

# EU-ASEAN Strategic Thinkers Forum and side-events

26-28 February 2018, Brussels

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2 March 2018

## Summary:

Proposed at the 21<sup>st</sup> AEMM in Bangkok, **EU-ASEAN Strategic Thinkers Forum** was convened in Brussels in February 2018, along with the first EU-ASEAN Young Leaders Forum and a Public Debate on the future of EU-ASEAN relations. **More than 200 thinkers** from EU institutions, ASEAN Secretariat, member states of both, academia, think tanks, business, researchers, and students attended these events. Discussions covered the full spectrum of EU-ASEAN relations from political-security and economic relations to socio-cultural cooperation and people-to-people contacts. The Forums jointly drafted a **list of recommendations to be presented to the 22<sup>nd</sup> AEMM** in Brussels later this year. There is great interest among participants and organisers alike in making people-to-people engagement through this type of forums more institutionalised and regular in future.

## Detail:

### EU-ASEAN Young Leaders Forum (26.02.):

1. Opened by Mr David Daly (EEAS) and Mr Chittipat Tongprasroeth (Thai MFA), EU-ASEAN Young Leaders Forum (YLF) convened **31 participants** (25-30 years old) from EU and ASEAN member states<sup>1</sup> to discuss opportunities and challenges in EU-ASEAN relations across the three pillars. Respective sessions were introduced by Mr Steven Everts (EEAS) and Ms Natthanan Kunnamas (Chulalongkord University, Thailand), Mr Peter Berz (DG TRADE) and Mr Arief Rizky Bakhtiar (ASEC), and Ms Claire Morel (DG EAC) and Mr Ekkaphab Phanthavong (Lao PDR MFA).
2. From the perspective of the youth, commitment to **sustainable economic development** should remain high on the agenda, in all its aspects (environmental impact of FTAs, fair trade, labour standards, social sustainability, indigenous groups, gender). The youth expects greater **transparency** and better **communication** on the benefits of EU-ASEAN cooperation, including on the FTA and CATA negotiations but also opportunities for research staff exchange; greater public diplomacy efforts are needed in both regions. Conscious of geopolitical changes, they fully support the EU-ASEAN commitment to a **rules-based** international order, **multilateralism** and global **partnerships** in addressing joint traditional and non-traditional security challenges, such as the SCS, DPRK, Rohingya, Ukraine and radicalisation, but also climate change, environmental degradation, water scarcity and disasters. While recognising developmental differences, they encouraged the use of modern digital **technology** and **social media** in pushing the agenda forward and reaching the people.
3. Summarised in the YLF press release (link below) and merged together with recommendations from the Strategic Thinkers, YLF concluded with **ten suggestions** for the ways in which EU-ASEAN relations could be strengthened, including focusing on human security, being more ambitious in the implementation of the Paris Agreement, and expanding into areas of cyber security, data protection, e-governance, de-radicalisation, public-private-partnership, visa facilitation and exchange of professionals (*'work and travel visa'*), arts, culture, and sports (*note: currently, no EU-ASEAN cooperation on sports, but there is an ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Sports and, as such, opportunity for cooperation*).

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1 List of participants in Annex 4.

4. **HRVP Mogherini** received the Young Leaders at the EEAS (27.02.) where questions were raised on the EU's role as a global actor, non-traditional security challenges, impact of the rise of China on EU-China relations, Marawi refugees in the Philippines, the EU's engagement with Russia, the situation in Ukraine, and the issue of uniting Cyprus. While meeting high-level officials gives Young Leaders confidence to bring new ideas to the table, HRVP also encouraged them to propose policies on youth.

#### **Public Debate: 'EU-ASEAN relations: the next forty years' (27.02.):**

5. The public debate convened **210 participants** with nine panelists:<sup>2</sup> opening speaker HE Mr **Le Luong Minh** (former ASEAN SG), Mr Reinhard Bütikofer (MEP), Mr Jose Tavares (Indonesian MFA), Ms Clarita Carlos (University of the Philippines), Mr Bart Gaens (Finnish Institute of International Affairs), Mr Peter Potman (Dutch MFA), Mr Suthad Setboonsarng (Bank of Thailand), Ms Yeo Lay Hwee (EU Centre Singapore), and Ms Annika Siirak (EU-ASEAN Young Leader); moderated by Ms Shada Islam (Friends of Europe).
6. Highlights of the discussion included stressing the **ASEAN centrality** and **neutrality** in the **power rivalry** between the US and China as ASEAN unity is being put to test (Tavares), the importance of symbolism in 'filling the gaps' by signing the **Strategic Partnership** (Potman), the issues of **poverty** and **inequality** as the root causes of radicalisation in Marawi and beyond (Carlos), the need to make the partnership more **security-oriented** (Gaens), the limited and unbalanced **awareness** among the people, especially in Europe (Minh), creating the same opportunities for everyone through enhancing **connectivity** (Bütikofer), the importance of '**listening**' in a dialogue (Yeo Lay), the potential of the **private sector** in implementing policies faster, for example, in the area of customs (Setboonsarng), and the **unique role of the EU** as a dialogue partner in building the ASEAN Community (Siirak). Interventions by Carlos (underlining the role of scientists and functional cooperation in solving **maritime disputes**) and Siirak (calling for better **communication** and engagement of the people, including the youth) were followed by an applause.
7. During the Q&A sessions, participants voiced concerns about relevant skills and training to ensure competitiveness in response to **digital development**, reaching the UN **SDGs** together, cooperation on **cyber security**, the role of small states, the possibility of a tripartite EU-ASEAN-**China** cooperation, ensuring the special status of Hong Kong, avoiding greater **inequality** being created by FTAs, and the ASEAN unity as well as the EU's stance on the **Rohingya** (*note: FAC conclusions adopted on 26.02*). On the latter, Mr Minh, although retired, responded with reference to mutual respect and mutual recognition, being bound by the rules of ASEAN. Debate converged to a consensus that the EU and ASEAN need each other not just as economic partners but also in jointly addressing security challenges, for which the signing of the **Strategic Partnership**, as early as possible, would be **essential**.

#### **EU-ASEAN Strategic Thinkers Forum (28.02.):**

8. Opened by Mr **Christian Leffler** (EEAS DSG) and Mr **Apichart Chinwanno** (Thai MFA), the EU-ASEAN Strategic Thinkers Forum (STF) was attended by **54 representatives** of academia, think tanks and EU-ASEAN member states' governments.<sup>3</sup> STF kicked off with discussion on **political cooperation** to address joint security challenges, with Mr Bill Hayton (Chatham House), Mr Tang Siew Mun (ISEAS), and Mr Jose Tavares (Indonesian MFA) as speakers, moderated by Ms Shada Islam (Friends of Europe).

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2 List of participants in Annex 3.

3 List of participants in Annex 2.

9. Hayton (*the author of 'The South China Sea: The Struggle for Power in Asia'*) called for including a reference to **UNCLOS** in every single EU statement made on the SCS. While acknowledging the need to avoid a 'containment' approach with China, Tavares was certain that UNCLOS application in the SCS would solve the issue, and even suggested going to an international court, if bilateral negotiations with claimant states do not yield results. Tang considered the political message that the region-to-region FTA would send, showing the importance of other ASEAN partners besides China and Japan.
10. During the Q&A session, participants suggested to use **preventive diplomacy** in relations with China, urged a strong and objective EU messaging on the **rule of law**, considered the consequences of the EU's change from a non-traditional to traditional **security actor** for the ASEAN region, suggested a joint solution to the **DPRK** issue, and called for greater capacity building cooperation in the area of **disaster management**, addressing the issue of rapid population **ageing**, and sharing experience on re-integrating returning **foreign fighters**. On India's proposal for **Indo-Pacific cooperation**, Tang explained that ASEAN would only support an inclusive cooperation format and, as such, the current proposal already has an 'anti-Chinese' connotation, confronting ASEAN with a difficult choice. Hayton highlighted the 'hugely climate disruptive' nature of **OBOR**, and Tavares encouraged cooperation among young people to counter violent extremism and **radicalisation**.
11. The second session on **economic cooperation** was moderated by Mr Suthad Setboonsarng (Bank of Thailand) and introduced by Mr Keo Chhea (Cambodian MFA, former ASEC), Ms Iana Dreyer (Borderlex), and Mr Farizal Razalli (National University of Malaysia) as speakers. In addition to the FTA and CATA, Chhea considered the possibility of an EU-ASEAN agreement in other areas, such as **investment**. For Dreyer, it is important to overcome the pressures holding up the EU's **FTAs** with ASEAN member states. Razalli pointed out the need to provide tangible results on the **grass-roots** level and to understand the aspirations of the **youth**. Questions touched upon Artificial Intelligence (AI), digitalisation, Chinese companies and energy production in Malaysia, the EU's norms enforcement after Brexit, competition policy, palm oil, and the rest of ASEAN becoming hostage to what Singapore and Vietnam have already agreed with the EU in their respective bilateral FTAs.
12. The third session on **people-to-people contacts**, moderated by Mr Fraser Cameron (EU-Asia Centre), was facilitated by Mr Konstantinas Andrijauskas (Vilnius University), Ms Clarita Carlos (University of the Philippines), and Mr Tran Viet Thai (Institute for Foreign Strategic Studies, Vietnam) as speakers. Carlos underlined the need to **avoid 'othering'**, increasing student mobility, faculty exchanges, and engaging the young. She suggested furthering cooperation in the form of **peace corps, sports, dance and poetry** events, and bringing the youth together with the elderly to alleviate the problems of Alzheimers, for example. Both Andrijauskas and Thai addressed the importance of achieving a shared people-centred **identity** as something that EU and ASEAN could work together on. According to Thai, **non-state actors** gaining importance should be more engaged, the **young** should be educated to prevent radicalisation, and the **visibility** of the EU as a group should be enhanced.
13. Participants reiterated that **cultural diplomacy** and **youth** should feature in EU-ASEAN cooperation, including by making such young leaders' events regular. They also added that **sustainability** should be discussed when encouraging **tourism** as a driving force of people-to-people contacts, that '**real press**' under 'mortal danger' in countries in both regions needs to be empowered, that the whole citizenry should be addressed to **combat fake news**, that a **joint Parliamentary Assembly** should be

established to further inter-parliamentary dialogue beyond EP-AIPA cooperation, that the **existing network of higher education institutions** should be utilised for further sharing of information and knowledge, and that **pop icons** (musicians, artists) could be used to promote EU-ASEAN relations.

14. The majority of the discussion at the STF focused on the **role of the EU in ASEAN** and not vice versa, despite efforts to shift the focus on the way ASEAN could contribute to security in the EU, reflecting the still-present **donor-recipient mentality** in the relations. On many occasions, participants raised the issue of the perception of the **EU** in ASEAN primarily as an economic partner and development aid provider, and not **as a security provider**, which, in fact, strategic thinkers of the member states of both would like to see in future. Participants agreed that the EU and ASEAN serve as vital pillars of **stability** in a volatile world, while greater efforts are needed in the area of **visibility** across both regions.
15. The Forum concluded with a **list of recommendations** for the future direction of EU-ASEAN relations, which would be **presented to the 22<sup>nd</sup> ASEAN-EU Ministerial Meeting** (AEMM) later this year.<sup>4</sup> Recommendations include creating issue-based expert groups in the areas of cyber security and nuclear proliferation; establishing common rules on digital infrastructure; accelerating CATA negotiations in view of job creation while ensuring labour and environmental standards; creating a dispute settlement mechanism that bases on scientific evidence; creating more integrated capital markets; considering a visa facilitation agreement between the regions, organising joint arts, sports and cultural events (endorsing what the YLF had proposed); organising summer school exchanges between students; holding an 'EU week' in each ASEAN member state and an 'ASEAN week' in each EU member state to increase cultural exchanges and raise the level of awareness; and producing hard copies of visibility material to reach indigenous communities that do not have access to electronic means of communication.
16. In his closing remarks at the STF, Mr David Daly emphasised focusing on the areas in which the EU and ASEAN have shared interests, and expressed gratitude to the Thai MFA for the great work throughout their coordinatorship of EU-ASEAN relations.
17. Visibility of the Forums:
  - [Press release](#) on the EEAS website;
  - [YLF press release](#) on the EEAS website;
  - Social media: [#EUASEAN](#) on Twitter;
  - EU-ASEAN Youth Photo Exhibition and banners displayed at the venue;
  - Visibility material (notebooks, statistical brochures, pens, USB sticks) distributed to all participants.

#### **Annexes:**

1. List of recommendations to be presented to the AEMM
2. EU-ASEAN Strategic Thinkers Forum – list of participants
3. EU-ASEAN Public Debate – list of participants
4. EU-ASEAN Young Leaders Forum – list of participants

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4 List of recommendations in Annex 1.