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THE CONFERENCE ON ASEAN AT IFES RAS

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Abstract. The article is a survey of the international conference with the theme: “ASEAN on the Path of Integration: Achievements, Dilemmas, Challenges” held by IFES RAS jointly with the ASEAN Center at MGIMO University, timed for the 55th anniversary of ASEAN. More than 100 Russian and foreign specialists took part in the conference. There following themes were exposed: ASEAN foreign policy, ASEAN relations with the main strategic partners, integration processes in some countries, relevant tasks of sustainable development of ASEAN countries, legal issues, cultural dialogue and scientific discourse.

Keywords: ASEAN, SEA, US, China, Vietnam, Indonesia, Myanmar, integration processes, IPR, BRI, regional cooperation.

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May 25–26, 2022 the international conference with the theme: “ASEAN on the Path of Integration: Achievements, Dilemmas, Challenges” was held by IFES RAS. It was timed for a significant event, which is the 55th anniversary of the Association of SEA states (ASEAN), one of the most successful international projects of regional integration. The organizer of the conference was IFES RAS jointly with the ASEAN Center at MGIMO University assisted by the Ministry of Education and Science of Russia. The Ministry placed the event on the plan of ASEAN – Russia Year of Scientific and Technical Cooperation, having provided it with necessary support.

IFES tried the ASEAN format for the first time, and the distinctive feature of the conference was its scope. More than 100 Russian and foreign specialists (researchers, expert practitioners, University employees) took part in it. As usual, the following three leading centers of Oriental studies of RF were presented: Moscow, St Petersburg and Vladivostok. The papers, also delivered by researchers from ASEAN countries, Malaysia and India, were heard and discussed by the representatives of the embassies of seven ASEAN countries (Cambodia, Thailand, the Philippines, SRV, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore); experts of a number of the countries participated online in the

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conference jointly with a rather wide Internet audience. Also, Russian and Vietnamese mass media paid great attention to the event. The conference was cordially greeted by K.V. Babayev, IFES Director. A.A. Baykov, MGIMO University Vice-Rector for research and international cooperation, Seyla Eat, the ambassador of the Embassy of the Kingdom of Cambodia in RF, K.S. Terashkevich, the Deputy Director of the Department for international cooperation of the Ministry of Education and Science of Russia (Fig. 1).



Fig. 1. Opening of the conference. *Photo: MGIMO*

In the scope of the first session of the conference the participants analyzed ASEAN foreign policy in the macro-regional context. It was mentioned that the Association added actively to its positions both in the region and in the world and possesses a significant geopolitical weight. A.A. Butko, Leading Specialist of the Center of Scientific and Analytical Information of IOS RAS, developed the thesis on ASEAN growing role and its importance in the foreign policy conception of PRC and US. He exposed both the opportunities and challenges in this Triangle having emphasized that US – China confrontation is the main cause of the tension in SEA, making the achievement of the consensus in ASEAN more complicated.

E.A. Kanaev, Leading Researcher of IMEMO, scrupulously analyzed the regional agendas of PRC, implementing the mega-strategy of “the Belt and Road Initiative”, and US with its projects of the Indo-Pacific region and the recently created military-technical alliance AUKUS with the participation of Australia and Great Britain. It is acknowledged that these initiatives are not mutually synergetic; therefore, they are not able to assist the Association to strengthen its global influence, but in the perspective, they will undermine its regional positions.

V.M. Mazyrin, Chief Researcher of IFES, assessed the foreign policy priorities of ASEAN countries, slow change of the balance of forces in SEA. He mentioned a relative decrease of the US influence along with the increase of political and especially economic positions of China, as well as of EU and Japan, and middle-sized powers, such as India and the Republic of Korea, with the perspective for the increase of this tendency in this decade. At the same time, he ascertained the decrease of the RF role which is assessed as a secondary gamer by ASEAN local elites and think tanks.

Also, increasing competition for influence in the SEA region was found in the field of military-technical cooperation. Its tendencies were analyzed by M.G. Evdotyeva, Senior Researcher of IMEMO, having mentioned the increasing confrontation about arms transfers. The expert described it as market “re-formatting” in favor of chief combat systems and their components from

Western countries and their allies in East Asia. M.G. Evdotyeva concluded that for many indicators the region's arms market becomes less open and more diversified.

A separate session was devoted to ASEAN relations with the main strategic partners. V.E. Petrovsky, Chief Researcher of IFES, showed contradictions in ASEAN and China positions on the issues of regional integration and security. At the same time, he called them creators and participants of a new reality of the formation of regional integration projects and multilateral security mechanisms.

P.Yu. Tsvetov, Assistant Professor of the Diplomatic Academy of the MFA, paid attention to the ASEAN key position in the US Pacific policy having appealed to a new Indo-Pacific doctrine being for SEA a form and a matrix of "Washington's vision of international order based on rules" (Fig. 2). At the same time, he ascertained that the White House prefers economic leverage over ASEAN, though security issues are also relevant.



Fig. 2. Associate Professor of the Diplomatic Academy of the MFA P.Yu. Tsvetov speaks at the conference.
Photo: MGIMO

A.S. Korolyov, Assistant Professor of the National Research University Higher School of Economics, raised currently urgent problem of a new "turn of Russia to the East" in the context of its strategic partnership with ASEAN. Essentially, he assessed the rupture of Russia's relations with the West as a chance to give a new stimulus to Russia – ASEAN relations to prevent their skidding. The conclusion is that the narrow scope for progress in the dialogue with ASEAN, particularly in the field of economy, became much narrower along with the RF special military operation in Ukraine and Western "Draconian" sanctions.

Pankaj Jha, an outstanding scholar, Director of the Center for Security Studies at Jindal Global University, expressed his opinion of ASEAN-India interaction. He pointed to the new fields of cooperation in the Plan of actions of India and ASEAN for 2021–2025, such as: digital innovations, the fourth industrial revolution, alternative energy sources, artificial intelligence, modelling and hybrid learning, common sources data development, alternative medicine, the Ocean pollution control, sea security issues. The expert mentioned positive dynamics of the relations development, but only concentrated on several countries of the block, which are a corner-stone of India – ASEAN dialogue.

Taking into consideration the exacerbation of geopolitical contradictions at the global level, V.N. Kolotov, Director of the Ho Chi Minh Institute at St Petersburg State University, forecasted also the increasing pressure on the key countries of the region with the purpose to weaken the PRC impact.

The issue of external pressure stability of the group depends, in his opinion, on the degree of revitalization of the key parts of the East Asian segment of the Eurasian arc of instability and its impact on the positions of the ASEAN leading countries.

The third session was devoted to integration processes in some countries. E.V. Koldunova, Director of the ASEAN Center at MGIMO University, concentrated on the integration of the “new” ASEAN members (Fig. 3). The inclusion of four new participants into the Association and the transfer of power in Myanmar from the military government to a civilian one in 2010, is acknowledged a reason to speak of successes of ASEAN “engagement policy” unlike the Western stake on sanctions and interventions, including the humanitarian ones.



Fig. 3. Director of the ASEAN Center at MGIMO MFA RF E.V. Koldunova and Head of the Center for Vietnam and ASEAN Studies of IFES RAS V.M. Mazyrin. *Photo: MGIMO*

V.V. Vershinina, an expert of the ASEAN Center at MGIMO University, exposed a complex analysis of Vietnam foreign policy towards ASEAN and observed a gradual transformation from its position of “a novice” of the Association to the position of a full member possessing now a significant potential and capabilities to influence regional processes, of a medium regional power. In her opinion, Hanoi, being the informal leader of the Indochinese “quartet”, serves an example for less developed members.

E.S. Burova, a Researcher of IFES, by means of the example of Greater Mekong Subregion illustrated the importance of subregional initiatives for the elimination of ruptures and improvement of interrelations, assistance to international coordination, promotion of sustainable development. She mentioned the key role of the water system of the region and the importance of adequate assessment of its exploitation level, showed the fragmentariness of economic planning in the countries of the Mekong basin. The expert acknowledged the inadequacy of the assessments of short-, middle-, and long-term consequences of various types of the development in Greater Mekong Subregion.

N.S. Kuklin, an expert of the ASEAN Center at MGIMO University, showed the duality of approaches to regional policy typical of Indonesia, being considered the leader of the Association. He mentioned that political decisions taken by the government of the country often go against its integration interests, due to the traditional dilemma of Indonesian diplomacy, namely, the necessity to fortify internal positions, on the one hand, and to raise regional and global authority of Indonesia, on the other.

Also, there was paid attention to Myanmar’s relations with its ASEAN partners. Their establishing is not simple and leaves a broad field for reflexing and numerous interpretations.

K.A. Efremova, Assistant Professor of MGIMO University, exposed the history and problems of this partnership.

L.M. Kuntys, Assistant Professor of the Military Academy of the Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation, spoke on the results of Laos 25-years membership in ASEAN, and gave their sufficiently positive assessment. Laos deserves its place in ASEAN as a country conducting balanced policy oriented to defuse difficult situations inside the Association and supporting the ASEAN majority. Its membership in ASEAN is a support to the country and assists to solve complicated problems frequently arising in its relations with the neighboring countries.

The fourth session considered the urgent tasks of ASEAN sustainable development. R.R. Hussamov, Assistant Professor of the Financial University under the Government of the RF, spoke on the study of Vietnam strategy of sustainable development with the use of current methods of strategic analysis. He pointed to four features of the strategy realization, emphasizing the role of the state in macroeconomic management and realization of the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

A team of researchers of the Institute for Demographic Research FCTAS RAS (A.S. Lukyanets, R.V. Manshin, E.M. Moiseyeva) touched the ASEAN climate and ecology agenda, important for the realization of SDGs. They mentioned high vulnerability and low adaptation potential to climate change and environmental degradation. The researchers prognose that ecological crisis in ASEAN will be perilous not only for the member countries of the Association, but also for the Asia-Pacific region as a whole.

S.V. Ryazantsev, Director of the Institute for Demographic Research, and M.N. Khranova, Leading Researcher of the same Institute, described the dynamics of migration processes in the ASEAN countries in the context of current demographic changes, and pointed to the influencing factors. The authors determined the scope and forms of migration inside ASEAN (labor migration, educational migration and forced one), and presented future perspectives of their interaction in migration sphere.

N.V. Grigoryeva, Assistant Professor of the National Research University Higher School of Economics (St Petersburg), analyzed ASEAN countries' policies towards the preservation of their historical heritage, having outlined the tasks and mechanisms of this work, its increasing importance for the ASEAN identity formation. She determined the role of the institutions of the Socio-Cultural Community in this process, as well as external challenges for the ASEAN countries in terms of supporting and representing the heritage.

The papers of the fifth session touched legal issues, cultural dialogue and scientific discourse. Noor Juhaidah Binti, Senior Lecturer of Malaysian University Sains Islam, exposed the basics of biosecurity in the region and analyzed and determined alternative methods of control of this sphere in ASEAN.

D.G. Tkachenko, a teacher of MPEI, outlined legal features and perspectives of development of ASEAN. This theme was followed by Yu.O. Rachinskaya-Spivakova, a postgraduate from MGIMO University. She spoke on the nature of civil society of the ASEAN countries and their interaction with authorities. The efficient spheres of this interaction (humanitarian cooperation and meeting climate change) were shown on dealing with the consequences of disasters and protection of migrant workers' rights.

Also, S.V. Veretikhina and V.V. Khalyukin, technology experts from Russian State Social University, took part in the conference. They spoke on new high technologies being produced in Russia and assessed the possibility and perspectives of their export to the ASEAN countries.

N.V. Kolotova, a master student of St Petersburg State University, addressed the sphere of digitalization and cybersecurity. She chose the case of Vietnam to outline the issues of ASEAN – Russia cooperation in the field of digitalization and cybersecurity and analyzed the measures SRV undertakes to realize the Strategy of national digital transformation.

At the final session, G.P. Trofimchuk, Chairman of the Expert Council of the Workshop of Eurasian Ideas Fund, resumed the growing importance of ASEAN for Russia. In his opinion, the participation of RF in ASEAN affairs may either decrease or increase. The academic community is striving for the latter. The conference at IFES has improved the comprehension of the importance of the ASEAN – Russia cooperation, which should result in the spheres of trade and economy, science and technology, and education.

Summing up the work of the conference, V.M. Mazyrin, moderator of the conference, Head of the Center for Vietnam and ASEAN Studies of IFES RAS, mentioned its success and emphasized the satisfaction of participants and guests with the candid and fruitful discussion held in the scope of the conference.