

APEC 2011 AND THE FUTURE OF REGIONAL ARCHITECTURE IN ASIA PACIFIC

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Being the first-ever symbol of open regionalism¹ in Asia-Pacific since 1989, APEC with the principle of non-discrimination is seen as the premier forum to promote regional trade liberalization and economic integration while strengthening cooperation to address non-traditional security issues. In the overall regional strategy of the Obama Administration, APEC continues to serve as an important and most appropriate bridge to link US economic interests to regional economies, thereby helping the US achieve its short-term target of doubling exports within five years while delivering on its long-term “back-to-Asia” commitment and vision to consolidate leadership, at least economically, in the evolving two-pronged regional architecture to be founded on the East Asia Summit (EAS) (as the politico-security pillar) and APEC (as the economic pillar). 2011 when the US hosts APEC is a golden opportunity for the Obama Administration to create next breakthroughs in the grand journey to return to the region in all dimensions and in the immediate future earn significant points in the race for presidency for Obama himself.

* Ph.D., Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Vietnam. The views expressed herein are my own and do not necessarily represent the views of the institution where I am working. I would like to gratefully acknowledge my colleagues for their valuable input and comments.

¹ Hoang Minh, “Open Regionalism”, *Tuổi trẻ Online*, 15 November 2006, available at <http://tuoitre.vn/Kinh-te/172647/Chu-nghia-khu-vuc-mo.html>.

In this paper, I argue that ASEAN should not view the US’s choice to bolster APEC and accelerate negotiations on the FTA-style Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) agreement as a sole challenge to the Association’s centrality in a regional architecture but an incentive for ASEAN to further promote intra-mural integration and community building while working with dialogue partners to enhance effectiveness of existing FTAs and explore more opportunities within the TPP framework. To be fair, ASEAN as of today deserves a central role in the evolving regional architecture because of its widely recognized significant contributions to regional peace and stability through confidence building processes and dialogue culture, thus laying a firm foundation for cooperation and prosperity for all countries across the region. Besides, ASEAN in its “driver seat” role has done much to promote economic integration and cooperation in Asia - Pacific in four dimensions, i.e. *political catalyst, responsible stake-holder, institutional base, and physical (infrastructure) connectivity*. From the perspective of regional governance, it is hardly possible to set up a single pan-regional institution able to address all challenges and the existing mechanisms are not necessarily mutually exclusive but rather mutually complementary in a rational division of labor for the shared benefits of peace, stability and prosperity of regional countries.

The paper includes five main parts: *the debate on a pan-Asia Pacific regional architecture; the US’s vision of a regional architecture in Asia Pacific; APEC 2011 and the US’s resolve to solidify economic leadership in the region; ASEAN and its centrality in the evolving regional architecture; what future for the evolving regional architecture in Asia Pacific?*

The debate on a pan-Asia Pacific regional architecture

The on-going debate on a pan-Asia Pacific regional architecture or, in other words, how best the region could be organized, was kicked off in

June 2008 with Australian then-Prime Minister Kevin Rudd's speech to the Asia Society AustralAsia Centre in Sydney, entitled "It's Time to Build an Asia-Pacific Community",² in which he outlined his initiative for an Asia-Pacific Community (APC). Rudd's central premises were: (i) global economic and strategic weight is shifting to Asia; (ii) increasingly pressing traditional and non-traditional security challenges are confronting the entire region; (iii) none of the existing regional mechanisms (APEC, ARF, APT, EAS) as currently configured are capable of achieving these purposes. Hence, in order to overcome the compartmentalisation of existing regional institutions, there is a need for a new regional architecture.³ Rudd's vision for an APC embraces "a regional institution which spans the entire Asia Pacific region" and "is able to engage in the full spectrum of dialogue, cooperation and action on economic and political matters and future challenges related to security".

Like the idea of East Asian Community (EAC) advanced by former Japanese Prime Minister Yukio Hatoyama, Rudd's bold proposal, nevertheless, was not well thought out and failed to convince many countries across the region on its feasibility in some important aspects: specific organisational form of the APC; its regional boundaries and membership; and the role of ASEAN in such an Asia-Pacific community,

² Available at http://www.pm.gov.au/media/Speech/2008/speech_0286.cfm. Also see Kevin Rudd (2008), "Building on ASEAN's Success – Towards an Asia-Pacific Century", The Singapore Lecture (December).

³ For a good review of Kevin Rudd's proposal, see Carlyle A. Thayer (2009), "Kevin Rudd's Asia-Pacific Community Initiative: Suggestions and Insights for the Future Process of East Asian Regional Cooperation", Presentation to International Conference on East Asia and South Pacific in Regional Cooperation, Shanghai Institute of International Affairs (September), available at http://www.iseas.edu.sg/aseanstudiescentre/ascd3_Thayer_90909.PDF; Hadi Soesastro (2008), "Kevin Rudd's Architecture for the Asia Pacific", The East Asia Forum (June), available at <http://www.eastasiaforum.org/2008/06/09/kevin-rudds-architecture-for-the-asia-pacific/>.

inter alia.⁴ As things stand, any initiatives on regional cooperation/integration/community floated by an influential power but ASEAN and not built upon and complementary to the existing multi-layered network of mechanisms would spark widespread concern/suspicion and eventually be doomed to failure. However, Rudd deserves appreciation for ringing a wake-up call among regional countries, particularly within ASEAN and among ASEAN's dialogue partners, about the relevance and value of existing dialogue/cooperation arrangements, including ASEAN and ASEAN-driven fora, in addressing increasingly acute traditional interwoven with non-traditional security challenges. Inspired by such proposals as the APC and EAC, the topic of regional architecture and ASEAN's centrality has over the past few years figured out prominently on the agenda of ASEAN and ASEAN-driven meetings, and thus inviting wider debate and discussion in Track II on the concept and its related ideas.

The study of regional structure makes up an important part of the study of the international relations system, and neo-realists' explanations serve as the foundation for the study. In theory, nation-states, particularly major powers, are key actors in building an IR structure which in turn has a decisive impact on behaviour/policy of all actors in that structure. An IR structure is power-centric and its contour and characteristics are mainly determined by the distribution of power among actors of the system and their power politics. In this light, regional structure is defined as an overall complex of paradigms of relationships largely determined

⁴ Carlyle A. Thayer (2009), "Kevin Rudd's Asia-Pacific Community Initiative: Suggestions and Insights for the Future Process of East Asian Regional Cooperation", Presentation to International Conference on East Asia and South Pacific in Regional Cooperation, Shanghai Institute of International Affairs (September), available at http://www.iseas.edu.sg/aseanstudiescentre/ascd3_Thayer_90909.PDF; Tommy Koh (2009), "Australia must respect ASEAN's role", *The Straits Times* (24 June).

by the distribution and manoeuvring of power among its actors (nation-states, multilateral regimes/institutions, etc.) and designed to serve certain goals in an IR system of a certain geographical region (i.e. a security complex).⁵

Though closely linked, the term “regional architecture” widely used in policy and academic writings and ASEAN meetings’ statements over the past few years can be distinguished from “regional structure” as traditionally used in IR theories. In its basic definition, structure focuses on technical aspects while architecture has more to do with the over-all look and design of a building. Civil engineers or structural engineers involve structural works such as building foundation, footing, trusses, etc., which are all about the stability and substance of the structure. Seen in this light, it can be argued that a regional architecture is the outward appearance of a regional structure and therefore is less stable and can be changed more easily and quickly over time. In Asia Pacific, some scholars claim that fundamental attributes of the post-World War II regional structure (which was built by major powers) remain the same and the evolving regional architecture reflects the shifting balance of power as well as the growing importance of certain bilateral relations and multilateral institutions/mechanisms. In this connection, the future contour or architecture of the regional structure and how ASEAN contributes to shaping that architecture are currently under discussion.

⁵ See Kenneth Waltz (1979), *Theory of International Politics*, New York: Random House; K.J.Holsti (1995), *International Politics - A framework for analysis*, Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall; Nguyễn Vũ Tùng (2008), "An IR approach to world configuration of power", *International Studies*, No. 3 (74) (September 2008); Barry Buzan (1995), "The post-Cold War Asia Pacific Security Order: Conflict or Cooperation?" in Andrew Mack and John Ravenhill (eds.) (1995), *Pacific Cooperation: Building Economic and Security regimes in the Asia Pacific region*, Boulder: Westview, pp.130-151; Barry Buzan (1991), *People, states, and fear: An agenda for international security studies in the post-Cold War era*, New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf.

The US’s vision of a regional architecture in Asia Pacific

In the 12 January 2010 remarks in Hawaii,⁶ US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton announced a sketch of the US’s vision and strategy of engagement in a future regional architecture in Asia Pacific. In order to end earlier complaints that Washington was neglecting the region due to American preoccupation with the wars on terror in Iraq and Afghanistan under the Bush Administration, the US reaffirms its long-term commitments in the region and aims to maintain leadership through being a dynamic economic partner and strategic stabilizer/military balancer. In the remarks, five key principles underlying the US’s new approach to a regional architecture (to replace the outdated “hub and spokes” system) are listed as follows: (i) the US’s network of bilateral ties with allies, important and new partners serves as the foundation; (ii) a new architecture must satisfy three fundamental interests of the US, namely strategic security, economic, and human rights and democracy; (iii) a new architecture should be realistic, efficient and action-oriented; (iv) complementary to a new architecture are informal, subregional and trilateral mechanisms; (v) no country would be allowed to dominate and manipulate key institutions/mechanisms in a new architecture.

In the first half-term, the Obama Administration showed true resolve to carry out commitments and policy adjustments with both proactiveness/imposition combined with flexibility/compromise in accordance with the US’s current capabilities and legitimacy, particularly against the background of an increasingly powerful and assertive China. As a result, the US’s prestige has been improved; responses from regional countries appeared positive. *In terms of approach*, the US adopts the “show-down” attitude through proactively articulating its interests

⁶ US Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton, “Remarks on Regional Architecture in Asia: Principles and Priorities”, available at <http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2010/01/135090.htm>.

and suggesting/imposing appropriate rules and norms wherever possible (mainly in bilateral channels and multilateral/regional institutions in which the US dominates) or making compromises and adapting with flexibility to widely accepted rules and norms in the region (mainly in ASEAN-driven institutions and fora). *In terms of agenda*, the US usually combines politico-security and economic measures to strengthen or set up tie frameworks while democracy and human rights are approached in a pragmatic manner to manage tempo of relations and cool down domestic pressure. *In terms of target venue*, the US has joined every ASEAN-related institution it is eligible to join, going from bilateral to subregional/multilateral (LMI, TAC, 2 ASEAN-US Summits in November 2009 and October 2010), and to regional frameworks (ARF, ADMM+, EAS) in the region where the tradition of multilateralism and regionalism is yet deeply rooted. The climax came in Ha Noi last year when the US (along with Russia) was invited to join the extended EAS in 2011.

APEC 2011 and the US's resolve to solidify economic leadership in the region

In the overall picture of regional architecture, those steps taken by the Obama Administration are largely related to political and security issues in order to consolidate bilateral ties and deepen engagement in ASEAN-driven mechanisms, including the summit-level EAS forum.⁷ So far, the US's economic leadership in the region in general and

⁷ The EAS, which has been hosted by ASEAN since 2005, has so far focused on education, finance, energy, disaster management and the prevention of avian flu. Against the backdrop of the global financial-economic crisis, EAS Leaders recently discussed post-crisis recovery and sustainable development, responses to climate change, etc. In a meeting in April 2011, ASEAN Foreign Ministers agreed to add regional political and security issues to the agenda of this year's EAS Summit, which for the first time will be joined by the US and Russia. See Varunee Torsricharoen, "ASEAN agrees to add security issues to East Asia Summit agenda", *Kyodo News*, 11 April 2011, available at <http://english.kyodonews.jp/news/2011/04/84642.html>.

multilateral fora in particular has been mildly felt and overshadowed by the financial - economic crisis erupted in 2008 on the one hand and by the impressive rise of China's economy pertaining to its increasing influence on most of regional economies, particularly ASEAN through ACFTA, the USD 15 billion credit facility and the USD 10 billion China - ASEAN Fund on Investment Cooperation, CMI and EAFTA, to name a few. Besides, there exist too many overlapping FTAs in the region (the so-called "spaghetti bowl") while existing FTAs (AFTA, ASEAN's FTA with dialogue partners, etc.) fall behind schedule and new pan-regional FTA initiatives such as EAFTA (ASEAN+3) or CEPEA (ASEAN+6) are being pushed too slowly due to ASEAN's incapability to assume a leadership role and unresolved divergence of strategic interests between key stakeholders, including China and Japan. Against such a background, the US finds some room for manoeuvre in the evolving regional architecture and envisages strengthening APEC as an economic pillar (the other politico-security pillar is EAS) and strategic gateway to establish economic and then overall leadership in the region. APEC will be aided by the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP)⁸ as an Asia-Pacific FTA with higher standards and an ambition to include all APEC member economies, thereby realizing the grand idea of trade liberalization championed by the US the world over.

In retrospect, the US, among others, was a strong proponent of Australian Prime Minister Bob Hawke's idea of setting up a ministerial economic consultative forum in Asia Pacific and in November 1989 became a founding member of APEC designed to promote policy

⁸ The TPP members are Brunei, Chile, New Zealand, Singapore, Australia, Malaysia, Peru, Viet Nam and the US. TPP aims to remove all trade tariff barriers by 2015, improve production efficiency and save energy for small and medium-sized enterprises through applying information technology and green technology, etc.

coordination between regional economies and speed up multilateral trade liberalization against the backdrop of the deadlocked Uruguay Round. Apart from strong economic interests, political and strategic motivations also figure out prominently in the US's approach to APEC and the politicization of the forum with a view to further projecting the US's influence and better manage relations among major powers in the region has always been the consistent policy of the US in the post-Cold War era. In the 1990s, APEC was preoccupied with membership expansion and economic and development issues were high on its agenda. As a result, the Uruguay Round negotiations were concluded in 1994. The 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks turned out to be a windfall for the US to successfully convince all APEC members to put the politico-security related topic of counter-terrorism on the agenda of APEC meetings, including APEC Economic Leaders's Meetings. The protracted impasse of the Doha Round negotiations and the outbreak of the global financial-economic crisis in 2008 injected more vitality into regionalism in general and APEC in particular. Despite the lower expectations for the APEC agenda, the member economies continue to see APEC as an integral part of the regional economic architecture and an important venue to promote regional economic integration, sustainable development and prosperity.

Secretary Hillary Clinton's 9 March 2011 remarks⁹ at the first APEC SOM meeting in Washington D.C. and 25 July 2011 address¹⁰ to the American Chamber of Commerce in Hong Kong portend a milestone in the history of APEC and a breakthrough in the US's relentless efforts

⁹ US Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton, "Remarks at the First Senior Officials Meeting (SOM) for the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Forum", available at <http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2011/03/157940.htm>.

¹⁰ US Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton, "Remarks on Principles for Prosperity in the Asia-Pacific", available at <http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2011/07/169012.htm>.

to expand the forum's agenda to politico-security issues. The remarks echoed once again the US's vision of APEC in an evolving regional architecture and affirmed the US's ambition and officially opted out of any ASEAN-driven FTA initiatives, including the CEPEA. The US-led economic pillar would boast four basic features: openness, freedom, transparency and fairness. A test for this bid in 2011 is whether the Obama Administration could convince the Congress to approve the three FTAs with South Korea, Panama and Columbia and substantive progress would be made in TPP negotiations. The US hopes its talks with eight other TPP economies would be completed by the APEC Summit in Honolulu, Hawaii, in November and in the long run TPP would be able to attract all APEC member economies to join and eventually form the basis of a free trade zone spanning the entire region. Obviously, there always exists a gap between rhetoric/expectation and reality on the ground and the upcoming rounds of negotiation are likely to be difficult since the nine TPP members are already linked by 25 different agreements at the bilateral and regional levels.

ASEAN and its centrality in the evolving regional architecture

In recent years, ASEAN has been persistent in pursuit of three key objectives: (i) strengthen intramural unity and cooperation while speeding up community building until 2015; (ii) deepen external relations with dialogue partners; and (iii) maintain and ensure ASEAN's centrality in the evolving regional architecture. Reality shows that ASEAN has gained some success across the board, most notably in 2010 when Vietnam was the Chair, thereby clearing doubts about ASEAN as a talk shop or sunset organization. In the Chair's Statement of the 18th ASEAN Summit held from 7-8 May 2011 in Jakarta, Indonesia, ASEAN Leaders envisages more clearly the organization's centrality in regional

architecture building and institutional building within ASEAN, and a strong ASEAN Community would be the core building block in the evolving regional architecture.¹¹ As a result, ASEAN's credibility has been enhanced and ASEAN-driven mechanisms become more appealing in the eyes of the dialogue partners. Many daunting challenges are awaiting ASEAN ahead, however. Looking towards the future regional architecture, ASEAN has to answer the tough question of how to maintain the rationale and relevance of its existing politico-security fora and ensure the driver seat won't be taken away by major powers which are increasingly keen to deepen engagement with the region (including Southeast Asia and the Mekong Subregion) and applying mounting pressure on ASEAN to further institutionalize and broaden the agenda of these mechanisms. Regarding regional economic integration, even more pressure is being felt by ASEAN when its intramural integration remains weak, some dialogue partners fail to overcome divergence of interests, and the US is lukewarm to the ASEAN-related FTA initiatives and focuses on boosting APEC and the TPP instead.

ASEAN should not view the US's choice to bolster APEC and accelerate negotiations on a FTA-style TPP agreement as a sole challenge to the Association's centrality in a regional architecture but an incentive for ASEAN to further promote intra-mural integration and community building while working with dialogue partners to enhance effectiveness of existing FTAs and explore more opportunities within the TPP framework. To do it justice, ASEAN as of today deserves a central role in the evolving regional architecture because of its widely

¹¹ "Chair's Statement of the 18th ASEAN Summit, Jakarta, 7-8 May 2011: ASEAN Community in a Global Community of Nations", Para 97-100, pp.18-19, available at http://www.aseansec.org/Statement_18th_ASEAN_Summit.pdf.

recognized significant contributions to regional peace and stability through confidence building processes and dialogue culture, thus laying the foundation for stable ties and balance of influence among major powers while enhancing cooperation and prosperity for all countries across the region. Besides, ASEAN in its "driver seat" role has done much to promote economic integration and cooperation in Asia - Pacific in four dimensions, i.e. *political catalyst, responsible stake-holder, institutional base, and physical (infrastructure) connectivity*.

First, ASEAN plays an important role in maintaining a peaceful and stable environment conducive to economic cooperation and integration among member countries as well as between ASEAN and outside partners. The ASEAN+1 frameworks are invigorated with more substance and effectiveness through the implementation of POAs/joint statements on strategic/comprehensive partnership and increasing dialogue at various levels, especially ministerial and summit meetings. In the two-prong approach, ASEAN is also pushing forward regional cooperation in a broader context through ASEAN-driven mechanisms such as ASEAN+3, EAS, ADMM+ and ARF while working out measures and initiatives to guarantee ASEAN's role as the driving force in regional cooperation frameworks. ASEAN leaders fully share the view that the evolving regional architecture should be open, inclusive, harmonious and balanced so as to promote peace, stability and prosperity in the region. Any new regional framework or process should be complementary to and built upon existing regional mechanisms and the principle of ASEAN's centrality.

Secondly, relentless efforts by and stability of ASEAN have helped East Asia become a key driving force for the process of crisis management, recovery and sustained development in the region and the

world at large. Given the growing interconnectedness among economies, ASEAN is gearing efforts towards three goals: (i) accelerate ASEAN's economic integration and work out a suitable model of sustainable development; (ii) intensify East Asian economic-financial cooperation in which ASEAN plays a central role; and (iii) join efforts of the international community in addressing global issues. The recent financial-economic crisis has testified to ASEAN's important role and right approach. ASEAN has chosen to stay away from the trend of getting back to protectionism; pledging to further promote regional economic integration, protesting all forms of protectionist measures and market distortion, firmly sticking to the commitments of trade liberalization and market opening, and calling for early conclusion of the Doha Round talks in the interest of all WTO member countries. ASEAN has delivered this consistent message at all regional and global fora, including APEC and G20. Many specific initiatives in the financial - banking area such as the CMI and the trust fund called ASEAN+3 Credit Guarantee and Investment Facility have been promoted by ASEAN and its partners to contribute to financial stability and avert the danger of plunging into a similar crisis in the future. Besides, ASEAN is working out a suitable model of sustainable, balanced development so as to ensure macroeconomic stability, environmental protection and social security, while calling for further assistance from developed countries in this regard.

Thirdly, ASEAN leaders are well aware that economic integration is the core of every process of regional integration. Hence, apart from its own economic integration towards the AEC in 2015, ASEAN is actively preparing the institutional base for regional economic integration through its crafted close FTA links (ASEAN+1 FTA) with outside partners, including China, Japan, South Korea, India, Australia and New Zealand.

In 2010, ASEAN basically completed the arc of FTAs among 16 East Asian countries with the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) as the future hub, and carried out various trade and economic cooperation projects with other important partners such as the US, Canada, EU and Russia, among others. It goes without saying that the network of ASEAN+1 FTA serves as the institutional catalyst and prerequisite for the creation of an FTAAP in the long run. In addition, ASEAN is also studying such initiatives as the ASEAN+3 EAFTA and the EAS CEPEA. If turned into reality, the EAFTA would be the world's largest market with more than 2 billion people and the total GDP of more than USD 10 trillion.

Fourthly, ASEAN with its long term vision has come to realize the crucial importance of a solid infrastructure to the success of regional economic integration. In the last few years, ASEAN expeditiously drafted the ASEAN Connectivity Masterplan aimed at (i) connecting physical infrastructures of transport, telecommunications and information technology; (ii) connecting policies; and (iii) connecting people within ASEAN, thus laying the foundation for expanded connectivity across East Asia and the creation of an FTAAP in the future. The Masterplan was endorsed by ASEAN leaders at the 17th Summit in Ha Noi.

What future for the evolving regional architecture in Asia Pacific?

As things stand, the regional architecture is going through dramatic changes at various levels, reflecting the shifting balance of power in the region. While some traditional security challenges remain unresolved or ineffectively managed, emerging non-traditional security challenges, particularly financial stability, energy security, water security, climate change/natural calamities and disasters, epidemics, transnational crimes,

maritime security, nuclear security/safety, abound and become increasingly pressing. At this critical juncture, under the adverse impacts of the recent global financial-economic crisis, an improved regional architecture has never been more necessary in order to better govern the profound economic interdependence in the region and overcome defects of the global governance system per se, promote dialogue/cooperation and build confidence towards shared norms and more effective resolution to common challenges.

In the current multipolar and multi-tier regional configuration of power, every country, be it small or large, has a role to play in shaping the contours of the evolving regional architecture. On the one hand, major powers strengthen alliances and strategic partnerships between them and with others in the region. On the other hand, ASEAN with its driven cooperation frameworks at all levels and in various areas has been making certain contributions to shaping the regional architecture. The Association in the driver seat role enjoys support and recognition from all major powers inside and outside the Asia Pacific region. Asia Pacific with its diversity in terms of level of development, socio-political system and culture is unlikely to have a single regional institution/framework able to address all issues and the existing mechanisms are not necessarily mutually exclusive but rather mutually complementary in a rational division of labor for the shared benefits of peace, stability and prosperity of regional countries.

From the perspective of regional governance, the evolving regional architecture should meet the following requirements:

First, the regional architecture must serve the shared objective of enhanced dialogue and confidence building, thus facilitating deep engagement and active contribution by regional countries in addressing

important issues related to peace, stability and development, and turning Asia Pacific into a stable region and the most dynamic economy.

Secondly, the future regional architecture must help develop common outlooks on the region's common security challenges (both traditional and non-traditional) and forge consensus on effective solutions to those challenges.

Thirdly, major powers should maximize their constructive, conscientious and responsible role in jointly ensuring peace, stability and cooperation for development in the region.

Fourthly, the future regional architecture should be built upon and complementary to the existing dialogue/cooperation processes (institutional *status quo*) in which ASEAN plays a central role. In this regard, ASEAN's centrality should not be either misleading or overestimated. From ASEAN's perspective, "ASEAN's centrality" implies meetings of ASEAN-driven mechanisms are held back-to-back to ASEAN meetings; agendas of all meetings are proposed by ASEAN on the basis of consultation, coordination and consensus among member states; and all member states must comply with fundamental principles enshrined in the ASEAN Charter and ASEAN legal documents. As mentioned above, such major powers as the US and China still play the critical role in regional affairs in the existing structure. ASEAN's centrality refers to the grouping's desire to continue its traditional and successful role of "honest broker" in initiating and driving regional mechanisms/processes forward to promote the habit/norms of dialogue/cooperation and confidence building among participating countries, thereby contributing to the creation of a new regional architecture and helping foster stability of the regional structure.

At the recent 18th ASEAN Summit in Jakarta, Indonesia, ASEAN Leaders once again emphasized the mutually reinforcing roles of ASEAN-led processes, including ASEAN+1, ASEAN+3, EAS, ARF, ADMM+, and other forums in the region in a joint effort to promote East Asian cooperation and dialogue towards the building of a community in the wider region.¹² Besides, they also stressed the need to ensure ASEAN centrality by building on existing ASEAN-led mechanisms, as well as through existing ASEAN cooperation with individual dialogue partners.¹³

Lastly, while continuing to uphold the principle of incrementalism, openness and inclusiveness, the region and ASEAN should now review and redefine functions and responsibilities, broaden agenda, and adjust pace/level of institutionalization of respective frameworks in order to minimize overlapping and justify the latter's *raison d'être* and enhance their relevance in a rational division of labor horizontally and effective mutual complementarity and support vertically, thus better reconciling interests and meeting expectations of regional countries, and overcoming the emerging challenges more effectively./.

¹² "Chair's Statement of the 18th ASEAN Summit, Jakarta, 7-8 May 2011: ASEAN Community in a Global Community of Nations", Para 98, p.18, available at http://www.aseansec.org/Statement_18th_ASEAN_Summit.pdf .

¹³ *Ibid.*, Para 101, p. 19.