



## **TALKING ASEAN**

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### **ASEAN Political-Security Community (APSC): Influence of Democracy in ASEAN Integration**

**The Habibie Center Building, Jakarta  
November 26, 2014**

## INTRODUCTION

JAKARTA – On Wednesday, 26 November 2014, The Habibie Center held a Talking ASEAN dialogue entitled “ASEAN Political-Security Community (APSC): Influence of Democracy in ASEAN Integration” at The Habibie Center building in Jakarta. This edition of Talking ASEAN featured Dr. Phillips J. Vermonte (Head of Department of Politics and International Relations, Centre for Strategic and International Studies) and Lieutenant General (Retired) AgusWidjojo (former Vice-Chairman of the People’s Consultative Assembly-Republic of Indonesia/Board of Advisors of Institute for Peace and Democracy) as resource persons with Mr. WiryaAdiwena (Researcher, ASEAN Studies Program at the Habibie Center) as moderator.

The objectives of this Talking ASEAN were to elaborate the perspective from various experts to:(a) discuss developments of democracy and democratization in Southeast Asia within the framework of the ASEAN Political-Security Community (APSC); (b) identify challenges and opportunities for democracy in Southeast Asia; and (c) produce possible recommendations on what should be done ASEAN to strengthen democracy.

This discussion report summarizes the key points of each speaker as well as the question and answer session that followed.

## SPEAKERS' PRESENTATION

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— Dr. Phillips J. Vermonte



Dr. Phillips J. Vermonte (Head of Department of Politics and International Relations, Centre for Strategic and International Studies)

Dr. Phillips J. Vermonte opened his presentation by explaining in detail about the importance of democracy in Southeast Asia with ASEAN being the example of democracy. His presentation was on “ASEAN Political Security Community: Where Is It Going?”

Before elaborating his ideas further, Dr. Vermonte reminded the audience about Indonesia’s recent setback with regards to its democratization process, highlighting the 2009-2014 Parliament’s passing of a regional election law that contradicted with Indonesia’s spirit of democracy. He argued that this was a major setback for the region as Indonesia’s democratization process was seen as the building blocks for ASEAN embracing the spirit of democracy in the region. He went on to state his worries that Indonesia’s democracy would now face more serious challenges.

Dr. Vermontethen discussed the issues of human rights and democracy which had become the basic ingredients of the ASEAN Political-Security Community. He argued that both human rights and democracy had begun to be conceptualize by ASEAN in a number of agreements and declarations,

such as the Declaration on the Advancement of Women (1998), the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women (2004), and also the adoption of the term “People” within the ASEAN Community roadmaps and especially the ASEAN Charter. The progress of human rights protection among ASEAN member-states was seen to have developed relatively satisfactory with the Philippines establishing a National Human Rights Institutions in 1987, followed by Indonesia in 1993, Malaysia in 1998, Thailand in 1999, and Myanmar in 2011. In his analysis, Dr. Vermonte, argued that there were many agreements and declarations on democracy and human rights that had been adopted by ASEAN, but that the major problem was the lack of implementation.

He went on to raise a number of questions as part of his analysis of ASEAN. For example he questioned whether ASEAN fitted the traditional theoretical definition of a security community. He also wondered whether any regional power had influence over this security community if it indeed existed. Lastly, as a normative projection, he questioned the future policy goals of the security community.

## SPEAKERS' PRESENTATION

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### — Dr. Phillips J. Vermonte



(left) Dr. Phillips J. Vermonte (Head of Department of Politics and International Relations, Centre for Strategic and International Studies)

To answer these questions, Dr. Vermonte compared three different analysis of security community. He recommended that a security community in ASEAN should be based on two prerequisites. First, Dr. Vermonte believed that the security community should be based on an agreed mechanism. Second, the security community should be established with shared perception among the parties about their domestic concerns as well as its impact on the region.

Dr. Vermontepointed to the Bali Concord II to analyze whether ASEAN met these prerequisites, especially since it was through this document that the regional organization committed itself to achieving a security community. He argued that there was not sign in the Bali Concord II that ASEAN would amalgamate its policies. He also argued that the Bali Concord II did not give much mention to human rights. Related to this argument, Dr. Vermontesuggested that the current situation in Indonesia and ASEAN justified his position. He pointed out that the most recent

Freedom House Report placed Indonesia as a “Partly Free” country in terms of its democracy, while all the other ASEAN countries were rated as “Not Free”.

Dr. Vermonte finalized his presentations by arguing four points. First of all, he mentioned that ASEAN does not have democratic spirit in the region since it has different political backgrounds. Second, he pointed to the issue of imbalanced development and a prosperity gap in the region. In this case, several countries in the region questioning the urgency of democracy as their focus was on economic growth. Third, was the problematic notion of non-interference in the domestic affairsof other ASEAN member-states. Fourth, there were competing ideas between universal values and regional values. Lastly, Dr. Vermonte suggested that to avoid sensitivity of democratization in ASEAN member-states, Indonesia should focus more on the South-South Triangular Technical Cooperation Scheme in directing development assistance while all at once embracing democracy.

**“The issues of human rights and democracy has become the basic ingredients of the ASEAN Political-Security Community”**

-Dr. Phillips J. Vermonte-

## SPEAKERS' PRESENTATION

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### Agus Widjojo



Lieutenant General (Retired) Agus Widjojo (former Vice-Chairman of the People's Consultative Assembly- Republic of Indonesia/Board of Advisors of Institute for Peace and Democracy)

Lieutenant General (ret) Agus Widjojo opened his discussion by explaining that his ideas would be derived from the questions put to him in the Terms Of Reference given by The Habibie Center. As his background argumentation, Lieutenant General (ret) Widjojo traced back ASEAN's history and noted how it was established for the ideals of creating a prosperous and peaceful region. He argued further that ASEAN's ideas of a Political-Security community were based on two things. First, perception was constructed due to tradition and cultural perspectives of a common threat within the members. While it was true that each member states in ASEAN shared similar ideas of communalism instead of individualism, it was also true that the ASEAN member-states differentiated with their cultural approach. In simple terms, the notion of individualism was not seen as part of the culture of ASEAN member-states, although traditionally this was seen as the foundations of democracy in the West.

Secondly, Lieutenant General (ret) Widjojo shared his ideas that the ASEAN Political-Security Community should be built on responsibility. In other words the idea of individuality should be followed with responsibility. He discussed his ideas about these two propositions because he believed that differences in cultural approach contributed to different political system, subsequently posing another challenge for ASEAN democratization. Despite these obstacles, Lieutenant General (ret) Widjojo also underlined the opportunities presented by the regional integration process brought about by the ASEAN Political Security Community. He mentioned that the idea of familiarization of consensus for peaceful dispute settlement mechanism in ASEAN could be more deeply embraced.

On a personal level, Lieutenant General (ret) Widjojo revealed that he did not entirely subscribe to the Democratic Peace Theory (whereby democratic states do not go to war with one another). He gave the examples of Singapore and Malaysia that were supposedly democracies but were widely seen as semi-democratic countries. Nevertheless, he mentioned that democratization and democracy in ASEAN could not and should not be delayed. To conclude his presentations, Lieutenant General (ret) Widjojo underlined the important aspect of ASEAN consensus as part of the ASEAN's democracy pillar and he hoped that this could effectively contribute to building a strong mechanism for dispute settlement.

**“ASEAN was established for the ideals of creating a prosperous and peaceful region”**

- Agus Widjojo-

## Q&A SESSION

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The audience of 4th Talking ASEAN

### Comment No. 1:

Regarding the current situation in Thailand, whereby there is now a military junta in power and their general election was disturbed earlier this year, why is ASEAN silent about this issue and what can/should it do?

### Comment No. 2:

In order to strengthen democratization in ASEAN, is it necessary to strengthen the role of the ASEAN Secretariat itself?

Responding to the questions, **Dr. Philips J. Vermonte** remarked that the situation in Thailand was seen as a domestic affair. However, within the regional context it was clear that ASEAN had shown itself unable to manage this sort of issues. It also showed that ASEAN lacked a mechanism that could provide a sense of “reward and punishment” for its member-states. He pointed to the example

of the European Union, in which European countries had to be democratic before they could be considered for joining the EU. Dr. Vermonte further recommended that ASEAN develop its own regional scorecard for democratic development. This would help ASEAN countries measure the progress of democratization in the region. Dr. Vermonte also noted that the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR) should also be equipped with mechanisms to enforce protection of ASEAN citizens. In this context, ASEAN could learn from the EU experience.

For the second question, Dr. Vermonte answered that strengthening democracy in ASEAN was not a matter of fact paralleled with strengthening the ASEAN Secretariat. He explained that the democratization process in ASEAN also required the involvement of other stakeholders including Non-Governmental Organizations, Civil Society Organizations, and Human Rights Activists. It was only through this inclusiveness that ASEAN democratization could be elevated and the regional organization address the common criticism that it was merely a “Talking Shop”.

## Q&A SESSION

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Mr. Wirya Adiwena (center), Researcher of ASEAN Studies Program - The Habibie Center, moderates the Q&A session.

Meanwhile on the issue of Thailand, **Lieutenant General (Ret) Agus Widjojo** questioned the rationale that a democratization process should only take place without the involvement of external parties. He pointed out that there were few cases where democratization took place with no external involvement citing the case of Myanmar, where there was pressure from ASEAN and the West. However he stressed the importance of creating a sense of ownership for democracy within each members states. Each member states should be convinced that democracy would positively contribute to the economic growth and prosperity of their country.

### Comment No. 3:

What are the speakers thoughts about a “People-Centered” ASEAN? Is this related to a more democratic ASEAN? Also how ready is Indonesia for a people-centered region? Will Indonesia continue with its Bali Democracy Forum?

**Dr. Philips J. Vermonte** highlighted the ideas of regional resilience that had been raised by Indonesia during the New Order era, and which had

been successfully accepted by ASEAN. He further confidently answered that the idea and principle of a “people-centered” region would spread in ASEAN. He noted of course that Indonesia cannot impose democracy to other countries, but in essence Indonesia can try to push it through dialogue. In doing so, Indonesia would have benefit, moreover in translating its democracy experience to the region.

On the Bali Democracy Forum, **Lieutenant General (ret) Agus Widjojo** explained that Indonesia was always trying to spread the ideas of democracy to others by providing examples of its best practices and experiences. He highlighted the idea of “Soft Democracy” and further shared Indonesia’s experience in producing soft power democracy which occurred during the Bali Democracy Forum process. He also responded to the notion that a democratization process could emerge from a well-educated society within a country or from scholars that had been studying abroad. He took the example of Indonesia’s reform of 1998 that also saw a well-educated society return to the country and help contribute to democratization. As a final remark, Lieutenant General (ret) Widjojo reminded the audience that the democratization process in Indonesia was an ongoing process and far from finished.

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