

Timor-Leste's Process to Join ASEAN: Struggle for Membership

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Abstract

This research was conducted to find out the journey and challenges faced by Timor-Leste in joining ASEAN both externally and internally. This research uses qualitative methods to help answer the problem formulation in this thesis, which aims to increase the researcher's understanding of social and political phenomena, activities, and processes. The research was conducted by collecting qualitative data based on primary data from interviews with government institutions and secondary data such as literature and document-based or internet research methods. The results of the research analysis show that Timor-Leste's process towards full membership in ASEAN was characterized by persistent efforts and very complicated issues. This research also discusses how ASEAN serves its purpose as an institution and how Timor-Leste seeks economic and political benefits by joining the ASEAN community. Timor-Leste's quest for ASEAN membership is relevant to the Theory of Liberalism which emphasizes the importance of interdependence and cooperation. Timor-Leste's desire to join ASEAN is to seek economic and political benefits.

Keywords: Liberalism, Timor-Leste, ASEAN, ASEAN Membership

Introduction

ASEAN has become one of Asia's most crucial regional peace organizations, especially in Southeast Asia. Since its conception, ASEAN has faced various political and security issues in response to the rise of communism, and its membership also poses risks to the stability of Southeast Asia as a whole. In regards to Southeast Asian security, ASEAN countries that could initially focus on internal affairs had to start considering external threats after the withdrawal of US troops (Buszynski, 2008). This change began a shift in ASEAN membership criteria from ideological exclusivity to more inclusive criteria, which allowed socialist countries to join ASEAN in the name of regional security from 1995 to 1999 (Rafaldhanis, 2023). ASEAN's founding members greatly desire to establish a stable Southeast Asian area. As a result of ASEAN's existence, it is anticipated that Southeast Asian nations will integrate and that member nations will cooperate more closely.

The initial process implemented by a country that wants to join ASEAN membership is to become an observer country. This process must be implemented to help the country know and understand the mechanisms, principles, rules and structures within ASEAN. After this process, the final decision that must be passed is the consensus decision of all ASEAN members through the ASEAN Summit based on the recommendation of the ASEAN Security Council by including

an exclusive declaration of ratification. Nevertheless, one of the countries with the longest membership acceptance period is Timor-Leste, its acceptance took more than ten years and until now also its full membership is still in process (Indonesian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2023).

Timor-Leste is the only Southeast Asian country not a member of ASEAN. On February 27, 2011, Timor-Leste's Minister of Foreign Affairs formally requested to become a full member of ASEAN to Indonesia as ASEAN Chair. Through the framework of the ASEAN Coordinating Council Working Group on Timor-Leste's Membership in ASEAN (ACCWG-TL) (Indonesian Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2023), the debate on Timor-Leste's application has been ongoing in ASEAN since then. In addition, ASEAN conducted a fact-finding mission to assess Timor-Leste's readiness. This assessment was conducted under ASEAN's three pillars: the ASEAN Security Community (ASC), the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC), and the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC). At the end of November 2022, ASEAN Leaders approved Timor-Leste as the 11th member state at the 40th and 41st ASEAN Summits and Related Summits in November 2022 in Phnom Penh, Cambodia. Based on the ASEAN Leaders' Statement on the Application of Timor-Leste for ASEAN Membership, Timor-Leste is designated as an observer. It has the opportunity to attend ASEAN meetings and participate in capacity-building activities but not the decision-making process. The ASEAN Leaders also mandated the ACCWG-TL to develop a comprehensive and objective roadmap for Timor-Leste's membership (ASEAN, n.d.). Under the leadership of Indonesia, the Roadmap for Timor-Leste's Full Membership in ASEAN was successfully drafted and finally adopted at the 42nd ASEAN Summit on May 11, 2023, in Labuan Bajo, Indonesia.

In order to develop its economy, the Timor-Leste government has been striving to join ASEAN since independence was restored in 2002. Nevertheless, some obstacles prevent it from being able to achieve its membership. In this study, the author divides the challenges into internal and external. The internal challenges are economic, human resources, institutions, and infrastructure. Then, the external challenges are consensus and Fact-Finding Mission (FFM). Those challenges are closely consequential and interdependent. In addition, those are subject to ASEAN assessment for membership of its government's foreign policy and geographical location close to ASEAN countries. Also, the desire to join as a permanent member of ASEAN is getting stronger after observing the cooperation between countries in ASEAN and concluding that the direction of the ASEAN organization has always experienced positive developments at the regional and international levels (Seran et al., 2020). Obviously, Timor-Leste is looking to Asia in considering their future and prosperity. Timor-Leste participated in the Civil Servant Internship Program representing a strategic step for Timor-Leste which was coordinated by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, as it is required to complete several points in the Road Map released at the 42nd Summit in Labuan Bajo. Therefore, the question arises as to why ASEAN took so long to admit Timor-Leste as a full member in 2011, given that ASEAN has long adjusted its membership policy to be more inclusive. There are several possibilities for why ASEAN was initially reluctant to accept Timor-Leste as a full member. First, ASEAN membership changed from ideological to economic. When Timor-Leste applied in 2011, ASEAN MEMBER STATE were still recovering from the global financial crisis that

we know as the Great Recession, and ASEAN Member States (ASEAN MEMBER STATE) were concerned that Timor-Leste's entry into ASEAN could worsen economic conditions in the region because Timor-Leste itself was considered not to have a developed economy. Second, ASEAN MEMBER STATE saw that the presence or absence of Timor-Leste as a member did not significantly impact the survival of ASEAN or the security of the Southeast Asian region.

Problem Identification

To identify the problem, the writer wanted to find out why there is a discrepancy between the policies of ASEAN MEMBER STATE in accepting Timor-Leste as an ASEAN member at the beginning when Timor-Leste first applied for membership in ASEAN and now. This research was conducted to explore the journey or challenges faced by Timor-Leste in joining ASEAN and the potential effects that will occur when Timor-Leste joins ASEAN both externally and internally. This research was conducted because Timor-Leste faces considerable challenges in joining ASEAN, and the author wants to know why is it difficult for Timor-Leste to become a member of ASEAN, why Timor-Leste was accepted as a member in 2022.

Research Method

This article was conducted by collecting qualitative data based on primary data from interviews conducted with government institutions. Interviews were another data-collecting technique employed in this study. In addition, this research also used interviews as a data collection method. The author conducted semi-structured interviews with resource persons at the Directorate of ASEAN Cooperation at the Indonesian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, including key informant Risha Jilian Chaniago, Diplomat Functional Officer. In addition, supporting informants were Adelaida De Jesus from the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries of Timor-Leste. Besides interview-based data collection, the author will also use secondary data such as literature, document-based research methods and the internet about Timor-Leste's effort to join ASEAN from government ministries and non-governmental organizations, including the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the ASEAN Secretariat. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs oversees the nation's intergovernmental organization admission process and the Timor-Leste civil servant internship program.

Result and Discussion

- **Timor-Leste Profile**

Timor-Leste, previously a Portuguese Colony, was annexed back in 1975 into the 27th province of the Republic of Indonesia under the name of East Timor. However, following a referendum in 1999, Timor-Leste voted to separate from the Republic of Indonesia after a separatist movement and a UN intervention designed to prepare the newly independent country. Timor-Leste chose to secede from the Republic of Indonesia for four more reasons: poverty, ethnic diversity, a repressive political system, and declining human resources. The conflict was complicated by the presence of Australia as a mediator. In addition, Australia is the country with the most visible interest in East Timor besides the United States. The economic motive was to gain control of the oil and

gas-rich Timor Gap. This was because Australia's intervention indirectly involved it in the conflict, and it 'facilitated' Timor-Leste's quest for independence by providing political support at the UN (Rumbia et al., 2022).



Figure 1 Map of Timor-Leste. Source: Tirto.id (2022)

In 1991, the eyes of the world turned to Timor-Leste when mass killings in Dili, known as the Santa Cruz and Liquica incidents, took place with the Indonesian military as the main accused, causing the violations of human rights perpetrated by the Indonesian government to worsen the situation, provoking the people of Timor-Leste to insist on secession and fight for independence (Indrawan, 2015). After the two incidents of human rights violations, there was political and security instability in Timor-Leste. The United Nations established an intervention force, the International Force for East Timor (INTERFET), to restore stability and security in Timor-Leste. Since the arrival of the intervention force, Timor-Leste has been under the auspices of the United Nations Transitional Administration in East Timor (UNTAET). The idea of the separation of Timor-Leste originated from the emergence of two options for resolving the Timor-Leste issue through a referendum by President B. J. Habibie on January 27, 1999. The first option was granting special autonomy, and the second option was the separation of East Timor (the name of Timor-Leste as the 27th province in the Republic of Indonesia) from Indonesia. After a long process, Timor-Leste finally started self-government, restored its independence as an independent and sovereign country on May 20, 2002, and established the city of Dili as its capital (Fadillah, 2021).

- **Timor-Leste's Road to ASEAN Membership**

Timor-Leste's journey towards ASEAN membership is a complex one, influenced by its history, socio-economic conditions, foreign policy, and the need for improved governance and access to resources. Timor-Leste's economy heavily relies on the oil and gas sector, accounting for 90% of its budget. The government established the Petroleum Fund in 2005 to ensure long-term revenue sustainability, however, the industry needs to create jobs for the unemployed. With a small population of around 1.4

million people and limited infrastructure and natural resources, Timor-Leste faces poverty and corruption, negatively impacting the government, economy, and society. To stimulate economic development, Timor-Leste should consider joining ASEAN, a regional organization in Southeast Asia.

Timor-Leste, being a new country in Southeast Asia, is well aware of the relevance of regional organizations such as ASEAN. Timor-Leste has shown interest and declared intention to join ASEAN since its independence in 1999. Joining a regional organization in its region is certainly something that must be done because joining a regional organization is one of the efforts a country must make to fulfill its national interests. However, before expressing its desire to become a member of ASEAN, there were some differences of opinion between Jose Ramos Horta, who was then Timor-Leste's Minister of Foreign Affairs, and Xanana Gusmão, who was then Timor-Leste's Prime Minister. The *Jakarta Post* reported in 1999 that Ramos-Horta would resist any attempt by Southeast Asian countries to include Timor-Leste in their spheres of influence. He also said Timor-Leste was part of the South Pacific countries, not ASEAN. He further stated, "We can accept Australia's command, we can accept New Zealand's command, we can accept Fiji's command, but we will not accept anyone from ASEAN countries because they are not neutral; they have become accomplices of Indonesia" (Madjiah, 2002). This stems from the lingering resentment of the civil war between Indonesia and Timor-Leste. The change in outlook supports a measured and gradual move towards ASEAN membership. Timor-Leste had expressed its desire for ASEAN membership since 2001 when it was still under UN supervision.

In addition, Sahin's (2014) study entitled "Timor-Leste's Foreign Policy: Securing State Identity in the Post-Independence Period," argues that after the withdrawal of UN forces from Timor-Leste in December 2001, when Timor-Leste's security forces took over responsibility for maintaining law and order from the UN, this can be referred to as a distinct but interconnected process of political and social change influenced by specific choices and actions of national political leaders. Examples of these decisions and actions include the development policies Timor-Leste adopted, the model of government it chose, and the strategic approach it developed to joining regional and intergovernmental organizations. Afterward, Timor-Leste's politicians affirmed the country's status as a Southeast Asian nation upon its independence. They opted to join the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) immediately (Ebo & Hänggi, 2020). In reference to the decision, José Ramos-Horta, who had taken up the role of Minister of Foreign Affairs in the transitional government established by the United Nations Transitional Administration of East Timor (UNTAET), remarked in an interview at Asia Pacific Media Services Limited in 2001:

"Ideally, we would prefer ASEAN and the Pacific Islands Forum membership. However, ASEAN rules do not permit such double membership. We are taking one step at a time, developing bilateral relations with as many ASEAN countries as possible, paving the

way for a future application for full membership" (Asia Pacific Media Services Limited, 2001).

Timor-Leste started actively participating as an observer in every meeting held by ASEAN MEMBER STATE following its readiness to join in 2002. This was the first effort made by Timor-Leste to be able to join ASEAN. After obtaining observer status, Timor-Leste increasingly showed its existence by participating in various events organized by ASEAN. Timor-Leste started to actively participate in ASEAN's internal meeting agenda, such as forums and agreements organized by ASEAN, including in 2002, Timor-Leste attended the 39th ASEAN Ministerial Meeting (AMM) in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia (ASEAN, 2012). After that, in 2005, Timor-Leste became a member of the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF). The ARF was founded during the 26th ASEAN Ministerial Meeting and Post Ministerial Conference in Singapore on July 23-25, 1993, to provide a platform for members to discuss and collaborate on regional security and political matters. The forum offered significant advantages to Timor-Leste as it facilitated their participation in a central platform for discussing the resolution of divergent perspectives among members of the ARF (MOFA of Japan, 2005).

Furthermore, in 2007, Timor-Leste signed the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC). It was the foundation and an instrument for ASEAN countries to associate peacefully as well as to resolve problems such as conflicts diplomatically. Additionally, the TAC became a critical component of the ASEAN Security Community (ASC) pillar in the early 2000s, reflecting ASEAN's commitment to resolve differences, disputes, and conflicts peacefully. Timor-Leste appointed Roberto Sarmiento de Oliveira Soares as its representative to demonstrate its intention to join ASEAN. It established diplomatic relations with the ten ASEAN MEMBER STATE to show its commitment to join ASEAN. In May 2008, at the Foreign Correspondents Association in Singapore, Ramos-Horta, the then Prime Minister, made a speech expressing his support for Timor-Leste's accession to ASEAN. At the same event, he also assured Timor-Leste that he would "work harder to be eligible to join ASEAN" (ABS-CBN News, 2008).

The government of Timor-Leste considers the consistent positive development within ASEAN and the potential benefits for all members, including Timor-Leste. Its desire to join ASEAN has strengthened. Facilitating free trade in Southeast Asia is one of these benefits. Therefore, Timor-Leste's government has declared that joining ASEAN is the highest priority for the country. Timor-Leste expressed a willingness to open an ASEAN representative office in Dili as a sign of its commitment to joining the organization in 2009. Finally, on February 27, 2011, Timor-Leste's Minister of Foreign Affairs formally requested Indonesia to become a full ASEAN member as the Chair of ASEAN. Timor-Leste officially submitted its application to the ASEAN Secretariat on March 4, 2011. President Ramos-Horta stated that the application had received support from Malaysia, Thailand, Cambodia, Brunei, and Myanmar. Timor-Leste is now in better social, economic, political, and security conditions. The United Nations Development Program (UNDP) places its human development in the medium human development category.

The country has significantly reduced child and infant mortality, increased life expectancy at birth, and has no external debt. Additionally, Ramos-Horta emphasized that Timor-Leste actively upholds good ties with other nations, promotes openness and good governance, strongly supports human rights, and has emerged as one of the region's most democratic nations (Eat Timor Represent, 2011).

Timor-Leste has developed a national plan, known as the Timor-Leste Strategic Development Plan 2011-2030, to become a member state of the ASEAN. This plan was developed to reflect the aspirations of the people of Timor-Leste to establish a prosperous and powerful nation. This plan aims to facilitate Timor-Leste's progression from a low-income nation to an upper-middle-income nation by the year 2030. The Timor-Leste Strategic Plan 2011-2030 noted that, despite certain positive accomplishments, Timor-Leste "still has a long way to go to become a full member of ASEAN." Nevertheless, Timor-Leste remains optimistic and states the ambitious goal of joining by 2012 (UNEP, 2011). The plan also states its goal and ambition to become "a permanent member of ASEAN, with recognized expertise in economic development, small state management, good governance, and aid effectiveness and delivery." According to Strating's report in February 2014, the Government of Timor-Leste still maintains accession to ASEAN as a priority and is committed to becoming a member in 2015 (Strating, 2017).

Timor-Leste's membership bid has the support of other ASEAN members, such as Indonesia, Singapore, and the Philippines. To support Timor-Leste's efforts to join ASEAN, Xanana Gusmao has visited several ASEAN MEMBER STATE since 2011, using public speaking opportunities to promote the country's membership. Since 2011, Xanana Gusmao has visited several ASEAN member countries to support Timor-Leste's efforts to join ASEAN by using a public speaking approach to praise ASEAN's role in regional and global affairs (Government of Timor-Leste, n.d.). In May-June 2013, as prime minister of Timor-Leste, he officially made a visit to Singapore to participate in the Shangri-la Defense Dialogue to discuss regional security and defense. After that, he traveled from Singapore to the Philippines to sign a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the two countries and deliver a formal lecture at the University of the Philippines. This visit was part of Timor-Leste's strengthening relationship with ASEAN MEMBER STATE. Prime Minister Gusmao visited Vietnam to initiate the implementation of the Viet Nam-Timor-Leste Framework Agreement on Economic and Technical Cooperation, signed in April 2010, to hold the first session of the Inter-Governmental Committee. The Prime Minister and President of Vietnam, Truong Tan Sang, promised close cooperation in multilateral forums. At the same time, Vietnam expressed its commitment to collaborate with ASEAN MEMBER STATE in assisting Timor-Leste's application for membership (VietNam News, 2023).

- ***Timor-Leste's Accession Process to ASEAN***

Before discussing Timor-Leste's accession to ASEAN further, it is important to understand ASEAN's membership procedures first. ASEAN membership must have

significant ramifications for both prospective and existing members. The primary factor is the geography—shared historical, cultural, and interest similarities. Southeast Asia is the required geographic location for the potential member. The 1967 ASEAN Declaration extends a warm welcome to "all States in the South East Asian region" that adhere to the goals and objectives of ASEAN.

The ASEAN Charter, which became effective in 2008, established the requirements for ASEAN membership in Article 6(2), which shall be based on the following criteria:

“(1) Location in the recognised geographical region of Southeast Asia; (2) Recognition by all ASEAN MEMBER STATE; agreement to be bound by the ASEAN Charter; and (3) Ability and willingness to carry out the obligations of membership.” (ASEAN, 2015)

The ultimate determination is reached through consensus during the ASEAN Summit, following the suggestion of the ASEAN Coordinating Council (ACC), which consists of the Foreign Ministers of ASEAN MEMBER STATE. Before its occurrence, multiple procedural measures must be undertaken. Initially, the applicant casually engages with ASEAN nations with positive bilateral relations to express their interest. The following phase is receiving an invitation to attend the annual meetings of the ASEAN Foreign Ministers as a guest of the country in charge, facilitated by the ASEAN member's diplomatic efforts. After a few occasions of such "familiarization," the applicant officially submits the membership application to the ASEAN members. Additionally, it publicly demonstrated interest by formally signing The Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia (TAC). The briefing, negotiations, and consultations regarding potential membership commence seriously with the ASEAN Secretary-General and his team serving as coordinators. Throughout this procedure, with the approval of all current members, the prospective member is normally given the status of "observer" in order to get ready for various membership responsibilities.

The process of Timor-Leste joining ASEAN entered a new stage when Timor-Leste officially applied for membership on March 4, 2011, after nine years as an observer in ASEAN. After the submission of the application, the discussion of Timor-Leste's application took place in ASEAN through the framework of the ASEAN Coordinating Council Working Group on Timor-Leste's Membership in ASEAN (ACCWG-TL). The role of ACCWG-TL in Timor-Leste's membership application is similar to the role of the ASEAN Security Committee Working Group in the membership applications of Cambodia, Laos, and Myanmar. This Working Group conducts an assessment by considering the three ASEAN Community pillars, namely the ASEAN Political-Security Community (APSC), ASEAN Economic Community (AEC), and ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC). Consideration of Timor-Leste's membership was conducted through various mechanisms, such as sending a Fact-Finding Mission (FFM) to assess Timor-Leste's readiness and Timor-Leste's participation in ASEAN meetings that are capacity building only and not a confidential decision-making process. The working

group also serves to recommend to ASEAN on Timor-Leste's capacity to fulfill its obligations as a member state. Based on the official website of ASEAN (2022) on the ASEAN Economic Community Fact-Finding Mission to Timor-Leste Shows Progress Towards ASEAN Accession, declaring:

"This mission marked the completion of the fact-finding missions to Timor-Leste by all three pillars of ASEAN, with the ASEAN Political-Security Community (APSC) FFM on September 3-6, 2019 and the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC) FFM on July 6-8, 2022." (ASEAN, 2022)

Nonetheless, the evaluation of the ACCWG-TL discourse will occur in March 2012 during the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Council (ASCC), Senior Economic Officials Meeting (SEOM), and Joint Meeting of ASEAN Senior Officials Meeting (SOM) in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, and Singapore, respectively. The meetings led to the establishment of the ACCWG-TL Term of Reference, which aimed to evaluate Timor-Leste's application for ASEAN membership. The discussions focused on the scope of the provision within the context of the membership application, the responsibilities and procedures of the ACCWG-TL, and various technical issues related to the ASEAN membership application as outlined in the ASEAN Charter (Afriansyah & Windraskinasih, 2018). The conference resulted in the finalization of the ACCWG Term of Reference (ToR) for Timor-Leste's application to join ASEAN as a member state. This involved aligning the perspectives of the relevant ACCWG ToR across all three pillars of the ASEAN Community. The ACCWG ToR specifically addresses the extent of its own scope within the context of ASEAN membership applications, the authority and methods of the ACCWG, and further technical matters concerning new membership applications in ASEAN.

ASEAN Member State appeared to express differing degrees of support for Timor-Leste's membership candidacy at the 31st ASEAN Summit, which was held in Manila, Philippines, on November 13, 2017. Nevertheless, the efforts were ineffective since ASEAN MEMBER STATE were unable to achieve a consensus decision, as mandated by Article 6(3) of the ASEAN Charter:

"Admission shall be decided by consensus by the ASEAN Summit, upon the recommendation of the ASEAN Coordinating Council" (ASEAN, 2015)

The fact that there were countries that did not agree with Timor-Leste joining ASEAN also contributed to the fact that this consensus was not unanimous. Singapore openly expressed their opposition to Timor-Leste's application. According to The ASEAN Post, Singapore opposed Timor-Leste's inclusion because they were worried about its economic status not being comparable to other ASEAN MEMBER STATE. Singapore expressed concerns that the admission of the country might hamper the realization of

the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC), a goal that was officially established at the end of 2015 (Gnanasegaran, 2018). Singapore is apprehensive about the potential for Timor-Leste to impose a financial and economic strain on the ASEAN regional organization. In addition, Singapore also expressed concerns regarding the unpredictable economic and political situation in Timor-Leste. Singapore's rejection is grounded in the assessment that Timor-Leste's current economic and defense conditions do not meet the necessary criteria for joining ASEAN. Timor-Leste has successfully met the membership criteria outlined by the Coordinating Council and stated in the ASEAN Charter. Additionally, it has established itself as a country with a robust democratic system in Southeast Asia. Timor-Leste actively participates in regional and international forums and receives support from other ASEAN MEMBER STATE. However, there is concern that this could reduce the influence of political parties. The rejection of Timor-Leste's application for membership in ASEAN by Singapore resulted in no further action being taken on the matter. The Philippines, in the Chairman's Statement of the 31st ASEAN Summit, diplomatically mentioned that Timor-Leste's application is currently being reviewed by senior officials. It also emphasized ASEAN's commitment to helping Timor-Leste develop its capabilities. The Chairman's Statement, seen as a collective statement by ASEAN leaders regarding the progress of Timor-Leste's application, expressed the following:

“Ongoing and ASEAN members argue the ASEAN Sectoral Bodies and Organs to continue exploring relevant capacity-building activities for Timor-Leste’s participation, in accordance with the elements and procedures outlined by the ASEAN Member State.” (ASEAN, 2017)

This ASEAN Chair's statement reveals that ASEAN has persistent concerns and lacks confidence in Timor-Leste's capacity to engage in and execute the various components of the ASEAN Community, including the ASEAN Political-Security Community (APSC), the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC), the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC), and other membership responsibilities. Singapore, in its role as the 2018 ASEAN Chair, deliberately removed these references from the Chairman's Statement of the 32nd and 33rd ASEAN Summit (ASEAN, 2018). The lack of ongoing deliberations over new memberships within ASEAN suggests that Singapore is once again declining to address Timor-Leste's application.

Furthermore, there was some movement in Timor-Leste's membership application process when the Chairman's Statement of the 34th ASEAN Summit on June 23, 2019, discussed Timor-Leste's excellent progress in the accession process and announced that ASEAN will send a fact-finding mission to the country. However, no other details are available regarding their progress, status, when they will arrive, and how they will conduct their activities in Timor-Leste. In September 2019, ASEAN sent a Political-Security Community (APSC) delegation to Timor-Leste to evaluate the country's readiness for the APSC Pillars. The delegation engaged with important government

officials to assess Timor-Leste's commitment and ability to support, coordinate, host, and chair APSC conferences and meetings.

In the year 2022, Indonesia, which is serving as the chair of ASEAN, is definitely in complete agreement with Timor-Leste's good intentions. Indonesia has consistently voiced its endorsement for Timor-Leste's accession to ASEAN, persuading other member states that Timor-Leste is deserving of membership and can make valuable contributions to the organization. Furthermore, Timor-Leste is encompassed within the geographical boundaries of the Southeast Asian area. Nevertheless, the acceptance of membership is contingent upon the consent of all ASEAN members, hence precluding Indonesia from unilaterally imposing its stance on the membership admission of Timor-Leste (Madrim, 2022). The consideration of Timor-Leste's membership was carried out in various mechanisms, such as sending a Fact-Finding Mission (FFM) to assess Timor-Leste's readiness, Timor-Leste's participation in ASEAN meetings that were non-sensitive and non-decision making. The previous Fact-Finding Mission indicated that there should be enough ASEAN to delay the decision to make Timor-Leste a member. In 2022 also the FFM conducted from three pillars will be completed, so the application process should be sped up. After the Joint Communique of the 55th ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Meeting on August 5, 2022, then it goes to the decision at the Leaders' level (ASEAN Summit) in November 2022. At the 40th and 41st ASEAN Summit and Related Summits in November 2022 in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, ASEAN Leaders accepted Timor-Leste as the 11th ASEAN member state in principle. The Leaders also mandated the ASEAN Coordinating Council Working Group on Timor-Leste's (ACCWG-TL) to develop an objective criteria-based Roadmap for Timor-Leste's full membership (ASEAN, n.d.).

Under the leadership of Indonesia, the Roadmap for Timor-Leste's Full Membership in ASEAN was successfully drafted and finally adopted at the 42nd ASEAN Summit on May 11, 2023, in Labuan Bajo, Indonesia. The Roadmap is intended to set out a package of criteria and milestones that Timor-Leste needs to achieve based on the results of Fact-Finding Missions across the three ASEAN Community pillars (Political-Security, Economic, and Socio-Cultural).

According to Cardoso (2024), the criteria and milestones outlined in the Roadmap for Timor-Leste's Full Membership in ASEAN is obligated to achieve include: Demonstrate the ability and readiness to implement and abide by the ASEAN Charter and carry out the obligations of ASEAN membership as well as institutional capacity to implement and abide by the ASEAN Community Vision, the ASEAN Community Blueprints and its attendant documents. Be able to implement and abide by all ASEAN treaties, conventions, agreements, and instruments under the three ASEAN Community pillars. Establish a dedicated diplomatic mission to ASEAN in Jakarta. Designate national implementing agencies, focal points and representatives for ASEAN sectoral meetings and working groups including ensure sufficient English-speaking personnel in all relevant line ministries and agencies. Establish bilateral agreements on the mutual recognition of official and diplomatic passports with the ASEAN member states and

agreements in accordance with the ASEAN Framework Agreement on Visa Exemption. Prepare a financial scheme to meet all financial obligations of ASEAN membership. Ensure required physical infrastructure and logistic readiness to host ASEAN meetings and accommodate delegates within a rotating chairmanship.

The roadmap also includes a requirement for semi-annual monitoring and evaluation by the ASEAN Secretariat on the progress of implementation in achieving the above milestones. Accordingly, at the 43rd ASEAN Summit in Jakarta in September 2023, Indonesian President Joko Widodo called on ASEAN member states and external partners to assist Timor-Leste in meeting the criteria outlined in the Roadmap.

- **Timor-Leste's Challenges Towards Full ASEAN Membership**

On its journey towards full membership in ASEAN, the Timor-Leste government faces several challenges. The author has identified 4 main challenges Timor-Leste faces in obtaining membership status in ASEAN. Apart from internal challenges, Timor-Leste also faces external challenges because ASEAN adheres to the ASEAN Way system, where all ASEAN MEMBER STATE must approve all decisions. One of the challenges for Timor-Leste to join ASEAN is the context of decisions that must be reached by the ten ASEAN member countries regarding its recognition and acceptance. Apart from that, Timor-Leste also had to face a fact-finding mission organized by ASEAN as a condition for assessing capabilities before being accepted as a member.

- **External Challenges**

To understand the uniqueness of this case, the author can compare Timor-Leste's membership process with other ASEAN countries. In the process, Timor-Leste experienced many obstacles and challenges.

- 1) **Consensus**

The use of consensus as a condition for accepting new ASEAN members is regulated in Article 6, paragraph 3 of the ASEAN Charter, which reads, "Admission shall be decided by consensus by the ASEAN Summit, upon the recommendation of the ASEAN Coordinating Council," (ASEAN Charter, n.d.). Thus, this thesis indicates that the acceptance of new members must be decided by consensus, meaning that all ASEAN member countries must agree to the membership application submitted by Timor-Leste. Only eight out of ten member countries have approved Timor-Leste's membership. The eight countries are Indonesia, Thailand, Malaysia, the Philippines, Vietnam, Myanmar, Brunei Darussalam and Cambodia. In contrast, the two countries that have not agreed to Timor-Leste's membership are Singapore and Laos. The main reason for the reluctance of these two countries is economic instability. Singapore and Laos are concerned that Timor-Leste will not be able to fulfill its obligations after being accepted as a member of ASEAN (Pratomo, 2009). Singapore considers Timor-Leste's membership to slow progress on ASEAN integration for two reasons: first, it will increase economic disparities so that the economic rationale for

moving forward with integration will be reduced, and second, it will give veto power in all decisions to other members.

These are the main reasons for ASEAN delaying the acceptance of Timor-Leste as a member and having to wait up to 10 years for a consensus decision regarding full membership in ASEAN. Starting from 2011 and only being decided in 2022. This is because, within those ten years, ASEAN needs to build a complete consensus among ASEAN member countries regarding Timor-Leste's membership. This is because several countries believe that if Timor-Leste joins ASEAN, the ASEAN capacity-building process that has been going on for decades will be disrupted. However, most ASEAN MEMBER STATE believe that, geographically, Timor-Leste is indeed in the Southeast Asia region. Therefore, ASEAN must ensure that Timor-Leste is stable in order to maintain regional integrity and stability. Indonesia, especially, has expressed its support for Timor-Leste's membership in ASEAN. In the future, whatever happens in Timor-Leste will also impact Indonesia, which borders directly on the mainland of Timor-Leste, and historically, Timor-Leste is part of Indonesia (Amirullah, 2021). Therefore, an independent study under the mandate of the ACCWG regarding Timor-Leste's Membership Application was carried out because there is ASEAN MEMBER STATE that need to be convinced that Timor-Leste is capable and willing to carry out membership obligations, which include regional economic integration.

2) Fact-Finding Mission

The Fact-Finding Mission (FFM) on Timor-Leste's membership in ASEAN is an important milestone in the country's accession process. This mission aims to assess Timor-Leste's readiness to join ASEAN and to identify the steps necessary for the country to become a full member (New Straits Times, 2022). This mission is part of ASEAN's efforts to evaluate Timor-Leste's commitment to the organization's principles and to ensure that the country meets the criteria necessary for membership. This fact-finding mission is carried out by three pillars: the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC), the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC), and the ASEAN Political-Security Community (APSC). This fact-finding mission enabled Timor-Leste to direct its attention to developing the economy, infrastructure, and human resources within the country.

This mission is an important milestone in Timor-Leste's efforts to join ASEAN. The country's commitment to ASEAN was reaffirmed during the mission, and Timor-Leste's readiness to become a member of ASEAN was reaffirmed. It is hoped that the findings from this mission will provide input for ASEAN's decision regarding Timor-Leste's membership, which is considered an important step for Timor-Leste's integration into the ASEAN regional organization. Finally, the fact-finding mission was completed by the three pillars of ASEAN, namely the ASEAN Political-Security Community (APSC) on 3-6 September 2019 and the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC) on 6-8 July 2022 (ASEAN, 2022). This is why Timor-Leste can

only go one step further by holding Observer status even though the decision is not yet final. Although Timor-Leste can participate in ASEAN meetings as an Observer, the journey towards full membership still needs to be completed. However, membership will open up opportunities for Timor-Leste to accelerate its economic development and enhance its international credentials as a member of one of the most successful regional organizations in the world.

3) Internal Challenges

As mentioned in previous sections, Timor-Leste faces several internal challenges such as:

a. Economy

As outlined in Point 6 of the Roadmap for Timor-Leste's Full Membership in ASEAN, one that must be fulfilled is Preparing a financial scheme to fulfill all financial obligations for ASEAN membership. However, Timor-Leste has yet to be able to fulfill its Roadmap. Timor-Leste faces internal and external economic challenges. Timor-Leste relies on gas and oil to support the country's economy, which makes economic inflation unstable. Meanwhile, ASEAN member state are concerned that Timor-Leste might burden ASEAN economically. However, Timor-Leste is trying to show progress in agriculture, education, and tourism. Timor-Leste potential benefits for ASEAN still need to be determined, hampering its acceptance as a full member. Timor-Leste's potential benefits to ASEAN still need to be determined, which has hampered its acceptance as a full member. Some ASEAN countries, notably Singapore is concerned that Timor-Leste's admission to ASEAN could derail the implementation of the ASEAN Community, particularly the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) which aims to make the ASEAN region more stable, prosperous and competitive, allowing for the free flow of goods, services, investment, capital and labour. However, Timor-Leste continues to try to convince ASEAN that reports from international organizations (such as the UNDP, the Human Development Index, and the ADB) show that its economic level is adequate compared to other CLMV members. Whereas in 2019, Timor-Leste's GDP growth reached 23.4%, they had outperformed other CLMV members such as Cambodia (7.1%), Vietnam (7.4%), Myanmar (6.6%), and Lao PDR (5.5%).

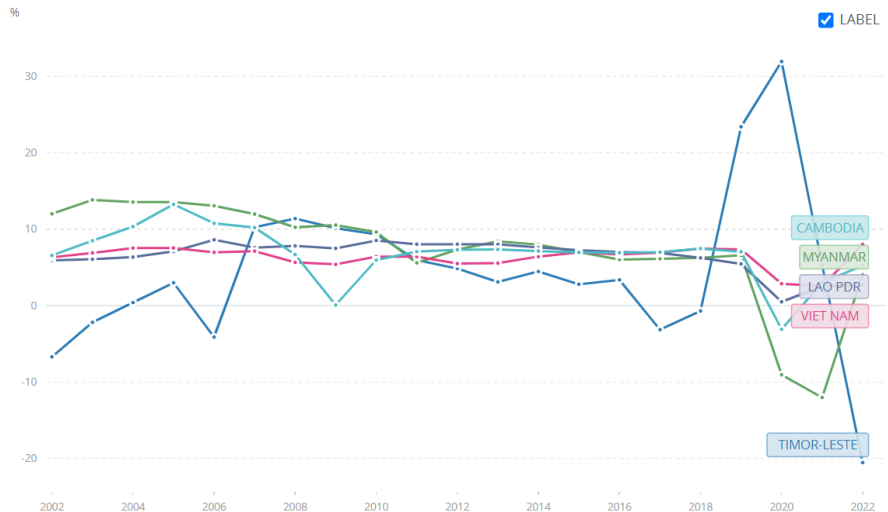


Table 3.1 GDP of CLMV Members and Timor-Leste.

Source: World Bank (2022)

From 2020 to 2021, the world faced the Covid-19 pandemic, which affected global trade. However, Timor-Leste's GDP experienced a higher increase than that of other CLMV members. Even though it experienced a drastic decline from 2020 to 2021, based on the results of a report from the Government of Timor-Leste (2021), an increase in public consumption of 6.2% was the main factor. Consumption of goods and services increased due to increased employment and operational spending related to Covid-19. Private consumption rose by 2.4%, while per capita growth remained maintained. Strong support from the Government through goods transfers and subsidies, as well as the recovery of household economic activities, also contributed to this increase. In addition, exports of goods and services increased by 26%, mainly due to coffee exports, which experienced an increase in production volume and stock during 2020. On the other hand, imports of goods and services decreased by 10.5%, while imports of services alone fell drastically by 40.7%. However, the consumption of imported goods increased by 13%, which is in line with the growth of private consumption and the expansion of international borders with Timor-Leste's central trading partner countries (Government of Timor-Leste, 2021).

Furthermore, GDP per capita growth is only one indicator of a nation's economic condition. Therefore, ASEAN assesses a country's economic performance based on the commercial value of all goods and services produced during the period under consideration. Factors considered include stable inflation, private consumption, government purchases, private inventories, construction costs paid, foreign trade balance, underemployment rate, and price of petroleum. According to the results of an interview with Adelaida De Jesus from the Timor-Leste government (2024), Timor-Leste has a very significant agricultural sector and can

meet the basic needs of the people of the country. However, this sector is not the main sector in the country's economic development. Timor-Leste still imports most of its food which could have been produced domestically while Timor-Leste's revenue comes largely from the oil and gas industry, leading to an agreement with Australia over the Greater Sunrise field, which will greatly benefit the country's economy. However, this adds to the notion that Timor-Leste is overly dependent on the oil and gas sector alone. Regardless of whether it will ultimately benefit the national economy, this may support ASEAN's contention that Timor-Leste's over-reliance will make it difficult for the country to diversify to other sources of income and develop other industrial sectors. (Windraskinasih & Afriansyah, 2018).

ASEAN Member States which has expressed reservations about Timor-Leste's membership, considers the country's economic level inadequate and unstable. This is due to Timor-Leste's internal inability to sustain sustainable economic development. The nation's economy is overly reliant on oil and gas extraction as a source of national income, which is not sufficiently diversified. Therefore, some ASEAN MEMBER STATE are still dissatisfied with the economic development situation in Timor-Leste. In 2022, ASEAN recognized Timor-Leste "in principle" and granted it Observer status. This provides an opportunity for Timor-Leste to participate in ASEAN meetings and understand ASEAN's structure, decision-making process, and internal rules. Nonetheless, there are still doubts about the benefits of Timor-Leste's membership.

b. Human Resource Issue

Timor-Leste, which has only been established as a country for 22 years, faces challenges in activities with international status. Many people work as employees in companies and civil servants in Timor-Leste (The World Bank, 2005). However, their expertise level differs from that of employees in other countries, especially ASEAN member countries. In other words, the competition for human resources in Timor-Leste remains relatively low in comparison with other countries. Timor-Leste must ensure an adequate supply of quality human resources, an essential factor in the economy's improvement and development. Many interconnected factors influence Timor-Leste's human resources to be less capable than other countries, such as:

- (1) *the quality of education in Timor-Leste is among the lowest in the region, with low school dropout, truancy, and graduation rates. According to Guteriano Neves, in Timor-Leste, educational facilities (such as libraries and laboratories) are inadequate, and most students are away from school at certain times. In addition, Timor-Leste is dominated by rural and mountainous areas, those areas need assistance to provide quality education as a result of the limited educational infrastructure especially those in agricultural areas. These assistances may include teaching staff, and public awareness about*

education's role (Neves, 2017). Some people think that education is not essential for jobs related to agriculture. As a result, this substandard level of education hinders Timor-Leste's ability to develop quality human resources to compete professionally in the non-agricultural sector.

- (2) Excessive reliance on oil and gas resources is detrimental to the level of education in Timor-Leste, a country rich in natural resources and a developing economy. This has resulted in a tendency to neglect other important sectors, such as education, that could facilitate the development of a domestically educated workforce. As a result, it restricts the development of domestic education, especially the desire for quality and competency testing of teachers and students. This issue has a negative impact on the ability of the people who never rise from the downturn and lag in science and information technology, let alone compete internationally and regionally as a sovereign country (Windraskinasih & Afriansyah, 2018).
- (3) The arrival of foreign workers affects human resource development in Timor-Leste. Although foreign workers can help develop Timor-Leste's human capital by providing technical assistance in certain development sectors, over-reliance on the use of foreign workers can lead to the perception that the domestic workforce is less qualified in terms of skills, qualifications and discipline than foreign workers. In reality, many people in their country are not employed.

c. Institution

Timor-Leste's institutional capacity is considered inadequate as a result of cronyism and nepotism at several levels, including in the public and private sectors. In other words, Timor-Leste has been using "political dynasties" in its government, indirectly affecting the decision-making process. The politicization of government civil servants further hinders the development of institutional capacity as recruitment, placement, promotion, and compensation in some institutions are often determined by an individual's loyalty and affiliation to a particular political party. (The World Bank, 2005).

According to Risha Jilian Chaniago as Diplomat Functional Officer in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia (2023), Suppose ASEAN considers Timor-Leste's institutional capacity insufficient to meet the pro-ASEAN Member State and requirements of ASEAN membership. In that case, these include implementing AEC agreements and participating in ASEAN meetings and summits, for which a sufficient number of trained and available human resources are required. The lack of educated human resources will make it difficult for Timor-Leste to develop its institutional capacity to meet ASEAN obligations and demands.

Another challenge is facilitating economic growth through collaboration with intergovernmental organizations. Timor-Leste has become part of the UN

Millennium Development Goals, which are eight international development goals set for 2015 following the UN Millennium Summit in 2000 and the adoption of the UN Millennium Declaration. After these goals are finished, they will be followed by the Post SDG-15, also known as the 'Global Goals'. These goals were designed to improve and strengthen Timor-Leste's institutional capacity, ensuring accountability, transparency, and effectiveness (Planipolis, 2019). However, the country faces challenges to achieving its goals, especially concerning institutional capacity. The lack of human resources, derived from the lack of formal education among the population, challenges institutional capacity development. In addition, the lack of individuals with government experience and the necessary professional and business skills also hinders the country's progress.

d. Infrastructure

The absence of an adequate legal framework for economic and trade activities represents a significant obstacle for Timor-Leste, given the necessity of aligning its legal and regulatory framework with those of ASEAN, particularly the sectoral agreements and the AEC Blueprint 2025. The framework that Timor-Leste must align are developed under the Master Plan on ASEAN Connectivity (MPAC) 2025. With the aim to improve infrastructure planning, implementation, and operations in ASEAN. These agreements represent essential requirements and obligations that must be accepted in ASEAN (ASEAN, 2019). Timor-Leste has demonstrated its strong support for trade facilitation through the establishment of the National Single Window and the formation of trade facilitation committees, as well as the elimination of tariff and non-tariff barriers. Despite the absence of comprehensive standards, technical regulations, and conformity regulations in Timor-Leste, the country has aligned its framework with ATIGA. Furthermore, As mentioned in Roadmap point 7, Timor-Leste must develop adequate infrastructure, especially ports, roads, and airports to support its integration into the ASEAN Community (Harmadi, 2012)/

Roads: Building and repairing roads are among the main priorities in Timor-Leste's infrastructure development agenda. While there has been significant progress, many avenues still require improvement and expansion. Poor road conditions have a detrimental impact on connectivity between regions in the country (Hasan, 2024). Damaged or narrow roads can hinder population mobility and the distribution of goods. With so many roads in disrepair, road infrastructure is a significant concern. Adequate roads are essential for the country's economic progress and integration with ASEAN.

Ports: Timor-Leste's ports are hampered by some problems, the most significant of which is a lack of facilities and available capacity. The lack of modern and efficient ports has a detrimental impact on maritime trade and transportation, hindering access to regional and global markets (Putra & Djalante, 2016). Apart from that, port limitations also affect the import and export of goods and access

to remote islands (Hasan, 2024). To increase the country's participation in global trade, it is necessary to increase capacity and adequate port facilities in Timor-Leste. Progress in port infrastructure is crucial to support economic expansion and the country's integration with ASEAN. Airport: Timor-Leste only has one international airport, namely Presidente Nicolau Lobato International Airport in Dili. This airport serves around 150,000 people annually and has daily flights to Darwin, Denpasar, and Singapore (Annisa et al., 2017). However, the overall condition of the airport is still inadequate and requires significant improvement and expansion to accommodate the ever-increasing passenger flow, as well as facilities and infrastructure to improve the tourism sector. The Timor-Leste government focuses on improving infrastructure to accommodate expansion and preparation for ASEAN membership, so an airport with adequate international standards is needed (Anam, 2023).

After improving road, port, and airport infrastructure, Timor-Leste can improve connectivity between regions, support economic growth, and facilitate transportation access for the community. Timor-Leste's membership in ASEAN is also expected to open up opportunities for cooperation and support from neighboring countries to strengthen infrastructure.

- **Timor-Leste's Effort Towards Full ASEAN Membership**

- i. **External Effort (Consensus and Fact-Finding Mission)**

After completing the external challenges of reaching a consensus and conducting a fact-finding mission, the subsequent external efforts concentrate on Timor-Leste's ability to adapt to the ASEAN organization to utilize its strategic position optimally. In this context, Timor-Leste must enhance its capacity to adapt to global shifts and actively engage in international collaboration.

In this case, Timor-Leste must enhance its capacity to adapt to global changes and actively engage in international cooperation. Timor-Leste should increase its cooperation with other ASEAN countries and intergovernmental organizations to improve adaptability. This can be achieved by enhancing collaboration in infrastructure projects, developing human resources, and strengthening the capacity to engage in international cooperation. Therefore, Timor-Leste can improve its capacity to adapt to global changes and enhance its ability to engage actively in international cooperation.

- ii. **Internal Effort**

To ensure the continued integrity of its ASEAN membership, the government of Timor-Leste must implement several strategic measures within the country, encompassing economic, human resources, institutional, and infrastructure policies. These steps must be taken to achieve political consolidation and build national integrity so that the country can immediately become a permanent member of ASEAN. The Timor-Leste government can make these internal efforts to support

Timor-Leste's interests on the international stage and put Timor-Leste in a more beneficial position.

- *Economy*

- i. *Integration of ASEAN Regional Trade Cooperation***

The internal obstacles facing Timor-Leste in joining ASEAN fully require cooperative solutions that focus on economic growth. Increasing integration with ASEAN regional trade cooperation will help realize this goal. Increase involvement in ASEAN forums, such as the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) and the ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA) (Soares, 2015). Timor-Leste can reduce trade obstacles, open markets, and unify laws. Participating in ASEAN forums discussing trade issues will help Timor-Leste improve bilateral relations and increase trade prospects in regional economic cooperation. Timor-Leste can also collaborate with other ASEAN countries to improve human resources, infrastructure, and ability to adapt to global change.

Timor-Leste must actively increase its ability to engage in ASEAN forums to maximize its involvement in regional commercial cooperation in ASEAN. Timor-Leste's delegation to ASEAN can be increased, and its cooperation with other ASEAN organizations can be strengthened. Timor-Leste must also improve its ability to adapt to global change, including increasing its participation in international cooperation and increasing its ability to develop technologically. After that, Timor-Leste will be better able to pursue full membership in ASEAN and strengthen its involvement in regional

- ii. *AFTA Optimization***

Timor-Leste must comprehend and optimally utilize the ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA). Requires an understanding of AFTA rules and regulations and adapting to changes. Timor-Leste can increase its capacity to face regional competition by investigating the potential of competitive export sectors. In addition, Timor-Leste should strengthen its collaboration with ASEAN countries to address global challenges, such as climate change and pandemics. To take advantage of AFTA, an in-depth understanding of the rules and regulations is required. Timor-Leste also needs to ensure that its products meet the quality standards and requirements of AFTA.

- iii. *Foreign Trade and Investment Partners***

Foreign investment and trade alliances must be actively pursued by Timor-Leste (Arisanto, 2020). Increasing the variety of trading partners will reduce a country's dependence on one country or region. Timor-Leste must also improve laws and provide incentives to foster a good investment

climate. Expanding the cooperation network with ASEAN countries can reduce the consequences of excessive dependence on one country. Of course, this can also be mitigated by diversifying trading partners. Therefore, Timor-Leste must create a strategy to build contacts with various economic partners who can significantly impact Timor-Leste to improve technology and market access through investment. Increasing the variety of trading partners will support Timor-Leste's economic stability. In addition, fostering a conducive investment climate and increasing investment cooperation with ASEAN countries will help Timor-Leste's market and technology prospects grow in the future.

Among Timor-Leste's various initiatives, this effort is very relevant and relates to the Theory of Liberalism, which emphasizes the importance of interdependence and cooperation. Judging from Timor-Leste's desire to join ASEAN, it can be concluded that Timor-Leste seeks the economic and political benefits of joining ASEAN. This effort strengthens the importance of liberalism in the region by reinforcing the eligibility criteria for Timor-Leste to be part of the ASEAN community.

- *Human Resource*

- i. ***The Intra-ASEAN Student Exchange Program***

The Intra-ASEAN Student Exchange Program provides a strategic opportunity for Timor-Leste. Timor-Leste can increase its knowledge base, expand its global perspective, and foster a deeper understanding of diverse cultures through facilitating student exchanges between ASEAN member countries. In addition, student exchanges have the potential to strengthen diplomatic relations and foster relationships with other students in the ASEAN region. This student exchange program can be an opportunity to increase Timor-Leste's proficiency in human resources, encouraging the advancement of technical and communication skills in English. In addition, this program can strengthen Timor-Leste's human resources ability to adapt to global changes and increase their potential to participate in international cooperation.

- ii. ***Training and Development of Workforce Quality and Standards***

Timor-Leste must improve the quality of its workforce to enable it to compete effectively in regional and global markets. Training and skills development are crucial in addressing economic and technological challenges. The government is responsible for ensuring the availability of training programs ASEAN Member State aligned with the demands of market jobs, including national and international competency standards. The development of the quality of the workforce will enhance Timor-Leste's competitiveness. It entails improving the abilities, knowledge, and work

ethic of employees. The government must collaborate with educational institutions and industry to develop training programs for ASEAN Member State that align with the job market demands. Standardization of workforce quality is also crucial for Timor-Leste to meet global requirements. Furthermore, in the future, when Timor-Leste becomes a full member of ASEAN and will serve as the host for ASEAN meetings, it will undoubtedly necessitate qualified human resources.

In addition, as a country with abundant natural resource potential, including petroleum, natural gas, and agricultural products, Timor-Leste needs to catch up in low-quality human resources. Regarding quality and quantity, adequate human resources should be essential to economic recovery and development, which also requires a skilled and trained workforce (Neves, 2017).

iii. Joint Science and Technology Research

Research collaboration with ASEAN countries and international partners can facilitate the advancement of science and technology in Timor-Leste. Joint research programs can address environmental concerns, alternative energy sources, disaster mitigation, and infectious disease control. The government must encourage collaboration between Timor-Leste researchers and ASEAN countries in addressing global issues. As organized by ITS DRPM (2023), Timor-Leste can participate in a joint research program to accelerate the country's scientific and technological development. Collaboration with ASEAN countries will enrich knowledge and expand the research network. The government must support and incentivize Timor-Leste researchers to participate in joint research programs, strengthening the country's research and innovation capacity.

• **Institution**

i. Timor-Leste Civil Servant Internship Program

Implementing employee exchange programs between state institutions presents internal and external obstacles. However, Timor-Leste Civil Servant Internship Program represents a strategic step for Timor-Leste, as it is required to complete several points in the Road Map released at the 42nd Summit in Labuan Bajo, Indonesia. One of the objectives in the roadmap is for Timor-Leste to become a full member of ASEAN. In order to achieve this goal, it is necessary to reinforce the country's human resources following the recommendations outlined in the Fact-Finding Mission report from the three pillars of the ASEAN Community. Consequently, Indonesia, which is currently serving as the chair of ASEAN in 2023, has pledged to fund an internship program for the Timor-Leste State Civil Servants from various Ministries and Institutions that are engaged in matters of cooperation within the three pillars of ASEAN: the

ASEAN Security Community (ASC), the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC), and the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC). The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia is collaborating with national Ministries and Institutions to provide experience, knowledge, and a deeper understanding of the tasks and functions of ASEAN as well as how meetings at the ASEAN level are run to representatives of Timor-Leste intern participants (Kementerian Luar Negeri RI, 2023).

The Timor-Leste civil servant's internship program represents one of the initiatives designed to prepare Timor-Leste for eventual full membership in ASEAN, which currently holds observer status. This program aims to reinforce the relationship between Timor-Leste and Indonesia and to facilitate the preparation of Timor-Leste's human resources through programs designed to enhance the capacity of civil servants from various ministries and institutions. These programs are intended to equip the participants with the skills and knowledge required to implement activities, programs, and meetings organized by ASEAN at the national, regional, and international levels. The participants will gain insights from sectoral bodies under the ASEAN Community Pillar, which can later be applied in Timor-Leste. The internship program facilitates the development of Timor-Leste's capacity to address the challenges and opportunities inherent in the ASEAN region.

The program aims to enhance the understanding of ASEAN mechanisms and working procedures among Timor-Leste's civil servants. During the internship, participants gain insight into ASEAN's mechanisms, work procedures, decision-making processes, and organizational structure. Additionally, they understand Indonesia's climactic role within ASEAN and have experience coordinating across ministries and institutions at the national level (Michaella, 2023). The internship includes the provision of human resources capacity training for Timor-Leste. This internship program offers an opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of the structure, goals, and cooperation within ASEAN, which will assist in fulfilling the obligations and requirements of a full member of ASEAN. Gain insight into the regulations and policies of ASEAN in various fields, including trade, economics, security, and other forms of regional cooperation. The objective is to develop the requisite diplomatic and negotiation skills to interact with ASEAN members, including understanding the requirements, procedures, and legal implications of ASEAN membership. Furthermore, the program offers interns the opportunity to improve their English language proficiency and better understand the cultural and social norms in the ASEAN region. Furthermore, the internship program in Indonesia offers insight into ASEAN's cultural diversity and policies, which are of significant

importance for Timor-Leste to integrate itself effectively into the structure and processes of ASEAN's working mechanisms as a full member in the future.

ii. Institutional Development Regional Standards and Training for State Employees

Timor-Leste must strengthen its state institutions to comply with ASEAN regional standards. Timor-Leste can address the conflicts of cronyism, nepotism, and corruption that give rise to these problems with three efforts. First, increased transparency and accountability. This can be done through the use of information technology that allows open access to information on public employment sector hiring, termination of employment contracts, and reduction or withdrawal of pensions of government officials. Second, streamlining the network of primordial bureaucratic processes among policy makers, both those in the executive, legislative and judicial institutions, so that the work procedures and placement of officials in certain positions or positions can really be carried out in an accountable and professional manner and carried out with consideration of professionalism and high moral integrity. Third, apply maximum criminal sanctions strictly, fairly and consequently without any discrimination for the perpetrators of nepotism in the sense that the principles of the rule of law must really be applied strictly and consequently, especially the principle of equality before the law. At the same time, society can adhere to the principles of democracy, human rights and the rule of law. Transparency, public participation, and protection for whistleblowers of corruption or nepotism must be an integral part of efforts to eradicate cronyism, nepotism, and corruption. Furthermore, Timor-Leste must prioritize increasing the capacity and competence of state employees (ASEAN, 2022). First, Timor-Leste must address the needs and obligations required to become a full member of ASEAN. Secondly, state institutions must adopt the most effective practices and align themselves with the latest developments in public administration. Training of state employees will enhance their managerial, technical, and socio-cultural abilities, equipping them to address challenges at the regional level. The development of state institutions must prioritize ASEAN regional standards. Timor-Leste must assess and enhance the capacity of state institutions to comply with ASEAN requirements. Training of state employees will improve the competency and quality of public services.

iii. Improving The Institutional Capacity of The State

Improving the state's ability to function effectively is intimately related to advancing the nation's human resources. These two aspects must be

developed together, as both are complex and require sustained dedication for long periods. Nevertheless, Timor-Leste could pursue a more focused approach, such as seeking external support by engaging with foreign consultants and specialists (already done in some government ministries and agencies). These advisors can help develop policies, provide technical guidance, coordinate operational functions, offer training, and share information. Furthermore, Timor-Leste could seek to increase its cooperation with foreign organizations. In this way, Timor-Leste's institutional capacity to fulfill its duties as an ASEAN member will significantly improve (Nixon, 2011).

- **Infrastructure**

- i. *Infrastructure Development for Foreign Access*

Timor-Leste should prioritize improving its infrastructure to facilitate connectivity with ASEAN countries and foreign partners. The expansion and improvement of ports and airports is one area that could benefit from further development. Expanding and modernizing Timor-Leste's ports can facilitate better sea links, encouraging investment, trade, and movement between countries. Similarly, the airport should be upgraded to accommodate more international flights. Investments in this infrastructure will create opportunities for economic expansion, facilitate business development, and promote tourism. In addition, it is critical for Timor-Leste to ensure that this infrastructure meets global standards and functions optimally. Timor-Leste needs to collaborate with ASEAN countries in infrastructure management and development.

In addition, Timor-Leste must harmonize its legal and regulatory framework with AEC requirements. Timor-Leste is positioned to develop a complete and appropriate framework for the economic activities outlined in Blueprint 2025. It should include creating a complete structure to facilitate the growth of critical facilities and the advancement of the non-government business sector. In addition, it is important to establish an information-sharing system between ASEAN members, particularly among the AEC Councils, which promotes the equitable and sustainable economic growth of ASEAN member economies and play an important role in implementing the Blueprint.

- **Foreign Investors in ASEAN**

Timor-Leste should actively engage foreign investors to invest in the country. Attractive facilities and incentives will open up opportunities for investors to participate in infrastructure development. The government needs to promote the investment potential in Timor-Leste through ASEAN business forums and bilateral cooperation. The attraction of foreign investors will allow Timor-Leste to accelerate infrastructure

development and create jobs. Timor-Leste can use regional cooperation programs such as the ASEAN Infrastructure Fund to support infrastructure projects. Investment-friendly policies should support the seeking of foreign investors. Timor-Leste must offer incentives, legal certainty, and facilities that facilitate investment. In addition, cooperation with ASEAN countries in terms of investment will expand the network and accelerate infrastructure development. Timor-Leste can utilize the ASEAN platform to promote investment potential.

- **Infrastructure Development Cooperation**

Timor-Leste should collaborate with ASEAN countries in infrastructure development. This collaboration should involve the exchange of knowledge, technology, and experience. Timor-Leste can use regional cooperation programs such as the ASEAN Infrastructure Fund to support infrastructure projects. In addition, collaboration with the private sector and international financial institutions is also essential to finance sustainable infrastructure development. Collaboration with ASEAN countries will enrich Timor-Leste's knowledge and experience in infrastructure development. The exchange of technology and best practices will accelerate development. In addition, Timor-Leste should build partnerships with the private sector and international financial institutions.

Conclusion

According to the research results discussed previously, the author can define some conclusions that can provide answers to the research problems. Based on the results of the research analysis, the author concludes that Timor-Leste's journey toward full membership in ASEAN is characterized by persistent efforts and very complicated problems. At the time of writing this thesis, "in principle" observer status was approved on November 11, 2022, during the 40th and 41st ASEAN Summit in Phnom Penh, Cambodia. Although the journey towards full membership is ongoing and has one step forward, Timor-Leste's full membership in ASEAN still needs confirmation.

In 2005, Timor-Leste joined the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and, in 2007 signed the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia (TAC). Subsequently, it established diplomatic missions in all 10 AMS and opened the ASEAN national Secretariat in its capital, Dili, in 2009. The ASEAN Secretariat has also attended several ASEAN meetings and empowered capacity building. 2011 Timor-Leste's commitment to accessing ASEAN membership was put beyond doubt when it finally submitted its formal application on March 4, 2011. With the signing of the TAC (The Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia), East Timor grasped the basic principles and objectives of ASEAN. This means that Timor-Leste is committing itself not to interfere in the internal affairs of AMS. Although Timor-Leste has made great efforts to become a member of ASEAN, ASEAN will only approve its recognition after a while. Timor-Leste must meet other conditions to be officially accepted into the ASEAN family. Article 6 (3) mentions that its admission shall be decided by: "the consensus of the 10 ASEAN Members Country at the ASEAN Summit". However, ASEAN has spent up to ten years to reach a consensus decision

to accept Timor-Leste's membership due to the disagreements of ASEAN members, such as Singapore and Lao PDR, which refused to give their consent on the grounds that they still have doubts about Timor-Leste's internal conditions such as their competency and ability to fully commit their responsibilities, programs, and objectives for membership.

Singapore has three specific reasons. First, Singapore is concerned about Timor-Leste jeopardizing ASEAN's regional economic integration plans when granted membership. Second, Singapore argues that Timor-Leste has not complied with Article 6(2)(d) of the ASEAN Charter. Third, Singapore has also mentioned if Timor-Leste's economic development is still inadequate. Other obstacles include human resources, infrastructure, and institutions. This can widen the development gap and become an economic one for ASEAN.

As highlighted above, internal conditions are not the main obstacle in the accession process. However, there are external factors and issues that come from ASEAN itself. The main reason why Timor-Leste was only allowed to enter ASEAN in 2022 is because the Fact-Finding Mission conducted as a condition of ASEAN for Timor-Leste was only completed by the three pillars of ASEAN, namely the ASEAN Political-Security Community (APSC) on September 3-6, 2019 and the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC) on July 6-8, 2022 and the ASEAN Economic Community on 19-21 July 2022. Therefore, obstacles and challenges including internal and external, must be overcome to enable Timor-Leste to be accepted in ASEAN. The national human resource development towards national education, exercise, and the institutional development required would be beneficial to Timor-Leste's economic growth and help to diversify Timor-Leste's sources of income towards a country that is not only reliant on the oil and gas sector. This would equip Timor-Leste to have educated and trained human resources to quickly achieve ASEAN goals and programs.

Suggestion

The gap in economic levels seen in some ASEAN MEMBER STATE may still need to be minimized because this gap may remain after Timor-Leste's admission into ASEAN. However, there is no need to compare all ASEAN MEMBER STATE as long as every country has its own advantages and unique internal situation. Some ASEAN MEMBER STATE have experienced economic and developmental gaps within their domestic situations. The critical goal for Timor-Leste is to manage its economic development to be more stable and focus on minimizing the gap among the people domestically. Strategies described above are long-term solutions that would take a long time to develop. Accordingly, to implement these strategies, the Government of Timor-Leste must provide commitment and have a strong political willingness to implement the strategy. Timor-Leste's efforts in entering ASEAN membership are relevant to the Theory of Liberalism, which emphasizes the importance of interdependence and cooperation. Judging from Timor-Leste's desire to join ASEAN, it can be concluded that Timor-Leste seeks the economic and political benefits of joining ASEAN. This effort strengthens the importance of Liberalism in the region by reinforcing the eligibility criteria for Timor-Leste to be part of the ASEAN community. External factors ranging from ASEAN's secrecy approach to regional geopolitical influences are also discussed. ASEAN must take a view that is more positive towards what Timor-Leste has achieved in fulfilling ASEAN's requirements.

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