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ASEAN AND G20 – INDONESIA'S FOREIGN POLICY PERSPECTIVES

Winfried Weck

Indonesia's acceptance into the G20 has opened up new avenues for the country's participation in international processes and development. Indonesia is also taking over the presidency of ASEAN this year. After President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono was able to make his voice heard at the 2009 G20 Summits in London and Pittsburgh with a number of interesting initiatives, including the reform of international financial institutions, Indonesia is now keen to position itself as a mouthpiece for ASEAN countries and as a representative of developing nations within the G20. The country has made the headlines recently as host to a number of high profile events, including the 2008 Climate Change Conference in Bali, aimed at updating the Kyoto Protocol, and the 2009 World Ocean Conference in Menado/Sulawesi 2009, and will continue in this vein with the organisation of the 2013 APEC Summit. For this reason Indonesia has already taken over the 2011 ASEAN Chairmanship and will host the annual summit in autumn 2011.[1]

So what are now the priorities for Indonesian foreign policy? Should the country concentrate on ASEAN, which adopted its charter[2] in 2008 and which from 2015 will take a first decisive step towards becoming a community of states? Or is concentrating on cooperation with the powerful G20 a better alternative to focusing on the somewhat indecisive ASEAN? Will Indonesia's foreign policy be appreciated by

1 | Indonesia was actually meant to take over the ASEAN presidency in 2013 but requested the presidency in 2011 at the Summit in Hanoi in April 2010 in order to be able to better prepare for the APEC Summit.

2 | In 2008 Indonesia ratified the charter as the last member country to do so.

its own people and, if so, how? Isn't the strong sense of national identity, not only amongst Indonesians, but also amongst nearly all the other peoples who come under the umbrella of ASEAN, fundamentally at odds with integration policies along European lines? What does Indonesia actually get out of its regional cooperation in ASEAN? These are the kinds of questions that are dominating foreign policy debates in Indonesia, not only amongst experts, but also amongst all levels of the population as a whole.

ASEAN – THE ROCKY ROAD FROM A CLUB FOR AUTOCRATS TO AN EFFECTIVE COMMUNITY OF STATES

To understand Indonesia's political stance towards ASEAN, as well as that of all the other member countries, it is necessary to take ASEAN internal sensitivities into consideration. All too often ASEAN is compared to the European Union in an international context and it is not unusual for these comparisons to emanate from the EU or ASEAN themselves. However, the objectives behind the founding of ASEAN are in no way comparable with those of the process of European unification. The idea of creating peace and prosperity through integration and shared sovereignty have until recently never been a subject for discussion within the ASEAN political framework.

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ASEAN was founded on August 8, 1967 by Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, Singapore and the Philippines. The aim of these relatively young countries was to create a loose network, without a legal basis under international law, to promote economic cooperation, to avoid conflicts between member states and to develop strategies against possible threats from outside. From the very beginning ASEAN played a central role in Indonesia's foreign policy under the then still young President Suharto, who was anxious to clearly distance himself from the anti-West rhetoric and policies of his predecessor Sukarno. So in addition to the Vietnam War, the fact that ASEAN tended towards anti-communism from the very beginning and saw itself as a protection organisation for its member countries against the People's Republic of China, is down to the influence of

Indonesia.[3] And yet for the original ASEAN members it amounted to little more than an informal "cozy club of authoritarian regimes"[4], for whom conflict resolution was less important than avoiding conflict amongst themselves in the first place. This can be seen in the fact that the first ASEAN summit in Bali in February 1976 only took place nine years after its formation[5] and in the following 27 years only 8 further summits were organised. Even the arrival of new members such as Brunei in 1984, Vietnam in 1995, Myanmar and Laos in 1997 and Cambodia in 1999 did not lead to any significant change in ASEAN's self-image.

This type of non-binding cooperation was not some kind of compromise, but was something that all the participating governments were specifically striving for. Jakarta for instance was constantly afraid of having to enter into any agreement within the framework of ASEAN with the aim of forming some kind of permanent structure or which might have been considered to be a measure designed to promote integration. Indonesia was particularly wary of even the smallest efforts to create a common market. Even today there is the fear that the home market could be flooded with cheaper imported goods from other highly competitive ASEAN member states.[6]

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However much Indonesia's role in ASEAN has always restricted and slowed the possible better utilization of their common economic potential, Indonesia still considers ASEAN as a means to create a regional political identity. After various attempts at creating some kind of foreign and security policy integration in Southeast Asia had

3 | Cf. Preamble of the Bangkok Declaration: "…the countries share a primary responsibility to ensure (…) their stability and security from external interference in any form or from propaganda (…)."

4 | Foreign policy expert Dewi Fortuna Anwar of the Indonesian Institute of Science LIPI at a KAS conference in Bandung in February 2010.

5 | At the Bali Summit in 1976 the position of ASEAN General Secretary was also created.

6 | This is equally true of the free-trade zone ACFTA (ASEAN-China Free Trade Agreement) created at the beginning of 2010. In April 2010 Indonesia tried to negotiate the removal of customs duty on a total of 228 of their domestic products (incl. shoes, textile goods but also popcorn), but to no avail.

failed[7], ASEAN created the *Southeast Asian Zone for Peace, Freedom, and Neutrality* (ZOPFAN) in 1971, at the height of the Vietnam War, with Indonesia as the driving force. Indonesia's overwhelming desire to see a zone of neutrality within the region was the result of a number of inter-related factors. The most important reason was that Indonesia had been created from a former Dutch colony and so had no links to those classic colonial powers Great Britain and France, unlike the whole of the Southeast Asian mainland, with the exception of Thailand. Since its formation, territorial integrity has been a fundamental hallmark of the nation's self-identity and the highest national goal of the Indonesian Republic. Political leaders in Indonesia have always considered the country's political independence as the most important way of protecting this integrity.[8] For this reason they were always very careful about not allowing themselves to come under the influence of the Soviet Union or the USA.[9] Added to this was the fear of an all-too-powerful People's Republic of China, which had developed into a regional power after the Cultural Revolution.

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However, in the first 20 years ZOPFAN lacked a common political strategy. Some of the member states like the Philippines and Singapore had too many links to the super-powers so that for them independence along Indonesian lines was out of the question. The compromises within the 1971 ZOPFAN Declaration in Kuala Lumpur showed that the aim of ZOPFAN was to turn the region as a whole into a zone of neutrality rather than each individual country.

7 | The *Southeast Asia Treaty Organization* (SEATO) military alliance, created in 1954 on the initiative of the USA along the lines of NATO was dissolved in 1977. Four years earlier the *Asian and Pacific Council* (ASPAC), formed in 1966, a union of Southeast Asian states, Australia and New Zealand, suffered a similar fate.

8 | It was no coincidence that the 1955 conference aimed at the founding of non-aligned states took place in Bandung (Island of Java, Indonesia).

9 | The country's founder Sukarno moved too far down the socialist path, leading to a coup and the takeover of power by Suharto. Even today terms like communist, socialist and even social are seen in an extremely negative light by a large part of Indonesia's population.

It was only with the end of the Cold War and the hope of a new world order at the beginning of the 1990s that the somewhat sleepy ASEAN started to show more signs of life. However, this newly discernable dynamism within ASEAN is in no way proactively driven but is almost entirely reactive. Even the "shot in the arm" afforded by its new members Vietnam, Myanmar, Laos and Cambodia did not lead to any fundamental change in its traditionally passive behaviour and especially not that of Indonesia. It took the massive economic and financial crisis of 1997 to make them wake up to the realisation that they needed closer economic cooperation and to accelerate the formation of the AFTA free-trade zone, for which 15 years had originally been scheduled.[10]

The truly historic and decisive moment for the future development of ASEAN came at the 13th ASEAN summit in Singapore in November 2007. There the member states signed a charter that had been two years in the making and which gave ASEAN a legally binding status for the first time and so made it subject to international law.[11] The Charter came into effect on December 15, 2008 after Indonesia had ratified it as the last ASEAN member country to do so on October 21, 2008. It created the legal basis for a community of states promoting cooperation on security, economic and socio-cultural issues[12], to be established by the year 2015. This community is committed to democracy, the rule of law and good government as well as human rights and basic civil liberties, rejects unconstitutional changes in government and plans the creation of an ASEAN human rights body.[13] There is no doubt that the Charter has a high symbolic value in terms of reflecting ASEAN's new found self-image. However, it seems highly unlikely that it will be implemented as

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10 | At the 4th ASEAN Summit in Singapore in 1992 the *ASEAN Free Trade Area* (AFTA) was set up with import duties between zero and five per cent for the period 1993 to 2008. However, AFTA only came into force on January 1, 2003.

11 | Cf. Art. 1 ASEAN Charter, http://www.aseansec.org/21069.pdf (accessed January 10, 2011).

12 | ASEAN Security Community (ASC), ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) and ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC).

13 | Cf. Art. 14 ASEAN Charter, ASEAN Human Rights Body, http://www.aseansec.org/21069.pdf (accessed January 10, 2011).

envisaged, and it is largely dependent upon the will of the individual member states. The instruments which ASEAN uses to achieve its own goals and objectives have not really evolved and remain very weak.[14] This fact leads indirectly to the somewhat provocative question as to whether ASEAN shouldn't indeed be compared to the European Union.

COMPARING ASEAN AND THE EU: A CLASH OF IDEAS

First things first: what is most apparent is not so much what they have in common but the differences between them. From the very beginning the European Union was conceived as a community of values, while ASEAN has done its best for decades to avoid even discussing a common set of values, let alone implementing them. This was never really their intention, for in contrast to the European Union, with its clear commitment to an anti-Eastern Bloc, pro-West/transatlantic community of values, ASEAN's main objective was to reduce the influence of both blocs and superpowers and that of China on the Southeast Asian region as much as possible.

The (lack of) common values are a result of the highly different forms of government in both organisations. The European Union is a club for democracies and being a pluralistic, democratic, constitutional state is a basic prerequisite of membership. Only the actual day-to-day organisation of the democratic system is left to each individual country (representative or direct, parliamentary or presidential, federal or central democracy, majority or proportional representation-based elections, etc.). ASEAN, on the other hand, consisted in the beginning only of countries with non-democratic governments, and that is still predominantly the case today. Members include communist countries such as Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia, the self-confessed military dictatorship of Myanmar, authoritarian single or multiparty states such as Singapore and Malaysia, a kingdom regularly beset by government crises and military coups in Thailand and the absolute Sultanate of Brunei Darussalam. Against this political cacophony,

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14 | Cf. Art. 20 ASEAN Charter, http://www.aseansec.org/21069.pdf (accessed January 10, 2011), Decisions should be made on the basis of consultation and consensus.

the most developed democracies of Indonesia and, to a lesser extent, the Philippines can only make themselves heard because of their importance and their size.

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The very different nature of these two membership groupings has led to fundamental differences within both the EC/EU and ASEAN as to how members should deal with each other. While the Europeans seek to resolve problems by working together in an often confrontational, but also predominantly constructive way, and through the systematic creation of interdependencies in nearly every political sphere, ASEAN members work according to a code of conduct they like to call the *Asian way*[15] and which is made up of three basic parts:

- strict non-interference in the internal affairs of other member states;
- a common duty to respect national sovereignty and identity and territorial integrity;
- avoidance of the creation of sub-ASEAN institutions which could lead to a sharing of national sovereignty at community level.

All ASEAN cooperation is therefore non-binding in character. The final aspect of this comparison may have long-term effects on cooperation within the ASEAN region and beyond and therefore needs to be looked at in more detail: if we take the geographical location, the current population size and the political and economic influence of individual EU member states into consideration, then the history of European integration can be seen as a permanent process of balancing out, especially between the larger member states. The EC was originally made up of three countries of roughly the same size (Italy, France and West Germany) and three smaller countries (Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg). When Great Britain joined the EC the club of three big countries became a club of four, and this balance of power was to be fundamentally important to the development of Community processes. After German reunification this balance was completely thrown out of kilter. Almost overnight one of the members of the club of four (also the strongest economically) suddenly enjoyed a

15 | Established in the *Treaty of Amity and Cooperation* in 1976.

substantial growth in physical size and, more importantly, an almost 20 million increase in population. Compared to Great Britain, France and Italy, who each had between 50 and 60 million inhabitants, Germany now had 80 million and was therefore *primus inter pares*, a situation that even Germany's closest EU partner, France, found difficult to deal with. It was therefore vital to reinstate the balance of power and this led to urgent steps towards expansion and to spreading the integration process beyond the existing economic community.[16] The more integration and sharing of national sovereignty, the greater the checks and balances and the building of trust between members: this is the historical lesson that can be learned from the Maastricht Treaty.

If we were to look at ASEAN from the viewpoint of those key issues mentioned above, then it can be seen that of the approx. 575 million people in the ASEAN region 240 million, or around 40 per cent, come from Indonesia alone. There is then a significant gap to the Philippines and Vietnam (each with approx. 90 to 95 million inhabitants) and Thailand (70 million). Until now these differences in size, and especially the vastness of Indonesia, both in terms of population and geography[17], were of no real significance in the way ASEAN was run. However, under the terms of the new Charter this situation could change drastically. If the ASEAN member states really want to build a community of nations along the lines of the European Union then it will soon become apparent who is in the driving seat and who should be considered more as passengers. The Charter sensibly allows for a two-speed process in certain areas so that more progressive member states can move more quickly towards integration.

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But which group will Indonesia belong to? Official government rhetoric suggests that they naturally see Indonesia assuming the role of leader on the basis of the size of their country in comparison to other member states, as mentioned above. But what if the other countries do not

16 | Refers to the second and third pillars of European Union.
17 | At 5,100 km Indonesia is almost as long as the distance between New York and Los Angeles and covers three time zones.

want to be led by the giant archipelago next door? After all, border disputes within ASEAN states have been smouldering for decades. Indonesia has been fighting constant diplomatic battles over the treatment of Indonesian migrant workers, especially with Singapore and Malaysia. And emotions continue to run high on both sides in the Malaysian-Indonesian dispute over who stole whose language (Indonesian and Malaysian are almost identical). Everybody in the region is very aware of Indonesia's sense of national identity, which in recent times has once again bordered on xenophobia. Most of the smaller ASEAN states are worried about a possible Indonesian hegemony. ASEAN lacks the kind of set up and mechanisms that help to allay similar fears amongst smaller members of the European Union and to maintain the balance of power, which is to say a grouping of similar-sized countries that keep each other in check and a process of integration aimed at achieving interdependencies.

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FUTURE OPTIONS: ASEAN + ?

The general feeling amongst ASEAN member states seems to be that ASEAN has no alternative but to look for ways to face up to today's challenges. The solution that seems to offer the most likelihood of success in tackling current problems, especially for want of better alternatives, lies in cooperation between ASEAN countries. This concept of "ASEAN+" has seen various initiatives put forward in recent years as a consequence of participation in a bewildering number of dialogue and cooperation platforms between ASEAN and third parties. With the help of the group known as the ASEAN Dialogue Partners[18], the "ASEAN+3" process was developed in 1997 (also APT: ASEAN Plus Three), a dialogue platform between ASEAN, China, South Korea and Japan aimed at improving cooperation in 20 different areas, including crime prevention, tourism, security and health. China and India have become new members of the security platform established in 1976 as part of the ASEAN Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC). ASEAN is now

18 | The official ASEAN Dialogue Partners are Australia (first Dialogue Partner 1974), China, India, USA, Russia, EU, Canada, New Zealand, Japan and South Korea. The UNDP also has Dialogue Partner status.

trying to persuade the other two APT partners, Japan and South Korea, to also join TAC. It is hoped that Russia will join in 2011. In 2009 President Obama showed an interest in the USA also signing up. The term "ASEAN+8" is already being considered for this expanded TAC grouping.[19] It is also worth mentioning the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) and the ASEAN Cooperation Dialogue (ACD).

An analysis of ASEAN's external contacts would suggest that it is trying to fix or at least conceal the shortfalls inherent in its own systems through a confusing number of platforms, (pseudo) organisations and discussion forums between ASEAN and other players. However this "head in the sand" policy will not be enough in the long term to make ASEAN capable of meeting global challenges ahead. As a result ASEAN must now be prepared to take a further decisive step beyond the "ASEAN+" concept and allow full member status to new, economically strong democracies from the region such as South Korean and Japan, but also Australia and New Zealand. This would have the effect of balancing out Indonesia's exceptional status and help to strengthen democratic processes throughout the whole ASEAN region. The idea of a cautious expansion of ASEAN, which until now has only been floating around in the region as a kind of desirable political utopia, could quickly gain momentum if, after 2015, the ASEAN member states actually seriously opt to go down the integration and community route within certain political areas. Anyhow, as early as 2005 the first East Asian Summit took place in Kuala Lumpur, with the participation of the ASEAN+3-countries together with India, Australia and New Zealand.

ASEAN must now be prepared to take a further decisive step beyond the "ASEAN+" concept and allow full member status to new, economically strong democracies from the region.

Political and economic necessity may also play a part in the successful implementation of this kind of expansion option in the mid-term. The European unification process didn't come about because a few European countries suddenly became aware of how much they liked each other, but because the tragedy of the Second World War and the initial

19 | ASEAN + Australia, China, India, Japan, South Korea, New Zealand, Russia and the USA.

establishing of blocs made it necessary for the Europeans to find new ways to ensure that there would be peace, at least amongst themselves. Maintaining peace was and still is the main objective of European Union. In Southeast Asia there has so far been no similar external or internal necessity to integrate, which may well be the main cause of ASEAN's relative weakness. However, you do not need a profound knowledge of the region to recognise that the superpower China will be the biggest factor putting pressure on the whole of the East and Southeast Asia region to act. Whether individual countries will be able to withstand this political and economic pressure is debatable. An expanded ASEAN would create an economic and security area on a par with both China and the European Union.

THE DILEMMA BETWEEN WANTING TO AND HAVING TO

At the Hanoi Summit in April 2010 all the countries' leaders expressed their agreement with the Charter and especially with the creation of an economic union by 2015. "There is a growing realisation among the leaders that the size of the market matters", claims Sanchita Basu Das, an analyst from the ASEAN Study Centre in the Institute of South East Asian Studies, Singapore.[20] The question is: are these positive signs just playing lip service or have the politicians understood the global challenges and accepted there is no really serious alternative to integration, union and the loss of a certain amount of national sovereignty in certain clearly-defined political areas? Only then can the weaknesses inherent in the Charter be overcome, such as the fact that in addition to the traditional decision-making process (principle of unanimity) there are no new proposals on how to settle differences of opinion or disputes.[21] The ASEAN union now stands at a crossroads. Its members must choose between a comfortable ASEAN with no institutional importance or an ASEAN regional power with an important political and economic role on the world stage.

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20 | Sanchita Basu Das, in: the *Business Times*, April 21, 2010, 19.

21 | The original idea to set up an ASEAN court to settle disputes was not pursued. The consensus principle and independent arbitration proceedings in individual cases remain the sole means of settlement. The latest arbitration issue concerned the ASEAN Summit.

It is still unclear as to what Indonesia will do next. If we believe the official statements on the Foreign Ministry website then Indonesia wants to be one of those countries pushing through the Charter and the development of further cooperation: "Indonesia and ASEAN share the view that the development of regional architectures not only needs to recognize the significance of ASEAN as a driving force, but also must be carried out with a view to strengthening efforts towards ASEAN Community-building. At the same time, efforts at ASEAN Community-building must also be implemented within each ASEAN member country's domestic conditions so as to elevate ASEAN Centrality."[22] The Foreign Minister Marty Natalegawa wants to leave us in no doubt as to Indonesia's good will: "Indonesia will be chairing ASEAN in 2011 and this is a good opportunity along the line for us to be part of the effort to help shape our regional architecture. For us, sooner is better than later."[23] However, ASEAN would not be ASEAN and Indonesia would not be one of its most influential members if the there wasn't a qualification to this: "But at the same time, we are very much aware that this is about comfort levels, we must proceed as they said in ASEAN language: at the best comfortable rate for all."[24] This policy of "promoting a dynamic equilibrance"[25], as it is known in the Indonesian government's phrasebook, is very much open to interpretation.

Indonesia's policy of "promoting a dynamic equilibrance" is very much open to interpretation.

At this point it is also worth mentioning the significant fact that the whole ASEAN process on Indonesia's side (as for all the other member states) will be carried out and developed by relevant internal ministries, even though until now this has been the exclusive domain of the Foreign Ministry. As far as Indonesia is concerned, ASEAN is part of foreign policy. As a result Jakarta has until today been able to avoid the dilemma of claiming on the one hand to want to be one of the driving forces of the ASEAN process, while

22 | Website of the Foreign Ministry of the Republic of Indonesia: http://www.deplu.go.id/pages/news.aspx?IDP=3104&1=en (accessed December 2, 2010).
23 | Lilian Budianto, "ASEAN presence a prerequisite in any future Asia Pacific community", in: *Jakarta Post*, May 1, 2010, 3
24 | Ibid.
25 | "U.S. and China vie to win over Jakarta," in: *International Herald Tribune*, November 10, 2010, 1.

on the other hand, and despite rhetoric to the contrary, pursuing a completely opposite policy, driven by nationalism and protectionism, designed to limit and put a brake on all efforts to develop ASEAN into a serious political and economic community of values. Many local experts have either been very critical of Indonesia's claim to be leaders in the ASEAN process or simply don't take it seriously.

THE WORLD AND INDONESIA: AN INSIDE VIEW OF A HETEROGENEOUS ISLAND KINGDOM

Indonesia is well aware of its growing international importance, and this new-found self-confidence has been boosted by its membership of the G20. Here this nation with the fourth biggest population in the world no longer holds a cautious or watching brief but adopts positions and takes initiatives. It is no accident that the Yudhoyono government claims to consider the G20 as the institution most likely to succeed in creating global economic processes and preventing future global economic and financial crises. As the only G20 country from the ASEAN group, Indonesia is taking the opportunity to represent the whole Southeast Asian region and is trying to position itself at the same time as the mouthpiece and defender of interests for all developing nations. In concrete terms the Indonesian government is particularly keen to see the inclusion of non-G20 states in internationally coordinated G20 activities, above all in order to avoid *beggar-thy-neighbour* situations arising.

As the only G20 country from the ASEAN group, Indonesia is taking the opportunity to represent the whole region and is trying to position itself as the defender of interests for all developing nations.

Membership of the decision-makers club at a time when the development of ASEAN seems to be showing no signs of growth has raised the question among experts as to whether G20 membership is more important for Indonesia than being in ASEAN and whether Indonesia's commitment to the G20 may spell the end of its involvement in ASEAN in the long run. Surprisingly, even foreign policy experts seem to be ignoring the fact that the G20, as a worldwide forum for the coordination of economic policies, cannot be considered in any way similar to a community of states like ASEAN, as both institutions have completely different functions.

Indonesian economic experts like to point out that, at a time of world economic stagnation, only China, India and Indonesia have achieved above-average economic growth. Indonesia is still expected to report over 6 per cent economic growth for 2010. At the same time the Indonesian economy proved to be less vulnerable during the latest financial crisis than the big export/import nations. Many Indonesians from the educated classes are aware of this. Today you can sense a noticeable feeling of national pride, especially amongst those in government positions and political life. The general feeling seems to be that Indonesia does not need any outside help, especially not from the West.

Amongst the wider population people are not really aware of what is happening in the G20. National print and broadcast media only give very rudimentary accounts of G20 meetings, if they bother to report them at all. Only a very small part of the population is aware that their own country is a member of G20. This is also basically true of people's awareness of the ASEAN process, even if there is a higher level of awareness of ASEAN itself as a result of its 40-year existence.

However, it is not only experts who believe that Indonesian foreign and ASEAN policies should be better explained to the people. Above all it is important that Indonesia's involvement in ASEAN is not presented as an end in itself but must clearly answer the question as to *cui bono* with policies for the benefit of the people.[26] This politically-driven push for an effective ASEAN community is therefore especially necessary, as nationalism in Indonesia as well as in neighbouring countries may be viewed positively in light of their colonial past and still relatively recent sovereignty, and especially while prejudices towards direct neighbours still prevail amongst opinion-formers on all sides.

26 | According to Evi Fitriani of the Department of International Relations of the Universitas Indonesia: "Community building is a long process that requires the participation of not only elites but also the common people at the grass-root level. Without the involvement of the people, the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC), ASEAN Political and Security Community (APSC) and ASEAN Social and Cultural Community (ASSC) are likely to remain empty political slogans." *Asia Views*, Vol. IV, № 6, October/November 2010, 6.