

The background of the cover is a close-up, slightly blurred image of the European Union flag (blue with yellow stars) and the Cambodian flag (red with a yellow sunburst). The text is overlaid on a white circular area in the bottom right.

**FACILITATING
MULTILATERALISM:
EU-CAMBODIA
ASEAN DIALOGUE**

OCTOBER 2021

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OUTCOME REPORT

FACILITATING MULTILATERALISM: EU-CAMBODIA ASEAN DIALOGUE

October 2021

Phnom Penh, Cambodia

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

On behalf of Samdech HRH Prince Norodom Sirivudh, Chairman of the Cambodian Institute for Cooperation and Peace (CICP), I would like to take this opportunity to express CICP's deep gratitude to the Delegation of the European Union in Phnom Penh and H.E. Ambassador Carmen Moreno for the EU's financial support and vital collaboration in the organization of this dialogue on the future of EU-ASEAN relations.

This is the second event over the last several years where CICP has been able to partner with the EU in order both to examine in detail and to expand our understanding the issues, challenges, opportunities, and I look forward to further engagement at the track 1.5 level to continue to move forward with further, concrete measures to strengthen EU-ASEAN ties in general and to collectively work towards the shared goal of an effective multilateralism.

At the same time, I would also like to thank all of our distinguished panelists from both the EU and ASEAN for taking time from their busy schedules to participate and provide their valuable insights - ranging from how we conceptualize multilateralism, to its main challenges, to the on the ground realities of its improvement, to concrete policy initiatives. I am confident that readers from a range of academic and analytical backgrounds will find the papers collected in this Outcome Report to be of significant interest.

Moreover, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to participants who joined the event both in person as well as online, with particular thanks to representatives from the Cambodian Ministry of Foreign Affairs - recognizing the vast responsibility that the Royal Government takes on as it begins its chairmanship of ASEAN.

Finally, I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge the excellent work of CICP's entire team of staff and fellows without whom this event would not have been possible.

Ambassador Pou Sothirak

Executive Director, Cambodian Institute for Cooperation and Peace

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CONTEXT AND OVERVIEW

The European Union has a deep and lengthy history in promoting multilateralism. Less well known is Cambodia's own commitment to this principle, with the kingdom approaching ASEAN to mediate its historic Preah Vihear border dispute with Thailand and the Royal Cambodian Armed Forces regularly serving as members of United Nations peacekeeping missions. At present, the future trajectory of multilateralism remains very much an open question, particularly in light of rising Sino-American competition in Southeast Asia and, indeed, globally. Various analysts and scholars have argued that the future of geopolitics is one that will be defined by the decline of multilateralism, citing a wide variety of variables as key causes: rising nationalism, the long-term impacts of the Trump administration's abjuring of multilateral institutions and models, the perceived shift into a new era of bipolarity etc.

However, at the same time – the Covid-19 pandemic could provide an opportunity to begin to reset this narrative, as cooperation in this area has begun to bear fruit, demonstrating how the failure of states coordinating around major issues can have severely negative implications. Issues such as climate change and cybersecurity remain key issues and both will require significant, multilateral efforts to ensure the realization of effective solutions.

As Cambodia prepares for its chairmanship of ASEAN in 2022, the Cambodian Institute for Cooperation and Peace (CICP), with the support from the Delegation of the European Union to Cambodia, organized a one-day conference on “Facilitating Multilateralism: EU-Cambodian ASEAN” on 12 October 2021 at Raffles Hotel Le Royal, Phnom Penh and via ZOOM, in order to examine how the EU and its member states can support the kingdom as it takes on the role of ASEAN chair.

The conference comprised of two panels. The first of these would focus on EU-ASEAN relations in the context of multilateralism writ large and how the relationship between these two entities can be furthered developed to facilitate multilateralism both in Southeast Asia and globally. The second panel will examine more precisely the questions of: (i) the ASEAN Chairmanship 2022, and (ii) the meaning and future of the principle of ASEAN Centrality.

PROGRAM AGENDA

8:00 – 8:30	Registration	
8:30 – 8:40	Scene-Setting Remarks	<i>H.E. Ambassador Pou Sothirak Executive Director, Cambodian Institute for Cooperation and Peace (CICP)</i>
8:40 – 8:50	Welcome Remarks	<i>H.E. Ambassador Carmen Moreno Head of the Delegation of the European Union to Cambodia</i>
8:50 – 9:20	Plenary Speech	<i>H.E. Dr. Cheunboran Chanborey Director General of the Information, Research and Analysis Group, MFAIC and High Representative of the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of Cambodia</i>
9:20 – 9:50	Keynote Address	<i>H.E. Ambassador Igor Driesmans EU Ambassador to ASEAN</i>
9:50 – 10:00	Group Photo Session for Role Players	
10:00 – 10:30	Coffee Break	
10:30 – 12:00	<p><u>SESSION I: EU-ASEAN Relations in the Context of Multilateralism</u></p> <p>Panelists:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Dr. Nguyen Hung Son, Vice President of the Diplomatic Academy of Vietnam 2. Dr. Françoise Nicolas, Director, Center for Asian Studies, French Institute of International Relations 3. Jessica Wau, Deputy Director, ASEAN Singapore Institute of International Affairs 4. Dr. Michael Reiterer, Distinguished Professor, Centre for Security, Diplomacy and Strategy (CSDS), Brussels School of Governance (BSoG-VUB); EU-Ambassador ret. <p><i>Q&A and Discussion</i></p>	<p><i>The first session discusses how the current relationship between these two entities can be furthered developed to facilitate multilateralism both in Southeast Asia and globally</i></p> <p><u>Instigator: Dr. Bradley Murg</u> Senior Advisor and Distinguished Senior Fellow, CICP</p>
12:00 – 13:30	Break for Lunch	

SESSION II: ASEAN Chairmanship in 2022 and its Centrality in the Context of Big Power Competition

13:30 – 16:00

Panelists:

1. Ms. Pich Charadine, Deputy Director, CICP
2. Dr. Eva Pejsova, Senior Japan Fellow, Centre for Security, Diplomacy and Strategy (CSDS) of the Brussels School of Governance (BSoG-VUB) and an Associate Fellow at the French “Fondation pour la Recherche Strategique” (FRS)
3. Dr. Philip Vermonte, Executive Director of Centre for Strategic and International Studies, Indonesia
4. Dr. Aries A. Arugay, Associate Professor University of the Philippines

Q&A and Discussion

The second panel assesses ASEAN Centrality amidst big power competition and discusses Cambodia’s ASEAN Chairmanship in 2022.

Instigator: Mr. Kavi Chongkittavorn
Visiting Senior Fellow, CICP
Columnist & Veteran Journalist on Regional Affairs

16:00 – 16:10 **Concluding Remarks**

*H.E. Ambassador Carmen Moreno
Head of the Delegation of the
European Union to Cambodia*

16:10 – 16:20 **Wrap-Up and Closing Remarks**

*H.E. Ambassador Pou Sothirak
Executive Director, Cambodian Institute
for Cooperation and Peace (CICP)*

End of Program

**Facilitating Multilateralism
EU-Cambodian ASEAN Dialogue**
Tuesday, 12th October 2021 | From 8:30AM | Cambodia Time

8:30 - 10:00 Opening Session

- Scene-Setting Remarks:** H.E. Amb. Pou Sothirak, Executive Director, CICP
- Welcome Remarks:** H.E. Amb. Carmen Moreno, Ambassador, EU to Cambodia
- Plenary Speech:** H.E. Dr. Cheunboran Chanborey, Director General of Information, Research & Analysis Group, High Representative, MTRC Cambodia
- Keynote Address:** H.E. Amb. Igor Driesmans, Ambassador, EU to ASEAN

10:30 - 12:00 SESSION I: EU-ASEAN Relations in the Context of Multilateralism

- Dr. Nguyen Hung Son, Vice President, Diplomatic Academy of Vietnam
- Dr. Françoise Nicolas, Director, Center for Asian Studies, French Institute of International Relations
- Jessica Wau, Deputy Director, ASEAN, Singapore Institute of International Affairs
- Dr. Michael Reiterer, Distinguished Professor for International Security and Diplomacy, Institute for European Studies, Brussels School of Governance (BSoG-VUB), EU-Ambassador ret.
- Dr. Bradley J. Murg, Senior Advisor and Distinguished Senior Fellow, CICP, **Instigator**

13:30 - 16:00 SESSION II: ASEAN Chairmanship in 2022 and its Centrality in the Context of Big Power Competition

- Ms. Pich Charadine, Deputy Executive Director, CICP
- Dr. Eva Pejsova, Senior Japan Fellow, Centre for Security, Diplomacy and Strategy of the Brussels School of Governance (BSoG-VUB)
- Dr. Philip Vermonte, Executive Director, Centre for Strategic and International Studies, Indonesia
- Dr. Aries A. Arugay, Associate Professor, University of the Philippines
- Mr. Kavi Chongkittavorn, Visiting Senior Fellow, CICP, Columnist & Veteran Journalist on Regional Affairs, **Instigator**

The virtual conference aims to examine how the EU and its member states can support Cambodia taking on the role of ASEAN chair next year by exploring how EU-ASEAN relations can facilitate multilateralism both in Southeast Asia and globally, and discussing the ASEAN Chairmanship 2022 as well as the meaning and future of ASEAN Centrality.

LIVE ZOOM
Zoom Registration: bit.ly/EUCASEAN | Further information: cicp@teleline.com.kh | 092 691 727 | raksmeymim2@gmail.com

Organized by: Supported by:

ROLE PLAYERS



H.E. Amb. Pou Sothirak
Executive Director, CICP

Amb. Pou Sothirak has been CICP Executive Director since 2013. He also serves as Advisor to the Royal Government of Cambodia.

He was appointed as Secretary of State of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of Cambodia from September 2013 to January 2014. He was a Visiting Senior Research Fellow at the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (ISEAS) in Singapore from January 2009 to December 2012. He also served as Cambodian Ambassador to Japan from April 2005 to November 2008. He was elected Cambodian Member of Parliaments twice during the national general election in 1993 and 2003. He was appointed as Minister of Industry Mines and Energy of the Royal Government of Cambodia from 1993 to 1998. He has written extensively on various issues concerning the development of Cambodia and the region.



H.E. Amb. Carmen Moreno
Head of the Delegation of the European Union to Cambodia

Ambassador Carmen Moreno has been the Head of the European Union Delegation to Cambodia since September 2019. From August-September 2019, she was the SOM ASEM and Special Representative to Afghanistan. She was the Ambassador of Spain to Thailand, accredited to Cambodia, Laos and Myanmar from 2013 to 2017. From 2012 to 2013, she was the Chief of Cabinet of the Secretary General of Foreign Affairs, Spain. She was Director Cooperation for Asia, Africa and Middle East at AECID (Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation) from 2008 to 2012. Before that, she held various diplomatic posts in China, Cuba, Malaysia, India and Pakistan. Amb. Moreno holds Postgraduate Degree on Armed and Political Conflicts and Master's Degree on Contemporary China and International Relations.



H.E. Amb. Igor Driesmans
EU Ambassador to ASEAN

Ambassador Igor Driesmans is the EU Ambassador to ASEAN. He was Member of Cabinet of Federica Mogherini, High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy / Vice-President of the European Commission until August 2019. His responsibilities included Asia and Pacific, Cultural Diplomacy, Transport and Fisheries. He served previously as Principal Assistant to the Chief Operating Officer of the European External Action Service (2014), Desk Officer for ASEAN (2013-2014), and Deputy Head of the Political, Economic, Trade and Information Section of the EU Delegation to South Africa (2009-2013). Ambassador Igor Driesmans is an official of the EU since 2003. He holds a Masters in History, University of Gent (Belgium).



H.E. Dr. Cheuboran Chanborey

Director General of the Information, Research and Analysis Group, MFAIC and High Representative of the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of Cambodia

Dr. Cheunboran Chanborey is an advisor to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation (MFAIC) of Cambodia and the Director-General of the Information, Research and Analysis Group, MFAIC. He is also the Strategic Advisor to a Phnom Penh-based think tank, the Asian Vision Institute (AVI).

He received his Ph.D. in International Political and Strategic Studies from The Australian National University. He earned a Master in Public Management from the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy in conjunction with the Harvard Kennedy School; M.A. in Diplomacy and International Studies from Rangsit University, Thailand; and B.A. in International Relations from the Diplomatic Academy of Vietnam.

Dr. Chanborey has just published a book, *Cambodia's China Strategy: Security Dilemmas of Embracing the Dragon* (London: Routledge, 2021). His articles and papers often appear on AVI publications, *Khmer Times*, *The Diplomat*, and *Thinking ASEAN*. The areas of his interest include Cambodia's foreign policy, small state foreign policy, and security studies and international relations in the Asia-Pacific.



Dr. Bradley Jensen Murg

Senior Advisor and Distinguished Senior Fellow, CICP

Dr. Bradley J. Murg is Associate Professor of Political Science and Dean of the Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences at Paragon International University. Additionally, Dr. Murg holds positions as Senior Academic Advisor at Future Forum and Distinguished Fellow and Senior Advisor for Research at the Cambodia Institute for Cooperation and Peace. His work, supported by grants from the Social Science Research Council and the International Research and Exchanges Board, focuses on contemporary international relations in Southeast Asia; the political economy of foreign aid; and the political economy of the Greater Mekong Subregion as a whole. Dr. Murg graduated Phi Beta Kappa from Emory University with a B.A./M.A. in philosophy, received a M.Sc. in economic history from the London School of Economics, and his M.A. and Ph.D. in political science from the University of Washington.



Dr. Nguyen Hung Son

Vice President of the Diplomatic Academy of Vietnam

Nguyen Hung Son is Vice President of the Diplomatic Academy of Vietnam and Director-General of the East Sea (South China Sea) Institute. Prior to his current designation, Nguyen Hung Son was Deputy Director-General of the Institute for Strategic Studies at the Diplomatic Academy of Vietnam.

He's research focused on major powers relations, regional security governance, maritime security and Vietnam's foreign policy. As a diplomat, Nguyen Hung Son served as Minister Counsellor of the Vietnam Embassy in Ottawa, Canada (2015-2018) and Second Secretary of the Vietnam Embassy in Stockholm, Sweden (2004-2006).

He also served at the ASEAN department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, during which period he extensively participated in regional summits, and had hands on experience on many regional processes and issues involving ASEAN. He was member of the Vietnam High Level Task Force delegation negotiating the ASEAN Charter in 2006-2007. While he was serving as the head of the ASEAN Standing Committee division at the ASEAN department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Vietnam presided over the ASEAN Standing Committee from July 2000 to July 2001.

Nguyen Hung Son got his B.A degree from the National Economic University of Vietnam, an M.Sc degree on International Economics from Birmingham University of the United Kingdom, and a Phd degree on International Relations at the Diplomatic Academy of Vietnam.



Dr. Françoise Nicolas

Director, Center for Asian Studies,

French Institute of International Relations (IFRI)

Françoise Nicolas has been with Ifri since 1990. She also teaches at Langues' O, Sciences Po Paris (Europe-Asia programme, Le Havre campus) and Sciences Po (Lyon) and is a consultant to the Directorate for Financial, Fiscal and Enterprise Affairs of the OECD (DAF) focusing on Southeast Asian non-member countries. In the past she was an assistant Professor in international economics at the University of Paris-Est (Marne-la-Vallée) from 1993 to 2016, and taught at the Graduate Institute of International Studies (GIIS, Geneva - 1987-90), at the Ecole Nationale des Ponts et Chaussées (1991-95), as well as at the HEC School of Management (2000-02).

Françoise Nicolas holds a Ph.D in international economics (1991) and a MA in political science (1985) from the Graduate Institute of International Studies (Geneva, Switzerland), as well as a diploma in translation from the University of Geneva (1980). She has also studied at the University of Sussex (1980-81) and has spent some time as a visiting fellow at the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (ISEAS) in Singapore (1999) and at the Korea Institute for International Economic Policy (KIEP) in Seoul (2004).



Jessica Wau
*Deputy Director, ASEAN Programme,
Singapore Institute of International Affairs*

Jessica leads the ASEAN programme at the Singapore Institute of International Affairs, the country's oldest think tank and founding member of the ASEAN Institutes of Strategic and International Studies (ASEAN-ISIS) Network of think tanks. She is responsible for driving research, reports and conversations on ASEAN matters and its key economies. Her work requires her to track policy trends and developments in Southeast Asia, which she analyses to provide advisory services to multinationals in the region.

Jessica has worked on a series of dialogues on ASEAN Centrality and Collective Leadership on pertinent issues including, trade, infrastructure and the Indo-Pacific. Currently, her work focuses on building SIIA's ASEAN digitalisation programme, proposing a collaboration with digital economy stakeholders to offer research and analysis on 'Charting ASEAN's Digital Future Post-COVID-19'.



Dr. Michael Reiterer
*Distinguished Professor, Centre for Security, Diplomacy and Strategy
(CSDS), Brussels School of Governance (BSoG-VUB);
EU-Ambassador ret.*

Michael Reiterer pursued his academic career always in parallel to his diplomatic one at the Austrian and then European service. After graduating as Dr. jur. from the University of Innsbruck post-graduate studies at the Johns Hopkins University/Bologna Centre and the Graduate Institute for International Studies in Geneva were further stepping stones to his habilitation (PhD) in International Politics at the University of Innsbruck (2005) focussing on EU-Asia relations. EU foreign policy, EU-Asia relations in particular with Japan and Korea, inter-regionalism, security issues, new forms of diplomacy, human rights are nowadays the main focus of his research, having previously published extensively on international trade law and relations including WTO, trade and environment and ASEM. He has taught at various universities in Europe and Asia. In September 2020 he retired from the European Diplomatic Service as the EU-Ambassador to the Republic of Korea; previous posts included Ambassador to Switzerland and the Principality of Liechtenstein, Deputy Head of Mission/Minister to Japan, Minister Counsellor at the Austrian Permanent Representation to the EU, Counsellor at the Austrian Permanent Representation to the GATT, deputy trade commissioner for West Africa and to Japan.



Kavi Chongkittavorn
Visiting Senior Fellow, CICP
Columnist & Veteran Journalist on Regional Affairs

Kavi Chongkittavorn is a visiting senior fellow, CICP and a senior fellow at Institute of Security and International Studies (ISIS) Thailand. He has been a journalist for more than three decades covering Thai and regional politics. He began his career as a reporter in 1983 and became the paper's foreign news editor in 1986. Then, he was asked to explore Indochina – first as Bureau Chief in Phnom Penh, Cambodia (1988-1990) and later on in Hanoi, Vietnam (1990-1992). After a year in Oxford University as Reuter Fellow in 1994, he went to Jakarta and served as Special Assistant to the Secretary General of ASEAN in Jakarta in 1995 before returning to journalism. He was named the Human Rights Journalist of 1998 to commemorate the 50th Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights by Amnesty International. From 1999-2000, he was the President of Thai Journalists Association. From 2000-2001, he went to Harvard University as Nieman Fellow. He served as a member of jury and from 2005-2008 as its chair of Guillermo Cano World Press Freedom Prize organized by UNESCO.



Pich Charadine
Deputy Director, CICP

PICH Charadine is currently the Deputy Executive Director the Cambodian Institute for Cooperation and Peace (CICP) in charge of Research, Training and Publication and serving as the Coordinator of the Global Center for Mekong Studies (GCMS-Cambodia Center, a Track II think tank network of Lancang-Mekong Cooperation).

Ms. Pich obtained her Bachelor of Arts in Political Science and International Relations with High Honors from Zaman University (Cambodia) and holds a Master of Arts in Dialogue Studies (concentrated on political dialogue) with Merit from Keele University (United Kingdom). She was nominated to the 2019 US Department of State International Visitor Leadership Program (IVLP) on ASEAN-Nations of the South China Sea – Sovereignty and Rules-based Order. She was also the Visiting Fellow at the China Institute for International Studies (CIIS) in 2018 and Visiting Scholar at China Foreign Affairs University (CFAU) in 2019.

She has written and published on various issues concerning Cambodia's political development and its subsequent foreign policy implications. Her focus is on Sino-Cambodia relations (particularly political economy dilemma, foreign aid policy, and economic statecraft), ASEAN Regional Framework and ASEAN-China Partnership, Cambodia's politics and foreign relations, and Mekong sub-regional cooperation, especially on Mekong-Lancang Cooperation.



Dr. Eva Pejsova

Senior Japan Fellow, Centre for Security, Diplomacy and Strategy (CSDS) of the Brussels School of Governance (BSoG-VUB) Associate Fellow at the French "Fondation pour la Recherche Strategique" (FRS)

Dr Eva Pejsova is a Senior Japan Fellow at the Centre for Security, Diplomacy and Strategy (CSDS) of the Brussels School of Governance (BSoG-VUB) and an Associate Fellow at the French "Fondation pour la Recherche Strategique" (FRS). Previously, Dr Pejsova was in charge of the Asia portfolio at the European Union Institute for Security Studies (EUISS), the EU's agency for foreign and security policy research and analysis. She holds a PhD in Strategic Studies from the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS) in Singapore and has previously worked with the Czech Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the French Prime Minister's Office, the OECD and the Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF).

Dr Pejsova leads the Japan Program and runs a course on Japan's Foreign and Security Policy. She also lectures at SciencesPo (Paris School of International Affairs) in Paris, the Geneva Centre for Security Studies (GCSP), as well as briefs the Members of the European Parliament. Her research focuses on security issues within the broader Indo-Pacific region, notably related to maritime security, sovereignty disputes, regional cooperative mechanism and good ocean governance. She is also interested in the role of the EU as a foreign and security policy actor.



Dr. Philips Vermonte

Executive Director, Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS)

Philips Vermonte is Executive Director, Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) Jakarta. He finished his doctoral study at Department of Political Science, Northern Illinois University in the U.S, funded by Fulbright scholarship. His research interest includes comparative politics, voting behavior, electoral politics and political parties in Indonesia. He is the principal investigator of public opinion surveys conducted by CSIS.

His recent publications include "The Increased Number of Female Members of Parliament: Identifying its origins and obstacles in Indonesia, the Philippines and Timor Leste," *Working Paper* (published by USAID and Kemitraan, 2014), "What Happened in the Early Years of Democracy: Indonesia's Experience" (co-authored with Rizal Shiddiq), *Middle East Development Journal* (vol.5/1,2013).Peer-reviewed;"Indonesia's 2014 Elections: Practical Innovations and Optimistic Outcome," *Journal of Asian Politics and Policy* (vol.7/2,2015), Book Review of *The Institutionalization of Political Parties in Post-Authoritarian Indonesia: From the Grass-Roots Up* by Ulla Fiona,(Amsterdam University Press,2013),published in *Bulletin of Indonesian Economic Studies* (BIES), 2015.



Dr. Aries Arugay

Professor of Political Science, University of the Philippines

Visiting Fellow, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies-Yusof Ishak Institute

Aries A. Arugay is Professor of Political Science from the University of the Philippines in Diliman and Visiting Fellow at the Regional Strategic and Political Studies Programme of the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies-Yusof Ishak Institute in Singapore. He is also Editor-in-Chief of *Asian Politics & Policy*, published by Wiley-Blackwell and the US-based Policy Studies Organization and a Founding Trustee of the Foundation for the National Interest, Inc., an independent Manila-based strategic studies think-tank. He obtained his PhD in Political Science from Georgia State University (United States) in 2014 as a Fulbright Fellow. He obtained his MA and BA (*cum laude*) in Political Science from the University of the Philippines-Diliman. His fields of specialization are comparative politics, international relations, and Philippine politics. In 2020, the National Academy of Science and Technology of the Philippines awarded him as an Outstanding Young Scientist (Political Science).

SUMMARY OF THE PROCEEDINGS

This day-long conference took place in a hybrid in-person/webinar format, drawing attendees from across ASEAN and the EU. At the outset, the stage was set by EU Ambassador to Cambodia, H.E. Carmen Moreno who highlighted the unique role that Cambodia will have in its forthcoming role as ASEAN chair, and the “unique chance” that the kingdom holds in order to move ahead the ASEAN Comprehensive Recovery Framework ensuring that “nobody is left behind and that human development, the SDGs and the Paris Agreement on Climate Change remain at the centre of the social and economic recovery efforts.”

CICP Executive Director, H.E. Ambassador Pou Sothirak, in his opening remarks highlighted that despite the differences among the EU and ASEAN as institutions in terms of history, objectives, structures, and capacity – partnership between the two can strengthen inter-regional cooperation, provided that convergence can be found on shared focal points of each entity’s regional interests. Ambassador Pou further underscored that the EU’s soft power approach to international relations and its desire to promote regional integration in general may be “more appealing to the ‘ASEAN Way’ of emphasizing informality and consensus with the avoidance of binding agreements and regulatory frameworks.

In his keynote speech, EU Ambassador to ASEAN H.E. Ambassador Igor Driesmans recognized the essential role that ASEAN plays in the EU’s Indo-Pacific Strategy, with “closer cooperation between the EU and ASEAN as one of its recurring themes.” He remarked that ASEAN is mentioned no less than 31 times, with strong expressions of support for “the principle of ASEAN centrality, ASEAN’s strong commitment to effective multilateralism as well as to its efforts towards an effective, substantive and legally-binding Code of Conduct in the South China Sea.” Additionally, Ambassador Driesman set out a thorough overview of existing and future areas of EU-ASEAN cooperation, highlighting three key significant points in the context of Cambodia’s upcoming chairmanship: “firstly, finding synergies between our approaches to the Indo-Pacific; secondly, green recovery; thirdly, sustainable connectivity.”

The two panels brought together EU and ASEAN scholars to highlight future paths forward and key next steps – which serve to build upon Ambassador Driesman’s keynote. Dr. Nguyen Hong Son emphasized the importance of the EU’s Indo-Pacific Strategy as laying the groundwork to improve cooperation with ASEAN, including new objectives, specifically: promoting a rules-based international order; creating level playing fields; and upholding multilateralism. Of particular note,

was Dr. Nguyen's recognition that: "These rather "intangible" interests meet those of ASEAN's outlook on the Indo-Pacific, where ASEAN foresaw a multipolar Indo-Pacific rather than a binary one to be its fundamental interest." In terms of an EU-ASEAN, Dr. Nguyen drew heavily on the multilateral framework of the United Nations and international law as a locus from which both entities should collectively draw: "ASEAN and the EU may undertake activities to strengthen the international system based on the principles of the UN Charter and the UN's system, through the promotion of the UN's international conventions and treaties, such as the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea."

Dr. Aries Arugay noted the challenges that face ASEAN itself as an institution and the need for the resolution thereof if EU-ASEAN collective action and engagement is to be successful: "Bolstering ASEAN's relevance today requires a smart combination of institutional upgrading, calibration, and retooling guided by a strategic appreciation of Asia-Pacific's volatile environment. Domestic developments within member states, collective learning from past failures and mistakes, and leadership fuelled by political will are all crucial to jointly undertaking institutional reform." The successful achievement of these "long-overdue changes to ASEAN's institutions," will, in his view, significantly support the goals of credibility and cohesion which are central in the reinforcement of centrality and the overcoming increasing regional polarization within ASEAN itself.

The importance of ASEAN reform was also strongly highlighted by Dr. Philips Vermonte, who pointed out the potential need to re-conceptualize the concept of ASEAN Centrality and the challenges of implementing the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP) in light of the arrival of the Covid-19 pandemic soon after its adoption. In terms of next steps, Dr. Vermonte advised that the question at hand at present is about implementation of AOIP and the need for ASEAN to clearly demonstrate to its dialogue partners its own direction and plans for implementation, underscoring the salience of the maritime domain in light of its role as the primary locus for potential regional conflict.

Jessica Wau, building on her initial remarks regarding the comparative conceptualization of multilateralism in the respective contexts of the EU and ASEAN and noting certain differences between the two contended that: "Both can take comfort that they share the same vision for an open and inclusive Indo Pacific reflected respectively in ASEAN's Outlook for the Indo Pacific and the EU's strategy for cooperation in the Indo Pacific. The latter openly supports the principle of ASEAN centrality and efforts to build rules-based architecture to

manage a wide-range of security issues in the region.” Moving more deeply into the practical steps to be taken she underlined the importance of mutual reinforcement of each institution’s agency and strategic autonomy in order to achieve an effective multilateralism wherein both place an emphasis on flexibility (a key theme of the conference as a whole) to facilitate functional cooperation in entities such as ARF and the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM).

Dr. Françoise Nicolas, also noted the salience of clear conceptualization of “effective multilateralism” and the shared interests of the EU and ASEAN in its maintenance, while strongly emphasizing the significant challenges that this approach confronts in the contemporary world – particularly, in her view, from both the United States and China. This was a theme very strongly developed subsequently by Dr. Michael Reiterer who paid particular attention to the rise of “minilateralism” and the inherently exclusionary nature thereof. Despite these challenges, Dr. Nicholas noted that there remains room for optimism: “although the EU is not perceived as having much strategic influence over the region, it emerges (together with Japan) as a clear front-runner for ASEAN’s most favored and trusted strategic partners in the hedging game against US-China rivalry. To be sure Japan remains the most trusted power in the region (with 67.1% of the respondents), but the EU comes in second place at 51.0% with many viewing the EU as a reliable champion on issues such as the rule of law, global governance, free trade, sustainability and climate change.” Thus in practice and in the context of a multipolar world experiencing rapid growth in great power competition, the EU is seen as “a potential economic counterbalance (together with Japan, and others) to China” thereby providing a pathway for easier and deeper collaboration between the two, further buttressed by the EU’s elevation as an ASEAN strategic partner – again, a point which Dr. Reiterer supported in his own remarks.

Across both panels, serious concerns were expressed over the state of the situation in Myanmar and the challenges that it continues to present for ASEAN as well as the global community and the central place it will occupy on the agenda as Cambodia takes the chair. While participants overwhelmingly recognized the challenges to the achievement of effective multilateralism – Sino-American competition, the need for reform in ASEAN, deeper conceptualization of ASEAN Centrality, etc. – the strategic partnership between the EU and ASEAN; the EU’s relatively strong position as a trusted partner in the region; the role of ASEM; and the shared interests of both in strengthening and, indeed, reinvigorating ASEAN provide distinct and definite opportunities for both the amelioration of EU-ASEAN relations as well as the rebuilding of multilateralism in the region and across the globe.

ANNEX

SCENE-SETTING REMARKS

H.E. Ambassador Pou Sothirak

Executive Director of the Cambodian Institute for Cooperation and Peace



Excellencies, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of HRH Samdech Norodom Sirivudh, Founder and Chairman of the Cambodian Institute for Cooperation and Peace, I would like to extend a warm welcome to all participants to this Webinar on *Facilitating Multilateralism: EU - Cambodian ASEAN Dialogue* organized by CICP with the kind support from the Delegation of the European Union to Cambodia.

At the outset, I would like to recognize the kind presence of H.E. Ambassador Carmen Moreno, Head of the Delegation of the European Union to Cambodia and I would like to express my thankfulness for the valuable supports her good office has given my institute, CICP, especially from DCM Tihamer Czika who have been most helpful in making this webinar possible. Ambassador Carmen Moreno, will give the open remarks right after my speech and we are very much looking forward to hear her statement.

Next, I am pleased to inform all participants of this Webinar that we are honored to welcome H.E. Dr. Cheunboran Chanborey, Director General of the Information, Research and Analysis Group and High Representative of Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of Cambodia to deliver a plenary speech, setting out the Royal Government of Cambodia's commitment toward fostering good relationship with the EU in the context of how multilateralism can be promoted and to set tones for possible priorities for Cambodia's next year ASEAN Chairmanship.

The following distinguished guest speaker will be H.E. Igor Driesmans, EU Ambassador to ASEAN who will deliver a keynote address explaining the distinct relationship between European Union and ASEAN in the context of the immerging geopolitical anxiety that challenges the multilateral rule-based order as well as providing his insightful perspective on what priorities for the EU and ASEAN in the making of their new strategic partnership a reality.

Furthermore, I would like to express my sincere appreciation to all the honorable guests, the prominent instigators and speakers from both ASEAN and the EU, and the distinguished participants for taking their valuable time to attend this Webinar in person and online today.

The main purpose of this Webinar is to bring EU and ASEAN scholars and experts to deliberate the EU-ASEAN enduring relations in the context of multilateralism writ large and how the relationship between these two entities can be furthered developed to facilitate multilateralism both in Southeast Asia and globally. This Webinar will also examine how the EU and its Member States support Cambodia's ASEAN Chairmanship during 2022 and discuss ASEAN Centrality in the context of big power competition. CICP will subsequently prepare as an outcome report, inclusive of key takeaways from this conference dialogue and will be delighted to distribute widely to the public.

At this juncture, I would like to describe the proceeding of this Webinar as follow. This Webinar comprises of two sessions. Each session has four credible speakers and will be managed by an experience instigator. The morning session cover the sub-theme of EU-ASEAN Relations in the Context of Multilateralism. The afternoon session handle ASEAN Chairmanship in 2022 and its Centrality in the Context of Big Power Competition.

We are fortunate to be able to assemble experts and scholars from the EU and ASEAN Member State to share their perspective and deliberate the theme of this Webinar. Each of the distinguished speaker will be invited to make a short presentation of about 10 to 15 minutes and there will be Question and Answer sessions follow the speaker's presentation. There will be lunch break between the morning and afternoon sessions.

I will let the two prominent instigators to introduce our distinguished speakers during the morning and afternoon session as well to moderate the panel discussion and question and answer session.

However, I would like to say a few words to set scene for this Webinar and to stimulate your interests on what we should expect to hear from our distinguished speakers.

As this online meeting is designed to create opportunity to reflect on what has been an enduring partnership between ASEAN and the European Union which is now reaching a new height, we can expect that the discussions today to focus on

identifying what exactly the ASEAN – EU Strategic Partnership is all about? We can also expect the rigorous debates on various point of views from the part of ASEAN and the EU experts on different levels of their engagement and function. Our eminent guest speakers will help us understand what constitute the desirable outcomes regarding future engagement between the two blocs and what are appropriate actions and planning for the realignment of interests of both ASEAN and the EU to form a successful strategic partnership.

Indeed, this is a formidable task, but it must be done amidst lingering uncertainty created by disturbing big power rivalries to provide a solid foundation for the ASEAN and EU to hold on to the global rules and norms and to jointly shape them further as it now appears more important than ever.

I have noted with satisfaction areas of mutual interest between ASEAN and EU worth mentioning at this forum.

Frist, after 44 years of formal partnership on 20 December 2020, ASEAN and the EU became strategic partners, building on the principles such as multilateralism and free trade to strengthen their bond. For ASEAN, the regional bloc has other strategic partner which include the United States, China, Russia, Japan, India, South Korea, Australia, and New Zealand and having the EU as the newest strategic partner will reinforce the structure for ASEAN's external engagement, it will also help ASEAN withstanding the bifurcated pressure imposed by the United States and China as they compete relentlessly for global dominance. For the EU, securing the elevation to strategic partnership with ASEAN means that the Union is able to reinforce its commitment to the wider region by announcing an EU Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific in mid-September this year and by recognizing the centrality of ASEAN.

Second, even with very different multi-dimensional regional entities with quite different histories, objectives, structures and capacities, the new partnership between ASEAN and the EU can and will reinforce interregional cooperation agreement between the two sides, if they can converge on common spots for their respective regional interests. For the EU, the tendency of symbolizing the importance of its soft power approach to international relations generally, to promote regional integration elsewhere may become more appealing to the “ASEAN way” of emphasizing informality and consensus with the avoidance of binding agreements and regulatory frameworks. However, the new strategic partnership should move away from the "donor-recipient engagement cliché" to focus more on the consolidation of the range of cooperative arrangements and

shared objectives that would include economic cooperation and the EU's support for ASEAN integration, and cooperation on such issues as the response to COVID-19, climate change and green growth, sustainable development and connectivity, maritime cooperation, and cybersecurity.

During Cambodia's ASEAN Chairmanship next year, it will be an opportune time for the EU to help ASEAN to unlock innovation opportunities to address glaring issues such as strengthening health care system of ASEAN Member States to increase their resilience and contribute to the speedy and sustainable recovery from Covid-19, as well as advancing digital transformation and climate change. Effectiveness in the implementation of these cooperation agreements is a key criterion for a meaningful strategic partnership, moving forward.

Third, the new strategic partnership between ASEAN and EU will be thriving well into the future with the well calibrated application of the rules and norms that each side have developed overtime, the promotion of mutual trust and understanding, the exhibition of a genuine and innovative way for region-to-region high level collaboration and the standing firm on the deepening of economic cooperation that laid the ground for broader cooperation as well as jointly addressing the unstable security environment in the Indo-Pacific region. This way ASEAN and EU can look forward to teaming up for a more dependable multilateral rule-based order that can pacify frictions and prevent conflicts from erupting among nations and therefore bring about abundant prosperity to both sides.

Excellencies, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I believe this Webinar is timely organized to allow EU to earn greater recognition as a serious security player in the region by exerting its foreign policy in the security realm more visibly since the adoption of the 2003 European Security Strategy and the ASEAN-EU strategic partnership is a clear sign that this is an ongoing policy for the EU to pursue. What has to be done, in my opinion, is for both ASEAN and EU to consult each other to draft a comprehensive Term of Reference that clearly define the what exactly constitute a strategic partnership that could transcend the usual notion of a the sound and dependable relationship, mostly characterized by development cooperation, free trade and economic support. The term strategic in itself refer to the need for the EU to become a more reliable security driver working in synergy with the existing ASEAN security architectures to effectively handle the current geopolitics and fulfilling the gap created by the decline of multilateral rules-based order which was sliding down the slippery slope during President Donald Trump's America First policy.

I would like to conclude by mentioning that If the EU wishes to call for more recognition of its influence and standing in the Indo-Pacific region and become a trusted partner with ASEAN, the Union needs to reinforce its security role and come up with specific document outlining all action points for the strategic relationship beyond the current ASEAN-EU Plan of Action 2018-2022.

I shall stop here and wish to extend my sincere appreciation, once again, to H.E. Ambassador Carmen Moreno, Head of the Delegation of the European Union to Cambodia for her valuable support for this webinar. I wish to also thank all my distinguished guest of honored, especially H.E. Dr. Cheunboran Chanborey, Director General of the Information, Research and Analysis Group, MFAIC and H.E. Igor Driesmans, EU Ambassador to ASEAN, as well as all other prominent speakers and instigators from ASEAN and EU for their kind participation and support.

I look forward to learning more from all of you and wish for a fruitful deliberation.

WELCOME REMARKS

H.E. Ambassador Carmen Moreno

Head of the Delegation of the European Union to Cambodia



Excellency Dr. Cheunboran Chanborey, Director General of the Information, Research and Analysis Group, MFAIC and High Representative of the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of Cambodia

Excellency Ambassador Pou Sothirak, Executive Director of the Cambodian Institute for

Cooperation and Peace,

Excellency Igor Driessman, European Union Ambassador to ASEAN

Ambassadors and colleagues,

Distinguished panelists,

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is for me a great pleasure to welcome you today at this conference, organized together with our friends from the Cambodian Institute for Cooperation and Peace. I want to thank all participants, both joining virtually or present here with us, with a special mention to Ambassador Sothirak, whose work and dedication has made this hybrid event possible.

Covid-19 pandemic has kept us apart for a long time, and has made it impossible for us to meet in person. While the virtual format allows us the privilege of having participants joining from a distance, like some of our panelist or Ambassador Driessman joining us from Jakarta, nothing can replace human interaction.

We certainly look forward to a safe reopening of our societies and our economies, in Europe and Southeast Asia, and that soon we will be able to meet in person, as we use to do before the pandemic.

In fact, two years ago, we gathered here at this same place, the Raffles Hotel, in November 2019, at another event organised with CICP and Konrad Adenauer

Foundation, to discuss the relations between the EU and ASEAN. Some of you participated also in that event.

And I was reflecting the other day, while preparing these opening remarks, on what has changed since that time? Well, we have had a pandemic, that is not yet over, and that has caused terrible damage to our societies and economies and has disrupted our interactions, exchanges and connections.

Whereas in 2019 we were looking at the future with some optimism, Covid-19 has opened a period of uncertainty around the world, and fragmentation and unilateralism seems to be growing to become the rule, rather than the exception. Today, our distinguished panelists and speakers will revisit the theme of multilateralism under the changed light of an international context divided by great power competition, where some global challenges, such as climate change, have become existential threats.

For us, here together today, some more things have changed and they are a reason for optimism. The EU and ASEAN have become Strategic partners and as such, they are committed to working together in support of multilateralism to tackle global challenges.

I am sure our speakers and panelist today will discuss in depth the opportunities to progress and deepen multilateralism, within the Strategic Partnership between ASEAN and the EU, and how Cambodia, as a Chair of the organization, can lead this process in 2022.

You will also reflect on how Cambodia and the EU can work together towards building effective multilateralism and facing together common challenges.

The European Union and Cambodia already have an important, complex and rich bilateral relation. Expanding this relation to the multilateral realm, now that Cambodia will soon take the role of ASEAN Chair, will be essential.

Recovery will need a strong and integrated ASEAN, increased intra-regional trade and investment, food security and safety, circular models of production and consumption, more sustainable, green and resilient value chains. Recovery will need to be more people-centred, built on human security and expand decent jobs, skills training, social protection, including to migrant workers, and focus on small and medium companies, the backbone of many of the region's economies.

The role as ASEAN Chair for Cambodia is a unique chance to advance the ASEAN Comprehensive Recovery Framework in a manner that nobody is left behind and that human development, the SDGs and the Paris Agreement on Climate Change remain at the centre of the social and economic recovery efforts.

The partnership that the European Union already has with Cambodia, through its development cooperation programs, trade and investment relations and political engagement is the structure that can serve us to build a deeper multilateral engagement and a more inclusive and green recovery for the region.

I am sure we will hear many interesting ideas and proposals here today on how to strengthen the European Union and ASEAN's support of multilateralism and how to work on this with Cambodia, in its role as ASEAN Chair.

I want to thank you all again for being here with us today and contributing to these reflections, that I hope will be an inspiration to our future work with Cambodia and ASEAN.

KEYNOTE ADDRESS

H.E. Ambassador Igor Driesmans

Ambassador of the European Union to ASEAN



Excellency Dr. Cheunboran Chanborey, Director General of the Information, Research and Analysis Group, MFAIC and High Representative of the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of Cambodia

Excellency Ambassador Pou Sothirak, Executive Director of the Cambodian

Institute for Cooperation and Peace,

Ambassador Moreno, dear Carmen,

Distinguished panelists,

Dear ladies and gentlemen,

Introduction

It is my pleasure to participate in today's EU-Cambodian ASEAN Dialogue. Taking place on the eve of Cambodia's upcoming Chairmanship of ASEAN and at a time when EU-ASEAN relations enjoy considerable momentum, the event is both highly timely and very relevant.

Indeed, next year's Chairmanship of Cambodia will coincide with the 45th anniversary of the establishment of the Dialogue Partnership between the EU and ASEAN. This provides us with an opportunity to deepen and expand our strategic partnership with Cambodia as ASEAN Chair and with the assistance of the Philippines as our country coordinator.

State of Play

Having mentioned our strategic partnership with ASEAN, allow me to start by offering a snapshot of the depth and breadth of our current relations that are built on solid foundations.

The EU and ASEAN have been committed partners for over 44 years. Our relations are value-based, sharing the belief in a rules-based international order, effective and sustainable multilateralism, and free and fair trade. As the two most advanced cases of regional integration, we collectively represent nearly half a billion people and a quarter of the global GDP.

The EU is ASEAN's largest development partner, with approx. 250 million EUR dedicated to supporting all three pillars of ASEAN integration, on subjects as far ranging as trade support, forest governance, higher education and student mobility, disaster response, and sustainable use of peatlands, to name but a few.

Many of our programmes' acronyms, for example E-READI, ARISE Plus, SHARE, have become familiar across ASEAN Member States and have a positive impact on people's lives – something that we try to highlight in our annually published Blue Book.

EU and ASEAN also engage in 20 structured dialogues focused on vastly different areas, such as environment and climate change, trade, science and research or maritime security. As we all know, good policies can and do make a lot of difference and these exchanges of experience among our experts form an important pillar of our relations.

Economically, in 2020, the EU was ASEAN's second largest trading partner after China, responsible for 8.5% of ASEAN's total trade in merchandise, which translates to over 226 billion USD. EU investment flows to the region continue to be robust, reaching 10 billion USD in 2020, making the EU the second largest external source of FDI among ASEAN's Dialogue Partners after the US.

In terms of our political relations, on 1 December 2020, the EU became a Strategic Partner of ASEAN. This upgrade from a Dialogue to Strategic Partnership reflects the truly strategic nature of our relations and serves as an important platform for further engagement. The strong EU interest in ASEAN was confirmed by a visit of Josep Borrell, High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy of the European Union and Vice-President of the European Commission to ASEAN Secretariat in June 2021 and his meetings with the Secretary-General and the Committee of Permanent Representatives. One of the key messages of his visit concerned the shifting centre of world's gravity towards the Indo-Pacific region and the role that ASEAN, located at its heart, plays therein.

Finally, during the testing times of the pandemic, the EU and ASEAN proved to be dependable partners. The EU and our Member States, in a joint Team Europe effort, then followed up by mobilising over 800 million EUR to support fight against COVID-19 in the ASEAN region. This amount was greater than that of any other ASEAN dialogue or strategic partner and topped up by a 20 million EUR support programme regional pandemic response that is being implemented by the WHO. Crucially, we also emerged as joint champions of vaccine multilateralism and the EU offered strong, unequivocal support to the COVAX Facility worth over 3 billion EUR. Over 20 million of COVAX vaccine doses have already been delivered to the region via COVAX and more than 40 million doses in commercial deals.

Forward looking

Having explored some basic parameters of our strategic relations, let us, however, look ahead, into their immediate future and highlights, along with possible deliverables, during the incoming Cambodian chairmanship of ASEAN.

In mid-September, the EU concluded a months-long, substantial reflection process on our involvement in the Indo-Pacific region by unveiling the EU strategy for cooperation in the Indo-Pacific.

The message is simple – we intend to increase our engagement with this region, in which we have a major existing stake and which we want to be peaceful and prosperous. As our HRVP previously said, this Strategy is as much about what we as the EU do *in* the region as it is about what we do *with* the countries of the region. Our renewed commitment is inclusive and we are open to cooperation with all partners on the basis of shared principles, values or mutual interests. This strategy is not directed against anyone – on the contrary, it creates broad avenues for partnerships and cooperation. With this goal in mind, our approach is deliberately pragmatic, flexible and multifaceted to ensure that the region remains stable and prosperous. Towards this end, we will pursue closer cooperation in seven areas - on sustainable and inclusive prosperity, green transition, climate change, ocean governance, digital partnership, connectivity, security and defence, and human security.

It should not come as any surprise that the Strategy comes with a strong ASEAN angle and has closer cooperation between the EU and ASEAN as one of its recurring themes. In fact, ASEAN is explicitly mentioned as many as 31 times, starting with a clear expression of support to the principle of ASEAN centrality,

ASEAN's strong commitment to effective multilateralism as well as to its efforts towards an effective, substantive and legally-binding Code of Conduct in the South China Sea.

Other noteworthy mentions include the continuation of our joint efforts on climate change and environment, including our regular high-level dialogues or the fight against plastic pollution; enhanced cooperation on supporting the ASEAN Digital Masterplan 2025 and a proposal to cover digital connectivity with science, research, technology and investment in innovation; a data protection dialogue; collaborative regional activities in science; eventual negotiation of a region-to-region free trade agreement with ASEAN; cooperation on disaster management capacity building by supporting the AHA Centre; the ASEAN-EU Comprehensive Air Transportation Agreement (CATA).

When combining our strategic partnership with ASEAN with our new Indo-Pacific Strategy and next year's 45th anniversary of the establishment of our relations with ASEAN, which will take place during Cambodia's Chairmanship of ASEAN, three significant points stand out – firstly, finding synergies between our approaches to the Indo-Pacific; secondly, green recovery; thirdly, sustainable connectivity.

1. Indo-Pacific

First on the Indo-Pacific. It is my firm belief that the EU's Indo-Pacific Strategy and the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific do, to a great extent, overlap and it is up to us to maximise these latent synergies. EU's seven areas of cooperation with the Indo-Pacific dovetails with the AOIP's four pillars on maritime cooperation, connectivity, UN SDGs, and economic and other possible areas of cooperation, including digital economy, science and technology, and climate change. There is a lot that we can do.

Our Commemorative Summit, due to take place in December 2022 in Brussels, will most certainly help us to focus mind and ensure that over the next fourteen months both sides undertake necessary preparatory work to ensure that we will deepen our cooperation even further by acting upon these synergies.

2. Green recovery

Secondly, against the backdrop of the ongoing pandemic and efforts to vaccinate our populations, both the EU and ASEAN have undertaken reflections on how to

recover – the EU by implementing our Recovery Plan for Europe, ASEAN by introducing the ASEAN Comprehensive Recovery Framework.

While it is important that we assist our people to restore their livelihoods, to build back our economies and ensure that our healthcare systems – nationally, regionally and globally – will be ready for the next pandemic, we cannot lose track of the other, even greater challenge of our times.

Rising seas, ever more devastating forest fires, and ever more destructive climate-induced phenomena prove that climate change marches on even while most of our attention is focused on the pandemic. Sadly, it is becoming increasingly clear that unless drastic actions is taken soon, the pandemic will be a mere sideshow to an even greater and almost irreversible tragedy.

It is therefore of crucial importance that we do not only focus on “building back better”, but also on “building back greener”, with sustainable development at the centre of our strategies. Green and digital transition, which accelerated during the pandemic, is now a key factor in reopening and modernising our economies.

On September 29th, management consultancy Bain & Company, Microsoft and Singapore's Temasek – not exactly green activists – released a report entitled Southeast Asia's Green Economy. They conclude that acting now could lead to US\$1 trillion in economic opportunities with new growth areas contributing about 6 to 8 per cent to ASEAN's gross domestic product (GDP) by 2030. The authors focus on three areas of action: speeding up the switch to green energy and transport; putting a value on nature; and making the agri-food sector more efficient, less polluting and less environmentally damaging.

This report comes to the same conclusion as the EU has: that transiting to a green economy is the best growth strategy. That is the corner stone of the EU Green Deal for a circular, carbon-neutral economy by 2050.

The fight against climate change requires joint efforts and the EU stands ready to work even more closely with ASEAN on the green agenda by making climate action a pillar of our relations and, by extension, also a global reality.

3. Sustainable connectivity

Thirdly, sustainable connectivity combines just about everything that I have said thus far. Connectivity is a strong feature of our respective Indo-Pacific approaches

and the subject of our Joint Ministerial Statement from 1 December 2020. The EU has been a longstanding supporter of various aspects of ASEAN's Master Plan on Connectivity, including on trade facilitation, infrastructure, and people-to-people mobility. Looking ahead, we must ensure that the Statement is duly utilised and that we further connect our Connectivities.

For example, it is becoming clear that digital connectivity will be a strong driver of economic growth in the foreseeable future and beyond and we must approach it in a holistic manner – from data protection to cybersecurity, e-commerce, and digital partnerships.

Restoring connectivity within and between our two regions will also serve as a vital engine of post-pandemic recovery. In a ground-breaking development that happened in June, following six years of joint efforts, the EU and ASEAN concluded the first ever region-to-region Comprehensive Air Transport Agreement (CATA). While legal scrubbing is ongoing, once this document is signed in 2022, CATA will create new opportunities for aviation cooperation and increased air connectivity between our two regions during the post-COVID recovery phase, enabling closer trade and people-to-people links.

Additionally, we must ensure that our approach to connectivity is more sustainable in the broadest possible sense – financially as well as environmentally. To this end, we should redouble our engagement, first and foremost on clean energy and renewables that will power our recovery and enable closer links between our region.

Myanmar

Before I conclude I would like to highlight one additional aspect of our engagement with ASEAN that is both pressing and timely. Since the launch of the military coup in Myanmar on 1 February, the EU has stood behind ASEAN and supported ASEAN's efforts in general, and those of its Chair in particular, in implementing the five-point consensus and bring Myanmar back to its democratic path.

However, the Myanmar military authorities have not lived up to the commitments they made at the ASEAN Leaders' Meeting.

We have not yet seen a significant reduction of violence. We have not seen an opening of a dialogue. We have not seen a visit by the Special Envoy with unhindered access to all stakeholders.

Let me just reiterate the importance of that visit – and for the Special Envoy to be allowed to exercise his mandate in an

Going forward, I would like to assure, Cambodia, as the incoming Chair, can count on our support with this ASEAN-led process.

Conclusion

To conclude, there is a lot what we can achieve together with Cambodia during your upcoming Chairmanship with ASEAN.

And I look forward to working with our colleagues and counterparts in Phnom Penh and Jakarta on making it happen.

Last but not least, allow me to extend my gratitude to the organisers of this event - the Cambodian Institute for Cooperation and my colleagues from the Delegation of the European Union to Cambodia – for bringing together such an interesting array of speakers and laying the groundwork for what we wish to be successful cooperation between the European Union and ASEAN under Cambodian Chairmanship. It is my hope that you will find the upcoming sessions on EU-ASEAN Relations in the Context of Multilateralism and on the issue of ASEAN centrality amidst big power competition enriching and stimulating.

Thank you for your attention.

PLENARY SPEECH

H.E. Dr. Cheunboran Chanborey

*Director General of the Information, Research and Analysis Group,
Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of Cambodia, and
High Representative of the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Foreign Affairs and
International Cooperation of Cambodia*



H.E. Ambassador Pou Sothirak, Executive Director of the Cambodian Institute for Cooperation and Peace (CICP)

H.E. Ambassador Carmen Moreno, Head of the Delegation of the European Union to Cambodia

H.E. Igor Driesmans, the EU Ambassador to ASEAN

Distinguished Speakers,

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen

It is my great pleasure to take part in the **EU-Cambodian ASEAN Dialogue**. I wish to take this opportunity to commend the CICP and the EU Delegation to Cambodia for jointly organizing this important event.

Before I commence, I wish to express my gratitude to **H.E. PRAK Sokhonn**, Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation for kindly allowing me to join this Dialogue. However, my views expressed today do not represent the position of my organization. They are all of my own.

To outline my remarks, I will first and foremost lay out the context or the state of multilateralism, if you will, and the need to revitalise and re-energize it. Second, I will attempt to highlight ASEAN-EU joint inspiration and commitment to multilateralism by investigating three levels of interactions: (1) through inter-regional frame, ASEM; (2) ASEAN-EU bloc-to-bloc mechanisms; and (3) bilateral ties between Cambodia and the EU.

Well, the theme of the Dialogue, **“Facilitating Multilateralism”**, is indeed timely and relevant because we are at a critical juncture in human history as the international community is facing with a myriad of utterly acute challenges due to

the COVID-19 pandemic, not to mention existing global challenges. After claiming more than 4.8 million lives and infecting over 238 million more in the course of less than two years, COVID-19 is still raging on in all corners of the globe, with new waves and more contagious variants. By all accounts, the pandemic has posed the unprecedented challenges that mankind has ever experienced for generations, triggering severe global crises in multiple aspects ranging from public health, tourism, to trade and the disruption of global supply chains, as well as the deterioration of many forms of socio-economic inequalities.

In the face of this global catastrophe, the cliché that everyone keeps repeating is that “no one is safe unless everyone is safe”. However, the responses to COVID-19 have revealed that nations operate according to their narrow self-interest, rather than the international norms or shared values that they have claimed to uphold.

On top of that, COVID-19 is occurring at an especially troubling moment in the world history. Multilateralism has been under attack due to the rise of unilateralism, populism and protectionism. The international order has been fraying as many of the norms, institutions, and practices that have sustained the world peace and prosperity over the past seven decades are under enormous stress.

From a geopolitical perspective, the international security landscape, has continued to evolve in an unpredictable and volatile way. We have witnessed the increasingly sharpened rivalry between major powers. Slowly and surely, decades of their political, economic and social engagements have been dismantled, setting the stage for a new era of confrontation, in what many have already called the ‘New Cold War’, with immense effects on peace, stability and prosperity, including in Southeast Asia.

Making things even worse, small states like Cambodia have experienced mounting pressure from the rivalry. Indeed, they find it harder to navigate in-between, particularly to ensure that they are not upsetting any major powers while securing their core national interest.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

In this context, ASEAN and the EU need to work together to further promote their partnership towards an effective multilateralism, a free and fair trading system with the WTO at the center, and more importantly an inclusive international order, anchoring on the UN system.

Over the past decades, ASEAN-EU partnership has grown from strength to strength. The two regional blocs are models of development which are unique to each region, yet share the common philosophy of economic integration and regionalism. Not only are ASEAN and the EU the two most advanced regional integration projects in the world, the two regional groupings represent over 1 billion people and almost 25% of the world's GDP.

The relationship between ASEAN and the EU is formally based on three levels of interactions. And I wish to elaborate here, as follows:

Level 1: Inter-Regional Cooperation through ASEM

ASEM includes all ASEAN and EU Member States as well as the ASEAN Secretariat and the EU as an institution, along with 24 other countries from Asia and Europe. Together, ASEM accounts for 65% of the global economy, 60% of the world's population and 55% of the international trade. Thanks to its sheer size and inclusivity, ASEM has been a part and parcel of multilateralism and the global governance. ASEM has indeed come along way as this year marks the 25th anniversary of the process, which Cambodia is proudly celebrating as the Host of the 13th ASEM Summit (ASEM13) to be virtually held on 25-26 November 2021.

It is worth mentioning that the decision to hold the Summit via videoconference, after the postponement for two times, was not easy at all. Cambodian leaders, especially **Samdech Techo Prime Minister** and my **Deputy Prime Minister**, as well as the whole Cambodian ASEM Team had always been hopeful, and refused to let go the hope, that Cambodia would host the biggest diplomatic gathering in Asia to embark upon the dawn of the post-pandemic recovery with a revived hope for a brighter future and a stronger commitment to multilateralism, as reflected in Cambodia's proposed theme, "**Strengthening Multilateralism for Shared Growth.**" But we had to accept the hard truth that the COVID-19 pandemic remains looming large and even more severe in many other parts of the world.

Whatever the format would be, the ASEM13 is even more relevant in galvanizing a collective response to the most challenging crises of our times and putting forth plan of actions for an inclusive, sustainable and resilient post-pandemic socio-economic recovery. More importantly, the Summit will be a good platform for ASEM Partners, especially ASEAN and the EU, to reiterate their common aspiration and commitment to re-energizing multilateralism, addressing the existing and emerging regional and global issues, and further advancing Asia-Europe partnership for the interest of the peoples in the two regions and beyond.

Level 2: ASEAN-EU Bloc-to-Bloc Partnership

The EU is one of the longest partners of ASEAN. The ties were formalized in 1977 and finally institutionalized following the signing of the ASEAN-EEC Cooperation Agreement in March 1980. There are numerous consultation processes that are organized through extensive mechanisms, including the ASEAN-EU Ministerial Meeting, ASEAN-EU SOM, and the ASEAN Regional Forum.

Whether the EU is the model for ASEAN's regional integration is debatable. But what is undisputable is that the EU has always been an important source of not only inspiration and also support for ASEAN's integration process through financial support and in-kind assistance in order to strengthen the capacity of the ASEAN Secretariat and enhance ASEAN connectivity in various development cooperation programs across the three pillars of ASEAN, namely APSC, AEC and ASCC.

Noticeably, ASEAN-EU Dialogue Relations were elevated into a Strategic Partnership last December, which was a crucial milestone, offering a multitude of prospects for increased cooperation in the years to come. The Strategic Partnership must therefore translate into additional momentums for a more robust cooperation. And amidst the pandemic, both regional groupings must continue to commit to vaccine multilateralism and keep their supply chains open, especially on essential supplies. ASEAN and the EU need to plan their road to recovery ahead together by promoting the synergy between the ASEAN Comprehensive Recovery Framework and the Recovery Plan for Europe.

On the geopolitical front, we welcome the EU's more active engagement in the region and particularly in the evolving regional architecture in the Indo-Pacific. However, the EU's participation in the region shall not reinforce the binary choice upon ASEAN. Instead, the EU should help ASEAN devise an alternative strategic option to maintain its neutrality and centrality that have been paramount to the rules-based regional order as well as the peace, stability and prosperity in this part of the world.

Normatively, ASEAN and the EU cannot agree on everything. But they share the same goal and similar values, which are to promote a multipolar and multiplex Indo-Pacific regional order and to ensure peace, stability and prosperity in the region and beyond. To this end, equal partnership, mutual respect and understanding, and willingness to listen to one another are crucial. Ultimately, the

socialization of norms and values is not a one-way traffic. It must be done through mutual learning, constructive dialogue, and mutual respect for respective internal processes, taking into consideration the different circumstances and unique characteristics of the respective regions. In other words, we must get used to agree to disagree.

Last but not least, the ASEAN-EU Strategic Partnership must produce mutual benefit and lead to the promotion of regional common goods, which include: (a) promoting economic integration and connectivity by exploring potential synergies with the existing connectivity projects, including the MPAC 2025; (b) facilitating the sharing of experience, expertise, and innovation to prepare regional countries for Industrial Revolution 4.0 and to achieve the 2030 UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs); (c) jointly addressing global challenges, including climate change and pandemics; and (d) promoting people-to-people contacts, cultural links, and interfaith dialogue.

Level 3: Bilateral Engagement

The EU's engagement with individual ASEAN Member States has been a force for good in terms of socio-economic and political development. For the interest of time, I would like to focus only on Cambodia-EU bilateral ties.

Over the last two decades, the partnership between Cambodia and the EU has significantly contributed to the Kingdom's socio-economic development and her integration into the international community through foreign direct investment, strong people-to-people ties, the promotion of democracy and human rights, and above all trade relations.

In the face of the unprecedented challenges caused by COVID-19, the EU has pledged to provide €443 million in financial aid to support the economic recovery and job creation in Cambodia is a kind gesture, which I highly appreciate.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen

Cambodia and the EU might have differences and even worse misperceptions. But we share many things in common, especially our shared global agenda, including the enhancement of multilateralism and the rules-based trading system; women empowerment and women in peace and security agenda; climate change and green growth; and sustainable development.

So, let's focus on issues that bind us. Let's discuss issues that we disagree in good faith, with objectivity and consistency. Let's face it, Cambodia is the hope for democracy in the Mekong that is willing to be a bridging state to the outside world.

Lastly, let me reassure that, as the incoming ASEAN Chair, Cambodia is unwaveringly committed to the principles, norms and values that I have highlighted earlier. Cambodia will focus on the strengthening of ASEAN's unity, centrality and relevance in the evolving regional architecture in order to maintain and promote peace, stability and shared prosperity. Galvanizing collective actions to address common challenges, including COVID-19 and the post-pandemic recovery, will also be top priorities.

On that note, I wish this Dialogue a great success, which will contribute to the deepening of cooperation between ASEAN and the EU.

I thank you.

EU-ASEAN RELATION IN THE CONTEXT OF MULTILATERALISM

Dr. Nguyen Hung Son

Vice President of the Diplomatic Academy of Vietnam

ASEAN and the EU have been praised as symbols of success of multilateralism in Europe and Asia for over half a century for their promotion of peace, stability and economic integration in their respective region. However, the return of geopolitical rivalry among the major powers coupled with unilateralism are posing threats to multilateralism worldwide. This common challenge should and would serve as another impetus for ASEAN-EU cooperation in the years ahead.

Multilateralism is a key feature of world order after the Cold war

Multilateralism has been an integral part of the liberal international world order since the end of the Cold War. The system of global and regional multilateral institutions and arrangements that is based on the basic principles of the UN Charter have helped promote international norms of peace and cooperation, enhance predictability in inter-state relations and overall stability. Multilateral institutions have been a critical element of global governance, based on which many global issues such as development, health, environment, human rights etc. are tackled. Multilateral cooperation was also the vehicle for regional integration and community building, such as the ASEAN Free trade Agreement (AFTA) and European Economic Community (EEC), the prelude to today's ASEAN and EU. Multilateralism served the interests of the minor, allow smaller countries to protect their interests through upholding international law, global rules and norms. ASEAN's utility to Vietnam, Cambodia have been tremendous, especially in the early years of regional integration.

However, key challenges are mounting on multilateralism. The "Great fracture" on the global system that UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres referred to and the prospect the "two largest economies splitting the globe in two - each with its own dominant currency, trade and financial rules, its own internet and artificial intelligence capacities and its own zero-sum geopolitical and military strategies" threaten multilateralism to its core. The risk to fragmentation, polarization of the global multilateral institutions, including the UN systems has never been greater. Decades old global multilateral institutions face leadership, orientation and value crisis.

These challenges have been due to Geo-political challenges, mistrust in traditional institution, and possibly the return of nationalism, which drive countries into self-help mode, such as during time of the pandemic.

ASEAN faces unprecedented challenges

Amid global challenges to multilateralism, ASEAN also faces unprecedented challenges, even to its existence in certain aspect. ASEAN was born amid the cold war and major powers conflict in the region, but ASEAN was only able to thrive when geopolitical forces gave ASEAN a break after the end of the Cold war, after which ASEAN could be left alone to manage its difference and to focus on own integration. ASEAN was able to expand t to include all Southeast Asian countries and to invest on community building when the Soviet and US retreated from the region while China was still benign.

ASEAN-10 therefore is undesignated for and untrained to face the growing geopolitical competition. Member states are increasingly facing difficult choices to make amid the push and pulls of the major powers. ASEAN default centrality becomes increasingly difficult to maintain, even on ASEAN's own internal affairs, such as on the Myanmar issue. Without unity and consensus, ASEAN's roles and voices, and ultimately its legitimacy may be questioned.

The EU is also facing a new wave of rising nationalism and skepticisms to regionalism and multilateralism. Brexit may be a rare extreme example but a reflection of growing line of thinking. The EU recognizes these challenges and is actively searching for new narratives for its being.

ASEAN emerge as EU's natural allies in the two organizations quest to strengthen and consolidate multilateralism. ASEAN still is the caretaker of the Indo-Pacific most inclusive multilateral architecture to date and still perceived as a normative middle power in the region, despite criticisms. Other powers either have not been able to create such inclusive structure, or not ready to cede the multilateral ground to other competing powers in the region.

Future direction for ASEAN-EU cooperation to promote multilateralism

ASEAN and the EU has had long history of cooperation, but the cooperation was mostly driven by trade and developmental interests, which are more immediate and tangible, such as market access, investment, governance, institution building, human resources development. EU's supports and assistance to ASEAN extended to non-traditional security issues such as climate change, protecting the environment and tackling trans-national crimes. Few cooperative activities were directed at more traditional security issues or less tangible, idealistic interests, such as preservation of the rules-based order or to counter "systemic challenges".

The recently adopted EU's Indo-Pacific strategy, however, laid the ground to elevate cooperation with ASEAN to a higher ground when the strategy identified new objectives, such as promoting the rules-based international order, creating a level playing fields, upholding multilateralism as its strategic interests. These rather "intangible" interests meet those of the ASEAN's outlook on the Indo-Pacific, where ASEAN foresaw a multi-polar Indo-Pacific rather than a binary one to be its fundamental interest.

ASEAN and the EU first and foremost need to collaborate to strengthen the rules-based international order. However, since different powers may have different interpretation of what the rules-based international order is, ASEAN and the EU may need to promote their visions and understanding of the key features of such order they seek to promote. ASEAN and the EU may undertake activities to strengthen the international system based on the principles of the UN Charter and the UN's system, through the promotion of the UN's international conventions and treaties, such as the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea. ASEAN and EU need to increase collaboration between its member states in key multilateral fora such as the UN general assembly, Asia-Europe Meeting processes to uphold these processes and its established norms. EU and ASEAN should try to air their voices on matters that threaten each other's regional stability and integrity.

EU and ASEAN should work together to realise their common interests for an inclusive, transparent, cooperative regional architecture. ASEAN should facilitate EU's engagement with the Indo-Pacific, provide the platforms for EU's enhanced interactions with the region. The EU's countries, having endured through the first Cold War, could share its lessons on how to avoid the negative impacts of major powers rivalries, such as how to prevent miscommunication and play mediation roles.

The EU and ASEAN should support one-other goals to strengthen its strategic autonomy by offering the other an opportunity to diversify economic relationship. ASEAN's projection to become the third most populous and fourth largest global economy by 2030 should offer EU a great alternative market to China or India, and a great destination for its China+1 strategy. EU's investment, technology, trade would also offer ASEAN's opportunity to diversity and its economic partners and lessen its dependence on China.

ASEAN and the EU also need to enhance its future oriented cooperation on issues such and digital connectivity, maritime security, climate change and sustainable development, great growth, human resources developments etc. These are issues

best tackled in multilateral settings and would provide ample ground for EU-ASEAN vital connection and cooperation for years to come.

Conclusion

The EU and ASEAN should not be complacent of its past success and achievement because the regional and global environment are going through fundamental transformation that do not always favour the minor powers nor their most valuable asset in international relations, namely multilateralism and international law.

ASEAN and the EU, as natural allies in the quest for multilateralism need to go beyond self-interests, experiment new areas of cooperation for their own good and to contribute to the upholding of the rules-based international order based on multilateralism and long-established norms founded by the UN Charter.

MULTILATERALISM UNDER STRESS: HOW CAN THE EU AND ASEAN RESPOND?

Dr. Françoise Nicolas

Director, Center for Asian Studies, French Institute of International Relations

Effective multilateralism is in all countries' own national interest, regardless of size or strength. Of course, it is particularly valuable for small and medium-sized countries that can have a say and get protection that they would not enjoy otherwise, but even for bigger players, getting others to cooperate by means of internationally agreed mechanisms is less costly and more reliable than resorting to unilateral force.

Paradoxically, while multilateralism has never been as important in a context of extreme interconnectedness leading to shared concerns and interests, it is also being challenged more fundamentally than ever. Multilateralism has been under duress for a number of years, but attacks have become increasingly tough lately. As strong supporters of a multilateral order, the European Union (EU) and ASEAN have an interest in preserving it. The objective of this note is to figure out what the two partners can do in this tense context. After highlighting the major challenges multilateralism is facing today, the paper will suggest ways and areas where ASEAN and the EU could contribute to restore and uphold multilateralism, with a view to being as practical as possible.

Multilateralism under attack

The most recent example of the rising distrust in multilateralism has been provided by the Covid-19 crisis. Paradoxically, multilateralism, or a multilateral approach to the challenges associated with the pandemic, should have been perceived as more important and more necessary than ever, but far to the contrary, the spread of the pandemic led most countries to turn inward, shift to self-help mode, engage in protectionist policies, and turn away from a multilateral approach. In other words, the pandemic proved that shortsighted nationalist sentiment tends to dominate political agendas at the expense of multilateral problem-solving.

ASEAN and EU countries were no exceptions in this respect. They had difficulties maintaining a multilateral approach to the crisis and fell prey to selfish attitudes, resorting to border closing, export restrictions and inward-looking strategies, without any coordination with their traditional partners.

In addition, the World Health Organization (WHO), the multilateral organization which should have been at the frontline in the fight against the pandemic, was found badly wanting. It was accused of mismanaging the crisis and, even if it eventually managed to get its acts together (at least to some extent) to properly address the pandemic, the crisis has added fuel to the rising distrust towards multilateral institutions.

But, more importantly, this recent crisis has taken place in a context of a more general rising discontent with regards to the multilateral rules-based order that was established in the post-war period.

The world has changed, and significantly changed, since the multilateral order as we know it today was created in the wake of the second World War. Tensions have been rising ever since with recurring calls for adaptation or adjustment of what had become an outdated order. But neither governments nor international secretariats have excelled in the task of reforming and adjusting multilateral institutions to a rapidly changing world.

The most glaring example may be the multilateral rules-based trade order under the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) and now the World Trade Organization (WTO). The WTO is faced with many trade-related issues that had not been anticipated by its founding members, while traditional trade, and traditional barriers to trade, are no longer the main issues.

But beyond specific attacks on the post-WWII liberal rules-based order, criticisms have been mounting against the very notion of multilateralism. Such criticisms are nothing new but what is new this time around, is that one of the principal assailants of multilateralism is the very country that contributed to design and build the post-WWII multilateral rules-based order, namely the US. It is even more paradoxical since the US benefited enormously from the system in the subsequent decades. Yet, even after President Trump left office, the US is not as strong a supporter of multilateralism as was the case in the past, primarily due to the mounting Sino-US rivalry.

Moreover, multilateralism is also under attack from China, which, as a rising power, is expressing discontent with rules and institutions that have been put in place in its absence and/or uphold values that it does not necessarily share. The misgivings of emerging large powers about their lack of voice and influence in important multilateral fora are understandable and must be addressed. The problem is not simply about representativeness, it is also about making sure that

these newcomers have a real sense of ownership in the multilateral institutions. China is one among many emerging economies that do not support the multilateral liberal rules-based order, but it is more vocal than the others and seeks to take on the mantle of promoter of an alternative order. Interestingly again, China (just like the US) is attacking a system from which it also benefited enormously. But the challenge posed by China is of a different nature. Indeed, China does not uphold the values on which post-WWII multilateralism is based and it is supporting a multilateral approach only when it sees fit and favors the use of pressure and coercion when it deems necessary.

In a nutshell, attacks against multilateralism are coming from all sides. On top of that, all issues now tend to be framed in terms of US-China rivalry. As a result, the polarization of attention on this bilateral rivalry has shifted interest away from multilateral fora.

Multilateralism was supposed to defuse the risks associated with great power dynamics, but with the return of the latter, it turns out that multilateralism is seriously weakened. A couple of years ago, in an article on the impact of great power competition and multilateralism¹, Javier Solana the former EU High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy, argued that “the return of great power competition did not automatically imply the end of multilateralism as the players in the game are still linked through mutually beneficial relationships. The fact that the complete defeat of an adversary is no longer desirable is one of the anchor points of the multilateral system.” But given what has been explained earlier about the hardening of Sino-US rivalry, this relatively optimistic assertion may no longer hold true today.

Potential cooperation between ASEAN and the EU in defense of multilateralism

In such a troubled context, the EU and ASEAN may have a role to play to uphold the very notion of multilateralism for many reasons. First, in the absence of multilateralism, the law of the strong is likely to prevail, and for middle powers like the EU and ASEAN, multilateralism is deemed particularly valuable. Secondly, multilateralism is part and parcel of the two partners’ respective DNAs and they tend to share the same view about multilateralism. Lastly, the pervasive presence of the Sino-US rivalry may turn out to be a blessing in disguise, providing

¹ (cirsd.org/en/horizons/horizons-spring-2016—issue-no-7/reconciling-great-power-competititon-with-multilateralism-?_cf_chl_)

an opportunity for other players to take on more responsibilities and push and uphold multilateralism.

Interestingly, the EU seems to be perceived more and more positively by ASEAN as reflected in the latest ISEAS survey Report on the State of Southeast Asia published last February.²

According to the survey, China is overwhelmingly regarded as the most influential economic power (by 76% of the respondents), a trend that has held consistently since 2019. But at the same time, China has raised the region's anxiety over Beijing's economic heft. Among those who see China as the most influential economic power, 72.5% are worried about its economic influence. Similarly, China continues to be seen as the most influential political-strategic power in the region, but the region's anxiety over Beijing's growing strategic clout has never been as large (88.6% of the respondents).

In contrast, although the EU is not perceived as having much strategic influence over the region, it emerges (together with Japan) as a clear front-runner for ASEAN's most favored and trusted strategic partners in the hedging game against US-China rivalry. To be sure Japan remains the most trusted power in the region (with 67.1% of the respondents), but the EU comes in second place at 51.0% with many viewing the EU as a reliable champion on issues such as the rule of law, global governance, free trade, sustainability and climate change. Southeast Asian respondents (32.4%) view the ability of the EU to provide leadership in maintaining a rules-based order and upholding international law positively and the EU is on par with the US and ASEAN (with 22.2%, 22.5% and 20.6%, respectively) in the ability to champion international trade. Lastly, the EU even ranks first among the "third countries" that ASEAN could seek out to hedge against the uncertainties of the US-China strategic rivalry. In a multipolar world and in a context of rising great power competition. The EU is seen as a potential economic counterbalance (together with Japan, and others) to China.

This positive situation may pave the way for easier and deeper cooperation between the EU and ASEAN. As a matter of fact, thanks to the EU's elevation to the rank of a strategic partner for ASEAN, the conditions are now in place for the two parties to cooperate more closely and push their shared agenda. The Strategic Partnership stands for the two partners' shared belief in multilateralism based on the conviction that no country should be forced to decide between two poles. The

² State of Southeast Asia: Survey report 2021, ISEAS, Singapore, January 2021.
<https://www.iseas.edu.sg/category/articles-commentaries/state-of-southeast-asia-survey/>

strategic partnership also stands for jointly advocating for common EU and ASEAN interests.

The EU has a firm interest in intensifying its relations with ASEAN and its member states in a comprehensive way. This means more exchange at all levels – from civil society, business circles to heads of government. But it is important to give substance to the strategic partnership, in other words it is important now to walk the talk. For instance, a concrete and visible move would be for ASEAN to accept the EU's request to participate in the East Asia Summit, which is a coordination platform dealing with a vast range of issues to which the EU, as a norm setter in trade, but also in many other areas including new ones such as cyberspace, can contribute in a positive way.

The Indo-Pacific constitutes an ideal area for such bilateral (or minilateral) cooperation. Typically, the Indo-Pacific is more than just about the US and China and the Sino-US rivalry should not be the exclusive narrative in the region. The moment has come to push an alternative view and the EU ranks among those who can do so.

This is all the more the case as the EU's and ASEAN's visions on (and for) the Indo-Pacific have a lot in common. The announcement of the EU's new strategy for cooperation in the Indo-Pacific was unfortunately overshadowed by the launch of the new AUKUS alliance on the very same day. Yet, in spite of this unfortunate timing, the EU's strategy should be examined in more details by ASEAN countries as it undoubtedly holds promises for further cooperation.

Indeed, both partners are in favor of a multilateral problem-solving approach in the region and they share largely congruent visions, stressing the need for inclusiveness and the importance of avoiding an overmilitarized approach to the region. In contrast to the US, the EU places a heavy emphasis on trade in its Indo-Pacific strategy, and this is of interest for ASEAN. Broadly speaking, non-traditional security is an area where the EU feels more comfortable and in this respect its approach is undoubtedly well aligned with the recently published ASEAN's outlook on the Indo-Pacific. Non-Traditional Security topics include, among others, sustainability and climate change, norms on digital sphere, counterterrorism. Preventive diplomacy, in particular in the maritime domain, is also an important focus.

Again, the EU's involvement and cooperation is all the more attractive for ASEAN partners because it offers an alternative narrative to the Sino-US rivalry, which tends to be presented by the US as the only possible narrative.

But beyond the Indo-Pacific, there is scope for the EU and ASEAN to act jointly to uphold the traditional multilateral rules-based order embodied in the UN-centered international organizations (such as the WHO, WTO, etc.). The opportunities for cooperation between the two partners with a view to upholding multilateralism have probably never been, as numerous and the timing as favorable. It would be a pity for them not to make the best of it.

EU-ASEAN RELATIONS IN THE CONTEXT OF MULTILATERALISM

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Introduction

The European Union (EU) and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) both pride themselves as norm setters. While they may subscribe to slightly different set of principles and norms, both put the centrality of peace as their key goal. For the EU the way to peace is through the rule of law, respect for fundamental freedoms and having a set of institutions to manage interdependence. For ASEAN having been colonised and as newly independent developing countries, their emphasis on norms of sovereign equality and principle of non-interference are important tools for them to engage big powers with a degree of confidence and autonomy.

This emphasis on different sets of norms and principles and rules of engagement have led ASEAN and the EU to have slightly different interpretations of the concept of “multilateralism”. For the EU, the effective multilateralism doctrine amounts to support for legally binding commitments agreed upon by the largest number of nations – made possible through institutionalised cooperation. Multilateralism arises from interdependence and applying multilateral principles can help countries overcome coordination problems and increase ability to solve common or transnational problems. Multilateral cooperation is supposed to seek win-win solutions and as a process can also be good in itself as it builds trust through regular interactions and exchanges. For ASEAN, multilateralism has always been a more amorphous concept. Built on the façade of ASEAN centrality, multilateralism is about inclusivity and giving voice to smaller states. Multilateralism is meant to strengthen ASEAN-led regional institutions which often rely on minimalist rules and maximum flexibility.

To understand and prognosticate how EU-ASEAN relations can develop in the context of multilateralism we need to have a clear-eyed view of some of these differences. For EU-ASEAN relations to flourish, these differences need to be managed as both settle on a workable concept of pragmatic multilateralism to achieve the common good.

Conceptualising Multilateralism

As with all concepts in social sciences, the definition of multilateralism is contested. It is also understood differently by different actors in the real world. For some countries multilateralism simply means cooperation amongst “multi” partners (usually meant more than two or three partners), while for others multilateralism also implies formal set of rules and institutions to govern states’ behaviour and interactions between states.

At the theoretical level, John Ruggie’s conceptualisation of multilateralism has been widely cited in international relations literature and refers to cooperation amongst three or more partners based on the following principles:

Generalised principles of conduct - cooperation is governed by norms exhorting general if not universal modes of relations” and “based on principles that identify appropriate conduct for a class of actions” without exception to particular interests or differentiating case-by-case.

Indivisibility - It constitutes the scope (both geographic and functional) over which costs and benefits are spread when actions are taken that affect the collective.

Diffused reciprocity - Members of a collective (involved in the cooperation) expect a rough equivalence of benefits in the aggregate and over time.

Multilateralism as an organising principle offered by John Ruggie can be accepted in theory but never really fully operationalised in reality. Robert Keohane thus suggests that we leave the normative dimension and define multilateralism as “institutionalised collective action by an inclusively determined set of independent states”, or simply “multilateralism is the practice of coordinating national policies in groups of three or more states through ad hoc arrangements or by means of institutions”.

Reconciling the EU’s and ASEAN’s Perspectives on Multilateralism

The European Union’s commitment to “effective multilateralism” refers to shared sovereignty and collective problem solving based on a set of norms and institutions. It is often said that multilateralism is in the EU’s DNA. In contrast, multilateralism has been a more amorphous concept for ASEAN. ASEAN’s “multilateralism” is built on the concept of “ASEAN centrality” based on sovereign equality and inclusivity – which in turn depends on “self-restraint” by bigger powers.

While there are some differences in their understanding and practice of multilateralism, the geopolitical realities and complexities of inter-regional cooperation has led both EU and ASEAN to double down on the support for multilateralism rhetorically. Multilateralism is an edifice for the EU and ASEAN to exercise their agency and autonomy and not let their relationship be defined by the Sino-EU rivalry.

Accepting ASEAN's centrality is a cornerstone to begin putting more substance into the strategic partnership that the EU and ASEAN has inked in December 2020. Both can take comfort that they share the same vision for an open and inclusive Indo Pacific reflected respectively in ASEAN's Outlook for the Indo Pacific and the EU's strategy for cooperation in the Indo Pacific. The latter in particular openly supports the principle of ASEAN centrality and efforts to build rules-based architecture to manage a wide-range of security issues in the region.

EU-ASEAN Vision of their Partnership in Multilateralism - Connecting the Two Oceans

Over 40 years of Dialogue Partnership

While the 40 years of EU-ASEAN dialogue has seen its fair share of trials and tribulations, no one can deny the big strides made in this partnership. In 2020, the EU was ASEAN's third largest trading partner. ASEAN is also the EU's third largest trading partner outside Europe - after the US and China. Political and security dialogues have expanded to cover a broad range of topics from human rights to maritime security. The EU is also actively involved in development cooperation with several ASEAN member states and has been most supportive of ASEAN integration with its various funding from the ASEAN-EU Programme for Regional Integration Support (APRIS) to the ASEAN Regional Integration Support from the EU (ARISE).

Trade and Investments

According to ASEAN preliminary data, the total bilateral merchandise trade between ASEAN and EU reached USD 226.2 billion in 2020, accounting for 8.5 per cent of ASEAN's total merchandise trade. Total Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) flows from the EU into ASEAN in 2020 amounted to USD 10 billion, which placed EU as the second largest external source of FDI among ASEAN's Dialogue Partners after the US.

As the EU and ASEAN plan to resume free trade agreement (FTA) negotiations, the challenge of multilateralism comes into focus. With the suspension of the EU-ASEAN FTA negotiations in 2009, the EU has had to progress with a more flexible, bilateral approach. Two FTAs with Singapore and Vietnam have been successfully concluded and have come into force. Negotiations on other bilateral FTAs within ASEAN are ongoing (Indonesia) or suspended (Malaysia, the Philippines, Thailand).

The diversity within the ASEAN group means that the EU needs to adopt a flexible approach to a multilateral FTA. The EU should double down on its efforts to conclude bilateral FTAs with Indonesia and other key ASEAN economies. While progress is being made on the bilateral front, the EU should begin work with ASEAN on a broad framework to connect the dots of the bilateral agreements.

Political and Security Dialogue

Political dialogue between the EU and ASEAN began in 1977 with the regular meetings of foreign ministers. The rather low-key political dialogue has since broadened and deepened to cover a broad range of topics. While there were periods of tensions over issues such as human rights in several ASEAN member states, and political dialogue stalled for a period of time when Myanmar became a member of ASEAN, the last decade has seen a flourishing of political engagement.

In December 2020, EU and ASEAN became Strategic Partners elevating the relationship with a commitment to regular summits at the leaders' level. The main areas of cooperation highlighted include economic and security cooperation, sustainable connectivity and sustainable development. It is notable that the ASEAN-EU Co-Chairs' statement announcing the strategic partnership did not mention democracy or human rights. This highlights the flexibility and accommodation that is necessary to make any progress in multilateral cooperation.

The ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) created in 1994 also provides a multilateral platform for dialogue regarding security issues. The much more inclusive forum has expanded to include all major players in the Asia-Pacific. In tandem with the development of ARF was the development of a Track 2 Council for Security Cooperation in the Asia-Pacific (CSCAP). The Track 2 dialogue allows for more controversial issues to be discussed.

The EU is a member of both the ARF and CSCAP. As alternative minilateral alliances such as the QUAD and AUKUS emerged, ASEAN-led forums such as

ARF risked being side-lined. Thus it would be beneficial for the EU and ASEAN to work together to revitalise ARF and CSCAP and promote a more inclusive, multilateral approach to security issues.

Development Cooperation

Under the ASEAN-EU Plan of Action (2018-2022) integration and narrowing the development gaps in ASEAN remain priority. Cooperation to close development gaps has been more salient in the current COVID-19 pandemic. The “Team Europe” package that pledges over EUR 800 million to combat the spread of the disease and mitigate its impact on the region is welcomed by ASEAN. The support programme “Southeast Asia Health Pandemic Response and Preparedness” provides an additional grant of EUR 20 million, implemented by the World Health Organization.

The Enhanced Regional EU-ASEAN Dialogue Instrument (E-READI) provides EUR 20 million for the duration of 2016-2024, and has been instrumental in strengthening cooperation in development. The programme has opened up avenues for broadening engagement of the people’s sector – such as support for education, science and research.

From Dialogue Partnership to Strategic Partnership – Moving beyond inter-regionalism to effective multilateralism

Now that the EU and ASEAN have elevated their longstanding relations to that of a strategic partnership, it is time that the EU and ASEAN put more substance into what they hope to achieve together moving forward. Their fundamental strategic interest would be to support and reinforce each other’s agency and strategic autonomy. As they commit to effective multilateralism, both should exercise diplomatic flexibility and finesse to steer functional cooperation of different constellations of partners in the regional and trans-regional architectures that both participate in, such as the ARF and the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM).

The thread that binds the collective interests of EU and ASEAN and beyond is the theme of connectivity. Translating the connectivity agenda on paper to connectivity outputs with real impact and reality on the ground should be the priority. Within the connectivity agenda one can inject most of the priorities that the EU and ASEAN have identified in the Indo-Pacific strategy and ASEAN Masterplan on Connectivity respectively – incorporating sustainability standards, green transition, digital governance and human security.

In exercising their agency as regional actors of relevance, both can work together to shape a vision of the Indo-Pacific beyond that of tensions and rivalry between the US and China. While cognizant of the geopolitical realities of big power competition, they must also work hand in hand to offer a more inclusive and developmental oriented narrative to connect the Indian and Pacific oceans. And in this joint endeavour, a pragmatic, multilateral approach is crucial.

While both step up their engagement, they will also have to contend with the differences that continue to exist between and amongst them. How to manage these differences while keeping an eye on the broader geopolitical landscape and the greater collective interests would be a real challenge for both the EU and ASEAN in view of their innate diversities. Some common approaches should come through if both the EU and ASEAN take principled pragmatism (the guiding approach in the 2016 EU Global Strategy) and ASEAN's often touted value of constructive engagement in good faith.

Conclusion

Multilateralism remains high on the agenda for EU-ASEAN relations. Both blocks face a bigger challenge more than their differences with the increased tension between China and the US. The EU and ASEAN need to come together to shape a different narrative for the Indo-Pacific and find ways to work together instead of harping on tensions and competition. Minilateral initiatives such as AUKUS and the Quad may put added strain on Southeast Asia's geopolitics.

Security, especially in the non-traditional sense, will be an important dimension for EU-ASEAN multilateralism. The EU is ramping up efforts in this space with its Indo-Pacific strategy. Under the EU's seven priority areas of action (sustainable and inclusive prosperity; green transition; ocean governance; digital governance and partnerships; connectivity; security and defence; and human security) ASEAN shares the EU's values and would welcome increased engagement. Some have suggested that ASEAN should support the membership of the EU in the East Asia Summit (EAS) and the ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting (ADMM)-Plus. Yet even before this can be realised, there is much that the EU and ASEAN can do together to revitalise the ARF as the inclusive multilateral forum including all powers in the region.

Cooperation between the EU and ASEAN has largely been on the development and economic level and that will likely strengthen. Going forward, it is also good

for the EU to try and conclude the bilateral FTA negotiations it has with ASEAN countries, making it easier to pave the way for an eventual EU-ASEAN FTA.

Deeper integration and cooperation in ASEAN will be much needed during the COVID-19 crisis. The EU's support including its capacity building programs will be even more crucial during this period. While the pandemic may pose hurdles for the ASEAN Economic Community to progress, Southeast Asia's growth potential remains intact, with a rising middle class with consumption power and increased digital penetration. This potential will still provide opportunities for EU companies to reap rewards as they continue to expand their business footprint in the region. Over the long term the aggregated benefits over time will provide the win-win situation that multilateralism aspires for.

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Facilitating multilateralism automatically bring ASEAN, ASEM and the Indo Pacific in the center of attention. In this context I will focus on ASEAN centrality, the force of multilateralism, the Asia Europe Meeting, ASEM, and the key role of multilateralism in economics and trade to generate prosperity to overcome COVID.

As EU Ambassador to ASEAN, Igor Driesmann, mentioned in his intervention, ASEAN has received considerable attention in the recent EU Indo Pacific Strategy - with 31 times mentions place One goes for ASEAN!

As a preliminary remark, I just would like to refer everybody to a policy paper by the European Union which was published in February 2021 called "Strengthening the EU's Contribution to Rules-based Multilateralism". In this policy paper which predates the Indo Pacific Strategy, the EU highlights many actions necessary to preserve the liberal international order, the principles it stands for and the institutions it serves. In looking ahead, it is innovative, not a status quo paper - we have to shape our future.

I will focus my comments to two key concepts: **ASEAN centrality** and linked to it, the **Asia Europe Meeting**, ASEM. Governance, norm setting, human rights and Myanmar will complete the picture, painted by big strokes.

ASEAN Centrality is a key concept. In the Indo Pacific Strategy, the EU reiterates its support for it. To remain relevant, we have to make a reality check and measure recent developments against this concept.

First think which comes to mind is Quad, followed by AUKUS. These are the two forms of cooperation of minilateralism but without ASEAN and without the EU. All participants in these two forums pay lip service their respect and support for ASEAN Centrality. But how fits the exclusion of ASEAN with ASEAN centrality? These need some more reflections.

ASEAN Centrality was created for a different time. Now it is time to adopt through new reflection ASEAN Centrality to changed circumstances and this new reality of great power competition as well as emerging minilateralism. Without embarking on history, ASEAN Centrality was developed in order to manage

relations between ASEAN and their external partners. The EU is such an external partner, I think the longstanding dialogue partner of ASEAN: the 45 years anniversary is in 2022. The ASEAN Regional Forum is the forum to integrate non-regional players collectively with ASEAN. Nevertheless, we have seen the creation of the East Asia Summit. This was extremely popular as long as President Obama gave it a high status, which President Trump did not. Its further development, not least in light of the pivot to the Indo Pacific, is unclear.

Joint endeavours will be necessary: ASEAN and the EU have become strategic partners in December 2020, in addition to the 45 years of dialogue partnership. Therefore, it can only be a historic leftover that the EU is neither invited to join the East Asia Summit nor the ADMM+ process. By excluding the EU, a strong supporter of multilateralism and therefore of ASEAN is missing. Everyone so far has concurred that multilateralism urgently needs a boost. But what is a better boost than having the champion of multilateralism, the EU, joining ASEAN in its endeavor to defend multilateralism against unilateralism and growing bilateralism? I think this is something which needs to be addressed rather urgently. There is a big difference between what ASEAN Centrality stands for and how the present system works. ASEAN Centrality and ASEAN cooperation is inclusive. If you compare with Quad, Quad means four, which by definition, is not inclusive. If you look at AUKUS, it is not inclusive, three only. Unilateralism can play a role in providing a public good through functional cooperation in a given regional situation. However, I would be concerned if Quad aims to become the directorate or the manager of the Indo Pacific.

In the huge area of the Indo Pacific, we need multilateralism. I would advocate strongly that the EU and ASEAN get their acts together and act together to support multilateralism within the framework of the ARF, or also the enlarged East Asia Summit. Drawing on existing formats and making them work is also the better policy than creating more international fora of cooperation which in turn creates a institutional fatigue and overlapping agendas which should be avoided.

That brings me to another form of cooperation, the Asia Europe Meeting, ASEM. To recall, ASEM was set up in 1996 as a product of cooperation between the EU and ASEAN. Ever since, the baby has grown, and has now 53 participants and is on both sides larger than ASEAN and the EU. ASEM has done valuable work on connectivity making the minds of Asian and European partners meet. This is an important feature in agenda setting: connectivity discussed within ASEAN, between ASEAN and the EU and could now, drawing on the Indo Pacific Strategy be brought to bloom in this context. The EU and ASEAN can lead, lead by example:

the recently concluded ASEAN-EU Comprehensive Air Transport Agreement (AE CATA). This first bloc-to-bloc agreement could serve as an example in the Indo Pacific context – to this end, ASEAN and the EU should work together closely in the Indo-Pacific. Such an example of saucerful multilateral cooperation would bode well supporting multilateralism. This is what we need right now, not more vision groups and papers – but more concrete actions.

We also have to work multilaterally when dealing with trade and the efforts to overcome the outfall of the COVID-19 crisis. Re-invigorating and protecting the global WTO system needs applied multilateralism. It also needs multilateralism on the regional level. More regional trade agreements can strain the WTO system, if not conforming to its rules. Thus, the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) and the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) have to be aligned with the WTO system.

Maintaining trade flows and production and value chains is also part of our security. Without this security no prosperity to lift more ASEAN people from poverty, to restart the economies in Asia and Europe to move beyond the pandemic. Last but not least, we have to be aware, that nowadays, security and economy are closely linked in geopolitics and geo-economics.

Norm setting is another important element where multilateralism plays its role. Norm setting is not limited to financial and economic issues, it also covers laws, the rule of law and reflects values. It also covers human rights. You might call this a double-edge sword because it cuts both ways, economic and politics.

This brings me to Myanmar which was mentioned several times in this conference. First and foremost, Myanmar is a challenge for ASEAN to keep its house in order. The EU has expressed many times its disapproval of the military coup and imposed various sanctions on those who are responsible, not the people of Myanmar. But ASEAN, not the EU should be the important actor there.

Flashback: many years ago, I was in charge of organizing ASEM for the EU. Myanmar joining ASEM was at the time a major problem because of human rights concerns. We should not make the mistake in becoming hostage of the individual problem of a country. Don't get me wrong. That does not mean that we should neglect this issue. On the contrary, in a mature relationship – 45 years – the EU and ASEAN should also discuss difficult issues openly, even if there is no agreement. This also applies to the issue of palm oil with Malaysia and Indonesia. I think it is the wrong approach to put the strategic partnership between ASEAN and EU on

risk because of country specific issues. If there are problems, there should be a discussion in the appropriate forum – bilaterally, ASEAN, WTO ...

In order to save and strengthen multilateralism these are concrete areas that the EU and ASEAN should work together rather urgently.

Along the same vein, international law is under duress too. If not the EU and ASEAN step in to defend international law and the multilateralism, who will do it?

Let me just remind you of the importance of the respect of international law for the weaker and – to apply it regionally – the South China Sea where ASEAN needs the protection of law. To sum up, I would like to quote 20212021 State of Southeast Asia Survey conducted by the ISEAS Yusof Ishak Institute: “the EU’s trust rate has received a strong boost in the region. The number of respondents having confidence in the EU to “do the right thing” has increased remarkably from 38.7% (in 2020) to 51.0% (2021) while the share of distrust has dropped from 36.9% to 29.6%.¹ In addition, the EU is already regarded as a champion of free trade, rule of law, global governance on issues of sustainability and climate change. The EU and Japan are also clear frontrunners as ASEAN’s most favorite and trusted strategic partners in the hedging against the US-China rivalry. Isn’t this a sound basis to build on and a sort of certificate of success for the last 45 years?

¹ <https://www.iseas.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/The-State-of-SEA-2021-v2.pdf>

CAMBODIA'S CHAIRMANSHIP OF ASEAN IN 2022: WHAT TO EXPECT?

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This paper will sketch and contemplate on 3 correlated elements, i.e., on ASEAN, on Cambodia and ASEAN, and on Cambodia's upcoming chairmanship of ASEAN in 2022. First and foremost, next year will mark the 55th anniversary of ASEAN establishment. From safeguarded the region from ideological sphere of influence back then during the Cold War, ASEAN has transformed Southeast Asia from conflicted arena of insecurity and economic disadvantage into a new potential region of astonishing prosperity, greater political stability, and more so as part of the larger 'Asian Miracle' of which external partners are eyeing to play some major roles. At the same time, ASEAN has been facing with various dilemma of internal setbacks, enduring challenges, and future uncertainties. Recently, the aspect of ASEAN's relevance and unity (or the lack thereof) has often been questioned, citing both internal and external factors.

Second, on Cambodia and ASEAN. Cambodia eventually became the 10th member of ASEAN in April 1999 after years of holding an observer status and after the deferral in 1997 due to its internal political crisis. Since its establishment in 1967 till becoming a full member, there had been several engagements between ASEAN and Cambodia vis-à-vis the country's political consequences. Back in the early 1990s, the engagement policy of ASEAN with Cambodia was intended to re-establish a political order in accordance with the 1991 Paris Agreement and 1993 Constitution of the country so that Cambodia would be admitted as a member. After its accession to ASEAN, many recognized the fundamental institutions Cambodia had built to foster its political and social stabilities.

Within the course of over 20 years membership, Cambodia has enjoyed benefits from ASEAN's cooperation mechanisms, its extensive partnership engagements, and continuous collaborative prospects. Its inclusion into the Initiative for ASEAN Integration (IAI) has strengthened Cambodia's direction toward narrowing down the development gap and elevate its economic developments focus.

Nonetheless, hard security issues remain to be at its critical juncture with points of controversy on cross-cutting issues such as the South China Sea, the Mekong, territorial skirmishes along the border, the recent Myanmar crisis, just to name a few. Cambodia-Thailand border dispute in 2008 and 2011 over Preah Vihear case, had seen major disappointment of the limited role that ASEAN possessed in

resolving hardline issues among its member countries, given the embedded principle of non-interference.

Another challenge in relations to its political dilemma is that Cambodia has a very limited space to maneuver around the dynamics of increasingly tensed power competition and the evolving regional security architecture. South China Sea dispute has raised critical concern of threatening regional peace and stability, alongside with the alarming general misperception across the region and beyond that Cambodia was taking a favorable stance with China. In fact, South China Sea issue has been there long before Cambodia became a member of ASEAN in 1999. And since being part of ASEAN, the Kingdom has been involved in many related meetings, especially the adoption of the Declaration of Conduct of Parties (DOC) in the South China Sea between all ASEAN member states and China, which was signed during Cambodia's chairmanship in 2002. That being said, next year will commemorate the 20th year of DOC adoption during Cambodia's 3rd chairmanship of ASEAN.

During the ASEAN meetings in 2012, Vietnam urged Cambodia as the Chair to include the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) in the Joint Communique, while the Philippines demanded to highlight the tension at Scarborough Shoal in the Joint Statement. Cambodia was of the view that those issues were particularly bilateral disputes between China and Vietnam, and China versus the Philippines, respectively, and not between China and the entire ASEAN. And hence, consensus could not be reached but to put the blame on Cambodia as the Chair to have blocked the Statement as often been portrayed by mass media is rather a misleading judgement.

In addition, great power politics is proven to be an unavoidable phenomenon for Cambodia and Southeast Asia region as a whole, especially surrounding the question of regional rules-based order. ASEAN cannot act as a "manager" of this regional order alone; its role will further be enhanced with the design of a constructive institutional arrangement that bridge the linkages with and between major powers as well as its external partners. Cambodia has been proactively engaged within ASEAN framework and has been diversifying its foreign policy in relations to small state diplomacy. A tactical balancing and diversification strategy would allow Cambodia to flourish well in the economic realm and embrace the essence of ASEAN unity and Centrality at large.

Third, as the upcoming Chair of ASEAN in 2022, Cambodia will handle an important task during one of the most critical times. First of all, with the unceasing

power competition between US and China, ASEAN remains at its hotspot especially on the South China Sea where conflict is not expected but tension could escalate further into force if not settle cautiously. Although Cambodia's position is clear that South China Sea is not an ASEAN-wide issue and that the dispute itself should be dealt with among claimant states and stakeholders involved, the Kingdom would still be expected to facilitate discussion on this matter further as the Chair. So far, the consultations on the Code of Conduct (COC) in the South China Sea has completed the first reading of the COC single draft negotiating text ahead of schedule since July 2019. The recent 19th Senior Officials' Meeting on the Implementation of the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea (DOC) held in Chongqing in June 2021, also agreed to resume the second reading of the COC as soon as possible and strive for the early conclusion of the negotiations. It would be another astonishing milestone for Cambodia to have the COC adopted next year during its Chairmanship, just as the adoption of DOC took place back in 2002.

The newly established trilateral security partnership between Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States - AUKUS, post a lot of questions and curiosity as to what extend this security pact entails. So far, Australia has reaffirmed its position that AUKUS seeks to promote peace and security in the Indo-Pacific region and it will respect ASEAN Centrality and as well the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP).

Second, with the Myanmar crisis likely to raging on, how will Cambodia as the Chair respond to its fellow member states' situation? Although the 'non-interference' principle of ASEAN still impeded, Myanmar crisis is rather a distinct one. That say, the situation is disrupting peace and stability in the region if the political climate in Myanmar could not be resolved. Discrete diplomacy shall be further enforced with Special Envoy to Myanmar now has been appointed. During the recent ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Meeting, the Ministers of ASEAN member states have also discussed on how to expedite smooth delivery of ASEAN's humanitarian assistance to Myanmar and emphasized on the urgent need to achieve progress in the implementation of the ASEAN Five-Points Consensus, beyond the relief provision, as being agreed during the recent Special ASEAN Leaders' Meeting held in Jakarta on 24 April 2021.

Third, with the anticipation that Covid-19 would be slightly ease by next year or so, expectation is set high for the Chair to guide a regional economic recovery agenda to recalibrate the respective member states' socio-economic developments from the pandemic setback as well as a collective intra-regional economic

framework. The ASEAN Travel Corridor Arrangement Framework (ATCAF) and the ASEAN Regional Reserve of Medical Supplies for Public Health Emergencies (ARRMS) are among the new initiatives that ASEAN put forward in the hope to gradually return the region to the state of normalcy and to boost ASEAN's preparedness for future regional health crises.

Last but not least, Timor-Leste's bid for ASEAN membership would also be high on the agenda as one of the key astonishing milestones to look forward to. Cambodia has reiterated its support for Timor-Leste's application and encouraged the ASEAN Economic Community and ASCC pillars to expedite their respective Fact-finding Missions so that ASEAN can come up with the roadmap and timelines for Timor-Leste's accession to the grouping. Cambodia also expressed support on further engagement with Timor-Leste in various capacity building programmes within the ASEAN frameworks.

IS THE “MIDDLE WAY” STILL POSSIBLE? CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE EU AND ASEAN IN 2022

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On 16 September 2021, the European Union (EU) published its long-awaited Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific. The publication has been stifled by the surprise announcement of the defence partnership between the US, UK and Australia (known as AUKUS), arguably downplaying the principles of inclusiveness, multilateralism and cooperation that Europe and other regional actors have been trying to promote.

Escalating great power rivalry between the US and China has led to an unprecedented polarization and fragmentation of the Indo-Pacific strategic landscape, putting existing cooperative mechanisms under ever-increasing pressure and reducing the breathing space of many smaller and middle-sized regional players.

While ASEAN centrality has been a defining feature of the regional multilateral security architecture, its relevance and effectiveness has been put into question. More than ever, the EU and ASEAN need to strengthen their cooperation to uphold multilateralism, moderate the negative impacts of great power tensions and ensure stability in the increasingly divided regional security environment.

Is the “middle way” still possible?

Ever since the accentuation of the US- China rivalry, countries across the Indo-Pacific and beyond have been trying to balance their strategic interests. Economically dependent on China on the one hand and relying on the US security presence on the other, they have been promoting the need to find a “middle way”, which would enable maintaining stable relations with both great powers without having to choose sides, while at the same time creating some breathing space for their own foreign policy agendas.

The need to build an inclusive, cooperative security environment and uphold multilateralism as a way to guarantee a rules-based regional order has been the

bottom/ central line of the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP), but also the EU's Indo-Pacific Strategy and the Japanese FOIP concept among others.

Yet, the emergence of new, exclusive, minilateral formations, such as the AUKUS partnership, has been interpreted by some as a turning point: demonstrating a shift away from inclusiveness and multilateral cooperation, back into confrontation. In this context, critics have raised concerns about the feasibility of the "middle way" - noting it is **no longer realistic** or reducing it at best to wishful thinking.

While some critical self-reflection is a due, the vast Indo-Pacific region is home to a formidable variety of actors and cannot be reduced to the US - CHN great power rivalry alone. More than ever, ASEAN countries and other regional players need not only to navigate, but try to shape regional security dynamics by formulating **an alternative narrative to a "G2" order**.

Despite the great diversity among ASEAN members, there is a consensus on sticking to the "middle way", as neither country feels comfortable to align either to the US or China only. This resonates with the EU's "third way" or "European Way", promoted by the EU High Representative/Vice President Josep Borrell, consisting in balancing interests and values and pushing the need to pragmatically engage China while strengthening cooperation with like-minded partner.

The involvement of the EU and other like-minded extra-regional partners is therefore more needed than ever to uphold a rules-based multilateral order and dilute the influence of a single (or two) actor(s) in the region.

ASEAN: A central piece of the EU's Indo-Pacific agenda

The EU and ASEAN have come a long way. From a donor-recipient relation to the current partnership with a strategic purpose, the two "partners in integration" have been stepping up their political and security cooperation, as marked by the new EU - ASEAN Bluebook 2021.

Multilateralism has always been part of the EU's DNA and a key common denominator of its engagement with ASEAN. Nowadays, it has become a matter of pragmatic interest: ASEAN and ASEAN-centred security architecture is seen as a vital **guarantee to sustaining a rules-based regional order** in today's volatile security environment.

The EU's Strategy for Cooperation in the I-P, published on 16 Sept 2021, has been a consensus document built on a strong demand of the 27 member states. It proposes concrete actions in seven main policy areas, including prosperity, connectivity, green alliance, trade, sec-def, digital transition & innovation (Horizon Europe) and resilient value chains.

The values of a "free and open Indo-Pacific", enabling a stable trading environment, free access to markets, are at its roots, together with a commitment to democracy, human rights, democracy and rule of law. But the main message is one of **inclusiveness and cooperation**, as opposed to confrontation, which are also at the heart of the AOIP and the "ASEAN-Way" in general.

With the EU's new-found determination to become a proactive political and security player in the region, its relationship with ASEAN gains in importance. Whether at the bi-regional or at the bilateral level, strengthening ties with Southeast Asian nations provides Brussels with the necessary **leverage and legitimacy** to boost its own narrative and engagement in the Indo-Pacific.

The many bilateral relationships that have gained traction in the recent years, notably with Vietnam, Indonesia and Singapore, but also Thailand and Malaysia, has been complementing the EU's strategic approach and engagement in the region. Above all, they allow **delivering on concrete projects**, especially in the field of connectivity, maritime security and cyber security and digital transition, which are the most sought for in the region.

Prospects for EU – ASEAN ties under the Cambodian Chairmanship of ASEAN

Much is expected from the upcoming Cambodian chairmanship of ASEAN in 2022. From steering the region towards post-Covid economic recovery, to managing the Myanmar crisis and negotiating a binding Code of Conduct in the South China Sea, the ASEAN agenda will be a heavy one... all items on the agenda will be more or less impacted by the escalating great power rivalry. ASEAN's relevance and success will be determined by its capacity to be proactive and deliver tangible results. To achieve that, an effective and operational partnership with the EU can be most instrumental.

In practical terms, the two partners need to focus on what they are good at. While great power confrontation steals most of the mediatic attention, many burning **non-traditional security** issues are some of the main challenges to Indo-Pacific

security, largely overlooked and underappreciated by policymakers and strategic planners.

For example, cooperation to achieve ambitious climate change targets ahead of the COP26 Summit, committing ASEAN to bringing 23% of its energy from renewable sources by 2025, is one promising arena, combining investments in green transition and technology transfers between the two partners. Marine environmental cooperation and sustainable development of resources, including the painful issue of Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing in the region and related trans-national criminal networks is another burning concern in a region, which can be addressed through effective cooperation with Europe.

Connectivity provides a vast array of opportunities for cooperation with high visibility. The EU's Global Gateway initiative connects with existing initiatives such as the OECD-led "Blue-dot Network" and therefore regional partners such as Japan and Australia, positioning itself openly as a more transparent and more sustainable alternative to China's Belt and Road Initiative. Southeast Asia is a major destination for infrastructure investments and the choice of partners is key to maintain a healthy and balanced competition environment.

Against the backdrop of escalating great power tensions exacerbating the many burning security hotspots in the region, the **focus on Preventive Diplomacy** should remain a priority. The EU, much as ASEAN, remain committed to promoting peaceful solutions to the Myanmar crisis through mediation and sanctions. In the case of the South China Sea, the EU supports the formulation of a legally binding Code of Conduct and provides capacity to bordering countries on maritime law enforcement and resource management. European countries have also joined legal action at the UN level, through the deposition of *Notes Verbales* calling for the application of the 2016 PCA ruling.

Finally, **further institutionalization of regional security architecture** may be needed. The East Asia Summit, the region's highest-level forum, may benefit from the inclusion of the EU (and other like-minded extra-regional actors) to increase their responsibility and dilute the overwhelming influence and dependency on a single (or two) actors – reducing the risks for countries to become victims of the ongoing rivalry.

To conclude: the "middle-way" is not dead. More than ever, it needs to be promoted through sustained political commitment and leadership. There are high hopes for the Cambodian chairmanship of ASEAN in 2022, as much as there are

high expectations for the EU's engagement in the Indo-Pacific. Both can be achieved if the two partners continue working hand in hand.

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Let me start by citing the fact that we just got the news few days ago that Maria Ressa, a Filipino citizen has just been awarded as a Nobel for peace this year. If my counting is correct, we already have four Nobel Laureates for Peace from Southeast Asia, Aung San Suu Kyi, [José] Ramos-Horta and Bishop Bellow, and now Maria Resa. What does this statistic tell us? If four Noble Peace Prizes are from Southeast Asia, then are we a Peaceful region or are we a not so peaceful region? Four already, citizens from Southeast Asia. So, I think we have to start thinking about this that many would think the region is home to so many conflicts, so many dissimilarities, and so many competitions. Then, we have ASEAN as a regional organization that would maintain peace and stability in the region, but somehow conflict remains. Pich Charadine already brief us a little bit about some of the latent conflict potentials in our Southeast Asian region. So, I would like to stop with that fact that we should start to think that our region is home to various conflicts, and we need a very strong regional organization. We have to strive for having a fully functional regional organization that next year Cambodia will have a chance to lead and chair ASEAN and lead us as a chairman.

Secondly, in the context of multilateralism amid the geopolitical rivalry, I think we all understand that most of ASEAN countries are developing countries that have benefit from a rules-based system. In mitigating the excesses of self-interest behaviors from bigger power, not only China and the US, but also from various major powers. And, we also, I think, benefit from this multilateral principle in promoting our regional stability. Indonesia would be the chair in after Cambodia in 2023, so Indonesia and Cambodia, and other ASEAN member states should strive to sustain the commitment, and energy towards multilateral forum.

The third point that I would like to make is that, Pich already mentioned as well, in the context of pandemic, I think Cambodian chairmanship, for sure, will attach the need of economic recovery and possibly anticipation of future pandemics that would occur. I think we all agree this is not going to be the last pandemic that we have. But the question of the public health security, regional public health security would be, I think, on the top priority of ASEAN Member States for some years to come. In addition to that, economic recovery would for sure be on top of the priority as well, as Pich already mentioned. Ambassador Pou Sothirak already mentioned earlier about the commitments of the EU to have and to promote green recovery. Southeast Asian countries should embrace this green recovery that would be very much supported by the European Union. Now, in the context of

economic recovery, and so on, I think one thing that Cambodia can work on is to leverage Indonesian Chairmanship of G-20 next year. So, how Cambodia and ASEAN can leverage on the Indonesian Chairmanship in G-20 next year, which I think help our programs and the plans for economic recovery next year? Indonesia, I think would welcome this kind of linkages between G-20 Chairmanship as well as the regional processes in Southeast Asia, especially with Cambodia as the chair next year.

The fourth point that I would like to make is that it is true that US-China competition is no longer inevitable, it's real, it's concrete. It's not only about trade war anymore, it is going to be about a competition on the technological side, and so on. Then, the question would be, should our region be defined by this competition between the two superpowers? Of course, the answer is No because, there are, so many areas that ASEAN countries would want to cooperate either with China, and with the US, and also with other major powers, especially in the context of the post-pandemic recovery. Now, the most critical part of this fact, competition between the two superpowers and our regional organization is not about the outcome, I think, but how we could maintain our diplomatic habits and modalities in Southeast Asia. When we come to managing a great-power relation and we do have so many modalities that we need to revolve in the context of managing these two superpowers. We had experience, and we have been successful in managing the superpower in the past and that's why I don't see any reason why we should not be able to do again.

The question is centrality. Now, I think centrality as we know is earned. It's not something that would be a given by our external partners. So, centrality is earned and that's why I think we need to get our act together, and Cambodia has some homework to do next year. Recent developments expose weaknesses and our institution's inability. The problem in Myanmar is just one example that so far, we have not even been to enforce the decision by our leaders, [which is] Five-Point Consensus that would, I think, then, be inherited to, Cambodia's Chairmanship next year. And then, this is the question of institutional set-up of ASEAN, and, I think, we would be very much appreciated during that Cambodia's Chairmanship of ASEAN. Some introductions to the idea of reviewing our charter, I think, would be beneficial that we have to acknowledge that ah we do have some institutional problems in ASEAN. And, we have to find how to solve these weaknesses. Because, as Pich mentioned, challenges abound, from the traditional security, and non-traditional security challenges. Pandemic is one, climate change is the other that require our institutions to be strong and responsive to the challenges that we would face in the future, not to mention the traditional security challenges of the

geopolitical rivalry between the two superpowers. So that's why we need to have an institutional set-up that would enable us to deal with the challenges in a more flexible way and in a stronger way.

I think, we have some modalities here. ASEAN, as we know, have in terms of managing great powers relations. We have our ASEAN Outlook of Indo-Pacific (AOIP). I think, this is a home ground vision that represents, the fastest process, in producing, such a strategic document. I mean the backdrop of heated US-China rivalry, a brinkmanship, tide war and so on, ASEAN was managed to formulate, and adopt this AOIP in in 2019. But it's rather unfortunate that AOIP was adopted just a couple of months before the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic. So, at that time ASEAN missed the opportunity for the immediate implementation of the outlook. Now I think 2022 with Cambodia as the chairman, this opportunity to have the immediate implementation of points of the ASEAN Outlook of Indo-Pacific would be great. This is important because it is a reference point for our external partners about what ASEAN thinks about the Indo-Pacific, and what ASEAN wants for alternating the region in the Indo-Pacific region, which ASEAN is, of course, at the central part of this geopolitical construct. And how we would want to see this region becoming the region of cooperation instead of the region of competition between the two superpowers, and the modality is strong because most of ASEAN Dialogue partners quickly and openly supported the AOIP.

The question is now about the implementation, and what we need then to clearly show our dialogue partners about the direction and the plan for implementation of the AOIP. Then, that would be, I think if it is put in the agenda during the Cambodia Chairmanship of ASEAN would somehow direct the discourse and the arrangement of the Indo-Pacific region, and then following the so-called ASEAN centrality or ASEAN led processes in the Indo-Pacific. Maritime Domain will be important then because I think this is an area where conflict happens recently or in the foreseeable future. So, functional maritime cooperation would be something that we would need in order for us to diffuse the already heated potential conflict in the maritime domain, especially when it comes to the question of South China Sea.

Lastly, I think, recent development in the geopolitical competition as we know. If I may bring this up, the reason Australian, UK, and US agreement on the building of the nuclear-powered submarine brings us the question of our own treaty in Southeast Asia. That is the long overdue signing of ASEAN Nuclear Weapon Free Zone by the nuclear states. So far, no nuclear states sign the ASEAN Nuclear Weapon Free Zone. And of course, we know the problem that there are

reservations from these nuclear states of the requirements, and the treaty, but it's been long overdue. It needs to be discussed again because now with this new recent development and the US, UK, and Australia Agreement, then, we do need to think about how to maintain our region as a region that is free from a nuclear weapon.

ASEAN CENTRALITY & LEGITIMACY: ISSUES & CHALLENGES

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Introduction

2021 is a challenging year for ASEAN. The challenges of COVID-19, the crisis in Myanmar, and tensions in the South China Sea has almost paralyzed the regional organization. In the middle of these crises is the debate about the continued salience of one of ASEAN's cherished operating principles: *ASEAN centrality*. ASEAN has diligently asserted and some observers say jealously guarded ASEAN centrality. ASEAN centrality is the relatively newer articulation of ASEAN's code. What used to be the ASEAN way, is now centrality. But unlike the ASEAN way, centrality is asserted more toward external actors may they be neighboring states, dialogue partners, superpowers, and even international organizations and institutions.

Over the past four decades, ASEAN has steadily asserted asserting its centrality. As former Indonesian Foreign Minister Marty Natalegawa has observed.

at critical junctures in ASEAN's journey ... the association has seized the initiative; providing leadership and demonstrating resourcefulness at a time of uncertainties, with concrete and transformative policies. All throughout-in the final analysis-the countries outside ASEAN deferred to it because ASEAN has asserted and *earned* its position of centrality.

As enduring structures that regulate behaviour and stabilize expectations, institutions are vital for the pursuit of mutual interests and shared goals. Institutions helped ASEAN, born in a regional milieu characterized by conflict, distrust and uncertainty, successfully reshape its environment to create a modicum of stability, peace, and prosperity. By acting in concert in the midst of cross-cutting diversity and political tensions, ASEAN made itself an attractive institutional mechanism for powers big and small.

In the past 50 years, this regional organization's convening and agenda-setting powers grew at pace comfortable to its members - and at the same time unthreatening to its neighbours.

ASEAN's evolving institutional configuration is a by-product of both its evolution as well as flexibility to respond to the most pressing political, economic, and socio-cultural challenges that affect its members. Underpinning its institutions and multilateral processes such as the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), ASEAN+3, the East Asia Summit (EAS) is ASEAN centrality, a collective principle of action of and a shared vision for the Asian regional security architecture.

It is said that one can become a victim of one's own achievements. Critics spared no punches against ASEAN when they reduced it to an ineffective, compromised, and paralyzed community.¹ While in the past criticisms emanated from its decision-making practices, palpable inaction on pressing issues, and lack of liberal and democratic credentials, current discontent over ASEAN focuses on the possible erosion of its cohesion and credibility as a community.

Bolstering ASEAN's relevance today requires a smart combination of institutional upgrading, calibration, and retooling guided by a strategic appreciation of Asia-Pacific's volatile environment. Domestic developments within member states, collective learning from past failures and mistakes, and leadership fuelled by political will are all crucial to jointly undertaking institutional reform.

In the end, the long-overdue changes to ASEAN's institutions and regional architecture should contribute to the overlapping goals of credibility and cohesion, as key elements in reinforcing centrality. This is critical to overcoming the fear of increasing relevance and worsening polarization the regional organization currently suffers from.

A more cohesive ASEAN will make it more credible to manage regional security, and a viable platform for pursuing mutual interests. Similarly, a more credible ASEAN in the eyes of its citizens and dialogue partners will contribute to a more credible community that is truly people-centred and contributes to a region of peace, freedom, neutrality, and prosperity.

ASEAN institutions: A Community and A Driving Force

As a regional organization of small powers and developing economies, ASEAN's institutional evolution was guided by a sensitivity to its internal contexts as well as recognition of the prevalent Cold War realities. It was founded after three failed attempts because of external meddling, intense distrust, and domestic distractions.

¹ See for example Barry Desker, "ASEAN Integration Remains an Illusion," *RSIS Commentary* No. 046, 5 March 2017. In <https://www.rsis.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/CO15046.pdf>.

Lacking similarities in political regimes and societal composition, ASEAN's founding members realized that common aspirations are the ties that bind them. But learning from abortive regional experiments, they carefully embedded ASEAN in a flexible legal and institutional structure.

ASEAN's founding legal document, the Bangkok Declaration, was less a binding treaty than an expression of shared aspirations to simultaneously build national resilience while fostering solidarity. Defying the path treaded by other regional groupings, it did not anchor itself at first on economic integration, nor possessing similar political systems. ASEAN's essential "region-ness" lied in the common perception of vulnerabilities that could only be addressed by an organization that enhances sovereignty and promotes security in the most comprehensive sense.

Over time, it was ASEAN's flexibility that dictated the gradual pace of its institutional growth. It took ASEAN four decades to formally establish itself a rules-based regime through a charter. But rather than impose limitation on the scope of action of its members, this formal document gave legal standing legitimacy to existing informal practices collectively known as the 'ASEAN Way'.

The 'ASEAN Way' is anchored on norms such as non-intervention, consensus, and face-saving that are likewise shared by other regional bodies – and arguably even more so (culturally) in Asia. However, it is the strict interpretation of these norms that has caused discontent. For example, consensus decision-making does not imply unanimity or veto powers for every member-state. Its history furthermore demonstrated that the ASEAN way has not been consistently used lending credence to the observation of the group's 'organized hypocrisy.'²

It is this emphasis on informality that enabled ASEAN to incrementally be comfortable in creating other noncommittal institutions, such as a human rights mechanism and other bodies that helped realize and further strengthen its community. In the same vein, ASEAN's forward-looking perspective encouraged it to set ambitious integration targets. While a common currency, passport, parliament, court, security policy, remain elusive, the organization has painted its integration goals in broad and bold strokes, as contained in the Bali Concord and ASEAN Visions.

Indeed, no serious ASEAN observer would think its visions of a people-centred development, a community of caring societies, and dynamic development can be

² An example was the ASEAN troika during the Cambodian conflict. See Robert Krasner, *Sovereignty: Organized Hypocrisy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999).

fully implemented within its target date for each. These goals are future directions of the region commonly shared by its ASEAN member states. In the end, they are as much roadmaps as they are by-products of meaningful community-building.

ASEAN's aspirations went beyond the geographic space it occupies. This stemmed from a strategic appreciation of its complex interdependence with big and middle powers in Asia, and beyond. Related to this is the acknowledgment that ASEAN member states' security and development are interlocked with these powerful states. The organization's ambition was less to be a regional hegemon than a safe venue where erstwhile adversaries can sit together, discuss common issues, and possibly pursue cooperation.

Major and middle powers took notice of ASEAN's potential to be a defining element in the regional security architecture. ASEAN+3, ARF, and EAS were the tangible outcomes of an imaginative ASEAN that envisioned the possibilities of multilateralism despite inherent tensions and antagonisms. As a driving force of regional cooperation, ASEAN as a non-threatening convener was made possible precisely because of its perceived credibility to act in concert as one community, and its equidistance from superpowers.

Moving Forward

How can ASEAN surpass these traps and overcome these existential threats? Part of the solution lies within the current institutional infrastructure and toolkit. It requires less innovation, but more political will and decisive action. The way forward, however, is for ASEAN is also to tap into its flexibility by taking creative and bold action. What is at stake is the organization's credibility and cohesion. Unless maintained or restored, the exit costs for ASEAN member-states will be dangerously low.

For example, the ASEAN troika was celebrated as one historical moment in which the regional grouping exhibited the necessary resolve and flexibility required to take decisive action during a crisis. As one astute ASEAN observer stated, 'It is time that we give life to the agreed mechanisms and processes to take cognizance of crisis situations such as the High Council under the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation and other mechanisms provided for under the ASEAN Charter.'³ The

³ M.C. Abad, Jr. "ASEAN at 50 and The Philippine Chairmanship in 2017," *CIRSS Commentaries*, Special Issue No. 1, 2017, <http://www.fsi.gov.ph/asean-at-50-and-the-philippine-chairmanship-in-2017/>

more ASEAN institutions remain just on paper, the more its irrelevance and polarization traps become more paralyzing for itself.

Old thinking, false impressions, and strict formality cannot continue to dictate ASEAN's relationships with the region's various sectors. For example, its continued stubbornness and lack of sincerity in engaging civil society needs to be replaced with a tolerant and open attitude that extends to other actors such as business. A people-centred ASEAN does not only interface with its larger public at predetermined points with strict rules of engagement. A way forward is to give life and substance to the institutional mechanisms within ASEAN's community pillars to constantly engage the *mélange* of actors and players that it now shares in the regional stage. Failure to result in possible disengagement of these sectors and ASEAN's own future irrelevance.

If ASEAN refuses to reform and upgrade its institutions based on demands from above and below, its collective stand on issues will be defined less by geostrategic realities. ASEAN's first 50 years has been defined by sweeping divisive issues under the rug, a stop-gap strategy that will no longer work in the future. It also needs to decrease the uncertainty induced by leadership changes within its member-states.

Finally, ASEAN's institutions need to evolve into entities that structure incentives, prolong time horizons, and reshape expectations, particularly on the imperatives of acting in concert. The secret of ASEAN's success in fostering peace and prosperity was its ability to mutually pursue national resilience and regional resilience. Under polarizing conditions, ASEAN must have the necessary mechanisms to facilitate a common stance that is mutually beneficial. A cohesive community that is unable to do so loses its credibility to be a collective entity, with a single voice.

ASEAN's institutions will be critical in its path in the next 50 years. It can continue to cling to old habits and become trapped in a downward spiral leading to its irrelevance and marginalization in the regional order, or it can defy current cynicism and take bold but pragmatic steps to activate, substantiate, and transform its institutional infrastructure in order to revitalize its centrality among its members.

By filling the gaps in its integration process, ASEAN can regain some of its credibility, and present itself as a cohesive actor that can once again shape the regional security architecture in the Asia-Pacific. By being truthful to one another

and having a perspective grounded on realities, ASEAN can become the regional organization that could once again attract powers big and small. To be taken seriously by its people and external actors, ASEAN must take institution-building seriously.

ASEAN centrality does not mean complete neutrality in superpower competition/rivalry in the region. One thing that ASEAN needs to assert is to undermine the hegemonic narrative that “right makes might”.

Next year should not be 2012 once again. As what a political philosopher said “history repeats itself, 'first as tragedy, then as farce'. If 2012 happened again, it will further delegitimize ASEAN centrality not only in the eyes of its external partners and actors but more significantly to its members.











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