

Russia-ASEAN Relations— Strategic Partnership or Strategic Illusion?

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Abstract

This article explores the main achievements and limitations of the Russia-ASEAN strategic partnership. The author reassesses the existing theoretical and methodological approaches to analyzing: the format of strategic partnership; states' goal-setting in the pursuit of such a bilateral relationship; and its main features as a “new” model of interstate relations. The author proposes an updated classification of a strategic partnership's characteristics, and on this basis concludes that the real content of Russia-ASEAN relations does not match their nominal form.

Keywords: strategic partnership, Russia, ASEAN, trade, military-technical cooperation.

Strategic partnerships have long been commonplace in international practice, at least since the 1990s. However, there is still no consensus in the academic community about the phenomenon's nature, purpose, or possible limitations. In this work, the author deliberately distinguishes the nominal status (form) from the real state (content) of strategic partnership, given that academic and general understandings of the concept lack methodological consistency and require further rethinking and adjustment.

For example, ASEAN's relations with Russia and with the EU have nominally identical status. But an evaluation of these relations must incorporate a hierarchy of their components—e.g., common values, trade volume, official visits, political trust, institutionalization, etc.—by relative importance. Additionally, studies mainly focus on Russia's relations with individual Southeast Asian countries, and rarely analyze Russia's strategic partnership with ASEAN as an autonomous actor. This study seeks to determine whether the Russia-ASEAN partnership is substantively strategic.

The author proposes an updated classification of the basic parameters for evaluating strategic partnerships, whose components are much more verifiable and quantifiable than those of many existing parameters.

Shared strategic vision and perception of each other as strategic partners. Measured by the frequency and manner in which Russia/ASEAN mention one another in official descriptions of their partnership.

Partnership in strategic areas—the intensity and quality of security and economic cooperation. A function of trade and economic cooperation (dynamics and volume of mutual trade in significant sectors and certain significant export categories of goods and of security ties (including Russian arms supplies to Southeast Asia).

Coordination on issues that are most sensitive for each partner, including crisis management. The parties' ability to pursue a coordinated policy on issues of national, regional, and global security, including the South China Sea dispute, the general Indo-Pacific situation, the conflict between Russia and the collective West, and the coronavirus crisis.

SHARED STRATEGIC VISION

Works on the shared strategic vision of countries and regional integration associations, and on their perception of each other as strategic partners can be divided into two main areas of study: 1) the goal-setting mechanisms used to create strategic partnerships; 2) the content of strategic partnerships.

Within the first area, many authors, such as David Envall, Ian Hall, and Dennis D. Trinidad, posit that strategic partnerships are a new practice in the field of security and can complement or replace military-political alliances (Envall and Hall, 2016, Trinidad, 2018). This position is especially characteristic of researchers who study security issues in Asia, where the United States and others have for decades been forming strategic partnerships to maintain and strengthen security umbrellas and build groups of like-minded states.

Another body of works suggests that strategic partnerships' purposes depend on their members' status and combined resources. For example, by raising relations to a strategic level, China seeks, on the one hand, to offer its partners a development model alternative to the Western one, thus legitimizing its own status as a global player (Michalski and Pan, 2017). On the other hand, Beijing hopes to export the image of a peaceful and responsible state in international affairs "in order to dispel the so-called China Threat" (Misalucha-Willoughby, 2018).

Small and middle powers are motivated by the desire to gain tangible and intangible benefits such as specific economic advantages from cooperation with global actors and/or strengthening their position and winning recognition in the international arena by achieving privileged status in relationships with larger partners (Czechowska et al., 2019).

According to a third approach, the transition to strategic relations permits the creation of an international environment that would facilitate the dissemination of norms, principles, and worldviews shared by the participants. Some authors claim that by forging strategic relations between themselves, Russia and China seek a multipolar world (Michalski, 2019; Zhongping, 2014).

Finally, a fourth approach suggests that the institution of strategic partnership can be aimed at preventing conflicts or reducing

tensions in relations by fostering interaction in certain strategic areas (Czechowska, 2022). The most common examples are China's bilateral partnerships with the United States, Australia, and India.

The second area of studies deals with the key components of strategic partnership: 1) converging interests, common strategic goals pursued through cooperation, and the mutually beneficial nature of partnership; 2) mutual loyalty, a high level of trust and equality; 3) informal obligations and mutual expectations; 4) a common view on regional and global processes or, in other words, a single "geopolitical identity" (Schmidt, 2010; Renard, 2010; Envall and Hall, 2016).

This review permits an adjustment of our understanding of which goals are pursued in the formation of strategic partnerships as well as an assessment of the feasibility of various qualitative characteristics when describing strategic partnership.

Russia and ASEAN began building a strategic framework for their bilateral partnership as soon as it was established in July 1991. For years, one of Russia's key advantages has been its lack of serious disagreements with ASEAN, which distinguishes it from the United States and China. The parties have managed to forge and maintain a close diplomatic dialogue at various levels, including bilateral summits, and achieve a high degree of institutional connectivity. This includes the Russia-ASEAN Business Council, the Russia-ASEAN Joint Cooperation Committee (ARJCC), and a number of other bilateral committees. Moreover, Russia is engaged in all key ASEAN-centric platforms for multilateral dialogue such as the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), the East Asia Summit (EAS), and the ASEAN Defense Ministers Meeting Plus (ADMM).

Another significant asset for Russia-ASEAN interaction is a common "diplomatic language" based on commitment to multilateralism, the UN Charter, international law, and open and inclusive systems of security and trade (Mosyakov, 2022; Martynova, 2021). All joint documents contain this wording and call for preserving the central role of ASEAN (ASEAN Centrality) in the regional security and economic architecture (The ASEAN Secretariat, 2018). This causes some researchers to overestimate the partnership's strategic depth and possession of a long-term shared vision for bilateral, regional, and global processes.

Meanwhile, the Russia-ASEAN partnership faces five fundamental problems.

First, the parties initially pursued different goals in establishing relations. For Moscow, a strategic partnership with ASEAN was a way to institutionalize its turn to the East. Implicitly, Russia sought to dispel the perception of its Asia-Pacific policy as Sinocentric. For ASEAN, support and recognition by a great power would grant socio-normative (as opposed to legal) legitimacy.

The **second** problem is that most of the mutual interests, norms, and principles of conduct mentioned in joint statements and documents are of a general nature. They functionally differ little from those that ASEAN promotes in relations with other countries with which it has no formal privileged relations.

The **third** problem is that the Southeast Asian countries, which traditionally attach great importance to personal representation in relations, are perturbed when ASEAN-centric events are not attended by foreign leaders. Since Russia's official accession to the East Asia Summit (EAS) in 2011, Russian President Vladimir Putin has attended it only once, in 2018 in Singapore, when it coincided in time and place with a Russia-ASEAN summit where the parties elevated their relations to the strategic level.

On the eve of the EAS summit in November 2022 in Cambodia, the leaders of the ASEAN countries and Southeast Asian experts expected the Russian leader in Phnom Penh. In their opinion, the Russian president's speech on the multinational dialogue platform in the midst of Moscow's geopolitical confrontation with the collective West would have symbolized the failure of attempts by the United States and its allies to isolate Russia (Khmer Times, 2022). However, the Russian leader decided against attending the EAS and the subsequent APEC summit in Bangkok and G20 meeting in Indonesia's Bali, causing discontent among the ASEAN elites and raising doubts about Russia's genuine interest in, and the viability of, the strategic partnership (Storey, 2022).

The **fourth** problem is the parties' asymmetric views and expectations regarding one another, as revealed by a discourse analysis of official statements and key documents pertaining to Russia-ASEAN relations (see Table 1 below).

Table 1.

Strategic partnership/perception narrative in Russian and ASEAN documents

	Name of document/statement	Year	Narrative used
Russia	Dmitry Medvedev's speech at the APEC Business Summit (The Russian Government, 2018)	2018	Strong ties between Russia and ASEAN
	Speech by Vladimir Putin at the final plenary session of the 16th meeting of the Valdai International Discussion Club (President of Russia, 2019)	2019	Formation of the Great Eurasian Partnership with potential participation of the members of the EAEU, CIS, SCO, ASEAN, and a number of other states; ASEAN's central role in Asia and the significance of various platforms built around ASEAN
	Speech by Vladimir Putin at the APEC Summit (President of Russia, 2021)	2021	Coordination with ASEAN, the EAEU, and the SCO to increase APEC's efficiency
	Speech by Vladimir Putin at the Plenary Session of the St. Petersburg International Economic Forum (President of Russia, 2022)	2022	ASEAN as an integral part of Greater Eurasia; Traditionally friendly Southeast Asian countries as prospective major investors in the region
	Russia's Foreign Policy Concept	2023	Formation of the Greater Eurasia integration space based on the EAEU, the SCO, and ASEAN; Strengthening of cooperation with ASEAN in the economic, security, humanitarian, and other areas
ASEAN	Annual Report 2019-2020 (The ASEAN Secretariat, 2020a)	2020	The role of financial and technical support from the Association's partners, including Russia, in implementing ASEAN projects and initiatives in 2020-2023
	Annual Report 2020-2021 (The ASEAN Secretariat, 2021a)	2021	
	Annual Report 2021-2022 (The ASEAN Secretariat, 2022a)	2022	
	Annual Report 2022-2023 (The ASEAN Secretariat, 2023)	2023	

Source: compiled by the author using official statements and documents

This analysis encompasses official statements and documents since 2018. It excludes joint declarations, statements by individual ASEAN member states (as opposed to the organization), documents that would by definition include the term 'strategic partnership' (e.g., documents adopted at a bilateral summit), and perfunctory mentions of the other party as one of many members of some group.

This analysis yields the following conclusions.

Firstly, references to the partnership by Russia far exceed those by ASEAN. Since 2018, Russia has produced five distinct texts with qualitative assessments of the partnership, whereas ASEAN has produced a single corpus of annual reports.

Secondly, there is a significant difference between the parties' narratives. While Russian texts are emotionally charged with a clear positive view of ASEAN, ASEAN produces statements of fact. For example, ASEAN annual reports for 2020-2023 mentioned Russia among other partners that had provided assistance, placing it in the penultimate or last place in the list (The ASEAN Secretariat, 2020a; The ASEAN Secretariat, 2021a; The ASEAN Secretariat, 2022; The ASEAN Secretariat, 2023).

Thirdly, three out of five Russian sources mention ASEAN in connection with multilateral associations that are of priority importance for Russia (EAEU and SCO) and position it as an integral part of Russia's flagship concept called the Greater Eurasian Partnership.

Fourthly, Russia's 2023 Foreign Policy Concept makes Southeast Asia synonymous with the Asia-Pacific region—fourth in order of priority (President of Russia, 2023). ASEAN plays a key role in forming Greater Eurasia and enhancing Russia's relations with the Asia-Pacific region (President of Russia, 2023). Remarkably, the previous Concept, adopted in 2016, did not mention either ASEAN or Southeast Asia at all. This illustrates ASEAN's transformation from a peripheral to priority partner in Russia's discourse and foreign policy.

Fifthly, Russia displays inflated expectations from the strategic partnership. Some of Russia's flagship initiatives meet no response at the expert and official levels in Southeast Asia. For instance, Russia's proposal for cooperation along the EAEU-SCO-ASEAN line (to "link" the three associations)—put forth in the 2016 Sochi Declaration adopted at an anniversary Russia-ASEAN summit (ASEAN-Russia Summit, 2016)—has failed to produce results or evoke serious resonance in Southeast Asia. The "linking" was not mentioned in future joint Russian-ASEAN documents, including the 2018 Statement on Strategic Partnership. The same fate befell Russia's Greater Eurasia concept, which has so far garnered neither official support nor interest in ASEAN.

Finally, after the aggravation of the Ukraine crisis in 2022, Russian experts have increasingly noted ASEAN's lack of support for Russia, despite their strategic partnership (Mosyakov and Astafieva, 2022; Mazyrin, 2022), betraying inflated expectations and an incorrect understanding of *strategic partnership*, which is conflated with a military-political alliance or an economic union.

These results place in doubt the feasibility of some characteristics, particularly trust between elites, as measures of strategic partnership. Trust is subjective, and Russia-ASEAN relations demonstrate that commonality of diplomatic norms and behavioral principles does not automatically fill bilateral relations with strategic meaning.

Russia publicly portrays the strategic partnership as a significant asset in its bilateral and multilateral relations with Greater Eurasia, while for ASEAN, the strategic nature of its relations with Russia is largely nominal.

PARTNERSHIP IN STRATEGIC AREAS

The actual concrete effectiveness of strategic partnerships is their least-studied aspect. According to Thomas Renard (2010), a strategic partnership can be considered effective if the parties cooperate at the highest strategic level (summits) and have a wide negotiation agenda, including issues of “high” (security) and “low” (economy) politics.

Elena Martynova and Lyudmila Kabir regard relations between Russia and ASEAN as a full-fledged strategic partnership marked by tight institutional ties, effective communication and consulting, and a high level of interaction in priority areas (Martynova, 2021; Kabir, 2016).

Relations between Russia and ASEAN can be described as a “reversed Asian paradox” (Bordachev et al., 2023). The classic Asian paradox consists of “hot economics and cold politics” (Newland and Govella, 2010). In the Russia-ASEAN case, constructive political relations contrast with weak trade and economic cooperation.

Practical interaction between Russia and ASEAN has traditionally been based on security cooperation, mainly Russian arms supplies to the Southeast Asian countries. From the moment that relations with ASEAN were fully institutionalized in 1996¹ until 2017, Russia supplied

¹ In 1996, Russia became a full ASEAN partner.

21.8% of the region’s arms imports, worth \$9.4 billion, behind only the U.S. (23.5% and \$10.2 billion) (SIPRI, 2023).

Since 2018, military-technical cooperation between Russia and ASEAN has displayed contradictory trends. On the one hand, from 2018 to 2022, Russia surpassed the U.S. as the leading arms supplier to Southeast Asia. On the other hand, its share of arms imports actually fell slightly to 20.8% (Table 2).

Table 2.

Russia’s share of arms imported by selected ASEAN members, 2018-2022, %

Cambodia	10.6
Laos	63.6
Myanmar	41.7
Thailand	2.5
Vietnam	54.9
ASEAN average	20.8

Source: compiled by the author on the basis of SIPRI data

Countering terrorism and transnational crime is another important aspect of security cooperation, as stated in the Comprehensive Plan of Action adopted by Russia and ASEAN for 2021-2025, and in the Joint Statement of ASEAN and Russian Foreign Ministers on the Occasion of the 5th Anniversary of the ASEAN-Russia Strategic Partnership (The ASEAN Secretariat, 2021b; Joint Statement, 2023).

In recent years, Russia and ASEAN have strengthened their partnership in maritime security, specifically in countering piracy, primarily in the Strait of Malacca. The first Russia-ASEAN naval exercise in Indonesia in 2021 was a key event (TASS, 2021). Overall, the current regulatory and institutional framework of bilateral relations covers all key spheres of security interaction, including health security (ASEAN News, 2023), especially relevant since the COVID-19 pandemic.

However, in most areas, especially biomedicine, counterterrorist activities and arms supplies, Russia cooperates not so much with ASEAN as with certain individual member states. For example,

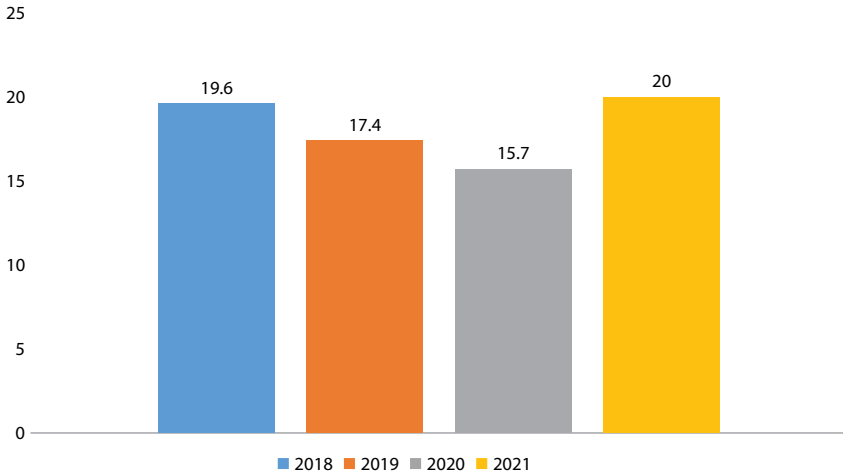
88% of all Russian military exports to ASEAN in monetary terms in 2018-2022 went to Vietnam and Myanmar. Russian arms supplies to other ASEAN member states are minimal (Cambodia), halted (Indonesia, Singapore), or completely nonexistent (Malaysia, Brunei, the Philippines). Additionally, in countering traditional and nontraditional security threats, the cooperation of ASEAN and its members with Russia falls significantly behind their cooperation with the leading players in the region—the United States and China—as well as ASEAN’s other partners—Japan, India, and Australia. Finally, despite an extensive regulatory and institutional framework for cooperation, there is practically no information about concrete achievements, activities, or successful joint initiatives. In fact, the only sources of information are sporadic press conferences held by Russian officials and joint statements, which in most cases are of a protocol nature and lack specifics (MFA RF, 2023). As a result, it is extremely difficult to assess the actual state of security cooperation between Russia and ASEAN.

Thus, the real depth and scope of Russia-ASEAN military-political cooperation do not match the depth of their institutional ties, regarded as the key factor of strategic partnerships according to the institutionalist approach (Czechowska, 2013; Kelley, 2004; Grevi, 2013). In fact, contact and institutional connectivity do not always convert into tangible achievements.

Economic cooperation has traditionally lagged behind in Russia-ASEAN relations. For years, among ASEAN’s partners, Russia surpassed only Canada and New Zealand in trade with ASEAN (Kanaev and Korolev, 2018). The transition to strategic relations did not alter this situation. Trade volume in 2018-2021 remained practically unchanged (Fig. 1).

For years, Russia-ASEAN trade has suffered from low diversity. In 2018-2021, fuel and fertilizers accounted, on average, for 50-55% of all Russian exports to ASEAN, while high-tech products such as electronics did not exceed 4% (Trade Map, 2023). Conversely, in 2018-2021, high-value-added products such as electronics comprised 45-50% of ASEAN’s exports to Russia (Trade Map, 2023).

Fig. 1. Russia-ASEAN trade turnover in 2018-2021, billion dollars



Source: FCS of Russia

Note: Data up to 2021, since publication of indicators was suspended by the Russian Federal Customs Service after the start of the Special Military Operation in February 2022

Moreover, as in the case of arms supplies, imports by ASEAN countries are very uneven, with the bulk going to Indonesia and Vietnam. In fact, in 2021, the two countries received 65% of all Russian supplies of coal briquettes and 58% of all fertilizer exports to ASEAN, respectively. Overall, Hanoi and Jakarta generated more than 45% of trade turnover between Russia and ASEAN in 2018-2021, which suggests that Russia is of strategic importance to just several ASEAN member states rather than the Association as a whole.

In general, Russia and ASEAN are not important economic partners for each other, as ASEAN accounted for 2.5% of Russian exports, and Russia for 0.5% of ASEAN’s exports, in 2021.

Russia’s Special Military Operation (SMO) in Ukraine and the subsequent shocks in global markets negatively affected trade and economic cooperation between Russia and ASEAN (Korolev, 2022). 2022 saw a 15% decrease in trade volume, to \$15.4 billion, followed by a slight increase to \$15.9 billion in 2023 (ASEAN Stats Data Portal, 2024). This was mostly due to a 41% drop in ASEAN exports in 2023—to \$4.35 billion, the lowest figure since 2018—caused by anti-Russian sanctions.

However, Russian exports to ASEAN did grow slightly (around 7%) after the start of the SMO, primarily due to increased supplies of fuel (60%, to \$7.7 billion) and fertilizers (32%, to \$1.1 billion) (Ibid). These two key commodities accounted for 55% of all Russian exports to ASEAN in 2023. As in the pre-crisis period of 2018-2021, positive dynamics were generated mainly by trade with Vietnam and Indonesia, plus increased supplies of refined oil products (naphtha) to Singapore—by more than 2.5 times to \$3.3 billion in 2023, despite the sanctions (Ibid).

The literature may generate the erroneous view that strategic partners by definition exhibit greater cooperation. The Russia-ASEAN partnership proves otherwise. To the contrary, Germany and France, which are formally mere development partners with ASEAN² are not prevented from developing comprehensive and strategic ties with ASEAN in “high” and “low” politics.

Since ASEAN is not a monolithic association, but rather the product of the domestic and foreign policies of ten sovereign states, what is commonly considered the Russia-ASEAN partnership is in fact the sum total of Russia’s interactions with individual ASEAN members in various areas.

Russia essentially acts as a middle power in the region, falling far behind most of ASEAN’s full partners in terms of influence and the intensity of bilateral ties. This state of affairs is systemic, only accentuated by its consequences since the start of the SMO.

COORDINATION ON SENSITIVE ISSUES

In modern expert discourse, the involvement of Russia and ASEAN in sensitive issues is analyzed mainly through the lens of the parties’ political weight (or lack thereof) in a region, “friendliness,” and a common “diplomatic language” as a key asset of bilateral relations (Mosyakov and Astafyeva, 2022).

For example, ASEAN typically refrains from any actions or specific statements on issues sensitive to Russia, including the Ukraine crisis and Russia’s relations with the West. Russia, in turn, for many years

² The third group in the hierarchy of external cooperation with ASEAN after sectoral partnership and full partnership.

has steered clear of political and regional crises in Southeast Asia, for example, the situation in Myanmar, and a series of coups in Thailand, Malaysia, and Cambodia (Rogozhin and Rogozhina, 2019). The most important point for Russia is to stay as far as possible from the territorial problem of the South China Sea, where the interests of two of its priority partners in the Asia-Pacific region—China and Vietnam³—clash.

Yet Russia's and ASEAN's understanding of the sensitivity and significance of regional and global problems are fundamentally different.

For Russia, the tensions in geographically remote Southeast Asia are not existential, as they pose no threat to its national security or political stability. This is why Russia shows little interest in the conflict in the South China Sea and intentionally refrains from making public partisan statements. Yet Russia cannot fully avoid the problem. For instance, the Russia-China naval exercise, conducted in the South China Sea in 2016, provoked a hostile reaction from the other parties to the dispute, primarily Vietnam (Voanews, 2016).

Russia's position on other regional issues important to ASEAN, above all the Indo-Pacific region, is of a similar nature. Unlike many extra-regional powers, Russia has so far not offered its own vision for the Indo-Pacific. Moreover, Russia and ASEAN have not articulated a strategy of cooperation amid increasing militarization in the Indo-Pacific region.

ASEAN acts similarly when it comes to coordination on issues vital for Russia's sovereignty. For example, despite their global impact, the Ukraine crisis and the conflict between Russia and the collective West are peripheral for ASEAN and outweighed by "internal" problems and the multifaceted U.S.-China confrontation. The results of a sociological survey conducted by the Singaporean research center ISEAS in 2023, among representatives of the public sector, think tanks, businesses, and NGOs, are quite telling in this respect. Among the key challenges facing ASEAN, the respondents named unemployment and economic recession (59.5%), climate change (57.1%), and escalation of the conflicts in the region—in the South China Sea and the Taiwan Strait and on the Korean Peninsula

³ Vietnam stands as a comprehensive strategic partner.

(41.9%) (ASEAN Studies Center, 2023).⁴ Similar results can be seen in the updated ISEAS 2024 survey. The Ukraine crisis takes 3rd place (together with global scam operations) in the list of key geopolitical concerns for Southeast Asia, after the Israel-Palestine conflict and the South China Sea territorial dispute (ASEAN Studies Centre, 2024). Russia and ASEAN are not eager to coordinate their actions on any of these issues.

The aggravation of the conflict in Ukraine in 2022 has indirectly affected ASEAN economies, mainly by elevating energy prices and increasing food insecurity. But the Ukraine crisis itself is not the root cause of these challenges or of growing inequality in Southeast Asia. Rather, along with the COVID-19 pandemic, it served as an additional catalyst for the current situation, adding to the deep structural problems in the region.

The reaction of Russia and ASEAN to the coronavirus crisis clearly defied expectations generated by their nominal strategic partnership, as it featured little coordination between them (Mazyrin and Koldunova, 2023). For the most part, it was limited to general discussions by relevant bilateral committees and foreign ministers' meetings, followed by the adoption of joint statements (Foreign Ministers of ASEAN Member States and the Russian Federation, 2021). Russia sent its Sputnik V vaccine to a number of ASEAN countries, mainly Vietnam (Mazyrin, 2021) and agreed in 2021 to build a Sputnik V factory in Vietnam (Vietnam +, 2021; The ASEAN Secretariat, 2020b), but the volume of aid was incomparable with that provided by other ASEAN partners, primarily the United States, China, and the EU, which not only shipped their own vaccines but also offered financial and institutional support to the Association. In particular, in March 2020, the EU allocated €800 million to ASEAN to fight COVID-19 (EU-ASEAN Strategic Partnership, 2022). Financial aid to the Association from the United States as of August 2021 had exceeded \$158 million (U.S. Department of State, 2021). As of April 2022, China had provided more than 300 million doses of vaccines and \$6 million in investments in the ASEAN COVID-19 Response Fund, and it also pledged to provide \$1.5 billion in additional financial aid in the next three years to restore the national

⁴ In this survey, respondents were allowed to name several groups of challenges.

economies of ASEAN member states impacted by the coronavirus crisis (The ASEAN Secretariat, 2022b; Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the Republic of Singapore, 2021; Xinhua, 2021).

Analysis of coordination between Russia and ASEAN on key regional and global issues reveals the folly of evaluating their strategic partnership's effectiveness solely on the basis of its nominal status. Differences in the perception of various issues' significance are hardly conducive to effective coordination in addressing them.

* * *

This research yields the following conclusions.

Firstly, due to a lack of unified understanding of the essence, nature, and limitations of strategic partnerships, profound differences have arisen in understandings of the mechanism at the theoretical, expert, and official levels, leading to inflated expectations. Actors may differ significantly in what they seek from a strategic partnership, but it is usually meant to formalize constructive relations between the parties, and their desire to improve the quality of bilateral relations without assuming legal obligations.

Secondly, when studying strategic partnerships, it is necessary to clearly distinguish between their nominal form and real content. Foreign policy practice, including that of ASEAN and its members, shows that de facto strategic cooperation with a foreign partner can occur even when it has no such official status.

Thirdly, an important and novel result of the research is an updated set of strategic partnership parameters that have been tested on the Russia-ASEAN case. This set is flexible and can be applied to other strategic partnerships.

Fourthly, the nature and level of relations between Russia and ASEAN do not meet the three parameters that are here offered as defining a strategic partnership. Throughout the existence of their strategic partnership, it has been marked by a significant imbalance in the parties' perceptions of each other as strategic partners. Whereas Russia views ASEAN in key conceptual documents and official statements as a valuable asset and one of the key actors in promoting

the Greater Eurasian Partnership, ASEAN sees interactions with Russia as purely transactional.

The intensity and quality of interaction in strategically important areas is the parameter that the Russia-ASEAN partnership meets best. Both Russia and ASEAN can boast concrete achievements in the priority areas of cooperation (security and economy), including Russia's rise to the position of top arms supplier to Southeast Asia, the first-ever joint naval exercise in 2021, and growing trade in certain types of critical goods. However, the strategic partnership has been selective and covered areas that are important but limited in scope. Moreover, strategic partnership in these sectors is sustained by individual ASEAN countries, with which Russia is developing bilateral relations.

The level of bilateral coordination on sensitive issues remains low. This is mainly because Russia and ASEAN assess the importance of issues differently, which directly affects their motivation to involve themselves. For example, for Moscow, problems in the South China Sea and piracy in the Strait of Malacca are much less important than the crises in Europe and/or in the post-Soviet space. For ASEAN's members, the situation is reversed.

The sufficiency of economic and diplomatic resources and capabilities to deal with crises is another question. Neither ASEAN states separately, nor the Association as a whole, are able or ready to propose ways to settle the Ukraine crisis or to coordinate their actions with Russia. The only exception is Indonesia, which has put forward its own peace plan. However, the plan is rather abstract and was instantly rejected by Ukraine and the West.

The formal status of the Russia-ASEAN strategic partnership exceeds the real content of bilateral interaction, not least because this is a "young" format, which has not yet had time to mature in the new geopolitical environment. The limitations mentioned in this work are systemic, and the changing economic and political situation will not transform the nature of Russian-ASEAN relations dramatically. The current situation is devoid of the prerequisites for raising substantive interaction between Russia and ASEAN to the strategic level, although this does not exclude the expansion or deepening of their partnership in select areas.

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