



EP-AIPA JOINT PRESS RELEASE

Members of the European Parliament and from the ASEAN region agree to closer and deeper EU-ASEAN exchanges at parliamentary level

The European Parliament (EP) and the ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Assembly (AIPA) convened the Inaugural Inter-Regional Parliamentary Dialogue on Tuesday, 22 June 2021. Held virtually, the dialogue discussed two issues that are shared by and most relevant for both regions: The Future of EU-ASEAN Trade Relations, and Mitigating the Negative Effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic.

MEP Heidi Hautala, Vice President of the European Parliament, opened the dialogue underlining the opportunities of the EU-ASEAN Strategic Partnership and the need to back this process by inter-parliamentary relations and parliamentary diplomacy. In her keynote speech Helena König, the Deputy Secretary General for Economic and Global Affairs of the European External Action Service, elaborated on the potential of EU-ASEAN trade and economic relations.

MP Dr. Fadli Zon, Chair of the Committee of Inter-Parliamentary Cooperation in the Indonesian Parliament and MEP Bernd Lange, Chair of the European Parliament's Committee on International Trade introduced the first panel on the future of EU-ASEAN trade. Members discussed the differences between the bilateral and the bi-regional approach regarding EU-ASEAN Free Trade Agreements. With different legislative powers and processes between the AIPA Member Parliaments and the European Parliament, the parliamentarians discussed the efficiency of FTA negotiations at executive level, both bilateral and region-to-region, as well as the role of parliamentary diplomacy in accelerating the negotiations process.



For the second panel, MEP Sean Kelly of the European Parliament and MP Don Tuan Phong of the National Assembly of Vietnam delivered their introductory remarks on the best practices in mitigating the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite a long border with China and a population of nearly 96 million, Vietnam has performed relatively better in containing and mitigating the virus as well as minimizing the economic damage, in comparison to other ASEAN countries, but also at global level. The discussion afterwards focused on the emergence of new COVID-19 variants, the possibilities and challenges of vaccines rollout, as well as the role of parliamentarians during pandemic times, which exceedingly require parliamentary scrutiny.

MEP Daniel Caspary, Chair of the European Parliament's Delegation for relations with Southeast Asia and the ASEAN, guided through the whole event and moderated the discussion of both panels.

Background:

The EP and AIPA are formal parliamentary institutions of their respective regions. They are natural partners with a significant potential to contribute towards strengthening EU-ASEAN relations. The Inaugural Dialogue has generated commitments from both groupings to strengthen the relationship by formalizing the EP-AIPA Inter-Regional Parliamentary Dialogue. While they already engage through the annual Dialogue with Observer Delegations during the AIPA General Assembly, the EP-AIPA Inter-Regional Parliamentary Dialogue, which is planned to be held annually, will further contribute in deepening the relationship between the EP and AIPA and strengthening the parliamentary dimension of EU-ASEAN relations.

The EU is ASEAN's second largest trading partner as well as the biggest provider of Foreign Direct Investment in ASEAN. In return, ASEAN as a whole represents the EU's third largest trading partner. From a trade point of view, this shows that



ASEAN and the EU are already very important partners. Negotiations on an EU-ASEAN Free Trade Agreement, however, have been suspended by mutual agreement since 2009. Instead, both sides agreed to give priority to the bilateral approach of negotiations. Despite the completed negotiations with Singapore and Vietnam, negotiations with a number of ASEAN countries stalled for various reasons, whereas negotiations with Indonesia are ongoing.

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