The International Political Economy of Green Transition: Critical Minerals, Market Access, and the Search for Sovereignty in ASEAN countries

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Introduction

The battle to secure global supply chains for digital and energy transitions is posing a strong challenge to global production networks. A recent OECD report (2022)[1] noted that the mineral reserves owned by the G7 countries are insufficient to meet their domestic industrial demand, so expansion of G7 trade and investment to countries rich in mineral reserves is needed. The International Energy Agency (IEA) report (2021)[2] accordingly recognized that the clean energy transition is already pushing new energy trading patterns and geopolitical considerations. This is because demand for mineral raw materials to produce green technology is highly concentrated in certain geographic regions, while their extraction is mainly focused on a few large producing countries.

Resource concentration, particularly the control of critical raw materials by China, has prompted G7 countries to diversify their supply chains, searching for alternative supplies of raw materials outside of China. Thus, the G7 trade ministers agreed at a meeting in Germany in 2022 to intensify multilateral, regional and bilateral trade cooperation to address export restrictions and trade barriers at the international level.[3] Notably, the restructuring of their global supply chain security agenda regarding critical raw materials is one of the core strategies to become less dependent on China. This will eventually change the standard setting for global trade rules, affecting other countries in the process, especially in Southeast Asia. International trade cooperation is increasingly directed at regional and bilateral cooperation based on the power of like-minded partners. As we argue in this paper, these agreements are weaponizing trade as a strategy to control the supply of critical raw materials. With the weaponization of trade we refer to using trade as a tool of foreign policy that goes beyond an economic agenda and entails geopolitical dimensions.[4]

As an effect of these weaponized trade patterns, the ASEAN region has become a strategic arena in pushing for global supply chain restructuring beyond China, both for geo-economic and geo-political debates, given that Southeast Asian countries have strong economic ties with China. Since 2021, several countries have promoted the Indo-Pacific strategy in the ASEAN region which in parallel has also encouraged strengthening regional trade cooperation, especially regarding the supply chain resilience agenda. Defending national interests in the midst of global political tensions has not been easy for countries in Southeast Asia. What are the consequences and options for these countries in the face of this new trade pattern?

This paper contributes to the current debate on geopolitical tensions in the battle to secure critical minerals for digital and energy transitions that have impacted the disruption of globalization and driven the re-organization of global supply chains. It will examine two key aspects: first, the Indo-Pacific strategy imposed by the G7 countries and particularly its connectedness with sustainability goals such as in the European Union's shift towards a Green New Deal and its impact on critical minerals supply chain resiliency in ASEAN Region; and, second, the new trade agenda on mineral supply chains proposed by the US Indo-Pacific Economy Framework (IPEF) and the EU Free Trade Agreements (FTA) with ASEAN Countries. The analysis shows the locked-in character of the current trajectory for ASEAN countries and discusses options for defending their interests, particularly from an economic and environmental perspective.

New Frontiers: The G7 Indo-Pacific Strategy and the EU's Green New Deal

The Indo-Pacific strategy, endorsed by the G7 countries, is a comprehensive framework that seeks to address geopolitical, economic, and security challenges in the dynamic region spanning from the Indian Ocean to the Pacific. This strategy recognizes the increasing importance of the Indo-

Pacific in shaping the global order and emphasizes the promotion of a free, open, and non-protectionist international trading system. At the G7 meeting in June 2022, the "Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment" proclaimed infrastructure needs of the Indo-Pacific region. The decision to come up with this strategy "was driven by the opportunity to invest in countries with great economic promise, the recognition of the fragility of existing supply chains, and to meet the competition posed by China's Belt and Road Initiative".[5] The main goal is thus to diversify supply chains in order to be less dependent on China and to reclaim the reins of action in global production networks.

An additional significant aspect of this strategy is its interconnectedness with sustainability goals, particularly evident in the US turn to onshoring investments into energy markets and European Union's shift towards a Green New Deal.[6] The European Union's Green New Deal aims to transform the bloc's economy into a sustainable and climate-neutral one by 2050. It encompasses various initiatives such as reducing greenhouse gas emissions, promoting renewable energy sources, and enhancing energy efficiency. The Green New Deal aligns with the Indo-Pacific strategy as both emphasize the need for sustainable development and climate action. The G7 countries, including the EU member countries, have shifted their focus on "green" and sustainable growth and have recognized how crucial alternative energy sources will be for long-term prosperity in the Indo-Pacific region and the world at large.

Although the agenda is framed in environmental terms, the drivers behind this new strategy are first and foremost economic and geopolitical. Legislators are reacting to domestic pressure groups that fear being left behind in a multipolar world order. For example, the CEO of Mercedes Benz recently called for increasing efforts in lithium extraction: lithium is "the new oil".[7] Accordingly, the EU has set enormously ambitious extraction targets.[8] In turn, global demand for new raw materials (lithium, nickel, copper) necessary for the development of sustainable and emission-free infrastructure is rapidly increasing. The turn to diversified alternative energy supply chains also gives the EU new ways of expanding its external leverage. After the decline of "normative power Europe" with regard to democracy export, being a global thought leader on sustainability could assign a prominent role to the EU in shaping the world order to come. One sign of this can already be seen in German chancellor Scholz initiative of designing a "Climate Club" which was quickly adopted by the G7.[9] The vague initiative rallies countries "that want to press ahead with the social and economic transformation needed to tackle climate change. The German government believes that such an open, collaborative climate club should be a partnership in which the participating countries commit to ambitious climate goals".[10] After acceptance by the G7, Scholz was quick to invite Indonesia to become part of the Climate Club, notably at the Hannover trade fair, emphasizing the economic, exchange-based view of climate politics that is being pursued in the club.[11] Failing to name any concrete measures against climate change that would emanate from this membership, the chancellor instead announced that "The G7 and Indonesia have one of the world's first partnerships on renewables. And we want to make progress on the EU free trade agreement."[12]

This partnership on renewables, based on a new free trade agreement will place a focus on market liberalizations in order to create optimal conditions for transnational companies to supply the EU with the raw materials it needs - especially against the background of the Green New Deal - for the sustainable transformation of its energy supply, production and mobility, for instance copper from Indonesia. The impact of the Indo-Pacific strategy and the EU's Green New Deal on critical minerals supply chain resiliency in the ASEAN region is therefore noteworthy. The extraction of these raw materials is often associated with enormous damage to people and the environment and, accordingly, with conflicts.

Emerging Trends of the Global Trade Agenda and their Impacts on Mineral Supply Chains

We have shown how resource concentration, particularly the control of critical raw materials by China, has prompted G7 countries to diversify their supply chains, searching for alternative supplies of raw materials outside of China. Thus, the G7 trade ministers agreed at a meeting in Germany in 2022[13] to intensify multilateral, regional and bilateral trade cooperation to address export restrictions and trade barriers at the international level. Notably, the restructuring of their global supply chain security agenda regarding critical raw materials is one of the core strategies to become less dependent on China. This is already impacting global production chains significantly through FTAs. During its G7 Presidency, for instance, Germany has underscored the close partnership with the Indo-Pacific, for instance by inviting the G20 partners Indonesia and India to the Summit in Germany. The G7 is in the process of negotiating "Just Energy Transition Partnerships" with India, Indonesia and Viet Nam. During the Indo-German intergovernmental consultations on 2 May 2022, Fourteen agreements in the fields of climate, energy, agroecology, security, health, safety in the workplace, research and migration were concluded. But also military exercises in cooperation with Singapore, Japan and the Republic of Korea and several other high-level visits drive home the point. In July 2022, for instance, German Foreign Minister Baerbock travelled from the G20 Foreign Ministers Meeting in Indonesia to Palau and Japan. In Palau, she introduced the new Special Envoy for the Pacific-island states. In June 2022, the Federal Government decided to resume bilateral development cooperation with, among other countries, Laos, Mongolia and Nepal.[14]

This emerging trend will eventually change the standard setting for global trade rules, affecting other countries in the process, especially in Southeast Asia. International trade cooperation is increasingly directed at regional and bilateral cooperation based on the power of like-minded partners[15]. In this paper, we argue that these agreements are weaponizing trade as a strategy to control the supply of critical raw materials. With the weaponization of trade we refer to using trade as a tool of foreign policy rather than only as an economic goal in and of itself.[16]

The Chatham House report (2021[17]) has stressed the importance of greater collaboration between the transatlantic partners and other like-minded countries that could strengthen supply-chain resilience, especially fostering policy coherence and to address shared concerns regarding China's concentration of production in critical areas. The OECD Report on Security of Supply for Critical Raw Materials (2022)[18] presented at the G7 meeting in Germany reinforced the need to diversifyG7 trade cooperation to meet their domestic industrial demand. One central case of this emerging trend is the US and EU trade-related cooperation on securing supply chains for critical raw materials which is increasingly transpiring into the Asia Pacific Region.

First, The US government initiated the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF) and the Americas Partnership for Economic Prosperity (APEP) to counter China's growing economic influence in Asia-Pacific and the Americas. Particularly on the supply chain pillar under the US IPEF, it is designed to solve the global supply chain disruption in the US.[19] It is no longer a secret that this agreement is a trade cooperation model used by the US to strengthen its strategy of encouraging reshoring and nearshoring[20], including significant provisions supporting only domestic supply chains as part of its inflation reduction strategy.[21] The need to ensure secure and resilient supply chains of critical raw materials under the IPEF would be implemented by minimising market distortions, promoting regulatory compliance, respecting market principles, and acting consistently with respective WTO obligations that govern under supply chain pillars of the agreement. The IPEF members are Australia, Brunei Darussalam, Fiji, India, Indonesia, Japan, the Republic of Korea, Malaysia, New Zealand, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam. The framework consists of four "pillars" of work excluding negotiations on market access, namely: (1) fair and resilient trade (covering seven subtopics, including labour, environmental and digital standards); (2) supply chain resilience; (3) infrastructure, clean energy, and decarbonisation; and (4) taxation and anti-corruption[22].

Second, the EU plan to accelerate the EU Critical Raw Materials Act (CRMA)[23] policy to diversify trade and secure the unabated supply of critical raw materials needed for the region's green transition. Under the EU CRMA, international trade cooperation is an essential part of the strategy to support the overarching agenda, by expanding free trade agreements (FTAs) and strengthen the WTO rules[24], particularly to ensure the regulation of unfair trade practices on export restriction measures, and enforcement of dispute settlement on trade and investment.[25] Another important element is a dedicated Energy and Raw Materials chapter in the EU FTA. Under this chapter, the EU will address raw materials-related matters such as predictable impact assessment procedures or non-discrimination treatment for investors in third countries, and strengthen disciplines on raw materials trade and investment. Currently, the EU is increasing trade cooperation with several strategic countries such as Chile, Mexico, New Zealand, Australia, India, and ASEAN countries (Singapore, Vietnam, Indonesia, Thailand).

ASEAN Centrality: Is it an alternative?

The Southeast Asian countries as the world's largest producers of minerals are caught between the web of global political tensions and political imperatives to defend their national agenda. This is a big challenge that must be faced by developing countries to be able to respond appropriately to their choices. Will they join in on one of the axes of power or present alternative proposals in the spirit of developing country solidarity.

Faizel Ismail, in his book The WTO Reform & The Crisis of Multilateralism: A Developing Country Perspective (2020)[26], explains that many experts want an alternative axis. So far, the options for responding to geopolitical and geoeconomic crises have only referred to two limited options, namely: a) deepening integration (hyperglobalization); and b) separation (protectionism). However, these two options were deemed neither feasible nor desirable. Ismail further explained that there is a need for a new approach in resolving the crisis. At present, an alternative approach is needed which is based on peaceful coexistence and tolerance for different economic paths and systems.

For this reason, today's strategic question for developing countries, especially the ASEAN countries themselves, is whether to do decoupling or diversification? Ismail emphasized that such an alternative could be formulated in the following framework: *"The alternative to these two polarised options (decoupling or deepening integration), should allow countries considerable latitude at home to design a wide variety of industrial policies, technological systems and social standards; to use well calibrated policies to protect their industrial, technological and social policy choices domestically without imposing unnecessary and asymmetric burdens on foreign actors; and to maintain a set of trade rules that prevent countries from deploying what economists call "beggar-thy-neighbour" policies".*

Currently, ASEAN's centrality is being challenged as an effective strategy to play its role for political-economic stability in the Southeast Asian Region, including in the Indo-Pacific Region. Conscious that decoupling is not an answer, ASEAN members increasingly consider diversification as a strategy that must be taken by ASEAN to strengthen its position in responding to global geopolitical challenges. The ERIA report (2023[27]) explains that by not taking the decoupling option, ASEAN can show the world that ASEAN Centrality can be an alternative that can be chosen in carrying out economic diversification. This is manifested in strengthening regional cooperation to develop a regional electric vehicle ecosystem production hub. On the occasion of the 42nd ASEAN Summit, on 10 – 11 May 2023 under the chairmanship of Indonesia, ASEAN Leaders adopted a Leaders' Declaration on developing a regional electric vehicle (EV) ecosystem[28].

ASEAN's choice to strengthen its central role in Asia through regional development of the EV Ecosystem has been considered by experts as the right strategy in responding to existing geopolitical tensions considering that the green economy has become the next geoeconomic and geopolitical battlefield[29]. The increasing demand for critical minerals for green energy transition has become the major battlefield due to significant supply constraints, and in this case, ASEAN wants to use a strategy of diversifying the supply chain of critical minerals through the development of an EV production ecosystem to benefit economic growth in the Region. ASEAN countries cumulatively produce almost 47% of global nickel and 35% of global tin, with high production shares for a range of other critical minerals, including bismuth, tungsten, rare earths, and bauxite, the region has captured a growing share of global processing and refining of key critical minerals, as value addition plays an increasing role in national development and industrial strategies[30]. Indonesia, Philippines, Myanmar, and Vietnam are the biggest mineral reserves in the region, such as: Nickel, Bauxites, Rare Earth Elements, and Tin.

However, in this context, it should be noted that ASEAN is not an association of inventor countries but one of investment recipients[31]. Most ASEAN trade value chains in the region happens via backward participation or foreign value added embedded in a country's exports, particularly from the East Asia region. This will potentially open a race to the bottom among ASEAN countries in the context of a strategy to attract investment from lead firms in partner countries. Moreover, each of

ASEAN member states have different interest due to different level of playing field and political approach for the economic development. Many times, the member countries impose protectionist economic policy and create economic-political tensions between the neighbouring countries in ASEAN, and in the end impacting to the cross-border trade disruptions[32]. Therefore, the dependence of each ASEAN country on its economic partner countries will affect the success of ASEAN Centrality as an alternative to global economic diversification in dealing with global geo-politics interventions.

Many ASEAN countries now look to capitalize on their domestic reserves to encourage further investment not only in the mining sector but also in downstream value-added industries, particularly on the regional EV production supply ecosystem. This can be seen in each national policy that encourages value added strategies. For instance: **The Philippines** has expansions planned across both the extractive and refining sectors for domestic value additions and the expansion of manufacturing capabilities across several sectors; **Malaysia** has also unveiled its National Mineral Industry Transformation Plan 2021–2030, which includes pillars on downstream value addition and technology and innovation; **Indonesia** has recently pursued robust policies aimed at adding value to its mineral production (raw mineral export ban and domestic processing requirement), including through vertical integration into advanced value chains; **Viet Nam's** Mineral Resources Strategy to 2020, with a Vision toward 2030 emphasizes the potential of the sector and domestic value addition; **Cambodia's** mining vision is guided by the National Policy on Mineral Resources 2018–2028, which highlights some of the country's mineral potential and the potential for further exploration work; and **Lao PDR** has The National Green Growth Strategy 2030 focuses on the mining and mineral sectors as opportunities for further economic and social development[33].

However, it should be noted that a successful EV ecosystem in the region has to bring together key elements like battery manufacturers, charging stations and charging outlet infrastructure, critical components (like magnets and cathodes), government regulators and policy makers, as well as end users (customers). It is likely the EV ecosystem will face larger geopolitical competition, considering that control over the sources of raw materials and technology only exists in a limited number of countries, especially dominated by China. For example, upstream and downstream supply control of lithium ion (Li-ion) battery packs and EV technology including Artificial Intelligence (AI), software, navigation and communications platforms, thousands of microchips, and onboard sensory equipment. Thus, the modern EV supply chain is susceptible to a growing list of rules and regulations in order to exclude China, including export controls and other restrictions, as well as regulations relating to data localization, security, and privacy[34]. In the end, the geopolitics in global trade supply chains will change the standard setting on global trade rules, consequently greatly influencing the debates in various international trade agenda.

In recent G7 leaders' statement on economic resilience and economic security[35], it expressed clearly how these countries would like to work against unfair trade practices and strategies to use a range of non-market policies and practices such as pervasive, opaque, and harmful industrial subsidies, market distortive practices of state-owned enterprises, and all forms of forced technology transfers, as well as other practices to create strategic dependencies and systemic vulnerabilities.

Currently, there are three important trade partnerships in ASEAN that will influence the Centrality of ASEAN in the regional cooperation, that is the own ASEAN Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), the US Indo-Pacific Economic Partnership (IPEF), and the EU FTAs. Various indicators show that these agreements will likely undermine the integration of member countries in the region, including the Centrality of ASEAN. The ASEAN RCEP is expected to stimulate growth and deepen the economic relationship between ASEAN Members countries, but ironically, ASEAN countries already trade more with the other RCEP countries than they do with each other internally[36]. The research of Rashmi Banga (2020[37]) confirms that Japan, South Korea and China will have close relationships in supply chain activities in the region and will be the ones who will benefit the most from RCEP, especially in the electronics and machinery components sector. Banga emphasizes RCEP may be undermining ASEAN integration as intra-ASEAN trade is increasingly diverted to China, and away from each other, as a result of RCEP. ASEAN countries' high dependence on China also poses a big risk when supply chain disruptions occur due to geopolitical tensions. In the end, ASEAN must also diversify trade to mitigate risks and to have an alternative supply source to China[38]. Therefore, this is likely to result in a friend-shoring trap where ASEAN countries can only rely on their trade supply chains to their like-minded partners. It creates potential political tensions among ASEAN member countries and threatens ASEAN Centrality.

ASEAN trade diversification with other partner outside RCEP members will also have big implication to each of member countries. The idea of decoupling from China has imposed the need to raise the standard of global trade framework and rules. Recently, G7 countries are pushing the agenda to implement a trade transparency mechanism to address the “unfair" trade practices in the context of sustainable and transparent critical minerals supply chains, such as all forms of forced technology transfer, intellectual property theft, lowering of labour and environmental standards to gain competitive advantage, market-distorting actions of state-owned enterprises, and harmful industrial subsidies, including those that lead to excess capacity[39]. Additionally, in responding to the US-China technology trade war escalation, there is an increasing demand to advancing global new rules frameworks on digital economy addressing not only on e-commerce and digital taxation, but also regarding global data governance and security[40]. And finally, the trade rules imposed in the agreement will only narrow the state’s policy space in defending national policies in ASEAN countries and finally lost the opportunity to get added values in national development from the EV ecosystem production chains. Indonesia is the best example in this issue.

It is the US aim to establish secure and resilient supply chains for critical minerals under the IPEF. This would be implemented by creating disciplinary rules on minimizing market distortions, promoting regulatory compliance, respecting market principles, and acting consistently with respective WTO obligations[41]. In this context, general disciplining rules in IPEF will contradict with Indonesia’s policy that requires domestic processing industry of all most minerals commodities needed for the national industries for the battery EV production chains. In fact, the regulatory compliance in IPEF will only force Indonesia to agree on a Plurilateral Agreement at the WTO, such as Investment Facilitation and Environmental goods and services, which are contrary to the principles of multilateralism in the WTO.

Similarly with the EU FTA. For instance, the European Union's lawsuit against Indonesia at the World Trade Organization (WTO) regarding the policy on nickel export restriction is a typical implication of free trade rules potentially impeding the realization of Indonesia’s plan to nationalize natural resources. The case was filed by the European Union on 22 November 2019 by submitting a request for consultation at the WTO Dispute Settlement Body against Indonesia regarding the national policy to restrict the export of nickel ore, and against the domestic processing obligation to strengthen its national industry[42]. Additionally, In the effort to realize its plan, Indonesia would limit several liberalization provisions, such as the prohibition on local content requirements[43], technology transfer, and the privatization of State- Owned Enterprises (SOEs). However, these rules directly contradict the EU FTA which would potentially hinder the critical raw materials supply needed for EU. The EU raises several concerns over Indonesia’s policy in the scoping paper of IEU CEPA, such as: export ban on unprocessed minerals introduced in 2014, local content requirements, the prohibition of the privatization of SOEs in the natural resources sector as well as energy subsidies.[44]

Given the parallelism of the discourse on ASEAN centrality, and the reclaiming of sovereignty over their own resources in countries like Indonesia and their willingness to sign both FTAs as well as memberships in investment-focused energy initiatives such as the Climate Club, it is likely that the idea of ASEAN Centrality as a global south alternative cannot stand.

People’s Alternatives to ASEAN Centrality for a Just Energy Transition

Establishing a regional electric vehicle ecosystem has become one of the decarbonization agendas in ASEAN with an Energy Intensity (EI) reduction target of 32% by 2025 based on 2005 level and agreed to actively pursue sustainable transport system under the Kuala Lumpur ASEAN Transport Strategic Plan 2016-2025[45]. The agenda is part of the ASEAN Community Vision 2025 on a resilient, dynamic, and people-centred ASEAN Community.

However, the development of the regional EV Ecosystem will come at a big cost that must be paid, especially by the people. This is because the shift to clean energy technologies, including batteries for electric vehicles, will contribute to the expansion of economic extraction activities in ASEAN countries, particularly those related to critical minerals. This is the other side of the green energy transition which in fact still depends on fossil-based resources. Such false solutions have accelerated land acquisition and deforestation, including the destruction of marine ecosystems which ultimately marginalized the rights of affected communities, especially vulnerable groups such as women, small farmers, small fishermen, indigenous peoples and laborers. The Business and Human Rights Resources Centre report (2023[46]) recorded 303 attacks against Human Rights Defenders in mining sector in the Philippines, where 70% were against land, environmental and climate defenders. Such attacks are typical for extractive industries and have been occurring as an unintended side effect wherever large investments into minerals and other mining products were rampant.

Accordingly, Human rights violations like these are likely to increase in the near future. In fact, the Government of Indonesia is targeting US$ 30.9 billion as a total investment pipeline for the Battery EV supply chain industry in Indonesia[47]. In order to attract foreign investment to support this industrial policy, the government of Indonesia passed a controversial national regulation called Omnibus Law on Job Creation that facilitates access to foreign investment to obtain business licenses for foreign investors, including permits to access natural resources and lease of land, as well as undermining the labour rights in Indonesia. According to the data of the Ministry of Energy and Mineral Resources in 2022, there are 258 Mining Business Permits (IUP), Special Mining Business Permits (IUPK) and Contracts of Work (KK) for nickel mining that locate in the islands of Sulawesi and Maluku, and 59 per cent from the total land areas of the mining concession is in natural forests and increase the deforestation level in both provinces.

These facts have put a big question mark behind the role of the ASEAN states in realising just transition and transformation in the region. Just energy transition is much more than a shift from fossil fuels to renewable or green energy sources, and it should take into account a wider range of injustices and inequalities inherent in resource extraction[48]. In this context, once again the concept of ASEAN Centrality through regional development on EV production chains ecosystem as an ASEAN alternative way has failed. The ASEAN governments do not have a clear vision to reflect an ASEAN community that is based on people-oriented and people-centred of ASEAN. In fact, state leaders have pledged to realize the ASEAN Community Vision 2025 which creates a rules-based, people-oriented, people-centred ASEAN of "One Vision, One Identity, One Community"[49]. But so far, they have failed to materialize the claim to ASEAN Centrality.

Conclusion

The politics of ‘green transition’ holds an astonishing number of contradictions. In this paper, we have shown how the G7 project of becoming less dependent on China has direct impacts on the ASEAN region. While the G7, particularly its EU states, operate with grandiose terms like “Green New Deal”, there is a contradiction between their sustainable and cooperative talk and their expansive and interfering walk. There will be an increasing number of environmental devastations and human rights violations in ASEAN countries due to FTAs with the EU that outsources its critical mineral production to Southeast Asia in order to become green while staying clean. These externalities of green transition projects that cannot be reconciled with European environmental directives, but provide essential raw materials for the 'green transformation', have not been sufficiently considered in research so far.

The dirty works remains in countries like Indonesia. But those countries also act contradictorily. On the one hand, there is the pronounced strategy to nationalize critical resources and to keep production domestic, hence the raw mineral export ban and domestic processing requirement. On the other hand, the Indonesian government happily signs trade deals that demand the liberalization of trade and forbid protectionist measures like this. The country is searching for ways that could reclaim economic sovereignty over resources but so far has not yet succeeded. Similarly, ASEAN acts condusingly. The concept of ASEAN Centrality as an ASEAN Alternative Way is being constructed as a systemic turn, but as we have shown in our analysis, it is constantly being undermined by its own member states.

ASEAN centrality could be a worthwhile project to aspire to. It would keep resources in the region while providing options for pooling production capabilities, thus opening opportunities for genuine cooperation and fair economic exchange rather than being at the receiving end of international power games. This must happen through genuinely democratic means, away from exploitation, extraction, and alienation, and it must be moving towards systems of production and reproduction that are focused on human well-being and the regeneration of ecosystems. Especially, if the regional development of EV Ecosystem in ASEAN will only pursue economic growth rather than addressing the need to overcome the climate crisis which has a great impact on people's lives, this is not a real alternative. As a strategic region in the geopolitical battle for critical minerals competition, it is timely for an ASEAN people’s movement to formulate and adopt a clear vision of a just transition for a people-oriented and people-centred of ASEAN Community. Currently, the discussion on ASEAN Community’s Post-2025 Vision is carried out by the ASEAN High-Level Task Force on ASEAN Community’s Post-2025 Vision (HLTF-ACV), and strengthening the capacity and effectiveness of ASEAN Institutions are two main recommendations[50]. However, the people-centred character is not reflected in the discussion process where ASEAN only gathered inputs from four entities, namely the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights, the ASEAN Centre for Biodiversity, the ASEAN Business Advisory Council and the Economic Research Institution for ASEAN and East Asia. Therefore, challenging ASEAN Centrality through the adoption of vision of a just transition for people-oriented and people-centred of ASEAN Community should be the main approach that can be used for the people’s movement to promote an ASEAN Alternative Way.

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