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Obstacles to East Asia Community Building

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Much has been accomplished since East Asia community building began shortly after the Asian financial crisis of 1997. Through the initiative of South Korean President Kim Dae-jung, the East Asia Vision Group (EAVG) was formed. Consisting of nongovernmental experts from the ten ASEAN member countries and China, Japan, and South Korea (ASEAN+3), it was tasked with developing concrete proposals for East Asia cooperation. The EAVG submitted its report in 2001, after which ASEAN+3 appointed an East Asia Study Group (EASG), consisting of representatives of the ASEAN+3 governments. The EASG submitted its report in 2002, recommending several short-term and long-term measures to build an East Asia community. Among its recommendations was that the ASEAN+3 Summit should evolve into an East Asia Summit. This process was seen as a slow and evolutionary process and limited to the geographical confines of the ASEAN+3 countries.

In the meantime, cooperation in economic, financial, and functional areas has been promoted among the ASEAN+3 countries, although in the form of bilateral agreements and "coalition of the willing" arrangements. Aware of the significant implications of broader security issues in their program of regional cooperation, they have also added items in the security field to their agenda, including maritime security and

counterterrorism, and they have expanded their economic and functional agenda to include gender issues and poverty alleviation.

In building a regional community, East Asia subscribes to the concept of “open regionalism,” which means that, in spite of their goal of promoting closer and enhanced cooperation across various dimensions among the ASEAN+3 countries, it does not intend to become a bloc that excludes other relevant players, particularly in the economic, functional, and even political dimensions.

However, in addition to the structural and historical difficulties facing East Asia community building, there are a number of obstacles, some existent and some potential, that could undermine the process. These include a gamut of issues that span this region of immense diversity, a group of states faced with many divides that could be obstacles to East Asia community building. Among them are a wide range of political systems; different levels of economic development; and disparities in human development, including disparities in income inequality and poverty.

The experience of the most successful regional integration scheme, that of the European Union (EU), shows that community building is facilitated by a relatively low level of sharp differences in the political and socioeconomic characteristics of the members of a proposed community. It is conventional wisdom to claim that the EU countries are more homogeneous than other regions in the world, but the EU countries themselves are quick to deny this claim. They point to their belief that, although they might come from the so-called Greco-Roman-Christian civilization, there are in fact many distinctions among them, borne of their distinct geographical circumstances and historical evolution, and that these would need to be diluted for them to become a genuine community with a common identity. Consequently, the EU established a set of criteria for membership, including the provision of “cohesion funds” for political and economic reforms to erode the differences between the old members and candidate members. Only after the implementation of these reforms can candidate members earn full admission into the community.

Further testimony to the importance of a set of common socioeconomic and political characteristics in realizing a community can be found in the recent change of heart among ASEAN leaders—the same ASEAN leaders who excessively celebrated the diversity of its members in the past. In recent years, they have come to recognize that a narrowing

of the ASEAN economic divide is needed for deeper integration into an ASEAN Economic Community; that the achievement of an ASEAN Security Community depends on the shaping and sharing of norms and political development that would promote greater participation, rule of law, justice, and democracy among the member states; and that the building of a community of caring and sharing societies (the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community) is a necessary component of building an ASEAN community. Thus, community building in East Asia requires the erosion of wide disparities among prospective members. Conversely, the continued existence of these wide disparities could serve as real and potential obstacles to community building.

This chapter identifies and analyzes structural, historical, political, and socioeconomic obstacles to East Asia community building from a Southeast Asian perspective. The structural dimension deals with the presence of two great regional powers, China and Japan, with the potential for future rivalry in a region of small and medium-sized states. The historical dimension relates to past acts of aggression and colonization by Japan against China, Korea, and most Southeast Asian states, a historical legacy that remains a factor in the continuing trust and confidence deficit among states in the region, particularly in Northeast Asia.

The political and socioeconomic obstacles highlight the case of ASEAN, which is acknowledged as occupying the “driver’s seat” in the East Asia community-building project, at least for the time being. Among the key obstacles to be addressed in the political dimension are the absence of regional leadership at both the ASEAN and East Asia levels; the diversity of political systems, governing norms, and values; the lack of common perspectives and policies on foreign relations and security; the domestic political challenges preoccupying regional states, including their unfinished nation- and state-building processes; the failure to embed community building in the core national interest of ASEAN countries; and an overall aversion to institutions.

The key socioeconomic obstacles that hinder East Asia community building include the unfinished economic reforms in many countries and uncoordinated free trade agreements (FTAs); persistent competitive elements in regional economies; wide differences in levels of economic development; as well as varying levels of human development, including large income disparities and widespread poverty, particularly within and across Southeast Asian countries. The discussion of this set of obstacles

will highlight the varying levels of human development because other chapters in this volume cover the economic dimension of community building in the region.

STRUCTURAL AND HISTORICAL OBSTACLES

Despite a number of promising recent developments in Sino-Japanese relations—increasing economic interdependence, political cooperation through the Six-Party Talks process in dealing with the nuclear weapons development program adopted by North Korea, and enhanced cooperation in several functional areas (in particular, environmental protection)—the fact that the structure of power in East Asia is dominated by these two potential rivals hinders community building in the region. The survival of historical animosities, as expressed in the occasional eruption of tensions in relation to visits to the Yasukuni Shrine by Japanese leaders such as Junichiro Koizumi and Shinzo Abe and in anti-Japanese public demonstrations in China, combines with the tenacity of territorial disputes to inhibit a genuine reconciliation between these two powers.

In addition, despite protestations to the contrary, the concern that there could be a future rivalry for regional leadership between these two nations has not subsided. Japan's military alliance with the United States, its perceived partiality toward Taiwan in cross-strait relations, its increasing participation in international peacekeeping, and its pursuit of a permanent seat on the UN Security Council, combined with suspicions about Japanese remilitarization as Tokyo begins to transform its international role by seeking the status of a "normal state," do not help to quell China's concerns. Nor do recent moves to try to amend the peace constitution and to change the name of Japan's Self-Defense Forces, which are seen as further evidence of Japanese "remilitarization."

To be fair, these developments are only the natural consequence of new realities emerging both inside Japan and in the external environment. These concerns are rooted in the structural rivalry between East Asia's major powers but are most likely unfounded given Japan's sustained policy of peaceful relations with its neighbors; its realization that its policy toward the region during the interwar period and World War II was counterproductive; and its strong alliance with the United States, which should obviate the emergence of a remilitarized Japan.

On the other hand, China's economic rise and its perceived future replacement of Japan as East Asia's economic powerhouse; Beijing's gains in its diplomacy vis-à-vis ASEAN; its proactive search for both diplomatic influence worldwide and energy resources in Africa, Central Asia, and Latin America; its creation of a China-centered regional cooperation scheme that excludes both Japan and the United States (i.e., the Shanghai Cooperation Organization); and its refusal to have Japan become a permanent member of the UN Security Council reinforce suspicion of its bid to rival Japan in the future. There is also the concern that, although economic interdependence and integration are leading the process of regional community building and China is committed to its peaceful development, political and security considerations would likely prevail in the event that China's core national interests were to run counter to its economic goals. Related to this is the view that contemporary Chinese nationalism is based to a large extent on perceived historical wrongs against China by external powers, cross-strait relations, and the preservation of China's territorial integrity. These bases are likely to survive in the event that the present regime in Beijing fails to meet the people's material expectations.

South Korea joins the ASEAN states in being caught up in this great power rivalry. Keeping China and Japan within the context of an East Asia community is a good way of moderating the likelihood of competition, which would be inimical to the interests of all states in the region. South Korea is also an important actor in Northeast Asian reconciliation—a process about which ASEAN nations have some lessons to share, having reconciled not only amongst themselves, but also with Japan since the 1970s.

If these structural and historical difficulties remain unresolved, the project of realizing an East Asia community will be in serious doubt. Small and medium-sized states in ASEAN might find themselves torn between these two powers. ASEAN is already sought after by Beijing and Tokyo in their bid to outdo each other in economic partnership with ASEAN. Japan is seen as trying to keep up with a fast-moving and responsive China, as seen in the building of the China-ASEAN Free Trade Area. Although China has not caught up with Japan as a development partner of ASEAN, trade relations between China and ASEAN countries are on the rise. Japan continues to lead in providing official development assistance (ODA) to ASEAN countries (39 percent of ASEAN's total ODA), as well as to China. Although there has been an increase in ASEAN-China trade relations in recent years, Japan's trade with ASEAN (13.7 percent of ASEAN's total trade) remains

larger than ASEAN-China trade (8.5 percent), while Japan's foreign direct investment (FDI) based on the balance of payments to ASEAN countries constitutes 11.6 percent of ASEAN's total inward FDI.¹

POLITICAL OBSTACLES

Among the political obstacles to East Asia community building is the leadership of the project. This obstacle operates at two levels: the intra-ASEAN level and the East Asia level. At the intra-ASEAN level, the loss of Indonesia as ASEAN's informal leader—a consequence of that country's domestic political and economic instability brought about by the 1997 financial crisis—hinders community building in the sense that consensus among the ASEAN member states is harder to achieve, while measures to move and act together are slower to develop. It must be recalled that Indonesia enabled the holding of the third ASEAN Summit in the Philippines in 1987, even as other members hesitated to come to Manila due to security concerns following a serious coup attempt against the Aquino government. Former Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad also refused to come to Manila until the Philippines dropped its territorial claim to Sabah. Through former President Suharto's exertion of influence-cum-pressure, the third summit was held successfully, as Indonesia—with Philippine consent—sent a naval ship that docked in Manila Bay to provide security to the leaders during the summit. Moreover, despite its serious misgivings about wider regional economic cooperation, Malaysia came on board the APEC forum after Indonesia's persistent persuasion. It is notable that such a leading performance among ASEAN member states in the context of APEC has not been seen since the 1997 financial crisis threw Indonesia into turmoil.

For the time being, ASEAN is in the driver's seat of East Asia community building because not one of the "Plus Three" countries (China, Japan, and South Korea) would be prepared to see either of the other two perform this role. However, ASEAN's bid to serve as the driving force or the core of East Asia community building could be undermined without some form of leadership, such as the role played by Indonesia prior to 1997. Of late, some other ASEAN member states have sought to

1. Data on ODA, trade, and FDI are for 2004 and are from the International Monetary Fund (IMF), *Direction of Trade Statistics Yearbook 2005* (Washington DC: IMF, 2005) and *Balance of Payments Statistics Yearbook 2005* (Washington DC: IMF, 2005).

fill this role, such as Thailand during the Democrat Party and Thaksin eras, Singapore in the ASEAN Economic Community project, Malaysia in the Non-aligned Movement, the Philippines in the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community project, and Indonesia once again in the ASEAN Security Community project. Yet these are no substitutes for a leader for all issues and for all seasons, as existed in the pre-1997 days. Singapore has shown a willingness to succeed Indonesia in playing that type of leading role in ASEAN. However, in spite of its numerous advantages, taking the leadership role in ASEAN would not come easy for this wealthy and efficient city-state amidst such larger states as Indonesia, Malaysia, and Thailand.

If ASEAN is handicapped by the lack of a leader, its bid to stay in the driver's seat in East Asia community building will be at risk. At this level, while ASEAN is regarded as the driving force in East Asia community building for now, the question of whether it can continue to be such a force in the foreseeable future worries its ten member states. ASEAN's combined economic output is lower than that of any of the Plus Three countries. The economic output of the ASEAN 10 stands roughly at US\$1 billion, compared with Japan's US\$4.4 trillion, China's US\$2.6 trillion, and South Korea's US\$900 billion.² ASEAN's economic growth before the 1997 financial crisis had been stimulated by close aid, trade, and investment ties with Japan, while its economic recovery since the crisis has to a large extent been spurred by its trade ties with China.

Thus, the drive to maintain ASEAN's centrality in the East Asia community was an overriding concern during the tenure of Lao PDR as chair of the ASEAN Standing Committee in 2004, during which all ten ASEAN states put their heads together to ensure that ASEAN remained at the center of this regional project. Many within ASEAN circles argue that it is in the interest of the Plus Three countries to buoy ASEAN's bid to remain in the driver's seat by providing assistance and support in narrowing the development gaps within ASEAN through various programs—including human resource, institutional, information, and infrastructure development—in addition to enhancing their trade and investment relations with ASEAN.

If ASEAN cannot be the driving force of community building in East Asia, neither can China, Japan, or South Korea. As already noted, any bid

2. These figures are based on 2006 GDP data from the IMF's April 2007 World Economic Outlook data, available at www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/weo/2007/01/data/index.aspx.

for leadership by either China or Japan would not earn the support of the other. Nor would South Korea earn the support of either China or Japan. So for now, ASEAN is the driving force by default. But to what extent can this be sustained?

Moreover, in spite of Kim Dae-jung's leadership in the EAVG and the EASG, the region does not have the equivalent of a Monnet or a Schuman, who so successfully advocated the creation of a European community. With the passing of President Kim Dae-jung from the political scene, South Korea was not able to sustain the initiative for an East Asia community. The East Asia Summit envisioned by the EASG to evolve from the ASEAN+3 Summit was hijacked by ASEAN and has now presented another challenge to community building in the form of an enlarged and no longer geographic East Asia concept that extends beyond ASEAN+3.

Another political obstacle is the existence of diverse political systems, governing norms, and values, not just in the broader East Asia but even within the 40-year-old ASEAN. The political diversity among ASEAN countries has created problems at the bilateral and regional levels. Treatment of the nationals of one country by another due to differences in governing norms has resulted in tension on occasions, or in refugees spilling into the territory of neighboring states. At the same time, the outside world continues to expect ASEAN to be accountable for the failings of Myanmar's military junta, thereby creating a degree of discomfort, if not embarrassment, for the grouping. Its political dialogue with the EU was suspended temporarily on account of Myanmar's admission into ASEAN in 1997. Attempts are now being made to narrow this diversity through the ASEAN Security Community, and particularly through the shaping and sharing of norms and political development toward a just, democratic, and more participative ASEAN that also observes human rights and the rule of law. The Plus Three countries also have different political systems, with China still being a regime run by the Communist Party, while Japan and South Korea are democracies.

Thus, in East Asia, one finds a wide range of political systems: a military junta, a feudal kingdom, three Communist Party-run states, a reversed democracy, an illiberal democracy, two constrained democracies, two unconsolidated democracies, and two consolidated democracies. Despite increasing economic integration, their common norms and values remain highly Westphalian—hardly conducive to community building. The latter requires common institutions of governance to

become effective and meaningful to its constituencies, a requirement seen as opposed to the core values of the Westphalian state.

Within ASEAN alone, what is apparent is the prevalence of national egoism rather than regionalism among member states, and a failure to make regionalism part of each country's core national interests. This debilitating situation can hopefully be corrected with a progressive and people-oriented ASEAN Charter that would establish ASEAN as a legal entity and intergovernmental organization; rationalize and adopt new institutions for more effective governance; empower its secretary-general with new authority, especially to monitor the implementation of agreements; make compliance no longer voluntary; institutionalize consultation with nongovernmental constituencies such as parliamentarians, business, academe, and civil society organizations; establish dispute settlement mechanisms not only for economic and trade disputes but also for political, territorial, and other types of disputes; and institute other institutional innovations.

Unfortunately, the ASEAN Charter approved at the Leaders' Summit in November 2007, beyond making ASEAN an international legal entity, merely codified its existing processes whereby consensus decision making and voluntary implementation of agreements remain central. New structures in the secretariat and new responsibilities given to the secretary-general were not matched by resources. Nonetheless, the charter contained principles and norms to propagate human rights, the rule of law, and democracy, regardless of the fact that its enabling provision for the establishment of a regional human rights body was vague.

Another political obstacle is the absence of common perspectives and policies on foreign affairs and security. In particular, differences in ideology and relations with the superpowers of the Cold War days, as well as historical and geostrategic factors, help explain this situation. The US-led military alliance network in East Asia includes Japan, South Korea, the Philippines, and Thailand, while Singapore is pro-United States in its overall defense policy despite the absence of formal bilateral ties. Looking at the Proliferation Security Initiative to counter terrorism, for example, the first East Asian countries to join the United States were Japan and Singapore, followed in 2006 by the Philippines and Thailand, the latter two as major non-NATO allies of the United States. There are varying types of relations with the United States among the rest of the nations of East Asia, with China, Lao PDR, Malaysia, and Myanmar being among the more critical of US policy in general. As a result, it will

take a while for ASEAN to develop common foreign affairs and security perspectives or policies and even longer for the Plus Three countries, given the more serious structural and historical problems that continue to exist among them.

In addition, domestic political challenges also pose obstacles to East Asia community building as states place priority on addressing these domestic concerns first. The challenges include regime survival, regime legitimacy, and the incomplete processes of nation and state building in Southeast Asia. These are issues that continue to preoccupy countries in ASEAN, taking efforts and resources away from the earnest pursuit of community building. Moreover, a related issue is the extent to which further integration of ASEAN itself to build an ASEAN community is also competing with domestic political challenges for its members' efforts and resources. In Northeast Asia, the survival of Cold War issues in the divided nations of China and Korea poses a major hindrance to community building as its effects transcend the parties directly involved.

Community building appears to be absent in the regional states' core national interests. In particular, countries in Southeast Asia have failed to define community building as part of their core national interests, leading them to persist in the practice of one-upmanship, which derails community building. This practice is evident in the reluctance shown by countries that occupy the chair of the ASEAN Standing Committee at any given time to share and consult with others regarding the initiatives to be taken during their tenure. The holding of the East Asia Summit in 2005, contrary to the recommendation of the EASG, is an important illustrative example in this regard. The challenge of harmonizing the EASG proposal for the East Asia Summit and the actual form of the summit as it has evolved since the 11th ASEAN Summit in December 2005 would not have arisen had Malaysia not launched the summit without prior consultation with its ASEAN partners.

One wonders if this might also be the case in the Plus Three countries. East Asia community building would have prospered much earlier had there been a willingness to make community building part of their national interests by desisting from actions that would undermine the common vision for East Asia that they had already agreed to in the EAVG and EASG reports.

Moreover, community building requires institutions. Too much flexibility and the excessive use of ad hoc arrangements are not conducive to community building. In East Asia, there is a general aversion toward

institutions. In fact, China's interest in becoming part of the ASEAN process is in part due to ASEAN's informality and flexibility; the voluntary, nonbinding nature of commitments; and the absence of accountability for noncompliance.

Southeast Asia's performance record in institution building is also not very encouraging. ASEAN has moved very slowly over the past 40 years in this area, in part due to the jealous guarding of national sovereignty. The decision to establish an ASEAN Secretariat was made only in 1976—nine years after ASEAN's establishment and on the occasion of its first summit. That having been said, there is now a large window of opportunity before the grouping in the form of the drafting of the ASEAN Charter, a vehicle that ASEAN leaders understand to be a requirement for the realization of the ASEAN Community.

SOCIOECONOMIC OBSTACLES

Although ASEAN lost much of its economic competitiveness in large part due to the rise of China and other more attractive destinations for FDI, there has been some recovery in recent years, as FDI to ASEAN has begun to grow. The immediate loss of competitiveness compounded the effects of the Asian financial crisis by either halting or slowing down growth in Southeast Asia and inhibited the old ASEAN member states from doing more to level the economic divide between themselves and the newly admitted CLMV countries (Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, and Vietnam).

The remaining challenges include incomplete economic reforms, such as reforms of the monetary and financial systems and the proliferation of uncoordinated FTAs. Ten years after the crisis, there are concerns about unsustainable economic recovery, particularly if China's economic growth were to slow down, the US economy were to further decline, or Japan's recovery were to be short-lived. These scenarios point to the need to complete economic reforms to ensure the sustainability of economic recovery and growth. Also, while hopes were raised by the proliferation of FTAs in the region, there is also concern that they have become a "noodle bowl" whose lack of coordination might create further problems in the future. An argument that was raised earlier on is the need for a broad regional framework in which these various FTAs would fit without creating coordination and harmonization problems.

Moreover, elements of competition in their economies could pose an obstacle to community building, which requires cooperation rather than competition. While ASEAN should be pleased with Vietnam's economic performance, for example, there is concern among economies that are not doing as well about being overtaken by Vietnam. On the other hand, Vietnam's economic performance can be raised as a model for narrowing the ASEAN divide.

The difference in levels of economic development among the ASEAN+3 countries poses a real obstacle to community building. As already noted, community is best served by narrower differences in levels of economic development. This is the rationale for the EU's economic requirement for membership and the application of its cohesion funds to make the economies of candidate members more similar to those of the existing EU members. Vietnam has shown that the economic divide can be narrowed, although this can also act as a double-edged sword, as indicated above.

But the divide is even wider between most of the ASEAN countries on the one hand and the Plus Three countries on the other. Japan and South Korea are already members of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the club of the wealthy that provides the bulk of the world's available resources for development. Most of East Asia remains the recipients of development assistance in spite of ASEAN's pre-crisis articulation of a transformation of its relations with its partners from a donor-donee relationship to a trade and investment partnership. The CLMV countries as well as Indonesia and the Philippines continue to require large amounts of ODA for their development. Despite multiyear double-digit economic growth since the 1980s, even China has not graduated to the status of a development assistance donor country just yet.

As a consequence of these different levels of economic development, there are wide income disparities and poverty within and across countries in East Asia.³ These countries range from those with a relative absence of poverty, such as Japan, Singapore, South Korea, and Brunei, to those that in 2004 had a substantial percentage of their populations living on less than US\$1 a day, such as Indonesia and Vietnam (7.5 percent), the Philippines (15.5 percent), China (16.6

3. The data on human development used in this section is from UNDP, *Human Development Report 2006—Beyond Scarcity: Power, Poverty and the Global Water Crisis* (New York: UNDP, 2006), available online at <http://hdr.undp.org/hdr2006/>.

percent), Lao PDR (27 percent), Myanmar (27 percent), and Cambodia (34.1 percent).

Related to this point is the fact that there exist huge differences in the level of human development across East Asia. The United Nations Development Programme's (UNDP) human development index (HDI) consists of gross domestic product (GDP) per capita, life expectancy at birth, and adult literacy. Other data supplementing the HDI include figures on each country's commitment to health (resources, access, and services); water, sanitation, and nutritional status; maternal and child health; status in terms of leading global health crises and risks; survival rates (infant mortality, maternal mortality, life expectancy); commitment to education (public spending); literacy and school enrollment; technology diffusion and creation; economic performance; inequality in income and expenditures; trade structure; rich country responsibilities (aid, debt relief, trade); flows of aid, private capital, and debt; priorities in public spending; energy and environment; refugees; armaments; victims of crime; the gender-related development index (GDI); gender inequality in education; and gender inequality in economic activity.

Of the 177 countries evaluated in terms of the HDI using 2004 data, Japan was ranked number 7, Singapore 25, South Korea 26, Brunei 34, and Malaysia 61—values indicating high development. Thailand was ranked number 74, China 81, the Philippines 84, Indonesia 108, Vietnam 109, Cambodia 129, Myanmar 130, and Lao PDR 133—values indicating medium development. Fortunately, none of the countries of East Asia remained in the low development group.

But it is in the disaggregated data relating to human development where the real disparities can be seen. Life expectancy at birth in 2004 ranged from Japan's 82.2 years to Lao PDR's 55.1 years, while GDP per capita ranged from Japan's US\$29,251 (purchasing power parity, or PPP) to Lao PDR's US\$1,954 (PPP). The Gini index, showing income inequality within countries, ranged from Japan's 24.9 to Cambodia's 40.4, Malaysia's 49.3, and China's 44.7, with the value of 0 representing perfect equality and 100 perfect inequality. With regard to the GDI, the range for East Asia is represented by Japan's 0.942 and Lao PDR's 0.545, placing them 13th and 100th respectively out of 136 countries evaluated by the UNDP. That the GDI is uneven within countries is seen by China's 0.761 GDI and rank of 64, while Hong Kong (SAR) has a GDI of 0.928 and a rank of 21.

The narrowing of the human development divide is therefore a major obstacle to community building in East Asia, particularly because the

indicators of human development relate more directly to people than other socioeconomic obstacles, and because community, in the final analysis, is about people.

OVERCOMING THE OBSTACLES TO EAST ASIA COMMUNITY

The political obstacles to building an East Asia community can be redressed with time and with the political commitment of the leaders of ASEAN and East Asia. The dynamics of economic development will open up opportunities for the growth of middle classes with greater access to education, travel, and more and alternative information. In short, they will become more empowered individuals whose obedience to rulers of whatever kind can no longer be taken for granted in part because the rulers' erstwhile monopoly of the sources of information will have been broken. This could lead to political development of the regional states toward greater participation, observance of the rule of law, justice, and human rights. To ensure that the economic, social, and political transformation that follows economic growth and development does not undermine political stability, leaders of East Asia's states need to strategize and calibrate policy instruments and measures proactively and skillfully. Authoritarian rulers in the region must preside over their own demise in order to ensure a smoother transition in which economic growth unleashes social and political forces no longer governable under the old political arrangements.

In Southeast Asia, the ASEAN Community envisioned in the Bali Concord II could help redress these political obstacles if it receives the political commitment of leaders. Particularly relevant are the various elements of the ASEAN Security Community, including the shaping and sharing of norms and political development, where increased popular participation in governance, democracy, and human rights are promoted across ASEAN societies. That, together with institutional mechanisms that would help realize such a security community, including the ASEAN Charter as already stressed above, could go far in overcoming the existing and potential political obstacles.

The socioeconomic obstacles can also be redressed with time and political commitment on the part of the region's leaders. In Southeast Asia, the vehicle already exists in the form of the ASEAN Economic

Community and the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community. Leaders throughout the region put a high premium on economic development, which can be sped up through greater economic cooperation and integration. Economic growth provides the resources by which human development can be improved, while both contribute to political legitimacy, especially for societies that do not have mechanisms for procedural legitimacy. The imperative for community building through economic integration is therefore strong, and this phenomenon is already taking place in East Asia.

CONCLUSION

The East Asia community can be advanced in spite of these obstacles through enhanced cooperation not only within ASEAN, but also among the ASEAN+3 countries. The shared vision for the region is already articulated in the EAVG report, and the broad strokes of this vision, as articulated in the medium- and short-term measures proposed by the EASG, are already guiding East Asia cooperation and integration. In addition, 2007 marked the adoption of the ASEAN+3 statement on enhanced cooperation over the next ten years, which provides more specific steps for realizing the East Asia community.

The obstacles can be overcome. However, as the EU experience has shown, as long as residual obstacles stand in the way and the trust and confidence deficit among participating states remains, the process will not be easy or smooth, the path will not be linear, and it will take an evolutionary, step-by-step approach.

Perhaps at the end of the day, the progress likely to occur in terms of economic and human development will unleash new social forces. If this happens, states may be overtaken by nonstate actors, driving the momentum of community building faster than state actors can cope with it. People-to-people interactions of all kinds—economic, cultural, professional, personal, and others outside the pale of state sovereignty—are already on the rise, and these are important building blocks for East Asia community. I will close, then, on this hopeful note, a statement of faith on what people are capable of achieving if they set their hearts and minds to it, either because they want it or because of strong imperatives that can only be ignored at their own peril.