



The Five-Decade Journey of EU-ASEAN Relations - Which Path For The Decades To Come?



EUROPEAN LIBERAL YOUTH
LYMEF

Self

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Foreword

Fostering Liberal Collaborations in a Global Landscape

By Svenja Hahn, Member of European Parliament, Renew Europe

In the conflict of our time, autocracy versus democracy, building partnerships between democracies but also fostering dialogue and stronger regional cooperation with different partners becomes ever more relevant. The relationship between the European Union (EU) and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) is a multifaceted one, in the fast-paced world of international relations. In the past, the EU and ASEAN have shared a journey marked by economic openness and multilateralism. A strong focus on this economic cooperation had been built on safeguarding human rights, in the framework of trade preferences that most ASEAN countries base their trade relations with the EU on. With Vietnam and Singapore, the cooperation has been taken to the next level with a Free Trade Agreement. But it needs to be acknowledged, that in some ASEAN countries, the situation on democracy, stability and human rights have eroded in the last years, while others have progressed. The relationship between the EU and ASEAN reflects opportunities and complexities but also shows the transformative potential of shared values in international cooperation.

In our interconnected world, global challenges require global solutions. As the EU and ASEAN navigate a rapidly evolving global landscape, our adherence to liberal principles becomes paramount in addressing emerging challenges and nurturing new opportunities. From climate change and trade to security, health and youth policies, the EU and ASEAN share many topics where cooperation can make a difference.

This publication looks into the role that cooperation plays in fostering comprehensive strategies to address pressing issues, demonstrating how the partnership between these two regions can evolve.

This publication provides an exploration of the multifaceted relationships between EU and ASEAN from a liberal standpoint, offering readers a comprehensive understanding of shared goals, differences and challenges in current and future collaboration. May the thoughts from this publication spark new ideas with the reader to contribute to the spread of liberal ideas in a world in need of more dialogue.

Abbreviations

AADMER	ASEAN Agreement on Disaster Management and Emergency Response
AATHP	Agreement on Transboundary Haze Pollution
AATIP	ASEAN Air Transport Integration Project
ACB	ASEAN Centre for Biodiversity
ACC	ASEAN Co-ordinating Council
ACCC	Co-ordinating Committee on Climate Change
ACGF	Catalytic Green Finance Facility
ACPOA-CT	Comprehensive Action Plan on Counter Terrorism
ACRF	ASEAN Comprehensive Recovery Framework
ACSDSD	Sustainable Development Studies and Dialogue
ACTIP	ASEAN Convention Against Trafficking in Persons
ACTS	ASEAN Customs Transit System
ACWC	ASEAN Commission on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Women and Children
ADB	Asian Development Bank
ADMM	ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting
AECB	ASEAN Economic Community Blueprint
AEM	ASEAN Economic Ministers
AFML	ASEAN Forum on Migrant Labour
AHA	ASEAN Humanitarian Assistance
AHRD	ASEAN Human Rights Declaration
AI	Artificial Intelligence
AICHR	ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights
AIIB	ASEAN Infrastructure Investment Bank
AMF	ASEAN Maritime Forum
AMM	Aceh Monitoring Mission
AMO	ASEAN Maritime Outlook
AMS	ASEAN Member States

AOIP	ASEAN Outlook on Indo-Pacific
APA	ASEAN Ports Association
APASTI	Plan of Action Science Technology and Innovation
APRIS 1	ASEAN Programme for Regional Integration Support
APSMPE	Sustainable Devt of Peatland Ecosystem
ARF	ASEAN Regional Forum
ARISE +	ASEAN Regional Integration Support from Europe Plus
ASB	ASEAN Sectoral Bodies
ASCC	ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community
ASCN	Smart Cities Network
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Countries
ASEF	ASEAN Europe Foundation
ASEM	Asia Europe Meeting
ATC	Technical and vocational education Council
AWEN	Women Entrepreneurs Network
AWGCC	Working Group on Climate Change
BIMP-EAGA	Brunei Indonesia Malaysia Philippine - East Asia Growth Area
BRI	Belt and Road Initiative
CAFTA	China-ASEAN Free Trade Agreement
CALD	Council of Asian Liberal Democrats
CATA	Comprehensive Air Transport Agreement
CBAM	Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism
CLMVT	Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Vietnam, Thailand
CMP	Co-ordinated Maritime Presences
CNRP	Cambodian National Rescue Party
CPP	Cambodian Peoples Party
CRIMARIO	Critical Maritime Routes Indo-Pacific
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
DAAD	German Academic Exchange Service
DEFA	Digital Economy Framework Agreement
DGMARE	Directorate General Maritime Affairs and Fisheries
EAS	East Asia Summit
ECAP III	EU ASEAN Protection of Intellectual Property Rights

ECJ	European Court of Justice
EEA	European Economic Area
EEC	European Economic Community
EFTA	European Free Trade Association
EGD	European Sea Ports Organisation
EMJMD	Erasmus Mudus Joint Masters Degree
ENQA	European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education
e-READI	Enhanced Regional EU-ASEAN Dialogue Instrument
ESPO	European Sea Ports Organisation
EUCSDP	EU Common Security and Defence Policy
EUDR	EU Deforestation Regulation
EUNAVFOR	EU's Naval Diplomacy for the Indo-Pacific
EUSCIP	EU's Strategy for Co-operation in the Indo-Pacific
EUSFTA	EU Singapore Free Trade Agreement
EUSOM	EU Senior Officials Meeting
EUSPCA	EU Singapore Partnership and Cooperation Agreement
EYY	European Year of Youth
FTA	Free Trade Agreement
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
Gen AI	Generative Artificial Intelligence
GFC	Global Financial Crisis
GHG	Greenhouse Gases
IAI	Initiative for Asean Integration
ILO	International Labour Organisation
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IMO	International Maritime Organisation
IMT-GT	Indonesia Malaysia Thailand - Growth Triangle
IOM	International Organisation for Migration
IORIS	Indo-Pacific Regional Information Sharing platform
IPA	Investment Protection Agreement
IRA	Inflation Reduction Act
ISDS	Investor State Dispute Resolution
JRC	Joint Research Centre

LDC	Least Development Countries
LGBTIQ	Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transsexual Intersex Queer/ Questioning
LYMEC	European Liberal Youth
MEAs	Multilateral Environment Agreements
MPAC	Master Plan on Asean Connectivity 2025
MPOA	Malaysian Palm Oil Association
MSMEs	Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises
NTBs	Non Tariff Barriers
NUFFiC	Dutch Organisation for Internationalisation in Education
NUG	National Unity Government
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OEWG	Open ended working group
READI	Regional Europe-ASEAN Dialogue Instrument
RED	Renewal Energy Directive
RIS	Regional Integration Support
SCP	Sustainable Consumption and Development
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SEOM-EU	ASEAN EU Senior Economic Officials
SHARE	Support to Higher Education in the ASEAN Region
SMEs	Small and Medium-sized enterprises
TAC	Treaty of Amity and Co-operation
TNFD	Taskforce for Nature Related Financial Disclosures
TREATI	Trans Regional EU-ASEAN Trade Initiative
UNCLOS	United Nations Convention on Laws of the Sea
UNGGE	United Nations Group of Governmental Experts
UNTOC	United Nations Transnational Organised Crime
UNWTO	United Nations World Tourism Organisation
WTO	World Trade Organisation
YAP	Youth Action Plan

Chapter 1 - Introduction

Partners in Progress – Exploring EU-ASEAN Partnership In a Changing World

By Isabelle Pucher

The Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) was first created in 1967 by the initial five member states of Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore and Thailand. Brunei Darussalam joined ASEAN in 1984, Vietnam in 1995, Laos and Myanmar in 1997 and Cambodia in 1999.

The relationship between the ASEAN and the European Union (EU) began 50 years ago in 1972 between the ASEAN and the European Economic Community (EEC) which later became the EU. The EU is perceived in Southeast Asia as a model regional organisation with laudable aims and objectives whilst the trade in goods and services provided by the two regional blocs are in many ways complementary.

ASEAN, meanwhile, is today the world's 5th largest economy with a market of over 640 million consumers. It is the EU's third-largest trading partner whilst the EU is ASEAN's second-largest trading partner.

Historically, South East Asia is not new territory for many European countries, and strong ties to the region already exist, for example, the UK with Brunei, Malaysia and Singapore, the Netherlands with Indonesia, France with Indo-China, and not least, Spain and Portugal with several countries in the region dating back to the 15th century.

“In an increasingly interconnected world, the 50-year partnership between the EU and the ASEAN stands as a beacon of collaboration, experience and growth.”

However, more recently, conversations between the EU and ASEAN have largely focused on specific issues, such as concerns over human rights in trade negotiations, e.g., the loss of “Everything-But-Arms” status by Cambodia, or over environmental issues, e.g., the banning of palm oil imports from Indonesia.

In an increasingly interconnected world, the 50-year partnership between the EU and the ASEAN stands as a beacon of collaboration, experience and growth. Fifty years

ago, the EU and the ASEAN embarked on a transformative journey that transcended geographical distances and cultural differences.

This publication encapsulates the spirit of collaboration that has characterised their relationship. Through the curation of essays by a diverse range of experts in various fields, this publication will take readers through an exploration of the trade dynamics between both regions, revealing the nuanced strategies that have propelled economic growth and innovation in both regions. The voices of the youth echo throughout these pages, showcasing the vibrant exchanges and initiatives that have empowered the next generation. The concept of the blue economy, committing to harness the potential of our oceans as well as proactive, innovative solutions addressing environmental and climate challenges to protect our planet are highlighted.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) as a catalyst for change and how to navigate an increasingly digital age, ensuring technology serves humanity is also discussed. Health, a fundamental cornerstone of well-being and citizens’ welfare also finds its due place in this narrative.



To reflect the policy relevance of the topics that this book addresses, interwoven in its chapters are policy recommendations derived from decades of shared experiences. These recommendations serve as guiding lights, illuminating the path to stronger collaboration, sustainable economic growth, improved systems and more inclusive societies.

As we navigate the complexities of the 21st century, this publication stands as a testament to the resilience of the EU-ASEAN relationship. It captures not just a shared history, but a shared vision for the future – a future defined by cooperation, understanding, and the unwavering belief in the potential of international collaboration to shape a better world.



Chapter 2

Europe's Asian Pivot: The EU-ASEAN Partnership as a Blueprint for Cooperation in the Pacific Century

By Dr Antonios Nestoras

EU-ASEAN Relations: Complementary Strengths, Shared Goals

In an era marked by a geopolitical and economic shift towards Asia – what pundits have called, the Pacific Century – the strategic relationship between the European Union (EU) and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) is of unparalleled importance. While both entities originate from different continents, cultures, and historical contexts, they find themselves at the confluence of shared interests, and complementary strengths. Amidst the increasing volatility of international relations, particularly with the recalibration of American foreign policy towards Asia, and the assertiveness of China, there is a timely necessity for both the EU and ASEAN to explore, deepen, and fortify their relationship across multiple dimensions—from economic partnerships to strategic collaborations, and from normative governance to societal exchanges.

The EU and ASEAN are interconnected economic powerhouses. The EU is ASEAN's second-largest trading partner, and ASEAN represents a critical market for European goods and investments. This economic interdependence provides a sturdy foundation upon which more elaborate strategic partnerships can be built. However, the strategic depth of EU-ASEAN relations extends far beyond economic considerations. The South China Sea, a hotbed of geopolitical tensions and territorial disputes, presents a compelling case for increased cooperation. ASEAN's unique consensus-based policy and general neutrality provide the EU with a conduit for diplomatic engagement in Asia that avoids exacerbating hostilities with major powers like the United States and China. It also creates an opportunity for the EU to involve itself in multi-party initiatives aimed at preserving peace and freedom of navigation. This is not just a matter of territorial integrity but also one of securing global trade routes that are crucial for EU member states.

“Herein lies
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relationship”

In a volatile period for world politics, where international norms and regulations are often flouted, both the EU and ASEAN stand as strong proponents of a rules-based international order. The EU's prowess in setting global standards—be it in data protection, environmental sustainability, or antitrust regulations—can be effectively complemented by ASEAN's nuanced understanding of regional geopolitics and commitment to 'quiet diplomacy.' This symbiosis can be leveraged to tackle a range of issues, from climate governance to human rights advocacy, reinforcing the importance of a law-abiding international community.

Moreover, the complexities of the 21st century bring forth an array of challenges that no nation or region can tackle in isolation. Climate change, pandemics, cybersecurity threats, and global terrorism are issues that transcend borders and demand a multilateral response. Herein lies the value of a fortified EU-ASEAN relationship, where combined expertise

and resources can accelerate solutions and advocacy on a global scale. At its heart, the relationship can also be deeply cultural and educational. programmes like Erasmus+ and various cultural exchanges serve as soft-power mechanisms to build mutual understanding, foster innovation, and nurture future leaders who appreciate the nuances of a multipolar world.

This chapter delves into the intricate and multifaceted relationship between the European Union (EU) and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), framing it as a beacon of potential in a world fraught with uncertainty. Beginning with the notion of the “Pacific Century”—a term that encapsulates the eastward shift of economic and political influence—we scrutinise why the EU has yet to enact a comparable “pivot to Asia” as seen in U.S. policy. Through a comprehensive analysis of EU-ASEAN interactions across economic, strategic, and cultural dimensions, the chapter argues that fortifying this partnership not only addresses pressing regional issues but also holds the potential to reshape the broader landscape of global governance, security, and the international community. Finally, for Europe, deepening its engagement with ASEAN could serve as a pivotal step in bolstering its geopolitical relevance and facilitating a strategic reorientation towards Asia.

From the “Pacific Century” to the American Pivot to Asia

The idea of the “Pacific Century” has been discussed in various forms for several decades, postulating that the 21st century would be dominated by Pacific Rim countries such as China, Japan, and the United States. The term was initially coined by economic pundits who noted the shift in economic power from the Atlantic region to the Pacific region. It reflected not just economic changes but also the geopolitical, strategic, and cultural influences that were steadily shifting westward across the Pacific Ocean. In due course, the “Pacific Century” concept evolved into the United States’ strategic “Pivot to Asia”, a policy aimed at strengthening American engagement with Asia in the face of the region’s emergence as an economic and political powerhouse.

“The Pivot to Asia was not merely a rhetorical gesture or an academic construct but had tangible policy actions associated with it.”

The origins of the “Pacific Century” concept can be traced as early as the late 20th century, taking root in academic and policy circles, and stemming from several observable trends including the rise of Japan as an economic power during the 1980s, the opening-up of China and its subsequent economic growth, as well as the economic liberalization and growth of the “Four Asian Tigers” (South Korea,

Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Singapore). These trends were also reinforced by increasing interdependence in trade, finance, technology, and even culture among the countries of the region. The Pacific Ocean was no longer just a geographical expanse; it had become a connective economic tissue linking powerful and increasingly influential nations.

Before the formalised “Pivot to Asia,” the U.S. had a longstanding strategic and economic presence in the region, a legacy of World War II and the Cold War. The United States had military alliances with countries like Japan and South Korea and had substantial economic and strategic interests in the Asia-Pacific region. However, these engagements were often seen in the context of containment policies against communism or as piecemeal involvements without a coherent, overarching strategy.

This changed in 2011 when then-Secretary of State Hillary Clinton officially introduced the term “Pivot to Asia” in an article in “Foreign Policy” magazine. The historical “America’s Pacific Century” article described a pivot policy aimed to redirect American diplomatic, economic, and military resources to engage more comprehensively with Asia. Key goals of this pivot included: strengthening bilateral security alliances, engaging with regional multilateral institutions, expanding trade and investment, and, of course, forging a broad-based military presence in the region.

The Pivot to Asia was not merely a rhetorical gesture or an academic construct but had tangible policy actions associated with it. Formally initiated by the Obama administration in 2011, the pivot was a calculated strategic manoeuvre with far-reaching implications. The most ambitious project by far was the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) aimed to create a free-trade zone linking the Americas with Asia¹. On the military and diplomatic front, the U.S. increased its marine presence in Australia and its naval presence in the contested waters of the South China Sea – precursor moves to the more recent AUKUS agreement – and strengthened ties with Southeast Asian nations in formal multilateral forums, developing a coherent counterbalance to China's growing military capabilities.

“...it also had a ripple effect that triggered introspection and strategic reevaluation on the part of America's traditional allies in Europe.”

The Pivot to Asia was not just a reorientation towards the East; the extensive reordering of economic, military, and diplomatic US resources, had also momentous consequences for the global geopolitical chessboard. As the US implemented the “Pivot”, American involvement in the Middle East, particularly in Iraq and Afghanistan, was winding down.

Most importantly, it also had a ripple effect that triggered introspection and strategic reevaluation on the part of America's traditional allies in Europe. The shift did not mean an absolute disengagement from Europe, but it did signify a recalibration of priorities. And Europeans found themselves receiving less attention than they had during the Cold War and the immediate post-Cold War period. The EU accustomed to a considerable U.S. presence both militarily and diplomatically, had to grapple with a relative diminution in direct American involvement.

1 Although this faced domestic opposition and was eventually withdrawn from by President Donald Trump in 2017, the agreement's principles lived on in what is now known as the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP).

Arguably, these policy elements of the “Asian Pivot” have endured to varying extents. On the one hand, the US has withdrawn from TTP, and the Russian invasion of Ukraine has prompted another recalibration of America’s Asian Pivot – this time tilting US engagement to Europe. On the other hand, the AUKUS agreement testifies to the policy’s foundational influence in shaping America’s approach to the growing significance of the Asia-Pacific region. From the conceptualization of the “Pacific Century” to the American Pivot to Asia, the United States has acknowledged Asia’s central role in global geopolitics, economics, and security.

While the United States has strategically reoriented its foreign policy towards Asia through its “Pivot to Asia”, the European Union (EU) has been notably slower in adapting its approach to the “Pacific Century”. In this context, it is valid to reconsider Europe’s potential role in the region, especially given official EU aspirations to become a global player. What is the EU’s role in a world where the centre of economic and geopolitical gravity is shifting towards Asia?

Europe's Elusive Pivot to Asia: Constraints and Limitations

Europe has a longer history of engagement with Asia than the US, stretching back to the colonial era. However, post-World War II relationships have mostly been shaped by trade links rather than any comprehensive strategic engagement. The EU is indeed thoroughly engaged in economic activities in Asia: from trade agreements with Japan and Vietnam to investment deals with China, the EU is far from absent in Asia’s economic landscape.

However, economic engagement has not translated into a broader strategic realignment. While some EU countries like Germany and France have strong economic relations with China and other Asian nations, these are often bilateral engagements rather than part of a broader, unified strategy. EU trade and investment deals have often been conducted without a geopolitical underpinning that takes into account the changing dynamics of the Pacific Century.

Europe's elusive pivot to Asia can be explained by several constraints or limitations, with the first and foremost being the very nature of the EU, which is fundamentally different from a nation-state, and which makes a coordinated "pivot" to anywhere much more complicated.

Historically too, the EU's focus has been largely Eurocentric given its immediate post-war challenges, but also from the more recent series of crises such as Brexit, migration, and relations with Russia. These issues have consumed the political and diplomatic bandwidth, leaving less room for an elaborate strategic reorientation towards Asia.

To make matters worse, there is no EU consensus on how to approach diverse and complex Asian geopolitics, such as the South China Sea conflicts, North Korea, and the rise of China. While China is a major EU trading partner, there are significant concerns about human rights, intellectual property, and security. EU member states have not even reached a consensus on whether to view China as a strategic competitor, partner, or something in between, which hampers the development of a coherent Asia policy.

Last but not least, unlike the United States, which has military bases and alliances in Asia, the EU lacks a robust military presence in the region. This absence reduces the EU's leverage and makes any form of "hard" pivot almost impossible. While there have been discussions around an increased EU role in Asian security, especially in maritime security, these are far from being fully realised policies.

As a result, the EU has focused primarily on its immediate neighborhood and its transatlantic relationship with the United States. While the Pacific Century calls for a rethinking of global strategies, and while the United States has made its move through its Pivot to Asia, the EU is still in the process of defining its role in this evolving landscape. Structural, economic, geopolitical, and military constraints have all played a part in the EU's hesitance.

The road to a European Pivot to Asia, however, is fraught with challenges that will require a level of unity and vision that the bloc has yet to demonstrate. On the one hand, the EU needs institutional reforms, particularly in the realms of security and defence cooperation and decision-making processes. In parallel, and in a geopolitical landscape increasingly centered around the Indo-Pacific, developing a more strategic approach to Asia will likely be essential if the EU wishes to maintain its relevance in global affairs. Here is where EU-ASEAN relations take on heightened importance and could potentially serve as the nucleus of a European pivot to Asia.

Unpacking the EU-ASEAN Relations

Given the United States' reorientation towards the Indo-Pacific, it is increasingly apparent that Europe, too, must recalibrate its foreign policy focus. The EU-ASEAN relationship offers a solid foundation on which to build. Strengthening ties with ASEAN could provide the EU with alternative economic partners, strategic depth in a geopolitically significant region, and increased clout in promoting a rules-based international order. In this context, the strategic importance of the EU-ASEAN partnership transcends mere economic transactions and extends into the realms of security, governance, and even cultural understanding.

As we delve into various facets of this partnership, from economic interdependence to shared global challenges, one thing becomes clear: the EU-ASEAN relationship is not merely an optional alliance but a crucial partnership that can shape the contours of global governance and stability. This makes a compelling case for why the EU must prioritise its relations with ASEAN as part of a broader, strategic reorientation towards Asia.

Economic Interdependence

Economic ties between the EU and the ASEAN countries are not just significant; they are monumental in scale. With ASEAN as the EU's third-largest trading partner outside of Europe, and vice versa, billions of euros exchange hands annually in the form of goods and services. This trade encompasses a vast array of sectors, from manufacturing and technology to agricultural products, indicating a complex and multi-layered economic relationship.

The mutual economic relationship offers a strategic advantage in the form of diversification. For the European Union, which has traditionally relied heavily on the U.S. and China for trade, strong ties with ASEAN offer an alternative and create a buffer against economic volatility in its primary markets. For instance, in times of trade tensions between the EU and the U.S. or China, a robust economic relationship with ASEAN can provide a safety net, allowing the EU to realign its focus without suffering significant economic setbacks.

Moreover, a strong EU-ASEAN economic alliance can also help both entities reduce their economic dependence on superpowers like China and the United States. This is particularly important for the EU, which has been entangled in complex economic and geopolitical issues with China, ranging from market access and intellectual property rights to human rights concerns. An alternative economic partner like ASEAN offers the EU greater leverage and negotiating power in its dealings with major world powers.

Beyond trade in goods and services, the relationship also extends to investment and infrastructure development. European investments in ASEAN countries have been instrumental in sectors like clean technology, digital innovation, and urban development. These investments are not just beneficial for the ASEAN economies but also open doors for European businesses to access fast-growing markets, thereby serving mutual interests.

The digital economy and sustainability are two areas where the EU-ASEAN economic relationship has enormous growth potential. With the EU's emphasis on clean technologies and ASEAN's push towards digitalization, collaborative projects in these areas could be the next frontier for mutual economic gain.

The economic interdependence between the EU and ASEAN is far-reaching and offers a multitude of advantages for both sides. It lends resilience and robustness to their economies, provides strategic options in the complex geopolitical landscape, and offers avenues for future collaboration in emerging sectors. Strengthening this economic partnership could serve as a critical first step in the European Union's strategic reorientation—or potential pivot—towards Asia, offering benefits that go well beyond the economic domain.

Strategic Depth

The South China Sea, with its complex territorial disputes and strategic shipping lanes, is increasingly becoming a hotbed for geopolitical tensions. China's expansive claims and military fortifications in the area have heightened concerns about freedom of navigation and regional stability. In this context, the European Union's strong partnership with ASEAN nations—many of which have territorial interests in the South China Sea—takes on added importance. It enables the EU to have a voice and a stake in a region that is quickly becoming a focal point of great power competition.

ASEAN's general policy of neutrality and consensus-based decision-making presents a unique advantage for the EU. It allows for diplomatic engagement without immediately triggering hostilities with either the United States or China. This neutrality also creates space for multi-party discussions and peace initiatives that could be supported, or even co-led, by the European Union. Furthermore, ASEAN's approach offers a diplomatic balancing act that aligns well with the EU's emphasis on multilateralism and a rules-based international order.

The South China Sea is not just about territorial claims; it is also a critical maritime route through which a significant portion of the world's trade flows, including that of EU nations. A destabilised South China Sea could have far-reaching implications for global commerce. A strategic partnership with ASEAN provides the EU with an opportunity to engage in cooperative security measures, from joint maritime patrols to intelligence sharing, thereby safeguarding critical trade routes and ensuring freedom of navigation.

Beyond the conventional geopolitical considerations, Southeast Asia is also susceptible to non-traditional security threats such as terrorism, human trafficking, and drug smuggling. An enhanced EU-ASEAN partnership could pave the way for more substantial cooperation on these fronts. Collaborative efforts could range from joint operations and information sharing to capacity building in areas like law enforcement and border control.

As Europe seeks greater strategic autonomy in its foreign policy, particularly in light of diminishing U.S. engagement with the continent, a robust relationship with ASEAN offers another piece of the puzzle. It provides the EU with greater geopolitical leverage and adds another layer to its portfolio of international partnerships, reinforcing its status as a global player capable of independent action.

The strategic depth afforded by strong EU-ASEAN relations is multifaceted, ranging from the geopolitical complexities of the South China Sea to broader security concerns that affect both entities. Strengthening this partnership can serve as a cornerstone in the EU's broader strategic reorientation towards Asia. It offers the European Union not just a seat at the table in Southeast Asian affairs but also invaluable advantages in navigating the intricacies of an increasingly multipolar world.

Promoting Rules-Based Order

Both the EU and ASEAN have historically been strong advocates for a rules-based international order. This shared ethos underscores their approach to international diplomacy, making them natural partners in upholding governance frameworks that prioritise law over might. At a time when authoritarianism, unilateralism, and disregard for international norms are on the rise, this mutual commitment takes on renewed urgency.

The EU has often used its regulatory power as a form of global governance—sometimes referred to as ‘normative’ or ‘regulatory diplomacy.’ Whether it is setting international standards in data protection with GDPR, promoting sustainable development, or enforcing antitrust laws against multinational corporations, the EU’s approach influences global behaviour and sets benchmarks for good governance. Pairing this regulatory prowess with ASEAN’s regional influence creates an opportunity for both to exert normative power effectively.

While ASEAN may not have the regulatory clout that the EU possesses, it brings to the table an in-depth understanding of regional geopolitics, culture, and history. ASEAN’s approach to dispute resolution, consensus-based decision-making, and ‘quiet diplomacy’ offers invaluable insights into managing complex regional issues. This nuanced understanding could enrich EU-ASEAN initiatives aimed at promoting a rules-based international order.

The complementary strengths of the EU and ASEAN can be harnessed in multiple avenues—whether it is initiatives aimed at climate governance, promoting digital rights, or ensuring maritime security by international law. For instance, a joint stance on the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) can send a strong message about the importance of legal frameworks in resolving territorial disputes. Likewise, collaboration on human rights forums can lend weight to the cause of individual liberties and democratic governance.

Beyond regional concerns, a reinforced EU-ASEAN partnership in promoting a rules-based order can extend to global challenges like pandemics, cyber threats, and even counter-terrorism. Both entities could advocate for strengthening global institutions and conventions that address these challenges, thus contributing to international stability and security.

The EU and ASEAN are natural partners in promoting a rules-based international order, each bringing distinct yet complementary skills to the table. The EU's regulatory expertise and ASEAN's deep regional knowledge can synergise to tackle not just regional but global challenges. This makes their collaboration not merely an option but a necessity in upholding a system that prioritises law, governance, and collective action in an increasingly fragmented world.

“Given that climate change knows no borders, a combined effort could amplify the impact and set an example for other regions to follow.”

transnational nature of these problems makes unilateral action insufficient and often counterproductive.

Addressing Global Challenges

The EU and ASEAN are both intricate systems of international governance that face a plethora of challenges transcending their regional boundaries. These challenges—ranging from climate change, pandemics, and cybersecurity to counter-terrorism—constitute global issues that require cooperative, multilateral solutions. The

Arguably, the most pressing issue that demands immediate action is climate change. The EU, with its Green Deal, and ASEAN, with its focus on sustainable development, both have policy frameworks that aim to combat environmental degradation. Joint initiatives could include knowledge-sharing on renewable energy technologies, collaboration on

reforestation projects, and co-financing climate-resilient infrastructure. Given that climate change knows no borders, a combined effort could amplify the impact and set an example for other regions to follow.

Recent pandemics have highlighted the vulnerabilities inherent in globalised societies. Collaborative research on vaccines, information-sharing protocols during health crises, and co-developed response strategies could form the basis of a strong EU-ASEAN partnership in health security. Together, they could also advocate for strengthening global health institutions and norms to better prepare for future pandemics.

In an increasingly digitalised world, cybersecurity has become a universal concern. Both the EU and ASEAN have vested interests in safeguarding their digital landscapes from threats ranging from data breaches to cyberterrorism. Joint efforts could involve shared cybersecurity standards, real-time intelligence sharing, and combined efforts to combat disinformation. These initiatives would not only enhance security but also facilitate digital trade and communication between the regions.

Terrorism continues to be a global threat that undermines security and social cohesion. EU-ASEAN cooperation in counterterrorism could include intelligence sharing, joint training exercises, and the establishment of a collaborative framework for deradicalization programmes. Such collaboration would send a strong message about the international community's commitment to combat extremism in all its forms.

The complexity of these challenges necessitates a multilateral approach and strengthened EU-ASEAN relations could serve as a cornerstone for this. Joint statements in international forums, co-sponsored resolutions, and unified lobbying for global reforms are ways through which the EU and ASEAN can amplify their influence and efficacy.

Facing an array of shared global challenges, the imperative for strong EU-ASEAN relations has never been more pronounced. Collaborative efforts in addressing issues like climate change, health security, cybersecurity, and counterterrorism not only serve mutual interests but also contribute to global stability. By unifying their voices and actions, the EU and ASEAN can be formidable actors in steering the world towards sustainable and secure solutions.

Cultural and Educational Exchanges

While economic and strategic considerations often dominate the discourse on international relations, the importance of human-to-human connections cannot be overstated. Cultural and educational exchanges offer a unique avenue for deepening ties at a societal level, paving the way for a more nuanced and sustainable relationship between the EU and the ASEAN.

Educational exchanges serve as a critical tool in enhancing mutual understanding and nurturing future leaders with a global perspective. programmes like the Erasmus+ for ASEAN students, or equivalent initiatives in the ASEAN region for European students, can greatly contribute to this end. Such programmes expose students to different educational systems, foster cross-cultural competencies, and often lead to lifelong connections that serve diplomatic and business interests in the long run.

Both the EU and ASEAN have shown strong commitments to advancing science and technology. Collaborative research projects, academic symposiums, and joint publications can not only propel scientific advancements but also build a community of scholars and experts who understand the nuances of both regions. Such partnerships become especially crucial in tackling global challenges like climate change, public health, and cybersecurity, where multi-disciplinary and multi-regional efforts are indispensable.

Cultural diplomacy, often expressed through arts, music, literature, and even culinary exchanges, can go a long way in forging a shared identity and mutual appreciation between the peoples of the EU and ASEAN. Initiatives could include cultural festivals, art exhibitions featuring artists from both regions and culinary events that celebrate the diversity and richness of both European and Southeast Asian traditions.

The social and cultural bridges built through educational and cultural exchanges can substantially enrich the economic and strategic ties between the EU and ASEAN. They add depth to the relationship, making it more resilient to political or economic shifts. In essence, these exchanges create a more holistic, multi-dimensional partnership that isn't just transactional but also relational.

In sum, bolstering EU-ASEAN relations through cultural and educational exchanges can offer the European Union a multi-dimensional engagement with Asia that aligns well with its economic interests, strategic concerns, and values. These exchanges are more than just peripheral activities; they are central to building a robust, enduring relationship. A strong partnership with ASEAN can thus serve as either the cornerstone or as a significant component of a larger European pivot to Asia—a pivot that is becoming increasingly urgent as the U.S. focuses its strategic interests towards the Indo-Pacific.

“... bolstering EU-ASEAN relations through cultural and educational exchanges can offer the European Union a multi-dimensional engagement with Asia that aligns well with its economic interests, strategic concerns, and values.”

The EU-ASEAN Partnership for Regional Stability and Global Governance

The analysis highlights the EU-ASEAN partnership as a mutually beneficial and strategically aligned relationship. It elucidates how the economic, strategic, regulatory, and cultural ties between the two entities could evolve to create a synergistic relationship that fortifies each against an array of global challenges.

Economically, the EU's expertise in regulation and sustainability complements ASEAN's dynamic growth, youthful demographics, and tech-forward agenda. This synergy could catalyse the EU's potential pivot towards Asia, enriching its global economic landscape. Strategically, the partnership gains importance in addressing geopolitical tensions in places like the South China Sea. Here, ASEAN's neutrality and the EU's commitment to multilateralism converge to promote a rules-based international order.

Both regions also share a commitment to rules-based governance, acting as a counterweight to authoritarian trends. Both the EU and ASEAN have already shown leadership in these areas individually. Their collaboration could, therefore, serve as a beacon for other regional bodies and nations. It could pave the way for collective action, drawing on the complementary strengths of the EU's regulatory expertise and ASEAN's regional insights. This collaboration could become a blueprint for multi-party, global solutions.

The manifold potential benefits of a strengthened EU-ASEAN partnership make it not just an opportunity but a necessity. In an increasingly multipolar and interconnected world beset by complex challenges, the collaboration between these two significant regional entities could serve as a model of effective international cooperation. It offers a balanced approach that could contribute not just to mutual benefit but also to global stability and progress.

Last but not least, the evolving dynamics of global power, characterised by heightened tensions between the U.S. and China, present both a challenge and an opportunity for EU and ASEAN nations. Neither entity can afford to become a mere pawn or battleground in a new Cold War between superpowers. Instead, the EU and ASEAN have the potential to emerge as a stabilizing “third pole of power”, leveraging their complementary strengths and shared objectives to influence global outcomes. Such an approach would also underline that the EU’s pursuit of strategic autonomy is not an exercise in isolationism but a recalibration towards forging robust partnerships with like-minded allies and nations confronting similar geopolitical quandaries. By uniting their efforts across economic, strategic, and cultural dimensions, the EU and ASEAN can contribute to a more balanced and stable international order, one that transcends the constraints of a bipolar power struggle and enriches global governance through multipolarity and collaboration.

Section 1 - Economic Sustainability and Trade

Chapter 3

EU-ASEAN Trade Cooperation: The European Perspective

By Laia Comerma Calatayud

Abstract:

This chapter outlines the status and the main issues of trade cooperation between the European Union and ASEAN states. After providing the historical and statistical background behind their trading relationship, it moves on to analyse the main challenges that their relationship is facing, while lastly providing several recommendations for a constructive trade dialogue between ASEAN and the EU going forward. It pays special attention to the negotiations and prospects for an ASEAN-wide Free Trade Agreement with the EU, as well as to the implications that China's role and policies in the region have for the EU's relationship with Southeast Asia.

Introduction

The EU is an important trade and FDI partner for ASEAN, as well as a provider of institutional solutions and capacity-building. ASEAN represents the EU's 3rd largest trading partner, after China and the US, with more than €215.9 billion worth of trade in goods in 2021, and €93.5 billion worth in trade in services in 2019. The EU is again ASEAN's 3rd largest trading partner after China and the US, accounting for around 10.6% of ASEAN's trade, and the 2nd largest investor in ASEAN countries. However, in the last 10 years, we see much evolution neither in ASEAN exports to the EU, which were 13.6% in 2012 from EU-28 and 11.3% in 2021 from EU-27, nor in its imports, which accounted for 12.5% in 2012 and 9% in 2021¹. This indicates that the EU needs to build better political relations with ASEAN countries and support their development if it aims to get a better position as a trade partner. On investments, in 2019, the EU was the second Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) provider to the region after the US. Its FDI stocks accounted for €313.6 billion in ASEAN member states. ASEAN investment in Europe, while at more modest levels until recently, has been growing at a steady pace to over €144 billion in 2019, according to EU official figures².

The institutional framework of the EU-ASEAN relationship is the 2020 EU-ASEAN strategic partnership. In particular, trade cooperation between the two countries is framed by the biannual ASEAN-EU Trade and Investment Work programme, which includes an EU-ASEAN dialogue, bioregional expert dialogue groups, various cooperation activities, and the ASEAN-EU Business Summits. Moreover, the EU finances cooperation regional projects including the ASEAN Regional Integration Support from the EU (ARISE PLUS); the COMPASS, which consists of statistics and integration monitoring and capacity-building; the ASEAN Project on the Protection of Intellectual Property Rights (ECAP III); the Enhanced Regional EU-

1 Sources: EU-ASEAN Business Council (2014). Promoting Trade & Investment between ASEAN & Europe. Available at: eu-asean.eu/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Promoting-Trade-Investment-between-ASEAN-Europe-2014.pdf (accessed 24 May 2023); ASEAN (2022). ASEAN Statistical Year Book 2021. Available at: <https://www.aseanstats.org/publication/asyb-2021/> (accessed 24 May 2023).

2 European Commission (online). Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN). Available at: https://policy.trade.ec.europa.eu/eu-trade-relationships-country-and-region/countries-and-regions/association-south-east-asian-nations-asean_en (accessed 23 May 2023).

ASEAN Dialogue Instrument (e-READI); and the ASEAN Air Transport Integration Project (AATIP). Related to this last area of cooperation, the EU and ASEAN concluded on 2 June 2021 the negotiations on the ASEAN-EU Comprehensive Air Transport Agreement (AE CATA), which is the world's first bloc-to-bloc air transport agreement, aimed to bolster connectivity and economic development among EU and ASEAN member states (Delegation of the EU to ASEAN, online).

One of the main trade priorities for the EU when it comes to ASEAN is increased market access. To this aim, both blocs started negotiations for an inter-regional trade and investment agreement in 2007, but due to reasons that will be further expanded below, it was paused in 2009 and the EU prioritised bilateral negotiations with ASEAN Member States instead. The following table (Table 1) provides an overview of the agreements concluded and under negotiation between the EU and ASEAN Member States. In September 2022, the ASEAN Economic Ministers-EU Consultation decided to revive the discussion and re-orient the Joint EU-ASEAN Working Group for the development of a Framework that set out the parameters of a future ASEAN-EU FTA. The Joint Working Group will prioritise sectoral cooperation on digital economy, green technologies, green services and supply-chain resilience. However, the press release of the 30th Joint Cooperation Committee Meeting, which convened in February 2023 in Jakarta, does not make any mention of a future EU-ASEAN FTA nor the progress of the envisioned negotiations (EEAS, 2023).

Table 1. EU-ASEAN FTAs: Bilateral FTAs between the EU and ASEAN Member States are building blocks towards an inter-regional agreement.

Partner	Bilateral agreement	State
Myanmar	Investment Protection Agreement negotiations	Launched in 2014 – on hold.
Thailand	FTA negotiations	Launched in 2013 – on hold.
Malaysia	FTA negotiations	Launched in 2010 – on hold.
Singapore	FTA	Concluded in 2015 and signed in 2018.
Lao PDR	-	-
Cambodia	-	-
Vietnam	FTA	Concluded in 2013 and signed in 2019.
Philippines	FTA negotiations	Launched in 2016.
Brunei Darussalam	-	-
Indonesia	Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement negotiations	Launched in 2016.

On institutional and capacity-building cooperation, the EU has been widely regarded as a regional integration model for ASEAN (Jetschke, 2013, 2009; Hwee, 2008) However, this needs to be nuanced because of what is known as the ‘ASEAN way’, which has translated into major institutional differences, that have resulted in limited political integration, and instead the EU has become a model of regional market integration. The ‘Asian way’ is the term used to define the principal norms and values that underpin ASEAN institutions, which have been crafted on top of pre-existing ideational underpinnings and remain sovereign-centric (Mattheis & Wunderlich, 2017). Its procedural norms are convention, voluntarism and informal agreement, which translates into “a ‘soft’ organisational approach based on consensus-based decision-making and legally non-binding arrangements” (Mattheis & Wunderlich, 2017:726). This

has put constraints on ASEAN's institutionalisation and actorness, as the consensus requirement has often resulted in ineffectiveness because of a lack of unity and national interests.

Already in 1972, ASEAN member states appeared as a bloc and made powers like the US, Japan or China deal with them the ASEAN way (Yeo, 2007), pushing for interregionalism. The Asian financial crisis of 1997/98 showed the deficiencies of the 'ASEAN way' and triggered enhanced regional cooperation in the banking and financial sectors (Maier-Knapp, 2014). However, while the 'ASEAN way' made sense when the grouping was founded, bringing together a highly disparate group of states with a conflictual history, as a set of diplomatic practices with which members felt comfortable and unthreatened, it is debatable whether it still makes sense (Beeson, 2016). Its principles of non-interference, peaceful resolution of conflicts, prohibition of use of force and the emphasis on consensus, not losing face, and voluntarism have proved an obstacle to effective cooperation, resulting in the politics of the lowest common denominator, avoiding problems rather than confronting them (ibid.).

Historical perspective of their trade relationship

The EU is ASEAN's first regional dialogue partner, as their relation dates back to the 1970s, first informally with the 1972 dialogue, and then with the ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Meeting agreeing to intensify formal relations with the European Economic Community (EEC) in 1977. This was followed by the ASEAN-EC Ministerial Meeting (AEMM) in 1978, and the ASEAN-EEC Cooperation Agreement in 1980, which institutionalised relations by setting out joint economic and development initiatives. For the EU, the relationship has focused on trade rather than development, under the overriding assumption that economic growth would foster development (Chaban et al., 2012). In 1995, the EU Communication 95/319 (Commission of the European Communities, 1995) recommended trade policy as a "way of promoting regional integration with and among developing countries", establishing trade one of the three main priorities in the EU-ASEAN relationship.

In 1996, the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) was launched, pointing out the EU's strategic interests in rapidly growing Southeast Asian market and the fear to miss out to the US and Japan (Rueland, 2000). During the 1990s, the ASEAN economies experienced a period of high and sustained economic growth, averaging a GDP growth of 7.4% per year between 1987 and 1997 (Mattheis & Wunderlich, 2017), and the European Commission called for increased cooperation (EC, 1996) but the 1997/98 Asian financial crisis undermined the economic attractiveness of these countries. The Commission's 'New Asia Strategy' (1994) emphasized strengthening "the Union's economic presence in Asia in order to maintain the Union's leading role in the world economy" (p.2). The Communications 'Europe and Asia: A Strategic Framework for Enhanced Partnerships' (2001) and 'A new partnership with Southeast Asia' (2003) outline areas of cooperation and the topics of the policy dialogue, such as supporting regional stability and the fight against terrorism; human rights, democratic principles and good governance; continuing to support the development of less prosperous countries; and intensifying dialogue and cooperation in specific policy areas (Jetschke, 2013).

In September 2003, ASEAN and the EU published the Joint Declaration to Combat Terrorism, and signed the ASEAN-EU programme for Regional Integration Support (APRIS I). APRIS I marks the beginning of a targeted effort to support ASEAN's economic integration goals, with a budget of €4 million, it aimed to help ASEAN members realise the goals stated in the Vientiane programme of Action, like lowering technical barriers to trade and harmonising customs procedures (Jetschke, 2013). It was followed until 2010 by APRIS II, worth €8.4 million, focused on trade and the convergence of standards in the ASEAN region to international standards, decrease barriers to foreign direct investment and capital flows, and the areas of dispute settlement and management capacity. The Trans-Regional EU-ASEAN Trade Initiative (TREATI) was a framework for dialogue and regulatory cooperation developed to enhance EU trade relations with ASEAN. The priority areas for co-operation under TREATI were closely linked to ASEAN's own drive for economic integration and comprise sanitary and phytosanitary standards in agri-food and fisheries products, industrial product standards and technical barriers to trade, and

forestry and wood-based products. Trade facilitation and co-operation on investment are tackled as cross-cutting issues (Cuyvers, 2007).

Further, the Regional Europe–ASEAN Dialogue Initiative (READI) fostered a political dialogue on common interests, such as information society, climate change and so on. The support also included a programme to enhance ASEAN’s FTA negotiating capacity, a project on the protection of Intellectual Property Rights, an Air Transport Integration programme and a Statistical Capacity Building programme. The ASEAN Economic Integration Support programme has a budget of €15 million. Between 2000 and 2007, EU transfers amounted to approximately €97.2 million in terms of directly related commitments, and an estimated €37.2 millions of commitments for the following period (2008–2010) (EU Commission, 2009:5).

The Nuremberg Declaration on EU-ASEAN Enhanced Partnership, adopted in March 2007, sets out a longer-term vision for mutual cooperation and dialogue based on shared values (Gilson, 2020). It also expressed support for the launch of negotiations into an EU-ASEAN FTA. Showing progress, the 2012 ASEAN-EU Ministerial Meeting devised the Bandar Seri Begawan Plan of Action to Strengthen the ASEAN-EU Enhanced Partnership from 2013 to 2017, to implement the cooperation envisaged in the 2007 Declaration.

Regarding diplomatic relations, with the adoption in 2008 of the ASEAN Charter, the EU initiated formal diplomatic relations with ASEAN in March 2009, followed by the EU Member States. In 2012, which was labelled the year of Europe’s “pivot to Asia” (Parameswaran, 2013; see also: Messerlin, 2012; Sharief, 2013) the EU signed ASEAN’s Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC), becoming the first regional organisation to accede the treaty. On 8 August 2015, ‘ASEAN Day’, the EU established a new diplomatic mission to ASEAN in Jakarta (Indonesia) and appointed Francisco Fontan as the first ambassador. The EU’s ‘EU and ASEAN: A Partnership with a Strategic Purpose’ (2015) document aimed to formulate a Strategic Partnership Agreement between the two sides, where the EU

recognised ASEAN's aim to complete its economic community. It sought to boost trade and investment with the region and foster intra- and inter-regional connectivity. On the occasion of the 40th anniversary of the establishment of the EU-ASEAN dialogue, the 2017 ASEAN-EU Post-Ministerial Conference devised another Plan of Action (2018-2022) to frame a clearer strategic future for collaborative actions between both parties (Gilson, 2020).

On 1 December 2020, the 23rd EU-ASEAN Ministerial Meeting elevated the EU-ASEAN Dialogue Partnership to a Strategic Partnership, and in 2021, the EU Mission to ASEAN became a fully-fledged EU Delegation to ASEAN. All this led to the EU Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific, where ASEAN takes a central place. It establishes "sustainable and inclusive prosperity" as a priority area, aiming to: "work with Indo-Pacific partners to reinforce value chains, strengthen and diversify trade relations, implement existing trade agreements, finalise ongoing trade negotiations and develop cooperation in strategic sectors", and to "strengthen rules to protect international trade against unfair practices, such as industrial subsidies, economic coercion, forced technology transfers and intellectual property theft" (EEAS, 2022a). Finally, at the EU-ASEAN Commemorative Summit (2022), a new Plan of Action for 2023-2027 was adopted with four pillars: political and security cooperation; economic cooperation; socio-cultural cooperation; and cross-pillar cooperation. Interestingly, the second pillar still mentions "a future ASEAN-EU Free Trade Agreement (FTA) and explore ways to move forward the work of the Joint Working Group (JWG) for the development of a Framework setting out the parameters of a future ASEAN-EU FTA, taking into account bilateral FTAs between several ASEAN Member States and the EU" as an objective (EEAS, 2022b).

The China factor

China's rise represents the greatest geopolitical and geoeconomic challenge to ASEAN countries and the Asian region, from an economic, political and security perspective. China has been acquiring since the 2000s growing commercial dominance in Southeast Asia, as a main FDI

provider. It has a geographical, political and cultural advantage in relation to the region as compared to the EU, which China has exerted to enter into preferential trade agreements. The main example of which is the China-ASEAN Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA) in 2009, which creates the world's biggest free trade area in terms of population and third largest in terms of nominal GDP, after the European Economic Area and the North American Free Trade Area. In addition, it reduces tariffs to zero on 7,881 product categories or 90 percent of imported goods (Saqib Irshad & Xin, 2014). Japan and Korea have followed China in signing similar FTAs with ASEAN, what has stimulated intra-Asian trade.

“...it is worth questioning why the EU has not yet managed to conclude an FTA with ASEAN, while other actors like South Korea, India or China, have.”

In fact, it is worth questioning why the EU has not yet managed to conclude an FTA with ASEAN, while other actors like South Korea, India or China, have. The difference between China's approach and that of the EU's on an ASEAN FTA was not normative or “the varying importance of human rights issues, but it was the timing, the political dimension, and the design of the FTA.” (Meissner, 2016) China proposed its FTA right after the Southeast Asian financial crisis, and ASEAN member states expected to benefit from the FTA, even if they had competitiveness concerns with Chinese products. To allay those, China offered certain incentives such as an early harvest provision that provided for a quick reduction of tariffs and concessions to some of ASEAN's members (Ba, 2003). Also, China's FTA with ASEAN does not include “any kind of good governance or transparency provisions” and establishes a “limited, less transparent ISDS mechanism”, which deviates from the norms and values that guide EU trade policy, as mandated by the Treaty of Lisbon (Comerma, forthcoming), which might have made it easier to overcome the various levels to adherence to democracy among ASEAN states.

Beyond FDI, China has also become a main financier of infrastructure through the projects within the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and financed by the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB). The AIIB has been regarded as the “carrot of development as a means to serve [China’s] geopolitical ends” (Lam, 2014:127). As part of the BRI, which all ten ASEAN countries have joined (Nedopil, 2023), China is seeking to “realise a grandiose reconstruction of former trade links that were formally centred on China” (Beeson, 2016).

With these new sources of funding, China is putting ASEAN solidarity and the ‘Asian way’ to test by playing a ‘divide and rule’ strategy and taking advantage of ASEAN’s internal divisions (ibid.). This is illustrated by the impossibility to agree on a statement that addressed the maritime dispute of Scarborough Shoal in the South China Sea: having entered into territorial conflicts with some ASEAN member states like the Philippines, Vietnam or Indonesia, China has gained allegiances with some other member states via trade and infrastructure benefits. While some states have enacted a “hedging” strategy, that is, offsetting China’s rise by reinforcing their security relations with the United States (Kuik, 2008), for others China has become particularly important as a trading partner, such as Laos, Cambodia, Malaysia and especially Myanmar, who are often China’s strongest supporters

(Beeson, 2016). Even those who have enacted territorial claims against China in the South China Sea, their criticism of Chinese provocations appears cautious, nuanced and not overtly confrontational in their official statements and actions, leaving open the possibility for a peaceful resolution (Maier-Knapp, 2016). This represents a major obstacle towards achieving consensus on policy responses towards China’s actions, as competing national interests and imperatives pull ASEAN members in different directions and makes it difficult to maintain a sense of unity.

The bumps on the road

In October 2006, the EU published a strategy paper called 'Global Europe – Competing in the World', where foreign trade agreements were described as "new competitiveness-driven FTAs... aiming at the highest possible degree of trade liberalisation including far-reaching liberalisation of services and investment" (EC, 2006:11). FTAs with third actors are widely recognised to be a way to achieve competitiveness and strengthen market power (Zimmerman, 2007). Fearing its economic interests in Southeast Asia at risk with the rise of China and the conclusion of FTAs with ASEAN by Japan, the US and China, the European Commission formally requested EU Member States a mandate to initiate the negotiating process of its own FTA with ASEAN on 6 December 2006, hoping to kick them off immediately and conclude them by 2009. Three scenarios were contemplated: an FTA with ASEAN as a whole; with ASEAN minus Myanmar, Laos and Cambodia – the three least-developed countries (LDCs) in the region; and bilateral FTAs with Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Vietnam and Thailand, with whom the EU was already negotiating individual partnership and cooperation agreements (Cuyvers, 2007). The EU wanted a 'WTO-plus' agreement, compatible with WTO rules but providing for increased market access and FDI liberalisation, as well as harmonisation of trade rules, regulations and standards, and measures to protect intellectual property rights.

In fact, one reason to initiate the negotiations of an FTA with ASEAN was the failure of the Doha Round Talks in the WTO (Robles, 2008). As the Global Europe paper states, these FTAs should go beyond the traditional framework of FTAs and cover non-traditional features like services, investments, public procurement, intellectual property rights, technical barriers to trade, sanitary and phytosanitary measures and rules of origin (Astuto, 2010). A quantitative report commissioned by the EC in 2006 argued that an EU-ASEAN FTA would boost EU exports to ASEAN by 24.2% (Camroux, 2010). Negotiations over an ASEAN-EU FTA started in 2007 and failed two years later (Meissner, 2016), as they did not manage to "overcome the heterogeneity of economic conditions in ASEAN member states and insurmountable political differences between the EU and

ASEAN over Myanmar³” (Jetschke, 2013). Actually, the FTA negotiations never passed the stage of a scoping or exploratory exercise into the exchange of market offers (Meissner, 2016). The EU, having entered into an economic crisis that made foreign trade agreements more pressing, decided to be pragmatic and considered bilateralism a more efficient strategy that allowed it to overcome falling into a “minimum common denominator” interregional agreement, as ASEAN members could not agree on non-traditional features (*ibid.*).

The four main structural and systemic issues that hinder the conclusion of an EU-ASEAN FTA are the low level of intra-ASEAN trade as compared to intra-European trade, or the fact that ASEAN is not yet a common market; that the ASEAN Secretariat does not possess the mandate to negotiate on behalf of its members as the European Commission does; the disparities between ASEAN members on trade, investment and development priorities; and that capacity-building measures are necessary in the case of some countries if they are to successfully implement the results of FTA negotiations (Camroux, 2010). The decision to instead deal bilaterally with ASEAN states by the EU during the past decade has diluted any attempt to enhance its partnership with ASEAN, a move that has been motivated by fundamental differences in economic structures and levels of development within the states involved, as well as varied levels of adherence to democratic principles (Gilson, 2020). The EU has so far concluded an FTA with Vietnam (in force since 2020), Singapore (in force since 2019); it is negotiating an FTA with Indonesia since 2016, with the Philippines since 2015, and with Thailand since 2013, and an Investment Protection Agreement (IPA) with Myanmar since 2015; and has put on hold an FTA with Malaysia negotiated between 2010 and 2012 (EC, online).

3 For a more comprehensive analysis of the challenge that Myanmar poses to the EU-ASEAN relationship see Boisseau du Rocher (2012).

Through its policy of Regional Integration Support (RIS), the EU has provided ASEAN countries with technical knowledge on how to create a single market, but a change in the context with China's rise, US's withdrawal from the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) in 2017, their economies having recovered from the Asian financial crisis, and EU's attractiveness diminishing after its own financial crisis in 2008, the regional context has changed and the ASEAN's integration path has slowed down (Jetschke, 2013). The EU itself has faced a myriad of internal challenges, such as Brexit, the rise of populism and the COVID-19 pandemic that have re-defined its own identity and resulted in a paradigm shift in its trade policy strategy, as represented in the 2021 Trade Policy Review (EC, 2021). Overall, the ASEAN region "faces a dilution of any regional identity that may have been emerging, and a greater incentive for ASEAN states to align themselves with Chinese projects led by its New Silk Road and financed by the AIIB" (Gilson, 2020).

The constructive way ahead

Taking into consideration the challenges presented in the previous section, there are many achievable possibilities to advance the EU-ASEAN dialogue. Firstly, it needs to be acknowledged that the EU has already been more active during the 21st century in its relationship with ASEAN than in the past, especially since the approval of the ASEAN Charter. However, there is still a long way to go. In that regard, EU-ASEAN action plans, especially the implementation of the 2023-2027 Plan of Action, constitute a positive step; yet, a realistic, critical and continuous review is recommended, to avoid overambitious goals and encourage incremental building of the relations, especially in the economic and socio-cultural fields, where the EU still has a limited role.

Next, the EU needs to develop a realistic strategy for the negotiation and conclusion of an ASEAN-wide FTA, and thus diversify its diplomatic and economic focus away from big ASEAN countries exclusively, towards including the smaller ones. "Some aspects of the European diplomacy are not understood and still raise doubts in the region (such as strict conditionality and so forth). The deadlock has been unproductive for

both parties.” (Boisseau du Rocher, 2012:168). If the EU wants to re-gain its influence in Southeast Asia, it needs fresh diplomatic thinking and a realistic implementation strategy, both when it comes to the content and the negotiation of the FTA. This needs to devote special consideration to the issue areas where ASEAN faces heterogeneity of priorities and more controversial topics, including normative ones, so as not to fall back again to minimums and, ultimately, deadlock. Besides, the EU should use its trade negotiations and future agreement with ASEAN to diffuse its norms and values, and thus shape the international regulatory environment (Maier-Knapp, 2014). It has to be aware and sensitive towards domestic pressures in Southeast Asia, and the growing impact of global interdependence, as well as the effects of China’s own bilateral policy towards these countries and in the region overall. It should translate its normative strategy into an issue-specific and demand-oriented agenda, so that its norms and values match the domestic and international realities of Southeast Asia (ibid.).

Relatedly, when diversifying its strategy towards smaller ASEAN countries, the EU should adhere to its principled pragmatism approach if it wants to overcome normative friction in cases of non-democratic countries and especially human rights issues. Here, a case in point is Myanmar, which had negative spill-overs on the EU’s relationship with ASEAN as a whole. Here, the EU will face a challenge if it wants to keep its commitment to fundamental norms and values, for which it will have to develop a pragmatic strategy that focuses on engagement over issues of mutual interest. Also, a substantial untapped trade potential still exists between ASEAN and the EU; while *de facto* trade integration has increased over time and achieved a high level of success, *de jure* integration is lacking (Kabir & Salim, 2011).

Currently, ASEAN as an organisation is being neglected in both strategic and economic terms. The EU should promote region-to-region relations to build up ASEAN’s own actorness, which can benefit the EU back by giving more intergovernmental powers on ASEAN to mediate between the EU and any controversy or disagreement with one of ASEAN’s states. As a first step towards giving ASEAN higher diplomatic importance, more

EU officials should visit ASEAN. Moreover, the EU should establish itself more strongly as a security actor in the region, through a coherent strategy that includes fostering political relations with ASEAN, region-to-region initiatives, the promotion of economic and trade links, and a multilateral security architecture to counterbalance the more unilateral attitudes of the US and China (Casarini, 2013). An example of what this tries to solve is the EU's refusal to mediate in the Thai-Cambodian clashes. In the face of Chinese military presence and US counter-balancing of Beijing's actions, which cause politico-security and economic pressures, the EU should use new opportunities to collaborate with ASEAN allies, to collectively offer a protection mechanism to the above-mentioned pressures (Gilson, 2020).

Overall, the EU needs to "walk the walk and talk the talk"; it cannot "talk" inter-regionalism but "walk" bilateralism and multilateralism (Camroux, 2010). It should achieve a common policy on investment towards Southeast Asia if it wants to be successful in the conclusion of an FTA with ASEAN and shape international investment rules, while achieving its objectives of increased market access, FDI liberalisation, harmonisation of trade rules, regulations and standards, and measures to protect intellectual property rights. Since both pursue the goals of peace, stability, development and free trade, this gives them ample way to expand their strategic cooperation. The EU should assist ASEAN in technical issues, science and technology, and human resource development, and define a strategy (Hung Anh & Hoang Tien, 2019) and proper incentives to achieve a greater opening of the ASEAN market and overcome ASEAN's heterogeneity and "minimum common denominator" rule when dealing with it as a group on trade issues.

Chapter 4

ASEAN-EU Trade Cooperation: The ASEAN Perspective

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Introduction

Brief History of the EU-ASEAN Partnership

The relationship between the European Union, which previously functioned as the European Economic Community (EEC), and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations has progressed for more than four decades. Since 1977, these two regional organisations have established formal relations through the 10th ASEAN Foreign Ministers Meeting, further solidified by the signing of the ASEAN–EEC Cooperation Agreement in March 1980. The EU-ASEAN relations are dubbed as one of the oldest models of interregional cooperation, characterised by intentional subject dialogues and cooperation ranging from trade, security, political dialogue, non-traditional security area cooperation, investment relations, connectivity, and most importantly, cooperation in fortifying community building among their respective regional states. This implicates the wide array of focal points in their negotiations to establish multiple pathways for growth and development in both regions. With a plethora of topics that have been tabled throughout their more than four-decade-long relationship, the EU-ASEAN collaboration has both expanded and encompassed a manifold agenda, specifically tapping into even as far as environmental and digital aspects. Guided by the Nuremberg Declaration on an EU-ASEAN Enhanced Partnership, the Declaration has led their teamwork, which served as a guidepost for a long-spanning vision and commitment to work together harmoniously

(European Union, 2017). In 2012, the said dialogue relation developed into the adoption of the Bandar Seri Begawan Plan of Action to Strengthen the ASEAN-EU Enhanced Partnership (2013-2017) which has ushered a strategic focalization on a comprehensive scope, especially on political, economic, and socio-cultural spheres.

“...are its close economic and trade ties that have grown substantially despite the tosses and turns of the ever-changing geopolitical landscape.”

From a political aspect, ASEAN's adoption of its Charter in 2008 prompted the EU's formal diplomatic relations with ASEAN in March 2009. Furthermore, the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia (TAC) was also acceded by the EU. It was the first regional organisation to do so in 2012, which marked an important milestone that reinforced the EU's political and security engagement in the region. More so, as a founding member of the ASEAN

Regional Forum (ARF), the EU also committed to increasing political and security ties with ASEAN. On security and defence cooperation, both regional organisations have buttressed their collaborative action to address matters in non-traditional military areas such as maritime security, conflict prevention, mediation and reconciliation, crisis management, transnational crime, counter-terrorism, cybersecurity, and non-proliferation (EEAS, 2021). Yet again, what remains tried, true, and tested in the EU-ASEAN partnership through the years are its close economic and trade ties that have grown substantially despite the tosses and turns of the ever-changing geopolitical landscape. At the heart of their dynamic collaboration is both their rigour and resilience to forward bilateral merchandise trade despite global financial difficulties. Given that they are like-minded partners with strong convictions for rules-based multilateralism, the EU-ASEAN relationship has been a testament to the possibility of a strong relationship between equally diverse regions. In 2006, the EU even declared ASEAN as its preferred partner inclined

to the region's market potential and protection level for EU exporters (Tudásközpont, 2020). Truly, the impressive numbers in the charts testify to the trade and investment closeness of both regions, marking the maturity and intensification of their inter-regional trade and investment.

Thus, this paper aims to discuss the many hallmarks of the EU-ASEAN relationship by focusing on the following outline: (1) the current state of its partnership, especially with key EU-ASEAN agreements and its outcomes, (2) key characteristics, issues, and problems in EU-ASEAN trade relations, and (3) prospects of EU-ASEAN trade relations, which includes recommendations on the enhancement of their partnership.

“... are two of the most advanced examples of regional integration in the world which have both affirmed their mutual interest in a peaceful, stable, and prosperous region.”

regions. The European Union (EU) and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) are two of the most advanced examples of regional integration in the world which have both affirmed their mutual interest in a peaceful, stable, and prosperous region (Ngo, 2023). During the 22nd EU-ASEAN ministerial meeting, the regional blocs declared the pivotal role played by ASEAN and the EU in carving a global and regional political, socioeconomic, and security agenda, which led them to the agreement of elevating their connections to a strategic partnership. According to Binder (2020), that occasion paved the way for the parties

Current State of the EU-ASEAN Trade Relations

A Dynamic Economic Partnership

There are but a few cooperative linkages in the international arena, especially between powerful, dynamic, and diverse regional organisations, and the EU-ASEAN trade partnership proved well, through time and numbers, how they have intensified and evolved collaboration through economic partnerships despite the prevalent financial tribulations in both their

to reaffirm, in the form of a joint statement, their mutual acceptance and commitment to free and open trade on a levelled playing field. On the one hand, it was evident in 2019 that the EU was ASEAN's third largest trading partner, following China and the United States, totalling US\$ 280.6 billion in trade, which accounted for 10.6% of ASEAN's total trade, bilateral trade in services amounted to €93.5 billion, and Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) stocks into ASEAN accounted for €313.6 billion all in the same year (ASEAN Secretariat, 2020; EEAS, 2021). On the other hand, ASEAN was dubbed as the EU's third largest goods trading partner outside Europe in 2019, following the United States and China. A unity of purpose is what binds the strong economic and trade ties of these regional blocs together. This positive trend is only reflective of the fact that their long history of formal dialogue and cooperation is no mere talk, with EUR 137 billion in 2008 in merchandise trade that exceeded EUR 237 in 2018, their economic partnership has provided region-to-region trade and investment agreements that have greatly benefitted aspects such as (1) trade in goods and (2) trade in services (Mission of the European Union to ASEAN, 2019).

As aforementioned, region-to-region trade agreements have served as ambitious precursors to the wide-ranging ability of their partnership to bolster surpluses in trade and investment. With the ultimate purpose of an EU-ASEAN region-to-region free trade agreement (FTA), the July 2021 EU-ASEAN ministerial meeting kickstarted an agreement to develop the strategic partnership that was previously agreed upon in December 2020 (European Union, 2023). It essentially binds the two regional blocs to regular summits, on a leader's level, to enrich their economic collaboration, security cooperation, and connectivity and development relations. But more notably, the said agreement is an upgraded measure of their partnership to launch a practical framework for a region-to-region FTA by taking into account the EU Strategy on Connecting Europe and Asia and the Master Plan on ASEAN Connectivity 2025 as they explore a potential connectivity partnership that strives to address challenges involved in attaining the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially in the vegetable oil sector.

Furthermore, regular consultations between ASEAN Economic Ministers (AEM) and the EU Trade Commissioner as well as regular meetings of the ASEAN-EU Senior Economic Officials (SEOM-EU) have also laid concrete action plans for Bilateral Free Trade Agreement (FTA) discussions and negotiations between individual ASEAN Member States and the EU. Speaking of bilateral FTAs, the dynamic economic relationship between the two regional blocs led them to the pursuit of an EU-ASEAN bi-regional web of FTAs after the identification of ASEAN as a regional priority in the 2006 Global Europe Communication. Despite the tug-of-war-like approval processes, finally, in December 2009, EU Member Countries signified their desire to embark upon FTA negotiations with ASEAN member states bilaterally, and in October 2013, they adopted an updated set of guidelines and mandates to gear the talks on FTAs with ASEAN countries in a more extended scope by involving investment protection provisions (Binder, 2020).

Bilateral Free Trade Agreements with the ASEAN Member States

Starting with the EU-Singapore partnership, talks on business and science and technology have been at the forefront of three ratified new generation agreements last February 2019, which are the following: the EU-Singapore Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (EUSPCA), the EU-Singapore Free Trade Agreement (EUSFTA) and the EU-Singapore IPA (EUSIPA). As Singapore remains one of the most attractive destinations for FDI for the EU, these agreements are meant to significantly reduce customs duties and technical and non-tariff barriers in goods. As a result, EU-Singapore's trade in goods amounted to EUR 42.9 billion in 2021, EU exports to Singapore totalled EUR 27.3 billion, and imports for Singapore garnered EUR 15.6 billion. In negotiations with Vietnam, an FTA was entered into force in August 2020 which basically eliminates over 99% of all tariffs on exports and was assessed to deliver several benefits such as an increase in the economic welfare of €6 billion and more than double of their exports by 2035. Furthermore, the EU has been a regular donor to the Philippines from 2014 to 2020 with their bilateral trade in goods totalling EUR 12.3 billion in 2020. As a result, the EU has become the Philippines' fourth largest trading partner which accounts for 8.4% of the country's total trade in 2020 (European Union, 2023).

Key Characteristics, Issues, and Problems in the EU-ASEAN Trade Relations

EU-ASEAN Trade Relations: Stuck in an Impasse

While the previously mentioned dynamic relationship by both regional blocs seemingly postures an imprint of success, there are but a plethora of external and internal issues that block the flattering chain of trade negotiations and discussions. ASEAN is an inter-governmental organisation with a sizable annual budget while the EU has an annual budget of more than five times. Both have carved strategies to form a single regional bloc and have worked towards pursuing market integration to enhance market competitiveness. Notwithstanding the similarities regarding freedom of movement for goods, services, capital, and labour, there are many challenging dissimilar contexts, therefore hindering a comprehensive and all-inclusive EU-ASEAN trade relationship.

Moving forward, we require more than just a strong determination to succeed. Despite the strong belief in free trade, it is now widely recognised that "Free Trade may not be fair but Fair Trade can be free". One of the initial factors that have contributed to the current EU-ASEAN trade stalemate is the issue of non-tariff barriers or NTBs. To substantiate this, the 2005 Vision Group established to present an EU-ASEAN Economic Partnership which was expected to elevate economic cooperation to a higher ground based on two pillars: a WTO-consistent FTA and the expansion of economic ties that guarantees the advantages of the FTA are maximised and balanced (ASEAN, 2012) concluded that the presence of all forms of non-tariff barriers represents a substantial impediment to trade in manufactured goods between the two regions. Non-trade issues have been outlined in trade negotiations as an attempt by the EU to classify itself as an international actor that hoists the banner of norms. In this same vein, it has created new and comprehensive framework agreements with a strong emphasis on labour and political rights, environmental protection and preservation, and universal human rights. This, in return, means that consumers will suffer by paying the price for NTBs through higher charges and reduced options, which adversely affect their economic competitiveness (EU-ASEAN Business Council, 2014). A large gap remains between the EU's anticipation and intent of



“...high levels of political and economic diversity posed tremendous challenges for ASEAN as a regional organisation in its decision-making process.”

trade policy and ASEAN’s awareness of the EU’s non-trade objectives, making it extremely difficult for both parties to advance their ambitions. This lopsided dilemma will only hinder market access and be understood by ASEAN members as a smokescreen for protectionism.

In the EU-ASEAN Free Trade Agreement negotiations, the adoption of a simple, transparent, and focused approach is key to achieving success. Avoiding the creation of unnecessary NTBs and steering clear of overly complex agendas will enable both regions to realise the full potential of the FTA. By streamlining the negotiation process and focusing on key priorities, the EU and ASEAN can promote economic growth, encourage sustainable development, and strengthen their partnership for the benefit of their countries and peoples.



Economic Diversity Leading to Economic Adversary

In the new geopolitical environment, one of the profound adversaries between the two regional blocs is compromised because of the formidable level of economic diversity that envelops the ASEAN region. The ASEAN region has long been faced with the burden of piloting over evident gaps of disparities and inequalities at high degrees, and dissimilarities in the levels of liberalization, evolution, and income per capita. According to Plummer (2006), the tremendously divergent levels of economic growth within ASEAN, whose member countries are both among the most inferior and the most affluent developing economies in the world, are far more different than in the premature years of the EU, when each member country was already a developed economy, or at least was by the end of the 1950s. ASEAN has been filled with peculiarities and asymmetries as it features all of the above: “dynamic Asian economies; middle-income developing nations; and least-developed countries (LDCs).

More so, high levels of political and economic diversity posed tremendous challenges for ASEAN as a regional organisation in its decision-making process. Non-interference in domestic affairs has further languished bloc-to-bloc negotiations. Economic diversity in the ASEAN region, specifically in land and population size, level of economic development, per capita income, and openness to international trade and investment, has also blurred the lines of the region's perception of the benefits and costs of economic integration. In comparison with the EU, ASEAN is additionally confronted with limitations in budget, human resources, and investments in future technologies to make the region more competitive.

Negotiating FTAs is not about imposing higher standards and practices on the other side, but it is about striking the right balance to achieve mutual benefits that can be felt by the peoples as quick as possible.

Economic Discord: An Interventionist EU and A Non-Interfering ASEAN

On the other hand, the EU has adopted the institutional bodies that can sanction EU member states once they abandon their adherence to supranational directives and the European Court of Justice (ECJ) also afforded judicial remedy for constitutional insubordination.

On the other hand, ASEAN had a long history of institutional construction that bears no resemblance to the institutional structures of the EU. It is more process-oriented and consensus-based in decision-making. The lack of a shared identity despite the presence of shared interests also poses difficult challenges for ASEAN. ASEAN's non-interference principle had been one of its fundamental regional and international relations guidelines.

The success of an FTA between the EU and ASEAN lies in embracing diversity, fostering mutual respect, and avoiding Eurocentrism. ASEAN is a vibrant community of diverse nations with their own histories, traditions and aspirations. By respecting this diversity and recognizing

the importance of mutual respect, the FTA can truly benefit all parties, promote economic growth, and foster sustainable development while preserving the individuality of each ASEAN nation.

Prospects of EU-ASEAN Trade Relations

Tap the Untapped Trade Potentials

Given the monumental untapped potentials, the EU-ASEAN trade must quickly achieve a more robust and rounded agreement as true trade partners. One of the most impressive and well-sought-after news in 2020, amidst the pandemic, was that the EU finally became a strategic partner of the ASEAN which is an affirmative sign that both sides intend to keep their economic lines open, strengthened, and better connected. In 2021, the EU-ASEAN Comprehensive Air Transport Agreement (CATA) was reached, enabling the ASEAN member countries to be provided with a single, modern framework for air transport between the two blocs. According to the European Commission (2022), this will streamline and simplify the administrative requirements and improve the capacity of both the airlines of these regional blocs to fortify and compete for traffic flows between the two regions. Indeed, on the brighter side, bilateral free trade agreements remain doable despite the hefty amount of effort placed into complex negotiations as benefits, such as tariff and non-tariff trade barrier reduction, and promotion of services and investment, could outweigh the costs and time expended in the end. For instance, in the case of Vietnam, while the negotiation lasted for fourteen (14) rounds, which is undeniably protracted, the payoff of the negotiations will greatly benefit both sides. The EU-Vietnam Free Trade Agreement will allow non-tariff exports for more than 71% in the following ten years, especially for products such as smartphones and electronic items, textiles, footwear, and agricultural goods like coffee. The EU, on the other hand, will enjoy 65% of non-tariff exports in the following seven years. As a result, Vietnam would reach a GDP increase of 4.6% and an export growth of 42.7% in 2025.

Incrementalism is the Route Forward

Despite many differences and disagreements, the way forward involves a deep understanding and acceptance of each other's positions. Hence, both sides must have strong convictions that incrementalism be regarded as the value that butters over obstacles to an all-encompassing EU-ASEAN FTA in the future. Former Prime Minister of Thailand Abhisit Vejjajiva at an ASEAN-EU conference organised by Asia Centre in June 2022 credibly suggested that "a minimalist agreement associated with in-built follow-on dialogues on petulant issues can render a logical outcome". Instead of highlighting the differences between the two regional blocs, the compromise must involve a human rights clause that is not mirrored by the European barometers but human rights clauses that are deemed to be tailor-fit to the Southeast Asian narrative.

Since the EU and ASEAN were conceived in an era of a rapidly changing international order and further confronted with a plethora of regional crises, the idea of pragmatic inter-regionalism will help protect the region from regional turmoil in the future.

New Standard, not New Non-Tariff Barriers

EU-ASEAN trade relations are significant for both regions. The EU is one of ASEAN's largest trading partners, and ASEAN represents a fast-growing market for European goods, services and investment. However, there has been growing concern regarding the potential impact of new Non-Tariff Barriers (NTBs) imposed by the EU. The proposed Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) is a case in point. While the EU's intention to address carbon emissions and promote sustainable practices is commendable, imposing CBAM on ASEAN may lead to unintended consequences such as Trade Complexity, Potential Disincentive for Sustainable Practices, Erosion of Trust and Economic Impact. It could impose additional costs on ASEAN exporters, making their products less competitive in the European market.

To create the New Standard, the EU and ASEAN must work together hand-in-hand in partnership. Through transparency, fairness, and collaboration, new standards can be a catalyst for innovation, climate action, and mutually beneficial trade between the two regions.

For the Best Benefits of Our People

Negotiating FTA between the EU and ASEAN is a complex undertaking. To maximise the benefits for the people in both regions, it may be prudent to adopt a phased approach. The EU and ASEAN can conclude rather quickly trade in goods and some trade in services, while leaving the more challenging issues such as sustainable development, intellectual property, investment protection, and regulatory alignment in the built-in agendas for subsequent rounds of negotiations. In so doing, we can deliver an immediate positive impact that can be felt by our people.

Conclusion

The purpose of this paper is to shed light on the current state of the EU-ASEAN trade partnership by looking into its key agreements established since 1977 and the outcomes borne out of them. At the same time, it also elucidated the dynamic economic partnership between the two regional blocs and how it has rippled through each other's economic ambitions as independent regional organisations and as trade partners. Key agreements concluded so far were mostly from the EU's bilateral free trade agreements with some individual ASEAN member countries.

Moving forward, this paper provides suggestions and outlines a pragmatic approach to allow both the EU and ASEAN to reconcile their differences, taking into account many difficult challenges each bloc has been and will be confronting. Nevertheless, despite monumental tasks ahead of us, we must work tirelessly and with unwavering determination to conclude the FTA Agreement as quickly as possible so that our people can enjoy a better quality of life and prosperity in the years to come.

Chapter 5

Perspectives on the ASEAN-EU Relationship

By Dr Reuben Wong

The Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) and The European Union (EU) have maintained a diplomatic relationship for more than 45 years. Together, they represent 1.1 billion people and trade approximately USD 280 billion worth of goods annually. The relationship between the two blocs and the bilateral relationship between the EU and ASEAN member states is multifaceted, extending to security, defence, trade and the environment. Viewing ASEAN as a critical regional partner with an essential role within geopolitics, in December 2020, the EU's relationship with ASEAN was elevated to a strategic partnership. However, it must be noted there is a limited extent of substantive cooperation and action between the two organisations arising. This chapter argues that the two organisations could build a closer, more collaborative relationship by institutionalising their inter-regional trade relationship.

Security and Defence

Cooperation on security and defence issues is limited. Apart from diplomacy, talks and a limited set of workshops, the defence relationship between the two organisations does not run deep. There are several driving factors for their limited cooperation on security issues. First and foremost, ASEAN is not a defence-oriented organisation. It is not an organisation founded upon common geostrategic values nor even normative values (aside from the primacy of sovereignty and non-interference), nor does it seek to pool its sovereignty and project its power to push forth a common agenda. With this being the case, cooperation on defence issues is rare within ASEAN itself. With such limited defence-

oriented action within the organisation, even less is done between the EU and ASEAN. Aside from the EU's active involvement in the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), cooperation is limited primarily to workshops and smaller, more niche forums.

The ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) is a security dialogue that allows countries worldwide to engage with ASEAN members on diplomatic and security issues within the Indo-Pacific. The platform primarily aims to foster constructive dialogue and consultation on security issues of common interest alongside confidence building and preventive diplomacy in the Asia-Pacific region. The EU is a founding and active member of the ARF and continues to contribute to the forum. The EU is represented in a Troika format to include representation from the Commission, President and incoming President. Within the forum, the EU has campaigned for ASEAN countries to adopt a firmer stance on the war in Ukraine, violence in Myanmar and the threat posed by North Korea and their repeated launches of ballistic missiles. To that end, it negotiated a commitment to preserving the South-East Asia nuclear weapons-free zone in 2022(?), among other statements on peace and stability.

“ASEAN is one of the most important organisations to help preserve peace and security” - Josep Borrell

For ASEAN, the ARF represents a key dialogue framework allowing countries in the Asia-Pacific region to address and discuss issues concerning peace and stability within the region. The EU's longstanding participation and active collaboration within the ARF represents their commitment to law, order and security in South East Asia. In the words of the High

Representative for EU Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Josep Borrell, “ASEAN is one of the most important organisations to help preserve peace and security” within South East Asia, and the EU wishes to be a trusted “partner in this endeavour” (Borrell, 2022). Moreover, the ARF provides a stepping stone for more concrete bilateral joint partnerships between the two blocs on security and defence issues.

Maritime security issues have been an area of collaboration between the two blocs. The EU-ASEAN High-Level Dialogue on Maritime Security Cooperation is a central forum for the two organisations to collaborate, especially focusing on maritime connectivity and law enforcement within the region. These two matters in particular represent critical issues for both ASEAN and the EU, given the strategic importance of the waters within Southeast Asia. In addition, the EU co-chaired the ARF Committee on Maritime Security with Vietnam in 2018 and since then has hosted various activities and workshops discussing the implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), enhancing maritime law enforcement cooperation, maritime domain awareness, ferry safety, dispute resolution and the Law of the Sea.

For the EU, collaboration on maritime security is vital as the South China Sea and Taiwan Strait represent a critical component of the potential threat posed by a rising and more assertive China. Similarly, collaboration on maritime security within the region allows ASEAN to develop its capabilities in defending its territorial waters while also diversifying its strategic partnerships to combat the perceived threats in the region.

Economic and trade relationship

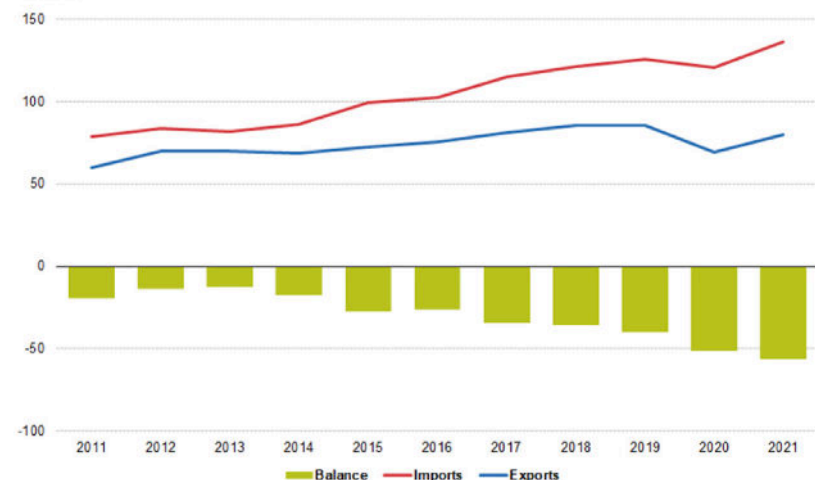
More than 45 years of the ASEAN-EU relationship have seen the partnership expand into many areas of strategic importance. Over this period, one area has stood the test of time: the close economic and trade ties between the two blocs.

Both organisations represent critical economic and trade partners to each other: among non-ASEAN countries, the EU is the third largest export destination for goods produced in ASEAN (12% of total exports). Conversely, the EU accounted for 9% of ASEAN imports from non-ASEAN countries, rendering it fifth among the countries ASEAN imports goods from. Notably, EU imports from and EU exports to ASEAN countries have grown considerably: despite the lowered trade volumes due to the COVID-19 pandemic, exports to ASEAN countries grew from 60 billion Euros in 2011 to 80 billion Euros in 2021, while imports from ASEAN countries to the EU grew from 79 billion Euros in 2011 to an all-time high

of 136 billion euros in 2021 (ASEAN-EU - international trade in goods statistics, 2022). This is represented in the following figure.

EU trade in goods with ASEAN countries, 2011 - 2021

€ billion



Source: Eurostat (online data code: Comext data code : DS-018995)

eurostat

Figure 1¹

A Free Trade Agreement (FTA) between the two blocs has been under discussion since July 2007, when negotiations began. One of the first areas of contention within the negotiations was the FTA's scope and the countries involved. Entering into an inter-regional FTA, there was contention on discrepancies in the level of development between countries and the possibility of widening these disparities should an agreement be reached. In particular, with Cambodia, Laos, Brunei and Myanmar representing only 2.05% of ASEAN's total trade in goods in

¹ EU trade in goods with ASEAN countries, 2011-2021 (billion Euros) (ASEAN-EU - International trade in goods statistics, 2022)

2009 and 3.42% of ASEAN's gross domestic product (GDP) between 2007 and 2009, the fear was an FTA with these members would destabilise their economies and amplify the already existing inequalities within the region. As a result, in March 2009, both organisations agreed to pause talks on an FTA after seven rounds of negotiations yielded no conclusion.

“intensify
engagement on trade
and economic issues
by pursuing other
avenues in the short
to medium term”

This pause gave way to bilateral negotiations between the EU and individual ASEAN members, in the hope that they would serve as building blocks for a future inter-regional trade agreement. Negotiations between the EU and Singapore and Malaysia were launched in 2010; with Vietnam in June 2012; with Thailand in March 2013, with the Philippines in December 2015, and with Indonesia in July 2016. So far, however, only two countries - Singapore and Vietnam - have concluded and ratified bilateral trade agreements with the EU.

In 2017, the European Commission and the ASEAN Member States undertook a stocktaking exercise to explore the possibility of an FTA, however, they concluded that their respective positions were too far apart. Since then, it has been hoped that by leveraging bilateral trade relationships, they will be able to build the foundations for a future FTA between the two organisations. With this in mind, subsequent ASEAN Economic Ministers (AEM) and the European Union (EU) AEM-EU trade Commissioner consultations have “tasked Senior Economic Officials to develop a framework encompassing the parameters of a future ASEAN-EU FTA”. Following this, little substantive action has been taken, apart from, “continued domestic consultations and engagements in experts’ dialogue”. In the eighteenth AEM-EU trade Commissioner consultations (2022), there was a shift to “intensify engagement on trade and economic issues by pursuing other avenues in the short to medium term”, namely

focusing on sectoral cooperation, in particular in areas such as the digital economy, green technologies and services and supply chain resilience.

To date, problems that hindered the negotiations in 2009 have persisted. In 2020 Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam were the primary destinations of EU exports to ASEAN, representing 78% of its total share, while 76.3% of EU goods imports from ASEAN originated from these four countries. In contrast, Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Brunei only represented 2.3% and 6.1% of ASEAN imports and exports with the EU and contributed a meagre 4.22% of ASEAN's combined GDP in 2020.

Another issue in the negotiations on an FTA between ASEAN and the EU was the lack of consensus within ASEAN on non-traditional trade features. While six of the ASEAN members (barring Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Brunei) held a cohesive stance on traditional trade issues such as tariff rate quotas or sectoral market openings in trade in goods, they were unable to agree on non-traditional trade features like non-tariff trade barriers, investments or services. With the EU's revamp of its strategic approach to FTA in 2020 and the stronger focus on non-traditional trade features, any negotiations with ASEAN or ASEAN6 members would be even more difficult.

Another layer of complexity would be added to any new discussions on the possibility of a region-to-region FTA with recent political developments in Cambodia and Myanmar. On the Cambodian front, the EU withdrew their preferential access to EU markets for Cambodia in 2020 over concerns over human rights, affecting approximately 20% of Cambodia's exports to the EU. The prospects of an FTA are almost unthinkable concerning Myanmar, with their relationship with the EU at an all-time low - the EU recently imposed its sixth round of sanctions on Myanmar.

In attempting to establish economic and regulatory power within South East Asia during the late 2000s, the EU attempted to forge an FTA with ASEAN under the assumption of working with a cohesive bloc. However,

as noted by Katharina Meissner, “EU’s ambitious vision for comprehensive agreements clashed with the actual heterogeneity of ASEAN member states”. This analysis still rings true today. With persistent discrepancies in economic size, accompanied by a lack of cohesion and fraught tensions between some members of ASEAN and the EU, an inter-region FTA seems very unlikely, at least for the time being.

Malaysia/Indonesia Palm oil dispute with the EU

It is worth noting that currently, there exists a trade dispute between Malaysia, Indonesia and the EU over EU imports of palm oil. In early July of 2022, the EU passed the Renewable Energy Directive (RED II), through which they began the phaseout of palm oil products with the end goal of complete eradication by 2030. Both Indonesia and Malaysia slammed the EU for RED II, lambasting it as unfair and “discriminatory”. Palm oil constitutes a significant export for both countries, exporting approximately 85 per cent of all global palm oil production. For Malaysia, palm oil is one of its primary industries and main agricultural export globally, constituting 2.5 per cent of its annual GDP. The EU represented a key trading partner for Malaysia in the industry, importing approximately 12 per cent of Malaysia’s exports. For Indonesia, Palm oil is a significant contributor to their economy, contributing 4.5% of its annual GDP and giving employment to 3 million people. With the EU’s RED II, the trade volume of Indonesian palm oil to the EU declined from 17% in 2016 to 12% of Indonesia’s total exports in 2018 such that it is now worth less than 20% of Indonesia’s total trade with the EU (Jukhee, 2021).

In reaction to the EU’s RED II, Indonesia and Malaysia lodged complaints with the World Trade Organisation against the EU because it discriminated against selected products. Since the complaints have been lodged (November 2020 for Indonesia and July 2021 for Malaysia), a panel has been convened to review the details, but a decision has yet to be made. Should the WTO rule in favour of Malaysia and Indonesia, the EU essentially has three options.

First, the EU could appeal against the decision, setting back the final ruling by years. Any new decision would have to be after new members are appointed to WTO's appellate body, which currently needs to be fixed due to the US blocking new appointees. Second, the EU could accept the WTO's ruling and adapt its environmental policies. It is worth noting here that Indonesia and the EU have gotten into a similar disagreement over Indonesia's refusal to export raw materials to the EU. Following a ruling against them, Indonesia fully complied with the WTO.

Lastly, the European Union could choose to continue its course with its phase-out of palm oil and bear the consequences of any retaliatory actions imposed by Indonesia and Malaysia. Whilst the environmental dangers of palm oil are notorious, the EU's ban on palm oil is criticised by some. As the World Wide Fund for Nature notes: Palm oil is an incredibly efficient crop, producing more oil per land area than any other equivalent vegetable oil crop. Replacing palm plantations with soya bean, coconut, or sunflower would require between four and ten times as much land, leading to environmental degradation elsewhere (Palm Oil, n.d.). Furthermore, with the EU's passing of RED II, China has demonstrated interest in Malaysia and Indonesia's palm oil exports. While the EU requires palm oil imports to pass specific environmental standards, China does not. Thus, if the EU were to permanently leave the market, China would most likely absorb the EU's imports but without the added cost of environmental standards and protections that would ordinarily accompany exports to the EU.

Development Cooperation

The EU previously offered technical support to ASEAN from 2013 to 2016 in trade facilitation through the ASEAN Regional Integration Support from the European Union (ARISE) project. This initiative, funded by a global EU contribution of 22 million Euros, consisted of three components: high-level capacity building, support for establishing a single market for goods, and capacity building for the ASEAN Secretariat.

Based on the positive feedback from ASEAN and the achievements of ARISE, the EU decided to continue its trade facilitation support to ASEAN with the introduction of ARISE Plus. ARISE Plus, spanning from 2017 to 2022, aimed to extend the EU's commitment to supporting ASEAN in trade facilitation. It built upon the progress made by ARISE and is structured around four main components: trade facilitation and transparency, standards and conformity assessment (particularly in healthcare and agro-based products), customs, transport, and ACTS (ASEAN Customs Transit System), and ASEAN economic integration monitoring and statistics.

Through its technical assistance and demand-driven approach, ARISE Plus further enhanced economic integration in ASEAN by implementing the ASEAN Economic Community Blueprint (AECB) 2020, strengthening the institutional capacity of the ASEAN Secretariat and its sectoral bodies.

Problems in the EU-ASEAN relationship:

Two main challenges stand in the way of extensive political and economic cooperation between the EU and ASEAN. ASEAN scholars and politicians note that a long-term EU strategy towards ASEAN is incomplete (Wong and Brown, 2016). Even though the EU is a major economic player in Asia, the EU is not as invested in ASEAN as compared to the US and China. This is attributed to the first challenge that stands in the way of fostering effective cooperation between ASEAN and the EU. Firstly, there are low levels of institutionalisation in the EU-ASEAN relationship. Ruland argues that there are no common overarching institutions, both sides exclusively rely on their own institutional infrastructure" (2001). Therefore instituting a free trade agreement (FTA) that acts as a framework to base future dealings between the EU and ASEAN will be most helpful.

This is further reinforced by how the EU needs to urgently recoup its previous political influence in Asia, especially as the EU loses out to growing Chinese and US influence in the region due to both nations' increasing market share and choice to prioritise expanding relations

with ASEAN. Therefore, the EU must take immediate steps to expand its efforts to engage the region to shore up its position as a regional power. This can be through the provision of economic incentives through trade agreements, or through strengthening its position as a regional security player through efforts such as the Aceh Monitoring Mission under the EU CSDP. But the EU can first choose to install a free trade agreement as previously mentioned. The lack of an FTA debilitates EU companies' competitiveness within ASEAN, as evidenced by the Chinese capture of markets that EU producers were once dominant, such as high-speed rail, and infrastructure.

The low level of institutionalisation in the EU-ASEAN relationship can be attributed to their inherent disagreement over political values. ASEAN espouses non-interference and prefers to operate informally; prioritising private meetings between ASEAN leaders to reach consensus on specific issues. The EU however is a more supranational organisation and places less emphasis on a mutual respect of sovereignty. Instead, the EU aspires to be a normative power and seeks to assert democracy and human rights in other nations to do so (Manners 2002; Wong 2012). This hinders agreements between the two entities. For example, the EU-ASEAN FTA which was supposed to be finalised in 2017, was delayed due to the EU issuing human rights sanctions against Myanmar. However, the EU must pursue a more pragmatic approach in its dealings with ASEAN. The EU has previously shown itself to be strategic in pursuing normative agendas. An example would be how in the 11th AEMM held in Karlsruhe in September 1994, the issue over unrest in East Timor in the early 1990s and the concerns over human rights abuse by the Indonesian army in East Timor were sidestepped and dropped from the agenda of the bloc-to-bloc meeting" (Yeo, 2020).

Second, the next challenge that prevents further EU-ASEAN cooperation is the lack of internal EU unity on its foreign policy in Asia. This is also compounded by ASEAN member states' (AMS) reliance on forming bilateral agreements with EU nations. Ruland argued that "with regard to Vietnam, not all EC members shared their partners' view of isolating

that country and excluding it from European aid". This explains the EU's struggle to come up with a cohesive stance that exemplifies most of the member states' opinions on how specific Asian nations must be handled. An example of this is how France, Germany and EU institutions were recently at odds with one another about whether to revive the stalled Comprehensive Agreement on Investment with China (Anderlini, 2023).

France wants to delay this whereas Germany is keen on reinstituting this agreement. Also, there is a strong tendency for Asian states to deal with EU nations separately based on bilateral agreements rather than dealing with the EU as a collective (Stokhof et al, 2004). This can be attributed to the high levels of mistrust between AMS, which also explains the lack of joint projects between AMS, such as the delays over the high-speed train connecting Singapore to Kuala Lumpur (Peimani, 2020). Institutional barriers within ASEAN contribute to delays in greenlighting agreements and deals with other nations due to the problem of the veto in ASEAN. ASEAN is consensus-driven and a single veto from AMS can derail an entire partnership agreement. This is due to ASEAN and the EU being composed of very different institutional structures. The EU has a parliament and hence has the authority to legislate and make supranational decisions for its member states. ASEAN however utmost only has an Inter-Parliamentary Assembly, which only allows for a discussion of ideas between member states to occur (Koh, 2017). Therefore, as a result, the EU can make decisions that even a minority disagrees with due to the power of its formalised voting system. ASEAN however is much more lax and takes the respect of member states' sovereignty much more seriously. The EU also enables this for low levels through its recent "elevation [of] bilateral relations [with AMS] into a strategic partnership" (Hsieh, 2022). But it should also be noted that the EU initiated the "Trans-Regional EU-ASEAN Trade Initiative (TREATI) that promotes dialogues on trade and investment issues" and which has become a launchpad for the ongoing discussions for ASEAN-EU FTA negotiations (Hsieh, 2022).

Recommendations

As ASEAN's economic and political role in the global political architecture continues to grow (Thompson & Tonby, 2014; Caballero-Anthony 2022), there is a growing need for the EU to continue pursuing meaningful, tangible relations with the region if the Union wishes to reinforce its position as a regional player. However, such ambitions are hampered by institutional barriers, competition from other states, domestic interests, and conflict in normative values. Hence, the EU must seek alternative mechanisms that allow for the deepening of material relations with ASEAN whilst also providing pathways for its growth, creating dual engines of expansion that can support the EU in establishing its place regionally and globally.

The EU largely identifies with the popular conception of itself as a normative power wherein it exerts its power through its ability to shape international norms which perpetuate European ideals and methodologies (Manners, 2002). Such sentiments are reflected in the EU's aims as a global actor that promotes '[democracies, human rights and sustainable development]' (EEAS, n.d). However, although such beliefs may have facilitated the formation of a 'European identity' (Liszkowska, 2017), the EU's self-identification with this role has sometimes driven it to occupy an antagonistic role within Southeast Asia. Persistence in pushing European understandings of democracy and human rights has weakened EU-ASEAN relations as the former view the EU's intervention in these areas to be antagonistic and unsuitable for the regional context (Schembera, 2016). Furthermore, the EU's crusade in environmental protection has earned the ire of some members of ASEAN, with Malaysia and Indonesia protesting against the European Union Deforestation Regulation (EUDR) which they perceived to discriminate against their palm oil exports, unfairly impacting their economic performance and social well-being (Haizan, 2023). As such, if the EU seeks to strengthen EU-ASEAN relations, rather than act as an arbitrator of the region, the EU should seek to catalyse change as per its normative identity. ASEAN-EU economic relations are significant, with the EU being the region's third largest trading partner and the two entities seeking to re-launch formal discussions regarding an EU-ASEAN Free Trade Agreement

(FTA) (The ASEAN Secretariat, 2020). Bilateral FTAs between the EU and ASEAN member states have also kicked off, with the EU securing FTAs with Singapore and Vietnam whilst continuing negotiations with several ASEAN nations as well (European Commission, n.d).

Through such avenues, the EU has the potential to strengthen relations by providing economic incentives which drive engagement and positive change. Stronger linkages between key economic units of the EU and ASEAN (and her member states) can enhance political relations (Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, n.d) whilst also allowing the EU to continue its promotion of democratic norms within the region through an increased strategic role (Liu & Ornelas, 2014).

“The EU’s decision to include ASEAN in the process allowed the Union to transcend geographical limitations in its activities and effectively carry out its civilian mission.”

Beyond consolidating its economic standing in Southeast Asia, the EU may also wish to consider increasing its role as a regional security player. ASEAN resides in a region facing an increasingly complex and complicated medley of security concerns. Maritime security issues are progressively rising, particularly due to disputes between some ASEAN member states and China regarding the contestation of territory in the South China Sea (Bradford & Edwards, 2022). The EU’s failure

to play a meaningful role within the region’s security architecture paves the way for the US-China rivalries to capture Southeast Asia, risking increased tensions and pressure on ASEAN states to align with regional blocs, potentially dividing the region and causing political instability (Stromseth, 2022). To reassert its role as a global actor and a critical actor regarding ASEAN, the EU must take stronger action about regional security in Southeast Asia. The EU’s previous forays into ASEAN-related security include the Aceh Monitoring Mission (AMM). The EU, under its

Common Foreign and Security Policy, collaborated with ASEAN, Norway and Switzerland to deploy a 'monitoring mission' in Indonesia following the Aceh insurgency (Glière, 2007). The EU's decision to include ASEAN in the process allowed the Union to transcend geographical limitations in its activities and effectively carry out its civilian mission (Bersick, Stokhof & Quigley, 2006). However, whilst previous security ventures with ASEAN may have been under European leadership, the EU must recognise the changing power dynamics in its engagement with the region. ASEAN members have learnt to use such experiences to develop their frameworks to respond to regional issues (Ibid.). Moving forward, rather than attempt to assert control and leadership over security enterprises, the EU should seek to be a collaborator of ASEAN, working alongside the organisation's own rules and procedures to foster improved relations that deepen European engagement with the region. This facilitates the EU in renewing deeper security engagement with ASEAN member states whilst continuing to have a seat at the table of Southeast Asian regional politics.

If the EU is to remain relevant in Southeast Asia, it must articulate and assert its ambitions. In the contemporary economic landscape, the EU faces increasing competition from other actors. Some observers note that Europe's role in the global value chain is declining (García-Herrero & Turégano, 2020). Such developments risk the EU's economic security and prowess, limiting its political potential. The EU may wish to encourage domestic producers to specialise in secondary production, which makes up a significant proportion of the region's main economic activity (Eurostat, 2020). Notably, manufacturing exports contributed to 60% of the total export-supported value added for the EU in 2020 (Eurostat, 2022). This is in contrast to the common perception of Southeast Asia as a region lower in the value chain (Meyer et al., 2022). Hence, there is potential for the EU to continue to develop its comparative advantage in secondary production, allowing it to enhance its economy by creating FTAs with ASEAN that will help the EU develop its secondary production industry whilst creating other economic opportunities for ASEAN states to flourish. Such mutually beneficial agreements encourage the deepening of relations and promote increased collaboration between the two entities.

Chapter 6

Advancing the Blue Economy – Harnessing Potential, Addressing Challenges and Collaborative Prioritisation for ASEAN-EU Cooperation

By Aimee Alado-Blake, Chair, ASEAN UK Business Forum (AUBF)

“The potential of the Blue Economy, including identifying critical sectors with growth opportunities.”

utilisation of ocean resources whilst concurrently safeguarding marine ecosystems and biodiversity. The importance of the Blue Economy transcends coastal nations and offers the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the European Union (EU) opportunities for tackling challenges through collaborative endeavours.

Introduction

The Blue Economy, often called the marine or ocean economy, constitutes a critical economic sector encompassing many maritime activities, resources, and industries. It revolves around the sustainable and responsible

The focus of this essay unfolds in three dimensions as we look at

- A. The potential of the Blue Economy, including identifying critical sectors with growth opportunities.
- B. The challenges facing the EU and the ASEAN include the impact of climate change, biodiversity loss and the scourge of plastic and marine pollution.
- C. The importance of collaboration between the two blocs to harmonise policy and regulatory frameworks for the Blue Economy, enabling blue finance to underpin the success of climate mitigation and adaptation, building resilience towards a fair and just transition.

Defining the Blue Economy and its Significance for ASEAN and the EU

The World Bank defines the Blue Economy as the “sustainable use of ocean resources for economic growth, improved livelihoods and jobs whilst preserving the health of the ocean ecosystem.” (United Nations, 2023), the Blue Economy seeks to balance economic growth and environmental conservation, recognising that the oceans’ health significantly impacts well-being, economy, and community.

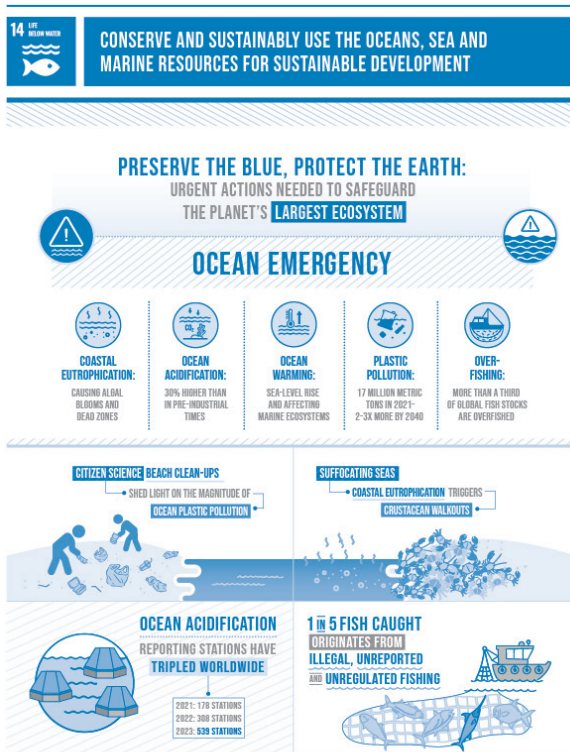
For ASEAN’s ten diverse nations of extensive coastlines and abundant marine resources – this means immense potential to advance economic growth for its people while working at the forefront of marine conservation. As the EU has extensive coastlines along the Atlantic, Mediterranean, and Baltic, it is logical that close cooperation is in the best interests of both blocs to promote innovation, green technologies, and sustainable development.

In today’s interconnected world, global challenges such as climate change, food insecurity, biodiversity loss, environmental degradation, and pollution necessitate unified action and collaborative approaches. Oceans are crucial regulators of the Earth’s climate, acting as carbon sinks and influencing weather patterns. Nonetheless, they stand among the most vulnerable ecosystems susceptible to the impact of climate change.

Both ASEAN and the EU share common concerns. Collaboration between the two blocs can facilitate the exchange of best practices, technology and knowledge transfer, fortifying marine conservation and sustainable practices. Harmonised ASEAN - EU policy and regulatory frameworks could enable the two blocs to seek new innovative ways of tackling problems relating to climate change.

Harnessing the Potential of the Blue Economy

The Blue Economy supports Sustainable Development Goal 14 (SDG 14) which emphasizes the oceans' role in sustaining life, supporting livelihoods, regulating climate, and nurturing biodiversity. See Fig 1



THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS REPORT 2023: SPECIAL EDITION- UNSTATS.UN.ORG/SDGS/REPORT/2023/

Figure 1¹

1 SDG 14 <https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal14>

ASEAN's Maritime Domain

The maritime domain profoundly influences the ASEAN region, affecting ASEAN's strategic, political, economic, and social aspects. It plays a crucial role in transportation, trade, livelihoods, and regional stability. Several Member states have extensive coastlines, with Indonesia ranking fourth globally and the Philippines eighth.

The ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP) highlights Southeast Asia's importance in connecting the Asia-Pacific and Indian Ocean regions. These regions are centres of economic growth where sea routes are vital, with 60% of global maritime trade passing through Asia. Consequently, ASEAN is crucial in global and regional trade, with sea cargo throughput reaching 3 billion tonnes in 2017 (ASEAN, 2023).

The maritime domain's significance is further evident in the 523 international seaports that facilitate trade and travel, as well as contribute to food security. It follows the ASEAN seafaring sector is a significant economic force. It contributes approximately US\$150 billion to the regional GDP annually and employs over 10 million people. The Philippines is the largest source of seafarers globally (UNCTAD, 2021), followed by Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore. This means that, collectively, ASEAN's trade in fish and aquatic resources with the global community amounted to an impressive US\$13.7 billion in 2021, underlining its significance internationally (Ibid).

Much of this economic strength is founded upon the natural self-organising systems of the oceans, which do not feature in economic terms but are as vital as breathing. For example, the Coral Triangle in Southeast Asia is a biodiversity hotspot. It hosts 76% of known coral species and 37% of coral reef fish globally. The effect of this is to make the marine biodiversity a rich economic and natural source for tourism as well as sustaining fishery stocks (ASEAN, 2023), but it is also fragile to impact from multiple anthropogenic causes.

The EU's Blue Economy

The notion of the Blue Economy has garnered worldwide recognition as nations seek sustainable economic prospects rooted in marine resources. From this, the EU and ASEAN countries emerge as important players because of their extensive coastlines. According to The EU's Blue Economy Report for 2022 (European Commission, 2022), nearly 4.45 million people contribute around €667.2 billion in turnover and €183.9 billion in gross value added (GVA). Key sectors include marine resources, marine energy, port operations, shipbuilding, maritime transport, and tourism. Innovative sectors like marine renewable energy, ocean energy, and blue biotechnology offer growth opportunities.

1. Marine Renewable Energy

It is important to note that the EU commands an impressive 90% share of the global offshore wind market, highlighting its importance in meeting the EU's ambitious 2050 energy strategy (European Commission, 2012).

2. Maritime Transport and Trade

Maritime transport and trade are vital in the EU, accounting for 80% of global goods to create 9% of blue economy jobs. However, they also leave an environmental footprint that contributes significantly to global CO₂ emissions. As an answer to this problem, the EU plans to cut emissions by 50% by 2050 to phase out single-use plastics in shipping by 2030 and invest in sustainable technologies such as Liquid Natural Gas, hydrogen, and energy-efficient ship designs.

3. Port Activities

Port design and service support will need to see the transformation to service, supply, bunkering, and goods integration to support the EU's ambitions to mitigate their environmental and waste footprints. Port operations are fundamental to the European economy, acting as enablers for trade, economic growth, and job creation but need to align with the goals of the European Green Deal (EGD) (European Commission, 2023) and have the potential to make significant contributions towards achieving its objectives.

4. Coastal and Maritime Tourism

Tourism is the EU's dominant and rapidly growing sector in the Blue Economy, generating 63% of jobs, 44% of GVA and 38% of profits. Europe, the most visited continent, relies on its coastal regions and islands as major tourist spots. However, the rising tourist numbers, e.g. from cruise ships, raise concerns about the impact of pollution and damage to marine ecosystems. Prudent management is needed to ensure thriving coastal tourism and economies whilst preserving the environment.

5. Fisheries and Aquaculture

The marine living resources sector, encompassing seafood capture and harvesting, processing, and distribution, holds immense significance for support of human health and nutrition, economic returns, and employment.

6. Marine Biotechnology

Blue biotechnology, a swiftly advancing field, harnesses marine organisms for various commercial applications. This sector depends on resources such as algae, bacteria, fungi, and invertebrates. Although the EU is a leader in blue biotechnology, its contribution to global algae production remains at less than 1%. As highlighted in the European Green Deal, the EU acknowledges the potential of algae for sustainable food systems.

Overcoming Multi-Faceted Challenges in the Blue Economy: A Path to Sustainable Solutions

It is important to take a moment to reflect on the importance of the Blue Economy. Valued at up to US\$6 trillion, it presents opportunities for economic resilience in the EU and the ASEAN. Yet it faces triple headwinds: from the crisis from climate change to biodiversity loss to plastic and marine pollution.

For example, an alarming 11 million tons of plastic are entering the oceans each year. Add to this we find 34% of fish stocks worldwide are below the maximum sustainable yield. This translates to a risk of roughly 3 billion

people being endangered, primarily in the coastal developing regions that depend on the ocean for food as well as income (UNCTAD, 2023).

According to the ASEAN Blue Economy Framework (Sep 2023), the Blue Economy can serve as the new engine for ASEAN's future growth, whether in accelerating growth of the conventional marine sector (e.g. in aquaculture, fish processing and tourism) or as the catalyst for emerging sectors (e.g. in renewable energy, biotechnology, in research and education).

The framework also supports the ASEAN Community Vision 2025 on Carbon Neutrality and the Regional Plan for Combating Marine Debris in ASEAN Member States (2021-2025).

Climate change

Climate change severely affects all the world's oceans. Oceans constitute a vast carbon sink accommodating two-thirds of the planet's surface, accordingly, they absorb approximately 90% of the heat generated from the increasing greenhouse gas emissions (GHG). As a result, this leads to rising temperatures (UNFCCC, 2021), promoting feedback loops to ice melt, sea-level rise, coral bleaching, heatwaves, ocean acidification and many more interrelated negative effects.

These changes have global ramifications. For example, around 680 million people inhabit low-lying coastal areas, and nearly 2 billion reside in coastal megacities (Carrington, 2019). Consequently, climate change threatens the oceans' critical role in supporting life and livelihoods, particularly in developing ASEAN nations.

Planetary Boundaries - Rising Pressures

The planetary boundaries concept identifies nine critical thresholds for human development, with six boundaries breached and growing pressures observed on all, except for ozone depletion, as of the 2023 update (Stockholm Resilience Centre, 2023). See Fig 2

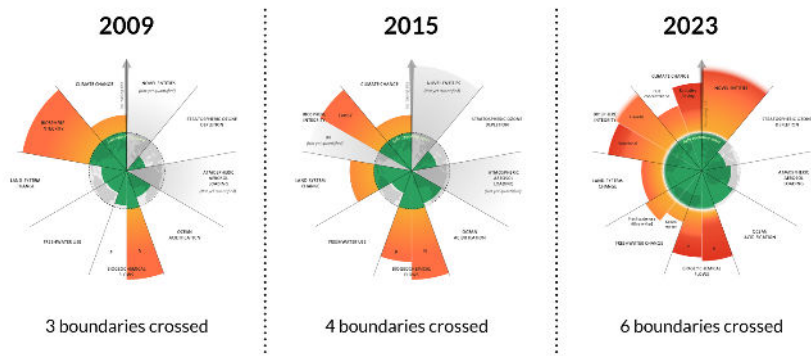


Figure 2²

For example, the Philippines exemplifies risk from climate change, ocean acidification, and pollution on aquaculture when the country faced a near-catastrophic collapse of aquafarming in the 1990s, significantly affecting black tiger prawns and crab cultivation causing substantial economic losses (Macusi, 2022).

CASE STUDY:

The author came from the province of Capiz, in Western Visayas, one of the primary island clusters in the Philippines (the other two being Luzon and Mindanao). Capiz is renowned for its abundant fishing grounds, native shellfish like Capiz and Angel Wing shells, and extensive brackish water fishponds, making it widely recognised as the ‘Seafood Capital of the Philippines.’

Her family has been deeply rooted in the lucrative aquaculture industry for four generations, primarily as fishpond operators. They managed a substantial land area of at least 1,000 hectares at their peak, yielding tens of metric tons of crabs, black tiger prawns, and milkfish, which were

² Planetary Boundaries-over-time (Azote for Stockholm Resilience Centre, Stockholm University. Based on Richardson et al. 2023, Steffen et al. 2015, and Rockström et al. 2009)

harvested once or twice a year (formerly three to four times) for local consumption and export. In addition to fishponds, they also operated substantial fishing boats for open-water fishing.

This background has afforded the author invaluable insights into how climate change has significantly impacted the local community and the aquaculture industry generally.

Over the years, there has been a troubling decline in sea catch and aquaculture production, rendering it increasingly unprofitable and unsustainable for small and large-scale operators and fishermen. The devastating consequences of hydrometeorological events, particularly typhoons, have become more frequent and ferocious each year. Moreover, fishers and operators are left at the mercy of the unpredictable La Niña and El Niño phenomena when determining when to fish and cultivate.

Fishing and aquaculture, vital components of the blue economy, are integral to achieving all 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Collaborating with the European Union (EU) could bring about mutually beneficial arrangements, contributing significantly to the fulfilment of most, if not all, SDGs. Furthermore, the EU is actively honouring its commitments under the Paris Agreement to assist developing nations through technical expertise and financial resources to bolster the industry's adaptation efforts.

Loss of Biodiversity and the Urgent Need for Conservation

Despite occupying just 3% of the Earth's surface, the ASEAN region is home to a rich tapestry of terrestrial, freshwater, and mangrove ecosystems that serve as vital carbon storage to help make ASEAN an important area for nature-based investments. Indeed, the European Commission recognises the importance of nature restoration for post-pandemic recovery. For example, it is reported that Biodiversity conservation efforts

in the EU can significantly bolster the economy by adding over €49 billion annually to the seafood industry by preserving marine stocks and saving the insurance industry about €50 billion yearly by mitigating flood damage by protecting coastal wetlands (European Commission, 2020).

Such examples reveal the interconnectedness of sustainable development and human well-being with nature and biodiversity. Interestingly, it is believed that US\$44 trillion (€41.2 trillion), representing over half of the world's economic output, is influenced by the health fitness of natural ecosystems, as estimated by the Taskforce for Nature-related Financial Disclosures (TNFD) (EBRD, 2022).

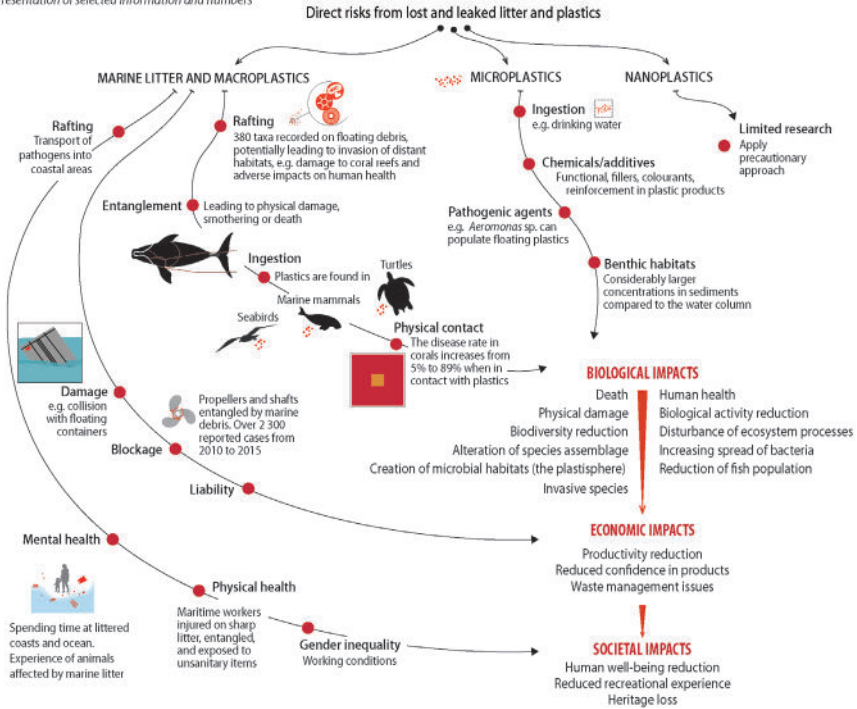
With such economic strength being related directly to flourishing communities and ecosystems, it is no wonder the Blue Economy holds immense significance for both EU and ASEAN regions, emphasising the urgent need for connected, harmonised and sustainably viable action.

Plastic and marine pollution

The presence of plastic, even in the most remote corners of the Earth, such as the Mariana Trench, the deepest point in the ocean, contains microscopic plastic particles from human activities, emphasising the scale of the problem (UNEP, 2021).

Direct risks and impacts of marine litter and plastics

Presentation of selected information and numbers



United Nations Environment Programme (2021). From Pollution to Solution: A global assessment of marine litter and plastic pollution. Nairobi.

Illustrated by GRID-Arendal

Figure 3³

Marine litter and plastic pollution threaten the livelihood of coastal communities, shipping, and port operations costing at least US\$6-19 billion in 2018 (Deloitte, 2019), not accounting for losses to marine natural capital, estimated at US\$2,500 billion annually (Beaumont, 2019). These intertwined crises underscore the imperative for ASEAN and EU regions to intensify harmonised systemic conservation efforts and protect their blue economies.

3 Plastic - UNEP Report, 2021.

Together, the EU and ASEAN have the bold opportunity to set an example of global leadership in forging a resilient and sustainable blue economy, inspiring other regions. In doing so, they can lay the foundation for a future where economic prosperity coexists harmoniously with preserving marine ecosystems and safeguarding biodiversity for generations to come.

Collaborative Prioritisation: Advancing the Blue Economy in ASEAN and the EU

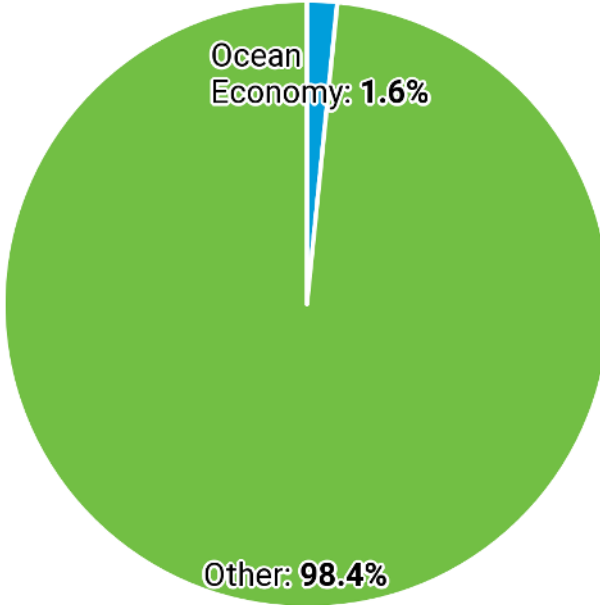
The Plan of Action to implement the ASEAN - EU Strategic Partnership (2023-2027) focuses, amongst other things, on Climate Change Mitigation, Adaptation, Resilience and a Fair and Just Transition. Blue Economy and blue finance are key areas for ASEAN-EU collaboration. This means financing sustainable ocean-based activities supporting climate mitigation and adaptation, enhancing resilience, and advancing a fair and equitable transition to a low-carbon economy.

The opportunities have so far needed more serious investment. Indeed, despite being one of the 17 UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), SDG14, which focuses on Life Below Water, it received a mere 1.6% of Official Development Assistance between 2013 and 2018. See Fig 4



The least funded sustainable development goal

Only 1.6% of total Official Development Assistance was directed to the ocean economy from 2013 to 2018



Source: UNCTAD calculations.

Figure 4⁴

⁴ Least Funded SDG14

It is important to note again that all the SDGs are interdependent and should not be viewed in isolated silos. Action within one will have effects on another. Consequently, to optimise outcomes, it would be excellent to see the transformation of effort into systemic programmes to:

- Collaboratively develop and implement blue finance instruments such as blue bonds, blue sukuk, blue carbon tax, blue carbon market and blue carbon credits.
- Promote the adoption of sustainable investment criteria for the blue economy, drawing inspiration from the EU's initiatives on sustainable finance, including investment plans, green investment taxonomy, and green bond regulations.
- Adapt the Taskforce for Nature-related Financial Disclosures Framework to encourage companies and financial institutions to create integrated and inclusive investments to enhance nature.
- Expanding the 'Poseidon' principle, a global framework for climate alignment of shipping finance, to encompass other sectors within the Blue Economy.

ASEAN-EU Plan of Action for Creating a Just and Equitable Transition

EU and ASEAN can tap into valuable synergies by sharing best practices, traditional knowledge, technology and expertise in sustainable fisheries management, renewable energy development, marine conservation and in the maritime industry. The Blue Economy is, therefore the driver of economic growth, social inclusivity, and environmental sustainability for the ASEAN region.

Through the ASEAN Leaders Declaration on the Blue Economy in October 2021, the ASEAN Co-ordinating Council (ACC) has been tasked to oversee the implementation and development of the Blue Economy. Further shape has been given to these initiatives following the recent publication of the [ASEAN Maritime Outlook](#) (August 2023) and the [ASEAN Framework](#) (Sep 2023).

These exemplify political will and ambition in enhancing EU and ASEAN collaboration. The Plan for Action covers different pillars for collaboration and the Blue Economy straddles a number of these sections including in the areas of maritime security cooperation, maritime safety as well as cooperation on food, agriculture, fisheries, and aquaculture. There are also sections dealing with the circular economy, the fight against marine litter and pollution and cooperation on biodiversity conservation and sustainable management of biodiversity.

The Blue Economy does not only cover oceans but freshwater ways as well, and there was mention of the Mekong River in the document, the 5000km long river that begins its journey in Tibet and China and travels through Vietnam, Cambodia, Lao PDR and Thailand. Some EU countries, such as Germany and Switzerland, have already supported the Mekong River Commission in the past, as ecological degradation and overbuilding of dams will greatly risk the livelihoods of the people downstream.

“This will speed the strategy and implementation cycles, visualising how to use better what we have already and where new technologies are appropriate in an environmentally efficient manner.”

In other sections, references were made to human resources, education, and cooperation on connectivity, smart cities and the future digital economy. All of these are relevant to the Blue Economy. We could bridge the gap between strategy and implementation by linking education and training opportunities across diverse communities at industrial and government levels. Such an approach to human development would build capacity and resilience. [Through this approach, they will introduce another dimension: integrating research and development with innovation

that is simultaneously being tested and developed. This will speed the strategy and implementation cycles, visualising how to use better what we have already and where new technologies are appropriate in an environmentally efficient manner.] Such a progressive, inclusive approach will enhance the focus on locally customised, people and nature-centred actions.

Additional recommendations that can be adopted and expanded within the ASEAN region include:

- Transforming the EU's 'Farm to Fork Strategy' into an 'ASEAN Sea to Spoon Strategy.' (Note: EU's 'Farm to Fork Strategy' is an EU (terrestrial) initiative. The phrase 'ASEAN's Sea to Spoon Strategy' is a phrase coined by the author that can be adapted to marine initiatives.)
- Ocean20: Blue Halo S initiative - Indonesia's unique self-sustaining model (blended finance) for marine conservation and fisheries management, with backing from the Green Climate Fund, Conservation International, and Konservasi Indonesia.
- Collaborative efforts in advancing the use of algae as sustainable alternatives to plastics and fostering the growth of the marine biotechnology sector (Precedence Research, 2023).
- Capacity building for nature-based education, advancing ocean literacy, cultivating a competent blue workforce, and facilitating job creation in fields like conservation, marine research, communications, engineering, maritime law, and more.
- Sponsoring and assisting the Philippines (for example) in developing innovative inclusive and integrated financial instruments, including Sovereign Blue Bonds, Blue Carbon (Ibid) initiatives, and Sovereign Debt Swaps for Nature Conservancy, to finance the regeneration of coastal ecosystems and enhance resilience in coastal communities, to include resilience and the rights of Indigenous People.
- Strengthen collaboration and integration between the ASEAN Ports Association (APA) and the European Sea Ports Organisation (ESPO) integrating their common objective of decarbonising the shipping sector and establishing sustainably viable port infrastructure.

There are many areas for EU-ASEAN collaboration and joined work. The constraints are in implementation and in finding the finance. This is why the Strategic Partnership Action Plan; the most important section may be the last section on:

“Follow Up of The Plan of Action

- a) ASEAN and the EU shall regularly review this Plan of Action through the appropriate existing mechanisms comprising ASEAN and EU officials, including through the ASEAN-EU Joint Cooperation Committee (JCC) and the ASEAN-23 EU Senior Officials' Meeting (SOM), with the assistance of the ASEAN Secretariat, based on mutual consent.
- b) A progress report of the implementation of the Plan of Action could be submitted to the biennial ASEAN-EU Ministerial Meeting.”

The Guiding Principles of Implementation would be in its value creation and as an engine for growth, whilst ensuring inclusivity and sustainability, both environmentally and socially.

Conclusion

The Blue Economy as part of an integrated and systemic approach to Sustainable Development presents an immense opportunity for closer EU-ASEAN cooperation. Collaboration between ASEAN and the EU can accelerate positive outcomes in a myriad of areas of the Blue Economy: from marine conservation, plastic and marine pollution management, ocean science and research, ocean education and awareness, to technological innovations, renewable energy (e.g. offshore wind turbines, floating solar, tidal) to blue bonds and new digital platforms for mobilising capital for impact investments.

Working in tandem, both blocs by nurturing their respective Blue Economies and through sharing of knowledge and experience (in both the public and private spheres) can address climate change, build resilience, and foster sustainable development, growth, and prosperity.

Section 2 – Multilateral Security and Strategy

Chapter 7

EU-ASEAN Security Cooperation

By Prof. Emil Kirchner

Abstract:

EU-ASEAN security cooperation has progressed primarily in aspects of non-military security, such as cyber security, climate change and energy security. Whilst the EU has strengthened its naval presence in the Indo-Pacific, it has not been translated into meaningful maritime security cooperation with ASEAN. The assertion in the EU Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific of the centrality of cooperation with ASEAN in the evolving security architecture in the region amid rising geostrategic tensions has therefore not been fully realised. The limitations in EU-ASEAN maritime security cooperation, and to regional security cooperation generally, largely relate to the China factor. China has been able, largely due to the creation of economic dependency, to practice a 'divide and rule' tactic over both the EU and ASEAN, but given historical and cultural affinity, and geographic proximity, China's economic and political influence affects ASEAN still more. Although both partners seek further collaboration, considerable work remains for the EU and ASEAN to make EU-ASEAN security cooperation more viable.

Keywords: ASEAN, EU, security cooperation, geopolitics, maritime security, naval operations, China, Sino-American rivalry, Free and Open Indo-Pacific.

Introduction

The EU's 2021 Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific (EUSCIP) highlights the centrality of ASEAN in the evolving security architecture in the region (Council of the EU 2021). It reiterates EU support for increasing EU-ASEAN security partnerships and cooperation, to respond to the intense geopolitical competition in that region, which is increasingly threatening the stability and security of the region and beyond, directly impacting on the EU's interests. These concerns and threats are also perceived by ASEAN. But it is one thing to face similar threats such as those emanating from China's aggressive

maritime behaviour in the East and South China Sea, its continued pressure on Taiwan, and its imperilling of the safe passage of seaborne trade in the Pacific and Indian Ocean; it is quite another to translate common security concerns into specific policies and instruments, or for that matter, to transform ASEAN into a more integrated security and defence entity. These challenges are not helped by the absence of a uniform and majority-oriented decision-making EU security and defence process, nor by the recognition on the part of many ASEAN states that their military security depends on the United States. To improve on its image as a reliable security actor, the EUSCIP seeks to support the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) principles for a Free and Open Indo-Pacific through a strengthening of its maritime presence in that region. Although limited in comparison to the United States military strength in the region, EU maritime and security partnership efforts can be seen as strengthening the three-way sharing of security interests between ASEAN, the EU and the United States in the Indo-Pacific region.

While these contextual factors remain constant, at least for the time being, the notion of security itself is changing the growing importance of aspects of non-military security (Caballero-Anthony & Gong 2020) and, in particular, the practice by powerful states such as China and Russia of weaponizing trade and economic factors, especially critical raw material supply chains, for geopolitical purposes. These developments affect both ASEAN and European states alike (Di Floristella & Chen 2022) but enable

the EU to have greater leeway to respond given the size of its internal market and existing and planned instruments aimed at either protecting critical infrastructure establishments or strategic assets from falling into the control of foreign powers or reacting to coercive economic and political measures by third states.

The aim of this article is to explore in greater detail specific measures the EU is proposing for security cooperation with ASEAN in the Indo-Pacific region and how these may be affected by developments in the wider geopolitical landscape – specifically, the rise of China, the Russian invasion of Ukraine, and Sino-American rivalry. After exploring the challenges and opportunities facing EU-ASEAN security cooperation we will turn our attention to EU attempts to advance connectivity and security partnerships and naval activities with ASEAN countries in the Indo-Pacific. The article will conclude with an assessment of the direction of EU-ASEAN security cooperation. In all these endeavours the emphasis will be on the EU perspective to EU-ASEAN security cooperation.

“ASEAN countries
perceive terrorism as
a lesser threat than
EU states do...”

Challenges and Opportunities in EU-ASEAN Security Cooperation

The prospects for EU-ASEAN security cooperation face both challenges and opportunities. The main challenges relate to how to build up cooperation from what

remains a relatively low level. Given long-standing relations, strong institutional ties and extensive economic interactions between the EU and ASEAN, it is surprising that in areas such as terrorism, regional security cooperation and environmental concerns ‘the relationship between the EU and ASEAN has not markedly progressed beyond perfunctory meetings and rhetoric’ (Heiduk & Wong 2021). Several factors account for this seeming under-performance. Among these are differences in perception between European and ASEAN countries: ASEAN countries perceive terrorism as a lesser threat than EU states do, or assign a lower priority to environmental issues, seeing them as a trade-off with economic

development, as is the case, for example, with Indonesian and Malaysian palm oil. On regional security, additional factors impede cooperation. First, ASEAN countries differ on the EU concept of 'shared sovereignty' and are reluctant to pursue regional security cooperation in their own right. Second, ASEAN countries differ on how to respond to China's aggressive maritime activities in the East and South China Sea, with some preferring Chinese investments to a more confrontational stance, hence restricting ASEAN's role in the management of the maritime dispute. Third, the EU also has found it difficult hitherto to develop a clear policy on China, being unable to strike a sufficient balance between maintaining trade and economic benefits and pursuing a tough stance on Chinese human rights violations and assertive maritime behaviour in the East and South China Sea. Fourth, in comparison to the United States, ASEAN countries have hitherto perceived EU military capabilities as weak and unable to have a major impact on ASEAN regional security. Moreover, the EU has failed so far – despite signing the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation, a precondition for membership, in 2012 – to gain access to the East Asia Summit or the ASEAN Defence Minister's Meeting Plus (ADMM-Plus). However, the EU is a member of the ASEAN Regional Forum, which also includes Russia and the United States, and aims to foster constructive dialogue on political security issues of common interest and concern, albeit mostly on aspects of non-military security, in the Asia Pacific.

Yet another challenge to EU-ASEAN security cooperation is posed by Russia's invasion of Ukraine, which has had two distinct effects. First, it has adversely affected EU relations with ASEAN states more generally, with several abstaining from UN General Assembly resolutions condemning Russia. This also prevented the 2022 EU-ASEAN summit from reaching a joint condemnation of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, with Laos, Thailand and Vietnam blocking the attempt (Gutschker 2022). Second, it has strengthened China-Russia cooperation through, for example, President Xi's declaration that there are no limits to Sino-Russian cooperation. In addition, as argued by Bond et al., far from being a distant country, China 'has become an important factor in Europe's political and security landscape' and they further assert that 'systemic rivalry is now at the core of Europe's interactions with China' (Bond et al. 2022).

While these challenges remain, they have to be revisited in the light of at least two factors. One is the growing disruption to supply chains of either critical raw materials or technology components by powerful states such as China and Russia; currently, China dominates almost all rare earth metal markets. Of particular concern is the high dependency on Chinese semiconductor manufacturing, which is a strategic asset for key industrial value chains. Should a Chinese takeover of Taiwan happen, the dependency on 'chips' would increase still further, as Taiwan is one of the leading global semiconductor producers. In response to this challenge, the European Chips Act was established, which seeks to boost the EU's share of global production capacity to 20 per cent by 2030 (European Commission 2022). In a related way, the EU has introduced a screening mechanism for foreign direct investment to protect strategic sectors of the economy and is proposing an anti-coercive instrument to counteract coercive actions, including sanctions, by third states. However, EU unilateral actions, though important, are insufficient on their own, and need to be augmented through bilateral collaborations, including those with ASEAN.

Second, given assertive Chinese maritime actions in the East and South China Sea, and the growing Sino-American rivalry, there is a need for joint EU-ASEAN action to either counteract or moderate these developments. Such an opportunity is enhanced through the 2021 EUSCIP, and can also build on the ASEAN-EU Plan for Action (2018-2022), which proposed projects for security cooperation with a focus on aspects of non-traditional security such as climate change, terrorism, and cyber security (EEAS & ASEAN 2017). The following will briefly summarise the main actions and instruments the EU has put forward.

a) **Non-traditional Security and Security Partnerships**

There has already been some security cooperation in aspects of non-military security between the EU and individual ASEAN countries, involving, for example, EU preventive diplomacy and peace-making measures in Myanmar and the Philippines (Banin & Pejsova 2017) and the mounting of a Monitoring Mission to the settlement of the protracted conflict in the Province of Aceh in 2005. In addition, the EU and ASEAN

maintain a regular, high-level, cooperative dialogue on issues such as cybersecurity and violent extremism (EEAS 2019).

Since 2022, under the policy on Enhancing Security Cooperation in and with Asia (ESIWA), the EU has started security and defence dialogues with six pilot countries in Asia, including Vietnam, through professional exchanges and capacity building, particularly in the areas of counter-terrorism/terrorism prevention, cybersecurity, and crisis management. These dialogues are to be extended to other Asian countries, including members of ASEAN, through the work of a French and German partner (Expertise France 2021).

The EUSCIP proposes engaging with Indo-Pacific partners to build more resilient and sustainable global value chains by diversifying trade and economic relations, and by developing technological standards and regulations that are in line with EU values and principles (Council of the EU 2021). Connectivity and security partnerships with Asian countries are seen as instrumental in achieving these objectives. As such, they can build on the 2018 EU Connectivity Strategy to Asia, which aims to establish stronger networks and strengthen partnerships for sustainable connectivity across all sectors based on respect for common rules. Already ASEAN is a 'Connectivity Partner', but the budget of €60 billion for the 2021-2027 budgetary period, from EU and other public and private sources combined, seems rather meagre when compared with the trillions planned by China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). However, a strengthening of EU partnerships will be advanced through its Global Gateway, with €300 billion of spending on infrastructure and other projects for the period 2022-2027. It could be used to invest in securing critical raw material supply chains in some third countries, including ASEAN states, and to renew and enhance cooperation on technology to provide global telecommunication networks and norms to third countries in a more interoperable and competitive way (Ekman 2022), and help prevent a decoupling between the free and open cyberspace and closed or semi-closed cyberspace which could affect global supply chains (Vosse 2022). Overall, it is the cumulative aspect of these connectivity and security

partnerships that helps to consolidate the EU's presence in Asia and to advance security alignment and cooperation with Asian counterparts, like ASEAN (Kirchner 2022). In addition, the United States' Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment, which has been launched within the G7, and the United States Alliance of Democracies represent important geostrategic initiatives in an era of strategic competition and are efforts to counterbalance China's BRI and its New Global Security Initiative.

b) Maritime and Naval Cooperation

In February 2022, the EU adopted the concept of Coordinated Maritime Presences (CMP) in response to geo-strategic rivalries in the Indo-Pacific, which threaten the freedom of navigation and the security of maritime routes and undermine international law, in particular UNCLOS (Council of the EU 2022). Under CMP auspices, the remit of the Critical Maritime Routes Indo-Pacific (CRIMARIO I) was geographically extended under CRIMARIO II into the North-West Indian Ocean (NWIO). CRIMARIO II is to run from 2020 to 2024 and aims to secure maritime routes and to support the coastal countries in the establishment of maritime situational awareness.

The concept of CMP is also supported by the EU naval presence in the Gulf of Aden – known under the dual name Operation Atalanta and EUNAVFOR – which is to deter acts of piracy, armed robbery and illicit trade financing criminal and terrorist networks off the coast of Somalia, and to protect the UN World Food programme and other vulnerable vessels. In late 2022, EUNAVFOR Operation Atalanta was extended to December 2024 with a new mandate to cover the expanded geographic area of the NWIO (EUNAVFOR 2023). It is to improve synergies with relevant EU instruments and programmes in the region to promote cooperation with partners, including by conducting joint maritime exercises and port calls, and to facilitate the exchange of information. The goal is to turn EUNAVFOR into a reference in the whole NWIO as a maritime security provider, which will contribute, inter alia, to a safer navigational environment, freedom of navigation and de-escalation. Engagement will take place voluntarily, with naval and air assets remaining under the national chains of command of EU member states.

The EU is not formally endorsing the US notion of a Free and Open Indo-Pacific, which stems from European calls for preserving a rules-based order while also staying within the widely recognised interpretations of UNCLOS. In this context, the EU has backed the ruling of the arbitration tribunal in The Hague in 2015 which firmly rejected the People's Republic of China's expansive South China Sea maritime claims as having no basis in international law. However, individual EU member states have taken a more extended view on the Free and Open Indo-Pacific principles. This is particularly the case of France, which has a relatively strong presence in the Indo-Pacific. French naval ships have sailed through the South China Sea including the Taiwan Straits and France also hosts and regularly participates in other bilateral and multilateral exercises in the Indo-Pacific. Strengthened by a pledge in the EUSCIP for an enhanced naval presence in the Indo-Pacific, Denmark, the Netherlands, and Portugal are all expected to take part in planned French naval operations in the Indo-Pacific. France also has a defence dialogue with Vietnam, which involves maritime security cooperation. In addition, Germany sent a frigate to the area in 2021 but carefully avoided provoking China by skipping the Taiwan Strait and focusing its core activities on monitoring compliance with UN sanctions against the Democratic People's Republic of Korea via United States-led maritime engagement in the East China Sea (Pugliese 2023). Several European states have also contributed to the ASEAN International Fleet Review maritime exercises. In addition, the EU-ASEAN High-Level Dialogue on maritime cooperation provides a platform for EU member states to take action on issues of common concern, such as freedom of navigation and the rule of law in the East and South China Sea.

Assessment

As these various economic, connectivity, security and naval activities in the Indo-Pacific indicate, European diplomacy draws on soft- and hard-power instruments in regions where, until the mid-2010s, it had a negligible footprint (Odgaard 2019). These efforts have also strengthened EU-ASEAN security cooperation on aspects of non-military security, such as cyber security and climate change, but have had scant impact on maritime cooperation, where – apart from Operation Atalanta – measures have not moved much beyond dialogue forums such as seminars and

workshops, and exchange of best practice on maritime safety and search and rescue. As Southeast Asia is often held up as the most promising example of a relatively unified nascent security community, these limitations, as argued by Beeson and Biscop, 'do not augur well for the prospects of security within East Asia, never mind between East Asia and anywhere else' (Beeson and Biscop 2021:37).

The limitations in EU-ASEAN maritime security cooperation, and to regional security cooperation generally, largely relate to the China factor. China has been able, largely due to the creation of economic dependency, to practice a 'divide and rule' tactic over both the EU and ASEAN, but given historical and cultural affinity, and geographic proximity, China's economic and political influence affects ASEAN still more. The tension in how to approach China also adds to pressure on ASEAN states to choose between China, their main trading partner, and America, the principal guarantor of regional security (Lee 2020). For the time being, as suggested by Shambaugh, 'no single country in the region is completely under Chinese or American influence' and these countries 'find it more advantageous to stay safely in the middle and navigate between the giants' (Shambaugh 2021:179). This position chimes with the EU stance on Sino-American rivalry, aiming to pursue a mediating role between the two.

While the EU shares with the United States concerns over China's military ambitions and assertiveness in the East and South China Sea, and while accepting that joint US-EU actions are necessary for dealing with the rise of China, the EU differs with the United States on the extent to which it should support the United States calls for containing China economically, politically and militarily. Given the key position China holds as an economic partner, the EU is keen to reduce dependence on China, but not to cut trade drastically. As Ursula von der Leyen pronounced in a speech in Beijing in April 2023, the EU policy is 'not to decouple from China but to engage in a practice of de-risking some important and sensitive parts of our relationship with China' (Von der Leyen 2023). This also means that, in contrast to calls for the West to

abandon efforts to integrate a hostile and revisionist China (Friedberg 2022), the EU recognises China's important contribution to such issues as global stability and climate change. However, there are also other, and to some extent countervailing, considerations which might affect transatlantic cooperation. Among these are potential linkages between the United States' contributions to the Ukraine war effort and the United States' demands for greater European support in its efforts to contain China. Moreover, it would appear politically unrealistic for Europe to maintain business as usual if China invaded Taiwan. As Europe's security guarantor, the United States could force the EU to choose sides. Of course, a Trumpian revival, either with Donald Trump, or a variant like Don DeSantis, would in the meantime raise renewed questions about the United States' security commitments to Europe and may reinforce its pivot to Asia.

“Lack of political unity is not helped either by some EU leaders presenting either national or personal rather than EU views...”

Conclusion

EU-ASEAN security cooperation has progressed primarily in aspects of non-military security, such as cyber security, climate change and energy security. Whilst the EU has strengthened its naval presence in the Indo-Pacific, it has not been translated into meaningful maritime security cooperation with ASEAN. The assertion in the EUSCIP of the centrality of cooperation

with ASEAN in the evolving security architecture in the region amid rising geostrategic tensions has therefore not been fully realised. For the EU, the question remains how to counteract a China which seeks to wield its economy as a weapon, to dominate or replace the global order, to weaken, divide, and isolate the advanced democracies, and to pose a systemic challenge to our values and interests. In practice, the advice given by scholars is for the EU to 'cooperate when you can, push back when you must' (Beeson and Biscop 2021:42). But pushing back requires political unity which, however, has so far been in short supply on many

issues of principle, such as freedom of navigation in the South China Sea, human rights, freedom of speech in Hong Kong, or relations with Taiwan, sometimes weakened by Chinese pressure on individual member states (Smith and Taussig 2019). Lack of political unity is not helped either by some EU leaders presenting either national or personal rather than EU views, such as when President Macron on his visit to Beijing in April 2023 declared that in the name of 'strategic autonomy' Europe should not be 'followers' of America on a crisis like Taiwan, and that Taiwan was not Europe's problem. Improving EU actorness also requires higher defence spending by member states, which will help respond to Russia's threat to European security, and is happening to some extent (Howorth 2023) but not yet sufficiently to significantly reduce United States defence commitments to Europe and/or markedly enhance its role as a security actor in Asia. Despite these deficits, the EU has made some strides in security partnerships with ASEAN countries, and in enhancing its naval presence in the Pacific and Indian Oceans. Yet considerable work remains for the EU and ASEAN to enhance their respective security and defence capabilities and to make EU-ASEAN security cooperation more viable.

Chapter 8

EU-ASEAN Strategic Partnership – Deepening Security Cooperation Towards Multilateral Polarity

By Dr Yeo Lay Hwee (Director, EU Centre in Singapore and Senior Fellow, Singapore Institute of International Affairs)

Introduction

The European Union (EU) and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) has a longstanding dialogue partnership beginning in 1977. Major structural forces driven by the diffusion of power, and most importantly by the US-China strategic rivalry led the two regional blocs to upgrade their relations to a strategic partnership in December 2020. From a partnership that began with a focus on development cooperation to one driven mainly by economics, the strategic partnership inked in 2020 reflected the desire of both regional blocs to engage on an equal basis on a range of security issues and to work together to address common challenges (Lay Hwee, 2020).

In the Plan of Action to Implement the ASEAN-EU Strategic Partnership (2023 – 2027) adopted at the ASEAN Post-Ministerial Conference + 1 with the EU in August 2022, the EU and ASEAN committed to enhancing strategic dialogue and deepening political and security cooperation in ASEAN-led security architecture (EEAS, 2022).

This chapter will provide a discussion on the challenges and opportunities of strengthening security dialogue and cooperation between the EU and ASEAN. It will end with some advice and recommendations on how and what the two regional blocs should engage with each other for the strategic partnership to flourish and contribute to global peace and development.

EU-ASEAN Strategic Partnership

The elevation of EU-ASEAN dialogue relations to one of strategic partnership came at a time of great uncertainties and tensions caused by the rivalry between the US and China, a pushback against globalisations amidst technological and supply chain disruptions, all exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic.

Building on over 40 years of partnership, the EU and ASEAN believe that they have reached a certain level of mutual understanding and trust to take their partnership further.

The Plan of Action to Implement the Strategic Partnership (2023 to 2027) was ambitious in that it comprised a long and comprehensive list of existing initiatives to be continued and reinforced and a wish list of new topics and areas of dialogue and cooperation. It was not restricted to strategic issues but listed cooperation in all three pillars of the ASEAN Community – Political and Security Cooperation, Economic Cooperation, and Socio-Cultural Cooperation.

Yet, if there was any indication that this strategic partnership inked in 2020 would take off smoothly to greater heights, it was not to be. The EU-ASEAN cooperation continued to be hampered by different outlooks and perspectives and the lack of strategic empathy. Perhaps, more importantly, is the fact that both blocs are distracted by events closer to home. For the EU it was the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine, and the prospect of a protracted war and insecurity on the European continent,

and for ASEAN, the coup in Myanmar, the domestic politics of several ASEAN member states and the downward spiral of US-China relations dominate. Beyond these immediate distractions, there are also more fundamental differences that challenge the partnership. These challenges include.

Principled pragmatism or Values-driven foreign policy.

In 2016 when the EU presented its Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy, it signalled a much more pragmatic approach towards the outside world, moving away from the idea of normative power to one in which its external action will be guided by principled pragmatism – one that balanced the need to champion and promote a rules-based order based on multilateralism as its key principle and a realistic assessment of the complexities of the world that also requires pragmatism in action (EEAS, 2016).

This was very much welcomed by its ASEAN partners as reflected in the ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute's annual State of Southeast Asia survey which began tracking ASEAN's responses to geopolitical and geo-economic challenges and the member states' perceptions of its dialogue partners in 2019. A majority of Southeast Asian elites consistently expressed the view that the EU can be trusted to contribute to maintaining a rules-based order and upholding international law (Tang, et al, 2020, S. Seah, et al, 2021, 2022, 2023).

In contrast, one could recall that EU-ASEAN relations went through a tumultuous period in the immediate post-Cold War era of Western triumphalism and the EU's more dogmatic emphasis on its democratisation and human rights agenda. The enlargement of ASEAN to include Myanmar in 1997 further impacted relations because of the latter's appalling human rights record under the military junta. This value-laden rhetoric in foreign policy and the idea of the EU as a normative, transformative power was tempered after the EU went through a decade of crises from the sovereign debt crisis to internal disunity over migration and refugee flows and then Brexit in 2016.

“ASEAN is an inter-governmental association of sovereign countries with different political systems, at different levels of economic development and with immense diversities in ethnic, religious, and cultural identities.”

However, the Russian invasion of Ukraine, and the US framing of the war as one of autocracies against democracies have brought back the ideological rhetoric of a value-based foreign policy. This was further compounded by the practical concerns over excessive dependence on a single country for the supplies of critical resources as revealed in the supply chain disruptions during the pandemic. The idea of on-shoring or friend-shoring of critical supplies and the fears over “weaponization” of inter-dependence dovetailed into this narrative of a value-driven foreign policy – that makes a difference between “friends of similar values” and those that do not.

ASEAN is an inter-governmental association of sovereign countries with different political systems, at different levels of economic development and with immense diversities in ethnic, religious, and cultural identities. The respect and acceptance of diversities is one of the core tenets of ASEAN that has allowed it to survive for more than five decades though it inevitably also affects ASEAN’s effectiveness as a truly cohesive regional actor.

Effective strategic engagement of ASEAN would require a pragmatic streak from the EU to balance interests and values. The EU should take note that in the same ISEAS-Yusof Ishak survey quoted above when asked why they (Southeast Asians) trust the EU to uphold the rule of law and do the right thing to contribute to global peace and security, it was not because the Southeast Asians admired the EU’s culture or shared

the EU's political culture and worldview. Instead, this trust (or perhaps expectation) that the EU would uphold the rules-based order is based on material considerations – that the EU still possesses significant economic, political, and military resources (S. Seah, et al, 2023).

Strategic Empathy – understanding the different worldviews and institutional set-ups of ASEAN and the EU

Closely related to the above challenge of dogmatism versus pragmatism in foreign policy is the need to develop mutual strategic empathy. The historical context and the geopolitical challenges that confront the Southeast Asian countries that founded ASEAN were vastly different from those confronting the founding members of the EU. The different *raison d'être* in the founding of these two regional organisations inevitably led to very different institutional set-ups where ASEAN remained primarily an inter-governmental entity with its core emphasis on sovereign equality and principle of non-interference unlike the hybrid nature of the EU with both highly legalised supranational institutions and inter-governmental characteristics.

The inability to appreciate the institutional differences has led to frustrations in the relationship for instance over the failed attempt to negotiate the bloc-to-bloc EU-ASEAN Free Trade Agreement (FTA) (Lay Hwee, 2023).

While it is true that after 40 years of engagement, there is now greater understanding of the different institutional set-ups and the different world views informed by their respective histories and geographies, these differences continue to be a barrier in optimising the partnership. Both the EU and ASEAN must be willing to let go of the inherent feeling that their respective worldviews are the correct way to view the world and instead focus on the strategic challenges that they face if they are to uncover the common interests that would serve both blocs.

Finding Common Ground – Where to start?

For the EU-ASEAN strategic partnership to move beyond political symbolism and be operationalised to benefit the two blocs and beyond, the following questions must be answered:

- How can the EU-ASEAN strategic partnership help to enhance the agency and autonomy of both regional blocs in an increasingly complex, connected, and contested world?
- How can this partnership help to bring down the temperature of the US-China rivalry and prevent a new Cold War?

Autonomy and Agency

In the 2016 EU Global Strategy it was stated that the EU nurtures the ambition of strategic autonomy as the best way for the EU to handle global pressures and local dynamics and continue to work to support an international system based on rules and multilateralism. Much of course has changed since then with the war in Ukraine and the threat of economic decoupling arising from the intensified rivalry between the US and China.

Before 2022, both the EU and ASEAN were united in their determination not to be forced to choose sides between the US and China with the EU talking up its strategic autonomy and ASEAN hanging onto its centrality. However, the Russian invasion of Ukraine, and the US determination to paint China in the same light as Russia with its autocracies against democracies narrative has produced a different calculus.

EU's reliance on NATO and especially the US for European security against the Russian invasion of Ukraine has muted the discussions on European strategic autonomy. The US engendered multilateral forums such as AUKUS and the QUAD and the reaffirmation of bilateral alliances with Japan, Korea, and the Philippines to counter the increasing presence and influence of China in the Indo-Pacific has threatened the centrality of ASEAN-led regional architectures such as the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and East Asia Summit (EAS).

How not to succumb to these pressures to give up their autonomy and agency and instead find ways to strengthen their capacity to remain autonomous and exercise agency is where the EU-ASEAN partnership can add value. As the cliché goes, “together we are stronger”. Just as ASEAN recognises the material strength and resources of the EU (as reflected in the ISEAS-Yusof Ishak survey), the EU is cognizant of the potential of ASEAN – acting together, ASEAN is the 6th largest economy in the world, and ASEAN member states from tiny Singapore to the 4th most populous country Indonesia are strategically important partners to build a far more inclusive world that rejects the binary choice of a US-led or China-led global order.

The multipolarity that currently exists in the Asian (Indo-Pacific) regional order should be preserved and not be forced by the US or China into a bipolar order. However, instead of multipolarity organised around different poles based on power or political systems, the EU can work with ASEAN to reshape this dynamic (and unstable) multipolarity to one of multilateral polarity. Multilateral polarity is defined as a region of different poles working within a framework of widely accepted rules and principles.

De-risking and Not Decoupling

While accepting that the competition between the US and China is somewhat inevitable, the EU and its member states have contributed in some way to lowering the temperature of the US-China tensions by coming up with the concept of de-risking and not decoupling.

China is the EU's second largest trading partner and in 2022, trade between them reached over 850 billion euros. The EU is also a major investor in China. At the end of 2022, the cumulative stock of EU investments in China is around 170 billion euros (European Commission, 2023). US strategy to outcompete China has resulted in several protectionist measures such as the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) that is also detrimental to the EU's interests.

The intensifying US-China rivalry especially in the economics and tech arena is huge and with potentially disastrous consequences for the rest of the world, and especially for the EU and ASEAN. For both regional blocs, China and the US are equally important economic partners. Particularly for the ASEAN countries, China is the number one trading partner for most of the ASEAN member states. China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has also contributed to the infrastructure development of some ASEAN countries - much needed by these countries for them to get connected and integrated into the world economy.

“This was a recognition of the complex relations that the EU has with China – widely and deeply connected in some areas but also competing and contesting in several arenas.”

In 2019, the EU has openly declared China “a partner, competitor and systemic rival” (European Commission, 2019). This was a recognition of the complex relations that the EU has with China – widely and deeply connected in some areas but also competing and contesting in several arenas. The realisation of the EU's overdependence on China in critical supplies during the COVID-19 pandemic and China's attempt to turn the pandemic into a propaganda exercise has led to increased distrust. Their relationship deteriorated further

after Russia invaded Ukraine because of China's declared “friendship without limits” with the Russians.

Despite the increasing reservations about China – politically and economically – the EU understood the disastrous consequences should the US seek to decouple with China and put pressure on its allies to go along with this decoupling. Hence, in a keynote speech on the future of EU-China relations, delivered in Brussels a day before her visit to

China, President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen called for de-risking instead of decoupling. According to her, decoupling from China is neither viable nor in the interest of Europe. Economic de-risking requires the EU to strengthen European economies by making them competitive, and at the same time taking measures to diversify its economic links and protect its critical industries to ensure economic resilience (von der Leyen, 2023).

The EU's much more measured approach towards China is welcomed by ASEAN. Many ASEAN countries faced the same dilemma as the EU – being economically deeply intertwined with China, while at the same time harbouring strategic distrust over China's long-term intentions and its increasing military presence in the South China Sea. The EU's de-risking strategy could also benefit the ASEAN economies directly as European companies and investments diversified from China to countries in Southeast Asia.

Both the EU and ASEAN therefore have the common interest to coordinate their diplomatic engagement in cautioning the US and China to manage their competition and rivalry responsibly. The message that US-China decoupling would be detrimental for the two superpowers and with serious consequences for global development and stability must be consistently made.

Deepening Cooperation in Comprehensive Security

The Russian invasion of Ukraine has led to a renewed emphasis on traditional security issues in Europe. The US efforts to draw parallels between the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the Chinese potential use of force to reunify Taiwan with its autocracies against democracies narrative is problematic for several ASEAN countries. NATO's 2022 Strategic Concept for the first time openly declared China as a challenge to the Alliance's interests, security, and values (NATO, 2022). In a move that is seen as potentially provocative, NATO has sought to increase its presence in the Indo-Pacific by upgrading its relations with US allies in the region – Japan, South Korea, Australia, and New Zealand.

All these developments have implications for the EU's security cooperation with ASEAN.

ASEAN's outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP) (ASEAN, 2019) called for a more open and inclusive approach to cooperation and development in the region. While ASEAN welcomed a strategic balance of power in the region, it is wary of Washington's over-zealous attempts to forge a hard anti-China alliance with the QUAD, AUKUS and what was perceived as potential moves to create a Pacific NATO.

The AOIP reflected ASEAN's concern over its marginalisation and the demise of ASEAN-led security architectures in the region. It is also an attempt to approach security in a comprehensive, holistic manner, putting economic growth and development as the fundamental cornerstone of peace and security. The AOIP is therefore also an attempt to shift the excessive focus on military security of the US posture in the region to return to a more inclusive approach of focusing on economic cooperation and political dialogue.

The EU's desire to deepen security cooperation with ASEAN should take note of the AOIP and not focus excessively on military cooperation. Indeed, this is in line with the EU's approach towards security which is human-centric and development-focused. The war in Ukraine may have somewhat shifted the attention to military and defence and the threat from Russia has led to the unfortunate securitization of discourses and related policies; the EU should not lose sight of the many other challenges that pose a greater threat to security and development – notably climate change and its consequences for food, water, and health.

With this broader understanding of security, there are a few specific areas in which the EU and ASEAN should be ready to engage more deeply:

Economic Security

The EU and ASEAN should prioritise economic security in their cooperation and engage in substantive discussions to work on economic diversification and supply chain resilience. Both regional blocs also subscribed to the basic understanding that multilateral rules-based cooperation through international institutions such as the World Trade Organisation (WTO), multilateral development banks and financial institutions provide the foundation for economic security for all. Hence, they must step up cooperation to revitalise these institutions to prevent economic fragmentation and protectionism.

Environmental Security

Balancing the need for development and protecting the environment is a delicate issue. The EU has drawn ire from ASEAN countries such as Indonesia and Malaysia, for example, with its Deforestation Regulation, which is seen as having a great impact on the small-holder farmers in Indonesia. EU's Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) is also broadly perceived in ASEAN as a protectionist measure. Moving forward, how can the EU work with ASEAN to protect the environment and work towards sustainability goals constructively and be engaged in more consultation before rolling out regulations and directives that are perceived as regulatory imperialism should be an area of priority (Jayaram & Lazard, 2023).

Maritime Security

The EU and ASEAN have already begun a series of exchanges on maritime security. This includes the regular conduct of the ASEAN-EU High-Level Dialogue on Maritime Security Cooperation and the Inter-Sessional Meeting on Maritime Security within the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF). More efforts can be put into areas such as combating sea piracy and hijacking / armed robbery of ships using the EU's experience in Atalanta as a focal point. Cooperation in maritime domain awareness and working to uphold the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea

(UNCLOS) to ensure maritime security and safety, freedom of navigation and overflight, and the peaceful resolution of disputes. The EU should also support ASEAN in working with China towards the early conclusion of an effective and substantive Code of Conduct in the South China Sea consistent with UNCLOS.

Conclusion

Heightened geopolitical tensions and geo-economic competition between the US and China have pushed the EU and ASEAN towards upgrading their longstanding dialogue partnership to one of strategic partnership. However, since the inking of this strategic partnership, both ASEAN and the EU remained distracted by events closer to home. Hence, not much energy and resources have been channelled into operationalising this strategic partnership into substantive cooperation to bring about greater benefits for both blocs and regions.

Different worldviews and institutional set-ups can be real constraints in finding optimal outcomes in their cooperation. Strategic empathy and patience are needed to overcome these constraints. Yet, there are good reasons for both the EU and ASEAN to persevere. The common goal of ensuring peace and stability for development and addressing pressing common challenges such as climate change should be the impetus for deepening their engagement and strengthening security cooperation from a comprehensive perspective.

Chapter 9

EU-ASEAN Cooperation on AI Governance Amid Geostrategic Shifts: Opportunities and Challenges

By Carl-Johan Carlstedt

Introduction

Great uncertainty will continue to limit attempts to develop effective global governance on emerging technologies such as generative artificial intelligence (GenAI). Many officials and business leaders have warned of the potential harms of unregulated artificial intelligence technologies. But in a space that is developing rapidly, there is also little consensus on the extent of potential direct and indirect harm. Many countries are legislating proactively but even then they are doing so on potential but not yet realised future harms and benefits of a technology that is still in its infancy.

Leading economic powers including China, the EU, US and businesses are moving quickly to establish the rules for this emerging field. And the same states are showing a willingness to begin cooperating on establishing governance that can establish safety standards and reduce harm. That said many states are also adopting a 'wait and see' approach due to

ongoing uncertainty over AI technology including its long-term harms and unrealised benefits. However, the early involvement of emerging economies and middle powers, such as Brazil, India and ASEAN states, is a crucial element in achieving any effective and inclusive safeguards. In this regard, this chapter is intended as a starting point in this discussion and not a definitive answer.

As a leader in AI regulation, the European Union should seek to work with ASEAN countries to proactively regulate to ensure minimal safeguards are established to mitigate against disinformation, cybercrime and influence operations. With so much uncertainty in the policymaking space EU-ASEAN cooperation can focus on developing confidence-building measures as a first step. This can include monitoring of incidents and information sharing on verified harmful and beneficial uses of AI technology as it develops. This would allow policymakers including in the EU and ASEAN to clearly track risks and harms that have not been anticipated but also as a current evidence base for future AI legislation.

“Nations and regional bodies like China, the EU and the US are already setting standards and establishing consumer protections.”

Geopolitical headwinds shaping global AI governance

Geopolitical factors will be instrumental in shaping regulation around Artificial Intelligence (AI). AI in turn will also be likely to exacerbate long-standing geopolitical and transnational issues including, fake news, cyber crime and extremism. Nations and regional bodies like China, the EU and the US are already setting standards and establishing

consumer protections. Diverse political ideologies and large regional economies will play a large role in shaping the global regulatory landscape. And national security-related competition between the US and China is likely to be a hurdle to more binding global governance of AI systems.

This chapter emphasizes the need for greater global cooperation on connectivity and emerging technologies. Our interconnected economies and digital infrastructure make it essential for countries with different political systems to seek at least minimalist safeguards to address the potential risks and share the benefits of AI on an international scale. The early involvement of emerging economies and middle powers, such as Brazil, India and ASEAN states, in shaping their own AI regulations is a crucial element in achieving any effective and inclusive safeguards.

As major international economic centres, the EU and ASEAN have acknowledged the need to coordinate on transboundary issues. The EU-ASEAN joint ministerial statement on connectivity from December 2020 said: "We noted the far-reaching impact of the transboundary nature of the COVID-19 pandemic on connectivity, in particular on people-to-people linkages and global supply chains, underscoring the interconnectedness of Europe and Asia." (Council of the EU, 2020). The impact of emerging technologies will be highly likely to show no regard for national borders either.

The future of AI regulation is likely to be complex and multifaceted. This chapter doubts that a globally binding approach is feasible in the next five years. This is despite forums like the UN, G7, G20 and collaborative efforts like the UK AI Safety Summit suggesting a growing recognition of the need for cooperation (William.J 2023). But at the same time the world's largest economic powers, the EU, the US, and China are pursuing their approaches to global AI governance, each reflecting their unique political and security perspectives and priorities for technological development. Technological competition, geopolitical fault lines and mistrust are all likely to remain inhibitors to effective global cooperation on the issue.

Major powers are recognising that alongside their domestic legislation, they also require global engagement with AI governance. 28 countries signed the Bletchley Declaration at the UK AI Safety Summit including China, the EU and the US. Although an encouraging first step and indication that countries recognise the harms of AI will be transnational,

the declaration did not lead to anything binding at this stage. Two weeks before the Bletchley Declaration, China issued its Global Initiative for AI Governance at its Belt and Road Forum on 18 October 2023 (Schneider.J 2023). A day ahead of the UK summit, US President Biden issued a new executive order “to ensure that America leads the way in seizing the promise and managing the risks of artificial intelligence (AI).” (White House, 2023).

This essay provides a comprehensive overview of the need for regulation, the risks that require mitigation, the evolving AI regulatory landscape and the imperative of regional blocs working together to enhance safe and secure technological connectivity.

The future benefits of AI

Generative models of AI (GenAI) have made immense strides in automated content generation in recent years. This includes developing the capability to generate text and imagery. GenAI models like ChatGPT and Stable Diffusion became publicly accessible in 2022 and quickly established new capabilities that are now in mainstream usage. The majority of modern AI systems use some kind of machine learning and can improve their output using data (Durkin, J. & Emerson, G. 2021). This year there has been a flurry of public discussion and concern on how new and emerging generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) models will develop and impact our politics and societies.

Artificial intelligence is a promising tool that is likely to stimulate global growth and drive the future of innovation including communication, education, robotics, defence and healthcare (Chui et al. 2023). It remains unclear what the cascading effects of this will be, including on labour markets and systems of governance (Eloundou. T et al. 2023). For now, expert opinions differ wildly on the benefits and risks that such technology presents to us. But to coordinate legislation globally it is important to be clear-eyed about opportunities and real risks and not succumb to unsubstantiated fears of new technologies.

What we can be sure of is that this is very much the thin end of the wedge. This includes the capabilities of the technology and how actors both well-meaning and malign will choose to employ it. What is clear is that this is a global issue that cannot be dealt with solely at the national level. Our digital infrastructure and societies remain interlinked and have transnational effects. This means that any large gaps in regulation or enforcement will be very likely to present negative implications for all nations. This chapter seeks to inform the debate around the potential opportunities and obstacles that regional blocs like the EU and ASEAN will face when developing regulation in this space.

Emerging risks: the 'known unknowns'

Amid uncertainty we need to be clear-eyed and factual with how we as a global society establish safeguards on this new tool. This chapter will outline some of the possible harmful impacts of this technology by drawing upon recent research on GenAI and the established intent of malicious actors in this space. Including how non-state and state actors may use such technology for financial, political and military gains. Such malicious actors include but are not limited to malign states, political activists, organised crime, extremist groups, militants and cyber criminals that may use GenAI for illegal purposes or in ways that exacerbate social and political issues. This is designed to be speculative to stimulate discussion on the subject.

Influence operations, fake news and disinformation

Gen AI gives malicious actors the ability to spread harmful, misleading and untruthful content at pace and scale not previously available. This gives someone the ability to shape people's perceptions and influence people for their own self interest. This includes the possibility of hyper-targeted influence operations. This includes the possibility of identifying and targeting vulnerable people with direct one-on-one communication to influence or motivate them to take or not take certain types of action that may lead to physical harm for them or wider society (Goldstein. J.A et al 2023).

Almost all societies have struggled with disinformation and misinformation in the past decade. And despite the efforts of social media companies and domestic legislation such as the UK Online Safety Bill to stop platforms from being used for illegal, harmful and malicious content it remains rampant. GenAI is likely to exacerbate this trend as it grants improved capabilities for the creation of text, audio, images and videos that are highly persuasive, rapid and available at little to no cost (Marcelino W., et al 2023).

Researchers including those at RAND (Marcelino W., et al 2023) and OpenAI (Goldstein. J.A et al 2023) anticipate that we are likely to see the proliferation of more actors that use such technology for propaganda and harmful content. This is because the barriers to entry for such actors are now much lower. Before it required an organised team of graphic designers, producers, videographers, coders and writers to produce persuasive content. Now it can be done by a single person or a poorly resourced group of a few motivated people.

As researchers at RAND argued earlier this year (Marcelino W., et al 2023), GenAI would also allow malign actors such as states to manipulate social media on a massive scale. This includes for purposes of stifling dissent and influencing target audiences at home and abroad. Countries such as Russia and China that have previously relied upon large groups of paid internet trolls would be able to create what appears to be genuine accounts and content that engages in real time with human beings to influence or shift opinions (Marcelino W., et al 2023). These capabilities can also be targeted at foreign audiences. This includes in the lead-up to a general election or stoking ethnic or religious violence during a crisis and undermining trust in foreign governments, security forces or emergency medical responses. Earlier this year, an AI-generated image claiming to show smoke billowing outside the Pentagon building led to a brief drop in the S&P 500. And in 2022, an AI generated video of President Zelensky telling Ukrainians to surrender to Russian authorities. These incidents of fake news were shared widely on social media outlets and by some online media outlets before finally being debunked by authorities.

Scams, frauds and cyber crimes proliferate

The ASEAN region has struggled with online scam groups in recent years. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime estimates that the scam industry in one unspecified country in the region alone generated between \$7.5-12.5 billion dollars, reaching half the value of that country's gross domestic product (UNODC 2023). Such gangs have tended to try to operate beyond the reach of law enforcement in countries like Cambodia, Myanmar and the Philippines. They have targeted millions of people across the region including in higher-income countries such as Singapore (Jones, 2023).

The same GenAI technology is likely to be used by cyber criminals and organised crime to expand scams and online fraud schemes. Scammers in 2022 created a 'deepfake' hologram impersonating senior executives at cryptocurrency firm Binance to arrange meetings online for financial gain. It would allow larger-scale operations and direct engagement with people in multiple languages. Such groups can relocate quickly to other areas of Southeast Asia that are difficult for enforcement to reach and are hard to detect. As an example, a regional media outlet (Jones, 2023) said in September 2023 that cybercriminals have recently tried to access private company data to steal videos and voice clips of senior company executives. This was reportedly to clone voices and use this to impersonate a CEO to commit further fraud on large corporations. Such threats are likely to mean that personal and biometric data including voice and likeness which is considered 'open source' can be cloned.

Geopolitics: competing visions and competing standards

Emerging technologies such as GenAI are an incredibly fast-moving field. However, regulations will be indispensable in mitigating the potential misapplications of AI and safeguarding the interests of consumers and trust in our economies. Regional bodies and governments including the EU and US are racing ahead on standard setting, technological classification and consumer protection rights. Given this, competing political practices and ideologies will inform how this space is shaped.

Regulation in this space is also likely to be iterative and with little uniformity. An international system divided along geopolitical fault lines also means that within international organisations like the United Nations for now we are likely to continue to see a lacklustre response to AI regulation. A lot of the regulation will indeed be shaped by domestic political goals but also by economic power and reciprocal access to the world's largest markets. The world's biggest markets will therefore be a key driver of standard setting and determine how emerging technologies are to be regulated. This means AI regulation in the world's largest markets including the EU, US and China will have a fundamental role in driving standards and ensuring compliance.

“The world's biggest markets will therefore be a key driver of standard setting and determine how emerging technologies are to be regulated.”

Despite geopolitical tension, our economies and our digital infrastructure remain significantly interdependent. And the impact of technological developments both good and bad are rarely contained by either governments or borders (Council of the EU 2020). Based on the precedent set by mass social media over the last decade or so, online misinformation and disinformation can undermine trust in society and even go so far as to motivate individuals to commit extreme acts of political violence and terrorism. But with any new technology, there remain unknown impacts that have not yet been anticipated. And future legislation will be required to address these as and when they arise. So it will be a global necessity to ensure that advanced industrial economies and emerging markets are included from the start and understand the emergence of new harms.

Middle powers and emerging economies including but not limited to Brazil, India and ASEAN states will play a fundamental role in choosing and adapting their own laws and particular standards for AI governance.

Some governments already have bills or initiatives being drafted whilst others are adopting a more cautious and hands-off approach to emerging technologies (Potkin, F., et al. 2023). Indeed, it is their sovereign right to do so.

Standard setters like the EU will need to engage widely to ensure that even minimalist aims of protection can be achieved (Manantan, R & Csernatori M. 2023). Indeed, the artificial intelligence space is fast becoming another geopolitical fault line between the US and China. There is a risk that other powerful state actors or private tech companies will shape the space to their security interests and the detriment of the wider global community. Outlining the minimalist aims in this space clearly will help to start the discussion of where we can find common ground and areas of regulatory progress.

No global approach

Suffice it to say there is unlikely to be a global binding approach to AI regulation any time soon (Techerati, 2023). That said, forums such as the United Nations, G-7 Hiroshima Process, the UK Summit on AI Safety, and India's Chair of the Global Partnership on AI are all seeking to coordinate greater cooperation on the issue. Although many regulatory frameworks are being developed, below are how the three largest economic powers are approaching safeguarding against the potential harms of GenAI.

European Union

The EU's Artificial Intelligence Act was passed earlier this year and is likely to be implemented in late 2023 or early 2024. Globally it appears to be the most comprehensive legal framework on AI regulation although it is yet to be finalised. This framework establishes a set of requirements and obligations that apply to developers, deployers, and users of AI, all with regulatory oversight (European Parliament, 2023) .

A central component is a risk categorization system for AI, with the below risk categories:

- **Unacceptable risk:** These AI systems are systems considered a threat to people and will be banned
- **High-risk:** AI systems that negatively affect safety or fundamental rights will be considered high risk
- **Limited risk:** AI systems should comply with minimal transparency requirements that would allow users to make informed decisions. After interacting with the applications, the user can then decide whether they want to continue using it. Users should be made aware when they are interacting with AI. This includes AI systems that generate or manipulate image, audio or video content, for example, deepfakes.

United States of America

US President Biden issued a new Executive Order on Safe, Secure, and Trustworthy Artificial Intelligence on 30 October 2023 (White House, 2023). The order establishes new standards for AI safety and security, privacy, and consumer rights and “advances American leadership around the world”. This is the most extensive effort by the US to establish protection against the potential risks and harms of AI. This includes but is not limited to:

- Requiring AI developers to share their safety test results and other critical information with the U.S. government
- Developing standards and tests to assess the safety of AI systems
- Protecting people against AI-enabled fraud
- Developing guidelines on the use of AI for intelligence agencies and the US military

This executive order builds on the US authorities’ decentralised approach and relies on a network of existing regulatory bodies to address potential harms in specific sectors such as healthcare or financial services or fake news (Whyman. B 2023). The US authorities in October 2022 published

a Blueprint for the Development, Use and Deployment of Automated Systems. The blueprint is in comparison to the EU a non-binding guideline and lists five principles intended to minimise harm from AI systems (White House Office of Science and Technology Policy, 2022).

China

China appears to be taking a far more prescriptive approach to AI regulation. The Chinese authorities are looking at risk mitigation but their scope on restricting such activities appears to be limited to protecting domestic stability whilst ensuring that innovation of key technologies isn't stifled (Wu.Y.2023). Several laws contribute to regulating the space, including but not limited to the Interim Administrative Measures for Generative Artificial Intelligence Services or 'Generative AI Measures'. This outlines several requirements including:

- New AI products are mandated to undergo a "safety assessment" before public release
- Ensure truthfulness and accuracy in AI-generated content
- Prohibitions on content include content that could be deemed as undermining state power, terrorist/extremist propaganda, violence, obscenity, pornography, ethnic hatred, discrimination, and content deemed disruptive to social order
- Non-compliance may result in fines, service suspensions, or criminal investigations for providers

China issued its Global Initiative for AI Governance at its Belt and Road Forum on 18 October 2023 (Schneider J., 2023). Amongst many other things, the initiative highlights the need to address AI safety concerns on a global level. A significant overlap between the US and the EU. But it also challenged unilateral efforts to restrict technology development. A thinly veiled hint at recent US export controls targeting China's development of advanced semiconductors and artificial intelligence. But this technological competition over emerging technologies that have dual military and intelligence use sees no sign of disappearing any time soon.

National security-related technology development is likely to remain a key point of competition between the US and China in years to come and an obstacle to more wide-ranging global governance of AI.

ASEAN response

Ministers from 10 ASEAN states agreed in February 2022 that there was a need to draw up an ASEAN AI guide (Baharudin. H 2023). Although detailed plans are currently publicly unavailable, Reuters recently said that ASEAN officials are drawing up 'guidelines' for artificial intelligence technologies (Potkin, F & Panu Wongcha-Um 2023). These guidelines appear likely to try to mitigate against risks whilst ensuring scope for technological development for the foreseeable future. But based on previous similar guidelines these are likely to be non-binding and lack significant enforcement.

Gen AI will have an impact on all of the ASEAN community pillars. As outlined above this includes 'Political-security', 'Economic Community' and Social-Cultural Community'. Singapore during its chairmanship of ASEAN digital coordination in 2024 is likely to lead in formulating some guidelines on governance and ethics. However, the impact of GenAI is likely to be much broader and impact other pillars beyond digital coordination. ASEAN will likely remain hesitant to proactively regulate the space until the capabilities and risks of the technology become more clearly established. As researchers at the regional think tank ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute noted earlier this year, it is likely to be 'best practices by design rather than anything legally binding' (Onn, Lee Poh 2023).

More thorough regulation appears likely to emerge on the national level and is likely to be driven by industry leaders such as Singapore. That said, Singaporean authorities appear hesitant to over-regulate the space and there is no hard AI legislation in the country yet (Wong, R, 2023). Singapore's Model Framework and Verify AI provide a toolkit and guidance when deploying AI solutions (Personal Data Protection Commission, Singapore, 2020). Other countries in ASEAN are also likely to follow a

wait-and-see approach and implement only minimal guidelines for now to ensure that their countries can be well-positioned for AI-related businesses (Potkin, F., et al. 2023).

“We acknowledged the importance of due recognition of data protection and cybersecurity, consistent with applicable international and domestic laws, at the core of digital connectivity.”

Why is greater coordination needed?

The EU and ASEAN are looking to safeguard their interests amid geopolitical competition and technological change. These two regional blocs already share a common goal of bolstering cybersecurity to safeguard online safety for their citizens, foster trustworthy connectivity, and digital trade, and protect critical national infrastructure, elections and institutions (Council of the EU, 2020). For all states, protecting consumers and mitigating risks will be instrumental in maintaining trust in institutions, markets, elections and government authorities.

As a matter of priority, the EU and ASEAN have to proactively address emerging technologies that can potentially cause harm. This includes the use of disinformation at scale to undermine government authority, spread extremist propaganda and commit crimes. But such risks can only be effectively mitigated by working with states where law enforcement capabilities remain low or where organised crime has found safe haven. The failure to do so is likely to lead to a proliferation of cyber criminals operating in less regulated countries to target victims in countries across ASEAN and Europe.

The EU needs to engage with key emerging markets amid this competition. The EU Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific notes digital governance, partnerships, and connectivity as priority areas (European Commission, 2023). The strategy pays particular attention to connectivity and how to connect European digital infrastructure and standards with ASEAN partners. This is equally so for ASEAN, the EU was the third largest source of foreign direct investment in ASEAN in 2019 and the third largest trading partner after China and the US, accounting for 10% of ASEAN's total trade.

As a major economic block, the EU should strive to ensure equitable AI access, help to empower local communities to understand AI and guard against disinformation and repression (Manantan, R & Csernatori M. 2023). Rapid AI development risks amplifying existing power imbalances, notably between ASEAN, the US and China. Neighbouring states within ASEAN with the resources to develop superior AI capabilities may further stretch this divide. The EU can work with the ASEAN forum to develop capabilities and resilience that thwart geopolitical competitors seeking to manipulate the region.

The EU and ASEAN can work closely together on monitoring the global use of AI technology to build a clearer database of information for all states to understand the risks and benefits of the technology as it develops. Researchers from OpenAI recommended confidence-building measures including incident monitoring in their research (Shoker.S et al 2023). With some states preferring to adopt a wait-and-see strategy to AI legislation an incident monitoring database would aid national governments, legislatures and law enforcement to track these emerging risks and the capabilities of malign actors. Informing policymakers with data on these capabilities will go a long way to aid the development of safeguards in policy. No such monitoring or sharing of information currently exists in an institutionalised capacity. Such a measure will help to bring policymakers on board to proactively regulate as technology use develops rather than after the horse has bolted.

The EU can help to drive this agenda forward globally. As the December 2020 EU ASEAN joint ministerial statement said “We acknowledged the importance of due recognition of data protection and cybersecurity, consistent with applicable international and domestic laws, at the core of digital connectivity.” The EU championed regulations like GDPR that provided a blueprint for other economies that sought better data protection. A lag in AI regulation leads to emerging risks, with technology’s misuse potentially destabilising social and political systems at key moments. And with several key elections coming up in the Asia Pacific region in 2024 including in Indonesia and Singapore malign state and non-state actors will likely begin to flirt with using GenAI to further their political interests sooner rather than later.

*Carl-Johan contributed to this brief in his capacity. The opinions expressed are solely his own and do not express the views or opinions of his employer.

Section 3 - Health, Human Rights, Youth Engagement and Personal Perspectives

Chapter 10

EU-ASEAN Relations – A Health Systems Perspective

By Dr Mike Walsh, University of Stirling Management School, UK and Dr Brian Howieson, University of Limassol, Cyprus

Abstract:

In this chapter we attempt to answer the questions: why is healthcare important to EU and ASEAN countries? What are the main health system challenges they face? What are the key differences between the health systems of the EU and ASEAN countries? And what are the main opportunities for and barriers to coordination between EU and ASEAN health systems? To help answer these questions we looked at three of the World Health Organisation's (WHO) "Six Building Blocks" of a strong health system (table 1) to compare EU & ASEAN health systems. We find there are opportunities for and barriers to greater coordination of EU and ASEAN countries. All data in this chapter is the latest available World Health Organisation (WHO) data unless otherwise stated.

The importance of health systems to EU and ASEAN countries

Health was recognised internationally from 1946 as a human right to “a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity” (The World Health Organisation, 2005). The idealism of this has been criticised frequently, for example by David Seedhouse who called it “hopelessly idealistic” (Seedhouse, 2001) but it is probably better to see it as hopefully idealistic since the creation of the World Health Organisation and its perfectionist definition must be seen in context as a reaction to the appalling suffering caused in the Second World War and to public demand for radical change. Indeed, Acheson (1988) famously defined the aim of public health as “the science and art of preventing disease, prolonging life, and promoting health through the organised efforts of society”. This organised effort of society is reflected by Gilson (2012, p. 13) who was surely correct in saying “Health systems are widely recognised to be vital elements of the social fabric of every society”. Gilson’s view is consistent with the aspirations of the health policy of both the EU and ASEAN blocs as discussed later.

Acheson’s public health definition points towards one of the most widely used measures of the success of any nation’s health system, which is the degree of improvement or deterioration in the life expectancy of its citizens. Life expectancy is the average number of years of life expected at any given age first defined by William Farr in the 1830s (Eyler, 1979) in an attempt to measure the impact of the obvious squalor of Victorian Britain at a time of unparalleled industrial strength leading to Chadwick’s famous Report on the Sanitary Condition of the Labouring Population of Great Britain (Chadwick, 1843).

Estimates by different sources vary but in their progress report the World Health Organization (2023) find that from 2000 to 2019, global life expectancy at birth rose from 66.8 years to 73.3 years, a gain of 6.5 years, helped by the halving of child mortality, a fall in maternal mortality by a third and falls in outbreaks of infectious diseases and the risks of premature death from noncommunicable diseases and injuries. Yet figure 1 shows only Estonia in the EU gained more than the global average

increase in life expectancy with a standout gain of 8 years and the vast majority of ASEAN and EU populations have gained less than the global average increase in life expectancy.

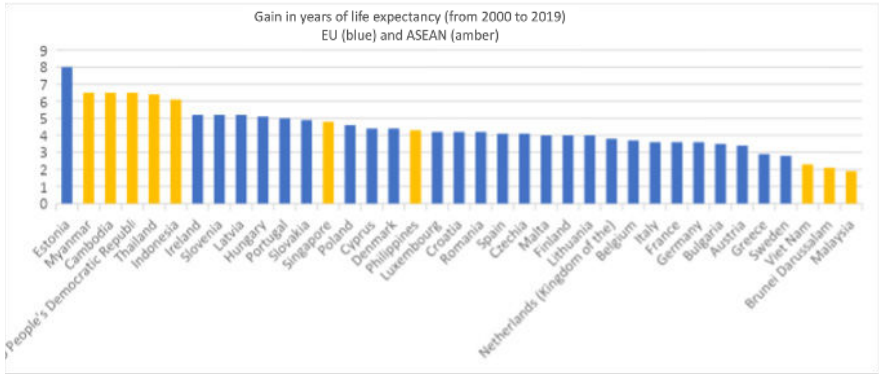
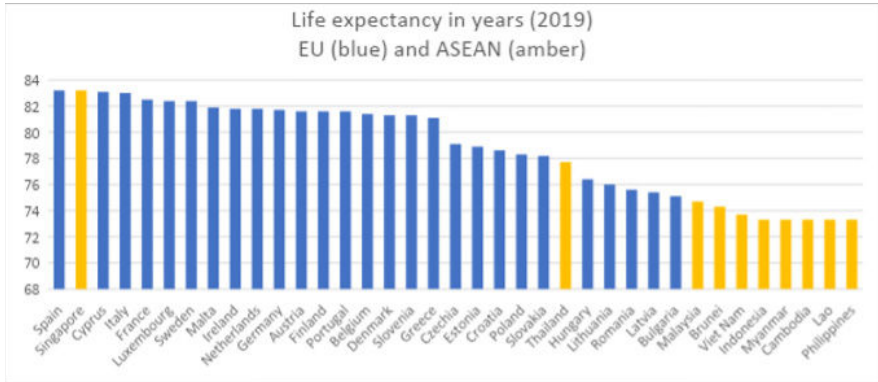


Figure 1¹

Nevertheless, in 2019, average life expectancy in the EU reached 83 years and in ASEAN it reached 75.

In the world, the highest life expectancy at birth has for decades been credited to Japan which currently stands at 84.3 years, and this represents a current maximum life expectancy. Therefore, ASEAN countries can reasonably aim to increase life expectancy more rapidly than EU countries with gains of up to nine years while EU countries may gain up to one year. Figure 2 shows that Spain and Singapore are joint top of all EU and ASEAN countries with life expectancy over 83 years. Singapore stands out from other ASEAN countries but as explained later, also stands out economically and spends five times more than any other ASEAN country on healthcare. There are 17 EU countries (with 76% of the EU population in 2019) where life expectancy is over 81 but eight ASEAN countries (with 88% of ASEAN population) where life expectancy is under 75 years.

1 (World Health Organisation, 2023)

Figure 2²

The World Health Organisation attributes these gains in life expectancy to many factors, from improved access to essential health services to reduced exposure to health risks, including tobacco use, alcohol consumption and child undernutrition. Of course, quality of life is not the same as years of life and it is important to note that for both ASEAN and EU countries “healthy life expectancy” (life years of “full health” as defined by the World Health Organisation) is around ten years lower than life expectancy. So, health systems not only prevent and treat disease but can reduce health inequalities and social injustice; they are also an industry in their own right producing and distributing wealth and they do all of this by delivering both the most basic and the most scientifically advanced goods and services in the day-to-day lives of almost all people. Healthcare can be as deceptively practical and simple as nurses advising somebody about handwashing to prevent cross infection (Wigglesworth, 2019) or as complex as neurosurgeons undertaking brain surgery with robotic tools (Bagga and Bhattacharyya, 2018) or the pharmaceutical industry response to the SARS-Covid 19 Pandemic emergency in developing and delivering over 13 billion doses of Covid vaccines globally in three years (Holder, 2023).

² (World Health Organisation, 2023)

The importance of health and healthcare is such that whether it is public health, medicine, surgery, psychiatry, psychology, dentistry, pharmacology, obstetrics, oncology, radiology, biomedical science, occupational therapy, physiotherapy, nursing, midwifery or any of the many occupations and disciplines, healthcare in some form is found everywhere there are people. No other industry is simultaneously as prolific, pervasive, varied, complex, science-dependent, professionalised and ethically sensitive in its service delivery from individuals to entire populations. Thus, it is a measure of their vital importance that health systems have, for decades, been taking a growing share of national economic outputs. Yet this is a sign not simply of success but also growing challenges as we now explain.

General challenges to health systems

The headline message from the World Health Organisation (2023) report on the health element of the internationally agreed Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is that while there is progress in global health improvement, it is inadequate to meet the SDGs by 2030 and there are some deteriorations, like the finding that 99% of the global population breathe unhealthy levels of fine particulates. They call for a “substantial increase in focus and investment – of both financial and political capital” (p. iv). Where this will come from or even what it means is not explained. Ironically, some may feel that improvements in health systems also mean healthcare expenditure increases disproportionately because more people live longer, with increasing frailty, and so need even more healthcare leading to an increasing proportion of economic outputs being spent on healthcare. This economic challenge to healthcare improvement assumes there will be both long-term rates of economic growth and political commitment to pay for rising healthcare expenditure.

Quality challenges have been recognised in Western healthcare for at least two and half millennia from the formulation of the Hippocratic Oath (Oxtoby, 2016) through the mid-19th century improvements introduced in the wake of the war in the Crimea by the iconic figure of Florence Nightingale (McDonald, 2014) and the less well known “result

idea” of Codman in 1911 which focused on the outcome of healthcare (Donabedian, 1989). In recent decades quality improvement has been led internationally by the Institute for Healthcare Improvement, with a focus on crossing the infamous ‘quality chasm’ (Institute of Medicine, 2001) typically by applying a Deming (1982) style ‘plan-do-check/study-act’ cycle coupled with international initiatives like the high profile patient safety campaigns (e.g. McCannon et al, 2007). There is a continuing search for technological inventions, innovations, process improvements (like the rollout worldwide of the surgical safety checklist, World Health Organization, 2008), new treatments (like gene therapy, Kazemi et al, 2016), the emergence of new healthcare information and communication technologies (Weiner, Yeh and Blumenthal, 2013), the innovative use of social media and other digital technologies (Gretton & Honeyman, 2016) and even whole health system redesign like that of the NUKA system in Alaska about which we say more below (Collins, 2015).

“...the strategic importance of strengthening health systems is absolute...”

Yet, despite the rising expenditure on health systems, there remain pervasive health inequalities internationally with lethal levels of “social injustice” in poorer countries (Commission on Social Determinants of Health, 2008,

p. 26). This was blamed on weak health systems failing to distribute what was already available, so the World Health Organization (2007, p. iv) emphasized that “the strategic importance of strengthening health systems is absolute” setting out a framework with “six building blocks” (table 1) to help with this. Other concerns have been raised about health technological, social and political factors and population demographics as well as about a variety of global systemic disruptions. One example of the latter was the recent SARS-Covid 19 pandemic that led to 14.9 million excess deaths (World Health Organisation, 2023, p. vii) with severe social and economic disruptions; but while the pandemic health emergency was declared over in May 2023 by the World Health Organisation (Wise, 2023) a less publicly well-known yet even greater “catastrophic threat” (Davies, 2013) is growing – that of antimicrobial resistance (AMR) to antibiotics.

Murray et al (2022) estimate that 5 million people a year die from AMR, with many of these victims in Africa, which suggests 15 million people may have died from AMR during the period of the pandemic although it is unclear how this overlaps with the excess mortality from the pandemic.

Climate change poses another severe disruptive threat (World Health Organisation, 2023, pp. 24-31), not simply the immediate distress or deaths caused by storms, extreme heat, droughts and floods but in the long run to human survival itself. On top of this, war is a perennial political disruptive threat par excellence to populations, not simply to those in the epicentres of conflict, but even to those far away by the disruption of political, economic and social life, for example by distorting markets for food as has occurred with war in Ukraine (BBC, 2023).

These challenges taken together constitute a “wicked problem” (Rittel and Webber, 1973). Such problems are complex, cannot be solved independently of the wider context, have uncertainties in causality, involve many systems and stakeholders and can seem intractable, leading Grint to call for “clumsy solutions” (Grint, 2010) with leadership that brings together multiple perspectives. The term “clumsy” is not attractive but it does convey the need for political, managerial and social as well as clinical pragmatism rather than perfectionism in searching for solutions to the wicked problems of healthcare.

Grint is also one of many who warn against the limitations of the medical deficit model (a pathogenic model focused on the causation, diagnosis and treatment of disease) that dominates healthcare but is seen as unsustainable by critics such as the former Chief Medical Officer for Scotland (Burns, 2014). Burns instead focuses on health assets, resources or strengths of individuals and their communities (a salutogenic model focused on the causation of health and well-being, introduced by the sociologist Antonovsky, 1979, see Mittelmark et al., 2016 for more information) of which the NUKA system of healthcare in Alaska is possibly the best example and is acclaimed by the healthcare quality guru Berwick (2011).

The success of NUKA led to the system being trialled in Scotland but was unsuccessful due in part at least to resistance from General Practitioners (Walsh, Kittler and Mahal, 2018) but others like Frerichs et al. (2016) have argued that the failure to account for systemic aspects of health policy implementation can lead to policy resistance and further emphasize the importance of building on strengths at multiple levels, from individuals to organisations. Indeed there is convincing evidence of peer influences on individual health behaviour (Christakis and Fowler, 2008) and of the benefits of individual and group involvement and participation in healthcare (Gomes et al., 2009). According to Walsh et al (2018), these developments suggest that healthcare is improved when communities themselves become more effective in processes that mobilise the resources and efforts of individuals, families and groups in co-producing and distributing the benefits of healthcare and this may help explain the success of NUKA in Alaska.

Therefore, the search for sustainable, resilient, technically feasible and socially desirable health systems is urgent in both richer and poorer countries. It is this perennial, global, search that can provide EU and ASEAN countries with an agenda for mutually beneficial actions on these “vital elements of the social fabric” (Gilson, *ibid*). To understand how we need to explore the differences between the health systems of the EU and ASEAN countries.

Comparing the Health systems of EU and ASEAN countries

From the viewpoint of health, populations are complex and comparisons risk oversimplification, but they are necessary for trying to understand how different the EU and ASEAN are at both bloc and national levels. WHO data shows 437 million people live in the 26 EU nations, with nearly 60% in five (Germany, France, Italy, Spain and Poland) (figure 3). There are 667 million people in the ten ASEAN nations, with nearly 60% in two (Indonesia and Philippines) (figure 3). Indonesia has the largest ASEAN population at 272 million which is over double that of the Philippines (112 million) and three times that of the largest EU nation, Germany, at 83 million. In population size, Indonesia dominates the ASEAN bloc with

41% of the population and is slightly larger than the populations of the top five EU countries combined. How these populations are served is a matter of health policy.

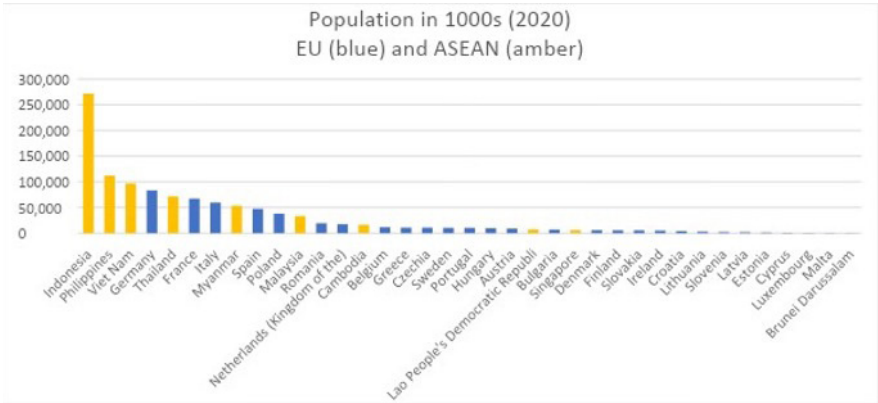


Figure 3³

EU and ASEAN Health Policy

While the 26 EU nations are each responsible for organising and delivering their healthcare, EU health policy provides a mechanism for coordination of approaches working towards a stronger “Health Union” (https://health.ec.europa.eu/eu-health-policy/overview_en). Current EU health policy prioritises protecting and improving the health of EU citizens, supporting modernisation and digitalisation of health systems and infrastructure, improving the resilience of Europe’s health systems and equipping EU countries to better prevent and address future pandemics. Strategic health issues are discussed by representatives of national authorities and EU institutions, countries, regional and local authorities, and other interest groups that contribute to the implementation of the EU’s health strategy and annual work programmes. The current strategic plan covers the period from 2020 to 2024 and deals with both health and food safety (European Commission, 2020). The strategy expresses the need to work

3 (World Health Organisation, 2023)

with the World Health Organisation, the OECD, the G7 and the G20 on global health challenges, health security and antimicrobial resistance and on future risks of pandemics and climate change to make Europe “the first climate-neutral continent by 2050” (p. 7). Thus, the EU is using its ability to coordinate 26 countries directly in addressing vital elements of the wicked problem of healthcare.

In contrast to the EU, with its detailed and highly coordinated international agreements enabled by a sophisticated civil service, the ten ASEAN states have a Charter comprising what ASEAN itself terms is a “legally binding agreement” (<https://asean.org/asean-charter/>, accessed 04/05/23). There is no direct reference to health within the ASEAN Charter. Indirectly, the Charter and the meaning of the Charter depend on health as a condition for success and should, it may be thought, deliver improved health as an outcome. However, the charter commits the ASEAN countries to “unite under One Vision, One Identity and One Caring and Sharing Community” and to build an ASEAN Political-Security Community, an ASEAN Economic Community and an ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community.

At the 48th ASEAN foreign ministers meeting in 2015 Yb Dato’sri Anifah Aman, the Foreign Minister for Malaysia giving the welcome speech, said the “ASEAN Community will bring new opportunities to the people of ASEAN and the broader global community ... continued peace, stability and harmony ... allow our people to pursue their dreams and free from threats or dangers; bigger, more open and freer markets ... better health for our peoples including our children and women, educational opportunities and sustainable environment” (<https://asean.org/welcoming-remarks-by-yb-datosri-anifah-aman-minister-of-foreign-affairs-of-malaysia-at-the-opening-ceremony-of-the-48th-asean-foreign-ministers-meeting-in-kuala-lumpur-malaysia/> accessed 04/05/23). This vision statement and the current ASEAN Charter therefore suggest there is scope to develop an ASEAN Health Community and an opportunity for the EU and ASEAN to strengthen their relationship.

Health System Building Blocks

The WHO Six Building Blocks of a strong health system (table 1) provide a convenient framework for comparison of key elements of health systems. WHO view these as a systemic entirety (2007, p. 7) but it is important to appreciate they are eclectic and pragmatic with trade-offs. For instance, equity (or fairness) is a vital aspect of several of the building blocks but Antwi, Adams and Walsh (2022) explain that equity can mean either equal inputs or equal processes or equal health outputs or equal health outcomes and equalising any one of these for a population means necessarily allowing others to vary; for instance, some communities and groups of people are harder to reach geographically or socially, so require higher input levels of expenditure to deliver equal outputs of health goods and services, but this means there is less to spend elsewhere, and that leads to ethical and political tensions as politicians and managers know. The corollary is that actions aimed at strengthening one element of a health system may weaken others, which is a wicked problem for health policy that depends on public support for legitimacy. The process by which resources are allocated and public and professional support for health systems strengthening is gained is, therefore, a concern for both the EU and ASEAN at bloc and country levels in terms of how policy is made, whose needs are prioritised and whose are sacrificed. In the remaining discussion, we will focus mainly on the fifth (health financing) and second (health workforce) Building Blocks.

Table 1

1	Good health services are those which deliver effective, safe, quality personal and non-personal health interventions to those that need them, when and where needed, with minimum waste of resources.
2	A well-performing health workforce works in ways that are responsive, fair and efficient to achieve the best health outcomes possible, given available resources and circumstances (i.e. there are sufficient staff, fairly distributed; they are competent, responsive and productive).
3	A well-functioning health information system ensures the production, analysis, dissemination and use of reliable and timely information on health determinants, health system performance and health status.
4	A well-functioning health system ensures equitable access to essential medical products, vaccines and technologies of assured quality, safety, efficacy and cost-effectiveness, and their scientifically sound and cost-effective use.
5	A good health financing system raises adequate funds for health, in ways that ensure people can use needed services and are protected from financial catastrophe or impoverishment associated with having to pay for them. It provides incentives for providers and users to be efficient.
6	Leadership and governance involve ensuring strategic policy frameworks exist and are combined with effective oversight, coalition-building, regulation, attention to system design and accountability.

Building Block 5: EU and ASEAN populations and health system expenditure

While Figure 3 shows how ASEAN countries have big populations compared to the EU, figure 4 shows that EU countries have big healthcare expenditures. In 2020, Luxembourg spent the lowest proportion of GDP on healthcare in the EU – approximately 6%. Only one ASEAN country spent over 6% of GDP on healthcare, Cambodia at 8%. Yet the poorest country in the EU in per capita terms, Bulgaria, has nearly seven times the GDP per capita than Cambodia and spends 9% of GDP on healthcare and although Luxembourg has the lowest EU spending as a percentage of GDP it has the highest per capita spend in the EU of \$6,757.

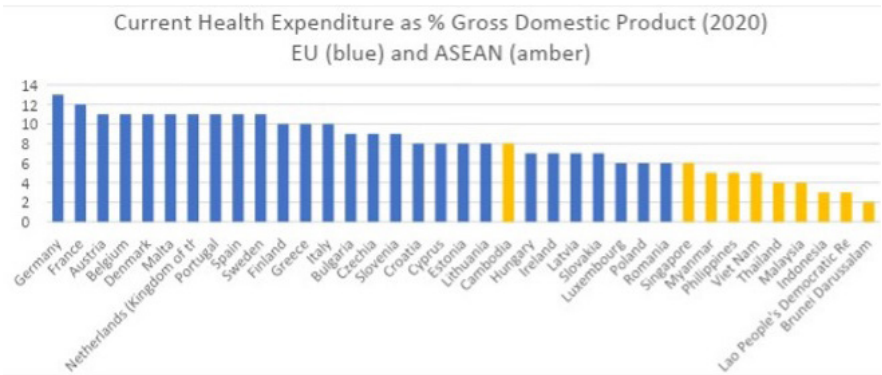


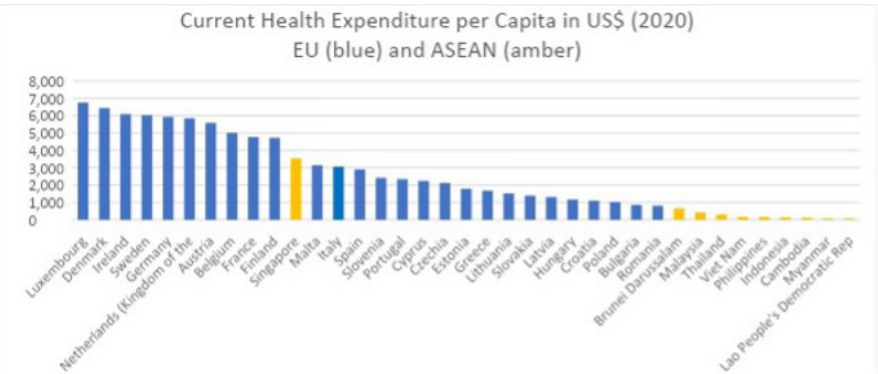
Figure 4⁴

Figure 5 shows how big a gap there is between EU and ASEAN health systems in health spending per capita. Indonesia, the Philippines and Vietnam have 72% of the population of ASEAN countries but spend less than than \$166 per capita on healthcare. Eight of the ten ASEAN countries spend less than \$500 per capita on healthcare, Brunei just slightly more (\$650), but the lowest EU country spend is Romania at \$810 per capita. Indonesia with the largest ASEAN population spends only \$133 per capita while Germany with the largest EU population spends \$5,930 per capita.

4 (World Health Organisation, 2023)

Singapore is an outlier for the ASEAN bloc spending \$3,537 per capita, over five times that of Brunei, and 21 times that of Vietnam, yet ten of the 26 EU countries spend over a third more per capita than Singapore, from Finland (\$4726 per capita) to Luxembourg (\$6,757 per capita).

Figure 5⁵

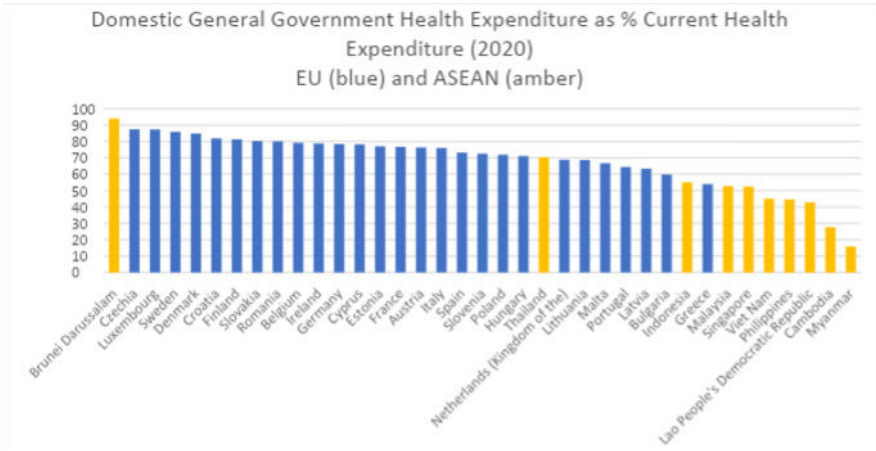


Where healthcare expenditure comes from also differs markedly between EU and ASEAN countries. Figure 6 shows Domestic General Government Health Expenditure, making up all public sources for health and including social health insurance. Eight ASEAN governments fund 16% to 53% of healthcare expenditures while 26 EU governments fund 60% to 87% of healthcare expenditures, all other funding of healthcare is from private or external sources. Brunei is a clear outlier from both ASEAN and EU with Government funding 94% of healthcare expenditure.

Figure 6⁶

5 (World Health Organisation, 2023)

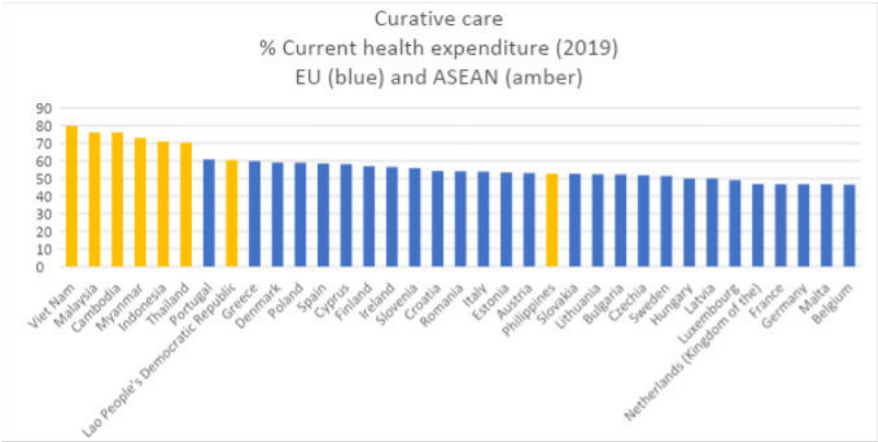
6 (World Health Organisation, 2023)



Health care is made up of a personalised mix of services often without records that help separate the components of care into preventive, curative or rehabilitative elements (OECD, Eurostat and World Health organisation, 2017, chapter 5). However, the magnitude of EU/ASEAN differences is indicated by looking at curative care. The data available is incomplete so only eight ASEAN countries appear in figure 7 and only for 2019. This shows that ASEAN countries tend to spend more of their budget on curative care than EU countries with six ASEAN nations spending from 70% to 80% while EU countries spend from 46% to 61% of their budgets. This difference may be due to a higher incidence and prevalence of infectious and other short-term diseases in ASEAN countries compared to the EU which will have a higher prevalence of long-term conditions. Indeed, the way healthcare expenditure is allocated between curative care, long-term care, preventive care, medical goods and administration probably all differ markedly between ASEAN and EU but data is not easily available to break this down further and far more extensive analysis is needed than can be provided in this chapter.

Figure 7⁷

⁷ (World Health Organisation, 2023)

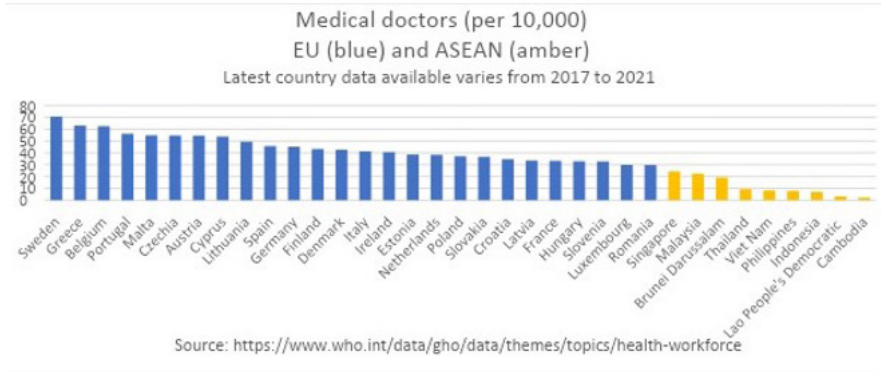


Building Block 2: EU and ASEAN Health Workforces

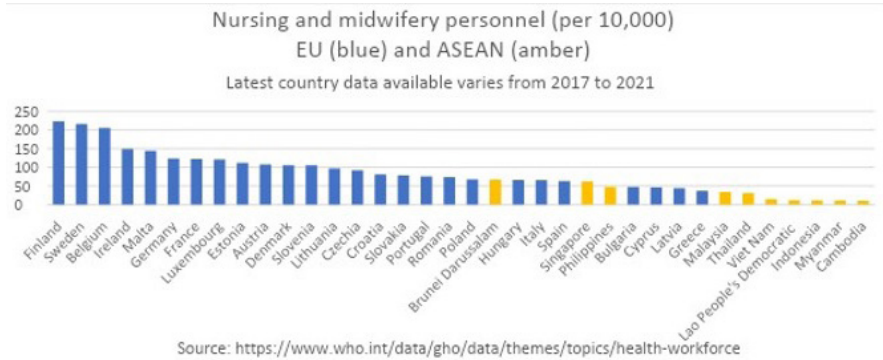
Perhaps the single most important difference between EU and ASEAN can be seen in workforce data. It is well established that the risk of death is higher in countries with a lower density of doctors and other healthcare workers and this is particularly noticeable for priority diseases like malaria (Yan et al., 2023). The lower density of healthcare workers may help explain why the people of ASEAN countries tend to have a lower life expectancy. Figure 8 shows that ASEAN countries have between 2 and 24 doctors per 10,000 people whereas EU countries have from 30 to 71 doctors per 10,000 people.

Figure 8⁸

8 (World Health Organisation, 2023)



Similarly, figure 9 shows how seven ASEAN countries have from 10 to 34 nurses and midwives per 10,000 people with Greece being the lowest of the EU with 37 but 19 EU countries have from 67 to 223 nurses and midwives per 10,000 people. However, Yan et al. (2023) note that five cross-country studies found no significant associations between nurse density and maternal mortality ratio and mortality rate in under-5s and infants. Therefore, it is important to understand that the causal link between health worker density and mortality is better understood as systemic and not as simple linear, so simply increasing workforce density may not have a direct or immediately obvious benefit – they must be the right healthcare workers for the specific situation.

Figure 9⁹

There are initiatives under way to improve the supply of healthcare workers in ASEAN countries including improved data collection and mutual recognition arrangements (Pachanee et al., 2019).

Conclusions: Opportunities for greater coordination between EU and ASEAN health systems

The Commission on Social Determinants of Health (2008) famously concluded that inequalities kill. This chapter has shown that the EU and ASEAN blocs are unequal in the life expectancy of their peoples and looking at just two of the WHO “Six Building Blocks”, healthcare finance and health workforce, shows how different the EU and ASEAN countries are. Yet in the face of the wicked problems of healthcare highlighted earlier there is an opportunity for EU and ASEAN with their combined population of around a billion people to coordinate their countries health systems to help make them sustainable, viable and resilient with the aim of reducing inequalities between the two blocs to mutual advantage.

⁹ (World Health Organisation, 2023)

To achieve this is not a simple linear process of change but, following Frerichs et al. (2016), requires building on the strengths of EU and ASEAN health systems at multiple levels, from citizens and front line workers to policy makers, bridging the gap between layers, with facilitated planning and action using Problem Structuring Methods such as Structured Democratic Dialogue (Laouris and Michaelides, 2018) and Strategic Choice Approach (Friend and Hickling, 2011). Using systems methods like this makes it possible to both “start where the people are” as Nyswander (1956) said from a health education perspective and, as noted at the First Global Symposium on Health Systems Research (World Health organisation, 2010), to mobilise the power of ideas, to influence those with the power to make decisions.

This can coordinate analysis and modelling at every level of health systems, as done for instance by the UN Development programme and the Global Environment Facility with the Ministry of Health in Ghana in involving healthcare managers and citizens from across Ghana in developing and coordinating local policy health responses to climate change (Walsh, Antwi and Adams, 2012).

Long-run planning and action can lead to the kind of transformation achieved by the NUKA health system discussed earlier. However, an immediate priority for action from the Six Building Blocks is that of increasing the density of healthcare workers, particularly of doctors in those seven ASEAN countries in the tail of Figure 9, which includes Indonesia which has 41% of the ASEAN population. One way forward is to consider both knowledge and personnel exchanges between and within ASEAN and EU but this must avoid causing a “brain drain” of knowledge and skill from other countries including from outside the blocs. This means for instance creating step-change opportunities and incentives to increase the numbers of trainee doctors and other healthcare personnel in Indonesia and other ASEAN countries alongside improving mutual recognition of roles within ASEAN and between EU and ASEAN.

Finally, a longer-run focus for action is to enhance the sustainable and viable economic and social development of the poorer ASEAN countries. To do this EU and ASEAN can explore their enormous scope for the growth of trade to mutual advantage. Not only will poverty reduction help reduce the social determinants of sickness and increase the social determinants of health and wellbeing it will enable increased resources for healthcare, and equality works.

Chapter 11

Dictatorship Succession in Cambodia Highlights Southeast Asia's Human Rights Crisis

By Mu Sochua and David Whitehouse

The regime of former Cambodian prime minister Hun Sen, a former commander in the Khmer Rouge, for decades rested on his ability to defy the international community.

A family succession saw his son Hun Manet take over as prime minister in August 2023 with no democratic mandate. Hun Sen's long-term ability to act with impunity has also set back prospects for broader human rights progress in the region.

Hun Sen's rule was made possible by the invasion of Cambodia by Vietnam in 1979. This ended Pol Pot's genocidal Khmer Rouge regime which had held power since 1975. Hun Sen, who joined the Khmer Rouge as early as 1970, had jumped ship to Vietnam in 1977.

Vietnam remained in Cambodia until 1989 when the declining ability of the Soviet Union to provide support for the occupation led to the withdrawal of Vietnamese troops. This made possible the 1991 Paris Peace Agreements on Cambodia. The agreements, signed by the world's major powers, laid down a system of regular, democratic elections for the country. The first election in 1993, held under United Nations supervision, saw Hun Sen's Cambodian People's Party (CPP) defeated by the royalist Funcinpec.

Hun Sen, backed by a large personal security apparatus, refused to accept his democratic defeat. The only workable solution was for Hun Sen to become "Prime Minister number two", working in an unclear relationship with "Prime Minister number one", Funcinpec's Norodom Ranariddh. The uneasy set-up finally ended in 1997 when Hun Sen launched a bloody coup and assumed full power as a de facto dictator.

Funcinpec's finance minister under Norodom Ranariddh was Sam Rainsy, who was forced out of his job in October 1994 after he refused to accept institutional corruption, especially with illegal deforestation for private benefit. Sam Rainsy became the founder of the country's opposition movement. The political party which he founded achieved growing support in successive elections. In 2012, the Sam Rainsy Party, eponymous because other party names were refused by the authorities, merged with the Human Rights Party led by Kem Sokha, to form the Cambodia National Rescue Party (CNRP).

The CNRP proved to be a major force with enough popular support to potentially unseat Hun Sen. It scored 44% in both the national elections of 2013 and the local commune elections of 2017, despite massive electoral irregularities in favour of the CPP. The CNRP was dissolved by Cambodia's politically controlled supreme court in 2017 in the face of a very real prospect of victory in the 2018 national elections. In March 2023, Kem Sokha, who had become leader of the CNRP before its dissolution, was sentenced to 27 years in prison on a spurious charge of "treason" for which no evidence was ever produced.



“The CNRP’s successor as the main opposition party, the Candlelight Party, was also founded by Sam Rainsy.”

The CNRP’s successor as the main opposition party, the Candlelight Party, was also founded by Sam Rainsy. It was refused the right to take part in the 2023 national elections on bureaucratic grounds. The authorities demanded an original registration document which they had already seized in a raid on party headquarters. This was despite the fact that the Candlelight Party had been allowed to run in the 2022 local commune elections. Again, the popularity of the opposition meant that it had to be prevented from contesting a national election.

There was, therefore, no recognised opposition in the July 2023 election. The CNRP called on its supporters to spoil their ballot papers. The manipulation of turnout figures by the government for public consumption was clear for all to see. The government-controlled Fresh News outlet reported after the polls closed on 23 July that, as of mid-afternoon, voter turnout stood at 80.5%. An unsigned document from the National Election Committee (NEC) which was attached to the story said the turnout was 78.28%. Minutes later, the document was deleted and the reported turnout was changed to 81.48%.



Inequitable Growth

Hun Sen in August 2023 handed over power to his son Hun Manet. The family dictatorship points to Hun Sen's record of economic growth, which has averaged around 6%-7% in recent years, to justify its intolerance of dissent.

The catastrophe of Khmer Rouge rule, which killed about 2 million people in Cambodia, meant that this growth was achieved from a very low starting point. Today, more than 44 years after the ousting of the Khmer Rouge and after billions of dollars of aid, Cambodia remains a least developed country as defined by the United Nations. Among ASEAN countries, only Laos and Myanmar have lower GDP per head than Cambodia, IMF figures show.

Economic growth has been highly inequitable. The Khmer Rouge abolished all private property, and hard property rights have never been re-established. Most Cambodians could lose their land at any time.

The US State Department country report for Cambodia in 2022 finds that provincial and district land offices continue to follow pre-2001 land registration procedures, which do not include accurate land surveys. Land speculation in the absence of clear title fueled disputes in every province in 2022 and increased tensions between poor rural communities and speculators, the US State Department found (United States Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, 2022).

Official statistics which claim an unemployment rate of less than 1% are meaningless. Over two million young Cambodians, or about 20% of the workforce, have emigrated in search of work in Thailand and elsewhere. The bulk of the population continues to live in dire poverty and, due to the rapid growth of microfinance, is drowning in debt. Total micro- and small loans in Cambodia grew from \$98 million in 2004 to more than \$16.4 billion in 2022, exceeding 60% of GDP. In 2021, the average loan was larger than 95% of all incomes in the country (Green et al, 2023).

Deforestation is the regime's *raison d'être* and has been accelerating rather than slowing down. The annual rate of loss in 2011–2021 was 1.76%, versus 1.00% per year in the previous decade (Pauly, Crosse & Tosteson, 2022). The country currently has the world's highest country-level annual rate of forest loss, much of which occurs in mature primary forests holding significant carbon and rich biodiversity (Ibid) In terms of absolute humid tropical primary forest loss from 2002 to 2021, Cambodia, according to the World Resources Institute, defies its small surface area to rank among the top 10 in the world (WRI, 2022).

The outside world has its role to play in helping Cambodia and the region adapt to climate change. Funding for adoption projects has not been a priority, even though Southeast Asia is one of the world's most vulnerable regions to climate change, with 56.3 million people living on its coastlines. In Cambodia, the government has dealt brutally with attempts to raise awareness of environmental issues. Members of the Mother Nature environmental group have been jailed. Chut Wutty, who led the Natural Resource Protection Group, was killed in 2012 as

a result of his work. Such repression has powerful invisible effects. The message to Cambodian citizens is that trying to act as custodians of the environment can have lethal consequences.

This has implications for everyone on the planet. According to Global Forest Watch, Cambodia's forests absorb the amount of carbon emissions generated by 2,200 US coal plants annually. Cambodia needs incentives from richer countries if it is to protect the lungs which its forests represent. Those incentives will only be useful if provided to a government that is free of corruption and answerable to its people.

An End to Impunity

Hun Sen has done much more than dissolve the CNRP. He has refused to tolerate any opposing voice whatsoever. Labour rights have been disregarded, with striking workers at the NagaWorld casino among those to have faced regular, ongoing harassment and intimidation. NagaWorld union leader Chhim Sithar is among Cambodia's political prisoners. Critics of the regime have faced attacks in the street from anonymous men in motorcycle helmets. Political commentator Kem Ley was gunned down in broad daylight in July 2016.

Arbitrary arrests are routine and opponents have been locked up after mass show trials lacking any recognised legal process – among them Theary Seng, an internationally respected lawyer and human rights activist with US as well as Cambodian citizenship.

Members of the Cambodian diaspora in the US, Europe and Australia have been intimidated, and their families at home are threatened if they don't keep quiet. Electoral laws were amended in the run-up to the 2023 elections to penalise those who boycotted the vote or spoiled their ballots. The government controls the vast majority of Khmer and English language media. One of the last independent outlets, Voice of Democracy, was shut down by the government in February 2023.

By standing down, Hun Sen loses his immunity from prosecution as a head of government and is therefore open to being arrested to face charges in a French court for his part in a grenade attack on a small, peaceful demonstration march in Phnom Penh in March 1997 which killed 16 people and left at least 150 wounded. The target of the attack was Sam Rainsy, who was leading the demonstration. Sam Rainsy is a dual citizen of France and Cambodia. An investigating French judge in December 2021 ordered that two leaders of Hun Sen's bodyguard unit should face trial in a French court for the grenade attack.

Weak Reaction

The reaction of the international community to this dismantling of democracy has been sporadic and ineffective. A typical example is the statement from the British Foreign Office after the July 2023 election, which simply referred to a "missed opportunity" for Cambodia. Elections carried out without opposition are not optional opportunities, like a missed appointment or lost business lead, which can perhaps be made up for later. They are a denial of fundamental human rights and a license for arbitrary government. In Cambodia, they are violations of the Paris Peace Agreements of 1991, which were signed by the UK. Such elections breach Cambodia's constitution, and mean that the regime of Hun Manet lacks any legitimacy.

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen in August 2023 stated congratulation to Hun Manet, saying simply that the European Union's relationship with Cambodia is based on a mutual commitment to multilateralism and sustainable growth. The statement leaves room for manoeuvre by recognizing the "administration" rather than the government led by Hun Manet.

Still, the calculation appears to be that explicit criticism would drive Cambodia further into the arms of China. The fact is that Cambodia, now as during the Khmer Rouge years, is an established Chinese ally. Western security experts have long accepted that the Ream naval base

in Cambodia has been built for Chinese military use. The idea that not criticising an authoritarian government will somehow detach it from the Chinese orbit is absurd. During the Cold War in Europe, no one kept quiet about the abuses committed by East European governments in the hope of detaching them from the Soviet sphere of influence. A strategy of silence makes no more sense now than it did then.

“Myanmar is planning to hold a fake Cambodian-style election in a bid to secure international legitimacy for its regime.”

Regional Repercussions

The results of such inactivity by powerful countries extend well beyond Cambodia. The populations of Myanmar and Thailand, like Cambodia, have been willing to vote in massive numbers for democratic parties, disproving the notion that democratic values are somehow unsuited to Southeast Asia. The military junta in Myanmar, which seized power

from the democratically elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi in 2021, was without a doubt emboldened by Hun Sen's ability to act with impunity over the long term against his opponents.

Myanmar has paid a heavy price for the coup. Research by the Peace Research Institute in Oslo finds that military, police and supporting militias were responsible for over 3,000 reported civilian deaths between 1 February 2021 and 30 September 2022 (Oo & Tønnesson, 2023). The dead include four democracy activists who were executed in July 2022 after a trial behind closed doors. This was the first time that capital punishment has been used in the country since at least 1988. There are more than 11,000 political prisoners in Myanmar, more than at any time in the country's history, and more than 1 million people have been internally displaced since the coup. Myanmar is planning to hold a fake Cambodian-style election in a bid to secure international legitimacy for its regime.

The coup has made it impossible to maintain the fiction that the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) has a meaningful contribution to make to the region's future. Cambodia failed to achieve any positive results in Myanmar as chair of ASEAN in 2022. Cambodia's government failed to meet with any representative of the National Unity Government (NUG), established in April to oppose the State Administration Council (SAC) led by Min Aung Hlaing. The NUG is the choice of the vast majority of Myanmar's people. Hun Sen looked on in passive acquiescence as Aung San Suu Kyi was sentenced to 33 years in jail including three years of hard labour.

In February 2022 Hun Sen noted that there were only 10 and a half months left in Cambodia's 12-month stint as ASEAN chair. Perhaps the next chair would be able to fix it: "just let it be," he said. It seems clear that the junta cannot play its part in ASEAN. A report has said that Myanmar will give up its chairmanship which was due in 2026 (Nikkei, 2023).

Military leaders in Thailand likewise calculate that they can afford to disregard the overwhelming desire for change expressed in the May 2023 elections in which the Move Forward Party led by Pita Limjaroenrat won the most seats. The Thai military aims to stick as closely as possible to the rejected status quo. Since the country's Communist insurgency petered out in the 1980s, the military in Thailand has found it ever more difficult to provide a convincing rationale for its share of national resources and political power. The country's military-drafted constitution is protected by a Senate that the military itself effectively has the power to appoint. Changes to the constitution require the backing of at least a third of senators, a stipulation that mass popular protests in 2020 and 2021 failed to overturn.

Historically, Thai military brutality sometimes matched that of the Khmer Rouge which they claimed to oppose. In 1972, the Thai military murdered innocent citizens in Phatthalung province by putting them in oil drums and setting them on fire. Estimates of the number killed range between 1,000 to 3,000. We know this only because the killings were exposed

by students following the democratic revolution in 1973 (Zipple, 2014). The military regained power in 1976 as state forces lynched unarmed, defenceless students at Thammasat University. The military, which re-established its control in 2014, has always sought to avoid discussing these facts.

The Thai military and the Hun Sen regime know how to scratch each other's backs. Thai political dissident Wanchalearm Satsaksit, among activists who fled Thailand after the country's military coup of May 2014, was forcibly abducted in broad daylight on the streets of the Cambodian capital Phnom Penh on 4 June 2020. Neither Cambodia nor Thailand has made a serious effort to investigate what happened. According to Human Rights Watch (HRW), there have been eight Thai activist victims of enforced disappearance in Laos, Vietnam and Cambodia. Meanwhile, members of the Cambodian opposition who have fled Cambodia for Thailand have been subject to assaults and kidnap attempts, with some being forcibly returned to Cambodia. Sam Rainsy, at the request of Hun Sen, was refused the right to enter Thailand in 2019 when he sought to return to Cambodia.

Thailand's deputy prime minister Don Pramudwinai has undermined ASEAN unity on Myanmar by holding "informal" meetings with the junta. Neither has Thailand played its part in trying to reduce the human cost of the conflict. In April 2023, three members of a Myanmar opposition group crossed into Thailand to seek medical treatment. The Thai authorities handed them over back to the Myanmar junta. This was despite the fact that the Thai government has officially adopted the UN Convention Against Torture, which states that no person should be deported where there is a danger of torture or enforced disappearance. Media reports say that Myanmar's Border Guard Force (BGF) shot and killed at least one of the men, with the fate of the other two unclear.

In Vietnam, there is a lack of tolerance for religious freedoms and self-determination. The country, according to Human Rights Watch, currently has at least 159 political prisoners locked up simply for exercising basic rights. There is also a specific hostility to the country's Khmer Krom ethnic population. This group is closely surveilled and prosecuted for

any protest or even for providing information about indigenous rights. The Vietnamese government has prevented the Khmer Krom from bringing Khmer textbooks from Cambodia to enable students to learn their language and history. Khmer Krom Buddhist monks attempting to teach the Khmer language in village pagodas have been blocked by local authorities. The result is that many Khmer Krom youths cannot read and write Khmer and also lack full knowledge of the Vietnamese language. Their job opportunities are undermined and the cycle of poverty continues (OHCHR, 2022).

ASEAN's human rights crisis

ASEAN was founded in 1967 and embraced “non-interference” in the internal affairs of other states as a guiding principle. That principle, in the 1960s, had solid reasons behind it. Most countries in Southeast Asia have had separatist movements, and from 1945, the region became a front line in the struggle between capitalism and communism. In such a context, the stability of regimes in the region was paramount. Anything which encouraged separatism in other states had to be avoided.

That justification has since disappeared, but regional conceptions of “rights” have remained focused on the right to govern without constraints, at the expense of the human and political rights which are essential to the equitable running of society. A key feature of democratic systems is that they tend to reduce the differentials in power and status between the centre and the provinces (Anderson, 1998). Leaders in ASEAN’s authoritarian regimes understand this well. They want to keep power and status narrowly concentrated in their own hands, and “non-interference” is a perfect alibi. Myanmar, Cambodia, Vietnam and Laos were all late entrants to ASEAN. They tilted the balance of power within the organisation away from founder members like Indonesia and Malaysia, which have historically been among its progressive influences. ASEAN’s new authoritarian core of countries turned the “non-interference” principle into a *carte blanche* to carry out internal repression without fear of regional censure. This has led to a generalised crisis of human rights within ASEAN.

Cyber Slavery

The cyber scam industry is a recent manifestation of this crisis. The corrupt regimes and lack of rule of law in Myanmar and Cambodia have made the two countries favoured areas for Chinese-run cyber-scamming operations. China solves its law and order problems by exporting them to the most corrupt jurisdictions with which it is allied. So Mafia gangs are prevented from operating on the Chinese mainland but allowed to do as they wish in Cambodia or Myanmar. Cyber scams involve people from China and other countries globally being tricked into going to Myanmar or Cambodia to take up what they believe is legitimate employment. They are confined in compounds and forced to work around the clock as cyber slaves, where they have to trick people into parting with money online. Failure to hit profit targets, or any attempt to escape, leads to brutal punishment (Jolley & Boyle, 2022). Vitit Muntarbhorn, UN special rapporteur on human rights in Cambodia, says those who are trapped face a "living hell" (UN, 2022). It has been estimated that 100,000 people have been enslaved in this way (Pierson, 2022). Such issues cut across national borders and highlight that ASEAN is in danger of becoming irrelevant.

Women's Lack of Rights

Women bear the brunt of the region's lack of enforceable rights. Research by Dalberg Advisers estimates that, across Southeast Asia, over 70% of women work in the informal sector, meaning they are on average lower paid and less securely employed than men. One in three women in the region are victims of partner violence, the research says (Dalberg Advisors & SPF, 2019). About a third of the region's women work in agriculture. They are much more likely than men to be involved in subsistence production, making them the most vulnerable to climate change impacts. Women also make up over 70% of the region's workforce in textiles, clothing and footwear manufacturing, where they are often vulnerable to abuse and exploitation. Nearly half of women in Vietnam's garment factories, according to the Dalberg research, suffered at least one form of violence and harassment in 2018. There was a strong correlation between these incidents and overtime: violence and harassment were nearly four times more likely during the high season than the rest of the year.

It is not surprising that the status of women is reflected in their lack of regional political representation. The OECD calculated that in 2020, women accounted for only 20% of Southeast Asia's parliamentarians. Such a status quo can't continue if Southeast Asia is ever to realise its full potential. The OECD has calculated that the economic cost of discriminatory social institutions in Southeast Asia amounts to around US\$200 billion, or 7.5% of regional gross domestic product (OECD, 2021).

The absence of clear land rights in Cambodia, likewise, is not gender-neutral. In June 2023, the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against women (CEDAW) highlighted the case of a rural Cambodian woman who suffered criminal charges and harassment by the authorities due to her role as a land rights defender. The woman, whose identity was kept secret, had seen her house destroyed in 2008, without prior notice, by the KDC International company. After playing a role in the community protests against the seizure, the woman and her family fled to Thailand but were forcibly returned to Cambodia. She received an anonymous death threat in 2013. The land seizure has left the woman unable to keep working as a teacher and forced to relocate to a place without basic infrastructure such as sanitary facilities.

LGBTIQ Identities

The crisis of rights within ASEAN extends into sexuality and gender identity. In Vietnam, the journalist Pham Doan Trang is serving a nine-year prison sentence after her writings on issues including women's, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender rights. Though homosexuality is not criminalised in countries such as Cambodia, Laos and Thailand, discrimination against LGBTIQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender, intersex and questioning) people, as well as domestic and public violence and media ridicule, are significant problems, according to the OutRight organisation. Even in Thailand, often considered to be in regional terms progressive, LGBTIQ people still face discrimination in employment, OutRight says. An early casualty of the fact that Move Forward has not been allowed to form a government in Thailand despite its democratic mandate to do so are the party's plans to enact same-sex marriage legislation, which would have been the first of its kind in the region.

Thirst for Democracy

Very few countries have been willing to completely drop the language of democracy as part of their claims of legitimacy. This language has to be maintained, no matter how wooden and strained it becomes, to safeguard international recognition with all the advantages it brings in terms of money and prestige. Yet the human rights needed for the development of democratic systems are dismissed as irrelevant by authoritarian regimes, and even by some constituencies in the West. In Southeast Asia, the problem was not that the West foisted over-ambitious democratic processes onto countries which were unequipped to implement them. The truth was that the West never did enough to support local democratic movements whose aims it claimed to share.

“Southeast Asia's grim human rights record does not mean that democracy can't be achieved.”

Southeast Asia's grim human rights record does not mean that democracy can't be achieved. Democracy is not an idea which originates exclusively in the West, and Southeast Asia has its traditions which colonialism helped to undermine. In Cambodia at the start of the twentieth century, the number of elected representatives in some villages could be as high as 150. That, in the eyes of the French colonial administration, made the communication of village grievances impractical, especially as many villagers were illiterate. The result was the creation of the modern system of village heads, which has underpinned the authoritarianism of Hun Sen at a local level (Baudouin, 1919).

As early as 1946, Cambodia had its own set of democratic political parties which were seen as a threat by the French colonialists who were attempting to re-establish their control lost during World War Two (Chandler, 1991). In 1993, the country's first election after the fall of the Khmer Rouge saw a turnout of 87%, although some areas of the country were still in Khmer Rouge hands. The region's people value democracy and understand it could improve their lives. Cambodians, Thai and

Myanmar have consistently turned out in very high numbers in every local and national election in which any kind of meaningful choice seemed to exist.

Sanctions

What can the outside world do? The obvious answer is sanctions, designed to target those responsible for repression and human rights violations, rather than Southeast Asian populations at large. Inaction is not a neutral position, but strongly favours existing regimes.

Some in the West believe that sanctions are in general terms counter-productive as they produce a “rally around the flag” effect in favour of a rogue regime. There is no danger of this in Cambodia if the sanctions are targeted at individuals. Cambodians have for decades understood by whom they are being oppressed. Neither is there going to be a rally around the flag in Myanmar for a government which slaughters its people.

“The US and UK announced sanctions on the second anniversary of the coup which they claimed were coordinated.”

Research from Global Witness on Myanmar since the coup shows that the real problem with sanctions is a lack of coordination among the countries which implement them (Global Witness, 2023). As of February 2023, the US, EU, and UK had placed targeted sanctions on 165 distinct targets in response to Myanmar’s coup. The data from Global Witness suggests that the US, the EU and the UK are

each pursuing their own sanctions policy on Myanmar with little or no coordination. The research found that 67% of the 165 individuals and entities sanctioned by the three powers had been targeted unilaterally, while only 13% were sanctioned by all three. The US and UK announced sanctions on the second anniversary of the coup which they claimed

were coordinated. Yet there was virtually no overlap in the targets announced by the two countries. In arms dealing, the US, UK and EU have each targeted different parts of the same network, missing the chance to increase impact by working together, Global Witness found.

Outside of sanctions, Global Witness notes, some effective coordination on Myanmar has been possible. Business advisories published by the US and UK released in early 2022 warned potential investors about doing business with Myanmar's military and its proxies. Companies that continued with business as usual without due diligence ran the risk of breaking money laundering rules and exposing themselves to criminal liability. Such coordinated business advisories, if backed by enforcement against companies which break sanctions, are a tool that should be more widely used. Hun Manet's Cambodia is an obvious candidate. The lack of sanctions currently creates little incentive for the government to carry out a substantial release of Cambodia's political prisoners.

Myanmar is much smaller than Russia, and the amount of sanctions needed to achieve policy changes in the regime is therefore obviously less. The 165 sanctions imposed by February 2023 compared with the 3,100 individuals and entities sanctioned in the shorter time since Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. Cambodia, in turn, is much smaller than Myanmar. Imposing targeted, meaningful sanctions here which target the regime rather than the population is not a task of great scale or complexity. It simply requires political will and a modicum of coordination.

Upstream Repression

A key difference between Myanmar and Thailand on the one hand and Cambodia on the other is that in the two former countries, the military is a well-established institution which will continue regardless of the fortunes of any particular leader. This has meant that the military has been able to allow the popular voice to be expressed in elections while remaining confident that control can be retained, in Thailand, or regained, in Myanmar.

Cambodia's institutions are far weaker. Hun Sen's personal bodyguard unit, which is over 5,000 strong, is more powerful than the army. It would be much harder for the Cambodian power elite to ignore or reverse a genuine election result than in Thailand or Myanmar. Repression, therefore, needs to take place further upstream, before a decisive electoral verdict.

This can make Cambodia appear an even more difficult terrain on which to achieve democratic progress. The paradox is that the Hun family regime is much more fragile than it appears. The regime rests largely on Hun Sen's ability to command personal loyalty, which it is far from clear that his son will be capable of replicating. Hun Manet has no power base or popular following which is independent of that of his father. Senior figures with the ruling party who were loyal to Hun Sen for decades will not take kindly to having to play second fiddle.

Just as the success of authoritarianism in Cambodia has encouraged its spread in Southeast Asia, a democratic breakthrough in Cambodia would be likely to have positive regional implications. The international community must deny legitimacy to Hun Manet until Cambodia has a genuine election, and impose sanctions on those upon whom his regime relies. Such an election would require a thorough reform of the NEC election committee, which remains dominated by the ruling party, despite its supposedly neutral role as an election administrator. The countries of the EU and the democratic world as a whole must do everything to facilitate democratic change in Southeast Asia.

Chapter 12

ASEAN Human Rights - Is There a Case for Cautious Optimism?

By Dr Yeow Poon

Human Rights Institutions in ASEAN and the EU

The ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR), responsible for the promotion and protection of human rights in Southeast Asia, was formed in 2009 (AICHR, 2023). The development of human rights institutions, instruments and capacity in Southeast Asia is therefore relatively recent compared to the EU, which established the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) in 1953 (ECHR, 2021).

All Council of Europe Member States are subjected to the ECHR and the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR), which was fully established in 1998. In contrast, AICHR members are called Representatives, who are nominated by their respective Governments to serve a maximum of two 3-year terms. AICHR reports to the Foreign Ministers of Member States and decisions on policies, strategies and actions are based on consultation and consensus. Hence unlike the ECHR, the AICHR has no judicial instrument to interpret, advise and/or enforce human rights obligations amongst Member States. Instead, AICHR functions through consultation and consensus and all Member States have veto power.

The AICHR has fourteen mandates that are implemented via priority areas in Five-Year Work Plans (AICHR, 2009).

For example, the first Work Plan 2010 – 2015 focused on developing institutional capacity to promote ratification of international human rights instruments by Member States and raise public awareness. The current Work Plan 2021-2025 focuses on the implementation of ASEAN human rights instruments, engaging with stakeholders and providing policy support to Member States.

AICHR mandates include engaging, consulting and enabling other human rights institutions and civil society organisations (CSOs) in ASEAN at regional and national levels. However, the institutions and CSOs will need to apply and be approved to receive a Consultative Relationship with AICHR (AICHR, 2015). Besides being consulted, approved members could take part in information dissemination, training and commissioned studies.

The ASEAN Human Rights Declaration (AHRD) was adopted in 2012, based on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) (AICHR, 2012). There are however significant differences. Both the UDHR and ECHR emphasize the rights of individuals. These individual rights are included in the ASEAN AHRD, however, they are caveated with the responsibility of the individuals for wider society and the realisation of human rights must take into consideration the “different political, economic, legal, social, cultural, historical and religious backgrounds” in the region.

Human Rights Development in ASEAN

The key document setting out ASEAN structures, purposes and principles is the ASEAN Charter (ASEAN, 2008). The principles in the Charter that constrain the mandates of AICHR are:

“Respect for the independence, sovereignty, equality, territorial integrity and national identity of all ASEAN Member States.

Non-interference in the internal affairs of ASEAN member states.

Respect for the right of every Member State to lead its national existence free from external interference, subversion and coercion.” (Ibid).

Unlike the EU, where Member States share a common liberal democratic multi-party political structure, Southeast Asian countries vary hugely from multi-party, one dominant party, single party, strong man rule, military rule and a monarchy. There is also great variation in religious practice and culture. Hence, for ASEAN countries to work together as a body the principles quoted above are necessary.

However, the severe downside is that democratic and human rights development is highly inconsistent across Southeast Asia. Countries like Malaysia, Thailand, Singapore and Indonesia are further up the progress curve, others like Vietnam and Lao PDR are further back and some others like Myanmar and Cambodia are sliding backwards.

To better understand the human rights environments in ASEAN, the human rights trajectories of 3 Member States are studied below:

Case Example 1: Indonesia (from military rule to multi-party)

Case Example 2: Vietnam (one-party state)

Case Example 3: Malaysia (end of one dominant party)

Each case example begins with a description of the political systems since gaining independence, followed by a commentary on the democratic and human rights progress or lack thereof.

Indonesia

Indonesia was colonised by the Netherlands for more than three centuries. The struggle for independence began in 1945, and resisted military by the Dutch, until formal recognition of its sovereignty in 1949. The early path for democracy was positive as Indonesia adopted a parliamentary system. However, there was political instability, rebellions and ideological conflicts, and in 1957 President Sukarno dissolved parliament, gave himself more power and reduced the role of political parties.

In 1965, General Suharto accused the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) of organizing a brutal coup attempt, following the kidnapping and murder of six high-ranking army officers. He used the pretext to purge Indonesians (especially those of ethnic Chinese origin) for affiliation with the party or for harbouring leftist sympathies. Estimates of the number of people killed ranged from 500,000 to 3 million. General Suharto replaced and established a military-dominated regime, the New Order in 1996, which lasted until 1998. Political opposition was suppressed, civil liberties restricted and the media censored. The adoption of pro-market policies led to rapid economic growth, but also to corruption, nepotism and inequality.

However, over time, as Suharto enriched his family and cronies, he lost support from key allies, such as the military and Islamic groups. The ASEAN financial crisis was a major pivot point. Indonesia was badly affected as the rupiah lost 80% of its value against the dollar, the banks collapsed and GDP growth dropped from 4.7% in 1997 to minus 13.1% in 1998 (Investopedia, 2022). Suharto failed to address the contagion in Indonesia and there was widespread protests, riots and looting, as well as demands for democratic reforms.

Suharto resigned in 1998 under pressure from the Reformasi movement. The new government introduced several democratic reforms. Power was decentralised from the centre to the regions. The military, judiciary and bureaucracy were reformed. Human and minority rights were recognised and new political parties, civil society organisations and social movements emerged. The media was unshackled and fair elections at various levels were held.

Currently, Indonesia is a republic with a president elected by direct popular vote for a five-year term. Indonesia's parliament is called the People's Consultative Assembly (MPR), which consists of two chambers: the People's Representative Council (DPR) and the Regional Representative Council (DPD). The DPR has 575 members who are elected by proportional representation from multi-member constituencies. The judiciary is independent of the executive and legislative branches, consisting of the Supreme Court, the Constitutional Court and the Judicial Commission.

However, there were still many challenges and setbacks. There were separatist movements in Aceh and Papua, ethnic and religious conflicts in Maluku and Kalimantan, terrorism, natural disasters and economic crises. The risk of religious extremism and violence remains. Corruption, nepotism and oligarchy persist in some areas and past human rights violations and transitional justice have not been addressed.

In 2022, Indonesia revised its new Criminal Code and concerns were raised that the Code could be abused to restrict civil rights such as the right to freedom of religion, freedom of speech, privacy and sexual orientation. Nevertheless, Indonesia is an important example of how the trajectory for democracy and human rights can change for the better in an ASEAN Member State.

Vietnam

When Japan withdrew in 1945 at the end of the Second World War, Ho Chi Minh announced Vietnam's independence. However, France was not ready to give up its colony and the ensuing war for independence lasted until 1954 when the French lost the battle of Dien Bien Phu. Peace talks were held in Geneva, and Vietnam was split into North and South. In 1956, South Vietnamese President Ngo Dinh Diem moved against political dissidents, followed by a Communist insurgency supported by the North in 1957. The United States (US) increased aid to South Vietnam in 1960 and backed a military coup in 1963, which killed President Diem. The US entered the civil war using the Gulf of Tonkin incident as a pretext in 1965. A ceasefire was agreed in 1973 for the withdrawal of US troops. North Vietnam invaded the South in 1975, unified the country and proclaimed the Socialist Republic of Vietnam in 1976.

From 1976, before Doi Moi, Vietnam had a socialist system with strict state control over production, trade and consumption. The country was economically isolated. There was no private sector, collective farming was enforced and poverty was widespread. In 1986, Vietnam initiated Doi Moi, consisting of political and economic reforms to transform from a centrally planned economy to a "socialist-oriented market economy." The changes included decentralization of economic decision-making, privatization of state-owned enterprises, reduction of subsidies, liberalization of trade policies and encouraging foreign investment.

Economic reforms were followed by public administration reform (PAR) in 1995, as the transition from a command to a market-based economy required a change in administrative mindsets. PAR introduced administrative decentralisation, public finance management and budgeting, reduction of bureaucratic procedures, improved public management systems and more effective public services.

Vietnam is a one-party state with an elected National Assembly dominated by the Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV). The CPV controls all political

and social organisations in the country and does not tolerate threats against its rule. People who challenged the government or party faced police intimidation, physical assault, arbitrary arrest and imprisonment. There are therefore restrictions on freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly.

Yet, there has been progress in human rights development compared to the period before Doi Moi, although with limitations. For example, freedom of association is a constitutional right. There are active civil society organisations in Vietnam but the Law on Associations (2017) imposes restrictions, such as requiring government approval for establishment and foreign funding or technical support. Associations are also prohibited for political or religious purposes and from opposing the government or the CPV.

One major reform that had implications on human rights at local levels is the Grassroots Democracy Decree promulgated in 1998 to promote direct citizen participation in local governance. The Decree is based on an overarching principle of “people know, people discuss, people decide and people supervise”. Local governments have to be more transparent, such as posting budgets, consulting on land use and economic development plans, holding votes on local projects and electing village chiefs. It also allows citizens to file complaints and petitions against local authorities. In 2003, the Decree was revised to emphasize:

“Works to be informed to the people. Works to be discussed and directly decided by the people. Works to be discussed by the people and decided by the commune administration. Works to be supervised and inspected by the people.”

Implementation however has been mixed, depending on the capacity, commitment and integrity of local leaders and civil servants. The human rights trajectory in Vietnam is a case example of potential opportunities in working with the State to further democratic and human rights at a local level by better implementation of Grassroots Democracy. But, at the same time recognising the strict boundaries and severe consequences that prevent further human rights progress. Dissent against the State is heavily suppressed and activists are jailed on alleged frivolous charges.

Malaysia

Unlike Indonesia and Vietnam, Malaysia gained its independence in 1957 from the British Empire without an armed struggle. In 1963, Malaya included Sabah and Sarawak to form the Malaysian Federation. However, Singapore left the federation in 1965 due to political and racial disagreements. The early years were marked by two conflicts. The Emergency, a guerrilla war with the Malayan Communist Party, which started in 1948 and lasted until 1960. During this period, ethnic Chinese were caught in the crossfire and many were reallocated into about 500 new villages with security systems to isolate them from the rebels. The second conflict was with Indonesia from 1963 to 1966, when it opposed the inclusion of Sabah and Sarawak into Malaysia.

Malaysia is a federal constitutional monarchy with nine hereditary rulers who elect a king every five years. The king is the head of state, while the prime minister is the head of government. The political structure is a parliamentary system consisting of parties representing different ethnic groups. The dominant party is the Barisan Nasional (BN), a coalition of political parties that ruled Malaysia for more than six decades from independence to 2018. Malaysia has experienced economic growth under various development plans and policies, but not without human rights concerns and other problems.

BN has been known to offer election bribes, such as offering cash, gifts, projects, or positions to voters and candidates. The ruling regime regularly jailed opposition leaders if they were successful in making

inroads after an election. A prime example is Anwar Ibrahim, the current Prime Minister, who was jailed twice for alleged sodomy for politically motivated reasons in 1998 and 2015. Dissent is suppressed through a plethora of laws and the Security Offences (Special Measures) Act allows for detention without trial for up to two years. The police and security forces have been implicated in arbitrary arrests, custodial deaths and extrajudicial killings.

In 1969 when the ruling regime lost its two-thirds majority to Chinese-dominated opposition parties, there was a race riot, causing possibly over 600 deaths, a state of emergency and the suspension of parliament. This led to the New Economic Policy, which aimed to address the grievances of the indigenous Malays, who were mostly rural and poorer than the urbanised Chinese. Positive discrimination policies were introduced, resulting in an undercurrent of resentment from other ethnic groups.

The legitimacy of BN began to decline from the 2008 global financial crisis. There were protests from civil society and human rights activists over electoral reforms, media freedom and judicial independence. The 1MDB corruption scandal involving billions of dollars siphoned off from a sovereign wealth fund by the serving prime minister led to the defeat of BN in the 2018 general election after six decades in power.

Malaysia is an example of how a long-standing political party became corrupt, and despite its control of the media and suppression of opposition, eventually lost legitimacy and power. An interesting question is whether the reformed-minded new government will repeal some of the draconian laws used by the previous government to repress dissent. Will Malaysia be able to make further progress up the human rights trajectory?

A Critique of Human Rights in ASEAN

ASEAN was created in 1967 primarily for economic development and security cooperation among its members. Human rights were not a concern until 1991-1993 when ASEAN acknowledged that human rights are universal but the promotion and protection of human rights must not be politicised and must respect national sovereignty and non-interference in the internal affairs of Member States. Human rights dialogue was mostly absent from 1994 until 2004 in the Vientiane Action Plan (VAP), which committed ASEAN to promote the awareness, education and protection of human rights as one of the strategies for security and political development (ASEAN, 2004).

The ASEAN Charter established in 2007 contained provisions for the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms, but caveated by the principles of neutrality and non-interference. The Charter was followed by extensive debates on what human rights institutions and instruments to implement. Indonesia, Thailand and the Philippines wanted to have a body that could protect human rights in the region, whereas Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam did not want an independent body and favoured an intergovernmental form (ASEAN, 2015).

AICHR was eventually established in 2009 and given the tasks of standard setting and providing policy support for Member States, ASEAN sectoral bodies and civil society through capacity building, dialogue and research, as well as developing human rights strategies cooperation and obtaining information on human rights measures from Member States. However, without a mandate for the protection of human rights, AICHR is judged ineffective by national, regional and international human rights groups. The majority of the AICHR Representatives, being appointed by governments, act as instructed by their governments. Only three states - Indonesia, Thailand and Malaysia - have open selection processes.

While accepting that the principle of non-interference was the only way the diverse nature of Southeast Asian countries could cooperate, it also meant that the more democratic Member States had no leverage over other States when they carried out excessive internal repression. Recent examples include the Rohingya genocide, the military coup in Myanmar and the destruction of the opposition and the consolidation of despotic power in Cambodia¹.

Non-interference also has negative impacts in areas where there has to be agreement for actions, such as the rights of women, children and migrant workers. As some representatives in the planning and implementing bodies do not have delegated powers for decision-making, progress towards approval for actions is often painfully slow. Also, consensus building to meet the demands for respecting sovereignty often led to the watering down of proposals.

Strengthening Human Rights Development in ASEAN

Given the constraints placed on human rights protection in ASEAN, can any positive outcomes be going forward or will ASEAN continue to be stuck with the status quo?

National and Regional

In a paper analysing the progress and challenges of human rights in ASEAN, Yuyun Wahyuningrum² observed the following:

‘There is a shift in ASEAN’s engagement with human rights from non-discussion to gradually embracing human rights values ... The inclusion of human rights in the ASEAN Charter introduces the language of human rights into the regionalism project in ASEAN, which was not anticipated back in 1967. Since 2007, the term “human rights” was mentioned in various official document of this grouping discussing a wide range of

¹ See chapter on “Dictatorship succession in Cambodia highlights Southeast Asia’s human rights crisis”

² Yuyun Wahyuningrum was a civil society advocate for human rights and is currently Indonesia AICHR Representative.

issues, such as social welfare, trafficking in persons, prevention and countering violent extremism, social security, the environment, and migrant workers.’ (Wahyuningrum, 2021)

Wahyuningrum also noted that most activities from 2009-2019 were Article 4.1 to “develop strategies for the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms to complement the building of the ASEAN Community” and Article 4.3 “to enhance public awareness of human rights among the peoples of ASEAN through education, research and dissemination of information”. The least implemented mandates were Article 4.10 “to obtain information from the ASEAN Member States on the promotion and protection of human rights” and Article 4.7 “to provide advisory services and technical assistance on human rights matters to ASEAN sectoral bodies upon request”. (Ibid)

The sentiment that there is forward momentum and a will to effect change by rights advocates is echoed by others. Rights theorists have argued that rights talk cannot be put in a box. “While the formal rights instruments in the region might be deemed below world standard, the broader discursive and international political frame in which they exist connects those who speak and act ... Creating rights institutions and authorizing the use of rights language legitimises norms that protect dissent and political contestation, in turn aiding the kinds of contestatory rights politics that press for the realization of these norms in regional and domestic political life” (Langlois, 2021).

Although AICHR has been criticised as toothless given the constraint of non-interference, it has perhaps wisely taken a non-confrontational approach and adopted a strategy of mainstreaming human rights concerns through ASEAN Sectoral Bodies⁷. For instance, a project to strengthen the protection of trafficked women and children was worked through Ministries responsible for social services in Member States. Regional challenges such as climate change, environmental degradation, food security, pandemics and sustainable development goals provide opportunities to thread in human rights protection concerns through

cooperation between the responsible Ministries when developing their various programmes and activities.

As human rights are now a formal part of ASEAN's repertoire of engagement with each other, space has been opened for CSOs in ASEAN Member States, and other international bodies, to demand that AICHR goes beyond promotion to protection outcomes. Without a doubt, however, some Member States would closely control and suppress further development.

However, from the 3 case studies outlined above, one critical point can be made. The socio-economic and political conditions in a country can and do change, even if they take a long time. The Suharto regime in Indonesia eventually lost legitimacy, and so did Ferdinand Marcos in the Philippines and the UMNO party who controlled Malaysia for more than 60 years. There is no certainty that the Cambodian People's Party will continue its dominance, nor how long the current junta in Myanmar can last.

Even Vietnam, with an autocratic one-party system, has to be concerned with its legitimacy to govern. Although almost all corruption cases involving officers and party members are dealt with internally, the scale of abuse over repatriation flights during the Covid pandemic was so large that it could not be hidden. 54 officials in the ministries of foreign affairs, health and public security were jailed, including senior diplomats and a former deputy minister (Shad, 2023). The scandal led to the removal of a deputy Prime Minister in charge of foreign affairs from the Politburo and the resignation of the President in January 2023. There is also a wider crackdown on corruption with hundreds of officials investigated and forced to step down including two deputy prime ministers.

“The EU could also be more engaged in supporting projects concerning climate change and sustainable development goals, which implicitly include human rights protection issues.”

regimes dig themselves further in (North Korea) or find ways to sustain themselves (Iran). The second type of sanctions targets carefully chosen individuals, usually the political leaders and senior officials of repressive regimes.

International

What can international bodies like the EU do to support human rights progress in ASEAN? There are two possible instruments to consider.

The first instrument is to sanction, which can be applied in two ways. The first type of sanctions generally targets the economy of a country. There is a negative impact on the general population as economic growth stagnates. Except for South Africa, economic sanctions do not appear to work, as targeted

However, targeted sanctions by the EU and other Western countries may not produce the desired results if the targeted entities have little or no stakes in Western connections for status, wealth and power. They cannot lose what they never had in the first place. Yet, earlier military juntas in Myanmar did want international regional legitimacy and were willing to take steps towards reforms and democratic elections. Whatever the results may be, sanctions remain a tool that the EU can use in highly targeted ways.

The second instrument is a collaboration with AICHR and civil society organisations to push the envelope of what is possible within the ASEAN boundaries of non-interference and respect for sovereignty. The EU could be more involved with joint projects to enrich the human rights eco-system in Southeast Asia by supporting dialogue and promotional

activities, knowledge dissemination, experience exchange, institutional development, capacity building and research.

The EU could also be more engaged in supporting projects concerning climate change and sustainable development goals, which implicitly include human rights protection issues. Given that AICHR has adopted a strategic mainstreaming approach for introducing human rights measures in sector development programmes, there should be ample opportunity for fruitful collaboration with the EU. The aim is not to challenge the legitimacy of a regime but to demonstrate how addressing human rights concerns enhances the success and effectiveness of sector development programmes.

Conclusion

When ASEAN was created in 1967, human rights were not part of its purpose. It took until the 1990s for human rights to enter the ASEAN discourse. AICHR was then established in 2009 and the AHRD was adopted in 2012. Both the AICHR as an implementing institution and the AHRD which sets out the ASEAN framework for human rights are constrained by the ASEAN principles of respecting sovereignty and non-interference in the Member States. Hence ASEAN as a whole, and individual Member States, have no means to intervene when repressive Member States abuse human rights, other than dialogue and making placating statements.

AICHR activities therefore mostly focused on promotion, capacity building and providing support when requested. It has been criticised for little or no attempts at developing protection rights. AICHR however has used what space it has to apply a strategy of mainstreaming human rights concerns, by working with ASEAN Sectoral Bodies, in the sectoral development programmes of Member States. Also, once the language of human rights became part of the ASEAN formal discourse, it generated momentum for civil society and the general public to want and demand for further changes. Perhaps of significance is the ASEAN Leader's

Declaration on the ASEAN Human Rights Dialogue on 5th September 2023. where the words 'protect' and 'protection' occurred frequently in the text (ASEAN, 2023).

As the human rights trajectories of ASEAN Member States are not homogenous, ranging from progressive to middling to none at all, the EU needs to adopt a multi-faceted approach. For countries like Cambodia and Myanmar, given the current political repression, targeted sanctions are needed. For ASEAN as a whole, the EU should develop collaborative initiatives working with AICHR, or individual Member States, and implement their sectoral development programmes, such as support for building climate resilience, pandemic responses and sustainable development growth targets.

In the long term, the strengthening of human rights voices and ecosystems would help more open ASEAN member states to further improve their human rights progress. They in turn may provide examples that could influence authoritarian regimes to respond more positively to human rights aspirations from their citizens. A stronger human rights eco-system across Southeast Asia would better enable positive change to happen when a repressive regime loses legitimacy.

Is there a case for cautious optimism for ASEAN as a whole? A critical uncertainty would be whether more democratic countries, like Malaysia and Indonesia, will continue to improve their human rights trajectories by undertaking the necessary reforms to repeal suppressive security laws, transform security institutions and strengthen protection rights.

Chapter 13

EU Youth Programmes: Visions and Spaces for a Truly Global Youth Exchange?

By Lauren Mason

Introduction

Young people and their concerns seem to be back on the agenda in the European Union (EU) since European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen designated 2022 as the European Year of Youth. The much-hyped Conference on the Future of Europe included youth-specific consultations and a working group on education, culture and youth. The 2021-2027 Multiannual Financial Framework saw an almost doubling of the funds for the Union's flagship Erasmus+ programme, with an increase from EUR 14.7 billion to EUR 26.2 billion.¹

What kind of mindset do these initiatives seek to shape: a cohort of internationally-minded globalists, or rather a generation of inward-looking Eurocentrics? Do EU youth programmes create visions and spaces for truly global youth exchange and pave the way for interactions with ASEAN counterparts? If not, how can we strengthen them for the next generations?

1 European Commission (2023), 'Erasmus to Erasmus+: history, funding and future' <https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/about-erasmus/history-funding-and-future>. Accessed 7 August 2023.

The Origins of EU Youth Policy: From Participation to Exchange

Youth policy in the European Union has a clear legacy in the 1968 student demonstrations that swept much of Western Europe's university landscape.² What was initially a demand for proper university provisions, quickly grew into a demand to be taken seriously as members of society. Students and young people demanded to be heard and demanded formalised structures to make that a reality. If workers could join trade unions to have their views represented, why shouldn't students and young people be able to do the same?

After several conferences, consultations, and some stagnation, the Commission of the European Communities produced a seminal White Paper on Youth in 2001.³ The White Paper marked a key moment where member states agreed upon a framework of cooperation on youth, although it was not until 2010 that a proper 'EU Youth Strategy' was developed.⁴ Importantly, the White Paper laid the foundations for the establishment of a fixed structure for dialogue with young people and resulted eventually in the launch of the Structured Dialogue in 2010. The Structured Dialogue on Youth was the first EU attempt to organise an institutionalised listening exercise with young people in a meaningful and participatory way. The dialogue relies heavily on the direction and drive of the member states, especially the trio presidencies, and thus on their priorities. It continues today, having undergone a revitalisation in 2018, under the name of the EU-Youth Dialogue.

Beyond participation, a strong focus was placed on exchange as a key ideological tenet of the EU's youth policies. Naturally, the first instantiation of this referred to an exchange between young people residing within the member states of the European Union. In 2000-2006, the European Commission ran the first Youth Community Action funding programme,

2 H. Williamson (2007), 'A complex but increasingly coherent journey? The emergence of "Youth Policy" in Europe,' *Youth & Policy*, 95, 57–72.

3 European Commission White Paper COM(2001)681 of 21 November 2001 on 'A New Impetus for European Youth'.

4 F. Hofmann-van de Poll and H. Williamson (2021), *European Youth Strategies: A reflection and analysis*. (Brussels: European Union-Council of Europe Youth Partnership).

“A game changer as regards links to non-EU countries in the higher education sector was the launch of Erasmus Mundus Joint Masters Degrees in 2004.”

world countries, including Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Philippines and Thailand.⁷

with headings for activities and exchanges run by youth NGOs and youth associations.⁵ It targeted primarily the EU Member States but allowed participation of EFTA/EEA countries, the Central and Eastern European countries, and Cyprus, Malta and Turkey.⁶ From 2007-2013, this grew into the Youth in Action programme, which beyond the Member States, was opened up to 27 neighbouring and partner countries and 105 other

As early as 1994, the European Communities had established a host of school and university exchange programmes under the Socrates programmes. In 2007, this was succeeded by the Lifelong Learning Programme (LLP), which included Comenius (for schools), Erasmus (for higher education), Leonardo da Vinci (for vocational education and training), as well as Grundtvig (for adult education).⁸ This was open to EU member states as well as the EFTA countries.

A game changer as regards links to non-EU countries in the higher education sector was the launch of Erasmus Mundus Joint Masters Degrees in 2004. This still rather little-known strand of the Erasmus programme promotes interconnected master's courses with a compulsory mobility element and a healthy scholarship pool for non-

⁵ European Commission (2014), 'Community action programme for youth, 2000-2006': <https://cordis.europa.eu/programme/id/ET-YOUTH-C> Accessed 6 August 2023.

⁶ Decision No. 1031/2000/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 April 2000 establishing the 'Youth' Community action programme.

⁷ European Commission (2008), 'Youth in Action programme Guide' https://ec.europa.eu/assets/eac/youth/tools/documents/programme-guide-2008_en.pdf Accessed 6 August 2023

⁸ Decision No 1720/2006/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 November 2006 establishing an action programme in the field of lifelong learning 2007-2013

EU students. There are currently 193 EMJMD running in 2023.⁹ As well as encouraging students from non-EU countries to study in the EU, it also opens doors for non-EU universities to join a Consortium, thereby offering students one or two semesters of study outside Europe.

These programmes have become stronger and more widely publicised over the years, as the European Union has come to recognise the importance of exchange for instilling a common (European) identity in the young generations. Nevertheless, they have remained rather inward-looking, targeting mostly EU member states and their immediate neighbours.

Scope and Vision of Current EU Youth Strategy and programmes (2019-2027)

What of the current programmes - is there evidence of a change in scope, or a vision to be more connected to global regions? Interestingly, the European Commission describes the development of the Erasmus programme as becoming more and more international, citing in 2019 that 'increasingly, it is also looking beyond Europe.'¹⁰ Could this be a reflection of Ursula von der Leyen's wish to have a more geopolitical commission?¹¹

9 European Education and Culture Executive Agency (2023), 'Erasmus Mundus Catalogue' https://www.eacea.ec.europa.eu/scholarships/erasmus-mundus-catalogue_en Accessed 14 August 2023.

10 European Commission (2023), 'Erasmus to Erasmus+: history, funding and future.' <https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/about-erasmus/history-funding-and-future>. Accessed 7 August 2023

11 "This is the geopolitical Commission that I have in mind, and that Europe urgently needs". U. von der Leyen (2019), 'Ursula von der Leyen President-elect of the European Commission: Speech in the European Parliament Plenary Session', delivered on 27 November 2019 in Strasbourg. Available online: https://commission.europa.eu/system/files/2019-11/president-elect-speech-original_1.pdf. Accessed 7 August 2023

The EU's programmes on youth are underpinned by the EU Youth Strategy, which deserves some exploration. The current EU Youth Strategy runs from 2019 to 2027 and centres around 3 pillars: Connect, Empower and Create.¹² Hoffmann-van de Pol and Williamson summarise it as follows:

- To engage, by fostering young people's participation in civic and democratic life
- To connect, by connecting young people across the European Union and beyond, to foster voluntary engagement, learning mobility, solidarity, and intercultural understanding.
- To empower, by supporting youth empowerment through quality, innovation, and recognition of youth work.¹³

In general, the EU Youth Strategy is rather inward-looking. References to global topics or third countries are limited to the single assertion that 'special attention' will be paid to 'straddling levels from global to local, [since] young people are committed to addressing global challenges, in particular the sustainable development goals'.¹⁴ Since EU actions fostering the political engagement of young people largely target EU citizens, here we are most interested in the second pillar of the strategy, namely programmes which address the second objective 'to connect young people across the European Union and beyond.'

Amongst the European Union's arsenal of programmes and instruments, the two most relevant are Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps. The RAY network's research indicates that Erasmus+ is a highly influential programme, with more than 75% of Erasmus+ project partners confirming that it successfully contributes to 'fostering youth participation in democratic life'.¹⁵ Of course, this primarily applies to

¹² Communication from the European Commission COM/2018/269 final of 22 May 2018 on 'Engaging, Connecting and Empowering young people: a new EU Youth Strategy 2019–2027'

¹³ F. Hoffmann-van de Pol and H. Williamson (2021), European Youth Strategies: A reflection and analysis. (Brussels: European Union–Council of Europe Youth Partnership).

¹⁴ Communication from the European Commission COM/2018/269 final of 22 May 2018 on 'Engaging, Connecting and Empowering young people: a new EU Youth Strategy 2019–2027'

¹⁵ Research-based Analysis and Monitoring of EU Youth programmes (RAY) Network (March 2020),

European ‘democratic life,’ which is central to what EU programmes more broadly aim to achieve. *Is there scope for a more internationalist outlook in the EU’s youth offer?*

At first glance – yes. All ten ASEAN countries are currently included in the Erasmus+ Asia Region, meaning that they can participate in certain parts of the programme, including International Credit Mobility; Erasmus Mundus Joint Masters Degrees (EMJMD); Capacity building in the field of Youth; and Capacity Building in Higher Education.¹⁶ Between 2015 and 2020, 18,998 students and staff came from Asia to Europe, whilst 11 645 students and staff went from Europe to Asia with the Erasmus+ programme.¹⁷ These numbers far outstrip the volume of mobility with Latin America and the Caribbean, Central Asia or Africa.

Erasmus Mundus has also been picked up well in Asia but lags behind the Latin America and Caribbean region in terms of participation. Between 2015 and 2020, universities from Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand fully hosted Joint Master’s Degrees, and a further 242 universities were involved as associate partners. In comparison, 331 Latin American universities were partners.¹⁸ From the students’ perspective, over 800 students from ASEAN countries received an Erasmus Mundus scholarship.¹⁹ This is less than the number of scholarships going to students from Brazil and Mexico alone (1707).²⁰ Thus, whilst Erasmus Mundus Joint Masters Degrees have the potential to be a key link between the EU and ASEAN, they are currently underexploited.

‘Erasmus+ Youth in Action: the programme’s objectives.’ Available online: <https://www.researchyouth.net/factsheets/programme-objectives/> Accessed 7 August 2023

16 European Commission (2021), ‘Factsheet: EU-Asia academic cooperation through Erasmus+’. Available online: <https://ec.europa.eu/assets/eac/erasmus-plus/factsheets/regional/asia-reg-erasmusplus-2020.pdf>. Accessed 15 August 2023.

17 Ibid. Note that this includes China and India, which together make up 37% of all participants.

18 European Commission (2023), ‘Factsheet: EU-LAC cooperation through Erasmus+: Opportunities for Latin America and the Caribbean’. Available online: https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2023-07/factsheet-erasmusplus-celac-2023_en.pdf. Accessed 15 August 2023.

19 European Commission (2021), ‘Factsheet: EU-Asia academic cooperation through Erasmus+’

20 European Commission (2023), ‘Factsheet: EU-LAC cooperation through Erasmus+’

Beyond higher education, the Erasmus+ programme has also offered opportunities for youth exchange and youth capacity building. Over 500 youth organisations in Asia were partners in youth empowerment, youth exchange, training or non-formal education projects in the last Erasmus+ programming period.²¹

“Whilst the programme is open for sending young EU citizens to Asia, the majority of opportunities outside the EU are in Africa (with not a single placement in ASEAN at the time of writing).”

Last but not least, in 2021, the European Commission incorporated the EU Aid Volunteers into the European Solidarity Corps programme (formerly the European Voluntary Service). This opened up opportunities for young Europeans to undertake voluntary assignments in non-EU countries, including disaster relief, humanitarian assistance and health and sanitation-related projects. Not everyone was pleased about this merger, which used EU funds to send young Europeans out of the EU, thereby undercutting some of the aims of

the programme, namely to create a sense of solidarity within EU member states.²² Whilst the programme is open for sending young EU citizens to Asia, the majority of opportunities outside the EU are in Africa (with not a single placement in ASEAN at the time of writing), and the one-directional nature of the programme leaves little space for exchange.²³

21 European Commission (2021), ‘Factsheet: EU-Asia academic cooperation through Erasmus+’

22 S. Akarçesme, H. Fennes (2019), Exploring the implementation of the European Solidarity Corps during its first year. (Vienna: Agentur für Bildung und Internationalisierung - SALTO European Solidarity Corps). Accessible online: <https://www.salto-youth.net/rc/solidarity/training-support-community/resources/> Accessed 14 August 2023.

23 European Union (2023), ‘European Youth Portal: EU funded volunteering opportunities’ https://youth.europa.eu/go-abroad/volunteering/opportunities_en Accessed 14 August 2023

The key to high take-up in all such programmes is good information sharing. It ought to be noted that the programme guides for Erasmus+ are lengthy and quite complicated documents, which do not make it very easy for universities, training institutes, or indeed youth groups from non-EU to understand which parts of the programme they are eligible to participate in.

The European Commission has attempted to assuage such difficulties by creating national focal points around the world.²⁴ In Asia, these focal points are present in 6 of the ASEAN countries, namely Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam. However, there is no Erasmus+ contact point in Brunei, Myanmar, Malaysia or Singapore.²⁵ A happy side-effect of the EMJMD has been the creation of a lively Erasmus Mundus Alumni Association, supported by the European Commission, which counts young (and slightly less young) members from several ASEAN countries, as well as specific country representatives in Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam.²⁶ Nevertheless, reliance on informal and personal connections is often essential for young people on both sides to access information about which opportunities await them.

Beyond the programmatic sphere, one EU initiative worth noting is the Youth Sounding Board run by the Directorate General for International Partnerships (DG INTPA). This mechanism, established in 2021 does not carry the weight of an EU programme in terms of funding or structure but is an interesting tool for enhancing the participation of young people from non-EU countries in the EU's work on external partnerships. Two of the 25-strong in the current sounding board (2021-2023) are from the ASEAN countries, Indonesia and the Philippines.²⁷ They advise the

24 European Commission (2022), 'Erasmus+ programme Guide, Version 2': 22. Available online: <https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/document/erasmus-programme-guide-2022-version-1>. Accessed 15 August 2023.

25 Ibid

26 Erasmus Mundus Association (2022), 'Country Representatives' <https://www.em-a.eu/country-representatives> Accessed 7 August 2023.

27 European Commission (2021), 'International Partnerships: Youth Sounding Board 2021-2023'. https://international-partnerships.ec.europa.eu/policies/youth/youth-sounding-board/youth-sounding-board-2021-2023_en. Accessed 15 August 2023.

Commissioner and the Directorate-General for International Partnerships (DG INTPA) to make EU action more participatory, relevant and effective for young people in EU partner countries.

In sum, there seem to be mixed messages in the current youth strategy, policies and programmes when it comes to the relevance of contacts with young people in ASEAN, or indeed in third countries more broadly. Whilst references to young people beyond the EU and its neighbourhood are lacking in the strategic and political framing of the EU's youth agenda, impulses coming from other fields of the EU's agenda (humanitarian aid, education and innovation) are slowly pushing third countries into the programmatic vision of the EU's offering to young people.

2022 - The European Year of Youth: Balancing internal and external objectives

Against the backdrop of these ongoing programmes, the European Commission improved its game in the youth field by playing the ace – designating 2022 as the European Year of Youth (EYY). In her State of the Union Speech in September 2021, President von der Leyen hailed the year, calling upon the EU to recognise the sacrifices made by young people during the COVID-19 pandemic and to acknowledge the contribution of young people to building a better future.²⁸ It followed the mantra 'If we are to shape our Union in their mould, young people must be able to shape Europe's future.'²⁹

Expectations for the European Year of Youth were high, especially as it coincided with the Conference on the Future of Europe, the European Union's first attempt at wide-scale exercise in participatory democracy. European Liberal Youth (LYMEC) was one of several youth organisations

²⁸ U. von der Leyen (2021), Speech 'State of the Union Address 2021' delivered on 14 September 2022 in Strasbourg. Available online https://state-of-the-union.ec.europa.eu/state-union-2021_en. Accessed 15 August 2023.

²⁹ Decision (EU) 2021/2316 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 22 December 2021 on a European Year of Youth (2022)

to call for proper follow-up on the Conference on the Future of Europe outcomes report for young people, particularly in the areas of mental health, banning unpaid internships, mutual recognition of academic degrees, civic education, quality information about climate change, and an EU 'Youth Test' to ensure all legislation and policy is subject to a youth-focused impact assessment.³⁰ Young people's eyes were on the EU and expecting action.

The legislative decision on the European Year of Youth included commitments to young people's well-being and mental health after the COVID-19 pandemic, the active participation of young people in democratic processes, quality youth employment opportunities, and importantly, 'strengthening youth participation in the Union's external action across all policies.'³¹ The decision references learning from youth participation mechanisms such as the Youth Sounding Board, as well as highlighting the role of young people as agents of change towards the UN 2030 Agenda, in the EU and in 'Union partnering countries as well as [...] our planet as a whole.'³² Thus from the outset, the European Year of Youth included an ambition to improve youth participation not just within the EU, but also in the EU's external activities.

Alongside an extra EUR 8 million dedicated to the implementation of the Year, and to a European Year of Youth top-up for the Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps programmes, several additional initiatives were hosted by the European Commission's DG for Education and Culture (DG EAC).³³ These included a dedicated website (youth.europa.eu/year-of-youth), a Voices of Young Europeans platform gathering young people's ideas, Youth Labs, high-level policy dialogues held with each

30 European Liberal Youth (16 May 2022), 'LYMEC Welcomes the Outcomes on the CoFoE.' https://www.lymec.eu/lymec_welcomes_the_outcomes_on_the_cofoe Accessed 15 August 2023

31 Decision (EU) 2021/2316 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 22 December 2021 on a European Year of Youth (2022)

32 Ibid

33 T. Laainen (2022), 'At a Glance: Legacy of the 2022 European Year of Youth' (Brussels: European Parliamentary Research Service). Available online: https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/ATAG/2022/739224/EPRS-AaG-739224-Legacy-European-Year-Youth-FIN_AL.pdf Accessed 15 August 2023.

of the European Commissioners, a large skills training event in the European Parliament in cooperation with the European Youth Forum, as well as thousands of activities organised at national level. This was complemented by the launch of the ALMA initiative (Aim, Learn, Master, Achieve) under the European Social Fund, a cross-border youth mobility scheme for young people not in employment, education or training.³⁴

Nevertheless, one of the key initiatives of the EYY came not from the DG for Education and Culture (EAC), but from the DG for International Partnerships (INTPA). This 'Youth Action Plan in EU external action 2022-2027' directly addresses the role of youth in the EU's global partnerships as we shall in more detail below. In any case, the European Commission has committed to publish a report evaluating the European Year of Youth and all of its activities by the end of 2023. This will be a space to see what is taken forward as a legacy of the Year and whether the Youth Action Plan in external affairs will be recognised by the institutions as a success story.

The Youth Action Plan 2022-2027: A Game-Changer for the EU's International Outlook

Published in October 2022, the 'Youth Action Plan: Promoting Meaningful Youth Participation and Empowerment in EU External Action for Sustainable Development, Equality and Peace' is the first attempt to mainstream youth participation in parts of the EU's external action, and has the potential to be gamechanger with regards to the promotion of exchange and participation of young people from outside Europe. Housed within the EU's Global Gateway Strategy, the action plans centres around the same three pillars of the EU Youth Strategy: engage, empower, connect.³⁵

³⁴ U. von der Leyen (2021), Speech 'State of the Union Address 2021' delivered on 14 September 2022 in Strasbourg.

³⁵ Joint Communication from the Commission JOIN(2022) 53 final of 4 October 2022 on 'Youth Action Plan (YAP) in EU external action 2022 – 2027: Promoting meaningful youth participation and empowerment in EU external action for sustainable development, equality and peace.'

Via the *engage* pillar, this strategy marks an important consolidation of the EU's interaction with youth initiatives at the regional and multinational levels. The EU-ASEAN Young Leaders Forum features explicitly in the communication, alongside similar initiatives such as the Young Mediterranean Voices and the EU4Youth in the Eastern Partnership countries. The EU-ASEAN Young Leaders Forum has also inspired the establishment of a similar structure with the African Union, in the form of the AU-EU Youth Lab.

Moreover, under the *connect* pillar, the strategy commits to 'promote youth mobility, exchanges and networking as an essential aspect of the people-to-people dimension of the Global Gateway strategy.'³⁶ It announces a very promising host of new youth mobility schemes, including the EU-ASEAN SHARE programme, promoting harmonisation of higher education and scholarships. It also commits to setting up Talent Partnerships and an EU Youth Mobility Scheme, as important pathways for legal migration of talented young people from Asia and Africa. This has a huge potential for increasing exchange between young people from ASEAN and the EU, building on the foundations laid by the Erasmus+ mobility schemes and the Joint Masters Degrees. Indeed, the strategy promises to establish a Global Erasmus+ Alumni Mentoring Scheme, which may fill in some of the gaps created by the lack of Erasmus+ contact points in some ASEAN countries.

How has the Youth Action Plan been received by young people and youth stakeholders? Despite some concerns about the participatory process of drafting the action plan, liberal youth organisations welcomed the step, with LYMEC hailing it as a space to 'ensure young people are empowered at the political, social and economic levels by EU external action.'³⁷ LYMEC also insists on 'the need for concrete actions to be taken from this Action Plan. Decisions taken must be more than just

³⁶ Ibid

³⁷ ALDE Party (4 October 2022), 'LYMEC welcomes European Commission Youth Action Plan' https://www.aldeparty.eu/lymec_welcomes_european_commission_youth_action_plan Accessed 15 August 2023

words.³⁸ Similarly, civil society actors such as Plan International are cautiously optimistic, noting that there is a high risk of tokenism in such mechanisms.³⁹ The European Year of Youth policy dialogue hosted by Jutta Urpilainen, held in November 2022, just after the announcement of the strategy, addressed the topic 'building partnerships as the way forward in geopolitically challenging times.' The participants reflected that the Strategy needed to be guided by the Sustainable Development Goals, and urged the Commission to work with existing youth organisations, recognising the importance of youth-to-youth connections in change-making and peacebuilding efforts.⁴⁰

Youth stakeholders expect to see a strong implementation and follow-up on these commitments, which if done well, have the potential to be a game-changer for youth exchange between the EU and ASEAN.

EU-ASEAN Youth Forum: A step towards multilateralism

In parallel to the launch of the Youth Action Plan and its commitment to the EU-ASEAN Forum, 2022 also saw a move to specifically strengthen ties between young people in the two blocs via the EU-ASEAN Youth Summit.

This second edition of the EU-ASEAN Youth Summit coincided with the 45th anniversary of the EU-ASEAN partnership and followed on from the successful first edition held in 2018 to mark the 40th anniversary of the partnership.⁴¹ The Summit took place on 13 December 2022 as a side event in the EU-ASEAN Commemorative Summit, co-chaired by the President of the European Council, Charles Michel, and the 2022

³⁸ Ibid

³⁹ S. Altinisik (23 February 2023), 'European Year of Youth: meaningful action or tokenistic gesture?' <https://plan-international.org/eu/blog/2022/02/23/year-of-youth-2022/> Accessed 15 August 2023

⁴⁰ European Commission (29 November 2022), 'Policy Dialogue with Commissioner Jutta Urpilainen: "Building partnerships as the way forward in geopolitically challenging times"' https://youth.europa.eu/year-of-youth/activities/5804_en

⁴¹ European Union External Action Service (1 March 2018), 'EU-ASEAN Young Leaders Forum & Strategic Thinkers Forum' www.eeas.europa.eu/node/42015_en Accessed 16 August 2023.

ASEAN Chair, Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen. Under the banner 'Scenarios for the Future of EU-ASEAN Relations,' the Youth Summit was the culmination of a six-month process of exchange between 90 young people from EU countries and ASEAN countries. The programme of debates and discussions covered topics such as sustainability, cyber diplomacy, security, trade, higher education, human rights and COVID-19 recovery.⁴²

The Youth Summit also drafted strategic priorities presented to the official EU-ASEAN Commemorative Summit, giving an important political validation to these young people's ideas beyond just the youth sphere. The final Joint Leaders Statement issued on 14 December 2022 welcomed 'our people-to-people connectivity initiatives' and encouraged 'stronger research and education links between ASEAN and the EU, including exchanges among researchers, students and youth.'⁴³ The statement further called upon 'young people and educators to make use of available opportunities for educational exchanges and cooperation through Horizon Europe, the Erasmus+ programme, as well as national programmes in ASEAN and EU Member States.'⁴⁴

With exception of a few ad hoc events, such as an EU-ASEAN Youth Conference on youth involvement in urban development in Bangkok in March 2023,⁴⁵ the work of the EU-ASEAN Youth Forum is largely limited to the high-level summits. A more frequent and structured programme of interactions and events would help to cement some of these relationships and processes. Indeed, initiatives such as these have an important normative potential in generating interest and curiosity in

42 EU-ASEAN Strategic Partnership 2022 (2022), 'EU-ASEAN Young Leaders Forum: Scenarios for the Future of EU-ASEAN relations' eunasean.eu/eu-asean-young-leaders-forum/ Accessed 15 August 2023.

43 Note from the General Secretariat of the Council 16014/22 of 14 December 2022 on 'EU-ASEAN Commemorative Summit- Brussels, 14 December 2022 - Joint Leaders' Statement'

44 Ibid

45 Global Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy (5 April 2023), 'EU-ASEAN Youth Conference: Discussion and Implementation of Youths' Meaningful Participation in Sustainable Urban Development' www.asean-mayors.eu/2023/04/eu-asean-youth-conference-discussion-and-implementation-of-youths-meaningful-participation-in-sustainable-urban-development/

the minds of young Europeans towards non-EU regions (and vice-versa). A question remains open about the selection of the young people who take part. A way to ensure stronger connections in the longer term and better follow-up would be to assign spaces for representative youth organisations, such as the Political Party Youth Organisations and Youth Councils.

In terms of ownership and agenda-setting, it is interesting to note that the EPP-affiliated *Konrad Adenauer Stiftung* played a key role in the organisation of both EU-ASEAN Youth Summits, showing that there is a clear space for Liberals to be more present in shaping this agenda. With the EU-ASEAN Forum now being codified and strengthened via the Youth Action Plan, there will be space for determining the agenda for future summits.

Conclusions

It is perhaps not surprising that international aspects of the EU's youth policy have fallen under the radar of its main implementor, namely the DG for Education and Culture. After all, the DG focuses on what is often considered 'traditional' youth topics and remains quite separate from the EU's activity in other areas such as trade or humanitarian aid, which lend themselves more easily to an international outlook.

Many of the current EU youth programmes do not target ASEAN youth, or indeed third countries beyond the candidate countries and EFTA. That is because they are not designed to, and because the EU Youth Strategy is largely inward looking. To date, most of the connections between ASEAN and Europe's youth, have been via ad hoc initiatives. For a more systematic inclusion of third countries into the EU's youth programmes, the strategies underpinning them need to change. We have seen a progressive opening up of programmes such as Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps to focus more on the global perspective, and 2022 marked an important shift in that respect with political and programmatic commitments via the Youth Action Plan. This has huge potential for creating links and sowing curiosity. Now it needs to be

implemented correctly and in cooperation with DG EAC who have the in-house expertise on meaningful youth participation. It also needs to receive more political attention, to avoid ending up merely as a tokenistic instrument of paying lip service.

This can be a difficult balance since the priority of the EU's programming around education and youth should of course not lose sight of its primary beneficiaries, namely young EU citizens, especially those with fewer opportunities. Yet a complementary stream of projects and programmes does not necessarily detract from the EU's aim to create 'a generation of dreamers and makers.'⁴⁶ After all, showcasing the relations that the EU can have as a bloc with other multilateral groups is a compelling narrative for why EU-level cooperation is necessary. Pro-European does not have to mean Eurocentric.

Policy Recommendations

Firstly, it needs to become a political priority for EU institutions to include more international exchanges in EU youth programmes. Politicians, parties, foundations and think tanks who care about these topics need to help get this on the agenda. Activities which focus on third countries should not be pitted against activities which promote a sense of European identity, since the two can go hand-in-hand.

Secondly, it must be noted that youth is and remains a member state competence, thus the EU's power is limited. With youth and educational exchanges being a pathway to more interest and engagement between the two blocs, national governments are an important target for putting Asia, and ASEAN more specifically, on the radar.

46 U. von der Leyen (2022), Speech: 'State of the Union Address 2022' delivered on 14 September 2022 in Strasbourg. Available online: ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/ov/speech_22_5493. Accessed 17 August 2023.

Concretely, a more internationalised approach to EU youth policy and programmes requires:

At the political level:

- MEPs to show that there is high political interest in ensuring that the Youth Action Plan is implemented correctly and in line with its ambitions; to hold the European Commission to account where possible.
- Member States and youth organisations, such as party-political youth wings, to influence the next EU Youth Strategy (2028-2035) to include a more international focus, e.g. a strand dedicated to international exchange, adding not taking away from programmes for EU citizens
- Seeking allies from other fields of EU action (DG ECHO, DG INTPA, EEAS, Research & Innovation) and bringing their agenda and expertise towards youth policy. Conversely, this could also support the efforts of youth organisations to make sure that youth perspectives are brought not only into “traditional” youth topics like education and mobility but across the board.
- The EU to rely on fostering grassroots connections where they already exist, encouraging partnerships between youth political parties, such as LYMEC and CALD Youth, and bearing these existing structures in mind when selecting participants for programmes such as the EU-ASEAN Youth Forum.

At the programmatic level:

- Youth policies and programmes to include not only EU candidate countries but also third countries of strategic interest to Europe's future.
- The EU to fully implement the commitments under the Youth Action Plan in EU's External Action, particularly boosting the EU-ASEAN Youth Forum beyond just the summits, and assuring youth engagement in all aspects of its relations with ASEAN.
- Erasmus Mundus Joint Masters Degrees opportunities to be better publicised, and facilitating the inclusion of non-European universities to be part of consortia to facilitate two-way exchange of students, not just drawing students into Europe. Specifically, consider having Erasmus+ contact points across the whole ASEAN region.
- More broadly, EU funding programmes to facilitate working with third countries. Whilst concerns around transparency and undue influence may be valid in some cases, this must not impede the flexibility of funding programmes to work with partners outside the EU.

Chapter 14

The Future of ASEAN-EU Youth Relations

By Jeremiah Tomas, Council of Asian Liberals and Democrats (CALD) Youth

Imagine a world where individual rights, freedoms and equality are safeguarded, where the vibrant ideas and the collective perspective of the youth is at the forefront of shaping international collaboration. In the year 2022 that vision took its first step towards building that future when the EU-ASEAN Young Leaders Forum gathered 90 young leaders aged 20-35 from over 27 countries in Europe and Southeast Asia. This event was dubbed the Year of the Youth, in commemoration of 45 years of EU-ASEAN collaboration, kicking off a new year of collaboration. In this article, we will dive into the programmes and schemes like the ERASMUS and how it fared the challenges that lie ahead, and the opportunities we can pursue. Take part as we examine, discuss and unravel the possibilities for the Youth relationship between these two regions.

The European Union is home to over 466 million people. The number of young people aged 15-34 in the EU as of 2021 was around 85 million which was roughly 19% of the EU's total population (Eurostat). The ASEAN, meanwhile, is home to more than 667 million individuals, with the youth comprising around 34% of the population at a staggering number of 213 million. This number is still growing steadily and is projected to peak at around 220 million by 2038. The youth population, time and time again, has been said to be a very important metric for economic growth & prosperity. This can either seal a victory or spell defeat for a country's future. One of the most important tools to ensure the growth of the youth is education. It has been said to be a great equaliser allowing individuals to open new doors of opportunity and to secure their future. Addressing this demand, one programme emerges as one, if not the most impactful

initiative--- the Erasmus programme. It takes education a step further by not only making opportunities to study available and accessible for all but also fostering international mobility and cooperation. Let us find out how the Erasmus programme came to be, how it affects the youth of the EU & the ASEAN and how it can create a more impactful future for all.

The prestigious Erasmus programme stands for the European Community Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students, now known as Erasmus+. It is the European Union's (EU) flagship student exchange programme for education, training, youth, and sport in Europe. It was created in 1987, providing learning mobility opportunities to just 3,000 university students. Since then, around 13 million people have taken part in the Erasmus+ programme (European Commission Website). The programme was named after a Dutch philosopher, theologian, and humanist, Desiderius Erasmus of Rotterdam (1465-1536). He is considered to be one of the most important figures of the Renaissance, whose travels for work and study took him to different parts of Europe. His thirst for knowledge, experience, and insights could only be quenched through wandering and living in foreign lands. His work had a profound impact on European thought. Even up to his death in 1536, he left his entire estate, which consists of his collection of books, manuscripts, and belongings, to the University of Basel. The money left was set to establish a professorship in Greece and to create a library with one of the most important collections of Renaissance literature in the world, the Erasmus Bibliothek. He was indeed a precursor for mobility grants (Rummel, 2019). And so, just like its namesake, the Erasmus programme has been at the forefront of promoting education and training in search of enlightenment and growth for various stakeholders. Starting from the members of the European Union (EU), from individuals to organisations, and even those applying outside of the European Union (EU).

For the youth who belong to the European Union, we can identify the following key features of the Erasmus+ programme:

1. **Youth Mobility:** The ERASMUS+ programme enables youth, regardless of socioeconomic background, education and ethnicity, to spend a

certain period to studying, carrying out training, or participating in internship opportunities abroad. Through the programmes, the Youth are given mobility both within the European Union and in partner countries outside the European Union.

2. **Credit Mobility:** Erasmus+ ensures that there is a smooth transfer and coordination between partner institutions regarding the credits earned during the mobility period, to avoid delays and hindrances in meeting the academic requirements of the students.
3. **Financial Support:** Erasmus+ offers financial assistance to youth to help cover costs while participating in its various programmes. This makes mobility accessible to a wider range of youth by providing different types of support such as allowances, housing, and travel costs.
4. **Language Support:** Erasmus+ aids in facilitating integration by offering language classes to youth before their trip begins. This helps with acclimation and integration into the host country's environment.
5. **Networking and Collaboration:** Erasmus+ fosters cooperation and collaboration among youth members of the European Union to promote the exchange of knowledge, ideas, and values, and to foster unity between nations.

The Youth programmes of the ERASMUS have had a significant impact on the European Union today. We can identify the top benefits it has gained through the various exchanges over the past 35 years:

1. **Cultural Understanding & Assimilation:** The opportunities to be able to visit, explore and live in different European and Non-European countries, enables intercultural exchange and understanding to happen. It gives time for the youth to learn the diverse culture language and traditions to broaden their horizon to come and understand one another. They can also learn to navigate through these diverse environments and work with other nationalities which enables them to adapt to changing circumstances in an ever-diverse and integrated world.

2. **Personal Growth & Development:** Living far from the community that one grows up in allows independence and confidence to come about. Having this experience makes one more adaptable, self-reliant and resilient. Along with this time away expands possibilities to find what one is passionate about, finding friends in the unlikelyst of circumstances and expanding their horizons by networking with individuals who aspire for distinct goals.
3. **European Identity & citizenship:** Going through similar experiences and interactions allows one to place oneself in the shoes of another fostering empathy and understanding of another's culture. By experiencing this first-hand, one gets to understand the shared European values, find ways to cooperate and come to be united to reimagine a better European Society.

Although the Erasmus+ programme started as a shared vision by the members of the European Union, it has now become one of, if not the largest, student exchange programmes in the world. In 2021 alone around 71,000 organisations cooperated with the programme, there were close to 649,000 individuals who participated in its mobility activities, and roughly 19,000 projects were enacted.

One of the top non-EU beneficiaries of this wonderful programme has been the ASEAN community, accounting for more than 10% of the recipients of the Erasmus+ programme coming from ASEAN countries. When we take a deep dive into the significant impact the Erasmus+ programme has been able to make for ASEAN, not only has it helped in terms of student mobility and regional integration, but it has also allowed thousands of students, staff and professors to study abroad. This allows them to learn from other cultures and learn from other perspectives which has led to greater understanding and cooperation between ASEAN and EU countries.

We see that it has been able to do a myriad of things such as the following:

Increase Student Mobility

1. In 2020 alone more than 10,000 individuals coming from ASEAN countries participated in the Erasmus programme.
2. International Credit Mobility - This two-way mobility scheme allows students to study in a foreign university for 3-12 months and obtain credits which are recognised by their sending institutions as part of their degree.
3. Not only has the Erasmus+ programme created opportunities for ASEAN members to conduct activities in the EU, but a two-way stream has been created where EU members also have the opportunity to come to ASEAN countries to take part in programmes.

Improved Quality of Education

1. Erasmus Mundus Joint Masters Degree - Coverage to study in top Universities by awarding full degree scholarships to probable masters' students around the world and covers their tuition, travel and living allowance.
2. Researchers, Professors and staff can take part in training and exchanges which enhance the quality of education through the transfer of knowledge that happens through the programme.
3. Capacity Building in Higher Education - Joint projects that are aimed at modernizing and reforming higher institutions by developing new curricula, governance and infrastructure. There are also structural projects that tackle policy and educational reform in cooperation with national authorities.

Enhanced Regional Integration

1. Capacity Building in the field of the Youth - A range of activities that encourages cooperation between organisations that are geared towards youth development and training.
2. Creation of Platforms and organisations by which the youth can cooperate and discuss key policies and issues that are not often discussed at the state level due to the sensitivity of the topics
3. Being able to have shared lived experiences at a young age creates the bond and understanding that would prove to be significant down the road. Members who have taken part in the programme would have a better understanding of their counterparts that would hopefully prove useful in the future.

The Challenges

There are currently several challenges that ASEAN faces. It is a political and economic union that has a high youth population with the median age being around 27 years old with more than half the population under the age of 30. This means that the challenges faced by ASEAN in the next few years are the challenges of the youth as they are the region's workforce, economy and society.

The main challenges are as follows:

High Unemployment & Underemployment

1. In 2021, youth unemployment stood at a peak of 11% which is roughly around 25 million youth compared to total adult unemployment of around 8.7%
2. The main reasons for this include several factors such as lack of relevant skills and competencies, geographical mismatch and mobility issues, poor education systems
3. Lack of resources and information for human capital development

Political Inequality

1. Ethnic and Racial - There are over 1000 ethnic groups in ASEAN making it one of the most diverse, but with this diversity comes inequality.
2. Widening Economic Gap - The richest 10% of households in ASEAN control more than 40% of the region's wealth, while the poorest 10% control less than 2% of the region's wealth (ADB)
3. Illiberal Regimes - the promulgation of such poses a threat to the overall trajectory and growth of the ASEAN, as this has led to social unrest, political instability and economic stagnation.

Low Regional Integration & Cooperation

1. Political Systems - ASEAN member states are made up of different political systems & have different ideologies. This makes it hard for them to reach a consensus on regional issues and political policies.
2. Economic Differences - ASEAN member states come from different levels of economic development. This creates concerns when it comes to trade and investment decisions and policies for the whole of ASEAN.
3. Regional Policies and Digital Infrastructure - As compared to the EU the ASEAN does not have pooled sovereignty in certain areas such as trade and environment. There is also no parliament, single currency (or at least shared cross-border payment system), or a foreign service. The amount that goes into the annual budget of the ASEAN and its 400 staff, stands only at around US\$20 million compared to the US\$180 billion that goes into the EU Commission and its 23,000 personnel. (SG Ministry of Affairs)

Despite these challenges, ASEAN has been able to make some strides towards better regional cooperation. Through the help of the EU they have been able to create various programmes, one such programme that was established in 2015 is called The European Support to Higher Education in the ASEAN Region (SHARE) programme.

SHARE is a €15 million European Union (EU) Grant funded project officially launched in 2015 that was formulated to respond to ASEAN's priority in higher education as stipulated in the ASEAN five-year work plan on Education. It saw its first phase happen in 2015-2020 and since then has been extended due to the promising impact it achieved. Its overarching objective is to strengthen regional cooperation and enhance the quality, competitiveness and internationalization of ASEAN higher education institutions and students, contributing to an ASEAN Community. The main aim is to enhance cooperation between the EU and ASEAN to create an ASEAN Higher Education Space. The programme has led to EU sharing its experience with the Bologna process, a series of ministerial meetings and agreements that was launched by Education Ministers and University leaders in 29 countries in 1999. The Bologna Process was important in harmonizing and reforming various higher education systems in Europe to overcome obstacles, which led to the creation of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). Starting in 2016 SHARE has been able to deploy 500 semester intra-ASEAN scholarships for ASEAN University Students and ever since 2022 has been able to support an additional 300 more students. The programme is run by a consortium of institutions comprised of the British Council, the DAAD, ENQA, NUFFIC and ENQA.

SHARE has been a vital step towards the vision of the ASEAN to create a regional education community through the following:

1. Synergies in the ASEAN education system through the creation of cohesive policies, quality assurance, ASEAN-wide credit transfer system, and ASEAN-branded scholarship scheme.
2. Jumpstarting not only student but also staff mobility, as well as an equal opportunity for all within ASEAN universities, by being able to match, students and staff with universities and scholarships.
3. Partnerships between intra-ASEAN universities as well as EU-ASEAN universities.

What has led to the developments within the ASEAN SHARE programme has come about due to the strides taken during the programme implementation planning from the various phases 2015-2022

1. Policy Dialogues between ministers of education as well as higher institutions.
2. ASEAN Qualifications Reference Frameworks and ASEAN Quality Assurance.
3. ASEAN Credit Transfer System (ACTS), ASEAN EU Credit Transfer System (AECTS).
4. ACTS & AECTS Student Mobility with Scholarships.

To ensure that proper harmonization takes place the SHARE takes into account the key stakeholders in every country from the Government departments in charge of the Higher Education Sectors, University administrators and faculty, Quality assurance agencies, student associations and individual students. There will surely be a myriad of benefits that SHARE will create both directly and indirectly through its recipients who can learn and share their skills with their respective communities.

Recommendations

When we take a deeper look at the current challenges that the ASEAN is experiencing, it may not be as easy to come up with one single solution or recommendation that will change the ways things are, in a drastic manner, but we shall offer our thoughts on this opportunity. The concerns that the ASEAN is experiencing are not completely dissimilar to that of the concern of the European Union in its early beginnings. The area of focus where we recommend institutions double down on is the ways to develop the potential of the Youth as the European Union has done through the ERASMUS+ programme and the SHARE programme. Here are some of the observations and recommendations:

Creation of an ASEAN counterpart to the ERASMUS programme

The European Union has greatly benefited from the increased mobility that their youth had in the past and is continuing to take advantage of that. This has led to a greater sense of shared identity through having similar experiences as well as a deeper understanding of each other's culture through mobility efforts that the programme has been able to provide. This has been one of the primary reasons the EU is the EU that we know now. Through the recent SHARE programme, the ASEAN has been able to get a glimpse of the economic benefits of a programme similar to that of the ERASMUS's higher education programmes. There must be a further expansion of the SHARE programme which would need the full cooperation of the ASEAN stakeholders. It should be at the core of the vision of the ASEAN leaders to give time, effort and funding to push expansion for such a programme to not only cover higher education integration but also incorporate other aspects that will increase the holistic development of an individual through such cultural, sport and volunteer exchanges with the proper support and funding in place. Investing in a programme such as this will yield beneficial effects for the future of the ASEAN as this will promote greater regional integration and identity through shared lived experiences at such developmental years of an individual. By harmonizing systems and having mobility, we can increase the opportunities as well as the possibilities for future collaboration be it in the academe, public sector or even the private sector. The hope is through this culture of understanding and assimilation of the youth of today, we can address the inequalities prevalent in our society today be it racial, economic or political. Only then can we create the leaders of tomorrow that will drive the change and cooperation we dream of seeing in ASEAN.

Review the ASEAN plans & integrate youth perspective

The ASEAN has a lot of moving parts while having very limited resources to reach its full potential. At first glance, one can be overwhelmed in trying to understand what its mandate is as well as what it can do. By conducting a thorough review to better understand all the moving parts we might be able to simplify the workings of the ASEAN in hopes of reaching its full

“With the ASEAN aim of cooperation as well as integration, the youth will bring social cohesion and unity to drive social movements for change.”

potential. The ASEAN Secretariat currently operates around limited resources and staffing. This limits their effectiveness to support the broader needs of the ASEAN when it comes to coordinating, aligning as well as in implementation and compliance with the agreements made. More often than not only a few people hear about the ASEAN and what it does, keeping its public awareness and engagement at a very low level. By enhancing communications and promoting its values as well as the ASEAN identity, citizens of ASEAN will be able to foster a sense of ownership and increase participation in its goal of regional integration and cooperation. To ensure the goals of the ASEAN, the youth must be engaged and involved in the processes. As more than 30% of the population is in this category their voices must be heard. Who better to have more skin in the game than the next generation of ASEAN leaders and members? Allotting a seat to the Youth on every committee will also spur fresh new ideas and innovation to solve long-standing problems because of their unique perspectives. With the ASEAN aim of cooperation as well as integration, the youth will bring social cohesion and unity to drive social movements for change. This integration of the youth will create opportunities for skills development, capacity building as well and leadership. Having a platform to network can offer them a chance to collaborate to foster cross-border collaborations and projects. Active youth involvement also ensures the region's commitment to sustainable development as well as innovative solutions to problems that the region will face moving forward.

Creation of ASEAN Youth Think Tank

The primary purpose of a think tank is to be able to aid in creating public policy through research, focus group discussions and debates. By creating a youth-led think tank within the ASEAN, the perspectives and insights of

young people will be at the forefront of policy development. The think tank would be able to engage and get more youth to participate in the activities of the ASEAN by spearheading Youth Consultations and Dialogues where the youth will be able to provide great opportunities to share their perspectives, concerns, ideas, and solutions. The creation of a think tank can lead to specialised Advisory boards to tackle different concerns in the foreseeable future. Another aspect that is not often targeted by institutions that can be capitalised is the realm of Entrepreneurship and Innovation, who better to take part in this than the people who will benefit from them the most? This can help aid in the economic growth, job creation and development in the region as technology is one of the great equalisers. Partnerships and collaboration can be enacted to ensure that all stakeholders can be tapped whether it be governments, academic institutions, or other international organisations. Learning programmes and co-development opportunities can be pursued.

Conclusion

The future we aspire to have may come sooner than we anticipated. As we look at the developments in ASEAN throughout the years, we see the immense impact that the European Union has been able to have on the youth. One such programme is the Erasmus+ programme that started in the EU and has been extended to the ASEAN. The ASEAN has benefited from increased student mobility, improved quality of education, enhanced cultural understanding and personal growth. We have also found ourselves identifying challenges faced by the ASEAN youth such as high youth unemployment, political inequality and low regional integration. The chapter also touches on the SHARE programme, funded by the EU, which has been key to strengthening cooperation and integration to enhance the quality of higher education in ASEAN. Moving forward, it is of utmost importance to address the challenges faced by the ASEAN, to start, all the resources available have to be taken into account and used efficiently. Along with this, it is also a great opportunity to build on programmes such as the SHARE to create ERASMUS+-like programmes in the ASEAN to spur inter-ASEAN collaboration and integration. Lastly, to move forward the Youth must be engaged, one way of ensuring this is to create an ASEAN Youth think tank that will champion the concerns,

insights as well and possible solutions to the problems the region faces. Echoing the words of the late Filipino Jose Rizal, "The youth is the hope of the future". As we look towards the future of the ASEAN, the role of the Youth becomes clearer in shaping it. With more than half the population being under the age of 30, there is still a lot of untapped potential to push for progress, unity and positive change within the ASEAN. Let us embrace their ideas, empower their voices and provide them with the opportunities to navigate a prosperous future, and together we can build a brighter future for the ASEAN not only for the next few years but the generations to come.

Chapter 15

Sustainable Development: An Inclusive Space For People to Flourish and the Planet to Thrive

By Christopher Gleadle

Introduction

It was declared at the UN Summit in New York on 25-27 September 2015 that Sustainable Development be aimed at ending poverty in all its forms, through “a world of universal respect for human rights and human dignity, the rule of law, justice, equality and non-discrimination”.

There is a strong emphasis on the empowerment of women and vulnerable groups such as children, young people, persons with disabilities, older persons, refugees, internally displaced persons, and migrants. The rights for all to have dignity, food, shelter, water, health, a living.

In this essay, I explore some of the interdependencies of Sustainable Development, and why it is time to bring a fresh approach to achieving the goals, aims and ambitions of the SDGs. Why an active, true systems approach can accelerate net positive outcomes supporting ASEAN-EU cooperation and collaboration to create methods as well as substance in Sustainable Development programmes.

Sustainable Development

At the Rio Summit in 1992 Sustainable Development was devised. In essence, human beings are at the centre of concerns for Sustainable Development. They are entitled to a healthy and productive life in harmony with nature. And, to achieve Sustainable Development, environmental protection shall constitute an integral part of the development process and cannot be considered in isolation from it (UNCED, 1992).

It follows that we aspire towards a society where living conditions and resources meet human needs without undermining the biosphere to provide services to support all interdependent life on earth. Consequently, we need to understand and nourish the natural feedback loops that are essential for the effective natural self-organising systems of running the whole, mimicking natural self-sustaining zero-waste systems. This means that Sustainable Development requires a balance of economic progression, environmental protection, and social well-being.

The 17 SDGs are aimed at tackling multiple global challenges that include poverty, inequality, justice, climate change, environmental degradation and so on (UN, 2023).

Against the backdrop of such laudable aims, Sustainable Development has been criticised from many quarters as something of a paradox as development is inherently unsustainable. Others express great disappointment at the lack of progress caused by core issues such as the linear mechanistic thinking that is seen to be the root cause of the issues to be addressed, It is unlikely the thinking that caused the problem is the thinking that can solve the problem. That intellectual and monetary vested interests trump substance as a result of which the gap between the rich and the poor gets ever wider, and the service levels of the biosphere become ever more depleted.

In reality, the aims, ambitions, and delivery remain distant. This suggests an execution and systems knowledge gap between strategy and implementation. The concept of Sustainable Development is complex. And in the gaps have fallen all the technological advances, and billions of euros spent. Consequently, we still observe that:

- emissions are still rising
- services of the biosphere are shrinking,
- productivity is on the decline
- all global societies are fractured.

It follows, we need to shine a light on the disparate actions that are taking place which were designed to help and support the human condition, the environment, or individual eco-systems, - but have inadvertently made things worse (Gleadle, 2021). The relationship between projects is not visualised nor sufficiently monitored and measured. Consequently, at best, we have sub-optimal outcomes, with hidden waste and impact residing in the gaps. This begs the question of why tackling multiple issues simultaneously is difficult to comprehend and leaves more complete solutions foregone (Gleadle, 2018). We need to use better what we have already.

Human Development

ASEAN has some of the highest populations as well as inequality levels in the world. Consequently, credible action to support human development is key. This presents huge potential for EU-ASEAN relations since both education and economic factors of trade, industry, and value chains offer a rich opportunity to contribute to social mobility and reduction of inequality. This can be achieved through innovation of both technology and process such as boundary setting to bridge the execution gap between strategy and tactical implementation.

It follows, that bringing together, for example, executive, management, policy, vocational training and education, can enable more efficient production and consumption chains since a far more diverse and inclusive boundary can be set that advances core skills, competencies and knowledge transfer essential for flourishing populations and planetary conditions (Gleadle, 2021).

“This approach allows for more informed decisions from better communication, problem-solving, knowledge sharing and adaptability.”

Sustainably Viable Systems

Integrating climate risks and opportunities into decision-making is becoming mainstream. What is not mainstream is the unifying sustainably viable systems thinking that bridges fragmented specialisms to aid the visualisation of the interdependency of economic, social, and natural systems to avoid unintended consequences.

Such a unified approach within the EU-ASEAN context bridges the execution gap between strategy and its implementation since there is direct interaction of transdisciplinary teams. This is important since it unifies process cycles, time boundaries, environmental boundaries and so on between those that set strategy and those that implement it. Such interaction introduces flexibility since a clear map can be created that visualises the systemic issues to be addressed. Accordingly, a greater spectrum of skills comes into play at the development stage, realigning the traditional elitist structures that have so far failed to meet Sustainable Development goals, that now reorientated admits greater diversity – culturally to cognitive – inclusion and fairness into decisions, making the greater value of the practical input.

This approach allows for more informed decisions from better communication, problem-solving, knowledge sharing and adaptability (Gleadle, 2011). It also leads to the meeting of major tenets of Sustainable Development through greater stakeholder cooperation, building human

development ecosystems and accelerating management and leadership competence.

Overall, human development affects social cohesion and trust - in government as well as in other entities. Human development is both an ASEAN and EU priority area, essential to meeting Sustainable Development goals as it requires greater collaboration as well as cooperative inclusion across many more skill sets. Such inclusion will aid greater awareness and empathy of the toxic and value-destroying nature of inequality and bring tools to accurately measure and ameliorate environmental as well as socio-economic measures.

Flourishing Investment – EVs as a case study

ASEAN has seen significant increases in investment over the last few years, not least, for example, in the Electric Vehicle (EV) value chain.

Governments are circling their wagons around EVs being visible adoptions of net-zero policies. As a result, they have the potential to drive strong investment growth.

For example, the EV value chain includes mining activities such as nickel mining as well as battery production, manufacturing, infrastructure and so on.

Fortunately for the ASEAN, 27% of current known global reserves of nickel are found in Indonesia and the Philippines (NS Energy, 2021)

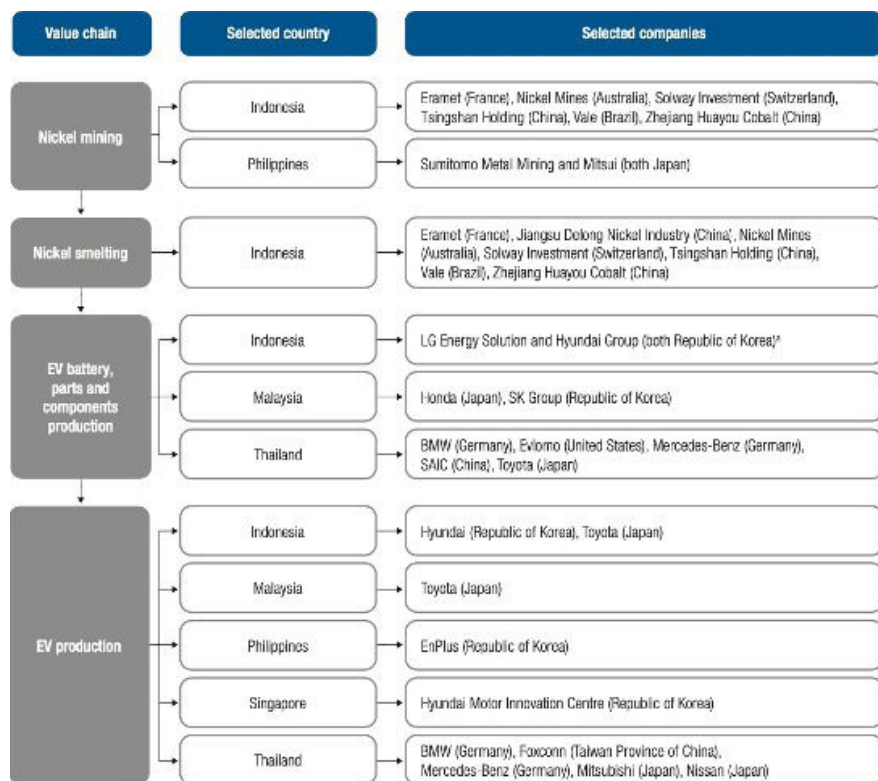


Figure 1¹

1 ASEAN Investment Report 2022 research.

Introducing the three I's – Inclusive, Integrated Investment

These developments have significant implications for further shaping investment in the region with the EV value chain connecting countries, production processes and companies. Adoption of EVs as well as zero-carbon policies are encouraged to further boost growth.

Consequently, for the EU to be at the vanguard of EV and battery production there is a significant opportunity to build inclusive, integrated education and industrial value chains. Knowledge sharing can build development ecosystems that amplify intuitive shifts in resource extraction and product use to counter the heavy biosphere burden of the EV industry which has variable long-term environmental return on investment as well as potential for negative eco-system impacts on health and well-being. There is an opportunity to learn today and avoid lessons after the event tomorrow (Gleadle, 2023).

Feedback loops between the integrated spectrum of learning experiences and interaction between, as well as along, multiple value chains will provide EU-ASEAN collaboration with distinct risk mitigation. Green transformation is not just for goods and services, but also for interdependent knowledge in building regenerative zero-waste supply chains through symbiotic integration of industries, sectors, supply chains and projects that currently do not happen at scale. This means that, for example, the circular economy becomes truly systemic since it can now account for both individual projects and provide comparison to other circular economy projects to stem the waste impacts between them. This improves the whole across projects, regions, and geopolitical boundaries (Gleadle, 2022).

Waste management, when viewed the other way around becomes the management of waste. Waste has now shifted from being someone else's problem to deal with (cost, risk, and impact) to being personal (value opportunity, lowered risk, lowered cost, lowered impact, and shorter time).

Investment, on the other hand, becomes an engine for many more sectors and services. It can be integrated and inclusive along and across multiple EU-ASEAN value chains to serve Sustainable Development goals not just in ASEAN, but in the EU too. This leaves highly valuable integrations of skills and technologies to flow freely between the two blocks.

For example, to support the electrification of vehicles, an extensive charging network is essential. The limited charging infrastructure in ASEAN as well as the EU poses challenges that need to be addressed. For example, 2021 saw BMW introduce rapid EV charging facilities in Thailand and Indonesia. January 2022 saw Porsche start the operation of high-powered charging stations in Johor, Malaysia. This is in addition to ASEAN entrants, such as Grab (Singapore) or Gojek from Indonesia.

Nevertheless, more needs to be done to develop the infrastructure network to support an efficient EV industry and market. This infrastructure gap implies opportunities for integrated inclusive investment and integrated Sustainable Development in infrastructure in both regions and for knowledge sharing. But it also highlights the increasing demand for sources of energy.

Integrated Energy

Inevitably, there needs to be a connection between economic growth and transformation of both how energy is supplied and networked. This will require a political commitment to pivot from fossil fuels to less carbon-intensive energy sources.

For ASEAN and EU to rely mainly on fossil fuels for development, would have serious consequences for the environment. A well-managed transformation to low-carbon energy is critical and higher levels of adoption of renewable sources of energy have a knock-on effect. For example, ASEAN will be able to participate in a valuable economic sector and attract stronger liberalised trade agreements with the EU.

With a strong manufacturing base and a competitive labour force, ASEAN becomes an important partner and supplier of sustainable energy equipment and solutions up, down and across value chains.

“...as with the impacts during the summer of 2023 seeing record temperatures, and record floods in Europe, ASEAN too will be increasingly affected by floods, droughts, due to hotter weather and so on.”

As large companies within the EU increasingly commit to net carbon-zero operations, they are increasingly going to come under greater public scrutiny for transparency of credible and comparable action. To be a climate delayer or a social justice delayer, will make it difficult for them to maintain and increase their investment and licence to exist. The ASEAN region is highly susceptible to climate change. For example, as with the impacts during the summer of 2023 seeing record temperatures, and record floods in Europe, ASEAN too will be increasingly affected by floods,

droughts, due to hotter weather and so on. This will feed back into increasingly poor health and well-being effects with associated lower-income outcomes. Vulnerable families are generally affected the most. The Asian Development Bank (ADB) estimates that the region's economy could shrink by 11% by the end of the century due to the collective effect of climate change on agriculture, tourism, energy demand, labour productivity, human health, and ecosystems (ADB, 2023). This is replicated in the EU, with the cost of climate change in Europe reaching an estimated 4% of the GDP of the EU (European Commission, 2023).

The above challenges contribute to uncertainty and risk, which in turn will impede the flow of finance. This can be mitigated and counter-balanced by a closer partnership between the ASEAN and the EU with a sharing

of expertise, technology, practical resources and financial resources (including eg from the European Regional Development Fund and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank).

Transformation of the energy system is complex since it encounters multiple interdependent problems. Tackling such complexity through systems thinking will be the game changer.

Integrated Agriculture

The ASEAN Guidelines for Responsible Investment in Food, Agriculture and Forestry aims, in brief, to promote regional economic development, food and nutrition security, food safety and equitable benefits, as well as the sustainable use of natural resources.

In creating the framework, it wishes to encourage large and small investors and other actors in the development of responsible and sustainable agricultural investment and value chains in the region.²

Creating decent, safe, and sustainable jobs and livelihoods means assisting many smallholders to transform from subsistence farming to other economic means of support. There is a need for smallholders to acquire land rights, IP and for new ways of promoting sustainable forest livelihoods. It also requires help in developing better and more sustainable farming practices that can be boosted at the interplay of high-tech, low-tech and biotech. For example, in mitigation against threats to food security, food production is already being hampered by changing weather patterns. Urban migration sees a decline in an available

² September 2017, the ASEAN Ministers on Agriculture and Forestry (AMAF) agreed to develop the ASEAN Guidelines on Promoting Responsible Investment in Food, Agriculture and Forestry (the "Guidelines") at their 39th annual meeting. In October 2017, Grow Asia was approached by the ASEAN Secretariat (ASEC) to provide expertise, funding and to bring a wider range of voices to the development of the Guidelines – especially within the private sector. Project funding was raised from The Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), a World Bank trust fund, and expertise was brought in principally from the International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD) Geneva.

agricultural labour force, which further competes with the desires of the young to seek alternatives away from farming.

These are complex multiple interdependent challenges. Incorporating hi-tech, low-tech and biotech will not only help optimise production but broaden exciting work opportunities for young people. For example, currently, hi-tech solutions such as drones and other high-tech sensors are mixed with low-tech which may look at non-till, mulch, and cover cropping. To further boost outcomes, incorporating biotech can add a third dynamic of increasing productivity across a spectrum of farming, from agriculture, livestock and poultry that too can tackle many other existential threats to health, well-being, and the economy.

Long-term agrichemical use can have the unintended consequence of boosting soil degradation, reducing soil ecosystem and biodiversity, creating a long-term drag on soil productivity: adding to the embedded impacts from point of manufacture to farm gate. Reducing the impact of agrichemicals can be measured at multiple interdependent environmental, social, economic, and time points. Biotech solutions introduce multiple interdependent positive effects, for example, but are not limited to:

- Root protection from pathogens
- Improved soil quality, essential biodiversity, water retention and long-term soil and land improvement.
- Improved productivity and yield
- Infrastructure improvements
- Improvements to human and animal health, well-being, and economy

Consequently, EU-ASEAN cooperation has immense potential to incubate and transfer agricultural practice and know-how in both directions. Productivity is essential for all concerned to meet the aims of Sustainable Development. The EU already imports much from ASEAN members such as Indonesia, Vietnam and Malaysia.

Agricultural Research and Development within the global food system is an immense opportunity to expand cooperation under the EU–ASEAN strategic partnership around capacity building and green growth. The EU can learn from the collective experience of smallholder farmers, whilst ASEAN can benefit from research and connectivity to strengthen farmer education. Both the EU and ASEAN would gain from more resilient and sustainable food security.

Water for all

Human activity has destabilised the water cycle. The hydrological cycle is complex. While some places are getting wetter, some are getting drier. Thus, we need also to study the effects of fractured water systems such as green water (SRC, 2021). Green water refers to moisture in the soil and the atmosphere, which represents two-thirds of all fresh water on Earth. It is the lifeblood of the water cycle since it is the engine for all biomass production, underpins food security as well as livelihoods and Sustainable Development and is directly affected by precipitation and evaporation.

It follows, that when we lose forestation, we lose green water flow. Farming needs seventy-five per cent of all global water. Farming activity can directly affect both local and distant water supplies to have negative effects on other economies such as the blue economy, and the health, well-being and flourishing of communities. Without understanding the relationship between practices and projects – sustainable, circular, or otherwise – how it is possible that what has been measured is even remotely accurate and representative of the whole? (Gleadow, 2022).

Thus, be cautious. Events and practices may be masquerading as Sustainable Development, but the reality may be completely different for the two regions which are sensitive to climate change, overfishing and unsustainable practices that threaten the sustainability of agriculture.

Integrated Urban-Rural Pathways

Frans Timmermans (The European Commission's Executive Vice-President for the Green Deal) 2021 announced the EU-funded **Smart Green ASEAN Cities programme**, designed to support 10 ASEAN cities to exchange best practices among them and with European cities as part of a stronger EU-ASEAN green partnership (EEAS, 2021).

Frans Timmermans stated: "The sustainability of our cities is based on the possibility to change the energy mix, to change the way public transport is organised, and to improve rapidly waste treatment and waste management."

In the next fifteen years, ASEAN's urban areas are expected to have another 100 million people. Tackling multiple complex challenges of not just cities, but towns, to small remote settlements, and how they are connected, presents opportunities to benchmark intuitive, innovative solutions that can be both scalable and replicable elsewhere.

For example, urban spaces and infrastructure can also be inclusive of satellite conurbations developing sophisticated opportunities to be economically, socially, and environmentally supportive in a mutually beneficial manner.

Managing municipal solid waste (MSW) is often problematic in densely populated areas. It can cause issues of health to urban pathway restrictions, to land-fill and associated land, water, and air degradation. As urban populations grow, so will the problems of urban waste disposal and pollution that can potentially cause health and well-being issues, impacting economic prosperity and rising premature death. Yet, it is these complex challenges that can be so uplifting as solutions are found to tackle multiple issues simultaneously and provide solutions to future needs. For example, MSW treated as raising the bar on sustainably viable agricultural productivity, can also help tackle community micro-urban electrification to EV charging. It's about understanding more about

the relationship between things, than simply focusing on the things themselves. See Fig 2

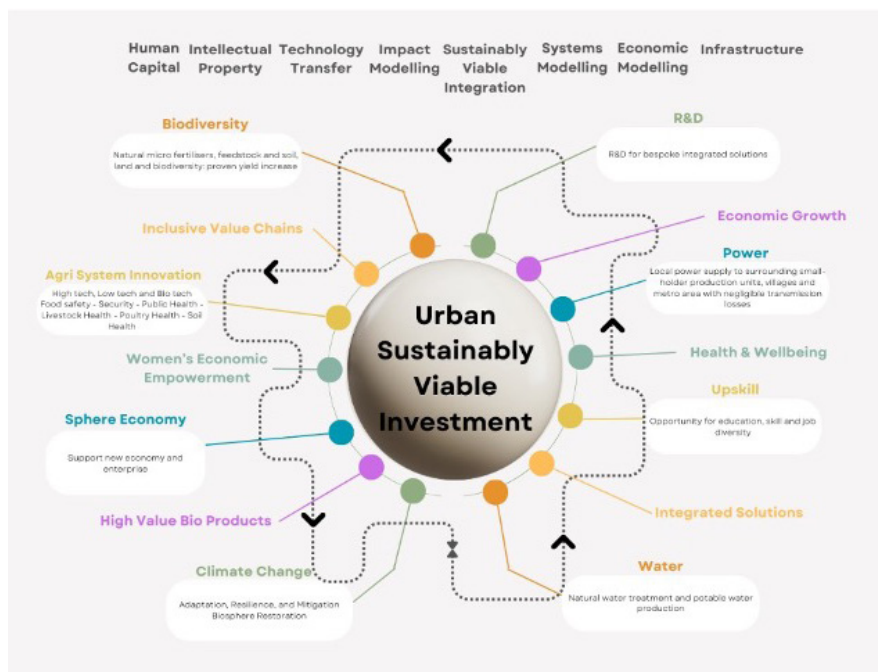


Figure 2³

As a result, an integrated inclusive approach to meeting, for example, SDG 11 (sustainable cities and communities) not only supports healthy urban landscapes, but food production, water, soil, agricultural biodiversity, transport, industrial activity etc. It underpins the economy and acts as an incubator for new eco-innovative economies. Consequently, we can reduce emissions, tackle multiple issues of waste and support health and well-being (Gleadle, 2022).

³ Sustainably Viable approach to connecting urban and rural communities Source: Christopher Gleadle, 2015 (amended)

The Rise of The Machines

The rapid rise of digital technologies can be the enabler to transform economies. With such a wealth of expertise from both EU and ASEAN countries, the opportunities are boundless.

Such disruption will be transformative. But the systemic governance of such digital enterprises will be key. For example, big data. To service decision-makers with suitable information for decision-making is a challenge since converting large quantities of data to reliable, clear information, is problematic. Compilation and interpretation are often subject to many influences such as personal biases and intent. For example, the intent of analysts and decision-makers may not always be as aligned as possible. It is common to find 'other agendas' embedded in the output information that perhaps serve some concealed purpose.

Consequently, AI can have problems amplifying errors since it has no way of telling whether the generated text corresponds to reality. As a result, more misinformation can be generated. You will not solve the problem with the thinking that caused it. Bias in, bias out. Performance delayer.

However, digital tools can connect urban pathways, people, communities, education, training, etc. It can aid and accelerate net positive outcomes from energy balance to agriculture, health to infrastructure, underpinning true Sustainable Development.

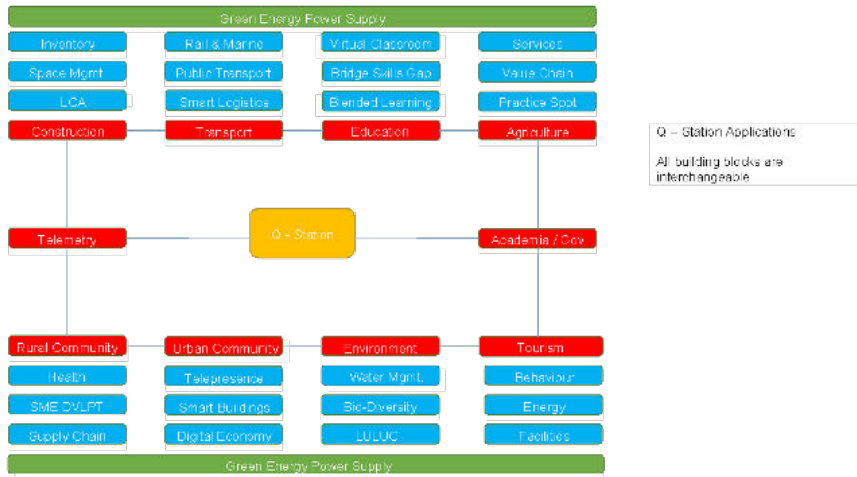


Figure 3⁴

As we can see from Fig 3, using digital responses we can provide opportunities for Sustainable Development that can help keep young people in rural communities, they can take advantage of exciting career experiences without the need for urban dwelling while directly connecting the urban–rural eco-systems.

⁴ Example of a digital solution for connecting diverse urban and rural communities through human development. Source: C Gleadle, 2016

As a result, EU-ASEAN Sustainable Development can be about connecting projects locally, regionally, and nationally. Capacities that drive higher levels of innovation, productivity and growth are strongly correlated with Sustainable Development. For example:

- Human development focuses on improving the lives of people that will lead to economic growth rather than work on the assumption that economic growth will automatically deliver greater well-being for all.
- Help create the right conditions to enable the development of people's skills and abilities and give them a chance to use them. Little point in educating and transferring knowledge if denied access to a ready labour market.
- Provide choice and create an environment for people where individually and collectively, they can develop their full potential.

Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) begins with the premise that communities are rich in resources, skills, and competencies, which can and should form the foundation for advancing sustainably viable change in the community.

Co-creation locally, nationally, and internationally through EU-ASEAN partnership can ensure the business model is culturally appropriate and environmentally sustainable by relying on local resources and capabilities. Importantly, it will expand the base of local entrepreneurial capacity using key principles, techniques, and methods that have been adapted from the fields of asset-based community development.

Integrated Trade

1. ASEAN as a whole represents the EU's 3rd largest trading partner outside Europe (after China and the US) with more than €271.8 billion of trade in goods in 2022. Bilateral trade in services amounted to €82.4 billion in 2020 (European Commission, 2023).
2. The EU is ASEAN's third-largest trading partner after China and the US, accounting for around 10.2% of ASEAN trade.

For many years the interplay between Sustainable Development and international trade has markedly increased. The EU favours Sustainable Development with its trading partners, which combines respect for internationally agreed labour market protection rules and respect for multilateral environmental agreements.

The EU-Korea FTA has been used as a model (European Commission, 2023). In brief, the agreement states that trade should promote Sustainable Development in all its dimensions and that decent work can create economic efficiency, innovation, and productivity. And, that the parties shall strive to facilitate and promote trade and foreign direct investment in environmental goods and services to include environmental technologies, sustainable renewable energy, energy-efficient products and services, and eco-labelled goods. Additionally, through addressing related non-tariff barriers, to facilitate and promote trade in goods that contribute to Sustainable Development.

The EU has introduced a Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism aimed at driving standards to curb the relentless rise of greenhouse gases from products travelling across geopolitical borders (European Commission, 2023). Such standards are a benefit to both sides of the border and can strengthen the EU-ASEAN partnership. Interdependent relational standards, mechanisms and programmes can motivate to promotion of environmental and social reforms that would not otherwise be implemented since the economic benefits now become sufficiently visible. For example, the value destruction from emissions – being

a waste stream - impacts costs and productivity measured as a mass balance. When the direct cost of emissions is seen in the right light, can create positive change over short time horizons. As a result, such agreements can nudge leaders toward liberalisation reforms which they would otherwise not have considered.

For many years, most ASEAN countries have been trading with the EU. For example, the EUSG FTA has been branded as the EU's first "Green" FTA. It contains terms on the liberalisation of environmental services such as waste removal and rules on illegal fishing and logging. But such precedents are not without disagreement too. An example is when the EU questioned the sustainability of palm oil biofuel with biodiversity losses triggered by the deforestation that takes place when a tropical rainforest or peat-swamp forest is reassigned to palm oil cultivation (Reuters, 2023).

But there are good reasons to think that trade policy is an aid to achieving a more robust level of Sustainable Development. Were the multiple effects of climate change and the destruction of biosphere service levels to be tackled effectively, everyone needs to be on board. It is not a matter of cherry-picking the bits you do like and the bits you don't. The difference between taking an integrated and viable systems approach to Sustainable Development and one that is not is that tensions and conflicts can be tackled more broadly and equitably. For this, we need to move from the entrenched linear polarised route that believes cause and effect are on a straight line. But as we have discussed, cause and effect can be very far apart in both distance and time. And unintended consequences can be mapped only by tackling complexity through a more holistic approach. As a result, conflict resolution can become more open and transparent.

Ultimately, as EU-ASEAN strength is in being together and are broadly, if not in all cases, connected through a liberalisation of trading relationships, then the knowledge, skills and technology transference can be of immense benefit to all peoples.

This will mean moving from “systematic” approaches to conventions and multilateral agreements, such as labour and environmental, to a “systemic” approach. As discussed within the digital area, governance needs to be systemic in all thematic areas to build flexibility.

Summary and Recommendations

As I have discussed and illustrated throughout this brief essay, are the interdependencies and relationships between thematic areas, practices, and projects. Without tackling complexity through systems thinking we cannot be sure if the individual positive outcomes add up to the whole being any better. Evidence suggests that matters are still getting worse despite immense technological innovation and billions of euros in expenditure. Fragmentation and competition can get in the way of progress.

“Without tackling complexity through systems thinking we cannot be sure if the individual positive outcomes add up to the whole being any better.”

Today, transitions are a much-used word – green transition, finance transition and so on – but if there is just one transition, we need it to be the transition from linear mechanistic thinking and actions to tackling complexity through systems thinking to transform economies, societies, and the environment today. To be at the heart of the EU-ASEAN partnership at the vanguard of Sustainable Development.

Cause and effect are not in a straight line but can be far apart in distance and time. For example, the drop in the venting of water vapour from tropical rainforests will cause an effect elsewhere over distances. Vapour will often travel great distances before eventually falling as rain. This will affect everything from agricultural productivity to energy production.

The application of systems thinking in policymaking discourages linear cause-and-effect thinking and encourages a more complex approach to understanding predictability and the relationship between actions and outcomes.

Such an approach creates harmonisation between policy areas. The effects will render empathy within societal changes rendering results formed on outcome-focus rather than process-focus. Consequently, relationships between income and wealth inequalities, which are seen as causal to low productivity as well as poor performance against planetary goals, can be reversed.

In shifting to higher performance working, an integrated spectrum of learning and working will free skills and knowledge transfer through vertical tiers of management and horizontally through practical skills building. A unified, EU-ASEAN standard could underpin strong sustainable development, measured, and managed over an integrated platform as outlined. As a basic model, Canada's Red Seal programme (Red Seal programme, 2017). This could enable highly valuable integrations of skills and technologies to flow freely between the two blocks. Investment can become integrated and inclusive across sectors, sizes, and locations to serve unified Sustainable Development goals. Returns on investment, environment and society become validated as a whole.

Conclusion

In the context of the EU-ASEAN partnership, it is important to ask, are we doing the right things to develop our people to deliver net-positive Sustainable Development outcomes? To truly know the answer is yes, then think the answer is yes, is a powerful value lever.

Balancing policy leadership with people leadership is key to future success. This means to develop ecosystems of human development and to activate talent that embraces the complexity of relationships between humans, and technical and natural capital to realise sustainably viable performance gains.

Working at the interplay of development activities is the hallmark of a great learning strategy. It has become as essential to growth and Sustainable Development performance as, say, breathing and eating. Likewise, digital transformation, is less about disruption and more about enablement for transformative learning and collaboration experiences that can itself be disruptive.

Strong EU-ASEAN partnerships can present opportunities for speedier, greater inclusiveness, and true diversity in the tackling of boundaries and bottlenecks to make substantial improvements in Sustainable Development. By shining a light into the shadows, let us deliver systemic governance that leads to societal transformation where people and communities can flourish, and the planet thrive.

Chapter 16

ASEAN Mosaic – A Personal Journey

By Dr Yeow Poon

Personal reflections from working in a number of the ASEAN countries over the last 25 years

Introduction

This essay is not a systematic study of the development and challenges of Southeast Asia, nor the range of governance and public administration systems amongst the ASEAN states. Rather it reflects my journey based on personal observations from working with civil servants on public administration reforms in Vietnam, Lao PDR and Myanmar, as well as on projects with the ASEAN Secretariat.

I have worked with all the major multi-lateral development partners and a range of European bilateral partners. Unlike my Western colleagues (from the UK, EU and US), I did not have any difficulties with cultural differences, nor carry the burdens of being past colonial masters. I was able to empathise, convey Western public management concepts in more appropriate ways and build trusted relationships quickly with government officials. I was born in Malaysia, and although I was naturalised as a British citizen, working in Southeast Asia felt like coming home.

In the last part of the essay, I will comment on Southeast Asia as a whole, from the perspective of governance, economic development and how ASEAN might or could respond to the geo-political struggle between the West and China.

The Journeys

Vietnam

My first mission in Vietnam was in 1998, where I replaced the team leader for a project to reform and strengthen the capacity of the National Institute for Public Administration (NIPA - now known as NAPA - the National Academy for Public Administration). In those days, everything was tightly controlled. The foreign consultants were confined to their project rooms and not allowed to wander around, knocking on doors to speak with staff or students. Every meeting had to be formally requested in writing.

Yet, there was a desire for change. I was supported by the retired President of NIPA who helped me to describe the civil servant training system in Vietnam, which was then opaque to the development partners. A NIPA professor once asked me what the biggest obstacle was to reform in Vietnam. I answered the Party without hesitation and his immediate answer was 'correct'. The Vietnamese generally love a good debate, especially when eating and drinking with friends. However, problems will arise for individuals if they go public with anti-government views without authorisation.

From NIPA, I moved on to the Ministry of Home Affairs (MOHA) and various provinces, working on over 40 donor-funded projects, mostly involving civil servant management and development, improving public services and performance management. My last project in Vietnam was in 2017. Many of my local counterparts were fluent in English and had completed master's degrees in the UK, Australia or the US. One became a Vice-President of NAPA and others built successful consultancy companies.

Economic reforms began with Doi Moi in 1986. Vietnam changed from a country where in 1998 everybody wore the same greyish-blue clothes. Progress was initially slow but speeded up from 2000 onwards. Roads were built and towns were transformed by modern housing estates, shopping malls and industrial parks. So, why has an authoritarian one-

party state succeeded in increasing prosperity for its people (when conventional wisdom asserts that Western-style liberal democracy is a necessary condition).

Lao PDR

My journey as an international public sector consultant in Southeast Asia began in Lao PDR in 1997. The project was to support a loan for the development of a new drainage system and road improvement programme for Vientiane, the capital city. Our role was to design a municipal administration, including a capacity-building system, to take responsibility for the loan. We soon realised that none of us in the consultant team knew anything about the Lao administrative system, including the expert on municipal legal matters.

The next time I was in Lao PDR for another project was many years later in 2013, with intermittent inputs until 2018, to build the capacity of PARTI (Public Administration Reform Training Institute) in the Ministry of Home Affairs (MOHA). This time, all the roads in Vientiane were paved, as well as major highways to the provinces. Vientiane was gridlocked every morning and evening. However, the charm of the Lao people had not changed – their traditions, their grace and their calm pace of life.

A popular party activity was the traditional Lam Vong dance. The Director-General was always invited and attended, even if the event was held by the lowest member of staff. Often, the Vice-Minister responsible for PARTI and the project would also be present. Every late Friday afternoon at about 4 pm, all the staff would gather to play petanque, a popular game inherited from the French. Again, the Director General and Vice-Minister would attend if they were not busy. Competitive games were also held between departments and other Ministries, strengthening informal networks amongst the staff. I often use these occasions to catch a few minutes with the Vice-Minister.

In contrast to Vietnam, there did not appear to be a much-animated discussion of party politics (at least not in my presence). One common refrain though is that the elderly party leaders are still fighting the war and not adapting well to contemporary realities. Translation of administrative terms from English to Lao was a fraught process, and often required lengthy discussions. Decision-making was slow, involving consultations with relevant ministries and other stakeholders, and as documents made their way upwards.

Generally, the Lao Government and the LPRP were cautious of reforms pushed by Western development agencies. For example, a donor-sponsored decentralisation project would be running in parallel with a homegrown project based on a different framework. The LPRP is always present, as most civil servants were also party cadre. They are always busy as essentially, they have two sets of responsibilities – their administrative job and their duties to the party. In addition, the staff also have to service the many multi-lateral and bilateral projects in their departments, as well as attend project activities.

Myanmar

My first visit to Myanmar was in 2007 when the country was under military rule and Aung San Suu Kyi was under house arrest. I was there to provide training on writing project proposals for international development aid. The 20 or so participants from various Ministries were fluent in English and enthusiastic. 2 men were sitting quietly at the back who were security but once they realised, I was not introducing any sensitive subjects, they eagerly joined the participative exercises.

When walking in the streets, the first thing I noticed was that everybody was walking. There were no motorcycles or bicycles. I later found out that it was easier for the security forces to catch people if they could only run. My next trip to Myanmar was in early 2015 on a project for the ASEAN Secretariat (more below). Talking to the civil servants involved, my impression was wariness and perhaps even fear.

My last visit to Myanmar was in late 2017 to support the design of 2 projects (i) the reform of the Myanmar Civil Service and (ii) the strengthening of administrative justice. It was 2 years since the National League for Democracy led by Aung San Suu Kyi formed a civilian government after many decades of military rule. Yangon was booming with construction cranes and traffic jams. People looked happier but the vast majority had little or no knowledge of Rakhine. This time I went to Naypyidaw officially, and visited a provincial administrative office and a civil service training institute to talk with a class of eager middle-level administrators. The civil servants were overwhelmed with their work but there was a feeling of optimism and change for the better.

I had another input remotely in 2022 after the coup in February 2021 replaced the elected government with another military junta. As the country descended into civil war, I helped design a project for collating and analysing information from the ground and another project to support civil society organisations. The international development partners had stopped funding many development projects. Security to ensure the safety of development staff and local partners was paramount.

ASEAN Secretariat

The two projects I did for the ASEAN Secretariat in 2014/15 were fascinating. The first was to develop a strategic plan to sustain a network of social service agencies across ASEAN to support victims of trafficking and violence against women and children. I was based in Indonesia and the project enabled me to visit Vietnam, Lao PDR, Brunei, Malaysia and Singapore. The second project was to undertake a review of the work of the ASEAN Commission on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Women and Children (ACWC) and then propose a strategic plan for the next 5 years.

Both projects gave me some insights into the way ASEAN member states work together. Firstly, the importance of consultation and consensus building with the representatives and involved sector Ministries of each Member State. Secondly, a need for sensitivity and respect for the

difficulties of officials in autocratic and repressive regimes. Thirdly, in the more democratic Member States, as well as in the Kingdom of Brunei, the sector Ministries do involve civil society organisations, working with officials, to develop ideas and strategies.

Reflections

If the EU intends to develop an effective collaborative relationship with ASEAN based on mutual respect, the following are some of my observations on governance systems across the ASEAN Member States, the implications of corruption on economic growth and the geopolitics between the West and China.

Governance

Although EU member states are distinctly different from each other, for example between Spain, France and Germany, there is nevertheless a shared commonality in religion, philosophy and governance systems. By and large the legitimacy of EU member states is based on multiple parties competing to govern in a representative liberal democracy. ASEAN member states however are highly varied. Some like Singapore and the Philippines are secular states, some are Islamic (Malaysia, Indonesia and Brunei) and others are Buddhists (Vietnam, Lao PDR, Cambodia, Thailand and Myanmar). Governance systems vary from states with one dominant party (e.g. Singapore) and competing multi-parties (e.g. the Philippines) with regular elections following Western practices, to single-party states (e.g. Vietnam), a kingdom (Brunei) and a military junta (e.g. Myanmar).

If the EU has the attitude that European forms of governance and economic systems are superior, the relationship with ASEAN will not go far beyond polite smiles, handshakes and signed agreements that would be ignored. The EU will need to acknowledge that ASEAN states have the agency to choose their development paths. Except for Thailand, all ASEAN states were once colonised by European countries. Resources were exploited and people were treated as lesser human beings. ASEAN and its people would not take kindly to being lectured about superior European values.

The EU will also need to recognise that there are other forms of governance (which may be anathema to EU values) that may work for some of the ASEAN states. From my observations of the various governance systems in ASEAN, it seems to me that it is not the form of governance that is critical but the competence and ambition of the ruling regime to the development of a country and its people. Even in autocratic regimes, there can be a genuine desire to empower people and ensure that people benefit from development, although implementation can be flawed or blocked by despotic power interests. The Vietnamese Grassroots Democracy Decree promulgated in 2007 - people know, people discuss, people do, people supervise - is a prime example of people's participation in local development.¹

Another critical factor, regardless of the governance system, is whether there is an effective renewal process. For single-party states, like Vietnam, renewal takes place every 10 years when the President, Prime Minister and other leaders are replaced. There is usually a 'struggle' between traditionalists, reformists and other factions, eagerly followed by the Vietnamese people, as the winning faction would set the policies of the country for the next 10 years. The Communist Party of Vietnam also practised democratic centralism, whereby party members are free to debate policies but everybody falls in line once a decision has been made.

In comparison, single-party states ruled by one dominant leader or by an unchanging party leadership, appear to stagnate or grow slowly (for example Cambodia by one strong man, Lao PDR by an elderly leadership and Myanmar under military rule). For multi-party states, renewal would normally take place after a general election, especially if the opposition wins power. However, for some ASEAN states renewal was hampered for long periods by a dominant party making sure it wins at every election.

¹ For an example of the Grassroots Democracy Decree in action see <https://www.newmandala.org/grassroots-democracy-made-in-vietnam/>

Corruption and Economic Growth

Corruption is a blight that often constrains emerging economies and most ASEAN states suffer from it. However, it is useful to distinguish between 2 forms of corruption – the baobab and the mango tree.² The metaphor of the baobab tree is that it is big, strong and little grows around it, whereas the mango tree provides shade, produces a lot of fruit and does not dominate the landscape. Examples of baobab tree corruption would be Marcos in the Philippines, Suharto in Indonesia and Hun Sen in Cambodia, where one person or family gained so much wealth that little is left for the rest of the country.

The economic development of Vietnam is a good example of mango tree corruption. During the early years of economic reforms, the salaries of civil servants were very low and bribes collected by public institutions were put into a pot. The pot was then distributed to all staff members, with higher levels getting more. Another factor that fed the mango tree was foreign exchange controls, which prevented the Vietnamese from sending their money overseas.

Hence, they mostly invested their money into setting up local businesses. I used to stay in a hotel in Hanoi in an area where most of the residents were military. The range of retail, catering and other small businesses that grew and changed over the years was amazing.

On the other hand, if individuals were caught pocketing the money themselves there would be an internal disciplinary hearing whereby the accused was allowed to acknowledge their misconduct and return all the money received. Generally, this is done quietly without any publicity. I don't know whether this form of mango tree corruption persists today.

² The expression was coined by Nicholas Thompson and Scott Thompson in 'The Baobab and the Mango Tree: Lessons About Development - African and Asian Contrasts', London: Zed Books (2000). Although the study was critiqued by A. F. Robertson, 'Journal of Political Ecology 8(1), 70-73, <https://doi.org/10.2458/v8i1.21609>, the baobab and mango trees are useful metaphors for understanding corruption in ASEAN member states.

However, the recent public trial of 54 officials in the foreign ministry who received bribes indicates that even a dominant one-party regime needs to gain the trust of the people with competent governance.

The EU too has problems with corruption. According to the European Commission,³ *'68% of Europeans believe that corruption is widespread in their countries and 41% think that it has increased in recent years' and that '59% of EU businesses agree with the statement that bribery and the use of connections is often the easiest way to obtain certain public services.* To tackle the problem the European Commission plans to establish an inter-institutional ethics body, which has been criticised as unambitious, unsatisfactory and not sufficiently independent.⁴

From my experience in Vietnam, I perceive that during the early stages of the development of a country, especially from a very low economic base, some form of mango tree corruption and foreign exchange control could be beneficial. It enables the growth of domestic capital for local development before the country opens up to larger foreign inward investment and global market forces. If Vietnam were to open up suddenly in the early years in accordance with liberal economic orthodoxy, its market would be overwhelmed and resources extracted by foreign multinationals.

Certainly, there is a point whereby excessive corruption is abused by people in power, infringes on people's right to fair treatment and damages economic progress. Perhaps, anti-corruption efforts are one area where the EU and ASEAN can work together and learn from each other.

³ Corruption. (2023, November 27). Migration and Home Affairs. https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/policies/internal-security/corruption_en

⁴ Jones, M. G. (2023, October 10). Proposed EU ethics body blasted as unambitious and unsatisfactory by MEPs. Euronews. <https://www.euronews.com/my-europe/2023/07/12/proposed-eu-ethics-body-blasted-as-unambitious-and-unsatisfactory-by-meps>

Geopolitics

At present, 2 elephants in the room will impact considerably on how ASEAN-EU relationships might develop in the short and medium terms. The rise of China and the efforts of the United States, the existing superpower, to restrict the growth of China. In a way, both the EU and ASEAN are subjected to influence from both the United States and China. The EU made its choice a long time ago, being a part of NATO. Its increasing acceptance of the leadership of the US in global affairs has led to a view that the EU is behaving like an ally of the US rather than as an independent bloc.

Globally, we are heading towards a multipolar world, possibly under 2 spheres of influence, one dominated by the US and the other by China. Although individual ASEAN Member States may be more pro-US or China, ASEAN as a whole has historically adopted a non-aligned stance, and long may it continue to do so. It would be unacceptable if the EU was to project US policies and strategies to constrain China economically and militarily in its dealings with ASEAN. The ASEAN-EU relationship should be built on its terms for the mutual benefit of both blocs.

Realistically, China will have the largest influence on the future economic prosperity of ASEAN, primarily due to geographical proximity, trade and transport connections (especially high-speed rail). Although the EU is likely not able to match the level of investment from China, it does not mean that there is no role for the EU to play. If the EU is truly sincere in supporting ASEAN for its own sake rather than as part of an anti-China strategy there is much the EU can do. There will be critical projects, such as building climate change resilience, to complement infrastructure projects implemented by others, e.g. China. Some of the less developed ASEAN states would also need help, not to critique and reject BRI projects but to enable them to evaluate, negotiate and supervise these projects more effectively.

Ideally, rather than being forced to choose sides, ASEAN should grow into a bloc that is independent and strong enough to look after its interests when negotiating with or navigating the conflicts between the great powers, such as the US, China and Russia. Perhaps, one day, the EU might also do the same.

Conclusion

It is imperative that the EU approach to ASEAN is not based on Josep Borrell's image of Europe as a garden, and the rest of the world as a jungle and the jungle could invade the garden. The ASEAN-EU relationship will not prosper if the EU believes that 'we have built a garden. Everything works. It is the best combination of political freedom, economic prosperity and social cohesion that the humankind has been able to build'. Worse, if the EU's approach to ASEAN follows 'EU ambassadors as "gardeners" ... to carry out their diplomatic work around the world and advance the bloc's geopolitical agenda'.⁵

ASEAN member states are far from perfect. For ASEAN states practising multi-party elections, there appears to be a movement over time from a dominant party to more equal competing multi-parties (e.g. Malaysia and Indonesia). However, although there is a general trend of ASEAN states opening up and becoming more transparent with economic prosperity, there is always a risk of relapse (e.g. the return of military rule in Myanmar and the nepotic transfer of power in Cambodia). Better governance is also not guaranteed when competing political parties, or factions within a single-party state, must win at any cost to protect their vested interests. The EU is not perfect either as undercurrents of inequality, racism and fascism undermine faith in democracy. Hence, there is much the EU and ASEAN can support and learn from each other.

5 Liboreiro, J. (2022, October 20). Josep Borrell apologises for controversial "garden vs jungle" metaphor but defends speech. Euronews. <https://www.euronews.com/my-europe/2022/10/19/josep-borrell-apologises-for-controversial-garden-vs-jungle-metaphor-but-stands-his-ground>

During my late teens, the Malaysian government promoted 'Muhibbah' to encourage multi-cultural togetherness, harmony and goodwill for each other. Another key Malay word for me was 'Gotong Royong', that is, cooperation and working together to benefit society. During my Sixth Form, the headteacher called the student leaders of the Malay, Chinese and Indian Societies to combine into one Cultural Society. From that point onwards, I adhere to the principle of to live and let live. I believe that when countries and people with different histories, philosophies, religions and cultures collaborate there can be mutual learning to enrich each other and even develop innovative paradigms for meeting new challenges as humanity evolves.

Chapter 17

Summaries

by Merlene Toh-Emerson MBE

This book was conceived in 2022 on the 45th anniversary of EU and ASEAN's relationship, beginning in 1977 as Dialogue Partners and progressing over time to becoming Strategic Partners in 2020. There had been a depth of research and publications¹ on the subject of EU and ASEAN relationship at the time, though the topic has since received more attention.²

Key to the work of the Paddy Ashdown Forum think-tank is its internationalist and balanced outlook: like an old long-playing (LP) record, there are often 2 sides or perspectives. We have authors based in the EU as well as in ASEAN. For example, the chapters on Trade (Chapters 4 and 5) are written from EU and ASEAN perspectives, respectively; likewise the chapters on Defence and Security (Chapters 7 and 8) and those on Youth (Chapters 13 and 14).

It follows therefore that all essays must be read together so that a more complete 3-dimensional picture can emerge.

Chapter 2 - Europe's Asian Pivot: The EU-ASEAN Partnership as a Blueprint for Cooperation in the Pacific Century

Dr Antonios Nestoras, former Head of Policy at ELF, leads in a clarion call for multi-polarity and greater cooperation between EU and ASEAN and hails the importance of the strategic partnership in the so-called Pacific Century.

¹ 'ASEAN-EU Partnership The Untold Story' by Tommy Koh and Lay Hwee Yeo

² McFaul, M. (2023, July 4). The Other Half of the Job. Carnegie Europe. <https://carnegieeurope.eu/2023/07/04/reimagining-eu-asean-relations-challenges-and-opportunities-pub-900%2078>.

Rather than censuring ASEAN countries for their slow consensus-based policymaking, Nestoras sees this as an opportunity for the EU to play its part in quiet diplomacy, driving multi-party initiatives and in introducing EU's hallmark global standards (whether in trade, data or environmental protection).

The benefits of closer working relationships between the EU and ASEAN are multi-fold: from providing diversification to EU supply chains, to access to fast-growing markets in Asia, to opportunities for European companies to support infrastructural and urban development. Other examples of synergies include the strengthening of global health initiatives and solutions eg during the COVID pandemic, the joint tackling of cybercrime and terrorism and the all-important promotion of education and cultural exchanges.

One of the impediments to the EU providing more security support in the South China Sea despite a joint stance on UNCLOS, Nestoras posits, is the lack of agreement and unity within a growing EU on questions of foreign policy and defence. However, it is in this area where the EU can engage as an independent actor to carve out a role for itself in the maintenance of global peace.

Section 1 - economic sustainability and trade

Chapter 3 – Trade Cooperation From an EU Perspective

Laia Comerma Calatayud writes with a wealth of knowledge given that her current PhD thesis is on the topic of EU trade. ASEAN is the EU's 3rd largest trading partner after China and the US; likewise EU is ASEAN's 3rd largest partner representing 10.6% of ASEAN's trade.

Yet in the last 10 years trade between the two blocs has stalled and ASEAN exports to the EU decreased from 13.6% in 2012 to 11.3% in 2021, whilst imports from the EU went down from 12.5% in 2012 to 9% in 2021.

Obstacles to closer cooperation include the so-called “ASEAN way” and the “China factor,” posits Comerma. The former relates to the norms and values which are stubbornly “sovereign-centric” and rely on consensus. There are also institutional reasons: the ASEAN Secretariat, for example, is not able to negotiate on behalf of the bloc. Despite these, China and ASEAN did manage to ink their FTA as far back as 2009 and a reason may be because China does not raise pre-requisites of good governance and transparency the way the EU does. However, the value of the EU to the ASEAN is that the EU provides funding support, institutional solutions and capacity building.

Comerma is not short on recommendations for a constructive way forward. Read her chapter on the blocs’ Plan of Action 2023-2027 and on how the EU can pursue a “principled pragmatism approach” in enhancing its trading relations with the ASEAN.

Chapter 4 – ASEAN-EU Trade Cooperation: The ASEAN Perspective

Kiat Sitttheeamorn, Dr Lito Arlegue and Thea Joyce Vistar recognise like Comerma that the trading relationship between the two blocs has struck an impasse. However, perceptions differ slightly on the reasons for this. The CALD authors downplay the China factor and instead suggest that the EU is partly responsible for their policy of “divide and rule” between the different ASEAN countries and introducing NTBs (non-tariff barriers) as smoke screens for protectionism.

Historical landmarks included the 1977 agreement to be Dialogue Partners, the Bandar Seri Begawan Plan of Action for an Enhanced Partnership (2013-2017) followed by more recent bilateral FTAs, first with Singapore (Feb 2019) and with Vietnam (August 2020). These are incremental steps in the right direction. However regional crises and challenges in both Europe and in Asia, such as the Covid pandemic and the more recent invasion of Ukraine, have meant that EU ASEAN dialogue has taken a back seat.

For the EU to understand the ASEAN way of non-interference, may mean the amelioration of the EU's "values-based diplomacy". Most of the ASEAN member states have undergone colonialism and subjugation with hard-won independence. They now dream of becoming true strategic partners and not merely remaining in an unbalanced, asymmetrical financier-receiver type of relationship.

Chapter 5 – Perspectives on the ASEAN -EU Relationship

Dr Reuben Wong provides a grand overview of the long-standing and multi-faceted relationship between the two blocs over the last 45 years. Wong correctly identified the key areas of collaboration in Trade as well as in Security and Defence. In his frank analysis, he noted that ASEAN is essentially not a defence-oriented organisation and to the chagrin of the EU establishment, there has not been a united stance against Russia over its invasion of Ukraine.

On the trade front, the FTA forged by the EU with specific ASEAN countries (namely Singapore and Vietnam) has exacerbated fears that it would merely increase existing inequalities within the region. Meanwhile, the palm oil dispute between Indonesia Malaysia and the EU cannot be ignored. In July 2022 the EU passed the Renewable Energy Directive (RED II) requiring the complete eradication of palm oil products by 2030.

However, there are also positives for the ASEAN in the relationship, such as from ARISE (grant support for regional integration from the EU). Wong recommends that the EU consolidate its standing in SE Asia by increasing its role as a regional security player (former forays had included the Aceh Monitoring Mission, circa 2007). Nevertheless, the EU must recognise there are changing power dynamics, and other competitors operating in the region, and the EU must work alongside ASEAN's norms, rules and procedures.

Chapter 6 – Advancing the Blue Economy – Harnessing Potential, Addressing Challenges and Collaborative Prioritisation for ASEAN-EU Cooperation

Aimee Alado-Blake delves into the depths and expanse of the burgeoning blue economy, viz the sustainable use of ocean resources for economic growth, and improved livelihoods and jobs while preserving the health of the ocean ecosystem (World Bank definition).

Growing up in the family-run aquaculture (fishponds) industry in the Philippines, Alado-Blake is all too aware of the negative impact of climate change on the aquaculture and fishing industry. She is also cognisant of the importance and potential for ASEAN and the EU to work together to deal with common concerns regarding food security, marine pollution and biodiversity preservation.

The EU has much to offer the region with expertise in traditional blue economic activities such as port management and as leaders in emerging blue economic activities such as harnessing offshore wind energy. There are myriad areas for cooperation, including renewable energy development, in advancing biotechnology and marine conservation.

Alado-Blake calls for harmonisation of policy and regulatory frameworks to deal with problems, e.g., plastic pollution and effects of climate change and also introduces novel ideas for paying for the clean-up, conservation and improving the livelihood of coastal communities, e.g., blue bonds (the first being issued by Seychelles) or 'Debt for Nature Swap'. The key is collaborative prioritisation (the "to-do" list is otherwise too long). By balancing economic growth with environmental protection, the blue economy could be the engine for growth for the two blocs and the panacea for a sick planet.

SECTION 2 - MULTILATERAL SECURITY AND STRATEGY

Chapter 7 – EU-ASEAN Security Cooperation

Prof. Emil Kirchner writes primarily from an EU perspective and is an advocate of increasing EU-ASEAN security partnerships and cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region. The heightening geo-political tensions and competition in the region between the US and China have a direct impact on the EU's interests and he laments the absence of a uniform and majority-oriented decision-making EU security and defence process with over-reliance on the US.

At the same time, Kirchner recognises the challenges to closer security cooperation, in part hampered by differences in perceptions and priorities. ASEAN countries generally view China as less of a threat despite its aggressive maritime activities in the South China Sea. The abstinence by some of the ASEAN countries (namely, Vietnam and Laos) from the UN General Assembly resolution condemning Russia's invasion of Ukraine has also highlighted the diverse political allegiances within the bloc.

Of policy recommendations, Kirchner supports more investment by the EU to build more resilient and sustainable global value chains, strengthen cyber-security, and extreme terrorism and improve crisis management. He also advocates more naval exercises in the S China Sea though he goes as far as to say that the EU's position is different from that of the US (the emphasis should be on de-risking not decoupling).

Chapter 8 – EU-ASEAN Strategic Partnership – Deepening Security Cooperation Towards Multilateral Polarity

Dr Yeo Lay Hwee shares a more ASEAN-oriented perspective of the security landscape facing the EU within Asia and the Indo-Pacific region. The main thrust of her argument is the need to move towards what she terms “multi-lateral polarity” defined as “a region of different poles working within a framework of widely accepted rules and principles”.

Like Kirchner, she acknowledges the different historical developments leading to the institutional set-up of the two blocs (one as a supra-national body able to make its own laws and the other a collection of sovereign states operating on an inter-governmental level only). However, Yeo expresses concern that since Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, there appears to be a return to ideological dogma and a hardening of views within the EU to divide ASEAN countries as between democracies and autocracies.

Yeo calls instead for “mutual strategic empathy” for the EU-ASEAN strategic partnership to bear fruit. EU and ASEAN should find common ground in working on economic, environmental and maritime security. At the same time to avert a new Cold (or hot) war, work towards lowering the temperature in the intensifying strategic rivalry between the US and China, ensuring that peace can be maintained in the region. ASEAN is therefore wary of Washington’s more hard anti-China alliance through the QUAD, AUKUS and the possible beginning of a Pacific NATO.

Chapter 9 - EU-ASEAN Cooperation on AI Governance Amid Geostrategic Shifts: Opportunities and Challenges

Transnational issues including, fake news, cybercrime and extremism could be exacerbated by Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI) especially if these new capabilities are used by malign actors, warns **Carl-Johan Carlstedt** in his essay on Sustainable Connectivity.

With great uncertainty around risks and benefits, he therefore stresses the urgent need for more global co-operation on tracking harmful uses of GenAI as an international open-source basis of evidence for policy making. This can be an evidence base used by governments to establish minimalist safeguards in AI to address the risks to citizens, as well as to reap the promised benefits of increasing innovation and productivity.

The EU and the US are already setting standards and proposing laws and regulations for greater consumer protection in the sphere of AI e.g. EU's AI Act passed in June this year and the Blueprint for an AI Bill of Rights is framing a more decentralised approach in the US.

Worryingly, the ASEAN region has been home to online scam groups in recent years, operating in countries beyond the reach of law enforcement e.g. in Cambodia, Myanmar and parts of the Philippines. Hence early development of ASEAN's own monitoring and AI regulations is highly recommended to bolster security and foster trustworthy connectivity, ensuring greater political security (e.g. fair elections) and a strong digital economy.

Next year Singapore has a rotating chair of the ASEAN Digital Ministers Meeting in 2024, and it is hoped that some progress may be made then with a new ASEAN Guide on AI Governance and Ethics.

Section 3: health, human rights, youth engagement and personal perspectives

Chapter 10 – EU-ASEAN Relations - A Health Systems Perspective

Dr Mike Walsh and Dr Brian Howieson examine key differences between health systems of the EU and ASEAN countries, referencing WHO's "six building blocks" to uncover the opportunities for and barriers to closer coordination between the two blocs.

Whereas there are mechanisms for working towards a stronger health union in the EU, the ASEAN Charter does not make specific reference to health care. Other differences include population sizes (437m in the EU, 667m in ASEAN, 2020), their respective levels of development and disparities in investments in the healthcare systems. For example, 8 of the 10 ASEAN governments fund between 16%-53% of healthcare expenditure whereas EU governments fund between 60%-87% of health expenditure. There are consequently corresponding differences in life expectancies as “inequalities kill”.

The authors also observed that ASEAN countries tend to spend more of their budget on curative care, but in the EU budgets are more divided between curative, long-term as well as preventative care.

Policy recommendations include the tackling of health systems at multiple levels: from policymakers to education and training, to health workers. A holistic rather than a linear approach with long-sighted planning (eg exchange of personnel and/or targeted economic and social development programmes for the poorer ASEAN countries) would help ensure better health outcomes.

Chapter 11 – Dictatorship Succession in Cambodia Highlights Southeast Asia’s Human Rights Crisis

Mu Sochua and David Whitehouse, focusing on Cambodia’s dictatorship succession, sound an urgent call for the international community to respond to the continuing democratic deficit in Cambodia. In August 2023, Hun Manet, son of strongman Hun Sen, was appointed the new Prime Minister. EU President Ursula von der Leyen had sent her congratulations rather than condemn the banning of all political opposition before the elections.

Cambodia suffers from chronic and systemic corruption, inequitable growth and the proliferation of cyber scams and cyber-slavery. Deforestation continues unabated whilst the world turns a blind eye to the high youth unemployment, endemic exploitation of women, persecution of LGBTI+ communities and threats from climate change.

Strong criticisms are also levelled at neighbouring military-controlled regimes, Myanmar and Thailand. Cambodia held the chair of ASEAN in 2022 but made little or no progress on human rights. The non-intervention principle of ASEAN is allowed to be used as a *carte blanche* for internal repression.

The authors recommend that targeted international sanctions be carried out in a coordinated fashion by the US, EU and the UK. Until Cambodia holds genuine elections allowing the reinstatement of political exiles such as Sam Rainsy and of the opposition Cambodia National Rescue Party, Hun Manet must be denied legitimacy as the new dictator.

Chapter 12 – ASEAN Human Rights – Is There a Case For Cautious Optimism?

Dr Yeow Poon provides a broad overview and detailed analysis of the fragmented human rights developments within the ASEAN region. Whilst SoChua and Whitehead had focussed on Cambodia and neighbouring Myanmar and Thailand, Poon has instead delved into the history and evolution of human rights in 3 case examples:

Indonesia, a former Dutch colony emerged after WW2 with independence under General Sukarno and can rightly call itself a democratic republic today under President Joko Widodo.

Despite threats from Muslim extremists in certain regions, it has a thriving economy, and its capital Jakarta is also the seat of the ASEAN Secretariat.

Vietnam, a former French colony, riven by decades of civil war was finally reunited in 1976 but remains governed by one party as a socialist state.

Malaysia, unlike Indonesia and Vietnam was able to gain independence from Britain without armed struggle, recently voted out a government which had been in power for six decades and installed a former political prisoner, Anwar Ibrahim (accused twice of sodomy) as Prime Minister.

The EU can be more engaged in supporting development projects in the region which implicitly include human rights protection. Collaborating with AICHR, targeted sanctions may be needed in the regimes guilty of perpetrating violent political repression. But an Indo-Pacific strategy that simply divides the region between democracies and non-democracies would be simplistic and fail to take into account the history, evolution and priorities of the relevant countries.

Chapter 13 – EU Youth Programmes – Visions and Spaces For a Truly Global Youth Exchange?

Lauren Mason applauds President Ursula Von de Leyen for designating 2022 the European Year of Youth. This has put young people back on the EU agenda with a doubling of funds for the flagship Erasmus + programme (from €14.7m to €26.2m in 2023).

Statistics show that 18,998 staff and students from Asia travelled to Europe between 2015 and 2020 on the Erasmus+ programme, whilst 11,645 staff and students went to Asia from Europe. More than 500 youth organisations in Asia have participated in youth exchanges, projects and training programmes.

A game changer as regards links to non-EU countries has been the launch of Erasmus Mundus Joint Master's Degrees in 2004, and there are now active alumni. The Youth Action Plan 2022-2027 mainstreamed youth

participation in the EU's external action and youths from the ASEAN region have also been recruited onto the Youth Sounding Board.

There is a need, writes Mason, to balance the EU's internal and external objectives. The youth are tapped for their vision and vigour for the "Future of Europe", encouraged to be the "generation of dreamers and makers", and agents of change towards meeting the UN 2030 goals. The test will be on how the EU's youth strategy and action plan will be implemented based on 3 pillars of "engage, empower, connect," and on whether the promises made at the EU-ASEAN Youth Summit in Dec 2022 will lead to action and not just words.

Chapter 14 – The Future of ASEAN-EU Youth Relations

Jeremiah Tomas invites us to imagine a world where the collective perspective of the youth is at the forefront of shaping international collaboration. That vision is not too far-fetched as in 2022, marking the 45th anniversary of EU-ASEAN relations, 90 young leaders aged 20-35 from over 27 countries in Europe and SE Asia gathered for the EU-ASEAN Young Leaders Forum.

ASEAN has a young population with the youth comprising 34% of the total population of 667 million. Tomas believes Education is the key to growth and prosperity. It is also the great equaliser and the catalyst for social mobility. Through the EU's ERASMUS programmes, the exchange of students between the EU and ASEAN has also helped improve regional integration and cross-border cooperation.

EU's Support to Higher Education in the ASEAN Region (SHARE programme) was launched in 2015 with a € 15 million grant by a consortium of institutions including the British Council, DAAD, ENQA and NUFFIC. Benefits have included greater student mobility, improved quality assurance and credit transfer systems.

Tomas proposes that the ASEAN countries could develop their counterpart to ERASMUS and attract more students to ASEAN's universities. Youth perspective should be more prominently integrated into the Secretariat, promoting its aims, and values and forging a stronger ASEAN identity. Allotting a seat for the Youth in every committee and the creation of an ASEAN Youth Think Tank are other novel ideas which could spur sustainable development and positive changes for the region.

Chapter 15 - Sustainable Development: An Inclusive Space For People to Flourish and the Planet to Thrive

In this informal but informed essay **Chris Gleadle** delivers with authority how a unified systems approach to Sustainable Development can accelerate positive outcomes within EU-ASEAN cooperation. Chris illustrates how multiple competing information sources undermine the extensive endeavours to sustainable development that are being made. And, creating a unified EU-ASEAN standard could underpin strong sustainable development, measured, and managed as a whole giving surety to all.

Having unpacked the complexity of societal, economic, and environmental relationships he calls for harmonisation between policy, industry, and NGOs. He describes how transforming these relationships from fragmented, siloed realities, to unified wholes improve actions in a messy world.

Paying attention to urban/rural struggles illustrates how transformation in human development gives voice to the integration of diverse technologies. How it is possible to accelerate energy transformation, improve agricultural productivity and deliver integrated finance opportunities simultaneously underpinning returns to a wider stakeholder audience?

Chapter - 16 ASEAN Mosaic - A Personal Journey

Dr Yeow Poon, writing in the first person, chronicles the experience of Malaysian-born British Chinese, working as an international advisor in the ASEAN region over the last 3 decades. He has witnessed development changes in several nascent economies as they struggled for political survival post-colonialism.

Poon could win over the trust of the personnel at multi-lateral and public institutions, largely through the avoidance of the “them” and “us” mindset that often riddled Western consultants working in the developing world.

From Socialist Lao PDR and Vietnam to military-controlled Myanmar, Poon helped with reform of the local civil service and assisted the Secretariat with strategic plans for dealing with people trafficking and violence against women and children.

His conclusions and recommendations? In short, to be mindful that different countries are at different stages of their development trajectory. “It is not the form of governance that is critical but the competence and ambition of the ruling regime” he opined. An interesting metaphor borrowed: the “baobab” versus the “mango tree,” regarding the levels of corruption confronted. Finally, he mentioned the two “elephants in the room”. Both the EU and the ASEAN cannot escape the influence of the US and China but do they need to be forced to choose one against the other? Read his chapter to draw your conclusions.

To Conclude

The EU and ASEAN regional blocs have different beginnings, constitutional structures and diverse memberships. The number of EU members may have been reduced by one following the UK's exit in 2020. But there are currently no less than eight awaiting approval for EU accession. ASEAN has one (Timor-Leste 2011) in the wings but where the number of members may be fewer, the region trumps in terms of size of the population, combined GDP and development potential.

These essays were penned at a certain point in time and there will no doubt be many more twists and turns to the narrative. What is clear is that so long as there is a mutual desire and political will to work towards closer cooperation and collaboration, then challenges can be overcome.

The editors hope this publication will be a useful resource for scholars, policymakers and anyone interested in the dynamics of international and 'bloc-to-bloc' cooperation in this the 'Pacific Century'.

Author Biographies



Dr Antonios Nestoras

Dr Antonios Nestoras is the Deputy Executive Director of the European Liberal Forum (ELF). His career spans more than 12 years in the academic, think-tank and European public administration fields, and his work has been published in peer-reviewed journals, think-tank reports and EU media. He holds a double PhD in Social and Political Science from VUB and the University of Antwerp.



Laia Comerma Calatayud

Laia is currently a PhD candidate in International Relations, specifically working on EU-China economic cooperation and EU global governance at the Barcelona Institute for International Studies (IBEI). She also has a Master of Science (MSc) on International Relations from the London School of Economics (LSE) and a Bachelor on Philosophy, Politics and

economics from University Pompeu Fabra (UPF).

Throughout the years, she has lived, worked or studied in four different countries in Europe and Asia, being passionate about cultural and linguistic diversity. She has worked as an assistant on international digital policies for the Catalan Government and as an intern at the EU Delegation in Hong Kong. She has a wide background on volunteering work, as part of her commitment for a fairer, more inclusive society.



Kiat Sittheeamorn

Kiat served previously as member of Thailand's Parliament, secretary general of the Council of Asian Liberals and Democrats, and vice president and member of Human Rights Committee of Liberal International. He also served as the President of Thailand Trade Representative (TTR), acting as the special envoy of the Prime Minister on international trade and investment for Thailand. TTR is also responsible for developing strategies, negotiations and implementation of international agreements as well as an Advisor to the House and Senate Committees in the areas of foreign affairs, trade, investment and other economic issues.

Prior to his political career, he served as the Chairman of the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC) of Thailand National Committee, a Director of the Thai Chamber of Commerce and the Deputy Secretary-General of the Board of Trade of Thailand. He played a crucial role in proposing policies and strategies to various governmental organizations related to trade and investment. He was also appointed as Thailand's representative in the East Asia Vision Group to map out new architecture between ASEAN and China, Japan and Republic of Korea. In addition, he has had extensive work experiences in many countries in Asia, Europe and Middle East. Kiat received B.S. in Engineering from Chulalongkorn University, graduated in Business Management from Harvard Business School and M.A. in International Affairs from Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, Tufts University.



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Lito is the Executive Director of the Council of Asian Liberals and Democrats. At present, he also serves as Lecturer in the Diplomacy and International Affairs Department of the De la Salle - College of St. Benilde. He also taught political science, social science and economics courses in a number of schools in the Philippines such as the University of the Philippines, Miriam College, University of Asia and the Pacific, San Beda College, Lyceum of the Philippines and De La Salle University. He obtained his Bachelor's and Master's degrees at the University of the Philippines Diliman, where he has also finished the course work for Ph.D. in Political Science. He also completed a certificate course on international relations research at the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies (IHEID) in Geneva, Switzerland.



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Thea Joyce Vistar is currently the Project Assistant of the CALD Secretariat, with focus on, but not limited to, CALD Local Government Workshop on Smart Mobility. Thea was a former CALD research intern from May to July 2023. She finished Bachelor's Degree in Consular and Diplomatic Affairs at the De La Salle – College of Saint Benilde.



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Reuben Wong is Deputy Head at the National University of Singapore's Department of Political Science. He held the first Jean Monnet Professorship in Singapore (2013-16). Reuben is an Associate Fellow at the EU Centre Singapore, and sits on the Singapore International Foundation's Board of Governors (2021-). His research interests include the EU's relations with ASEAN and China, and the politics of disability. His publications have focused on EU and French foreign policy.



Aimee Alado-Blake

Aimee is an international lawyer, entrepreneur, environmental & EDI (Equality, Diversity, Inclusion) advocate, sustainable & impact investor, and legal and business strategist. She specialises in commercial, trade, investment, and intellectual property (IP) law.

Her remarkable achievements include being the first Filipino lawyer to attain a fellowship in IP rights from the WIPO and Japan Patent Office in Tokyo, Japan.

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Emil kirchner is Emeritus Professor as well as Jean Monnet Chair of European Political Integration at the University of Essex. He received his Ph-D from Case Western Reserve University. He was the Director of the Jean Monnet Centre of Excellence 1999- 2021. He is holder of the Order of Merit of the Federal Republic of Germany, a Fellow of the British

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Carl-Johan Carlstedt is geopolitical intelligence analyst focused on the Asia Pacific region. He is based in Singapore working for Dragonfly Intelligence, a part of FiscalNote. Carl-Johan has lived, worked and studied in the Asia Pacific region including in China, Indonesia, Malaysia and Vietnam. Previously he worked for several years in London as a government contractor specialising in counter-disinformation and counter-extremism. Carl-Johan holds a double Master's degree in International relations from the London School of Economics and Peking University in China.

Carl-Johan contributed this brief in his personal capacity. The opinions expressed are solely my own and do not express the views or opinions of my employer.



Dr Mike Walsh

Mike Walsh is a Member of the Institute of Consulting and retired in 2023 as Senior Lecturer in Management Science at the University of Stirling Management School. He specialises in health systems and community operational research and has carried out numerous large health systems projects including for the UN Development Programme / GEF & Ministry of Health in Ghana (strategic response to Climate Change), NHS Lothian, Edinburgh (design & implementation of knowledge exchange system). He is a reviewer for Medical Care, Health Systems, Healthcare Management Review, the European Journal of Operational Research and for book publishers on leading research, healthcare management and politics titles.



Dr Brian Howieson

Dr Brian Howieson is, at present, Vice Rector (Research and International Affairs) and Interim Dean at CIIM Business School, The University of Limassol, Cyprus. Previously, he was a Professor at two Scottish universities. He entered academia, mid-career, in 2009 via a UK Senior Foundation for Management Education/Economic and Social Research Council Fellowship. Prior to this academic career, he served as a Commissioned Officer in the Royal Air Force and as Head of Education, Training and Professional Development at the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Glasgow.



Mu Sochua

Mu Sochua is a Cambodian politician who has dedicated her life to fighting for women's rights and democracy in Southeast Asia. Her parents disappeared during the Khmer Rouge genocide. She is the vice president of the banned opposition Cambodia National Rescue Party (CNRP) and is exiled from Cambodia.

She won her first seat in parliament in 1998 and became the first woman to serve as the Minister of Women and Veterans' Affairs. As the government grew increasingly corrupt under Prime Minister Hun Sen, Sochua stepped down in 2004 to join the Sam Rainsy Party.

She won a seat in parliament for the second time in 2008. In 2013, she was elected for a third time, running under the banner of the CNRP.

Dedicated to combating sex trafficking and cyber slavery, and to the struggle for gender equality, Mu Sochua was nominated for a Nobel Peace Prize in 2005. She is now travelling globally to rally support for a democratic Cambodia.



David Whitehouse

David Whitehouse PhD is a freelance journalist in Paris who spent 17 years as an editor at Bloomberg News. He co-authored the autobiography of Cambodian opposition leader Sam Rainsy published in 2013.



Dr Yeow Poon

Dr Yeow Poon is a management consultant working primarily in the public and voluntary sectors. He has worked on a wide range of public administration reform, capacity building, management and leadership development projects in the United Kingdom, Vietnam, China, LAO PDR, Cambodia, Thailand, Myanmar, Bangladesh, South Africa and Greece. He has a particular interest in cross-culture-AI governance, leadership, management and organisation development issues. Yeow was born in Malaysia, attended university in the UK and naturalised as a British citizen. He is the Chair of the Chinese Community Centre – Birmingham, President of England China Business Forum, Chair of Arts in the Yard, Chair of Chinese Liberal Democrats, a Trustee of Chinese Welfare Trust and a core member of the Covid-19 Anti-Racism Group. He was the Business Desk Midlands Leadership Award Winner: Public and Third Sector Leader 2018.



Lauren Mason

Lauren Mason brings expertise in democratic engagement, human rights, youth participation and digital governance. Lauren currently works for the European Youth Forum, promoting youth participation in policy-making processes at EU and Council of Europe level, on topics ranging from digitalisation to human rights.

She is a member of LYMEC's working group on Civic and Minority Rights. She previously worked at the European Liberal Forum and the Council of Europe, and holds an MA in European Studies from the University of Göttingen and a BA in Modern Languages from the University of Cambridge. The perspectives expressed in this chapter are the personal views of the author.



Jeremiah Tomas

Jeremiah Tomas presently holds the role of Youth Caucus Chairperson within the Council of Asian Liberals & Democrats (CALD), a notable regional alliance of liberal and democratic political parties in Asia. CALD provides a unique platform for dialogue and cooperation, aiming to promote liberal values and democratic principles. Jeremiah is a dedicated advocate for

youth engagement in shaping Asia's political landscape and is committed to advancing liberal ideals. The work he is involved with is pivotal in fostering positive change and inspiring the next generation of leaders, securing a brighter future for Democracy in Asia.



Christopher Gleadle

Christopher Gleadle is a speaker, writer, and adviser on critical systems thinking and systemic intervention to advance the practical implementation of high-performing net-zero strategies. He is CEO of The Paddy Ashdown Forum and Sustainable Viability Ltd. Christopher draws on a diverse professional background from systems software design, paper, automotive, fleet and logistics, and finance where he designed and implemented novel reporting and training solutions highlighting the effects of multiple interacting investment, organisational, environmental, and social ecosystems. How actions of each affects the many. How feedback loops inform better decision making to reduce impact between functions – The 5 Essential Habits To Sustainable Viability. Christopher has written and co-authored several books, published 40 articles and written over 150 private reports and policy papers on a diverse range of topics. Christopher collaborates with European and international think tanks on a diverse range of topics, has conducted deep research and implementation projects from Southeast Asia to Europe across many industries.



Merlene Toh-Emerson MBE FRSA

Merlene had a legal career before entering politics and working in the third sector. She practiced as a solicitor in UK and Singapore and was involved in project finance in Indonesia, Singapore and Thailand. She was also a CEDR-accredited Mediator and Restorative Justice Practitioner in the UK. She now spends her time between the UK and the ASEAN region and this book was her brain-child to help bridge understanding between the 2 blocs. She is a Liberal Democrat delegate to ALDE Party (Alliance of Liberals and Democrats in Europe), Director of the England China Business Forum Limited and a Livery member of the Worshipful Company of World Traders.

About publishers



European Liberal Forum

The European Liberal Forum (ELF) is the think-tank and the official political foundation of the European Liberal Party, the ALDE Party. Together with 51 member organisations, ELF works all over Europe bringing new ideas into the political debate, providing a platform for discussion, and empowering citizens to make

their voices heard. Their work is guided by liberal ideals and a belief in the principle of freedom. They stand for a future-oriented Europe that offers opportunities for every citizen. ELF is engaged on all political levels, from the local to the European. They bring together a diverse network of national foundations, think tanks and experts. In this role, their forum serves as a space for an open and informed exchange of views between a wide range of different EU stakeholders.



The Paddy Ashdown Forum

The Paddy Ashdown Forum (PAF) is a non-partisan liberal think-and-action tank that was inspired by the legacy of Paddy Ashdown, a prominent British politician and statesman. Paddy Ashdown's vision, commitment, and principles have laid the foundation for this forum, which aims to continue his work in

promoting progressive values and fostering dialogue on pressing global issues. The founders of PAF, Christopher Gleadle and the late Robert Woodthorpe Browne, were deeply inspired by Paddy Ashdown's vision and sought to honour his legacy by establishing a platform that would carry forward his ideas and principles. They recognised the need for a space where individuals and organisations could come together to discuss and address complex global challenges.



European Liberal Youth

The European Liberal Youth (LYMEC), is a pan-European youth organisation seeking to promote liberal values throughout the EU as the youth organisation of the ALDE Party and the Renew Europe parliamentary group in the European Parliament. LYMEC is made up of 60 Member Organisations and 150,000 Individual Members, and it is active across the breadth and diversity of the European continent. Their central aim is the creation of a liberal and federal Europe.

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