

Moon Jae-in Administration's New Southern Policy and Outcomes of the 2019 ROK –ASEAN Commemorative Summit

By Kijoo Kim

Research Fellow, KIDA



From November 25 to 27, the 2019 ROK-ASEAN Commemorative Summit and the 1st ROK-Mekong Summit were successfully held in Busan, Korea's second largest city and the country's primary trading port. The 2019 ROK-ASEAN Commemorative Summit was the third commemorative summit following the 2009 summit held in Jeju and the 2014 summit held in Busan. The event commemorated the 30th anniversary of the establishment of the ROK-ASEAN relations and sought to evaluate achievements of the past 30 years so as to provide a vision for the next 30 years. The ROK-ASEAN Commemorative Summit was intended to pave ways for future cooperation with the ASEAN, a key partner of Moon administration's New Southern Policy, which aims at creating "people-centered community of peace and prosperity." In line with this approach, the slogan of the summit was selected as "Partnership for Peace, Prosperity for People."

On the occasion of the 2019 ROK-ASEAN Commemorative Summit and the ROK-Mekong Summit, around 30 additional events were held before or during high-level meetings, covering various aspects such as economics, culture, public administration and national defense. Examples of such events include: ROK-ASEAN CEO Summit, ROK-ASEAN Business & Startup Expo, ROK-ASEAN Culture Innovation Summit, ASEAN Pop Music Concert, ROK-ASEAN Ministerial Roundtable and Exhibition on Public Service Innovation, Meeting of the

ASEAN-ROK Ministers Responsible for Culture and Arts (AMCA Plus ROK), ROK-ASEAN Public Service Ministerial Meeting,, ROK-ASEAN Heads of Intellectual Property Offices Meeting, ROK-ASEAN Infrastructure Ministers' Meeting, ROK-ASEAN Defense Vice Ministerial-level Talks, and Special Exhibition on ROK-Mekong Biodiversity Cooperation.

Crucially, the ROK-ASEAN Commemorative Summit and the ROK-Mekong Summit did not conclude as fragmentary international events. Through this summit, the ROK and ASEAN adopted the “ROK-ASEAN Joint Vision Statement for Peace, Prosperity and Partnership,” which presents a blueprint for future cooperation on various fields, and the “Co-Chairs' Statement of the 2019 ROK-ASEAN Commemorative Summit,” which delineates the outcomes of the summit discussions, the current status of cooperation by sector, and planned projects. In addition, the two adopted the “Han-Mekong River Declaration for Establishing Partnership for People, Prosperity and Peace” based on the ROK-Mekong Summit discussions, which proposes a direction towards strengthening future cooperation between the ROK and Mekong River basin countries.

As seen in the *ROK-ASEAN Joint Vision Statement for Peace, Prosperity and Partnership*, the two sides sought to build a bridge between Moon administration's New Southern Policy, which aims to deepen the ROK-ASEAN strategic partnership based on three pillars of people, mutual prosperity, and peace and the ASEAN community vision of the “ASEAN 2025: Forging Ahead Together” that steadfastly maintaining ASEAN centrality. To this end, the two sides agreed to work together to establish a peaceful East Asia, recognizing that peace and stability in Northeast Asia are intimately linked to peace and stability in Southeast Asia. Specifically, the two sides agreed to strengthen security cooperation on both traditional and non-traditional security issues which include transnational crimes, terrorism, and violent extremism. Furthermore, to achieve complete denuclearization and establishment of permanent peace on the Korean Peninsula, the two sides agreed to promote discussions and cooperation on the matter through ASEAN-led regional consultative bodies. In addition, in order to promote regional development and prosperity, the two agreed to support free trade and promote economic partnerships through increased trade and investments between the ROK and ASEAN. To promote regional connectivity, the ROK and ASEAN will strengthen collaboration on human

exchanges and sustainable infrastructure. As for tackling climate change, the two sides will accelerate environmental cooperation and seek a joint response. The two sides will also pursue boosting interregional human, social and cultural exchanges and ties. As a result, these cooperative efforts are expected to contribute to building a people-centered ROK-ASEAN community.

The Co-Chairs' Statement of the 2019 ROK-ASEAN Commemorative Summit provides a highly positive evaluation regarding the two sides' cooperation results in various fields since establishment of their dialogue partnership in 1989. The statement also aims to further expand cooperation in areas such as security, trade, high-tech industries, and human exchanges. In the field of political and security cooperation, the two sides agreed to strengthen cooperation on transnational crimes, cyber security, maritime security, natural disasters response, food and energy security, and nuclear safety. For economic cooperation, the two sides will make sufficient use of the existing ASEAN-ROK Free Trade Agreement (FTA) to promote further involvement from the private sector, increase trade, and upgrade relevant regulations to ultimately achieve the 2020 target of USD 200 billion in ROK-ASEAN trade volume. In the field of social and cultural cooperation, the ROK announced plans to increase participation in human exchanges between the ROK and ASEAN to 15 million total personnel by 2020. To this end, the nation has decided to reform its visa system for ASEAN member countries. Agreements were also made on: developing ASEAN Technology Vocational Education and Training (TVET) programs, boosting ROK-ASEAN scholarship programs, expanding sports-related cooperation projects and joint sporting events, strengthening health care technology sharing and medical manpower capacity, promoting cooperation in medical systems, and enhancing ASEAN's capacity in forestry. In particular, the two sides acknowledged the significance of the ROK's doubled contributions to the 2019 ROK-ASEAN Cooperation Fund (AKCF) as part of the New Southern Policy. Accordingly, the ROK announced plans to double its grant-type aid to ASEAN member states by 2022 under its New Southern Official Development Assistance (ODA) strategy.

The Mekong-Han River Declaration for Establishing Partnership for People, Prosperity and Peace gave a positive assessment of the progress made between the ROK and Mekong River basin countries of Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam through their

launching of the ROK-Mekong cooperation mechanism and the subsequent “ROK-Mekong Action Plan (2017-2020).” The statement also provided guidelines for future ROK-Mekong cooperation. Firstly, for its pillar of “People for Inclusive Society,” the two sides designated 2021 as the “ROK-Mekong Exchange Year” to commemorate the 10th anniversary of initial ROK-Mekong cooperation and to provide a platform to promote cooperation in culture and tourism among the participating countries. For its “Prosperity by Sharing Experience” pillar, the two sides agreed to work together to realize economic development and prosperity in the Mekong region, similar to the Miracle of the Han River through which the ROK experienced rapid economic development. To accomplish this goal, the two decided to strengthen cooperation between various national institutions, in agricultural and rural development, in Mekong-area infrastructure improvement, and in information and communication technology utilization projects, such as smart city projects. For “Peace for Sustainable Development,” the two sides agreed to cooperate in water resource management, biodiversity, forest management and other Mekong area environmental conservation efforts. The two also agreed to establish the ROK-Mekong Biodiversity Center and the ROK-Mekong Water Resources Joint Research Center, support the clearance of explosive remnants of war and assist their victims, and welcome the Korea-Mekong Future Peace Community Program. Moreover, the ROK and ASEAN agreed to establish a sustainable consultation mechanism by holding the ROK-Mekong Summit every year along with other ASEAN-related summits and annually holding the ROK-Mekong Foreign Ministers' Meeting and the Senior Officials' Meeting.

By hosting the 2019 ROK-ASEAN Commemorative Summit and the 1st ROK-Mekong Summit, the Moon Jae-in administration has laid out a foundation to promote and expand practical cooperation between the two regions through expanding consultative bodies by sector, newly establishing partnership institutions, and increasing funds and shared resources. Particularly for the ROK-Mekong Summit, the elevation of ROK-Mekong cooperation from its minister-level talks in 2011 to its first summit status provided an opportunity for the ROK to firmly establish future cooperation commitments with fast-growing Mekong River basin countries. This outcome can be evaluated as an upgrade of the ROK-ASEAN ties and the establishment of a strong partnership to assist in the active implementation of the Moon administration's key national policy, New Southern Policy. The ROK government has also succeeded in gaining the

firm support from ASEAN for the administration's policy of Denuclearization-Peace Process on the Korean Peninsula. ASEAN has expressed its support for the important and constructive role the ROK government plays in the process of peacefully achieving complete denuclearization and permanent peace on the Korean Peninsula. ASEAN has also expressed its desire to explore ways it can contribute towards this process.

The largest international conference held since the inauguration of the Moon administration has successfully concluded. As the strategic competition between the U.S. and China intensifies, ASEAN's strategic importance continues to grow. Stemming from the outcomes of the 2019 ROK-ASEAN Commemorative Summit and the 1st ROK-Mekong Summit, the Moon administration should establish and actively implement its follow-up plans of the "New Southern Policy 2.0" to ensure continuity of the policy. These efforts will positively reinforce the ROK's status as a bridge linking maritime and continental powers and ultimately contribute to the country's creation of sustainable peace and prosperity on the Korean Peninsula and in East Asia.