



30/11/2017, Raffles Hotel Le Royal, Phnom Penh, Cambodia

Notes for Speech by George Edgar
Ambassador of the European Union to Cambodia, 30 October 2017

Many here are more expert than I on ASEAN issues so I will focus on the EU angle: the commonalities and differences between the EU and ASEAN, and how we see relations between these two important regional structures.

First, a word about the EU. Former President of the European Council Herman Van Rompuy was in Phnom Penh ten days ago and spoke movingly about the creation of the European Union “on the graves of millions of Europeans”. That is, the idea and the ideal of the EU grew out of the terrible experiences of the first half of the twentieth century, with two world wars, and the persecution and murder of people on the grounds of their ethnicity, their religion, their sexual orientation or disability that was a feature of the Nazi ideology. The founders of the EU were determined to build a system that would make such things impossible.

They chose to do so through the creation of a community that initially focussed on industry and the economy. The European Coal and Steel Community, with six members, was set up in 1951 through the Paris Treaty. The European Economic Community – the direct ancestor of today's European Union – was established through the Treaty of Rome 60 years ago in 1957.

The principle underlying all of this was that sharing economic resources and interests – and eventually sharing aspects of sovereignty – would be to the benefit of the individual nations and would also bind them together.

From the beginning, the EC or the EU has had supranational tendencies, which were strengthened in the Lisbon Treaty that came into force in 2009. The Commission has strong executive powers, and the ability to initiate legislation - although it needs to be approved by the Member States through the European Council and by the European Parliament. The Commission leads in a range of areas, not least external trade relations and the international negotiations such as those that led to the Paris Agreement on climate change. The Lisbon Treaty brought into being the European External Action Service – my employer – which is the EU's diplomatic service and speaks for the EU and its 28 Member States together.

The EU has provided an unprecedented era of peace among its members, and an unprecedented level of prosperity. It has made possible the creation of legislation on social and environmental issues that would have been far more difficult to achieve among the Member States acting on their own. It has also stuck to its principles of democracy and respect for human rights which are, as a great British judge put it, the foundation of the freedom of the individual against the arbitrary authority of the despot. Putting those principles into practice will always be a work in progress, and I do not by any means claim that we have a perfect record. But the vision that respect for the dignity of every individual is an essential part of a civilised society remains at the heart of what the European Union is and does.



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ASEAN was born ten years later than the EU, in 1967. It was created perhaps more in solidarity against perceived external threats than, like the EU, in an effort to overcome internal conflicts. It is a different kind of structure, reflecting the different situation in the region. It works by consensus. There has been important progress in the last few years in breaking down trade and economic barriers, but economic or monetary union is not on the table. There are no ambitions for supra-national status as with the EU (though the idea was at least discussed during the process of establishment of the ASEAN Charter).

But ASEAN has nevertheless played an important role in maintaining peace and stability – what Kishore Mahbubani describes as “the ASEAN miracle”. It has created a sense of regional identity for what could otherwise have been a set of disparate states with very different histories and cultural backgrounds, and it is moving towards the establishment of a single market in a region that has seen remarkable economic growth and a remarkable increase in its human potential.

The EU applauds the establishment of the ASEAN Community at the end of 2015, encompassing the ASEAN Political-Security Community, the ASEAN Economic Community, and the ASEAN Socio-Economic Community. I look forward to hearing more from other speakers about progress in the implementation of these ambitious and important programmes.

Another of this year's anniversaries is the 40th anniversary of EU-ASEAN dialogue relations. The EU and ASEAN are the two most advanced regional integration projects in the world. Both are committed to addressing issues through a multilateral approach, and both see regional integration as the most effective way to foster stability, build prosperity and address global challenges. We are therefore natural partners. Over recent years those have been shaped by the Bandar Seri Begawan Plan of Action 2013-2017, which will be followed by the Plan of Action 2018-2022, which was agreed earlier this year.

The EU is the number one investor in ASEAN, with a total of around €15 billion annually. Since 2004 we have invested around twice as much as the US and four times as much as China. We are not in the first place in Cambodia, but I hope to see us gaining ground over the coming years. We are ASEAN's second trading partner after China (and Cambodia's first). But we see scope for EU-ASEAN trade and economic relations to grow further. That will be facilitated by the implementation of the ASEAN economic community, and that is why in the current period (2014-2020) the EU is devoting roughly half of its financial assistance to ASEAN to supporting its connectivity agenda through sustainable and inclusive economic integration and trade. The EU will also mobilise resources from its Asia Investment Facility by blending EU grants with loans from the European investment Bank and other international financial institutions.

In all, more than €170 million has been earmarked by the EU under its current budget to support ASEAN's regional integration. As well as our support for economic integration, we are providing significant support in the field of climate change, environment and disaster management. And



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through the Enhanced Dialogue Facility we fund technical assistance and dialogue in arrange of sectors.

In terms of political and security cooperation, the EU is a founding and active member of the ASEAN Regional Forum. That aims to foster constructive dialogue and consultation on political and security matters through confidence-building and preventive diplomacy in the Asia-Pacific region. We are also working with ASEAN on a range of non-traditional security areas, including through a High level Dialogue on Maritime Security Cooperation; a programme of capacity building on migration and border management; shared experience and technical support on CBRN issues through the a regional secretariat in Manila; and a policy dialogue on human rights.

Under the heading of socio-cultural cooperation, we work together on a variety of issues from education to climate change mitigation and adaptation. Both of those are areas of fundamental importance. Every country need young people with the skills and knowledge that are needed in an increasingly complex, increasingly globalised and inter-dependent world. And every country, every region needsto face the challenges of climate change and biodiversity loss, for which we have a responsibility not just for ourselves but for every future generation.

I want to finish with a thought on the nature of structures, or projects, like the EU and ASEAN. There is a very pervasive view that states have fixed interests that are essentially antagonistic to one another, and that peace requires a management of those potential conflicts. Henry Kissinger, in his book "World Order", spoke about the shift from a traditional balance or power in Europe to a new system, in these words: "The European order as seen in the eighteenth century, as a great Newtonian clockwork of interlocking parts, had been replaced by the Darwinian world of the survival of the fittest". I don't think he understands either Newton or Darwin. But more importantly there is another alternative, which is the recognition that – in a globalised world more than ever – we can be stronger and more successful through cooperation than through competition.

Whatever the challenges it has faced, the EU has always exemplified that approach. There have been other examples that I have seen from close up, for example the successes in the 1980s and 1990s of the Organisation for Cooperation and Security in Europe and the Treaty on Conventional Forces in Europe – which pioneered the idea of intrusive verification as a means of building confidence and reducing the danger of conflict. And the outcome in Paris in 2015 of the slow and often painful process of negotiating an international agreement on climate change represents a recognition that there are problems that have to be faced together, and that to deal with them we will all have to compromise on our individual short-term interests for the sake of a better result for all.

It's in that spirit that I am confident the EU, ASEAN, and our work together will continue to develop and prosper.