

Building the Diverse Community

Beyond Regionalism in East Asia

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Accelerando of East Asia Regional Cooperation. Analyzing the ASEAN+3-Centered Community-Building Process

Introduction

Since the first ASEAN+3 (APT) Summit meeting was held in Kuala Lumpur in December 1997, the process of East Asia regional cooperation has gradually taken off. After more than 15 years of development, all of a sudden, we have noticed the speed-up of East Asia cooperation. The East Asian Summit (EAS) has been held eight times. Consequently, we sense the rapidity of East Asian regional cooperation forging ahead toward the vision of East Asian community with the scenario of the co-existence of a complex of multilateral regional processes, i.e. ASEAN meetings, ASEAN+1 meetings, ASEAN+3 meetings, EAS meetings, etc.

ASEAN is now striding forward with its own reform. The document of the ASEAN Charter was signed by the 10 member states on November 20, 2007, during the 13th ASEAN Summit in Singapore. The ASEAN Charter entered into force on December 15, 2008. This is the very first legal document in the history of ASEAN, which intends to help make ASEAN a more effective organization with clearer purposes, a stronger legal framework and a better mechanism for dispute settlement. ASEAN will henceforth operate under this new legal framework and establish a number of new organs to boost its community-building process.

The process of establishing the ASEAN Community has been accelerated. The Blueprint for the ASEAN Economic Community was signed in November 2007, which serves as the roadmap for transforming ASEAN into a single market and production base, highly competitive and fully integrated into the global community by 2015 (Yeo 2007).

Moreover, ASEAN has already accepted 10 countries and the European Union (EU) as its dialogue partners. The 10 countries are China, Japan, Korea, Australia, New Zealand, Russia, India and Pakistan. Almost all the ASEAN dialogue partners have appointed ambassadors to ASEAN under the framework of the ASEAN Charter. Up to April 2014, altogether 78 countries worldwide have appointed ambassadors to ASEAN, including Poland (ASEAN 2014).

ASEAN is now in its forties and is undergoing unprecedented transition and the reinvigorated ASEAN is playing and to play a crucial role in the process of the APT. It is believed that the APT will remain as the main vehicle in regional community building efforts. With the adoption of the Second Joint Statement on East Asia Cooperation and its accompanying ASEAN Plus Three Cooperation Work Plan (2007–2017), the APT is geared up for building an open regionalism connected to the world (Yeo 2007).

With a detailed review of the efforts at the East Asian regional cooperation, the paper tends to conclude that the APT is of considerable promise to be the main vehicle to promote East Asian cooperation with ASEAN as the driving force. However, what we must heed is that the East Asian regional cooperation can never be reached through expedient endeavors, rather a process in which all regional actors will enjoy a certain level of comfort, through which regional awareness and identity can be fostered.

Birth of the APT

The end of the Cold War marked a key turning point in the analyses of the new regionalism in East Asia. The geostrategic context of Cold War politics in which ASEAN was created has transited to a geo-economic context in which ASEAN is facing a variety of changes and ways of functioning. With the incorporation of former adversaries into ASEAN and a move towards economic cooperation with China, Japan and South Korea, new development rationales come to the scene.

The first proposal for East Asian cooperation was made by an East Asia Economic Group (EAEG), renamed before long as the East Asia Economic Caucus (EAEC), in late 1991. The EAEC was intended to create an Asian common market comprising the then six ASEAN countries as well as China, Japan, South Korea and the Indochinese countries, which very much resembled the ASEAN+3 framework. However, this proposal

received lukewarm support within ASEAN. It was also opposed by the United States (US) because the East Asia Grouping might exclude it, and would affect the then two-year-old Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC). The ASEAN states, though preferred to have ASEAN states work together, guarded against a trade bloc (McGowan 1991).

However, there was enough sympathy among the caucus members for the goal of producing a collective voice for East Asia. Later, the establishment of the Asia-Europe Meeting in March 1996 invigorated the idea of East Asia cooperation. The East Asian countries were forced to consider themselves as a grouping in their own right, so that they could interloquite with Europe (Hassan 2006). In practical terms this proved to be the catalyst that turned the EAEC into the APT, a functioning 3 if somewhat embryonic – East Asian regional cooperative arrangement (Stubbs 2002, p. 442).

The Trajectory of the APT

It is still fresh in our minds that on November 20, 2007, the heads of the ten member countries of ASEAN and the three Northeast Asian countries convened in Singapore on the occasion of the 10th Anniversary of the APT cooperation. At the summit the leaders issued the historic document in the development of the APT, i.e. the Second Joint Statement on East Asia Cooperation: Building on the Foundations of ASEAN Plus Three Cooperation. Meanwhile, a detailed ASEAN Plus Three Cooperation Work Plan (2007–2017) was signed which serves as the master plan to enhance APT relations and cooperation in a comprehensive and mutually beneficial manner for the next ten years (ASEAN Secretariat 2007).

Hardly when we could notice the swiftness of the APT development, a series of document had been signed in Cambodia in November 2012 to celebrate its 15th anniversary. On November 19, 2012, the ASEAN Plus Three Leaders' Joint Statement on the Commemoration of the 15th Anniversary of the ASEAN Plus Three Cooperation was signed in Phnom Penh, Cambodia (ASEAN 2012a). Besides, the leaders adopted The Leaders' Statement on ASEAN Plus Three Partnership on Connectivity. The latter reiterated the importance and necessity of the multi-faced and multi-layered ASEAN-led regional framework and re-stressed ASEAN's commitment to the APT connectivity and the building of the East Asian Community (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan 2012). Moreover, the leaders took note of the Report of the East Asia Vision Group II, Memo

No. 9 of the Network of East Asian Think-Tanks (NEAT), Summary Record of the 10th East Asia Forum, the Progress Report on the Implementation of the Second Joint Statement on East Asia Cooperation and the APT Cooperation Work Plan, and the APT Plan of Action on Education: 2010–2017 (ASEAN 2012b).

A review of the 15 years of its evolution is to shed much light on our understanding of the recent acceleration of the APT process. The evolution of APT in the past decade can be divided into three stages. The first stage (1997–1999) is the process of institutionalization of the APT cooperation. The second stage (2000–2005) is the period of further development of the APT. The third stage (2005–beyond) is the period when the APT moves side by side with the EAS in an effort of community-building in East Asia.

The First Stage (1997–1999)

The idea of ASEAN+3 was hinted by Goh Chok Tong at the 5th ASEAN Summit, suggesting inviting China, Japan and South Korea to an ASEAN informal summit. His idea echoed with the Malaysian idea of inviting the three Northeast Asian countries to the informal summit of 1996. In December 1997 China, Japan and South Korea were invited to the ASEAN informal leaders meeting to be held in Kuala Lumpur.

Overshadowed with the Asian financial crisis, this meeting ended up being a “talk shop” meeting, with leaders stating their views without any concrete agreement. Anyhow, the first APT Summit did provide a chance for leaders of East Asian countries to sit together to voice their concerns and willingness to cooperate in the face of the impending crises.

Thus the 1997–1998 Asian economic crisis is predestined to open a new phase of regionalization in East Asia. Thanks to the crisis, the ASEAN countries are brought face-to-face with its own inability and ineffectiveness. Still, APEC’s inaction during the crisis and the US pressure to stymie the Asian Monetary Fund in 1997, left regional states with no regional solutions but to turn to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for impractical solutions of no use.

Hence the APT cooperation. The East Asian countries were jolted into realizing in times of crisis it was best to rely on each other. It was imperative for ASEAN to realize that any future crises could not be steered clear of unless the Northeast Asian countries were included.

The second APT Summit was held in Hanoi on December 15, 1998, against the backdrop of the turbulent political and social situation in many East Asian countries in the wake of the economic crisis. It was at this meeting that China promised not to devalue its currency. By exerting its own capacity to help its neighboring countries, China behaved as a responsible international economic player and further solidified its image on the international stage.

It was at this Summit that the APT summits were regularized to be held annually. In addition, the three Northeast Asian states put forward key policies to ensure efficient and effective cooperation to cope with the crisis, such as the New Miyazawa Initiative, China's proposal of the financial experts meeting and South Korea's proposal of an East Asian Vision Group.

The third APT Summit was held in Manila on November 27, 1999. The leaders reached extensive agreements on the principles, goals and priority areas of regional cooperation and issued the Joint Statement on East Asia Cooperation.

Henceforth, the APT Summit, an informal meeting among leaders in ASEAN, China, Japan, and South Korea, has become an annual meeting held in tandem with the ASEAN Summit. Various regional cooperative initiatives have emerged, such as functional ministerial meetings and an advisory panel. By the end of last the century the APT has been gradually getting full-fledged as a viable international institution in East Asia.

The Second Stage (2000–2005)

Since the crisis started in the financial sector, it is thus of top priority to explore proper mechanisms of financial cooperation. The APT Finance Ministers Meeting was held in Chiang Mai, Thailand on May 6, 2000, during which the APT finance ministers agreed to create a network of bilateral swapping deals among member states. Other functional fora were set up: the Economic Minister Meeting was held first in Yangon on May 2, 2000, and has been held annually since then. Other areas such as labor, agriculture, energy, tourism and environmental issues are still being discussed at the ministerial level.

At the 2000 Singapore Summit, a range of new ideas were raised such as transforming the APT Summit into an EAS and the possibility of building a free trade area in this region.

In November 2001 the East Asian Vision Group (EAVG) submitted to the APT its report in which the Vision of East Asia cooperation was stated, i.e. “an East Asian Community of peace, prosperity and progress based on the full development of all peoples in the region” (ASEAN+3 Summit 2002, p. 6). According to the EAVG, the community-building is comprised of six areas of cooperation, that is, economic, financial, political and security, environment and energy, social and cultural, and institutional cooperation. The report made altogether 57 recommendations, among which there are 3 most noteworthy, namely:

- establishment of East Asian Free Trade Area (EAFTA) and liberalization of trade well ahead of the APEC Bogor goal;
- establishment of a self-help regional facility for financial cooperation. Adoption of a better exchange rate coordination mechanism consistent with both financial stability and economic development;
- evolution of the annual summit meetings of ASEAN+3 into the East Asian Summit.

However, the EAVG could not work out the concrete steps to realize the hope of East Asia cooperation. Thanks to the EASG, a final report was presented to the 2002 Phnom Penh Summit, which included the assessment of the recommendations made by the EAVG and assessment of the implications of an EAS. Mindful of sorting out concrete measures to be carried out to achieve the vision of East Asia Community, the EASG had selected 26 implementable concrete measures with high priority, among which 17 were selected as “short-term measures” and 9 “medium-term and long-term measures” (ASEAN+3 Summit 2002, pp. 3–4).

In regard to the recommended EAS, the EASG came to a practical conclusion that the EAS can be “a long-term desirable objective of the ASEAN+3,” and “part of an evolutionary and step-by-step process.” It reaffirmed that “the ASEAN+3 framework remains the only credible and realistic vehicle to advance the form and substance of regional cooperation in East Asia” (ASEAN+3 Summit 2002, p. 5).

The outcomes from the EASG report do show a willingness to move beyond talk into substantive policy actions. Both the vision set out in the EAVG report and the final report of the EASG have duly aroused people’s intense interests in working for East Asia Community.

The following years have witnessed the intensification of ASEAN+1 processes under the overarching APT framework. China took the lead by deciding to open its Free Trade Agreement (FTA) negotiations with ASEAN in 2001 and expected to conclude the ASEAN-China Free Trade Area

(ACFTA) in 2010, which has been realized within the time range. Then at the 2002 ASEAN-China Summit, China and ASEAN concluded a Framework Agreement of Comprehensive Economic Cooperation together with the Early Harvest Program. In 2003, China became the first dialogue partner of ASEAN to sign its Treaty of Amity and Cooperation. Since then China has continued to expand the scope and depth of its cooperation with ASEAN, with a new bilateral dispute resolution mechanism being agreed upon in 2004 and cooperation in disaster management and relief operations being undertaken in 2005.

Japan followed suit by signing its first regional FTA with Singapore in January 2002, and by proposing to launch talks in 2008 for an FTA with ASEAN, also with a target date of 2010. At the 2003 APT Summit, Japan and ASEAN concluded a Framework for Comprehensive Economic Partnership. And in 2004, Japan, together with South Korea and Russia, acceded to the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation. South Korea has agreed to implement an FTA with ASEAN by 2016.

The Third Stage (2005-beyond)

December 14, 2005, witnessed the commencement of the EAS. After that a series of EAS has been held. Henceforth the APT goes side by side with the EAS. As for the membership of the EAS, besides the APT countries, Australia, India, and New Zealand joined the summit as full participants.

An epoch-making event took place at the 5th EAS in 2010, when the US and Russia were formally invited to participate in the EAS starting from 2011 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan 2010). Thus, the number of member states of the EAS reaches 18. After the enlargement of member states three EASs have been held. A number of EAS document of historic significance have been signed. They include: The 2010 Ha Noi Declaration on the Commemoration of the 5th Anniversary of the EAS (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade of Australia 2010); The 2011 Declaration of the EAS on the Principles for Mutually Beneficial Relations (ASEAN 2011a); The Declaration of the 6th EAS on ASEAN Connectivity (ASEAN 2011b); and The Joint Declaration on the Launch of Negotiations for the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) (Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry of Japan 2012). In general, the EAS framework has been progressing swiftly and has been making great efforts on enhancing

cooperation in the six priority areas of the EAS, namely energy, education, finance, global health issues including pandemic diseases, environment and disaster mitigation, and ASEAN Connectivity. Recently the major achievements are as follows:

a. In the field of construction of a free trade zone in East Asia, the RCEP negotiations have started since early 2013. The whole process of negotiation is expected to end by the end of 2015;

b. In November 2011 at the 6th EAS, the Master Plan on ASEAN Connectivity was embraced in the EAS efforts to ensure intra-regional Connectivity among all EAS participating countries, which would complement and contribute to the ongoing community building efforts in the East Asian region. By doing so the commitment of the ASEAN's maintaining its centrality is evident;

c. Still in November 2011, the 6th EAS issued the Declaration of the EAS on the Principles for Mutually Beneficial Relations, which is considered as the guiding principles setting the norms for the member states of the EAS. It is stated definitely that the participating states of the EAS are to form friendly and mutually beneficial relations on the basis of the twelve principles, from which the typical "ASEAN Way" stands out.

In spite of the involvement of the US in the EAS framework, it is still believed that the EAS is moving forward steadily and healthily. The central role of ASEAN in the EAS and the APT's role as a main vehicle towards building an East Asia community have been reaffirmed.

The year of 2012 is a historic point for the development of APT. Though facing a variety of challenges, the APT welcomes its 15th birthday. The construction of East Asia integration has been moving on steadily. On November 19, 2012, the 15th ASEAN Plus Three Summit was held in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, to celebrate this special occasion, during which The ASEAN Plus Three Leaders' Joint Statement on the Commemoration of the 15th Anniversary of the ASEAN Plus Three Cooperation was adopted. According to the Joint Statement, the fast growing and deepening of cooperation in all areas of cooperation is satisfying, such as politics and security, economy, finance, connectivity, food security, energy, etc. It is extensively acknowledged that the APT cooperation played "an indispensable role in promoting East Asian unity and coordination, deepening regional economic integration and expanding horizon for common development" (ASEAN 2012a, p. 1). In facing the complex changes in the world and the pressures to maintain sustainable development in this region, the APT leaders expressed collectively their commitment to meet

the challenges and to make good use of the well-established APT cooperation mechanisms.

Still, the Second Joint Statement on East Asia Cooperation signed in 2007 and the ASEAN+3 Cooperation Work Plan (2007–2017) formulated that year were re-stressed as the master plan providing strategic guidance for the future direction of the APT Cooperation. Moreover, the leaders reiterated their strong will to ensure the APT to serve “as a main vehicle towards the long-term goal of building an East Asian community” and together they expressed “their continued support for the central role of ASEAN in the evolving regional architecture.” They reiterated that “the ASEAN+3 Cooperation would continue to support the realization of the ASEAN Community and pave the way towards regional integration” (ASEAN2012a, p. 2).

As for the future efforts of the APT, there are several proposals made at the 15th APT Summit in Phnom Penh. First, the APT leaders agreed that it is obliged to boost the economic development in the region. It was for the sake of fighting against the 1997–1998 financial crisis the APT came into being. Thus it is natural and reasonable for the APT to further strengthen its regional ability and resilience in dealing with the financial and economic crisis. Thus ASEAN Plus One Free Trade Agreements with Plus Three countries are called upon. The APT leaders hailed for RCEP, which was believed to construct “a comprehensive, high-quality and mutually beneficial economic partnership” (ASEAN 2012a, p. 3). The APT Summit expressed its appreciation for the launch of the negotiations of the RCEP at the end of 2012.

Secondly, in order to ensure healthy and stable regional macroeconomic development and enhance regional financial cooperation, the APT summit meeting called for strengthening the effectiveness of the Chiang Mai Initiative Multilateralisation (CMIM) as part of the regional financial safety net in light of the Joint Statement of the 15th ASEAN+3 Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors’ Meeting in May 2012. The APT economic and financial leaders have made successful efforts to strengthen the CMIM, i.e. doubling its total size from USD 120 billion to USD 240 billion, increasing the IMF delinked portion to 30% in 2012, and introducing a crisis prevention facility “CMIM Precautionary Line” (AMRO-ASIA 2012). The ASEAN+3 Macroeconomic Research Office (AMRO) was established in 2013 which was expected to be transformed into an international organization so as to strengthen its capacity as an independent regional surveillance unit. “The Asia Bond Market Initiative New Roadmap +” has been endorsed in 2013 (ASEAN 2013).

Thirdly, the APT Emergency Rice Reserve Agreement, which has come into force on July 12, 2012, is to serve as a permanent mechanism to ensure sustainable and integrated food security in the region in response to the acute food emergencies in this region.

Here appears the co-existence of the APT framework and the EAS process. The former is viewed as one of the East Asian frameworks, among others, the ASEAN, ASEAN+1, ASEAN+6, the members of which are all from East Asia. The latter, as well as the Trans-Pacific Partnership and APEC, involves as its member states from outside the region. Hence Pan-Asia processes (Yuan 2008, p. 32), which is different from the one conceived in the EAVG and EASG reports. Both the APT and the EAS are of great significance to the efforts of ASEAN and East Asia community building.

Till now it has been agreed by East Asian countries that the EAS is an open, inclusive, transparent and outward-looking forum of “leaders-led” and strategic nature. As the first Pan-Asian summit meeting, the EAS should play a complementary and mutually reinforcing role with other mechanisms. Unquestionably, the EAS has been endowed with the symbolic value of “Asian solution for Asians” for the very reason that the US was not in, which was true before 2011.

However, whatever the EAS becomes it cannot be a primary vehicle for community building in East Asia, though it may be beneficial. Therefore, those two approaches to community-building should be complementary and mutually supportive with the APT Summit at the core and the EAS playing a supportive role (Tanaka 2006).

Prospects of East Asian Cooperation

It was in 2002 that Richard Stubbs wrote, “As a result of APEC’s limitations and the need for a vehicle for East Asia to voice its concerns on the international stage, political space has opened up so as to allow the APT process to develop as a potentially major regional institutional cooperative arrangement” (Stubbs 2002 p. 447). After more than 15 years of development, the APT has turned itself into a gradually mature regional cooperative framework as the foundation of East Asia cooperation, and contributed significantly to East Asia Cooperation covering twenty-four areas. Institutionally, the sectorial bodies, the EASG and the APT Unit of the ASEAN Secretariat have likewise made great contributions, according

to the Second Joint Statement on East Asia Cooperation. The APT is in effect the main vehicle towards the long-term goal of building an East Asian community, with ASEAN as the driving force (ASEAN Secretariat 2007b).

The APT will continue to support ASEAN integration in order to realize the ASEAN Community, and contribute to the building of an East Asia community as a long-term goal (ASEAN Secretariat 2007b). The assumption, based on the second Joint Statement, is that East Asian integration is an open, transparent, inclusive, and forward-looking process for mutual benefits and support internationally shared values to achieve peace, stability, democracy and prosperity in the region. The future scope of APT cooperation would go beyond economic and financial cooperation to include other fields, namely, political and security cooperation, energy, environment, etc. within wider cooperative frameworks (ASEAN Secretariat 2007b).

The purpose of the Second Joint Statement will be realized through the implementation of concrete priority activities and flagship projects stated in the attached Work Plan, which serves as the master plan for more comprehensive APT cooperation. Such broad frameworks imply long-term commitments to a common vision (Pablo-Baviera 2007, p. 239). The commitments of the ASEAN leaders to strengthen the APT as a more efficient and effective process to facilitate East Asia cooperation are evident in its multilayered monitor arrangement stipulated in the Work Plan. Yet such a commitment to a shared vision is not readily existing in East Asia and will have to be negotiated for years to come among the APT countries. The project of building a community is fraught with challenges and obstacles.

In the aspect of political-security, the first political obstacle is the role of the US in East Asia. The main reason for the US presence is to recover and maintain its hegemony. Though greatly affected by the 2008 financial crisis, the US is still powerful. However, the rise of the newly-emerging powers in East Asia and the rather high-speed development of East Asia community have pushed the gravity of world strategy and economy to the East. Under those circumstances, the US has to steer back to Asia and has been worried in the case that it might be shunned from that region. The US has tried every means to maintain the hegemony of Dollar, free trade (by proposing Trans-Pacific Strategic Partnership) and the safety of maritime passage in East Asia, which are its topmost concerns.

The second political obstacle is the competition between China and Japan. It is said that both are trying to dominate the agenda of East Asian

cooperation. China has declared that it has not attempted and will never intend to be the regional leader. It is imperative for Tokyo to take a realistic attitude toward its past and only through bilateral dialogue and cooperation can misperception and distrust be wiped out. After all China and Japan are two important players in East Asia and their relationship is key to the building of an East Asian community (Qin 2007).

Besides, in East Asia traditional security threats are various, which, if not properly handled, will turn into serious problems for the region as a whole. Territorial disputes have surfaced in the South and East China Seas, and over the Taiwan Strait. China has been playing a crucial and assertive role in handling such issues. It has, on the one hand, demonstrated repeatedly its strong political will to safeguard its sovereignty and national integrity, while, on the other hand, demonstrated readiness to set aside disputes in the interests of regionalism.

Nontraditional security issues have been identified where immediate cooperation involving all East Asian countries is called for. These are transnational crime, maritime piracy, trafficking of persons and illegal substances, epidemic diseases and terrorism. In the processes of pursuing multilateral coordination and cooperation in these activities, the parties can gradually build mutual confidence, enhance sensitivity to each other's concerns, and develop habits of consultation and consensus building that will serve them well in addressing more difficult bilateral problems (Pablo-Baviera 2007, p. 238).

However, the practical benefits that further regional economic cooperation are expected to produce appear to outweigh the problems it may create. The APT is committed to giving East Asian states a voice in global trade negotiations and a forum in which to discuss regional economic issues themselves. Crucially, that the APT's support and immediate implementation of an expanding set of currency swap agreements help deal with future currency crisis is a major reason to keep the whole process moving forward (Stubbs 2002, p. 454).

After all, the APT has just celebrated its 15th anniversary in 2012. The APT leaders acknowledged the indispensable role of the APT. Thanks to the collective efforts, the APT has successfully tackled the global financial crisis and preserved economic and financial stability, thus East Asia becoming the most vibrant region in the global economy. In light of the profound and complex changes in the world and the multiple pressures to maintain sustainable development of the region, the leaders were determined to work together to meet the challenges, make good use of the

well-established ASEAN+3 cooperation mechanisms and give full play to the advantages (ASEAN 2012a, p. 2).

As stressed again in the Second Joint Statement on East Asia Cooperation, the APT is the core of regional cooperative arrangement. The East Asian community, to a great extent, is process-oriented, which is an open, transparent, inclusive and forward-looking process for mutual benefits. The main purpose of strengthening APT is to promote and facilitate functional cooperation among APT member states in the following aspects, i.e. political and security cooperation, economic and financial cooperation, energy, environment, climate change and sustainable development cooperation as well as socio-cultural and development cooperation.

Still, the EAS functions as a forum for strategic dialogue between the APT member states that are important to the well-being of the East Asian countries, for mutual benefit and in keeping with the spirit of open regionalism and constructive engagement with major players outside the East Asian community (Hassan 2006, pp. 11–12). The EAS is proposed to be a leaders-led forum of informality, with a flexible agenda of discussion on strategic issues, no secretariat and at a low level of institutionalization. It cannot replace the APT and can only play a mutually reinforcing and complementary role with ASEAN+1, ASEAN Regional Forum in the East Asian Community building process.

Conclusion

The East Asian regional cooperation is on the fast drive heading for the building of East Asian community. However, the potential pitfalls, trouble spots and requisite conditions are likely to make participants dismayed and skeptical about its future prospects. As the history of European integration as well as the experiences of ASEAN show, regional community building is not for the easily disheartened, but for visionaries and strategists, namely those who are prepared to move forward steadfastly. After all, the East Asian community is a prolonged course, delicate and fragile, in need of care.

Facing such a complicated situation, China, in order to set up a beneficial environment for its development as well as be a responsible member in pushing forward East Asian regional cooperation, should try to speed up the change of its own development pattern so as to ensure sustainable economic development; to further its efforts to strengthen its trade and

economic relations with East Asian countries, so as to ensure more and more regional countries to benefit from China's growth; to seek cross-regional economic cooperation so as to develop healthy cooperation with other regions as well.

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