

April 2023 – Notes from the ED



Selamat Hari Raya and Eid Mubarak to all our Muslim colleagues!

“Mari teman, mari saudara, kita bergembira! Lupakanlah hatimu yang duka,” so goes a line from a popular Malay song often played during this festive season. For the uninitiated, the song calls for friends and family to be happy, and to leave behind any heartache. We hope you had a joyous celebration with your loved ones, and filled your tummies with delicious food! For us at the EU-ABC, we were treated to traditional Malay dishes like *ketupat* (rice cakes), beef *rendang*, and *sambal goreng* (a rich and spicy mixture of meats and herbs), lovingly cooked by our Advocacy Director Liyana (it’s really her mother).

Goodbye, ARISE+

This month, we bid goodbye to the EU-funded ARISE+ project. Throughout the years, this project has done amazing things to support ASEAN regional economic integration, and sought to improve trade facilitation across Southeast Asia. The ASEAN Customs Transit System will be a lasting legacy, as will the work done on standards harmonisation in food safety and pharmaceuticals. These are just some of the project’s many achievements. Aimed at strengthening the capacity of ASEAN to implement and monitor its integration goals through technical assistance, capacity-building, and policy advice, ARISE+ has indeed helped to enhance the competitiveness of Southeast Asia in the global economy.

It has to be hoped that any new EU-funded projects will follow this template of collaboration, cooperation, and camaraderie that the ARISE team worked so hard to establish. I also bade farewell to two of my good friends, Paul Mandl and Paolo Vergano, who had worked tirelessly to lead this special project with unshakeable faith in ASEAN’s potential.



European officials visit to Singapore

The EU-ABC also had the honour to meet with several Members of Parliament from the EU during their visit to this region, including Jan Zahradil, Vice Chair of the European Parliament Committee on International Trade. There was an invigorating and informative exchange of ideas and opinions on the state of EU-ASEAN relations between Mr Zahradil and our Members over lunch. We discussed issues like developments on FTAs with ASEAN Member States and how geopolitics are impacting doing business in this part of the world. We were also invited by the EU Delegation in Singapore to a meeting with MEPs from the Internal Market and Consumer Protection Committee.

Such interactions are important, given Europe's growing emphasis on building relations with ASEAN, and the increasing range of sustainability-linked policies out of the EU that will have wide-ranging effects on international trade and relations. At the EU-ABC, we prioritise building relations with influential MEPs in an effort to move the needle on pressing issues, and to remind the EU Parliament – which holds the power to pass or reject laws and is largely internal-looking – where Southeast Asia is on the map.



Council Activities in April

We continue to be busy in April. For one, we launched a paper on energy transition in ASEAN with a webinar featuring experts from the Asian Development Bank, the ASEAN Secretariat, EDP Renewables, and ING Bank. It's always a pleasure to moderate a session where real, concrete solutions are given. We heard how more needs to be done on the regulatory front to promote renewables and their adoption in Southeast Asia, how more finance needs to be unlocked to ensure green projects can take-off, and how more effort needs to be made to clearly define these projects so they can start attracting the right investments. I would like to personally thank our Chamber Members in Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam, for their support.

The topic of energy transition continues to be a huge part of the EU-ABC's advocacy, because we recognise the critical need for systemic transformation to fight the climate emergency. For our Members, sustainability is no longer a strategy, but a way of life. European industry is encouraged by the strong political will demonstrated by ASEAN, and will continue to contribute towards the region's efforts on this front. This I relayed to the ASEAN Secretariat's Deputy Secretary-General H.E. Satvinder Singh at one of our regular meetings earlier this month.

I rounded off this month with a visit to Brunei, where I was invited to moderate a session on digital and inclusive growth at the Brunei Business Conference 2023. The Council took this opportunity to bring a small delegation for a mini trade mission to the country – just myself, our Advocacy Manager Jenn, and Chairman Martin Hayes. Good and productive meetings with the Ministries of Finance & Economy and Transport & Infocommunications, along with the Department of Energy.



Come what May

We'll be living out of our suitcases next month! Liyana and I will be in Brussels the first week of May to meet with various EU officials and ASEAN Ambassadors. We have our Board Member Noel Clehane, Global Head of Regulatory & Public Policy at BDO to thank. Not only is he our eyes and ears on the ground in Brussels, but Noel also maintains an excellent working relationship with key stakeholders there – not to mention driving us to and from meeting locations!

The team will then head to the Philippines for our [Business Mission](#) (22-24 May). We're bringing our best frocks along for the [European-Philippines Business Dialogue \(EBPD\)](#) and Gala Dinner which we are co-organising with the European Chamber of Commerce of the Philippines – do sign up for that if you haven't.

While we're in Singapore, we will be hosting a couple of webinars with our partners: one with the International Trade Centre on 11th May looking at the EU's CBAM, and another on unlocking investments for ASEAN's Green Growth on 15th May with the Hinrich Foundation. For Members, look out for yet another informative closed-door briefing by BowerGroup Asia on 10th May, this time focussing on the Thai elections.

A lot more in store for you this May, so check out our LinkedIn profile for updates! But before I go, I would like to urge you to take part in our annual [Business Sentiment Survey](#). Just 20 minutes of your time for a report that will inform governments across ASEAN and the EU about the realities of doing business in Southeast Asia amidst some troubling times.