

FOREWORD

Dear reader,

As Cambodia takes over the chairmanship of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) from Brunei, this small but fierce country is taking over at a time of momentous challenge to the organization and the world.

Cambodians are astutely aware that their chairmanship of ASEAN will be watched closely from home and abroad. With the Kingdom at the helm of the organization many views this opportunity that demands undivided attention from the many actors involved in its preparation and execution.

For the past two years Southeast Asia has had to grapple with a challenge well-outside of the conventional political experience of a region already prone to challenges: The world-wide Covid-19-pandemic. In a region, where the service industry increasingly grows in importance and skilled labor becomes ever more valuable, the wholesale disruption of regional and especially people-to-people links has caused economic havoc on a scale that is still difficult to describe.

In late 2021, signs of better times seem to be on the horizon with national borders becoming again more open to travelers. Cambodia is now posited to preside over a return to normalcy or at least a semblance of it.

The other big challenge ASEAN will take into 2022 is of a more conventionally political but no less at least equally difficult nature: The ongoing instability in Myanmar will continue to make things difficult for the currently 10 member-states of ASEAN.

Finally, there is the broader state of play of international politics in 2021: With the People's Republic of China flexing its muscles in the region and the United States of America trying to regain influence deemed to been lost over the last decade, ASEAN is finding itself increasingly situated between a rock and a hard place, with calls to its member states to choose sides increasing in volume, threatening to undermine the very concept of ASEAN-centrality.

But the Cambodian chairmanship of ASEAN is not just all about challenges but also about opportunities both for the Kingdom and for the region as a whole. Where does ASEAN want to go in the 55 year of its existence? What are the areas where the organization can grow and gain in stature?

These are the questions the Asian Vision Institute (AVI) and Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS) in Cambodia have asked us and our authors in this book. Over three sections and 15 chapters, we will look at the past, present and future of the organization, the internal and external situations facing ASEAN and finally the priorities and challenges facing it under Cambodia's leadership.

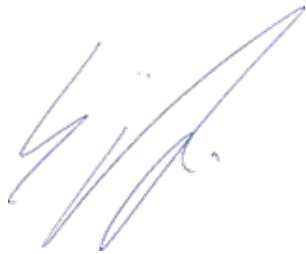
AVI and KAS are proud to have worked together on this project, that we hope will make a contribution to project the future trajectory of ASEAN under Cambodia's stewardship and further afield. A diverse cast of the most renowned experts and researchers from Cambodia, Southeast Asia and around the globe has submitted chapters to this book reflecting not just a diversity of different topics but also of national backgrounds, perspectives and viewpoints. We hope that you, dear reader, will find the topics you will encounter over the next few hundred pages stimulating.

We wish you an insightful and hopefully thought-provoking read.

Phnom Penh, 3 December 2021,

Dr. Daniel Schmücking

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H.E. Dr. Sok Siphana

Chairman of the Board of Directors, Asian
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