

**Brainstorming Session on**  
**Achieving the ASEAN Economic Community 2015: Challenges for Member Countries**  
**and Businesses**

ASEAN leaders have repeatedly conveyed their political will and commitment to build an ASEAN economic community (AEC) by 2015. They signed the ASEAN Charter in 2007, which put in place the institutions and mechanisms to build an ASEAN community. The AEC Blueprint adopted in the same year gave a master plan for building the economic community characterised by a single market and production base and a competitive economic region with equitable development that is engaged with the global economy. Recently, during the 16<sup>th</sup> ASEAN summit in April, the leaders agreed that ASEAN would focus efforts on ensuring financial stability, fostering regional infrastructure development and connectivity, promoting sustainable development and narrowing the development gap.

But to achieve these targets and promises require cooperation and coordination among different sectors of the economy. Each member-country has to act in harmony both at national and regional levels to ensure that it does not lag far behind the others. Currently, with countries having varying considerations on economic liberalisation (particularly in the services sector) protectionism still persists in some sectors. Again, while the new ASEAN members are addressing the gaps in infrastructure, and the lack of human resources and adequate institutions, much more needs to be done for these countries to be at par with the advanced ASEAN members. Thus, the governments of the ten countries are taking small but definite steps in their regionalisation drive and identifying areas of assistance among donors and Dialogue Partners so as to comply with the ASEAN commitments by 2015.

These are the conclusions that emerged from a roundtable discussion organised by the ASEAN Studies Centre (ASC) at the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (ISEAS), along with the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung (KAS), on April 29 at Shangri-La Hotel. The theme of the roundtable was: “Achieving the AEC 2015: Challenges for Member Countries”, which examined the state of readiness (or lack thereof) of the member countries for regional integration.

However, besides the governments, the private firms, both regional and multi-national, are also important players in the process of regional integration. Until now ASEAN businesses have shown little or no interest in ASEAN developments. This may pose the greatest threats to realising an AEC by 2015.

Given this, the ASEAN Studies Centre (ASC) at the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (ISEAS) will convene a brainstorming session on **23 September, 2010 at ISEAS**, Singapore. This will be a follow-up to the ASEAN Roundtable 2010 of 29 April 2010 and will include private sector representatives and their views on the prospects of achieving an AEC by 2015. We envisage four separate closed-door sessions, so that participants can express their views more freely.

The sessions will examine the progress in implementing the ASEAN economic agreements and the challenges to it. They will assess the economic agreements that have already been successfully implemented and their economic impact (if any).

The sessions will discuss the challenges to ASEAN businesses and identify possible solutions. The sessions must recommend practical measures for facilitating trade and investment and effectively implementing ASEAN integration initiatives on the ground.

The attendees will involve personalities from think-tanks, academia, and private business. The one-day discussion will be of special significance for major ASEAN stakeholders - member countries, businesses, the ASEAN Secretariat and ASEAN Dialogue Partners. Policy-makers will be benefited by the recommendations.