

1. Why are the ASEAN-EU FTA negotiations stalled?

Pongsak - I think this is not stalled. It rather proceeds slowly. As of Jan 1 this year, Asean now has its own charter and to build its own community. There are a lot to be done in relatively short time. Asean Summit meeting last month was in Hua-Hin/Cha-Am. Asean + 6 meeting is next month in Pattaya. Without proper arrangement among ourselves, how can Asean enlarge its trading bloc and partners ?

2. How does this affect ASEAN's legitimacy as a regional bloc?

Pongsak - Legitimacy is a big word ! It can be derived by legislation, expert opinions, people voices, etc. I would not call the delayed Asean-EU FTA as Legitimacy issue. It is rather an issue of priority. "One Community, Ten Nation" building is first !

3. How important is it to ASEAN to have a FTA with the EU?

Pongsak - EU is a big & important market for Asean. EU is 2nd or 3rd trading partner for Asean depending how you count this. According to IMF figures, trade between EU & Asean countries amounted to over USD190 bn (Euro160bn) seconded only by China.

To have FTA with EU is definitely going to be beneficial to both parties. But first Asean + 6 meeting next month in Pattaya. Let's see how China, India, Japan and other Asian countries have to say along with other world leaders.

There are a lot to be done to integrate Asean to the world as the 4th Pillar and economic engine, as Dr. Surin, Asean Sec-Gen stated it in Davos.

4. Some reports say ASEAN countries are wanting the EU to include Burma in FTA negotiations.

Pongsak - We are in the middle of global economic crisis. Economic issues must be the first priority. The poor & have-not suffer most in this crash. What I am afraid most is the political game to stop engaging country like Burma.

Only engaging Burma in the process would give a chance for democratically elected gov't and social welfare enhancement. Embargo & exclusion do not work.

How long have Westerners try to press on this ? 40 or 50 years. What is the final outcome ? More isolation, occasional bloodshed, human right problems.

The key is to open and to engage, not isolate Burma.

5. How big of a concern is it for ASEAN to have Burma included in any FTA agreement with the EU?

Pongsak - Economically, this is not much a concern. Some say because Asean works on consensus, then this is an issue...Yes. But we can work on multilateral basis and terms as well.

Socially, this is quite an issue. We can not live happily if our friends and neighbors are suffering. Thailand has done more than its fair share with million Burmese immigrants to Thailand and along its borderline.

But at the end, we live in a world that human right issues is paramount important. Everyone has to help and to support constructively Burma as much as we can.

6. Anything you'd like to add?

Regarding to Burma, it should be "One-Step-At-A-Time". It is locked in its own world for many years. You cannot simply open it up to the 21st century.

Regarding to the current global economic crisis, I am very afraid of protectionism around the world. This may cause a grave concern.

Many thanks for your interview.

Happy Songkarn Day or Happy Thai New Year.

Unquoted

By Pongsak Hoontrakul
Senior Research Fellow
Sasin of Chulalongkorn Univ., Bangkok
Email: Pongsak@Hoontrakul.com
www.Pongsak.Hoontrakul.com

>>> > Thanks!

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>>> > Sincerely,

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>>> > Daniel Schearf

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>>> > Southeast Asia Correspondent

>>> > The Voice of America, Bangkok

>>> > Tel : +66 02-2546810

>>> > Fax : +66 02-2520472

From: "Daniel Schearf" <dschearf@VOANews.COM>