

EU-ASEAN YOUNG LEADERS FORUM: INTER-REGIONAL COOPERATION IN PRACTICE

BY G. TERCOVICH

On 26-27 February 2018, our GEM Fellow Giulia Tercovich joined the young professionals that met in Brussels for the EU-ASEAN Young Leaders Forum. The event was organised in the context of the 40th Anniversary of the EU-ASEAN Dialogue Relations with the aim of submitting informal recommendations to the 22nd ASEAN-EU Ministerial Meeting that will take place later this year in Europe.



Ms Federica Mogherini, High Representative of the EU for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy

Following the 21st ASEAN-EU Ministerial Meeting (AEMM) held in Bangkok on October 2016, the European Parliament suggested to organise an ASEAN-EU Young Leaders Exchange Programme to increase engagement from young stakeholders in the EU-ASEAN relationship. The purpose of the forum was to encourage greater interaction between the two regions, including discussing the further evolution and upgrading of EU-ASEAN relations. The forum represented the opportunity for young leaders from the EU and ASEAN to exchange ideas and build relationships in order to support EU-ASEAN relations in the future. The Young Leaders Forum served this purpose and thus has the potential to make an important contribution to the shaping of the inter-regional partnership.

On the first day participants reflected on what the partnership between EU and ASEAN has achieved so far and discussed ideas for strengthening the inter-regional cooperation. The debate was organised in three sections, dedicated to political and security issues, economy, trade and business exchanges, as well as to people-to-people contacts. Each debate was kicked-off by two introductory statements provided by ASEAN and EU representatives. After that, the floor was open to comments, remarks and statements by the over 30 participants coming from the two regions. The different backgrounds and expertise, as well as the friendly environment, made the discussion very lively and passionate.

A set of recommendations was provided for each of the topic discussed. On political and security issues, young leaders suggested increasing the focus of the cooperation of human security, launching joint initiatives on cyber security and de-radicalisations of returning foreign fighters, and further promoting the cooperation on the management of disasters. On issues related to economy, trade and business exchanges, the key recommendations proposed by young leaders focused on the need to develop effective and meaningful communication strategy of trade and economic activities (especially on the FTAs), on the necessity to sustain network of (young) entrepreneurs and SMEs across the two regions and on the vital importance of looking for ways in which economic growth can be encouraged without harming future generations. Finally, on people-to-people contacts young leaders agreed that the

knowledge and awareness of coming together should come early in the learning process. They proposed that more history and content regarding other regions should be included in the curriculum of formal education. In addition to this a set of initiatives were also proposed from the launch of inter-regional sport event (including e-sports) to the establishment (or reinforcement) of study, professional or artistic exchange programmes.

During the second day young leaders participated in a public debate on 'EU-ASEAN relations: the next forty years'. The debate started by exchanging on the possible lessons learned responding to the unexpected geopolitical transformations and uncertainties that interested the two regions. Interventions from Le Luong Minh, Secretary General of ASEAN from 2013 to 2017 and from Reinhard Bütikofer, Member of European Parliament and rapporteur on EU-ASEAN relations, made the debate truly informative and dynamic.

At the end of the day EU and ASEAN young representatives had the opportunity for a meeting with the High Representatives of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice President of the EU Commission (HR/VP) Federica Mogherini. During the one-hour meeting young leaders presented the set of recommendations produced and had the opportunity to informally discuss them with HR/VP Mogherini and its team. The very positive and constructive meeting was the best way to conclude two days of intense and productive work.

As collective regional actors the EU and ASEAN appear to be a natural partners allowing an open inter-regional exchange of ideas and practices on a broad range of issues. Indeed, cooperation between ASEAN and the EU has been progressing through existing dialogue mechanism, but initiatives such as the EU-ASEAN Young Leaders Forum, and more in general the involvement of young professionals in the debate should be encouraged and it should become a regular practice. Beyond the set of recommendations produced, the forum represented also the opportunity to meet and discussed current and topical issues with colleagues coming from both regions and to start a network of like-minded people that will hopefully continue producing relevant work in the hope that the cooperation between ASEAN and the EU will continue growing.



Family photo at the Forum

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