EU and ASEAN young leaders address shared global challenges

A group of young professionals from the EU and ASEAN met up at the EU-ASEAN Young Leaders Forum in Brussels on 26 February 2018 to discuss common challenges. Read the article to find out more on what issues were highlighted by the young leaders and their set of recommendations.

EU-ASEAN Young Leaders Forum

By Ananya Hemvjitraphan, Pachara Aungsusuknarumol and Johanna Sutton

It is exciting to see so much energy brought by the youth leaders as they come together in Brussels to make recommendations regarding the most pressing topics: political and security issues, economy,
On Political and Security Issues

The youth which we represent here today are stakeholders in global security, and an inter-regional forum such as this is an ideal place to talk about global challenges and the EU and ASEAN’s role in facing them.

The 'end of politics' has not materialised, and we can argue that geopolitics have returned to Europe (if they ever went away). Crises which remain unresolved in both regions, notably the dispute in the South China Sea and the Ukraine crisis in Europe, were brought up as case studies. The delegates discussed the importance of international norms, and encouraged both the EU and ASEAN to continue to support the international rules based order.

The young leaders' recommendations address issues which concern us most, which will affect us in decades to come and where we think the EU and ASEAN can have a strong impact.

Key Recommendations:

1. We want to see both ASEAN and the EU focusing more on enhancing human security, alongside big geopolitical issues, specifically vulnerable groups – such as refugees – and improve their integration into societies.
2. We want to see the EU and ASEAN create strategies for cyber security together, to enhance personal data protection.
3. Climate change will result in a higher number of natural disasters, which will put states under strain. ASEAN and the EU could share expertise on prevention of and response to natural disasters.
4. Both regions will be vulnerable to risks posed by returning foreign fighters and extremists, and both regions have existing expertise in de-radicalisation/EXIT programmes. ASEAN and the EU could together exchange expertise to better address social drivers of radicalisation through education at primary and secondary level.

On Economy, Trade and Business Exchanges

There is a high level of open-mindedness among the young leaders, despite our differences in economic and political situations. Firstly, we all strive for a common goal: sustainable development. It is at the top of our agenda and we are looking for ways in which we can fuel economic growth without harming future generations. Secondly, we see opportunity to better promote public awareness of trade and economic activities by the EU and ASEAN, specifically on communications around the Free Trade Agreements (FTAs). Lastly, we see the EU-ASEAN partnership as an exciting opportunity for employment and entrepreneurship.

Key recommendations:

1. Communication strategy: to develop effective and meaningful communication strategy of trade and economic activities, especially on the FTAs, to raise public awareness and ensure transparency of policies to the general public. In particular, we would like to urge the EU-ASEAN to promote the key benefits in accessible media.
2. Employment & entrepreneurship: to promote public-private partnership, such as co-payments to facilitate skill trainings to avoid retrenchment by firms as well as develop and strengthen network of entrepreneurs and SMEs across the two regions.
3. Sustainable development: to encourage states to re-assess their performance metrics and re-adjust targets to a higher ambition after each Voluntary National Review of the Paris Agreement Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs)

**On People-to-People contacts**

Regarding people-to-people contacts, participants have discussed various topics ranging from student exchange programmes, model meetings, language barriers and awareness of ASEAN. "I have asked my mom, my dad and my brother, they have no idea what ASEAN is," said Ryan Kelle, a delegate from the Netherlands. Youth leaders have also further suggested that the knowledge and awareness of coming together should come early in the learning process. More history and content regarding other regions should be included in the curriculum of formal education. "One without a driver license should not be allowed to drive," suggested Yi Jun, a representative from Singapore.

**Key recommendations:**

1. Support inter-regional sports events, including e-sport, in high school or university level between both regions
2. Create a programme exchanging artists from one region to another to promote cultural exchange
3. Launch a work, travel and professionals exchange programme to allow people-to-people contacts from more sectors
4. Establish a solid initiative on exchanging students between ASEAN and EU, for example, ASEAN-EU University Network

The Young Leaders Forum has resulted in concrete suggestions, and we look forward to seeing what influence they will have on the Forum of Strategic Thinkers and EU-ASEAN relations in the future. We hope that the Young Leaders Forum will become a recurring event, with representatives selected to represent regions and specific expertise, to refine ideas as we go forward. A recurring theme in the day’s debates was how the EU and ASEAN could lead by example to address global challenges in an uncertain geopolitical context.

We call on the EU and ASEAN to use their influence for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals and for peace, prosperity and stability.

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