

REPORT



47TH ASEAN SUMMIT
AND RELATED SUMMITS
26-28 OCTOBER 2025, KUALA LUMPUR, MALAYSIA



№ 108 / 2026

Toward a New Agenda for Russia–ASEAN Relations



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MOSCOW 2026

Russian International Affairs Council

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Toward a New Agenda for Russia–ASEAN Relations: Report No. 108 / 2026 / E. Koldunova, V. Vershinina, N. Kuklin et al.; edited by S. Gavrilova, J. Melnikova, D. Rastegaev, K. Trotskaya et al.; Russian International Affairs Council (RIAC). — Moscow: NPMP RIAC, 2026. — 36 p. — Authors and editors are listed on the copyright page.

ISBN 978-5-6054794-5-1

The report offers a comprehensive analysis of Russia—Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) relations. The authors examine ASEAN's place and role in Russia's foreign policy strategy, tracing the evolution of Moscow's approach to bilateral engagement since 1991. The study offers a detailed overview of the current state of Russia's cooperation with Southeast Asian countries across the political and security, trade and economic, and socio-humanitarian spheres. It also analyzes the potential of Russia and ASEAN as future centers of a multipolar world and offers practical recommendations for the comprehensive development of their partnership at a new stage.

The opinions expressed in this report reflect solely the personal views and analytical outlook of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of the Non-Profit-Making Partnership Russian International Affairs Council.

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Introduction

By the mid-2020s, Russia's pivot to the East had taken on a clear practical dimension. In the context of the crisis in the European security architecture following the launch of the special military operation in Ukraine in 2022, and the intensification of sanctions pressure on Russia, the role of key Asian directions in Russian foreign policy has undergone a significant, qualitative shift. Structurally, the primary focus has been on deepening cooperation with partners across Eurasia—China, India, Iran, Turkey, and the member states of the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU). At the same time, Russia's relations with Southeast Asian countries and their regional organization, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), have also been reassessed.

Today, ASEAN represents an important diplomatic partner for Russia, not least because of the Association's interest in the gradual transformation of the international system. As a whole, the Association and most of its member states have shown a form of benevolent neutrality toward efforts to develop alternatives to the Western normative framework, promote a more equitable system of global and regional governance based on international law, and build a more resilient and diversified financial and economic architecture. Despite pressure from the United States and its allies, ASEAN-centered institutions¹ and international platforms chaired in recent years by ASEAN member states have refrained from supporting policies aimed at isolating Russia.² ASEAN's neutral stance toward Moscow reflects its broader strategic approach: distancing itself from confrontational dynamics, hedging foreign policy and economic risks, and remaining engaged with emerging political, diplomatic, and economic networks in the non-Western world. For Southeast Asian countries, Russia thus serves as an additional element in the balance of power that ASEAN has been carefully cultivating since the early 1990s. It contributes to reinforcing the region's political and strategic landscape while also acting as a partner for broader global engagement. This logic helps explain ASEAN and member state interests in further institutionalizing ties with the EAEU, as well as in developing partnerships with BRICS and BRICS+.

In practical terms, cooperation with Russia offers ASEAN countries additional opportunities in military-technical collaboration, access to economic resources—particularly in energy, ICT, and the chemical industry—enhanced food security, and the potential to expand inbound tourism from Russia, which remains important for several economies in the region, especially Thailand. At the same time, ASEAN has no intention of severing ties with the Western world; rather, its member states continue to pursue a balanced foreign policy, navigating between competing and sometimes conflicting centers of power.

ASEAN's neutral position toward Moscow is driven by the grouping's desire to distance itself from the confrontational logic of the West, to hedge its foreign

¹ ASEAN Regional Forum on Security (ARF), East Asia Summit (EAS), ASEAN Defense Ministers' Meeting Plus (ADMM-Plus), Expanded ASEAN Maritime Forum

² In 2022, Indonesia held the presidency of the Group of Twenty (G20), while Thailand chaired APEC.

policy and external economic risks, and to avoid being excluded from potentially significant channels of emerging political-diplomatic and financial-economic interaction in the non-Western world. For Southeast Asian countries, Russia thus acts as an element of the balance of power, painstakingly constructed by the Association since the early 1990s, fulfilling a political-diplomatic and military-strategic role of “consolidating”³ the regional space, as well as serving as a partner for reaching the global level. This logic, in particular, explains the interest of ASEAN and individual member states in further institutionalizing relations with the EAEU and in establishing partnerships with BRICS and BRICS+. In addition, cooperation with Moscow provides ASEAN countries with additional opportunities in the field of military-technical cooperation, grants access to economic resources—especially in energy, ICT, and the chemical industry—contributes to strengthening food security, and creates prospects for increasing tourist flows from Russia, which are important for the economies of several countries in the region, particularly Thailand. At the same time, a rupture with the Western world is by no means part of the Association’s plans, and ASEAN states seek to maintain balance in their foreign policy, navigating between competing or conflicting centers of power.

Under these conditions, Russia reasonably maintains that strengthening the leading role of ASEAN-centered institutions in Southeast Asia will contribute to the region’s emergence as one of the centers of a future multipolar world order. There remains potential to scale up the experience of inclusive engagement, grounded in a distinctive culture of dialogue and in the consideration of the interests of international actors at different levels. It is no coincidence that the prominent Singaporean diplomat and scholar Kishore Mahbubani, who served as Singapore’s Permanent Representative to the United Nations in 1984–1989 and 1998–2004, noted that a key achievement of ASEAN has been its significant contribution to the *peaceful* rise of major Asian powers such as China and India.⁴

Russia and ASEAN have a positive track record of historical interaction, which provides a favorable foundation for the development of bilateral relations unburdened by issues of “historical memory” or “historical grievances.” Given the dynamic growth of the regional economy, the strengthening of Russia’s ties with Southeast Asian countries holds significant potential in the trade and economic sphere. At the same time, the full realization of these opportunities requires Russian business to adapt to a new ethnopsychological environment, to operate under conditions of intense competition, and to take into account the structural features of social organization in Southeast Asia, which shape business practices in the region. In 2025, the implementation period of the Comprehensive Plan of Action for the Strategic Partnership between the Russian Federation and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations for 2021–2025 comes to an end. Accordingly, the development of a new agenda for Russia–ASEAN relations across global political, political-diplomatic, and socioeconomic dimensions represents a pressing task.

³ A term introduced by the prominent Russian international relations scholar A.D. Bogaturov. It was first used in his work *Great Powers in the Pacific* and described the emergence of a specific type of international-political space in East Asia, within which leading states were compelled to accept certain constraints imposed by smaller countries (in this case, the ASEAN states).

⁴ Mahbubani, K. *The New Asian Hemisphere. The Irresistible Shift of Global Power to the East*. N.Y.: Public Affairs, 2008. P. 84.

Section 1. ASEAN in Russia’s Foreign Policy and External Economic Priorities: Evolution and Transformation

An analysis of Russia’s foreign policy concepts adopted in 1993, 2000, 2008, 2013, 2016, and 2023 makes it possible to trace the transformation of ASEAN’s role and place in Russian foreign policy in the post–Cold War period. As global geopolitical shifts accelerated and competition in the Asia-Pacific region intensified, Russia’s interest in ASEAN as a key element of its strategic approach correspondingly increased.

The development of the **1993 Foreign Policy Concept**⁵ took place in the context of the collapse of the bipolar world. The foreign policy priorities outlined in this document reflected Moscow’s intention to establish dialogue with Western countries and to shape a new international image for Russia. As for Southeast Asian states, no clearly defined strategy of engagement had yet been formulated at that time. At the same time, the Concept included Section VI, devoted to the Asia-Pacific region, which emphasized the shift of the center of global development toward this region and declared the need to strengthen Russia’s position in this direction, although ASEAN itself was not given particular attention. In the **2000 Concept**,⁶ unlike its predecessor, there was no separate section dedicated to the Asia-Pacific region. Relations with countries of the region, including Southeast Asian states, were addressed in a brief paragraph in Section IV, “Regional Priorities.” The **2008 Foreign Policy Concept** of the Russian Federation differed significantly from the two previous versions in its more detailed articulation of priority areas of cooperation with countries of the Asia-Pacific region. The text included a formulation affirming Russia’s belonging to the region and emphasized the need for the economic development of Siberia and the Russian Far East through cooperation with Asia-Pacific states. Unlike earlier versions, the 2008 document also specified particular ASEAN countries with which Moscow aimed to expand engagement.⁷ Priority was given to developing a strategic partnership with Vietnam, followed by Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, the Philippines, and Singapore. Paragraph 78 of the **2013 Concept** characterized ASEAN and its key mechanisms, as well as several ASEAN-centered formats—such as the East Asia Summit (EAS), the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), the Asia–Europe Meeting (ASEM), the ASEAN Defense Ministers’ Meeting Plus (ADMM-Plus), the Dialogue on Cooperation in Asia, and the Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia (CICA), as well as APEC—as key platforms for strategic multilateral dialogue on security and economic cooperation. Paragraph 87 once again reaffirmed the commitment to deepening the strategic partnership with Vietnam, which

⁵ Foreign Policy Concepts of the Russian Federation, 1993–2023 / Comp. by D.V. Kuznetsov. N.p.: N.p., 2023. Pp. 5–32.

⁶ Ibid. Pp. 32–43.

⁷ Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation, July 12, 2008 // President of Russia. 15.07.2008. URL: <http://www.kremlin.ru/acts/news/785>

at that time was regarded as a key country for advancing Russian integration initiatives.⁸

The **2016 Foreign Policy Concept** of the Russian Federation reflects a qualitatively new stage in Russia's approach to ASEAN. In this version, cooperation is framed as an instrument for advancing transregional integration, or the "integration of integrations," in the Asia-Pacific region. ASEAN is presented as a consolidated space capable of a distinct type of interaction within complex integration processes. In particular, paragraph 80 expresses the intention to elevate dialogue with the Association to the level of a strategic partnership.⁹ According to the document, these efforts were to be supported by expanded engagement in formats such as the East Asia Summit (EAS), serving as a platform for strategic dialogue among state leaders on the conceptual architecture of the Asia-Pacific region, the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), and the ASEAN Defense Ministers' Meeting Plus (ADMM-Plus). Forums mentioned in the previous version of the Concept—APEC, ASEM, and CICA—were placed in separate paragraphs (81 and 83), which can be interpreted as an effort to conceptually distinguish Russia–ASEAN dialogue partnership as a priority mechanism of engagement in the region. The document also introduced new elements. For example, paragraph 82 emphasized Russia's intention to promote the formation of a common, open, and non-discriminatory economic partnership—a shared development space encompassing the member states of ASEAN, the SCO, and the EAEU—aimed at ensuring the complementarity of integration processes across the Asia-Pacific and Eurasian regions.

Important steps in this direction included Russia's participation in various multilateral forums, where it advanced its own model of regional cooperation based on the principles of mutual respect and sovereign equality. Moscow emphasized the need to address comprehensive security challenges in the region, including counterterrorism and the fight against transnational crime. This contributed to strengthening Russia's position as one of the key actors in the Asia-Pacific and as a potential provider of regional security. In 2015–2016, the idea of establishing a free trade area between ASEAN member states and the EAEU began to be actively discussed, potentially opening new opportunities for economic cooperation. The promotion of this initiative underscored Russia's focus on advancing integration processes and maintaining stable economic linkages in the region, while also serving as a response to the integration initiatives of the United States and China, such as the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) and the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), respectively. During the same period, the concept of the Greater Eurasian Partnership (GEP) began to take shape—an initiative proposed in President Vladimir Putin's 2015 address to the Federal Assembly, aimed at creating a broad integration framework across the Eurasian continent.¹⁰ Following

⁸ Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation of February 12, 2013 // Garant.ru. 20.02.2013.
URL: <https://www.garant.ru/products/ipo/prime/doc/70218094/>

⁹ Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation of November 30, 2016 // President of Russia. 30.11.2016.
URL: <http://www.kremlin.ru/acts/bank/41451/page/1>

¹⁰ Address by the President to the Federal Assembly, December 3, 2015 // President of Russia. 03.12.2015.
URL: <http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/50864>

the ASEAN–Russia Summit in Singapore in 2018, relations between the parties were elevated to the level of a strategic partnership.

By 2023, **Russia’s Foreign Policy Concept** had undergone significant revision, reflecting global challenges such as the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, the slowdown of economic globalization, and intensifying competition among centers of power.¹¹ The 2023 Concept was developed and adopted in the context of the special military operation in Ukraine, which substantially influenced the transformation of Russia’s foreign policy priorities. Under these conditions, ASEAN came to be viewed as an important counterpart in maintaining regional stability. The Concept once again emphasized the need to create a broad integration space—the Greater Eurasian Partnership—envisaging the aggregation of resources from all countries, regional organizations, and groupings across Eurasia, with a focus on the EAEU, the SCO, and ASEAN, into a unified network based on the principles of openness, equality, and mutual benefit. It also highlighted the importance of synergy between the development plans of the EAEU and China’s Belt and Road Initiative. Thus, the document reflects a shift in geopolitical and geoeconomic priorities toward Eurasia, which is expected, in effect, to incorporate various multilateral formats, including those associated with the Asia-Pacific region.¹²

ASEAN, in this context, continued to be regarded as an integral, and now key, platform for advancing multilateral cooperation in the region. Paragraph 55, devoted to the Asia-Pacific, underscores Russia’s opposition to the creation of dividing lines in the region and to attempts to undermine the system of ASEAN-centered multilateral frameworks. Particular emphasis is placed on the idea of developing an open security architecture grounded in multilateralism and collective engagement.

Such formulations were incorporated into the document in response to the growing activity in the region of U.S.-centered formats such as the Quad (Quadrilateral Security Dialogue involving Australia, India, the United States, and Japan) and AUKUS (a minilateral framework comprising Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States). From Russia’s perspective, the actions of these groupings are aimed at undermining ASEAN-centered regional security mechanisms and contribute to the escalation of U.S.–China tensions in the Asia-Pacific region.

The document also notes that Russia is shaping its strategy toward ASEAN with an emphasis on deepening and expanding cooperation across the Asia-Pacific as a whole, while seeking to implement joint projects and initiatives that promote transregional integration in the fields of economics, security, and humanitarian cooperation. It is also notable that the 2023 Concept does not identify specific partner countries in Southeast Asia; instead, ASEAN is treated primarily as a collective actor.

¹¹ Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation, March 31, 2023 // Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation. 31.03.2023. URL: <https://www.mid.ru/ru/detail-material-page/1860586/>

¹² This framing becomes understandable in light of the active circulation of more than a dozen Indo-Pacific concepts, which have discursively supplanted the Asia-Pacific as a reference framework. In this context, Russia’s foreign policy concept placed emphasis on the development of its own integrative space of Greater Eurasia.

Thus, Russia's foreign policy concepts from 1993 to 2008 were characterized by an effort to define the country's place in the Asia-Pacific under shifting geopolitical conditions. At the same time, analysis of these documents shows that Russia generally paid limited attention to engagement with ASEAN and ASEAN-centered mechanisms. The transformation of ASEAN's role in Moscow's foreign policy since 2016 reflects not only the development of multilateral relations but also a growing ambition on Russia's part to play a more active role in shaping the regional architecture of security and cooperation in the Asia-Pacific. Whereas earlier Russia merely positioned itself as a potential provider of regional security, the 2023 Concept expresses an intention to actively counter attempts by other extraregional actors to destabilize the region. From a geo-economic perspective, the 2016 and 2023 concepts consistently advance the idea of promoting transregional integration between Eurasia and the Asia-Pacific through coordination among the EAEU, the SCO, and ASEAN. All of these are viewed as integral components of the Greater Eurasian Partnership. The key aspects of the transformation of Russia's foreign policy perceptions of ASEAN are summarized in Table 1.

The agenda of Russia–ASEAN summits has also undergone qualitative changes since the establishment of dialogue partnership relations—it has become more substantive and functionally differentiated. The first Russia–ASEAN summit was held in 2005 in Kuala Lumpur, the capital of Malaysia. During the summit, the parties signed the Joint Declaration on Comprehensive and Progressive Partnership, aimed at advancing and strengthening the Russia–ASEAN dialogue partnership across a broad range of areas.¹³ The priorities for cooperation identified at the summit have since remained an integral part of the dialogue.

Among the cross-cutting themes of Russia–ASEAN summits, priority has consistently been given to cooperation in the international political sphere and in the field of security. Official documents adopted following these summits have emphasized the importance of preserving ASEAN centrality in the regional architecture, as well as the peaceful settlement of disputes in accordance with generally recognized principles of international law, including those enshrined in the UN Charter. It has also been noted that the emerging regional security architecture should be open and inclusive.

Russia and ASEAN have placed particular emphasis on initiatives to combat terrorism and transnational crime, including illicit drug trafficking, human trafficking, maritime piracy, arms smuggling, money laundering, international economic crime, and cybercrime. The parties have also deepened issue-specific cooperation within ASEAN-centered mechanisms, including the Expanded ASEAN Maritime Forum. Bilateral documents have repeatedly underscored the importance of fostering dialogue between ASEAN and other integration groups, such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and the Eurasian

¹³ On the Adoption by the President of Russia V.V. Putin and the Leaders of the ASEAN Member States of the Joint Declaration on Comprehensive and Progressive Partnership and the Comprehensive Program of Action for the Development of Cooperation between the Russian Federation and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations for 2005–2015, Kuala Lumpur (Malaysia), December 13, 2005 // Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation. 14.12.2005.
URL: https://www.mid.ru/ru/foreign_policy/rso/1679322/

Table 1. ASEAN and Southeast Asian Countries in the Foreign Policy Concepts of the Russian Federation

Foreign Policy Concept	Commentary
1993	A shift in the center of global development toward the Asia-Pacific is noted. It is recognized that the Russian Far East and Siberia have been largely excluded from regional integration processes. Emphasis is placed on developing relations with former Soviet allies in the region.
2000	The growing importance of Asia in Russia’s foreign policy is emphasized, driven by the need to stimulate the economic development of Siberia and the Russian Far East. Russia’s direct belonging to the region is explicitly highlighted. The objective is set to intensify Russia’s participation in APEC and the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF). There is no direct reference to ASEAN or to individual Southeast Asian countries.
2008	The increasing significance of the Asia-Pacific region and Russia’s belonging to it are emphasized. Active participation in regional institutions in the Asia-Pacific is declared, including ASEAN-centered mechanisms (in particular, the ASEAN Regional Forum, ARF) and APEC. Among regional priorities, the development of a strategic partnership with Vietnam and comprehensive cooperation with other Southeast Asian countries is identified.
2013	ASEAN is identified as part of the Asia-Pacific region, with its mechanisms regarded as on par with other regional groupings. Among individual countries, only Vietnam is specifically mentioned.
2016	ASEAN is identified as a leading partner in the region; an intention to elevate relations to a strategic partnership is declared, and the beginning of efforts to align integration processes between Eurasia and Southeast Asia is noted. ASEAN member states are referenced in detail.
2023	ASEAN is identified as the principal collective actor in the Asia-Pacific and a key partner. A full-fledged intention is declared to establish a transregional integration framework within the Greater Eurasian Partnership (GEP) and other initiatives. Russia also expresses its intent to counteract efforts to destabilize the region and ASEAN. No specific countries are mentioned.

Source: Compiled by the authors based on the texts of the concepts of Russian foreign policy

Economic Union (EAEU). Thus, the agenda of Russia–ASEAN summits and their outcome documents reflects a convergence of the foreign policy priorities of both sides. Since 2016, Russia has actively promoted the concept of “integration of integrations,” while the documents have also incorporated narratives significant for ASEAN, particularly regarding the Association’s central role in the regional security architecture.

According to the documents adopted following Russia–ASEAN summits, the key areas of economic cooperation between the parties have included energy, digitalization, ICT, and agriculture. The sides have repeatedly emphasized the need to enhance capacity in the energy sector, including the development of

initiatives to ensure stable energy supplies, notably through the expansion of alternative and renewable energy sources, as well as energy conservation and efficiency. To support this area, relevant cooperation frameworks have been developed, including the Russia–ASEAN Work Plans on Energy Cooperation for 2016–2020 and 2023–2025. The issue of maintaining and strengthening regional food security was reflected in the Russia–ASEAN Work Program on Agriculture and Food Security for 2016–2020. At various stages, Russia and ASEAN have also highlighted opportunities to expand economic cooperation in a wide range of sectors, including aeronautics, space, investment, e-commerce, industry, natural resources, transport, food production, agriculture and forestry, tourism, finance, science, technology, and innovation.

Russia and the Association have attached particular importance to socio-humanitarian cooperation. The parties have emphasized the need to expand student exchanges between Russia and ASEAN member states, establish research centers specializing in ASEAN and related processes, and strengthen humanitarian ties in order to foster social and cultural dialogue. To advance cooperation in this area, the countries have endorsed a number of initiatives and programs, including the Action Plan on Science, Technology and Innovation (2016–2025) and the Russia–ASEAN Work Plan on Education (2022–2026).

In addition to the aforementioned traditional areas of cooperation, which have been reflected in most documents adopted following Russia–ASEAN summits, it is important to highlight additional domains that are increasingly coming into focus for both sides. These include cooperation on the climate agenda, environmental protection and biodiversity, the provision of favorable sanitary and epidemiological conditions and the prevention of the spread of pandemic diseases, as well as initiatives related to the protection of the rights of women, children, youth, the elderly, and persons with disabilities. The key elements of the outcome documents of Russia–ASEAN summits are summarized in Table 2.

An analysis of summit documents and agendas allows for several conclusions. Over this period, substantive content has been developed across all three pillars of cooperation corresponding to the ASEAN Community—namely, political and security affairs, economic cooperation, and the socio-cultural sphere—and relations have been formally elevated to the level of a strategic partnership. The documents have institutionalized the idea of ASEAN cooperation with the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) in the field of security and with the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) in the economic domain. Thus, Russia–ASEAN partnership has acquired new contours, including Russia's integration into the ASEAN-centered institutional architecture in the Asia-Pacific through cooperation with ASEAN, as well as attempts to link ASEAN with the SCO and the EAEU via interaction with Russia. At the same time, a noticeable gap remains between the discourse of strategic partnership and the frequency of high-level engagements. The initiative has also been asymmetrical: Russia has demonstrated a clear interest in involving ASEAN in the development of the Greater Eurasian Partnership (GEP), while ASEAN has maintained a relatively neutral stance toward this initiative.

Table 2. Key Aspects of the Outcome Documents of Russia–ASEAN Summits

Summit	Year and Venue	Areas of Cooperation
First Russia–ASEAN Summit	2005, Kuala Lumpur Chair’s Statement of the First Russia–ASEAN Summit ¹⁴	<p>Politics and Security:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Combating international terrorism • Strengthening cooperation in countering transnational crime, including illicit drug trafficking, human trafficking, maritime piracy, arms smuggling, money laundering, international economic crime, and cybercrime • Developing cooperation between ASEAN and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). <p>Economic, Scientific, and Technological Cooperation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhancing cooperation in industry and energy • Countering the spread of infectious diseases • Advancing cooperation in education, tourism, agriculture, transport, science and technology (including ICT), disaster management and emergency response, and humanitarian engagement <p>Socio-Humanitarian Sphere:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promoting student exchanges between Russia and ASEAN member states and establishing research centers specializing in ASEAN studies • Supporting the development of tourism
Second Russia–ASEAN Summit	2010, Hanoi Joint Statement of the Second Russia–ASEAN Summit ¹⁵	<p>Politics and Security:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promoting regional cooperation within the framework of the East Asia Summit (EAS) • Intensifying cooperation in countering transnational crime (including illicit drug trafficking, human trafficking, migrant smuggling, maritime piracy, arms smuggling, money laundering, international economic crime, and cybercrime) • Developing cooperation between ASEAN and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) <p>Economic, Scientific, and Technological Cooperation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhancing capacity in the energy sector • Expanding cooperation in aeronautics • Cooperation in disaster management and emergency response • Jointly addressing global climate change • Cooperation in ensuring favorable sanitary and epidemiological conditions and preventing the spread of pandemic diseases <p>Socio-Humanitarian Sphere:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promoting closer cooperation in tourism

¹⁴ Chairman’s Statement of the First ASEAN-Russian Federation Summit Kuala Lumpur, 13 December 2005 // ASEAN. 13.12.2025.
URL: <https://asean.org/chairmans-statement-of-the-first-asean-russian-federation-summit-kuala-lumpur-13-december-2005/>

¹⁵ Joint Statement of the Second ASEAN-Russian Federation Summit // ASEAN. 30.05.2010.
URL: <https://asean.org/joint-statement-of-the-second-asean-russian-federation-summit/>

Summit	Year and Venue	Areas of Cooperation
Russia-ASEAN Anniversary Summit	2016, Sochi Declaration "Towards a Mutually Beneficial Strategic Partnership" ¹⁶	<p>Politics and Security:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support for deepening regional integration processes, ASEAN centrality in the East Asia Summit (EAS), ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), and ASEAN Defense Ministers' Meeting Plus (ADMM+), as well as Russia's role in ensuring security and stability within the ARF • Expansion of cooperation in counterterrorism, combating transnational organized crime, and ensuring maritime security • Consolidation of the EAS as a key platform for leaders' dialogue on a broad range of strategic, political, and economic issues <p>Economic, Scientific, and Technological Cooperation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continuation of dialogue on strengthening cooperation to support the development of the ASEAN Economic Community • Exploration of mutually beneficial cooperation formats among ASEAN, the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO); Russia proposed conducting a feasibility study on establishing an EAEU-ASEAN free trade area, which ASEAN agreed to consider • Promotion of reform of the international financial system, taking into account the interests of developing countries • Development of cooperation in trade, transport, energy, e-commerce, agriculture, fisheries, the maritime economy, science and technology, space, and healthcare <p>Socio-Humanitarian Sphere:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Holding the Russia-ASEAN Year of Culture in 2016 • Expansion of cooperation in education, including the establishment of a joint working group on education • Development of cooperation in environmental protection, climate change, and emergency response • Utilization of the ASEAN Centre at MGIMO University to expand humanitarian ties, as well as scientific, youth, and cultural exchanges
Third Russia-ASEAN Summit	2018, Singapore Joint Statement on the Strategic Partnership following the Third Russia-ASEAN Summit ¹⁷	<p>Politics and Security:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthening ASEAN-Russia cooperation within the framework of the East Asia Summit (EAS) • Interaction along the ASEAN-Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) track • Active participation of Russia in ASEAN-centered mechanisms • Enhancing cooperation in addressing both traditional and non-traditional security challenges (including international terrorism, transnational crime,

¹⁶ Sochi Declaration of the ASEAN-Russian Federation Commemorative Summit to Mark the 20th Anniversary of ASEAN-Russian Federation Dialogue Partnership "Moving Towards a Strategic Partnership for a Mutual Benefit" // ASEAN, 20.05.2016. URL: www.asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/Sochi-Declaration-of-the-ASEAN-Russia-Commemorative-Summit-Final.pdf

¹⁷ Joint Statement of the 3rd ASEAN-Russian Federation Summit on Strategic Partnership. URL: <https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/ASEAN-Russia-Joint-Statement.pdf>

Summit	Year and Venue	Areas of Cooperation
		<p>and countering the illicit production and trafficking of narcotics at the regional and global levels)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensuring maritime security, freedom of navigation, and unimpeded trade <p>Economic, Scientific, and Technological Cooperation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expanding cooperation in trade and investment, energy, e-commerce, industry, natural resources, transport, food production, agriculture and forestry, ICT, tourism, communications, financial services, science and technology, and innovation • Facilitating engagement among relevant stakeholders, including government bodies and the private sector • Supporting the development of micro-, small-, and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) and strengthening private-sector interaction between Russia and ASEAN member states • Strengthening the EAEU–ASEAN partnership • Expanding cooperation in agriculture (including concrete measures to promote sustainable agricultural development and resource management, expand agricultural markets, and ensure regional food security) • Building capacity in space technologies and their applications • Promoting cooperation in environmental protection, biodiversity conservation, and the protection of the coastal and marine environment • Strengthening cooperation in science, technology, and innovation <p>Socio-Humanitarian Sphere:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthening cooperation in tourism • Enhancing humanitarian ties • Promoting social and cultural cooperation between Russia and ASEAN • Developing cooperation in education • Fostering cooperation in healthcare (including combating infectious diseases) • Protecting the rights of women, children, youth, the elderly, persons with disabilities, and migrant workers
<p>Fourth Russia–ASEAN Summit</p>	<p>2021, held in a virtual format due to the COVID-19 pandemic Joint Statement of the Fourth ASEAN–Russia Summit</p>	<p>Politics and Security:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Active participation of Russia in ASEAN-centered mechanisms (EAS, ARF, ADMM+) • Potential practical cooperation along ASEAN–SCO and ASEAN–EAEU tracks, as well as a proactive role for Russia and ASEAN in “connecting the connectivities” across the Asia-Pacific, the Indian Ocean region, and Greater Eurasia • Ensuring maritime security, freedom of navigation and overflight, and unimpeded trade

Summit	Year and Venue	Areas of Cooperation
	“Building a Peaceful, Stable and Sustainable Region” ¹⁸	<p>Economic, Scientific, and Technological Cooperation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensuring resilient and reliable infrastructure and logistics • Supporting sustainable economic recovery in the region in the post-pandemic period <p>Socio-Humanitarian Sphere:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing humanitarian linkages along the ASEAN–Eurasia track

Source: Compiled by the authors based on the outcome documents of ASEAN–Russia summits

¹⁸ Joint Statement of the 4th Asean-Russia Summit: Building a Peaceful, Stable and Sustainable Region // ASEAN. 28.10.2021. URL: <https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/82.-Joint-Statement-of-the-4th-ASEAN-Russia-Summit-Final.pdf>

Section 2. Opportunities and Constraints in the Development of the Russia–ASEAN Strategic Partnership in the New Geopolitical and Geoeconomic Context

Politics and Security

By the mid-2020s, Southeast Asia has emerged as a region of intensified competition among major global actors (Russia, the United States, China, the European Union, Japan, and India), as well as middle powers (South Korea, Australia, Canada, the UAE, and Saudi Arabia), all seeking privileged engagement with ASEAN. This is обусловлено the Association’s longstanding inclusive approach to structuring its external political and economic relations over the past three decades. The interest of these actors in Southeast Asia is also driven by the region’s overall positive economic trajectory, its openness in international political engagement, and its relative stability in terms of security.

By 2019, the combined economy of ASEAN member states had become the world’s fifth largest (after the United States, China, Japan, and Germany) and the third largest in Asia.¹⁹ In recent years, ASEAN countries have actively sought to leverage the political and economic decoupling between the United States and China. In this context, the United States has pursued a strategy of “friendshoring,”²⁰ relocating elements of production chains to partner countries, while China has aimed to retain control over segments of value chains being relocated from its territory in order to sustain export volumes to U.S. and European markets. As a result, there has recently been a noticeable relocation of manufacturing from China to Southeast Asia by both Western and Chinese companies (including as a means of circumventing U.S. sanctions). Under these conditions, ASEAN states stand to benefit both from the relocation of production by the United States, Japan, and South Korea out of China, and from the transfer of Chinese manufacturing facilities to Southeast Asia.²¹ Amid intensifying trade and economic—and ultimately political and technological—competition, ASEAN countries are seeking to position the region as a form of investment and production buffer zone. Between 2018 and 2022, U.S. investment in Southeast Asia reached \$74.3 billion, while Chinese investment amounted to \$68.5 billion, reflecting a near-symmetric increase.²² Washington has primarily invested in semiconductor manufacturing, while Beijing has focused on electric vehicle production and resource extraction.

¹⁹ ASEAN Integration Report 2019 // ASEAN. 01.11.2019. P. 6.

URL: <https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/ASEAN-integration-report-2019.pdf>

²⁰ Friendshoring — a strategy of relocating production to countries considered politically aligned, friendly, or allied.

²¹ Sayavongse, M. How Laos and Other ASEAN Countries Can Leverage U.S.-China Competition // United States Institute of Peace. 04.10.2023.

URL: <https://www.usip.org/publications/2023/10/how-laos-and-other-asean-countries-can-leverage-us-china-competition>

²² U.S. and China Butt Heads over Investment in Southeast Asia // Nikkei. 02.12.2023.

URL: <https://asia.nikkei.com/Spotlight/Datawatch/U.S.-and-China-butt-heads-over-investment-in-Southeast-Asia>

Russia, for its part, has sought to maximize the expansion of its network of partners among non-Western countries. As noted in Section 1, following 2022 these efforts have become more clearly articulated, as the need to maintain a presence in multilateral institutions where feasible and expedient has increased, along with the importance of having instruments to engage “swing” partners in its own institutional initiatives (BRICS+, SCO, EAEU) and macroregional formats (the Greater Eurasian Partnership, GEP).

At the same time, the Russia–ASEAN strategic partnership faces certain constraints. Southeast Asian countries, with the exception of Myanmar, seek to maintain their integration within Western-centered institutions and view economic and technological ties with Western states as a guarantee of sustained high economic growth. Consequently, the crisis in relations between Russia and the West has had a negative impact on Moscow’s engagement with ASEAN member states.

Russia and ASEAN member states also hold differing positions regarding the Western-promoted concept of the Indo-Pacific (IPR). Moscow interprets this concept in geopolitical terms, viewing it as an instrument of containment directed against China and potentially Russia, whereas ASEAN countries seek to adapt the Indo-Pacific framework to their own objectives by incorporating the notion of ASEAN centrality in the region. These aspirations of the Association are supported by the United States, Japan, and Australia: references to ASEAN centrality have been relatively easily incorporated into their strategic documents, although this does not necessarily entail a genuine accommodation of ASEAN’s ambitions. None of the multilateral formats established under U.S. leadership—such as the Quad, Quad+, or Squad—envision the promotion of ASEAN as the central actor in the regional order.

Competitive dynamics in the region are particularly evident in the sphere of military diplomacy and military-technical cooperation (MTC). By 2018, according to SIPRI data, Russia had become the leading supplier of arms to Southeast Asia²³ and had significantly intensified cooperation with regional states in counterterrorism, emergency response, the organization of joint military exercises, and within ASEAN-centered multilateral platforms such as the ASEAN Defense Ministers’ Meeting Plus (ADMM+). Western sanctions have had a negative impact on Moscow’s MTC with ASEAN member states. In particular, the implementation of a number of projects in this area has been called into question due to the Countering America’s Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA), prompting discussions in the region about the need to further diversify sources of arms procurement. At the same time, Russia has managed to significantly expand its cooperation with Southeast Asian countries. Since 2019, Russia and Laos have conducted bilateral military exercises under the “LAROS” framework. Between 2019 and 2023, Russian military specialists carried out five demining missions in the provinces of Bolikhamsai, Xiangkhouang, and Khammouane.²⁴ In December

²³ Wezeman, S. Arms Flows to Southeast Asia // SIPRI. 01.12.2019.

URL: https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/2019-12/1912_arms_flows_to_south_east_asia_wezeman.pdf

²⁴ Russian sappers begin a demining mission in Laos // RIA Novosti. 04.01.2023.

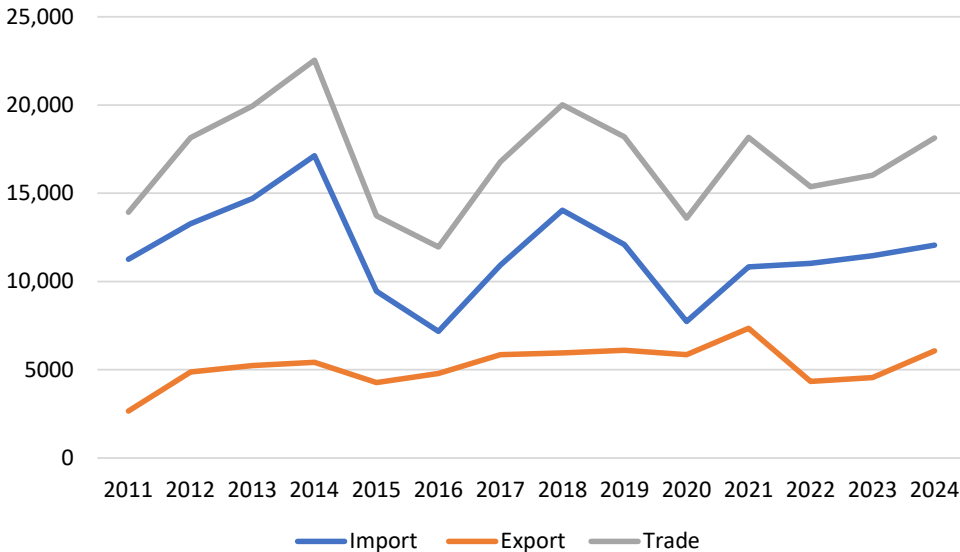
URL: <https://ria.ru/20230104/sapery-1843024074.html>

2021, the first Russia–ASEAN naval exercises took place. In August 2023, counterterrorism exercises jointly organized with Russia were held in Myanmar, with the participation of Brunei, Vietnam, India, Indonesia, Cambodia, China, Laos, Malaysia, Thailand, and the Philippines.²⁵ In 2024, joint naval exercises between Russia and Indonesia were conducted. In addition, Russian naval vessels have begun making regular port calls in ASEAN member states.

Economic, Scientific, and Technological Cooperation

Political dialogue between Russia and ASEAN has traditionally outpaced trade and economic relations. Bilateral trade is sensitive to shifts in the external political environment, and its trajectory is cyclical in nature: periods of gradual growth under relatively stable conditions are interrupted by geopolitical disruptions (the imposition of Western sanctions against Russia in 2014 and again from 2022) and the COVID-19 pandemic. Under current conditions, the closure of Russian foreign trade statistics complicates a comprehensive assessment of bilateral trade. The analysis of statistical data for 2022–2024 presented below therefore relies on ASEAN sources. Figure 1 illustrates the dynamics of trade between Russia and ASEAN member states from 2011 to 2022: bilateral trade peaked in 2014 at \$22.5 billion, recovered to near pre-sanctions levels in 2018 at \$20 billion, and was followed by a gradual post-pandemic recovery that was subsequently disrupted in 2022.

Figure 1. Trade Turnover between Russia and ASEAN Countries, 2011–2024, USD million



Source: ASEAN Statistical Yearbooks²⁶

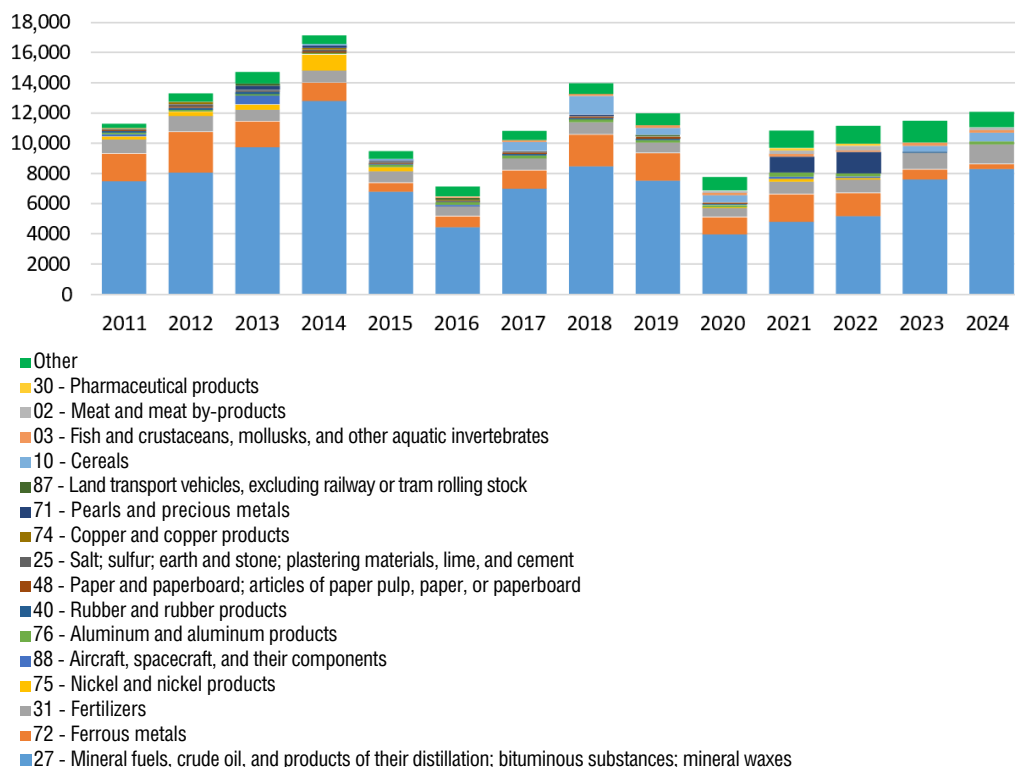
²⁵ Counter-terrorism drills with the participation of ASEAN member countries and Dialogue Partners (ADMM plus) began in Myanmar // Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation. 03.08.2023.
URL: https://eng.mil.ru/en/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12474571@egNews

²⁶ ASEAN Statistical Yearbooks // ASEANstats. URL: <https://www.aseanstats.org/category/yearbook/>

Currently, a major obstacle to the growth of trade turnover is Singapore’s alignment with Western sanctions against Russia. As Southeast Asia’s principal financial and investment hub, Singapore had, after 2014, served as a key intermediary in facilitating trade transactions between Russia and ASEAN countries, with the majority of payments routed through Singaporean banks. In the new environment, businesses in both Russia and ASEAN are compelled to seek alternative mechanisms for conducting trade, which has led—albeit temporarily—to a decline in trade volumes.

At the same time, trade is characterized by a significant imbalance: Russian exports account for between 55% and 80% of total trade turnover with the region. The structure of Russian exports to Southeast Asia has traditionally been limited in diversification, which has increased its vulnerability to external shocks and fluctuations in global oil prices. Thus, while from 2011 to 2019 the share of mineral fuels, crude oil, and petroleum products accounted for 60–75% of total export volumes, since 2020 this figure has declined to 44–51% (see Figure 3). At the same time, absolute export volumes have remained largely unchanged—the decline is attributable to a decrease in oil prices (see Figure 2).

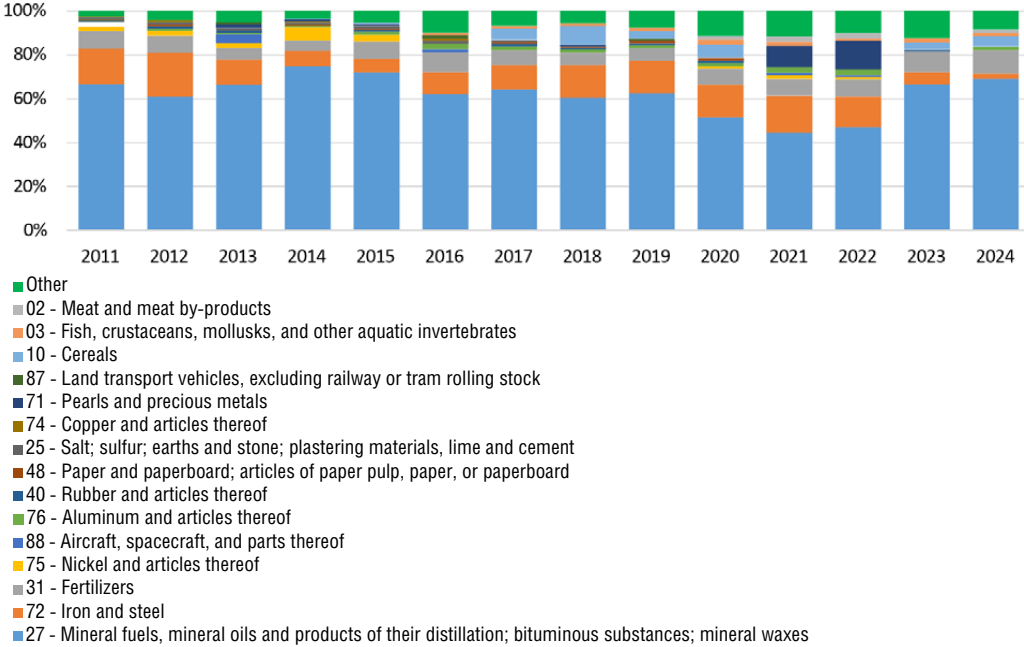
Figure 2. Russian Exports to ASEAN Countries, 2011–2024, USD million



Source: ASEAN Statistical Yearbooks²⁷

²⁷ ASEAN Statistical Yearbooks // ASEANstats. URL: <https://www.aseanstats.org/category/yearbook/>

Figure 3. Structure of Russian Merchandise Exports to ASEAN Countries by Harmonized System (HS) Commodity Categories, %



Source: ASEAN Statistical Yearbooks²⁸

Other significant categories of Russian exports to ASEAN countries are also predominantly raw materials: ferrous metals (6–17%), fertilizers (5–9%), aluminum (1–3%), rubber and rubber products (around 1%), as well as cereals (up to 9%). In 2020–2021, new export categories began to emerge, including pearls and precious metals (13% in 2022), meat (up to 3%), fish (up to 2%), and pharmaceuticals (around 1%). Additionally, such items as nickel (around 2%) and aircraft (around 1%) have once again become noticeable in the export structure. Accordingly, it is possible to speak of an emerging diversification of Russian exports to Southeast Asia.

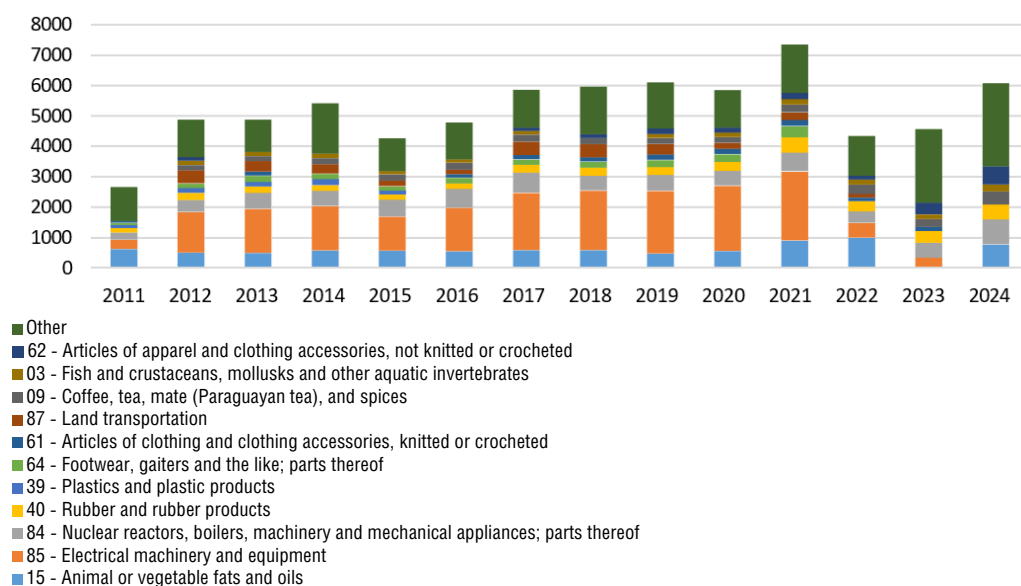
The volume of imports to Russia from ASEAN countries in 2012–2020 fluctuated within the range of \$4 to \$6 billion. In 2021, this indicator saw a sharp increase to \$7.5 billion, but in 2022 it declined again to \$4.5 billion (see Figure 4).

At the same time, the structure of imports is fairly diversified. From 2012 to 2021, electronics was the key sector, accounting for 25–35% of total imports. However, in 2022, amid sanctions and the withdrawal of Western companies from the Russian market, this category declined sharply to 11%, falling from \$2.3 billion to \$500 million—nearly a fivefold decrease in absolute terms. Most of the electronics assembled in ASEAN countries is produced not by domestic firms but by American, Japanese, and South Korean technology corporations

²⁸ ASEAN Statistical Yearbooks // ASEANstats. URL: <https://www.aseanstats.org/category/yearbook/>

that relocated their manufacturing facilities to Southeast Asia due to lower labor costs in countries such as Vietnam, Thailand, Indonesia, and Malaysia, as well as deteriorating relations with China. Unwilling to violate restrictions on the supply of microchips and dual-use goods to Russia or risk reputational damage, these companies suspended cooperation with Russian distributors and chose to halt shipments of their products to Russia through official channels.

Figure 4. Structure of Merchandise Imports from ASEAN Countries to Russia by HS Classification, 2011–2024, USD million



Source: ASEAN Statistical Yearbooks²⁹

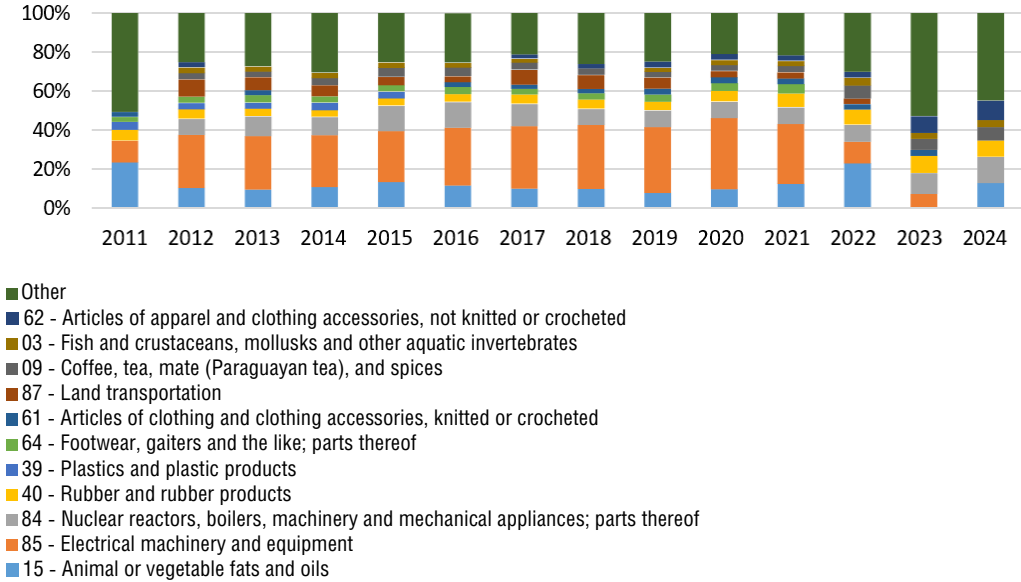
The second most significant category of Russian imports from ASEAN countries consists of animal and vegetable fats and oils, as well as products derived from them. This category notably includes palm oil—a key input for the modern food industry, for which Southeast Asian countries are major producers. Its export volume to Russia in 2011–2020 fluctuated between \$500 and \$600 million annually, consistently ranking second or third in the structure of Russian imports from ASEAN and accounting for 7–14% of total supplies of this product to Russia. Following the start of the special military operation (SMO), this category became the leading import item, with its share rising to 23%. Imports of industrial goods (including mechanical equipment and boilers) also fluctuated within the \$500–600 million range, accounting for 8–13% of total imports. However, in 2022 these supplies declined sharply to \$375 million, although their share in total imports remained unchanged (see Figures 4 and 5).

Other significant categories of imports from ASEAN countries include vehicles and their parts, rubber and rubber products, coffee and tea, fish and seafood, as

²⁹ ASEAN Statistical Yearbooks // ASEANstats. URL: <https://www.aseanstats.org/category/yearbook/>

well as clothing and footwear. Each of these categories accounts for up to 7% of total imports, or up to \$500 million in value terms. The value of all these goods—except for coffee and tea—declined in 2022, although their share in imports from ASEAN countries remained relatively stable (see Figures 4 and 5).

Figure 5. Structure of Merchandise Imports from ASEAN Countries to Russia by Harmonized System (HS) Commodity Categories, %



Source: ASEAN Statistical Yearbooks³⁰

Investment cooperation between Russia and ASEAN countries remains at a relatively low level of development. Russian foreign direct investment (FDI) in ASEAN countries peaked in 2013 at \$600 million, accounting for only 0.5% of total FDI inflows into the Association.³¹ Thereafter, until 2021, annual figures did not exceed \$100 million.³² In 2022, Russian FDI rose again to \$166 million, although Russia’s share in total FDI to ASEAN countries remained very limited.³³ At the same time, the investment relationship is characterized by asymmetry. In certain years, investment flows from individual ASEAN countries into Russia (notably from Vietnam and Thailand) exceeded the total volume of Russian investments in the region.

The brief analysis of trade and economic dynamics, as well as investment cooperation, indicates the need for further diversification of trade structures. This could be achieved, in particular, by expanding Russian exports that may appeal to the growing middle class in Southeast Asian countries (including food products),

³⁰ ASEAN Statistical Yearbooks // ASEANstats. URL: <https://www.aseanstats.org/category/yearbook/>

³¹ ASEAN Statistical Yearbook 2023 // ASEANstats. P. 183.
URL: <https://www.aseanstats.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/ASYB-2023-v1.pdf>

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

as well as by increasing imports of goods from the region that, with proper development, could enter the Russian market. At the same time, concerns among ASEAN countries about the risk of secondary sanctions, along with the need to move toward more advanced stages of cooperation to give stronger momentum to the Russia–ASEAN strategic partnership in the economic sphere, call for new forms of economic interaction. These include, in particular, the development of industrial cooperation and the establishment of joint ventures based on industrial infrastructure located in ASEAN countries.

The disconnection of most Russian banks from the *SWIFT* system and the withdrawal of *Visa* and *Mastercard* from the Russian market have underscored the **need to develop an independent financial infrastructure** to support Russia–ASEAN trade and economic relations. Even prior to 2022, among ASEAN member states only Vietnam had reached an agreement on the use of the *Mir* payment system; however, even in this case, the capabilities of the banking infrastructure remained limited, with only about 40% of Vietnamese banks able to process payments via the system.³⁴ Unofficial assessments also indicated significant difficulties faced by Russian citizens in using these cards in Vietnam. In August 2022, negotiations on the use of the *Mir* payment system and on connecting to the Bank of Russia's System for Transfer of Financial Messages (SPFS) were initiated with Myanmar. Similar plans were announced with regard to Thailand³⁵ and Indonesia.³⁶ However, following the introduction of additional sanctions targeting the *Mir* system, these efforts largely stalled, despite the ongoing need to establish correspondent banking relations between Russian and ASEAN financial institutions, as well as to develop settlement mechanisms in national currencies. For example, in July 2022, VTB enabled money transfers to Vietnam in Vietnamese dong.³⁷ At the same time, the relatively modest volume of trade turnover remains a structural constraint on the broader expansion of such practices.

The strengthening of economic cooperation between Russia and ASEAN could be facilitated by the qualitative **development of transport infrastructure**, first through the establishment of direct air and maritime links. Prior to the pandemic, direct flights from Russia were operated only to Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam. Direct routes to Singapore were served by Singapore Airlines, while flights to Vietnam were operated by Aeroflot and Vietnamese carriers. Singaporean and Vietnamese airlines suspended operations following the imposition of sanctions against Russia. By 2023, Aeroflot had restored direct flights to Bangkok, which has since become a regional transport hub for Russian travelers. In addition, direct flights operated by medium-haul aircraft were launched from several ASEAN countries (such as Laos and Myanmar) to cities in Siberia and the Russian Far East.

³⁴ Mir cards to be accepted by 80% of Vietnam's banking infrastructure by spring 2022 // TASS. 29.10.2021.
URL: <https://tass.ru/ekonomika/12801101>

³⁵ Bangkok is working with Moscow on the introduction of the Mir card, ambassador says // RIA Novosti. 02.08.2022.
URL: <https://ria.ru/20220802/italand-1806582860.html>

³⁶ Indonesia discusses with Russia the introduction of the Mir payment system in the country // TASS. 10.08.2022.
URL: <https://tass.ru/ekonomika/15443245>

³⁷ VTB launches money transfers to Vietnam in the national currency // Vedomosti. 26.07.2022.
URL: <https://www.vedomosti.ru/finance/articles/2022/07/26/933204-vtb-perevodi-vietnam>

Positive developments have also been observed in Russia–Vietnam tourism ties: since January 31, 2024, Aeroflot has resumed direct flights on the Moscow–Ho Chi Minh City route. By the end of 2024, Aeroflot also reinstated flights from Moscow to Denpasar (Bali, Indonesia). In all of these cases, the decisive factor behind the restoration of air connectivity has been the significant tourist flow from Russia.

Freight transport routes are also expanding. In early June 2022, FESCO launched a direct container shipping line along the route Vladivostok—Haiphong (Vietnam)—Ho Chi Minh City (Vietnam)—Ningbo (China)—Vladivostok.³⁸ At present, cargo deliveries to Russia from several countries in the region are also possible via Chinese ports such as Dalian, Tianjin, and Lianyungang. In August 2024, the regular FESCO Intra Asia Service (FIAS) line was launched, connecting the Vietnamese port of Ho Chi Minh City with Port Klang in Malaysia. The opening of this route enables the delivery of goods not only from Malaysia, but also from other Southeast Asian countries (Singapore, Indonesia, Thailand) and South Asia (India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka).³⁹ In December 2024, FESCO established a subsidiary in Vietnam, with offices in Ho Chi Minh City and Haiphong. Nevertheless, it is evident that further expansion of trade, business, and tourism ties will require the development of a much denser transport and logistics infrastructure.

Since the early twenty-first century, ASEAN has placed particular emphasis on advancing digital connectivity. Accordingly, the digital agenda has become a key area of interaction between Russia and the Association. Prior to 2020, ASEAN operated under the ASEAN ICT Masterplan, followed by the ASEAN Digital Masterplan for 2021–2025. At the ASEAN Summit in Indonesia, the Association articulated an ambitious objective to develop a regional agreement in the digital domain—the ASEAN Digital Economy Framework Agreement (DEFA). If successfully implemented, it would become the first regional agreement of its kind in the global digital economy. As reflected in Table 2, ICT-related issues were first incorporated into the Russia–ASEAN summit agenda in 2018. Since 2021, a dialogue on cybersecurity has been underway. In 2024, Russia became an official dialogue partner of ASEAN in the digital domain. Thus, two principal tracks have emerged in the digital cooperation agenda: information security and the digitalization of socio-economic interaction. Against the backdrop of growing demand among ASEAN states for technologies as drivers of economic growth, Russian solutions could be востребованы in areas such as information security (as demonstrated by the successful operations of Kaspersky Lab in Southeast Asia), digital technologies for smart cities and infrastructure development, smart agriculture, clean energy, the aviation industry, and the application of space technologies. A notable advantage of Russian software lies in the transfer of control keys to the customer, ensuring a high degree of sovereignty over the deployed solutions. At the same time, the long-standing reliance of regional countries on Western technological solutions, limited awareness of Russia's

³⁸ Vladivostok Commercial Sea Port receives the first container ship of FESCO's new regular maritime service // SeaNews. 02.07.2022.
URL: <https://seanews.ru/2022/06/02/ru-vmtp-prinjal-pervyj-kontejnerovoz-novogo-reguljarnogo-morskogo-servisa-fesco/>

³⁹ FESCO launches a regular maritime line between Vietnam and Malaysia // FESCO. 14.08.2024. URL: <https://www.fesco.ru/ru/press-center/news/fesco-zapuskaet-reguljarnuyu-morskuyu-liniyu-mezhdu-vetnamom-i-malayziej/>

technological capabilities, and the risks associated with secondary sanctions continue to constrain the development of practical cooperation in this sphere.

Socio–Humanitarian Sphere

In contrast to the uncertainty in trade and economic relations amid the continued tightening of anti-Russian sanctions, there has been a noticeable intensification of humanitarian ties between Russia and ASEAN. This includes cooperation in tourism (despite the logistical constraints noted above), education, and public diplomacy. A portion of financial resources previously allocated by Russian institutions to cooperation with Western countries has been redirected toward Asia and Africa. This has made it possible to expand quotas for students from ASEAN countries at Russian universities and has enabled Russian public diplomacy institutions to step up their engagement across Asia more broadly. A number of Russian universities have not only increased efforts to attract students from ASEAN countries and develop specialized programs for them (as seen, for example, at MGIMO University), but have also begun working on establishing branch campuses in the region (including initiatives by HSE University and Far Eastern Federal University). Given the continued high quality of Russian education and its relatively low cost compared to universities in the United States, Europe, and Australia, the export of Russian education to Southeast Asia retains significant potential for further growth.

Tourism has emerged as the sector of cooperation that not only recovered most rapidly to pre-pandemic levels but also benefited from the transport, visa, and financial restrictions faced by Russian citizens in the European direction. Moreover, Russian nationals have become more active in acquiring real estate in several countries of the region, particularly in Indonesia and Thailand. At the same time, further development in these areas requires the identification of new formats and instruments that could facilitate the organization of tourist flows, student mobility, and business operations. This includes the creation of dedicated tourist payment cards and package solutions aimed at addressing the constraints associated with the inability of Russian travelers to use Western payment systems.

Cooperation in the media sphere has also experienced a noticeable upswing. After 2022, a dedicated online training program was launched by RT for journalists from ASEAN member states. One of the tracks of the *InteRussia* program, implemented by the Gorchakov Fund in partnership with other Russian organizations, was specifically devoted to engagement with journalists from all ten ASEAN countries. This track received organizational and analytical support from the ASEAN Centre at MGIMO University. As a result, more than one hundred publications, news reports, and video materials on Russia were produced and disseminated across various media outlets in the region. At the same time, in the context of the widespread dissemination of misleading narratives about the Russian Federation by foreign media, such initiatives remain insufficient. Engagement with the journalistic community in ASEAN countries requires a more systematic and sustained approach.

Section 3. Russia and ASEAN as Centers of the Emerging Multipolar World and Prospects for the EAEU–ASEAN Partnership

Foundations for the Emergence of Russia and ASEAN as Centers of a Future Multipolar Order

It is evident that Russia and ASEAN are actors of different orders and perform distinct roles in international relations. Russia is one of the key drivers of the transformation of the contemporary system of global governance. As has been repeatedly noted, it actively advances the idea of structuring Eurasia as a macro-regional space within the framework of the Greater Eurasian Partnership. ASEAN, for its part, has since 2015 declared its transition to the Community stage,⁴⁰ yet it remains, above all, a conglomerate of ten small and medium-sized states that do not aspire to any form of supranational political authority. While ASEAN continues to serve as the principal organizing force behind a number of institutional formats in the Asia-Pacific, the Association should be regarded primarily as a diplomatic platform rather than an outright regional hegemon.

At the same time, Russia and ASEAN share a number of important commonalities. Both can be viewed as potential centers of an emerging multipolar world, albeit far from identical in their roles, functions, and capabilities. Each, however, operates under its own set of constraints, which necessitates the pursuit of cooperative strategies and the search for like-minded partners in the international arena. Both Russia and the ASEAN member states attach considerable importance to sovereignty and the principle of non-interference in internal affairs, as well as to adherence to international law. It may be argued that, for the Association, despite incorporating elements of the Western discourse on a “rules-based order,” an international environment grounded in international law would be more conducive, as it is more likely to safeguard the interests of small and medium-sized states. At the same time, Russia places value on the autonomy of other international actors and on their willingness to recognize Moscow as one of the leading states in the international system. A similar logic applies to ASEAN, for which preserving space for the exercise of its strategic autonomy in international affairs, as well as securing recognition of this autonomy by other actors in regional matters, is of fundamental importance.

In light of the above considerations, it appears both logical and warranted to develop multiple layers of interaction between Russia and ASEAN, not only on a bilateral basis (as discussed earlier), but also through ASEAN’s engagement with institutions of global and macro-regional governance such as the EAEU and the SCO (at the macro-regional level), as well as BRICS+ (at the global level).

⁴⁰ Within ASEAN, the establishment of a Community based on three pillars—political and security, economic, and socio-cultural—is viewed as a more advanced stage of integration compared to the earlier Association framework.

Since its official launch in 2008, BRICS has undergone several phases of transformation. The initially optimistic outlook—linked to the rapid economic growth of its founding members against the backdrop of crises in Europe and the United States in the 2010s—has given way to a more skeptical assessment. A renewed surge of interest in BRICS has been associated with its expansion waves in 2023 and 2024. Egypt, Iran, the United Arab Emirates, and Ethiopia formally joined the grouping. During Russia’s BRICS chairmanship in 2024, Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, and Vietnam were engaged through the *BRICS Outreach* format and granted the status of BRICS partner countries. By the end of 2024, Indonesia joined BRICS as a full member. Laos has also officially expressed interest in participating in the grouping.⁴¹

ASEAN member states demonstrate an interest in engaging with BRICS for several reasons. Foremost among these is the foreign policy hedging logic characteristic of Southeast Asian countries, as well as an awareness of the risks associated with the monopolization of global governance instruments by the collective West and their potential adverse instrumentalization. Accordingly, a significant number of ASEAN states recognize the need to develop hedging mechanisms to safeguard their development trajectories under unfavorable scenarios.

Another driver is ASEAN countries’ aspiration to participate in emerging formats of global governance in which they would have an individual voice at the national level, regardless of their relative size. This stands in contrast to Western-dominated institutions of global governance, where ASEAN states often exert influence primarily as a collective actor, and even then, not always effectively—as is the case, for example, within the World Trade Organization. It is also important to note ASEAN’s structural limitations in expanding its global influence and in addressing regional challenges, which further increases the interest of its member states in participating in newly emerging institutions of global governance.

The appeal of BRICS at this stage also stems from the non-binding nature of the group’s activities, which allows national governments to retain room for maneuver. Structurally speaking, participation in BRICS does not conflict with participation in other multilateral cooperation frameworks. This logic resonates with ASEAN countries, which adhere to a strategy of maintaining “freedom hands” regarding economic processes. For example, the absence of a customs union within ASEAN allows each member country to enter into free trade agreements with any external partners without having to coordinate these matters within the Association.

ASEAN countries have also found appealing BRICS’ pragmatic strategy for further development, which is not centered on constructing alternatives to Western institutions and structures, but rather on offering additional, more modern and potentially more technologically advanced solutions tailored to the development needs of countries beyond the collective West. Such initiatives include, in particular, the emerging BRICS investment and payment platform (*BRICS Bridge*),

⁴¹ Laos expresses interest in joining BRICS // RIA Novosti. 06.12.2023. URL: <https://ria.ru/20231206/laos-1914014896.html>

which envisages the use of digital platforms regulated by the central banks of the member states.⁴²

The considerations outlined above may serve as a foundation for BRICS' further efforts to develop engagement with ASEAN countries. In the future, this interaction could be complemented by a more institutionalized presence of ASEAN within the format, beyond the participation of its member states in their national capacities.

Developing EAEU–ASEAN Interaction as an Element of the Greater Eurasian Partnership

In 2016, at the commemorative Russia–ASEAN Summit in Sochi, President Vladimir Putin proposed advancing cooperation between the EAEU, the SCO, and ASEAN as a foundation for the “integration of integrations” across Eurasia. This idea generated interest among ASEAN member states; however, despite its conceptual appeal, its practical implementation has lagged behind. A Memorandum of Understanding between the SCO and ASEAN was signed in 2015, and between ASEAN and the EAEU in 2018. It should be noted that ASEAN countries have generally tended to interpret potential forms of interaction with these Eurasian organizations primarily through the lens of trade and economic liberalization. For this reason, the most tangible and comprehensible format of engagement for them has been the conclusion of free trade agreements between the EAEU and individual ASEAN member states. At the same time, expert discussions have also addressed the possibility of concluding a free trade agreement between the EAEU and ASEAN as integration blocs. However, at this stage, such a scenario remains largely hypothetical.⁴³

It is important to note that the first international free trade agreement concluded by the EAEU was signed with an ASEAN member state—Vietnam (signed in 2015 and entered into force in 2016). Despite critical assessments of its effectiveness, this agreement should primarily be viewed in the broader context of the overall deterioration of the institutional framework of Russia's relations with Western countries. By 2015–2016, the sanctions regime against Russia had already been put in place, which called into question the limited number of ongoing negotiations on trade liberalization involving the EAEU, including those with New Zealand. All subsequent agreements were concluded after the signing of the EAEU–Vietnam FTA and were negotiated predominantly with non-Western partners: since 2016—with Egypt and Israel; since 2018—with Iran; in 2019—with Serbia and Singapore; and since 2022—with Indonesia and the United Arab Emirates.

A number of assessments in the academic literature regarding the EAEU–Vietnam free trade agreement characterize it primarily as a politically driven, rather than economically motivated, decision. Some authors also point to the agreement's pilot nature, particularly for the EAEU, which at that stage was only beginning to

⁴² BRICS Bridge will enable a financial messaging exchange mechanism // TASS. 22.10.2024.
URL: <https://tass.ru/ekonomika/22189527>

⁴³ Lisovolik, Y.D. What are the benefits of a Russia–ASEAN free trade area? // International Affairs.
URL: <https://interaffairs.ru/jauthor/material/328>

develop its capacity and experience in negotiating trade and economic liberalization arrangement.⁴⁴ At the same time, more neutral and even positive assessments have also been expressed. These suggest that the free trade agreement has helped sustain a certain positive dynamic in economic relations between the EAEU and Vietnam, and that, despite its limitations, the agreement constitutes a reasonably effective instrument that could, over time, be expanded to additional areas of cooperation.⁴⁵

At the same time, beyond free trade agreements, both the EAEU and ASEAN may be interested in developing more comprehensive formats of interaction. However, such formats would require further elaboration, given the differences in how these integration groupings approach the structuring of their external economic relations. For ASEAN, the experience of developing dialogue partnerships can be considered particularly instructive. Their initial stage typically takes the form of sectoral partnership, followed by a full-fledged dialogue partnership, which often includes the establishment of a dedicated cooperation fund, usually financed by the external partner. In recent years, a number of ASEAN's dialogue partnerships have been elevated to the level of comprehensive strategic partnerships, including those with Australia, China, India, Japan, the Republic of Korea, and the United States. Since 2018, Russia–ASEAN relations have also been characterized as a strategic partnership. At the transregional level, ASEAN has established cooperative relations with a wide range of organizations, including the United Nations, the European Union, CELAC, the GCC, the EAEU, the SCO, SAARC, MERCOSUR, the Pacific Alliance, the Pacific Islands Forum, and the Indian Ocean Rim Association. At the same time, ASEAN's relations with regional organizations and groupings remain significantly less intensive and substantively developed compared to its dialogue partnerships.

The EAEU's activities also provide for the possibility of international cooperation with external partners; however, such cooperation is based on somewhat different principles. Article 7 of the EAEU Treaty regulates the conclusion of the Union's international agreements, with decisions taken by the Supreme Council. Another form of the EAEU's international engagement, in addition to treaty-making (including free trade agreements), is the signing of memoranda of cooperation with individual states, regional groupings, and international organizations. It is also possible to obtain observer state status within the EAEU.

A comparison of the integration agendas of the EAEU and ASEAN suggests a fundamental convergence in their core objectives, foremost among which is enhancing competitiveness within the global economic system. Moreover, for both organizations, 2025 serves as a key benchmark for assessing the effectiveness of their integration efforts. In particular, the EAEU's Strategic Directions for the Development of Eurasian Economic Integration are designed to run

⁴⁴ Fedorov, N.V. The free trade agreement between the EAEU and Vietnam as a factor in Russia–Vietnam relations. *Comparative Politics*. 2018. Vol. 9. N 1. Pp. 74–90.

⁴⁵ See: *Free Trade Area between the EAEU and Vietnam. A Preliminary Analysis of the Effects of Trade Integration*. Moscow: INFRA-M, 2019.

through 2025.⁴⁶ Similarly, ASEAN’s “ASEAN Community Vision 2025” is set to expire in the same year.⁴⁷

As follows from Table 3, the economic development agendas of ASEAN and the EAEU largely overlap. Among the promising areas of cooperation between the two groupings are the exchange of best practices in strategic economic planning, coordination of approaches to innovation-driven development (including digitalization and the advancement of green energy), and the formation of common spaces (trade, investment, and transport). Given the sanctions factor, a separate avenue of cooperation could involve exploring opportunities for industrial cooperation between companies from the EAEU and ASEAN member states.

Table 3. Comparison of the Integration Agendas of the EAEU and ASEAN

Strategic Directions for the Development of Eurasian Economic Integration up to 2025	ASEAN Community Vision 2025
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Completion of the formation of the Single Economic Space (including common markets in sensitive sectors). • Expansion of the range of areas of economic integration cooperation. • Development of approaches to sectoral policies. • Transition of the Union to an innovation-driven development model, including the establishment of systems for forecasting and strategic planning of scientific, technological, and economic development. • Ensuring the uninterrupted flow of internet traffic, including transit traffic, in the context of the continuous advancement of digital technologies. • Development of industrial cooperation and flexible financing instruments for cooperative projects, including through existing institutions such as the Eurasian Development Bank, the Eurasian Fund for Stabilization and Development, and the Astana International Financial Centre. • Exploration of the establishment of joint Eurasian corporations operating both in the Union’s internal market and internationally (including the formation of joint financial-industrial groups and Eurasian multinational corporations). • Development of a balanced agricultural market. • Formation of a unified transport space. 	<p>Political and Security Community</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formation of a unified, inclusive, and resilient community based on a comprehensive approach to security. • Development of a region in which conflicts are resolved through peaceful means. • Establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free region. • Ensuring maritime security through ASEAN-led mechanisms and frameworks in which the Association plays a central role, in accordance with international conventions and principles governing maritime security. • Preservation of ASEAN’s role as the primary organizing force in shaping the regional architecture, with such architecture built around ASEAN-centered mechanisms. • Deepening cooperation with dialogue partners and other external actors. <p>Economic Community</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formation of an integrated and interconnected regional economy that sustains high rates of economic growth through intensified trade, job creation, advancement of the single market agenda by reducing non-tariff barriers, deeper integration in services trade, and seamless investment flows. • Development of a competitive, innovation-driven, and dynamic community (with a focus on innovation,

⁴⁶ Strategic Directions for the Development of Eurasian Economic Integration until 2025 // EAEU Legal Portal. 12.01.2021. URL: https://docs.eaeunion.org/docs/ru-ru/01428320/scd_12012021_12

⁴⁷ ASEAN Community Vision 2025 // ASEAN. URL: <https://www.asean.org/wp-content/uploads/images/2015/November/aec-page/ASEAN-Community-Vision-2025.pdf>

- Ensuring the free movement of goods, services, capital, and labor within the Union’s internal market.
 - Improvement of the regulatory framework and application of sanitary, veterinary, and phytosanitary measures within the Union.
 - Further development of conditions for the effective functioning of common markets for pharmaceuticals and medical devices.
 - Enhancement of customs regulation.
 - Promotion of the tourism potential of the member states.
 - Improvement of energy conservation and energy efficiency.
 - Intensification of economic cooperation with foreign countries and international organizations.
 - Increasing the effectiveness of the Eurasian Economic Commission.
- evidence-based approaches to green technologies and sustainable development, digitalization, and expanded participation in global value chains).
 - Strengthening sectoral connectivity and improving strategic planning in sectoral cooperation.

Socio-Cultural Community

- Formation of a socially responsible community.
- Development of an inclusive community ensuring a high standard of living and the protection of human rights.
- Establishment of a sustainable community supporting social development and environmental protection.
- Formation of a dynamic and harmonious community that combines respect for identity, culture, and cultural heritage with a capacity for innovation.

Source: Compiled by the authors based on the Strategic Directions for the Development of Eurasian Economic Integration up to 2025⁴⁸ and the ASEAN Community Vision 2025⁴⁹

At the same time, it is important to take into account that EAEU–ASEAN interaction remains at a very early stage of development. Limited awareness of each other’s economic potential and the structure of their respective economic systems is characteristic not only of Russia–ASEAN relations, but also of EAEU–ASEAN relations more broadly. Moreover, not all EAEU member states maintain diplomatic missions in ASEAN countries, and not all ASEAN members have diplomatic representation in EAEU states. This undoubtedly complicates the collection of information on economic conditions and participation in integration processes. The absence of a well-developed “Track II” dialogue between the EAEU and ASEAN also constitutes a notable constraint.

⁴⁸ Strategic Directions for the Development of Eurasian Economic Integration until 2025 // EAEU Legal Portal. 12.01.2021.
URL: https://docs.eaeunion.org/docs/ru-ru/01428320/scd_12012021_12

⁴⁹ ASEAN Community Vision 2025 // ASEAN. 22.11.2015.
URL: <https://www.asean.org/wp-content/uploads/images/2015/November/aec-page/ASEAN-Community-Vision-2025.pdf>

Conclusions and Recommendations

Political and Diplomatic Interaction

In recent years, political interaction between Russia and ASEAN has demonstrated a positive trajectory. Southeast Asian countries, with the exception of Singapore, refrained from joining Western sanctions, while the Association as a whole has maintained a neutral position toward Russia. At the same time, Moscow has continued its participation in all ASEAN-centered regional formats.

The intensification of Russia’s “pivot to the East” after 2022 has led Moscow to adopt a more systematic approach toward ASEAN, with a focus on all areas of interaction—from political to economic and socio-cultural. An analysis of Russia–ASEAN summit documents indicates a significant diversification of the bilateral agenda, accompanied by the inclusion of more concrete and functional priorities. At the same time, the primary driver of the partnership continues to be Russia’s political will, while ASEAN’s neutral stance creates a relatively favorable environment for the further development of relations.

Over the past three years since the start of the Special Military Operation, areas of both formal and informal convergence of interests between Russia and ASEAN countries have become increasingly evident. These include a shared interest in the formation of a multipolar international system—one that would allow Russia to remain one of its leading centers, while enabling ASEAN to retain its role as a collective actor whose interests are substantively, rather than merely discursively, taken into account by larger partners.

In this context, it is important not only to further develop the Russia–ASEAN strategic partnership, but also to build a comprehensive system of linkages encompassing bilateral, transregional (through ASEAN’s cooperation with the SCO and the EAEU), and global levels (through the engagement of interested ASEAN countries in BRICS, and, in the longer term, the potential participation of ASEAN as an institutional actor).

Trade and Economic Relations

Trade and economic relations have been the most adversely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and anti-Russian sanctions, which have exposed the key vulnerabilities of this area of interaction. These include dependence on external factors, the absence of a dedicated financial and logistics infrastructure, and the lack of major macro-level investment projects that could serve as stabilizing mechanisms for economic relations during periods of geopolitical turbulence. The development of economic ties after 2022 has not yet resulted in a more structured and resilient interdependence.

While at the political level ASEAN’s disagreement with Western sanctions policy has been clearly articulated, in the economic sphere concerns over secondary sanctions have significantly constrained the room for maneuver of ASEAN’s

member states. Southeast Asian countries, with the exception of Myanmar, seek to preserve their engagement with Western-centric institutions and view economic and technological ties with Western countries as a key guarantee of sustained economic growth.

At this stage, the most effective way to mitigate the negative impact of sanctions appears to be the further diversification of trade and economic ties, the expansion of financial and logistics infrastructure, the development of industrial cooperation, and the use of ASEAN's partnerships with the EAEU and BRICS to establish new mechanisms for financial settlements.

Socio-Humanitarian Interaction

Socio-humanitarian interaction remains one of the least vulnerable areas of cooperation, largely due to the absence of historical grievances or acute political disagreements in relations between Russia and ASEAN countries. At the same time, this sphere also requires moving beyond isolated, ad hoc measures toward the development of a more strategic, long-term approach.

Despite sanctions-related constraints, tourism has emerged as one of the sectors that recovered more rapidly than others following the pandemic. Even in the presence of logistical disruptions, Southeast Asian countries have remained attractive destinations for both short-term travel and real estate investment. In the context of growing tourist flows from Russia to ASEAN countries, there is a need to develop new instruments to stimulate tourism in the opposite direction. One such measure could be the introduction of visa-free regimes by Russia for those ASEAN countries that have already implemented similar arrangements for Russian citizens.

Educational cooperation and public diplomacy have been developing actively; however, an information gap in Russia–ASEAN relations persists. This situation calls for the further expansion of direct socio-humanitarian contacts at all levels—across business, academia, education, culture, and media.

The emergence of new dimensions of Russia–ASEAN cooperation also necessitates the development of a Track II EAEU–ASEAN dialogue, including the regular organization of joint seminars and business events. Such initiatives should not be ad hoc, but rather institutionalized on a sustained basis, taking into account the specific features of business culture in Southeast Asian countries.

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Report No. 108 / 2026

Cover photo credit:
RIA Novosti / Grigory Sysoyev

Layout—Olga Ustinkova

Format 70×100 1/16.

Offset printing.

100 copies.

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