

**Keynote Speech of  
H.E. Mr. PRAK Sokhonn, Senior Minister,  
Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation  
At the “ASEAN-EU International Days Symposium”  
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*Professor Michel GRIMALDI, Professor of law at Paris II Panthéon-Assas University,  
His Excellency Mr. George EDGAR, Ambassador of European Union in Cambodia  
Her Excellency Ms. Eva NGUYEN BINH, Ambassador of France in Cambodia  
Excellencies, Distinguished Participants, Ladies and Gentlemen*

1. It is indeed my great pleasure to be associated with you all today for the launching of the **ASEAN-EU International Days**. My congratulations to the conference organizers, the Fondation pour le droit continental, the Association Henry Capitant, the University Paris II Pantheon-Assas and The Sorbonne-Assas International Law school, and in particular to Professor Michel Grimaldi for your joint initiatives to initiate this Symposium. I hope that you can make this symposium a regular event in the future.

2. Professor Grimaldi, you have chosen a good year to organize this conference. Here it is the 50th anniversary of Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the European Union (EU) is also celebrating its 60th anniversary. Quite coincidentally we are jointly celebrating the 40th anniversary of formal EU-ASEAN relations. It seems that with all these years of evolution, I am sure that there are a lot of lessons for us to learn. I am also very impressed with the list of eminent speakers from both the ASEAN and the EU regions and I am quite confident that your exchanges would be very rich and would stimulate useful suggestions for the cooperation of our two regional blocs.

*Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen*

3. One of the distinctive features of the international scene in the last century is probably the rise of regional economic integration followed by political integration. We can see that this phenomenon is further enlarged in this century. The EU and the ASEAN provide two of the most successful examples of regional integrations, granted, in a

completely different milieu and historical background. No doubt, both display many culture and institutional differences, but to me, they do share at least one fundamental similarity. They both aspire to the same hope of peace and security, the safeguarding of their independence against external interference, the search for economic prosperity in a very competitive globalized world.

4. From their rich histories, you would concur with me that both groupings are successful in their respective missions. There is no military conflict in either of the regions, and economic prosperity is clearly apparent. In fact, it may have inspired other regions to follow similar paths, such as the African Union, and the Eurasian Economic Union.

5. That said, I would not go as far as to say that their journeys were not without challenges. Even as a powerhouse in the global economy the EU is still affected by the Global Financial Crisis with the Euro crisis and the Greek debt crisis. The recent Brexit is another test I believe that the EU will overcome.

6. As to our region, we were neither spared by these financial turbulences. The financial crisis of 1997-98 will remain in the ASEAN's history as a major choc. But as the saying goes, "crisis sparks opportunities". In the face of adversity, ASEAN looked into its own structural strengths to develop an ambitious cooperation framework leading to the adoption of the ASEAN Charter and recently the realization of the ASEAN Community.

*Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen*

7. There is no denying the fact that EU and ASEAN are two stand-alone models of regionalisation and are not similar institutions. Their policy responses reflect their specific respective experiences. Their culture, historical background, geography, and political priorities of both the organisations have impacted the trajectory of their evolution.

8. The EU is a **homogeneous** region unlike ASEAN, which is a **heterogeneous** region. Against the EU's presence of Christianity in religion and democracy in political

system ASEAN's heterogeneity reflects in the co-existence of Buddhist, Hindu, Muslim, and Christian religions but also in terms of diversity in its political environment. Democracy, monarchy and autocracy all are present in this region. Against a Continental Europe, we have a maritime ASEAN and an ASEAN land based Greater Mekong Sub-region.

9. In terms of approaches to political integration EU and ASEAN differ significantly. The EU is a model for codified and institutionalised integration based on a supranational formalised organisation whereas ASEAN acts according to its Charter's "principle of non-interference in internal affairs" of its Member States and its modus operandi is encapsulated in the "ASEAN Way". Today, the EU is fully integrated both politically and economically. It has achieved a supranational level of government with its two constitutive treaties, its executive branch represented by the European Commission and the Council of Members, its legislative branch as embodied in the European Parliament, and its judicial branch that takes the form of the European Court of Justice. The EU has also a common currency, a common market with four freedoms of movement: goods, services, people and capital. I must praise the EU for its patience. Indeed, this full integration did not happen overnight. Instead it was a sixty years long journey of slow and incremental process.

*Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen*

10. How about our ASEAN? We have turned 50. We are 10 years younger than the EU but still 50 years of evolution nonetheless, sometimes fast and sometimes slow. If we look back to the days when the ASEAN Founding Fathers signed the Bangkok Declaration 50 years ago, I am sure they would not have imagined what the wheel of times could have brought to ASEAN 50 years later.

11. Granted, we neither have a common currency nor a common fiscal policy and I doubt we plan to have either one. In the aftermath of the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis, ASEAN has launched the so-called Chiang Mai Initiative together with China, Japan and the Republic of Korea to promote greater financial cooperation among the 13 countries.

We do not operate a regional defense force, and we do not need one. ASEAN's approach to security lies, *Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen*, in soft diplomacy. Our regional security is based on the principles of mutual respect, non-interference, non-use of force and peaceful settlement of difference.

12. Well, we now have an ASEAN Charter, which gives us a legal status and an institutional framework that serve as a firm foundation for us in achieving the ASEAN Community. We have codified ASEAN norms, rules and values, a "One language policy" with English as the sole medium for meetings and communications as compared to the 23 official languages in the EU. We have set clear targets for the next decade to come. The Kuala Lumpur Declaration on ASEAN 2025 is a forward-looking roadmap to attain a politically cohesive, economically integrated, and socially responsible, and a truly rules-based, people-oriented, people centred ASEAN.

13. Speaking to regional economic integration again we can make a sort of distinction between the EU's "*de jure institutional regionalisation*" and ASEAN's "*de facto economic regionalisation*". Today, ASEAN integration can still be best described as a market-driven integration. We have been reluctant to embrace EU-style integration strategies as we tend to pursue strategies of loose and pragmatic "open regionalism" and "open integration". ASEAN's Open regionalism connotes that initiatives in economic integration are not necessarily limited to our region. And this approach works for us.

14. We now have a vibrant and increasingly integrated community, where flow of goods, capital and peoples are being constantly facilitated and improved. ASEAN's combined GDP of more than US\$2.55 trillion as of last year count would make us the world's 6<sup>th</sup> largest economy. Our combined population of 635 million or some 8.7% of the world's total population makes us the 3<sup>rd</sup> largest after China and India.

*Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen*,

15. I am sure everything I have said up to now about the past and present of the EU and ASEAN, you probably know already. So instead, allow me to contribute to our

debates in the next two days as to how we see the future of our two regional blocks can grow. The EU-ASEAN relations have a history of more than 40 years. With the respective strengths and shortcomings of each regional block, how can they deepen their block-to-block partnership and cooperation?

16. I can think of two areas of focus: First, we could think of priority areas such as trade, connectivity and other development efforts, like food security, employment and energy. Trade will remain a top priority agenda between the two regions. The recent Free Trade Agreement between the EU and Singapore and ongoing negotiations with Malaysia, Thailand and Vietnam can be seen as first steps and a natural evolution towards a full-scale EU-ASEAN Free Trade agreement in the future. ASEAN is without a doubt a major opportunity for European companies seeking markets. Vice versa the growth oriented agenda of Europe 2020 on the EU side creates more opportunities for ASEAN partners.

17. Second, here I am referring to coordination of the two blocks' joint efforts in a multilateral framework or fora like the G20, the WTO, ASEM, and the UN on global issues like the SDGs, climate change, peace and security, terrorism and non-traditional threats. In the area of peace and security cooperation, I believe both the EU and ASEAN are soft powers best known for employing confidence building measure and preventative diplomacy to deliver on these noble objectives. Anyhow, I hope that these few suggestions could be helpful for your roundtable debates later.

*Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,*

18. Before I wrap up my speech, let me leave you with a main message. Irrespective of their structure, the EU being formalistic and ASEAN driven by its ASEAN Way, I believe we can learn from each other. I believe in the future of the EU post-Brexit and there is no doubt that the UK will still remain ASEAN's important partner. The ASEAN's decision of not following the EU-institutionalised integration style is not necessarily a weakness but rather a strength for us as it keeps our integration processes "flexible" and preserves our ASEAN Way of doing things. No doubt, a vision of an EU-style borderless

area is a long way off but we have made important progress and we will continue to move forward in our own distinctive “ASEAN characteristics” toward the creation of a true single market.

19. Until then, let’s ensure that our two regions continue to enjoy political stability and a non-conflictual regional environment so as to eliminate the possibility of any military conflict as well as to enable our respective member states to concentrate on their own economic and social development. Thank you.