

**Co-Chairs' Press Release**  
**ASEAN-EU: Senior Officials' Meeting**

8 July 2021

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) - European Union (EU) – Senior Officials' Meeting was convened via videoconference on 8 July 2021. The Meeting was co-chaired by H.E. Stanley Loh, Second Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Singapore and H.E. Gunnar Wiegand, Managing Director for Asia and the Pacific, European External Action Service. The Meeting was attended by officials from all ASEAN and EU Member States, as well as by representatives from the European Commission and the ASEAN Secretariat.

In the face of common challenges including economic, security, health, environment and climate change, we reaffirmed the shared values, principles and interests that underpin the ASEAN-EU Strategic Partnership, such as our common belief in the importance of strengthening the rules-based multilateral system and the promotion of effective multilateralism. We noted with satisfaction the comprehensive and multifaceted nature of our dynamic and growing partnership today. We commended the good progress on implementing the ASEAN-EU Plan of Action (2018-2022). We reiterated our shared commitment to support ASEAN Centrality and ASEAN-led mechanisms in the evolving regional architecture that should remain open, transparent, inclusive and rules-based. ASEAN Member States reiterated the importance of promoting and implementing the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific, and encouraged greater cooperation in the key areas of the Outlook to enhance mutual trust, mutual respect, and mutual benefit through ASEAN-led mechanisms. EU Member States presented the new EU Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific, while stressing its inclusive approach and openness to cooperation with other countries in areas where we can find common ground based on shared principles, values, mutual interest, and mutual benefit.

We looked forward to the 45<sup>th</sup> anniversary of ASEAN-EU relations in 2022. On this historic occasion, ASEAN Member States supported the EU proposal for an ASEAN-EU Commemorative Summit in Brussels in 2022, and will take up this proposal at the next ASEAN-EU Post-Ministerial Conference (PMC) to be held in August 2021.

We welcomed the successful convening of the 23<sup>rd</sup> ASEAN-EU Ministerial Meeting (AEMM) on 1 December 2020 via videoconference, which saw the elevation of the ASEAN-EU Dialogue Partnership to a Strategic Partnership.

We acknowledged the importance of the ongoing work of the Joint Working Group on Palm Oil between the relevant ASEAN Member States and the EU to address sustainability challenges. The Joint Working Group is an important platform for them to establish mutual understanding on relevant issues.

We recognised the unprecedented impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and reaffirmed our commitment to strengthen both regions' preparedness for, and capacity to respond effectively to, current and future public health emergencies. ASEAN expressed appreciation for the EU's "Team Europe" package of over EUR 800 million to combat the spread of the disease and mitigate its impact on the region, as well as the additional support programme "Southeast Asia Health Pandemic Response and Preparedness" of EUR 20 million, implemented by the World Health Organization. ASEAN took note of the EU's announcement on 23 March 2021 to allocate up to EUR 11 million for disaster preparedness and humanitarian aid in the Southeast Asian region, to support those affected by natural disasters, the COVID-19 pandemic, and conflicts. ASEAN encouraged the EU to continue to support ASEAN's pandemic response and recovery efforts, including the COVID-19 ASEAN Response Fund, the ASEAN Regional Reserve of Medical Supplies for Public Health Emergencies, and the ASEAN Comprehensive Recovery Framework.

We expressed our continued support for vaccine multilateralism, the World Health Organization and fair, equitable, timely and affordable access to safe and effective vaccines under the multilateral COVAX Facility. ASEAN recognised Team Europe's contribution of over EUR 3 billion in grants and guaranteed loans to the COVAX Facility to purchase, secure and deliver vaccines to low and middle-income countries and accelerate manufacturing capacity for their global supply. Both sides welcomed the EU-ASEAN Experts' Dialogues on COVID-19 Vaccines that were held on 8 December 2020 and 25 May 2021 respectively and their contribution to exchanging views, best practices and seeking opportunities for further collaboration on combating COVID-19.

We received updates on the EU's implementation of its priorities under the Strategic Agenda for 2019-2024, notably the Next Generation EU and the European Green Deal, both putting the environment and climate action at the core of the EU's policy agenda. We also welcomed Brunei's 2021 ASEAN Chairmanship theme of "We Care, We Prepare, We Prosper", its plans and proposals to strengthen ASEAN's resilience, care for its people and ensure it continues to prosper, especially given the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

ASEAN welcomed the EU's contributions towards ASEAN's Community building and regional integration efforts. We reaffirmed the EU's and ASEAN's commitment to strengthen relations and cooperation across all areas of mutual

interest, as outlined in the ASEAN-EU Plan of Action (2018-2022) and acknowledged the good progress in its implementation. We exchanged views on recent ASEAN-EU policy dialogues, notably those on climate change, biodiversity conservation, digital cooperation, sustainable development, human capital development, education and vocational training, people-to-people exchanges, narrowing the development gap, as well as micro, small, and medium enterprises. We welcomed the EU's initiatives to contribute to the ASEAN Catalytic Green Finance Facility and the outcomes of the 2<sup>nd</sup> ASEAN-EU High-Level Dialogue on Environment and Climate Change, which took place on 27 November 2020. In particular, we welcomed concrete cooperation between the ASEAN Centre for Sustainable Development Studies and Dialogue and the EU on sustainable consumption and production, including the establishment of the ASEAN Circular Economy Stakeholder Platform. In this regard, we highlighted the importance of global actions in combating marine litter and plastic pollution and the EU promoted the launch of negotiations for an ambitious global agreement on plastic pollution at the next session of the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA-5.2). We looked forward to the 3<sup>rd</sup> ASEAN-EU Dialogue on Sustainable Development to be hosted by Thailand in the fourth quarter of 2021 to explore cooperation for the post-COVID-19 recovery, including on the Bio-Circular-Green Economy Model. We also welcomed EU's and ASEAN's ongoing work towards ensuring a successful 15<sup>th</sup> Conference of the Parties of the Convention on Biological Diversity. We also appreciated the ongoing discussions on deforestation and sustainable forest management. We welcomed the EU's commitment to attain climate neutrality by 2050, and will work together to achieve a successful COP26.

We also had wide-ranging discussions on how to further strengthen ASEAN-EU cooperation, including in terms of enhancing regional trade, investment and connectivity, dialogue and capacity in reaching SDG targets, as well as protecting the environment, biodiversity and fighting climate change, development of smart cities, cybersecurity, dialogue on political-security and socio-economic issues of common concern to address regional and global challenges and opportunities together, and promote closer people-to-people ties.

We welcomed the conclusion of the negotiations on an ASEAN-EU Comprehensive Air Transport Agreement (AE CATA), the world's first region-to-region air transport agreement, and noted that the AE CATA will help bolster connectivity and economic development among ASEAN and EU Member States. We welcomed efforts to strengthen and build on synergies between the Master Plan on ASEAN Connectivity 2025 and the EU Connectivity Strategy. We also called for the effective implementation of the Joint Ministerial Statement on Connectivity adopted during the 23<sup>rd</sup> AEMM on 1 December 2020.

We looked forward to the next ASEAN Economic Ministers (AEM) – EU Trade Commissioner Consultations which would tentatively be held in the third quarter of 2021, to explore further cooperation between the EU and ASEAN in the area of trade, and investment and digital economy, and to take stock of the ongoing efforts of the EU-ASEAN Joint Working Group on the Framework setting out the parameters of a future ASEAN-EU Free Trade Agreement. ASEAN also welcomed the EU's support and sharing of best practices and experiences in narrowing the development gap, enhancing ASEAN's competitiveness as a region. We encouraged the EU to continue to contribute towards narrowing the development gaps within and between AMS through the implementation of Work Plan IV of the Initiative for ASEAN Integration (IAI), as well as through the EU's flagship programmes.

We engaged in candid and productive discussions on regional and international issues of mutual interest and concern. We underlined the importance of the respect for international law, in particular the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). We also reaffirmed our support for the open, inclusive and rules-based multilateral system.

We further reaffirmed the importance of maintaining and promoting peace, security, stability, safety, and the right of freedom of navigation in and overflight above the South China Sea, as well as the peaceful resolution of disputes, in accordance with international law, in particular the 1982 UNCLOS which is of universal character and sets out the legal framework within which all activities in the oceans and seas must be carried out. We further encouraged negotiations towards the early conclusion of an effective and substantive Code of Conduct in the South China Sea (COC) consistent with international law, in particular the 1982 UNCLOS. The positive role and contributions made so far by the EU as co-chair for two ASEAN Regional Forum Inter Sessional Meetings – the ISM on Maritime Security and the ISM on Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime were also acknowledged and welcomed.

Regarding the situation in Myanmar, the EU noted its long-standing support for the principles of democracy, the rule of law and good governance, respect for and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms, which are enshrined in the ASEAN Charter. The EU reiterated its concern for the situation in the country and called for the release of all detainees including foreigners. The EU also stressed the need for constructive dialogue among all parties to seek a peaceful solution in the interests of the people. The EU emphasised the need to provide humanitarian assistance and ensure the early appointment of a special envoy of the ASEAN Chair. The EU called for the immediate cessation of violence, dialogue, reconciliation and the return to normalcy in accordance with the will

and interests of the Myanmar people, in line with the Five-Point Consensus of the ASEAN Leaders' Meeting on 24 April 2021.

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