

(as delivered)

21st ASEAN-EU Ministerial Meeting (AEMM)

Opening Session Remarks

by H.E. Mr. Don Pramudwinai,

Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Thailand

Grand Hall, Plaza Athénée Bangkok Hotel

Friday 14 October 2016, 09.00 – 09.30 hrs.

Your Excellency Miroslav Lajčák, Minister of Foreign Affairs and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic, as the representative of the European Union and Co-Chair of the 21st AEMM,
Foreign Ministers of ASEAN and the EU Member States and their representatives,
The Secretary-General of ASEAN,
Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. I wish to extend a sincere welcome to all delegates attending the 21st ASEAN-EU Ministerial Meeting (AEMM) here in the Kingdom of Thailand.
2. As you know, yesterday our revered monarch, His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej passed away. While the Thai delegation, together with the entire nation, mourns this immeasurable loss, we are grateful for the many expressions of condolence and sympathy from our ASEAN and EU friends.
3. There will be a condolence book at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs available for signing today from 13.00 hrs. onward. Those wishing to sign the book are requested to kindly inform their liaison officers so that we may facilitate your arrival.

Mr. Co-Chair,

4. If there was anything that His Majesty taught us, it was a sense of duty.
5. As host of the 21st AEMM, we will therefore continue to work with all our friends for the success of this important meeting.
6. Our two organizations, ASEAN and the EU, have enjoyed close relations for almost four decades. Our enhanced partnership is a natural one, built on a long history of relations, mutual interests and shared values.
7. Our mutual interests today are broad-based and closely interwoven. The EU is currently ASEAN's largest foreign direct investor, second largest source of tourists and third largest trading partner. One only needs to look at the Bandar Seri Begawan Plan of Action to see the breadth and depth of our comprehensive relations. Indeed, our partnership has become an important pillar of global peace and prosperity.
8. More and more, whether in Europe or Southeast Asia, the people want to benefit from regional integration. They want not to be told, but to discover for themselves, that regional organizations such as the EU and ASEAN will make a

positive difference in their lives, that they are stronger when they work hand in hand with their neighbors.

9. Popular support for regional integration, however, cannot be taken for granted. That is why, as ASEAN approaches its 50th anniversary next year, we cannot afford to be complacent. Rather, we must make every effort to ensure that our policies serve the interests of the people, and that they feel a sense of ownership in the process.

10. We are all aware of the rapid and great transformations in the regional and global environments that have given rise to both opportunities and challenges. This year, the world's great powers have been interacting ever more closely with Southeast Asia. From Sunnylands to Sochi to Vientiane, the United States, Russia, China and others, have been engaging with ASEAN at the highest levels. Norway, Switzerland and Germany have become a new generation of partners for ASEAN. It is my hope that in time, our remaining Dialogue Partners will match this level of engagement.

11. But we are also well aware of the growing challenges that the changing regional and global environment poses to all of us. In our part of the world, the situation in the South China Sea and developments on the Korean Peninsula, amongst others, need to be resolved urgently and creatively, through peaceful means.

12. Non-traditional security challenges have also posed problems for both ASEAN and the EU. Transnational crime, including human trafficking and irregular migration, is a common challenge and must be tackled through closer cooperation. Terrorism and violent extremism are challenging the very foundations of global peace and order.

13. As two of the world's oldest civilizations, Southeast Asia and Europe need to strengthen our support for the voices of moderation. Both our organizations are built on fundamental principles such as respect for diversity and tolerance. We need to promote these principles beyond our organizations, in the global stage.

14. The importance of pursuing sustainable development and addressing climate change is well recognized in our respective support for the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Paris Agreement. In this connection, Thailand is prepared to host an ASEAN-EU Dialogue on Sustainable Development next year to help explore how inter-regional cooperation can help contribute to meeting the SDGs, including the challenge of climate change.

15. Thailand is also prepared to host an ASEAN-EU Forum of Strategic Thinkers bringing together top thinkers from the two regions, to help contribute innovative ideas to the development of our partnership. Concept papers on these initiatives have been circulated to all Member States and we hope that you will support them.

16. We look forward also to hearing about initiatives from our partners to complement the many important developments in our cooperation in the pipeline. Indeed, the opportunities for our strategic partnership are endless. As we meet at the 21st AEMM here in Thailand, I hope that all of us will contribute to making this partnership a reality.

17. The people of our regions deserve no less. Thank you.
