

# ASEAN-EU dialogue focuses on stability, strategic partnership

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Minister of Foreign Affairs II Dato Seri Setia Awang Haji Erywan bin Pehin Datu Pekerma Jaya Haji Mohd Yusof underscored the importance of observing the international law, encouraging dialogue and negotiation as well as mitigating the impact in short and medium term through more closer coordination and cooperation between ASEAN and the European Union (EU) in addressing the current Middle East conflict and current global supply chain challenges during the 25<sup>th</sup> ASEAN-EU Ministerial Meeting press conference yesterday.

A question was raised during the press conference on how ASEAN and EU can address the Middle East conflict and tension, as well as current global supply chain challenges.

Dato Seri Setia Awang Haji Erywan responded, "The conflict in the Middle East initially disrupted the energy sector and has since extended its impact to global supply chains. This has certainly put considerable pressure on economies, not only within the region but worldwide because it has multitude of impact. In order to address such issue, we need to address the Middle East conflict and tension as well as supply chain issues together and not separately."

He added, "We are not the main player in Middle East but first and foremost as two organisations (ASEAN and EU) that strongly uphold the international law, we can contribute by enforcing the core principles of international law, supporting de-escalation and dialogue and respecting the relevant international law. This hopefully helps to prevent further escalation and maintain long term stability."

At the same time, he shared, "We can also mitigate the impact by strengthening the supply chain through closer coordination between regions, keeping trade flow open and predictable as well as diversifying supply sources



Minister of Foreign Affairs II Dato Seri Setia Awang Haji Erywan bin Pehin Datu Pekerma Jaya Haji Mohd Yusof and EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice-President of the European Commission Kaja Kallas during the press conference.

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options and collaborating in regional initiatives like the ASEAN Power Grid and so on."

Dato Seri Setia Awang Haji Erywan also shared that the 25<sup>th</sup> ASEAN-EU Ministerial Meeting was very productive. He said, "Our discussions were guided by a simple truth: in today's world, no region can tackle global challenges alone. This is why the ASEAN-EU partnership is a strategic choice. Our relationship is strong, and it is delivering real results. Today, we agreed to work even more closely to maintain peace and strengthen economic resilience."

On security, he highlighted, "We are stepping up cooperation to address cybersecurity threats and transnational crime. These issues hit home. They affect the safety of our people and the trust they place in our institutions. By working together, we make both our regions more secure and more stable."

On the economic front, the minister said, "We want to see stronger trade and investment links between both regions. For ASEAN, there is a clear interest in realising an ambitious region-to-region Free Trade Agreement. ASEAN believes the foundations are already in place. The task now is to build on this momentum and move forward. We are also looking ahead to the digital economy and the energy transition. We especially wel-

come the EU's support for the ASEAN Power Grid, which is key to our regional energy security."

He added, "We also discussed the importance of strengthening people-to-people linkages. At the heart of ASEAN-EU relations are our people - students, professionals, businesses, researchers and communities - who continue to build understanding between our two regions. We therefore want to see more exchanges, more mobility, and more practical cooperation that brings ASEAN and Europe closer together. We also had a candid exchange on regional and global affairs, including the situation in Ukraine and the developments in the Middle East, involving Gaza, Lebanon, and Iran."

Meanwhile, EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice-President of the European Commission Kaja Kallas commended Brunei for its excellent hospitality and leadership in hosting the meeting.

Brunei, she described, "is a valued partner to the EU, and more broadly, this is also how we see ASEAN. The EU is and will remain a reliable and predictable partner."

In today's global landscape, she said, "none of our countries can afford to stand alone. What is now happening in the Middle East makes this abundantly clear to everyone. Two

months into the Iran war, diplomatic efforts have yet to produce a breakthrough. Higher energy prices hurt both Europe as well as Asia. Freedom of navigation must remain free, or it will set the dangerous precedence elsewhere in the world."

The EU and ASEAN, she said, "share a common interest in regional stability and the rules-based international order. Today's discussion focused on how we can deepen our cooperation even further. Areas where this makes most sense are, for example, maritime security, counter terrorism, and cyber defense. We can do more together with full respect for ASEAN's principles of neutrality and consensus. Through our Global Gateway strategy, the EU is strengthening the security dimension of our partnerships. Here in the region, this covers projects on coast guard training, critical and maritime infrastructure protection, as well as combatting transnational crimes such as online scams. We are also exploring closer cooperation with ASEAN navies in the Indo-Pacific."

She explained, "The greatest foundation is our growing economic partnership. With around EUR400 billion in bilateral trade in 2024, ASEAN is the EU's third largest trading partner outside Europe, and the EU ranks as ASEAN's third largest partner globally. This has been enormously profitable for both of our regions."

In addition, she said, "We are looking ahead to the EU-ASEAN 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Summit that is going to take place next year. The EU is moving forward with the negotiations for trade agreements with Malaysia, Philippines and Thailand. And in the long-term, we should also aim for a region-to-region trade agreement."

She added, "Brunei's Vision 2035 and its ambition to build a digital, smart nation resonate strongly with the European Union's own priorities. The EU can learn from your experience in energy efficiency, and my intention is to also work with Brunei towards relaunching negotiations on a Partnership and Cooperation Agreement between EU and Brunei. This will give us a stronger framework to work together, including on education and people-to-people exchanges."