

THE ASEAN WAY OF MAKING REGIONALISM WORK BEYOND FIVE DECADES: PROCESSES, REMODELING AND TRANSFORMATION

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ABSTRACT

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) has reached its five decades of existence and expansion. While it has several limitations as a regional organisation, its luster both from within and outside the region seems to have increased in recent decades where countries of distant locations have expressed their desire in joining as members. Why is it that, despite its limited performance as a regional organisation, its gatherings are more attended? What made the ASEAN process oriented regionalism tick and remain fundamentally relevant? Regionalism that is non-legalistic tends to offer different recipes, and somehow keeps thriving in a world of developing economies. ASEAN has its own style known as the ASEAN way to make regionalism work. Even though it may not mean much, its relevance seems to resonate well with great powers from both far and near. Its dynamics, processes and structural mechanisms for cooperation demonstrate the kind of flexibility and adaptability to a changing strategic scenario that is compatible to regional needs without sacrificing sovereignty of its members. This article offers some theoretical explanations of what entail regionalism in its changing context. ASEAN's practical and pragmatic responses towards keeping regionalism alive in its own unique way are also deliberated. Beside its thriving and adaptive nature, it also discusses the limitations, which ASEAN must address in order for it to execute its plans to sustain regionalism into the next century.

Keywords: ASEAN, ASEAN way, theories on regionalism, ASEAN's limitations

INTRODUCTION

ASEAN is regarded as a successful regional organisation in advancing regionalism in its own accord, defying the common misperceptions in many scholarly works on the process of institutionalisation in the developing world. It has become a role model for many parts of the world, particularly among developing countries in demonstrating a style of working together that is non-confrontational and cooperative in nature. As a regional organisation comprising of small and medium size states, with the exception of Indonesia, ASEAN's progress in utilising the regional platform is admirable. Indonesia, too, as the biggest member state has never been a hegemon in regional theatre since ASEAN was established in 1967. It somehow astounds many, in the ways and manners in which this regional organisation has managed all their differences. Critics often highlight this as due to the practice of 'sweeping under the carpet' of important conflicting issues and differences among ASEAN members. Nonetheless, its success in establishing successful cooperation and regionalisation at certain degree in politics, security, economic, socio-cultural and environmental dimensions can be given some credit. Whenever there is a serious difference, members have also sought the UN and international legal institutions to settle their differences in demonstrating respect for international law. Some of the

territorial and border disputes between members had been resolved in this manner in the last few decades.

This article is an attempt to explain and explore the ASEAN way of making regionalism work beyond the five decades, or the 50-year mark that is widely discussed in 2017 among epistemic communities, media and policy think tanks. It will provide a theoretical basis of what entails regionalism and discuss the evolutionary strength of the regional organisation, or the ‘Darwinism’ of the ASEAN creature as a regional mechanism, its survival and adaptation beyond expectation. In doing so, this article will also briefly discuss the structures and mechanisms in which ASEAN ways of regionalism have been working, continuing its incremental progress and even thrive in some unexpected ways. Some of its limitations in the regional process will be also highlighted.

REGIONALISM FROM A THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

Regionalism is a contested idea or concept. Scholars have defined it in a variety of contexts, ranging from that of bilateral or trilateral arrangement and multilateral cooperation among states. Originally, the idea of cooperation between states in a regional locale was seen more as normal, without the use of the expression ‘regionalism’, or regionalization was in the pipeline in the manner of which contemporary international relations scholars theorised the phenomenon called ‘regionalism’. The study of international organisation and cooperation among members were explained purely as functional collaborations before the Second World War. Even when some European states got together to form the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC), it was never explained as the starting point of regionalism. Similarly, when the Association of Southeast Asia (ASA) or MAPHILINDO (Malaysia, Philippines and Indonesia) was established in the early 1960s in Southeast Asia, regionalism was never used as a term among the leaders. These initiatives were purely to manage tension and conflict between states, and were seen as a diplomatic initiatives of that era among statesmen to address problems between states as new states emerged after World War II. Hence, regionalism after World War II or during the Cold War were meant for security and conflict management, and to enhance ties among allies and within a regional vicinity.

David Mitrany looked at international organisation as a way to bring together countries to avoid conflicts and install peace. One of the key ideas is to look at commonly agreed area, or mutually agreed ideas or point of cooperation which can bring about positive change in the relationship between countries.¹ From here, the idea of functional cooperation was introduced. In this context, states worked on areas that were mutually beneficial where less tension prevailed, or commonality of interests existed. It was in this context that regions or regional organisations started to thrive after the Second World War by the adoption of this idea of functional cooperation. Functional cooperation later enhanced the forces of regional countries in a designated organisation at the global level as in the UN and etc. It eventually led to sectoral cooperation when more sectors were identified. Today, regionalism thrives because of sectoral

cooperation. More works can be efficiently done in identified areas as agreed upon, even though it cannot be done region-wide at times.

Regionalism originates from the concept of region - basically denoting a place or geographical locale. Geography plays a vital role, either in smaller set ups, mechanisms or bigger regional entities. So, when one tries to define it, it basically relates to the idea or a believe system, the spirit of cooperation, and the attitude of working together among governments and the people of a common geographical region. From the standpoint of international relations and world politics, regionalism relates to how countries cooperate in a particular geographical location involving a few states, or even between just two states at times. Eventually, regionalism of this sort developed into a much bigger phenomenon involving the setting up of larger international organisations called regional organisations. These types of organisation and processes mainly involve a particular geographical location of countries residing closer to one another and sharing borders, seeking to cooperate in resolving problems and in the search of common good, either through a functional approach or through legal agreements between governments. Elements of commonality, culture, value systems and related identities help regionalism to flourish whether in Southeast Asia or elsewhere on the planet. Creating a Free Trade Zone or Agreement, establishing a Common Market or implementing Customs Union have become a trend in the setting up of regional initiatives which leads to regionalism.² All these are seen as types of regional integration model that leads to, or enhance regionalism.

Some scholars tend to use the term regionalisation more popularly in the Post-GATT 1994 (General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade) scenario, signifying the numerous efforts and initiatives at regional level via regional organisations which were then encouraged given the failure of international economic cooperation to take off and the unsettled nature of international political economy in the 1980s and 1990s. Ultimately, regionalism has flourished from security based regional initiatives of the Cold War model, to the market based initiatives of the Post-GATT 1994 world. The transition from security type functional cooperation to that of the market based regional organisation had also been totally influenced and in line with the speed of contemporary globalisation.

Today it is vital to study and understand regional organisations, not just to appreciate regionalism as a phenomenon, but also to better understand how regionalism has shaped international relations and world politics in a globalized world. It can provide a better picture of how relations in intra-regional settings and inter-regional meetings shape international relations and world politics in broader contexts. Great powers and major powers tend to spend a lot of time, money and resources to ensure sustainable regional security and finding ways to capture regional markets. Politics of identity has also crept into regionalism whereby inter-regional cooperation and competition is inescapable. While the worries of a trade bloc war have been averted, it is obvious that cooperation, competition and rivalry is here to stay between regions of the world.

Historically, external powers from outside the region had also played a vital role. Some of the regional initiatives involving Southeast Asia nations were initiated by external powers. For example, SEATO (Southeast Asia Treaty Organisation) which was led by the United States in Southeast Asia in 1954 also included Pakistan as a member. It was obviously a Cold War product led by the US. Britain however, did not lend support to the US leadership in Southeast Asia due to fear of receding British influence in the region. This eventually led to the failure of SEATO. By 1971, Britain and a few key Commonwealth States had established the Five Power Defence Arrangement (FPDA) in order to sustain its relationship and security support for Malaysia and Singapore. Brunei, too, in recent years has actively participated in joint military exercises under this platform. Australia became an important regional power that contributed to the FPDA, and the US somewhat stayed in the Philippines until 1993 and later extended its defence support role by acquiring more Visiting Forces Agreements (VFAs). It also conducts the annual CARAT Exercise with several Southeast Asian nations while keeping bases in South Korea and Japan for observing the whole of Asia Pacific. The US and Australia have to date been active as ASEAN Dialogue Partners. Britain on the other hand uses the ASEM (Asia Europe Meeting) to expand its dialogues with ASEAN and other states in Asia. ASEAN has moved its security based regionalism forward via the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meetings (ADMM Plus).

The thriving of regionalism in local settings can also be attributed to the support it receives from great powers that reside far from the region, but with strong global presence. The United States and a number of European states can be said to have contributed in this way in Southeast Asia. Australia, Canada and Japan, too, have contributed to the thriving of Southeast Asian regionalism. China is now doing its bit with a stronger motive of influencing the region and rivalling other powers. India's historical and cultural presence, too, have evoked influences in recent decades. Economic regionalism in Southeast Asia has taken shape in the form of the ASEAN Free Trade Agreement (AFTA) like that of North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) to denote sub-regional level of regional cooperation. Sub-regionalisation has become more popular after the failure of the GATT in the late 1980s. The multilateral trading system which seemed to have failed in regulating protectionism in the age of globalisation had led to countries resorting to regional platforms to find solutions in advancing and embolden their trade and economic interests, and hence their state interests.

Ideas and concepts on regionalism have grown at different levels in the age of globalisation. Scholars like Kenichi Ohmae exaggerated this phenomenon and thrived on ideas of region-states. This fits well when we explain Europe's move from the European Economic Community (EEC) to the European Union (EU). Another popular term that warrants attention is the concept of mega-regions pointing to the size of, for example, Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) or the Asia Pacific region which is seen as the biggest region involving regional cooperation. Regions are seen as powerful political unit or entity when the EU moves towards demonstrating its supra-national authority by making members submit to regional treaties, constitution and parliament, and not to mention the regional currency of Euro which could rival the US Dollar, Japanese Yen, UK's Pound Sterling and the PRC's Renminbi. India is trying hard to create another bigger idea in the shape of Indo-Pacific region with the help of the

United States and Japan. ASEAN has yet to approve this. Australia's former prime minister, Kevin Rudd had proposed the idea of Asia Pacific Community (APC) which was rejected by Southeast Asia. ASEAN on the other hand has expanded and established another region-wide entity called the East Asia Summit (EAS) to rival APEC.

Regionalism is not a just a political entity, but also one that shapes international relations by way of cooperation, rivalry and the subscription to the traditional idea of balance of power. States have got used to it and have become more agile. Regionalism is no longer rigid. It assumes identity to fortify ideas like the presence of a regional community which can be called ASEAN Community or the European Community or even as large as the Asia Pacific community. Like states, regions too, have become adaptive and responsive to changes and changing needs. Members are encouraged to participate not only in smaller organisations, but also concurrently in larger and expanding regional organisations. Ideas like regionalism and multiple-regionalism can now co-exist without offending one another including external powers. This brings about a convergence of national foreign policies and strategies at every level, be it at the regional or even at the global scale. Regionalism has altered the course of international relations significantly like never before in the history of mankind in unimaginable ways. It created frustrations to some of the old theories, and at the same times enriching them too, by giving them flares like 'defensive' or 'interdependence'. Ideas, perceptions, perspectives and contexts have become hugely relevant in understanding regionalism and international relations today than ever before. Regionalism is not just a state-based cooperative phenomenon, but an exercise to understand human capacity to work out solutions in a rapidly changing world. Whether it brings the desired result is another story. Despite its limitations, regionalism is still expanding in various forms between states and also among non-state forces and is widely preferred as a mode of finding solutions and driving societies forward.

REGIONALISM AS A PROCESS ORIENTED GROUPING: THE ASEAN WAY

ASEAN's overall initiatives thus far must be seen as a process oriented regionalism than that of a legalistic functional regionalism as found in Europe under the EU. A process is basically a dynamic move or momentum which can be slow but effective in establishing a direction. Regionalism of this nature has its own advantages and disadvantages. The EU was formed to establish a supranational authority within European states. Its various institutions, including an electoral process for the European Parliament, are meant for establishing strong legal basis, laws and policies - implementations of which can be overarching and binding on all member states. ASEAN does not function in this European unitary state approach.

ASEAN was established as a diplomatic organisation or regional association, where members get together to cooperate, reduce tension and find areas to develop functional cooperation in politics, economic, security and socio-cultural and environmental fields. The nature is cooperation and not a legally sound way of doing things by using conference diplomacy and initiatives in as many sectors to cooperate. The flexibility is higher, but state sovereignty is still protected and cherished. The Sultan of Brunei who just celebrated his Golden Jubilee as

monarch may not be fully respected by all, but Bruneians take pride in his rule of the small state because of the welfare state approach which reduces citizens' burden. Many state leaders including from Malaysia attended the celebration. Thailand is another state where the role of the Royalty and also involvement of the armed forces in political interventions are seen as vital stabilizing forces even though democracy is preferred by the majority. ASEAN had also brought in communist states like Laos and Vietnam into its fold. Myanmar and Cambodia are also members whose democracies are often questioned. Differences in political systems have not discouraged regionalism of the ASEAN way.

The ASEAN Charter is not a legally enforceable punitive document, but it invokes certain behavior and expectation of member states to adhere to, e.g. with respect to human rights, to ensure political stability. After establishing the Charter, ASEAN later moved to form what is now known as the ASEAN Community - a solid identity type of or a framework basis organisation to further strengthen cooperation to benefit member states. The ideas of ASEAN Political and Security Community, ASEAN Economic Community and ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community are explored and expanded to strengthen a community and process oriented regionalism. These styles of initiatives are not to choke member states into legal structures, but to follow cooperative and diplomatic norms that are generally followed, much like the UN system where states contribute, participate and evolve as responsible international community at the regional level and at the same time develop a common identity for common and regional advancements. Differences are tolerated and differing positions on political structures, human rights, territorial disputes and time frame for economic liberalization are all accepted as practical realities of the regional association called ASEAN. There is no sacking of members. Instead, there are only delays for certain members to host Summit Meetings especially when their human rights records are appalling and also when crisis within a member state can be damaging to the image of ASEAN. Members' opportunity to fully enjoy prestige is lost until the situation improves or improvements are made. ASEAN is fully aware of the UN style of operation and therefore it has expanded and is still expanding accordingly. Timor Leste's entry is an important milestone given its past tension with Indonesia. Even countries outside ASEAN, such as Turkey and Australia want to become members of this grouping to benefit from regionalism of this type.

Similarly in the practice of diplomacy, diplomatic behavior and policy related decision making have moved from pure consensus based decision making to that of ASEAN minus X principle, in which case, initiatives can still proceed without a certain member, and such member may later join when their capacity to participate is fully developed. Historically, the ASEAN way which was often mentioned as *musyawarah* and *muafakat* - literally meaning consultation and consensus type of diplomacy, was moving the organisation. But this too, was seen as slow and not helpful when it comes to serious and dire matters. So, ASEAN has adapted in big ways from the old style to inclusivity and the ability function without all members moving together at the same speed. This, overall helps the momentum of regionalism, cooperation and regional integration. Members are critical of one another when differences occur, but this is not allowed to the extent it can damage the real dynamics. All members are fully aware of the benefits of being in the Association. ASEAN has been adaptive to a scene of differences, and yet at the same time sustains its processes and functions of a regional organisation.

STRUCTURAL MECHANISMS FOR REGIONALISM: DARWINISM AND THE ADAPTIVE NATURE OF THE ASEAN WAY

Whether it is regional, national or international, every organisation has its own structure for implementing agendas and also to carry out its programmes and to ensure survival in the international system. Some organisations maintain simple structures while some have gone very far with numerous set ups and mechanisms in order to proceed with its daily and yearly activities. Continuous expansion remains an important vision. Regional organisations have also in recent years becoming a bit like the UN - setting up numerous level of mechanisms, meetings and sub-processes. Some are even seen as bigger region-wide organs, stretching beyond the original members and the initial organisation. ASEAN is no exception in this context. Such trend was basically to address the changing needs of the global scenario and for bringing about a better response to these changes.

Two important global shifts took place in the 1990s. First, was the end of the Cold War with the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and later the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. Second, almost in parallel, was the failing of the GATT processes or the Uruguay Round of Talks when states could not agree on trade liberalisation policies due to the emergence of protectionism and rivalry between trading blocs. The above challenges were immediately addressed by ASEAN in order to adjust to the post-Cold War scenario of global and regional security situation so that its relevance would still be sustained. In the same light, ASEAN altered its Preferential Tariff Arrangement (PTA) system that was ailing with the failure of the Uruguay Round of Talks. The attention was then placed on the setting up of AFTA to facilitate trade from within the region and improve the Dialogue Partner status with powerful economies.

Economic regionalism in Southeast Asia took shape in the form of Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) much akin to NAFTA to denote sub-regional level of regional cooperation. Sub-regional economic cooperation was further upgraded in the form of Growth Triangles. All these became more popular after the failure of the GATT in the late 1980s. The weaknesses in the multilateral trading system which seemed to have encouraged all kinds of protectionism in the age of globalisation had also been one of the main causes for countries to resort to regional platforms. ASEAN continued to find solutions in order to advance trade and economic interests to embolden its member states' interests. On regional security, ASEAN established the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) mechanism by the mid-1990s. What is interesting to note about ASEAN is that this has given birth to other mechanisms such as the ADMM and ADMM Plus to further strengthen security cooperation. Throughout the post-Cold War period, ASEAN has shown adaptability and flexibility, albeit a bit slow at times. But the setting up of new mechanisms has allowed ASEAN to remain an attractive region along with its economic and market growth. External interests towards the region have never diminished.

DIFFERENCES OF FOREIGN POLICIES, RIVALRY AND STATE SURVIVAL OF THE ASEAN WAY

It is important to note that before the establishment of ASEAN, Southeast Asia as a region had different colonial powers ruling in different locations or selected states within the region.

Indonesia was under the Dutch or Netherlands. Malaya, Singapore, Brunei and Burma were under the British rule. Indochinese states were under the French umbrella. The Philippines was colonized by Spain and later became a protectorate state under the US. Thailand was regarded free from colonialism because its monarch was flexible and friendly towards Western interests. Prior to Western colonisation, the region was influenced by the Hindu-Buddhist empires spanning from Cambodia, India and up to Bali, Indonesia. These diversity and rich experiences had their own rivalry for influence and alliances. Western colonial states contributed an important part on the rivalry in the contest for colonial control and treaties. These historical experiences and state formation in the post-colonial era had taken its toll somewhat.

After independence, state rivalry in Southeast Asia intensified. ASEAN itself got used to it and operated quite pragmatically in dealing with internal regional rivalry and this continues even until today. In the past, Indonesia was ambitious to have its own *Indonesia Raya* or *Wawasan Nusantara* idea in trying to capture some major maritime and mainland areas in Southeast Asia. Malaya, with the help of Britain, brought in Sabah and Sarawak into the establishment of Malaysia in 1963. This had resulted in confrontation with Indonesia and also protests from the Philippines. Brunei did not join Malaysia, and Singapore was expelled from Malaysia in 1965. Major power interests and rivalry among players such as the United States, France, Britain, Russia and China continued in various ways - either through direct involvement or in subtle ways without them directly participating in regional events. This continued for a long period even after independence. The Cold War and post-Cold War tensions and foreign policy differences continued to manifest in different capitals of ASEAN member states because of their alignment or association with a particular great power. In 1973, ASEAN came out with the Kuala Lumpur Declaration of Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality for Southeast Asia (ZOPFAN) reminding its members to pledge for a neutral foreign policy orientation to ensure that the region will not be choked by great power rivalry, including from the forces of Communism at that time. Great powers such as the US, China and Russia have continued their interests in spreading their influence and warding off rivalry even until today despite all the ASEAN centered regionalism and ASEAN way of international forum.

Individually, ASEAN states have demonstrated their differences in foreign policies on issues like Cambodia, refugees and anti-communism during the Cold War. The war in Vietnam and the Cambodian conflict had indeed divided Southeast Asia once. The end of the Cold War has helped ASEAN to drive member states into regionalism to iron out their major differences and to start focusing on economic interests and regional peace. However, foreign policy differences within ASEAN still continue even until today despite the end of the Cold War. Issues of democracy, human rights, free trade, natural and man-made disasters, climate change, cultural rights and identities and rivalry in wooing investors still exist despite more than 300 ASEAN meetings being held throughout the region. In September 2017, Malaysia openly voiced out its difference in foreign policy and displeasure with ASEAN's statement on the Rakhine conflict or Rohingya issues taking place in Myanmar. Malaysia, displeased with ASEAN's light statement on these issues, would have preferred a much stronger condemnation. Huge aid to Myanmar and Bangladesh had been sent by Malaysia in support of the displaced Muslim Rohingya.

Territorial disputes in the South China Sea is another common issue of foreign policy in which Malaysia, Vietnam and the Philippines take different approaches. Laos and Cambodia avoid strong wordings against China due to their heavy dependence on the latter's economic support. Indonesia has of late criticised China and renamed the northern reaches of its Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) in the South China Sea as the North Natuna Sea. On economic and trade liberalisation issues, not all ASEAN member states follow the AFTA and the ASEAN economic initiatives goals fully. National compliances are obviously different as late comers have been given longer time frame to comply with the obligations. There is now even acceptance among governments that protectionism still continues to be a problem, including those practised by older members. Non-trade barriers are still seen as major problems within ASEAN. This may weaken regionalism. Overall, such differences in foreign policies have never hampered ASEAN Summits in serious ways. The only major problem would be when a final communique is not issued, or there are disagreements as to the wordings of these communiqués as not being strong and specific enough. These were highlighted during the Cambodia's Chairmanship of ASEAN or on other Summits and meetings in 2017.

However, overall, the ASEAN processes of Summit Meetings, ASEAN Ministerial Meetings, SOM Meeting, ARF and the EAS have continued unabatedly. Having said that, ASEAN member states are also known for giving all kinds of facilities to lure investments. One or two states can be shrewd in luring investors from investing in member states whose economy is less developed. These hidden practices still exist in recent years, for example, in the contest to secure large scale infra-structure investments from abroad or from richer countries. More modernised ASEAN members tend to benefit more from foreign investments than it does the least developed ones.

LIMITATIONS OF THE ASEAN WAY IN MAKING REGIONALISM WORK

While it is true that the ASEAN way of making regionalism work and at the same time protecting members' national sovereignty can be given due praises, it can also backfire at times when we view it from a different angle. Three areas can be cited in looking at the weaknesses of the ASEAN way of making regionalism work. First, is the lack of enforcement mechanism and the legal bite that are necessary to move the regional organization in a progressive manner. While ASEAN cannot be expected to move like the EU and its parliament, councils and treaties, this should not hinder ASEAN to start signing treaties that can be enforced and bind states from perpetuating certain problems for years and decades. The rise in environmental related crimes, climate change, the haze, illegal logging, human trafficking, smuggling of goods and cross-border terrorism demand a degree of harmonization of law and enforcement cooperation at a higher level between ASEAN governments. Similarly numerous security and crime related laws must be revised, harmonised and enforced. Thus far, too much focus has been put on trade and commerce, and the results have not been encouraging.

Second, the existence of deeply rooted nationalism remains a stumbling block to regionalism, and this weakens ASEAN's potential progress towards economic regionalism. Global events such as Brexit, and Trump's policy to revert to nationalism could only lead to the rise of economic and political nationalism elsewhere. Member states may slow down or move

backwards when there is no enforcement mechanism in place for the already agreed and implemented liberal trade policies at the AFTA level. Indonesia and a few other members are not showing the same level of enthusiasm as Vietnam, Brunei, Malaysia and Singapore in liberalising their trade and economy. Malaysia, under Prime Minister Najib Tun Razak, had gone further in trade and economic liberalisation by participating in the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) negotiations during the Obama administration. Their readiness to expand economic cooperation and liberalise numerous sectors may not be shared by Indonesia, Thailand or Myanmar. Political will on economic matters does not seem to be coherent within ASEAN.

The third challenge relates to corporate governance. The desire for big ASEAN state-based corporations to expand within the region and beyond indicates a kind of strength on their ability to perform on a bigger stage and serve the 630 million ASEAN population. Numerous local banks, and service sectors such as Air Asia, and Multinational Corporations (MNCs) from ASEAN may indicate strong interests and expecting all member states to open and speed up liberalisation. However, these business oriented private sectors must also take cognizance of how they can contribute to local developments beyond borders rather than to keep hanging on to profit making mindset. Banks are known to be on the profit-making mode all the time. Their contributions to lower income sectors of the population via their corporate social responsibility (CSR) policies are doubtful as they expand. Other corporations must also give more consideration of this before launching their interests in capturing the regional market. Regionalism can flourish positively if business entities truly serve the people while doing business for profit. Their contribution in community development needs to be explored further.

CONCLUSION

Observing ASEAN and its regional process from the year 1967 is definitely fascinating even though it was initially set up to mitigate tension. Its role in strengthening peace and prosperity in Southeast Asia cannot be doubted. The speed in which cooperation in more than a dozen fields, and some 300 ASEAN based meetings taking place annually is indeed amazing. Besides all the limitations, ASEAN governments continue to encourage, support and host initiatives to strengthen regionalism. Regionalism is indeed an important foreign policy agenda and tool for both the smaller and bigger member states. This is one way in which nations of this developing world attempt to make them feel important and visible globally. The arrival of great leaders from economically powerful countries and their willingness to explore opportunities in Southeast Asia cannot take place if not for a better ASEAN. As an organisation of developing countries, ASEAN is generally punching beyond its weight. Limitations aside, regionalism of the ASEAN way is here to stay into the next century. It is perhaps time for ASEAN to explore into what it should become in the next 50 years. While visions are encouraged, its organisational flexibility to adapt must not be sacrificed.

NOTES

1. On theory of functionalism, See, Inis Claude, JR. *Swords into Plowshares: The Problems and Progress of International Organisation*, New York: Random House, 1971, p. 379.

2. For theory and definitions see also K S Balakrishnan, “Regionalisme dan Isu-Isu Keselamatan Asia Tenggara”, *PEMIKIR*, Julai-September, 2001, pp. 1-46.