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## The EU Relationship with ASEAN

AEI Occasional Paper 23

H.E. Ambassador Luc Vandebon

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### ***“The EU Relationship with ASEAN”***

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# **The EU Relationship with ASEAN**

H.E. Ambassador Luc Vandebon

Distinguished guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

A very pleasant and good morning to all.

I am very grateful to and honoured by the invitation of the Asia-Europe Institute to address you in the framework of the Ambassadors Lecture Series on the multi-layered topic, that is “The European Union’s Relationship with ASEAN”. And this, in particular now, at a time when Malaysia is preparing to assume the Chairmanship of ASEAN!

The wider Asia –Europe relationship has made headlines recently in the world media, because of the very successful ASEM summit which took place last week on 16 and 17 October in Milan, Italy. Besides the summit itself, bringing together the largest gathering of Heads of State and Heads of Government, we also had a number of side meetings on different topics:

- There was the AEBF, the Asia-Europe Business Forum
- A gathering of European and Asian Parliamentarians
- The Asia-Europe People’s Forum
- An ASEF Editors’ Roundtable
- And an Asia-Europe Labour Forum

And last but not least, and closer to the subject of my intervention here this morning, a very successful EU-ASEAN leaders’ lunch meeting with excellent attendance and interventions which confirmed the positive momentum our relationship is currently experiencing.

Our regions have been intertwined and interlinked for centuries and our citizens have been traveling in huge numbers in both directions, be it for business, for cultural exchanges and visits, for academic and education purposes or simply for leisurely tourist trips.

Looking back at the origins of our relationship, with the creation of the EU and ASEAN, our regions became natural partners. In 1972, the EU – the European Community (EC) at the time – was the first to establish official contacts with ASEAN. Five years later, in July 1977, these contacts were formalised at Ministerial level.

Today, the EU and ASEAN can look back on 40 years of friendship and partnership, having established cooperation in many areas, expanded financial assistance and enhanced dialogue through numerous technical-level as well as bi-annual Ministerial meetings.

In recent years, the EU-ASEAN partnership has grown exponentially. This is also reflected by the number of high-level visits between our two regions which is continuously increasing:

- The ASEAN Secretary General has visited Brussels 3 times in less than one year.
- On our side we have had both Presidents Van Rompuy of the European Council and Barroso of the European Commission visiting several ASEAN countries in November 2012,
- And our HR/VP Cathy Ashton has travelled 3 times to the ASEAN region in less than 12 months, including last November when she visited Jakarta, including the ASEAN Secretariat, plus Thailand and Myanmar.

Looking to the future, we are sure to see this cooperation broaden and deepen even further. I say this with such confidence because our peoples and

economies depend on each other deeply and this will spur and drive cooperation even more.

The EU-ASEAN relationship is multi-layered and multi-dimensional – over the years the EU and ASEAN have developed:

- (1) An economic-trade-investment cooperation,
- (2) A political cooperation,
- (3) Cooperation in education,
- (4) On security issues, and
- (5) On regional integration

### 1. Economic significance of ASEAN to the EU

ASEAN as a whole is the EU's **third largest** trading partner outside Europe (after the US and China) with more than **€235 billion of trade in goods and services in 2012**. On the other hand, the EU is ASEAN's 3rd largest trading partner (after China and Japan), **accounting roughly for 10% of ASEAN extra-regional trade**.

**Trade in goods** between both regions has been growing steadily for the last five years, passing from €130 billion in 2008 to almost €180 billion in 2013. Among the **EU's main exports** to ASEAN are chemical products, machinery and transport equipment, cars, wines and spirits, while the **main imports from ASEAN** to the EU are machinery and transport equipment, agricultural and fishery products as well as textiles and clothing.

During the last years the increase of **trade in services** between both partners has been equally impressive, going from €40 billion in 2007 to over €55 billion in 2012.

In addition, **Foreign Direct Investment (FDI)** – a key element in the creation of direct, stable and long-lasting links between economies – has witnessed a steady growth during the last five years. EU FDI stock in ASEAN has passed

from €110 billion in 2007 to over €205 billion in 2012, and growth of ASEAN investment in the EU has not fallen behind, with FDI stock almost doubling, from €45 billion in 2007 to €87 billion in 2012.

Several EU initiatives stimulate further investment. The Asia Investment Fund (AIF) currently provides €30 million to unlock high impact investments in areas such as energy, transport and SMEs. The EU is supporting the establishment of business centres in Malaysia, Vietnam, Indonesia and the Philippines, helping European business to find their way in South East Asia (SEB-SEAM and EU Business Avenues).

When disaggregating EU trade and investment flows with ASEAN, it is clear that Singapore is by far the EU's first trade and investment partner in the region, also serving as a hub for trade and investments, followed by Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia and Vietnam. To be noted also is that in 2013, for the first time, Vietnam surpassed Indonesia in terms of trade in goods with the EU. And also worth noting is that Singapore is the only ASEAN member country that has a trade deficit with the EU, the rest of the countries and the region as a whole having wide surpluses.

Another factor which naturally brings our two regions closer together is our shared vision and desire to create single markets. The single market of the EU and, separately the one of ASEAN, are more advanced than any other attempts in this respect in the rest of the world. And ASEAN has even higher ambitions for its single market from 2015 onwards.

We have now been steadily removing trade barriers. In September 2013, the EU and Singapore concluded an FTA and negotiations on similar deals with Vietnam, Thailand and Malaysia are underway. These agreements are stepping-stones on the way to a region-to-region FTA between the EU and ASEAN. FTAs allow both sides to strengthen their commercial ties, overcome hurdles still faced by companies and create jobs, thus bringing considerable benefits to our combined 1.1 billion citizens. To support the process, the EU has launched a programme to enhance ASEAN's FTA negotiation capacity.

I would like to stress here that we in the EU are multilateralists and strong believers and supporters of the international system and the UN. The same thing goes for the WTO. We therefore see as the ultimate price or goal, a region-to-region EU-ASEAN FTA. We started working on this in the earlier part of 2000 but we had to abandon because of political reasons. I vividly remember that our then **Trade Commissioner, Pascal Lamy**, insisted that we would not contribute to “the spaghetti bowl” of bilateral FTAs and would keep pushing for a deal on the Doha Development Agenda. But, regretfully we had to come down from the fence when we did indeed see an explosion of bilateral FTAs which resulted in the EU, very principled, being left in the cold. The FTA with Singapore and the other bilateral FTAs that we are currently negotiating with Vietnam, Thailand and Malaysia are therefore to be seen as building blocks contributing to the region-to-region FTA which we hope we can eventually restart exploring again.

In this respect I would also like to refer to **Prime Minister Najib’s** recent statements in Europe: During his speech at the Asia-Europe Business Forum (AEBF) in Milan in conjunction with ASEM last on Thursday, Najib gave a signal that the Malaysia-EU FTA should be continued, besides stressing that Malaysia is a strong proponent of the free trade policy. He also stated that Malaysia wants to restart the EU-ASEAN FTA talks.

Similarly, MITI **Minister Mustapa** said just recently in Frankfurt, Germany, that, and I quote: “Malaysia-EU FTA talks, which have been put on the backburner for the past two years, will be rekindled soon”... and “The EU represents a significant market for us as it provides a viable access to penetrate the strategic Eurozone – an important source of foreign direct investment and transfer of knowledge and technology”.

## **2. Political significance of ASEAN to the EU**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The EU and ASEAN Ministers met for the first time formally in 1978, making the EU ASEAN’s oldest dialogue partner.

During the 19th EU-ASEAN Ministerial meeting, in July 2012, the EU and ASEAN Foreign Ministers upgraded the relationship by adopting the Bandar Seri Begawan Plan of Action to strengthen the ASEAN-EU Enhanced Partnership 2013-2017. The informal motto of that Brunei meeting was: *‘let us build a more ambitious, more political partnership’*.

The Plan gave the relationship a more strategic focus, deepened political ties and expanded cooperation to new domains, with more than 90 agreed actions in three areas: the political and security areas; the trade and economic area; and the socio-cultural area, in fact matching ASEAN’s three pillars or Communities.

Three months after the adoption of the Plan, the EU acceded to the ASEAN Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC), which further strengthened political engagement with ASEAN.

In July this year, the EU and ASEAN held their 20th Ministerial meeting in Brussels, Belgium under the theme *“Towards a Strategic Partnership for Peace, Stability and Prosperity”*. Ministers welcomed the deepening of political ties and the organisation of the first meeting between the EU Committee of Permanent Representatives and the Committee of Permanent Representatives of ASEAN, which took place in February 2014.

Our ministers also noted the progress made in the negotiations, signature and entry into force of the Partnership and Cooperation Agreements (PCAs), which are a confirmation of the growing EU-ASEAN ties and which will upgrade, broaden and diversify relations.

**Human rights** has been another ‘growth area’, if I can call it like that. We saw a successful study trip by the ASEAN Committee for the protection of the rights of Woman and Children to Brussels this year, while our EU Special Representative for Human Rights, Stavros Lambrinidis, visited Jakarta in May 2013. We now need to work up a more developed set of ideas on how we can best proceed, also to support the ASEAN Human Rights Commission (AICHR) as it is developing its role and remit and with additional resources becoming

available under the READI instrument (on which I will talk a bit later). At the July Ministerial, the EU invited the ASEAN Inter-governmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR) for another visit to Europe.

Today, there is clearly a positive momentum; with plenty of practical work taking place and with more in the pipeline. I think it is fair to say that there is hardly any area of public policy without some degree of cooperation between EU and ASEAN.

### **3. EU-ASEAN cooperation in education (teaching and research)**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The simple facts are that 10 million of our citizens move between our two regions each and every year And whether these trips are to enjoy a holiday, close a business deal or to study at a university, each in their own way help cement our ties and bring us closer together.

More than 4,000 students and researchers from ASEAN member countries come to study on EU scholarships in Europe every year. Around 250 ASEAN students receive funding under the EU Erasmus Mundus Partnership, while 25 other students from the region receive a Marie Curie Fellowship. On top of that, EU Member States offer a range of national funding schemes for ASEAN students. As of 2014, funding for student and scholar exchange continues under the Erasmus+ programme that funds Joint Master Degrees, capacity-building projects and initiatives to enhance international credit mobility.

A project which I would like to highlight in particular is the **EU Support to Higher Education in the ASEAN Region (or EU SHARE)** for which a total of €10 million is allocated. The key idea of this programme is to share EU experience with ASEAN for the improvement of standards and quality of Higher Education Institutions in the ASEAN region, drawing on the experience of the Bologna process and the establishment of the European Higher Education Area.

The overall objective of the programme is to strengthen regional cooperation, enhance the quality, regional competitiveness and internationalisation of ASEAN higher education institutions, contributing to an ASEAN Community in 2015 and beyond. The programme should assist with the harmonisation of ASEAN higher education standards, support the mutual recognition of certificates and diplomas and, hence, promote mobility of students.

More technical “targets” of the programmes are:

- Enhancing a Policy dialogue on strategic issues of harmonisation of ASEAN higher education;
- The further development and support of the ASEAN Qualification Reference Framework and the ASEAN Regional Quality Assurance;
- The further development of the ASEAN Credit Transfer System and the testing of the ASEAN-EU Credit Transfer System through mobility with scholarships.

The programme has been jointly designed by the EU and ASEAN, including the ASEAN Secretariat’s Education, Youth and Training Division, the Senior Officials Meeting on Education and the ASEAN University Network.

In this respect, a Commission Decision was taken on 1st August 2013 and the resulting Financing Agreement was signed by the EU and submitted early 2014 to the ASEAN Secretariat for countersignature. Our colleagues in Jakarta are telling us that the Financing Agreement will be signed very soon. The “Call for proposals/invitation to tender” will be launched soon thereafter.

Last but not least, sharing innovation and progress is crucial in today’s global competitive economic environment. The EU encourages the exchange of knowledge between research institutions. Under Framework Programme 7 (2007-2013) more than 212 ASEAN research organisations interacted with EU institutes and have received €27.4 million in funding with ASEAN countries

contributing another €12.2 million. The follow-up initiative to the successive series of Framework Programmes organised by the European Commission's Directorate General for Research and Technological Development, Horizon **2020**, foresees an increased cooperation with ASEAN and identifies green technologies and food security as priority areas. The First ASEAN-EU Science, Innovation and Technology Days held in Bangkok in January 2014 demonstrated, once more, the potential of EU- ASEAN collaboration in this field.

#### **4. EU-ASEAN's response to the global security challenges**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The European Union started as a peace project. A number of visionary individuals promoted integration among European states, solidifying peace and preventing war and armed conflict amongst them. The integration of the European states along the lines of their economic interests was vital.

The violence so prevalent during the first half of the 20th Century has given way to a period of peace and stability within the EU's borders. The EU started with 6 countries, now there are 28, with the prospect of other European countries joining sooner or later. The EU today has a population of over 500 million citizens and spreads in geographic terms from Ireland to Romania, and from Sweden to Malta.

The EU aims at spreading democracy and stability also beyond our 28 Member States, creating a "circle of friends" in our neighbourhood. We offer to our neighbours - Moldova, Belarus, the Caucasian and Central Asian countries, Northern Africa and the Middle East – everything but membership.

The EU promotes governance and assists reforms in order to increase the competitiveness of the partner countries and prepare them to have an increasing stake in EU's common market.

Currently the EU is reassessing what it could do more or differently in North Africa. In this respect, the EU High Representative Cathy Ashton has announced setting up of a Task Force that will act as a focal point for assistance to countries in North Africa.

### **A coherent response in the new security environment**

The EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) emerged as an integrated policy rather late.

EU's peace, stability and prosperity were achieved without common military capacities. The EU has relied largely on NATO structures, mechanisms and assets to carry out military operations. Most of the EU Member States, but not all, are also members of NATO, which provided the tools for intervention. Since 2003, the EU has developed independent civil and military crisis management capacities.

The EU Member States were conscious that their individual role in the world was declining. Mainly because of budgetary considerations, Member States started sharing military equipment, such as submarines and aircraft carriers. With the creation of the Common Security and Defence Policy, the EU has acquired new operational and institutional instruments for crisis management. The military command is in Brussels and it is equipped with a Crisis Team.

Since 2003, the EU has launched 30 peace-keeping missions and operations contributing to stabilisation and security in Europe and beyond.

Among ongoing missions are:

- The EU Advisory Mission for Civilian Security Sector Reform **Ukraine** (EUAM Ukraine),
- The European Union Force RCA, which is the United Nations- mandated European Union peacekeeping mission in the **Central African Republic**,

- European Union Training Mission in **Mali** (an EU multinational military training mission),
- The European Union Coordinating Office for **Palestinian** Police Support
- And the European Union Police Mission to **Afghanistan**.

One of the successful developments in the framework of the Common Security and Defence Policy is the EU Battlegroups initiative. Battlegroups are rapid response units of about 1,500-2,500 troops. They are composed of national or multinational contributions under the responsibility of a framework nation. The Battlegroups initiative succeeded in setting up a functioning capability-generating mechanism with a palpable output. Since 2007 two EU Battlegroups have always been on stand-by. The EU Battlegroup Concept was also developed to be mutually reinforcing with the larger NATO Response Force (NRF).

The “comprehensive security” model that inspires the EU aims not only to manage conflicts, but also to prevent them.

The essence of the EU’s foreign policy remains focused on spreading stability through the support of democratic reforms. The European Security Strategy of 2003 clearly states that the “best protection for our security is a world of well-governed states.” **Hence: cooperate with third countries for development.**

In 2012, in the face of continued budgetary constraints owing to the economic and financial crisis, the EU collective Official Development Assistance (ODA) decreased to €55.2 billion from €56.2 billion in 2011, or from 0.45% to 0.43% of EU gross national income (GNI). Nevertheless the EU has maintained its position as the biggest global ODA donor accounting again for over half of the total ODA to developing countries. The EU supports various reforms, including:

- Socio-economic;
- Achieving the Millennium Development Goals;
- Institutional development;

- Governance;
- Environment.

We do this for obvious reasons. If our neighbours do not enjoy a fare socio-economic development, this will ultimately affect us as well.

### **Cooperation with multilateral and regional organisations**

Today, no single country is able to tackle the complex problems and security challenges on its own. As I mentioned earlier: we are multilateralists and are committed to work through multilateral institutions and together with regional organizations, including ASEAN.

The EU remains engaged in the world and we aim at addressing issues and contributing as much as we can and wherever we can to finding solutions to alleviate risks for insecurity: our High Rep Cathy Ashton is leading the nuclear talks with Iran; and we are assisting the international community in finding solutions for the Korean Peninsula.

Sovereign governments must take responsibility for the consequences of their actions and hold a shared responsibility to protect populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity. The recent conflicts in Ukraine, Syria and Iraq are more than convincing in this regard. In this respect, we are of the opinion that the International Criminal Court (ICC) should grow further in effectiveness, alongside broader EU efforts to strengthen international justice and human rights. Malaysia's Cabinet's decision to ratify the Rome Statute is an important step towards becoming a member of the Court. Malaysia's ratification would bring the number of ICC state parties to 123 and would mark yet another step forward in ensuring complementarities with the national systems in bringing justice to victims of the most serious crimes of international concern.

In parallel to multilateralism, the EU is working more closely with regional organizations. As mentioned many times today, the EU has developed a longstanding engagement with ASEAN.

The EU also participates in the ASEAN Regional Forum, through which ASEAN offers others to join the debate about the future shape of its own region and the wider circle around the Pacific Rim. The ASEAN Regional Forum offers the EU the only important political forum where together with, for instance, the US, China, Russia and Japan, regional and global security issues like North Korea, the Middle East, and counter-terrorism can be discussed.

The EU provides support to the ASEAN Political and Security Community. One EU-ASEAN project has already started in border management. In the EU and ASEAN experience, border management becomes a critical issue as closer integration leads to far greater flows of citizens and commercial traffic across national borders.

At the last Ministerial summit, the EU shared ASEAN's commitment to preserving Southeast Asia as a region free of nuclear weapons and all other weapons of mass destruction as enshrined in the Treaty of Southeast Asia Nuclear Weapon-Free Zone and the ASEAN Charter. Our ministers expressed the hope that ASEAN countries and the Nuclear Weapon States would agree arrangements for signature of the Protocol to the Treaty as soon as possible. Our leaders further underlined the importance of conventional arms control and the implementation of the Arms Trade Treaty, which I am happy to note Malaysia has ratified. Our leaders also welcomed the work of the EU-sponsored South East Asian Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear (CBRN) Centre, established in Manila in November 2013, assisting in the development of national response plans and foster regional coordination.

ASEAN has played an important role in mediation and conflict resolution in the Southeast Asia region. Examples include its assistance in the Cambodian conflict of 1997–99, the Timor-Leste peacekeeping operation of 1999 and onward, the Aceh Reconciliation of 2005, and the Cyclone Nargis catastrophe of May 2008.

Recently, during the 20th Ministerial summit, our ministers reaffirmed their commitment to the peaceful resolution of conflicts and to fostering **preventive diplomacy**. They conveyed support for the efforts by the UN Secretary General and the UN Group of Friends of Mediation and called for enhanced cooperation on mediation and preventive diplomacy in the ARF and elsewhere.

In June 2014, the EU-ASEAN Senior Officials held consultations on Transnational Crime in Brunei Darussalam. The EU and ASEAN reaffirmed their commitment to intensify EU-ASEAN cooperation in the fight against terrorism and organised crime, notably illicit drug production, trafficking and use; trafficking in human beings; cybercrime; as well as in the mitigation of chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear risks.

The similarities between the EU and ASEAN as real supporters of the “soft power” approach when dealing with national, regional or global issues should be further explored and create the premises for a more constructive, coherent and consistent relation between our organizations, enabling us to act as natural allies when dealing with global issues.

The Aceh Monitoring Mission has been established to monitor the implementation of various aspects of the peace agreement set out in the Memorandum of Understanding signed by the Government of Indonesia and the Free Aceh Movement on 15 August 2005 in Helsinki, Finland. The European Union, together with five contributing countries from ASEAN (Thailand, Malaysia, Brunei, Philippines and Singapore), Norway and Switzerland, provided monitors for the peace process in Aceh.

The Aceh experience demonstrates that, if there is a well-defined objective and when political will and energy are effectively mobilised, also with a soft power approach success can be achieved and fully recognised. The more operations of this type we undertake, the more our common capacity builds.

In this respect, at the 20th Ministerial meeting, our leaders supported regional cooperation in disaster mitigation and management; ASEAN welcomed the EU’s

and its Member States' continued assistance for ASEAN in the development of a monitoring and evaluation system for the ASEAN Agreement on Disaster Management and Emergency Response and the ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance on Disaster Management, including the Centre's interface and active engagement with individual ASEAN member countries.

The EU cooperates with ASEAN member countries on specific security topics. Dual Use Goods, chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear (CBRN) weapons, counter-terrorism all provide good illustrations. The EU tries to include provisions of this sort of cooperation in our bilateral PCA agreements.

The EU values highly its cooperation with Malaysia in these matters. In 2010 Malaysia has adopted the Strategic Trade Act, in conformity with its international obligations as member of the United Nations, and it entered into force as of January 2011. In the framework of our cooperation, the EU has supported the adoption of the Strategic Trade Act and currently provides assistance to the Malaysian authorities. EU's assistance focuses on the training for the licensing of customs officers and other outreach activities.

The benefits of having effective export controls in place were illustrated when the Malaysian Police seized in 2012 containers in Port Klang, containing parts and equipment believed to be used in the production of weapons of mass destruction, including nuclear warheads. The parts, which were on a Malaysian-registered ship bound from China to Iran, were listed among items subject to control and restricted sale by the UN Security Council Resolution 1540. This is only one case which demonstrates that the Strategic Trade Act is clearly showing results.

**Piracy** is another threat to the international security. The EU welcomes that, owing to regular patrols by Malaysia and Indonesia in close collaboration with the International Maritime Bureau, the situation in the Malacca Straits and the South China Sea has been stabilised. Yet, there is a need of integrated regional cooperation in the area of maritime piracy as worrying trends persist.

The EU's approach is one which seeks to spread peace, prosperity and stability. The EU is working with ASEAN member countries on technical assistance and capacity building, particularly in the areas of economic relations, science and technology, higher education, environment and agriculture.

## **5. Regional integration support**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The EU and ASEAN share the same goals for their citizens – peace, stability and prosperity. Both are committed to address issues with a multilateral approach. In that sense, the EU and ASEAN share, as it were, the same DNA. The EU and ASEAN are the two largest regional integration initiatives in the world. They are longstanding, natural partners. In that sense, it is only natural for the EU to share its experience with ASEAN. However, ASEAN has its own integration process and its own dynamics.

You will find your own path. But the EU can perhaps offer some suggestions, or lessons we have learned along the way, including the hard way – from trial and error.

We want ASEAN to succeed. Perhaps more than any other partner of ASEAN, our interests, values and assets all point in the same direction: we want a strong, united, self-confident ASEAN proceeding with its integration.

In practical terms, an EU financial contribution of around €70 million directly supports ASEAN in its efforts to implement the Blueprints for the three Communities in the ASEAN Charter. At the July 2014 Ministerial, ASEAN Ministers expressed their appreciation for the EU's commitment to more than double dedicated support for ASEAN's institution building and 2015 Community-building goals to €170 million from 2014 to 2020. Overall EU aid to South East Asia, including through bilateral assistance, will increase from €2.2 billion (2007-2013) to close to €3 billion (2014-2020). ASEAN also appreciated the ongoing EU support to the ASEAN Connectivity, for

strengthening the capacity of the ASEAN Secretariat and for narrowing the intra-ASEAN development gap.

In line with the ASEAN institutional architecture, the EU supports the ASEAN Community in the following areas:

**Support to the Political and Security Community.** This is an area of cooperation emerging from the Charter. In the EU and ASEAN's experience, border management is becoming a critical issue as closer integration leads to a greater flow of citizens and commercial traffic across national borders.

**Support to the ASEAN Economic Community.** Given that the EU established its own internal (single) market almost 20 years ago, linking the by now 508 million citizens of the 28 Member States of the EU, this has been a natural focus for EU-ASEAN programmes since the 1990s.

With the Charter, ASEAN formulated the concrete goal of establishing a single market by 2015. A new large EU programme to help ASEAN realise the nuts and bolts of this single market, addressing harmonised product standards and customs procedures is being implemented.

**And, support to the Socio-Cultural Community.** The EU is providing support for enhanced cooperation through its project **READI** (Regional EU ASEAN Dialogue Instrument), which finances dialogue and exchanges on disaster management and preparedness, climate change, science and technology, energy and information society, and recently Human Rights. Support to the Socio-Cultural Community also covers higher education through qualification frameworks, credit transfers and student mobility.

Special attention and extra resources are given for the Least Developed Countries, Cambodia, Laos and Myanmar, as well as Vietnam (CLMV) with a view to contribute to reduced disparities within the ASEAN region.

**ASEAN benefits from other regional, thematic and humanitarian EU programmes in the following areas:**

- Higher education exchange: about 250 students and scholars from ASEAN are awarded Erasmus Mundus scholarships for studies in Europe each year.
- Switch-Asia promotes sustainable consumption and production, more concretely in fields as diverse as energy efficient air conditioners and food products (€ 65 million).
- Under the Global Climate Change Alliance (GCCA) support is provided for climate adaptation strategies in the Mekong region as well as to reduce emissions from deforestation (€ 22 million).
- The Forest Law Enforcement Governance and Trade (FLEGT) initiative aims to improve sustainability and legality in the forest sector (€11 million).
- Regional health hazard programmes: cooperation in combating highly pathogenic diseases (HPED) in Asia (€ 19 million).
- The European Community Humanitarian Office (ECHO) responds to disasters (€ 299 million). € 20 million of immediate emergency aid was allocated in the aftermath of 2013 typhoon Haiyan.
- Aid to Uprooted People in the region (€ 81 million) providing support for people in post-crisis situations and fragile states.
- Cooperation in the areas of science and innovation (Framework Programme 7) amounted € 27 million contributing to around 100 projects involving ASEAN scientific institutions).

## Conclusion

Ladies and Gentlemen,

One observation that has rightly been made is that both the EU and ASEAN need to put more efforts in public diplomacy – telling the story of what the EU and ASEAN are doing together and why. Plenty is happening between our two regions but sometimes the message is lost and doesn't make it to our citizens.

In conclusion, the EU is investing in ASEAN **because it makes sense**.

To further stress the importance we give to the relationship, the EU just a few weeks ago created the new position of **EU Ambassador to ASEAN** and the selection process is underway.

The alliance we are building today will not only underpin and expand the people-to-people and economic ties that we already enjoy, but will form the basis for an expanded alliance of tomorrow - where the two greatest soft powers in the world will work together more and more to find multilateral solutions to common and critical problems that traditional, national, bilateral relations are insufficient to address alone.

We have a good sense of what lies ahead, roughly between now and 2015. It will require determination and creativity to deliver it across the three Communities. Meanwhile, our leaders also need to start thinking about what lies after; what kind of ambitions we have and exactly what we mean when we talk about ***recognising the strategic nature of the relationship***.

In doing so, we should always be conscious that, as two of the largest regional blocks, through our continuous dialogue and cooperation we are shaping the world we live in, as a more prosperous and peaceful world, both for our citizens of today and the generations of tomorrow.

Thank you for your kind attention.

## About the Author

Luc Vandebon joined the European Commission in 1985 and has since worked on the European Union's foreign relations, holding various positions in the External Relations Directorate General of the European Commission and more recently in the European External Action Service of the European Union.

He has spent more than twenty years in European Union Delegations in Asia in the capacity of Head of Political, Trade, Economic and Public Affairs, as well as Deputy Head of Mission. He served six years in Beijing, China, where he was also Co-Director of the China-EU Biotechnology Centre; five years in Seoul, South Korea, also dealing with and undertaking several missions in North Korea in the context of the Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organisation (KEDO); five years in Manila, the Philippines; and more recently three years in Kabul, Afghanistan. From 2006 to 2009 he was responsible for relations between the EU and Australia and New Zealand.

In September 2012, he was appointed as the Ambassador/Head of the European Union Delegation to Malaysia.

Prior to joining the EU, he worked as a research assistant at the Free University of Brussels (VUB) centre for financial and regional economics and later in the private sector in Belgium, France and the Netherlands. He holds a degree in Business Engineering from the VUB's Solvay Business School in Belgium.

Luc Vandebon was born in Halle, Belgium, in 1953. He is married to Marti Spettel and they are the proud parents of a son and a daughter. He is also an avid guitarist.





## **AEI Occasional Paper 23**

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