

# 2024 JOINT DECLARATION ON ECONOMIC COOPERATION BETWEEN THE ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS AND THE MEMBER STATES OF THE EUROPEAN FREE TRADE ASSOCIATION

*Signed in Vientiane, Lao PDR on 19 September 2024*

**Brunei Darussalam, the Kingdom of Cambodia, the Republic of Indonesia, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Malaysia, the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, the Republic of the Philippines, the Republic of Singapore, the Kingdom of Thailand and the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam: Member States of Association of Southeast Asian Nations** (hereinafter referred to as "ASEAN"):

and

**Iceland, the Principality of Liechtenstein, the Kingdom of Norway and the Swiss Confederation** (hereinafter referred to as the "EFTA States"):

**DESIRING** to enhance economic cooperation between ASEAN and the EFTA States;

**RECALLING** their respective rights and obligations under international law, including those set out in the United Nations Charter;

**BUILDING** on their mutual commitment to the World Trade Organization (hereinafter referred to as the "WTO") and the free trade and economic partnership agreements in force between some ASEAN Member States and the EFTA States;

**EXPRESSING** their intention to strengthen the framework supporting the expansion and diversification of trade and investment flows between ASEAN and the EFTA States;

**DESIRING** to pursue the objective of sustainable development and inclusive economic growth and recognising the importance of coherence and mutual supportiveness of trade, investment, and environment, and labour policies in this respect;

**RECOGNISING** the different levels of development between ASEAN and the EFTA States and the need for corresponding flexibility; and

**ACKNOWLEDGING** the need to promote the principles of good governance, transparency, and responsive regulatory regimes;

**DO HEREBY DECLARE** the following:

## I. OBJECTIVES

1. ASEAN and the EFTA States will jointly seek to:

(a) support, where possible, ASEAN's economic integration agenda;

- (b) enhance economic relations between them, in areas such as trade in goods and services as well as investment;
- (c) promote and facilitate greater involvement of the private sector, in particular of micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs), in economic cooperation;
- (d) ensure that the objectives of sustainable development and inclusive economic growth are reflected in their trade and investment relations;
- (e) share trade and investment best practices and exchange views and information on available trade policy instruments with a view to realising the objectives of this Declaration; and
- (f) consult on trade and investment-related issues of mutual interest under the multilateral trading system such as the WTO and other relevant frameworks

## **II. TRADE AND INVESTMENT RELATIONS**

2. ASEAN and the EFTA States will seek concrete ways and means to strengthen their trade and investment relations, taking into account the principles and provisions of the WTO agreements and the free trade and economic partnership agreements in force between some ASEAN Member States and the EFTA States, inter alia in the areas of:
  - (a) trade in goods, including technical barriers to trade, sanitary and phytosanitary measures, customs procedures and trade facilitation;
  - (b) trade in services;
  - (c) electronic commerce;
  - (d) investment; and
  - (e) intellectual property rights.
3. ASEAN and the EFTA States will seek to broaden economic cooperation in areas of particular importance to strengthen their trade and investment relations, inter alia, by exchanging views and non-confidential information and encouraging cooperation on:
  - (a) trade and investment flows;
  - (b) competition policy and law;
  - (c) public procurement;
  - (d) innovation and emerging technologies including technology transfer, on mutually agreed terms;
  - (e) trade and sustainable development, inclusive growth, and human resources development;
  - (f) consumer protection; and
  - (g) other trade and investment-related issues and policies agreed upon by ASEAN and the EFTA States.

### **III. PRIVATE SECTOR COOPERATION**

4. ASEAN and the EFTA States will seek to promote private sector trade and investment cooperation projects, inter alia, by creating favourable conditions conducive to capital flows and investment in economic sectors of mutual interest
5. ASEAN and the EFTA States will encourage and stimulate business contacts, notably between enterprises and organisations concerned with international trade and investment, with the aim of developing mutually beneficial, inclusive, innovative, and sustainable economic activities between them.
6. In this context, ASEAN and the EFTA States will cooperate to promote relevant business practices such as responsible management of supply chains by businesses.

### **IV. IMPLEMENTATION ARRANGEMENT**

7. This Joint Declaration does not create rights or obligations under international law.
8. In order to implement the objectives of this Joint Declaration, ASEAN and the EFTA States will:
  - (a) develop a comprehensive, mutually beneficial, action-oriented, forward looking and encompassing Work Plan;
  - (b) review the implementation of this Joint Declaration and discuss any other issue of mutual interest, as and when necessary, upon agreement of ASEAN and the EFTA States; and
  - (c) meet virtually or in person as and when necessary, upon agreement between ASEAN and the EFTA States.
9. To this end, ASEAN and the EFTA States will provide a forum of discussions comprising representatives of ASEAN and the EFTA States. They may formulate recommendations on any relevant subject by consensus.
10. The secretariat services for the forum of discussions will be provided jointly by the EFTA Secretariat and the ASEAN Secretariat.
11. The financial arrangement to cover expenses for the initiatives undertaken within the framework of this Joint Declaration will be mutually agreed upon by ASEAN and the EFTA States, subject to the availability of funds.

### **V. CONFIDENTIALITY**

12. ASEAN and the EFTA States undertake to observe the confidentiality and secrecy of documents, information and other data received from the other within the framework of this Joint Declaration subject to their laws and regulations.

### **VI. FINAL PROVISIONS**

13. This Joint Declaration comes into effect on the date of its adoption. Adopted at Vientiane, Lao PDR on the nineteenth day of September 2024