



Council of the EU

PRESS  
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COMUNICATO STAMPA  
843/20  
1.12.2020

## Co-chairs' press release of the 23rd ASEAN-EU ministerial meeting

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the European Union (EU) convened the 23rd ASEAN-EU Ministerial Meeting (AEMM) on Tuesday, 1 December 2020 via video conference. The Meeting was co-chaired by Singapore's Minister for Foreign Affairs Dr Vivian Balakrishnan, as Country Coordinator for ASEAN-EU Dialogue Relations, and EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice-President of the European Commission Josep Borrell. The Meeting was attended by the Foreign Ministers or their representatives from all ASEAN Member States and 27 EU Member States, as well as the ASEAN Secretariat and European Commission.

We reaffirmed the shared values and common interests that underpin 43 years of ASEAN-EU Dialogue Relations and noted with satisfaction the comprehensive and multifaceted nature of our dynamic partnership today. We commended the good progress on implementation of 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 is open, transparent, inclusive and rules-based. ASEAN Member States reiterated the importance of the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP) as a guide for ASEAN's engagement in the wider Asia-Pacific and Indian Ocean regions. ASEAN Member States encouraged the EU to work with ASEAN in promoting the AOIP and in the key areas of cooperation identified in the Outlook to enhance mutual trust, mutual respect and mutual benefit through ASEAN-led mechanisms.

Recalling that the 22nd ASEAN-EU Ministerial Meeting in Brussels in 2019 agreed in principle to upgrade relations, today we elevated the ASEAN-EU Dialogue Partnership to a Strategic Partnership.

In the spirit of mutual cooperation pertaining to sustainable vegetable oil production, we welcomed the launch of a joint working group between the EU and relevant ASEAN Member States to address the challenge towards reaching Sustainable Development Goals in the vegetable oil sector, especially the importance of a holistic approach to the environment and looked forward to the convening of its first meeting, to be held in January 2021.

Recognising the unprecedented impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, we encouraged greater cooperation in strengthening both regions' preparedness for, and capacity to respond to, current and future public health crises in line with Sustainable Development Goal 3 on health and well-being. ASEAN expressed appreciation for the EU's "Team Europe" package of over EUR 800 million to combat the spread of COVID-19 and mitigate its impact in ASEAN as well as the EU support programme "South East Asia Health Pandemic Response and Preparedness" of EUR 20 million announced at this Ministerial Meeting. We invited our experts to launch a dialogue on COVID-19 vaccines and looked forward to the outcomes of the ASEAN-EU Experts Dialogue on Vaccine Security on 8 December 2020. We expressed our strong support for "vaccine multilateralism" and the World Health Organization (WHO), as we work together to ensure fair, equitable, and affordable access to safe and effective vaccines as "global public goods". In this context, we recognised the EU's contribution of EUR 500 million in grants and guaranteed loans to support the multilateral COVAX facility to accelerate and scale-up development and manufacturing of a global supply of vaccines. ASEAN encouraged the EU to continue to support ASEAN's pandemic response and recovery efforts, including the COVID-19 ASEAN Response Fund, the Regional Reserve of Medical Supplies and the ASEAN Comprehensive Recovery Framework.

We recognised the EU's early engagement with ASEAN at the outset of the pandemic through the successful convening of the ASEAN-EU Ministerial Video Conference on COVID-19 in March 2020. We also discussed ways to take forward cooperation to combat the pandemic, facilitate robust recovery, "build back better", and enhance our long-term resilience and sustainability, including through our cooperation to support the implementation of the ASEAN Comprehensive Recovery Framework. The EU and ASEAN agreed on the importance of collaboration at the WHO, including towards an impartial review of the pandemic response. The EU and ASEAN looked forward to continue working together on pandemic response and sustainable recovery efforts, in line with the ASEAN Comprehensive Recovery Framework.

We were heartened by our robust economic cooperation, with the EU being ASEAN's third largest foreign investor and trading partner in 2019. Nonetheless, we acknowledged the serious economic impact of the pandemic and resolved to strengthen the

economic linkages binding our two regions to bolster the comprehensive post-COVID economic recovery. Cognisant of the strategic value of closer ASEAN-EU trade relations, we committed to further efforts towards creating a practical framework for an ambitious ASEAN-EU Free Trade Agreement (FTA) as this would send a strong signal of both regions' commitment to bring tangible benefits through economic integration and trade liberalisation. We commended the trade agreements concluded between the EU and Singapore and Vietnam, respectively, and encouraged further progress in negotiations between the EU and Indonesia. We also looked forward to closer cooperation to reform core functions of the World Trade Organization in order to preserve and strengthen the multilateral, rules-based trading system. We also encouraged deeper public-private engagements, including through the EU-ASEAN Business Council and the ASEAN Business Advisory Council.

We recognised the need to enhance cooperation on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals, the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, including through the ASEAN-EU Dialogue on Sustainable Development and the ASEAN-EU High Level Dialogue on Environment and Climate Change. We acknowledged the work of the ASEAN Catalytic Green Finance Facility and looked forward to the 3rd ASEAN-EU Dialogue on Sustainable Development to be hosted by Thailand next year as well as greater concrete cooperation on sustainable development, including in sustainable consumption and production, in partnership with the ASEAN Centre for Sustainable Development Studies and Dialogue. We welcomed the outcomes of the 2nd ASEAN-EU High-Level Dialogue on Environment and Climate Change, which took place on 27 November 2020. We welcomed the EU's commitment to climate neutrality by 2050, and will work together to achieve a successful COP26.

We recognised the long-standing robust partnership of ASEAN and the EU on our concerted efforts to conserve and sustainably use the region's natural heritage. In light of the global concern on biodiversity loss, ASEAN expressed appreciation for the EU's continued support to the ASEAN Centre for Biodiversity through the Biodiversity Conservation and Management of Protected Areas in ASEAN (BCAMP) project. ASEAN welcomed the EU's crucial contribution to enhancing capacity in the effective management of ASEAN Heritage Parks and other protected areas and mainstreaming biodiversity into key development sectors, as we work together to develop the post-2020 global biodiversity framework towards transformative change. We looked forward to close cooperation in the preparation of COP15.

We agreed that sustainable connectivity represents a key priority for the region-to-region relationship and welcomed efforts to build on synergies between the Master Plan on ASEAN Connectivity 2025 and Connecting Europe and Asia: The EU Strategy. Despite the disruptions from COVID-19, we reiterated our shared objective of strengthening ASEAN-EU connectivity, including through the successful convening of the ASEAN-EU Connectivity Seminar in June 2020 and the ASEAN-EU Joint Ministerial Statement on Connectivity, adopted today at this 23rd AEMM, which are particularly timely. We further appreciated the great strides that both sides have made towards an ASEAN-EU Comprehensive Air Transport Agreement (CATA), which would be the first substantive aviation agreement between two major regional groupings. We reaffirmed our commitment to its expeditious conclusion.

Recalling the ASEAN-EU Statement on Cybersecurity Cooperation adopted in 2019, we underscored the importance of strengthening cooperation in cybersecurity to promote an open, secure, stable, accessible and peaceful information and communication technology (ICT) environment and to support ASEAN's digital economy, and looked forward to exploring further initiatives to advance cooperation. ASEAN also welcomed the EU's engagement on promoting greener and more resilient cities in the region through the EU's new programme "ASEAN Smart Green Cities" (EUR 5 million), and closer engagement with the ASEAN Smart Cities Network, by enhancing the sharing of experiences and expertise in tackling the challenges of urbanisation through innovative, digital and green technologies.

ASEAN encouraged the EU to support the humanitarian mine action of the ASEAN Regional Mine Action Center (ARMAC) as well as other regional activities pertaining to peace and reconciliation.

ASEAN welcomed the EU's contributions towards ASEAN's Community building and regional integration efforts. In particular, the two sides welcomed the launch of the ASEAN Customs Transit System (ACTS) on 30 November 2020 as a significant achievement of the strong and dynamic ASEAN-EU partnership which will bring benefits to businesses and citizens. The EU supported the development of the ACTS through its ASEAN Regional Integration Support programme (ARISE Plus). We also identified topics through which we could expand the breadth and depth of ASEAN-EU cooperation, including maritime cooperation, climate change and green growth, disaster management, biodiversity conservation, smart cities, digitalization, combatting transnational crime, terrorism, sustainable development, and supporting human capital development, education and vocational training, narrowing the development gap, as well as micro, small, and medium enterprises. We also supported sub-regional economic cooperation efforts which continue to serve as catalysts for economic growth and for reinforcing regional economic integration and connectivity. ASEAN welcomed the EU's support and sharing of best practices and experiences in narrowing the development gap, enhancing ASEAN's competitiveness as a region, and further ensuring that sub-regional development and sustainable and equitable development strategies are aligned with the overall development strategies of ASEAN. In this respect, ASEAN welcomed the new EU programme to support ASEAN and its Member States: "Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade in ASEAN" (EUR 5 million).

We updated each other on recent developments in ASEAN and the EU. We congratulated Vietnam for a successful ASEAN Chairmanship in 2020 and commended its leadership in realising ASEAN's achievements in an extraordinary year. We expressed support for Brunei Darussalam's 2021 ASEAN Chairmanship as well as its Chairmanship priorities and looked forward to working together to further enhance the ASEAN-EU relationship under Brunei Darussalam's Chairmanship next year.

We engaged in frank and fruitful discussions on regional and international issues of mutual interest and concern. We underlined the importance of the respect for the rule of law, sovereignty and territorial integrity of States, maritime security and safety, freedom of navigation and overflight, peaceful resolution of disputes, in accordance with the universally recognised principles of international law, including the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) and the relevant standards and recommended practices of the International Civil Aviation Organization and the International Maritime Organization. We also reaffirmed our support for the open, inclusive and rules-based multilateral system and reiterated our shared interest in promoting international law and internationally agreed norms and standards. We also reaffirmed the importance of maintaining and promoting peace, security, stability, safety, and freedom of navigation in and overflight above the South China Sea. We emphasised the importance of non-militarisation and self-restraint in the conduct of all activities by claimants and all other states, including those mentioned in the 2002 Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea (DOC) that could further complicate the situation and escalate tensions in the South China Sea. We further underscored the importance of the full and effective implementation of the DOC in its entirety, and encouraged negotiations towards the early conclusion of an effective and substantive Code of Conduct in the South China Sea (COC) consistent with international law, including the 1982 UNCLOS.

We looked forward to commemorating the 45th anniversary of ASEAN-EU relations in 2022, and to continuing our discussions at the 24th AEMM which the EU is scheduled to host that same year.

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