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**Master's Thesis**

二十一世紀俄羅斯與東協國家的關係  
**RUSSIA'S RELATIONS WITH ASEAN COUNTRIES  
IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY**



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Abstract:

Modern international relations are characterized by the growing importance of regional integration structures. ASEAN being one of them, is comprised of ten Southeast Asian nations, which are trying to build a prominent three-dimension regional community. Russia has always been a large-scale power both on the global arena and within regional affairs, and with the recent rise of the Southeast Asia, it seeks for more influence with the region. This paper analyzes key trends, achievements and issues of the Russia-ASEAN strategic partnership in the field of political, economic and socio-cultural affairs, carefully highlighting existing obstacles and possibilities of the multilateral cooperation.

摘要:

現代國際關係的特點是區域一體化結構日益重要。東盟是其中之一，由十個東南亞國家組成，這些國家正在努力建立一個有意義的三維區域共同體。俄羅斯一直是全球舞台和地區關係的主要權力中心，隨著近期東南亞的崛起，它正在尋找增加其在該地區影響力的方法。本論文分析了俄羅斯-東協戰略夥伴關係在政治、經濟和社會文化領域的主要趨勢、成就和問題，仔細強調了多邊合作存在的障礙和機遇。

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# CHAPTER 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Research topic

Contemporary international relations are becoming more and more complex, and with such leading trends as globalization and political decentralization, the developments and progress of the various regional integration mechanisms became especially important not only to smaller states, which originally sought to unite their capabilities in order to balance against the great powers, but also to the regional leaders and hegemons as well. Nowadays it is hard to find a state, apart from the rogue ones, which are normally forcefully isolated, that does not participate in regional integration organization, one way or another. Thus, this area also attracts a lot of attention from the international relations researchers. This is especially acute in the field of Asia-Pacific studies, as the region has been on the rise since the beginning of the twenty-first century and have already become another prominent center of international affairs with its rapidly developing countries, as while as regional integration organizations of the Asia-Pacific region are always in the limelight or relevant research papers and analytics. Despite that traditionally Russia is often viewed as a Western, European country, it is undeniable that due to its size and ambitions, traditional interests and foreign policy history, Russia has always been represented in the Asian-Pacific region. This paper examines the issue of cooperation between Russia and ASEAN, one of the biggest and most distinguished mechanisms of interaction in the Southeast Asia.

As through the first years of the twenty-first century Asia-Pacific region has been the fastest growing in not only economic indicators, but also in terms of political integration,

creating multiple unique centers of cooperation, which have already fostered more and more inclusivity of the regional periphery, as well as promoting inter-regional cooperation. All of these factors, and namely various multilateral agreements, aimed at facilitating regional political cooperation, free trade, implementation of complex joint projects, unique cultural exchanges and promotion of social contacts, both business and tourism travelling, play the key and crucial part in making Asia-Pacific one of the new emerging center in the modern international affairs, and thus, making it attractive to Russia.

Having a very rich history of bilateral ties with many countries in the Asia-Pacific, Russia has been on the crossroads since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, as political issues such as inner political instability coupled with weak economy, and constant changes of foreign policy priorities and strategy ultimately brought Russia on the brink of the biggest political uncertainty in its history. However, nowadays it is safe to state that Russia has formed a firm and stable political course, and has gradually been developing its foreign policy accordingly. Since relations with traditional counterparts represented by European countries and the United States have faced many hurdles in the recent years, more and more attention was given to developing ties with other partners, mostly among the developing countries, including ones in the Asia-Pacific. Russia's range of interests in the region is quite wide, as traditionally leading issues of security, ensuring peace and stability are still present, but stopped dominating the rhetoric of the political elites. They are being progressively replaced by the economic agenda, as well as many other fields of cooperation.

This inevitably leads to the creation of circumstances, in which Russia and ASEAN have a lot of common interests, new ties and partnership forms can be emerged and evolved. Russia and ASEAN have great capabilities for cooperating numerous vital spheres, improving overall stability and prosperity of the Asia-Pacific, especially close to the borders of Russia and in the Southeast Asia, where ASEAN member states are located. Crucial factor



in this case is maintaining favorable conditions and amiable atmosphere of the relations, which have a great potential for growth and future expansion in various fields.

A significant premise of the success of Russia's relations with ASEAN is the fact that Russia has established and preserved very close partnership ties with the countries of the Asia-Pacific, as while as, being an initiator or an active participant in a variety of regional and inter-regional integration frameworks already, such as Shanghai Cooperation Organization, Eurasian Economic Union, BRICS, Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation forum (APEC), Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia (CICA), and some others.

As one of the leading regional organizations today, ASEAN cannot be neglected, and of course, has been irreplaceable in the scope of the Russian foreign policy, as relations with the Association are viewed in the long-term perspective, seeking ways to expand the partnership directly and with utilizing such mechanisms, as the East Asia Summit, which serves as a platform for a strategic dialogue on the regional development issues, the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), devoted to discussing political and security issues, the Meeting of the Ministers of Defense of the ASEAN member states with dialogue partners. This is formalized as one of the regional priorities in the Russian Foreign Policy Concept. On the other hand, ASEAN has been steadily growing in both political and economic weight, and establishing strategic dialogue partnership with major regional and global powers only supports its willingness to expand communication channels and diversify its cooperation, seeking rapprochement with new counterparts, such as Russia, which has many concepts and ideas both to offer and to get from the relations with the Association.

The relations between Russia and ASEAN has been developing gradually, but progressively, and overall, can be described as positive ones with major potential still hidden in them. Having achieved a status of a strategic partner, holding three official and one

commemorative summits, regular exchange visits and highest-level meetings, maintaining consistent formal dialogue between political and business elites, successfully implementing a number of joint projects and striking deals in such fields as energy, space exploration, military-technical sphere, combating terrorism and others, the partnership can be characterized in a very amiable and productive over the 25 years of its history. However, it still must be recognized that to date, its scope, especially in most promising and acute spheres, is strictly limited and full potential is still far from being feasible, even in the near future. Apart from direct hurdles and limitations which exist in the Russia-ASEAN ties, such as transportation system underdevelopment of the Russian Far East and general geographic remoteness of Russia's political center from the region, there are some other crucial factors hindering their further development, namely the fact, that since Russia made first steps to initiate the dialogue with ASEAN only in the 1990s, it was already lagging behind other strategic partners, like China, the United States, Japan, the European Union, Republic of Korea, who have achieved a partner status earlier and occupy higher positions in the trade structure of the Association.

Speaking of the discovering the true limits and ways to realize all the existing opportunities in Russia-ASEAN relations requires a massive and diligent work of the two parties, while adhering to the agreed principles, reassuring devotion to the current political course of mutual rapprochement and preserving the amiable atmosphere, which has been dominating the partnership since its early days. Another crucial aspect for the prospects of Russia-ASEAN ties is whether or not parties will be able to find mutual points of interests and find an appropriate solution, which will yield some positive results and be equally beneficial for both Russia and the Association. All in all, future seems bright, as the parties recognize that existing partnership is fruitful and mutually advantageous, and to date still seek for ways and means of expanding it.

## 1.2 Thesis rationale and research questions

As mentioned before, Asia-Pacific has been gaining more and more prominence in the international relations, and Russia has to maintain strong ties with countries of the region. Apart from established great powers and historical centers of force, such as China, which has been the closest and most important counterpart of Russia recently, it is also crucial to develop and maintain fruitful comprehensive cooperation in with other, smaller countries, which contain large potential for becoming future regional and global leaders in different spheres, and namely, the states of the Southeast Asia. The dominating force and largest player of the Southeast Asia is, however, not a single state, but rather a well-organized and institutionalized integration entity - ASEAN – Association of South East Asian Nations, which as for now, consists of 10 states: Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam.

Russia has always been trying to keep its presence in the Asia-Pacific, starting from early expeditions of the Russian Empire times up to the recent so-called “pivot to the East”, caused mainly by significant deterioration of the relations with the West. The rich and diversified history of relations with the Association member states, some of which have already passed a centenary, others grew into amiable dialogue due to the shared communist past, while some have only been established not so long ago and are yet to yield some marvelous breakthroughs, makes it simply unavoidable for both Russia and ASEAN to search the points of mutual interests, as well as discussing and cooperating with each other in order to tackle the issues of joint concerns. Thus, the future of Russia-ASEAN relations will shape not only some aspects of state-level partnerships and dialogue, but the whole landscape of the Asia-Pacific, as Russia is still considered one of major regional and global political actors, and ASEAN has been progressively building up its economic strength,

prosperity. Both parties share the status of reputable partners, and both parties possess mutually advantageous resources, which their counterparts can find useful. For instance, Russia's traditionally strong spheres are energy, military, engineering, space exploration, raw materials exports, and in return, ASEAN is capable in providing investments, especially ones that are needed for regional development of the Russian Far East and Siberia, and in such areas, as communication technologies. Therefore, nature and achievements of Russia-ASEAN partnership can determine whether both parties succeed in their aspiration towards strengthening ties with each other or not.

Even though there exist some studies, which examine relations between Russia and ASEAN countries, none of them provide the deep analysis for both levels of cooperation and their influence on one another, mostly focusing on the institutional level of Russia-ASEAN partnership. Moreover, these studies are rarely optimistic due to the fact that Russia-ASEAN relations have been relatively slow-paced, however, this paper asserts the assumption that the partnership has a bright future, based on existing evidence and current atmosphere in the bilateral relations, thus, once again confirming the relevance of the research.

In order to make a comprehensive conclusion and analyze the nature of Russia-ASEAN relations in the twenty-first century, several key research questions have to be answered:

- How did relations between Russia and ASEAN countries on bilateral and institutional levels affect each other and what consequences it has nowadays?
- What are the main areas in the scope of Russia-ASEAN partnership in the twenty-first century?
- What are the main hurdles and challenges in the relations between Russia and the Association?

- What are the major opportunities for the Russia-ASEAN relations and how can we evaluate their potential in the short- and long-term perspective?

### **1.3 Literature review**

This research paper will be using the primary sources, such as official documents, agreements, reports, statements, as well as official data and statistics both on the Russian and ASEAN sides, as the main base for proving the made assumptions. Nevertheless, a proper analysis is impossible without evaluation of the existing scientific literature and materials devoted to the topic of Russia-ASEAN relations. Even though many researchers have published their works devoted to the subject, similar or overlapping with this paper's topic, it is still challenging to call the range wide, as relevant academic research on integration and international relations in the Southeast Asia has often been more focused either on the Association's internal developments, or with its long-term strategic partners and regional leaders, while these new emerging and growing ties, such as ones with Russia have been severely neglected. Most of the time, such works cover only specific highlights in the Russia-ASEAN relations, which are often viewed on the surface, lacking a deep and consistent analysis, thus missing the bigger picture about the true scope of the bilateral partnership. This puts this research in need to utilize a great variety of literature, which can be divided into the following categories:

- 1) The first group is devoted to the integration processes and institutions in the Southeast Asia, and predominantly, focuses on research of ASEAN itself, as it is crucial to keep in mind the principles the Association is built on, as well as ambitious goals and means of their achievement, set by the founding countries. The Association's purposes, its ups and downs, and assessment of its policies and ties nowadays provides us with great insights on

existing challenges, amount of progress made, as well as helps to predict the future of such an important regional institution. ASEAN Countries are very diverse politically, economically and culturally, which makes it harder to make certain predictions about the collective political agenda promoted by the Association, although it is still feasible with a close attention to detail in precise analysis of existing political direction ASEAN has been following at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

First created as the security community of small developing states, which pursued stability and peace in the Southeast Asia, ASEAN nowadays has grown into much more diverse and multilateral organization, which is rightfully considered one of main centers of integration in the Asia-Pacific. Even though, there is no rigid structure, that would make sure correspondence of national interests of member states and insurance of close stances regarding various international issues, the spirit and appearance of unity is still present in majority of cases, which is highly dictated by the goal and main mission vested into the organization, when it was created. Within just half a century, ASEAN has come down long road from a small anti-communist coalition of five developing countries of the Southeast Asia Community comprised of ten states of the region and consisting of three interconnected and closely entwined community pillars: Political-Security Community, Economic Community, and Socio-Cultural Community

The Association has a very peculiar history of development and cooperation processes, and individual successful cases of regional economic development among several member states, namely Singapore, being a small, resource-wise poor country, but nonetheless achieving a leading status among the Four Asian Tigers, and other cases of rapid economic growth, experienced by other Association members, which are striving to become World's leading newly industrialized countries and top tier developing states on the global level as well. This indicates increased level of trust and faith put into the future of the existing

format of the Association, which makes it a viable center of integration for the region, and being quite an appealing institution for other states and international and regional organizations to promote cooperation with.

2) The second group are the studies, that focus on researching the Russian foreign policy in the Asia-Pacific, as in the bilateral relations with the Association are mostly developing due to the initiative from the Russian side, as well as a deep understanding of Russia's long-lasting aspirations to "turn to the East" in attempt to gain more partners in the Asia-Pacific and give a new impetus to the existing ties with the countries of the region. Some of these relations have always been on the positive side, provided a rich history of exchanges between the parties, while others suffered from many obstacles and lack of mutual understanding, which shaped the state of the bilateral ties between Russia and ASEAN countries in the twenty-first century.

The end of the Cold War and the dissolution of the Soviet Union, search for a stable and appropriate political course, constant radical shifts in the relations with the West, internal factors, such as brain drain and, thus, need to import various products, lack of regional development in Siberia and the Far East, seeking new markets for traditional exports, such as natural resources, aspiration of maintaining peace and stability near its borders, combating terrorism and piracy, etc., those are various elements which have affected Russian foreign policy in major way in the last 30 years. This notable footprint made Russian political elites to make some crucial decisions and posed a serious challenge to the future prospects of country's involvement in the regional and global integration processes, while its absence from such platforms would have been devastating not only to the Russia's political image on the international stage, but also would have hurt Russian economy and put it in a very disadvantageous position against competitors in the face of other major powers in the Asia-Pacific, like China, Japan, United States. Experience of participating in other integration



platforms and interactions with other regional players provides a better understanding of The general strategy and agenda of Russian foreign policy in the Asia-Pacific, as well as gives some hints on the Russian approach towards future of the relations with ASEAN.

3) The third group examines relations between Russia and ASEAN, both on the state and organization levels, mostly analyzing the current events and present state of the partnership, however still attaching enough importance to the historical background and premises, which shaped the framework of the Russia-ASEAN relations we observe today. Despite not having officially established contacts with the Association until the 1990s, Russia still managed to cooperate with several of the ASEAN members before, which of course, left its footprint on the process of rapprochement in the relations between Russia and ASEAN. As such, the first ever attendance of the ASEAN Ministerial Meeting by Russian delegation was granted by the special invitation of the Malaysian government, which also hosted the said Meeting. In the span of twenty-five years, the relations of Russia with ASEAN grew into strategic partnership. The parties cooperate in a variety of spheres, and as in the beginning, they focused mainly on the political and security agenda, as time passed, the scope of the partnership became broader, covering other major spheres as well.

Here are some examples of the main relevant literature, which was used in the course of this research.

In “ASEAN's half century: a political history of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations”, Donald E. Weatherbee<sup>1</sup> provides a comprehensive overview of political history of the Association, and emphasizes that recent researcher' close attention to the economic performance of the ASEAN countries has obscured the fact, that initially, the Association was a political establishment of the Southeast Asian nations, who had strong concerns about

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<sup>1</sup> Donald Weatherbee, *ASEAN's Half Century: A Political History of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2019), pp. 32-36.



domestic insecurities, communist and ethnic insurgencies, and regional rivalries, caused by the Cold War. ASEAN was founded with the goal of promoting peace, stability, security, and economic growth in the Southeast Asia. The order of these achievements is not random, as first three are the necessary conditions to reach the fourth one. The author recognizes development stages, which he calls reinventions: security sphere was a primary interest during the Cold War, then the focus shifted towards economic integration, while beginning of the twenty-first century adopted creation of the ASEAN Community in 2015. Another important question covered by the book is evaluation of the Association's actions on various levels, and dealing with existing challenges, like democracy and human rights, also not neglecting contemporary security issues, such as South China Sea conflict. Mainly, the author suggests that the history of ASEAN's responses to emergencies in the Southeast Asia has shown to often been neither timely nor effective. As such, an objective and comprehensive analysis of ASEAN's existence is made, both acknowledging its successes and breakthroughs, while also still admitting existing troubles and outlining the possible solution, which should be systematic and large in scope, to be called "the fourth reinvention".

Another outstanding piece of literature is "ASEAN Community in the Modern World", wrote collectively by G.M. Lokshin, E.V. Kobelev and V.M. Mazyrin<sup>2</sup>. The book is devoted not only to the half-century history of the Association activities, but also key features in its interaction with great powers, which have constantly been fighting for the influence and dominance in the Asia-Pacific. A particular attention is paid to the section dedicated to the Russia-ASEAN relations. Authors specify the capabilities and limitations, which ASEAN had previously, and how its progression from Association to the Community status affected them in the long-term, especially dealing with traditional for ASEAN issues

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<sup>2</sup> Grigoriy Lokshin, Evgeniy Kobelev, Vladimir Mazyrin, Сообщество АСЕАН в Современном Мире / ASEAN Community in the Modern World (Moscow, Forum, 2019), pp. 252-278. [in Russian]

of its agenda, such as maintaining stability, promoting security and conflict resolution. Moreover, external factors of ties with regional leaders is considered, as major powers have often influenced integration processes not only in the Southeast Asia, but in the Asia-Pacific in general. However, the scope of the study is not limited to only traditional leaders and it analyzes prospects of ASEAN in developing amiable cooperation with emerging powers. While assessing Russia-ASEAN ties, the authors underline that crucial factor in the relations is the security sphere, which is not only the cornerstone of the dialogue partnership, but also achievements in this area served as a firm ground for expanding the scope of the relations in such spheres as economic ties, promoting cooperation between ASEAN and Eurasian Economic Union. The book also emphasizes that Russia's strategic partnership with Vietnam plays a significant role in strengthening ties with ASEAN as a whole, since Vietnam has been one of the major counterparts of Russia in the Asia-Pacific, and played a very important role in the promotion of Russia's inclusion in the regional integration processes, such as taking on the role of the curator for Russia's integration into ASEAN dialogue mechanism during the late 1990s. The authors pinpoint prominent results achieved by the partnership, while having a strongly positive attitude on the prospects of Russia-ASEAN relations, seeing a lot of potential, first and foremost in the economic, financial and innovation spheres, while playing a crucial role in maintaining peace and stability in the Southeast Asia.

The research would have been incomplete providing only positive and optimistic sources, so the paper also takes a look at works of authors, who are skeptical, directly or indirectly, about the significance and prospects of Russia-ASEAN partnership. A great way to discuss such critique is to take a look at the literature, which provides us with reasons or explanations of the absence of depicting and analyzing the Association's relationship with Russia whatsoever.

For example, Kishore Mahbubani and Jeggerly Sng<sup>3</sup> admit that despite “great power” status and its impact on international affairs on the global level, Russia does not retain its former strength in the Southeast Asia since the Cold War era. Other regional priorities have consistently been put in front of the Russian foreign policy in the Asia-Pacific. The authors characterize the nature of Russia-ASEAN relationship as a symbolic one, with little substance, which even at this level, face some major hurdles, such as, for example, late admission of Russia to the East Asia Summit. This, though, reflects the deeper, structural problem of the Russian foreign policy: it lacks a long-term Asian strategy, which could facilitate determine points of mutual interests and foster more productive and fruitful cooperation between Russia and ASEAN. The authors note that Association itself shall recognize weak points in the bilateral relations not only with Russia but with other major partners, if it seeks to tackle the existing challenges and maintain close and extensive ties in the future.

The literature review gives us several indications and hints, that there is uneven distribution in the attention to various aspects of the cooperation between Russia and ASEAN. The parties maintain consistent ties in such field, as security cooperation, pursuing a goal of preserving peace and stability in the Southeast Asia, while constantly showing close proximity or complete coincidence of the stances, which is often recorded in all fundamental joint documents and statements, and is always repeated and confirmed even on other grounds, such as margins of the United Nations or other international institutions. Russia has been actively seeking to develop bilateral relations with ASEAN members both within and outside of the framework of the Association, while still adhering to the common principles of the established partnership. However, in some areas, which can be mutually

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<sup>3</sup> Kishore Mahbubani, Jeffery Sng, *The ASEAN Miracle: A Catalyst for Peace* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2017), p. 92.

advantageous, full potential have not been reached yet, due to various factors, but the fact that dialogue between the parties has been regular and productive in the recent years, provides a firm ground for Russia and ASEAN to resolve the existing issues and catch up in the areas, where cooperation lags behind the most.

The fact that the Russian political elites finally realized the obvious fact that Russia historically cannot be separated from the Asia-Pacific region, and as a consequence, from the Southeast Asia, is crucial for the successful development of relations with ASEAN, both as the organization and its member states separately. Russia has vital political and economic interests in the region. Moreover, recently, it turned out that rapid economic growth made Asia-Pacific the most suitable region to obtain both investments and advanced technologies to boost the Russian economy, which is especially acute after a severe deterioration of the relations with the European countries and the United States, which has always been considered as the main direction of the Russian foreign policy. The logical pivot to the East has been called several times, but nowadays, this term means much more than before, as modernization of Russian economy, its integration in the regional development seems impossible without the active participation of Southeast Asian partners, who might gain more prominence not only on the regional, but global level as well, in the near future.

#### **1.4 Methodological and theoretical scope**

The paper utilizes a wide spectrum of sources, both primary and secondary, in order to prove the assumptions made and support the raised arguments.

The list of the former is comprised of official documents released by ASEAN, Russia, and by the two parties together. These documents include agreements, statements, declarations and other accords signed by Russia and ASEAN, as well as unilateral official

reports, protocols, data statistics and special releases. Moreover, statements and articles released by the officials of Russia and ASEAN, including officials of the ASEAN countries themselves, are also represent an important part of the primary sources. The documents analyzed in the paper cover a wide range of cooperation spheres, going from broad, framework agreements, like, for example, Comprehensive Programme of Action 2005-2015<sup>4</sup> followed by Comprehensive Plan of Action for 2016-2020<sup>5</sup>, both of which cover almost all major and potential cooperation fields, to more specific accords aimed at achieving goals in a particular sphere, such as one of the most recent documents, Statement on Cooperation<sup>6</sup>, devoted to a very narrow, specific field of security and in the use of information and communication technologies, which both contributed a lot to deepening and strengthening of the Russia-ASEAN partnership. The scope of primary sources also goes as far as such fundamental documents, as Russian Foreign Policy Concept, which determines the current political course and behavior line in the Asia-Pacific, as well as relations overview presented by Russian Embassies in the ASEAN countries.

The latter list mainly consists of relevant literature on the topic, which has already been discussed in the Literature Review section. Moreover, secondary sources include scientific papers and research articles, which also reflect on the topic of Russia-ASEAN partnership as a whole, or focus on particular aspect, such as various cooperation field the parties have been interacting in, or assessing particular challenges and issues faced either by

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<sup>4</sup> Comprehensive Programme of Action to Promote Cooperation between the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and the Russian Federation (2005-2015), Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. December 13, 2005.

URL: [https://asean.org/?static\\_post=comprehensive-programme-of-action-to-promote-cooperation-between-the-association-of-southeast-asian-nations-and-the-russian-federation-2005-2015](https://asean.org/?static_post=comprehensive-programme-of-action-to-promote-cooperation-between-the-association-of-southeast-asian-nations-and-the-russian-federation-2005-2015)

<sup>5</sup> Comprehensive Plan of Action to Promote Cooperation Between the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and The Russian Federation (2016-2020), Sochi, Russia. May 21, 2016. URL:

<https://www.asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/ASEAN-Russia-CPA-2016-2020-Final1.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> Statement of ASEAN and the Russian Federation on Cooperation in the Field of Security of and in the Use of Information and Communication Technologies, Singapore. November 16, 2018. URL:

<https://asean.org/storage/2018/11/FINAL-Statement-of-ASEAN-and-the-Russian-Federation-on-Cooperation-in-the-Field-of-Security-of-and-in-the-Use-of-Information-and-Communication-Technologies.pdf>

Russia or ASEAN, while shaping its stance and approach towards current agenda in the Asia-Pacific. Furthermore, various verbatim reports, interviews, press releases, newspaper and magazine articles are added to this section to specify peculiarities and not to miss on any important detail of the Russia-ASEAN cooperation.

Historical roots of the ASEAN creation, primary national interests and foundation of the relations between the parties lies in the area of security, maintaining peace and stability, especially taking into consideration existence of several challenges in the Asia-Pacific, like South China Sea conflict and emergence of new transnational threats, like terrorist groups and crime organizations, and only due to prominent breakthroughs in this sphere, the parties are capable of promoting the partnership to the new heights, covering more aspects in the areas of economics, business, humanitarian and other contacts. This logically led to the selection of Neorealism as the theoretical framework for the research, as using this concept also resorts to the structural assessment, which is key to clearer understanding and broader explanation of all the tendencies and trends currently occurring in the Russia-ASEAN relations.

Theoretical basis of the research is the liberal institutionalism, as this paradigm provides the better understanding of the ASEAN as a regional cooperation and integration institution, as well as putting emphasis on the sustainability of the regional development, which is supported by a long-lasting history of the ASEAN itself, as well as its well-developed system of partnership ties with other countries, especially backed by strong economic ties. From its point of view, as also shared by both ASEAN and Russian sides, power politics and can be overcome by institutional means, negotiations and peaceful cooperation, which is an important goal for the two parties.

The methodological basis of the research is a systemic method, which focuses on the foreign policy and behavior strategies analysis of Russia and ASEAN member states in

bilateral and multilateral cooperation fields, underlining the existing dynamics and development directions and providing fundamental and comprehensive understanding of the relations as a system, its elements, algorithms and mechanisms.

Another tool widely used in this paper is the method of comparative analysis, which makes it feasible to assess the features, similarities and contradictions between the stances of Russia and ASEAN regarding various issues of paramount importance on the current agenda. Furthermore, it is not possible without resorting to the event analysis and content analysis, in order to interpret the contents and results of the interactions between the parties, let it be official highest level meetings, or various signed accords, more precisely, not losing any significant detail in the research process.

As this research paper makes use of various kinds of sources, it is essential to build more credible review of the data collected, which is achieved by implementation of the triangulation method while working with the sources.

In pursuing the goal to make adequate assumptions about the prospects and future of the Russia-ASEAN partnership, the method of political forecasting was used, which is based upon recognition and evaluation of the main existing trends and potential of Russia-ASEAN relations.

### **1.5 Scientific novelty and theoretical significance of the research**

The research provides a detailed and extensive analysis of the current state of the Russia-ASEAN relations, evaluating the main events and results, pace of development, and its prospects. The scientific novelty is defined by the most acute among latest sources, which were used in the course of writing this paper, including up-to-date opinions and viewpoints of officials, researchers and experts, both among Russia and ASEAN, as well as representing



international research community. The stances given in the research also represent contradictory points of views in order to make the analysis more accurate, comparing the arguments made by different sides.

Another main point of the scientific novelty of the research is the fact that other authors mainly do not focus on the fact that multilateral Russia-ASEAN relations are closely entwined with the bilateral Russia-ASEAN countries ties, as they are normally assessed separately, without looking at any evidence of mutual influence on one another. At the same time, Russia's foreign policy interests and other initiatives in the Asia-Pacific are rarely viewed as one great strategy, which has been gradually shaped in the twenty-first century, and, hence, the experience of participation in other integrational structures and relations with other regional actors are neglected or overlooked. On the other hand, experience of ASEAN inner development as a major integration entity in the Southeast Asia and its traditionally strong ties with other major powers of the Asia-Pacific also lack comparisons and parallels with Russia-ASEAN partnership, while it can be very useful and prominent in defining what ASEAN is striving to achieve in the development of the strategic partnership, and which direction it is likely to follow. Moreover, the roots of existing challenges and problems in the Russia-ASEAN relations are outlined and analyzed, facilitating the search to resolve these issues and give a new significant impetus to the relations.

The theoretical significance of research is defined by possible implementation of conclusions and forecasts made in the research paper in any further studies of the acute Russia-ASEAN relations topics, as well as to generally assess current state and prospects of Russian foreign policy in the Asia-Pacific, and Southeast Asia in particular, or ASEAN's relations with its newly obtained partners, or those who seek establishment of partnership ties.



## 1.6 Time frame and research limitations

The research covers first two decades of the twenty-first century, and such restrictions were made due to several key factors. Early years after the dissolution of the Soviet Union were characterized by lack of consistency and order in the direction of the Russian foreign policy, while even with the establishment of formal contacts between Russia and ASEAN, the relations did not have any significant practical results. It is also true, because that present stage of Russian foreign policy is often associated with President Putin's era in Russian politics, which much clearer goals and priorities. Moreover, a qualitative leap forward from dialogue to comprehensive partnership occurred only recently, in 2018, and taking into consideration the dynamics of the relations, it is excessive to widen the research time frame, as the scope of the study does not include any comparison among Russia's foreign policy towards the region in the past, but rather provides a necessary historical information and factual background, supporting the research of such relations in the recent years and present time.

The research has certain limitations in its scope. The largest one of those is the nature of the subject, which is defined by the existing diplomatic practice, and only particular types of relations and cooperation can be analyzed between Russia and ASEAN states. A lot of vital information, regarding the negotiation process, is often held behind closed doors, while even upon reaching some breakthroughs in the relations, parties do not release data immediately, or release it partially, thus obscuring researchers from gaining full access to information about the scope and achievements in the Russia-ASEAN relations. This is applicable both to the Russian and ASEAN countries side, which mostly try to maintain amiable atmosphere of the partnership, without undermining its positive image.

## **CHAPTER 2. Background: Development of Russia-ASEAN countries relations on bilateral and institutional levels**

To understand the true character and nature of relations between Russia and ASEAN as the organization, it is crucial to begin with a comprehensive overview of how the bilateral cooperation on the state level was organized, first and foremost, before the formation of the Association, and to provide an essential analysis of effects and impact the creation of ASEAN had on the said relations. The main point of this chapter is to give necessary background information about the development and state of the bilateral relations between Russia and every ASEAN member state, thus making it possible to have a comparative view of how successful and fruitful, or vice versa, lacking and unproductive, this cooperation was, what achievements has it seen and whether or not some controversies exist in the bilateral field. Moreover, the scope of the chapter covers development of the contacts and establishment of partnership on the institutional level with ASEAN itself, as it is needed to suggest the possible shifts, emerging challenges and possibilities throughout years of extending partnership between Russia and ASEAN. As the effects of cooperation on both state and institutional level can have serious influence on the future of not only Russia-ASEAN partnership, but the whole Southeast Asian international relations, other organizations, where Russia and ASEAN countries participate on a regular basis.

### **2.1 Bilateral ties with the ASEAN countries**

It shall be noted, that for convenience, countries were put in alphabetic order, instead of putting them in any other more complicated way, such as “since establishment of

diplomatic ties”. Another important note is that analysis of socio-cultural exchanges proved that most of the contacts in these fields are underdeveloped or minor, and thus this section will be covered in a separate chapter, where it is reviewed combined with such contacts established and developed on the institutional level with ASEAN.

### **2.1.1 Russia-Brunei relations**

In the course of the twentieth century, no significant efforts to establish contacts were made, since Brunei gained full independence only in 1984, and coming from under the wing of British protectorate, did not have any plans to develop relations with communist Soviet Union. However, closer to the ending of the Cold War and significant political pivot of the Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev, who called for the establishment of diplomatic relations with Brunei, the situation changed. It was not a fast change of approach though, as Soviet ambassador to Singapore failed to establish relations with Brunei in 1988<sup>1</sup>. It took several years for Brunei to finally change its opinion on the Soviet Union, and on October 1<sup>st</sup>, 1991, the formal bilateral relations were finally established.

In November 2000, Russian President Vladimir Putin visited Brunei which hosted APEC summit and held a meeting with the Sultan of Brunei Hassanal Bolkiah. During the negotiations, a Protocol Agreement establishing bilateral consultations between both countries was signed. The consultations have been held alternately between the two countries over the last 2 decades<sup>2</sup>.

A significant impetus to Russian-Brunei relations was given by Sultan’s first ever official visit to Russia in June 2005. The Joint Statement following the visit noted the

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<sup>1</sup> Leszek Buszynski, *Gorbachev and Southeast Asia* (New York, Routledge, 2014), p.211.

<sup>2</sup> The Russian Federation. Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Brunei Darussalam. URL: [http://www.mfa.gov.bn/Pages/br\\_Russia.aspx](http://www.mfa.gov.bn/Pages/br_Russia.aspx)

existence of good prospects for expanding bilateral cooperation, confirmed the mutual interest in establishing multifaceted cooperation in such areas as combating terrorism, military and technical cooperation, energy, investments and education fields.

As noted by the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs official website, “trade and economic ties have only episodic nature<sup>3</sup>. The volume of mutual bilateral trade is insignificant.” However, it is supposed to improve in the near future as in 2017 Brunei and Russia signed a mutual 14-day visa exemption agreement to foster tourism and small business travel.

### **2.1.2 Russia-Cambodia relations**

Even though diplomatic relations between the Soviet Union and Cambodia were established in 1956, and 2021 marks their 65-year anniversary, the bilateral ties had to overcome some serious difficulties in the first years.

For more than a decade, from 1956 to 1970, the Soviet Union and Cambodia enjoyed very special and fruitful relations, mostly driven by the support from the Soviet side in pursuing the goal to gain a new partner in the Southeast Asian region, even though Cambodia always adhered the course of non-alignment in its foreign policy. However, during the 1970s, due to a military coup in Cambodia and deterioration of ties between the Soviet Union and China, the Soviet-Cambodian bilateral relations did not prosper as well. However, the ties were fully reestablished by 1979 and since then have only been on the rise<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> Политические контакты (справочная информация) / Political contacts (for reference). Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Russian Federation. URL: <https://www.webcitation.org/6AHFXIVIA> (archived) [in Russian]

<sup>4</sup> Kin Phea, 65 years of Cambodia-Russia relations: An overview. The Phnom Penh Post. 13 May, 2021. URL: <https://www.phnompenhpost.com/opinion/65-years-cambodia-russia-relations-overview>

The greatest milestone in the current state of bilateral relations between Russia and Cambodia was the signing of a Joint Declaration on the Basics of Friendly Relations in 1995, which established a firm legal framework for further development of cooperation in a variety of fields. At the same time, an intergovernmental agreement on trade and economic relations and a protocol on consultations between the two Ministries of Foreign Affairs were also concluded.

In November 2015, Russian Prime Minister Medvedev visited Cambodia to hold talks with his Cambodian counterpart Hun Sen, which supported a further rapprochement in the relations of the two countries. The parties signed joint statements and declarations aimed at expanding and broadening the cooperation in such fields as trade, investments, law enforcement, information and humanitarian affairs, including for example, a very prominent Memorandum of Understanding between Rosatom (Russian State Atomic Energy Corporation) and the Ministry of Environment of Cambodia on cooperation in utilizing nuclear energy for peaceful purposes, which was confirmed by creation of a joint work group, according to the agreements signed during a return visit of the Cambodian Prime Minister to Russia a year later. Furthermore, in the course of the negotiations, the Intergovernmental Agreement on Military-Technical Cooperation was signed, which helped to expand the cooperation to new spheres both parties are interested working on in the near future. There is also a Russian-Cambodian High-Level Working Group on the promotion of joint investment projects<sup>5</sup>.

All in all, it is easy to acknowledge that trade and economic cooperation between Russia and Cambodia is developing, however the relations nonetheless have its own hurdles and controversies. Economically, bilateral trade between the two countries has risen

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<sup>5</sup> Political and Economic Relations, Embassy of the Russian Federation in the Kingdom of Cambodia.  
URL: <https://embrusscambodia.mid.ru/web/cambodia-en/political-and-economic-relations>

substantially, but with taking a closer look, the imbalance is noticeable, as Russia imports ten times more from Cambodia than exports to it. It is crucial to admit that Russia's share in Cambodian international trade is low, it accounts only for 0,1%, while the Cambodian share in the Russian trade balance is 0,3%. Moreover, the structure of bilateral trade doesn't fully realize the potential yet, as there are still examples of fields, where the volume and prominence can be increased significantly, such as rice export from Cambodia and wheat export from Russia<sup>6</sup>.

### **2.1.3 Russia-Indonesia relations**

The history of Russian-Indonesian relations is rich and can be tracked way back to expeditions of the Russian Empire to the region, which was formerly known as the Dutch East Indies, and to support the willingness to establish and maintain positive contacts with Indonesia, a consulate in Batavia (now Jakarta), the capital of the East Indies at the time, was opened. Later, upon gaining independence after World War II, Indonesia was developing as a sovereign state and already in 1950, Indonesian and Soviet foreign ministers exchanged telegrams on the establishment of bilateral diplomatic relations. Upon exchanging visits of the state leaders, the relations grew only stronger and kept their traditionally amiable atmosphere, which got carried over to the twenty-first century<sup>7</sup>.

There exists a Russian-Indonesian Joint Commission on Trade, Economic and Technical Cooperation, which coordinates joint collaborative efforts in the abovementioned

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<sup>6</sup> Online round table “65 Years of the Russia — Cambodia Diplomatic Relations”, Russian International Affairs Council. April 10, 2021. URL: <https://russiancouncil.ru/en/news/online-round-table-65-years-of-the-russia-cambodia-diplomatic-relations/>

<sup>7</sup>Sergey Lavrov, Russia and Indonesia: 70 Years of Fruitful Cooperation. Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. February 2, 2020. URL: [mid.ru/en/foreign\\_policy/news/-/asset\\_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/4016185](http://mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/4016185)

fields. Moreover, major Russian governmental corporations are participating in primary infrastructure projects in Indonesia, while the main focus of the bilateral relations in the twenty-first century still is on the area of security and defense, military and technical cooperation, as well as energy and natural resources sector. Both parties regularly admit that the established dialogue and diplomatic channels are efficient and fruitful. Several prominent agreements were signed between the parties, such as those on cooperation in peaceful use of nuclear energy, civil aviation jets supplies, and numerous contracts on various military equipment supplies, all coming from the Russian side. The defense and security sphere has been very strong with joint anti-piracy military exercises held in 2011 and 2012. Moreover, Russia provided assistance in tackling the consequences of the natural disasters: tsunami, earthquakes and forest fires in Indonesia<sup>8</sup>.

#### **2.1.4 Russia-Laos relations**

The diplomatic relations between the Soviet Union and Laos date back to the 1960 and for over a decade, Soviet diplomatic efforts were aimed at ensuring that recently gained independence of Laos was not to be lost and its sovereign rights to be preserved, as the general political line of Soviet government at the time towards emerging states. During the twentieth century, the relations have seen significant rapprochement, as Soviet party was fully committed in providing comprehensive support for Laos, especially helping in strengthening defensive and economic capabilities. After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the nature of the ties did not vanish, on the other hand, fruitful cooperation and mutually

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<sup>8</sup> Russian-Indonesian Relations (reference information) / Russian Embassy to Indonesia.  
URL: [https://indonesia.mid.ru/rossijsko-indonezijskie-otnosenia/-/asset\\_publisher/of6O5rmqcon5/content/rossijsko-indonezijskie-otnosenia-spravocnyj-material-?inheritRedirect=false](https://indonesia.mid.ru/rossijsko-indonezijskie-otnosenia/-/asset_publisher/of6O5rmqcon5/content/rossijsko-indonezijskie-otnosenia-spravocnyj-material-?inheritRedirect=false) [in Russian]



positive attitude have remained, which led to the signing of the Treaty on Amity between the two countries in the 1994<sup>9</sup>.

Since the beginning of the twenty-first century, the dialogue between the parties have been kept on the positive side and several minor agreements were sealed. On the Russian side, Laos was believed to be among the most reliable political partners of the Russian Federation in the Asia-Pacific region. The true peak of this development came in 2011, when Laos leader Sayasone came to Russia with an official visit, which truly turned over a new leaf in the bilateral relations. In the course of the visit, he held negotiations with Russian leaders, and a very prominent milestone was reached. The two parties signed the Declaration on the strategic partnership. In the next years, multiple high-level talks were held with exchanging visits of both countries' leadership, including the Russian Prime Minister and parliamentary delegations from both sides<sup>10</sup>.

There is a Joint Russian-Lao Intergovernmental Commission on trade and economic, science and technology cooperation, which was established in order to improve the relations, while defense and security remain as the cornerstone of the bilateral relations for decades<sup>11</sup>. They can also give a significant boost to other fields of trade, as the complexity of modern international relations and interdependence tend to foster growth of adjacent areas, or based on the rational logic, expansion in those areas, both counties are more likely to make concessions in. One of those fields is, as it was already observed by another example, is the nuclear energy. In 2016, a Memorandum of cooperation in this field was signed between Rosatom (Russian state nuclear corporation) and the ministry of energy and mines of Laos,

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<sup>9</sup> Russia-Laos Relations, Embassy of the Russian Federation in the Lao People's Democratic Republic. URL: <https://laos.mid.ru/en/countries/>

<sup>10</sup> Saleumxay Kommasith, Лаос - Россия: 60 лет дружбы и сотрудничества / Laos - Russia: 60 years of friendship and cooperation. The International Affairs. MGIMO, №10, 2020. URL: <https://interaffairs.ru/jauthor/material/2407> [in Russian]

<sup>11</sup> Laos Continues to Deepen Military Ties with Russia but Risks Chinese Backlash, ASEAN Today, February 4, 2019. URL: <https://www.aseantoday.com/2019/02/laos-continues-to-deepen-military-ties-with-russia-but-risks-chinese-backlash/>



which established the framework for future projects regarding nuclear power plants and research reactors<sup>12</sup>. These initiatives did not slow down, and the two parties maintain an active and productive dialogue in the sphere, extending the scope of the cooperation and strengthening ties in the nuclear energy field<sup>13</sup>.

### 2.1.5 Russia-Malaysia relations

Diplomatic relations between the Soviet Union and Malaysia were established in 1967, and in the following year, the countries exchanged embassies. Since the very start, relations had a great potential, for instance, in 1972 Malaysian Prime Minister Razak visited the Soviet Union for the first time, which was truly a landmark event, during which several agreements on economic, technical, cultural and scientific cooperation were signed by the parties<sup>14</sup>.

Even though during the Afghanistan war the relations deteriorated, as Malaysia expressed disapproval of the Soviet military operations, after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the ties have been on the rise, maintaining positive attitude and consistent pace. Both parties maintain a constructive and regular political dialogue, frequently exchanging visits and sharing opinions and stances on current political agenda's crucial points. Another special feature for the bilateral relations was the fact, that the first ever Russia-ASEAN interaction, which led to the establishment of a Dialogue Partnership between the two parties, as well as

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<sup>12</sup> Prashanth Parameswaran, What's Behind Russia's New Nuclear Pact with Laos? The Diplomat, April 25, 2016. URL: <https://thediplomat.com/2016/04/whats-behind-russias-new-nuclear-pact-with-laos/>

<sup>13</sup> Россия и Лаос Развивают Сотрудничество в Области Использования Атомной Энергии в Мирных Целях / Russia and Laos develop cooperation in the field of peaceful uses of atomic energy, Rosatom. 10 July, 2019. URL: <https://www.rosatom.ru/journalist/news/rossiya-i-laos-razvivayut-sotrudnichestvo-v-oblasti-ispolzovaniya-atomnoy-energii-v-mirnykh-tselyakh/> [in Russian]

<sup>14</sup> Sergey Lavrov, Celebrating 50 years of Russia, Malaysia relations, New Straight Times, June 1, 2017. URL: <https://www.nst.com.my/opinion/columnists/2017/06/244603/celebrating-50-years-russia-malaysia-relations>

first ever Russia-ASEAN Summit of 2005 both were took place in the Malaysian capital, Kuala Lumpur. The two parties promote cooperation in a vast majority of political spheres, as consistent contacts have been established and actively maintained between the highest legislative, executive and judicial bodies of the two counties, as well as between Malaysian officials and Russian regional leadership<sup>15</sup>.

The Russian-Malaysian trade and economic relations are regulated by the Agreement on Economic Cooperation, which was signed in 2000 and by the cooperation agreement between Russian and Malaysian Chambers of Commerce in 2005, which were supposed to foster cooperation in trade and economy. While Malaysia is one of the main Russia's partners in the South East Asia, and Russia is self-claimed to be the leading trading partner of Malaysia in the CIS, the volume of the bilateral trade is still relatively low, while main export and import categories remain natural resources and mainly oil, chemical industry goods, food and agricultural products<sup>16</sup>.

Both countries pay a close attention to promotion of scientific and technical cooperation. A number of talks were held between the parties, which resulted into implementation of a wide scope of joint projects, most notable in the space exploration sphere. Russia provided necessary assistance to the Malaysian side to launch its satellites in 2000 and 2006. One year later, a new breakthrough was achieved, when Russian side launched a rocket with the first Malaysian astronaut onboard to the International Space Station. Both sides do not limit their technological sphere contacts only to the space exploration, as in 2003 the Agreement on Science and Technology Cooperation between Russia and Malaysia and Agreement on Cooperation in the field of Communications and

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<sup>15</sup> Malaysia – Russia, Business Council for Cooperation with Malaysia.

URL: <https://rmcouncil.com/malaysia/relations/> [in Russian]

<sup>16</sup> Russian-Malaysian Trade and Economic Ties, Embassy of the Russian Federation in Malaysia.

URL: <https://malaysia.mid.ru/rossijsko-malajzijskie-otnosenia/>

/asset\_publisher/RKgXgXWL36pV/content/rossijsko-malajzijskie-torgovo-ekonomiceskie-svazi [in Russian]

Information were signed, which indicated both parties' willingness to facilitate cooperation in the respective field, being out of paramount importance in the modern era<sup>17</sup>.

### **2.1.6 Russia-Myanmar relations**

Diplomatic relations between the Soviet Union and Burma were established in 1948. During the 1950s and 1960s, the Soviet side actively provided help with some of the construction projects, which were held in Burma at the time. Since that time, relations did not gain much prominence for both sides, mainly due to Myanmar's geographical position, and its non-alignment principle in the foreign policy. However, the relations still remain quite amiable, and the parties continue to cooperate in a variety of fields. The two countries have signed a handful of bilateral documents, like Declaration on the Basic Principles of Friendly Relations, Agreement on Visa-Free Entry, Agreement on Military-Technical Cooperation and numerous other, covering other fields of cooperation.

Even though 2013 marked the 65th anniversary of the establishment of Russian-Myanmar diplomatic relations, some mechanisms of the cooperation were not set up yet. Only a year later, Inter-Governmental Commission on Trade and Economic Cooperation was formed, while the most distinguished results in the recent years was Russian assistance in tackling the consequences of natural disasters in Myanmar in 2008 and 2015<sup>18</sup>. Overall, the scope of relations is limited, mostly focusing on traditional spheres of security and

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<sup>17</sup> Bilateral Relations, Embassy of the Russian Federation in Malaysia.

URL: <https://malaysia.mid.ru/web/malaysia-en/russian-malaysian-relations>

<sup>18</sup> Russia-Myanmar, Embassy of Russia in the Republic of the Union of Myanmar.

URL: [https://myanmar.mid.ru/web/myanmar\\_en/bilateral-relations](https://myanmar.mid.ru/web/myanmar_en/bilateral-relations)

military-technical cooperation, which have been backed by a number of military equipment contract sealed and visit of Russian Defense Minister to Myanmar in January 2021<sup>19,20</sup>.

### **2.1.7 Russia-Philippines relations**

Traditionally during colonial time and after gaining independence in 1946, the Philippines adhered to a policy of abstaining from establishment of diplomatic relations with socialist countries. Nevertheless, since the 1960s, seeking for expanding its range of commercial and trade partners, the Philippines adopted a more open and balanced approach, which opened new opportunities in interactions with different countries including the socialist ones. The Philippine Foreign Trade Company was established in 1973, and a year later, the Agreement on Cultural Cooperation between the Soviet Union and the Philippines and was signed, giving a remarkable impetus to the start of the bilateral contacts. Formal diplomatic relations were established in 1976, when the Philippines president Marcos paid the first official visit to the Soviet Union. Apart from the Communiqué on the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries, Agreements on Trade Cooperation and on Partnership between Chambers of Commerce and Industry of the Philippines and the Soviet Union were signed<sup>21</sup>.

Recent high-level visits include not only regular meetings and talks between Heads of State, but also among vast majority of governmental leaders. Russia and the Philippines enjoy very cordial inter-parliamentary relations, active exchanges of opinions and

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<sup>19</sup> Russia and Myanmar to Implement a Vast Plan for Bilateral Military Cooperation, Russian Ministry of Defense. January 20, 2018.

URL: [https://function.mil.ru/news\\_page/country/more.htm?id=12158837@egNews](https://function.mil.ru/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12158837@egNews) [in Russian]

<sup>20</sup> Shoygu Arrives in Myanmar with an Official Visit, TASS. January 21, 2021. URL: <https://tass.ru/armiya-i-opk/10518317> [in Russian]

<sup>21</sup> Bilateral Cooperation, Embassy of the Russian Federation in the Republic of the Philippines.

URL: <https://philippines.mid.ru/en/countries/>

experience between the diplomats, and in addition to this, parliamentary dialogue is strong, which is backed by signing of an Agreement on Cooperation between the Council of Federation of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation and the Senate of the Congress of the Republic of the Philippines. This accord was aimed at fostering the cooperation in such areas of cooperation, as energy, transport, telecommunications and mining. Furthermore, in 2015 the Agreement on the Establishment of the Joint Commission on Trade and Economic Cooperation was signed by the parties, in order to further enhance potential of the bilateral partnership. The bilateral trade is not that large, even though the volume has been increasing over the years, it also got affected by other external factors and faced a significant drop in 2015 and 2016, and mostly consists of raw materials and natural resources, electronics, food and agricultural products<sup>22</sup>.

### **2.1.8 Russia-Singapore relations**

The history of Russian-Singaporean contacts can be tracked way back to the end of the XIXth century, when Russian expeditions had been launched often to the Asia-Pacific region. At the time, Singapore was under the rule of the British empire, however, it did not prevent Russian Empire from establishing its consulate there in the 1890s. Already back then, diplomatic efforts were put into promoting Russia's interests in the fields of trade and shipping, as well as into maintaining good relations with local and colonial leaders of the region<sup>23</sup>. Upon gaining independence, Singapore established diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union. Not many notable events can be tracked throughout the twentieth century,

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<sup>22</sup> Ph - Russia Relations, Embassy of the Philippines to Russia. URL: <https://moscowpe.dfa.gov.ph/85-diplomatic-relations/76-ph-russia-relations>

<sup>23</sup> Karen Snow, Russian Commercial Shipping and Singapore, 1905-1916. *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 29(01), 1998. pp. 44–62. doi:10.1017/s0022463400021470

however, as time passed, and Singapore's rapid development gave it a rightful place among "The Four Asian Tigers", Russia's interest reappeared again and in the last 20 years, more and more considerable efforts were made to achieve prominent progress in the bilateral relations.

The highlight of the Russia-Singapore relations was a State Visit of the Russian President to Singapore in 2009, which was the first in history. After the talks, the parties signed a Joint Statement, which determined further steps in the development of bilateral ties in a complexity and multiplicity of spheres. The High Level Russia-Singapore Inter-Governmental Commission was established, which conducts annual meetings, which are normally co-chaired by the parties<sup>24</sup>.

Due to the prominent status of Singapore in the region, bilateral trade and economy is the central pillar of the cooperation between the countries. Russia-Singapore ties are especially strong in the field of investment, scientific and technological spheres, which is backed by regular business forums, as well as high-level meetings of the Russian and Singaporean business elites in the margins of various international economic and business summits<sup>25</sup>. Moreover, in 2009, Russian government created the Russia-Singapore Business Council, a governmental agency aimed at creating and maintaining business contacts between the two countries' entrepreneurs, enhance the efficiency of the bilateral trade, economic and investment policies and projects. The Council is holding annual business dialogues between Russian and Singaporean business circles and provides various

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<sup>24</sup> Political Relations, Embassy of the Russian Federation in the Republic of Singapore. URL: [https://singapore.mid.ru/en/russia\\_and\\_singapore/bilateral\\_relations/political\\_relations/](https://singapore.mid.ru/en/russia_and_singapore/bilateral_relations/political_relations/)

<sup>25</sup> Russia and Singapore Discuss Strengthening Commercial and Economic Relations, St. Petersburg International Economic Forum. URL: <https://forumspb.com/en/news/news/russia-and-singapore-discuss-strengthening-commercial-and-economic-relations/>

initiatives, such as 2016 creation of its own B2B platform RSTrade, which is aimed not only at Singapore, but at the Asia-Pacific region as a whole<sup>26</sup>.

### **2.1.9 Russia-Thailand relations**

The first contacts between Russia and Siam date way back to 1863, when one of the Russian expeditions stopped at the Bangkok Port. At this period, Siam considered Russia as an ally for promoting Siamese strive for preserving independence against the expansion of European colonial empires, and during the Royal visit of Thai King Chulalongkorn (Rama V) to Russia in 1897, the formal diplomatic relations between Russia and Siam were established. However, there has been a lengthy pause in the bilateral relations in 1917-1941. Even after re-establishing ties with the Soviet Union, Thai party did not rush the development of the bilateral ties, so during the Cold War the relations between the two countries saw neither challenges nor any substantial breakthroughs. Only in 1979, Thai Prime Minister Chamanan arrived to the Soviet Union with an official visit, which was marked by the establishment of the Soviet-Thai Friendship Society. Since that time, more regular contacts and exchange of visits by foreign ministers of the two countries was witnessed<sup>27</sup>.

The twenty-first century can be considered a more eventful time period, as frequency and results of the political interactions raised dramatically. An important milestone in the recent development of the Russian-Thai bilateral ties was the first ever visit to Thailand of the Russian President in 2003, while in 2007 Thai Queen Sirikit paid the return visit, which

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<sup>26</sup>Friendship with the “Lion City”: on the Russian-Singapore Business Council, Rostec. October 28, 2019. URL: <https://rostec.ru/news/druzhiba-s-gorodom-lva-o-rossiysko-singapurskom-delovom-sovete-/> [in Russian]

<sup>27</sup> History of Bilateral Relations, Embassy of The Russian Federation in The Kingdom of Thailand. URL: <https://thailand.mid.ru/en/russian-thai-relations/history>



was also marked by the celebration of the 110th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Russia and Thailand. Consultations between the ministries of foreign affairs of both parties have been held on a regular basis since 1993. Moreover, active dialogue is being promoted between defense ministries and judicial authorities of Russia and Thailand<sup>28</sup>.

The Joint Russian-Thai Commission on Bilateral Cooperation (JC) plays a key role as the central mechanism of bilateral interaction in various areas, dealing with such issues of cooperation as industry, trade, agriculture, energy, transport and investments. The first General Trade Agreement between the parties was signed in 1970, and since then multiple documents proceeded in the field of economic cooperation, such as the Agreement on Cooperation between the Chamber of Commerce of Russia and the Chamber of Commerce of Thailand of 1997, the Agreement on Cooperation between the Russian Union of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs and the Federation of the Thai Industries of 2003 and the Agreement on Cooperation between the Russian-Thai Business Council and the Thai-Russian Business Council, the Memorandum of Understanding and Partnership between various ministries of Russia and Thailand. The structure of Russian-Thai trade is heavily dependent on oil and other energy resources, raw materials, machinery, chemical industry products, food and agricultural commodities. There exist Russian-Thai and Thai-Russian business councils, which have been operating successfully, providing a firm ground for regular exchanges between the business communities of the two countries<sup>29</sup>.

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<sup>28</sup> Political Ties, Embassy of The Russian Federation in The Kingdom of Thailand.

URL: <https://thailand.mid.ru/en/russian-thai-relations/political-ties>

<sup>29</sup> Trade and Economic Ties, Embassy of The Russian Federation in The Kingdom of Thailand.

URL: <https://thailand.mid.ru/en/russian-thai-relations/trade-and-economic-ties>



### 2.1.10 Russian-Vietnam relations

1950, the Soviet Union became one of the first countries to establish diplomatic ties with the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, contributing to the country's international recognition. However, Ho Chi Minh's travel to the Soviet Union in research of Communist theory and the national liberation movement can be accounted for the beginning of the relations between the two countries. In the twenty-first century, the Russian-Vietnamese relations grew over to the status of the bilateral strategic partnership, which was established by the Declaration of the diplomatic relationship, signed in 2001<sup>30</sup>. Political dialogue on the high levels has always been regular, productive and mutually advantageous. The comprehensive partnership was reassured by both heads of state during an official visit of Vietnamese leader Nguyen Phu Trong to Russia in 2014<sup>31</sup>. The regular exchanges of delegations at the highest levels, notably between Prime Ministers' visits demonstrates the persistent willingness and that national interests of Russia and Vietnam are strongly entwined and pursue similar goals. This argument is also supported by the fact that inter-parliamentary and contacts have become more active in recent years<sup>32</sup>.

The cooperation in such fields as trade, economics, military, science, technologies has got a significant impetus. Oil and natural gas sphere remain one of the strategic cornerstones in the Russian-Vietnamese comprehensive partnership with the establishment

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<sup>30</sup> Duy Nguyen, Russia-Vietnam Strategic Partnership: Natural Result of Long-term Relations. Hanoi Times, March 2, 2021. URL: <http://hanoitimes.vn/russia-vietnam-strategic-partnership-natural-result-of-decades-long-relations-316508.html>

<sup>31</sup> Совместное Заявление о Поступательном Продвижении Всеобъемлющего Стратегического Партнерства между Российской Федерацией и Социалистической Республикой Вьетнам / Joint Statement on the Progressive Advancement of the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership between the Russian Federation and the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, Moscow. November 25, 2014. URL: <http://www.kremlin.ru/supplement/4785> [in Russian]

<sup>32</sup> Konstantin Vnukov , 70th Anniversary of Việt Nam-Russia Traditional Friendship and Strategic Cooperation, Viet Nam News, January 30, 2020. URL: <https://vietnamnews.vn/politics-laws/591601/70th-anniversary-of-viet-nam-russia-traditional-friendship-and-strategic-cooperation.html>

of the joint venture. Cooperation has been rapidly developing in many oil and gas exploration and production projects, including the supply of liquefied natural gas to Vietnam<sup>33</sup>. Moreover, energy partnership gained more significance with the implementation of major projects including construction of a thermal power plant and Center for Nuclear Science and Technology in Vietnam. The Russian-Vietnamese bilateral trade has a big room for improvement and vast possibilities, and its full potential is far away from being reached, even though it has been developing steadily in the recent years<sup>34</sup>.

## **2.2 Russia and ASEAN: dialogue partnership and institutional framework of cooperation**

2021 marks the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Russia-ASEAN Dialogue Partnership, and throughout all these years, the relations have been on the steady and consistent rise. As observed and supported by the positive nature of bilateral relations between Russia and ASEAN member countries, the ties with the Association itself also enjoy a significant list of achievements, mutual agreements, prominent high-level meetings and a variety of unusual and perspective projects.

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<sup>33</sup> Посол: Вьетнам Намерен Развивать Сотрудничество с РФ в Сфере Обороны / Ambassador: Vietnam Intends to Develop Cooperation with the Russian Federation in the Field of Defense, RIA. May 17, 2016. URL: <https://ria.ru/20160517/1434919217.html> [in Russian]

<sup>34</sup> Интервью Посла России во Вьетнаме К. В. Внукова Телеканалу «ВТВ 4» ко Дню Установления Российско-Вьетнамских Дипломатических Отношений / Interview of the Ambassador of Russia to Vietnam K. V. Vnukov to the "VTV 4" TV Channel on the Anniversary of Establishment of Russian-Vietnamese Diplomatic Relations, Embassy of The Russian Federation in The Socialist Republic of Vietnam. URL: <https://vietnam.mid.ru/rossijsko-v-etnamskie-otnosenia> [in Russian]

### 2.2.1 Main milestones of the dialogue partnership

As mentioned previously, Russia-ASEAN Dialogue Partnership has its roots in the 1991 ASEAN Ministerial Meeting held in Kuala Lumpur, to which Russian delegation was invited as the guests of the Malaysian side. Since then, the contacts between Russia and the Association have been gradually developing and already in 1996, during another ASEAN Ministerial Meeting Russia was elevated to a status of a full Dialogue Partner of ASEAN. The relations took off relatively slow, however strong commitment of both parties led meant that the ties are destined to prosper in the coming years. This resulted in the series of Russia-ASEAN Summits, the first of which, as was mentioned before, took place in 2005 in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia<sup>35</sup>.

During the Summit, Russia and ASEAN signed the Joint Declaration of the Heads of State/Government of the Member Countries of ASEAN and the Russian Federation on Progressive and Comprehensive Partnership<sup>36</sup>. The Joint Declaration reaffirms that both Russia and ASEAN seek to adhere the principles of equality, mutual benefit and shared responsibility in their interactions, while also promoting peace, stability, security and prosperity in the Asia-Pacific region. Another goal was to improve and strengthen the dialogue mechanisms between the parties and enhance cooperation in a variety of spheres.

In order to achieve the ambitious goals outlined by the Joint Declaration, ASEAN and Russia also adopted the Comprehensive Programme of Action 2005-2015<sup>37</sup>. Its contents a wide range of fields of cooperation in almost every sphere imaginable. However, it is

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<sup>35</sup> Overview ASEAN-Russia Dialogue Relations, ASEAN. As of August 2020.

URL: <https://asean.org/storage/2012/05/Overview-ASEAN-Russia-Dialogue-Relations2.pdf>

<sup>36</sup> Joint Declaration of the Heads of State/Government of the Member Countries of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and the Head of State of the Russian Federation on Progressive and Comprehensive Partnership, Kuala Lumpur. 13 December 2005. URL: [https://asean.org/?static\\_post=joint-declaration-of-the-heads-of-state-government-of-the-member-countries-of-the-association-of-southeast-asian-nations-and-the-head-of-state-of-the-russian-federation-on-progressive-and-comprehensive](https://asean.org/?static_post=joint-declaration-of-the-heads-of-state-government-of-the-member-countries-of-the-association-of-southeast-asian-nations-and-the-head-of-state-of-the-russian-federation-on-progressive-and-comprehensive)

<sup>37</sup> Comprehensive Programme of Action...

crucial to notice how they are arranged and that coming from the first to the last ones, less and less points are highlighted in each sphere. As such, the most important for the parties are political and security spheres cooperation, as well as combating terrorism and transnational crime. A firm second place is occupied by economic cooperation, which again, looks very similar in its pattern to the bilateral economic cooperation between Russia and ASEAN member states. The least importance is attached to the such spheres as tourism, science, technology and innovation, as well as socio-cultural cooperation, which heavily undermines the huge potential of these areas of partnership. However, the Programme also highlights the specific mechanisms responsible for implementation of the plans and reaching the set goals.

The Second Russia-ASEAN Summit was held in 2010 in Hanoi, Vietnam which reaffirmed the parties' mutual commitments to consolidate efforts in future promotion and enhancement of Russia-ASEAN comprehensive partnership towards further rapprochement of the relations, working closely together to ensure stability and prosperity in the Asia-Pacific region<sup>38</sup>.

The 20th anniversary of the dialogue relations between Russia and ASEAN in 2016 was celebrated with a Commemorative Summit in 2016 in Sochi, Russia. During the Summit, the Leaders adopted the Sochi Declaration and the new Comprehensive Plan of Action, aimed at diversifying mutually beneficial cooperation for the period of 2016-2020 between Russia and the Association. Both documents follow the lines of the previously signed accords and pursue same goals, but with a wider scope, significantly expanding and deepening the dialogue partnership<sup>39</sup>.

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<sup>38</sup> Joint Statement of the Second ASEAN-Russian Federation Summit, Ha Noi, 30 October 2010. URL: [https://asean.org/?static\\_post=joint-statement-of-the-second-asean-russian-federation-summit](https://asean.org/?static_post=joint-statement-of-the-second-asean-russian-federation-summit)

<sup>39</sup> Documents, ASEAN-Russia Summit, Sochi, May 19-20, 2016. URL: <http://en.russia-asean20.ru/documents/>

The last but not least in the important milestones list was the third Russia-ASEAN Summit in 2018 in Singapore, which finally brought the ASEAN-Russia relations to a new peak, bringing it to a status of a Strategic Partnership<sup>40</sup>. This prominent advancement of the relations should foster even closer cooperation for a mutually advantageous future of the relations, sticking to the same principles, as the ones dialogue partnership was initially built on.

The Summit also adopted Statement of ASEAN-the Russian Federation on Cooperation in the Field of Security and in the Use of Information and Communication Technologies, once again underlining the importance and central role of the political and security dialogue in the course of relations between Russia and ASEAN, as well as finally strengthening the cooperation in such crucial and essential sphere as information and communication technologies<sup>41</sup>. At the same time, economic cooperation gained another strong impetus by the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding between the ASEAN and the Eurasian Economic Commission on Economic Cooperation<sup>42</sup>. The document is aimed at promoting economic cooperation and collaboration, contributing to trade, investments and economic expansion between the two parties.

On January 26 2021, Senior Officials of Russia and ASEAN Member States held a videoconference, which also is marked by the 25th Anniversary of the ASEAN-Russia Dialogue Partnership<sup>43</sup>. During the meeting, the participants discussed issues of promoting the Russian-ASEAN Strategic Partnership with an emphasis on most relative areas such as

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<sup>40</sup> Joint Statement of the 3<sup>rd</sup> ASEAN-Russian Federation Summit on Strategic Partnership, Singapore, 14 November 2018. URL: <https://asean.org/storage/2018/11/ASEAN-Russia-Joint-Statement.pdf>

<sup>41</sup> Statement of ASEAN and the Russian Federation on Cooperation in the Field of Security of and in the Use of Information...

<sup>42</sup> Memorandum of Understanding Between the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and The Eurasian Economic Commission On Economic Cooperation, Singapore, November 14, 2018. URL: [https://asean.org/storage/2012/05/44.-MoU-between-EEC-and-ASEAN-Final-clean-ASEAN-Version\\_updated\\_rev-1.pdf](https://asean.org/storage/2012/05/44.-MoU-between-EEC-and-ASEAN-Final-clean-ASEAN-Version_updated_rev-1.pdf)

<sup>43</sup> On the 17th ASEAN-Russia Senior Officials' Meeting, Mission of the Russian Federation to ASEAN, January 26, 2021. URL: [https://asean.mid.ru/en\\_GB/news-and-events/-/asset\\_publisher/CczwEr8Fkk8T/content/o-sovesanii-starsih-dolznostnyh-lic-rossia-asean](https://asean.mid.ru/en_GB/news-and-events/-/asset_publisher/CczwEr8Fkk8T/content/o-sovesanii-starsih-dolznostnyh-lic-rossia-asean)

foreign policy coordination, science, innovations and digitalization of the economy. Furthermore, preparation for releasing the new ASEAN-Russia Comprehensive Plan of Action, which is scheduled to be adopted later this year, has been conducted by the parties.

There are three main Russia-ASEAN cooperation mechanisms. The first one is the ASEAN-Russia Joint Cooperation Committee, which is vested with objectives to enhance the efficiency of current activities and identifying promising directions of cooperation. Another important body is ASEAN-Russia Dialogue Partnership Financial Fund, used to provide financial assistance to the initiatives launched by the Joint Cooperation Committee. Finally, there is Russia-ASEAN Business Council, which provides all-round help to business circles of the both parties, identifies and promotes most promising investment projects and assists the work of the Russian Chamber of Commerce and Industry in the region<sup>44</sup>. These mechanisms operate on a regular basis, offering a stable and significant support to the improvement of economic ties between Russia and ASEAN.

### **2.2.2 Effects and consequences on the bilateral ties between Russia and ASEAN states**

To some extent, it is relatively hard to make a firm assumption, whether establishment of Russia-ASEAN dialogue partnership and subsequent promotion of said partnership to the status of a comprehensive one have affected the level of bilateral ties between Russia and the Association member states or not, however, there are still several long-lasting and easily recognizable tendencies, which have been dominating the relations between the countries in the years since the establishment of first contacts between ASEAN and Russia.

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<sup>44</sup> ASEAN - Russia Cooperation Mechanisms, Russia – ASEAN Summit, Sochi, May 19-20, 2016.  
URL: [http://en.russia-asean20.ru/russia\\_asean/20160309/9441.html](http://en.russia-asean20.ru/russia_asean/20160309/9441.html)

First and foremost, the most notable and outstanding is the similarity of approaches and patterns of formalizing the ties. All the above mentioned bilateral relations share same framework, based on the same principles and are often entwined with the cooperation between Russia and ASEAN member states within the regional and international organizations. Even though it is impossible to determine the most obvious driver in the relations, whether it is the institutional level cooperation or bilateral level one, however, the important conclusion is that of course, certain level of influence from Russia's bilateral relations with its long-lasting partners surely affected not only the scope and character of partnership with the Association, but bilateral ties with the other ASEAN member states, serving as a benchmark to newly formed and underdeveloped ties.

Another thing, which is instantly identifiable, is the fact, that cooperation has been driven mostly by the political sphere, specifically in the area of promoting peace, security, fighting international crime and terrorism, while economic cooperation, even though always strongly promoted and highlighted by the parties, still lacks development or any marvelous achievements. Generally, the relations have been steadily developing, but Russia is still lagging behind in trade turnover, with no real potential to challenge other ASEAN's major partners, namely, of course, Asian-Pacific region hegemons, China and the United States. One key factor to this may also be obvious, and that is, of course, limited scope of the cooperation of the two parties, as well as lack of serious attempts for discovering and promoting partnership in new areas, which might yield more gains in the near future, such as high-tech, information, communication, and hugely underdeveloped area of humanitarian ties, as people-to-people and society connections play a more significant role in the rapidly changing globalization-affected society.



## 2.3 Chapter summary

Russia has a very rich and diverse history of relations with ASEAN member countries, sometimes dating long before the creation of the Association. Despite this very uneven background, in the twenty-first century the approach has been more consistent, while the other side of the partnership always responded adequately and frequently showed its willingness to maintain open and amiable dialogue with the Russian side. Most of the bilateral relations enjoy a great and consistent level of communication, while the strategic comprehensive partnership and general principles have been carried out by the Russia-ASEAN highest-level cooperation mechanisms. The three official and one commemorative summits confirm the attitude and intentions of the parties to further elaborate and develop projects in a variety of spheres, cornerstone of which traditionally was maintenance of peace and security in the Asian-Pacific region. Even though analysis of the specific fields, their ups and downs, breakthroughs, challenges and prospects are going to be discussed in detail in the next chapters, it is already safe to admit, that generally, development of the Russia-ASEAN relations have been relatively slow, without any giant leaps forward. In many areas, Russia, though in the status of the ASEAN comprehensive partner and with 30 years of bilateral contacts with the Association, still lags behind most of other major player in the region in terms of density and efficiency of these contacts. However, recent developments and the nature of the Russia-ASEAN relations suggest a bright future for the partnership and hopes for its potential to be fully realized.



## **CHAPTER 3. Political and diplomatic relations between Russia and ASEAN in the twenty-first century**

The chapter discusses the dynamics of the core of the relations between Russia and ASEAN, which has always been the political sphere, namely the issue of preserving peace and security, maintaining stability and ensuring prosperity in the Southeast Asia, as it has been one of reasons behind the formation of the Association, as well as corresponds to the Russian national interests in the region. As previous section has already outlined the main stages of establishment and progression of the Russia-ASEAN partnership, this one is devoted to the contents and results of the interactions between the parties in the field of security, analyzing the reasons and background, which made security an issue of paramount importance to both sides, explaining and evaluating the work of existing cooperation framework mechanisms and its effectiveness, as while as highlighting peculiarities in both sides' stances on acute issues. Finally, the chapter draws a first conclusion, whether or not the limits of the scope in the security cooperation have been reached or not, and what further developments are feasible in the foreseeable future.

### **3.1 Change of political agenda: ASEAN in the Russian pivot to the East**

In order to fully comprehend the position Asia-Pacific occupies in the foreign policy priorities of modern Russia, we need to trace the emergence of so-called Russian pivot to the East, as it is a relatively young concept, which nevertheless, has been growing rapidly in significance. The first ever attempts to establish contacts were made in the second half of

the 1990s, which resulted in not only formalizing of the partnership with ASEAN in 1996, but also formation of “Shanghai five”, which later transformed into another regional structure – Shanghai Cooperation Organization, and admission of Russia into the APEC – Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation in 1998. All of these regional integration formations play a key part in different aspects of Russian foreign policy in the Asia-Pacific, and active participation indicates high level of trust that Russia puts into them for promoting its current agenda and stance in the region.

A lot of experts and researchers have actively started using the term “pivot to the East” after the outbreak of the Ukrainian crisis and the following deterioration of the relations between Russia and its traditional largest partners, the Western countries. However, this vector of Russian foreign policy has been on the agenda for longer, even though it lacked formalization and confirmation of its presence among strategic regional priorities. As former Russian Ambassador to Thailand K. Barsky noted<sup>1</sup>, the first years after the dissolution of the Soviet Union were characterized by attempts to develop cooperation with its neighbors economically powerful and technologically advanced Western states, while adhering to the principles of equal partnership with friendly neighboring. However, the common belief among political elites that Western countries would share the interest in finding joint approaches in the political, military, economic and other fields with democratic Russia was wrong, and this approach failed. When E. Primakov became the foreign minister in 1996, a new approach and strategy of the Russian foreign policy was introduced. A concept of the multipolar world, the principles of mutual respect for interests and equal, mutually beneficial cooperation, the central role of the UN were established as the core of this new vision, while a new key role was assigned to strengthening cooperation with a wide range of partners,

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<sup>1</sup> Kirill Barsky, «Восточный вектор» начертил Примаков / “The Eastern vector” was drawn by Primakov, the International Affairs, №10, 2016. P.42-66 URL: <https://thailand.mid.ru/images/misc/docs/mezhd.pdf> [in Russian]

including the countries of the Asia-Pacific region. The main goal was formulated as creation of a "belt" of good neighborliness, trust and security, which is capable of providing favorable conditions for the economic and social development of Russia. The task was not only to develop bilateral relations with the countries of the region, but also to intensify Russia's involvement and participation in the activities of all regional organizations and forums.

These structural changes of approach resulted in inclusion of Asia-Pacific in the list Russian foreign policy regional priorities, which are addressed in a variety of official documents, released in the recent years. The main one of them, Foreign Policy Concept has faced four different iterations in the twenty-first century, all of which demonstrated the emergence and steady development of the new strategic approach in the Russian foreign policy. At first, regional priorities were relatively narrow and relations with such countries as the ASEAN members were not viewed as strategically important, however, as time passed, the situation changed, and more and more prominence have been attached to these relations.

For instance, while 2000 Concept includes just one paragraph mentioning maintaining positive tendencies in relations Southeast Asia, in regards that Russia needs to enhance its presence in the Asia-Pacific as a whole, while participating in the regional integration structures, such as APEC, ASEAN Regional Forum, and the Shanghai Five, which all are mentioned in the context of being beneficial for development of Siberia and Russian Far East<sup>2</sup>.

The next iteration, released under President Medvedev in 2008, still lacked any specific details or peculiarities when describing ties with ASEAN: "(Foreign policy objectives) In the Asia-Pacific region: develop additional proposals for inclusion of the East

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<sup>2</sup> Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation, June 28, 2000.  
URL: <https://fas.org/nuke/guide/russia/doctrine/econcept.htm>

Asian Summits and the Russia-ASEAN Dialogue Partnership in the agenda.” The 2008 Concept, on the other hand, outlined practical fields of cooperation, which should have been promoted with the countries of the Asia-Pacific, such as the field of countering terrorism, security and civilization dialogue establishment, while continuing to actively participate in the the main integration structures of the region<sup>3</sup>.

The 2013 revision of the document also underlined prominence of deepening and strengthening strategic partnership with Vietnam and intensify its cooperation with other ASEAN member states, which once again confirms the fact that relations with the Association have often been viewed in the context of development of the bilateral ties between Russia and its members. Moreover, importance was attached of another ASEAN initiative – the East Asia Summit (EAS), which Russia viewed as the main platform for strategic dialogue between leaders on key security and cooperation issues of the Asia-Pacific. Other partnership mechanisms, such as ASEAN-Russia Dialogue, ASEAN Regional Forum on security, ASEAN Defense Ministers' Meeting with dialogue partners are mentioned as well, however only briefly<sup>4</sup>. Russia first participated in the EAS as an observer by the invitation of Malaysia in the first-ever Summit of 2005, and joined as a full member in 2011 alongside the United States<sup>5</sup>. Russia views East Asia Summits as another crucial platform for promoting its agenda of the creation of a security and sustainable development framework in the Asia-Pacific, as its format of inclusion of all ten ASEAN member states

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<sup>3</sup> Концепция Внешней Политики Российской Федерации / Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation, July 12, 2008.

URL: [https://studme.org/120906135871/politologiya/novaya\\_kontseptsiya\\_vneshney\\_politiki\\_rossiyskoy\\_federatsii](https://studme.org/120906135871/politologiya/novaya_kontseptsiya_vneshney_politiki_rossiyskoy_federatsii) [in Russian]

<sup>4</sup> Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation, February 18, 2013. URL:

[https://www.mid.ru/en/foreign\\_policy/official\\_documents/-/asset\\_publisher/CptlCk6BZ29/content/id/122186](https://www.mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/official_documents/-/asset_publisher/CptlCk6BZ29/content/id/122186)

<sup>5</sup> US, Russia to join East Asia Summit, AFP, July 20, 2010.

URL: <https://web.archive.org/web/20110723014303/http://www.google.com/hostednews/afp/article/ALeqM5h3xcrO8YSIm9-PeBMNAC-i5PMfcw> [archived]

and its eight dialogue partners facilitates the comprehensive multilateral dialogue, comprising all the major regional actors<sup>6</sup>.

Finally, the current edition of the Concept, published in 2016, reflects on the practical steps and undertakings, which occurred in the Russia-ASEAN partnership, and finally corresponded to the statements of the political leaders, who claimed that Russia's regional priorities and its foreign policy towards new partners has seen a lot of improvements. First and foremost, it is crucial to mention, that more articles are devoted to Southeast Asia in general, and to ASEAN partnership in particular, in the entire text of the Concept. The Asia-Pacific is called "a foreign policy area of strategic importance", while noting its aspirations to actively participate in regional integration processes, in effort to create "an inclusive, open, transparent and equitable collective security and cooperation architecture" in the region. The goal to strengthen the "long-term dialogue partnership" and achieve a status of strategic partner of ASEAN was highlighted as well, following the Sochi Summit, where these topic was voiced for the first time. Moreover, Russia's activities in leading the dialogue and shaping agenda of such organizations as Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) provided a wide range of opportunities to establish inter-organization cooperation framework in a variety of fields. Lastly, compared to the previous Concept, not only strategic partnership with Vietnam is mentioned, but also "multidimensional cooperation with Indonesia, Thailand, Singapore, Malaysia and other States in Asia-Pacific" are viewed as another area which needs to be in the focus of the Russian foreign policy<sup>7</sup>.

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<sup>6</sup> Восточноазиатский Саммит (справочный материал) / East Asia Summit (Reference material), Ministry of the Foreign Affairs, Russia. February 11, 2016. URL: [https://www.mid.ru/atr/-/asset\\_publisher/0vP3hQoCPRg5/content/id/958591](https://www.mid.ru/atr/-/asset_publisher/0vP3hQoCPRg5/content/id/958591) [in Russian]

<sup>7</sup> Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation, November 30, 2016. URL: [https://www.mid.ru/en/foreign\\_policy/official\\_documents/-/asset\\_publisher/CptICkKB6BZ29/content/id/2542248](https://www.mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/official_documents/-/asset_publisher/CptICkKB6BZ29/content/id/2542248)

However, some other documents sometimes lack this level of clarification. For instance, even though security and sustainable development has always been the issue of common interest, Russian National Security Strategy of 2015 does not explicitly mention ASEAN partnership, while noting other integration entities, such as BRICS, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, and the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation forum. The only prominent detail discussed in the document is necessity for creation of “reliable mechanisms for ensuring stability and security” in the Asia-Pacific, increasing the effectiveness of political and economic cooperation with the countries of this region, using regional integration structures to expand interaction in the fields of science, education and culture<sup>8</sup>. This discrepancy can be justified by the nature of the Strategy, as this document is aimed at asserting security issues mainly within the scope of Russian borders, while regional and global security courses are promoted by the Foreign Affairs Ministry in the abovementioned Concepts.

Nevertheless, the Concepts do not remain the only documents which determine Russia’s approach to promoting cooperation with ASEAN in the field of security. Another, practical field document was adopted in 2016, the Doctrine of Information Security of the Russian Federation. Contemporary security challenges, such as the use of “information technologies to compromise the strategic stability”, pose a serious threat, so the aim of this document is to promote such policy, which will “facilitate the development of an international information security system” aimed at countering these threat and will “strengthen equal strategic partnership in the sphere of information security”. It is a strategic objective in the national defense policy, as it involves tackling both internal and external threats, while trans-national character and worldwide interdependence in the field of

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<sup>8</sup> Стратегия национальной безопасности Российской Федерации (Strategy of the National Security of the Russian Federation, December 31, 2015. URL: <https://rg.ru/2015/12/31/nac-bezopasnost-site-dok.html> [in Russian])

information technologies makes it an issue of paramount importance not only while maintaining integrity within the borders of one state, but also, in the scale of regional and global stability<sup>9</sup>. Thus, Russia has been actively promoting cooperation in this field with its partners, including ASEAN. Results of these efforts was signing of the Statement of ASEAN and the Russian Federation on Cooperation in the Field of Security of and in the Use of Information and Communication Technologies during the third Russia-ASEAN Summit in 2018 in Singapore. The Statement was released pursuing the goal to acknowledge the growing importance of use in the information and communication technologies, necessity to adhere to the international law principles and express concerns about misuse of such technologies, which can potentially be harmful to regional and international peace, security and stability<sup>10</sup>. The document will be reviewed in detail later, as it is relevant to the current security issues agenda of the Russia-ASEAN dialogue.

The idea of vast and ongoing expansion of Russia's presence in the Asia-Pacific, which can be tracked in these framework documents is supported by official position. As noted by the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, it is "one of the fundamental foreign policy priorities is to promote multifaceted cooperation with Asia-Pacific countries", and numerous regional structures, such as EAS, ARF, APEC, the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM), and others are mentioned as those, where Russia actively participates on a regular basis. The security cooperation must be open, transparent and inclusive, which can ensure "effective response to the existing security challenges". Fostering cooperation in the areas of countering terrorism and transnational crime, emergency tackling, safe use of information and communication technologies can only be achieved adhering to the principles of

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<sup>9</sup> Doctrine of Information Security of the Russian Federation, December 5, 2016. URL: [https://www.mid.ru/en/foreign\\_policy/official\\_documents/-/asset\\_publisher/CptlCk6BZ29/content/id/2563163](https://www.mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/official_documents/-/asset_publisher/CptlCk6BZ29/content/id/2563163)

<sup>10</sup> Statement of ASEAN and the Russian Federation on Cooperation in the Field of Security of and in the Use of Information...



international law, peaceful conflict resolution, and non-use of force within existing integration frameworks<sup>11</sup>.

During the 27th Asia-Pacific roundtable in Malaysia, 2013, Russian Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Igor Morgulov noted that putting Asia-Pacific among strategic priorities of the Russian foreign policy has been implemented consistently and systematically in the twenty-first century. He also confirmed that Russia views participation in various multilateral associations and forums in the Asia-Pacific as the key element of Russia's policy in the region. Specifically, again highlighting the importance of the EAS, organized by ASEN, which Russia treats as “the leading regional platform for dialogue between leaders”. This dialogue format is suitable for discussion of such issues, such as regional strategic stability and economic development. Another important institution in the security framework is the ASEAN Regional Forum, which has the necessary foundations for dealing with new challenges and threats, such as cybercrime<sup>12</sup>.

Russian State Duma member Vyacheslav Nikonov mentioned that ASEAN implements a unique model of political modernization, which differs from traditional “Westernization” forms of integration, thus contributing to diversity and multipolarity development, welcomed and favored by Russian foreign policy in the twenty-first century. He also shares the common Russian idea of so-called “security architecture” in the Asia-Pacific, which is essential against the large number of flashpoints, which have a high potential for conflict outbreaks in the region, various in their nature and scale, from nuclear disarmament of the Korean peninsula to peaceful distribution and shared use of natural

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<sup>11</sup>Участие России в многосторонних механизмах в АТР (Russia’s Participation in the multilateral mechanisms of the APR), The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation. URL: <https://www.mid.ru/ucastie-rossii-v-mnogostoronnih-mehanizmah-v-atr> [in Russian]

<sup>12</sup> Выступление заместителя Министра иностранных дел России И.В.Моргулова на заседании 27-го Азиатско-Тихоокеанского «круглого стола» по безопасности, (Speech of Russian Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Igor Morgulov at the 27<sup>th</sup> Asia-Pacific roundtable on security) Kuala Lumpur, June 6, 2013. Russian Ministry of the Foreign Affairs. URL: [https://www.mid.ru/atr/-/asset\\_publisher/0vP3hQoCPRg5/content/id/106890](https://www.mid.ru/atr/-/asset_publisher/0vP3hQoCPRg5/content/id/106890) [in Russian]



resources and territories. The nature of these challenges specify significance of Russia in conflict resolution and stability maintenance of the Asia-Pacific, as moreover, it has been positioning itself “as the Eurasian power”<sup>13</sup>.

On the other hand, the success and all the achievements of the Russia’s “pivot to the East” could not be possible without a proper and comparable response from its counterparts in the Asia-Pacific. So, some significant steps and measures were taken by ASEAN as well, in order to approve inclusion of Russia in its integration mechanisms. As a complex institution comprised of ten unique member states, a firm consensus based on substantial reasons must be reached before such decision of extending its partnership ties, or invitation to one of its regular special forums can be made. Undoubtedly, close ties with numerous ASEAN members and their support for Russia’s partnership status with the Association played an important role in this process, however, it is also supported by factual evidence, that not only Russia needs ASEAN as a platform for promoting its agenda, but in return, ASEAN needs Russia’s presence for stabilizing the dialogue between all the major regional powers. As admitted by Paradorn Rangsimaporn: “For ASEAN countries, Russia was seen as a useful ‘balancer’ to other regional powers, which accorded well with Russia’s desire for regional acceptance and greater role”.<sup>14</sup> After the end of the Cold War, the United States remained the sole superpower still promoting its national interests all around the globe, raising many local and regional balance-of-power questions. However, it is not the only major player. Blistering rise of China multiplied by its ambitions and capabilities to take the role of the regional leader create another center of power in the Asia-Pacific, and with the

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<sup>13</sup> Vyacheslav Nikonov, Russia and ASEAN, keynote address, delivered at the “ASEAN-Russia Conference: foundations and future prospects”, ISEAS, Singapore, April 26-27, 2011. ASEAN-Russia: Foundations and future prospects. Ed. by Sumsy, V. & Hongand, M. & Lugg, A., (Singapore, ISEAS, 2012), pp. xli-xlix.

<sup>14</sup> Paradorn Rangsimaporn, Russia’s search for an enhanced role in Southeast Asia. ASEAN-Russia: Foundations and future prospects, Ed. by Sumsy, V. & Hongand, M. & Lugg, A., (Singapore, ISEAS, 2012), p.327.

likes of Japan, South Korea, Australia and ASEAN itself, the level of complexity and conflict possibilities increase as well. Therefore, bringing in Russia, which nowadays has a lot in common with ASEAN in terms of stance on multipolarity and equality in the regional partnership ties. This is also observed by the delay of Russia's acceptance into the EAS until the 2011, which can be explained by the fact that at first, ASEAN members doubted Russia's significance to the organization and scope of its balancing role, while admitting existing weaknesses in Russia-ASEAN dialogue partnership. Still, as China has been on rise, this "increased ASEAN concerns over its predominance", even despite close and amiable ties with China, Russia was perceived as a counterweight to it<sup>15</sup>. Consistent support of main Russian partners among ASEAN members also helped to overcome the skepticism and Russia is now rightfully acknowledged as one of the key players in the Asia-Pacific by ASEAN, which was sealed in the establishment of the strategic partnership status in 2018.

After assessing at the historical background of Russia-ASEAN partnership establishment and the prerequisites, external and internal factors shaping the interactions between the parties, it is time to take a deeper look at the cooperation mechanisms in the political sphere.

### **3.2 Main mechanisms of political and diplomatic cooperation**

Analysis of the cooperation mechanisms, pointing out their special features, gives a better indication for evaluation of the Russia-ASEAN partnership effectiveness as a whole, especially in such key area, as security. Before assessing the agenda of the relations and judge the achieved results, it is essential to understand the limitations of the established

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<sup>15</sup> Paradorn Rangsi maporn, p. 328.

framework, its capabilities and how it has been functioning on different stages of the Russia-ASEAN partnership. As ASEAN acts as a host and center for many of the regional integration platforms, it is essential to highlight their advantages and benefits they bring to the partnership.

First and foremost, there are highest-level meetings – Russia-ASEAN Summit. Being fundamental to the partnership, these three official and one commemorative summits have established the framework and guided the direction of partnership development, symbolizing and representing different stages of progress of the Russia-ASEAN ties. For instance, the First Summit of 2005 was a first great leap forward, which launched the frequency of high-level interactions and dialogue between the parties, attaching great importance not only to the fact that Russia signed the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia a year before, but also confirming significance of other regular cooperation platforms, such as ASEAN Regional Forum, while also mentioning promotion of closer cooperation between ASEAN and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, another institution aimed at ensuring peace and stability in the Asia-Pacific region<sup>16</sup>. The Joint Declaration, signed in the course of the Summit, also attaches key importance to a variety of dialogue forms, including, for example, the ASEAN Senior Officials Meeting on Transnational Crime (SOMTC) – Russian Federation Consultations, which serves as a venue for discussion combating such issues as “transnational organized crime, drug trafficking, trafficking in persons, sea piracy, arms smuggling, money laundering, international economic crime and cybercrime”<sup>17</sup>.

At the same time the parties adopted the Comprehensive Programme of Action, which thoroughly described the areas of cooperation and explicitly specified the bodies and

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<sup>16</sup> Chairman’s Statement of the First ASEAN-Russian Federation Summit Kuala Lumpur. December 13, 2005. URL: [https://asean.org/?static\\_post=chairman-s-statement-of-the-first-asean-russian-federation-summit-kuala-lumpur-13-december-2005-2](https://asean.org/?static_post=chairman-s-statement-of-the-first-asean-russian-federation-summit-kuala-lumpur-13-december-2005-2)

<sup>17</sup> Joint Declaration of the Heads of State/Government of the Member Countries of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and the Head of State of the Russian Federation on Progressive...

mechanisms responsible for the consistent and regular interaction between Russia and ASEAN countries. Those include “annual ASEAN Post Ministerial Conference (PM?) +1 Sessions with the Russian Federation, ASEAN-Russian Federation Senior Officials Meetings (SOM), ASEAN-Russian Federation Joint Cooperation Committee (ARJCC), and ASEAN-Russian Federation Joint Planning and Management Committee (ARJPMC). The dialogue, however, was not limited to these mechanisms, as parties agreed to hold “special meetings of Foreign Ministers of ASEAN and the Russian Federation on the margins of the UN General Assembly Sessions, consultations of the delegations on the agenda of those Sessions, as well as meetings of Permanent Representatives to the UN”<sup>18</sup>.

Moreover, the Program mentioned the possibility of creation of the ASEAN-Russia Joint Working Group on Counter-Terrorism and Transnational Crime, the goal, which has its roots back in 2003, when the parties signed Joint Declaration on Partnership for Peace and Security, and Prosperity and Development in The Asia-Pacific Region<sup>19</sup>, making it one of the first strategic cooperation documents within a certain field and a vast practical scope for implementation. The Joint Working Group was eventually created, vested with the objective to promote cooperation in combating new transnational threats, which is truly an issue of paramount importance, as Southeast Asia acts as one of the largest logistics hubs in the world, thus making it a potential target of “WMD-terrorism”, as stated by Vladimir Orlov, who was a member of the Russian delegation took part in the 4th meeting of the Joint Working Group. He noted: “the greatest risk with components of nuclear, chemical and biological weapon is related to their transportation - in particular by sea”<sup>20</sup>. This indicates

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<sup>18</sup> Comprehensive Programme of Action...

<sup>19</sup> Joint Declaration of the Foreign Ministers of the Russian Federation and The Association of Southeast Asian Nations on Partnership for Peace and Security, and Prosperity and Development in The Asia-Pacific Region, Phnom Penh. June 19, 2003. URL: <https://asean.org/joint-declaration-of-the-foreign-ministers-of-the-russian-federation-and-the-association-of-southeast-asian-nations-on-partnership-for-peace-and-security-and-prosperity-and-development-in-the-asia-pac/>

<sup>20</sup> PIR Center at the Annual ASEAN-Russia Joint Working Group Meeting, PIR Center. October 12, 2012. URL: <http://pircenter.org/en/news/6348-pir-center-at-the-annual-aseanrussia-joint-working-group-meeting>

concerns of Russia about the region and that both parties pay a particular attention to strengthening ties in the area of security and stability, following the current trends and successfully responding to emergence of new types of challenges.

After the adoption of the new Comprehensive Plan of Action for 2016-2020 during 2016 Sochi Summit, Russia-ASEAN partnership saw another enhancement in the political-security cooperation. At the time the parties were putting enormous efforts and all the hard work to achieving the goal for promoting the Russia-ASEAN dialogue to a level of strategic partnership, so a comprehensive improvement of highest-level interactions and cooperation activities carried out by existing regional mechanisms in such vital spheres as promoting peace, security, and stability in the region. With the inclusion of Russia into East Asia Summit (EAS), this regional platform is viewed as having a lot of prospects for maintaining positive dialogue between the state leaders. Many other channels of cooperation are highlighted, such as previously mentioned regular ASEAN Post Ministerial Conference, Senior Officials' Meetings, the ASEAN Regional Forum, ASEAN Defense Ministers' Meeting-Plus (ADMM-Plus), and moreover, adding to these list some fresh mechanisms, for example, the dialogue between the Committee of the Permanent Representatives to ASEAN (CPR) and the Russian Ambassador to ASEAN, Expanded ASEAN Maritime Forum (EAMF), the ASEAN Regional Mine Action Centre, and the Experts Working Group on Military Medicine (EWG-MM) are mentioned, covering more particular, narrower issues<sup>21</sup>.

In all its diversity and multiplicity, these cooperation mechanisms still play an uneven role and should be judged accordingly. As some platforms, such as Summits, are more suitable for reaching general consensus and forging of strategic approach to tackling issues of common interest, others, such as various Joint Working Groups focus on specific areas, which require a lot of attention at a certain period of time, often in response to newly

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<sup>21</sup> Comprehensive Plan of Action...

emerging challenges. As noted by A. Voronin, the key role is played by the annual ASEAN Post Ministerial Conference, which are not exclusive to inviting the Russian representatives only, as this format is standard for all of the Association's partners. The Conference is often divided in sessions in 10+1 format (10 ASEAN member states + 1 partner), so all the partners share an equal right for independent discussion of the relations status, while the sessions itself are chaired by the countries' Foreign Ministers. Normally, the preparation of such meetings involves a significant number of ministries and departments, as well as business circles, which facilitates implementation of the agreements concluded during Russia-ASEAN Summits<sup>22</sup>. The annual basis of the Conferences allows parties to maintain consistent dialogue, while creation of ad hoc Commissions and Councils for resolving minor current issues makes the existing framework more flexible towards fulfilling responsibilities it was initially vested with. Moreover, some of the areas, which require consistent ongoing dialogue, the meetings on the level of Deputy Foreign Ministers are held more frequently. It is also important to mention that since 2009, Russian ambassador to Jakarta has also obtained a status of its permanent representative in ASEAN, as was noted by Vyacheslav Nikonov<sup>23</sup>. The permanent representation plays a crucial part in maintaining effective communication between the parties, thus providing a firm ground to exchange opinions on burning issues and coordinate closely in a variety of fields.

As mentioned before, there are some other major cooperation mechanisms, such as: ASEAN-Russia Joint Cooperation Committee (ARJCC), ASEAN-Russia Dialogue Partnership Financial Fund (DPFF) and Russia-ASEAN Business Council. As the latter two act specifically in the economic and financial cooperation area, they will be covered in detail in the next chapter. Even though the Joint Cooperation Committee, which consists of Russian

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<sup>22</sup> Leonid Vasiliev, *АСЕАН в начале XXI века. Актуальные проблемы и перспективы / ASEAN at the beginning of the XXI century* (Moscow, Forum, 2010), p.129. [in Russian]

<sup>23</sup> Vyacheslav Nikonov, *Russia and ASEAN*, keynote address. p. xlvi.

representatives, Permanent Representatives to ASEAN and the ASEAN Secretariat, is overseeing the activities of the other two bodies, its scope is not limited to the economic field only. “Its objectives include increasing the efficiency of ongoing activities and identifying promising directions and means to enhance such cooperation”, which can be achieved in the form of “recommendations for the relevant authorities in the ASEAN member states and Russia” and “considering and endorsing cooperation programmes”<sup>24</sup>.

The existing framework of mechanisms and dialogue channels between Russia and ASEAN is rather highly developed, while the communication is often stable and effective. However, it is obvious, that taking a decade to be formed and implemented after the establishment of the dialogue partnership inevitably undermined its role on the early stages. Gladly, both parties realized that and put maximum efforts into enhancing and improving of this system, making it comprehensive, covering all levels and most of the major areas of mutual concern.

### **3.2.1 Political and security cooperation agenda**

In order to fully comprehend the list of achievements and properly evaluate this breakthrough, it is crucial to return back to the official documents adopted after various high-level meetings in the course of the Russia-ASEAN partnership. As viewed in the previous section, sometimes, parties underline their intentions to take particular measures, and as time passes, these ideas are being implemented into a practical field, such as elevation of the relations to the status of strategic partnership, or creation a special Joint Working Groups.

The first and foremost, even though, after a lengthy deadlock, there was already mentioned the Joint Declaration on Partnership for Peace and Security adopted in 2003,

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<sup>24</sup> ASEAN — Russia Cooperation Mechanisms...



which truly can be viewed as the first significant breakthrough of the Russia-ASEAN partnership. Its contents include parties' understanding the necessity "to enhance peace and security, and prosperity and development in the Asia-Pacific region", as well as acknowledging the existence and impact on regional security of issues "such as terrorism; separatism; organized crime in various forms, including illicit drug trafficking, the smuggling of psychotropic substances and their precursor, illicit small arms trafficking, cyber crimes, people smuggling, and trafficking in women and children"<sup>25</sup>. Both Russia and ASEAN realized that effective multilateral cooperation at all levels is crucial for achieving these aims, therefore, discussion of particular steps to give an impetus to the partnership was discussed. They considered establishing Russia-ASEAN summits, and this fundamental framework has already been discussed in detail previously. Nevertheless, another prominent achievement was Russia's recognition of "ASEAN's efforts to encourage the Dialogue Partners to accede to the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia", which Russia signed a year later, in 2004<sup>26</sup>, when Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov attended the ASEAN Post-Minister Conference in Vientiane, Laos<sup>27</sup>. The signing of the Treaty was another crucial step forward in the Russia-ASEAN partnership, facilitating the sooner realization of the first-ever Russia-ASEAN Summit.

Moreover, ASEAN countries acknowledge that Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and Russia's active participation in its activities successfully promotes peace and security in the region. This attitude saw a practical reflection as well, as formal communication between ASEAN and Shanghai Cooperation Organization started upon the

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<sup>25</sup> Joint Declaration of the Foreign Ministers of the Russian Federation and The Association of Southeast Asian Nations on Partnership for Peace and Security...

<sup>26</sup> Instrument of Accession to the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia by Russian Federation. Vientiane. November 29, 2004. URL: <https://asean.org/instrument-of-accession-to-the-treaty-of-amity-and-cooperation-in-southeast-asia-by-russian-federation-2/>

<sup>27</sup> В рамках саммита АСЕАН в Лаосе состоится церемония присоединения России к Балийскому договору / As part of the ASEAN summit in Laos, a ceremony of Russia's accession to the Bali Treaty will take place. RIA. November 23, 2004. URL: <https://ria.ru/20041123/741168.html> [in Russian]



Russian Special Representative to SCO visiting the ASEAN Secretariat in 2002. Two years later, the two institutions exchanged opinions on regional development and possible areas of cooperation between two regional organizations<sup>28</sup>. This resulted in the adoption of the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the Secretariats a year later, which highlighted priority areas of cooperation, including various forms of “transnational crime: counter terrorism, drugs and narcotics control, arms smuggling, money laundering, and trafficking in persons”. Furthermore, the Memorandum sought to define other areas of cooperation, such as Economic and financial cooperation, energy cooperation and others<sup>29</sup>. On the one hand, since then not many practical steps were taken in order to bring the two security frameworks closer together, however, ASEAN and SCO have a huge potential and interests in expanding the cooperation in the trade and investment field, which, is as stated by SCO Secretary-General Vladimir Norov “has been significantly advanced on the basis of the Plan of Action of the Secretariats of the two organizations for 2019-2020”<sup>30</sup>. These contacts also expanded during the 2019 roundtable discussion “ASEAN-SCO: trade and investment potential», which underlined possibilities to enhance cooperation between the SCO and ASEAN, resulting in a number of initiatives and proposals in the fields of trade, economic and investments cooperation between the parties<sup>31</sup>.

Returning back to the assessment of the fundamental documents, it is necessary to take a deeper look in the contents and practical outcomes of the Programme of Action and Plan of Action, which shaped the Russia-ASEAN partnership agenda in 2005-2015 and

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<sup>28</sup> Overview of ASEAN-SCO Relations, As of October 2017. ASEAN. URL: <https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/DONEOverview-of-ASEAN-SCO-as-of-Oct-17-fn.pdf//>

<sup>29</sup> Memorandum of Understanding Between the Secretariat of The Association Of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN Secretariat) And The Secretariat of The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO Secretariat), Jakarta, April 21, 2005. URL: <https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/images/ASEAN-SCO-MOU.pdf>

<sup>30</sup> Address by SCO Secretary-General Vladimir Norov at a press conference, June 12, 2020. URL: <http://eng.sectSCO.org/news/20200612/656076.html>

<sup>31</sup> About roundtable discussion “ASEAN-SCO: trade and investment Potential», Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, October 22, 2019. URL: [https://asean.mid.ru/en\\_GB/-/o-meropriatii-asean-i-sos-torgovj-i-investicionnyj-potencial-?inheritRedirect=true&redirect=%2Fen\\_GB%2F](https://asean.mid.ru/en_GB/-/o-meropriatii-asean-i-sos-torgovj-i-investicionnyj-potencial-?inheritRedirect=true&redirect=%2Fen_GB%2F)

2016-2020 respectively. Firm analysis of issues covered by the topics and implementation of various solutions and initiatives helps us to better understand how successful the partnership really is and outline feasible outcomes and future prospects of the relations. Even though both documents place political and security cooperation as the first section and devote majority of their contents to this sphere specifically, it is still important to assess these decisions and proposals, as well as evaluate how successfully they were implemented into practical field.

The Programme of 2005 states the necessity to hold regular meetings within the existing mechanisms of ASEAN-Russian Federation dialogue partnership and establish new ones if necessary, while holding consultations on the issues of the ARF agenda, and to negotiate on the possibility of “accession of the five Nuclear Powers to the Treaty on the Southeast Asia Nuclear Weapon-Free Zone”<sup>32</sup>. While this document is comprised of general statements, its significance is still evident, as established network and reassurance of both parties being eager to foster cooperation. Following these directions, the 2016 Plan of Action has vast improvements and enhancements in the description of the political and security cooperation. Firstly, the Plan emphasizes that constructive dialogue and cooperation in order to promote peace, security, and stability of the Asia-Pacific is only effective while adhering to the “universally recognized rules and principles of international law, mutual trust and respect for each other’s interests, principles of settlement of disputes by peaceful means and, refraining from threat or use of force”, which can give an impetus to preserving amiable atmosphere in the ties and make it possible to achieve “comprehensive, open, equal and inclusive security architecture” in the region<sup>33</sup>. Apart from already mentioned main mechanisms of cooperation, such as ASEAN-Russia Summits, the ASEAN Post Ministerial

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<sup>32</sup> Comprehensive Programme of Action...

<sup>33</sup> Comprehensive Plan of Action...

Conference+1 Sessions, Senior Officials' Meetings, ASEAN-Russia Joint Cooperation Committee, ASEAN Defense Ministers' Meeting-Plus, and others, narrower, relevant spheres of cooperation, for instance, maritime security, military medicine, counterterrorism, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, humanitarian mine action and peacekeeping, are also covered by special communication channels and frameworks, such as Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM), Asia Cooperation Dialogue (ACD), Expanded ASEAN Maritime Forum (EAMF), ASEAN Regional Mine Action Centre. These mechanisms maintain a regular and productive dialogue, as often noted by the ADMM-Plus meetings, who claim that progress of practical cooperation of these working groups have contributed to capacity-building in the region<sup>34</sup>. Furthermore, Russia views itself as a viable partner in the sphere of maintaining maritime peace of Asia-Pacific, with regular Russian Navy visits to the region and joint naval exercises, while actively participating in all the existing dialogue mechanisms, as stated by Russian Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev<sup>35</sup>.

A lot of efforts have also been put into the issue of non-proliferation, especially by promotion of the Treaty on the Southeast Asia Nuclear Weapon-Free Zone (Bangkok Treaty), which ASEAN countries are trying to persuade the five official Nuclear Weapon States to sign and ratify. Nuclear safety and security has remained among the key topics on the security agenda, as it has always been mentioned in a number of different cooperation mechanisms. As the Bangkok Treaty is yet to be formalized, Russia “reaffirmed its readiness to sign with standard reservations the Protocol to the SEANWFZ Treaty”, while also remaining open to hold special meetings and consultations with other Nuclear Weapon States and ASEAN countries in order to give a boost to the reach an a decision to create this

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<sup>34</sup> Joint Statement by The ADMM-Plus Defense Ministers on Advancing Partnership for Sustainable Security, Bangkok, November 18, 2019. URL: <https://asean.org/storage/2019/11/JS-of-the-6th-ADMM-Plus.pdf>

<sup>35</sup> Dmitry Medvedev's interview with the Bangkok Post, November 3, 2019. URL: <http://government.ru/en/news/38265/>

nuclear-weapon-free zone sooner<sup>36</sup>. Furthermore, cooperation in the area of combating other Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMDs), such as Biological and Toxic Weapons, also remains among top priorities in the Russia-ASEAN political and security dialogue<sup>37</sup>.

Another major area of concern that both Russia and ASEAN are interested in working on is Counter-Terrorism and Transnational Crime. The first steps in this area were taken in 2004, when the parties signed the ASEAN-Russia Joint Declaration for Cooperation to Combat International Terrorism. This is a remarkable breakthrough, bringing the relations between law enforcement agencies of Russia and ASEAN closer in their work, also promoting interactions in such areas as “transportation, border and immigration control” in order to identify and prevent “fraud to stem effectively the flow of terrorist-related material, money and people”<sup>38</sup>. The provisions of the Declaration are carried out through all the major dialogue channels, which had its practical implementation in launching Russia-ASEAN Senior Officials Meetings on Transnational Crime as joint efforts to combat terrorism is one of key goals of Russia and ASEAN, as stated by Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov. Furthermore, in 2009 Russia-ASEAN Working Group on Countering Terrorism and Transnational Crime was organized and a relevant Work Plan was adopted<sup>39</sup>. Russia-ASEAN cooperation in this field is carried out within both regional and international frameworks, namely the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, the “ASEAN Convention on Counter Terrorism” and the “ASEAN Comprehensive Plan of Action on Counter-Terrorism”. For both Russia and ASEAN, it is vital to “enhance cooperation at various levels

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<sup>36</sup> ASEAN Regional Forum Annual Security Outlook, 2020. 313p. (p. 234-235). URL: <https://aseanregionalforum.asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/ARF-Annual-Security-Outlook-21.10.pdf>

<sup>37</sup> Comprehensive Plan of Action...

<sup>38</sup> ASEAN-Russia Joint Declaration for Cooperation to Combat International Terrorism, Jakarta, July 2, 2004. URL:

<https://asean.mid.ru/documents/24790352/26986233/Declaration+on+countering+terrorism+2004.pdf/>

<sup>39</sup> Sergey Lavrov, Russia and ASEAN Can Achieve a Great Deal Together, (MGIMO, International Affairs, Special Issue, 2010), pp. 7–16. URL: [https://asean.mgimo.ru/images/partn/Lavrov\\_Russia-and-ASEAN\\_en.pdf](https://asean.mgimo.ru/images/partn/Lavrov_Russia-and-ASEAN_en.pdf)

on counter-terrorism initiatives to address conditions conducive to the spread of terrorism, violent extremism and radicalism, including countering the spread of terrorist and extremist ideology”<sup>40</sup>, as terrorism is perceived as a more serious issue for the countries of the Asia-Pacific. According to Russian Defense Minister Sergey Shoygu, many extremist organizations have emerged in the region, as well as many fighters have returned from Iraq and Syria<sup>41</sup>. This opinion was expressed during the fifth ASEAN Defense Ministers’ Meeting-Plus in 2018, following the Statement of ASEAN and Russia Ministers of Foreign Affairs on Joint Efforts to Counter International Terrorism adopted a year before, which among others, included key notes on necessity to “counter growing spread of violent extremism, terrorist propaganda, acts of public justification of terrorism”, The parties especially underline their concerns over the use of the Internet and social media for terrorism-related purposes<sup>42</sup>, which indicates their awareness and timely response to the new forms of and non-traditional threats, even in such complex emerging areas as cyber security and use of communication technologies in illegal activities. As a matter of fact, Russia-ASEAN partnership has been very productive in the field of security in general, often maintaining adequate and consistent dialogue, which also resulted into adopting the mentioned before Statement on Cooperation in the Field of Security of and in the Use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) in 2018, acknowledging the direct effect of the ICTs on “the political, economic, social, cultural and other components of national and international security and stability”. The concerns of the parties are strong, as they seek to deepen the “practical cooperation on security of and in the use of ICTs in areas

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<sup>40</sup> Comprehensive Plan of Action...

<sup>41</sup> Терроризм становится всё более серьёзной угрозой для государств АТР – Шойгу / Terrorism is an increasingly serious threat to the APR states – Shoygu, Interfax – Military News Agency. October 20, 2018. URL: <https://www.militarynews.ru/story.asp?rid=1&nid=493491&lang=RU> [in Russian]

<sup>42</sup> Statement of ASEAN and Russia Ministers of Foreign Affairs on Joint Efforts to Counter International Terrorism, Manila, August 6, 2017. URL: <https://asean.mid.ru/documents/24790352/26986233/Joint+Statement+on+Countering+International+Terrorism+2017.pdf/61ce55b4-3c02-4c0b-83e2-4a48a031e2ad>

such as combating the use of ICTs for terrorist purposes and other criminal activities”. Both parties seek a peaceful, secure and cooperative environment in the area of information, in order to developing trust and confidence, avoiding conflicts between all the regional actors<sup>43</sup>. The prominence of the issue is supported by the researchers as well, for instance, L. Efimova notes that one of the biggest concerns nowadays is “vitality of radicalism and extremism”, as some of the regional terrorist organizations have their roots from radicals who fought in Afghanistan in the 1980s, which have developed a vast decentralized networks, making it harder to combat these entities, as the defeat of the command center practically does not affect the activities of the minor network cells, who can continue to lead a small group of radicals even without the leading orders<sup>44</sup>.

As Russia puts its hopes into promotion of the East Asia Summits as the new pillar for the open and comprehensive partnership structure for the Asia-Pacific region, and it is vital because this integration entity is carried out under the auspices of ASEAN. Russia seeks the implementation of the two key proposals: the establishment of the regional security architecture within the EAS framework, as this platform is viewed as taking the leading role in shaping the uniform rules and provisions for all the regional players; “strengthening the contacts between the EAEU, ASEAN and the SCO in the spirit of network diplomacy with an eye to implementing the Greater Eurasian Partnership initiative”, which should bring the three integration spaces closer together and expand scope of their cooperation<sup>45</sup>. That said, now it is time to take a closer look into the EAS agenda. Even though analysis of Chairmen’s

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<sup>43</sup> Statement of ASEAN and the Russian Federation on Cooperation...

<sup>44</sup> Larisa Efimova, Невоенные угрозы безопасности в ЮВА / Non-military security threats in the Southeast Asia, MGIMO. January, 15, 2021. URL: <https://mgi.mo.ru/about/news/experts/nevoennye-ugrozy-bezopasnosti-v-yuva/> [in Russian]

<sup>45</sup> Comment by the Information and Press Department on Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov’s participation in the Russia-ASEAN Ministerial Meeting, the EAS Foreign Ministers’ Meeting, and the 24th Session of the ASEAN Regional Forum on Security, Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, August 4, 2017. URL: [https://www.mid.ru/en/atr/-/asset\\_publisher/0vP3hQoCPRg5/content/id/2832394](https://www.mid.ru/en/atr/-/asset_publisher/0vP3hQoCPRg5/content/id/2832394)



statements throughout recent years can find the minor differences in choice of words and description of topics of mutual concern, still, the general direction remains the same. For instance, Statement of the eighth East Asia Summit of 2013 includes a section named “Non-traditional security and non-proliferation”, focusing on the need to improve cooperation on such newly emerged security issues, as “terrorism and its financing, piracy, illicit drug trafficking, cyber-security, illicit wildlife trafficking, human trafficking and people smuggling”<sup>46</sup>. On the other hand, however, the 2015 Statement already puts these issues in the section of “other areas of cooperation”, while still attaching great importance to the topic, as many paragraphs in this section and another one, named “regional and international issues”, are devoted to the relevant security problems<sup>47</sup>. In the latest iteration of the document, which was released in 2020, the EAS members reaffirm their ambitions and intentions to maintain fruitful security cooperation, as traditional and non-traditional security issues discussions have been increasingly featured within the Summit framework<sup>48</sup>.

As asserted by G. Lokshin, E. Kobelev, and V. Mazyrin, Russia and ASEAN share a common stance on the most acute international problems, and therefore, ASEAN countries can rely only on a politically and economically strong Russia, building the relations on the basis of mutual respect and equal benefits in the field security. Authors note that this policy direction in the Asia-Pacific is highly demanded nowadays, because ASEAN has been constantly forced to maneuver and balance within the US-China-Japan triangle, tensions of which can be eased with the addition of the fourth corner - Russia. In general, authors claim that “cooperation between Russia and ASEAN is progressing most successfully on issues of

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<sup>46</sup> Chairman’s Statement of the 8th East Asia Summit, Brunei, 10 October 2013. URL: [https://www.iri.edu.ar/publicaciones\\_iri/anuario/cd\\_anuario\\_2014/Asia/19.pdf](https://www.iri.edu.ar/publicaciones_iri/anuario/cd_anuario_2014/Asia/19.pdf)

<sup>47</sup> Chairman’s Statement of the 10th East Asia Summit, Kuala Lumpur, 22 November 2015. URL: <https://www.asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/Chairmans-Statement-of-the-10th-East-Asia-Summit-Final-25-Nov.pdf>

<sup>48</sup> Chairman’s Statement of the 15th East Asia Summit, Viet Nam, 14 November, 2020. URL: <https://asean.org/storage/45-Final-Chairmans-Statement-of-the-15th-East-Asia-Summit.pdf>

world politics in general and on specific issues of maintaining peace and security in Asia and the Asia-Pacific”, as they constantly demonstrate that stances on issues of mutual concern are very close or in complete coincidence, recorded in all fundamental joint documents<sup>49</sup>.

The recent achievements of the Russia-ASEAN partnership indicate that the Russian political elites finally realized that Russia is historically inevitably linked with the region, and nowadays has vital political and economic interests in the Asia-Pacific. Russia actively supported the ASEAN initiative to create the ARF from the very beginning, considering it as one of the most important mechanisms for dialogue on the vast spectrum of issues of strengthening stability in the APR, an instrument for promoting the concept of a multipolar world while ensuring the primacy of international law. The authors also note that important role is played by some of the closer partners of Russia among ASEAN members, for instance, in 2007, during the ASEAN Summit, the Philippines proposed an initiative to establish closer ties with SCO, which is perceived as “potential partner in promoting peace, security and prosperity in the region”<sup>50</sup>.

Another impetus to the partnership is given by the traditionally strong Russia-Vietnam relations. During 2006 visit of Russian President Vladimir Putin to Vietnam, the parties expressed the position to further strengthen interaction within Russia-ASEAN partnership, through ASEAN-SCO communication channels and other existing multilateral structures in the Asia-Pacific. Moreover, Vietnam, using its position in ASEAN, has prompted for Russia’s admission to the EAS, while in 1996, it was tasked to oversee and curate ASEAN's relations with Russia by the Association. Upon taking this responsibility,

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<sup>49</sup> Grigoriy Lokshin, Evgeniy Kobelev, Vladimir Mazyrin, pp. 258-259.

<sup>50</sup> Chairperson’s Statement of The 12th ASEAN Summit H.E. The President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo. “One Caring and Sharing Community”, Cebu, Philippines. 13 January 2007. URL: <https://cil.nus.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/formidable/18/2007-Chairperson%20A2%2080%2099s-Statement-of-the-12th-ASEAN-Summit.pdf>



Vietnam made serious efforts to ensure that the Russia-ASEAN dialogue development was substantial and mutually beneficial, despite the fact that Russia was experiencing serious political and economic difficulties during that time, which also resulted in organizing the stable work ASEAN-Russia Joint Cooperation Committee and foundation of ASEAN-Russia Dialogue Fund<sup>51</sup>.

Other researchers also note the significance of Russia to ASEAN for the beneficial cooperation in the field of security, even if it has been recognized not so long ago and was heavily undermined by the Russia's weakness in the past and by the Cold War confrontation background. As stated by Hiro Katsumata, the nowadays consensus and willingness of the parties to enhance their security dialogue took a long way to reach such level, as previously, the United States did not support the multilateral security institutions to address these issues, and above that, did not consider that it needs "support from countries such as China and Russia in dealing with this issue", while no real initiative had been taken by ASEAN<sup>52</sup>. With the change of approach and shift of security policy priorities, nowadays we can observe all the achievements and breakthroughs, which were reached by these institutions in a matter of two decades of intensive work.

Rodolfo Severino and Moe Thuzar observe that "the politically-led nature of ASEAN-Russia relations is evident", which "is no different from other dialogue relations". ASEAN roots lie in the pursuit for a peaceful, stable and prosperous environment in the Southeast Asia, where the latter point is objectively dependable on the first two factors. As such, the Association established its partnership network "largely because of political and strategic considerations". The authors consider ASEAN-Russia dialogue "to be seen in strategic terms as well as in terms of practical outcomes", whereas ASEAN has always

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<sup>51</sup> Grigoriy Lokshin, Evgeniy Kobelev, Vladimir Mazyrin, pp. 274-276

<sup>52</sup> Hiro Katsumata, ASEAN's Cooperative Security Enterprise, (Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), pp.131-132.

perceived Russia as a global powerful actor, who can play a constructive role in the region, acting “as a bridge between East and West”. As a matter of fact, Russia remains one of the most active participants in a great variety of international and regional organizations and project, number of which can only be compared to the United States, which attaches more strategic importance to the ASEAN-Russia partnership<sup>53</sup>.

### **3.3 Prospects of future developments in the partnership framework**

These firm foundations and remarkable achievements of the Russia-ASEAN strategic partnership in the field of security cooperation lead us to the logical assumption that they are destined to have a very bright future. Even though the term of the latest Plan of Action “expired”, the parties did not cease consultations and dialogue is frequently maintained. Despite the current global pandemic situation, a lot of events were moved online, such as ASEAN-Russia Senior Officials’ Meeting, which was held virtually in January 2021. During the meeting, the parties have “reaffirmed the commitment towards the early finalization of the new ASEAN-Russia Comprehensive Plan of Action for the period of 2021-2025”, indicating their continuous strategic approach towards the future of the partnership<sup>54</sup>. Even though the new document is set to cover a smaller time period, it does not undermine its contents, as rapidly developing international and regional environment, as well as high level of uncertainty, makes this proposal more flexible for amendments and upgrades in the short-term, without actually destroying its long-term capabilities. During the 19th Meeting of the ASEAN-Russia Joint Cooperation Committee in March 2021, Russia

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<sup>53</sup> Rodolfo Severino, Moe Thuzar, ASEAN Regionalism and the Future of ASEAN-Russia Relations, ASEAN-Russia: Foundations and future prospects, Ed. by Sumsky, V. & Hongand, M. & Lugg, A. (ISEAS, Singapore, 2012), p.26

<sup>54</sup> ASEAN, Russia to strengthen strategic partnership, ASEAN, Jakarta, 26 January 2021. URL: <https://asean.org/asean-russia-strengthen-strategic-partnership/>

and ASEAN “spoke highly of fruitful cooperation results”, which was proved by the successful implementation of the 99 out of 139 lines, stated by the Comprehensive Plan of Action 2016-2020 across such spheres as “politics-security, economy, socio-culture, connectivity and development gap narrowing”. Moreover, Russia confirmed that ASEAN remains one of the top priorities in its foreign policy, and that it is eager to support ASEAN Community building process, while not forgetting the cooperation in the fight against terrorism and transnational crime<sup>55</sup>.

Experts also admit that even though the parties have already reached a lot of milestones in the partnership, there are still more things to offer. Christopher Len thinks, that Russia is ready to gain a more prominent position among the ASEAN partners, as both parties share “an open, flexible, and balanced foreign policy approach”, which is also welcomed by the ASEAN countries, as they estimate development of the ASEAN-Russia partnership as positive for the openness of the region and allows them to utilize Russia’s “strengths in the fields of high technology, chemical processing and products, energy and mineral resource wealth, and arms manufacturing”<sup>56</sup>. Gleb Ivashentsov states that still, despite major talks, “no regional structure of comprehensive security in the Asia-Pacific area” has been established yet, unlike the OSCE in Europe, and the only structural security “framework” is based on the set of bilateral treaties of several states with the United States. So, the author proposes experience of Russia’s ties with Europe and establishment of Asia-Pacific energy partnership as a new foundation for a comprehensive regional security, comparing it to the origins of the European Union<sup>57</sup>. Even though such structure has enough

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<sup>55</sup> ASEAN, Russia agree to deepen strategic partnership, VNA, March 31, 2021. URL:

<https://en.vietnamplus.vn/asean-russia-agree-to-deepen-strategic-partnership/198395.vnp>

<sup>56</sup> Christopher Len, *Russia and The ASEAN Member States: Political and Economic Cooperation in Progress*, ASEAN-Russia: Foundations and future prospects. Ed. by Sumsky, V. & Hongand, M. & Lugg, A. (ISEAS, Singapore, 2012), p. lix.

<sup>57</sup> Gleb Ivashentsov, *From Energy Partnership to Comprehensive Security in the Asia-Pacific*, ASEAN-Russia: Foundations and future prospects. Ed. by Sumsky, V. & Hongand, M. & Lugg, A. 2012. (ISEAS, Singapore, 2012), p.7.

potential to have a major contribution to the Russia-ASEAN partnership, it is only one of the many components needed to strengthen the security cooperation and facilitate implementation of the new regional security architecture. Mark Hong also agrees that Russia can offer its views on regional security, which can accelerate mitigation of potential regional hotspots, such as Korean Peninsula, South China Sea, and, what is crucial to counter-balance the U.S.-China tensions, and moreover provide support in dealing with various non-traditional security challenges<sup>58</sup>. Rodolfo Severino and Moe Thuzar note that continuity of the bilateral relations between Russia and ASEAN countries plays an important part in the capacity-building of the Russia-ASEAN partnership as a whole. As Russia has always had a lot to give, and its generosity was enjoyed by several ASEAN members “since the days of the Soviet Union, and continue to do so today under their separate bilateral arrangements with Russia”. The scope of these fruits in the partnership with the Association itself was narrower before, but with the implementation of recent multilateral accords, the practical solutions reached new heights. Authors assume that “Russia will continue to be an important part of ASEAN’s engagement with major powers” in the strategic terms, while more structured cooperation is needed for this<sup>59</sup>.

The shared opinion of the senior officials and experts indicate that both Russia and ASEAN seek to deepen the strategic partnership in the near future, and certainly, the abovementioned “new regional security architecture”, a truly comprehensive, open, multilateral installation, which will unite all the major players in the Asia-Pacific, including Russia and ASEAN as key active actors, can be named the most tangible prospect for the joint efforts of the parties, as this will make already successful practical security cooperation even more effective.

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<sup>58</sup> Mark Hong, *The Rise of Asia and Russia’s Options, ASEAN-Russia: Foundations and future prospects*. Ed. by Sumsky, V. & Hongand, M. & Lugg, A., (ISEAS, Singapore, 2012), p. 9.

<sup>59</sup> Rodolfo Severino, Moe Thuzar, pp.28-29.

On the other hand, there exist some crucial factors, that might affect these aspirations in both short- and long-term perspective, and all of them are connected with China. As its influence has been expanding in the Southeast Asia in the twenty-first century, and nowadays PRC regards itself as the regional and global leading power and since territorial disputes in the South China Sea are still far from being resolved, this raises questions and possibly poses another challenge to the stability in the region. Alexander Korolev states that even though Russia's relations with ASEAN countries have been positive, its cooperation with China is on a higher level, and balancing between the confronting parties is a tough decision, especially since Russia recognizes China's leading role and its ambitions in the region<sup>60</sup>. In this regard, ASEAN countries cannot really count on Russia in the negative possible scenarios of escalation of tensions between the parties of the territorial disputes, as well as also addressing the issue of balancing and countering Chinese influence in the Southeast Asia. However, these risks are to be put aside in the more likely peaceful resolution of the situation, as within the framework of the South China Sea conflict, the parties have mainly resorted to negotiations and consistent communication, while within the bigger picture, Russia and China have asserted several times their commitments to "promote a new security concept based on mutual trust, mutual benefit, equality and cooperation"<sup>61</sup>. Both parties realize that only joint efforts can be effective for successfully tackling the existing security issues, and the fact that conflicting interests of China and ASEAN member states did not affect Russia's intentions to build strong ties with all of them confirms the trust, which Moscow has for the peaceful resolution of existing controversies.

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<sup>60</sup> Alexander Korolev, *Russia in the South China Sea: Balancing and Hedging*. Foreign Policy Analysis. 15. URL: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/323201523\\_Russia\\_in\\_the\\_South\\_China\\_Sea\\_Balancing\\_and\\_Hedging1](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/323201523_Russia_in_the_South_China_Sea_Balancing_and_Hedging1)

<sup>61</sup> China, *China, Russia call for efforts in Asia-Pacific security*, China Daily, September, 28, 2010. URL: [http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2010-09/28/content\\_11361116.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2010-09/28/content_11361116.htm)

### 3.4 Chapter summary

The history of the Russia-ASEAN partnership came down a very long way and, despite the efforts of some Russian politicians to widen the circle of close partners in the Asia-Pacific as early as the 1990s, and with warm welcoming of long-lasting allies among ASEAN members, it took nearly a decade for the rest of political elites to realize the true importance of Russian presence in the region and the need to institutionalize the Russia-ASEAN relations, which, gladly, saw a gradual development to the heights of the strategic partnership, clearly indicating that ASEAN also has a very high opinion on Russia's involvement and activities in the region, which is also supported with inclusion of Russia to all the major ASEAN-led mechanisms, such as EAS and ARF. All the major mechanisms of cooperation on the highest level, unfortunately, apart from Russia-ASEAN Summits, are held regularly and the parties maintain a very positive and productive dialogue on the relevant security issues. The framework and specialized documents do not remain only ink on paper, but also see true practical implementation, and as noted by both senior officials and experts, the security cooperation remains the key issue, a true cornerstone of the strategic partnership for years to come, and new marvelous breakthroughs and remarkable achievements are imminent and such minor complications, as for example adoption of new Comprehensive Plan of Action, or deepening of strategic partnership with such structure, as SCO, is just a matter of time.

## **CHAPTER 4. Russian-ASEAN economic cooperation and Socio-cultural exchanges**

Despite the fact that Russia-ASEAN partnership celebrates its twenty-fifth anniversary in 2021, and throughout these years the parties compiled a long list of prominent achievements in the field of security, the other aspects of cooperation, however, lag behind and remain strongly underdeveloped, that is why economic and socio-cultural areas are put in the same chapter. It will be a huge understatement to say that it is hopeless to reach any breakthroughs, though, as still, there have been some bright spots, again closely connected to the traditionally amiable ties Russia enjoys with some of the ASEAN member states, as well as several key cooperation mechanisms in the economic sphere, including ones that are not organized by ASEAN itself, but still present a viable discussion stage for all the key regional players, including Russia and ASEAN countries.

### **4.1 Emergence of the comprehensive Russia-ASEAN partnership**

We have already discussed the process of emergence of the Russia-ASEAN dialogue partnership and its milestones in the twenty-first century, which eventually led to its elevation up to the level of a strategic one. But the true question is, whether its contents correspond to its self-proclaimed status, or does it just remain only on paper, while in reality the ties are nowhere near being that close and deep. Undoubtedly, security cooperation has always been significant for the Russia-ASEAN relations, being the true central pillar of the partnership, but it cannot be the only common interest to call the partnership “comprehensive strategic” one. Moreover, the doubts arise when taking a look at more developed framework of dialogue partnership with other counterparts of ASEAN. Therefore, a more thorough analysis of other fields of cooperation, how leaders’ statements and initiatives were



implemented, and where does the comprehensive partnership with Russia and its development stays within the scope of ASEAN agenda in the recent years and the near future. In order to assess it, it is appropriate to draw parallels with other ASEAN dialogue partners, take a deeper look at institution of “ASEAN partner” as a whole, and compare these concepts and facts to the existing environment in the Russia-ASEAN relations. Thus this section is aimed at evaluating what is the true scope of ASEAN as economic community, which the Association strives to build at the beginning of the twenty-first century, especially in terms of developing cooperation with its dialogue partners, how does it align with Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum, which is another major regional economic integration institution, and what are the conditions that defined the present stage of Russia-ASEAN partnership in the less progressive fields. Crucially, there is no theory or any assumption that economic and socio-cultural spheres are not important for the parties at all, but on the contrary, their aspirations and ambitions in these areas are not questioned, as Russia desperately needs a broader circle of counterparts since the last round of deterioration of already now so well-maintained ties with the Western countries, traditionally, Russia’s biggest and closest partners, while ASEAN is still in search of balance between the strict and rigid institutionalization and traditional principles of collective and independent consensus in its decisions, trying to achieve a status of a prominent regional power, especially as an economic and socio-cultural community, once again, building upon the successful security and stability cooperation. The actual idea here is that there exist some premises and certain restrictions, which prevent Russia-ASEAN partnership to uncover its full potential, and it is still a matter of time for the relations to achieve new breakthroughs in those areas, that lag behind the most, such as economic ties and socio-cultural exchanges.

The discussion that Russia-ASEAN partnership has not lived up to the expectations of the political leaders has been a constant position of a certain circle of researches. Some of

them are more skeptical than others and do not believe that Russia and ASEAN truly need each other as big and stable partners in the long run, while others claim that other ASEAN strategic partners enjoy this status for a longer period of time, and this head start gives them an upper hand at the present stage, and some of other researchers claim that such factors as inconsistency of Russian foreign policy approach and geographical remoteness of Russian center from Southeast Asia affect the environment of the Russia-ASEAN strategic partnership. Statistically, Russia still lags behind the other dialogue partners, as it is not among top ten ASEAN trade partners in trade volumes<sup>1</sup>, and none significant breakthroughs or signs of such breakthroughs have been shown lately despite consistent growth rates of trade volumes over the years<sup>2</sup>. In order to draw a complete picture, we need to take a look at these opinions and check whether or not they take into account enough evidence to stay on the pessimistic side, or is it possible that these theories neglect or oversee some of the promising signs in the strategic partnership.

Eugene Rumer, Richard Sokolsky and Aleksandar Vladicic published a vast report on Russian foreign policy activities in Asia, implying that it is portrayed much better than it really is, while ultimately, Russia has been “missing in action in the region”. The authors support their opinion with the idea that the atmosphere and statements during Russia-ASEAN 2016 Sochi Summit created strong impressions, that the relations will grow stronger and the agreements to reach strategic partnership should find their respective practical outcomes, especially because of the Russia’s growing tensions with the West, and after two years since the escalation of the Ukrainian conflict, Russia still needed to expand its energy and arms exports to the new regions, which were hindered by the imposed sanctions, and the

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<sup>1</sup> Top ten ASEAN trade partner countries/regions, 2015. URL: [https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Table20\\_as-of-6-dec-2016.pdf](https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Table20_as-of-6-dec-2016.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Товарооборот России со странами АСЕАН / Russia-ASEAN trade turnover. Valdai Club. November 27, 2015. URL: <https://ru.valdaiclub.com/multi/media/infographics/tovarooborot-rossii-so-stranami-asean/> [in Russian]

strong need to give a boost to the development of the domestic economy, especially in Siberia and Russian Far East. What is most important, is that Southeast Asia and ASEAN were considered a very important vector in Russia's pivot to the East. However, the authors note, that in reality, the Summit did not turn the tables, and the whole idea of Russia's strategy in Asia was rather symbolic than practical. Russia-ASEAN partnership still lacks development and Russia is not among ASEAN top-tier counterparts, despite the eventual elevation to a status of a strategic partner in 2018. The authors highlight several key factors that undermine development of Russia-ASEAN relations, above all, "because neither side needs the other that much", keeping the institutional ties between the parties on a weak level. And this can be considered true to some extent, as some of other ASEAN partners are honored to have Summits within the ASEAN+1 format annually, along with the Association's own activities, while as we observed before, Russia-ASEAN partnership saw only four summits in total.

Another reasons, that are pointed by the authors include lack of core interests in the Southeast Asia for Russia, as the region falls short to gain more prominence in the scope of Russian foreign policy compared not only to Europe, China and United States, but also Northeast Asia, not recognizing ASEAN as a counter-balancing power to the United States in the region; Russia's strategic partnership with China has often been prioritized over relations with ASEAN countries, as Russian political elites do not want to risk undermining "substantial economic, diplomatic, and geopolitical benefits from the partnership" with China with any contest over Chinese-ASEAN tensions over territorial disputes and growing Chinese influence in the Southeast Asia, which is supported by the constant statements from Moscow, that China is playing a major role in the region; Russia's "ambivalent attitude toward the organization", which is demonstrated through the fact that Russia's main interests are pursued through bilateral relationships rather than through ASEAN itself, which "is

incapable of taking concerted collective action”; ASEAN does not have illusions about Russia-China partnership and knows it cannot count on Russia in terms of restraining and deterring Chinese influence in the Southeast Asia, while still “recognizing ASEAN efforts to build a new security architecture”, which, however, in the view of Russia should be promoted to be multilateral and comprehensive to balance against the American’ influence in the region, not Chinese<sup>3</sup>.

Mahbubani, Kishore and Jeffery Sng claim that “the Russia-ASEAN relationship is essentially a symbolic one, with little substance”, which have been hindered by such factors, as Russia’s late admission to the EAS, and lack of a consistent Russia’s long-term foreign policy strategy in the Asia-Pacific, creation of which, though, can create conditions suitable for ties to prosper in the coming decades<sup>4</sup>. Their opinion heavily rely on the paper written by Elena Martynova, who rightfully admits that despite Russia and ASEAN “increasing their economic ties over last several years, creating a comprehensive agenda and a legal platform for partnership”, the scope of economic cooperation between the parties is much lower than the level of interaction other major powers have with ASEAN countries. Her argument is supported by statistical reports, as “Russia is not among ASEAN’s top ten biggest trading partners and accounts for less than one percent of ASEAN’s total trade. The author considers such factors as that Russia and ASEAN are not close neighbor and do not have any common land borders, emptiness within the information space for both Russia and ASEAN economic and business circles, as well as infrastructural and legal frameworks are weak, thus seriously limiting extent of economic and financial links. And while the former one can be overcome as “Russia has seaports on the Pacific”, the latter ones are really hard to be dealt with, as any

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<sup>3</sup> Eugene Rumer, Richard Sokolsky, Aleksandar Vladicic, A. Russia in the Asia-Pacific: Less Than Meets the Eye. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2020. pp. 24-31. URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep26185.10>

<sup>4</sup> Kishore Mahbubani, Jeffery Sng, pp. 91-92.

further attempts to develop economic ties with Russia, especially with the striving for development Russian Far East, have been severely undermined by ineffective and unclear legal regulations, poor investment climate, and high level of corruption, which does not contribute to attracting new partners among ASEAN business and investment circles, who “consider trading with Russia to be rather problematic”<sup>5</sup>.

This stance is shared by Roman Vakulchuk, who notes that Russian government understands the need to stimulate the economic development of Far East, and he cites President Putin’s idea to encourage the region’s integration into the development of the Asia-Pacific. Moreover, the author focuses on investments, as an important factor of the regional development, and admits that foreign direct investment (FDI) comprise “less than ten percent of total investments in the the Russian Far East”, which is also hampered by the Western sanctions, as Russia’s partners in Asia, mainly China, and not ASEAN, still did not reach the same level achieved by the European counterparts, while FDI has also been hampered by the fact, that significant number of these investments come from Bermuda and Cyprus, which is in reality domestic, as it is “of Russian origin” coming through “offshore accounts”<sup>6</sup>.

A considerable list of unfavorable conditions and factors hindering promotion of economic ties with not only ASEAN, but other partners in the Asia-Pacific place Russia in the tough position, as many hurdles have to be overcome in order to achieve any significant progress. Some other arguable moments, such as concerns about the rise of China and growth of its influence in the Southeast Asia and Russia’s status as a great power also pose more questions whether or not the partnership can be more beneficial and has actually more things

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<sup>5</sup> Elena Martynova, Strengthening of Cooperation Between Russia and ASEAN: Rhetoric or Reality? Asian Politics & Policy. No. 6. 2014.

<sup>6</sup> Roman Vakulchuk, Chapter 8, in *Russia's Turn to the East: Domestic Policymaking and Regional Cooperation*, Ed. by Helge Blakkisrud and Elana Wilson Rowe, (Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), pp. 140-142.

to offer to both ASEAN and Russia. As Russian officials and some of the researchers do not deny such possibilities, it is more interesting to take a look on the other side of the field, where the questions are posed about the capabilities, limitations, and obstacles for ASEAN, as a less rigid integration entity and how does it co-exist with other regional structures, such as APEC.

When comparing these two structures, Elena Martynova highlights the different scope of ASEAN and APEC, as the latter “was created mostly on the basis of principles of several already existing organizations, and to some extent, can credit ASEAN’s experience and ideas through its history. According to the author, it is important to realize that the two organizations have been moving in completely opposite directions: APEC was created as an economic forum, and only after years of annual summits, the agenda began to go outside the framework of economic cooperation and other issues, such as combating terrorism, prevention and elimination of the consequences of natural disasters and other issues started being discussed; ASEAN, on the contrary, was created as a political organization in the Cold War era, with security issues occupying the spotlight of the member states, while the question of economic integration became more prominent later on. From the very creation of APEC, the forum was not seen as a strict politically cohesive platform, as opposed to GATT/WTO structure and formal rules, but a more independent discussion framework for free and independent economies of the Asia-Pacific, but the region is defined in the widest sense possible, as it involves many states and sub-regional organizations, such as ASEAN. And on the ASEAN side, it was clearly impossible to avoid this entity, however, in reality, participation in the forum only gave a boost to the sub-regional economic ties, among ASEAN members as well. A wide circle of participants, including such strong economic powers as the United States and Japan made the possibilities broader for the ASEAN countries, and moreover, strengthening regionalism in Europe and North America raised

serious concerns in the Asian business circles, who were more committed to the regional, more stable and inclusive institution. According to Martynova, for ASEAN, there were three crucial factors for successful participation in the APEC activities: no legally binding powers of forum, no rights to conduct trade negotiations, and no regional agreements that go beyond GATT / WTO agreements<sup>7</sup>.

These concerns and skepticism has its basis in the ASEAN's own strive to build up a sustainable and prospering economic community on the basis of mutual respect, benefits and equality. And this idea has been on the agenda for a long period of time. For instance, Donald E. Weatherbee claims that "the promotion of freer intra-ASEAN trade had become a core issue in official circles" by the late 1980s already, and apart from political threats, other issues, such as economic threats, namely protectionism, are needed to be addressed by the Association as well, as previously, ASEAN countries had export-based growth strategies oriented at North American and European markets respectively. Therefore, the author underlines the importance of Framework Agreements aimed at promoting: ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA), which was set up to "reduce intra-ASEAN tariff barriers by the implementation of a system of common effective preferential tariffs"; "sectoral cooperation in industry, energy, finance, agriculture, transportation and communication". Weatherbee admits that these aspirations "coincided with proposals for wider regional Asia-Pacific economic cooperation that were promoted particularly by Japan and Australia", while the mentioned Framework Agreements institutionalize the mechanisms of economic ties with partners among "the wider Asia-Pacific region, where many of its most important economic partners lay". This led to disagreements between the ASEAN members, as some recognized the necessity to have such a formalization and saw APEC as a perfect platform for carrying

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<sup>7</sup> Elena Martynova, APEC VS ASEAN: Genesis, Evolution and Prospects, International Organizations Research Journal, 2012. Vol. 7. No. 2, pp. 144-162.  
URL: <https://iorj.hse.ru/data/2012/06/08/1252691241/91.pdf>



out such activities, while others insisted on ASEAN remaining in control of agenda and cooperation implementation, which are always hard to be tackled, as ASEAN Charter project is yet to be implemented, thus, ASEAN remains “a loose, consensus-based, diplomatic concert”, and adhering to the ASEAN way makes it ineffective in interactions with its dialogue partners<sup>8</sup>.

This is also true when discussing Russia-ASEAN partnership, as ASEAN is comprised from truly unique and different states, some of which have always been advocating for expanding ties with Russia, but in return, as the Association as a whole, struggled to reach any consensus on the necessity of such efforts, the focus shifted towards the direct bilateral partnership between the countries, without involvement of the ASEAN as the institution. This, however, hinders Russia’s participation in the ASEAN initiatives, such as Free Trade Agreements, which are enjoyed by some of the other dialogue partners.

## **4.2 Economic field of cooperation**

Even despite the well-deserved criticism and skepticism towards Russia-ASEAN partnership in the economic field, some researchers argue that it still had considerable success and fruitful contents in the relations. For instance, R. Gidadhubli notes that even during the 1990s, Russia’s trade with the ASEAN countries exceeded the numbers during the Soviet period. Of course, this was achieved mainly due to the traditionally strong economic ties and large contracts being signed with only several ASEAN member countries, such as Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Vietnam. The initial interests were based upon Russia’s capabilities at the time and what it had to offer to its trade partners, and these interests mainly laid in the area of arms and military equipment trade. The author referred to

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<sup>8</sup> Donald Weatherbee, pp. 34-36.

the Russian foreign minister Andrei Kozyrev's statement that Moscow 'is actively fighting for an entry to the arms market' in Southeast Asia, that, nevertheless, was not an attempt of war-mongering, but rather an offer for a productive mutually advantageous cooperation, as ASEAN countries in return can provide Russia with “a wide range of consumer goods, food products, and also tropical products such as rubber and spices”<sup>9</sup>. So, even during the early stages of Russia-ASEAN contacts, some attention was given to the economic aspects of cooperation, and their true potential and capabilities were yet to be discovered, as some obstacles were already discussed in the course of the previous chapter. As politics and economy are closely entwined and interdependent, all the factors that hampered political initiatives inevitably slowed down the pace of economic and other ties as well.

Leszek Buszynski also leans towards the opinion that tangible results of the Russia-ASEAN relations appeared later, when Vladimir Putin became Russian President, as at the time, “ASEAN represented new possibilities for Russian arms sales”, which were promoted with the idea of achieving some “counter-trade deals to exploit new markets in ASEAN”. In this regard, the author notes the importance of the bilateral cooperation with ASEAN members, as “Putin's first visit to an ASEAN capital was to Hanoi in February 2001 where the interest was trade and arms sales”, which was later supported by awarding Russia-Vietnam relations with a strategic partnership status, once again confirming how much weight and prominence the country has among Russian foreign policy priorities in the Southeast Asia, contributing to more than a quarter of Russia's total trade with ASEAN. The cooperation was also developed through various investment and development projects, including construction of power plants in Vietnam. Moreover, as a Soviet heritage, a joint oil production enterprise Vietsovetpetro, which has given significant impetus to the

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<sup>9</sup> R.G. Gidadhubli, *Russia's Economic Relations with Asia*, Economic and Political Weekly, Vol. 30, No. 24. Jun, 17, 1995, pp. 1424-1427. URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4402875>

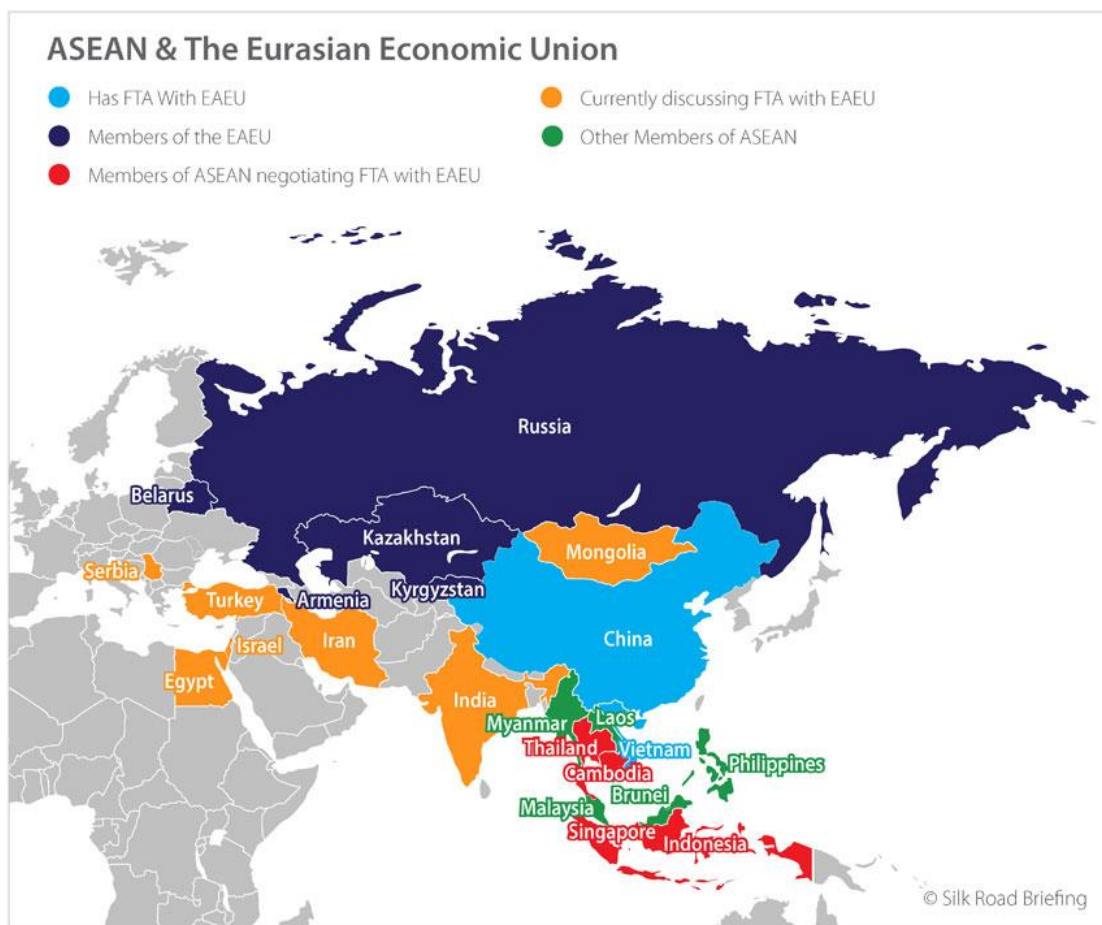
Vietnamese economy over the years. In addition to that, Buszynski highlights Malaysia and Indonesia as the other two crucial partners of Russia among ASEAN members, as the former was a frequent advocate and supporter of Russia's inclusion into the regional discussion platforms at the time, viewing Russia as a power promoting multipolarity and counterbalancing the United States in its hegemony aspirations, while the latter became another big partner in the area of military-technical cooperation, in the limelight of the Indonesian needs to modernize its Armed Forces and Russia possessing vast experience in the area and one of the most advanced military in the world, while refraining from aggressive rhetoric in promotion of its military assistance and technical equipment. The author thinks that by "placing itself in the position of major arms supplier to three ASEAN countries" Russia has undertaken the first significant step in the pursuit of future benefits from these ties, while also gaining a strong diplomatic leverage in the Southeast Asia, as, like we mentioned before, politics and security being the issue of paramount importance, create a loop of dependence of the political agenda on the successful implementation of the arms trade accords<sup>10</sup>.

After more than two decades of Russia-ASEAN partnership, the situation can be assessed in a very similar manner. Some aspects of economic cooperation have seen significant breakthroughs, while in others the parties struggle to overcome existing obstacles. However, new formats and frameworks are taking the central place in evaluation of the Russia-ASEAN relations. As noted by the joint Russia-ASEAN Trade and Economic Relations Report, the importance of the has not diminished, but vice versa, has expanded to the scope of ASEAN-Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) relations, an economic integration structure in the post-Soviet space led by Russia. Despite the fact that ASEAN has truly

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<sup>10</sup> Leszek Buszynski, *Russia and Southeast Asia: A New Relationship*, Contemporary Southeast Asia, Vol. 28, No. 2 ISEAS. August, 2006, pp. 276-277. URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25798785>

modest trade volumes with Russia compared to its other global dialogue partners, there is still more areas to discover for the two parties. The authors of the report underline, that for the time being, only Vietnam had signed the Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with the EAEU among ASEAN members, as while as other Association members either claim their willingness to work on the similar agreements for themselves, or just started weighing the potential benefits from such accords. *Figure 1* illustrates current state of the negotiation processes and shows that this area has a lot of room for improvement and progress.



**Figure 1: ASEAN & The Eurasian Economic Union<sup>11</sup>**

<sup>11</sup> Chris Devonshire-Ellis, Business Opportunities for Russian Companies In ASEAN, Russia Briefing. August 13, 2019. URL: <https://www.russia-briefing.com/news/business-opportunities-russian-companies-asean.html/>

On the other hand, the authors take a stance that the EAEU and Russia in particular can serve as a reliable gate for connecting Southeast Asia with Europe, further contributing to “Russia and the EAEU can exercise greater participation in East Asian production networks, and East Asia can tap into existing and potential strengths of the Russian economy”<sup>12</sup>.

Ekaterina Koldunova also admits that the path of Russia-ASEAN partnership “was far from smooth”, predominantly because “Russia was different from ASEAN’s other dialogue partners, as it was less economically involved in the region’s affairs”, being primarily considered as a major military actor by the ASEAN countries, however, Russia still remained neutral in its position towards the disputed islands in the South China Sea, which has been a long-lasting regional dispute between the Southeast Asian nations and China, as numerous of the conflict parties represent close Russian counterparts, and Russia did not intend to “exacerbate relations with either party to the confrontation”. She also highlights that the key role in this was played by the fact that Russia has been “maintaining a high level of military technical cooperation with Vietnam, Indonesia and Malaysia”, while also providing similar cooperation opportunities for other Association members, such as Thailand, the Philippines and Myanmar, whose domestic issues undermined their stance on the international and regional scene. The author notes that, for instance, domestic terrorist threat in the Philippines, “President Duterte was forced to appeal directly to President Putin concerning the purchase cutting-edge weapons from Russia”, which was a huge step from the military cooperation with the United States, which has been the only counterpart of Philippines in this area for a long period of time. While admitting that compared to traditionally developed political and military cooperation, the Russia-ASEAN economic ties

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<sup>12</sup>ASEAN–Russia: Trade and Economic Relations, Report of ERIA–RFTA Joint Seminar, Moscow. December 19, 2017. URL: [https://www.eria.org/uploads/media/ERIA\\_RFTA\\_Joint\\_Seminar\\_Report\\_ASEAN-Russia.pdf](https://www.eria.org/uploads/media/ERIA_RFTA_Joint_Seminar_Report_ASEAN-Russia.pdf)

have been relatively weak, due to small trade and investment volumes. Koldunova sees the reason for this in the set of serious structural restrictions, like other ASEAN dialogue partners: it “was not part of the regional integration processes that were based on specialization and cooperation within the production chains established by transnational corporations in Southeast Asia”; Russia could not provide large-scale investment opportunities or undertake serious infrastructure projects, which were usually covered by Japan and China, and compared to these countries and the United States, Russian domestic market is considerably smaller. And most crucially, these constraints have not been overcome even after the efforts which were put into promoting the economic cooperation, like hosting the 2012 APEC summit in Vladivostok or committing to the pivot to the East after the 2014 sanctions by the collective West being imposed on Russia. In reality, some projects, like nuclear power plant in Vietnam construction, were put on halt in 2016, which also does not contribute to the development of the economic ties<sup>13</sup>.

In this regard of mixed impressions from the course of Russia-ASEAN partnership, it is vital to note that Russian officials realize its real capabilities and scope, not shying away from the fact, that Russia is not among top-tier of the ASEAN partners. As stated by Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov, “Russia is not going to compete with anyone in that respect. Just like our ASEAN partners, we have our own interests”, which include such practical long-term objectives as concluding free trade agreement with ASEAN<sup>14</sup>. Despite some weaknesses, the Russian side is willing to continue cooperate with ASEAN countries and enlarge the scale of the economic cooperation gradually, where the emphasis is put into the general positive dynamics of the relations.

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<sup>13</sup> Ekaterina Koldunova, ASEAN, EAS and APEC: What Russia Achieved in 2018, Russian International Affairs Council, November 26, 2018. URL: <https://russiancouncil.ru/en/analytics-and-comments/analytics/asean-eas-and-apec-what-russia-achieved-in-2018/>

<sup>14</sup> Sergey Lavrov, Russia and ASEAN can achieve...

All in all, the situation is very difficult and ambiguous, as there are considerable constraints and limitations rooted deep within internal issues of both Russia and ASEAN, and the evaluation of several scholars only supports the idea that in the economic field, a lot of work is still needed for the relations to correspond to the level of expectations which they are vested with by the Russian and ASEAN political elites. Now, it is time to take a deeper look at the existing mechanisms of Russia-ASEAN partnership in the economic field, as well as all the practical activities and steps, such as signing agreements on various development projects and joint enterprises, some of which have been around for a long time and were more or less successful.

#### **4.2.1 The framework and institutional establishments of economic ties**

The necessity to outline legal basis and framework of the Russia-ASEAN economic cooperation requires going back to the fundamental documents, such as Comprehensive Programme and Plan of Action, which shaped the scope of economic interactions in the previous years. As the basis and some of the mechanisms of cooperation and communication channels were established before the adoption of the Programme, its main emphasis is put on asserting that such mechanisms as ASEAN-Russian Federation Senior Economic Officials Consultations, ASEAN-Russian Federation Working Group on Trade and Economic Cooperation (ARWGTEC), ASEAN-Russian Federation Business Council are holding meetings and consultations on a regular basis as well as new forms of contacts are being established by local authorities and relevant officials. The parties also agreed on strengthening cooperation for introduction of better regulations, standards procedures, enhance ASEAN regional integration by “providing special and differential treatment for the newer Member Countries of ASEAN”, while also facilitating information exchange and



holding regular meetings between the business communities for facilitating their cooperation<sup>15</sup>. Even though some consultations were held before the First Russia-ASEAN summit, considerable efforts were put into development of the economic ties, starting with outlining the essential framework and legal basis only since 2005 negotiations in Kuala Lumpur. For instance, an Agreement between the Government of the Russian Federation and the governments of the ASEAN member states on cooperation in the field of economy and development was signed by the Foreign Ministers of Russia and ASEAN countries. This document asserted the principles of “equality of rights, mutual respect and benefit, common understanding, goodwill, friendly assistance and support” as the basis for achieving practical results in the economic cooperation. Russia and ASEAN once again confirmed the importance of consistent information exchange regarding existing issues in the trade and investment, meaning that parties are willing to overcome difficulties seeking to promote economic cooperation and facilitating regulations for achieving mutual benefits, promoting trade and efficiency of investments. Apart from trade and investments being the main preoccupation of the parties, the agreement also specified such areas of cooperation as small and medium enterprises, science and technology, energy, mineral resources, transport, information and communication technologies, human resources development, environmental protection, tourism, sports and culture as other areas of mutual interests. Even though their prospects and practical steps are not thoroughly specified, mentions of such spheres and inclusion of them into the agenda discussion has outlined a vast spectrum of areas for potential cooperation in the future. As for the mechanisms of cooperation, the parties vested the ASEAN-Russian Federation Joint Cooperation Committee (ARJCC) with powers to oversee the implementation of the agreed terms and leading the pace of the economic cooperation, while the ASEAN-Russian Federation Dialogue Partnership

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<sup>15</sup> Comprehensive Programme of Action...

Financial Fund (DPFF) took the responsibilities for funding of the collaborative projects<sup>16</sup>. However, just like we observed in the political sphere, pace of practical implementation of these provisions was really slow and it took several years before the cooperation could be considered fruitful by both sides.

In the course of the second Russia-ASEAN Summit in Hanoi, the two parties made a decision to develop a roadmap for trade, economic and investment cooperation, which got approved two years later, in 2012, by the trade ministers of Russia and the ASEAN member countries<sup>17</sup>. At the same time, the proposed partnership mechanisms and communication channels on the multilateral level began to function properly, including the fundamental ARJCC, as well as other working bodies, such as Working Group on Trade and Economic Cooperation and ASEAN Moscow Committee. Furthermore, the coordination of the trade and economic direction of the dialogue partnership is carried out during regular meetings of Russia-ASEAN senior officials on economic issue Senior Economic Official Meeting (SEOM) - Russia Consultations and regular ASEAN Economic Ministers (AEM)-Russia Consultations. This is also true to the private sector, as business contacts were developing rather slow due to the outlined obstacles hampering the development of business-to-business ties. Even though in 1998 the Russian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (CCI) and the ASEAN CCI Confederation reached an agreement about setting up direct contacts between representatives of the business communities of the two parties by establishment of Russia-ASEAN Business Council<sup>18</sup>. However, the contacts intensified only with the Second Russia-

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<sup>16</sup> 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, Kuala Lumpur. 10 December 2005. URL: [https://asean.org/?static\\_post=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-kuala-lumpu](https://asean.org/?static_post=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-kuala-lumpu)

<sup>17</sup> ASEAN-Russia Trade and Investment Cooperation Roadmap, Endorsed at 44th AEM. URL: <https://cil.nus.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/2012-ASEAN-Russia-Trade-and-Investment-Cooperation-Roadmap.pdf>

<sup>18</sup> Russia-ASEAN Business Council. Official Website. URL: <https://www.russia-asean.com/en/board/>

ASEAN Summit and especially with the declared pivot to the East after the West imposed sanctions on Russia, hindering many of the business contracts, as many of the European and American businessmen ceased most of the contacts with the Russian counterparts fearing that any kind of such interactions may cause sanctions to affect their activities as well. Since 2014, Russian party began to organize regular business missions to separate countries of the Association, which were organized by the Ministry of Economic Development of Russia in collaboration with the Russia-ASEAN Business Council. Such delegations normally include entrepreneurs, regional officials, representatives of such sectors as energy, oil industry, IT and innovation, transport, aircraft construction, mechanical engineering, investment activities and others. Formalization of such contacts within utilizing ASEAN Secretariat to host such meetings in addition to organizing business forums and direct commercial negotiations in the business-to-business circle helped to enhance cooperation on mutually advantageous projects between the business communities of Russia and ASEAN, and these initiatives were supported by reaching agreements on further development of appropriate measures and support mechanisms, while also obtaining enough experience and information on the peculiarities of doing business with ASEAN counterparts in the era of Economic Community building<sup>19</sup>.

After the decade after its adoption, the Comprehensive Programme of Action expired and its place was taken by another document, Comprehensive Plan of Action, which was a result of fruitful talks during the 2016 Sochi Summit. It repeated a lot of provisions of the previous Programme, however, many points of interest were not simply mentioned, but explained in detail, which showed that parties attached more importance to these spheres of

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<sup>19</sup> Информация о ходе реализации государственной программы Российской Федерации «Развитие внешнеэкономической деятельности» / Information on the implementation of the Russian Federation state program "Development of foreign economic activity", Ministry of Economic Development of the Russian Federation, November 27, 2017. URL: [https://www.economy.gov.ru/material/news/informaciya\\_o\\_hode\\_realizacii\\_gosudarstvennoy\\_programmy\\_rossiyskoy\\_federacii\\_razvitie\\_vneshneekonomicheskoy\\_deyatelnosti.html](https://www.economy.gov.ru/material/news/informaciya_o_hode_realizacii_gosudarstvennoy_programmy_rossiyskoy_federacii_razvitie_vneshneekonomicheskoy_deyatelnosti.html) [in Russian]

economic cooperation than before, for instance, the emphasis was put on promotion of Public-Private Partnership (PPP) “to mobilize private sector investments for the mutual benefit, as well as develop private sector engagement particularly in the area of Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises”, which indicates the understanding of the existing controversies and hurdles on the way of the Russia-ASEAN partnership, and therefore, such existing bodies as Russia-ASEAN Business Council, ASEAN Business Advisory Council as well as Chambers of Commerce and Industry were called upon to resolve these issues and to strengthen business connections and opportunities. Moreover, with the formation of the Eurasian Economic Union, Russia insisted on bringing its close partners in the post-Soviet space to the negotiation table with the ASEAN Community, as well as expanding ties with other regional structures, in which Russia takes active part, such as Shanghai Cooperation Organization, as it, just like ASEAN, passed the stage of being explicitly political organization with peace and security being the only issues on the agenda. Much more attention was put to implementation of sectoral documents, such as the proposal of ASEAN-Russia Energy Cooperation Work Programme, Work Programme for ASEAN-Russia Cooperation on Agriculture and Food Security and other related documents<sup>20</sup>. Even though such programmes existed before the Sochi Summit, their prominence was elevated on the background of promotion of the Russia-ASEAN partnership to the strategic level<sup>21</sup>.

The Sochi Summit truly created a framework that gave a noticeable impetus to the development of comprehensive relations, primarily, in the economic field. Apart from political talks that covered such new areas of partnership as certain issues of trade policy, investment cooperation and trade in services, as well as the development of interaction in the field of infrastructure and transport and logistics chains, Russia had ambitious initiatives

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<sup>20</sup> Comprehensive Plan of Action...

<sup>21</sup> ASEAN and Russian Federation, ASEAN Learning Center. URL: <http://asean.dla.go.th/public/article.do;jsessionid=7908B7C4039BEC28C2D692A9E4AED239?menu2Id=86&countryCode=9&lang=en&cmd=goViewByCountry>

on the feasibility of creating a free trade zone between the EAEU and ASEAN. On top of that, Russia-ASEAN Business Forum was held on the sidelines of the summit, which involved around three hundred Russian and ASEAN entrepreneurs and business representatives, which opened a great opportunity for establishing new connections and concluding accords through direct communication. The Summit also saw separate sectoral deals and proposals with Indonesia Vietnam, Cambodia, Thailand, Myanmar and Laos, fostering bilateral ties with ASEAN members<sup>22</sup>.

Meanwhile, the Summits were not the only format where the economic aspect of cooperation was discussed at. For instance, the Third East Asia Summit Economic Ministers Meeting, comprised of ten ASEAN Member States, Australia, China, India, Japan, Republic of Korea, New Zealand, Russia and the United States, paying especially close attention to the “continuous support to the multilateral trading system and enhancing regional economic integration”, also noting strengthening of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises agenda<sup>23</sup>.

Furthermore, after the third AEM-Russia Consultations in 2014 the parties released a statement, noting “the progress of the ASEAN-Russia Trade and Investment Cooperation Work Programme”, expressing their satisfaction with the practical steps taken in the course of implementation of the said Programme, “including the annual AEM-Russia Consultations, ASEAN-Russia Senior Economic Officials Consultations, ASEAN-Russia Senior Officials Meeting on Agriculture, exchange of business missions, and various projects on technology, agriculture products, energy, and transportation”. Both parties also praised the growing interest of the Russian private sector in doing business with their ASEAN counterparts, and highlighted the Russian delegation comprised of businessmen

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<sup>22</sup> The Russians Are Coming...to Southeast Asia, Otto, Ben. Wall Street Journal, July 6, 2016. URL: <https://www.wsj.com/articles/the-russians-are-coming-to-southeast-asia-1467824327>

<sup>23</sup> The Third EAS Economic Ministers’ Meeting 24 August 2015, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. URL: <https://asean.org/the-third-eas-economic-ministers-meeting-24-august-2015-kuala-lumpur-malaysia/>

from private companies and associations to the region to explore business and investment opportunities<sup>24</sup>.

During the third Russia-ASEAN Summit in Singapore, the topic of inter-regional economic integration was raised once again, as the parties signed the Memorandum of Understanding Between ASEAN and EAEU, aimed at facilitating cooperation in customs procedures and trade facilitation, investment, e-commerce, and business development<sup>25</sup>. In the foreseeable future, it is possible for this MoU to be expanded into practical sectoral accords, that can further advance cooperation between the two structures.

Even despite initial skepticism and doubts about the essence of Russia-ASEAN strategic partnership, which in some cases, is viewed as severely limited to the political field, this section has illustrated that now there exist firm structure and foundations for further enhancement and deepening of the economic ties between the two parties, and within strong back up from the bilateral cooperation with ASEAN member states, Russia, both directly and through EAEU can achieve more progress and boost its own benefits, as well as contributing to the successful building of the ASEAN economic community. Now it is time to assess the actual practical outcomes in various spheres and measure their significance, outline existing problems and define which ones have higher potential than other.

#### **4.2.2 Trade**

As admitted previously, structurally, the trade of Russia and ASEAN began with large military cooperation contracts. As military cooperation is often on the edge between

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<sup>24</sup> The Third AEM-Russia Consultations, Nay Pyi Taw, Myanmar, 28 August, 2014. URL: <https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/12-JMS-AEM-Russia-3-28-Aug.pdf>

<sup>25</sup> Memorandum of Understanding Between the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and the Eurasian Economic Commission ...

politics and economy, and the political aspect has already been thoroughly covered in the previous chapters, here, only Russian arms export is discussed. In 2003 Vietnam purchased four Sukhoi fighter jets, and 30 percent of the deal was set as a counter-trade, meaning Russia got goods in return instead of almost third of the jets price. Moreover, the Vietnamese party got interested in buying S-300 air defense missiles. However, the trade was not limited only to the arms sales. Vietnam was a large market for Russian metals and metal products, fertilizers, chemicals, vehicles, and electrical equipment, while in return, Vietnam exported rice, rubber, tea, pepper and fruits to Russia. Fighter jets also featured heavily on the agenda of the Russia-Malaysia trade, once again with the use of the counter-trade, paid in palm oil, which, however, did not receive a warm welcome from the Russian aviation community, which preferred to be paid in cash instead of goods, but certain conditions in the deal were made aimed more for strengthening the ties and laying down foundations for future cooperation, rather than gaining more benefits. The same situation was true in regard with the last large arms trade partner Indonesia, with the exception that this time the counter-trade made up 86 percent of the whole contract price, which undermined the prospects of the deal. Even despite Indonesian willingness to purchase Russian arms, there have been large concerns whether it was capable to afford such deals<sup>26</sup>.

Over the years, the tendencies remained strong and most of the issues of the early 2000s regarding the arms deals terms were resolved. Lately, Asian countries contribute towards more than 40 percent of all Russian weapon exports with Vietnam, Myanmar and Laos being the major importers, supplying their military mostly with Russian equipment<sup>27</sup>. The true scope of these sales can be observed statistically: “Russia’s conventional arms sales

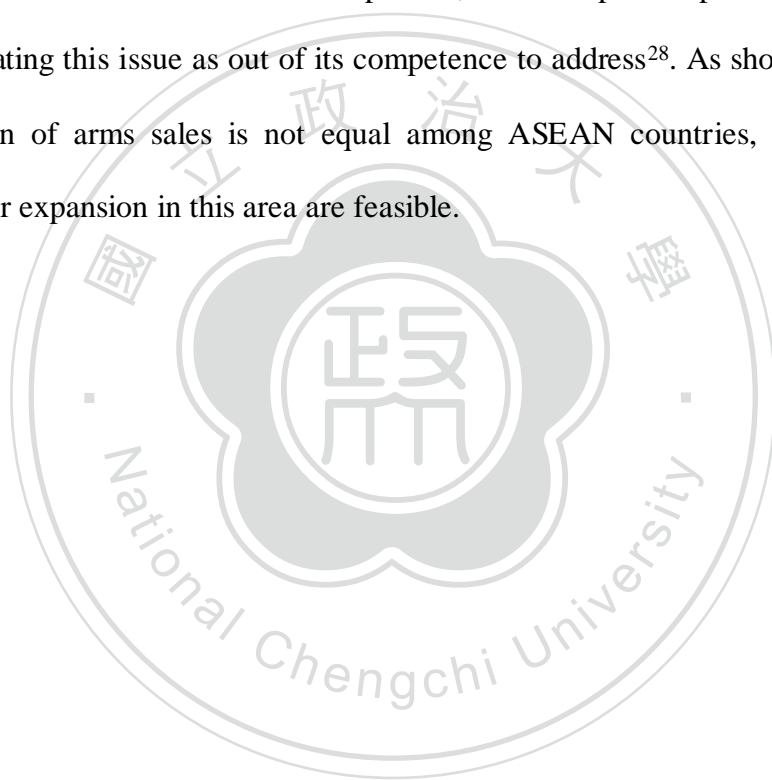
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<sup>26</sup> Leszek Buszynski, *Russia and Southeast Asia...* pp. 278-279.

<sup>27</sup> Putin uses arms sales to ASEAN to increase Russian standing in Southeast Asia, *ASEAN today*, March 14, 2018. URL: <https://www.aseantoday.com/2018/03/putin-uses-arms-sales-to-asean-to-increase-russian-standing-in-southeast-asia/>



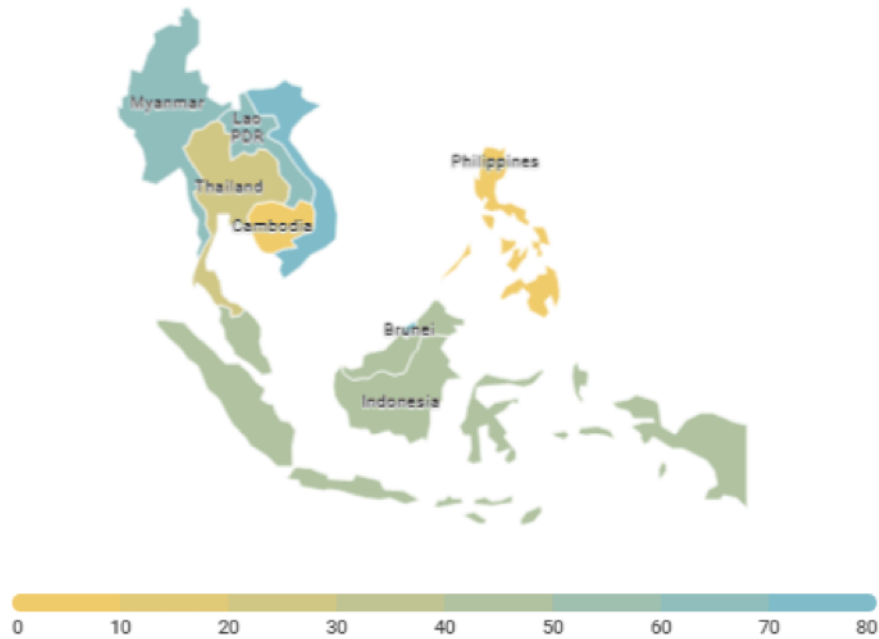
to Southeast Asia totaled US\$6.6 billion between 2010 and 2017, as much as the US and China combined.” ASEAN countries show great interest in Russian arms due to the complications existing in the relations with other potential suppliers, for instance, having contradictions on the human rights and democracy issues, leading to embargos from the Western countries. This provides Russia with opportunity to increase its export by selling more weapons to Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia and Myanmar. The existing restrictions in the ties with the West leave Southeast Asian countries with Russia as their only alternative to play the role of a sustainable and reliable partner, who I not preoccupied with the domestic landscape, treating this issue as out of its competence to address<sup>28</sup>. As shown on *Figure 2*, the distribution of arms sales is not equal among ASEAN countries, however further possibilities for expansion in this area are feasible.



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<sup>28</sup> Umair Jamal, Russian arms sales in Southeast Asia: What does it mean for the region? ASEAN today. August 18, 2020. URL: [https://www.aseantoday.com/2020/08/russian-arms-sales-in-southeast-asia-what-does-it-mean-for-the-region/?utm\\_source=Daily+News+on+the+Southeast+Asian+Region+-+18+Aug+2020&utm\\_campaign=Daily+News+Alert+20200818&utm\\_medium=email](https://www.aseantoday.com/2020/08/russian-arms-sales-in-southeast-asia-what-does-it-mean-for-the-region/?utm_source=Daily+News+on+the+Southeast+Asian+Region+-+18+Aug+2020&utm_campaign=Daily+News+Alert+20200818&utm_medium=email)

## Share of arms imported from Russia 2000-2016 (%)



Source: The Asean Post

**Figure 2: Share of arms imported from Russia 2000-2016 (%)<sup>29</sup>**

Despite having this solid foundation in the area of trade, “Russia has worked modestly in developing its relationship with ASEAN. Trade increased from US\$500 million in 2005 to US\$4.3 billion in 2017 while foreign direct investment reached US\$45 million in 2017”. Russian growing attention to the partnership with ASEAN is met ambiguously among the Association’s members, as even under launching ASEAN Economic Community, multilateral cooperation still lags behind the bilateral one. In this essence, such countries as Laos and Vietnam play a key role, being long-term close partners of Russia and opening the

<sup>29</sup> Putin uses arms sales to ASEAN...

window of opportunity for deeper integration with ASEAN as a whole<sup>30</sup>. *Figure 3* demonstrates that Russia lags behind other major strategic partners, which ultimately hinders its ambitions to achieve equal treatment as ASEAN plus three or plus six members enjoy.

**Table 5.10. ASEAN Exports and Imports of Goods by Trading Partners, 2010-2019**

(in million US\$)

Trading Partner	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
<b>EXPORT OF GOODS</b>										
<b>ASEAN</b>	<b>264,398.2</b>	<b>316,017.7</b>	<b>328,023.5</b>	<b>338,613.4</b>	<b>330,209.5</b>	<b>287,106.4</b>	<b>277,896.3</b>	<b>311,825.3</b>	<b>344,506.5</b>	<b>332,311.9</b>
<b>Trading Partner</b>	<b>784,645.1</b>	<b>926,172.4</b>	<b>929,684.7</b>	<b>939,803.3</b>	<b>963,778.1</b>	<b>884,627.2</b>	<b>875,712.4</b>	<b>1,012,970.0</b>	<b>1,091,543.4</b>	<b>1,091,518.3</b>
Australia	37,980.5	42,716.0	46,049.4	45,296.5	45,223.0	35,790.9	33,083.4	34,603.9	39,209.4	35,441.1
Canada	6,003.0	6,763.1	6,580.3	7,240.1	7,464.7	7,182.4	7,395.5	7,822.5	8,728.2	9,960.4
China	112,576.8	140,065.5	142,540.0	153,378.5	154,012.6	145,291.4	143,965.3	187,027.6	197,679.5	202,550.0
EU-28	115,164.1	131,143.6	124,826.1	124,545.5	132,506.4	127,387.0	130,433.3	157,666.8	160,778.6	154,107.8
India	37,083.7	45,989.2	43,595.1	42,326.3	43,694.2	40,553.4	37,762.6	45,393.9	50,613.6	48,299.7
Japan	102,990.8	128,069.6	127,932.7	122,553.7	120,158.4	101,941.2	96,554.8	105,945.6	114,767.3	109,910.5
Korea, Republic of	45,034.3	54,163.4	55,390.1	52,842.0	51,625.4	45,420.8	45,917.6	56,731.9	60,485.7	59,379.9
New Zealand	4,371.7	4,976.1	5,621.6	5,683.7	6,376.4	5,225.7	4,547.0	5,461.3	6,093.5	6,000.9
Russian Federation	3,417.5	4,706.2	4,878.1	5,247.7	5,414.4	4,268.9	4,782.1	5,865.6	5,959.4	6,103.1
USA	99,893.6	105,109.5	107,827.5	113,786.0	121,213.2	125,442.9	131,076.3	142,481.0	160,261.2	183,794.3
Rest of the World	220,129.0	262,470.2	264,443.9	266,903.3	276,089.3	246,122.5	240,194.5	263,969.9	286,967.1	275,970.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,049,043.2</b>	<b>1,242,190.2</b>	<b>1,257,708.2</b>	<b>1,278,416.6</b>	<b>1,293,987.5</b>	<b>1,171,733.6</b>	<b>1,153,608.7</b>	<b>1,324,795.3</b>	<b>1,436,049.9</b>	<b>1,423,830.2</b>
<b>IMPORT OF GOODS</b>										
<b>ASEAN</b>	<b>238,465.6</b>	<b>266,920.2</b>	<b>277,616.7</b>	<b>279,138.3</b>	<b>277,904.3</b>	<b>248,274.0</b>	<b>240,058.1</b>	<b>277,291.4</b>	<b>304,278.8</b>	<b>300,292.4</b>
<b>Trading Partner</b>	<b>713,934.1</b>	<b>889,217.9</b>	<b>945,267.2</b>	<b>975,514.3</b>	<b>963,316.6</b>	<b>852,854.3</b>	<b>846,230.7</b>	<b>969,213.6</b>	<b>1,084,587.4</b>	<b>1,092,309.4</b>
Australia	19,454.3	24,771.9	24,389.4	23,756.6	28,172.2	21,701.7	19,795.4	24,504.2	26,958.7	27,649.8
Canada	4,730.7	5,906.5	5,752.4	6,289.2	5,866.5	5,472.8	5,238.1	5,974.2	7,002.8	7,181.5
China	122,936.9	154,923.8	176,849.7	198,204.9	212,698.6	218,205.4	224,602.0	253,945.7	284,814.3	305,413.2
EU-28	88,716.5	108,975.2	117,854.3	121,989.1	115,672.8	103,268.1	103,145.8	103,092.8	127,288.8	126,710.7
India	19,642.1	28,242.9	27,656.9	25,943.1	24,298.9	19,612.3	20,829.6	28,274.8	30,330.3	28,798.1
Japan	115,936.4	128,341.1	136,526.3	117,877.2	108,936.3	100,858.9	105,862.8	112,860.2	116,881.9	116,118.7
Korea, Republic of	56,965.0	70,586.8	76,078.0	82,022.2	79,812.9	75,145.9	78,549.3	98,117.5	101,025.0	97,126.6
New Zealand	3,237.1	4,067.0	3,665.2	4,105.3	4,329.6	3,527.3	3,352.6	4,043.4	4,228.6	4,340.3
Russian Federation	9,275.8	12,145.2	13,263.9	14,736.4	17,156.7	9,700.1	7,174.7	10,882.4	14,046.8	12,094.9
USA	81,347.5	93,000.7	91,975.9	91,527.1	90,294.7	85,139.6	80,733.7	91,352.8	102,739.6	110,999.1
Rest of the World	191,691.6	258,256.6	271,255.2	289,063.3	276,077.4	210,222.3	196,946.6	236,165.6	269,270.7	255,876.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>952,399.7</b>	<b>1,156,138.1</b>	<b>1,222,883.9</b>	<b>1,254,652.6</b>	<b>1,241,220.9</b>	<b>1,101,128.3</b>	<b>1,086,288.7</b>	<b>1,246,505.0</b>	<b>1,388,866.3</b>	<b>1,392,601.8</b>

Source:  
ASEAN Secretariat

**Figure 3: ASEAN Exports and Imports of Goods by Trading Partners, 2010-2019<sup>31</sup>**

In general, ASEAN's exports to Russia are mainly comprised of electrical appliances, machinery, animal and vegetable oils, which in total make up more than a half of ASEAN's exports to Russia, still being "more diversified than Russia's exports to ASEAN". Russian exports, on the other hand, are "primarily concentrated in energy, as well as cereals, fertilizers, metals, and vehicles"<sup>32</sup>. Moreover, trade in services has also increased, including such spheres as manufacturing services, maintenance and repair services, use of

<sup>30</sup> Joshua Bernard B Espeña, Putin's power and Russian foreign policy in ASEAN, East Asia Forum, 14 August 2020. URL: <https://www.eastasiaforum.org/2020/08/14/putins-power-and-russian-foreign-policy-in-asean/>

<sup>31</sup> ASEAN Statistical Yearbook 2020. URL: [https://www.aseanstats.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/ASYB\\_2020.pdf](https://www.aseanstats.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/ASYB_2020.pdf)

<sup>32</sup> Товарооборот России со странами АСЕАН (Russia-ASEAN trade turnover) ...

intellectual property, telecommunications, computer, and information services. “ASEAN–Russia trade in services increased significantly over 2005–2017 from \$0.5 billion to \$4.3 billion” with Thailand and Vietnam dominating the tourism services, and Singapore leading in exporting business services, Russia primarily exported transport services<sup>33</sup>.

#### 4.2.3 Energy

Energy sector has been another prominent sector of the Russia-ASEAN strategic partnership. As stated by Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov, “the dynamics of global development bring issues of energy to the forefront of Russia-ASEAN cooperation” and he welcomed the interest of the ASEAN countries towards Russia’s capabilities, which are in fact not limited to the nuclear energy cooperation, but also involve discussions on renewable energy and environmentally friendly technologies<sup>34</sup>. ASEAN on its side, has extensive plans and ambitions in this sector as a part of its three-dimensional Community building, while enormous attention is given to such factor as energy security, once again keeping economy very close to politics<sup>35</sup>.

In this regard, Russia-ASEAN cooperation in the field of energy has obtained a status of a crucially important one, even without traditional to Russia oil and natural gas field, but due to a number of external factors, in the electricity production and nuclear energy as well. With the large number of crises among Middle East countries, causing fluctuations in oil and gas prices and supply, as well as Fukushima nuclear accident, the questions of energy security became acute once again, and in this situation, Russia provides a very advantageous

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<sup>33</sup> ASEAN–Russia: Trade and Economic Relations, Report...

<sup>34</sup> Sergey Lavrov, Russia and ASEAN can achieve...

<sup>35</sup> Agreements & Declarations, ASEAN Ministers on Energy Meeting (AMEM). URL: <https://asean.org/asean-economic-community/asean-ministers-on-energy-meeting-amem/agreements-declarations/>

opportunity, being one of the world's largest oil and gas supplier and a leading nuclear power, which is open about sharing its experience and technologies with counterparts. These ambitions make Russia eager to overcome the challenges emerged in the nuclear energy field after Fukushima, and is "is planning to increase Russia's share in global construction of nuclear powerhouses and their exploitation"<sup>36</sup>.

The Russian Federation holds important stakes in the international nuclear fuel market. Around 16 percent of the Asia-Pacific nuclear reactors are fueled by Russia, and it aims at establishing "international nuclear fuel cycle service centers as joint ventures with other economies", prompting further development of nuclear cooperation with its counterparts, including ASEAN member countries<sup>37</sup>. This led to a network of various practical and research ongoing projects with Association members. For example, an experimental nuclear reactor designed by Russia is planned to be built in Indonesia<sup>38</sup>, while in 2015 Russia and Myanmar signed a preliminary agreement to cooperate in the peaceful uses of nuclear energy followed by an agreement to set up a nuclear research center, which can later on turn into full-scale joint nuclear power plant project<sup>39</sup>, and Russian state nuclear corporation Rosatom and Vietnam's Ministry of Science and Technology signed memorandum of understanding on the establishment of a center for nuclear science and technology in Vietnam<sup>40</sup>. The research programs facilitate the future implementation of such projects, as they help to educate general public about safety of nuclear energy use and overcome the doubts and concerns, that got raised by the Fukushima accident among the

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<sup>36</sup> Gleb Ivashentsov, pp.7-8.

<sup>37</sup> APEC Energy Overview 2009, Asia-Pacific Energy Research Center. URL: <https://aperc.or.jp/file/2010/9/25/Overview2009.pdf>

<sup>38</sup> Nuclear Power in Indonesia (updated January 2021), World Nuclear Association. URL: <https://www.world-nuclear.org/information-library/country-profiles/countries-g-n/indonesia.aspx>

<sup>39</sup> Emerging Nuclear Energy Countries (updated march 2021), World Nuclear Association. URL: <https://www.world-nuclear.org/information-library/country-profiles/others/emerging-nuclear-energy-countries.aspx>

<sup>40</sup> Russia, Vietnam progress with nuclear research centre project, World Nuclear News. May 23, 2019. URL: <https://world-nuclear-news.org/Articles/Russia,-Vietnam-progress-with-nuclear-research-cen>

regional societies. Moreover, this can have effect on the social exchanges, as high-tech equipment requires skilled professionals to operate, obtainable through special courses, trainings and experience exchanges.

#### 4.2.4 Finance

Considerable efforts have been put into promotion of the investment cooperation, another opportunity is offered by the launch of joint investment projects. Russia is continuously improving the terms for doing business, which has substantially affected its position in the Doing Business rankings<sup>41</sup>. ASEAN-Russia Business Council has been providing information support for the Russian business circle who are willing to conduct business with their Southeast Asian counterparts<sup>42</sup>. However, despite the efforts put into the financial ties, Russian foreign direct investment (FDI) in ASEAN was small, contributing only US\$45 million of the total US\$160 billion in FDI in 2019, most of which came to the field of energy - oil, gas, and nuclear power. However, there exist other areas for great investment potential among ASEAN member countries. For example, Indonesia, which has been a major consumer of Russian military equipment in recent years, but still plans to modernize its military capabilities. Moreover, such areas as digital economy and technology sectors with its fast-growing number of startups, agriculture with Indonesian large cereal imports, and infrastructure projects also present opportunities for investment. In Thailand, opportunities for Russian investors are mainly located in manufacturing, especially in the aerospace industry, and maintenance, repair, and overhaul (MRO) services, as well as food and agriculture. A rather unique to the investment capabilities is Singapore, as “there are already over 700 Russian companies based in Singapore, including Kaspersky Labs and

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<sup>41</sup> Dmitry Medvedev’s interview...

<sup>42</sup> Analytics, ASEAN-Russia Business Council. URL: <https://www.russia-asean.com/analytics/>

energy giants Gazprom and Rosneft”, and the country provides favorable legal, tax, and business environment accompanied by access to international financial markets, making it the most attractive ASEAN country to foreign investors. Philippines represent another large market in such areas, as agriculture, infrastructure and military equipment, the latter two being heavily endorsed by the local government. In cooperation with Malaysia, manufacturing, which is being promoted from traditional manufacturing sector into high-tech exports, can play a key role for Russian businessmen, and collaborations in this area already saw some fruitful results, like “production of smart lighting systems, high-speed transmitters, and traffic monitoring systems”. Another non-traditional sector is healthcare, as “Malaysia’s medical device industry has room for huge growth”<sup>43</sup>.

In return, only one of the ASEAN member countries contributes substantial total value of FDI to the Russian economy, and that is Singapore. In 2016 Russia occupied the twelfth place among the leading recipients of Singaporean FDI. This led to the label of “regional gate” attached to Singapore, which indicated diversification of advantages and benefits, which Russia enjoys in the bilateral relations with different ASEAN members<sup>44</sup>.

In general, investment cooperation still lacks consistency, and all the existing numbers on the Russia-ASEAN FDI has been highly drawn to the most prosperous areas of cooperation, which still highlights that existing conditions for investors are not ideal and some work has to be done in order to increase these numbers and intensify Russia-ASEAN cooperation in this area.

#### **4.2.5 Transport and logistics**

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<sup>43</sup> Ayman Falak Medina, Opportunities for Russian Investors in ASEAN. ASEAN Briefing. May 20, 2021. URL: <https://www.aseanbriefing.com/news/opportunities-for-russian-investors-in-asean/>

<sup>44</sup> L.V. Shkvaryya, M.V. Melanina, Kh.V. Tyrkba, Russia's Investment Cooperation with ASEAN Countries, Advances in Economics, Business and Management Research, vol. 47, pp. 1155-1159. URL: <https://www.atlantis-press.com/proceedings/iscfec-18/55912583>



The Arctic Sea Route has been posed as the major Russian project in the field of transport in the twenty-first century. Implementation of such an ambitious alternative to traditional logistics ways, especially in the limelight of the latest incident in the Suez Canal, has been very topical not only for Russia and ASEAN countries, who would like to obtain access to other logistic corridors with Europe, as the Arctic also represents a much safer environment, while traditional sea trade routes are still vulnerable to pirate attacks. The Arctic Sea Route can also serve as a great tool of inter-regional integration, as its utility for such project as Chinese “One belt – One road” initiative<sup>45</sup>. Some experts, on the contrary, admit that this competition can also undermine the regional transportation hubs. For instance, expanding Arctic shipping can have a negative impact on Singapore, as it has concerns over its position of the pivotal “maritime crossroads connecting European and Asian markets”, bringing a significant contribution to the Singaporean economy<sup>46</sup>.

Other transportation projects involve vast contacts with Indonesia in the area of railroad construction. The accord was signed in order to facilitate transportation of coal in the country, and both parties view it not only as a great infrastructure project creating a lot of working places, but also taking into account ecological aspect of the issue<sup>47</sup>. Later on, this cooperation was expanded to several other infrastructural projects, which enhanced Russian positions in the regional transportation field<sup>48</sup>.

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<sup>45</sup> Boris Heifetz, Северный морской путь - новый транзитный маршрут «Одного пояса - одного пути» / Northern Sea Route - a new transit route "One Belt - One Road", *The International Affairs*, No. 7, 2018.

URL: <https://interaffairs.ru/jauthor/material/2047>

<sup>46</sup> Katherine Cima, Russell Sticklor, Japan, Korea, Singapore and the Arctic Sea Lanes, *The Diplomat*, March 24, 2014. URL: <https://thediplomat.com/2014/03/japan-korea-singapore-and-the-arctic-sea-lanes/>

<sup>47</sup> РЖД за пять лет построят и оборудуют железную дорогу в Индонезии / Russian Railways will build and equip a railway in Indonesia in five years, *RIA*. January 8, 2016. URL: <https://ria.ru/20160108/1356580270.html#ixzz45BONxbNc> [in Russian]

<sup>48</sup> Индонезия предложила РЖД участвовать в четырех транспортных проектах / Indonesia offers Russian Railways to participate in four transport projects, *Finanz*. January 8, 2016. URL: <https://www.finanz.ru/novosti/aktsii/indoneziya-predlozhila-rzhd-uchastvovat-v-chetyrekh-transportnykh-proektakh-1000989093> [in Russian]

#### 4.2.6 Technologies, information and communications

The field of technologies has also seen some significant breakthroughs. Apart from already joint space exploration programs and agreement on the cooperation in the area of information technology and communication, Russia has been paying a lot of attention to the relevant issues. As stated by Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev during his speech at the 2019 ASEAN Business and Investment Summit noted that Russia seeks to promote digital economy, by “taking active efforts to develop its communication infrastructure”, and it “is ready to share its experience with ASEAN nations as well to use the successful practices of our ASEAN colleagues, even more so since we are facing similar challenges”. He also praised the contribution of the Russia-ASEAN working group on scientific and technological cooperation, which also promoted joint learning programmes in the digital area, as well as highlighting the growing importance of the technologies and acknowledging the leading positions of some ASEAN members in this area<sup>49</sup>.

The two parties also strengthened their partnership in the field of science and technology with the adoption of the ASEAN-Russia Plan of Action on Science, Technology and Innovation for 2016-2025 period, aimed at facilitating contacts in the practical field, such as R&D cooperation, maintaining dialogue between researcher communities and “strengthen regional science, technology and innovation linkages”<sup>50</sup>.

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<sup>49</sup> Dmitry Medvedev attends the Business and Investment Summit of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). November 3, 2019. URL: <http://government.ru/en/news/38266/>

<sup>50</sup> Overview ASEAN-Russia Dialogue Relations...

#### 4.2.7 Humanitarian ties

Humanitarian contacts between Russia and ASEAN countries have also been relatively strong. Russia treats this kind of interaction as a great gesture of good will, showing its capabilities to provide assistance to its close partners during the hard times, and that yields a positive result in the face of international image improvement. In this regard, in 2017, after Vietnam got struck by a large typhoon, which caused a lot of damage to local economy and infrastructure, Russia provided the country with both humanitarian aid and financial assistance to relieve the consequences of the disaster<sup>51</sup>, and at the beginning of next year, Philippines, suffering from the same problems caused by a typhoon, also received deliveries of Russian humanitarian aid<sup>52</sup>.

Due to the spread of COVID decease, more concerns were expressed about the cooperation in combating infection-spread and its treatment, while Russia and ASEAN reaffirmed their willingness to “enhance technical guidelines and solutions for prevention, detection, control, treatment and response” to the virus<sup>53</sup>. This is especially acute, as with the multiple ways and types of the virus spreading globally, not every country can quickly react and be self-sufficient in vaccine and individual protection supplies, that is why cooperation in this area remains topical for both Russia and ASEAN.

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<sup>51</sup> Россия отправила во Вьетнам гуманитарную помощь / Russia sent humanitarian aid to Vietnam. RIA. November 8, 2017. URL: <https://ria.ru/20171108/1508358930.html> [in Russian]

<sup>52</sup> Пострадавшие от тайфуна Филиппины получили помощь из России / Typhoon Affected Philippines Receive Aid From Russia. Interfax. January 3, 2018. URL: <https://www.interfax.ru/world/594353> [in Russian]

<sup>53</sup> Statement of the Special ASEAN-Russia Foreign Ministers' Meeting on Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19), June 17, 2020. URL: <https://asean.org/storage/2020/06/Statement-of-ASEAN-Ru-SFMM-FINAL-1.pdf>

#### 4.2.8 Tourism

Russian tourists have been choosing Southeast Asian resorts as their destination more and more in 2010s, as during the last decade, many issues caused the halt in trips to traditional popular destinations – Egypt and Turkey. Thus a thorough program for development of tour operator networks with ASEAN countries was needed. The most acute issue addressed was the shortage of Russian-speaking personnel to service Russian tourists in the Southeast Asia, thus the parties implemented various language projects, improving the quality of services. A comprehensive multi-stage program was carried out and some of the trained professionals even took parts in special full-time courses, as well as some cultural and historical studies. These courses were organized and supported by the relevant authorities of the two parties<sup>54</sup>.

As noted by Chairman of Vietnam National Administration of Tourism Nguyen Trung Khanh, “the tourist exchange is growing, and Russian tourists now account for a large segmentation of each ASEAN member states”, making it relevant to design and implement specific products and services aimed especially at the Russian tourists, uncovering the full potential of this area of cooperation<sup>55</sup>.

#### 4.2.9 Main issues and challenges for the cooperation in the economic sphere

The main problem of the Russian-ASEAN economic cooperation is its limited scope and small volumes of trade and investment, which can be justified by such factors, as

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<sup>54</sup> ASEAN-Russia Dialogue Partnership. Federal Agency for Tourism, Russia. URL: <https://tourism.gov.ru/en/contents/deyatelnost/international-activities/cooperation-in-international-organizations/asean-russia-dialogue-partnership/>

<sup>55</sup> ASEAN and Russia talk on strengthening tourism cooperation, Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism, Vietnam. January 15, 2019. URL: <https://vietnamtourism.gov.vn/english/index.php/items/13614>

systemic constraints, inconsistency of direct contacts between representatives of private sector, as well as corruption and geographical distance of Russia from the region. Moreover, lack of numerous truly advantageous points of mutual interests leaves Russia on the sidelines of the major ASEAN initiatives, in which other, larger dialogue partners are being included, thus making it clear, that in the balance of interests, Russia needs ASEAN more than ASEAN needs Russia. Even though this statement can be contested by the successful implementation of continuous bilateral cooperation plans and projects, the cooperation with the Association itself is heavily hindered, especially with the lack of FTAs, despite plentiful efforts from the Russian side in the recent years. Nevertheless, the spirit of the partnership is kept and reasonable consensus is reached in the relevant areas of mutual concerns, so it is possible to claim that these contradictions can be resolved in the foreseeable future, and Russia can occupy a much higher, more prominent spot among other ASEAN counterparts, when all the criticism will be abandoned and its status of Association's strategic partner will not be contested.

### **4.3 Social and Cultural cooperation**

Socio-cultural sphere, in some cases, was one of the central topics among cooperation agenda during Soviet Union times, as it was eager to provide education for the students coming from the friendly Southeast Asian states, in hopes of promoting socialist ideology. Gladly, these contacts did not cease after the change of political ideology and these exchanges continue nowadays. Moreover, unlike in the economic sphere, such dialogue channels, are being carefully monitored and promoted on the multilateral level of the Russia-ASEAN partnership.

In this sphere, the parties realized the initiative to conduct regular Youth consultations, resulting in organizing ASEAN-Russia Youth Summits, which have been held since 2013 on a regular basis as a full-scale part of the Russia-ASEAN dialogue partnership. The first Youth Summit was held in May 2013 in Moscow at the initiative of the ASEAN Center at MGIMO, the leading Russian University supported by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Since then, four more Summits took place with the last one being held in 2019 in the Philippines, where among others, Russian delegation invited ASEAN colleagues to participate in other youth forums held in Russia<sup>56</sup>. Regularly, Youth Summits are honored by the speeches of high ranking officials from the host country, which emphasizes that long term prospects of the Russia-ASEAN partnership are not neglected, and youth policy and communication between future leaders of the two parties is pivotal for sustainable development and achieving marvelous advancements in the Russia-ASEAN strategic partnership.

In addition to that, such events as Russia-ASEAN Education Forum<sup>57</sup> and Russia-ASEAN University Forum<sup>58</sup> were held, providing a platform for discussion of best practices in higher, secondary and primary education, practices in the field of student mobility, as well as exchange of opinions both on the educational and Russia-ASEAN partnership agenda.

Another interesting mechanism of cooperation in the area of social exchanges is the Meeting of the Network of ASEAN-Russia Think Tanks, where experts and scholars can discuss relevant and topical issues of cooperation, while the outcomes and conclusions made

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<sup>56</sup> Молодежное сотрудничество Россия-АСЕАН набирает обороты / ASEAN-Russia Youth Cooperation Gains Momentum. Rosmolodezh. URL: <https://fadm.gov.ru/news/52116?hashtags=2> [in Russian]

<sup>57</sup> Образовательный форум Россия — АСЕАН / Russia-ASEAN Education Forum. MGIMO. October 21, 2019. URL: <https://mgimo.ru/about/news/conferences/edu-forum-russia-asean/> [in Russian]

<sup>58</sup> Университетский форум Россия — АСЕАН / Russia-ASEAN University Forum. MGIMO. URL: <https://ufasean.mgimo.ru/2016/> [in Russian]

find their practical utility, as “the main recommendations on the Russia-ASEAN strategic partnership resulting from the meeting are passed on to senior officials of Russia and ASEAN countries”<sup>59</sup>.

Another sphere of cooperation is cultural cooperation, that was formalized by concluding an Agreement in 2010, fostering multilateral exchanges of information on cultural events and protecting, preserving and restoring historical monuments, exhibits and other objects of cultural legacy<sup>60</sup>. Furthermore, in 2015 Russia and ASEAN agreed to celebrate 2016 as the ASEAN-Russia Year of Culture, which was regarded as “an important milestone in our dialogue relations”, and believing in the importance of the development of people-to-people contacts in the cultural sphere to foster other fields of cooperation<sup>61</sup>.

#### **4.4 Possibilities and opportunities for the Russia-ASEAN relations**

The long-term prospects of Russia-ASEAN partnership has been viewed differently through the recent years. Vyacheslav Amirov and Evgeny Kanaev admit that the future of the relations depends on the tendencies that are taking place in the Southeast Asia how they would influence the policies both on the national policy of ASEAN member countries and on the multilateral level of the Association itself. Considering this, the authors highlight four aspects: response to the global financial crises; its ambitions to build a successful three-dimensional ASEAN Community, a large contribution to which can be made by expanding trade with other states outside the Southeast Asia, but the volume of ASEAN-Russia trade

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<sup>59</sup> Second Meeting of the Network of ASEAN-Russia Think Tanks. MGIMO. November 20, 2020. URL: <https://english.mgimo.ru/news/ii-nartt>

<sup>60</sup> Agreement on Cultural Cooperation Between the Governments of the Member States of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and the Government of the Russian Federation / Hanoi, Vietnam. October 13, 2010. URL: <http://en.russia-asean20.ru/load/31150>

<sup>61</sup> Joint announcement Concerning the Celebration of the ASEAN-Russia Year of Culture in 2016 / Saint Petersburg, December 15, 2015. URL: <http://en.russia-asean20.ru/load/33311>



is truly insignificant to make such contribution; weak pace of implementation of practical steps in the Russia-ASEAN partnership, as ASEAN's role of Asia-Pacific multilateral dialogue leader is diminishing in favor of highest-level dialogue between China, Japan and South Korea; and lastly, with Asia-Pacific likely being affected by growing tensions between China and the United States, Russia-ASEAN partnership may be significantly hindered<sup>62</sup>.

However, upon successful realization of Comprehensive Programme and Plan of Action provisions, the attitude changed. Alexander Korolev claims that implementation of so-called flagship projects is vital in the long run, as even without rapid direct impact it lays a great foundation and framework for strategic partnership building in the future. The author describes such projects as the most advantageous for the parties, believing their prominence is growing day by day. He highlights such areas of cooperation, as high-tech cooperation, including introduction of joint projects in IT and smart cities network. Another field worth putting efforts in is the intensification of youth and academic exchanges, which is comprised by already mentioned Youth Summits and Network of Think Tanks, while still parties can launch new initiatives in the academic exchange between Russia and ASEAN, including holding regular seminars, round tables and discussions, as well as awarding scholarships for students, young professionals and researchers. The last but not least is the possibility for expansion of contacts between the business circles and information support of economic processes. Efficient business-to-business cooperation requires transparent and open legislation, regular and reliable dialogue mechanism and assistance from the responsible Russia-ASEAN partnership mechanisms as well as local officials. Crucial factor in this

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<sup>62</sup> Vyacheslav Amirov, Evgeny Kanaev, Russia's Policy towards the Countries of South-East Asia and ASEAN: Positive Developments, But an Uncertain future? / Russian Analytical Digest, No.76. 2010. URL: [https://css.ethz.ch/en/publications/external-publications/details.html?id=/r/u/s/s/russias\\_policy\\_towards\\_the\\_countries\\_of\\_](https://css.ethz.ch/en/publications/external-publications/details.html?id=/r/u/s/s/russias_policy_towards_the_countries_of_)

essence is the informational support of the business exchanges, as better knowledge provides more opportunities to promote trade and investment between Russia and ASEAN<sup>63</sup>.

## 4.5 Chapter summary

Economic and socio-cultural aspects of Russia-ASEAN strategic partnership are truly ambiguous. On the one hand, we have facts and expert conclusions, that indicate that the ties are strongly underdeveloped and there exist a lot of challenges in constraints that prevent them from reaching new heights, but on the other hand, officials from both sides understand the reality and still see a lot of room for improvement and further development, so the real question arises, how long does it take for relations to be called not living up to the expectations, rather than having a lot of opportunities and room for growth. Because if the situation is not getting even slightly better in the near future, Russia might fall even lower among the tier of ASEAN partners and be excluded from many profitable and advantageous regional projects, as its relatively weak economic development might neglect all the political advancements and the security perks it brings to the Asia-Pacific. That said, the framework of ties and regular contacts seem to be working reasonably effective, so the main question is to take the raised issues from the paper of various agreements and successfully implement them in the practical field of cooperation, as it is crucial not only for the statistical numbers and higher of Russia among ASEAN partners, but also for the Russian domestic economic growth and successful building of the ASEAN Community.

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<sup>63</sup> Alexander Korolev, Россия — АСЕАН: поиск новых «точек роста» / Russia - ASEAN: Search for New “Points of Growth”. Russian International Affairs Council. January 9, 2019. URL: <https://russiancouncil.ru/analytics-and-comments/analytics/rossiya-asean-poisk-novykh-tochek-rosta/> [in Russian]

## CHAPTER 5. Conclusion

All things considered, Russia-ASEAN strategic partnership deserves to exist and be recognized as such, as amount of trust and efforts that both parties put into it undoubtedly demonstrate presence of mutual interests and benefits within the ties. In order to draw a comprehensive conclusion, it is crucial to remember the research questions proposed in the introduction chapter. The process of establishment and promotion of the Russia-ASEAN dialogue partnership relies heavily on the historical bilateral ties between Russia and countries of the region. In this regard, traditionally closer partners among ASEAN members provided support on the initial stage and proposed inclusion of Russia into a wider circle of initiatives led by ASEAN. At the same time, within the existing multilateral framework of Russia-ASEAN Summits, regular Senior Officials' Meetings and other platforms, direct contacts and exchanges became possible with each of the ten Association members, and this allowed Russia to enlarge the list of its counterparts and obtain stronger positions in the region.

The initial goals of ASEAN creation and Russia's national interests entwined first and foremost in the field of political and security cooperation, aimed at maintaining peace and stability in the Asia-Pacific, combating terrorism and transnational crime, as well as tackling non-traditional security issues. Both parties also took a shared stance on the necessity of creation of a strong, equally beneficial multipolar regional security architecture, which is determined by such external factors as rise of China and its colliding interests with other regional powers, like the United States and Japan. Moreover, ASEAN's aspirations to build three-dimensional Community require significant steps forward within regional

integration processes, as well as expanding the scope of cooperation with its dialogue partners, including Russia. As the dialogue relations are heavily dominated by the security sphere, it is not the only relevant topic on the multilateral agenda. With increasing role of regional integrational structures, Russia also tries to develop ties between different frameworks which it leads, calling for establishing of contacts between ASEAN and EAEU, which so far, has not yielded much, but first steps of concluding several FTAs might be an important foundation for future progress.

Traditionally strong Russian exports of military equipment, natural resources and energy find their respective buyers among ASEAN members, who in return, supply Russia with electronics and agricultural products, as well as in some cases, like Singapore, proving great opportunities for the business and investment communities to conduct deals with the regional colleagues. Even though Russia's share in the total ASEAN trade and investment volumes is not that large, it has been steadily raising and both parties seem to understand the current trends and acknowledge the work that has been put to achieve these results.

It would be wrong not to mention that complications exist, though. Relatively weak positions and lack of any considerable breakthroughs come from relatively obvious reasons, such as the absence of favorable conditions for the local businesses to engage in cooperation with each other, legal hurdles and corruption, as well as relatively small Russian domestic market on the one hand, and problems with obtaining information, geographical distance and preference towards traditional, long-lasting dialogue partners of ASEAN on the other.

And still, as both officials and experts note the special spirit and atmosphere of the partnership, more and more practical results have been achieved. Both Russia and ASEAN share a vision for the future, which is reflected in their attention to relevant and new areas of cooperation, such as information technologies, including security, youth exchanges, digital economy, startups and innovations, renewable energy and others. With such attitude, it is

possible to predict a bright future for the Russia-ASEAN partnership, however several conditions must be met for erasing all the remaining doubts about its future prospects. For instance, more highest-level exchanges are needed to ensure Russia's status among top-tier ASEAN partners, while practical field needs to witness more significant advancements, such as FTAs or other special agreements, final uncovering the true potential of economic cooperation, which has been declared over the last years. In this regard it will be interesting to assess the new Comprehensive Plan of Action, which is supposed to be adopted soon. Moreover, both Russia and ASEAN are still vulnerable to the growing Chinese influence in the region, as its growing tensions with the United States or escalation of South China Sea disputes may negatively affect the whole region, and it is still a question, what stance will Russia take and how will it affect the dialogue partnership with ASEAN. Nevertheless, it is safe to note that both Russia and ASEAN will be fighting hard for peaceful resolution of all existing conflicts and would still strive to promote mutually beneficial, transparent and inclusive security framework in not only Southeast Asia, but the whole Asia-Pacific.

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