



The EU and ASEAN: Natural Partners

Daily headlines in South East Asia speak about the region's impressive economic achievements. More and more they also focus on security tensions, including those in the South China Sea. The EU supports ASEAN in the twin challenge of integrating the region's economies and addressing growing security threats. That's why on 23 July Foreign Ministers from 28 EU and 10 ASEAN Member States will gather in Brussels to discuss how the EU-ASEAN partnership can best deliver shared security and sustainable prosperity for their peoples.

It is little wonder that our societies are growing increasingly interconnected. The EU and ASEAN are the world's two major initiatives for promoting regional integration. We have worked to advance peace and security at home and abroad for almost four decades.

Economic ties between us have traditionally been strong. The EU is the biggest foreign investor in ASEAN – close to a third of all foreign investments from abroad come from the EU. With the prospect of economic integration in ASEAN, these numbers are likely to increase even further.

The depth of our economic ties inspired us to reap the benefits of closer ties also in other areas. Two years ago in Brunei Foreign Ministers from both regions decided to take EU-ASEAN cooperation to a new level, making it more political and more ambitious.

More than any other ASEAN partner, the EU is committed to promote peace through regional integration instead of power politics. More than anyone else we know about the strategic imperative of shaping regional solutions. We also know the how difficult it is to reach them. That's why sharing experiences and best practices is such a central part of the EU-ASEAN partnership.

To confront challenges that transcend borders, such as climate change or maritime security should be common sense. In a world where we increasingly rely on each other to sustain prosperous and safe societies, it is also a strategic necessity. Today conflict, terrorism or crime in one part of the globe can influence the well-being of societies in another. Our solution is simple - when countries act together they are stronger and more resilient.

When foreign ministers meet in Brussels this week they will focus on three concrete steps: Our first priority is connectivity- deepening the connection between and within our societies. We want to invest more in transport, education and communication to bring people together to learn, travel and exchange ideas.

We also want to work together more closely on maritime cooperation. Safe and secure seas in South East Asia are a prerequisite for a stable and prosperous ASEAN. They are also important to the EU which conducts 90% of its trade by sea. The EU does not take sides on the question of sovereignty. We believe that all territorial disputes should be settled peacefully in a spirit of cooperation and respect of international law including UNCLOS. The EU also supports the efforts to work on a formal

and legally binding Code of Conduct between ASEAN and China and hopes these discussions can be completed as soon as possible.

The EU and ASEAN have a lot of common experiences to share from keeping our ports safe to sustainably managing our resources. For example, on maritime surveillance, illegal fishing or marine conservation, the EU has created a set of regional policies that could inspire ASEAN countries as they grapple with similar challenges. By translating shared experiences into practical cooperation we will make an important contribution to regional security and prosperity.

Our third priority is development cooperation with ASEAN. The EU has decided to more than double development aid to ASEAN countries to eradicate poverty and sustain the region's dynamic economies. The EU and ASEAN are also investing in the future of our societies by linking up our younger generations. Every year more than 4000 students and scholars from ASEAN come to the EU. They will be an important backbone to driving innovation and growth for generations to come.

Four decades of cooperation have made the EU and ASEAN 'natural partners'. As Ministers gather in Brussels, they know that together the EU and ASEAN achieved a lot. They also know that there is even more work to be done.

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