

ASEAN'S DEFICIENCY IN DEALING WITH SECURITY ARENA

Teoman Ertuğrul TULUN

Analyst

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The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) last year celebrated its 50th anniversary. Since its establishment in 1967 by five countries in Southeast Asia (Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand) it expanded to 10 countries (first five plus Brunei, Vietnam, Laos, Myanmar and Cambodia) and encompassed almost all of Southeast Asia. As it was mentioned in number of articles on its 50th anniversary, ASEAN during the past fifty years weathered the hot conflicts of the Cold War, domestic strife and turmoil in almost all of its Member States, economic recessions and headwinds from beyond the region.[1]

It was also stressed in these articles that ASEAN has positioned itself at the center of the regional architecture and succeeded in exerting considerable influence over the peace and prosperity of East Asia. It strived for Southeast Asian integration and achieved the establishment of the first regional community in Asia under the title of ASEAN Community. [2]

It is possible to enhance the list of the noteworthy achievements of ASEAN during the last 51 years especially in the area of economy oriented issues.

The Council for Security Cooperation in the Asia Pacific (CSCAP) has recently published its Regional Security Outlook for 2018. According to its web site, CSCAP was established in 1993. Web site introduces the Council as a non-governmental (second track) process for dialogue on security issues in the Asia Pacific.[3]

In its publication of The CSCAP Regional Security Outlook 2018, the Council further explains its status as the premier Track Two organization in the Asia Pacific region and counterpart to the Track One processes dealing with security issues, namely, the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), the East Asia Summit (EAS) and the ASEAN Defense Ministers Plus Forum.[4]

Per these explanations, CBCAP provides an informal mechanism for scholars, officials and others in their private capacities to discuss political and security issues and challenges facing the region. It provides policy recommendations to various intergovernmental bodies, convenes regional and international meetings and establishes linkages with institutions and organizations in other parts of the world to exchange information, insights and experiences in the area of regional political-security cooperation.

CSCAP is considered as the region- wide think tank network affiliated with the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF). ARF is an affiliated dialogue and consultation platform of ASEAN. The objectives of the ARF is "to foster constructive dialogue and consultation on political and security issues of common interest and concern" and "to make significant contributions to efforts towards confidence-building and preventive diplomacy in the Asia-Pacific region."[5] In this sense CSCAP might be considered as one of the prominent think-thank institutions of ASEAN.

In the introduction section of the Regional Security Outlook for 2018, the editor of the publication states that ☀□□□□□ 2017, the international system appeared to slip more conspicuously into a gap between the established but besieged order and the still empty space of what might replace it. Editors assessment of the ASEANs involvement in the security arena is quite striking. He states in this respect the following:

> ASEAN has painstakingly led the way in constructing an array of multilateral processes in the security arena - ARF, ADMM, EAS □ that are often collectively characterized as an indispensable component of the architecture of security in the Asia Pacific. At the same time, ASEAN has also encountered mounting criticism for not developing an agenda for these processes that matched the interests and authority of the participants, let alone what the region needed or, indeed, addressed the preferences that ASEAN has itself articulated on how the major powers should relate to the grouping. A regions security architecture, of course, is a means to an end. That end is a region that functions in a substantively orderly and harmonious fashion because its constituent members are content with their relative status and with the machinery available to address disputes, and are therefore prepared to be restrained in the setting of national goals and the means employed to advance them

This assessment contains pertinent observations concerning the ASEANs general approach to the security issues. In view of the disturbing developments in the Eurasian context concerning the political-security order in the heartland of this region, dangerous break-down in the arms control arrangements as well as the certain prolonged conflicts in the Asian-Pacific Rim bring about serious risks not only to the Eurasian countries but also to the ASEAN.

In such a sensitive international security environment, it seems reasonable that the ASEAN might consider its more proactive involvement in the security issues instead of pronouncing rhetorical statements.

In this context it is possible to mention the South China Sea issue. There is no doubt that

this is one of the major problems in the region. In spite of the fact that ASEAN has managed to present a position so far based basically on the expression of concerns regarding developments in the disputed waters, requests for a peaceful resolution and calls for a code of conduct has dramatically failed to find an effective way to deal with the issue. This reality has the potential to weaken the ASEANs ability to contribute to peace not in Southeast Asia and East Asia, but also nearby regions.

We are going through a period of time that hard security agenda has started to leave no room for repeated rhetorical statements. It is time to face this reality and strive for meaningful and goal-oriented dialogue on security issues.

**Photo: SİNA*

[1] Tan Chin Tiong, Editorial Note, *ASEAN Focus* ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute, no. 5 (October 2017): 1–3, https://www.iseas.edu.sg/images/pdf/WEB-ASEANFocus-0917.pdf.

[2] Mie Oba, Challenges for ASEAN As It Turns 50, *The Diplomat*, October 16, 2017, https://thediplomat.com/2017/10/challenges-for-asean-as-it-turns-50/.

[3] About Us (Council for Security Corporaton In Asia Pasific, January 1, 2018), http://www.cscap.org/.

[4] Ron Huisken, Regional Security Outlook (Council for Security Corporaton In Asia Pasific, n.d.), http://www.cscap.org/uploads/docs/CRSO/CSCAP2018WEB.pdf.

[5] Teoman Ertuğrul Tulun., The Relevance of Turkeys Participation in the ASEAN Regional Forum, *Daily Sabah*, August 16, 2018, sec. Opinion Editorial, https://www.dailysabah.com/op-ed/2018/08/16/the-relevance-of-turkeys-participation-in-the-asean-regional-forum.

About the Author :

Teoman Ertuğrul Tulun is an analyst at Ankara-based think-tank Center for Eurasian Studies. Dr. Teoman Ertuğrul Tulun received his Ph.D. in Political Science and Public Administration from İhsan Doğramacı Bilkent University in Ankara. His area of research include European Union Studies, Globalization, Xenophobia, Hate Speech Studies and International Relations.

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Süleyman Nazif Sok. No: 12/B Daire 3-4 06550 Çankaya-ANKARA / TÜRKİYE
Tel: +90 (312) 438 50 23-24 • **Fax**: +90 (312) 438 50 26
@avimorgtr
https://www.facebook.com/avrasyaincelemelerimerkezi
E-Mail: info@avim.org.tr
http://avim.org.tr

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