN Member States;

    (b) shared commitment and collective responsibility in enhancing regional peace, security and prosperity;

    (c) renunciation of aggression and of the threat or use of force or other actions in any manner inconsistent with international law;

    (d) reliance on peaceful settlement of disputes;

    (e) non-interference in the internal affairs of ASEAN Member States;

    (f) respect for the right of every Member State to lead its national existence free from external interference, subversion and coercion;

    (g) enhanced consultations on matters seriously affecting the common interest of ASEAN;

    (h) adherence to the rule of law, good governance, the principles of democracy and constitutional government;

    (i) respect for fundamental freedoms, the promotion and protection of human rights, and the promotion of social justice;

(j) upholding the United Nations Charter and international law, including international humanitarian law, subscribed to by ASEAN Member States;

(k) abstention from participation in any policy or activity, including the use of its territory, pursued by any ASEAN Member State or non-ASEAN State or any non-State actor, which threatens the sovereignty, territorial integrity or political and economic stability of ASEAN Member States;

(l) respect for the different cultures, languages and religions of the peoples of ASEAN, while emphasising their common values in the spirit of unity in diversity;

(m) the centrality of ASEAN in external political, economic, social and cultural relations while remaining actively engaged, outward-looking, inclusive and non-discriminatory; and

(n) adherence to multilateral trade rules and ASEAN's rules-based regimes for effective implementation of economic commitments and progressive reduction towards elimination of all barriers to regional economic integration, in a market-driven economy.

ANNEX 2. ASEAN and the EU through the Years

Source: ASEAN Studies Centre (2016)

ASEAN

1951

1952

1957

1967
Signing of the **Bangkok Declaration** which established ASEAN with five member states – Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand

1968
The EEC becoming the first external party to establish informal ties with ASEAN

1971
Signing of the **Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality Declaration** (ZOPFAN)

1972

1973
Signing of the **Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia** (TAC)

1976
First ASEAN Summit in Bali which adopted the **1976 Declaration of ASEAN Concord** (Bali Concord I)

EU

1951
Signing of the **Treaty of Paris** which established the **European Coal and Steel Community** among Belgium, France, West Germany, Italy, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands

1952
Signing of the **European Defence Community Treaty** aiming to establish a pan-European military, which failed to enter into force in 1954

1957
Signing of the **Treaty of Rome** which established the **European Economic Community** (EEC) and the **European Atomic Energy Community** (Euratom)

1968
Establishment of the **Customs Union** with the removal of all customs duties among the six EEC members, together with the Common Commercial Policy and Common Agriculture Policy

1972
Statement of the **Paris Summit** setting for the first time the objective of achieving a European Union

1973
First enlargement with accession by Denmark, Ireland and the United Kingdom

EU

2016
Brexit referendum with 51.9% of vote for 'leave' and 48.1% for 'remain'

Establishment of the EU Mission to ASEAN

2015
Adoption of the **ASEAN Community Vision 2025**, and launch of the **ASEAN Community** on 31 December 2015

2013
Seventh enlargement with accession by Croatia

EU acceding to the TAC

2012
The Nobel Peace Prize 2012 awarded to the EU for its contribution in upholding peace, democracy and human rights in Europe

Launch of negotiations on the **Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership** (RCEP) between ASEAN members and six Dialogue Partners – Australia, China, India, Japan, Republic of Korea, and New Zealand

2011
Establishment of the **European External Action Service** which serves as EU's diplomatic service

Signing of the **Bali Declaration on ASEAN Community in a Global Community of Nations** (Bali Concord III) which aims to establish an ASEAN common platform on global issues by 2022

2010
Inaugural **ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting Plus** (ADMM-Plus) – a platform of defence dialogue and cooperation among ASEAN and its Dialogue Partners, except Canada and the EU

2009
Adoption of the **Roadmap for an ASEAN Community** (2009-2015)

2007
Signing of the **Lisbon Treaty** which further reformed EU institutions and its decision-making procedures, and strengthened EU's ability to act on the global stage

Sixth enlargement with accession by Bulgaria and Romania

Signing of the **ASEAN Charter** which provides a legal personality and institutional framework for ASEAN

ASEAN-EU Commemorative Summit in Singapore

2006
Inaugural **ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting** (ADMM) – ASEAN's highest-level defence consultative and cooperative mechanism

ASEAN

1977 — Formal establishment of the ASEAN-EU dialogue relations

1981 — Second enlargement with accession by Greece

1984 — Brunei Darussalam joining ASEAN

1985 — Signing of the **Schengen Agreement** which abolished border controls among Belgium, France, West Germany, Luxembourg and the Netherlands

1986 — Signing of the **Single European Act**, setting the date of completion of the Single Market by 1 January 1993

Third enlargement with accession by Portugal and Spain

1989 — Signing of the **Maastricht Treaty**, which replaced the European Communities with the present day European Union

Fall of the Berlin Wall (and subsequently, the Iron Curtain), paving the way for the reunification of Germany and EU's eastward expansion

1991 — Signing of the **Paris Peace Agreements** on a comprehensive political settlement of the Cambodia conflict, paving the way for reconciliation in Southeast Asia and ASEAN expansion

1992 — Signing of the **ASEAN Free Trade Area** (AFTA) **Agreement**

1993 — Completion of the **European Single Market** with the "four freedoms" of movement of persons, goods, services and capital

1994 — Inaugural meeting of the **ASEAN Regional Forum** (ARF) which fosters dialogue and consultation on political and security issues in the region

1995 — Signing of the **Treaty on the Southeast Asian Nuclear Weapon-Free Zone** (SEANWFZ)

Vietnam joining ASEAN

1996 — Inaugural **Asia-Europe Meeting** (ASEM) Summit – an informal process of dialogue and cooperation to strengthen partnership of the two regions

1997 — Lao PDR and Myanmar joining ASEAN

1999 — Cambodia joining ASEAN

Signing of the **Treaty of Amsterdam** which strengthened the powers of the European Parliament, enacted institutional reforms for EU expansion, and incorporated Schengen into the EU framework

Fourth enlargement with accession by Austria, Finland and Sweden

2001 — Introduction of the euro as the single currency of most EU member states

Signing of the **Treaty of Nice** which reformed EU institutional structure to accommodate eastward expansion

2003 — Adoption of the **2003 Declaration of ASEAN Concord** (Bali Concord II) towards building a three-pillar ASEAN Community

2004 — Fifth enlargement with 10 new members – Czech Republic, Cyprus, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia, and Slovenia

2005 — Signing of the **Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe** which failed to enter into force due to rejection in the French and Dutch referenda in 2005

Inaugural **East Asia Summit** (EAS) – a Leaders-led forum for strategic dialogue and cooperation between ASEAN and its Dialogue Partners, except Canada and the EU