

ASEAN-EU Partnership: Historical Development and Prospects in the Context of Indonesia's ASEAN Chairmanship in 2023

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Abstract

This year we mark 46 years of ASEAN-EU partnership, a period during which the two parties have endeavoured to expand and diversify their relationship. Considering that the ASEAN's relationship with EU was elevated to a Strategic Partnership in December 2020, the purpose of this study is to highlight the most important milestones in bilateral relations and also to analyse how this cooperation has contributed to developed a dynamic and multifaceted partnership which covers political, security, economic, environmental, climate and socio-cultural issues. To achieve this proposed goal, qualitative and quantitative research methods were used, using written data, but also logical or statistical observations to draw conclusions. As well, inductive reasoning conducted the research from the specific of the ASEAN-EU partnership to the general situations, while deductive reasoning allowed to make an inference by going from general premises to specific and relevant conclusions. Taking into account the Indonesia's ASEAN Chairmanship in 2023, the study also aims to emphasize the 30th ASEAN-EU Joint Cooperation Committee Meeting convened in Jakarta, on which occasion the both sides reaffirmed their commitment to strengthening ASEAN-EU cooperation and to uphold ASEAN centrality based on shared relevant fundamental principles of their respective Indo-Pacific approaches.

Keywords: ASEAN-EU Cooperation, Bilateral Relations, Strategic Partnership.

INTRODUCTION

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the European Union (EU) are often regarded as two of the more successful regional organisations in the world. Ties between ASEAN and the EU date back to 1970s, when the European Economic Community (EEC) became ASEAN's Dialogue Partner in 1977. Discussions between the officials of the two organisations laid the groundwork for the first ASEAN-ECC Ministerial Meeting, held in Brussel in November 1978, which gave ASEAN-EEC relations a boost and accorded the relations a greater political significance.

The signing of the ASEAN-EEC Cooperation Agreement, on 7 March 1980 in Kuala Lumpur, provided the legal and institutional framework to develop further the inter-regional ties. Although the main emphasis of the Agreement was on economic cooperation and development, ASEAN until the 1980s remained at the bottom of the EEC's hierarchy of relations, below even that of the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) and Latin American countries. While economic ties between the two blocs have progressed steadily, and diplomatic and political relations have broadened, ASEAN's cooperation with the EU has not reached its full potential (Yeo, 2020). That's because there have been acute sensitivities about the place of democracy and human rights in EU-ASEAN relations since the two actors signed a cooperation agreement in 1980. Relations have long struggled to prevent political issues from complicating interregional cooperation. A brief overview of the evolution of EU-ASEAN relations reveals both the difficulties of broaching democracy and human rights issues and the way they have gradually found a modest place on the interregional agenda. Thus, the absence of democracy in the ASEAN region in the 1980s pushed the EU to focus on the economic dimension of relations with Southeast Asia (Bava & Youngs, 2023).

The end of the Cold War and the realisation of the impressive ASEAN economic achievements resulted in the need to review the framework of relations. Thus, at the ASEAN-EEC Ministerial Meeting held in Luxembourg in 1991, it was decided to upgrade the 1980 Agreement to take into account the changing needs to be satisfied by mutual cooperation. Forwards, on the base of a consensus reached during the ASEAN-EEC Ministerial Meeting held in Manila in October 1992, it was decided to strengthen cooperation, promote further ASEAN-EEC bilateral trade and investments and intensify their close dialogue on all areas of mutual interest and priorities of importance to both regions. Treaty on European Union (also known as Maastricht Treaty), officially came into force on 1 November 1993, repeals the provisions on European political cooperation (EPC) and introduces a genuine common foreign and security policy (CFSP) as one of the three pillars of the EU (Vătăman, 2011). Thus, the reform realised by the Maastricht Treaty reflecting the aspirations of the EU not only to be an economic power but a political actor with its own Common Foreign and Security Policy.

Taking into account that Maastricht Treaty represent a turning point in the ASEAN-EU relations, it was necessary that the first section of the present study to be structured in such a way as to reflect, in a first stage, the evolution of ASEAN-EEC bilateral relations between 1972 and 1993, and then, in a distinct way, the evolution of relations between ASEAN and the EU – a new actor in international relations – during 1994-2020.

Considering the upgrade of ASEAN–EU bilateral relations to a strategic partnership in 2020, and thus the opening of a new chapter in their longstanding relationship, in the next section of the study it needed to be analysed the three pillars of ASEAN Community, these being considered as a strong foundation for EU-ASEAN Strategic Partnership (2023-2027). Thus, the research was focused on political and security cooperation, economic cooperation, socio-cultural cooperation, but also on so called "cross pillar cooperation", which includes among others: cooperation on connectivity; smart cities cooperation; cybersecurity cooperation.

As was expected, in the section for conclusions it was highlighted the fact that, although the ASEAN and the EU are very different organisations, their partnership has developed continuously being built on the basis of shared values and principles of a rules-based international order, effective and sustainable multilateralism, as well as free and fair trade. Despite the notable achievements, some challenges to ASEAN and the EU were also highlighted, all this requiring that the leaders of EU and ASEAN member states to work together closely for maintaining peace and stability in the two regions.

RESEARCH METHODS

This research was designed to highlight the longstanding, dynamic and broad-based relationship between ASEAN and EU, both successful regional organizations. Despite the many ties that bind these two institutions, the relationship between them is little known to the public, aspect that required a new type of analysis to clarify how the two organizations have evolved over time, focusing on the primary documents jointly adopted, such as agreements, declarations, plans of action or treaties. Also, very important for the information and documentation activity was the specialized literature, within the study referring to the opinions expressed by some specialists in the field of international relations. Although the specialized literature on this topic is very valuable, there is a belief that a new study can contribute to a better understanding of how the ASEAN–EU bilateral relations have evolving to a strategic partnership. To achieve this proposed goal, qualitative and quantitative research methods were used, using written data, but also logical or statistical observations to draw conclusions

(Vătăman, 2019). As well, inductive reasoning conducted the research from the specific to the general situations, while deductive reasoning allowed to make an inference by going from general premises to specific conclusions.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The evolution of the ASEAN-EU bilateral relations over time

The partnership between the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the European Economic Community (EEC) - later renamed the European Community (EC) and incorporated into the European Union (EU) - dates back in the 1970s, when ASEAN started dialogues with external partners primarily on economic issues (Vătăman, 2009).

ASEAN-EEC bilateral relations between 1972 and 1993

The possibility of forging closer cooperation was discussed by the ASEAN Foreign Ministers in 1972, on which occasion it was approved the establishment a committee to conduct an institutionalized joint ASEAN dialog with the EEC. A number of meetings with the EEC Commission were subsequently held, culminating in the establishment of a formal dialog in 1975 with the creation of the ASEAN-EEC Joint Study Group. While it discussed mainly trade matters, such as market access, commodity price stabilization and related issues, the scope of the dialog in subsequent meetings was broadened to include industrial and development cooperation (Akrasanee & Rieger, 1982).

A further step was the initiation in 1977 of a dialog between the ASEAN Ambassadors in Brussels and COREPER (Committee of the Permanent Representatives of the Governments of the Member States) in the EEC Council of Ministers. Their discussions laid the groundwork for the first ASEAN-ECC Ministerial Meeting which was held in Brussel in November 1978. As an indicator of growing interest in ASEAN, ECC established a Commission for South and Southeast Asia in Bangkok in late 1979 and, to facilitate consultations, ASEAN designated Thailand as the country coordinator for the ASEAN-EEC Dialog (Nierhaus&Williams, 1986). Finally, after extensive preparatory work, in March 1980, it was signed the ASEAN-EEC Cooperation Agreement, the main emphasis of this document being on commercial, economic and development cooperation. Also, the ASEAN-EEC Cooperation Agreement provided the establishment of a Joint Cooperation Committee to promote and keep under review the various cooperation activities envisaged between the parties (OJEC L144/1980).

The end of the Cold War and the realisation of the impressive ASEAN economic achievements resulted in the need to review the framework of relations. Thus, at the 9th ASEAN-EEC Ministerial Meeting held in Luxembourg in 1991, it was decided to upgrade the 1980 Agreement to take into account the changing needs to be satisfied by mutual cooperation. Forwards, on the base of a consensus reached during the 10th ASEAN-EEC Ministerial Meeting held in Manila in October 1992, it was decided to strengthen cooperation, promote further ASEAN-EEC bilateral trade and investments and intensify their close dialogue on all areas of mutual interest and priorities of importance to both regions.

The Treaty on European Union - a turning point in the ASEAN-EU relations

The Treaty on European Union (also known as the Treaty of Maastricht), officially came into force on 1 November 1993, changed the official denomination of the EEC, which thereafter was called the EC and became one of the three pillars of the European Union (EU): EC, Common Foreign and Security Policy, and Cooperation in Justice and Home Affairs. Thus, these changes allowed the EU to develop important new policies, including developing strong bilateral and global connectivity partnerships (Vătăman, 2011).

In this regard, the Commission's Communication "Towards a New Asia Strategy" published in July 1994, set out for the first time an overall direction to be followed in EU's relations with Asia, and sought to build a partnership of equals with ASEAN. As a result, at the 11th ASEAN-EEC Ministerial Meeting held in Karlsruhe in September 1994, the Ministers welcomed the content of the Commission's Communication and agreed that ASEAN should remain a cornerstone of the EU's dialogue with the Asian region. Also, expressed their commitment to reinvigorate and to intensify their longstanding dialogue and cooperation on issues of peace and security, the environment and sustainable development, trade and investment, human rights, based on partnership, shared responsibility and mutual benefit.

In July 1996, it was presented the Commission's Communication "Creating a New Dynamic in ASEAN-EU Relations" (COM (96) 314, 3.07.96), which proposed that the ASEAN/EU cooperation to be reoriented towards a more dynamic and concrete policy which has as its first objective the support of the approaching between the two societies and the two economies.

Further, the "Nuremberg Declaration on an ASEAN-EU Enhanced Partnership", adopted at the 16th ASEAN-EU Ministerial Meeting was held in Germany (March 2007), it was an important milestone that marked 30th anniversary of the ASEAN-EU Dialogue Relations, the 40th anniversary of the establishment of ASEAN and the 50th anniversary of the signing of the Rome Treaties. The "Nuremberg Declaration" set out the long-term vision and commitment of both sides to work together, this being considered and endorsed as a major contribution to taking EU-ASEAN relations to a higher level (Shambaugh & Yahuda, 2008)

Pursuant to the "Nuremberg Declaration" was drawn up a plan of action for enhancing ASEAN-EU relations and cooperation in the medium term (2007-2012) in a comprehensive and mutually beneficial manner. Also, this plan was supposed to support ASEAN integration, through helping to realise the end-goal of the establishment of ASEAN Community by 2015, consisting of three pillars, namely ASEAN Security Community, ASEAN Economic Community and ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community.

At the 19th ASEAN-EU Ministerial Meeting held in Brunei Darussalam in 2012, it was adopted the *Plan of Action to Strengthen the ASEAN-EU Enhanced Partnership (2013-2017)*, a wide-ranging document which gave a more strategic focus to cooperation and dialogue.

It should also be noted that in July 2012 the EU acceded to the *Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia (TAC)*, a legally-binding code for inter-state relations in the region and beyond (Fitriani, 2014). The EU lodged an application to accede to the TAC on 7 December 2006, but the process of accession took long because ASEAN had to amend - through a Third Protocol - the Treaty to enable "regional organizations" to accede. This Protocol has been signed in 2010, and entered into force on 12 June 2012 (OJCE, L 154/15.6.2012). Thus, the EU became the first regional organisation to accede to the TAC, an important milestone, boosting the EU's political and security engagement with the region.

The Joint HR/VP-Commission Communication *"The EU and ASEAN: a partnership with a strategic purpose"*, adopted in May 2015, mentioned that the EU has a strategic interest in strengthening its relationship with the ASEAN. This is because, "a strong, cohesive and self-confident ASEAN proceeding with its own integration is good for regional stability, prosperity and security and creates new opportunities for cooperation on regional and global challenges" (JOIN (2015) 22 final). The Joint Communication was subsequently endorsed by the EU Council which issued conclusions on EU-ASEAN relations on 22 June 2015, on which occasion it was shown that "EU has a genuine strategic interest in strengthening its relationship with the ASEAN, the major contributor for stability in the Asia-Pacific region".

After only a few days, on 8 August 2015 (which also coincided with celebration of the 48th ASEAN Day), the EU expressed its commitment and interest to strengthen and elevate the

ASEAN-EU Dialogue Relations to a greater height, and established a diplomatic Mission to ASEAN and appointed a dedicated Ambassador.

The 21st ASEAN–EU Ministerial Meeting held in Bangkok, in October 2016, reaffirmed the importance of close and cordial cooperation and partnership between ASEAN and EU, and agreed to intensify engagement and dialogue between the two sides with the possible establishment of a Strategic Partnership.

The ASEAN-EU Plan of Action (2018-2022) was adopted in 2017, at the Post Ministerial Conferences (PMC+1) session with the EU on 6 August 2017 in Manila, with the aim to strengthen and enhance the ASEAN-EU partnership. Among other crucial points discussed under the plan, the cooperation intended to promote capacity building and to support ASEAN's efforts in strengthening democracy, good governance, the rule of law and judiciary systems through the sharing of experiences and best practices.

The upgrade of ASEAN–EU bilateral relations to a strategic partnership

ASEAN and EU opened a new chapter in their longstanding relationship by the decision of the 23rd ASEAN-EU Ministerial Meeting, held on 1 December 2020 via video conference, to elevate the ASEAN-EU Dialogue Partnership to a Strategic Partnership. Further, the both sides were determined to take their bilateral cooperation to a higher level, as materialized by the new *Plan of Action to Implement the ASEAN-EU Strategic Partnership (2023-2027)*, adopted by the ASEAN Post-Ministerial Conference (PMC) +1 with the EU held on 4 August 2022 in Phnom Penh, Cambodia. This document replaces the ASEAN-EU Plan of Action (2018-2022) and serves as one of the main cornerstones of their bilateral cooperation. It aims to increase the level of engagement between the 27 EU member states and the 10 Southeast Asian nations across a wide range of areas, including sustainable trade and investment, crisis and disaster management, maritime security, counter-terrorism and economic recovery. In addition, ASEAN's financial enhancement with the EU is another field with great prospects of greater bilateral cooperation.

The ASEAN-EU Commemorative Summit, held on 14 December 2022 in Brussels, on the occasion of the 45th anniversary of ASEAN-EU Dialogue Relations, was the first-ever summit between the leaders of ASEAN and EU member states. On this occasion, the participants reaffirmed their partnership based on shared values and principles such as the rules-based international order, the respect of territorial integrity and effective and sustainable multilateralism. Also, ASEAN and EU leaders discussed past achievements and future endeavours in a wide range of areas of the strategic partnership, including: peace and security; connectivity and digital transition; clean and just energy transition; economic cooperation and trade; sustainable development, climate change and energy; the COVID-19 pandemic; and regional and international issues.

The first outcomes of the ASEAN-EU Commemorative Summit were welcomed at the 30th Meeting of the ASEAN-EU Joint Cooperation Committee which was held on 24 February 2023 in Jakarta. At that point, Indonesia presented its priorities and key deliverables under the theme of "ASEAN Matters: Epicentrum of Growth" for ASEAN's Chairmanship in 2023, and reiterated the importance of enhancing ASEAN Capacity in responding to future challenges and to support ASEAN Centrality.

The three pillars of ASEAN Community: a strong foundation for EU-ASEAN Strategic Partnership (2023-2027)

The ASEAN Heads of State or Government envision the organization as a peaceful, stable and resilient region within a global community of nations while still maintaining ASEAN centrality. ASEAN Community is envisioned as a community with enhanced capacity and capabilities to both respond effectively to challenges and to seize opportunities, this vision

being realized through three pillars of ASEAN which are: Political-Security Community; Economic Community; and Socio-Cultural Community.

These three pillars of ASEAN Community correspond to the same three areas of cooperation established in the *Plan of Action to Implement the ASEAN-EU Strategic Partnership (2023-2027)*, as follows: political and security cooperation, economic cooperation and socio-cultural cooperation. In addition, the *Plan of Action* also contains a fourth area of cooperation, so called "cross pillar cooperation".

Political and security cooperation

As a component part of ASEAN Community, this pillar supports relations in the political and security fields among ASEAN Member States, with the aim to uphold peace and avoid political and security tensions. Thus, any ASEAN Head of State or Government will always adopt peaceful ways in overcoming any differences and disputes among Member States, seeking also to create a conducive political situation, develop norms for living together, prevent conflicts among Member States, and resolve conflicts with the best mechanism. In this regard, the ASEAN resembles the EU in that one of its main achievements has been to promote peaceful cooperation, thus bringing stability to a formerly turbulent region.

Accordingly, in the ASEAN-EU political and security cooperation, the Plan of Action to Implement the Strategic Partnership (2023-2027) is focused on: Enhance strategic dialogue and deepen political and security cooperation; Enhance the ASEAN-EU cooperation in the ASEAN-led security architecture; Combat terrorism, transnational crimes, address other non-traditional security issues; Enhance maritime security cooperation; Promote disarmament and non-proliferation; Promote the Women, Peace and Security Agenda; Promote peace-building initiatives; Promote cooperation on human rights and good governance; and Strengthen Institutional Relationships.

Economic cooperation

Regarding the ASEAN Economic Community, this pillar supports achieving the ultimate goal of economic cooperation between Member States, namely a stable, prosperous and competitive economic region. This is done by implementing free flow of goods, services, investment and capital among ASEAN Member States, while at the same time trying to reduce poverty and minimize socio-economic disparities.

In the case of the ASEAN-EU Strategic Partnership, economic cooperation between the two parties spans across a number of priority areas including: Expand trade, business and investment; Enhance Cooperation in Intellectual Property; Strengthen the role of the private sector and Public-Private Partnership; Strengthen Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises; Strengthen Cooperation in Transport, Energy, Digital Economy and Technology; Enhance cooperation in sectors on food, agriculture, fisheries, aquaculture and forestry; Enhance cooperation on research and innovation, Science and Technology; Enhance cooperation on Competition Policy and Consumer Protection.

Socio-cultural cooperation

As concerns to ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community, this pillar represents a partnership of Southeast Asian countries that care for each other and form a common identity. The aim is to foster cooperation in the field of social development so as to improve the standard of living of disadvantaged groups in society. The ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community seeks to improve the quality of human resources in ASEAN, reduce unemployment, eradicate poverty, reduce social inequality, and increase equality in economic growth.

By comparison to the actions of ASEAN Member States in this domain, ASEAN-EU socio-cultural cooperation is focused on: Enhance people-to-people exchanges and cooperation in the areas of education, science and culture; Enhance cooperation to address health priorities, including public health emergencies and pandemics; Promote gender equality, well-being,

rights and welfare of women, children, the elderly/older persons, persons with disabilities and migrant workers; Enhance cooperation on Crisis and Disaster Management; Address regional and global environmental challenges and promote sustainable development.

Cross pillar cooperation

As strategic partners, the ASEAN and EU share a joint commitment to action in a fourth area of cooperation, so called "cross pillar cooperation", which includes the following areas: Cooperation on connectivity; Smart Cities Cooperation; Cybersecurity Cooperation; Circular Economy; Cooperation in Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET); Initiative for ASEAN Integration and Narrowing the Development Gap in ASEAN; Safe Cross-Border travel.

ASEAN-EU Strategic Partnership in the context of Indonesia's Chairmanship of ASEAN in 2023

Regarding the prospects of the ASEAN-EU relationship during the Indonesian ASEAN Chairmanship in 2023, these aspects have been addressed since the 6th Political Dialogue under the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement between the European Union and Indonesia, which took place on 22 March 2022 in Brussels. On this occasion, the EU reiterated its willingness to build on the close cooperation with Indonesia and ASEAN, and agreed to continue working on the further deepening of relations in light of the EU-ASEAN Summit in December 2022.

Farther, as announced in a press release after the 30th Meeting of the ASEAN-EU Joint Cooperation Committee, held on 24 February 2023 in Jakarta, "ASEAN and EU are strategic partners with a shared interest in a peaceful, stable and prosperous region, where international law and the rules based international order are respected and upheld, and where peace, security and stability are maintained, including through, among others, the promotion and protection of human rights such as gender equality and fundamental freedoms".

On this occasion, Indonesia presented its priorities and key deliverables under the theme of "ASEAN Matters: Epicentrum of Growth" for ASEAN's Chairmanship in 2023, and reiterated the importance of enhancing ASEAN Capacity in responding to future challenges and to support ASEAN Centrality.

ASEAN Matters: Epicentrum of Growth

Thus, with the motto "ASEAN Matters: Epicentrum of Growth", the Indonesian government intends to continue the primarily economic policy agenda of its G20 presidency at the regional level - despite all the challenges in the region. Consequently, Indonesia's chairmanship in ASEAN focuses on making ASEAN a stable and peaceful region; as the anchor of world stability. For that purpose, ASEAN must consistently uphold international law and not become a proxy for anyone and must maintain its internal peace in Southeast Asia and the Indo-Pacific region. ASEAN must also become a dignified region that upholds human values and democracy. All of this can only happen if ASEAN continues to strengthen its centrality.

ASEAN Centrality

Regarding the ASEAN centrality concept, it should be highlighted that Article 1.15 of the ASEAN Charter clearly states that ASEAN's main objective is to maintain ASEAN's centrality and proactive role as the main driving force for its relations and cooperation with external partners in an open, transparent, and inclusive regional architecture. Under these conditions, it is more than obvious that the strengthening of ASEAN centrality is a non-negotiable condition so that ASEAN continues to maintain its identity as the guardian of stability and peace for its member countries and the Indo-Pacific region (Mueller, 2021).

Taking into account this ASEAN-led regional architecture, on 19 April 2021, the EU Council adopted conclusions on an *EU Strategy for cooperation in the Indo-Pacific*, in which is

very clearly shown that "EU reiterates its support for ASEAN centrality". Furthermore, on 16 September 2021, the Commission and the High Representative presented a Joint Communication on the EU's Indo-Pacific Strategy, in which it is also shown that "EU appreciates ASEAN's commitment to effective multilateralism and supports the principle of ASEAN centrality, its efforts to build a rules-based regional architecture, and the multilateral anchor that it provides" (JOIN (2021) 24 final).

CONCLUSION

Although the ASEAN and the EU are very different organisations, their partnership has developed continuously being built on the basis of shared values and principles of a rules-based international order, effective and sustainable multilateralism, as well as free and fair trade.

Today, after over four and a half decades of evolution, ASEAN and the EU became strategic partners with a common interest in a peaceful, stable and prosperous region, where international law is respected and upheld, and where peace, security and stability are maintained, including through, among others, the promotion and protection of human rights such as gender equality and fundamental freedoms.

Thus, upon the completion of 46 years of dynamic and broad-based relationship, ASEAN and the EU are determined to take their partnership to a higher level, as exemplified by the new Plan of Action to Implement the ASEAN-EU Strategic Partnership (2023-2027).

Although the achievements are notable, taking into account the huge geopolitical threats facing Europe and Asia (such as the Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, the ongoing Myanmar crisis, or US-China tensions over Taiwan), but also some global challenges (such as climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution), it is necessary that the leaders of EU and ASEAN member states to work together closely for maintaining peace and stability in the two regions.

This is the biggest challenge for the Indonesia's Chairmanship of ASEAN in 2023. And this is especially because, amid geostrategic competition between the United States and China in Southeast Asia, Indonesia perceives the EU as an alternative partner that shares the ASEAN's interest in maintaining a fair and inclusive global order based on the rule of law and multilateralism (Fitriani, 2022). Going forward, it is also a challenge for the EU, which should capitalize on this perception and consider Indonesia and ASEAN more important as future partners, abandoning its traditional approach of lecturing ASEAN countries about normative values.

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