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Executive Summary

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Implications of the ASEAN Community Vision 2045 and the Four Strategic Plans for Korea's ASEAN Policy

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At the 1st ASEAN Summit of 2025 held in May, the ASEAN Community Vision 2045 (ACV 2045) was adopted. This serves as a 20-year blueprint following the ASEAN Community Vision 2025 announced in 2015. The new vision provides a direction for the development of the ASEAN Community up to 2045 in response to rapidly changing regional and international environments. The ACV 2045 expands upon the original three pillars of the ASEAN Community—Political-Security, Economic, and Sociocultural—by officially adding Connectivity as a fourth pillar. Alongside the ACV 2045, sector-specific strategic plan documents were simultaneously released, designed to function as an integrated package along with the vision. This structural feature demonstrates ASEAN's commitment to synchronizing its community vision with actionable plans.

Significance of the ACV 2045

The emergence of the ACV 2045 reflects both continuity in ASEAN community building and adaptation to changing circumstances. Since the launch of the initial vision, the ACV 2025, at the official founding of the ASEAN Community in late 2015, the political, economic, and social environments surrounding ASEAN have witnessed substantial changes, including intensified U.S.-China strategic rivalry, increased international uncertainty, climate change, pandemics, digital innovation, and supply chain restructuring. These new challenges have required a reassessment of the direction for ASEAN cooperation, resulting in the need for a new vision for the next 20 years (2025–2045).

Malaysia, holding the 2025 ASEAN Chair, led the adoption of the ACV 2045, continuing its historical role in spearheading past visions such as “ASEAN Vision 2020” in 1997 and “ASEAN Community Vision 2025” in 2015. Thus, the timing and background of the ACV 2045’s announcement are closely linked to a decade-long evaluation of ASEAN Community building and the conceptualization of the next 20 years, illustrating the significance of the chair country’s leadership in presenting a long-term development vision for ASEAN.

Importantly, the ACV 2045 sets a milestone not only for internal cooperation within ASEAN but also for guiding its external partnerships. At the ASEAN Foreign Ministers’ Meeting in July 2025, it was confirmed that the ACV 2045 and the four strategic plans will serve as key documents guiding cooperation with ASEAN’s dialogue partners. For countries like Korea, this means the ACV 2045 is an essential reference for formulating future cooperation strategies with ASEAN. Especially after Korea and ASEAN elevated their relationship to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership (CSP) in 2024 and agreed on a Plan of Action 2026–2030 for the CSP, the ACV 2045 provides important implications for Korea’s policy toward ASEAN.

ASEAN Connectivity Elevated as the Fourth Pillar

The most prominent change in the ACV 2045 is the official elevation of ASEAN Connectivity as the fourth pillar. Whereas the ASEAN Community previously revolved around three main pillars—Political-Security, Economic, and Sociocultural—the addition of Connectivity marks a shift to a four-pillar system. The adoption of not only the three traditional strategic plans but also the ASEAN Connectivity Strategic Plan (ACSP) at this summit is a clear indication of ASEAN’s intent to advance its vision and four strategic plans as a unified package.

Connectivity, initially formalized through the Master Plan on ASEAN Connectivity (MPAC) in 2010 and updated with MPAC 2025 in 2016, had primarily been considered a cross-cutting domain intersecting the three pillars. In the ACV 2045, however, connectivity is elevated to its own pillar, providing a systematic and prioritized foundation for efforts to enhance infrastructure, transport networks, digital connectivity, and people-to-people ties across ASEAN. In other words, connectivity is now officially recognized as essential to ASEAN integration, incorporated fully into its comprehensive regional blueprint.

The new strategic plan for connectivity (ACSP) represents several advances over the previous MPAC 2025. Firstly, ACSP identifies seven megatrends shaping the future connectivity landscape—something not addressed in MPAC 2025. Secondly, ACSP expands the five strategic objectives in MPAC 2025 into six objectives, adding smart and sustainable urban development as a separate goal. This upgrade reflects the elevation of urban strategy—previously included under sustainable infrastructure—into an independent area, underscoring the increased priority placed on reducing urban-rural gaps and building resilient cities.

Incorporating connectivity as a pillar on par with the traditional three and introducing new trends and cooperative areas highlights ASEAN's strategic focus on integration and enhanced connectivity as the core drivers for future community building.

Adapting to Strategic Environmental Changes: New Cooperation Agendas

Compared to the ACV 2025, the ACV 2045 also features changes in goals and slogans. The 2015 ACV 2025 set out a future vision of a “rule-based, people-oriented and people-centered ASEAN” under the slogan “One Vision, One Identity, One Community,” emphasizing unity and integration in ASEAN's formative years. By contrast, the ACV 2045 aims to build a “Resilient, Innovative, Dynamic, and People-Centred ASEAN,” emphasizing resilience, innovation, and dynamism over a mere focus on a single community. This change reflects ASEAN's heightened awareness over the past decade of instability under major power rivalry, the need to secure new engines of growth via technology, and the importance of crisis resilience. In fact, resilience now features as a core keyword in ASEAN cooperation, with the ACV 2045 explicitly stressing ASEAN's capacity to maintain sustainable development despite external shocks.

The ACV 2045 also specifically identifies challenges and opportunities facing the ASEAN community—something not prominently featured in the ACV 2025. The ACV 2045 lists 17 distinct challenges ranging from regional peace and security (including the South China Sea), intensifying great power competition, and cybersecurity threats; to technological change, digitalization and artificial intelligence, protectionism and supply chain vulnerabilities; and the promotion of the blue economy in the economic domain; as well as issues such as food, water, and energy security, poverty, development gaps, disasters, climate change, pandemics, demographic change, aging, migration, inclusion of vulnerable groups, and empowerment of women and youth in the socio-cultural domain.

Strategic Plans for Enhanced Implementation of Objectives

The four strategic plans released alongside the ACV 2045 specify detailed strategic goals and implementation tasks to address the challenges outlined above. For example, the ASEAN Political-Security Community (APSC) Strategic Plan delineates 10 strategic goals, such as strengthened regional institutions, peaceful dispute resolution, and maintaining ASEAN centrality, under which there are 23 implementation objectives and 177 detailed strategic measures. The ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) Strategic Plan contains six goals—such as building a single integrated market, enhancing supply chain resilience, and fostering a green economy—supported by 44 implementation objectives and 192 specific actions.

The ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC) Strategic Plan sets out 12 strategic objectives (e.g., an inclusive and people-centered community, resilience to future crises, and

the promotion of green and blue economies), 20 implementation goals, and 112 specific actions. The ASEAN Connectivity Strategic Plan (ACSP), as previously mentioned, contains six strategic objectives, 14 implementation goals, and 49 detailed actions. By providing specific objectives and means of implementation within each pillar, the ACV 2045 offers a comprehensive blueprint that goes beyond rhetoric to practical planning. All strategic plans include mechanisms for monitoring and interim evaluation, ensuring sustained momentum over the next 20 years.

Policy Implications for Korea

There are three major policy implications of the ACV 2045 for Korea's cooperation with ASEAN. First, there is a need to strengthen structural approaches in Korea-ASEAN cooperation. As connectivity collaboration has been officially elevated to the fourth pillar of the ASEAN Community, Korea should treat connectivity as a separate priority domain in future cooperation, focusing resources and policy capacity accordingly. The Korea-ASEAN CSP Plan of Action should systematically include and promote projects related to connectivity alongside those in the traditional three fields. To achieve this, it will be necessary to consolidate Korea's previously dispersed connectivity projects under the framework of "Korea-ASEAN Connectivity Cooperation," making outcomes visible across diverse fields such as digital innovation, infrastructure, and human exchange.

The Korea-ASEAN Digital Innovation Flagship (KADIF) project, launched in 2024, could be actively utilized to highlight Korea's leading role in digital connectivity cooperation with ASEAN. Additionally, Korea's unique merit as the only country that has maritime Southeast Asia sub-regional cooperation among ASEAN dialogue counterparts should be fully leveraged. Based on such subregional cooperation, Korea can position itself as a key partner supporting network building and joint development within ASEAN connectivity projects.

Second, a paradigm shift in cooperation is necessary. Until now, Korea's cooperation with ASEAN has largely been characterized by a one-sided support model. However, many of the new cooperation agendas articulated by the ACV 2045—such as supply chain restructuring due to US-China rivalry, green and blue economy transition for carbon neutrality, and the digital economy and AI—are areas where both Korea and ASEAN face common challenges as learning economies, with relatively small starting gaps between them. In these new areas, Korea should seek mutually beneficial strategies based on equal partnership rather than a one-sided support approach, as this will enhance both efficacy and acceptability. Persisting with a one-sided support model risks limiting ASEAN's capacity-building and may provoke emotional resistance or reduce the effectiveness of joint initiatives. Therefore, sectoral distinctions are required: Korea should differentiate between fields where it possesses overwhelming advantages and those where equal-level cooperation is possible, applying tailor-made cooperation frameworks to build effective cooperation models.

Third, strategic cooperation linked with regional middle powers and multilateral platforms must be reinforced. As the ACV 2045 stresses, great power rivalry is ASEAN's greatest contemporary challenge—a dilemma Korea also confronts. Maintaining a stable and open order in the region is a shared interest of both Korea and ASEAN, making it vital to seek strategies for easing the pressures and uncertainties of US-China competition and securing autonomy of regional countries. Korea and ASEAN need to deepen dialogue and accelerate the search for joint strategies in intersecting areas of strategic interest—for example, defending the rules-based order in the Indo-Pacific, strengthening inclusive multilateralism, ensuring supply chain security, and enhancing maritime security.

When conceptualizing Korea-ASEAN cooperation, it is crucial to promote a multi-layered solidarity from the ASEAN+ perspective, linking Korea-ASEAN cooperation with partnerships with other regional middle powers (e.g., Japan, Australia) and with regional multilateral mechanisms. By preparing platforms for trilateral or multilateral synergies, Korea can move beyond passive responses to become an active role-player amid great power rivalry. This multi-dimensional regional strategy should inform not only Korea's ASEAN policy but also broader relations with Japan, Australia, and throughout the Indo-Pacific region.

In sum, ASEAN's Community Vision 2045 serves as both a blueprint for internal integration and external partnerships, providing a crucial benchmark for devising Korea's post-New Southern Policy strategy toward ASEAN. Korea should closely analyze the shifting priorities and cooperation needs reflected in the ACV 2045 and align its policy toward strengthening structural, mutually beneficial, and multilateral cooperation. Doing so will deepen the Korea-ASEAN relationship into a future-oriented and sustainable partnership and present a model for middle-power collaboration contributing to shared prosperity and stability in the region.

About the Author

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