



Joint Press Release: Cambodia and European Union Hold 12th Joint Committee Meeting

Brussels, 25 April 2024

The 12th Cambodia-EU Joint Committee was held in Brussels on 25 April 2024 and was preceded by meetings of the three subgroups namely: (1) Trade and Investment, (2) Cooperation, and (3) Institution Building, Administrative Reform, Legal and Judicial Reform, Governance and Human Rights. The respective subgroup meetings were held on 22-24 April 2024. The Joint Committee was co-chaired by **Ms. Paola Pampaloni**, Deputy Managing Director for Asia and the Pacific of the European External Action Service and **H.E. Mr. Meas Kim Heng**, Secretary of State of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of the Kingdom of Cambodia.

The EU and Cambodia exchanged views on a wide range of bilateral and multilateral issues, including the latest political and economic developments in both Cambodia and the EU. Regarding the situation in Ukraine, they agreed on the need to find a just and lasting peace in accordance with the United Nations Charter and international law. They committed to working together in upholding the international order based on the rules and principles of international law at the UN and in regional fora. They also exchanged views on the situation in the Middle East and discussed the avenues to enhance the EU-ASEAN partnership. They underscored the successful meetings of the EU-Indo Pacific Forum and the EU-ASEAN Ministerial Meeting in Brussels on 2 February 2024. They also discussed developments in Myanmar and reaffirmed their united position that the ASEAN Five-Point Consensus remains the main reference to address the political crisis in Myanmar. They expressed their concerns over developments in Myanmar and urged all parties involved to take concrete action to immediately halt violence.

As far as development cooperation is concerned, the EU and Cambodia discussed their overarching strategic frameworks and reviewed progress in the EU-Cambodia ongoing cooperation. Both the EU and Cambodian delegations agreed on the alignment of the EU Multi-annual Indicative Programme (MIP 2021-2027) with Cambodia's new Pentagonal Strategy-Phase 1, emphasising the coherence with the Global Gateway strategy and the Team Europe approach. The discussion encompassed the three key priorities of the MIP: Green Growth and Decent Jobs, Education and Skills Development, and Good Governance. Both sides also shared insights into the recently launched programmes aimed at supporting green growth and decent jobs, and enhancing integration within ASEAN. Moreover, there was an exchange on the

progress of policy reforms, particularly in sectors supported by the EU, such as education, public financial management, trade, agriculture, fisheries, and energy transition. The pivotal role of civil society in attaining sustainable development goals, promoting transparency, and ensuring accountability was acknowledged. The parties also appreciated advances in regional and ASEAN cooperation programmes.

Regarding trade relations, in 2022 and 2023, according to the EU, bilateral trade in goods stood at €6.3 billion and €5.8 billion, respectively. During the meeting, bilateral trade and investment relations were discussed, including Cambodia's obligations under the EU's Generalised Scheme of Preferences Regulation, market access issues, as well as technical cooperation on trade and private sector development. They discussed the investment climate and business environment in Cambodia, as well as the effective implementation of the new Law of Investment aiming to attract further foreign direct investment. Views were exchanged on regional and global economic developments, including updates on economic integration in ASEAN and across the Asia-Pacific region, EU-ASEAN region-to-region trade relations and developments in the World Trade Organisation (WTO).

They discussed and exchanged views on key developments on human rights including civil and political, labour and women's rights, the fight against human trafficking, the ratification of international conventions, as well as business and human rights. The EU and Cambodia agreed on the importance of effectively implementing commitments and obligations under international human rights law and UN conventions and looked forward to the upcoming 4th cycle of the Universal Periodic Review for Cambodia scheduled for May this year. The EU and Cambodia stressed their attachment to democratic principles and fundamental freedoms, and acknowledged the important role played by civil society in a well-functioning democracy. The EU and Cambodia agreed on the importance of an enabling legislative framework for upholding democratic pluralism, human rights and fundamental freedoms, labour rights and the rule of law. These are vital in a democratic society and for a successful and inclusive social and economic development of Cambodia. The EU and Cambodia diverged in their assessment of the implementation of UN human rights conventions. Referring to a number of individual cases, the EU expressed concerns on the recent harassment and arrests of several human rights defenders, members of the opposition and civil society activists and called on Cambodia to allow them to freely exercise their civil and political rights. Cambodia informed that the exercise of democratic rights and freedoms must be in accordance with the rule of law and that the recent arrests and prosecution of some human right defenders, members of political parties and civil society activists were acts of law enforcement in accordance with the constitution and procedural law of Cambodia. The EU and Cambodia agreed to continue their dialogue on these important issues in order to bring their diverging positions closer.

The Joint Committee concluded under an amicable and frank atmosphere and it was agreed that the 13th Cambodia-EU Joint Committee and its three subgroup meetings would be held in 2026 in Cambodia.