
ASEAN A COHESIVE ENTITY: A STUDY ON THE CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR ITS EXISTENCE

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Abstract

ASEAN was formed in 1967, principally to help South East Asian nations to collectively safeguard themselves against the spread of communist ideology, which was spreading throughout Asia. They wanted to cooperate economically so as to become a viable defense against communism, which was spreading from the North in China and spreading to the South. This regional grouping has come a long way as a success story. However, in spite of its success, it faces many challenges to remain viable and relevant. As such this study is to review some of the challenges faced by ASEAN. The findings of this study show ASEAN having succeeded as a trading block but with many weaknesses and challenges. Political and social challenges need to be overcome, otherwise it may fail as a cohesive entity as envisioned by its founding fathers.

Key words: ASEAN, communism, trans-border activities, sociopolitical, South East Asia.

Introduction

ASEAN, is made up ten member states, whose population is varied in terms of language, culture and religion. With a population of more than 600 million, it is a potpourri of different races, ethnicities, cultures, religions and cultures. Kishore Mahbubani, the eminent scholar and former Singaporean diplomat to the United Nations calls ASEAN, a miracle (Mahbubani & Sng, 2017). It is a mosaic of different ethnic composition, reflecting its position as the crossroad of cultures sandwiched between two great civilizations, namely India and China. Recognized universally as a vibrant regional organization and an important world actor, it does face many challenges as part of the process of globalization.

Since its birth in 1967, it has come a long way as a regional grouping. During this period, it has undergone many challenges, which helped to shape and mould its status as a prominent regional grouping in this part of the world. There have been border skirmishes between member states such as between Thailand and Cambodia, straining of the relationship between Malaysia and the Philippines due to the issue of Sabah, the annual Haze from Indonesia, the financial crisis of 1997, the Rohingya Crisis of Myanmar, China's claim of several islands in the South China Sea and Pandemics such as SARS, H1N1 and the impact of the Corona Virus.. However, this regional grouping has overcome and withstood many such challenges, in spite of the fact that new challenges seem to appear every now and then. As such, this study intends to examine the challenges faced by ASEAN and its impact on this regional grouping.

Background to the Study

There was euphoria and jubilation in South East Asia, where almost all the countries had experienced the humiliation under colonial rule. There was uncertainty and fear. The Cultural revolution in China was creating ripples throughout Asia, with its slogan, ' the East is Red. 'The Vietminh and the Vietcong were making inroads through the Ho Chi Minh Trail. The United States was trying to counter Soviet influence by sending its B52 bombers from Guam, only adding misery to the farmers, caught between two ideologies and military giants.

The foundation laid by these eminent leaders of Asia, was to pave the way for ASEAN to grow in strength, to achieve the respectable status in the international arena. The path to prosperity has not been smooth either. Together they have trodden the path of economic, political, military and social ups and downs, only to emerge stronger and resilient, giving credence to the founding fathers dreams and visions. Over the years, ASEAN has been able to