

book to operate as a forum for broad debate and discussion between representative stakeholders and commentators in the conflict management process, they have succeeded resoundingly and I believe that we, as readers, are better off for it.

reviewed by JEREMY LEONG

A guide to Free Trade in Asean BY LOK HWEE CONG, CHRISTOPHER H. LIM AND NG LYN eds.
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In his Foreword to the book, Mr Ong Keng Yong, who was at the time of publication the Secretary-General of ASEAN wrote:

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) has come a long way since its formation in August 1967. In particular the launch of the ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA) in 1992 has created a new economic dynamism in the region. [...] Given the new impetus towards the early realization of the ASEAN Economic Community, it will be useful to have a comprehensive reference book on AFTA.

Indeed, soon after the publication of the book, the ASEAN Charter was signed on 20 November 2007 and the ASEAN members also issued a Declaration on the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) which adopted the AEC Blueprint for the implementation of the AEC by 2015. The Declaration states that “[t]he AEC Blueprint will transform ASEAN into a single market and production base, a highly competitive economic region, a region of equitable economic development, and a region fully integrated into the global economy.”

However, while the ASEAN Charter and the AEC Blueprint have been adopted, much remains to be fleshed out and the trade agreements preceding the ASEAN Charter still remain as the operational trade rules of the emerging AEC.

It is thus timely that a reference book which collates all those trade agreements has been published. While most of these agreements are available for download from the ASEAN Secretariat’s website (www.aseansec.org), the organization of the texts and the chronological and contextual arrangement of the sections as well as the cross-referenced index in the book provide a better guide to a researcher initially

unfamiliar with ASEAN than what is otherwise available online.

However, what is noteworthy of the book are the overviews accompanying each section. In particular, Ms Lynn Chua Shu Xian’s introduction to the AEC provides the reader with a clear and concise discourse on the historical context, and the current institutions within the AEC. Her conclusion that ASEAN’s consensual decision-making process is necessary to preserve unity in ASEAN but also poses challenges that will have to be overcome by commitment from the political leaders captures the thoughts of most ASEAN scholars in a few pithy sentences.

The other introductions accompanying the sections on Trade in Goods, Trade in Services, Investments and the ASEAN Dispute Settlement Mechanism are also very helpful reference aids that organize and summarize the various ASEAN texts.

Despite some passing familiarity with the ASEAN documents, this reviewer had the occasion to refer to Mr Alan Ong Teck Keong’s summary of the 2004 ASEAN Protocol on the Enhanced Dispute Settlement Mechanism (2004 Protocol). This reviewer was asked by a member of the audience in a talk on ASEAN whether consensus was required for the adoption of a Panel Report. Unfortunately, age having eroded what little memory was once available, an answer to this query was not immediately apparent but a quick reference to the book, which this reviewer had serendipitously brought along to the talk, enabled this reviewer to sagely reply that a negative consensus rule was in operation in the 2004 Protocol pursuant to Article 9 of the 2004 Protocol.

The editors of the book are also to be congratulated for bringing together the commentators on the various topics whose experience and expertise, obviously obtained from negotiating, implementing or advising on the different texts, is plainly evident. It may be helpful in the future to also include a short biography of each of the commentators.

While the book is a good start particularly since no other such reference guides currently exist, nonetheless, like ASEAN and the AEC, this reviewer is hopeful that further evolution will occur. A chapter on the ASEAN Charter and the AEC Blueprint is probably the most immediate necessary update. It is therefore appropriate that the book has been published in a loose-leaf format.

reviewed by MICHAEL EWING-CHOW