

Upholding Peace, Development, Independence and Inclusiveness and Renewing the Firm Commitment to Open Regionalism

Wang Yi

China and ASEAN are linked by mountains and waters as well as hearts and aspirations. We are always good neighbors, good friends and good partners with a shared future. I have been personally engaging with ASEAN for more than three decades. In recent years, I have visited ASEAN countries almost every year and met with ASEAN foreign ministers frequently. Through my travels and engagements, I am keenly aware of the rapid and phenomenal development of China-ASEAN relations. Over the past 10 years in particular, thanks to the strategic guidance and personal commitment of President Xi Jinping and leaders of ASEAN countries, China-ASEAN relations have entered the “fast lane” and made accelerating progress.

In retrospect, the most encouraging development was that China-ASEAN relations have stayed ahead in many areas. China was the first to forge a strategic partnership with ASEAN, the first to join the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia, the first to start FTA negotiation with ASEAN, the first to give unequivocal support for ASEAN centrality in regional cooperation, and the first to publicly express its willingness to sign the Protocol to the Southeast Asia Nuclear Weapon-Free Zone. My ASEAN colleagues have told me that among ASEAN’s dialogue partners, China has the most vibrant and productive ties with ASEAN.

Wang Yi is State Councilor and Minister of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China. This article is based on his speech at the Secretariat of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in Jakarta, Indonesia on July 11, 2022.

The most touching event was China and ASEAN countries have been standing together in solidarity to fight COVID-19. When China was hit first by the virus, ASEAN countries immediately expressed solidarity and support and donated in cash and in kind to tide us over the trying time. When ASEAN countries were affected by the pandemic, China did its best to help ASEAN brothers fend off the virus, including sharing COVID response experience without reservation and providing timely vaccine assistance. Our cooperation against COVID-19 was a vivid testament to our deep friendship through thick and thin. Together, we have set a good example of working together to beat the virus.

The most heartening progress was the thriving economic cooperation and trade between China and ASEAN. We are each other's largest trading partner. Our trade volume has soared 100 times from 30 years before. Our two-way direct investment has exceeded \$310 billion. The China-Laos railway is up and running. Good progress has been made in the Jakarta-Bandung high-speed railway, the China-Thailand railway, the China-Malaysia and China-Indonesia "twin industrial parks," and a number of other Belt and Road projects.

The most gratifying achievement was that China-ASEAN security cooperation has been making steady progress. With full implementation of the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea (DOC), and positive progress in the consultations of a code of conduct in the South China Sea (COC), differences and disputes are being effectively managed. The situation on the sea has remained stable on the whole, and there has been no problem with the freedom of navigation and overflight. Military and security exchanges have deepened, and fruitful cooperation has been carried out in non-traditional security areas such as counter-terrorism, climate response, cybersecurity, combating transnational crime, and disaster preparedness and reduction.

In commemoration of the 30th anniversary of China-ASEAN dialogue relations, President Xi Jinping made five proposals on building our home together, and announced together with ASEAN leaders the establishment

of a China-ASEAN Comprehensive Strategic Partnership, pointing the way forward for the growth of China-ASEAN relations. With this year being the first year for building the China-ASEAN comprehensive strategic partnership, we should get off to a good start, make solid steps, and lead the way forward. We should get united, and join hands together to keep China-ASEAN cooperation at the forefront of the times and galvanize stronger force for peace and progress.

This year marks the 55th anniversary of ASEAN. Over the past 55 years, ASEAN has embarked on an extraordinary development path from early inception to steady growth in size and strength. Meanwhile, the past 55 years was also a golden era of Asia's rise and take-off.

With concerted efforts of all countries in the region, Asia has become a highland of development and promising land for cooperation. Recently, the Boao Forum for Asia published the Asian Economic Outlook and Integration Progress Annual Report, which pointed out that in 2021, Asia was the first to recover amid the global pandemic, and that Asia became an important engine for global economic growth. Early this year, the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) agreement, the world's largest free trade area, officially went into effect, injecting strong impetus to regional development.

With concerted efforts of all countries in the region, Asia is also becoming a fine example of global governance. Most notably, a number of key multilateral events will be held in Asia this year. China has successfully hosted the BRICS Summit, and Cambodia, Indonesia and Thailand will host the leaders' meetings on East Asia cooperation, the G20 Summit, and the APEC Economic Leaders' Meeting respectively. The world's attention is turning to the Asian region, global governance has ushered in the moment of Asia, and the international community needs to listen attentively to the voice of Asia.

Our region has secured such remarkable achievements in development and created exceptional miracles in growth, most fundamentally because countries in the region have adhered to open regionalism, respected

and appreciated the diversities among members, and upheld and practiced the principle of voluntarism. We have advanced regional economic integration through free trade, promoted regional and sub-regional cooperation via equal consultation, and developed networks of friends worldwide with an open mindset.

Asia is standing at a new historical starting point and facing unprecedented development opportunities. But we must also be aware that the world today is not peaceful, and there are two completely different trends concerning the future of Asia. One advocates open regionalism, true multilateralism, a development-first approach and mutually beneficial cooperation; it aims to help countries in the region emerge from the pandemic and achieve all-round development as soon as possible. The other pursues a relapse into the obsolete Cold War mentality and closed group politics, and classifies countries in the region based on their values; it attempts to divide the regional economy into different blocs and even apply the NATO approach to Asia-Pacific security.

The choice we make today determines where the path will take us from now on — openness or isolation, cooperation or confrontation, solidarity or division, progress or regression. It will have a fundamental and far-reaching impact on the future of all countries in the region.

As a Chinese saying goes, “Advancing with the times opens up new horizons.” Both history and reality show that a country, or a region for that matter, can only make progress when it follows the trend of the times. President Xi Jinping has pointed out on multiple occasions that openness is the lifeline of Asia-Pacific cooperation and that we need to uphold open regionalism. Therefore, China chooses to join hands with ASEAN members and other regional countries to adhere to the vision of peace, development, independence and inclusiveness, firmly uphold open regionalism and, by drawing experience and wisdom from Asian civilizations and practices, constantly add new dimensions to open regionalism.

We need to always uphold the concept of peaceful coexistence. In history, China lived in harmony with Southeast Asian countries and other

neighbors, leaving touching stories of good neighborliness and enduring friendship. In the 1950s, we together advocated the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, under which all countries enjoy rights to peace regardless of their size and strength. Over the past half century, the region has developed the ASEAN way, namely, the Asian way, underpinned by major principles such as mutual respect, consensus-building, and accommodating the comfort levels of all parties. It has established a diversified and multi-layered security architecture, and fostered a proactive thinking of pursuing common, cooperative and comprehensive security. All this has laid a solid foundation for lasting peace in Asia.

At present, frequent international security crises are sounding the alarm for mankind. It is a stark reminder that peace should never be taken for granted and must be carefully preserved and cherished. We should never allow any attempt to extend geopolitical conflicts or bloc confrontation to Asia, nor do we want to see any sanction, blockade or humanitarian crisis in this part of the world. Not long ago, President Xi Jinping put forward the Global Security Initiative (GSI), offering China's solution to global peace deficit and global security dilemma. It is necessary that we unequivocally champion the vision of common, comprehensive, cooperative and sustainable security. We need to stay committed to safeguarding the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all countries, taking seriously the legitimate security concerns of all countries, and resolving differences and disputes in a peaceful way through dialogue and consultation, in a bid to protect our shared home and defend our fundamental interest in peace and stability.

We need to always uphold the goal of development and rejuvenation. For a long period of time in history, the Asian economy accounted for over half of the world's total. In modern times however, its development stagnated and fell behind. Today, the valve to Asia's development and progress is fully open, unleashing a strong momentum of rejuvenation and prosperity in the region. In only one generation's time, Asia doubled its share of global GDP and transformed itself from a low-income region to a middle-

income one. Asia's development is attributed to the hard work of people of all Asian countries. We never committed colonial plunder or moved the "cheese" of any country outside the region, still less trying to replace or drive away anyone. All we want is to bring a better life to our peoples.

At present, the Asian economy is facing growing risks, with disruptions to the stability of regional industrial and supply chains and unabated noises of "decoupling" and "severing supply chains." The Global Development Initiative (GDI) put forth by President Xi Jinping has pooled consensus and strength for the collective efforts of the international community to meet challenges, drive global economic recovery and accelerate the implementation of UN's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. It is necessary that we continue to be development-oriented, form a right perception of each other's development and share development opportunities. We should together defend the multilateral trading regime with the WTO as the cornerstone, ensure a free and open global market, and promote integrated economic development.

We need to always uphold the principle of independence. In modern times, regional countries including China and ASEAN members had suffered from colonization and aggression. We achieved national independence and liberation after tenacious struggles. We value the hard-won independence like our life. We hope that we can independently choose political systems and development paths, independently pursue foreign and defense policies, and independently decide on the pathway and pace in participating in economic globalization and advancing regional integration. ASEAN countries have initiated and led Asia's regional cooperation mechanisms. Their independence and centrality has been widely respected by countries within and outside the region.

At present, many countries in the region, including ASEAN countries, are under the pressure to take sides, and the strategic environment in the region risks being reshaped by political factors. It is necessary that we continue to uphold independence, respect each other's sovereignty and core interests, and respect the integrity, independence and leading role of

ASEAN as a community. We should insulate this region from geopolitical calculations and the trap of the law of the jungle, from being used as chess pieces in major-power rivalry, and from coercion by hegemony and bullying. Our future, and the future of our region, should be in our own hands.

We need to always uphold the spirit of openness and inclusiveness.

Openness and inclusiveness are inherent in the genes of regional civilizations; they are also the keys to the regional economic miracle. More than 60 years ago at the Bandung Conference, countries in this region made a just call for seeking common ground while shelving differences and pursuing peaceful coexistence. Since the end of the Cold War, as pioneers in globalization and pace-setters of free trade, countries in this region have embraced the world with greater openness, supported each other with an inclusive spirit, and ensured together the economic takeoff of Asia.

At present, despite current headwinds, globalization keeps surging forward as it is still the prevailing trend. Seclusion and isolation will only lead to rigidity and backwardness, while inclusiveness and openness will bring mutual benefit and win-win results. It is necessary that we promote harmony without uniformity, embrace diversity in coexistence, and reject the attempt to split the region into confrontational or exclusive groups. We should uphold true regional cooperation that unites countries within the region and remains open to countries outside, and reject the kind of fake regional cooperation that keeps certain country out and targets certain side. We believe that the Asia-Pacific is big enough for all regional countries to pursue their development and at the same time promote common development, and that all can prosper respectively and collectively.

As the world's largest developing country and an important member in Asia, China has always followed a path of peaceful development and a win-win strategy of opening-up. We pursue friendship and partnership with our neighbors, seek an amicable, secure and prosperous neighborhood, and follow a neighborhood policy featuring amity, sincerity, mutual benefit and inclusiveness. We hope to champion open regionalism together with ASEAN and deepen our comprehensive strategic partnership.

China will continue to support ASEAN Centrality and promote solidarity and cooperation in the region. ASEAN is at the center of all ASEAN Plus “concentric circles” of regional cooperation. China firmly supports ASEAN’s role in the “driver’s seat,” supports ASEAN community-building, and supports the ASEAN-centered regional cooperation architecture. China welcomes ASEAN’s efforts to formulate a Post-2025 Vision for the ASEAN Community. We are ready to assist ASEAN countries in achieving their development goals by tapping into such resources as the Global Development and South-South Cooperation Fund and the China-ASEAN Cooperation Fund. We will also scale up input into the Initiative for ASEAN Integration, Lancang-Mekong cooperation and BIMP-EAGA, to help close the development gap in the region.

ASEAN has stressed on many occasions that its Outlook on the Indo-Pacific is an independent initiative that commits to openness and inclusiveness and focuses on dialogue, cooperation and economic development, and that it is not subservient to or targeted against any party. China appreciates this position. We would like to increase synergy and cooperation with ASEAN on the implementation of the Outlook to produce cooperation outcomes at an early date.

China will continue to call for settling differences in the Asian way and uphold regional peace and stability. We will work with other countries in the region to implement the Global Security Initiative, and deepen cooperation in such areas as defense, counterterrorism, joint maritime search and rescue and exercise, combating transnational crimes, and disaster management. We hope to blaze a new path of security that chooses dialogue over confrontation, partnerships over alliances, and win-win over zero-sum game, and put into practice principles for how neighbors may get along: trust as the basis, the greater good as priority, and sincerity in interaction.

China and ASEAN countries are expediting the COC consultations, which will serve as solid institutional safeguards for more effective management of differences in the South China Sea, more vigorous

advancement of cooperation and more active joint governance. We will continue to support ASEAN's efforts in building a nuclear-weapon-free zone, and reaffirm that China is ready to sign the protocol to the Treaty of Southeast Asia Nuclear Weapon-Free Zone at any time.

China will continue to pursue firmly its open strategy for development and promote regional economic integration. We will speed up the importing of \$150 billion worth of ASEAN agricultural goods, bring in more high-quality products from ASEAN countries, and encourage more Chinese companies to make ASEAN their top investment destination. We will continue to promote post-COVID recovery, advance the development of demonstration zones for Belt and Road international industrial capacity cooperation, enhance the resilience of industrial and supply chains in the region, and ensure smooth trade flows across borders.

We are ready to launch a new round of upgrade of the China-ASEAN Free Trade Area as soon as possible, and implement the RCEP across the board and promote its upgrade in due course. China remains firm in its resolve to join the CPTPP and DEPA, and is ready to sign high-standard free trade agreements with more countries. China looks forward to closely integrating the development of the Hainan Free Trade Port and the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area and China-ASEAN cooperation, and supports Hong Kong and Macao in engaging in more extensive and closer exchanges and cooperation with ASEAN countries.

China will continue to resolutely advance cooperation in science, technology and innovation to stimulate new drivers of development in the region. China and ASEAN have formulated the Action Plan for Implementing the China-ASEAN Partnership on Digital Economy Cooperation (2021-2025). China will earnestly implement this plan of action with a focus on increasing input in digital infrastructure and digital transformation in this region, deepening practical cooperation in e-commerce, actively facilitating dialogue on digital governance and coordination and harmonization of rules in the digital arena, and strengthening digital connectivity.

We are ready to, through the Belt and Road partnership on green development and the Bio-Circular-Green Economy (BCG) model, explore cooperation on low-carbon, circular and green economy, and jointly build platforms for cooperation in clean energy science and technology. We will advance barrier- and discrimination-free scientific and technological innovation that transcends borders. We will implement well the China-ASEAN Science, Technology and Innovation Enhancing Program, and speed up talent cultivation and technology transfer, to provide a constant source of strength for high-quality economic growth, and accelerate regional transformation and development.

China will continue to carry forward Asian values and deepen the bonds of friendship among peoples in the region. The older generation of leaders of ASEAN countries insightfully summarized Asian values as cherishing family, community, consensus and morality. China feels the same way. We are ready to work with ASEAN to carry forward and practice Asian values, rise above the zero-sum mentality, and deepen our brotherly bond of sharing weal and woe in the spirit of solidarity and partnership. China will adopt more measures to facilitate the flow of people and discuss the launch of tourism recovery plans with all sides at the proper time. We support the development of an ASEAN travel corridor. In a post-COVID era, we will proactively step up exchanges in culture and between the youth, subnational entities, media and women, to promote mutual understanding, amity and affinity between our peoples.

ASEAN's motto, "One Vision, One Identity, One Community," is also a portrayal of the region's spirit of seeking strength through unity. In the new era, China is ready to work with ASEAN member states and other countries in the region to uphold peace, independence, development and inclusiveness, and resolutely practice open regionalism. Together, we will build a common homeland that enjoys peace, tranquility, prosperity, beautiful environment and friendship, and write a new chapter of regional cooperation and Asian vitalization! 