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Press Release

**Economic Integration- Why does it matter?
ASEAN and EU officials, business representatives and academics
discuss the single market, trade reforms and regional economic
integration**

Forty-five officials, business representatives and academics from ASEAN Member States and the ASEAN Secretariat as well as from the European Union gathered in Yangon, Myanmar for a regional trade capacity-building workshop. They presented and exchanged views on key issues of the European Union single market-building process, ASEAN's Economic Community building process 2015 and beyond and institutional measures to foster regional economic integration. Opening the workshop was Dr. U Than Htut, Deputy Director General, Foreign Economic Relations Department, Ministry of National Planning and Economic Development, Myanmar and Mr. Andreas Röttger, Head of Economic and Regional Cooperation/Good Governance, Delegation of the European Union to Indonesia, Brunei Darussalam and ASEAN.

Organised by the EU-ASEAN Enhancing ASEAN FTA Negotiating Capacity Programme, the workshop focused on three main issues: (1) the single market and trade reform; (2) legal and institutional mechanisms to foster regional integration and cooperation and (3) costs and benefits of economic integration and adjustment.

Dr Than Htut from Myanmar commented that "the EU through collaboration and cooperation with ASEAN can create better economic, social and political conditions for the region and beyond." Meanwhile Andreas Röttger from the EU emphasised that "regional integration not only yields economic benefits, such as a wider choice of products and services at more competitive prices, but equally important it connects people and ideas contributing to more cohesion and innovation."

This regional trade capacity-building activity is the programme's ninth workshop in a series taking place throughout ASEAN Member States, all led by eminent academics and practitioners. The regional workshop series have covered a variety of important trade themes including *new and emerging trade issues*, traditional trade topics such as agriculture, non-agricultural market access, trade in services, trade and international investment and various cross-cutting issues. Most workshops have also devoted at least two days to participants simulating preferential trade negotiations.

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The previous eight regional workshops took place in 2012 in Siem Reap, Jakarta, Kuala Lumpur, Hanoi, Bangkok and Vientiane; and in 2013 in Manila and Bandar Seri Begawan. A regional trade round-table on *The Global Trade System: Face of the Future and Implications for EU-ASEAN Trade and Economic Relations* will take place in Singapore in early October.

The EU-ASEAN Enhancing ASEAN FTA Negotiating Capacity Programme is a €2.5 million technical cooperation programme funded by the EU for the benefit of ASEAN Member States. It supports ASEAN economic integration and facilitates ASEAN's preparedness for participating in FTA negotiations. The programme is designed to provide high-quality training, cutting-edge research and analysis, and bilateral FTA negotiations simulations for government, private sector and academic representatives of the ASEAN Member States as well as ASEAN Secretariat officials. It covers a broad range of trade and investment issues and addresses traditional and non-traditional issues and newer 21st century challenges.

In addition to its regional capacity-building activities, the programme conducts bilateral in-country trade-training courses customised for the specific needs of the later entrants into ASEAN—Vietnam, Laos, Myanmar and Cambodia. Following the close of the current regional workshop on 11 September, the programme will implement its last in-country trade training workshop in Nay Pyi Taw, Myanmar, which will focus on competition policy and law.

Finally, the EU-ASEAN Enhancing ASEAN FTA Negotiating Capacity Programme has reached out to a wider audience of ASEAN stakeholders with Public Dialogue Fora on trade issues of keen interest.

ASEAN as a whole represents the EU's 3rd largest trading partner outside Europe (after the US and China) with more than €182 billion of trade in goods in 2012 (according to ASEANstats data). The EU represents ASEAN's third largest export partner with exports amounting to €93.6 billion in 2012 and ensuring an annual trade surplus to ASEAN of nearly €5.25 billion.

The EU is committed to contributing to ASEAN's process of regional integration and to share lessons learnt from its integration experience. Currently negotiating trade agreements with a number of ASEAN Member States, the EU believes that ultimately a region-to-region free trade agreement between both regions makes political and economic sense in the long term.

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