



ASEAN in 2020: Celebrating 53 Years of Regional Stability, Shared Prosperity and Peaceful Integration

Exactly 53 years ago, I was a junior member of the Romanian Diplomatic Corps. From August 1967, I started my career in the Asia Division of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as a specialist on South East Asia and speaker of Bahasa in conformity with the diploma obtained after graduating the Moscow Institute for International Relations.

In the same month and year I drafted my country's Note with regard to the foundation of the **Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN)**. Romania was among the few countries and the first among the former socialist countries, recognizing ASEAN as per its own Charter as regional organization for economic cooperation. Just for the record, initially, ASEAN was considered by other countries as a substitute to SEATO.

This was my first contribution to assume an official position for Romania in international relations. The idea of economic cooperation among the new independent states of South East Asia, launched by their great prestigious leaders, was worth to be recognized and supported.

The foundation and development of the regional economic organization became intertwined with my entire diplomatic career. As a former Head of the Mission and Ambassador to three ASEAN nations and a career diplomat, I watched with great admiration the outstanding development and continuous regional integration achieved by ASEAN.

As ASEAN concluded its 36th summit and other related meetings, under the chairmanship of H.E. the Prime Minister of Vietnam and in the auspicious (on-line) presence of the distinguished ASEAN leaders, **it marked cohesive and responsive adaptation to the new realities of the time ("New Normal")**. In fact, ASEAN displayed the same spirit, unity and attitude as it did during its 53 years of majestic history. There is no better way to celebrate ASEAN's foundation in 1967!

It is the **resilience and commitment to its original values** that brought ASEAN such a long way and will continue to remain the driving force of the political and economic architecture in the region as well as to mark its glorious future. While the decades which have passed from its foundation have incorporated new legal instruments and lead to the expansion of the organization, ASEAN continued to respect and apply the **ASEAN Declaration** (1967). Accelerating economic growth, social progress and cultural development continues to promote regional peace, collaboration and mutual assistance among the ASEAN member states today, as intended by its distinguished founding leaders. The ASEAN nations have incessantly continued to uphold the principles enlisted in the **Treaty of Amity and Cooperation** of 1976. The **momentous development of the ASEAN Charter** and the **visionary ASEAN 2025** roadmap expand and continue to respect the original principles of the regional organization.

Committed to its founding principle of non-interference, ASEAN remains a non-intrusive regional organization, maintained by a shared understanding of its members. As a cardinal principle of ASEAN, non-interference has continued to be embedded not only in the actions of the regional organization, but similarly in the 2003 Declaration of ASEAN Concord II and the 2008 ASEAN Charter. Not only that ASEAN has never intruded in its member's internal affairs, but, in the spirit of its faith and commitment to original values, **has never set new institutions or stretched existing ones capable of such intrusions.** The jurisdiction and domestic politics of the ASEAN members have remained – first and foremost – a national affair.

Development has been a landmark feature, spanning across ASEAN's 53 year long history. **ASEAN's Vision 2025 charts the robust development of the organization toward a consolidated, integrated and cohesive ASEAN Community** across three pillars: **Political-Security Community, Economic Community and Socio-Cultural Community.** The three pillars create a new path for the continuous development of a more united, peaceful and cohesive Community in which participative and responsible members foster an equitable access to opportunities. ASEAN remains a continuous and forward looking regional organization in its incessant efforts to ensure new opportunities and tackle new challenges for all.

ASEAN has grown into a foreign policy vacuum, attracting a global network of national states dialogue partners, regional and international organizations, as well as sui generis formats in its globally recognized international affairs. While continuously upholding its neutrality in politics, ASEAN has signed multiple **bilateral investment treaties** and agreements with states across the globe (e.g. China, Hong Kong, India, Japan, Korea, United States). ASEAN's **Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC)** has been signed by numerous states (e.g. Argentina, Australia, Bangladesh, Brazil, Canada, Chile, China, East Timor, Egypt, France, India, Iran, Japan, Mongolia, Morocco, New Zealand, North Korea, Norway, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, Republic of Peru, Russia, South Korea, Sri Lanka, Turkey, United Kingdom, United States), decades after it was drafted and signed by the ASEAN members. The European Union became a signatory party of TAC in 2012. Besides, ASEAN has become a significant actor in multiple multilateral formats, which **underline its openness for international cooperation and partnerships.** Apart from the **ASEAN+3** meeting (with China, Japan and South Korea), **ASEAN+6** (with Australia, China, India, Japan, New Zealand and South Korea), **ASEAN-CER** (with Australia and New Zealand) and the **ASEAN – Shanghai Cooperation Organization** partnership, the regional organization also hosts an informal dialogue process with the European Union (**Asia-Europe Meeting – ASEM**).

Certainly, **as a member state of the European Union, Romania is deeply involved in all EU-ASEAN cooperation projects.** In this regard, to further strengthen the **ASEAN-EU Enhanced Partnership (2013-2017), the ASEAN-EU Plan of Action (2018-2022)** has been adopted to **pursue a closer cooperation** following the political and security, economic and socio-cultural pillars. Moreover, besides being represented at ambassadorial level at the ASEAN Secretariat in Jakarta, the **Romania-ASEAN relations have witnessed a positive tendency in their bilateral cooperation during the past years.** In fact, during her meeting with the Deputy Foreign Minister of Brunei, Dato' Erywan Yusof, on January 2019, the Romanian Secretary of State for Global Affairs, Monica Gheorghiuță, has mentioned **the intention of the Romanian side to establish a consultation mechanism for political and diplomatic affairs at ministerial level.**

All these good thoughts about ASEAN could be interpreted by negativists as a protocol requirement message for an Anniversary Day. Nothing of the kind! Certainly, I am aware of the existence of doubts and criticism as far as today and future of ASEAN is concerned, but I remain a dedicated believer that ASEAN Community will be accomplished and, by such a positive achievement, the peace, understanding and stability in South East Asia will continue to be strengthened to the benefit of the whole region.

The Romanian Institute for Asia- Europe Studies – IRSEA is constantly following the developments in ASEAN and, by its engaged program of action will try to bring to the attention of the Romanian society these great and difficult efforts of ten Nations to stay united, to develop together and defend peace in their habitat based on the foundation principles inscribed in the UN Charter as well.

On this note of ASEAN's further strengthening and continuous development, I would like to take this opportunity to extend my best wishes to the organization's prestigious Leaders and its dedicated people who have contributed to its safeguarding and permanent evolution. Today, as I did 53 years ago, I look forward to ASEAN as an organization that will continue to firmly advance and see new and strong development steps, both regionally and internationally.

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