

Regional Integration: A Comparative Study of European Union and ASEAN
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European Union and ASEAN are two exemplar models of regional integration in modern world. The former was formed after the European region witnessed the devastation caused by the Second World War. Another war akin to the two World Wars had to be made unthinkable. One way doing this was to make the nations dependent to each other for economic prosperity and gradually integrating them politically. Thus, leaders like Schuman and Jean Monnet decided to merge the European nation states into one supranational entity. An uphill task as it is, regional integration project has gathered much success into forming a European entity. The European Union countries include nations with market economy and politically liberal establishments. These nations are relatively homogeneous in most of the social and political aspects.

ASEAN was formed as a bulwark against communism. The region instead of being wary of nationalism sought to vehemently to protect it. Being victims of colonialism, with the exception of Thailand, all the nations of Southeast Asia were sensitive to their sovereignty. These nations will not trade their sovereignty with a supranational institution. Their purpose for a regional organization is to secure their independence from foreign intervention. While Europe is seen as an integration exporter, ASEAN too forms a model of integration outside Europe. The difference in history and culture of the two institutions reflects in their trajectory, institutions and their approach to regionalism. But they do have a lesson for other potential regional organizations that keeping political differences aside and cooperating in economic sector can yield fruitful results. This study analyses regional integration through a comparative case study of these two regional organizations, whether there exists a universal model that is suitable to all regions or the kind of regional grouping that evolves depends on the history, situation, environment and experience of a particular region. The study examines the relationship between globalization and regionalism.

This research work is an analytical study of the European Union and ASEAN in a comparative context. The study will draw upon reports and periodicals published on European

Union and ASEAN, their constitution and evolution and the relevant treaties and declarations of summit. The study will depend upon historical and analytical methods relevant for the subject. It will utilize both primary and secondary sources

When compared to the European Union, the association still lags behind. The union is far ahead in terms of integration both economic and political. However, Leaders of ASEAN never contemplated a supranational entity. It was envisioned as an intergovernmental body. Thus, notwithstanding the flaws of ASEAN, it would be unfair to criticise it for not achieving a goal that it had never set for itself. The circumstances in which the two started their journey was different, thus the trajectory they followed were different too. In a comparative analysis, ASEAN emerges as a more pragmatic model than EU

However, there has to be no universal model or an integration/norm exporter. Regions having conditions similar conditions to EU may take cue from the EU style of integration and regions akin to Southeast Asia may learn from the ASEAN experience. However, there is a universal message. If nation states are willing to cooperate, cooperation is possible. The willingness of political leaders also plays a large part in the success and failure of regional organisations. Creating link between people and the organisation is something leaders have lagged behind. People don't know what the regional organisation does and how does it affect them. They don't look to that organisation for the solution of their problems. A sense of regional identity is never created. Shifting loyalties towards a new centre will require a mental shift which will not come in few years or even few decades. World is still battling with secessionist tendencies. States are breaking away and nationalism is still the dominant passion. Sovereignty may not be as rigid but it has still not become irrelevant and states are still sensitive about it.

Both European Union and ASEAN interact with the world as one bloc in voice. They help articulate the interest of smaller nations at global forums. Membership of regional organisations gives these nations benefits of economy of scale, large market and effective bargaining power. The functioning of these organizations has pushed forward the process of globalization rather than being a deterrent.