

9TH EC-ASEAN MINISTERIAL MEETING (AEMM)
LUXEMBOURG, MAY 30-31, 1991

1. Economic Part of the Communiqué

The main achievement was to agree on the need to revise the current EC-ASEAN Cooperation Agreement to take into account changing circumstances in both regions, and new priorities, since the signing of the present one in 1980.

The ASEAN senior officials tried very hard to lay down four main points to be included in a revised agreement, which points they tabled on the morning of the first meeting. Three of the points were drawn from recent EC agreements or communiqués with Latin American countries (i.e. a trade consultation mechanism; participation in EC Science and Technology programmes open to third countries and the eventual possible extension of EIB funding to the ASEAN region).

The fourth point was to seek the EC's support for the 'relocation' of EC industry to Southeast Asia. Clearly the first three points, suitably qualified, could have been acceptable although there was no way to include the fourth point (which re-emerged during the Economic Ministers meeting).

Unfortunately, ASEAN was unwilling to see EC concerns reflected in the communiqué, most importantly, the human dimension (i.e. human rights) and economic development. The other points tabled by the EC, namely protection of the environment, improvement of the business climate and human resource development were more readily acceptable. In the end both sides agreed not to list their particular priorities in the communiqué.

No agreement was possible on the Uruguay Round which went beyond a simple statement on the desirability of an early conclusion and a balanced package.

Many other points were eventually included in the Communiqué but with the exception of the environment they were less controversial.

2. Political Part of Communiqué

The highlights of the political discussions were on human rights: "The Ministers were of the view that international cooperation to promote and encourage respect for human rights and for fundamental freedoms for all without distinction to race, sex and religion should be enhanced. In this context, the Ministers reviewed the developments in Burma and Vietnam and expressed the hope that the situations there would evolve in such a way as to enable them to take their place among the dynamic Asian economies."

There were lengthy exchanges on the Cambodia question. Ministers supported the New York Framework for a comprehensive political settlement elaborated by the Five Permanent Members of the UN Security Council.

Ministers noted with appreciation that the initial phase of the EC programme for repatriation and reintegration of Vietnamese asylum seekers was now being implemented.

On June 1st, Ministers responsible for economic matters from the EC and ASEAN met. They held a wide-ranging discussion on regional and bilateral issues. (See separate Note d'Information prepared by Mr Dugimont).

3. The ASEAN Ministers throughout the Conference (AEMM, May 30-31) expressed their desire to 'upgrade' their relations with the Community. It became clear that this meant not only renegotiating the EC-ASEAN Agreement, but also switching from a "donor-recipient relationship" to a more equal relationship based on mutual benefits. Objectives fully in line also with Community policy. However, to many on the ASEAN side, these also implied upgrading in protocol terms. Weeks before the meeting, their diplomatic missions constantly asked how many EC Ministers would be attending. In the event, seven full EC Ministers attended and of the seven, three either arrived late or left early. Only Luxembourg, Belgium and Holland and the Commissioner attended throughout.

In protocol terms, therefore, from the ASEAN point of view, the Meeting was not considered a success. For some on the ASEAN side it was taken as confirmation that the EC attached little importance to its relations with ASEAN.

Indeed much of their comments and disappointment (reflected in the few news reports appearing in the ASEAN press) are best interpreted in terms of this perceived protocol set-back. Headlines included: 'ASEAN cool to EC request on Burma'; 'Southeast Asia criticizes Europe'; 'EC urged to revise policies hurting trade'; ASEAN officials quoted as saying EC wants to make aid and trade conditional on non-trade issues; 'ASEAN rejects EC bid to link aid to human rights'.

At the ad hoc Ministerial meeting on economic matters (AEMM, June 1st) only two full Ministers attended from the EC side, while from ASEAN all but one attended.

The meeting had been requested by ASEAN already in 1988, and they were aware of the Community's evident lack of institutional enthusiasm. In view of the disappointing turnout they decided at the last minute to ask for the meeting to be shortened to one morning which was readily accepted by the EC. After the meeting the ASEAN released a statement strongly condemning the EC's agricultural policies and calling for EC concessions in the GATT.

4. Conclusions

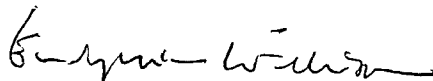
In Luxembourg last week altogether 22 cabinet ministers and 250 senior officials from the ASEAN and the EC participated in the AEMM and the AEEMM as well as in the preparatory meetings. The meetings lasted from Monday evening to Saturday afternoon.

It is difficult to reconcile the time spent, or the expense involved, with the results achieved.

- (i) One way of shortening the meeting (which takes place every 18 months) is to insist that the 'negotiation' of the communiqué be achieved more efficiently (the EC as host had sent its draft to ASEAN one month before the meeting; ASEAN only replied on the morning of the meeting).

(For several years now both sides have started with the good intention of shortening the agenda and the Communiqué. In the event this has not yet proved possible).

- (ii) Perhaps we should also take the occasion of renegotiating the agreement with ASEAN to better structure the various meetings and levels to ensure that maximum effectiveness is achieved in the EC-ASEAN dialogue.



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