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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to explain the causal relationship between ASEAN's process toward a Security Community and recent political developments in Myanmar. Therefore, this research mainly focuses on the question "how the process of transforming ASEAN into a Security Community has influenced the political reform process in Myanmar". In October 2003, at their 9th Summit in Bali, Indonesia, ASEAN leaders agreed to establish an ASEAN Security Community by 2020. Transforming ASEAN into a Security Community demands the member states to share democracy and other liberal norms and values as their common vision and values within the regional political and security cooperation framework. It is imperative for the member states including Myanmar to follow and implement their agreed principles and programs in order to reach the goal of ASEAN Security Community. The new government which came to power through November 2010 general election pledged to build Myanmar as a modern, developed democratic country; to reform their government as clean government which is transparent, accountable, and responsible to the people through the Union Parliament; and to respect the fundamental rights of the citizens. As the latest development, in order to promote and protect the fundamental rights of its citizens, the new government established the National Human Rights Commission in early September 2011. Moreover, the by-election was held in April 2012 based on the principle of all inclusiveness. There can be several variables explaining recent political developments in Myanmar. As one of the variables, this paper argues that Myanmar's recent political developments should be understood under the light of its leaders' response to the changing circumstances in its regional strategic environment as well as their attempts to adjust its domestic political system with regional standards, i.e, ASEAN standards. This research is conducted through "Qualitative Analysis" by analyzing ASEAN Official Documents like Bali Concord II, ASEAN Security Community Plan of Action, ASEAN Charter as well as Myanmar National Documents such as President's Speeches, govt.'s Press statements and releases; Newspapers. This research also applied "Karl W. Deutsch's "Security Community" concept as an Analytical Framework.

Keywords: ASEAN Security Community, Political-Security Cooperation, Liberal Norms, Myanmar, Internal Political Development

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1. Introduction

In October 2003, at their 9th Summit in Bali, Indonesia, ASEAN leaders endorsed Bali Concord II which establishes ASEAN's commitment to build an ASEAN Community (AC) by 2020. ASEAN Community is comprised of three main pillars, namely, ASEAN Economic Community (AEC), ASEAN Security Community (ASC), later renamed as ASEAN Political and Security Community (APSC), and ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC). This paper mainly addresses the second pillar, namely, ASEAN Security Community. Transforming ASEAN into a Security Community demands the member states to share democracy and other liberal norms and values as their common vision and values within the regional political and security cooperation framework. After being signed and ratified by all member states, ASEAN Charter came into force since December 2008. ASEAN Charter as an implementation of ASEAN Security Community Plan of Action also endorsed democracy and liberal norms as ASEAN's official vision and goals. Therefore, it is imperative for the member states to follow and implement their agreed principles and programs under ASC of Bali Concord II as well as ASEAN Charter so that ASEAN could reach its goal of ASEAN Security Community. Being a member of ASEAN, Myanmar government has to respond the changing circumstances in its regional strategic environment as well as has to adjust its internal political system with ASEAN's standards.

Recently, the constitutionally elected government came to power in Myanmar through the multiparty general election held in November 2010. The new government is responsible to the people through the Union Parliament. Now Myanmar has three branches of the government; namely, executive, legislature and judiciary and they can now exercise the check-balance against each other. In his inaugural speech at the Union Parliament on 30th March 2011, President U Thein Sein of the new government pledged to build Myanmar as a modern, developed democratic country and to reform their government as a clean government which is transparent, and accountable for their actions. He also pledged to respect the fundamental rights of the citizens. As an implementation of his promises, on 6 September 2011, the new government established the National Human Rights Commission with the purpose of promoting and protecting the fundamental rights of its citizens. Furthermore, the by-election was held in April 2012 based on the principle of all inclusiveness Therefore, this paper is aimed at explaining how ASEAN's process toward a Security Community has influenced the recent political developments in Myanmar.

2. How has ASEAN Engaged Myanmar since 1990?

Before going to explain ASEAN's process toward a Security Community, this section will explain how ASEAN has engaged Myanmar since 1990. With the end of the Cold War, the ideological conflicts between the East and West bloc also ended. The major powers especially the Western powers began to project the liberal norms and values like "democracy and respect for human rights" which they ignored during the Cold War in their foreign policy. After the Cold War, human rights and democracy emerged as a major issue in the relationship between the ASEAN members and their Western dialogue partners.[1]

The issue of Myanmar's membership in ASEAN took place when the human rights and democracy emerged as a major issue in the relationship between the ASEAN members and their Western dialogue partners. While the Western powers imposed sanctions on the Myanmar since1990, ASEAN decided to engage Myanmar constructively since they believed that sanctions were not helpful in promoting peace and stability essential for democracy to take root in Myanmar. At that time, many ASEAN policy-makers saw the Western efforts in promoting, democracy and human rights in the region would undermine the foundations of regional order in Southeast Asia based on the inviolability of state sovereignty and the doctrine of "Non-interference" in the internal affairs of members. The key aim of ASEAN's Constructive Engagement policy was to reject interference by the outside powers, especially the Western countries, in Myanmar's internal affairs.

Later, despite the Western pressure against the Myanmar's membership in ASEAN, ASEAN granted the Myanmar's membership in July 1997. Since Myanmar's membership in ASEAN in July 1997, ASEAN has always protected Myanmar from the outside powers' interference in its internal affairs. While protecting Myanmar from the outside powers' interference in its internal affairs, ASEAN has also pushed Myanmar to move quickly its democratization process. Actually, ASEAN did not have effective mechanisms to tackle that kind of non-traditional security issue. Also its strict practice of non-interference principle has become the hindrance in coping with this kind of issue because in the past, in ASEAN, criticizing the internal political situation of a member state was regarded as the violation of "Non-interference" principle.

To tackle effectively this kind of non-traditional security issues like human rights problem which is related to the internal politics of a member state, it is imperative for ASEAN to review and modify its traditional practice of

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[1] Acharaya, Amitav: *Constructing a Security Community in Southeast Asia: ASEAN and the Problem of Regional Order*, London, Routledge, 2009, p.130

"Non-Interference" principle in their interstate relations and to include effective regional mechanisms in their regional co-operation framework so that it can touch the internal politics of the member states and can effectively cope with this kind of non-traditional security issues. Some members like Indonesia viewed that in order to address the this kind of security challenges effectively, the domestic political regimes among member countries had to be taken into account since it believed that closer political integration within the grouping could bring about higher degree of trust and comfort among member countries to address various issues of common concerns.[1] At the same time, it realized that it is imperative to adjust the ASEAN's existing rules and principles in order to heighten its integration in the political and security field.[2]

Therefore, in June 2003 at the 36th ASEAN Ministerial Meeting in Cambodia, Indonesia introduced ASEAN to the concept of "ASEAN Security Community." As a response to the international criticisms and in order to effectively cope with the non-traditional security issues like human rights problems in some of its member states, in October 2003, at their 9th Summit in Bali, Indonesia, ASEAN leaders agreed on the goal of establishing an ASEAN Security Community (ASC) as one of three pillars of ASEAN Community. That agreement is also known as Bali Concord II under which ASEAN would create an ASEAN Community by 2020. ASEAN Community is composed of three pillars: the ASEAN Security Community, the ASEAN Economic Community, and the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community. This paper addresses one of the three pillars of ASEAN Community, namely, "ASEAN Security Community".

3. Security Community: Conceptual Framework

This section will give a brief explanation on the conceptual understanding of Security Community in International Relations. "Security Community" as a concept of International Relations was first proposed by Karl W. Deutsch and his colleagues in their book, *Political Community and the North Atlantic Area: International Organization in the Light of Historical Experience*, in 1957. Karl W. Deutsch defined security community "a group of countries in a region that do not use force or threaten to use force in resolving their conflicts". That means there is no open war in the region since the member states resolve their

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[1] Interview with Hassan N. Wirajuda (the former Minister of Foreign Affairs, Indonesia), Jakarta, 22
April 2009, and Interview with Dr Rizal Sukma, Executive Director of Centre for Strategic and International Studies, Jakarta, 14 July 2008, 10 February 2009
[2] Ibid.

conflicts by peaceful means. For Deutsch, the essential preconditions for developing a Security Community are "*economic interdependence and liberal democracy*" and he regarded "sense of community" or "we-feeling" shared by the member states as the most important characteristic of a Security Community.

4. How could a Security Community be created?

According to the view of Karl W. Deutsch, the "*economic interdependence and liberal democracy*" are the essential preconditions for the development of a security community and a true security community, according to them, is a "Democratic Security Community". Some scholars like Amitav Acharya considered that if the development of security community is linked to liberal democratic politics and economics, then the possibility of such communities in the Third World like Southeast Asia would be very low since ASEAN members neither shared liberal democratic values, nor were bound by a high degree of mutual interdependence since the time of its formation." Since the conceptual framework of Security Community developed by Karl W. Deutsch was originally aimed at explaining the development in North Atlantic (North America and Europe) countries, it is difficult to be applied for developing world like Southeast Asia.

That is why, Amitav Acharya proposed an alternative security community framework applicable for developing countries. His definitions of security community are concerned with Pluralistic Security Community. According to Acharaya, the development of Security Community does not require shared democratic political systems, at least initially. He viewed that ASEAN's existing rules and principles like ASEAN Way of quiet diplomacy, consultation and consensus, non-interference principle, non-use of force in resolving interstate conflicts, etc. were already shared by member states and these principles contributed to the necessary preconditions for the development of ASEAN Security Community. Differences, disputes or conflicts of interest can arise among the actors in the Pluralistic Security Community although they will not become open war. If the disputes arise, the member states will resolve them not by using force but by using peaceful means of formal and informal mechanisms.[1]

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[1]Amitav Acharaya(Deputy Director and Head of Research Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies): "Constructing Security and Identity in Southeast Asia", An Interview with Jillian Moo-Young,   24 March 2006, *the Brown Journal of World Affairs*, winter/Spring, 2006, Volume XII, Issue 2, p. 163,

Based on the existing literatures on Security Community in International Relations, there are two ways to reach a Security Community. The first way proposed by Karl W. Deutsch demands the member countries to share the liberal norms and values such as democracy, human rights, rule of law, etc. as their common values and to build *"sense of Community"* or *"we-feeling"* among the people of the member countries through free movement of people, mail, (internet) etc. The 2nd Way is proposed by Amitav Acharaya. According to his argument, member countries do not necessarily need to share democratic political system and even if a group of authoritarian states can share the norms like "non- use of force" in resolving their interstate disputes and conflicts, they can develop into a Security Community. Amitav Achrya argued that ASEAN has already reached a *Nascent[1]* stage of a Security Community.

5. ASEAN Security Community under Bali Concord II: What way is ASEAN using to reach a stage of a Security Community?

This section will explain what way ASEAN is using to reach a stage of a Security Community. The Declaration of ASEAN Concord II (Bali Concord II) established ASEAN's commitment to pursue comprehensive security in Southeast Asia region. The purpose of the ASEAN Security Community is to promote an ASEAN-wide political and security cooperation and not to form a defense pact, military alliance or a joint foreign policy. The ASC under Bali Concord II reemphasizes the core documents of ASEAN, such as the 1971 Zone of Peace, Freedom, and Neutrality (ZOPFAN) Declaration, the 1976 Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC), and the Southeast Asia Nuclear Weapons Free Zone (SEANWFZ). Under Bali Concord II, the ASC is envisaged to ensure that countries in the region live at peace with one another and with the world at large in "a just, democratic and harmonious environment."[2]

The use of the word "democratic" as a shared political-security objective is the first official reference of democracy for ASEAN[3] and clearly shows the shift of ASEAN's emphasis to democratic norms. "Peace, stability,

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[1] There are three stages in the development of security communities, *Nascent* Phase, *Ascendant* Phase, and *Mature* Phase. The *Nascent Phase* contains a number of "triggering mechanisms" including threat perceptions, expected trade benefits, shared identity and organizational emulation.

[2] Declaration of ASEAN Concord II (Bali Concord II), 7 October 2003, http://www.aseansec.org/15159.htm

[3] During the discussion for approving the ASC, the dispute lined up Cambodia, Indonesia, the Philippines, and Thailand, who argued to include the term "democratic", against Brunei, Laos, Myanmar, and Vietnam, who 'objected to the promotion of democracy as an ASEAN objective'.

democracy and prosperity in the region" have now become the shared vision and common values of ASEAN members. The 2004 ASEAN Security Community Plan of Action also outlines the areas of the cooperation in order to achieve the goal of ASC: (1) political development, (2) norm-setting,(3) conflict prevention,(4)conflict resolution, and (5) post conflict peace building in order to achieve peace, stability democracy and prosperity in the region.[1]

Unlike in the past, ASEAN has now made "democracy" as its political-security objective and it demands the member states to share liberal democratic values such as democracy, respect for human rights, rule of law, etc. as their common vision and common values. Indeed, Indonesia, the main proponent of ASC concept, emphasizes the importance to share the basic internal values such as democracy and human rights as the preconditions for ASEAN to move towards a more stable Security Community. The sharing of domestic values and institutions among the ASEAN member countries is expected to enhance the consolidation of an ASEAN Security Community. Indonesia believed that ASEAN's unity and cooperation would not be enhanced without sharing the basic liberal norms and institutions regulating their respective internal politics.[2] In this regard, the ASC is closely connected with the adoption of the new ASEAN Charter (2007) in which it was endorsed that democratic and liberal norms and institutions should be shared among the members. Therefore, ASEAN's plan to reach a Security Community is using Karl Deutsch's way of reaching a Security Community.

6. Myanmar and the Process toward an ASEAN Security Community

This section will explain Myanmar's participation in ASEAN's process toward a Security Community. At the time of its membership in ASEAN, Myanmar signed all of the core documents of ASEAN such as the 1976 Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC). ASEAN's normative principles first established under TAC are: mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity; non-interference in the internal affairs of one another; the 'settlement of differences or disputes by peaceful means; and the renunciation of the threat or use of

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[1] According to Dr. Rizal Sukma, the declaration of ASEAN Concord II in October 2003 originally proposed that the ASC should contain five principles. But, "Political Development" that was put by the Indonesia government was dropped from the Declaration. However, "political development" was included in the 2004 ASCPA, because the Indonesian government pushed it back.

[2] Interview with Dr. N. Hassan Wirajuda: Former Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia (2001-2009) and Dr. Rizal Sukma: Executive Director of Centre for Strategic and International Studies, Jakarta,

force; and effective cooperation[1]. Myanmar has followed these principles in its relations with other member states. Being a member of ASEAN, Myanmar also signed Bali Concord II in October 2003 and ASEAN Charter in November 2007 and ratified it in July 2008.[2] ASEAN Charter which came into force in December 2008 also endorsed Liberal norms& values such as promoting democracy, respecting human rights, rule of law, good governance as ASEAN's principles & goals and demands the member states to share these liberal norms as their common values in ASEAN cooperation framework. That is why, it is imperative for member states to adjust their internal political system with ASEAN standards. Also as a member state of ASEAN, Myanmar has to follow and implement all agreed principles and programmes under Bali Concord II and ASEAN Charter.

Here, a brief explanation on the changing nature of interstate relations within ASEAN after Bali Concord II and ASEAN Charter should be given. Indeed, the ASC under Bali Concord II, ASC Plan of Action and ASEAN Charter have become the legitimate regional frameworks that provide the member states to intervene in internal affairs of a member state, especially for the cause of promoting democracy and human rights in a member state. In the past ASEAN's practice of non-interference principle was very strict. Now, ASEAN is practicing non-interference principle in a flexible way. ASEAN no longer regard criticizing the internal political situation of a member state as violating the non-interference principle.

Since 36th AMM in 2003, Communiqués of AMM always urged Myanmar to bring about a transition to democracy through dialogue and reconciliation. For example, Paragraph 18 of Joint Communiqué of the 36th ASEAN Ministerial Meeting stated:

> "We discussed the recent political developments in Myanmar, particularly the incident of 30 May 2003. We noted the efforts of the Government of Myanmar to promote peace and development. In this connection, we urged Myanmar to resume its efforts of national reconciliation and dialogue among all parties concerned leading to a peaceful transition to democracy. We welcomed the assurances given by Myanmar that the measures taken following the incident were temporary and looked forward to the early lifting of restrictions placed on Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and the NLD members."[3]

Also Paragraph 15 of Joint Communiqué of the 37th ASEAN Ministerial Meeting, stated:

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[1] 1976 Treaty of Amity and Cooperation, www.aseansec.org/1216.htm
[2] Myanmar ratifies ASEAN Charter, 18 July 2008, www.reuters.com
[3] Joint Communiqué of the 36th ASEAN Ministerial Meeting, Phnom Penh, 16-17 June 2003

> "We noted the briefing given by Myanmar on the reconvening of its National Convention and the development thereon. We acknowledged the potential of the Convention in paving the way for new constitution and the holding of elections in keeping with it. We recalled and emphasized the continued relevance of the Joint Communiqué of the 36th AMM and the Chairman's Press Statement of the 9th ASEAN Summit. In this regard, we underlined the need for the involvement of all strata of Myanmar society in the on-going National Convention. We encouraged all concerned parties in Myanmar to continue their efforts to effect a smooth transition to democracy."[1]

Furthermore, some members like Indonesia, Singapore, the Philippines and Malaysia individually urged Myanmar to move quickly its democratization process. For example, when ASEAN faced the difficult position of Myanmar's ASEAN Chairmanship in 2006 which would entail a threatened boycott by the US and EU of multilateral meetings led by Myanmar, Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines were keen on implementation of democratic reforms before Myanmar was given the ASEAN Chairmanship as it was affecting the credibility of the group as a whole. Indonesia made its opposition clearly in the ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Retreat in Cebu, the Philippines, on 10 April 2005.[2]

Actually, there is no precedent of a member being suspended from taking the Chairmanship or being bypassed. However, it is possible if a member who is due to take over decides to give up its turn voluntarily. Thus, a face-saving formula could be suggested in which Myanmar stepped aside voluntarily and allowed another ASEAN member to be the next chairman instead. Myanmar would have to tell other members whether it would insist on taking its turn to lead ASEAN in 2006 at the upcoming ASEAN Foreign Ministers Meeting in Vientiane, Laos on 26 July 2005.[3] Due to the growing opposition came from the parliaments and public of the region, Myanmar agreed to delay its chairmanship of ASEAN at the ASEAN Ministerial Meeting in Vientiane, Laos, on 26 July 2005.[4] It can clearly be seen that Myanmar had to respond the changing nature of interstate relations within ASEAN since 2003 after Bali Concord II.

7. "Political Development" Element of ASC and Recent Political Developments in Myanmar

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[1] Joint Communiqué of the 37th ASEAN Ministerial Meeting Jakarta, 29-30 June 2004

[2] "ASEAN Face Difficult Position on Myanmar", *International Herald Tribune*, July 26, 2005

[3] "ASEAN Expects Myanmar's Decision on Leadership Issue Next Month", *AFP*, 17 June 2005

[4] "Burma will not take Asean chair", BBC News Asia-Pacific

This section will illustrate how ASEAN's process toward a Security Community has influenced the recent developments in Myanmar internal politics. There are five main areas of cooperation among the member states to develop an ASEAN Security Community; namely, Political Development; Norm-Setting; Conflict Resolution; Conflict Prevention; and Post-Conflict Peace-building[1].

Out of five areas of cooperation, "Political Development" is the most important element to reach a stage of a Security Community. Actually, "Political Development" element of ASC provides the necessary "entry points", through which ASEAN could create the necessary preconditions for the development of ASEAN Security Community. These entry points are as follows: ASEAN members will nurture common political values such as democracy, human rights and the rule of law; not accept unconstitutional and undemocratic change of government; promote people's participation in politics through the conduct of general election; implement good governance; strengthen judicial institutions and legal reforms; promote and protect the human rights situation in their respective country.[2]

The first point under Political Development element of ASC, *"ASEAN will nurture common political values such as democracy, human rights and the rule of law",* demands ASEAN members to share democracy, human rights and the rule of law as their common political values. As a response to this regional requirement, the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) promised to implement its "7-Step Roadmap" to Democracy in August 2003. The objectives of the SPDC's 7-Step Roadmap were to establish Myanmar as a modern, developed, and democratic nation and to nourish "Disciplined-Flourishing" Democracy[3]. These objectives are in line with the requirement for the development of ASC. President U Thein Sein of new government also pledged the same objectives.[4]

The second point outlined under Political Development element of ASC demands the member states *"not to accept the unconstitutional and undemocratic change of government in a member state"*. That means ASEAN will no longer support the government in a member country which came to power through military coup d'état. The third point also urges the member

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[1] ASEAN Security Community Plan of Action, www.aseansec.org/16826.htm

[2] Annex of ASEAN Security Community Plan of Action, www.aseansec.org/16826.htm

[3] *New Light of Myanmar*, 31 August 2003

[4] "President U Thein Sein's Inaugural Address to Pyihtaungsu Hluttaw", *New Light of Myanmar*, 31 March 2011

countries to *promote their people's participation in politics through the conduct of general election"*. Being a member of ASEAN, the State Peace and Development Council of Myanmar realized that Myanmar had to adjust its internal political system with ASEAN standards. As an implementation of its 7 −step Roadmap toward Democracy, the SPDC had drafted the new Constitution since 2005 and has approved it in May 2008. The 2008 Constitution allowed the multi-party system and the SPDC taking the role of transitional government conducted the General Election in November 2010.[1] People in Myanmar now have the right to elect their representatives as well as the right to be elected as the people's representatives in Parliament. The SPDC government handed over state power to the constitutionally elected civilian government in April 2011. The new government is responsible to the people through Union Legislature. Myanmar now has elected President, elected parliamentarians with Bicameral legislature at the union level and also has the State and Region legislature. The three branches of government, namely, executive, legislature, and judiciary now can exercise the "Check and Balance" against each other. As the participation in the process of Southeast Asia's regionalism, Myanmar's Union Parliament has become full member of ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Assembly (AIPA) in September 2011.[2]

The fourth and fifth points under Political Development element of ASC demand the member states *"to implement good governance and to strengthen judicial institutions and legal reforms"* in their respective countries. In his inaugural speech at the Union Parliament in Naypyitaw on 30th March 2011, President U Thein Sein of new government pledged to reform the existing political institutions as well as to establish *"rule of law and good governance"* during his administration. He promised that his government would try to be a *"clean government"* which is *"transparent and accountable"* for their actions.[3]

Recently, the significant developments can also be seen in this regard. For example, on 30th September 2011, it was announced that Myitsone Dam project which was being developed jointly by Myanmar and China at the head of the Ayeyarwadi River in Myanmar's northern Kachin state has been suspended by the President's decision. [4] Indeed, being located in an environmentally sensitive, earthquake prone area, Myitsone Dam project had

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[1] *New Light of Myanmar*, 28-29 November 2010

[2] *New Light of Myanmar*, 21 September 2011

[3] "President U Thein Sein's Inaugural Address to Pyihtaungsu Hluttaw", *New Light of Myanmar*, 31 March 2011

[4] "President's Memo to Pyihtaungsu Hluttaw", *New Light of Myanmar*, 1 October 2011

faced with the broad campaign by anti-dam project environmentalists and some political parties due to the potential environmental impact of the project. In his memo to the Union Parliament dated 29th September 2011, President U Thein Sein clearly expressed:

> "…We have to respect the will of the people as our government is elected by the people" and "We have a responsibility to solve the worries of the people so we will stop construction of the Myitsone Dam during our current government…"..[1]

The above mentioned words by the President in his memo to the Union Parliament clearly show that the new government has followed its promises and commitments to the people not only by words but also by deeds.

Regarding the judicial reforms, the 2008 Constitution has entrusted the Supreme Court at the Union level with power to issue writs, and the first ever Constitutional Tribunal of the Union in the history of Myanmar has been formed. These organizations are not only to maintain and safeguard the judicial pillar, but also to define constitutional provisions and scrutinize the functions of legislative and executive bodies whether or not they are in conformity with the 2008 Constitution. In addition, President U Thein Sein also pledged to reform the existing judicial institutions in order to *"carry out judicial tasks in accord with the provisions of the 2008 Constitution such as openly handling of judicial affairs and the right to pass judgment in the presence of the public except legislative constraints and the rights to defence and appellate jurisdiction in criminal cases".[2]* Therefore, the above mentioned improvements in the internal politics of Myanmar should be seen as the Myanmar leaders' attempts to implement all agreed principles and programmes under ASC of Bali Concord II and ASEAN Charter.

The last point outlined under the "Political Development" element of ASC urges the member states to *"promote and protect the human rights"* situation in their respective countries. In his inaugural speech at the Union Parliament in Naypyitaw on 30th March 2011, President U Thein Sein of new government pledged to *"respect the fundamental rights of its citizens"*. He said: his government "guarantees the people's life security and civil servants treat the people fairly so that people put reliance and trust in the legislative and executive institutions. According to him, Myanmar people lead a peaceful life under the protection of laws and the 2008 Constitution.[3]

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[1] Ibid.

[2] "President U Thein Sein's Inaugural Address to Pyihtaungsu Hluttaw", *New Light of Myanmar*, 31 March 2011

[3] Ibid.

Recently, the significant developments can be seen in the human rights situation of Myanmar. For example, in November 2010, after holding the general election, the SPDC government released the leader of opposition party, National League for Democracy which is about to register as a formal political party again, from the house arrest. In August 2011, President U Thein Sein of new government met her at the President's office in Naypyitaw. At their meeting, President U Thein Sein proposed to set aside the political differences between them and work together with all political parties for the good of the country. [1] In early September 2011, in order to promote and protect the fundamental rights of its citizens, the government established the National Human Rights Commission which is composed of 15 retired civil servants and academics[2].

The new government also pledged to respect the role of media because it believed that the government which is responsible to the people is *"required to inform the people about what they should know and appreciate positive suggestions of the media".[3]* Myanmar people can now have free access to the Internet websites which were blocked in the past. Under the rule of new government, the media has got the permission to publish the news and articles written about the politics, various political points of view and about various political parties in the private weekly journals that were not allowed to be mentioned in the past.

8. Conclusion

Recently, the significant developments can be seen in the internal politics of Myanmar. Based on the above mentioned analyses, this paper argues that the recent political developments in Myanmar are its leaders' response to the changing circumstances in the regional strategic environment as well as its leaders' attempt to adjust its domestic political system with regional standards, that is, ASEAN's standards. This paper is not saying that the changing regional strategic environment is the only one variable explaining the recent political developments in Myanmar. Actually, there can be several variables explaining the recent developments in Myanmar's internal politics. This paper just said that as one of the motivating factors, the changing regional strategic

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[1] [1] *New Light of Myanmar*, 18 August 2011

[2] *New Light of Myanmar*, 7 September 2011

[3] "President U Thein Sein's Inaugural Address to Pyihtaungsu Hluttaw", *New Light of Myanmar*, 31 March 2011

environment in Southeast Asia has contributed to the recent political developments in Myanmar.

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