# ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS (ASEAN) AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF REGIONAL ECONOMIC COOPERATION - PARTNERSHIP WITH RUSSIA

## Hendra MANURUNG\*

Abstract: This study focuses on the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and its economic relations with Russia by applying economic cooperation in Southeast Asia. Russia began intensively establishing regional cooperation with the ASEAN two decades ago and officially became an ASEAN dialogue partner in 1996. At the 2018 high-level meeting, the ASEAN and Russia agreed to promote partnership by establishing a strategic partnership. In early August 2018, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov inaugurated the Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation to the ASEAN, Russia's permanent representative office to the ASEAN also doubles as Russia's diplomatic headquarters. In the era of the COVID-19 pandemic, Russia has contributed to cooperation in handling the global pandemic, not only improving in the fields of anti-terrorism and anti-extremism. The qualitative approach is literature-based and neoliberal in nature. Russian cooperation with the ASEAN provides strategic interest in the world's busiest regions to open export markets to Central Asia. These challenging close relations are perceived as optimistic by the ASEAN member states. Indonesia benefits more from trade with Russia than Russia itself. Russian products marketed in Indonesia consist of cars and machinery. Products have cheaper substitutes than in Russia. Meanwhile, for Indonesia, consumer products such as palm oil and other consumer goods are still challenging to find product substitutes for in Russia. This paper concludes that ASEAN and Indonesia need to take advantage of the temporary momentum of Russia's presence to overcome the boosting competition in the Asia-Pacific region, especially during and postpandemic.

*Keywords:* ASEAN, Russia, strategic partnership, Southeast Asia, Indonesia.

<sup>\*</sup> Lecturer, International Relations Department, Padjadjaran University, Bandung, West Java, Indonesia. E-mail: hendra19001@mail.unpad.ac.id

# **INTRODUCTION**

The ASEAN and Russia's longstanding partnership is a pillar of stability. security, and peace in Southeast Asia. Obviously, this raises the question of why and how, since the 2000s, Russian policy-makers have expanded their global politics and foreign policy orientation to reach a number of countries in the Southeast Asian region. In research by Tsygankov et al. (2022, p. 68), he describes the crisis of modern international relations theory and assesses the prospects of political realism for developing a nationally oriented theory in Russia. The realism approach contributes to the development of such a theory. Like it or not, the national idea should not be confined to the country's survival and security but should cover the national understanding of freedom, values. and development resources continuously. The Kremlin sees a number of opportunities for developing sustainable and synergistic economic, political, social, cultural, and defense cooperation with the ASEAN. Russia has changed its foreign policy strategy from West to East, particularly in optimizing Southeast Asia's economic progress with the ASEAN. The Soviet Union during the Cold War rarely interacted with a number of countries in Southeast Asia (Adigapa, 2019, p. 2), Russia's relations with the West took a turn for the worse when the Crimea problem emerged internationally in late 2014. Thereafter, the intense rivalry between the US and China in the region will widen even further. Russia's commitment and support for ASEAN centrality and the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific in October 2021 was timely (Ministry of State Secretariat of Indonesia, 2022). The ASEAN-Russia strategic partnership celebrated its 25th anniversary in 2021, during which the Indonesian government encouraged the strengthening of mutual cooperation in the health sector, particularly in dealing with the pandemic and economic recovery (Indonesia Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2021). Further, Collins (2012, p. 313) stated that since the end of the Cold War, and particularly in the last decade, there has been a generating interest in security threats that emerge from intra or interstate war but a host of transnational threats to human well-being and state capacity. Indeed, there is a consequence of these threats that could emerge along with the state cooperation in the region. These challenges should be responded to quickly and timely. There are considerable increases in the threats to individuals and nation-states, as shown by trans-national security concerns. Russia received the status of an ASEAN partner in the framework of a regional dialogue during the meeting of the ministers of foreign affairs of this organization on July 20-21, 1996, in Jakarta (Tass, 2016). In 2004, Russia joined the fundamental document governing relations between the ASEAN and its dialogue partners, the 1976 Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation in Southeast Asia (Bali Treaty). Both sides urged practical and concrete cooperation in the economic sector in order to achieve the UN SDGs 2030 in maritime and connectivity. The ASEAN's concrete cooperation with Russia should be maintained and carried out, which will later foster a habit of mutually beneficial cooperation and can eliminate the culture of competition. A number of the ASEAN countries have forged strong cooperation with Russia for 30 years. Moscow's relations with Southeast Asia reflect how strategic the region is for a number of policy-makers of the global major-power countries, such as the United States (US), China, and Russia. Furthermore, according to Leifer (1999, p. 25), any attempt to deal with the rise of a potential hegemon, and the consequent disruption of the balance of power by non-military means was highly problematic. In research by Beeson and Stubbs (2012, p. 1), they identified that Asian regionalism is still taking shape and many of its key aspects are highly contested. Both scholars found that Asian regionalism is generally thought to have Western origins. However, most Asian populations accept that the borders of the various regions of the continent are challenged simultaneously by some of the countries. Regionalization is the process through which people and groups within a broadly defined geographic area are connected by tangible patterns of transnational transactions, such as family ties, migration patterns, trade, and capital movements. Indeed, each region has its own unique geographical characteristics.

The ASEAN cooperation with Russia started in 1991 (Indonesia Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2021). Russia has officially become the ASEAN Dialogue Partner at the 29th AMM/PMC in Jakarta in July 1996. The ASEAN-Russia comprehensive cooperation was only formed in 2005 (Directorate General of International Trade Negotiation, 2018), namely since the signing of 1) the Joint Declaration of the Heads of State/Government of ASEAN and the Russian Federation on Progressive and Comprehensive Partnership, 2) the Comprehensive Program of Action to Promote Cooperation between the ASEAN and the Russian Federation 2005-2015, and 3) the Agreement between the Governments of the Member Countries of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and the Government of the Russian Federation on Economic and Development Cooperation. In addition, it is certain that Russia's cooperation with the ASEAN will create opportunities for closer cooperation with Indonesia in order to open export markets to Central Asia. The ASEAN and Russia Trade and Investment Work Program Post 2017 has been developed based on the ASEAN-Russia Trade and Investment Cooperation Roadmap. It was further endorsed by the Ministers on October 12, 2012, and revised in 2017 in order to enhance economic cooperation to address emerging challenges and opportunities for trade and investment between the ASEAN and Russia (Directorate General of International Trade Negotiation, 2018). Further, this Roadmap covers: 1) Two-way trade and investment flow improvement between the ASEAN and Russia; 2) Supporting ASEAN's deepening economic integration; 3) Facilitating broader economic integration between the ASEAN and Russia as well as within the ASEAN; and 4) Contributing to the multilateral trading system sustainably. Further, Russia's close relationship with the 10member region was reflected in mid-June 2020 in a Plan for Multilateral Cooperation with the ASEAN, which was conveyed in a virtual meeting between ASEAN Foreign Ministers and Russia (Umar & Permana, 2020). In 2005, about 93 million Southeast Asian people lived below the US\$ 1.25-a-day poverty line and 221 million below the US\$ 2-a-day poverty line (ADB, 2009, p. 53). Meanwhile, according to research by Manurung (2021, p. 27), Indonesia still needs to focus its diplomatic resources, especially on strengthening defense diplomacy, so that strategic defense cooperation with Russia can be pursued optimally and sustainably. Further, a number of the ASEAN member countries fully supported strengthening partnerships with Russia in various fields following the opening of diplomatic representation for the association member countries in August 2017 in Jakarta (Putra, 2017). This was stated in the official statement of the 50th ASEAN Foreign Ministers Meeting in Manila, Philippines. Previously, in mid-May 2016 in Sochi, a number of heads of state or heads of government of the ASEAN met with President Vladimir Putin regarding the Russia-ASEAN Summit. At first, the ASEAN cooperation with Russia was only focused on foreign policy and security issues in the Southeast Asia region. Subsequently, the establishment of a Working Group on Trade and Investment Cooperation was initiated in 2002. This was followed by direct cooperation with the respective ministries and government agencies in the fields of energy procurement, agriculture, transportation, space, emergency, culture and tourism, as well as strategic defense-military concerns. The following documents are important for the ASEAN cooperation with Russia (Indonesia's Permanent Mission to ASEAN, 2018): 1) the Joint Declaration of the Heads of State/Government of ASEAN and the Russian Federation on Progressive and Comprehensive Partnership; 2) the Comprehensive Program of Action to Promote Cooperation between the ASEAN and the Russian Federation 2005-2015; 3) the Agreement between the Governments of the Member Countries of The Association of South East Asian Nations and the Government of The Russian Federation on Economic and Development Cooperation; and 4) the Roadmap on the Implementation of Comprehensive Program of Action to Promote Cooperation between the ASEAN and Russia 2005-2015. The development of the struggle for influence between the world's major powers in the international system reflects how the global structure has a pattern of continuous interdependence. The relationship between one issue and another and between one country and another has become an unavoidable reality. The long-running conflict between Ukraine and Russia has had an impact on the alignment of strategic interests among ASEAN member countries, as well as the expansion of US, Chinese, and Russian global interests in the Southeast Asian region. Moreover, Jakarta is viewed by the Kremlin as a regional influential power and can become a dominant regional actor in Southeast Asia (Manurung, 2021, p. 77). Russia and China reaffirm their commitment to consistently deepen the comprehensive partnership and strategic interaction in all areas (Kremlin.ru, 2022). The illegitimate sanctions policy implemented by the West has made the global economic situation more complicated. Both countries agreed to expand cooperation in energy, finance, the manufacturing industry, transport and other areas, as well as further development of military and defense cooperation. At present, in the midst of the ongoing conflict between Ukraine and Russia which began at the end of February 2022, the conflict in the Eastern European region has not been resolved yet due to the inability of regional and international organizations to find a peaceful resolution for both countries. This is also becoming increasingly uncertain as the COVID-19 pandemic continues and the rivalry between the US and China intensifies. The exclusion of the Russian Federation from any global and regional peace agreement will not be successful and smoothly. Sergey Naryshkin, the head of the Russian Foreign Intelligence Service, on June 11, 2022, in Moscow stated (RT News, 2022): "Russia is a traditional guarantor of international peace and security. No peace, neither global nor regional, can be solid, stable, or lasting without Russia". The sanction and cancellation of Russia's global influence are attempts by Western countries to implement liberal totalitarian regimes. Indeed, these facts have reflected Western leaders' obsession with being the center of the world and making other nations bend to their will.

# ASEAN-RUSSIA RELATIONS: SEEKING MUTUAL COOPERATION

Since 2016, Russia, as one of the world's superpowers, has been interested in approaching a number of Southeast Asian countries with the aim of improving sustainable and measurable economic and political relations. There are 10 (ten) Southeast Asian countries that have been members of the ASEAN regional organization since its establishment on August 8, 1967 in Bangkok, Thailand (The ASEAN Secretariat, 2020). President Putin's view on strengthening ties with the ASEAN member-states has always been and remains one of the priorities of Russia's policy (Kremlin.ru, 2022). Indonesia is

recognized as the ASEAN's largest economy and the leader of the Southeast Asian countries with high economic growth. The growth of the regional economy is expected to support global economic stability. According to research from Manurung et al. (2021, p. 94), Russia is a non-traditional market for Indonesia's main products in the Eurasian region. Therefore, Indonesian products in Russian markets and supermarkets are quite rare. In 2021, both sides will celebrate the 30th anniversary of official diplomatic relations. These relations, as documented in the Joint Statement adopted at the Russia-ASEAN Summit in Singapore in 2018, are of a truly strategic nature. ASEAN centrality and unity are supported by Russia continuously along with Russian active participation in various ASEAN-led mechanisms such as the East Asia Summit (EAS), the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), and the ASEAN Defense Ministers' Meeting Plus (ADMM-Plus), on various aspects of security cooperation such as addressing traditional and non-traditional threats and challenges that contribute to regional peace, security, and stability (ASEAN.org, 2021). Noticeably, for many years, it confirms the accumulated experience of practical cooperation and a solid package of agreements in the political, economic, social, humanitarian, and other spheres. It is important that not only governmental, but also business, public, and academic circles are involved in the interaction between Russia and the ASEAN. Further, the total population of all ASEAN countries is around 661.5 million people (O'Neill, 2021). The member countries of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) are Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam. For twenty years, intensive political and economic cooperation has been maintained by Moscow in Southeast Asia and with Jakarta in particular. Russia views Indonesia as an important strategic partner (Tass.ru, 2022). According to Lavrov (2006, p. 2), Russia's role in international politics will be boosted, acquiring new facets and due depth. This is one of the priority areas in efforts to bring the resource potential of Russia's foreign policy into line with the requirements of the times. Moscow has seen a multifaceted orientation as one of its key characteristics outlined in the Russian Foreign Policy Concept, endorsed by the president in June 2000. In fact, the international roles of all states are changing dynamically. A joint declaration on a developed and comprehensive partnership and a comprehensive program of action for cooperation between Russia and the ASEAN for 2005-2015 were signed as a result of the 1st Russia-ASEAN Summit, held on December 13, 2005, in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia (Tass, 2016). During the 2<sup>nd</sup> Summit, held on October 30, 2010, in Hanoi, Vietnam, a joint statement was also adopted, reflecting the common approaches of the parties to security and cooperation in the Asia and Pacific region. In 2013, the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation and the member states of the association approved the development of a new plan for the development of cooperation for the period from 2016 to 2020. In the strategic view of the countries involved in the SCS, this region certainly has political and economic value. However, apart from Indonesia's initiative to facilitate meeting forums, a bilateral approach is more dominant between China and the parties to the conflict in the South China Sea, except for Taiwan. Regionally, the four ASEAN countries, such as the Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia, and Brunei Darussalam, that are directly involved in the SCS conflict also tend to override the ASEAN regional mechanisms to resolve conflicts (Indonesian Institute of Sciences, 2018). In addition to the ASEAN implemented mechanism being increasingly absent in the SCS conflicts, it reflects that among the ASEAN member countries there are still wide differences in regional interests, which also show mutual suspicion or distrust between countries regarding the ASEAN's ability as a regional organization to resolve conflicts in accordance with its norms and values. Therefore, with the establishment of the ASEAN Community, particularly the ASEAN Political-Security Community in December 2015, the ASEAN should contribute proactively to maintaining regional peace and stability in the South China Sea and Southeast Asia regions.

Russia and the ASEAN began cooperation in 1991. In July 1996, Russia officially became the ASEAN Dialogue Partner at the 29<sup>th</sup> ASEAN Ministerial Meeting/Post-Ministerial Conference (AMM/PMC) in Jakarta (Koran Tempo, 2005). The establishment of the partnership was initiated and is based on Russia's status as a permanent member of the UN Security Council, which is expected to be utilized for the benefit of the ASEAN. Russia's large economic market potential, coupled with its wealth of natural resources, is also an opportunity for the ASEAN to further enhance relations with Russia in a number of development areas, namely: 1) Science and Technology; 2) Trade; 3) Resources; 4) Investment and Economy; 5) Environment, Tourism, and Culture, and 6) increasing people-to-people contact. The ASEAN's cooperation with Russia in the field of counterterrorism and the fight against extremism needs to be continued.

# RUSSIA'S INTEREST IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

The existence of the ASEAN as the only regional organization in Southeast Asia, which was founded on August 8, 1967, in Bangkok, Thailand, has always received positive support from a number of global major powers. D. A. Medvedev, President of the Russian Federation, met with the ASEAN leaders in October 2010 and stated as follows (Lavrov, 2010), "Many experts believe that

the 21st century will be the Asian century. Whether this is true or not, time will tell. But the importance and prospects of this area of the world and its special role in the destinies of our planet are beyond doubt. Perhaps it is here, in the Asia-Pacific region, that the outlines of a new world order are being laid today, a new image of the system of global governance is being formed". Russian President Vladimir Putin and Chinese President Xi Jinping are committed to strengthening cooperation with the ASEAN. Both globally powerful leaders considered the ASEAN to be a key element of the regional architecture. The ASEAN's strategic central role is supported continuously by Moscow and Beijing in promoting the strengthening of cooperation in East Asia, continuing to improve coordination on issues of strengthening cooperation with the ASEAN, and jointly promoting cooperation in the fields of public health, sustainable development, counterterrorism, and the prevention of transnational crime. This statement was emphasized by President Putin and President Xi Jinping in a joint declaration released after their bilateral meeting in Beijing in early February 2022 (Dikarma, 2022). In addition, Russia-ASEAN cooperation is also valuable as a multilateral effort in solving the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic for the last two years (Manurung, 2020, p. 1). The intense interactions between and amongst state and non-state actors are generated by globalization. However, in pursuit of its national interest, Indonesia is working very hard to further strengthen its bilateral trade relations with Russia for mutual benefit (Manurung, 2016, p. 1). Therefore, the ASEAN is a major element of the Asia-Pacific regional architecture, in which the role, contribution, and cooperation of Russia, China, and other countries with the ASEAN should be constantly strengthened and developed simultaneously. Additionally, Russia and China are also clearly opposed to the use of external forces that undermine security and stability in the territory of their mutual neighbors and intend to reject the interference of external powers in the internal affairs of sovereign countries under any pretext. Furthermore, regarding the pandemic, Russia opposes any attempt to politicize global health issues. Russia welcomes the cooperation of China and the World Health Organization (WHO) to establish the source of the new coronavirus infection and supports the reports of China and the WHO on this issue. The international community needs to come together to uphold a serious scientific approach to research on the origins of COVID-19. Sumsky et al. (2012, p. 2) identified that Russia is geographically and historically part of Asia and the Asia Pacific and has been a dialogue partner of the ASEAN since 1996. The barriers of distance and language prevented the ASEAN member nations and Russia from knowing each other and interacting much ten years ago. Since the end of 2014, the Russian confrontation with the West has been getting increasingly tense, especially over the Crimea issue. As Leo Tolstoy in War and Peace (in Russian Война и мир) stated (Karaganov, 2017, pp. 2-3): "A battle is won by those who firmly resolve to win it". Indeed, Russia would resolve and win any global and regional conflicts. Moscow considers the West's sanctions on Russia due to the Russian special military operation deployment to Ukraine as the US-led attempt to shift the responsibility for what is happening in the world food market (Kremlin.ru, 2022). Since 2014, the US alone has spent billions of dollars for this purpose, including supplies of arms and equipment and training of military specialists (Kremlin.ru, 2022). However, Western leaders deliberately blame Russia for emerging problems in the global market, such as food and energy availability issues. The development of Asian economies is characterized by rapid integration processes, both in sub-regional and pan-Asian formats, which often overlap and are mutually complementary. Distinctly, the SCS region has always been a stage for power competition since 2010 between China, the Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia, and Brunei. The five parties mentioned above are fighting for control over certain areas. Basically, the issue in the SCS area is not much different from other territorial disputes. However, the strategic position of the SCS later became a factor that drew public attention to this case. In the contemporary era, the emergence of the SCS issue is ultimately seen as a problem that arises because of a shift in the balance of power, namely when the US seeks optimally to preserve Washington's unilateral policy momentum after the Cold War, which has created a vacuum of a regional major power in Southeast Asia and boosted Beijing's international ambitions to show a military force presence in the region in line with the implementation and pursuance of the Belt and Road Initiative agenda sooner or later. Therefore, each ASEAN member country is certain to have a special strategy to deal with China's intentional behavior related to Chinese unilateral actions in the South China Sea. Although there are only four ASEAN member countries that are directly involved, the Declaration on the South China Sea, which was adopted by all ASEAN member countries, emphasized that in this case, the ASEAN stood together to show objections and rejection to China's aggressiveness. The authors use the perspective of structural realism as an analytical tool. The tendency of different strategies of each ASEAN member country towards China, related to the South China Sea issue, can be understood by explaining the motives behind this tendency. The Philippines and Vietnam tend to show a balancing strategy against China, then Cambodia, Laos, and Myanmar towards a bandwagon strategy, while the others do not show any skew. Russia and a number of ASEAN countries agreed to continue improving cooperation to build a peaceful, stable, and sustainable region at a virtual meeting in October 2021 (Wirawan, 2021). President Putin at the fourth Russia-ASEAN summit stated as follows, "We all support the expansion of equal and mutually beneficial cooperation in the vast Asia-Pacific space. We now have a real opportunity to intensify cooperation between Russia and the ASEAN, including in terms of strengthening stability and security, post-pandemic economic recovery, trade stimulation, and expansion of humanitarian contacts". In a joint statement after the summit. Russia and the ASEAN members agreed to explore the possibility of practical cooperation on issues of common interest between ASEAN, the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). In addition, the ASEAN member-states fully encourage and support the ASEAN's partnership with Russia to prevent the threat of regional security stability to the dynamics in the Indo-Pacific, which leads to the struggle for influence and the rivalry of world major-powers to intensify. Russia and the ASEAN have shared common interests and aspirations for many years in building and maintaining safe and prosperous Southeast Asian regions. The ASEAN and Russia still need to seek appropriate synergies in their development strategies to promote regional connectivity, in addition to increasing efforts to enhance maritime connectivity and develop sustainable and resilient logistics infrastructure and port management. Support for sustainable economic recovery in the region and closer people-to-people exchanges needs to be echoed and realized.

# CONCLUSIONS

Russia has positioned cooperation with the ASEAN as one of the orientations of national interests and the focus of strategic foreign policy in Southeast Asia. The existence of ASEAN has become a locomotive for carrying the progress of a peaceful and prosperous Asia-Pacific region with the aim of realizing a process of economic, political, social, and cultural closer cooperation. However, the ASEAN and Russian leaders must continue to emphasize that their strategic positions and prominent contributions to key global and regional issues are in many ways similar in order to achieve global peace and stability. The main thing is that both sides are in favor of developing equal and mutually beneficial cooperation in the vast Asia-Pacific region. There are plenty of opportunities to intensify cooperation between Russia and the ASEAN, including strengthening stability and security, post-epidemic economic recovery, stimulating trade, and expanding humanitarian support and contacts. The dialogue partnership between Russia and the ASEAN is steadily gaining momentum. Both sides intend to continue to consistently generate and empower strategic cooperation. It requires political will, long-standing friendship traditions, political trust, and a solid foundation for the parties' cooperation and mutual interest. Therefore, optimism should be maintained for the future of Russian-ASEAN cooperation.

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