

EU TO BE ASEAN'S PARTNER IN DEVELOPING POST PANDEMIC EXIT STRATEGIES: 8TH ASEAN-EU BUSINESS SUMMIT

- The EU-ASEAN Business Council held its 8th ASEAN-EU Business Summit at the Fullerton Hotel, Singapore
- The Summit brought together business leaders from Europe and Southeast Asia with regulators, politicians, and leading academics.
- Speakers included (1) Chan Chun Sing, Singapore's Minister for Trade and Industry; (2) Valdis Dombrovskis, EU Trade Commissioner; (3) Tran Tuan Anh, Minister of Industry and Trade, Vietnam and; (3) Ajarin Pattanapanchai, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Digital Economy and Society, Thailand
- High level speakers and panellists exchanged views on how to work together towards economic resilience in a post-pandemic world
- As the US prepares for a leadership change and as tensions with China continue to rise, now, more than ever, the EU needs to step up and be ASEAN's partner

Singapore, 19th November 2020 - The EU-ASEAN Business Council (EU-ABC), the sole voice for European business interests in ASEAN held its flagship annual business Summit at the Fullerton Hotel in Singapore. Attended by over 250 people both virtually and physically, the Summit brought together business leaders from Europe and Southeast Asia with policy and decision makers from regional governments and the European Commission to debate and discuss improvements to the trade and investment relationship between the EU and ASEAN and key issues around post-pandemic recovery.

Against the backdrop of economic uncertainty and an unprecedented health crisis, the year's Summit critically looked at how ASEAN states could collectively implement recovery strategies which prioritise the acceleration of a vibrant regional digital economy. **Mr. Chan Chun Sing, Singapore's Minister for Trade and Industry** reiterated how "the EU and ASEAN can be connected and united by digital platforms and standards, and not be divided by geographical distances." Specifically, there are growing opportunities for like-minded countries to collaborate and establish high-standard rules for issues related to digital trade. In this spirit, Minister Chan suggested that a "A Digital Economy Agreement (DEA) will be a key step towards connecting the EU and ASEAN digitally, while (fostering) innovation and investments in new digital industries." More crucially, DEAs can also help lubricate the engines for the new global economy.

With digital transformation seen as the new leaver for long-term recovery, it is crucial for the region's digital divide to be addressed, ensuring that no one gets left behind. **Khor Chern Chuen**, Chief Operating Officer, SAP Southeast Asia said "The COVID-19 pandemic has brought a new normal for governments, businesses and citizens in ASEAN. Through SAP's strong capabilities, we accelerated the need for government and businesses to be at the forefront of digital transformation for its industry. By bridging processes, systems, and data, this helps them to thrive in the new normal."

Another aspect of the new normal is the provision of quality healthcare in ASEAN in an affordable and sustainable way. **Eric Mansion**, General Manager, Sanofi Pasteur Asia said "health is wealth - access to reliable and affordable health services ensure healthier and happier citizens. We need to keep working towards expanding access to prevention including life-course immunisation, plus accelerating the evolution of self-care and even digital health possibilities. Life-course immunisation is vital especially in ASEAN to lessen the impact of ageing societies and to protect against preventable diseases."

With global leaders looking to create a new normal whilst recalibrating new growth engines, this Summit critically discussed what a post-pandemic world would mean for ASEAN and how the region should leverage on

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its new economic choices. **Donald Kanak**, Chairman of the EU-ABC and Chairman of Prudential Insurance Growth Markets said: “Southeast Asia has been, and will be, a region of great opportunity for European businesses. The EU-ABC’s recent Business Sentiment Survey highlighted this with 53% of respondents naming ASEAN as the region of best economic opportunity over the next 5 years. For economic recovery in a post pandemic world, ASEAN has a window of opportunity to gain an increasing share of global investment and supply chain relocation if it can move more deliberately to eliminate the remaining non-tariff obstacles to trade and harmonise standards. EU and ASEAN businesses can then fully contribute to a robust recovery by focusing on inclusivity, interconnectivity and sustainability.”

At a time when the US is preparing for a leadership change and as tensions with China continue to rise, now, more than ever, the EU and ASEAN should graduate from just being natural partners to strategic economic partners. Reiterating EU’s commitment to the region, **H.E. Valdis Dombrovskis**, EU Trade Commissioner said in the video message which was played at the Summit, “The ASEAN region is a very important political and economic partner for the EU. We have a strong trading relationship which has excellent potential to grow even more. The EU is the third largest trading partner of ASEAN as well as being one of the largest investors and the largest development donor in the region. We share a similar outlook on open markets on the importance of rules based multilateral order and on the value of regional cooperation. We should build on this shared outlook and even closer cooperation.”

Similarly, **Tran Tuan Anh, Vietnam’s Minister of Industry and Trade** expressed optimism for EU-ASEAN relations encouraging the two blocs to “take advantage of potential opportunities after COVID-19 which can create economic resilience and prosperity for both.” Citing the EU-Vietnam FTA as an example, **H.E. Tran Tuan Anh** expressed such “high-quality FTAs have a positive impact on Vietnam’s economy, improving the (country’s) legal system and administrative procedures towards greater transparency and openness.” Although an EU-ASEAN FTA is noticeably missing, such bilateral trade agreements are step in the right direction to attract European businesses to the region.

This is the eighth iteration of the ASEAN-EU Business Summit, following earlier Summits held in Indonesia, Vietnam, Cambodia, Malaysia and the Philippines. The last summit was in Bangkok, with Thailand helming ASEAN’s Chairmanship. Further details about the Summit, including schedule, registrations and sponsorship opportunities, can be found at www.asean-eu-summit.org.