

EU-ABC forges trade, commerce and investment between Europe and ASEAN region

29 October 2021 | News

In conversation with Chris Humphrey, Executive Director of EU-ASEAN Business Council, Singapore



The EU-ASEAN Business Council (EU-ABC), a primary and sole voice for European business in the ASEAN region, enhances trade, commerce and investment between Europe and ASEAN. It is recognised by the European Commission and the ASEAN Secretariat and is an accredited entity under Annex 2 of the ASEAN Charter. Independent of both bodies, the Council has been established to help promote the interests of European businesses operating within ASEAN. It works on a sectorial and cross-industry basis to help improve the investment and trading conditions for European businesses in the ASEAN region by influencing policy and decision-makers. The EU-ABC's membership consists of large European Multinational Corporations and the nine European Chambers of Commerce from around Southeast Asia.

In September 2021, EU-ABC held a health summit in Singapore bringing together business leaders, members of the

diplomatic corps, and academics across Southeast Asia and Europe to discuss and deep dive into emerging trends and transformative healthcare industry solutions, addressing the unprecedented circumstances posed by the global health crisis on healthcare systems. BioSpectrum Asia had an opportunity to converse with *Chris Humphrey, Executive Director of EU-ASEAN Business Council, Singapore* in an insightful discussion.

What's the standing of the EU-ASEAN Business Council (EU-ABC) in the ASEAN region?

EU-ABC represents the voices of EU-businesses in ASEAN by promoting their interests through the frequent release of advocacy papers, high-profile dialogues with the ASEAN government and various ASEAN sectoral bodies as well as through gauging the sentiments of its members through the annual business sentiment survey. The advocacy papers address issues in the ASEAN region, where relevant stakeholders from the private sector come together to recommend changes towards the ASEAN government. For example, the Healthy Ageing and Lifetime Immunisation Advocacy Paper, contributed by KPMG in Singapore, and Sanofi, with the support of the Western Pacific Pharmaceutical Forum (WPPF) unveiled healthy aging barriers in Southeast Asia and called for an urgent and greater focus on the implementation of life-course immunisation. The EU-ABC is the only pan-ASEAN business body for European business.

How is EU-ABC promoting healthcare capabilities, trade, and investment between Europe and the ASEAN region?

We have produced a number of policy position papers over the last year aimed at opening debates with policymakers and other key stakeholders on a range of health-related matters. These include a paper on Sustainable Health Financing and one on the need for the promotion of self-care in ASEAN. We have also run a number of workshops on these issues and on the Healthy Ageing topic across the ASEAN region as well as webinars on topics involving both industry and government representatives. These are in addition to our recent Summit focused purely on health issues that involved a range of sector experts and Ministers from across ASEAN. Regular dialogue with government bodies, Ministries of Health, Finance and Trade/Commerce are key planks of our ongoing efforts to promote both health issues and those related to trade and investment.

Can you elucidate sustainable healthcare financing in ASEAN and the Asia Pacific?

EU-ABC's Insurance Paper released in March this year, is focused on improving the affordability of insurance protection using tax policies, intelligent automation and investments. It emphasises improving the accessibility of insurance with digital solutions, and providing integrated digital health solutions to ensure the protection of individual wellness. Additionally, our Sustainable Health Financing paper published last year developed a number of recommendations to help the countries of the region make the aim of universal health coverage more affordable.

These included resolving the inefficiencies in the existing system through elements such as:

- ? Establishing a more regular routine of driving healthcare issues across multiple ministries (Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Education, etc.);
- ? Bringing preventative concepts into reality, for example through promoting life-course immunisation, promoting healthy lifestyles and introducing more early diagnosis techniques;
- ? Promotion of self-care through increasing access to OTC products, vitamins and minerals and leveraging digital health tools
- ? Augmenting the roles of nurses and pharmacists
- ? Revisiting the core financing model to upgrade the system

How significant is public-private partnership and collaboration in leveraging life-course immunisation and improving access to quality healthcare?

To establish life-course immunisation as a core part of healthy ageing policies, a whole-of-system and society approach is needed, both top-down and bottom-up approaches are equally important.

The government will have to recognise life-course immunisation as part of healthy ageing policies; leverage the influence of healthcare providers by engaging their expertise and knowledge on increasing vaccination uptake; develop robust data collection infrastructure where information can be captured and stored in a central location to monitor, track and convey

information about current epidemics, continuously evaluate and improve current efforts; improve public access to vaccination points and; increase the affordability of adult vaccines through free or subsidised vaccines.

The private sector can provide annual influenza vaccination as part of employee benefits and introduce insurance products to cover vaccination costs.

Lastly, citizens can contribute to the efforts by supporting the elderly to bridge the digital gap to access information and online bookings for vaccination. Grassroots can also share information on vaccine safety and efficacy with the wider population.

How do you elaborate on EU-ABC vision towards prioritising healthcare economies and funding to address preventative care?

Governments and society at large, cannot take healthcare for granted. Therefore, investing in health, in all aspects, is vital for society. This does not just mean more hospitals, doctors, clinics or nurses (though in some cases more are truly needed), but it also means the right policies to encourage healthier living, allowing access to products and services for people to look after themselves better, promoting education on healthier living, vaccinations, etc., and advancing more modern elements such as digital health tools.

How can the ASEAN region come together to tackle the spread of counterfeit drugs in the region?

EU-ABC's advocacy paper, 'Tackling Anti-illicit Trade in ASEAN', highlights recommendations across different areas of concerns:

Counterfeit Drugs

? Develop a comprehensive framework pertaining to the implementation and protection of lot codes.

? Define serialisation and Track and Trace laws, mandate serialisation of products.

? Form a regional Public-Private working group for Illicit Trade to share market intelligence and investigative techniques with customs authorities.

E-commerce

? Collaborate with online platforms to promote online to offline enforcement.

? Develop an ASEAN-wide MoU between law enforcement, platform owners, and brand owners to make the identification and takedown of illicit sellers easier.

? Promote the adoption of better due diligence processes for online intermediaries including social media platforms.

? Develop national government frameworks for governing advertising and promotion of products, compatible with OECD guidelines.

Free Trade Zone (FTZ)

? Form comprehensive and specific definitions of permissible activity in FTZ's with implementation policies and periodic checks.

? Incorporate digital solutions to ease reporting requirements, track and trace requirements.

? Ensure authorities have access to aggregated data on goods entering and exiting the FTZ with correct tariff classification and owner information

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