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## VIETNAM AS A LINCHPIN BETWEEN RUSSIA AND ASEAN

### Overview of the international conference “Russia and ASEAN in Asia-Pacific Region: Dynamic of Cooperation, Regional Processes and the Global Context”

V.V. Vershinina, D.D. Bachilo

**Abstract.** The article presents an overview of the international conference “Russia and ASEAN in Asia-Pacific Region: Dynamic of Cooperation, Regional Processes and the Global Context” that was held at MGIMO University on October 15-16, 2021. The event was a part of the 13th Russian International Studies Association (RISA) Convention. This year the conference was dedicated to the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Russia-ASEAN Dialogue Partnership and 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of their bilateral relations. The overview is focused on the presentations, covering Russia-Vietnam relations and the role of Vietnam in ASEAN-Russia partnership, as well as Vietnam’s position within the region.

**Keywords:** Vietnam, ASEAN, conference, dialogue partnership.

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The 2021 year of a double anniversary, that is the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Russia-ASEAN Dialogue Partnership and the 30<sup>th</sup> – of their bilateral relations, has not escaped the attention of the academia. On October 15–16, 2021 ASEAN Centre, MGIMO University held an international conference “*Russia and ASEAN in Asia-Pacific Region: Dynamics of Cooperation, Regional Processes and the Global Context*” as a part of the 13th Russian International Studies Association (RISA) Convention. The conference busy agenda<sup>1</sup> reflected the international importance of the event: nine highly topical sessions along with a round table discussion “*How to Sustain Russia’s Pivot to Asia?*”, both counting with the participation of Russian and foreign scholars, covered almost the whole spectrum of Russia-ASEAN bilateral ties.

Interestingly enough, the focus of many Russian and foreign conference participants was on Vietnam, its role in the region and within the Association, as well as its relations with Russia. Although such an accentuation comes as no surprise, for in the Russian Asian Studies this country has long been in the center of attention, and historically Vietnam has had close ties with USSR/Russia, this fact also reflects the current dynamic of Russia-ASEAN relations.

It is therefore quite understandable that a MGIMO graduate and the current Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Vietnam to Russia Mr. Dang Minh Khoi was one of the key guest speakers at the conference opening ceremony. The Ambassador pointed out to the fact that being Russia’s traditional partner and a responsible member of ASEAN, Vietnam has always been eager to enhance ASEAN-Russia relations. The past thirty years have witnessed a major progress in Russia’s interactions with the Association’s member states and now, according to Dang Minh Khoi, the Dialogue Partnership is scaling up to a new stage of development.

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<sup>1</sup> URL: [https://asean.mgimo.ru/upload/ckeditor/files/2021-10\\_russia-asean-conf\\_prog.pdf](https://asean.mgimo.ru/upload/ckeditor/files/2021-10_russia-asean-conf_prog.pdf)

The opening remarks<sup>2</sup> were also delivered by the Deputy Foreign Minister of the Russian Federation Mr. Igor Morgulov, the Secretary-General of ASEAN Dato' Paduka Lim Jock Hoi; the Minister for Education, Youth and Sport of the Kingdom of Cambodia Mr. Hang Chuon Naron; the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia (2009-2014) Mr. Marty Natalegawa (Fig. 1); the Ambassador of the Russian Federation to ASEAN Mr. Alexander Ivanov; the Russia-ASEAN Business Council Chairperson Mr. Ivan Polyakov and MGIMO Vice-Rector for Scientific Affairs Mr. Andrey Baykov. The speakers provided their respective organizations and public institutions' perspectives on the key takeaways and the current state of Russia-ASEAN relations. Mr. Morgulov, for instance, stressed the role of the academia in the enhancement of Russia-ASEAN relations. The impressive composition of the conference and the range of topics at the sessions' agendas show a growing mutual interest between the respective parties and suggest the research on Russia-ASEAN regional cooperation is more than timely.



**Fig. 1.** Opening remarks by the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia (2009–2014) Mr. Marty Natalegawa. *Photo by MGIMO University*

The role of Vietnam in the region and its relations with Russia were analyzed in the following spheres: 1) economy (in bilateral trade and investment as well as in interaction with EAEU); 2) education; 3) military and defense cooperation.

As for the economy, both Russian and foreign scholars acknowledged the ambiguity of the cooperation results, at the same time stressing the great potential this cooperation has despite the external challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. Dr. Nguyen Thi Bich Ngoc, Director of the Centre for Foreign Policy and Regional Studies, Diplomatic Academy of Vietnam, proposed several recommendations for intensification of Russia-ASEAN bilateral cooperation. In her opinion, there is a significant potential in economic sphere, namely, in contacts between Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) and ASEAN. Vietnam was the first country to sign the Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with the EAEU, followed by Singapore. According to Nguyen Thi Bich Ngoc, as the majority of ASEAN countries aims to diversify their trade relations and gain access to other markets, they have a wide range of opportunities in cooperation with EAEU. Both Russia and ASEAN need to consider the feasibility of an FTA. Accordingly, the global climate change prompts Russia-ASEAN green energy

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cooperation, and the application of green technologies grows in importance. Another promising sphere is health cooperation and joint research activities on COVID-19, as well as other diseases. Russia and Vietnam do have already positive experience in this sphere thanks to the Joint Russian-Vietnamese Tropical Research and Technological Center (Tropical Center).

Vice Rector for International Relations (Far Eastern Federal University, FEFU) Mr. Evgeny Vlasov also stated the special role of Vietnam in Russia and EAEU relations with ASEAN. He stressed that the idea of contingency between the two integration blocks had been repeatedly pronounced by Vietnamese senior officials at various international forums. It first appeared in the speech by the Deputy Prime Minister Trinh Dinh Dung at the 2019 Eastern Economic Forum: he stated that Vietnam is ready to act as a bridge between EAEU and ASEAN. Nguyen Hong Dien, Minister for Industry and Trade of Vietnam, welcomed the idea and reassured Vietnam is ready to make the necessary efforts to achieve this aim. However, as Evgeny Vlasov emphasized, despite all the benefits of the prospective project, Russia faces severe challenges in its implementation. He drew the example of the Vietnamese company TH True Milk, who is building several dairy farms and a plant in Primorsky Krai, which may become the biggest Vietnamese investment project in the region. The prolonged burocrating arrangements, low population density and underdeveloped regional transport infrastructure provoked considerable delays in the process of the project's implementation. According to the expert, such projects implemented by big corporations may boost Russia-Vietnam and later Russia-ASEAN trade and economic cooperation, however, several intrinsic challenges should be addressed beforehand.

Another aspect of the economic cooperation, the functioning of the Vietnam – EAEU FTA, was touched upon by Anna Dolinina, a Ph.D. student at the Institute of Asian and African Studies, Moscow State University. The topic was brought up in the context of the consumer market analysis in Vietnam. The author's statistics demonstrated that Vietnam is moving to a more westernized model of consumption and is partly reducing the share of traditional products, such as rice. The growing demand for meat and dairy products, as well as the nullification of customs rates prompted food export from Russia to Vietnam, making Russia the biggest supplier of pork to Vietnam and putting Vietnam second after China in the list of major meat importers from Russia.

Irina Korgun, Acting Director of the Center for the Russian Strategy in Asia, Institute of Economics, Russian Academy of Sciences, analyzed the participation of Vietnam in the global value chains. Taking the Vietnam – Korea cooperation as an example, the expert explained how Vietnam-Russia cooperation is influenced by the country's participation in the international division of labor. Vietnam is now one of the leading suppliers of domestic electronic devices to Russia, which is explained by the relocation of the Korean production plants to Vietnam due to growing trade tensions between the US and China, lower labor costs in Vietnam, as well as the investment, trade policies and the participation of Vietnam in multilateral trade agreements, etc.

The issue of education as one of the key elements of Russia – Vietnam cooperation in a broader context of Russia-ASEAN Dialogue Partnership was brought about by Marina Shpakovskaya, Professor at the Department of Theory and History of International Relations, RUDN University. The focus of her speech was the problem of the export of Russian education to Vietnam. It is well known that many Vietnamese politicians made their studies in Russia, however, the new generation coming to power was educated mostly in the Western countries. She took as a key study in export of education services the activities in Vietnam by the US private Fulbright University and the Australian Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology. The expert concluded that Russian

universities are hardly visible on the Vietnamese education market and a more effective strategy on the export of Russian educational services is needed.

Several presentations covered the topic of Vietnam military and defense cooperation with other countries (Fig. 2). For instance, Nikolay Fedorov, Associate Professor at the Department of American Studies, Faculty of International Relations, St. Petersburg State University, stated that Vietnam is forging modernization of its army and is trying to diversify its defense cooperation. India, by enjoying Comprehensive and Strategic Partnership with Vietnam, may become a new and promising counterpart in the sphere. The India's experience in handling both Soviet/Russian and Western military equipment may be a strong point for Vietnam in favor of this country. Russia is preserving its leadership in the sphere, however, according to the expert, India may become in the future a strong competitor, as the Vietnam-India defense cooperation is already actively expanding.



**Fig.2.** The conference participants. *Photo by MGIMO University*

Anna Kireeva, Associate Professor at the Department of Asian and African Studies, MGIMO University, analyzed Vietnam's cooperation with another important partner, Japan. Anna Kireeva based her assumptions on the results of the poll conducted in 2019 by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, which aimed to identify how liable is this or that country population to Japan, with Vietnam scoring considerably high. The expert highlighted the special position of Vietnam in the Japanese foreign policy strategy initiated by the former Prime-Minister Abe Shinzo, which is explained by the Japan's quest to counter Chinese domination in the region. The two countries are expanding exchanges over traditional and non-traditional security challenges, as well as in trade and investment.

A special part of the conference was a thematic book exhibition as well as book presentations. The major outcome of the conference is expected to be a publication of conference papers.

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## ВЬЕТНАМ В РОЛИ СВЯЗУЮЩЕГО ЗВЕНА МЕЖДУ РОССИЕЙ И АСЕАН

Обзор международной научно-практической конференции «Россия и АСЕАН в АТР:  
динамика взаимодействия, региональные процессы и глобальный контекст»

**В.В. Вершинина, Д.Д. Бачило**

**Аннотация:** В статье содержится обзор состоявшейся 15–16 октября 2021 г. в МГИМО МИД России в рамках XIII Конвента Российской ассоциации международных исследований (РАМИ) международной научно-практической конференции «Россия и АСЕАН в АТР: динамика взаимодействия, региональные процессы и глобальный контекст». Мероприятие было приурочено к 25-летию диалогового партнёрства и 30-летию установления официальных отношений России и АСЕАН. Акцент в обзоре сделан на докладах, посвящённых Вьетнаму и его отношениям со странами региона и Россией.

**Ключевые слова:** СРВ, Вьетнам, АСЕАН, ЕАЭС, конференция, диалоговое партнёрство.

**Для цитирования:** *Вершинина В.В., Бачило Д.Д.* Вьетнам в роли связующего звена между Россией и АСЕАН // Вьетнамские исследования. 2021. Т. 5. № 4. С. 162–170.

Юбилейный для российско-асеановских отношений 2021 г., в котором стороны отметили 25-летие диалогового партнёрства и 30-летие отношений, не был обойдён вниманием экспертного сообщества. 15–16 октября 2021 г. в МГИМО МИД России в рамках XIII Конвента Российской ассоциации международных исследований (РАМИ) состоялась международная конференция «Россия и АСЕАН в АТР: динамика взаимодействия, региональные процессы и глобальный контекст». Богатая программа конференции<sup>1</sup> отразила большую важность для международного научного сообщества означенного события: девять тематических сессий с участием отечественных и зарубежных исследователей, а также круглый стол на тему «Поворот России на Восток: как обеспечить его системный характер?» охватили весь спектр взаимоотношений нашей страны с Ассоциацией (рис. 1).

Примечательно, что во многом фокус внимания как зарубежных, так и российских экспертов на различных сессиях оказался смещён в сторону Вьетнама – его места в регионе, в Ассоциации и в отношениях с Россией. Этот акцент, безусловно, не случаен для отечественной науки и выражает не только дань традиции востоковедной школы нашей страны и истории взаимоотношений СССР и России с регионом, но и во многом выявляет акценты российско-асеановских отношений.

В этом смысле закономерно, что среди почётных гостей церемонии открытия конференции оказался посол Вьетнама в России, выпускник МГИМО Данг Минь Кхой. В своём приветствии он особо отметил, что Вьетнам как традиционный партнёр России и ответственный член Ассоциации всегда придавал особое значение развитию отношений АСЕАН и России. За 30 лет был достигнут значительный прогресс во взаимодействии России

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<sup>1</sup> URL: [https://asean.mgimo.ru/upload/ckeditor/files/2021-10\\_russia-asean-conf\\_prog.pdf](https://asean.mgimo.ru/upload/ckeditor/files/2021-10_russia-asean-conf_prog.pdf)

со странами – членами Ассоциации, и на данном этапе, по его мнению, диалоговое партнёрство вступает в новую фазу своего развития.

С приветственными словами<sup>2</sup> к участникам конференции также обратились заместитель министра иностранных дел Российской Федерации И.В. Моргулов, генеральный секретарь АСЕАН Лим Джок Хой, министр по делам образования, молодёжи и спорта Королевства Камбоджа Ханг Чуон Нарон, министр иностранных дел Республики Индонезия (2009–2014) Марти Наталегава (рис. 1), постоянный представитель РФ при АСЕАН А.А. Иванов, председатель делового совета Россия – АСЕАН И.В. Поляков и проректор по научной работе МГИМО А.А. Байков. Спикеры церемонии открытия поделились видением представляемых ими ведомств и организаций относительно итогов и современного состояния партнёрства России и АСЕАН. И.В. Моргулов, в частности, в своём обращении подчеркнул роль экспертного сообщества в развитии отношений России и АСЕАН. Представительный состав участников конференции и широкий тематический охват свидетельствуют, по его мнению, о росте взаимного интереса России и стран АСЕАН и об актуальности исследования регионального измерения российско-асеановских отношений.

Роль Вьетнама в регионе и во внешних связях России в рамках конференции анализировалась в основном по следующим направлениям: 1) в сфере экономики: касательно двусторонних торгово-экономических и инвестиционных отношений с Россией, взаимодействия с ЕАЭС; 2) в сфере образования; 3) в рамках военно-стратегического сотрудничества.

По первому блоку вопросов как российские, так и зарубежные исследователи отметили неоднозначность итогов торгово-экономического и инвестиционного сотрудничества и вместе с тем – перспективность их развития, несмотря на объективные сложности, вызванные пандемией COVID-19. Так, директор Центра внешней политики и региональных исследований Дипломатической академии Вьетнама Нгуен Тхи Бить Нгок в своём докладе дала несколько рекомендаций, которые могут способствовать дальнейшей интенсификации сотрудничества России и АСЕАН.



Рис. 1. Приветственное слово министра иностранных дел Республики Индонезия (2009–2014) Марти Наталегава. Фото МГИМО МИД России

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The role of Vietnam in the region and its relations with Russia were analyzed in the following spheres: 1) economy (in bilateral trade and investment as well as in interaction with EAEU); 2) education; 3) military and defense cooperation.

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