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Significant Role of Indonesia in ASEAN:

A Comprehensive Analysis

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The strategic location and high economic growth have enabled Indonesia to demonstrate a model of more democratic and accountable nation. The country has remained an active and resilient player in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and beyond. Ever since its independence, Indonesia kept dominating regional politics in Southeast Asia until the end of the 20th century. Due to the constant changes in the geo-political atmosphere, the prospects of becoming most active regional players have been increased exponentially in recent times. In this aspect, it is important to understand how Indonesia has fared in its geo-political and economic spheres. In the following lines, the significance of ASEAN is concisely given. Furthermore, the paper highlights a brief overview of Indonesia's guiding role in the regional discourse.

Significance of ASEAN:

ASEAN was formed on 8 August 1967, against the backdrop of the Cold War. The tumultuous transition to independence was occurring in many southeast Asian states at that time. In this aspect, its founding's main objective was "to



accelerate the economic growth, social progress and cultural development in the region through joint endeavours in the spirit of equality and partnership. That will



enable to strengthen the foundation for a prosperous and peaceful community of Southeast Asian Nations.”¹

Moreover, as per the 1967 ASEAN Declaration, the association’s primary objective was to increase regional cooperation. The objectives of the group were further broadened with the notion of a cohesive "ASEAN Community" encompassing security, economic, social, and cultural cooperation. In present times, ASEAN’s Political, Security, Economic and Socio-cultural communities were formed for cooperation vis-à-vis essential issues in the region.

ASEAN’s existence was further strengthened with its 2007 Charter. The Charter was introduced for reaffirming and codifying ASEAN’s purposes and principles. The institutional system set out in the Charter incorporated key existing institutions. Meanwhile, new structures were created which were subsequently phased into ASEAN’s operations.²

Rise of Indonesia’s Regional Influence during the 21st century:

After securing a stable domestic front by the mid to late 2000s, Indonesia started to assert its influence in the region. Many domestic problems were resolved under the visionary leadership of President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono. His administration established the Bali Democratic Forum in 2008 for nurturing the economy in the region.

¹“An Introduction to ASEAN.” cil.nus.edu.sg. Centre for International Law, August 20, 2019. <https://cil.nus.edu.sg/research/asean-law-policy/topics/asean-resources/an-introduction-to-asean/>

² Ibid.



Moreover, this course of action continued by the effective policies of the incumbent Indonesian President Joko Widodo. Jakarta has pushed ASEAN to clearly express a future vision for its significant role in Asia.³



Prospects for Indonesia's Rising Geo-political Role:

Indonesia has many reasons for becoming the leader of the ASEAN region. Many other important countries in the region like Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam have all weighed in and worked hard, vis-a-vis the prospects of becoming important power centres. Nevertheless, the following points discuss how Indonesian people and government have steered their country towards prosperity:

Economic Growth:

Since the culmination of the colonial era across the globe, the strength is determined by economy, resources, and workforce. In this aspect, the steady economic growth in Indonesia has steered towards becoming the only ASEAN country in the elite group of the G20 countries.

³ Kurlantzick, Joshua. "Indonesia: Southeast Asia's Once and Future Regional Power?" aspeniaonline.it. Aspenia Online, July 3, 2019. <https://aspeniaonline.it/indonesia-southeast-asias-once-and-future-regional-power/>



Regional Economic Integration:

One of the most important functions of ASEAN has been the homogenous economic integration with its member states. Indonesia has actively worked in this regard since the beginning of the 21st century. Nevertheless, the initiative for further inclusive economic integration within this region should be carried more vigorously by the Indonesian government.

Resistance amid COVID-19 Pandemic:

The Indonesian government and its people have held to their prominent economic growth rate even during the current pandemic of Covid-19. The country has shown substantial growth, unlike many other countries within the exclusive G20 circle. This growth of around 5.3% has put Indonesia way ahead of its compatriots in the region. The economic growth can work as a springboard for pushing Indonesia way ahead of ASEAN and other countries in the wider region.⁴ The rich dividends from such economic growth can play a decisive factor in cementing its socio-economic dominance within the ASEAN region and beyond.

Indonesia's Influence in Multiple Domains: Political, Socio-economic, and Security

Indonesia's socio-economic success is undoubtedly a priceless asset in the fight for Indonesia's national interest for ASEAN and the international public. Indonesia has

⁴ "Indonesia as an Emerging Power." ecdpm.org. ECDPM, April 16, 2015. <https://ecdpm.org/great-insights/emerging-economies-and-africa/indonesia-emerging-power-2/>



reinitiated its propose in establishing of an ASEAN community that depends on economic cooperation and other aspects such as political cooperation, security cooperation, and socio-cultural cooperation. Moreover, the country is combating many risks such as the enforcement of political cooperation, democratization, and respect for human rights, issued by the ASEAN charter decades ago. Under such political strengths, it can be easily perceived that Indonesia's political position and leverage are secured in its region.

Conclusion:

Indonesia has played a critical role in establishing and nurturing ASEAN for more than half a century now. It has utilised its entire political and economic influence on certain occasions in the past that has paved the way for a more active and prudent role for its outstanding leadership. This advantageous position is fully used by the Indonesian state, its institutions, and people for turning the optimistic prospects regarding Southeast Asia's prosperity into reality.