

Opening the ASEAN Day

A few years ago we created something that since then has become a tradition. The students of the Doctoral School of Education of ELTE organised the first “regional day” in 2018. It was about Kazakhstan. One year later a “Myanmar Day” was organised and this was followed by our “African Day”. You can see photos of these events if you visit the blog created for this event by our doctoral students.

Today we shall have our “ASEAN Day.” We are going to make a virtual trip to Southeast Asia. We shall visit the “virtual museum” of ASEAN: the Association of Southeast Asian Nations. The idea of this „museum” was born in the mind of the international doctoral students of the Doctoral School of Education of ELTE.

Let me share with you the brief history of the birth of this „museum”. Last December, one day before Christmas, I wrote a letter to one of my doctoral students, who is from Myanmar. I asked her to consult some members our doctoral student community whether they were interested in organising a regional day on ASEAN. This idea came to me after finishing the reading of a wonderful book, written by two Singaporean scholars, entitled “The ASEAN Miracle” (see the book [here](#)). A few days later I received a positive answer. An organisation team was set up and they presented a plan for the program. I reacted with enthusiasm, and – with the leadership of Bimba – they started organising the event.

We had the hope that we can organise the ASEAN Day being physically present. We even reserved the room for this event in our Kazy building. We did not expect that a third wave of the COVID pandemic will come, and it will be even stronger than the second one. It is sad that we cannot be together in real. But, fortunately, we are already used to the use of digital communication and we can perhaps feel the presence of the each other even through screens cameras.

And there is another thing that we could not foresee in January. At that time we could not know that just one month later ASEAN will face one of the greatest crises in her history. In one of its member states, Myanmar, a military took power, and when public protest emerged, they reacted with brutal violence. By now more than 700, mostly peaceful protesters were killed, most of them young people and many of them children. Thousands were imprisoned, and many tortured and killed after being arrested. The country fell into chaos, and the brutality of the military government generated worldwide protest and solidarity. All around the world political, social, religious and even military leaders condemned the junta, they expressed their solidarity and their admiration for the Myanmar people resisting the violence. Let mention just one of these leaders: the head of the Roman Catholic Church who declared publicly several times his deep solidary with the Myanmar people. In these days coping with the Myanmar crisis if the most serious challenge the leaders of ASEAN have to face.

A couple of days ago the Secretary General of the United Nations, Mr. *Antonio Guterres* and the former Secretary General Mr. *Ban Ki-moon* urged governments in Southeast Asia to push to end the crisis in Myanmar, during a video conference of the United Nations Security Council leaders. They asked the Council “to act decisively to prevent the worst in Myanmar and beyond.”

The UN Secretary General also addressed directly ASEAN, as the organisation was preparing a summit where the head of the Myanmar junta was also invited (this summit will take place tomorrow). He said this: "*They should agree that a high level delegation will visit Myanmar to engage with all relevant parties. I am sincerely appealing to ASEAN leaders to step up together with the United Nations to help the people and country of Myanmar*" (Source: [Mizzima](#) independent news agency – [here](#))

We were discussing this crisis with the team preparing the ASEAN day a few days ago. We came to the conclusion that although nothing is more important in these days for ASEAN than coping with this crisis, we shall not modify the program. We keep it as it was designed before the crisis. We agreed that today we shall not talk about the current Myanmar crisis. Although this will be there in the mind of most of us all the time, we try not to speak about it in the next few hours. Of course, we can organise a separate event where we can discuss the crisis, and we can also express our solidarity, but we shall not do this today. Today we follow the program as it was designed by the preparatory team before the military coup in Myanmar.

So we agreed in our meeting with the organising team that I shall ask ourselves to try to forget for a few hours our deep sadness and anger generated by the violence in Myanmar. So we ask you not to talk about the current Myanmar crisis this afternoon. We ask you not to bring this theme into our dialogue today.

In the following hours we shall think and talk about the south-eastern Asian countries and their intergovernmental organisation, ASEAN as if we were two months ago, and, hopefully, as we shall be again in the near future. We shall just look at this region with its marvellous cultural, linguistic and religious diversity where people have the wisdom to live in peace and to create prosperous societies. Just as this appears in the book "The ASEAN Miracle".

Let me greet all who are here today with these words. A special welcome to those guests who are not from among the EDiTE doctoral student community. I am very glad that we have students from the MARIHE international Master's program with us and also students and teachers from other universities. I hope you will all enjoy our journey this afternoon.

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