

THE ASEAN SINGLE VISA SCHEME AND ITS IMPLICATIONS TO BORDER SECURITY IN THE REGION: A PHILIPPINE PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT – The vision of the ASEAN Single Visa Scheme is to boost tourism in Southeast Asia with the hope of bolstering regional tourism business and investment through the influx of international travellers amongst ASEAN member states (AMS). However, security and sovereignty issues have hampered the discussions of a regional common visa. As a contribution to scholarly discussions in the security aspect of such a scheme, this study offers to answer how the ASEAN Single Visa will affect security governance in the Region, particularly in the Philippines. In addition, the questions regarding implications of the scheme on visa policy and border security situation of the Philippines, factors affecting the adoption, and measures necessary for the realization of the scheme were answered using quantitative and qualitative analyses in a sequential explanatory design. By analyzing the Bureau of Immigration (BI) statistical data, key respondents' interviews from the BI, Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) and several AMS embassies particularly Indonesia, Singapore and Thailand, it was shown that there is a significant difference between visa-required and visa-free nationals on security-related violations in the country in relation to the current visa policy of the Philippines. It also revealed that (1) security and sovereignty; (2) the development of internal sharing mechanism; (3) support border control management; (4) synchronization of visa issuance systems; (5) human resource development; and (6) upgrades of infrastructure and technology of immigration agencies were factors hampering the realization of the ASEAN Single Visa scheme in the country. In spite of this, key officials from the BI, DFA and select embassies said that the single visa scheme would be beneficial to the Philippines and the Region. The ASEAN Single Visa scheme is set to bring about positive impact for ASEAN security governance as it intends to bolster closer inter-agency and regional cooperation between the Philippines and AMS. Thus, its implementation will become an impetus among AMS to work together to improve border management capabilities of the Region in the realization of the ASEAN Single Visa Scheme.

Keywords: ASEAN single visa, border security, visa policy, immigration, cross-border movements, transnational issues

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