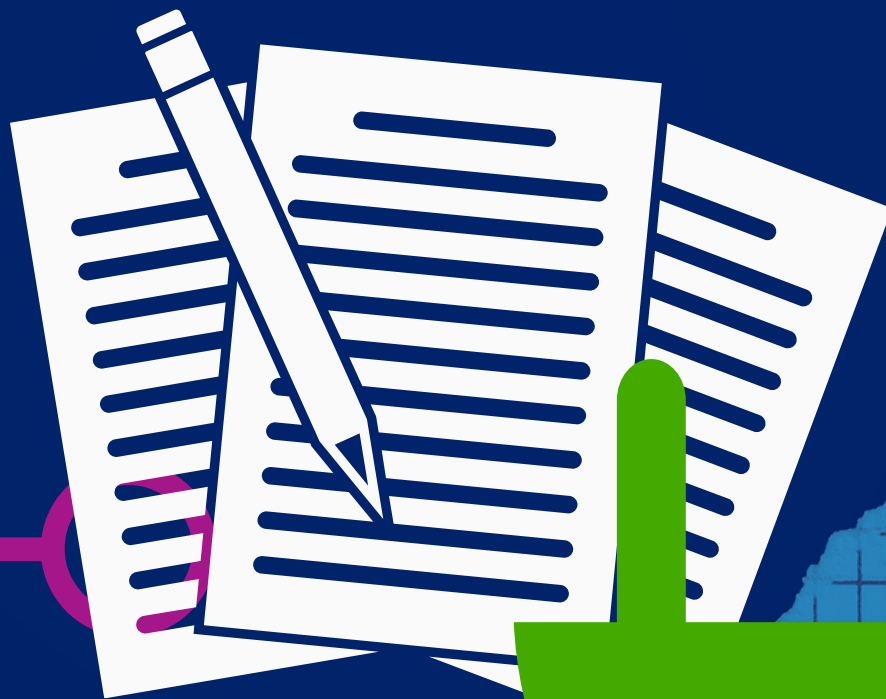


# Essay competition

EU-ASEAN synergies for a  
green and digital world

**Vincent Tadday**



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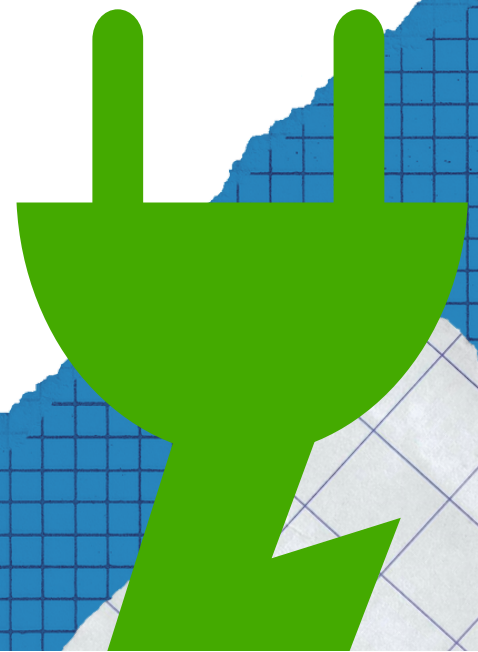


## About the author

Vincent Tadday is a third-year bachelor's student in Global Studies at Maastricht University with a career focus on policy evaluation and advice. After graduating, he will start his master's in public policy at Sciences Po Paris. Vincent is especially interested in Europe's role in a global context and appreciates working in an intercultural and interdisciplinary environment.



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# EU-ASEAN youth engagement in the twin transition of green and digital

## Introduction

Southeast Asia is highly vulnerable to the effects of climate change, including rising sea level, heat waves, floods, and droughts. Furthermore, in Europe, unpredictable and extreme weather events occur more often. As a consequence, the voices to act against the origins of these catastrophes have become louder over the last few years. Climate change is indisputably one of the most pressing challenges of our time. The European Union (EU) and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) have dramatically increased their efforts over the last decades to face this challenge.[1] However, experts and civil society actors argue that the actions taken so far are insufficient.[2]

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[1] European Union External Action, "ASEAN and EU enhance cooperation on Environmental Protection and Climate Change", [eeas.europa.eu](https://eeas.europa.eu), July 8, 2019.

[2] John S. Dryzek, Richard B. Norgaard & David Schlosberg, "Climate Change & Society: Approaches and Responses", Oxford Press, August 2011.

At the same time, our societies have become more aware of the opportunities digital infrastructure, literacy, and the e-economy can provide. Following the idea that the green and digital transition must go hand in hand, the EU and ASEAN could seize the opportunity to involve their young citizens as ambassadors to join forces to pursue the twin goals of green and digital.

## Towards a Young EU-ASEAN Working Group

Two years ago, Commission President Ursula von der Leyen announced that 2022 would be the European Year of the Youth. In her 2021 State of the Union address, she stated that: "Europe needs the vision, engagement, and participation of all young people to build a better future that is greener, more inclusive, and digital". [3] This declaration acknowledges the need to involve the European youth in the policymaking process and the development of political priorities. Moreover, it supports the EU Youth Strategy 2019-2027, which aims to ensure that young people are able to participate in the political decision-making processes.[4] Likewise, ASEAN declared 2022 as the Year of ASEAN Youth, which aligns with Cambodia's 2022 chairmanship theme, "ASEAN ACT: Addressing Challenges Together".[5] Policymakers in both regions have started to recognise the need to involve and engage young people on topics such as climate change and digital transformation. This awareness stems from the understanding that tomorrow's generation will live with today's decisions. This momentum has the potential to serve as the foundation for youth engagement that goes beyond the traditional frameworks of EU and ASEAN relations.

[3] Ursula von der Leyen, "State of the Union 2021", September 15, 2021.

[4] Council of the European Union, "Council Resolution of 26 November 2018", November 26, 2018.

[5] Association of Southeast Asian Nations, "#ASEANyouth2022 – ASEAN declares 2022 as Year of the ASEAN Youth", asean.org, February 23, 2022.

Studies show that the voices of young people remain underrepresented in political decision-making processes.[6] This leads to a paradox especially relevant for green and digital policies: the demographical group affected the most by the decisions made is not sufficiently involved in the decision-making processes. To ensure a successful implementation of the twin transition, young people need to be at the front of implementing the behavioural change needed. Without changing how we think and act, the green and digital transition will take too long to counteract the present and upcoming threats of the climate crisis. It is vital that representatives from the young generation are listened to, and that their concerns are acknowledged and considered. Many of them are aware of the problems regarding climate change and digitalisation. To involve young people as agents for change and to include them in the decision-making processes, the EU and ASEAN need to provide their youth with a joint platform to exchange ideas and create solutions and recommendations.

In the last few years, the EU and ASEAN have created multiple opportunities for young citizens to make their voices heard. In Europe, some of the most recent examples are the European Youth Event in 2021 and the Young European Ambassadors, an initiative focusing on building bridges between young citizens from EU member states and Eastern partner countries. In ASEAN, Youth ministers were appointed, and summits with youth delegations and experts were organised. [7] Moreover, EU and ASEAN joint efforts were first made to establish an exchange of perspectives between young Europeans and Southeast Asians. With the ASEAN-EU Youth Forum in 2017, young farmers were brought together to discuss their approaches to agriculture.[8] With the virtual EU-ASEAN Young Leader Forum at the beginning of 2022, a platform was provided to 90 young leaders to participate in different workshops and talk about similarities and differences in their perspectives.[9]

[7] ASEAN, "ASEAN Youth ministers work towards a cohesive and responsive community", November 2, 2020.

[8] ASEAN Foundation, "ASEAN EU Youth Forum", November 7, 2016

[9] EURAXESS, "EU and ASEAN invite young leaders to take part in shaping the future of the EU-ASEAN relations", February 10, 2022.

Additionally, the first EU-ASEAN Youth Summit was kicked off in December 2022 and brought together "Young Leaders" as a side event of the EU-ASEAN Commemorative Summit. The exchange of ideas these initiatives foster is a valuable step towards an established EU-ASEAN youth engagement. However, more than providing a platform is required. Policymakers need to find ways to implement the outcomes of these exchanges in the EU and ASEAN policymaking processes.

A possible solution could be launching a Young EU-ASEAN Working Group bringing together policymakers and youth representatives from all 27 EU and the 10 ASEAN member states. The working group's goal would go beyond fostering an exchange of best practices, challenges and opportunities. The youth representatives could be mandated to draft policy recommendations regarding digitalisation and green transition to be presented to the annual EU-ASEAN Summit and the EU-ASEAN Joint Cooperation Committee. As a next step, the EU and ASEAN could support the youth representatives in establishing networks and organising national and local events to educate and advocate for a green and digital transition.

Moreover, an annual or bi-annual meeting of the Young EU-ASEAN Working Group would allow collaboration consistency to evaluate former policy recommendations. Such a forum that gathers young people's ideas in a consistent, structured, and problem-based way could be a first step towards a long-lasting, strategic partnership between young people from the EU and ASEAN. Establishing this fundament for future collaborations aligns with the three ASEAN Community Pillars – i.e. the ASEAN Political- Security Community, the ASEAN Economic Community and the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community – which are already essential focus points for EU-ASEAN cooperation.[10]

[10] EU-ASEAN Strategic Partnership 2022, "The EU and ASEAN – 45 years of partnership", 2022.

## Conclusion

Young people have the potential to provide valuable input and ideas that should not be ignored. The EU and the ASEAN need to extend their dialogues to strategic partnership projects focusing on the youth to empower them. A concrete step can be made in the form of a Young EU-ASEAN Working Group being mandated to formulate policy recommendations for the EU-ASEAN Summit and to the EU-ASEAN Joint Cooperation Committee. This initiative would acknowledge young people's role in European and Southeast Asian societies. Across the continents, young people are bridge builders and agents for change. As emphasised by the European Commission President von der Leyen: "From climate to social to digital, young people are at the heart of our policymaking and political priorities". A twin transition with, by, and for the next generation is only possible through young people's direct engagement and involvement. It is time to recognise young people's role in the twin transition and to rethink how to include them in the formal decision-making processes.

[10] EU-ASEAN Strategic Partnership 2022, "The EU and ASEAN – 45 years of partnership", 2022.