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**JOINT COMMUNICATION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND THE  
COUNCIL**

**The EU and ASEAN: a partnership with a strategic purpose**

# JOINT COMMUNICATION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND THE COUNCIL

## The EU and ASEAN: a partnership with a strategic purpose

### 1. Introduction

The EU has a strategic interest in strengthening its relationship with the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN).<sup>1</sup> A strong, cohesive and self-confident ASEAN proceeding with its own integration is good for regional stability, prosperity and security and creates new opportunities for cooperation on regional and global challenges. ASEAN combines high rates of economic growth as well as demographic dynamism. Grouped together, it would be the world's seventh largest economy and is set to become the fourth largest economy by 2050. ASEAN's young middle class is expected to rise to 65% of ASEAN's total population by 2030, up from 24% in 2010. ASEAN is also at the heart of the efforts to build a more robust regional security order in the wider Asia Pacific. A united and self-confident ASEAN is key to ensure that regional challenges are addressed in a rules-based manner; this is in the direct interest of the citizens of the region, but also of the European Union.

The EU thus has a huge stake in the success of ASEAN.

There is a new momentum in EU-ASEAN relations and both sides have an interest in sustaining it. Many in ASEAN have expressed a hope for greater EU engagement and a desire for a formal 'Strategic Partnership'. For its part, the EU has compelling economic, sectoral and political interests in enhancing its cooperation with this pivotal player in a region of strategic importance.

ASEAN is working to establish the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) by the end of 2015 and developing its post-2015 Vision, including how it sees its relations with the EU and the other Dialogue Partners. Therefore, the moment to articulate a vision for the future of EU-ASEAN relations is now.

Whilst ASEAN and the EU are 'partners in integration', they differ significantly in terms of average levels of economic development, the nature of their political systems as well as their institutional strength. ASEAN will have to face the challenges posed by, inter alia, its entirely intergovernmental decision-making mechanism based on consensus; the financing of the ASEAN budget (only USD 16 million per year, based on equal contributions from every ASEAN Member State); and empowering its Secretariat. At the same time, the EU and ASEAN share a commitment to 'Community building', sustainable development and rules-based integration as the best way to provide their citizens (over 1.1 billion altogether) with security and prosperity. The EU 2020 Strategy could serve as an inspiration for developing and implementing ASEAN's post-2015 vision and agenda.

Investing in the EU-ASEAN relationship will bring significant returns for EU interests, both economically and politically. For its part, ASEAN values the role that the EU can play in a regional context driven by growing strategic competition. More than any other Dialogue Partner,

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<sup>1</sup> ASEAN's Member States are Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Malaysia, Myanmar/Burma, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam.

the EU can help ASEAN to achieve its integration goals as a trusted partner, without preaching any specific model.

For the EU, deeper engagement with ASEAN is key to developing a more rounded Asia strategy. In recent years, the EU has:

- acceded to the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia;
- scaled up and redirected its cooperation, forging a more ambitious and political partnership, as set out in the Brunei Plan of Action (2013-2017)<sup>2</sup>, the framework for all EU-ASEAN cooperation, including the many activities of EU Member States;
- taken part in more top-level visits; and
- launched new initiatives for tangible engagement in priority areas.

ASEAN has noted and appreciated the EU's engagement; there is now a need to step up the momentum and give effect to the ASEAN and EU foreign ministers' joint decision in July 2014 to 'turn the relationship into a strategic one'. Taking EU-ASEAN relations to the next level will build on and complement the already rich and varied bilateral ties between the EU and individual ASEAN members; these processes should be seen as mutually reinforcing.

## **2. Connectivity: capturing the essence of regional integration**

Connectivity is the central, unifying project at the heart of ASEAN today. The core aims were set out in the 2010 *Master Plan on ASEAN Connectivity*, with the overall objective to bring business, people and institutions closer together by eliminating barriers<sup>3</sup>. The *Master Plan* underlines that, while hard infrastructure is important, an enabling regulatory framework and a shared identity also play crucial roles in connecting ASEAN countries with each other and with the rest of the world. The EU – itself an exercise in regional integration – is also founded on Connectivity (even if terminologies differ). It is with the EU more than any other partner that ASEAN can discuss, for instance, the lessons learned in establishing integrated transport systems at a continental level, creating an internal market and bringing people together.

The July 2014 EU-ASEAN Ministerial Meeting in Brussels confirmed the mutual interest in cooperating on Connectivity. Many of the sectoral initiatives referred to in this communication should be seen in the context of putting cooperation on Connectivity at the centre of EU-ASEAN relations.

The Lower Mekong region (Cambodia, the Lao PDR, Myanmar and Vietnam) is developing fast but contains ASEAN's poorest and least connected countries. The current per capita gross national income of the richest ASEAN country is 26 times that of the poorest (in the EU, this ratio is less than 1:4).<sup>4</sup> Narrowing the development gap will be a litmus test for intra-ASEAN Connectivity and key to the success of the AEC.

<sup>2</sup> The *Bandar Seri Begawan Plan of Action to Strengthen the ASEAN-EU Enhanced Partnership (2013-2017)*, [http://eeas.europa.eu/asean/docs/plan\\_of\\_action\\_en.pdf](http://eeas.europa.eu/asean/docs/plan_of_action_en.pdf).

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.asean.org/resources/publications/asean-publications/item/master-plan-on-asean-connectivity-2>.

<sup>4</sup> World Bank data (2013).

EU development cooperation fits well with the scope of ASEAN's Initiative for Integration (IAI), which places strong emphasis on bringing Lower Mekong countries closer to the development levels of wealthier ASEAN Member States. ASEAN could benefit from the EU's own experience of integration and cohesion.

Specific initiatives in this area will include:

- promoting regular and systematic dialogue between the EU and ASEAN on Connectivity – following the success of the ASEAN Connectivity Coordinating Committee (ACCC) visit to Brussels and Luxembourg in February 2014, a first dialogue was held in Naypyidaw (Myanmar/Burma) in September 2014;
- setting up a Connectivity task force to act as the ACCC's interlocutor and drive forward the EU's various activities in support of ASEAN Connectivity;
- continued support for the countries of the Lower Mekong in their efforts to reduce the intra-ASEAN development gap and to connect with each other. To this end, the EU will triple its bilateral aid to Mekong countries, from EUR 607 million (2007-13) to EUR 1 705 million (2014-20);
- supporting bankable projects on regional connectivity in the fields of transport, energy and urban infrastructure<sup>5</sup>. An ASEAN technical assistance facility (EUR 1.1 million, operational mid-2015), will help identify projects and undertake feasibility studies;
- blending EU grants and loans from international financial institutions, including the European Investment Bank (EIB), to promote the development of a green economy in the ASEAN region through the Asia Investment Facility (AIF);
- sharing the EU's experience of successful river-basin management, e.g. the Danube Region Strategy;
- proposing a dedicated dialogue of Foreign Ministers on the Lower Mekong to discuss regional issues and ongoing EU assistance; and
- sharing EU's experience in building an internal market in goods and services as ASEAN advances with the completion of its ASEAN Economic Community.

## ***2.1. Boosting trade, investment and business***

Trade and investment flows between the EU and ASEAN have intensified considerably over the past decade. Today, ASEAN as a whole is the EU's third largest trade partner outside Europe (after the United States and China) and the EU is ASEAN's second trade partner (after China), with bilateral trade in goods and services reaching a value of EUR 238 billion in 2013. The EU has also built a solid investment stock of over EUR 156 billion in the ASEAN region. It accounts for the biggest proportion of total foreign direct investment in ASEAN (almost a quarter). Although a more recent phenomenon, ASEAN investment in Europe has also been growing steadily and reached a total stock of over EUR 57 billion at the end of 2013.

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<sup>5</sup> Specific EU programmes funded under the EU's DCI programme include the ASEAN Air Transport Integration Project (AATIP), the EU-ASEAN Statistics and Integration Monitoring (COMPASS) programme, the EU Support to Higher Education in the ASEAN Region (EU-SHARE) programme, the EU-ASEAN Border Management and Migration programme and the Enhanced Regional EU-ASEAN Dialogue Initiative (E-READI).

Despite these impressive figures, there is still significant scope for EU-ASEAN trade relations to grow. ASEAN is about to become a single market with over 600 million consumers and a growing middle class; this offers great investment and export opportunities for European business.

The EU has engaged actively with the ASEAN region and increasingly with its individual member states. Negotiations for bilateral free-trade agreements (FTAs) were launched with Singapore in 2010, and subsequently with Malaysia, Vietnam and Thailand. The negotiations on the EU-Singapore FTA were concluded in October 2014 and negotiations for an ambitious and broad-based FTA with Vietnam which could set an important benchmark for other EU negotiations in the region are close to completion.

In 2014-20, the EU will devote roughly half of its financial assistance to ASEAN (EUR 85 million) to supporting ASEAN's connectivity through sustainable and inclusive economic integration and trade. To this end, it will also mobilise resources from the AIF, by blending EU grants with loans from the EIB and other international financial institutions.

Beyond trade agreements and financial assistance, the EU will also work with ASEAN to promote smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. This will focus on encouraging a business-friendly environment in other countries, eliminating non-tariff barriers, harmonising standards, strengthening the rule of law and the implementation of international labour standards. The ongoing EU-ASEAN Research and Innovation Dialogue will also have to play a primary role in supporting socio-economic growth.

Only 13% of EU SMEs are internationally active outside the EU<sup>6</sup>. Creating business opportunities for European SMEs in ASEAN countries will involve *inter alia* improving the regulatory environment, access to finance, intellectual property rights and market access (including public procurement) and developing corporate governance.

Specific initiatives in this area will include:

- taking trade relations with ASEAN to a different level, including through regular consultations between economy ministers, and working towards an ambitious region-to-region FTA building on bilateral agreements between the EU and ASEAN Member States as stepping stones towards this objective;
- improving business opportunities for SMEs, including through instruments such as the EU Gateway/Business Avenues in South-East Asia, the ASEAN-EU Business Council and the joint development of bankable projects in support of the development of Green Economy to be supported by blending grants from the EU and loans from European and International Financial Institutions through the Asia Investment Facility (AIF);
- exploring with the EIB and the development banks operating in the ASEAN region ways to improve access to finance for the internationalisation of SMEs.

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<sup>6</sup> According to *Eurochambres*, only 13% of EU SMEs are internationally active outside the EU and about 9.7% of manufacturing SMEs export goods to countries outside the EU. It is expected that 90% of world growth in the next five years will take place outside Europe.

- strengthening EU-ASEAN dialogue and cooperation in the field of Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) measures on the basis of international standards, to facilitate trade and removing existing SPS trade barriers;
- supporting enhanced cooperation among border agencies to combat customs fraud while encouraging legitimate trade, transparency and non-discrimination between economic operators, including through technical assistance (as in the case of the ASEAN Computerised Transit System pilot project) under the EU's ARISE programme;
- starting a dialogue with ASEAN to enhance mutual understanding of regulatory and industrial policy frameworks. The chemicals sector, for instance, would benefit from an exchange of best practice on the implementation of global standards such as the UN Global Harmonised System (GHS) for classification and labelling, as well as exploring areas of common interest;
- promoting business-to-business and cluster-to-cluster cooperation, access to finance, and regional capacity-building on standardisation on the basis of recognised international standards and WTO principles;
- starting a dialogue on intellectual property, corporate governance and corporate social responsibility, consumer protection, judicial cooperation (especially in international commercial law) and improved application of international labour standards;
- promoting sectoral dialogues in areas of mutual interest, including:
  - regional and international standards in the *automotive industry* and *health and medicine*;
  - *satellite navigation, Earth observation, Copernicus and space issues* with a view to building a long-term cooperation strategy supported by Horizon 2020 application research grants in these areas;
  - the *defence-related industrial sector*, to support the internationalisation of Europe's defence industry, including by EU-ASEAN matchmaking events<sup>7</sup>; and
  - *information and communication technologies*, with a focus on ICT applications for the benefit of citizens, spectrum harmonisation and management, search and rescue services, management of mobile communication growth, digital television and broadcasting.

## **2.2. Transport**

Civil aviation plays a key role in ensuring good connectivity within ASEAN and between the EU and ASEAN. Half of the world's new traffic growth over the next 20 years will be to, from or within the Asia-Pacific region, reaching a global market share of almost 40 % by 2030. Air traffic between the EU and the ASEAN region is projected to grow by 65 % in the next 20 years, partly due to increased tourism.

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<sup>7</sup> See Commission Communications COM(2013) 542 and COM(2014) 387. Matchmaking events can be organised through COSME, the EU programme for the Competitiveness of Enterprises and Small and Medium-sized Enterprises.

The Commission's 2012 Communication on *The EU's External Aviation Policy*<sup>8</sup> highlighted the importance of the ASEAN single civil aviation market, which offers the potential for closer region-to-region cooperation and, by combining market liberalisation and market regulation, could represent a reference for ASEAN. The EU has gone through a similar process over the past three decades, culminating in today's fully integrated EU single aviation market.

The EU is providing technical assistance to develop institutional capacity within ASEAN to achieve a safe, secure and sustainable single aviation market through the ASEAN Air Transport Integration Project (AATIP), implemented in close cooperation with the European Aviation Safety Agency (EASA).

ASEAN's progress in setting up an internal aviation market also prepares the ground for closer cooperation at region-to-region level. The EU-ASEAN Aviation Summit in February 2014 and the subsequent work of a dedicated EU-ASEAN aviation working group have been instrumental in this respect.

Specific initiatives in this area will include:

- strengthening the dialogue on aviation, including with a view to starting formal negotiations on a region-to-region civil aviation agreement; and
- supporting the development of improved urban transportation systems co-financed by the EIB, EU Member States' development banks and/or the AIF.

### ***2.3. Research, innovation and people-to-people contacts***

Closer people-to-people contacts are a core component of a deeper EU-ASEAN partnership. They cover both dialogue and cooperation on research and innovation, and exchanges of higher education students and researchers. ASEAN's strong participation in the EU's Seventh Framework Programme for Research and Technological Development (2007-13) led to 103 projects, with EU contributions totalling EUR 20 million.

Each year, around 250 ASEAN students have received scholarships under the EU Erasmus Mundus programme, which has now been succeeded by Erasmus+, and many scholarships are provided by EU Member States. Altogether, more than 4000 ASEAN students travel to Europe on EU scholarships funded by the EU and its Member States every year.

Specific initiatives in this area will include:

- enhancing cooperation under the EU's new research and innovation programme, Horizon 2020<sup>9</sup>, in the priority areas jointly identified by senior officials at the EU-ASEAN Dialogue on Research and Innovation in August 2014 (and subsequently);
- extending cooperation on education, including by sharing EU experience on modernisation and internationalisation of higher education and system reforms (e.g.

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<sup>8</sup> COM(2012) 556 final.

<sup>9</sup> In addition to Horizon 2020, the instruments that can be used are the already mentioned EU-ASEAN Research and Innovation Dialogue as well as the upcoming ASEAN Plan of Action on Science, Technology and Innovation (APASTI, 2015-2020).

impact on qualification frameworks, quality assurance, accreditation and evaluation systems, and mutual recognition of diplomas) through Erasmus+ projects and the EU Support to Higher Education in the ASEAN Region (EU-SHARE) programme;

- organising higher education fairs and academic exchanges (as part of EU support to promote ASEAN connectivity in the education sector);
- continuing dialogue and cooperation on migration and mobility issues such as legal migration and visas, irregular migration and the return and readmission of irregular migrants, trafficking in human beings, migration and development, and international protection (asylum and other forms of international protection);
- cooperating with ASEAN Member States on sustainable tourism on the basis of the experience being made with Thailand, Myanmar/Burma and Vietnam; and
- promoting the participation of Non-State Actors and Civil Society Organisations (CSO) in regional integration processes.

### **3. A greener partnership for a sustainable future**

The ASEAN region is endowed with rich natural resources that sustain a wide range of economic activities and livelihoods. While occupying only 3 % of the world's total land area, the region has an exceptionally large biological diversity and provides the natural habitat to over 20% of known plant and animal species. However, population and economic growth are exerting increasing pressure on the region's natural resources, with water scarcity, illegal logging, forest conversion), peatland drainage and forest fires leading to biodiversity loss and an upsurge in greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, as well as health problems and economic losses. Challenges in the region also include water scarcity and poor waste management, contributing to global marine litter problems.

The ASEAN region is the third largest tropical forest basin in the world and the one where GHG emissions from deforestation and forest degradation are growing fastest: currently 260 million tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> a year, out of 810 million globally.

South-East Asia is prone to natural disasters, in part linked to climate change. These have led to significant loss of life and (in particular the 2004 tsunami, cyclone Nargis in 2008 and the 2013 Haiyan mega typhoon) affected ASEAN, but also EU, citizens. For years, the EU has been helping ASEAN countries, notably through the EU DIPECHO programme, to develop a more effective emergency response and early-warning capacity to handle man-made and natural disasters, as well as sharing lessons learnt in developing efficient consular assistance mechanisms. The EU is one of the leading financial supporters of the ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance (AHA) Centre, while also enhancing its links with national crisis response structures, e.g. in Myanmar/Burma and the Philippines. Supporting the post-2015 development of the "ASEAN Agreement on Disaster Management and Emergency Response" (AADMER) and in line with the Sendai Framework on Disaster Risk Reduction<sup>10</sup>, the EU and ASEAN will focus on increasing the resilience of populations to meet disaster challenges as well as on the reduction of risk, notably in urban settings.

<sup>10</sup> [http://www.wcdrr.org/uploads/Sendai\\_Framework\\_for\\_Disaster\\_Risk\\_Reduction\\_2015-2030.pdf](http://www.wcdrr.org/uploads/Sendai_Framework_for_Disaster_Risk_Reduction_2015-2030.pdf)

In view of their global responsibilities, the EU and ASEAN have a shared interest in developing a more effective region-to-region dialogue on climate change. ASEAN and the EU share the objectives of staying below 2°C temperature increases and developing low-emission and climate-resilient economies and societies. The EU is ready to support ASEAN in mainstreaming climate change in its post-2015 vision, including through dedicated funding under the focal area Climate Change, Environment and Disaster Management of its regional programme 2014 to 2020. The EU will support mitigation, adaptation and resilience, and cooperation on disaster management, while offering the opportunity to tackle climate change and its root causes in an integrated manner.

The EU's Forest Law Enforcement Governance and Trade (FLEGT) Action Plan aims to improve forest governance and promote trade in sustainably and legally harvested timber products and provides a good basis for intensifying dialogue and capacity-building in ASEAN. The EU is engaged in the negotiation or implementation of FLEGT Voluntary Partnership Agreements (VPAs) with most ASEAN countries and has been supporting cooperation at the regional level<sup>11</sup>. In addition, the EU is contributing USD 3 billion to the UN's climate policies and incentives for reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation (REDD+) and will encourage ASEAN members to develop robust and ambitious REDD+ strategies.

Haze pollution is an issue that affects several ASEAN countries, such as Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore. Sustained smouldering and fire on peatland and other land, driven by forest conversion, affects air quality, local health and the economy. In some cases, pollution is so bad that local authorities have declared a state of emergency. The GHG emissions from drained and/or burned peatlands are significant drivers of climate change, contributing to the fact that the ASEAN region ranks very high as GHG emitters. The EU-funded SEApeat project has helped ASEAN countries to develop and implement national action plans for peatlands. This includes alternative income-generating activities and fire prevention methods such as controlled burning. For 2014-20, new funding is planned for the Sustainable Use of Peatlands and Haze Mitigation in ASEAN project (EUR 20 million) and the Biodiversity and Protected Area Management in ASEAN project (EUR 10 million).

In the coming years, the energy sector will be key to underpinning socio-economic development and connectivity, while complying with climate change and environmental objectives. Sharing experience and best practice and demonstrating innovative solutions, including in the areas of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions reduction, energy efficiency and reduction of demand as well as in development of renewable energy sources, can be the basis for fruitful dialogue on energy and climate change. Research and innovation, including the demonstration and deployment of novel solutions related to the above challenges will be covered by the EU-ASEAN Research and Innovation Dialogue.

The sustainable use of natural resources also involves fighting illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing, which has significant environmental, economic and security repercussions. The EU remains committed at international level to the fight against IUU fishing and this

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<sup>11</sup> A Voluntary Partnership Agreement (VPA) is a legally binding trade agreement between the European Union and a timber-producing country outside the EU. The purpose of a VPA is to ensure that timber and timber products exported to the EU come from legal sources. A VPA between the EU and Indonesia was concluded in 2014. VPA Negotiations are ongoing with Laos, Malaysia, Thailand, and Vietnam. Cambodia and Myanmar are in a preparation phase. A FLEGT dialogue with the Philippines is ongoing.

commitment is essential to the promotion of better global ocean governance. ASEAN has also declared it an important priority.

Specific initiatives in this area will include:

- strengthening EU-ASEAN collaboration on climate change and initiating a policy dialogue on environment and sustainable development, in line with the Brunei Plan of Action and on the basis of EU's experience in handling sustainable development on a continental scale, climate policy mainstreaming and transforming Europe into a highly energy-efficient, low carbon economy;
- enhancing support for ASEAN efforts to tackle climate change, protect the environment and promote green and sustainable growth through the EU's regional cooperation programme (over EUR 60 million of EUR 170 million allocated for 2014-20), as well as through the AIF and the SWITCH Asia programme<sup>12</sup>;
- supporting in particular Lower Mekong countries' efforts as regards the nexus water – energy – food security, the development of enhanced sustainable agriculture, food security (including food safety), natural resources management systems and through the promotion of a dialogue with the Danube region;
- strengthening regional approaches to FLEGT and REDD+, including to prepare new REDD+ Emission Reduction Programmes at national or province/district level to better address the drivers of deforestation and forest degradation in a trans-boundary manner, and to access REDD+ results-based payments, building upon the EU-sponsored EU REDD Facility;
- promoting practical cooperation on issues such as deforestation, illegal logging and associated trade, including through the effective implementation of FLEGT VPAs, tackling trans-boundary haze, including by halting the drainage of peatlands, supporting a more sustainable production of commodities such as palm oil, rubber and coffee, reversing biodiversity loss, fighting wildlife trafficking and marine litter, promoting a sound management of waste and chemicals, supporting water security (including in its trans-boundary aspects) and green urban development;
- enhancing EU-ASEAN cooperation on energy – in particular, the dialogue should cover energy efficiency and conservation, biofuels, the investment framework, renewables and infrastructure development;
- strengthening EU-ASEAN regional cooperation on IUU fishing, in addition to existing bilateral dialogues with some ASEAN members; implementing appropriate rules on monitoring, control and surveillance; and
- developing EU-ASEAN collaboration on disaster management, notably through stronger operational links, expanded training activities and participation in the ARF disaster relief exercises and by focusing on the implementation of the Sendai Framework on Disaster Risk Reduction.

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<sup>12</sup> <http://www.switch-asia.eu/>

## **4. Cooperation on political and security issues**

### ***4.1. Security***

In recent years, the EU and ASEAN have agreed to develop a more rounded partnership, going beyond the traditional focus on economic issues. This followed ASEAN's decisions to begin to tackle security issues such as disaster management, maritime security, transnational crime and counter-terrorism. Similarly, the EU has expanded its role as a security actor and provider, including through the Lisbon Treaty provisions enabling more integrated approaches to foreign policy.

ASEAN has shown creativity and determination to put itself at the centre of the regional architecture, where it engages regional and global powers through a set of concentric and overlapping fora such as ASEAN+3 (involving China, Japan and South Korea), the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), the ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting – Plus (ADMM-Plus) process and the East Asia Summit (EAS).

The EAS is increasingly becoming the leading forum for strategic cooperation in the region, with the United States, China, Japan, South Korea, India, Australia, New Zealand and the Russian Federation as members, but not yet the EU. Given the EU's trade, investment and other links, it has a clear interest in stability in the region and thus in promoting a security architecture that is better able to manage the region's political tensions and in which it plays a key role, including through future accession to the EAS.

ASEAN values the opportunity of enhancing cooperation with the EU on security. It can draw inspiration from the EU's experience of framing security cooperation at regional level and the EU's involvement — active but non-threatening — can help it maintain multiple strategic options and centrality as the big powers assert themselves more forcefully in the region.

The EU and ASEAN should exploit the convergence of interests and make political and security issues one of the most dynamic vectors of their cooperation, both under the umbrella of EU-ASEAN cooperation and through greater EU involvement in the ARF, currently the only regional security forum of which it is a member.

The EU has already stepped up its involvement in the ARF in recent years. The High Representative/Vice President has attended the ARF Ministerial Meeting every year since 2012. At officials' level, the EU has been more active than ever before, co-chairing ARF meetings and contributing to the implementation of ARF work plans. Recent EU initiatives include:

- in 2013/14, co-chairing (together with Myanmar/Burma) the ARF Inter-Sessional Group on Confidence-Building Measures and Preventive Diplomacy and the related Defence Officials Dialogue;
- co-sponsoring, with Brunei Darussalam, the first ever ARF training course on preventive diplomacy and mediation in October 2014 in Brunei; and

- the first ever European Security and Defence College orientation seminar on the common security and defence policy (CSDP) in March 2014, with a special focus on EU-ASEAN security cooperation.<sup>13</sup>

ASEAN partners have noticed and appreciated this rise in EU activity on security but question whether it will be sustained. Apart from its interest in regional stability as such, the EU's ability to develop security cooperation will influence how ASEAN partners assess its bid to accede to the EAS.

Maritime security is a key challenge of common concern and a key component of the EU's promotion of better ocean governance. Almost 50% of world shipping (by tonnage) passes through the South China Sea. Energy supplies, raw materials and goods transiting these waters are of vital importance to most economies, including the EU's. The EU therefore has a strong interest in maintaining stability and security in the South China Sea, as well as respect for international law, including the UN Convention on the Law of the Seas (UNCLOS). It has consistently called for peaceful and cooperative resolution of territorial disputes and is a strong supporter of ASEAN's and China's ongoing efforts to agree a Code of Conduct on the South China Sea, encouraging an early conclusion of the negotiations.

The EU took the initiative of organising the first EU-ASEAN High-Level Dialogue on Maritime Security in Jakarta in November 2013, featuring in-depth discussions on piracy, maritime surveillance, port security and the joint management of resources. A second Dialogue will be held in 2015, with a special focus on the link between maritime security and countering organised crime.

The EU Centre's of Excellence Initiative on CBRN (Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear risks) has built an effective regional network around its Secretariat in Manila. All 10 ASEAN Member States are partners of this initiative, which provides a regional platform for tackling CBRN risks and is a key response to both European and ASEAN security concerns. The EU encourages closer ASEAN involvement in the initiative, which would assist in ensuring the longer term sustainability and political support for the Centre.

Other areas where threats to ASEAN and EU interests are growing and both sides have a stake in closer cooperation include:

- trafficking (in human beings, drugs, wildlife);
- cyber security and cybercrime (including countering online child sexual abuse);
- non-proliferation and disarmament (including the Arms Trade Treaty);
- de-radicalisation/countering violent extremism;
- situations of vulnerable minorities that have regional implications;
- mediation; and
- election observation.

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<sup>13</sup> A second seminar is due to take place in the second half of 2015.

In each of these areas, the EU is preparing practical initiatives, in both the EU-ASEAN and ARF frameworks, to deepen dialogue and explore greater capacity-building.

Specific initiatives in this area will include:

- strengthening EU support for regional solutions to piracy and other aspects of maritime security. In addition to its existing engagement through the Critical Maritime Routes (MARSIC) Programme, the EU will explore capacity-building activities in and with ASEAN in the field of maritime security (surveillance, port security), as set out in the EU Maritime Security Strategy and Action Plan (adopted in June 2014)<sup>14</sup>. It will seek to make the EU-ASEAN High-Level Dialogue on Maritime Security an annual event;
- enhancing dialogue on disaster relief combined with greater capacity-building at ASEAN (AHA Centre) and national level; extending the current projects in Myanmar/Burma and the Philippines to other ASEAN member states;
- co-chairing (with the Philippines) an ARF workshop on raising awareness and promoting ARF cooperation on CBRN risk mitigation in Manila in September 2015;
- organising an annual CSDP orientation seminar with a focus on EU-ASEAN cooperation, to enhance awareness of the EU's growing role on security issues and foster greater practical, operational cooperation in the future with ASEAN and its Member States;
- strengthening dialogue and cooperation on issues of common interest such as asset recovery to counter organised crime, wildlife trafficking, combating child sexual abuse, including in the context of the Global Alliance against Child Sexual Abuse Online, and tackling jointly the issue of transnational child sex offenders; and
- supporting dedicated human rights dialogues at both the regional and bilateral level.

## ***4.2. Human Rights***

As part of the effort to build a more mature and more political partnership, the EU is also keen to work constructively with ASEAN to promote and protect international human rights standards. In this context, a key EU priority is the abolition of the death penalty in the ASEAN region. The EU therefore welcomed the creation of the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR) in 2009 and the adoption of the ASEAN Human Rights Declaration in 2012.

Specific initiatives in this area will include:

- supporting the ASEAN human rights mechanism, hosting visits by the AICHR (such as that in 2011; another is planned for the second part of 2015) and the ASEAN Commission on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Women and Children (ACWC), which visited Europe in 2013, and arranging visits by the EU Special Representative for Human Rights (following up those in May 2013 and November 2014);
- stepping up the dialogue and cooperation with the AICHR (as the overarching human rights mechanism in ASEAN) on issues such as the rights of migrants and victims of trafficking, business and human rights/corporate social responsibility, torture, women's and children's rights, gender equality and the fight against discriminations;

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<sup>14</sup> <http://register.consilium.europa.eu/doc/srv?l=EN&f=ST%2011205%202014%20INIT>.

- placing greater emphasis on minority rights and the death penalty as crucial areas for the policy dialogue with ASEAN; this will include a transparent and systematic process of consultation and dialogue with civil society and other stakeholders; and
- supporting civil society organisations and non-state actors in the ASEAN region, including through specific programmes such as the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR).

## 5. Moving towards a partnership with a strategic purpose

The immediate priority is to develop the substance along the lines of the Brunei Plan of Action and the proposals set out in the present joint communication. For the future, Foreign Ministers of both EU and ASEAN agreed last July to turn the EU-ASEAN relationship from a 'natural' or 'enhanced' partnership into a strategic one' and tasked Senior Officials to develop a roadmap for this goal<sup>15</sup>.

Working towards an EU-ASEAN Strategic Partnership would mean going beyond the current predominantly bilateral mindset and aiming for greater engagement on key regional and global issues. There is considerable scope for deepening the dialogue and aligning positions on issues of global significance, including:

- climate change;
- reducing disaster risk and increasing resilience;
- post-2015 sustainable development goals including poverty eradication;
- health pandemics; and
- counter-terrorism, counter-radicalisation and foreign fighters.

Moreover, regional conflicts such as in Ukraine, the tensions in the South China Sea and the Iranian and North Korean nuclear issues are all, in essence, about core security principles and how to ensure compliance with international law. As strong proponents of rules-based and effective multilateralism, the EU and ASEAN have a vested interest in expanding their cooperation on these regional issues of global significance. Deepening EU-ASEAN cooperation in the various sectors will strengthen the rationale for moving to a formal Strategic Partnership will require political commitment and resources on both sides. The EU is ready to play its part in a significant upgrading of relations and is committed *inter alia* to:

- engaging in a joint assessment on the prospects for a successful region-to-region FTA negotiation;
- negotiating a civil aviation agreement;
- initiating an EU-ASEAN policy dialogue on environment and sustainable development and strengthening the one on research and innovation;
- continuing dialogue and cooperation on migration and mobility issues;

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<sup>15</sup> For the co-chairs' statement, see: [http://eeas.europa.eu/statements/docs/2014/140723\\_03\\_en.pdf](http://eeas.europa.eu/statements/docs/2014/140723_03_en.pdf).

- increasing its financial support for regional cooperation with ASEAN and for development cooperation with less developed ASEAN Member States (Cambodia, the Lao PDR, Myanmar, Vietnam and the Philippines) to more than EUR 2 billion for the period 2014-2020;
- implementing an extensive ‘package’ of new initiatives in the area of non-traditional security (maritime, disaster relief, transnational crime, various training courses on preventive diplomacy, crisis management, mediation, the rule of law and election observation); and
- appointing a dedicated resident EU ambassador to ASEAN.

The successful October 2014 informal Leaders’ meeting in Milan should be replicated in the future on a regular basis. At the level of Foreign Ministers, in addition to the full-scale two-yearly EU-ASEAN Ministerial Meeting and the PMC (Post-Ministerial Conference) in the margins of the ARF, the HR/VP and ASEAN Foreign Ministers could meet at the opening of the UN General Assembly. Sectoral meetings at ministerial level, even if informal, would also contribute to furthering the bilateral agenda in many of the areas covered by the present Communication. The EU will promote such meetings as much as possible, including in the margins of ministerial meetings within the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) and the ASEM Summit.

The EU will also continue to promote the parliamentary dimension of the EU-ASEAN relations, including by supporting more structured exchanges between the European Parliament and the ASEAN Inter-parliamentary Assembly (AIPA), as proposed in the EP resolution on the future of EU-ASEAN relations adopted on 15 January 2014<sup>16</sup>.

This Joint Communication puts forward concrete ideas for taking EU-ASEAN relations to the next level by providing a more coherent framework for sectoral cooperation and ensuring a sharper political focus. Both sides have an interest in seizing this opportunity. This will also form the backdrop for ASEAN’s review of the EAS, including its functioning and future membership. The EU is in a good position to contribute to the practical work of the EAS and thus heed the call from ASEAN for greater EU engagement. The move to an EU-ASEAN Strategic Partnership should go hand in hand with the EU’s presence at the region’s strategic table.

The High Representative and the Commission call on the Council and the European Parliament to endorse the ideas presented in this Joint Communication and to work together to forge a modern EU-ASEAN partnership with a strategic purpose.

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<sup>16</sup> <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+TA+P7-TA-2014-0022+0+DOC+XML+V0//EN>