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Short Curriculum Vitae: Hidetoshi Nishimura

Entered the Ministry of International Trade and Industry (MITI) in 1976, after graduating from the University of Tokyo Faculty of Law. Served as Asia-Pacific Representative of the Japan Overseas Development Corporation, Director of the Southeast Asia and Pacific Division of the MITI Trade Policy Bureau, Vice Governor for International Affairs of Ehime Prefecture, Director-General of the Business Support Department of the Small and Medium Enterprise Agency, Executive Managing Director of the Japan-China Economic Association, and President of the Japan-China Northeast Development Association, before appointment to current position as Executive Director of the Economic Research Institute for ASEAN and East Asia (ERIA) international organization in June 2008. Appointed Visiting Professor at Waseda University, Fellow at the Meiji Institute for Global Affairs, and Professor of Literature at Darma Persada University.

The locus and future of the 50th anniversary of ASEAN

On August 8, 2017, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) celebrated the 50th anniversary of its founding. ASEAN started out as a gathering of foreign ministers from small and medium-sized countries in 1967. It was merely an association for discussion to avoid flare-ups of delicate territorial disputes and war situations. At the end of 2015, it launched the ASEAN Community, consisting of the Political-Security Community, Economic Community, and Socio-Cultural Community. Looking towards 2025, ASEAN is currently advancing its efforts for further regional integration.

The ASEAN Way has been an inseparable part of ASEAN regional integration so far. This is a pattern of behavior distinctive to ASEAN, based on the principles of unanimous agreement and non-intervention in internal affairs. Rather than manifesting the realities of multilateral relations, it sets forth a process for the practice of mutual interchange. In other words, this approach is essentially characterized by caution, informality, pragmatism, utilitarianism, consensus-building, and non-confrontational negotiation. Its style contrasts with the decision-making procedure like that observed in multilateral negotiations among Western countries, which is colored by rivalry among the principals and grounded in respect for law. This ASEAN Way concept is said to derive from the thinking termed “musyawarah.” According to the “musyawarah” concept, leaders must constantly engage in full discussion with all other participants, take their perspectives and feelings into consideration, and always pay close attention so they can reach integrated conclusions. ASEAN member countries differ from each other in various respects including culture, religion, political systems, and creed. Although it takes time to reach and implement agreements, the ASEAN Way may be given high marks as a form of wisdom discovered by ASEAN in order for it to make steady progress forward.

In my view, the grand quest for ASEAN integration so far has been tempered and deepened by the constant experience of danger. The Asian currency crisis broke out 20 years ago in 1997. Triggered by the crash of the Thai baht, it swiftly plunged East Asian economies into disruption. At the height of this crisis in 1997 (the 30th anniversary of its founding), ASEAN announced Vision 2020 at a meeting in Kuala Lumpur. The Vision states: “We in ASEAN have created a community of Southeast Asian nations at peace with one another and at peace with the world...Our rich diversity has provided the strength and inspiration to us to help one another foster a strong sense of community.” In this passage, we can observe the idea that ASEAN is capable of being a “community.” In my opinion, the Vision is a crystallization of the wisdom of ASEAN leaders who sent out this message, by strange coincidence, in the middle of the Asian currency crisis.

To celebrate the 50th anniversary of ASEAN, the Economic Research Institute for ASEAN and East Asia (ERIA) published “ASEAN at 50: Retrospectives and Perspectives on the Making, Substance, Significance, and Future of ASEAN.” This work provides an overview of ASEAN’s history and embodies the hopes for its further advancement over the next 50 years. Consisting of five volumes, this commemorative publication takes up individual themes related to the three communities. In addition, in the first volume, current and former ASEAN leaders on the order of heads of state look back on, and share their future outlook for, the development of each country in East Asia. The publication makes it clear that the firm determination and hard efforts for nation-building on the part of each country while receiving the economic cooperation of dialogue partners was of extremely great importance for the construction of a huge economic sphere. This economic sphere brings together ten member countries with differing ideologies, cultures, religions, and political systems, constitutes the world’s seventh-largest market, and has the world’s third-largest labor force.

ERIA has done its utmost to support the advancement of ASEAN over the last ten years of its 50-year history. I feel these last ten years were a pivotal period of landmark evolution in ASEAN goals, from the aforementioned economic cooperation to economic integration, and from nation-building to community-building. In the process, the work expected of ERIA in its activities is widening from investigative research of the economic community in the initial period after its establishment to investigative research of socio-cultural and political-security communities. In this connection, I would like to introduce some comments on the socio-cultural community in particular, made by Abhisit Vejjajiva, former Prime Minister of Thailand, in Volume 4 of the publication.

“In particular, the most important aspects of ASSC are the goals of participation or engagement and the creation of an ASEAN identity. (Omitted) Political leaders, not bureaucrats, must take on the responsibilities to move things forward. From there, we,

the peoples of ASEAN, will create our identity and values that will steer ASEAN into the future.”

As for measures related to the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community, looking ahead to the next 50 years, health, education, and disaster management are listed as long-term issues. These issues can all be said to be crucial issues for the people of ASEAN countries as a whole and also require solid and steady approaches.

What shape will ASEAN take 50 years from now? According to statistics compiled by the United Nations and the World Bank, the combined population of ASEAN countries is projected to reach 850 million. There are even opinions that the day will come when all of these countries will be classified as high-income ones. We at ERIA are determined to provide further support for ASEAN’s continued economic integration and advancement through the “power of the pen,” in other words, scholastic research and the formulation of policy-making proposals based on the findings.

Reference literature

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- *Ponciano Intal, Jr. and Lydia Ruddy, ASEAN @ 50 Volume 2: Voices of ASEAN: What Does ASEAN Mean to ASEAN Peoples? ERIA 2017.*
- *Aileen Baviera and Larry Maramis, ASEAN @ 50 Volume 4: Building ASEAN Community: Political-Security and Socio-cultural Reflections, ERIA, 2017*