ASSESSING THE ATTAINMENT OF ASEAN OBJECTIVES
VIA SUMMITS

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Abstract. The Association of Southeast Asian Nation (ASEAN) marks its 50th years of establishment in 2017. Initially, the main focus on ASEAN was to develop the countries within the region but as the member states have expanded, the aims shifted towards developing a peace and stable region. Currently, there are only 10 members of ASEAN striving and committed in realizing the objectives of ASEAN. The ASEAN Summit is used as a mechanism to meet, discuss and decide between member states and dialogue partners on various issues and agenda. The ASEAN Summit is a three-day meeting held semi-annually and the latest was the 31st summit held in Manila, the Philippines. Despite numerous summits and meetings, the results and key performance on the objectives have not been publicly scrutinized. Hence, this paper seeks to assess the attainment of ASEAN objectives which have been outlined during the establishment of ASEAN in 1967 via the discussion and agreement reached in each of the summits. The contents of the summit, such as focus and agreement or treaties, will be used as the yardstick to measure the attainment of the ASEAN objectives.

Keywords: ASEAN, Regionalism, Political-Security, Social-Cultural & Economic

Introduction. Integration is the action of combining and joining together to achieve desired goals. It is also reflected on the communal and joint effort amongst parties that share similar vision and values. This noble intention usually seeks on interaction between affiliates. In the context of international relations, Shafritz1 defined that integration as a voluntary process of joining together to create a new political community. This definition is much related with the process of regionalism which embraces the shift of loyalty and commitment on individual state focus to the integration and regional-based focus. Initially, the effort of joining together amongst few parties or states started with minimal members’ involvement such as bilateral integration, which then enhanced with various parties cooperation which representing the multilateral integration and finally institutionalized the commitment through agreements and declarations. This scenario very much reflects on the basis of establishment of regional-based institution which is best reflecting the Association of Southeast Asian Nation (ASEAN). As mentioned by Dent2 for some time now, Southeast Asia has provided models of regionalism that have contrasted with those traditionally supplied by Europe while Severino3 noted that it has served as the core regionalism in East Asia and Asia Pacific.

Association of Southeast Asian Nation or internationally known as ASEAN is a region-based institution that was established 50 years ago. Initially, the association engaged on strengthening solidarity through inter-states integration on political-security (more emphasized given on preventing communism influence and threat), economic and socio-cultural spheres. Recently, the focus has been emphasized on developing caring societies which equates all member states and its population to be assimilated as One Identity and One Community.

Research issue. The Association of Southeast Asian Nation (ASEAN) was institutionalized on 8th August 1967 in Bangkok, Thailand. The initial member states were only five; the Republic of Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore and Thailand. All these founding fathers of ASEAN agreed to integrate and cooperate in various spheres by signing the formal document; the Bangkok Declaration4. This document outlines their aspiration and future direction in the form of objectives. Overall, the are seven objectives of ASEAN which are:

i. To accelerate the economic growth, social progress and cultural development
ii. To promote regional peace and stability
iii. To promote active collaboration and mutual assistance
iv. To provide assistance to each other in the form of training and research facilities
v. To collaborate more effectively (agriculture and industries, trade, transportation and communication facilities)
vi. To promote South-East Asian studies
vii. To maintain close and beneficial cooperation with existing international and regional organization

These objectives remain as the main reference and direction for ASEAN and due to its uniqueness and comprehensive elements, it attracted neighboring counties to join and be part of ASEAN member states. Currently, there are 10 member states of ASEAN with the inclusion of Brunei (1984), Vietnam (1995), Laos and Myanmar (1997) and the last member is Cambodia, joined in 1999.

Even though the total members of ASEAN have increased and the objectives are clear, however the attainment
of each objective remains unclear. Hence, this paper seeks to identify the attainment of ASEAN’s objectives via ASEAN Summits.

**Asean summit.** ASEAN Summit is the avenue used by ASEAN member states to meet and discuss the current and arising issues within and beyond the region. Initially, the summit was held without having fixed regularity. The first summit was held nine years after the establishment of ASEAN. The 2nd summit held a year later (1977), the 3rd summit convened 10 years after that (1987) and the 4th summit held in 1992.

During the 4th summit, member states have agreed that formal summits would be held every three years rather than on an ad hoc basis. As a result, the 5th and 6th summits were held in 1995 and 1998 respectively. However, the frequency in convening the summits has been sped-up to become an annual meeting. This was reflected on the 7th to the 11th summits which were held annually. The current trend of convening the ASEAN summits is semiannually. Since the 12th summit in 2007 until the recent 31st summit (2017), all summits were held twice a year. Currently, the summit is held for three days that comprising of meeting among ASEAN leaders, a conference between ASEAN leaders and foreign ministers, and the ASEAN+3 meeting which refers to the meeting with China, Japan and South Korea as ASEAN’s essential partners.

**Methodology.** This study has used quantitative method and the data gathered have been analyzed by using descriptive analysis. The frequency analysis has used in order to assess the attainment of ASEAN’s objectives by identifying and quantifying certain words or content in text (declarations, agreements or statements produced in the summits) to understand the contextual use of words or content. The words or content identified would be measured on its frequencies and the attainment of which objectives of ASEAN would be determined.

**Discussion and conclusion.** As indicated in Table 1, the most prominent objective attained throughout the ASEAN summits is Objective 3: to promote active collaboration and mutual assistance among the member states. This objective has been emphasized with the total of 63 frequencies, represented by the several declarations, plan of actions and cooperation. Among the scopes of Objective 3 highlighted and pursued through the declarations, plan of actions and cooperation are collaboration and mutual assistance on labor and manpower, social-cultural, functional, intellectual property, science and technology, HR development, environmental development, HIV and AIDS, combating terrorism and cybercrime, food security, human rights, women, youth and children, drug-free society and emerging diseases.

The second rank of ASEAN objective highly discussed throughout the summit is Objective 1: to accelerate the economic growth, social progress and cultural development with 38 frequencies represented by the outcomes of the summit in the form of declarations, plan of actions and cooperation. The area of concern for this objective reflects on the economic cooperation among member states in creating an integrated and single production base. This scenario would make Southeast Asia more effective in the present heightened competition and necessary in the face of fiercer competition posed to ASEAN. The other priority of this objective is on the social development and establishing the ASEAN Community. The effort and focus on creating the ASEAN Community initiated during summit 9th in 2003 and a year later ASEAN outlined the Plan of Action for Socio-Cultural Community and Security Community. The ASEAN Economic Community Plan of Action was outlined during summit 14th in 2009. It should be noted that ASEAN Community is the current focus set by ASEAN and the discussion, agreements and arrangement to materialize the creation of these communities has been conveyed regularly since its inception.

The third rank of objective attained via summits is the Objective 7: to maintain close and beneficial cooperation with existing international and regional organization. This objective recorded the total number of 21 frequencies. All declarations, plan of actions and cooperation produced throughout the summits having the focus of setting-up external relations with non-member states. In order to become a stable and viable region, ASEAN not only pursued internal cooperation with its existing members but also embark various external cooperation with external counterparts through Dialogue Partners, ASEAN Regional Forum, ASEAN+3, East Asia Summit, bilateral and multilateral agreements.

It cannot be denied that, these efforts and actions has benefited ASEAN in return. For instance, bilateral trade in goods and services amounted to EUR 208 billion in 2016 and FDI from the EU represents 22% of the total investments in the region. These scenario reflect that such cooperation and integration with external counterparts resulted with fruitful outcomes to ASEAN member states in the sphere of economics, politics and social.

The fourth rank of objective attained via summits is the Objective 2: to promote regional peace and stability. This objective recorded with total number of 18 frequencies in the form of discussion, plan of action and agreements produced throughout all summits. This objective reflects on effort to create a peace, secured and harmonized region through underlying principles of Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality (ZOPFAN), Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC), Southeast Asia Nuclear Weapon Free Zone (SEANWFZ) and ASEAN Charter.

All these principles and guidelines are coined as the ASEAN Way. The principles of ZOPFAN and TAC were codified as the regional norms for inter-state relations in the region. ASEAN member states believe that any conflict, dispute or disagreement may disrupt peace and stability among them. Hence, the peace and stability should be preserved in order to safeguard individual states and the region from internal or external threat. Thus, series of discussion and agreement reached by member states during the early stage of establishment of ASEAN that reflect the instability and inability of them to deal with internal insurgencies and external threat. The importance of the TAC has been discussed by some scholars as the TAC will benefit both parties; the member states and non-state members of ASEAN as it just might prove a bridge between them. The principle of ZOPFAN was the brainchild of Malaysia’s Tun
Dr. Ismail Abdul Rahman and known as The Ismail Peace Plan. The essential idea was subsequently adopted by the government of Tun Abdul Razak who converted it into a proposal for a zone of peace, freedom and neutrality in 1970. A year later, the ZOPFAN proposal was endorsed by the ASEAN member states at the Kuala Lumpur Declaration.

The focal points of this principle are focusing on the two levels of implementation which are the intra-member states and with the non-member states. All member states must espouse non-aggression principles based on mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity as well as demise ways and means to ensure peace and security among themselves. As for non-member states, the United States, the Soviet Union and China were specifically named as prospective guarantors for ensuring that Southeast Asia be excluded as an arena for their conflict and power ambitions.

The least attained objectives due to least frequency of attention and focus by ASEAN are Objective 5, Objective 4 and Objective 6, which recorded with total frequencies of 7, 5 and 2 respectively. There were only few outcomes derived from all summits conveyed that reflect the discussion, plan of actions and agreements emphasize on providing training and research facilities, industries, transportation and telecommunication and promoting Southeast Asia through studies. These low figures of frequencies also depict the imbalance of the effort and focus by ASEAN to attain all the objectives agreed by them with similar weigh. The current focus and ambition of ASEAN is to create a well-balanced community that comprises of Political-Security Community, Economic Community and Socio-Cultural Community by the year 2025. The researchers believe that all these forms of communities will need to a solid and strong foundation and base; which is the understanding and education relating the Asian region and also the association itself. Hence, ASEAN need to set the focus on how best to promote the understanding on Asian and ASEAN. This focus already been highlighted in the ASEAN’s objectives which is to promote Southeast Asian studies.

The researchers reiterate some of issues relating with promoting the studies on Southeast Asian as discussed and debated by scholars. The first issues that ASEAN need to focus is to attract and assist the local scholars and writers to contribute their thought and ideas towards publishing their artwork locally and also internationally. This is due to the number of true ‘Southeast Asianists’ in the region remains limited. This scenario much related with the next issues which is the availability of scholarship as funding mechanism to attract the interested and potential local scholars.

Even though some member states such as Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand are classify to be the regular researchers due to the availability of scholarship to them, but other states which are Myanmar, Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam still facing with limited funding. The last issue is relating with the language used by local scholars. This disadvantage is best illustrated by the significance of research done in local language published in local journals. While such research is meant to solve local issues, nevertheless, the findings and solutions offered by such research are worthy of wider recognition. Unfortunately, due to the language barrier, they are not accessible to global researchers.

As a conclusion, the researchers strongly suggest that ASEAN must put extra effort and be more comprehensive in dealing with all the objectives in order to create a well-balanced region. It is recommended that the emphasis should be more on educating the society to know and understand one another, protecting human rights, practicing good values and norms that will create a sense of respect and a caring society in order to materialize the aspiration of ASEAN in creating the ASEAN Community by 2025.

Table 1: Mapping the Attainment of ASEAN Objectives
Via Summits

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Objectives (O)</th>
<th>Summits (S)</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
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<td>O3</td>
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<td>63</td>
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References