



**Nemzetközi Kapcsolatok
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**A COLLECTION OF THE THESES
of**

Lukács József's

Doctoral dissertation, titled

Building an Integration in South East Asia

The ASEAN+3 Cooperation

Thesis Advisor:

Professor

Dr. Rostoványi Zsolt D.Sc.

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Nemzetközi Tanulmányok Intézet

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1. A brief introduction to the subject of the thesis

The trend to create regional alliances as well as integrational organisations can be witnessed widely all over the world. We don't need to go far to prove this, all we need to do is to observe our own region Europe. The achievements of the European Union are undoubtedly spectacular. Despite all the setbacks and constant difficulties, Europe was able to accomplish, what is indisputably the most advanced multinational integrational organisation of the World. The implications of the EU are to be felt far beyond the borders of Europe. It's success is clearly and visibly serving as inspiration for other multinational efforts of similar purpose. Among others we can witness the evolving process of organisations like the NAFTA in North America, MERCOSUR in South America, the SAARC in the Indian subcontinent or the Gulf Cooperation Council in the Gulf area. Many more are trying to proceed as well. In the age of globalisation, the national borders cannot hamper the flow of goods any more. At the same time the demand from nations and their governments to form integrational organisations based on the same values is on the rise.

Southeast Asia is no exception concerning this tendency. Following several ill-fated attempts to create regional alliances, the decisive change occurred in the year 1967. The Association of South East Asian Nations, the ASEAN was formed. As of today this organisation is not only active, but has achieved impressive results, and as such is the cradle of further regional integration not only in the Southeast-Asian but in the whole East-Asian region. Is it proper to make such a statement? We can hardly deny that regarding the last three decades, the Southeast-Asian region has carried out the most dynamic growth in the world. They are still outperforming the rest of the world. The ASEAN has significantly developed during this period, and by now the issues of further enlargement as well as the deepening of the organisation had to be raised. During the abyss of the 1997 financial crisis the grouping was able to realize important organisational progress. They came up with the extended ASEAN formula, the ASEAN+3. ASEAN governments have realized that they are no longer able to exist without the back up of the East-Asian great powers. Nowadays the real question is not whether China can be a strategic partner to the ASEAN, but to what extent and in what kind of modality can China be accepted into the East Asian regional process. Obviously the East-Asian process of integration will radically differ from the European way – although it is hard to deny, that some similarities do exist. It is quite a challenge to find those similarities, and occasionally compare them. The question of “jealousy” might also be considered. To what extent – if any – has the spectacular success of European integration has influenced the

Southeast Asian course of integration. If this “jealousy” exist (this is quite likely, though obviously not tangible), is it considered as a beneficial effect for Southeast Asia? We all know that East-Asia has proved to be a highly flexible and adaptable region. Do they even wish to learn the recipe for success from the EU?

Another crucial issue regarding ASEAN’s future is the boundaries of the organisation. Some say that ASEAN has reached its “natural” borders and limits. Others argue that the organisation is not complete without the addition of all East-Asian nations. The present ten nations enjoying full scale membership are simply not powerful enough to face the contemporary challenges. Then who exactly is supposed to join an enlarged ASEAN? Obviously those nations, which have something in common with the “core”, with whom they have shared interest. Besides China, Japan and South-Korea is keen on approaching closer ties with the ASEAN. But the ASEAN needs them as well, though they will try to conceal that. They will probably not be able to continue without those three regional powers in the long run. To go against China has already proved to be counter-effective. However to counterbalance their enormous influence, it seems reasonable to welcome Japan and Korea into the organization as well. With these three additional members, the resources of this organisation – namely ASEAN+3 – is so vast, that they easily become one of the political and economical centre of the World. Cooperation is mutually beneficial for them, and they are beginning to recognise it.

2. Formulation of the key research and hypotheses

2. 1. Methodology of the research

This doctoral dissertation explores the intention for building and establishing integration in the member states of the ASEAN and also the ASEAN+3. It is necessary to analyze the real purpose of the individual states and their respective governments. What is therefore being explored is what strategy they implement, what are their goals, what exactly they expect from joining a specific alliance. Specific emphasis is dedicated to those individuals, who have promoted Southeast Asians into closer alliances, including the idea of Southeast Asian integration. This is important, since it is always the person or persons, who are behind those world shaping projects. During the time of my research I have been able to contact officials

and academics from almost all of the ASEAN+3 member states, with the exception of Burma and Laos.

During my entire research I tried to avoid a frequent mistake regarding this subject. European and American scholars often try to look behind the East Asian events and occurrences by means of “European logic”. Thus their results are often inconsistent. Consequently I was trying to utilize all my experiences gained during my several years of residing in East Asia, and I concluded my research with an open East Asian point of view, also making use of a multidisciplinary approach. The foundations of this research were based upon the wide range of theoretical works, including the theory of political science, history of integration, aspects of international law and works of widely respected international scholars. Among these the highly valued publications of Amitav Acharya - American University Washington, Philomena Murray - University of Melbourne, Jean Monnet Chair, William T. Tow - Australian National University, Toshiro Tanaka - Keio University Tokyo, Nam-Kook Kim – Seoul National University, Peter Katzenstein - Cornell University have been meticulously examined, and some of their conclusions were verified and applied. A unique feature of my study was trying to examine the contrasts and parallels between the evolutionary and organizational process of the European Union and the ASEAN.

In order to make my study transparent, I decided to divide the member states into three groups. The first group consist of the original (founding) five that is Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore and Thailand, plus the Sultanate of Brunei. This group is sometimes also considered as the “advanced” part of ASEAN. The second group consist of the new members, the less developed four nations, namely Cambodia, Myanmar (Burma) Laos and Vietnam (These are officially called the CLMV group.) Finally a third group was set up for research, obviously the so called “+3” group, i.e. China, Japan and South Korea. I have been scrutinizing and comparing the aims of these nations towards the ASEAN, and their methods of lobbying in order to exploit their interest during the organisation’s meetings.

The major structures of the analytical work were based upon the following segments.

- Involvement into theoretical and practical studies concerning the subject, with special attention to the topics of alliance forming, East Asian and European connection;

- Pursuing of national interest and lobbying among the states of ASEAN (also ASEAN+3). Exploring, whether simultaneous domestic occurrences influence the process of integration, if yes in what extent;
- Based upon the results of on-the-spot personal research, I tried to verify or confute the hypotheses regarding East Asian integration. At the same time, I made an effort to collect some experiences, which might be valuable for the recently joined Central European states, including my native country Hungary;
- Differences in national lobbying strategies within ASEAN, determining individual and collective interests with special aspect on the diverse historical and cultural background;
- Examining the relatively scarce common cultural environment. In what way does the ASEAN intend to familiarize the culture of one member state among the other? Unlike in Europe, the member states of ASEAN have been isolated from each other for centuries. Are they determined to narrow this gap, do they even realise the significance of common historical and cultural background, when building a sophisticated integration;

The research was based upon the following disciplines:

- International Political Science, Diplomatic Studies.

Special focus was placed on the concept of national interest. From the practical view I scrutinized major diplomatic events leading up to the deepening of alliances, which also enabled me to gather information on techniques of representing individual national interests during multilateral negotiations.

- Theory of Economy, and International Trade.

Ratio of payment into common budget, in what ways does it influence a nation's lobbying strength within the association. Do they have a cohesion program in order to economically improve the situation of the less developed countries (CLMV-countries), do the advanced countries share their experiences and management skills with the poorer nation.

- International Law, issue of law harmonisation.

Decision making process in the organisation of the ASEAN, depth and extent of regulations, how can they "force" their own directions on the member states.

- Sociology and historical/cultural factors.

The influence of cultural aspects, seeking of common and shared values. In what way does this contribute to the understanding towards each other within the population of the member states? How does this contribute to the willingness to reach compromises? Differences in historical environments, with special attention to the colonial past.

2.2. Issues examined in the thesis and other hypotheses.

- Do states in Southeast Asia have the clear intention to take part in integration? Do local governments have a clear view, what liabilities they will have to take up? Suppose that the answer is yes, what circumstances have forced them to join a multinational integration? How different are the concepts of the respective member states. Do all agree with the concept of forming a strong alliance with mutual responsibilities and political partnership, or some only view the integration as a loose economical coalition? Are the “weaker” member states ready to comply with the stronger states’ drive? Most important of all, are they aware of the fact, that in order to form an effective integration, all states will have to give up some parts of their sovereignty, and even if they are aware of this, are they still determined to go forward?
- Based upon the empirical research, is it proper to claim that the economically stronger and politically more influential states are behaving dominantly within the integration, consequently they are more successful than the weaker states when pursuing their own interests. If the previous hypothesis is proved correct, in what way will it influence the development of the ASEAN+3?

It is quite right to assume that the stronger states in an integration can apply more influence when defending their own national interests. By this means they can manipulate the decision making body, thus in most of the cases the outcome would be favourable for them. The real question is, if this is really the case? If so, it would have a grave effect on the course of the integration. As a result, the integration would end up in constant disputes and the smaller states would be left out. Therefore reality must be a bit different from theory. Though it is hardly deniable, that the objectives of the stronger states will determine the course of an alliance, but still it also against their long term interests to alienate the weaker states. This could easily disrupt an alliance. Therefore it is also essential for the stronger states to set up mutually acceptable aims, hence the smaller states will agree to strengthen the alliance. The latter is the clear goal for the stronger states as well. Consequently the stronger states need to understand the necessity of harmonising their aims with the weaker in order to avoid unnecessary clashes. Stronger states have the possibility to go further to negotiate a compromise. This way the alliance can remain stable. During integration building it is natural, that disputes often arise. But the stronger state will still benefit from the

alliance in the long run, so despite some hard compromises, it is still advisable for them to give in for the demands of the smaller states.

- Great Powers cannot and will not tolerate for long, when smaller states or even an alliance of smaller states try to move against their interests. Therefore any alliance without the backing of a great power will be subject to constant attack from a great power – obviously from the one, which considers its interest undermined. However if the alliance has a great power among its membership, then it is much safer for everyone. The great power will provide the alliance with stability and security, and can even increase the political significance of the grouping. Consequently the presence of a superpower in an integration is not only beneficial but also inevitable in the long term. The European Union is a unique example. Despite no respective nation inside the grouping can consider itself as a great power, however the Anglo-French-German alliance can undisputedly be regarded as a de facto superpower.

3. Results of the research.

1. In order to develop, strengthen and deepen the alliance of the ASEAN+3, the members states will be able to give up some parts of their national sovereignty. The members are not keen on such measures, but they are aware of the stakes of institution building in their region.

To achieve such a grandiose vision as the integration of ASEAN+3 extraordinary efforts are required, but there is no doubt that the member states are capable of such efforts. Undeniably it will take time, but the region has clearly realized its long term interest. It can also be stated, that the ASEAN without the “+3” would hardly be able to accomplish the goals by itself. The way ahead is bumpy. If the ASEAN+3 really intends to go beyond the features of simple economic partnership, and wants to realise its goal of single market common currency (as already declared at The Manila Summit in 1999) then they will have to sacrifice some of their national interests. Such a plan requires a degree of political integration as well. They will need to give up some of their principles of full national sovereignty. Their governments will have to obey to a superior authority. European nations were able to give in to this condition. Will East Asians act similarly?

Another issue is the enlargement of the ASEAN. It is quite obvious that some smaller states with shared interest and background like East Timor or even Mongolia will be accepted sooner or later. However the future of ASEAN without the “+3” is more than uncertain. China’s power is rising, it is already the de facto great power of the region and no country in the area can avoid cooperation with her. Historically it is a return to the Pre-European era of East Asia. Despite the fact that one of the original aims of the establishment of the ASEAN in 1967 was precisely to make counterbalance against then threatening China, the organisation is not in the position of moving against China any more. Its best option is to work in partnership with China, even involving her into the regional organisations. If China is accepted, Japan and Korea cannot be left out. This way, the ASEAN+3 became the second most prosperous association of the World, right after the EU. This is true even when there is a huge gap between those two organisations. Studying the recent experiences we have every reason to believe that the experiment of the ASEAN+3 integration will be successful. Subsequently, they will be an equal partner to the EU as well as to NAFTA.

2. Within the integration the politically and economically stronger nations can pursue their interests with greater success as the weaker states. This inevitably leads up to numerous internal disputes, however these disputes are manageable and as such they will not cause the breakup of the integration. Empirical research indicates, that stronger states are also the most flexible when negotiating a compromise with their strategic partners. This could already be observed in the European Union and recently within the circles of ASEAN+3.

It has already been observed that the allocations of benefits as well as inconveniences are uneven within any integration. Naturally the Gran Theory of Integration sets it as a principle that all participating members are on the winning side, however it is also evident that countries receive a different amount of advantages and disadvantages. This also means that in a highly developed integration, redistribution is inevitable; it is a natural occurrence in the organization. Consequently intervention from a superior authority is not only unavoidable but necessary. However experience tells us, that the stronger states in an integration can apply more influence when defending their own interests. But this will not disrupt the integration. At the same time it is against their interest as well to dissolve to the integration. They want to keep the smaller states inside because they need allies. In the end the stronger states will consider the interests of the weaker states as well, since they have more reserves, and can act

more flexible at the negotiation table, than weaker countries. All this will make the integration a desirable choice for all participating states, regardless of their power.

In the case of ASEAN and ASEAN+3 the decisive question is the behaviour of China. As of now, it seems that China is indeed showing a flexible attitude towards ASEAN. They made several concessions when signing the China Asean Free Trade Agreement (FTA). Until China's economy is producing approximately 10% growth annually (almost undisturbed by the recent financial crisis) they can afford such concessions as signs of goodwill towards Southeast Asia. What we don't know at this moment, what will happen when sooner or later (hopefully later) China will enter into an era of recession. Economic growth cannot last forever, and one day China will inevitably enter a domestic recession as well. How will the Chinese leadership react to that? Hardly anyone can answer that. However if they will be able to survive a recession and regain strength in peaceful conditions, that would indicate that China is strong enough to manage and overcome its crisis. (Unlike the former Soviet Union, which ended up breaking into pieces when hit by a crisis.)

Undeniably enormous challenges lie ahead for East Asia. Still we must also realize, that they have achieved a degree of integration believed to be impossible by many even a decade ago. They are still far from the "European level" of integration, but regarding their background it is more than spectacular, that they even made it so far. An alliance from west of Burma(Myanmar) until the east of Indonesia, with nations and people of such high degree of diversity that is unimaginable for Europeans. Though the EU is an outstanding model of regional integration it is unrealistic to think of it as the blueprint for building a community in East Asia. In fact, the experience of Asia indicates that a Western-style liberal integration is one of the least likely outcomes among these nations, having freed themselves from colonial status only a generation ago. The Asean(+3) way of building a community has to be significantly different of that in Europe.

3. In order to keep up an effective integration the organisation must have great power among its members. No alliance can sustain its role in the long term without the backing a superpower.

Alliances without the assistance of a superpower did not last for long, or their role and mission faded away. However a participating great power provides the alliance with stability and security, and even increases the political significance of the grouping. This leads to a better level of representing and enforcing their interests, Consequently the presence of a

superpower in an integration is not only advantageous but also inevitable in the long term. Moreover the great power can defend the integration from external attacks, not only from militaristic nature, but also economical or political interferences. ASEAN is a good example for this. The 1997 Asian crisis escalated regional awareness of the need to build stronger ties and common economical/financial architecture in East Asia, which was under-institutionalized compared to other developed regions of the world. The ASEAN could not survive the crisis “alone”, it needed patronage from at least one superpower. And the superpowers were ready to accept an invitation. China, Japan and South-Korea were accepted into ASEAN in a special modality, the ASEAN+3. This characterized the ASEAN+3 as a framework for dealing with financial and monetary (thus political) cooperation. In particular, resentment against the US on dealing with the crisis promoted not only financial and economic cooperation among ASEAN+3 members, but also a wide range of interregional solidarity. The Chiang Mai Initiative is a concrete agreement and an important institution for describing ASEAN+3 as a framework for promoting financial, monetary and to a lesser extent political cooperation. However, this institution reflects the direction and nature of the ASEAN+3 framework as being a result of consultation and negotiation among members who share significant common values as well as common interests.

4. The ASEAN+3 integration based on East Asia will establish a kind of Pan-Asian organisation, which will have the capability to compete with both the United States and the European Union, and as such will be a primary challenger to the western-based economical and political centres.

The rise of China and the simultaneous ascend of the whole East Asia will directly contribute to the relative weakening of the Western influence. Actually the decline of global European control has already begun decades ago. The centre of global economic growth has already been displaced from the Atlantic region to the Pacific. Although the highly successful attempt of Europe to create a Union has indeed won considerable respect for the old continent, but this alone could not regain the old days of glory for Europe. Asia, especially East Asia has proved to be not only an important, but also inevitable actor on the stage of global world politics. The clear loser in this process was Europe. As for the United States, their global leadership has not been challenged after all. It has simply shifted the centre of gravity from the Atlantic East Coast to its Pacific West Coast. Though it is true, that Washington needs to work together

with Beijing, both economically and politically, the US is still the major global power. East Asia is rising but they are still far from their goal of being self-reliant.

However the Western Hemisphere has to obey to the rules of a new world order. The exaggerated western representation in multinational institutions, as well as the “oversized” European and American existence in major international structures cannot be maintained any more. Other emerging nations and regions of the world are demanding to receive appropriate acknowledgement according to their strengthened economic and political capabilities. The present structure of international order and institution building was heavily influenced by the western powers, sometimes created and operated exclusively by them. East Asia will no longer tolerate this. They need to be given the proper status, if not they will leave certain organizations. It is in the interest of Europe to help to modernise the international institutions in order to keep them genuine and effective.

5. The overall diversity among the East Asian nations is so enormous that there is no realistic chance to establish the European level of cohesion. However this does not mean that the obstacles faced by East Asians are impossible to overcome. In the first stage of integration, it will be necessary to set up all the institutions which handle the financial differences and later manage the macroeconomic differences. A common cohesion fund is essential, which will contribute to the build up of solidarity within the association.

The success of European integration has indisputably set a „standard” for regional integrations. Though the EU cannot serve as rigid model for other similar initiatives, it can serve as an excellent example. The norms of Europe, especially the norms and ideas behind the union of equals are something, that other regions are eager to study. When mentioning norms we might as well seriously discuss what the difference is between EU and North-American “norms”. But the former colonies of Asia are aware of these differences. No doubt, the majority prefers the European norms by now. In order to receive some respect, the EU has to offer something more in Asia than financial aid and advanced technology. The EU has to teach how to coexist in a community of almost endless diversities. Who else should do so, if not the EU? East Asian nations are separated by huge distances, they are living in diverse cultures speaking various languages and they subscribe to different religions. And still they do share something in common. That something, which can be used as base might be the socio-

cultural community in Asia. At least – just like in Europe – most of them are somewhat ethnically related.

The European example has also taught us, that some sensitive areas of national interest do not need to be unified. Among others, areas like national taxation, national budget or the role and ratio of state owned companies versus private companies are absolute domestic national matters within the EU. And this does not weaken the integration. East Asians have so far not made up their minds about these sensitive issues. ASEAN and ASEAN+3 officials will have to present a clear picture of certain future prospects regarding the division of national and institutional authority. They need to clarify which areas remain a domestic national issue, and which areas will be transferred to a supranational authority, evidently the ASEAN secretariat. So far East Asians lag behind the Europeans regarding this matter. They will need to take up a courageous initiative in order to keep up with the demand of a serious integration.

6. It is undeniable and proven that the high pace progress of the East Asian and Southeast Asian region is based on western inputs and Western results. Obviously they worked hard for their accomplishments, they do have a disciplined society along with skilled and energetic labour, and on the top of it a highly adaptive management. Still all this would have been insufficient without western technology. East Asians needed to adapt to the latest developments of American and European advances. And that's exactly what they did. And not only from the point of technology. Other significant aspects of modern western management, social structure and even part of the welfare system had to be adopted into the east-Asian societies in order to achieve their spectacular results.

No doubt, the above mentioned thesis would be vehemently denied by most Asian scholars. They would argue that Asia was already highly developed even before the arrival of the aggressive and often destructive European colonisers. In their view the arrival of western powers has interrupted their long and prosperous development, hence it resulted in more harm than good. It is not scientific to ask “what would have happened if” the Western powers did not influence Asia, but we must admit, that western presence in East Asia had both advantageous and disadvantageous effects. Undeniably western influence has broken up the natural path of development in East Asia. Their resources were exploited for the sake of western fortune seekers. On the other hand East Asians have adapted to a higher degree of

social standards as well as they have benefited from western based cutting-edge technological innovations. They voluntarily implemented some of the western technological breakthroughs, and put into practice management methods and know-how having learned from the West. (They call this soft-power.) They have also agreed to keep up their legal system largely inherited from the European colonial past, even mentioning issues such as human rights or equality of women. Most of their leaders and academicians have attended western education, and even their new norms and lifestyle is partially based on western values.

Naturally the question arises: Could the East Asians have achieved all their successes solely on their own, without any input from the Western Hemisphere? Would have all these spectacular developments happened, would they already be in the frontline of the World without any western addition? The answer is a definite no. The success of East Asian rise was heavily based on the western investments and the excessive utilization of western technology as well as management. Even some segments of the Asian societies have begun to become “westernised”. They started democratising their societies, they have liberalised some segments of trade and politics, even began building democratic institutions, often leading up to free elections deciding the leadership of a nation. As a consequence it is impossible to deny the positive effects of recent western influence when examining the rise of East Asia. Japan is a good example as well. It has demonstrated an incredible pace of development, when more than a century ago they have voluntarily implemented western style reforms. Probably the same is true for most of East Asia.

3.1. Major Conclusions

Since the EU is facing serious challenges from the rising China and its Southeast Asian neighbours, the need to fasten the ties between the world’s two most advanced integrational bodies the EU and the ASEAN is inevitable. The EU must not lag behind the US, which already has well maintained institutional relations with the world’s most dynamic economic region, i.e. East Asia. Undoubtedly the EU serves as a role model for integrations in the world, however this does not mean, that it could be a blueprint for the ASEAN. The historical and cultural background of these alliances significantly differ, nevertheless some similarities exist. Based upon these and the recently ratified Treaty of Lisbon, the time is right for the new European External Action Service to make the necessary steps for a brand new chapter in European-East Asian relations.

The present state of the Asian integration process is approximately at the level of European integration in the early sixties. Since then Europe took a long and bumpy road to get where it is today, a few times coming close to total disintegration. When observing the ASEAN we must admit, that most of their achievements are already beyond one could have imagined a quarter of a century ago.

Compared with Europe there are fundamental differences:

- Asia completely lacks the historical background for integration(s), unlike Europe, which has more than a thousand years of “experience” regarding alliances and “pre-integrational” structures (from The Roman Empire to Austrian-Hungarian Monarchy etc).
- Geographically isolated from each other, East Asians never had that wide range of socio-cultural/economical/political interactions that Europe constantly experienced within the continent.
- In Asia there are no similar or “counterbalancing” nations. In Europe there is a clear distinction of the “subgroups”. Heavyweights like Germany and France, medium sized like Poland and Spain or less influential nations like Hungary, Greece. Hence they create a natural political equilibrium within the integration. Asian nations are so different regarding power and influence, that such a natural grouping for counterbalance (e.g. Sino-centrism) is virtually impossible, but there is an absolute dominancy of one –maybe two- nations
- Another major obstacle is the US. In the case of Europe, Washington originally endorsed the idea of a strong European alliance; however they are vehemently against anything similar of that kind in East Asia. This is unlikely to change in the future.

Consequently we’ve come to the question: What benefits, if any, can be derived from the European experience? ASEAN must realize that their present intergovernmental structure that leaves the decision-making to its member states will never work. Europe tried such a thing, the EFTA. It quickly became incompetent. And Europe was able to make a quick move forward. How and why? Any valuable lessons for Asia? Scrutinizing the EU we must admit that despite the grave diversities, all 27 members share a common socio-cultural background among many other things. But the multicultural diversity that exists in Asia is incomparable to that of Europe.

Consequently before anything, Asia must notice, that widening the system of FTA-s is beneficial, but unsatisfactory in the long run. This alone, will not even be enough, to make up an economical or even a political community. More effort is required. The FTA is just a step forward at its best, but not a solution. Asia (and ASEAN) has to learn from the European experience, and realize, that a lasting and effective alliance needs to include a political aspect as well. It is again the EU which is – unlike the US - ready to provide full-hearted support to ASEAN's integration efforts. Although the EU is an outstanding model of regional integration it is unrealistic to think of it as the blueprint for building a community in East Asia.

And at this point we come up to the main issue. How serious is the ASEAN about sticking to their ten-nation frame. Even though the ten states do indeed form a noteworthy and powerful alliance in Southeast Asia, it is immediately apparent, that none of them (the ASEAN-10) are even close to being a superpower. Probably not even a regional power. History has clearly taught us, that no alliance can last for long without a global major player. Any multilateral grouping that was eager for a lasting influence on the international stage, sooner or later had to accept the “backing” of one or two superpowers. (In most cases alliances were formed by the superpowers). This is not the case in Asia now. Ten states formed an Alliance, but they do not seem to be ready to acknowledge, that “alone” without a superpower they remain weightless and vulnerable.

Now Asian nations have come to a standstill at the crossroads. They need to decide: Is it their long term economic or their short term political interest which matters more. Are they able to give up some parts of their sovereignty to make the alliance operable? Can they provide ASEAN (or more likely ASEAN+3) the supranational features and sidestep the issue of non-interference? Will they be able to create a “community of equals” (do they even require such a thing) or they will admit the dominance of certain nations. Most importantly: Are they ready to let in new member states? The applicants are at the doorstep. China and Japan and Korea are at the door. Can Japan or the other “+3 members” compel the ASEAN-10 into an enlargement? Will they be able to create a truly operational ASEAN+3 integration? These are the real challenges of today's Asian politics. And Japan as the most advanced nation of the region can do a lot, to lead East Asia on the right path.

Should ASEAN+3 reach a solution, and an “EU-type” community would emerge in parts of Asia that might well create the second strongest integration on the world. But the challenges ahead are enormous. The ASEAN-10 is struggling with its “under-institutionalization”. The

ASEAN+3 appears to be a much more viable grouping, however the “original” members are seriously worried of being taken over by the newcomers. Maybe not without a reason. Regarding economic output, the “+3” nations are about eight times stronger, than the ASEAN-10. (If Hong Kong and Taiwan is included, ten times more.) And if political power and global influence is measured, one must easily recognize, that the ASEAN-10 and the “+3” are in a completely different category. Any statements of ASEAN might easily go relatively unnoticed. This will hardly happen, when Japan or China lets the world know about its certain interests.

The Asian financial crisis of 1997-98 has clearly indicated the limits of capabilities of ASEAN. There was no way out, except to strengthen and deepen the regional cooperation, which inevitably meant the welcoming of “new” members. Members who are capable to give answers to global challenges, members who have the ability to drive the region out of the turmoil. ASEAN “alone” has clearly failed, and had to accept the helping hand of superpowers. But this time it was not the US nor Europe. The region had its own superpower(s), so common sense dictates that they should be invited to cooperate.

Regarding the East Asia Summit, it appears to be limited to a multilateral consultation body. Can it move forward? The way I see it, scarcely. Australia, New-Zealand, India (as well as the US) are significantly different from the ASEAN+3 nations by all means. Besides if they would join, then where would be the natural limits of an Asian Integration? ASEAN+3 has reached its natural limits regarding expansion. In addition it is extremely hard to imagine China and India in the same integration. It would probably do more harm than good. These giant emerging markets must not be unified, they need to operate independently of each other. In case of a recession, one can balance the effects of the other, but if both are in the same association, the whole World economy could be shaken when they suffer simultaneously.

Finally we must ask, what are the future prospects of ASEAN and its extended version the ASEAN+3. In short: they will form the base for a potential East Asian integration. Probably their major merit is that unlike previous Asian attempts for unification, which were based on one sided hegemony, the ASEAN has presented a new method. This organization offers membership in an association of equals, where all members regardless of their size and power are considered equivalent. The case of Europe has indicated, that is a recipe for success.

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