

ASEAN a crucial partner for China

International cooperation to build a community with a shared future starts in the immediate neighborhood

The recent annual sessions of the National People's Congress (NPC) and the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) have set new milestones for the country and beyond. Taken together, the election of a new national leadership, adoption of Constitutional amendments, and a new round of national institutional reform, send out strong signals of China's sustained commitment to deeper reform and opening-up.

The latest amendments to the 1982 Constitution have captured most of the headlines overseas, but what is often missed is the inclusion into this "mother law" of ideas such as "following a path of peaceful development", "pursuing a mutually beneficial strategy of opening up", and "working to build a community with a shared future for mankind". They have been China's foreign policy practice and committed goals, and by being written into the Constitution, have become a binding manifesto governing China's engagement with the world.

The efforts to build a community with a shared future start with the neighborhood. And ASEAN, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, is in our immediate neighborhood. President Xi Jinping called on the two sides to build a higher level of strategic partnership and forge a closer community with a shared future.

State Councilor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi reiterated at his press conference during this

year's NPC session that the China-ASEAN partnership has become the most successful and dynamic model for regional cooperation in the Asia-Pacific, and that China will put ASEAN on the front page of its international cooperation program, which speaks volumes about China's utmost sincerity and aspirations for stronger and closer partnership with ASEAN.

This year is the inaugural year for China to implement the blueprint mapped out at the 19th CPC National Congress and marks the 40th anniversary of reform and opening-up. It also opens a new chapter for ASEAN in next 50 years. While China and ASEAN are embarking on new phases of development respectively, ASEAN-China relations also enter a new era.

In such a new era, China's policy toward ASEAN is as clear and consistent as ever, which can be shortened into "One priority, two furthers and three supports". Namely, China will continue to take ASEAN as a priority partner in its neighborhood diplomacy; China will further promote a higher level of strategic partnership and further forge a closer community of a shared future with ASEAN; and China will continue to support ASEAN's community-building, support ASEAN's centrality in regional cooperation, and support ASEAN's bigger role in international and regional affairs.

This policy bears the hallmark of what we call "the major-country diplomacy with Chinese characteristics in the new era". It is consistent with China's decades-old engage-



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China's ambassador to ASEAN.

ment with ASEAN, and in line with our shared embrace of traditional values like unity in diversity, and harmony without uniformity. Above all, it underlines our deep appreciation of what ASEAN means to China. It can be understood in the following four aspects:

First, linked by mountains and rivers, ASEAN is China's immediate and inseparable neighbor. We share land boundaries of more than 4,000 kilometers, and the vast majority of China's foreign trade passes through Southeast Asia, which underlines how crucial the peace and stability of this region is to China.

Geographical proximity means we are easily affected by common challenges, be it natural disasters or manmade hazards. History has seen us stand by each other in such instances, lending support and help and emerging stronger. Proximity also leads to frequent people-to-peo-

ple exchanges and closer cultural relatedness. Two-way mutual visits are about to cross the benchmark of 50 million in these two years.

Second, ASEAN is an important platform for China to promote global multi-polarization, build a new type of international relations, and participate in the regional rule-making process. The "ASEAN Way", featuring mutual respect, dialogue, consensus and noninterference, shares the same spirit with the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence that China has long advocated and abided by in its efforts to build a new type of international relations of mutual respect, fairness, justice, and win-win cooperation. The ASEAN-centered East-Asian regional cooperation frameworks have been valuable platforms for China to participate in regional cooperation and work for the common good of the region and beyond.

Third, ASEAN is a critical partner for China to uphold economic globalization and regional integration and work for a more balanced and healthy trade relationship. China has been ASEAN's largest trading partner for nine consecutive years, and ASEAN has remained China's third largest trading partner for seven years in a row. In 2017, China's trade with ASEAN exceeded \$500 billion for the first time, up 14 percent on an annual basis, of which China's imports from ASEAN rose by 20 percent.

We are now working closely to intensify the implementation of the upgraded protocol to the China-ASEAN free trade agreement, and

move up the negotiation toward a mutually beneficial RCEP, the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership. With protectionism and isolationism on the rise and international trade rules dismissed and trampled, China and ASEAN will continue to champion economic globalization, free trade and regional integration.

Fourth, ASEAN is a priority area in China's Belt and Road Initiative and the endeavor to open wider to the outside world. ASEAN stands at the intersection of the Belt and Road and is at a critical stage in advancing its own regional connectivity. China is working closely with ASEAN and many other partners to contribute to this process. A number of infrastructure projects have been kicked off, such as the Jakarta-Bandung High Speed Railway, China-Laos Railway and China-Thailand Railway. ASEAN is also among the highest destinations for Chinese investment and business partnerships.

This year marks the 15th anniversary of China-ASEAN strategic partnership. We are working to formulate the China-ASEAN Strategic Partnership Vision 2030 to chart the course for our relations in the next decade. Efforts will include more strategic communication, better synergies between development strategies, and enhanced people-to-people exchanges, toward building a closer community with a shared future. China-ASEAN partnership in a new era will be one that provides, stabilizes and leads for regional peace, stability and prosperity.

New era, new opportunities

By HUANG XILIAN

With China and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations both entering a new phase of development and the bilateral relations stepping into a maturity stage from a growth stage, China and ASEAN are now entering a new era and will surely usher in more opportunities for development and more cooperation space.

What is the substance of China-ASEAN relations in this new era?

First, to strengthen strategic trust and safeguard common security. The world is undergoing profound change. Faced with global and regional challenges, no single country could handle well

on its own. Building great political mutual trust as well as a community of shared future for win-win cooperation, common security and shared development is the only way to shoulder the responsibility and face the challenges of the times. Currently, China and ASEAN maintain close exchange of high-level visits, frequent strategic communications and burgeoning political and security cooperation. China is working with ASEAN countries to steadily move forward the Code of Conduct consultation, and the situation in the South China Sea has stabilized and shown a positive momentum. China and ASEAN share similar outlook on security in this region.

Second, to enhance synergy of development strategies to lead

regional economic growth. China will work with ASEAN to better align the Belt and Road Initiative with the ASEAN Community Vision 2025, particularly the Master Plan on ASEAN Connectivity 2025, continue to deepen our all-round cooperation. China and ASEAN share a giant market of 2 billion population and enjoy complementary advantages. With enhanced synergy of development strategies of both sides, China and ASEAN will become a pair of strong wings for leading the regional economic boom in this new era.

Third, to revitalize regional cooperation and create a new model for South-South cooperation. At the China-ASEAN Summit in Manila last year, Chinese Premier Li Keqiang proposed formulating the

China-ASEAN Strategic Partnership Vision 2030 and put forward dozens of initiatives. He also proposed upgrading the "2+7" cooperation framework into a new "3+X" framework underpinned by the three pillars of political and security cooperation, economic cooperation and people-to-people exchanges. Meanwhile, China-ASEAN sub-regional cooperation mechanisms are developing rapidly. The booming development of Lancang-Mekong Cooperation framework accelerates the synergy of the Belt and Road Initiative to the development strategies of six Mekong River countries. China is also willing to actively explore with ASEAN to further participate in the construction of the East ASEAN Growth Area to make greater contributions for ASEAN

integration and ASEAN community building. We also propose to work with ASEAN to build an East Asian Economic Community at an early date.

Fourth, to enhance the people-to-people exchanges and foster the common value of community of shared future. As we implement the Joint Statement between China and ASEAN on Tourism Cooperation and Action Plan for Education, it is a great opportunity to upgrade tourism cooperation and education cooperation to a new level.

These are excerpts from remarks of Huang Xilian, Chinese ambassador to ASEAN, at a roundtable discussion with local think tanks and media on Feb 9, in Jakarta.