

**REMARKS/LECTURE BY H.E. MICHAEL TENE, DEPUTY SECRETARY-
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THE UNIVERSITY OF TURIN**

Luigi Einaudi Campus, Lungodora Siena, 100/A Aula A3, University of Turin
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(Lecture Length: 45 – 60 minutes, with 30 minutes Q&A session)

ASEAN AND THE INDO-PACIFIC

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Ladies and Gentlemen

I would like to thank the University of Turin for the invitation to discuss about “ASEAN and the Indo-Pacific”, highlighting the roles and initiatives of ASEAN in maintaining peace, security, stability and prosperity in the region and beyond. I would also touch upon ASEAN-Italy relations and share ideas on how ASEAN and Italy could enhance their development partnership, thus playing a greater role in the Indo-Pacific amidst the growing geostrategic and geo-economics challenges that the world is facing.

ASEAN Journey towards Peace and Prosperity

Having established amidst the proxy wars and internecine conflict under the shadow of the Cold War, ASEAN’s Founding Fathers have long envisioned ASEAN to become a region of peace in order to create a conducive environment for regional countries to cooperatively pursue economic development, and thus bring about prosperity for their peoples.

These visions are stipulated in a number of ASEAN's political documents and treaties, including the *1967 Bangkok Declaration*¹, which established the Association and set forth its main objectives to contribute towards peace, progress and prosperity. Further, in 1971, the Special ASEAN Foreign Ministers Meeting adopted the *Declaration on the Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality (ZOFPAN)*², which has been further reaffirmed over the years, amidst the growing concerns of instability in the Asia-Pacific region in light of the major power rivalries.

In 1976, five founding Member States of ASEAN signed the *Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia (TAC)*, which embodies universal principles of peaceful coexistence and friendly cooperation among States in Southeast Asia. Currently, there are 54 signatories to the TAC, 44 of whom are non-regional countries, with the latest being Kuwait, Panama and Serbia who acceded the Treaty on the sidelines of the 43rd ASEAN Summit and Related Summits, in September 2023 in Jakarta.

Subsequently, other political documents and treaties have been adopted, including the *Declarations of ASEAN Concord*³, the *Treaty on the Southeast Asia Nuclear Weapon-Free Zone (SEANWFZ)*⁴, the *ASEAN Vision 2020*⁵, the *Roadmap for an ASEAN Community (2009-2015)*⁶, the *Bali Declaration on ASEAN Community in a*

¹ The Declaration is available in this link: <https://agreement.asean.org/media/download/20140117154159.pdf>. The ASEAN Declaration or Bangkok Declaration is the founding document of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). It was signed in Bangkok on 8 August 1967 by the five ASEAN founding members, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand. It states the basic principles of ASEAN: co-operation, amity, and non-interference. The date is now celebrated as ASEAN Day.

² The Declaration is available in this link, https://www.icnl.org/wp-content/uploads/Transnational_zone.pdf. It was signed by the Foreign Ministers of the ASEAN member states (Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand) in 1971 in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. In the declaration, the parties publicly stated their intent to keep South East Asia "free from any form or manner of interference by outside Powers" and "broaden the areas of cooperation."

³ The Declaration is available in this link: <https://asean.org/the-declaration-of-asean-concord-bali-indonesia-24-february-1976/>. In the Declaration, the parties stated that in the pursuit of political stability, ASEAN cooperation shall take into account, among others, the stability of each Member State and of the ASEAN region, which is an essential contribution to international peace and security.

⁴ The Treaty is available in this link: <https://asean.org/treaty-on-the-southeast-asia-nuclear-weapon-free-zone/>. On 15 December 1995, ASEAN Member States signed the Treaty of Southeast Asia Nuclear Weapon-Free Zone (SEANWFZ Treaty) as a commitment to preserve the Southeast Asian region as a region free of nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction. The Treaty is also known as the Bangkok Treaty. Through this Treaty, ASEAN reaffirms the importance of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) in preventing the proliferation of nuclear weapons and in contributing towards international peace and security. It also marks the establishment of a Nuclear Weapon-Free Zone (NWFZ) in Southeast Asia – one among five NWFZs in the world. The other four NWFZs are in Latin America and the Caribbean, South Pacific, Africa, and Central Asia. The Protocol to the SEANWFZ Treaty welcomes the signing and early ratification of the Nuclear Weapon States (NWS), which will contribute to the promotion of the realisation of a Southeast Asia Nuclear Weapon-Free Zone.

⁵ The document is available in this link: <https://asean.org/asean-vision-2020/>. Vision 2020 envisages an outward-looking ASEAN, playing an important role in the international forum.

⁶ The Roadmap is available in this link: https://www.asean.org/wp-content/uploads/images/ASEAN_RTK_2014/2_Roadmap_for_ASEAN_Community_20092015.pdf.

The Roadmap replaced the Vientiane Action Programme and was adopted through Cha-am Hua Hin Declaration on the Roadmap for the ASEAN Community (2009-2015), signed by ASEAN Leaders on 23 October 2009.

*Global Community of Nations*⁷, the *ASEAN Community Vision 2025*⁸, the *ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP)*⁹ and the *ASEAN Charter*¹⁰, all of which place a strong vision of ASEAN for a better future of its people, and set forth the maintenance of peace, security, stability and prosperity at the heart of the ASEAN Community building efforts.

Externally, ASEAN has intensified constructive dialogue and cooperation with its partners through the ASEAN-led mechanisms, such as the East Asia Summit (EAS), the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), the ASEAN Plus Three (APT), and the ASEAN Defense Ministers' Meeting (ADMM)-Plus. Over the years, the EAS continues to be a leaders-led forum for strategic dialogue among leaders. While the ARF remains to be the most inclusive security dialogue platform, the ADMM-Plus promotes strategic dialogue and builds confidence among the defense establishments across the region. Further, ASEAN also continues to develop friendly bilateral relations and mutually beneficial dialogue cooperation and partnerships with countries and sub-regional, regional and international organisations and institutions through ASEAN Plus One modality, which include ASEAN Dialogue Partners¹¹, ASEAN Sectoral Dialogue Partners¹² and ASEAN Development Partners¹³. This modality over the years has served as a bedrock of ASEAN's leadership in the regional architecture.

Guided by these frameworks and principles, and thanks to the unwavering support from its important partners, ASEAN has been progressively realising the vision of an ASEAN Community where its people are bound in friendship, cooperation, peace & prosperity. What began as a grouping of five countries in 1967 has today grown into

⁷ The Declaration, also known as Bali Concord III, is available in this link: <https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Bali-Concord-III.pdf>. It was signed by ASEAN Leaders on 17 November 2011. Focusing on strengthening ASEAN's position on global issues, Bali Concord III encourages ASEAN leaders to commit to one voice in responding to various issues. These include political-security, economic, and socio-cultural issues, referring to ASEAN's basic principles.

⁸ The document is available in this link: <https://www.asean.org/wp-content/uploads/images/2015/November/aec-page/ASEAN-Community-Vision-2025.pdf>. Vision 2025 envisages a peaceful, stable and resilient ASEAN Community with enhanced capacity to respond effectively to challenges, and ASEAN as an outward-looking region within a global community of nations, while maintaining its centrality.

⁹ The document is available in this link: https://asean.org/asean2020/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/ASEAN-Outlook-on-the-Indo-Pacific_FINAL_22062019.pdf. ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific envisages ASEAN Centrality as the underlying principle for promoting cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region, with ASEAN-led mechanisms.

¹⁰ The Charter is available in this link: <https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/images/archive/publications/ASEAN-Charter.pdf>. The Charter was adopted at the 13th ASEAN Summit in November 2007 serves as a foundation in achieving the ASEAN Community by providing legal status and institutional framework for ASEAN. It also codifies ASEAN norms, rules and values; sets clear targets for ASEAN; and presents accountability and compliance.

¹¹ To date, ASEAN has established Dialogue Partnership with Australia, Canada, China, European Union, India, Japan, New Zealand, Republic of Korea, Russian Federation, United Kingdom and United States.

¹² To date, ASEAN has established Sectoral Dialogue Partnership with Brazil, Morocco, Norway, Pakistan, South Africa, Switzerland, Turkiye and United Arab Emirates.

¹³ To date, ASEAN has established Development Partnership with Chile, France, Germany, Italy and Netherlands.

a full-fledged association comprising of ten-member states with a combined population of 662 million and a joint GDP of near USD3.0 trillion, thus making ASEAN the 3rd largest Asian economy, and 5th largest in the world. In 2022, during the 40th and 41st ASEAN Summit and Related Summits, the ASEAN Leaders have agreed to admit in principle Timor-Leste as the 11th member of ASEAN and grant it with an observer status and allow its participation in all ASEAN Meetings, including at the Summit plenaries.

As indicated in the ASEAN Stats Data Portal based on data culled from the Asian Development Bank¹⁴, the ASEAN economy is expected to grow at a rate of 4.6% this year and 4.8% in 2024 on the back of robust consumption and tourism. Should ASEAN continue to maintain this positive trajectory, the ASEAN economy is projected to be the 4th largest in the world by 2030. Furthermore, it is reassuring to hear the view of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) Managing Director during the 43rd ASEAN Summit in September this year that ASEAN Member States are contributing 10 per cent to global growth or over twice their weight in the global economy.

Beyond the political stability that has resulted in economic benefits for the region, it could also be modestly claimed that ASEAN is the process of developing an ASEAN Identity for its people. The *Poll on ASEAN Awareness 2018*¹⁵ found that “94% of the general public identify themselves as ASEAN citizens at some level” and “two-fifths of citizens strongly affiliate themselves with ASEAN”. Furthermore, there is a significantly higher proportion of the general population (at 83%) that see the benefits of being citizens in ASEAN.

As such, ASEAN journey and evolution has showcased that peace, stability and prosperity are strongly linked. While peace is a necessary pre-condition for sustained economic growth and prosperity, economic cooperation in turn produces stability, peace and prosperity. Not only that peace and stability has paid economic and socio-cultural dividends across the region, the comprehensive economic and socio-cultural integration would also prevent conflicts, given the enormous human and economic costs that it would incur.

It should be pointed out, however, that ASEAN’s journey to achieve regional peace and stability throughout the years has not been free from challenges and obstacles. One of the biggest challenges was the 1997 Asian financial crisis, which wreaked havoc on ASEAN economies and laid bare the region’s vulnerabilities to financial

¹⁴ Please see ‘ASEAN Development Outlook September 2023’, <https://www.adb.org/publications/asian-development-outlook-september-2023>, accessed 29 September 2023.

¹⁵ The Poll on ASEAN Awareness 2018 was conducted by Ipsos Business Consulting, in consultation with the ASEAN Secretariat (led by CID with support from CRD), supported by JAIF 2.0. Available on <https://asean.org/asean2020/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Poll-on-ASEAN-Awareness-2018-Report.pdf>

instability. In the aftermath of the crisis, the Chiang Mai Initiative¹⁶ was agreed in 2000 between ASEAN and its Plus Three partners, namely the People's Republic of China, Japan and the Republic of Korea, to manage regional short-term liquidity problems and to strengthen resilience against any future recurrences of the crisis. This initiative was expanded into the Chiang Mai Initiative Multilateralization in 2009 and has led to, among others, the creation of the ASEAN+3 Macroeconomic Research Office or AMRO¹⁷.

Terrorism and violent extremism have also been one of ASEAN's biggest challenges, which were exemplified by terrorist attacks in the region since the early 2000s. Following the attacks on the Twin Towers in New York in September 2001, the ASEAN Leaders issued the *ASEAN Declaration on Joint Action to Counter Terrorism* in November 2001, which then led to the adoption of the *ASEAN Convention on Counter-Terrorism (ACCT)*¹⁸ at the 12th ASEAN Summit in 2007. The ACCT is complemented by the *ASEAN Comprehensive Plan of Action on Counter Terrorism*¹⁹, which was adopted in 2017. The two documents serve as a framework for forging collaboration and coordination not only within ASEAN but also between ASEAN and other relevant regional and international entities to address terrorism and violent extremism.

Some of the more recent challenges, along with measures that ASEAN has undertaken to address them, include:

- The digitalisation of society, which accelerated during the COVID-19 pandemic, has generated social and economic disruption due to the limited availability of digital infrastructure and digital-related skills. To this end, ASEAN has identified specific concrete steps to develop an enabling environment for a robust ASEAN digital economy and to ensure that the region emerges stronger from the disruptions of COVID-19, including the *Consolidated Strategy on the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) for ASEAN*²⁰ and the development of the ASEAN

¹⁶ The Chiang Mai Initiative (CMI) is the first regional currency swap arrangement launched by the ASEAN+3 countries in May 2000 at an annual meeting of the Asian Development Bank to address the short-term liquidity difficulties in the region and to supplement the existing international financial arrangements. Please see: <https://aric.adb.org/initiative/chiang-mai-initiative>, accessed on 28 November 2023.

¹⁷ Established in 2011 by ASEAN+3 Finance Ministers, the ASEAN+3 Macroeconomic Research Office (AMRO) is an international organisation that aims to contribute to the macroeconomic and financial resilience and stability of the region through surveillance, supporting regional financing arrangements, providing technical assistance, serving as a regional knowledge hub and facilitating ASEAN+3 financial cooperation. <https://amro-asia.org/>, accessed on 28 November 2023.

¹⁸ The Declaration is available in this link: <https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/2001-ASEAN-Declaration-on-Joint-Action-to-Counter-Terrorism.pdf>.

¹⁹ The Plan of Action is available in this link: <https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/ACPoA-on-CT-Adopted-by-11th-AMMTC.pdf>.

²⁰ The document is available in this link: <https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/6.-Consolidated-Strategy-on-the-4IR-for-ASEAN.pdf>. This Consolidated Strategy on the 4IR for ASEAN identifies three focus areas, namely Technological Governance and Security; Digital Economy and Digital Transformation of Society. To operationalise the key focus areas, the Strategy proposes three immediate, medium-term, and longer-term priorities for cooperation.

*Digital Economy Framework Agreement (DEFA)*²¹, which aims to progress digital transformation and embrace new technologies in a comprehensive manner.

- The Asia-Pacific region is particularly vulnerable to the effects of climate change, which have manifested in the form of hydro-meteorological disasters. With initiatives such as the circular economy and carbon neutrality, as well as the establishment of an ASEAN Centre for Climate Change, efforts are underway towards the creation of an ASEAN Community that is sustainable, energy efficient and climate resilient.
- While the COVID-19 situation in ASEAN continues to improve with the region's accelerated reopening, the possibility of another public health emergency or severe communicable disease cannot be dismissed nor disregarded. In this regard, ASEAN has collectively agreed to establish an ASEAN Centre for Public Health Emergencies and Emerging Diseases (ACPHEED), which would advance the region's preparedness and response to future public health emergencies. Furthermore, ASEAN has developed the *ASEAN Comprehensive Framework on Care Economy (ACFCE)*²² to protect different segments of populations and sectors through care work and the care economy.

All of these challenges are taking place in the context of increased strategic competition between global powers, with the looming possibility of the bifurcation of the world into separate spheres of influence including an arms race developing, not only in terms of conventional or even nuclear weapons but in regard to cyber capabilities. It must then be emphasised that Southeast Asia should not be an arena for major power-rivalry, and ASEAN must ensure that it does not become a proxy to any party or parties while protecting and advancing its interests in relations with external parties and the wider international community.

ASEAN has also lent its voice to regional and global issues through the issuance of joint statements at the Leaders and ministerial levels throughout the years. Statements on the developments in regional hotspots such as the Korean Peninsula, the Middle East, the Taiwan Strait and Ukraine, on terror attacks that occurred in and outside ASEAN, and on natural disasters are a reflection of ASEAN's position and commitment to global and regional peace and stability.²³

²¹ DEFA is a cooperation framework that provides a comprehensive roadmap to empower businesses and stakeholders in the ASEAN region, through accelerating trade growth, increasing interoperability, creating a safe digital environment, and increasing MSME participation. The development of DEFA was launched pursuant to the issuance of Leaders' Statement on the Development of the ASEAN Digital Economy Framework Agreement (DEFA) in September 2023. The Statement is available in this link: <https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/Leaders-Statement-DIGITAL-ECONOMY-FRAMEWORK-AGREEMENT.pdf>.

²² The document is available in this link: <https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/8.-Final-ASEAN-Comprehensive-Framework-on-Care-Economy.-20-Oct-2021.pdf>.

²³ The Statements can be found on the ASEAN website.

ASEAN Beyond 2025

As we move closer to the end date of *the ASEAN Community Vision 2025*²⁴, ASEAN is in the process of developing *the ASEAN Community Vision 2045*. Building upon the current ASEAN Community Vision 2025, the ASEAN Community Vision 2045 shall ensure that ASEAN is adaptive, agile, proactive, and responsive to harness opportunities and overcome emerging and future challenges in an increasingly uncertain and turbulent geostrategic, geo-economic and socio-cultural environment.

The ASEAN Community Vision 2045, which was noted by the 43rd ASEAN Summit in September 2023, is a long-term, 20-year document situating ASEAN in the context of megatrends anticipated to shape its strategic environment. *The ASEAN Community Vision 2045* underscores that these megatrends also present inherent opportunities for regional cooperation which can be leveraged from ASEAN-led initiatives.

One such opportunity is the full implementation of *Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP)*²⁵, which is a priority in ASEAN's external economic relations. As the largest free trade agreement in the world, it will firm the position of ASEAN as one of the poles in the global economy. The RCEP is intended to further liberate market access among Parties in the region in the areas of goods, services and investment, with gradual unification of the rules of origin, customs procedures and technical standards. In addition, the RCEP maintains an open and inclusive mechanism in which interested economies can accede to it even though they did not participate in the negotiations.

ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific

Excellencies

Ladies and Gentlemen

Background²⁶

²⁴ Vision 2025 is available in this link: <https://www.asean.org/wp-content/uploads/images/2015/November/aec-page/ASEAN-Community-Vision-2025.pdf>.

²⁵ The Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) is a free trade agreement (FTA) between the ten 10 Member States of and its five FTA partners (Australia, China, Japan, New Zealand and Republic of Korea). The RCEP was conceived at the 2011 ASEAN Summit in Bali, Indonesia, while negotiations formally launched during the 2012 ASEAN Summit in Cambodia. The Treaty was formally signed on 15 November 2020 at the virtual ASEAN Summit hosted by Vietnam. For the first ten ratifying countries, the trade pact took effect on 1 January 2022. <https://asean.org/our-communities/economic-community/integration-with-global-economy/the-regional-comprehensive-economic-partnership-rcep/>, accessed on 28 November 2023.

²⁶ This section is mainly sourced from the "ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific", https://asean.org/asean2020/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/ASEAN-Outlook-on-the-Indo-Pacific_FINAL_22062019.pdf, accessed on 29 November 2023.

The geo-strategic and geo-economics dynamics increasingly give evidence on the shift of the world's economic centre of gravity from a North Atlantic axis to the Indo-Pacific region.²⁷ It is hence timely for us to discuss the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific, as an important initiative by ASEAN Leaders that reinforces ASEAN's position in its role of maintaining peace, security, stability and prosperity through dialogue and building mutual trust among nations in the Indo-Pacific region. Under *the ASEAN Community Vision 2045*, the AOIP has also been identified as one of the opportunities for regional cooperation which can be leveraged from ASEAN-led initiatives.

For decades, the Asia-Pacific and Indian Ocean have been among the most dynamic regions as well as centres of economic growth of the world. As a result, these two regions continue to experience geopolitical and geostrategic shifts, which present both opportunities and challenges. The regions' economic growth opens up possibilities of cooperation to alleviate poverty and elevate living standards of millions of people. Yet on the other hand, the rise of economic and military powers requires avoiding the deepening of mistrust, miscalculation, and other patterns of behaviour based on a zero-sum game.

ASEAN lies in the centre of these dynamic regions, and it is therefore in the interest of the ASEAN Member States to lead the shaping of their economic and security architecture and ensure that such dynamics will continue to bring about peace, security, stability and prosperity not only for the peoples in the Southeast Asian nations, but also in the wider Asia-Pacific and Indian Ocean regions or the Indo-Pacific.

Having been engaged in the development of an inclusive regional architecture for decades, ASEAN needs to consistently come up with its collective leadership in forging and shaping the vision for closer cooperation in the Indo-Pacific and to continue to maintain ASEAN's central role in the evolving regional architecture in Southeast Asia and its surrounding regions. At the same time, ASEAN also needs to continue being an honest broker within the strategic environment of competing interests.

Faced with this situation, ASEAN Leaders have agreed to further discuss an initiative that reinforces the ASEAN-centered regional architecture, namely, ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP). This Outlook, adopted by the ASEAN Leaders at the 34th ASEAN Summit in June 2019 in Bangkok, is not aimed at creating new mechanisms or replacing existing ones; rather, it is an Outlook intended to enhance ASEAN's

²⁷ See among others: NATO, "Regional Perspectives Reports on the Indo-Pacific", <https://www.act.nato.int/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/regional-perspectives-2022-07-v2-1.pdf> Event Report of Asia-Europe Foundation, European Parliament in ASEAN and Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, "Indo-Pacific: A New Global Centre of Gravity?" all accessed on 29 November 2023 <https://www.kas.de/documents/272317/12435792/Event+Report+23-06-27+Indo-Pacific+Panel+EYE23.pdf/60878b2e-8b6b-5234-e861-05c8485f8e77?t=1687966872595>,

Community building process and to strengthen and give new momentum for existing ASEAN-led mechanisms to better face challenges and seize opportunities arising from the current and future regional and global environments. Moreover, the Outlook is intended to be inclusive in terms of ideas and proposals.

The Outlook envisages ASEAN Centrality as the underlying principle for the promotion of cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region, with ASEAN-led mechanisms, such as the East Asia Summit (EAS), as one of the platforms for dialogue and implementation of the Indo-Pacific cooperation. Furthermore, ASEAN may also seek to develop, where appropriate, cooperation with other regional and sub-regional mechanisms in the Asia-Pacific and Indian Ocean regions on specific areas of common interests to complement the relevant initiatives.

In line with decades of ASEAN's role in developing and shaping regional architecture in Southeast Asia and beyond, and with ASEAN's norms and principles as stipulated in the ASEAN Charter and other relevant ASEAN documents, the Outlook views the wider Asia-Pacific and Indian Ocean regions, or the "Indo-Pacific", not as contiguous territorial spaces but ones that are closely integrated and interconnected, with ASEAN at the centre and playing a strategic role. Through this Outlook, ASEAN envisages an Indo-Pacific region of dialogue and cooperation instead of rivalry as well as a region of development and prosperity for all. Furthermore, ASEAN recognises the importance of the maritime domain in the evolving regional architecture.

Objectives and Principles of AOIP²⁸

The ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific is meant to support and provide ballast for the current dynamism in the Indo-Pacific region, which should be viewed from the perspective of encouraging progress. As such, it should also provide added value to the existing regional arrangements. Therefore, the Outlook is aimed at: (1) offering an outlook to guide cooperation in the region; (2) helping to promote an enabling environment for peace, stability and prosperity in the region in addressing common challenges, upholding the rules-based regional architecture, and promoting closer economic cooperation, and thus strengthen confidence and trust; (3) enhancing ASEAN's Community building process and further strengthening the existing ASEAN-led mechanisms, such as the EAS; and (4) implementing existing and exploring other ASEAN priority areas of cooperation, including maritime cooperation, connectivity, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and economic and other possible areas of cooperation.

In order for the Indo-Pacific to continue evolving as a region of dialogue and cooperation, the Outlook reaffirms that ASEAN's sacrosanct principles are the bedrock of cooperation. These are (1) ASEAN Centrality, (2) Openness, (3) transparency, (4)

²⁸ *Ibid.*

inclusivity, (5) rules-based, (6) good governance, (7) respect for sovereignty, (7) non-intervention, (8) equality, (9) mutual respect, mutual trust and mutual benefit, (10) respect for international law such as the UN Charter, UNCLOS, ASEAN Charter among others as well as principles enshrined in the TAC such as peace settlement of disputes, renunciation of the threat or use of force and promotion of the rule of law.

Implementation of and Mainstreaming the AOIP within ASEAN-led Mechanism

Since its adoption by the ASEAN Leaders in 2019, the AOIP has been gaining momentum as the guide in ASEAN's engagement in the wider Asia-Pacific and Indian Ocean regions. The AOIP stipulates that ASEAN shall undertake cooperation with its external partners on four priority areas, namely (1) maritime cooperation; (2) connectivity; (3) UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 2030; and (4) economic and other possible areas of cooperation.²⁹

It is worth noting that since its emergence, an increasing number of ASEAN's External Partners are recognising the AOIP as a framework of their cooperation with ASEAN. Along this line, the 56th AMM in July 2023 reaffirmed the AOIP as a key instrument of ASEAN to engage external partners and welcomed their support to the AOIP, including through the issuance of joint statements and indication of concrete projects to be undertaken. Such would include (i) *ASEAN-China Joint Statement on Mutually Beneficial Cooperation on the AOIP*³⁰; (ii) *Joint Statement of the 24th ASEAN-ROK Summit on Cooperation on the AOIP*³¹; and (iii) *ASEAN-US Leaders' Statement on Cooperation on the AOIP*³², which were issued during the 43rd ASEAN Summit and Related Meetings in September 2023. Previously, ASEAN have also issued joint statements with other partners, which include India and Japan.

The acceptance of the AOIP by ASEAN's external partners in their engagement with ASEAN is a manifestation of ASEAN's power to influence regional affairs and diplomacy, which enables ASEAN to shape the regional architecture and serve as the centripetal force by bringing various players together in an inclusive manner and with the spirit of cooperation. The focus on concrete and practical projects will also help to make ASEAN more adaptive and responsive in addressing the challenges that it faces. Likewise, the facts that the AOIP shares commonalities with Partners' strategies on the Indo-Pacific, including the *European Union (EU) Indo-Pacific Strategy*, which could serve as a basis for ASEAN's closer cooperation with its partners.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ The Statement is available in this link: <https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/Final-ASEAN-China-Joint-Statement-on-Mutually-Beneficial-Cooperation-on-the-ASEAN-Outlook-on-the-Indo-Pacific.pdf>.

³¹ The Statement is available in this link: <https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/Final-Joint-Statement-of-the-24th-ASEAN-ROK-Summit.pdf>.

³² The Statement is available in this link: <https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/ASEAN-US-Leaders-Statement-on-AOIP-FINAL-formatting.pdf>.

The effective implementation of the AOIP has been highlighted as the third pillar of Indonesia's priorities for its ASEAN Chairmanship in 2023. The AOIP's strategic objective of building trust and serving as a paradigm of inclusive collaboration will be operationalised through identification and promotion of economic and connectivity projects with various partners. One of the concrete and tangible ways to mainstream the implementation the AOIP was through the convening of the ASEAN-Indo-Pacific Forum (AIPF) which was held on 5-6 September 2023 at the sidelines of the 43rd ASEAN Summit.

The AIPF showcased infrastructure projects to implement the AOIP under four sub-themes: (1) Green Infrastructure and Resilient Supply Chain; (2) Inclusive Digital Transformation; (3) Sustainable and Innovative Financing; and (4) Creative Economy. The AIPF was open to public and private sector participants from ASEAN Member States, ASEAN External Partners, countries from the Indian Ocean and South Pacific regions, and representatives from international financial institutions as well as international organisations including the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) and Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA). More than 2,500 participants from 51 countries took part in the AIPF, including 185 investors which tabled more than USD 40 billion in potential projects.

Forging Closer Cooperation between ASEAN and Italy

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ASEAN values Italy as an important partner given its long-standing relations and engagements with ASEAN and its Member States, as well as under the ASEAN-European Union (EU) framework.

Following the conferment of the status of Development Partner of ASEAN on Italy on 9 September 2020, ASEAN and Italy continue to institutionalise and substantiate its partnership. ASEAN and Italy have exerted efforts to implement *ASEAN-Italy Development Partnership: Practical Cooperation Areas 2022-2026*³³, which serves as an overall framework and guide for practical cooperation between ASEAN and Italy. Both sides have been pro-active in substantiating ASEAN-Italy partnership and in putting forward a number of project proposals and cooperative activities in the areas of culture, people-to-people exchange, agriculture, transnational crimes, and environment, among others.

With this progress, there remain tremendous opportunities for closer collaboration between both sides. On the political security front, we welcome cooperation in the areas of maritime security, transnational crimes, cybersecurity and counterterrorism. In the economic sphere, we encourage Italy to explore cooperation on digital economy,

³³ The PCA is available in this link: <https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/ASEAN-Italy-PCA-2022-2026-adopted.pdf>.

particularly in digitalisation, renewable energy, green infrastructure, green growth, space technology, eco-and sustainable tourism, blue economy and smart agriculture. In the socio-cultural field, we look forward to enhance cooperation in the areas of climate action, people-to-people exchange and disaster management. Further, we also encourage Italy to support for the implementation of the Initiative for ASEAN Integration (IAI) *Work Plan IV*³⁴ and *ASEAN Master Plan on Connectivity 2025*³⁵.

When it comes to the Indo-Pacific, ASEAN noted the *EU Indo-Pacific Strategy*³⁶ in 2021, which sets out the EU's intention to reinforce its strategic focus, presence and actions in the region of prime strategic importance to the EU interests. We take note that the Strategy states that the EU will engage with the ASEAN-led regional architecture as well as promote and pursue its objectives in its bilateral summits and at the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM). Conversely, the EU's support for ASEAN Centrality is reiterated in the Strategy and that the EU looks forward to the realisation of its new EU-ASEAN Strategic Partnership.

With its support for the 2021 EU Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific, we acknowledge Italy's contribution in all seven priority areas of the EU Strategy³⁷, including through the undertaking of activities in the Indo-Pacific with India³⁸, Japan³⁹,

³⁴ The Initiative for ASEAN Integration (IAI), launched at the Fourth ASEAN Informal Summit in Singapore in 2000, aims to narrow the divide within ASEAN and enhance ASEAN competitiveness as a region. The IAI helps ASEAN newer Member States implement ASEAN commitments and agreements. Under the 2001 Ha Noi Declaration on Narrowing the Development Gap for Closer ASEAN Integration, the Foreign Ministers of ASEAN declared to narrow the development gap within ASEAN and between ASEAN and the rest of the world for the sake of dynamic and sustained growth of the region and prosperity of ASEAN. The Ha Noi Declaration called for special assistance to Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar and Viet Nam (CLMV) countries, to further regional integration in order to narrow the development gap within ASEAN. The IAI Workplan IV is available in this link: <https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/IAI-workplan-IV.pdf>.

³⁵ The Master Plan on ASEAN Connectivity (MPAC) 2025 aims to achieve a seamlessly and comprehensively connected and integrated ASEAN that will promote competitiveness, inclusiveness, and a greater sense of Community, through 15 initiatives across five strategic areas. The document is available in this link: <https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/47.-December-2017-MPAC2025-2nd-Reprint-.pdf>.

³⁶ Please see: <https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/2023/EU%20Indo-pacific.pdf>; accessed on 29 November 2023.

³⁷ Sustainable and Inclusive Prosperity; Green Transition; Ocean Governance; Digital Governance and Partnerships; Connectivity; Security and Defence; and Human Security

³⁸ The Prime Minister of Italy, H.E. Giorgia Meloni, chose India for her bilateral first trip to Asia. PM Meloni's meeting with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi in March 2023 resulted in the elevation of the India-Italy relationship to the level of strategic partnership. The two sides concluded a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on defence cooperation with a focus on manufacturing, co-production, co-design and co-innovation as well as military exercises in the naval domain.

³⁹ Italy's Defence Minister Guido Crosetto visited Tokyo in March 2023 to strengthen the strategic partnership and technological and industrial cooperation between the two sides, including on the joint project for the development of a sixth-generation combat aircraft – the Global Combat Air Program (GCAP) – announced by Japan, the United Kingdom and Italy at the end of 2022.

some countries in Southeast Asia⁴⁰, as well as the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) and the Pacific Island Forum (PIF)⁴¹.

In view of intensifying its further assistance in the Indo-Pacific, we encourage Italy to support the implementation of the AOIP, by undertaking practical cooperation with ASEAN in the four key areas of cooperation outlined in the Outlook. This could be done through practical projects to promote mutual trust, mutual respect, and mutual benefit through ASEAN-led mechanisms, thereby contributing to the maintenance and promotion of peace, stability and prosperity in the region.

*Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,*

I hope that our discussion today provides you with a deeper understanding of the strategic values of ASEAN and the Indo-Pacific region, especially for ASEAN's external partners such as Italy, and how, through the AOIP and other ASEAN-led mechanisms and initiatives, including the ASEAN-Italy development partnership mechanism, ASEAN hopes to further strengthen its central role in maintaining peace, security, stability and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific region and beyond.

Thank you.



⁴⁰ Between May and June 2023, the Italian offshore patrol vessel Francesco Morosini carried out different activities in Southeast Asia, making port calls to Ho Chi Minh City and Bangkok, participating in defence exhibitions in Malaysia and Singapore, and notably taking part for the first time in the Indonesia-led multinational search and rescue "Komodo-23" exercise.

⁴¹ Italy has provided support for Indo-Pacific regional organisations in their actions aimed at improving the governance of the seas, namely through its Dialogue Partnership with PIF and IORA.