



POINTS OF VIEW

The International Studies Center (ISC) publishes commentaries on international issues in its Points of View. The views expressed are the authors' own and do not represent those of the Royal Thai Government or the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Thailand. Permission to reproduce the commentary(s) may be obtained from the ISC at isc@mfa.mail.go.th, and due recognition to the author(s) should also be given as appropriate.

No. 12/2022 | December 2022

Thailand's Perspective on Ways to Enhance ASEAN-Kazakhstan Partnership¹

Orathai Phubunlap Gunaseelan²

The year 2022 marks the 30th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between most ASEAN Member States and Kazakhstan. However, as an international organisation, ASEAN does not have an official relationship with Kazakhstan that would render a kind of formal platform for conducting concrete cooperation between each other. Kazakhstan's engagement with the Southeast Asian region is directed through cooperation with each ASEAN Member State. As for Thailand, the diplomatic relations between Thailand and Kazakhstan were officially established on 6 July 1992. Since then, both countries have enjoyed close and cordial relations. Throughout 30 years of diplomatic ties, Thailand and Kazakhstan have regular exchanges of visits and contacts on

¹ The article was part of Dr. Orathai's speech, delivered on 16 November 2022, during the panel discussion among ASEAN Ambassadors and academia at Nazarbayev University of Kazakhstan on the topic of "the 30th anniversary of diplomatic relations between ASEAN Member States and Kazakhstan".

² Dr. Orathai is currently a counsellor of the Royal Thai Embassy in Astana, a Ph.D. in human resource and organizational development, and a specialist in Thai-Russian relations and Russia-related issues.

different levels and spheres, covering a wide range of issues from trade, investment, tourism, culture, and people-to-people contact.

Considering the similarity between Thailand and Kazakhstan, one of which is the strategic location of both countries, where Thailand is situated at the heart of mainland ASEAN; while Kazakhstan is at the center of Central Asia, Thailand can essentially serve as a bridge to link deeper and more concrete cooperation between ASEAN and Kazakhstan. Having met at Saranrom Palace in Bangkok, Thailand, on 8 August 1967, leaders of Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand adopted the Bangkok Declaration to officially establish ASEAN. Since then, ASEAN has always been and will remain the cornerstone of Thailand's foreign policy.

As a founding member of ASEAN, Thailand has always contributed to the ASEAN affairs to ensure the growth, peace, stability, and prosperity of the region. Thailand has from time to time taken the lead in the ASEAN matters. Two remarkable examples of Thailand's leading role in ASEAN are Thailand's initiative of the ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA) and the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), the latter of which has served as the first and only forum to discuss security issues in East Asia. Given the active and responsible role of Thailand in ASEAN and the close and cordial relations between Thailand and Kazakhstan, Thailand can potentially play an imperative role in helping strengthen ASEAN-Kazakhstan partnership in at least three ways.

First, closer cooperation between ASEAN and Kazakhstan can be implemented through the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia, known as CICA. On one hand, ASEAN is the foundation of foreign policy of all 10 ASEAN Member States, and it has played a critical role in maintaining peace, stability, and prosperity in the Southeast Asian region. On the other hand, CICA, founded by Kazakhstan in 1992, is a crucial multi-national forum that advances cooperation between its 28 Member States toward peace, security, and stability in Asia.

From here, it is evident that both ASEAN and Kazakhstan share the same principles of their operation, which are to maintain peace, security, stability, and prosperity. Within the framework of CICA, in which three ASEAN Member States are CICA Member States (Cambodia, Thailand, and Vietnam), and 4 ASEAN Member States are CICA Observer States (Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, and the Philippines), both organisations can possibly cooperate through the utilisation of CICA's five interaction dimensions, ranging from economic, environmental, human, new challenges and threats, and military-political dimensions.

As for Thailand's role in CICA, Thailand upholds its commitment and contribution to the issue of sustainable development. Thailand has been fulfilling the role of coordinator for implementing CICA Confidence Building Measures (CBMs) on sustainable development, which is under the environmental dimension. Thailand has continuously offered and hosted various training courses on sustainable development and the country's home-grown Sufficiency Economy Philosophy (SEP). In 2022, two online international training courses on "Sustainable Waste Management in Circular Economy" and "Sufficiency Economy Philosophy" were held by Thailand to enhance capacity building for all CICA Member States in the area of sustainable development.

Second, Thailand's leading role in sustainable development can link ASEAN with Kazakhstan and potentially lead both sides to an enhanced partnership in this area. For ASEAN, sustainable development remains one of the strategic priorities. Currently, Thailand serves as the ASEAN Coordinator on Sustainable Development Cooperation. Thailand is committed to advancing partnership between ASEAN Member States and partners in promoting complementarities between the ASEAN Community Vision 2025 and the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development or the so-called Complementarities Initiative.

As for Kazakhstan, the country is committed to achieving the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the issue of sustainable development is positioned at the core development path of the country. Such commitment is demonstrated through numerous regional and global events and activities, hosted by Kazakhstan to promote sustainable development. One of which is the Second Regional Summit on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), held in June 2022. Currently, Kazakhstan is the location for the UN Center for SDGs for Central Asia and Afghanistan.

Likewise, Thailand is the hub for the ASEAN Centre for Sustainable Development Studies and Dialogue, which serves not only to promote research and capacity building on sustainable development, but also offers a platform for policy dialogue among ASEAN Member States, and between ASEAN and its external partners. Therefore, considering the roles of both Thailand and Kazakhstan in promoting and achieving sustainable development through ASEAN and UN frameworks, it is unquestionable that there is a prospect of cooperation between ASEAN and Kazakhstan in the area of sustainable development.

Third, another possible area for ASEAN-Kazakhstan partnership is through the Bio-Circular-Green Economy Model or the so-called BCG Economy Model, which is adopted by the Royal Thai Government as part of Thailand's national strategy for sustainable recovery and a greener future in the post COVID-19 world. The BCG Economy Model is aimed at implementing the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, with an emphasis on economic growth that is based on efficient resource utilisation, waste reduction, and low-carbon emission. The BCG Economy Model targets four industries, namely, (1) agriculture and food, (2) medical and wellness, (3) bioenergy, biomaterials, and biochemicals, and (4) tourism and creative economy.

Given the significance of the BCG Economy Model, Thailand has been entrusted by ASEAN to explore the Model as a possible strategy for ASEAN's post pandemic recovery and sustainable future growth. In addition, the BCG Economy Model has been employed as the core strategy of Thailand's APEC 2022 Chairmanship, under the theme "Open. Connect. Balance.", to address the disparities exposed by the COVID-19 pandemic and to attain sustainable growth. The BCG Economy Model is aimed at being integrated into the economies not only in the Asia-Pacific region but also beyond to rebuild competitive economies in the post-pandemic world and advance more robust, balanced, and sustainable growth and development that leaves no one behind. The Bangkok Goals on BCG Economy, adopted as a key outcome document during the APEC 2022 Summit, serves as the APEC's first-ever comprehensive framework on sustainability, complementing the Putrajaya Vision and Aotearoa Plan of Action until 2040 and has reflected Thailand's strong commitment to the sustainable agenda.

The BCG Economy Model can be a complementarity to Kazakhstan's Concept of Transition towards Green Economy until 2050 or Kazakhstan's Strategy 2050, set as the country's guidelines for building a sustainable and efficient economic model for the transition to a green development path. Similar to the BCG Economy Model, Kazakhstan's Strategy 2050 is aimed at increasing resource utilization efficiency, modernizing existing and developing new infrastructure, improving population well-being, and protecting environment quality, and increasing national security, including water supply. Therefore, the interrelation between Thailand's BCG Economy Model, which is a possible strategy for ASEAN's post pandemic recovery and sustainable future growth, and Kazakhstan's Strategy 2050 can offer an opportunity for an enhanced partnership between ASEAN and Kazakhstan.

ศูนย์ศึกษาการต่างประเทศ
(International Studies Center -ISC)
isc.mfa.go.th | isc@mfa.go.th