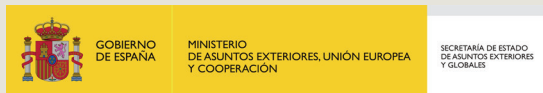


This document analyzes the potential for strengthening relations between the European Union (EU) and ASEAN, highlighting the strategic role of Spain and Indonesia. Both blocs share values such as multilateralism and face common challenges, including climate change, tensions between the U.S. and China, and the need for trade integration. Spain and Indonesia, as maritime powers and emerging economies, can lead initiatives in defense, trade, digitalization, education, and innovation.

The document proposes revitalizing bilateral cooperation and advancing new agreements in defense and maritime surveillance. It also emphasizes the urgency of concluding the EU-Indonesia Economic Partnership Agreement to promote trade and green investment. In the fields of education and culture, it suggests intensifying university exchanges and joint research. Finally, it recommends elevating the bilateral relationship to a Strategic Partnership and promoting a shared agenda in multilateral forums for a more just and cooperative global order.



ASEAN AND THE EU. STRATEGIC OPPORTUNITIES FOR INDONESIA AND SPAIN

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FUNDACIÓN ALTERNATIVAS

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STRATEGIC OPPORTUNITIES
FOR INDONESIA AND SPAIN

ASEAN Y LA EU. ESTRATEGIAS Y OPORTUNIDADES PARA INDONESIA Y ESPAÑA

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INTRODUCTION

This working paper, written by **Professor Javier Gil Pérez** (Pontifical Comillas University, Spain) and **Dayu Nirma Amurwanti** (Binus University, Indonesia), analyzes the need and potential to deepen relations between the **European Union (EU)** and the **Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)**, with a special focus on the strategic role of **Spain** and **Indonesia** as key actors in their respective regions.

The document argues that both the EU and ASEAN share common values such as multilateralism and the promotion of peace and stability in a rules-based world order. Both blocs face shared challenges in the emerging global order, such as rising tensions between the United States and China, climate change, and the need to strengthen regional trade ties.

Spain and Indonesia, as maritime regional powers and emerging economies, are called upon to lead together. New strategies for cooperation are proposed in areas such as **security and defense, investment and trade, digital innovation, and education and research.**

Historically, Spain and Indonesia have cooperated successfully, notably in the joint production of the CN-235 aircraft. The paper suggests revitalizing this collaboration through new agreements on defense, including submarines, maritime surveillance, and counterterrorism efforts.

On the economic front, the urgency to conclude the EU-Indonesia Economic Partnership Agreement is highlighted. The goal is to boost trade in industrial goods, pharmaceuticals, and agricultural products, and to encourage investment in digitalization and the green economy.

In the field of education and culture, the document calls for intensifying university exchange programs and promoting joint research in key sectors such as agriculture, renewable energy, critical minerals, and cyber and space technology.

Finally, institutional proposals are made to elevate bilateral relations of both countries to the level of a **Strate-**

gic Partnership, increase high-level diplomatic contact, promote interreligious dialogue, and develop a shared agenda in multilateral forums.

This working paper provides an ambitious yet realistic roadmap for **Spain and Indonesia** to act as bridges between the **EU and ASEAN**, contributing to a more just, balanced, and cooperative global order.

1

THE EUROPEAN UNION (EU) AND THE ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS (ASEAN) AS KEY REGIONAL ACTORS IN THE EMERGING GLOBAL ORDER

The European Union (EU) and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) are key regional actors in two vital areas for the present and future Emerging World Order: Europe and the Indo-Pacific region. The geopolitical positioning of their respective regions and their overall magnitude make them in important actors at the global scene.

Together, these organizations represent more than 1 billion people, with a combined economic value of \$20 trillion (World Bank Development Indicators, 2025). Geopolitically, they span over 8 million km², with maritime and land borders connecting them to global powers such as Russia, for the EU and India and China for ASEAN (CIA World Factbook, 2025). In addition, the presence of oceans and seas plays a crucial geopolitical role for both regions. The

EU, with its Atlantic frontage, is also linked to vital trade routes such as the Mediterranean and the Baltic, serving as a strategic crossroads to Africa, Russia, and the Middle East. Meanwhile, ASEAN's centrality is justified by its strategic position at the intersection of the Indian and Pacific Oceans and between South Asia and East Asia, making it a key axis in the Indo-Pacific.

Thus, stability in both regions and the promotion of stable and positive relations between these organizations are essential for global stability.

These two regional organizations established diplomatic relations in 1977 when the European Union became a Dialogue Partner of ASEAN. Over time, they progressively strengthened their bilateral ties, culminating in the 2020 ASEAN-EU Strategic Partnership agreement,

which marked the consolidation of four decades of collaboration and mutual trust (EEAS, 2025).

The partnership has since evolved. With similar founding principles i.e. promoting peace, stability and economic cooperation across its member states, the partnership initially was focused on developing commercial and economic – focused cooperation between the two regional groupings. With EU now being an important Dialogue Partner to ASEAN, the partnership has now expanded into political security domains. The world is growing more uncertain, as two largest and most influential regional groupings, both have to work on new strategies to balance against growing rivalry between two largest economies, United States and China; address issues caused by ongoing conflicts in Europe and Middle East; and develop pragmatic solutions with the United States withdrawal from its role as primary provider of global security and order.

At the same time, with different forms of governance, levels of integration, and at times, converging interest between member states, there is also a need to maintain flexibility – of agenda, of forms of cooperation, and the choice of whether bilateral, inter regional cooperation or combination of both in the partnership.

The EU and ASEAN share significant commonalities as partners in the complex international landscape. These shared interests and values can be summarized in two key points: first, their commitment to multilateralism as a fundamental tool in international relations; and second, ASEAN's role as a central organization for Indo-Pacific stability. This shared vision opens the door to numerous areas of cooperation between the two organizations, particularly between two leading countries in their respective regions, Spain and Indonesia.

Economically, the EU is ASEAN's third-largest investor, following the United States and Japan, with a 10.8% share of total investment (AIR, 2024). Additionally, the EU is ASEAN's third-largest trading partner in goods, demonstrating strong economic ties between both blocs. ASEAN's ten member states represent diverse economic stages of development: some countries are more advanced, some are emerging, fast-growing economies, while others are still developing. The region's relatively stable domestic politics present draws intra ASEAN and external investment. ASEAN has been leaning towards 'open regionalism' – with economic integration lies at the core of its community building and vision and is open to trade and

cooperation with other countries and regions. This paves the way for partners, particularly EU to engage meaningfully with the region and its member states.

ASEAN's economic focus has always been external and is marked by its collective preferences of regional trade partners. The ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA) was signed in 1992, to promote trade among its member states and their global competitiveness. While intra-ASEAN trade is increasing, many perceive that this is not the sole objective of the free trade agreement. The bilateral trade arrangements with China, Japan, South Korea, India, Australia and New Zealand have successfully boosted trade and contributed to the region's growth. Combined, it is now the 5th largest global economy. While there is not yet consensus among ASEAN member states on inclusion of EU into its regional trade and/or comprehensive agreements, EU has strong trade relations and partnerships with individual members. With major economies currently waging active war against trade imbalances through tariff and non-tariff barriers, the incentive for both regions to elevate and formalize regional trade relations is stronger than ever. A dialogue to bring both regions together was initiated in 2022. Success in sealing strategic trade deal will be an

important parcel to overall political, economic, and security relations between two regional groupings.

Currently, the European Union is an active participant in many ASEAN-led mechanisms, most notably the ASEAN Regional Forum. The EU has also played a crucial role in regional peace initiatives in the region, such as, the Aceh peace process, where European Union deployed personnel alongside five ASEAN nations, Norway, and Switzerland between 2005 and 2006 to oversee the implementation of the peace agreement between the Government of Indonesia (GoI) and the Free Aceh Movement (GAM). (European Parliament, 2006)

However, the EU is not part of the crucial ASEAN Defense Ministers' Meeting-Plus (ADMM-Plus), the regional security dialogue forum that includes ASEAN and eight other nations (Australia, China, India, Japan, New Zealand, South Korea, Russia, and the United States). This exclusion may suggest a lack of recognition of the EU as a top-tier geopolitical actor. Although their relationship is stable, positive, and beneficial, there remains significant growth potential in areas such as security and defence, non-traditional security issues, trade, and technological advancement. Thus, the scope for cooperation is extensive and should

be further explored. Consequently, there is still room to strengthen the already strong ties between the two regional organizations

1.1. EUROPEAN UNION AND INDONESIA

While efforts to formalize trade relations between EU and ASEAN have been pursued, EU have begun negotiations with ASEAN member states. Negotiations with Singapore and Vietnam have concluded, whereas negotiations with other countries, in Indonesia, are still ongoing or have been put on hold. Indonesia is an important country in ASEAN, not only because of its influence in regional diplomacy, but also because the country is the most populous country with the largest economy (ASEAN, 2024 and EEAS, 2025).

Indonesia's 'Bebas Aktif' (free and active) foreign policy principle covers a broad spectrum of foreign policy objectives, activism and alliance. Throughout history, various administrations in Indonesia have translated constitutional principle into, for instance, co-founding the Non Aligned Movement during the Cold War; open support to Palestine's independence; active membership in both regional and global organizations; forming strategic bilateral and

mini-lateral alliances; signing trade and comprehensive economic partnership agreements with key trade partners; and expressing its intent in joining organizations such as the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). Indonesia has also demonstrated its aspiration to become a leading force in climate discussions, to represent the voice of developing and emerging nations in G20 and to become influential middle power in global politics. In the meantime, Indonesia's trade policies have evolved into outward looking, export-oriented policies, attributed by series of reforms in the 1980s and liberalization policies after the 1998 monetary crisis. Most importantly, the nation undertook major overhaul of its investment and trade policies to streamline regulations and processes with the 2020 Job Generation Law.

1.2. SPAIN AND INDONESIA AS KEY REGIONAL ACTORS

At the regional level, Spain and Indonesia share important geopolitical attributes. Both are maritime nations and leaders in their respective areas of influence. Spain is the natural leader of Southern Europe, serving as a key link between Europe and Africa and connecting the Medi-

terranean Sea to the Atlantic Ocean.

Indonesia, an archipelago of 17,000 islands, is the natural leader of its region as the largest country in terms of population, land area, and economic value—making it the regional giant. Its strategic location, linking the Indian and Pacific Oceans and controlling critical maritime chokepoints such as the Malacca, Sunda, and Makassar Straits, further reinforces Indonesia's pivotal role in the region.

Beyond these geopolitical factors, both nations share fundamental principles of mutual respect, which have fostered a long-standing and stable diplomatic relationship. Spain and Indonesia established diplomatic ties in 1958, and since then, cooperation has been positive and robust in sectors such as defense. However, there are significant opportunities for further collaboration, which should be leveraged to enhance the level and intensity of bilateral relations.

Both countries should strengthen its ties based on common desires for peace, belief in multilateral global order and for the prosperity of both nations. The pivotal roles that Spain play in EU and Indonesia in ASEAN should serve as foundations to also bring both regional groups closer. Strategic alliances of both regions will help address global conundrums

such as conflicts in the Middle East and Europe, climate change, and efforts to reverse globalization.

1.3. OBJECTIVES AND SCOPE

This working document, jointly written by Javier Gil Pérez, Professor at the Pontifical Comillas University, and Dayu Nirma Amurwanti (Binus University, Indonesia), aims to present ideas to promote greater collaboration between two countries that deal with similar challenges and share a vision of the emerging world order based on international norms, where multilateralism plays a crucial role in shaping a new global architecture, with peace and global stability as key objectives.

This document is structured as follows. The discussion begins with outlining importance of EU and ASEAN strategic partnership to navigate global turn of events, followed by describing the reason and the need for Spain and Indonesia to strengthen bilateral relations and how both countries should serve as gateway for stronger EU and ASEAN cooperation. Finally the working document provides recommendations of how domestic and foreign policies should be shaped to bolster connections and deliver better quality of life for the population.

2

EU-ASEAN STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP ARE KEY TO NAVIGATING GLOBAL TURN OF EVENTS

EU's Strategy for Cooperation in Indo Pacific recognizes Southeast Asia and ASEAN's significance. The Indo Pacific will host more than 90% of middle class in 2030 (EEAS, 2023), with ASEAN becoming one of the world's largest economies and drivers of growth. With tension between the US and China intensifying globally, ASEAN's centrality – in ensuring that the regional association and member states playing key role in maintaining regional stability and rules based order – is a key pillar to EU's strategic partnership to ASEAN. EU and ASEAN shares commitment in maintaining secure, free, open maritime routes, rules based order and security – which is fundamental to ensuring safe passage of trade vessels passing South China Sea between the two regions.

Both regions have understood the need for a strategic partnership and committed to undertake this

further. EU and ASEAN signed a Plan of Action to Implement ASEAN EU Strategic Partnership of 2023-2027, which paves the way for cooperation in the field of politics and security, economic development, social and culture and other cross pillar fields of cooperation. The partnership is built upon a shared vision on respect for human rights, active promotion of peace and sustainable development. The primary areas for the partnership includes trade, investment, economic openness and connectivity; promoting multilateralism, working together in preventing and addressing global issues such as health pandemic, climate change, and promoting digital innovation, and most importantly in maintaining security.

ASEAN and EU member states, individually and combined, hold immense significance. In 2025, the size of ASEAN economy is over USD

2.5 trillion; EU 19.9 trillion of aggregate GDP (World Bank, 2025)– with a combined population of more than 1 billion people. Both are therefore key actors in global trade and economy. Although with different degree of integration, both groupings practice what is defined as ‘open regionalism’ where intra regional trade and integration is encouraged while at the same time keeping the region open to external trade partners. Most importantly, both ASEAN and EU are influential in shaping global politics. Both regional groupings and member states believe in the values of multilateralism – with active participation in key issues such as human rights and climate change.

ASEAN and EU have been working closely together. The inter regional dialogue, and recently, strategic partnership (signed in 2020), have been built over 5 decades of constructive relations. The first Asia – Europe Meeting (ASEM) was inaugurated in 1996 – but this was not the first formal cooperation signed. In 1980 ASEAN and the European Economic Community signed a Cooperation Agreement which outlined areas of formal cooperation, and in 2007 the Nuremberg Declaration on EU-ASEAN Enhanced Partnership expanded the cooperation to include democracy and human rights, climate change, among others. While

the next logical step would be to sign a Free Trade Agreement, Indonesia and Malaysia have blocked further negotiation after the passage of EU’s anti deforestation policy affecting their palm oil exports. Bilateral negotiations with the two countries have continued, and it is in the interest of the broader EU and ASEAN region for issues to be resolved (ASEAN, 2025 and CIL,2025).

ASEAN citizens’ perception of EU has improved over the years. A recent survey by ISEAS Yusof Ishak Institute indicates that level of trust across respondents in 10 ASEAN countries in 2025 is better (51.9%) compared to last year (41.5%), based on EU’s perceived strong leadership in issues such as climate change, its efforts in championing international rule of laws and its economic strength.

It is imperative for the two largest regional groups, ASEAN and EU to act swiftly in the face of changing global turn of events. Figure 2.1.i on income elasticity – indicating influence of demand in major trading partners such as the US, China, Japan, and EU (driven by economic growth in the respective partners) – illustrates that degree of EU’s influence varies across major ASEAN economies. The recent and dramatic spur of events triggered by the US’ wage on tariff against countries from which they have trade deficit with

2. EU- ASEAN STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP ARE KEY TO NAVIGATING GLOBAL TURN OF EVENTS

– have sparked reactions: reciprocal tariffs, rise of protectionism and plans for industrial reshoring. Multilateral institutions, i.e. the Bretton Woods institutions such as the WTO, the World Bank and the IMF who are founded to gatekeep global trade and economic order – have not been able to stop, let alone support emerging economies in coping with increasingly restrictive trade,

rerouting of trade destinations and alliances – and the financial implications with movements of capitals and investments. With its combined population size, economic strength and share in global trade, ASEAN and EU should be able to combine forces and at least try to support member states by shifting trade and investment alliances.

Country Elasticity				
	1.49	1.07	1.45	0.66
	0.37	0.35	0.33	0.39
	1.28	0.95	1.11	0.45
	0.89	0.64	0.90	0.71
	1.24	0.94	1.02	0.43

Figura 1: Income elasticity of major ASEAN countries against trading partners.

Source: Bloomberg (Q4, 2024).

Note: Every 1% decrease in China's GDP, indonesia's GDP will decrease 0.39%. /
Every 1% decrease in US's GDP, indonesia's GDP will decrease 0.37%.

ASEAN constitutes a promising trade and investment destination. ASEAN member states, on average, is predicted to grow at 4.8% in 2025 despite the global downturn, as strong domestic demands and investment will remain positive. Vietnam and the Philippines were countries with strongest growth in 2024 (both at 6-7%) – creating also growth of their middle class. Demographic wise, some countries in the region are transitioning towards ageing society, while others are still enjoying their demographic dividends. By 2045, ASEAN envisions to be a major global economic power, a center of growth propelled by digital transformation. The region also benefits from its strategic location – positioning the region as a hub for supply chain (ASEAN, 2025), and 40% of EU's trade is passing the South China Sea (EEAS, 2023).

There are also opportunities behind ASEAN's demography. ASEAN is both young and old, with some not prepared to age. UN World Population Prospects states that median ages among ASEAN member states vary widely: Thailand (39.7), Singapore (35.1), and Vietnam (32.4) are aging, while the Philippines (25.3), Laos (24.3), and Timor-Leste (21.0) have much younger populations. With younger population, some member states have active and dy-

namic workforce that industries can tap into. For some countries shifting to ageing population, there is a need to learn from other regions – such as EU – to prepare health and social policies and services for their population. In fact, health care is an industry that is enjoying significant growth – with digital healthcare predicted to grow on average at 8.6% from 2024 to 2028 (UN, 2025, World Development Indicators, 2025 and ASEAN, 2025).

ASEAN member states are increasingly concerned about climate change and have been going to greener development trajectory. Survey of ASEAN citizens in 2025 by ISEAS Yusof Ishak Institute indicated that climate change and extreme weather events is the top of respondents' minds (more than 55%), followed by economic concerns. ASEAN member states such as Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, and Vietnam are among the 13 major emitting countries that will also be highly exposed to climate hazards. EU has positioned itself as a global climate leader, (Oberthur and Dupont, 2021) and has been a major contributor to development aid (including in climate) in the region (EEAS, 2023). The success of global climate change mitigation and adaptation also rests partly in ASEAN Member States' climate undertakings. Countries such as Indonesia,

Malaysia and Vietnam are home to vast tropical forest, the fast-growing region are major consumers of energy and Singapore has pride itself for becoming a regional leader for climate innovation and finance (Overland and Seah, 2024)

The ASEAN Digital Economy Framework Agreement (DEFA) potentially promotes one of the largest digital economic regions. The Agreement (with negotiation to be concluded in 2025) prompts member states to begin discussing interoperability of payment systems, having regional regulatory framework for data protection, Artificial Intelligence (AI) and digital governance. Considering that EU has more advanced Information, Communications, and Technology (ICT) regulatory framework, infrastructure, and education, there are potentials for cross learning and investment in this space. ASEAN's digital economy is approximately US\$400bn in size 2021, with a potential to reach US\$2trn by 2030 (ERIA, 2023, ASEAN, 2025 and EIU, 2025).

ASEAN member states are broadening their strategic alliances. In 2024, Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand and Vietnam have begun their accession as new members of BRICS – in addition to 9 emerging nations as new partner nations. The original BRICS countries—Brazil, Russia, In-

dia, China and South Africa—founded the grouping to counter Western dominance in multilateral institutions such as the WTO and the World Bank and lessen reliance to US dollars (EIU, 2025). As partner nations they are now able to access financing from the New Development Bank. At the same time, two ASEAN countries, Indonesia and Thailand are in the process of accessing the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), to also benchmark and align themselves in broader groupings – more akin to Western standards. With the US tariff policy, ASEAN member states are expected to increase trade with Japan, India, and Middle Eastern countries. ASEAN and its member states, therefore, is looking at multipolarity and power balance rather than choosing sides between the US and China (Memon, 2021, EIU, 2025).

2.1. STRENGTHENING BILATERAL RELATIONS: IMPERATIVES FOR SPAIN AND INDONESIA

Spain and Indonesia constitute two important economies and leaders in EU and ASEAN, respectively, with ability to influence and shape regional and global policies. Stronger bilateral ties will also bring about people closer, foster mutual understanding

and dialogue between political leaders, strategic defense cooperation to defend global order and maintain peace and potentially generate better quality of life.

2.1.1. Cooperation in Politics, Security, and Defense

Spain and Indonesia share a rich history of cooperation in the field of security and defence. During the 1980s and 1990s, both nations jointly developed the CN-235 aircraft, which was the result of cooperation between the companies CASA, currently part of Airbus, and PT Nurtaño. The origin of this collaboration arose from Indonesia's need to seek an international partner for the construction of aircraft intended for the transport of troops and population throughout Indonesia. The person in charge of this task, Jusuf Habibie, contacted his former university friend and the president of CASA, Enrique de Guzmán, to carry out this mission (Gil, 2015). After arduous negotiations, the first aircraft factory in Bandung was launched, developed by both companies, and which operated for more than a decade, until the severe economic crisis of 1998, which caused the abrupt end of technological cooperation between both countries.

This satisfactory and sustained collaboration over time highlights that Spain and Indonesia can once again become important partners in the field of security and defence, and both can become reliable extraterritorial allies.

At present, Spain and Indonesia show similarities and differences in their strategic environments and, therefore, their needs in terms of security and defence present divergences, but also common necessities, which may generate synergies for joint collaboration.

Here, two major areas of cooperation clearly emerge, focusing on the transfer of military equipment and joint production in the field of defence, along with greater cooperation between the Armed Forces and police forces of both countries in the maritime domain.

The first of these focuses on the transfer of technology and the joint development of weaponry. Spain has just completed, through the company Navantia, the milestone of developing its first submarine with domestic technology (Navantia, 2023). In other words, it has managed to guarantee its strategic autonomy in submarine development. This aspect is key in the relationship with Indonesia, due to the historical connection of the shared defence industry and, on the other hand, to the

urgent need for the renewal of Indonesia's submarine fleet, even more so considering the recent and unfortunate accident of the Indonesian submarine Nanggala in 2021, where the entire crew perished (Novi, 2021)

This cooperation in the field of joint production in the defence sector could also be accompanied by other important vectors for Indonesia, such as radars for maritime use and transport aircraft like the C-295 (Tata). A model that, in another example of cooperation of Spain, is already being built by Airbus together with the Indian company Tata, and where the first aircrafts are already being produced. Future collaboration that would replicate the past success of the CN-295.

This important collaboration in the defence sector within the naval domain would follow the path set in the past with the CN-235 and, in more recent times, with the sale of the KRI Bima Suci, a training ship of the Indonesian navy, which was produced at the Freire shipyard in Vigo for around 50 million euros and has been sailing the world's seas since September 2017 as a training ship, similar to the Juan Sebastian Elcano training vessel (Panyue, 2019)

Within the collaboration in the naval field, the Spanish company Navantia clearly emerges, manufacturer of the submarine and with broad

experience in technology transfer programs to other countries, some of them close to Indonesia, such as Australia, for the construction of destroyers or submarines in Malaysia.

This greater collaboration in defence implies overcoming three important obstacles.

The first of these is the institutional one, where it is not only necessary to update the Memorandum of Understanding signed in 2013 (Santosa, 2013) between both countries in the field of defence, but also the 2018 defence pact, which aimed to deepen cooperation in the defence sector but has not been fully developed (Parameswaran, 2018). Alongside this, neither of the States, Spain and Indonesia, have a specific strategy concerning the other, which reflects a limited interest. This is an aspect that must be promptly reviewed.

Secondly, there are budgetary limitations in both countries to meet such cooperation, linked to low defence spending. In fact, Indonesia stands at 0.73% and Spain at 1.43%. (Sipri) Although the EU as a whole, and Spain in particular, are going to increase their defence spending, it remains to be determined where those allocations will go and how they will be used. In Indonesia, an increase in defence spending is also expected, but the rise must be significant. Therefore, it is necessary

to clear the fog before being able to advance. This open debate in Spain also presents important investment opportunities, where cooperation with a country that shares a successful past of collaboration can be reflected once again.

Thirdly, Spain competes with at least two other European countries for influence in the region, and specifically in Indonesia. France and Germany, both countries with a defined strategy towards South-east Asia, and especially France, are ahead in this race for influence (Tari-gan, 2025). Their territorial presence in the region, their nuclear forces, supported by military drills in the region, their powerful defence industry with significant sales to Indonesia, and above all, their willingness to lead the EU in the region in matters of security and defence, make it a serious competitor that could limit Spain's efforts. This implies the design of a medium- and long-term strategy that positions Spain as a relevant actor in the region and with respect to Indonesia, taking into account its specific objectives, its own limitations, and the competition from its European partners.

The second area of cooperation in the field of defence focuses on the fight against terrorism, mainly centered on two vectors: improving the capabilities of the State's

security forces and, on the other hand, enhancing the processes to combat jihadist ideology through programmes of deradicalization, integration, and dismantling of terrorist groups (Ipac, 2024). This cooperation should be carried out through the creation of joint working groups that exchange harmonious experiences for both countries, and here Indonesia has abundant and valuable experience that could be shared with Spain when addressing the issue of jihadist terrorism.

The various deradicalisation programmes for jihadist terrorists in Indonesia, and some brilliant initiatives in their reintegration, deserve detailed study by Spain. Alongside this, the voluntary dissolution of what was the largest jihadist terrorist organisation in Indonesia in the first decade of the 21st century, Jammah Islamiyah, represents a milestone that must be analysed to improve the capacities of Spain's security forces and its institutions in the fight against terrorism (Abuza, 2024). For this reason, an important path opens up for deep collaboration between two countries that have suffered from jihadist violence.

The third area of cooperation focuses on the maritime domain, which is key for both countries and regions, as reflected in the ASEAN Maritime Outlook and in the EU Maritime Se-

curity Strategy, and where our interests and objectives converge. In this domain, both countries express their nature and where both enjoy great experience. In fact, Spain was the first country in the European Union to develop the first strategy focused on Maritime Security, specifically in 2013, demonstrating leadership in Europe within the maritime field (Gobierno de España, 2013).

Cooperation in this field focuses not only on the Spain-Indonesia duo but also on the EU-ASEAN one.

The EU has long had extensive experience in maritime operations such as EUNAVFOR Operation ATALANTA, which has been extended until February 2027, CRIMARIO I and II, ASPIDES, etc (EEAS, 2025). All these maritime operations against piracy have had as their ultimate objective the maintenance of key maritime routes both in the Indian Ocean and in adjacent areas such as Africa, keeping them open and free from threats.

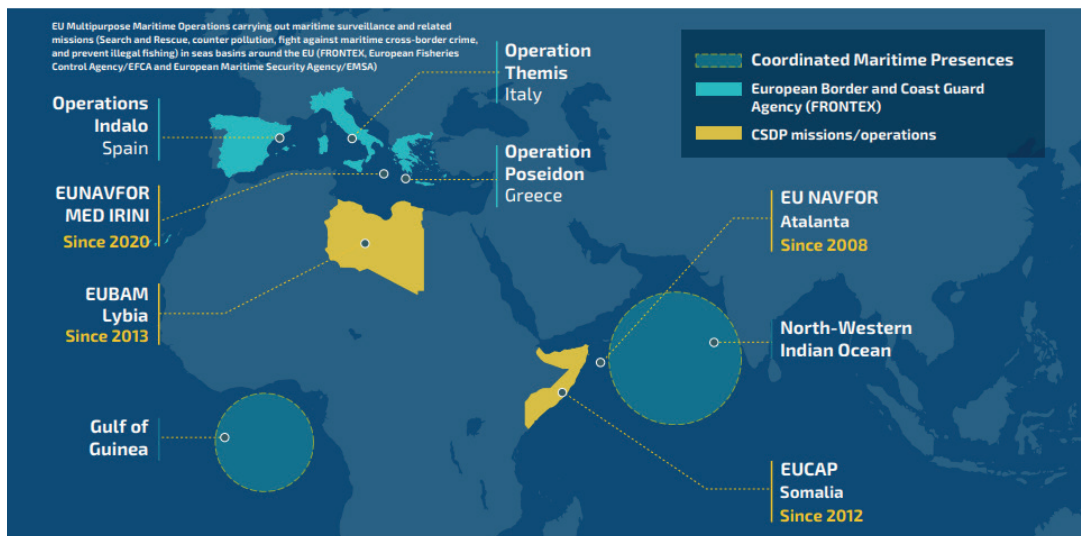


Figura 2: EU maritime security around the world.

Source: <https://safety4sea.com/ecsa-welcomes-the-updated-eu-maritime-security-strategy/>

Therefore, the good practices learned in the various maritime operations could be replicated and applied through EU-ASEAN cooperation in the Eastern Indian Ocean environment or in the South China Sea itself. Alongside this, the naval exercises between the EU and Indonesia, which first took place in August 2022 in the Arabian Sea, must be strengthened and continued. Indonesia is a country that is awakening growing international interest, and neither the EU nor Spain should fall behind.

Alongside this, and at the state level, cooperation in this area could crystallise in several directions.

Firstly, Indonesia could help Spain to elevate its status as a global maritime power by collaborating in the inclusion of Spain in an organisation where Indonesia plays a key role, namely IORARC, where other European countries such as France, the United Kingdom, or the EU itself are already integrated.

Along with this, it would be very beneficial for both countries if Spain could participate, at least as an observer, in such powerful exercises as Super Garuda Shield (Prabowo, 2025) on the land level or Exercise Komodo on the maritime level. Both manoeuvres would undoubtedly help Indonesia to project greater strategic autonomy by supporting

the participation of extraterritorial actors and, secondly, by supporting Spain's role as a responsible country in maintaining a strategic environment in Southeast Asia free from threats. European countries such as Italy, France, Germany, or the United Kingdom have already participated in them, and Spain must join these exercises that are gaining increasing relevance if it wishes to elevate its status in the region.

Alongside these two initiatives, Indonesia has much to contribute to Spain through its own accumulated experience in managing such complex maritime domains as the three vital straits located in Indonesia, namely Malacca, Sunda, and Makassar, as well as the entire maritime border with Malaysia and the Philippines in the Sulu Sea, with the aim of combating the various illicit traffics that pass through its waters along with the terrorist groups that operate in this maritime domain.

At the Spanish level, Spain can and must collaborate with Indonesia not only in improving maritime capabilities, as previously mentioned, but also in three areas where Spain has evident experience and where sharing it with Indonesia could prove beneficial.

The first of these focuses on the delimitation of maritime boundaries, as a core element in defend-

ing the maritime sovereignty of the country, reflected not only in its territorial waters but also, and above all, in the EEZ and the continental shelf. In the case of Indonesia, although it is not fully affected by the conflict in the South China Sea, it maintains open maritime disputes with other countries in the region. In this context, Spanish assistance could be beneficial in resolving such disputes and would contribute to reducing tensions in the region.

Secondly, the control of maritime borders and the entire extensive system of both in-person and remote surveillance emerges. Spain, as a country at the crossroads between Europe and Africa, enjoys broad experience in border management that combines maritime and land domains, and the sharing of best practices would be of great value to Indonesia. Alongside this, it could provide material support for the modernisation of unmanned ve-

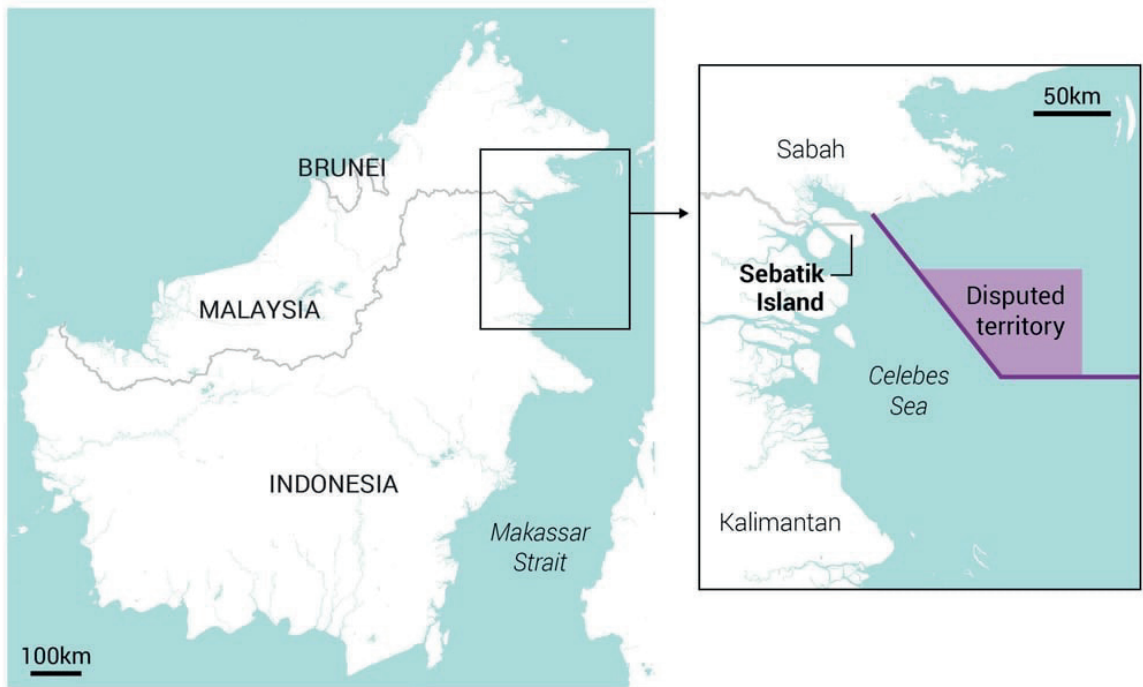


Figura 3: Indonesia-Malaysia maritime dispute.

Source: <https://www.scmp.com/week-asia/explained/article/3163035/indonesias-land-and-maritime-border-disputes-malaysia>

hicles, both aerial and underwater, as well as the strengthening of coastal and port surveillance mechanisms (Pascual and Martin, 2024). This aspect is key for Indonesia, as the country is greatly affected by the incursion of fishing vessels from other countries in the region into its waters.

Finally, Spain could make available to Indonesia its experience in border management and its collaboration with Frontex, the European Border and Coast Guard Agency.

Within Spain's commitment to Indonesia, Spain must not only be a clear defender of UNCLOS as a key legal basis in the maritime domain, but there must also be greater material cooperation to support the rhetoric of engagement. Therefore, the donation of coast guard vessels is proposed as a gesture of goodwill. Donations of ships and other types of naval equipment are common in the region, with notable examples being Japan (Talosig-Bartolomé, 2023) or India (Singh, 2023), which in the past have gifted patrol boats to the Philippines and Vietnam, respectively.

In addition, and replicating what was done with the Philippines and Vietnam, the EU could establish a subcommittee for maritime cooperation and working groups to give continuity to its commitment to ASEAN.

Within the areas of mutual cooperation, three main fields emerge:

Firstly, the exchange of information and best practices in the protection of two vital aspects for both maritime nations: submarine cables, marine oil and gas pipelines, and the management of maritime traffic in the key straits of both countries—Gibraltar on the Spanish side, and Malacca, Sunda, and Makassar on the Indonesian side.

Secondly, the prevention and management of natural disasters and crises. Spain and Indonesia share the experience of having witnessed major natural catastrophes, such as the 2004 Tsunami or the recurrent floods in the capital, Jakarta, and other locations; and in the case of Spain, the effects of the Dana in Valencia in 2024, the maritime volcanic eruption on the island of El Hierro in 2011, or the more recent nationwide blackout in April 2025, are examples of nature's destructive power and of the dangers that threaten industrial societies.

This highlights the need to share experiences in the management of these and other natural disasters and, above all, to examine what measures have been implemented in both countries to mitigate the effects of nature's deadly blows (González, 2024)

Thirdly, the possibility arises of facilitating visits by Indonesian naval and air forces to Spain and vice versa, replicating the French model (Ma-

2. EU- ASEAN STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP ARE KEY TO NAVIGATING GLOBAL TURN OF EVENTS

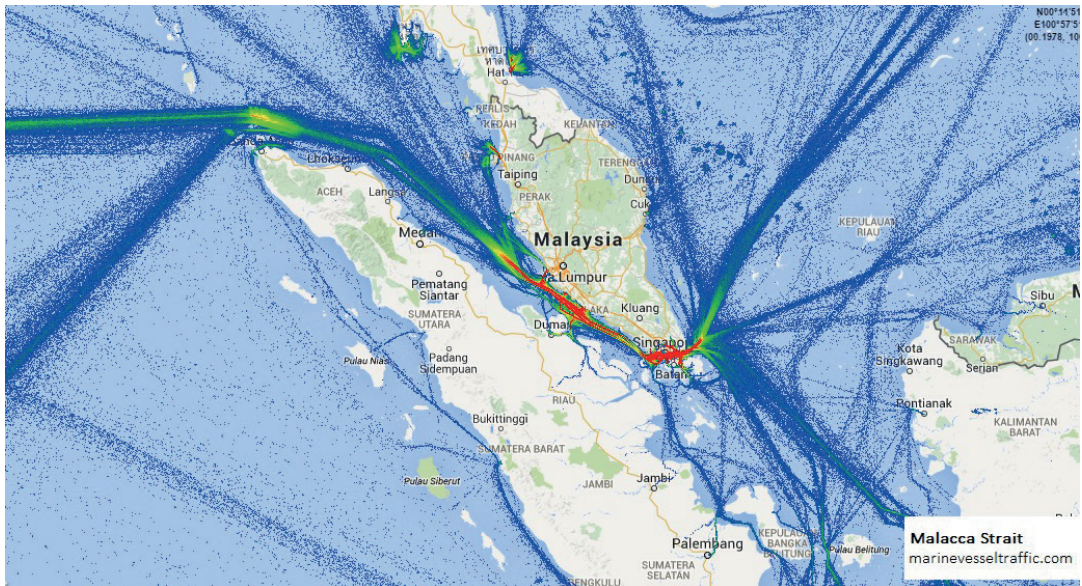


Figure 4: Maritime traffic at Malacca Strait (May, 15th 2025).

Source: <https://www.marinevesseltraffic.com/MALACCA%20STRAIT/ship-traffic-tracker#google.vignette>

hadzir, 2025), with the aim of developing cooperation ties between both nations and making Spain present in a key region of the world. In fact, the proposal includes, in particular, the execution of bilateral military exercises in the maritime domain, an aspect that would undoubtedly reinforce Spain's presence in the region and vice versa.

Fourthly, it is noteworthy the absence of leadership by the EU and ASEAN in the crisis caused by the Houthis in their attacks on ships transiting through the Gulf of Aqaba. In response (Salhani, 2025), a remarkable proposal for joint col-

laboration would focus on reducing tension within the region, placing special emphasis on national reconciliation in Yemen and the stability of the entire Arabian Peninsula, taking into account the strong ties that both Spain and Indonesia maintain with many countries in the region, such as the United Arab Emirates or Saudi Arabia.

Fifthly, the joint question arises of how to address the technological revolution and the dilemmas that emerge regarding security and defence. In this context, important avenues of collaboration open up in areas such as AI, space exploitation

and exploration, or quantum computing. Therefore, it is recommended to establish working groups between universities and Think Tanks that create spaces of collaboration and mutual trust, laying the foundations for high-level technological cooperation in the medium and long term.

Alongside these three major areas of cooperation in security and defence, four other fields of collaboration emerge, linked to regional and global peace and stability, which should be explored by both countries.

Interreligious Dialogue: Indonesia and Spain can lead a much-needed interreligious dialogue that helps to improve understanding among different religions at the global level. Indonesia, as the country with the largest Muslim population in the world, also hosts other religious faiths such as Christianity, Buddhism, or Hinduism, making it a religious melting pot (Guler, 2015). On the other hand, Spain, although predominantly Catholic, also possesses a religious legacy linked to Islam and Judaism. This makes Spain a country where religious mixture and coexistence are a key element in its past and present history. Both nations have overlooked this valuable treasure that should be used to reduce global tensions.

This interreligious dialogue must establish bridges of communication and understanding between East

and West and must help to reduce interreligious tension at the global level. The situation in the Middle East, the tension between India and Pakistan, or the rise of religious extremism in regions such as Africa, make it necessary to establish paths of interreligious cooperation. Spain, with its good relationship with the Vatican, and Indonesia, with its role in the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, can be leaders and promote activities that address this issue,

The second area of cooperation focuses on the mutual support that both countries can provide each other within various international organisations and in the ongoing reconfiguration of global power. On Indonesia's side, the EU has a significant deficit in its participation in some of the most important security mechanisms developed by ASEAN.

Three stand out above the rest: the East Asia Summit, the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting Plus, and the Expanded ASEAN Maritime Forum (EAMF). The EU must elevate its status within ASEAN if it wishes to play a greater role in international affairs and especially in the Indo-Pacific. Alongside this, the EU itself does not yet have a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership with ASEAN, a situation that does not reflect the EU's importance to ASEAN, particularly in the economic sphere.

On Spain's side, Indonesia must be supported in its legitimate aspiration to be included in the OECD and thereby gain access to an important club. At a shared level, both nations must cooperate for a New Multipolar Order that is more fair and democratic, (Santoso, 2024) and this implies, among other things, the reform of the United Nations Security Council and of a broad range of international treaties, especially those related to Security and Defence, mainly those concerning Arms Control, to bring them up to date. It is more urgent than ever to reform the Non-Proliferation Treaty or the Convention on the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons or Biological Weapons.

Within the framework of the United Nations, Spain and Indonesia could better coordinate their participation in Peacekeeping Operations, leading new missions. Their contribution to UNIFIL has been very important, so both countries could lead future operations.

Alongside this, the situation in Myanmar demands greater cooperation between the EU and ASEAN and, of course, between Spain and Indonesia. Within the maritime domain, the Indian initiative for the Indian Maritime Economic Corridor emerges as a maritime route connecting India and Europe. This initiative could be decisively sup-

ported by both Spain and Indonesia, as maritime powers, by collaborating in maintaining peace and security in the Indian Ocean.

Alongside this, ASEAN is called to play a key role in the reconfiguration of global power and especially within the Indo-Pacific as the central organisation in the region. And ASEAN has much to teach the European Union itself when it comes to navigating global tensions between the USA and China. If there is a region and an organisation that has masterfully adapted to geopolitical changes, it is ASEAN. Therefore, it is necessary to establish joint working groups that show the EU how to manage asymmetric relations with respect to the USA and China.

2.1.2. Cooperation in Investment and Trade

There is a potential for EU to be a top trading partner to Indonesia, with Spain as a major beneficiary to this increased trade flow. According to the Indonesia's Statistics, in 2024, Indonesia's top exports were manufactured products, followed by mining products, and agricultural commodities – mostly going to China, the US, Japan and India. While Indonesia's industrialization requires raw and auxiliary materials

and capital goods most were imported from China, Singapore, Japan and Malaysia. FTA negotiations between Indonesia and EU have started since 2016, with little progress reported. Sticky points in the negotiations include EU's sustainability standards, Indonesia's nickel protectionism, among others. Now more than ever, the two need to reach a consensus to seal trade agreements and divert trade away from the two current largest economies (EIU, 2025).

Indonesians believe that EU's global influence and power will grow. A survey conducted by the European Council on Foreign Relations in November 2024 across 16 European countries, and 8 non-European countries revealed that Indonesians believe that the EU is a serious contender to US and China, with possibility for the grouping to enhance its global influence (ECFR 2024).

Bilateral economic partnership agreement negotiation needs to conclude soon. There is now a time

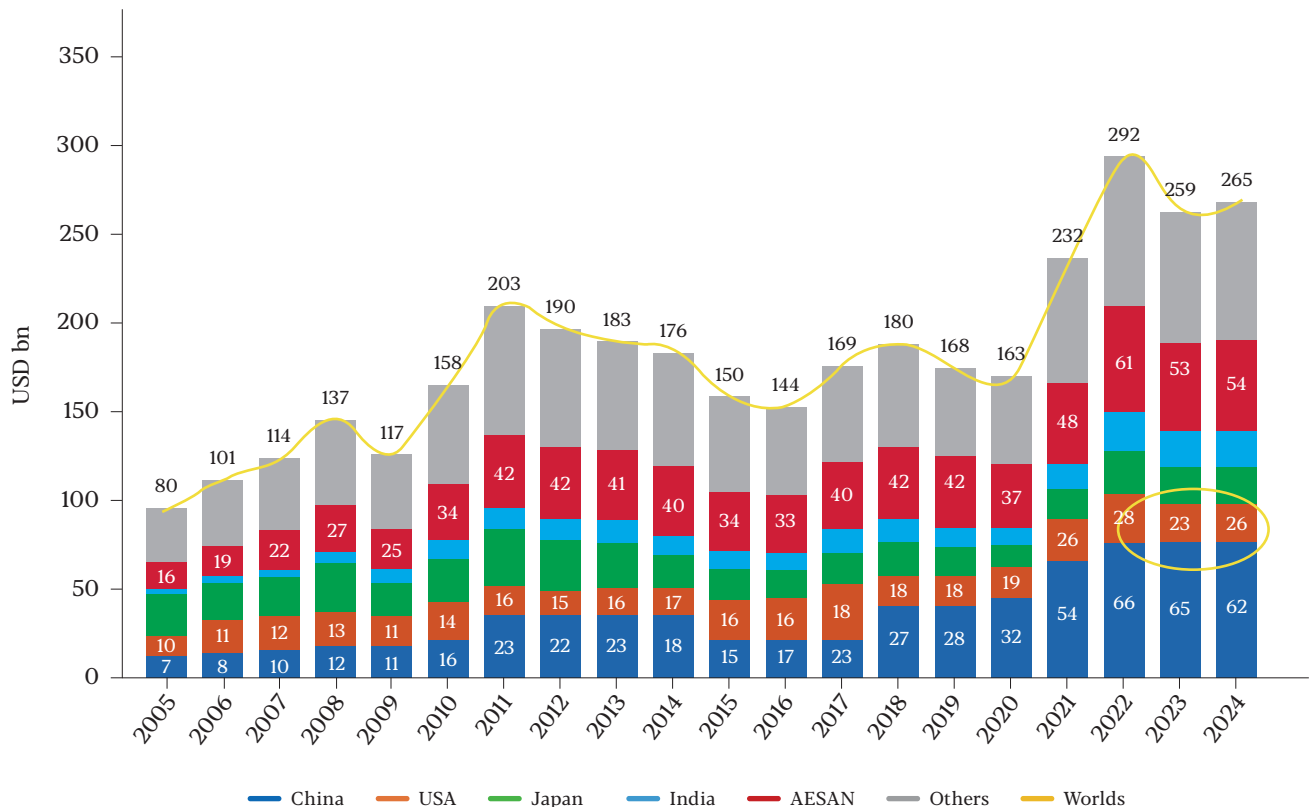


Figure 5: Indonesia's export destination, based on size (bn USD).

Source: Indonesia Bureau of Statistics, 2025

pressure for the negotiations to conclude – there needs to be political consensus and pragmatic solutions on how to move forward with two sticky points: EU’s anti deforestation policy and Indonesia’s ban of mineral ore exports. Without the agreement, both EU member states, particularly Spain and Indonesia are losing time in accessing free market access – while US and China’s tariff war is ongoing.

Indonesia is an attractive destination for investment and trade.

With a population size of 278.8 million people, almost 50 million of them classified as middle class (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2024) – domestic spending has been key to its ability in maintaining demand and therefore growth. In this sense, the Consumer Perception Index and Purchasing Managers’ Index remain positive in 2025 (at 126.4 and 52.4 respectively, all expansionary), with retail outlook remaining promising. Indonesia’s economy is expected to grow around 5% in 2025 (IMF, 2024).

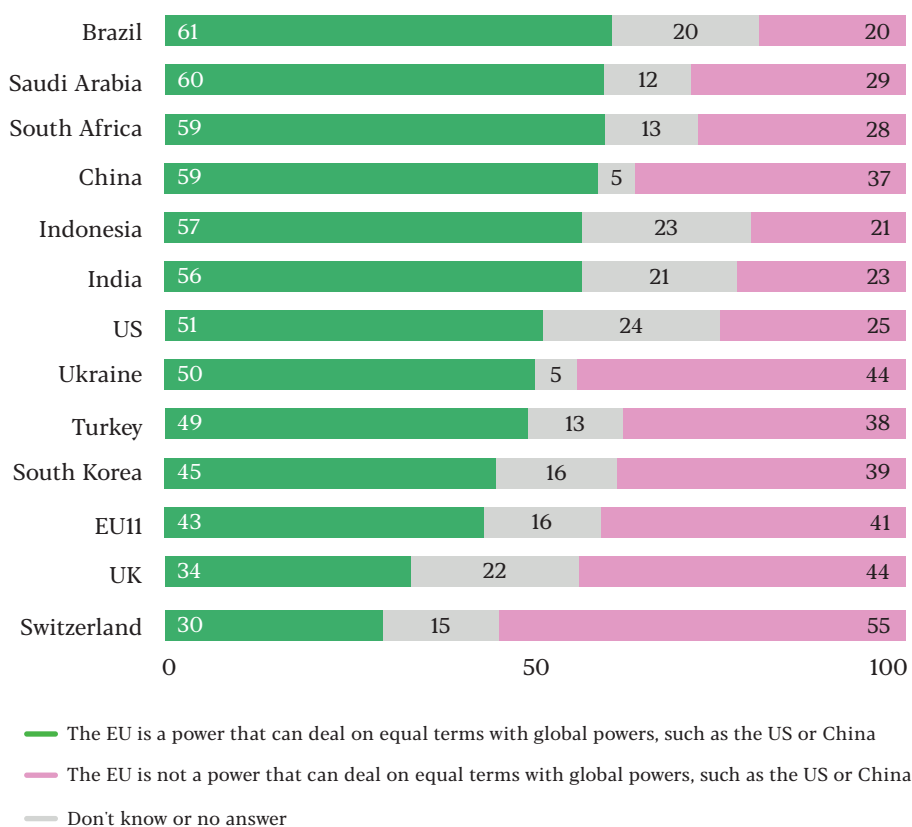


Figura 6: Perception of EU’s global standing against US and China.

Source: ECFR (2024)

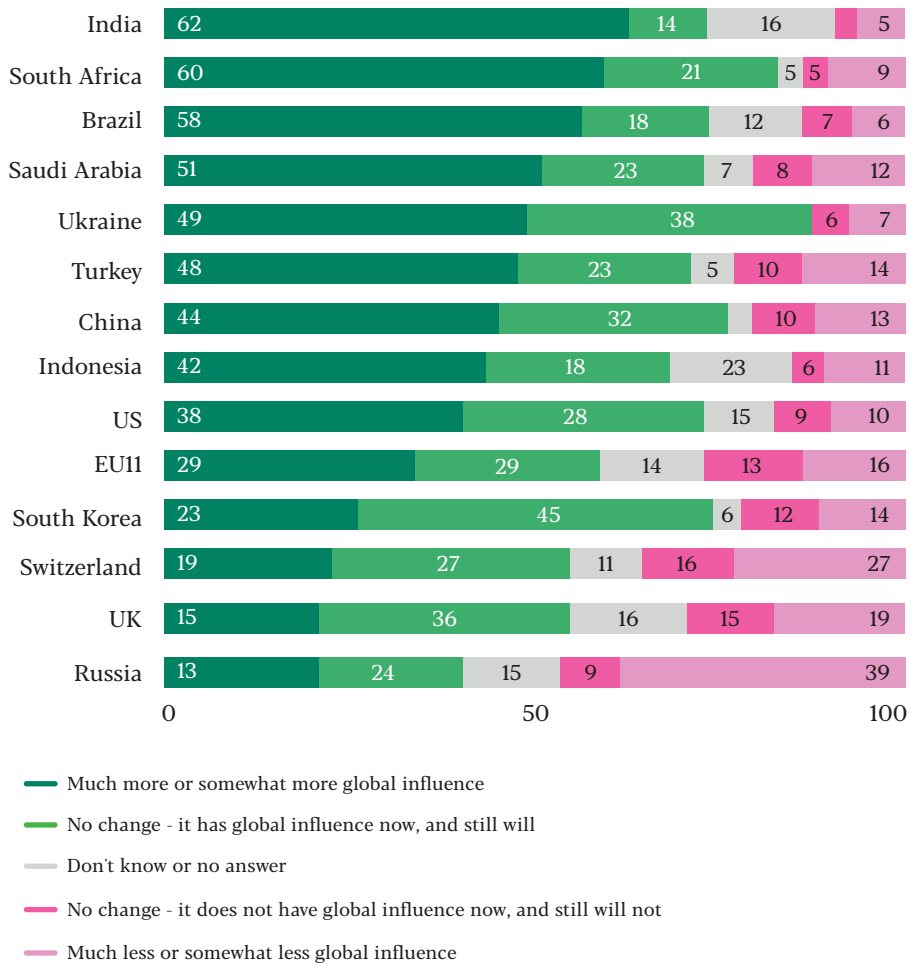


Figura 6: Perception of EU's future global influence.

Source: ECFR (2024)

This is driven by the country's strategic move to downstream its industries and shifting transfers and mobilize growth to eastern part of Indonesia. The manufacturing sector is expected to contribute to approximately 20% of the Gross Domestic Product (Coordinating Minister of Econom-

ic Affairs presentation, 2025). The Economist Intelligence Unit predicts that this sector will grow at 5.3% in 2025, offsetting declining exports of commodities such as palm oil – this will also trigger acceleration of imports for machineries and raw materials. The credit growth remains

stable above 10%, indicating that private sector investments and consumption have not been deterred by lackluster global economic outlook. This makes Indonesia attractive as a market and investment destination (EIU, 2025).

Industrial down streaming will encourage imports of industrial equipment, demand for consumer goods remain strong. The government's push towards industrial down streaming, promoting processing of minerals, production of Electric Vehicles, promotion of green industries warrants massive investments and capital goods – which needs to be sourced externally, and Spain as a

major producer and exporter of capital goods and automotive parts and products should begin considering Indonesia seriously.

Indonesia's game plan in navigating current global tariff war lead to structural trade and industrial policy reform. Indonesia, among other Southeast Asian nations remain optimistic that it will be able to navigate the ongoing US -led tariff war. In the short term, it has pre-empted US spike in tariff by ramping up exports to the US and China upfront, creating a trade surplus in the first quarter of 2025 and providing adequate foreign reserves for the country to address short term shocks in

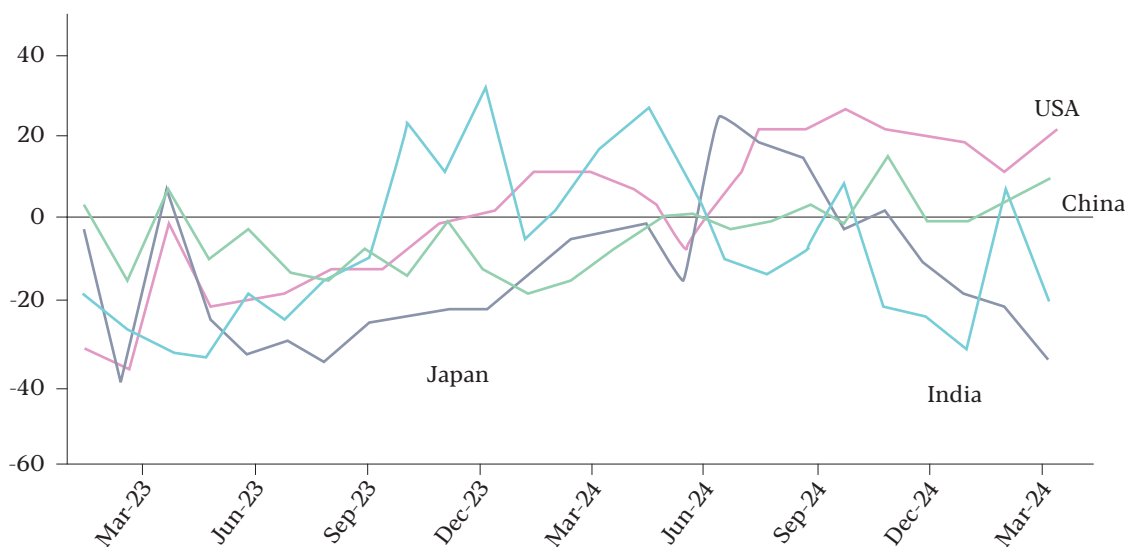


Figure 7: Indonesia's Uptick in Exports in the First Quarter of 2025 in Anticipation of US – China Tariff War.

Source: Indonesia Economic Monitor, World Bank, May 2025

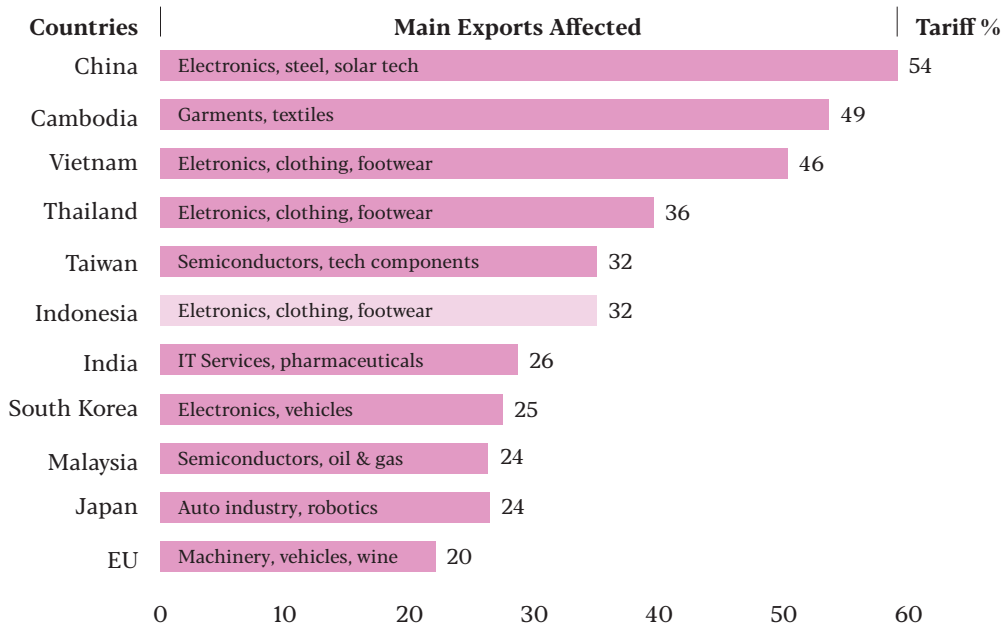


Figura 8: US Tariffs Rate, Global Effects and Indonesia.

Source: WorldVisualized, Bank Mandiri Economic Outlook presentation, April 2025

the remaining year (World Bank, 2025). Unlike China and other countries retaliating the US move with reciprocal tariff, Indonesia chose to negotiate with the US. With its export share to the US reaching 2 % of GDP, the government promised trade and industrial policy reforms: cutting import quotas, deregulating import licensing and permits, and reducing local content requirements (EIU, 2025 and World Bank, 2025). The effects of these reforms will be far reaching beyond the US, but also other trade partners.

Indonesia is looking to lessen the tariff blow domestically and regionally. Among other ASEAN members, Indonesia faces the 5th highest tariff hike from the US, after Vietnam, Laos Cambodia and Thailand – with its electronics apparel, footwear and natural resources commodities' exports worst affected (World Bank, 2025). These are labor intensive industries – and the Government is preparing short term income and employment alternatives while considering longer term strategies to diversify its risk. In the region, Indo-

nesia is set to influence Malaysia as the 2025 ASEAN Chair to produce a collective position and statement in response to US and China's tariff war, while promoting intra ASEAN trade to grow the regional demand and hence enhancing its resilience against similar shocks.

Strengthening bilateral cooperation in trade and investment is timely as Indonesia and Spain are diversifying trade partners and alliances. In response to weakening multilateralism, countries have turned to regional, minilateral groupings and strategic alliances – and Indonesia is no exception. Indonesia has publicly stated that it refused to be cornered to pick a side between China and the US. Indonesia is in the process of formally joining BRICS and OECD, with both organizations representing more than 40% and 60% of global trade respectively. As part of ASEAN, it welcomes further integration of the bloc and enjoy benefits from its free trade agreement external partners i.e. Australia, New Zealand, China, India, Japan, and South Korea). ASEAN and its FTA partners, except India, are part of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP). It is already part of the G20 group of the world's largest economies, Recent overseas trips of President Prabowo to a number of Middle Eastern nations and now ac-

tive participation Organization for Islamic Cooperation indicated that the country is pivoting in this direction (World Bank, 2025, EIU, 2025). Spain's exports had mostly been to the US and Western Europe – and private businesses are looking to pivot and diversify to Southeast Asian economies, primarily Vietnam, Philippines and Indonesia (UNCTAD, 2025). Among many areas of cooperation in trade and investment, this document will highlight five key areas, while digital innovation is laid out in a separate section.

Firstly, digital innovation is at the forefront of Indonesia and Spain's growth strategy. Spain has one of the most robust digital infrastructures, with ambitious roadmap under Digital Spain 2026 – charting its course to be a global contender. It is currently promoting private and public sector investment in innovative enterprises involving quantum computing and AI. Indonesia's adoption of digital technology and IA is relatively novel, but private sector interest and government support guarantees growth, warranting investment, infrastructure, and skills.

Innovation and Digitalization

ASEAN Community Vision 2045 represents is aspiration to foster

innovation driven growth and economic development. Currently its member states benefit from robust and thriving manufacturing and tourism, and most countries are now set towards becoming innovation-based economies. Digital economy has emerged as a new growth engine in key ASEAN countries. The region now aspires to be a global hub -thus warranting investments in education and skills development, in infrastructure, and most importantly in reforming and developing innovation enabling policies and incentives (ASEAN, 2025).

Information Communications and Technology (ICT) sector has grown 9% annually in the past decade in the region. This remarkable growth, however, has not been followed by proportionate increase in skills and number of workers with required ICT competencies – leaving a huge talent and literacy gap (as noted in the 2021 ASEAN Digital Integration Index). While a regional ICT talent mobility framework being developed, some countries have promoted measures to attract external talents. This is believed to only be able to meet the most immediate demand: states will have to invest in domestic skills development through both formal and vocational education.

On the other hand, Science, Technology, Engineering and Math-

ematics (STEM) education has always been a priority for EU and its member states. As the global workforce is growing more digital where AI may replace jobs, it is more important than ever for both regional groupings to ensure equal access to quality skills upgrading and education.

Secondly, both countries will benefit by working together in developing the service sector. In 2024, GDP composition of the two countries is largely similar, with majority of GDP contributed by the service sector (70% in Spain and 53% in Indonesia) (EIU, 2025 and World Bank Development Indicator, 2025). With tourism being one of the important pillars of the sector, there are many cross-learning opportunities. Indonesia's tourism infrastructure and skills development needs further upgrading – and cross promotion through events, arts and cultural exchanges and exhibitions will build better awareness and hopefully, access to tourists from both countries. The health sector is also promising – as private and public expenditure in Indonesia for health, fitness and wellbeing have increased over the years. Sports events and joint training can also be explored. Spanish sports, particularly football, have been popular in Indonesia – there is a need to explore how this can also be capitalized. Tennis has also been

growing in popularity – thus providing rationale to exploring how population in both countries can enjoy and take part in sporting events through exchanges, friendly matches, and other events.

Thirdly, manufacturing and industrial down streaming is also a key opportunity. Industry is also the second biggest contributor to both countries' GDP in 2024. While Indonesia focuses more on natural resources extraction, Spain is more inclined towards manufacturing and energy (including renewable energy production). Spain, having one of the largest renewable energy operator companies in the world (Iberdrola) can benefit from Indonesia's natural resources industry and investment in down streaming and move towards more sustainable energy. Indonesia also produces nickel and copper, (ranking first and seventh largest producers respectively by metric ton) – all important to production of iron and steel products, batteries among others (UNCTAD, 2025 and EIU, 2025).

Fourth, with US imposed tariff, Indonesia is forced to look elsewhere pharmaceuticals. There are potentials for joint research and development, investment for pharmaceutical production and trade. Spain has the fourth largest pharmaceutical industry across Europe

– dialogue between health officials, and businesses should ensue to explore potentials.

Fifth, bilaterally, trade in agricultural commodities should be strengthened. Another sector worth mentioning is agriculture. Spain's agri-food industry is projected to be worth over \$57.17 billion in 2025, while Indonesia's is projected to be worth over \$46.42 billion (EIU, 2025). The types of commodities and agricultural products produced are different in the two countries and the increase in trade will further diversify products for consumers. At the same time, Indonesia is open to investments in agricultural technologies and processing.

Key reforms to promote competitiveness are underway. Competitiveness has been a key economic and administrative target to the country's administration. Indonesia's World Competitiveness Index has improved since 2023, and much have been achieved in easing imports, streamlining logistics and import processing in key sea and airports. Currently, 69% of Indonesia's imports are subject to non tariff measures, compared to just 31.1% in Thailand and 38% in Vietnam. The import permit system is complicated – with more than 400 items being restricted or prohibited, mostly in forestry, agricultural, mining,

cultural heritage products, scrap metal and even low priced goods (World Bank, 2025, and EIU, 2025). Indonesia recently issued the Job Creation Law aimed at streamlining investment regulations and systems, bringing about greater transparency, and risk based monitoring.

2.1.3 Exploring cooperation in digital innovation

The adoption and use of digital technologies in both EU and ASEAN have been growing at a rapid pace, thus warranting closer cooperation beyond investment. The EU- ASEAN Strategic Partnership states that both regions will support implementation of ASEAN Digital Masterplan 2025 – including in technical assistance and knowledge exchanges relevant to digital governance, cybersecurity, sustainable digital services, support to global trade, and other Information Communications and Technology (ICT) areas. Commercial transactions, information and data exchange have raised issues such as risks to cybersecurity and personal data security, enforceability of laws and contracts, digital divide and possible displacement of workforce unable to keep a pace with digital knowledge. At the same time, advancement in digital inno-

vation brings about unprecedented growth in knowledge, opportunities to transact and access employment opportunities, attainment of efficiency and automation, business and logistics cost reduction, and better quality of life overall. With digital innovation being pillars of development and growth in both Indonesia and Spain, exploring cooperation in this space is essential. The potentials are outlined below.

Firstly, majority of Indonesians are connected to mobile phone service and broadband internet. It is currently a nation with the fastest growing internet access among adults in Southeast Asia, with more than 74.6% (or approximately 212 million people, mostly in the upper income group) of its population connected. In 2025, there are 356 active cellular mobile connections – equivalent to 125% of the population. Most of these are broadband connections (3G and beyond) There is still, however, serious urban-and rural divide – in addition to income and education related gap – to fixed broadband connection due to limited broadband infrastructure. The country also ranks 5th in internet engagement, behind Philippines, Brazil, Thailand and Columbia. People mostly utilize the internet intensively for communications, social media, and leisure applications.

Indonesia is considered as a social media capital of the world – with its internet users spending on average 6 hours a day on social media (World Bank, 2025).

Secondly, E-commerce and the digital economy are rapidly growing. The e-commerce platform has allowed mostly households to diversify their income – particularly for women, youth, and those temporarily disconnected from the labor market. The growth, however, is constrained by challenges related to data and transaction security, payments and logistical issues, and internet connectivity. Digital based employment has benefited workers with better skills (unfortunately, most are urban men), and it is expected that with increasing digital uptake by firms, adoption of AI in big, small and medium enterprises will further expand the need for skilled workers (World Bank, 2025).

Thirdly, digital and innovation policies have worked in favor of Health technology and Education technology’s advancements. Indonesia’s health technology and education technology are growing rapidly. The government of Indonesia launched One Health digital platform, which connects individuals with primary health care providers, and adoption of digital health consultations, pharmaceuticals, and

health and fitness applications is growing (Futri and Naruetharadhol, 2025). Edutech, on the other hand, has benefitted from previous administration’s focus to improving teacher quality and education (including lifelong and vocational learnings) through digital platforms and increase adoption of ICT (OBG, 2024). With Spain being ahead of the curve among other EU member states, exchange and investment in this space has numerous potentials.

Finally, to align with EU and ASEAN strategic partnership priorities, knowledge exchange between regulators and policy makers between the two countries in improving digital governance is an important first step to ensure security and inter operability of investments and transactions between the two countries. This will also support both countries in identifying required investments in education, skills upgrading and infrastructure to address divide between rural and urban areas, between age groups and gender, and levels of education and digital literacy.

Stronger cooperation between the two regions are particularly relevant to anticipate the growing competition in technological innovations between the US and China. China has transformed its growth tagline from “Made in China” into

“Invented in China” with serious investments and ambitious targets of making innovation driven economy to contribute more than 10% of its GDP. Both EU and ASEAN member states will be priority markets now that the US posing restrictions to Chinese technologies and products. There will be growing interface with Chinese technologies or Chinese powered technologies, manufacturing processes, and investment. With Southeast Asia having not only geographical proximity but preferential trade agreements with China – to be ahead of the competition EU needs to bring to bring EU companies, technologies, and investments closer to Southeast Asia.

33

PROTAGONISTS OF COOPERATION

*Spain and Indonesia as a bridge
between the EU and Southeast Asia*

Spain can and must play a greater role in the relations between the European Union and ASEAN. However, it is necessary to be realistic about the current level of relations between both regional institutions, and also to begin a deep reflection on the shared values and interests upon which joint construction can be based.

This aspect is key, since there is great potential for growth in the relations between Indonesia and Spain, but also, and above all, between the EU and ASEAN. However, political will, sustained leadership, continuous effort, and mutual trust are needed to elevate the relationship to higher levels consistent with the current state and changes in the World Order.

A new world order, which has witnessed, over the past four decades, the transition from the old Cold War to an aggressive competition between great powers, with more conflicts and greater inter-

national tension. This competition demands a deep introspection regarding the role of both the EU and ASEAN, and above all, about how the relationship between them should be shaped. In this complex era of profound change, Spain presents significant value for Southeast Asia and for ASEAN as a regional organisation. This importance is based on three main variables.

Firstly, due to the good relations that both nations have maintained since their beginnings in 1958. Relations free from major disputes, which allow these two middle powers to work together on shared objectives such as stability and prosperity for both Europe and the Indo-Pacific. A cooperation based on shared values and interests which, although at times may be clouded by a lack of internal cohesion in both organisations, are difficulties that can be overcome if addressed from the elements that unite us. Moreover, both countries complement each other

perfectly, as shown in the previous pages; they respect one another and maintain closely aligned positions on major global dilemmas.

Secondly, because Spain is not only a gateway to the European Union, but above all, a gateway to Latin America (Sanchez, 2023) and North Africa. This aspect is of notable importance, as it grants the bilateral relationship a significant capacity for projection beyond its regional borders. Both North Africa and Latin America are regions of growing interest for ASEAN and the EU, and in this regard, Spain must play a leading role.

Thirdly, both countries defend multilateralism as the main tool in international relations, and this defence is key to confronting the global problems we face. A world in which regional borders have been blurred in the face of global threats, demands intense cooperation, and geography has placed both countries in key areas for the stability of both the Indo-Pacific and the European Union itself.

Along with this, both Spain and Indonesia enjoy stable relations with both the United States and China, placing them in a privileged position to act as drivers of dialogue and cooperation within their respective regional organizations and geographic spheres. This positioning gives them the potential to

help reduce rising global geopolitical tensions. Therefore, both countries should commit to maintaining strong and balanced relations with these two global powers.

On the other hand, Indonesia as a founding member of ASEAN and one of the largest economies in the region, needs to be cognizant of Spain's importance in Europe and other parts of the world and hence constructs strategies and measures to bring the two nations together. Indonesia's bilateral relations with Kingdom of Spain have entered its 67th year – and Indonesia's foreign policy needs to reflect its intention to expand and strengthen current ties and scope of cooperation. Both countries have recently signed a financing agreement for a fisheries project, and have recently stated intent to work together in other areas such as defense (Indonesia Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2025). While these are important first steps, a more comprehensive strategy and high level political dialogue should also be considered.

4

THE WAY FORWARD

Finally, and with the objective of improving relations between both countries, a series of actions emerge in the institutional sphere that would support greater cooperation between the two countries in the medium and long term.

Firstly, it would be very appropriate to increase both the level and intensity of institutional communication, in order to make Indonesia a priority partner in the region. It is surprising that the last President of the Government of Spain to officially visit Indonesia was Felipe González in 1988 (Jaúregui, 1988) although it should be noted that President Pedro Sánchez visited Indonesia in 2022, but for the G-20 Summit. Conversely, Indonesia should now consider Spain as an important ally and partner – with mutual support in issues of common interest such as promoting multilateral solutions to conflicts, countering terrorism and terrorism financing, addressing climate change, and sustainable development.

Therefore, the last presence at the highest level was that of Queen Sofía in 2007. As for Indonesia, Suharto was the last leader to officially visit Spain, returning the visit made months ear-

lier in 1980 by King Juan Carlos and Queen Sofía to Indonesia. At present, Indonesia is a country that has been frequently visited by our European partners, such as France, Germany, or the United Kingdom. President Prabowo, on the other hand also did not include Spain as part of his official presidential visit to Europe early in his term.

It is necessary to schedule high-level visits, as well as ministerial-level visits, in the short and medium term, with a view to establishing in the future 2+2 working dialogues. All of this aims to elevate our bilateral relationship with Indonesia to the level of a Strategic Partnership and, just as other European countries such as France, Germany, Italy, or the Netherlands have done, to establish Development Partnerships that more clearly define the bilateral relations between both countries. High level Ministerial Dialogues or even thematic/ sectoral dialogues (in areas such as trade, defense, digital connectivity, sustainable development, tourism, education) can be pursued to prepare either state visits or meetings between the leaderships – possibly resulting in a launch

of tangible and politically visible sets of cooperation.

Secondly, this greater institutional representation must be complemented by a stronger physical presence of the Spanish diplomatic network and other institutions linked to Spain, such as the Cervantes Institute, the Spanish Chamber of Commerce, or other instruments of Spanish action abroad. At present, Spain has an embassy in Indonesia and a consulate in Bali. If we compare this with some of our neighbouring countries, the figures are low. Indonesia should also amplify its efforts in promoting Indonesia's interest and its citizens in Spain by offering and organizing people to people events, exchanges, and scholarships. The Indonesian Embassy and Consulate in Spain should also do a better job in connecting Indonesian companies and enterprises to its Spanish counterparts.

Therefore, it is proposed to increase both the number of attachés at the embassy in Indonesia and to reinforce the consulate in Bali. Interestingly, the Embassy of Spain in Indonesia does not have a defence attaché, as this position is located in Australia—an aspect that limits the message of Spain's desire for cooperation with Indonesia in the field of defence. Likewise, Indonesia's defence agreements – currently signed

with France, South Korea and Saudi Arabia, other than Spain (Jakarta Post, 2023) – should also materialize in the form of investments in defence technology, security dialogue and technical cooperation.

In addition, efforts to foster people to people connection should also be taken with youth engagement in mind. Youth ambassadors can be selected in the two countries, with their mission being promoting exchanges between youth – be in arts and culture, in research and education, sports, featuring specific features and characteristics between the two countries. As Indonesia's social media users are among the highest in the world, engaging youth also potentially raises broader awareness and sparking interesting, mind provoking conversations.

Besides this, education is key in the future of bilateral relations. At the educational and research level, cooperation between Spain and Indonesia remains limited, as neither country considers the other a priority destination. As a result, cooperation agreements between universities in both countries are still few in number and are primarily focused on student exchange programs.

There is, therefore, enormous potential to intensify and expand not only student exchange initiatives at the university level, but more impor-

tantly, to promote joint research efforts in sectors where both countries are leaders—such as the agricultural, marine, and industrial sectors. In addition, there is a clear opportunity to foster collaboration in key future sectors, including space technology, cybersecurity, quantum computing, and the critical minerals industry, among others.

Thirdly, Spain must commit to Indonesia through a singular strategy that, while aligned with the EU's Indo-Pacific strategy, also responds to Spain's own interests. Spain should seek an important ally in Indonesia within the region to break a possible future Sino-American bipolar order. It is necessary to articulate stable alliances that advocate for a multipolar order in which middle powers such as Spain and Indonesia can generate positive synergies. A bilateral strategic dialogue between the two countries will likely be welcomed by Indonesia, as in the experience with the United States of America, Denmark, South Korea and other states. The partnership may cover a broad range of topics/areas of interest – spanning from trade and investment, politics, security and human rights, to culture and arts.

Therefore, it is recommended for Spain to establish a special and unique strategy for Indonesia, similar to what other European coun-

tries have implemented regarding other Asian nations, such as Germany with a focus on India (The Federal government).

Finally, it is proposed to identify driving actors to first maintain and then promote dynamism in the relations between both nations. In this regard, companies such as Navantia, Airbus, Sol Meliá, as well as prominent Spanish civil society representatives highly regarded in Indonesia, could serve as communication levers—among them, the Professional Football League. The identification of these actors and their enhancement in the host country would serve as a communication channel with our Indonesian counterparts. As Indonesia is a country with younger demography, both countries can also work with young culture/arts/sports ambassadors with the use of social media to promote bilateral relations. Fostering mutual understanding and appreciation of each other's rich culture, fostering dialogue based on mutual trust, are, after all, the key ingredients to more fruitful and meaningful relations.

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