



EU-ASEAN STRATEGIC THINKERS FORUM

BACKGROUND PAPER

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The beginnings of formal relations between the EU and ASEAN date back to early 1970s. The EU is ASEAN's oldest dialogue partner. Likewise, ASEAN was the first regional organisation to enter into institutionalised relations with the EU. Today this long-standing group-to-group partnership is embedded in a comprehensive dialogue structure with the biennial ASEAN-EU Ministerial Meetings (AEMM) as the highest forum. The other main pillar of EU-ASEAN relations is the annual ASEAN Post Ministerial Conference with the EU (PMC)+1, which is supported by regular meetings of the ASEAN-EU Senior Officials (SOM) and the ASEAN-EU Joint Cooperation Committee (JCC). Over the years, several sector policy dialogues and cooperation programmes have been added, the thematic agendas have widened and deepened and the number of stakeholders involved in the multi-level dialogue process has markedly grown. In 2014, an independent evaluation of the EU's regional co-operation with Asia concluded that EU-ASEAN political and policy dialogues were "highly relevant" in addressing regional and global challenges.¹

However, EU-ASEAN relations are in a constant process of evolution and development and neither side can rest on what has been achieved. The current cooperation strategy, as outlined in the ASEAN-EU Plan of Action (2018-2022), is the most comprehensive to-date, setting the framework for a detailed cooperation agenda mainly in political-security cooperation, economic cooperation and socio-culture cooperation.

This background paper provides a brief overview of the history and milestones of EU-ASEAN cooperation and a short summary of main achievements in principle cooperation areas. It goes without saying that the presentation cannot be exhaustive and can only focus on a selection of relevant cooperation agendas.

¹ Particip (2014). Evaluation of the European Union's regional co-operation with Asia Final Report Volume 1 March 2014. Evaluation carried out on behalf of the European Commission
https://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/sites/devco/files/evaluation-cooperation-ec-asia-1326-main-report-201403_en_0.pdf





1. History and Milestones of EU-Relations and Milestone

When the foreign ministers of Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand founded ASEAN in 1967, one main objective was “to maintain close and beneficial co-operation with existing international and regional organisations with similar aims and purposes”, as stated in the Bangkok Declaration, ASEAN’s founding document. Five years later, in April 1972, ASEAN launched a Special Coordination Committee (SCANN) to conduct a regular dialogue with the then-European Community (EC), which became ASEAN’s first “Dialogue Partner”. A few months later, this initiative led to the establishment of the **ASEAN-Brussels Committee (ABC)**, comprising ASEAN ambassadors accredited to the EC to act as ASEAN’s outpost in Europe. The ABC – which was the first ASEAN Committee in a third country – marked the beginning of formalised ASEAN-EC relations. In 1974, a **Joint ASEAN-EC Study Group** was established to complement the commercial cooperation agreements that had been negotiated bilaterally between the EC and individual Commonwealth countries in Southeast Asia. Dialogue relations between the two organisations were formalised in 1977 when the 10th ASEAN Foreign Ministers Meeting (AMM), agreed on ASEAN’s formal cooperation and relationship with the EC, which included the Council of Ministers of the EC, the Permanent Representative of the EC countries and the EC Commission. In November 1978 the first **ASEAN-EC Ministerial Meeting (AEMM)** took place.

The signing of the **ASEAN-EC Cooperation Agreement** in Kuala Lumpur in 1980 was an important step for cooperation between the two regional organisations. It was the first international treaty that the EC signed with another regional organisation. Of particular importance was the statement in the agreement that “such cooperation will be between equal partners”, without disclaiming that it will “take into account the level of development of the member countries of ASEAN and the emergence of ASEAN as a viable and cohesive grouping, which has contributed to the stability and peace in Southeast Asia”.² Under the treaty, objectives for commercial, economic, and technical cooperation were established and a **Joint Cooperation Committee (JCC)** was formed to monitor ASEAN-EC cooperation.

The general trend in the history of EU-ASEAN relations has been the steady broadening of areas of engagement. In 2003, the EU issued the strategy document “**A new partnership with Southeast Asia**” which noted that a more active engagement was needed and identified a wide range of potential areas of cooperation. The strategy acknowledged the inter-relationship of different issues and suggested addressing them through integrated policies. “Thus, terrorism, organised crime and illegal migration undermine the rule of law, discourage investment, and hinder development.

² ASEAN (1980) ‘Cooperation Agreement between Member Countries of ASEAN and European Community’, 7 March, <http://investmentpolicyhub.unctad.org/Download/TreatyFile/3106>





Similarly economic and trade development can best flourish in countries that not only encourage economic freedom but also respect human rights and the rule of law, practice good governance and rule democratically.”³

An important milestone in the ASEAN-EU dialogue relations was marked in 2007 with the adoption of the **Nuremberg Declaration on an EU-ASEAN Enhanced Partnership**. The Declaration set out a long-term vision and commitment of both sides to work together for common goals and objectives. The declaration specified the cooperation agenda in five broad areas: political and security cooperation; economic cooperation; cooperation in the field of energy security and climate change/environment; socio-cultural cooperation and development cooperation. This agenda was further outlined in a Plan of Action (PoA), a master plan to enhance ASEAN-EU relations and cooperation. The Declaration expressed the signatories’ interest in the promotion of a long list of liberal values, including but not limited to the universal values of justice, democracy, human rights, good governance, anti-corruption, and the rule of law, while the PoA included a particular commitment to the strengthening of cooperation on human rights and in the fight against corruption. A first-ever **EU-ASEAN Summit** took place in November 2007 in Singapore to celebrate 30 years of formal relations between the EU and ASEAN and to mark the beginning of a higher level of cooperation under the Nuremberg Declaration.

The dialogue relations have since grown as well as expanded with the adoption of the **Bandar Seri Begawan Plan of Action to Strengthen the ASEAN-EU Enhanced Partnership (2013-2017)** in 2012. The aim of the Plan of Action was to give a more strategic focus to cooperation at regional cooperation in a wide range of areas – political-security, economic/trade and socio-cultural. In 2015, the EU issued a Joint Communication on its relations with ASEAN entitled “**The EU and ASEAN: A Partnership with a Strategic Purpose**”. In this Communication, the EU acknowledged that “it has a strategic interest in strengthening its relationship with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations” because “ASEAN is at the heart of the efforts to build a more robust regional security order in the wider Asia-Pacific”.⁴ The **Bangkok Declaration on Promoting an ASEAN-EU Global Partnership for Shared Strategic Goals** of 2016 reaffirmed a shared commitment to foster rules-based approaches to promote security and prosperity for citizens in the EU and ASEAN and to address global challenges effectively. In institutional terms, EU-ASEAN relations were upgraded through the appointment of a dedicated EU Ambassador to ASEAN in September 2015 and the

³ Communication from the Commission. A new partnership with South East Asia. COM (2003) 399/4. http://trade.ec.europa.eu/doclib/docs/2004/july/tradoc_116277.pdf

⁴ Joint Communication of the European Parliament and the Council. The EU and ASEAN: a partnership with a strategic purpose. 18.5.2015 JOIN(2015) 22 final, <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=JOIN:2015:22:FIN&from=EN>





establishment of an EU Mission to ASEAN in Jakarta, which was inaugurated in January 2016. Currently there are 25 Ambassadors from the EU Member States and the Commission that accredited their Ambassadors to ASEAN.⁵

ASEAN and the EU celebrated the 40th anniversary of their dialogue relations in 2017 and adopted the Joint Statement on the 40th Anniversary of the Establishment of ASEAN-EU Dialogue Relations as well as the **ASEAN-EU Plan of Action (2018-2022)**, which replaced the Bandar Seri Begawan Action Plan, to further enhance cooperation towards a strategic partnership.

Closely connected with – but formally independent from – the EU-ASEAN dialogue is the **Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM)**. The creation of ASEM, which built on the experiences of EU-ASEAN relations, could be seen as the European-Asian institutional response to the strengthened transpacific cooperation established through the founding of the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) and other organisations in the 1990s. The first ASEM meeting was held in Bangkok in March 1996, followed by regular summits and meetings which have taken place every two years and alternate between European and Asian cities. ASEM is an intergovernmental forum for dialogue and cooperation which fosters political dialogue, reinforces economic cooperation, and promotes collaboration in other areas of mutual interest. Initially consisting of 26 members, ASEM currently comprises 53 partners: 30 European and 21 Asian countries, the European Commission and the ASEAN Secretariat.

The EU, represented by the European Commission, is also a member of the **ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF)**, founded in 1994, which meets on an annual basis to discuss security issues in the Asia-Pacific region. The ARF has offered the EU the opportunity to enhance its collective security actorness as co-host or co-chair on a wide range of security issues. However, unlike other main dialogue partners of ASEAN, the EU is not (yet) a member of ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting-Plus, the currently most important regional mechanism for governmental exchanges on security.

⁵ Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, the EU, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, and the United Kingdom.





2. Economic Cooperation

Main Objectives of Economic Cooperation in the ASEAN-EU Plan of Action (2018-2022)

- Expand trade, business and investment
- Strengthen the role of the private sector and Public-Private Partnership
- Strengthen Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises
- Strengthen Cooperation in Transport, Energy and ICT
- Enhance cooperation in sectors on food, agriculture, fisheries, aquaculture and forestry
- Enhance cooperation on research and innovation, Science and Technology

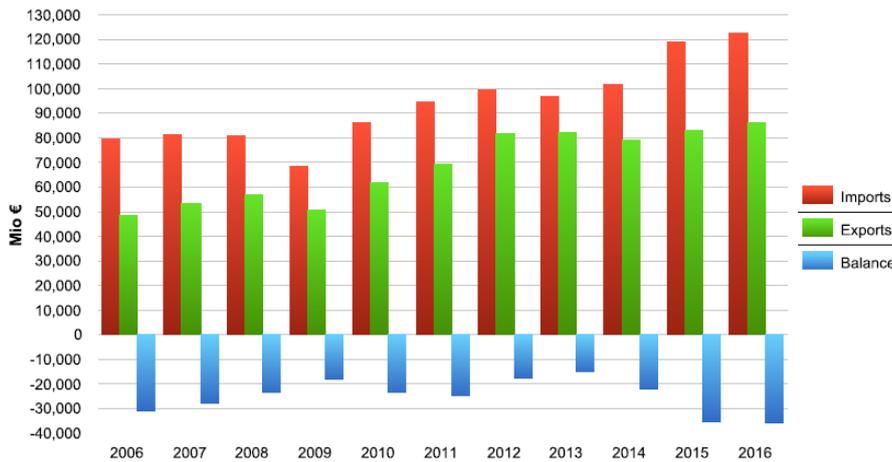
ASEAN as a whole represents the EU's third largest trading partner outside Europe (after the US and China) with EUR 207.9 billion of trade in goods in 2016. The EU is ASEAN's second largest trading partner after China, accounting for around 13.5% of total ASEAN trade. The trade volume increased strongly in 2015 in the run-up to the establishment of the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) which formally came into existence on 31 December that year. Singapore accounts for roughly one-fourth of the EU's total merchandise trade with ASEAN. Vietnam is the EU's second largest ASEAN trading partner (19.1%), followed by Malaysia (17.9%), Thailand (16.3%) and Indonesia (12.6%). All ASEAN countries, except Singapore, recorded a considerable surplus in their trade with the EU. In total, EU-ASEAN merchandise trade relations resulted in a substantial EUR 35.9 billion surplus for ASEAN in 2016 – and the EU's largest trade deficit for the past decade.⁶

⁶ European Commission (2017). European Union, Trade in goods with ASEAN http://trade.ec.europa.eu/doclib/docs/2006/september/tradoc_113471.pdf; European External Action Service (2017). 40 Years of EU ASEAN Partnership and Prosperity, https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/eu_asean_trade_investment_2017.pdf





Figure 1: EU trade in goods with ASEAN, 2006-2016



Source: Eurostat, http://trade.ec.europa.eu/doclib/docs/2006/september/tradoc_113471.pdf

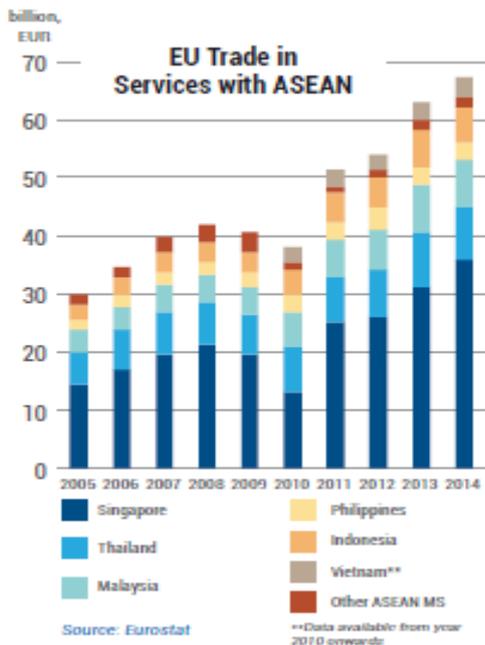
Total bilateral trade in services between the EU and ASEAN has more than doubled in the last decade. The figure amounted to EUR 67.4 billion in 2014, which represented a substantial rise from EUR 29.9 billion in 2005. While the EU has a surplus in trade in services with ASEAN overall, ASEAN enjoys comparative advantages in some sectors. EU recorded surpluses in commercial services, other business services, financial services, communication services, and construction services, whilst ASEAN recorded surpluses in transportation services, tourism and travel services.⁷ Furthermore, the EU is the largest investor in ASEAN countries, accounting for approximately a quarter of the total FDI stock in the region.

⁷ Ibid.





Figure 2: EU Trade in Services with ASEAN



Source: https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/eu_asean_trade_investment_2017.pdf

In May 2007, negotiations on an ASEAN-EU Free Trade Agreement were launched. In 2009, however, the trade talks were suspended and have not been resumed. Soon, both ASEAN and the European Commission realised that bilateralism offered a more flexible and effective approach and subsequently the Commission approached several individual ASEAN members for negotiations on bilateral free trade agreements; negotiations of bilateral FTAs were concluded with Singapore in October 2014 and with Vietnam in December 2015 respectively. However, the future of the deals remains uncertain. In May 2017 the European Court of Justice (ECJ) ruled that the FTA with Singapore requires ratification by the EU’s 38 national and regional authorities before entering into force. The European Commission itself had asked the court for clarification on whether it had exclusive competence to finalise the agreement. ASEAN Economic Ministers (AEM)-EU Trade Commissioner Consultations held in March 2017 in Manila welcomed the work conducted by the Senior Economic Officials to develop a framework encompassing the parameters of a future ASEAN-EU FTA. EU Trade Commissioner Cecilia Malmstrom said in Manila talks would restart, but there





was so far no targeted time-frame: “We believe it is important to connect two growing markets and to take away as many obstacles to trade... Having a region-to-region agreement between the EU and ASEAN is a long-term goal we've been discussing for many years. We are now taking steps towards this.”⁸

Between 1996 and 2013, the European Commission provided the ASEAN nations with almost EUR 200 million in support a range of integration projects, particularly in the economic sphere, but also latterly in a number of other areas. This assistance has helped ASEAN to fund the implementation of a broad range of activities under the ASEAN Economic Community. The EU has substantially contributed to the funding for amending the legal and regulative frameworks, training of officials involved, creating the necessary physical infrastructure, and other key measures. A number of large projects funded by the European Commission are of special significance here: the multi-million ASEAN Programme for Regional Integration Support (APRIS, 2003 to 2010) and its successor ASEAN Regional Integration Support from the EU (ARISE, 2013 to 2016); the EU-ASEAN Project on the Protection of Intellectual Property Rights (ECAP), which has been running since 1993; and the Regional EU-ASEAN Dialogue Instrument (READI), which has been ongoing since 2011 and addresses non-economic issues such as disaster preparedness and management, energy security, and human rights. The Enhanced Regional EU-ASEAN Dialogue Instrument (E-READI) for 2016-2020 builds on the success of the ASEAN-EU READI Facility. It aims to further ASEAN integration in all three pillars through providing support for its integration policy shaping and specific technical support for developing its capacity.

For 2014 to 2020 the EU has almost tripled the previous amount of funds for cooperation projects implemented by the ASEAN Secretariat (EUR 196 million) to support ASEAN’s post-2015 integration agenda. This support is in addition to EUR 2 billion the EU is devoting in bilateral assistance over the same period of time to poverty reduction and connectivity within and between ASEAN countries.⁹

⁸ Deutsche Welle Business: EU, ASEAN ready to restart free trade talks. 10 March 2017.

⁹ European Commission (2014). Regional Programming for Asia Multiannual Indicative Programme 2014-2020, https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/regional-asia-mip-2014-2020_en.pdf





3. Political-Security Cooperation

Main Objectives of Political-Security Cooperation in the ASEAN-EU Plan of Action (2018-2022)

- Enhance strategic dialogue and deepen political and security cooperation
- Enhance the ASEAN-EU cooperation in the ASEAN-led security architecture
- Combat terrorism, transnational crimes, address other non-traditional security issues
- Promote Cooperation on human rights and good governance
- Enhance maritime security cooperation
- Promote disarmament and non-proliferation
- Promote peace-oriented values

In the absence of military engagement – beyond occasional British military exercises within the context of the Five Power Defense Agreements (FPDA) – the EU and its member states have shown growing attention to Southeast Asia on a variety of **transboundary and non-tradition security (NTS)** challenges. Political and security cooperation between ASEAN and the EU has been progressing through the ASEAN-EU dialogue mechanisms, such as ASEAN-EU Ministerial Meeting, ASEAN-EU Senior Officials’ Meeting as well as through dialogue and cooperation frameworks initiated by ASEAN, most prominently the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and the Post Ministerial Conferences (PMCs) 10+1 session. In broader sense, ASEM has also provided an important forum for advancing the political-security cooperation agenda. In 2012 the EU became the first regional organisation to accede to the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia (TAC).¹⁰ The accession demonstrated the EU’s commitment towards ASEAN and reflected as an important milestone in ASEAN-EU relations to promote peace, security and stability in the region.

In particular, in the aftermath of the terror attacks on New York and Washington on 11 September 2001 and worldwide securitisation trends, the security perspective – and with it the NTS angle – has incrementally advanced within Western European interests towards Asia, entering official declarations and summity within the ASEAN-EU and ASEM dialogue processes. The EU’s experience in preventive diplomacy and multilateral confidence-building across many issue areas appears especially relevant to the treatment of NTS matters within the ARF. For example, the

¹⁰ Signed in 1976, the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation provides guidelines for the management of intra-regional relations, including mechanism of conflict resolution.





European External Action Service (EEAS) hosting of the High-Level Dialogues (HLDs) on maritime security in the region pave the way for the EU's role as ARF co-chair on maritime security from 2017-2020. Currently, the South China Sea (SCS) disputes related to territory and resources in the Spratly and Paracel Islands and adjacent waters can be considered as one of the most important security issues in the region. All official SCS claimants (China, Taiwan, Vietnam, Philippines, Malaysia, and Brunei) have multiple overlapping claims in the area.

Overall, the EU – which is not actively involved in these territorial disputes and great power politics of the Asia-Pacific – has assumed a coherent voice and made reprimanding official statements of concern in instances of severe violation of international law. For example, the fall-out between China and Vietnam in connection to movements of the Chinese oil rig HD981 in May 2014 displayed this collective international agency of the EU. Another incident underlining the united voice of the EU was the Chinese instalment of missiles in disputed territory in March 2016. In addition to this construction of the EU as a principled collective actor with a united voice on the issue of the South China Sea, EU and EU member state officials have furthermore shown interest in substantiating their commitment to the region through attending and co-hosting a variety of seminars and workshops.

Another example of a pro-active approach towards Southeast Asian security is the EU's past role as a co-host of the ARF Inter-Sessional Meeting on transnational crime and counter terrorism. This experience is relevant to the priorities of the current ARF agenda, as expressed by the Philippines as the ASEAN and ARF chair in 2017. The Philippines stated the significance of transboundary and NTS challenges at the 23rd ARF in 2016 and commended the work of the ARF members thus far in addressing terrorism and extremism, trafficking in persons, drug trafficking, and climate change within the ARF framework. Active engagement of the EU in ASEM and ARF highlights European collective capacity which could work towards membership in the East Asian Summit (EAS), ADMM-Plus and affiliated meetings in the future.

Good governance and human rights are subsumed under the political-security cooperation agenda. In 1991 the European Commission decreed that all new international agreements should include a human rights clause as an indispensable component. In 1992 the Treaty on European Union (known as the Maastricht Treaty) stated that the spread of democracy, human rights and basic freedoms was a key goal of development co-operation and created an appropriate legal framework in this respect. In 1994 the European Initiative for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR)¹¹ was set up as a

¹¹ Since 2006: European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights. 40 Years of EU ASEAN Partnership and Prosperity, https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/eu_asean_trade_investment_2017.pdf





funding instrument for the worldwide advancement of participatory and representative democracy, political pluralism, the rule of law, human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Also in 1994, the EU announced its first Asia Strategy, stating that its aim was to work on “the development and consolidation of democracy and the rule of law and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms” as a direct contribution towards security and stability in Asia. Since then, this approach has been steadily intensified and differentiated. The establishment of the Development Cooperation Instrument (DCI) in 2006 provided its chief impetus. It replaced all the EU’s previous geographical and thematic approaches to development co-operation and brought them together in a single funding instrument. Under the DCI, the EU agrees to promote good governance, democracy, human rights and institutional reforms.

EU human rights policy and its relations with Asia, and thus ASEAN, reached a new quality in 2012. The Guidelines on the EU's Foreign and Security Policy in East Asia stated human rights protection and promotion as aims within the EU approach to security.¹² In the same year, the first Special Representative for Human Rights was appointed and the Council of the European Union released its Strategic Framework and Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy, which underlined the Union’s aim of becoming a global leader in human rights support.

At the same time ASEAN has also strengthened its approach to the protection of human rights. A general commitment to human rights is enshrined in the ASEAN Charter of 2007 and central norms are codified in the ASEAN Human Rights Declaration of 2012. In 2015, the first **EU-ASEAN Policy Dialogue on Human Rights** took place, followed by a second meeting in 2017. The ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR) is the EU counterpart for this dialogue which is also attended by the ASEAN Commission on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Women and Children (ACWC), the ASEAN Committee on Women (ACW), the ASEAN Committee on the Implementation of the ASEAN Declaration on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Migrant Workers (ACMW) and the ASEAN Secretariat (ASEC). Consultations with civil society organisations took place ahead of the dialogue meetings.

Overall, EU-ASEAN cooperation on human rights has progressed in mutually beneficial ways. The EU Special Representative for Human Rights has paid visits to the region since the position was created, the Human Rights Dialogue is seen as constructive and the EIDHR continues to support specific programmes in the region. The AICHR and the ACWC work productively together with the EU, with the EU having hosted officials from both commissions for information exchange. However,

¹² Council of the European Union (2012). Guidelines on the EU's Foreign and Security Policy in East Asia, 15 June, http://eeas.europa.eu/archives/docs/asia/docs/guidelines_eu_foreign_sec_pol_east_asia_en.pdf





some observers are more critical noting that, for example, “the EU’s political aims and narrative regarding human rights are often incompatible with ASEAN’s priorities. In addition, perceptions in Asia do not consider the EU as a political actor or normative power but rather a practical partner with which to cooperate on a needs basis.”¹³

4. Socio-cultural Cooperation

Main Objectives of Socio-Cultural Cooperation in the ASEAN-EU Plan of Action (2018-2022)

- Enhance cooperation in education, academic and cultural exchanges
- Enhance cooperation to address health matters including pandemics
- Promote gender equality, well-being, rights and welfare of women, children, the elderly, persons with disabilities and migrant workers
- Address regional and global environmental challenges and promote sustainable development

While several of the issues under the socio-cultural pillar have been addressed by READI and other programmes, the recent launch of two new EU-ASEAN programmes on Sustainable Use of Peatland and Haze Mitigation in ASEAN (SUPA) and Biodiversity Conservation in ASEAN have strengthened the approach in these policy fields. In November 2017 the inaugural **High-Level ASEAN-EU Dialogue on Sustainable Development** took place. It was established as a platform to discuss particularly the implementation of the Agenda 2030 and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The longest track-record exist with regard to the support to academic collaboration. As in Europe higher education ranks high on the agenda of ASEAN, which established an ASEAN University Network (ANU) of 30 universities across the region in 1995 to promote regional co-operation in higher education. ANU is probably the most advanced and institutionalised regional higher education system outside Europe. Since early 2015, the EU has provided funding through the EU Support to Higher Education in ASEAN Region (EU SHARE) programme, and thereby contributed to

¹³ Laura Allison-Reumann (2017). ASEAN and human rights: challenges to the EU’s diffusion of human rights norms. *Asia Europe Journal*, March, Volume 15, Issue 1, pp 39–54.





ASEAN's regional harmonisation agenda. The promotion of, and support to, region-to-region student and faculty exchanges dates back much longer – within the context of global programmes such as Erasmus Mundus and, since 2014, Erasmus+. A recently concluded independent evaluation found that the EU support to higher education “has directly and substantially promoted and strengthened inter-cultural understanding within and between regions (through mobility programmes and research collaboration between higher education institutions).”¹⁴

People-to-people contacts have also been strengthened through initiatives such as the Interregional EU-ASEAN Perspectives Dialogues (2013-2015) as an innovative format of exchange between young students and practitioners from Europe and Southeast Asia. The main contribution in this regard has been made by ASEM which has placed emphasis on people-to-people connectedness by investing in the Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF), a Singapore-inspired think tank that aims to boost intellectual, cultural and economic interaction between the two regions. Other achievements of fostering the cooperation among non-state actors are the Trans-Eurasia Information Network (TEIN) the first large-scale research and education network connecting regional researchers in Asia and Europe. Lawmakers, businesses and civil society organisations participate in the Asia Europe People's Forum the Asia-Europe Parliamentary Partnership and Asia-Europe Business Forum, held every two years alongside ASEM Summits.

5. Concluding remarks

EU-ASEAN relations have come a long way and continue to broaden and deepen. Yet, while the partnership is a success story, overall it is not without shortcomings, hurdles and challenges. The ambitious cooperation strategies of recent years are far from being fully implemented. Although political-security issues were added to the cooperation agenda as early as the early 2000s, the perception of EU-ASEAN relations as a predominantly economic partnership is only slowly and gradually changing. Furthermore, geopolitical tensions and troubles within their respective regions as well as globally challenge both the EU and ASEAN. One of the main challenges for ASEAN is to maintain its centrality in the regional multilateral cooperation architecture as a contribution to a stable and peaceful Asia-Pacific. Throughout Europe, political leaders have to respond to heightened risks emanating from extremism and radicalisation among other pressing issues in the

¹⁴ Particip. Evaluation of the EU Development Co-operation Support to Higher Education in Partner Countries (2007-2014) Final Report. Volume I – Main Report. September 2017. Evaluation carried out on behalf of the European Commission, https://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/strategic-evaluation-eu-development-co-operation-support-higher-education-partner-countries-2007_en





EU's internal and external relations. Yeo Lay Hwee, a renowned expert on EU-ASEAN relations, sees these challenges as an opportunity: "Both ASEAN and the EU therefore have very good reasons to engage more strategically with each other. These can be done at different levels: EU member states with ASEAN member states, inter-regional EU-ASEAN endeavours, and EU-ASEAN efforts at multilateral forums such as ASEM and ARF. But fundamentally, the road to a fruitful and fulfilling partnership starts with an understanding of each other's interests, strengths and weaknesses".¹⁵

Such an understanding is important not least in view of the differences between the EU and ASEAN. ASEAN remains highly diverse in terms of its member states' levels of socio-economic development, political systems and approaches to governance, security interests and strategic significance in the perception of extra-regional powers. The ASEAN Charter has provided the group with an identity makeover and legal personality, but overall confirmed the traditional ASEAN way of soft institutionalisation and consensus-building in the process of inter-governmental cooperation. By contrast, the EU as a supranational entity is built on a legalistic approach to integration. While the EU and ASEAN meet each other as equals, the fact that the two organisations are based on different concepts of regional integration, has, more often than not, affected mutual perceptions and expectations.

¹⁵ Yeo Lay Hwee (2017). ASEAN's Cooperation with the European Union – ASEM and Beyond. *Panorama. Insights into Asian and European Affairs*. Special Issue on ASEAN at 50, pp. 81-93: 84, <http://www.kas.de/wf/doc/23555-1442-2-30.pdf>





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