

# EU political relations with ASEAN

2017/2026(INI) - 28/06/2017 - Committee report tabled for plenary, single reading

The Committee on Foreign Affairs adopted an own-initiative report drawn up by Reinhard BÜTIFOKER (Greens/EFA, DE) on EU political relations with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

ASEAN has become one of the most dynamic and growth-oriented regions in the world. Relations between the EU and ASEAN cover a wide range of areas, including trade and investment, development, economics and politics. With bilateral trade in goods valued at more than EUR 200 billion per year, ASEAN is the EU's third largest trading partner and the EU ASEAN's second.

**Strategic partnership:** Members recommended upgrading relations between the EU and ASEAN to a strategic partnership. They suggested strengthening economic and political relations while underlining the opportunities for cooperation in implementing the sustainable development goals.

Cooperation could be strengthened to address **global challenges** such as climate change, international crime and terrorism, border management, maritime security, financial sector development, transparency and macroeconomic policies.

Members emphasised the pursuit of a high level of EU-ASEAN cooperation in multilateral institutions such as the UN, but also the WTO, and insisted on the EU to upgrade and intensify its diplomatic efforts with ASEAN in order to contribute to **greater stability and security** in conflict areas with renewed tensions.

In this context, Members are concerned about the increase in defence spending in the region and the increasing militarisation of conflicts, notably in the South and East China Seas. The EU should therefore continue to support the development of peaceful relations between China and its neighbours around the South China Sea through multilateral mechanisms.

**Security:** the report expressed support the EU-ASEAN security partnership and the sharing of experiences on a host of mostly non-conventional security issues with a view to stepping up regional capacities, with particular regard to strengthened dialogue and cooperation on maritime safety, piracy and the fight against organised crime. They reaffirmed the EU's support for ASEAN's central role in promoting dialogue and cooperation for peace, security, stability and prosperity in the Asia-Pacific region and beyond.

**Free Trade Agreement:** Members stated that there are good reasons to advocate the relaunching of negotiations for a regional EU-ASEAN free trade agreement and welcomed the steps taken to achieve the final objective of a region-to-region agreement. From a strategic point of view, they encouraged efforts to explore the possibilities of concluding free trade agreements with all ASEAN countries.

**Corporate Social Responsibility:** the report called on European companies investing in the ASEAN region to meet their corporate social responsibilities and to respect European standards concerning consumer, labour and environmental rights and to uphold the rights of indigenous population. Members called on ASEAN countries to ensure respect for **social, environmental and labour rights**. They called for the application of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) conventions and the United Nations guidelines on business and human rights.

**Human rights:** concerned about the regression of democracy, violations of human rights and minorities, Members supported the **continuation of EU-ASEAN political dialogue** on human rights launched in 2015. They regretted the adoption of a repressive approach against drug users, which has cost the lives of

many people and led to extrajudicial killings. They also called on all ASEAN countries to refrain from reinstating the death penalty and to ratify further UN human rights conventions.

ASEAN member states are invited to work together to **end statelessness** in the region as a whole. In this regard, the report noted that one million stateless persons reside in ASEAN Member States, the Rohingyas in Burma, representing the largest group of stateless persons in the world.

**Climate change:** recalling that ASEAN remains one of the regions most exposed to this phenomenon, ASEAN member states are urged to accelerate the shift towards low-carbon economies and to rapidly reduce deforestation, effectively curb forest fires and adopt more environment friendly technologies for transport and buildings. They welcomed the EU's initiative of a new dedicated EU-ASEAN Dialogue on Sustainable Development.

Lastly, the report urged for greater use of **parliamentary public diplomacy** in various policy areas.