

Intervention at the Opening Session
By H.E. Prak Sokhonn,
Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs and
International Cooperation of the Kingdom of Cambodia
At the Ministerial Forum for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific
Paris, February 22, 2022

Excellency Jean-Yves Le Drian, Foreign Minister of the French Republic,

Excellency Josep Borrell, VP of the EC and High Representative of the EU for FA and Security Policy,
Excellencies ministers, Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. It is indeed my great honour and pleasure to participate in this Ministerial Forum for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific.
2. As France took over the Presidency of the Council of the European Union for the first half of 2022, so is Cambodia with its rotating chairmanship of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) for this year. Both the EU and ASEAN see multilateralism as an instrument of peace and development.
3. Just a few months ago, Cambodia hosted the 13th ASEM Summit where ASEAN and the EU did their part to strengthen an open, inclusive, and rules-based multilateralism for shared growth.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

4. In light of the fast-changing global landscape, we are compelled to constantly adapt and adjust our external

relations to deal with geopolitical rivalries and other complex regional hot spots. And all over the world, the COVID 19 pandemic, the effects of climate change and the destruction of biodiversity are affecting the human community.

5. As the rotating chair of ASEAN this year, Cambodia underlines the spirit of “Togetherness” in which we emphasize ASEAN centrality, unity, and solidarity in addressing regional challenges and enhancing ASEAN’s contribution to regional and global peace, security, and sustainable development. We stress unity for cooperation for our mutual interest and we focus on issues that bind us all together rather those that divide us.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

6. I am very pleased to see the ASEAN-EU partnership being gradually strengthened, both in breadth and depth. The elevation of this relationship to the level of a Strategic Partnership in December 2020 was a critical milestone for our two regional entities. We are of the view that convening an ASEAN-EU Commemorative Summit this year to mark the 45th anniversary of our Dialogue Relations will provide an excellent opportunity to explore more tangible cooperation.

7. I believe that greater economic interdependence will reduce the risks of conflicts. As such, we need to deepen further our intra- and inter-regional economic cooperation. The conclusion of the ASEAN-EU Comprehensive Air Transport Agreement was a great start. The future realisation of the ASEAN-EU FTA, for instance, would help

further deepen inter-regional integration and connectivity. Combined with the recent entry into force of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), their economic prospect is enormous and will certainly boost the post-pandemic recovery. Concrete actions can be made also through the linkage between the Master Plan of ASEAN Connectivity (MPAC) 2025 and the Global Gateway of the EU.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

8. Our desire for peace and prosperity is shared within the framework of the French Strategy on the Indo-Pacific, the EU Strategy for Cooperation in Indo-Pacific and our own ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP). In this framework, ASEAN and EU can find so much complementarities and synergies to tackle the commonality of issues ranging from maritime and economic cooperation, connectivity, trade, climate change, and sustainable development, among others.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

9. Allow me to say a few words on a crisis that is the cause of concerns for us all. The current political and security crisis in Myanmar is, without doubt, one of the most complex regional issues. It is clear that if the current situation is not well managed, the country could descend into a full-blown civil war. Obviously, there is no simple solution nor quick-fix to this conundrum. It requires sincere commitment from all sides. Like my colleague, Foreign Minister of Thailand, Don Pramudwinai, said it needs time and patience. I will just add pragmatism.

10. It was with this sense of pragmatism that my Prime Minister, Samdech Techo HUN SEN, paid a visit to Myanmar last month. The visit was an ice-breaking mission. It was also aimed to build trust, confidence and understanding and it has certainly placed a stepping stone for further progress. In my capacity as the Special Envoy of the ASEAN Chair on Myanmar, I will work with all stakeholders and will do my best to advance the implementation of the five-point consensus, that is to help finding a common ground toward ending violence, providing humanitarian relief to those most in need and bringing normalcy back through a political process which is inclusive, Myanmar-owned and Myanmar-led.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

11. ASEAN and the EU, including France from whom we expect more as 1 of the 5 Permanent Members of the UNSC, are natural partners to promote an open, inclusive, rules-based Indo-Pacific. Our partnership will shape the future of this region in which peace, prosperity and progress can be ensured.

I thank you and wish you all well.
