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# The V4 – ASEAN Perspectives Cooperation and Diplomatic Missions in Southeast Asia and Central Europe

## Abstract

*This paper provides an overview of diplomatic missions between Central Europe and Southeast Asia and draws a picture of the political, economic, and cultural interactions between the countries of the two regions on vertical and horizontal levels. Desktop research is combined with selected theoretical views on diplomatic representation and international cooperation. A particular attention is paid to the interaction of the Visegrad Group (V4) countries with the countries of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). Descriptive empirical views are interpreted in a growing “Indo-Pacific” context. The potential of the V4-ASEAN cooperation format is recognized but not yet fulfilled, which is expected to change with implementation of the EU’s Indo-Pacific Strategy.*

**Keywords:** ASEAN, consulate, cooperation, diplomatic mission, embassy, V4

## 1. Introduction

This paper is dedicated to the Central European – Southeast Asian perspectives. Attention is given to the distribution of diplomatic representation and cooperation of the Visegrad Group countries (V4) with the countries of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). Southeast Asia is considered to be the central region in the growing ‘Indo-Pacific’ discourse, in which EU’s position might appear peripheral while

Asia is the core region. This discourse turns on a growing response from the West to the ambitious Chinese international politics. The V4 has been involved in the 'China and Central and Eastern European Countries' (China + 17/16 CEEC), which is a major Chinese multilateral initiative related to the 'One Belt One Road' in this part of Europe.

In East Asia, the V4 has formalized cooperation with Japan (V4 + Japan) and to a lesser degree with South Korea (V4 + South Korea) (cf. Dubravčíková et al., 2019). For Southeast Asia, the V4 countries cooperate with the ASEAN countries mostly on an individual basis, though ASEAN is recognized by V4 among "Other Partners" (Visegrad Group, 2021). The ASEAN is a major trading partner for China, while the European Union (EU) is the ASEAN's 3<sup>rd</sup> major trading partner. The V4 with the population over 64 million is equivalent to 5<sup>th</sup> largest economy in the EU 27 (Statista, 2020), but unlike top economies in GDP at current market prices, such as Germany, France, Italy, Spain; the V4 countries has had a modest interaction with ASEAN. This has been changing in the past few years until the coronavirus pandemic paralyzed the steady development of the V4 relations in Southeast Asia.

This short qualitative study explores vertical and horizontal levels of interaction between Central Europe and Southeast Asia. The short study focuses on two cases. The first case presents network of diplomatic missions of Czechia, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia in Southeast Asia and of the ASEAN countries in Central Europe. The second case sums up cooperation in given three areas. The overview is presented in tables. The methodology is based on desktop research with a focus on political, economic, and cultural aspects from the official diplomatic and governmental sources such as the diplomatic corps, consular lists and websites, providing the primary data.

The literature on Central European – Southeast Asian relations *per se* is lacking. Regarding information sources for this analysis, a portion of undirect or related sources were examined as secondary data. The secondary literature mostly covers academic and local media articles related to the topic. This study is rather empirical and descriptive, filling a gap in literature. The theoretical base stems on international cooperation and diplomatic missions. The study seeks insights to the two following problems: 1) what is the coverage of the general V4 – ASEAN diplomatic representation in Central Europe and Southeast Asia; and 2) how the V4 and the ASEAN countries stand with cooperation in the political, economic, and socio-cultural areas.

In assessing the cooperation and diplomatic representation of a group of countries for another region, this analysis was conducted in two steps – abstraction and decomposition. For abstraction it is creation of a model to solve a problem, in this case which V4 countries have what representation in each Southeast Asian country, and which ASEAN countries have what diplomatic representation in a given V4 country. For decomposition it is the identification of key information and going into a problem based on an analysis of smaller elements of diplomatic representation – e.g. which examples of the political, economic, and cultural cooperation are mostly visible.

## **2. International cooperation and diplomatic representation**

International cooperation is a cornerstone of international relations. Theoretically it stems on empirical knowledge and practice in international politics. According to Dai, Snidel & Sampson (2017), today's study of international cooperation is influenced by constructivism and agent modelling leading to new challenges to a rational approach. There have been occasional shifts from a realist to a neorealist view that stress pessimistic assumptions for new cooperation possibilities. The pragmatic side of traditional diplomacy underwent changes in the turn of 1980s and 1990s with globalization, in which dependency effects were blended with a geo-economic interests of nation states. Globalization brought new actors, such as non-governmental organizations, international institutions, trans-national corporations, who opened new channels of international cooperation. It contributed to horizontal development of sectoral cooperation. Major themes in the contemporary study of international cooperation include reciprocity and reputation, different strategic settings, problems of relative gains, large number of actors as a limit, domestic politics, effects and distribution of sources of international institutions (Dai, Snidel & Sampson, 2017).

The diplomacy as a tool for dialogue and mediation leads us to the explanation of actions among governments of different countries (Steizen, 2018). The diplomatic representation is a broad category, which involves various different levels that delegate national interests. Apart from traditional diplomacy of a nation state, Steizen (2018) divides such a representation further on: non-state representation (e.g. multinational

corporations), supranational representation (EU, ASEAN and to some degree the Visegrad Group), subnational representation (such as sister cities) and the transnational representation (such as non-governmental organizations). The diplomatic mission involves a diplomatic representation of the sending state with the host state. This function is maintained by the embassies and consulates. According to the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations from 1961, the diplomatic missions are implemented by diplomatic agents in order to perform and develop friendly relations that will contribute to the international peace and security. The diplomatic agents are represented by heads of missions (ambassadors) supported by members of diplomatic staff. The functions cover protecting the national interests within the international law, negotiations with host country, promotion of political, economic and cultural relations, among other (United Nations, 2005). The embassies, consulates and permanent representations serve as sources of local information and knowledge of host countries, providers of assistance to all nationals and national subjects (corporations, organizations, individuals, etc.) of the country represented by the mission, and last but not least, the platform for development of bilateral relations (Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs, Luxembourg, 2021).

Public diplomacy is one of the primary objectives of state diplomacy. It covers a scope of activities such as cultural events, cultivation of country image and country branding, a channel of state propaganda, visa administration and communication with a host country, among others (Mellisen, 2005). This scope has been developing over the past decades. An important variable is the good or best practices, which as a category is based on successful projects and negotiations that lead to significant spill-overs generated by related areas, such as joint business activities or democracy building efforts. It goes together with the soft power, a concept that has become popular in academia and politics, which is based on attractiveness and persuasion of one country towards other countries (Nye, 2004). It includes cultural factors leading to persuasion without coercion, unlike hard power which stems on strong economy and military. As Mellisen states (2005), the power of persuasion has become a key requirement for the EU's success in the world through the means of cultural diplomacy.

New trends in diplomacy include the diplomacy for sustainable development and the knowledge diplomacy (also science diplomacy) that are upcoming relevant academic trends in the pandemic-recovery era, in the post-truth era and in relation to the climate change (Macaspac Hernandez,

2021). Volker Stanzel explains (2018) that the modern diplomatic practice operates in new conditions of the digital era. Here the digitalization of diplomatic agenda, on one hand, makes the diplomatic practice more efficient and flexible, with better tools to gather local intelligence and synthesize it in a diplomatic output; on other hand, it makes the whole structure more susceptible to cyberthreats, espionage from outside to inside of embassies, or the social media that has become also a diplomatic tool as a channel of public diplomacy and a source of criticism and disinformation. Last but not least, the personal element or the personality of a diplomat has become a critical variable in diplomatic missions (Stanzel, 2018).

### 3. The V4 and the ASEAN

The EU and ASEAN, although geographically distant regional groupings, are considered as the first and the second most successful regionalisms in the world (Mahbubani & Sgn, 2017). The EU forms a market of up to 450 million consumers, while ASEAN's market counts over 600 million consumers. While the EU, though with regional disparities, can be considered among the richest and most developed parts of the world, ASEAN countries are more fragmented in development. Unlike mono-cultural European civilization with democratic and capitalist systems, ASEAN nations are characterized as a multi-cultural civilization, in which one finds different political systems from autocratic and authoritarian to democratic regimes in different degree of economic and political transitions. The ASEAN is the 3<sup>rd</sup> largest trade partner to the EU, while the EU is ASEAN's 3<sup>rd</sup> largest trade partner after China and Japan in 2021.

Created in 1991, the V4 is a Central European regional multilateral initiative, community and political-cultural alliance of Czechia, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia. These countries had been converging since the fall of Iron Curtain towards EU membership in 2003 and 2004. The transition period strengthened European identity and contributed to democratization of the region, which is located just next to the Baltics, Belarus, Ukraine, and the Balkans. In 2021 the V4 countries were a faction in the EU politics and the fastest growing region in the EU that is prominent in engineering industries based on export-oriented model. The V4 as a platform is not institutionalized deeply, rather it is working on a principle of periodical

meetings and ministerial summits on an annual basis (Visegrad Group, 2021). As well, the V4 stands as a faction in the EU politics. In the past decade the Visegrad Group has been ever more opened to East(ern) Asia.

Created in 1967, the ASEAN operates within a supranational multinational institutional entity based on co-existence of different states (ASEAN, 2021). The so-called “ASEAN Way” has been guided by a consensus on problems while respecting principle of non-interference in internal affairs of different countries share in the region and beyond. As an economic union, ASEAN has become ever more important in global economy following an export-oriented Asian model of state development. With population roughly over 670 million, the 12 countries share located in the region of various levels of socio-economic development (ADB, 2021). The ASEAN binds 10 from these countries into a multilateral community addressing regional and supra-regional common interests and challenges. Known for its multilateralism, ASEAN has become an important international actor in Asia and a mediating factor for diplomatic exchange across Asia, Indo-Pacific.<sup>1</sup>

Southeast Asian centrality in the Indo-Pacific makes this diverse region a critical intersection from Indian Ocean to Pacific Ocean through the Straits of Malacca to the South China and East China Seas, and a bridge between Asian and Australian continents. Contradictory Indo-Pacific Asian Regionalisms of Chinese “One Belt, One Road” and the “Indo-Pacific” reflect growing Western-Chinese rivalry manifested in supra-regional geo-economics. In both concepts it is Southeast Asian region, which is central to successful operationalization of both regionalisms. ASEAN as the regional institution is known for its multilateral engagement and often serves as a bridge for rival actors. As a core institution one can mention such formats as Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM), ASEAN+3 (China, Japan, Korea), ASEAN+6 (China, Japan, Korea, Australia, New Zealand, India), among others.

The ASEAN has reacted on Indo-Pacific prospects with publishing the official Indo-Pacific Outlook in 2019. In the EU the only country that drafted such a response to Indo-Pacific has been France until Spring 2021, when the EU also presented a common Indo-Pacific strategy (Council of the European Union 2021). Member countries of the V4 are all involved in the China's 16+1 (also 17+1) regional cooperation which puts together some EU and non-EU Balkan countries in the One Belt, One Road. Japan as a major

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1 It is no wonder that the first historical meeting of the US president Donald Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un took place in Singapore in 2018. The ASEAN has successfully played a particularly responsible role of a mediator.

democratic country of Asia presented in 2007 in its diplomatic Bluebook the “Arc of Freedom and Prosperity”– a belt of countries from Southeast Asia to the Central Europe. In context of new Indo-Pacific strategies, Japanese Foreign Minister Motegi held bilateral talks with the V4 and presented Japan’s diplomatic position on the Indo-Pacific in spring 2021 (MOFA, 2021).

Cooperation of the EU with ASEAN follows efforts to achieve the sustainable development goals in three general areas: political security, economic cooperation and socio-cultural cooperation (EUINASEAN, 2021). These categories are also chosen for this analysis of sectoral cooperation of the V4 with ASEAN. The V4 recognizes the ASEAN among its ‘Other Partners’ in a quest for better mutual coordination of joint activities with the Southeast Asian nations in order to strengthen cooperation in various fields. As presented in the official websites of V4, the “Visegrad Group will increase efforts to coordinate the approach of the V4 countries toward ASEAN. A harmonized, joint policy could strengthen the two regions’ relations and may be a base to future cooperation in various fields.” (V4, 2021). This process is ongoing. This text may serve as a referential overview for converging areas, which gives new insights to the contemporary V4-ASEAN relations.

#### 4. Vertical Level of V4-ASEAN Interaction

The vertical level of diplomatic interaction involves governmental representation in abroad by means of diplomatic missions, in which the diplomatic representation is spread into a regional network of embassies and honorary consulates or consulates general of individual countries. The Table 1 presents locations of diplomatic missions of the individual V4 countries in individual ASEAN countries + Timor Leste.

**Table 1. The network of diplomatic missions of Czechia, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia in Southeast Asia**

ASEAN + Timor Leste	Visegrad Group (V4)			
	Czechia	Hungary	Poland	Slovakia
1	2	3	4	5
<b>Brunei</b>	Jakarta N/A*	Singapore N/A	consulate Bandar Seri Begawan embassy Kuala Lumpur	N/A

**Table 1** (cont.)

1	2	3	4	5
<b>Cambodia</b>	embassy Phnom Pehn	embassy Phnom Pehn (2021), Hanoi	Bangkok N/A	Bangkok N/A
<b>Indonesia</b>	embassy Jakarta, consulate Makassar, Denpasar, Surabaya	embassy Jakarta, consulate Yogyakarta, Denpasar, Bandung	embassy Jakarta	embassy Jakarta, consulate Denpasar
<b>Laos</b>	consulate Vientiane	embassy Vientiane	consulate Vientiane	consulate Vientiane embassy Bangkok
<b>Malaysia</b>	embassy Kuala Lumpur, consulate Kota Kinabali	embassy Kuala Lumpur, consulate Penang	embassy Kuala Lumpur	consulate Kinabalu, Kuala Lumpur
<b>Myanmar</b>	embassy Yangon consulate Mandalay	consulate Yangon	consulate Yangon closed in 2020 N/A	Bangkok N/A
<b>Philippines</b>	embassy Manila, consulate Cebu, Davao	embassy Manila, consulate Cebu, Angeles City, Davao	embassy Manila, consulate Cebu, Davao, San Fernando	consulate Manila, Cebu
<b>Singapore</b>	consulate Singapore	embassy Singapore	embassy Singapore	Jakarta N/A, Hungarian Embassy
<b>Thailand</b>	embassy Bangkok, consulate Phuket, Amphoea Mae Sai	embassy Bangkok	embassy Bangkok	embassy Bangkok
<b>Vietnam</b>	embassy Hanoi consulate Ho Chi Minh, Hai Phong	embassy Hanoi, consulate Ho Chi Minh	embassy Hanoi	embassy Hanoi, consulate Ho Chi Minh
<b>Timor Leste</b>	N/A	N/A	consulate Dili	N/A

\* N/A – not available. For the purpose of this analysis, it refers to a situation without direct diplomatic mission

Source: own elaboration.



Brunei is the only country from the ASEAN, which host limited direct diplomatic representation from V4 countries except for Poland that manages the Honorary Consulate in the capital city. Territorially large countries such as Indonesia, Malaysia or the Philippines host most of the diplomatic missions represented by embassies and consulates. There are disparities of V4 countries' representation when it comes to scope and concentration of relations. Thailand, a founding ASEAN country, enjoys particular attention and serves as a major diplomatic hub for countries in mainland Southeast Asia (known as Indo-China). Often it hosts diplomatic missions that cover diplomatic services in neighboring countries, mainly Myanmar, Laos and Cambodia. Vietnam enjoys traditional historical ties with the Central European countries as a remnant of socialist history from the bipolar period. Indonesia on the other hand serves as a diplomatic hub in maritime Southeast Asia. It hosts missions operating in Singapore (Slovakia) and Timor Leste. Malaysia hosts missions mediating somewhat distant relations with the Brunei sultanate. Only Poland has a direct representation in East Timor in the region.

**Table 2. The network of diplomatic missions of ASEAN countries in the Visegrad Group member states**

ASEAN	Visegrad Group (V4)			
	Czechia	Hungary	Poland	Slovakia
<b>Brunei</b>	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
<b>Cambodia</b>	Berlin N/A	consulate Budapest	embassy Warsaw	Berlin N/A
<b>Indonesia</b>	embassy Prague	embassy Budapest	embassy Warsaw	embassy Bratislava
<b>Laos</b>	Berlin N/A	embassy Budapest	Berlin N/A	N/A
<b>Malaysia</b>	embassy Prague	embassy Budapest	embassy Warsaw	consulate Bratislava
<b>Myanmar</b>	embassy Prague	Vienna N/A	Berlin N/A	Belgrade N/A
<b>Philippines</b>	embassy Prague	embassy Budapest	embassy Warsaw	Bratislava
<b>Singapore</b>	consulate Prague	consulate Budapest	consulate Warsaw	Vienna N/A
<b>Thailand</b>	embassy Prague	embassy Budapest	embassy Warsaw	consulate Bratislava
<b>Vietnam</b>	embassy Prague	embassy Budapest	embassy Warsaw	consulate Bratislava

Source: own elaboration.

The Table 2 displays an overview of diplomatic representation of the individual ASEAN countries in Central Europe. Again, the only country without a direct diplomatic mission in V4 countries is Brunei. The second most limited diplomatic representation in Central Europe is Myanmar, which embassy can only be found in Czechia. Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar but also Singapore have limited direct diplomatic representation and use representative offices in Austria, Germany, or Serbia. The strongest direct Southeast Asian representation is in Czechia, Hungary and Poland, the smallest in the smallest country of the V4 – Slovakia.

## 5. Horizontal level of V4-ASEAN Interaction

The horizontal level of diplomatic representation covers general sectoral areas of cooperation. This chapter focuses on three general areas often articulated in bilateral cooperation within the political, economic and cultural ties. Due to a vast scope of activities on one hand, and limited comparative available information on the other, it was necessary to generalize various elements into comparable general categories. The point here is not to give a list of all different projects and activities due to a vast empirical information, instead, the following Tables 3, 4, 5, 6 show most visible elements of cooperation from the official websites of foreign ministries and diplomatic bodies. Tourism is included in the cultural area due to the impact that contributes to mutual understanding. The economic impact is relatively small for the V4 countries, unlike EU countries such as France or the Netherlands. In general, with the exception of one-time initiatives, such as Visegrad Group cluster initiative<sup>2</sup> from the past decade (National Cluster Association, 2014), there have been no particular V4 initiatives aimed at ASEAN. From the side of ASEAN countries, in traceable information resources there have only a been few cases such as an exchange of Indonesia-V4 talks on business and trade from 2019, just before the coronavirus pandemic broke out (KIKE, 2020).

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2 This initiative was aimed at creation of sector-specific clusters operating in the V4 traditional industries, the mechanical engineering (Czechia), manufacturing (Hungary), telecommunications (Poland), and the automobile industry (Slovakia).

**Table 3. The general sectoral cooperation and exchange of Czechia and ASEAN**

Country	Political	Economic	Cultural
<b>Brunei</b>	limited	limited	limited
<b>Cambodia</b>	1956, before 1989, Sihanouk	ODA*	tourism
<b>Indonesia</b>	70 <sup>th</sup> anniversary of relations	developing	tourism, exchange**
<b>Laos</b>	strong before 1989	negligible, loans	exchange by 1989
<b>Malaysia</b>	1957	developing	tourism, exchange
<b>Myanmar</b>	1952, strong before 1989	high focus last 3 years	limited
<b>Philippines</b>	limited	security (2019)	tourism, exchange
<b>Singapore</b>	limited	strong (1 <sup>st</sup> ), investments	arts/film, exchange
<b>Thailand</b>	1974	strong (2 <sup>nd</sup> ), security	tourism, exchange
<b>Vietnam</b>	70 <sup>th</sup> anniversary of relations, support in East Sea*** dispute	developing	tourism, exchange

\* ODA – official development aid covers various projects including environmental, sustainable development, education, disaster relief. It is categorised under economic area for the economic nature of given help

\*\* Exchange refers here primarily to the student mobilities and to lesser extent the mobilities of staffers or businesses

\*\*\* East Sea refers to the Vietnamese marine toponym for the South China Sea

Source: own elaboration.

The Table 3 displays cooperation in three areas summed-up by a single box. Brunei has limited relations with Czechia in all areas. In the political area Czechia has limited relations with the Philippines and Singapore, although it is not case in the economic relations delegated by business chambers. Traditional relations with Cambodia are highlighted by the King Sihanouk who used to study in Prague and speaks Czech. Traditional relations are held with Vietnam and Laos to a lesser degree. There is a significant Vietnamese diaspora of over 80 000 Vietnamese nationals living in Czechia. In economic area Singapore and Thailand are the most important partners for Czechia. Philippines and Thailand have become importers of Czech security technologies such as arms with a potential for further trade growth. Almost all ASEAN countries are involved in student exchange in Czechia. The sector of tourism has a particular potential in case of Thailand, Vietnam, Philippines, Malaysia, Indonesia and Cambodia. Czechia has become the first country of the V4 countries with an Indo-Pacific strategy in 2022 (MZV ČR, 2022).

**Table 4. The general sectoral cooperation and exchange of Hungary and ASEAN**

Country	Political	Economic	Cultural
<b>Brunei</b>	limited	limited	limited
<b>Cambodia</b>	assistance in 1980s, opening consulates (2021)	ODA (farming, food safety)	tourism
<b>Indonesia</b>	partner	developing	tourism, exchange
<b>Laos</b>	60 <sup>th</sup> anniversary, strategic partnership	ODA (farming, food safety)	exchange
<b>Malaysia</b>	50 <sup>th</sup> anniversary 2019	developing	fairs, exchange
<b>Myanmar</b>	60 <sup>th</sup> anniversary	limited, recognized	limited
<b>Philippines</b>	limited	developing (2021)	exchange
<b>Singapore</b>	50 <sup>th</sup> anniversary 2020	strong (1 <sup>st</sup> ), investments	arts, exchange
<b>Thailand</b>	oldest relations to monarchy	strong (2 <sup>nd</sup> )	tourism, exchange
<b>Vietnam</b>	justice, defense, security	ODA, IT, business	tourism, exchange

Source: own elaboration.

The Table 4 displays general cooperation of Hungary with the ASEAN countries. Hungary enjoys generally the oldest relations from the V4 in Southeast Asia, which follows the historical heritage of Austro-Hungary Empire, the dominant political unit in Central Europe before the World War I. Relations with Brunei are limited and distant. Politically most of countries therefore have a tradition of official contacts. Hungary is involved in official development aid in Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam. Hungary has elevated relations with Laos to a strategic level in 2019 following growing mutual trade. Economically the most important partners are Singapore and Thailand, such as it is in case of Czechia. In 2021 Hungary and Cambodia opened diplomatic missions in both directions. Tourism is an important source of cultural rapprochement in both directions. Majority of ASEAN countries are involved in student exchange in Czechia, and these countries are becoming popular partner countries for Czech universities.

**Table 5. The general sectoral cooperation and exchange of Poland and ASEAN**

Country	Political	Economic	Cultural
<b>Brunei</b>	limited	limited	limited, film
<b>Cambodia</b>	limited, Phnom Pehn embassy closed in 2008	low, recognized, rice	tourism
<b>Indonesia</b>	developing after 1989	strong, diary products	exchange, dialogue
<b>Laos</b>	limited	limited	limited
<b>Malaysia</b>	50 <sup>th</sup> anniversary	developing slowly	exchange
<b>Myanmar</b>	65 <sup>th</sup> anniversary	developing since reforms	limited
<b>Philippines</b>	50 <sup>th</sup> anniversary	developing, recognized	exchange
<b>Singapore</b>	pragmatic	strong, investments	exchange
<b>Thailand</b>	50 <sup>th</sup> anniversary	strong (2 <sup>nd</sup> )	tourism, exchange
<b>Vietnam</b>	traditional, pragmatic	strong (1 <sup>st</sup> for VT)	diasporas, exchange

Source: own elaboration.

The Table 5 displays relations of Poland with individual ASEAN countries. The relations with Brunei are limited although sources show at least cultural exchange in the film industry (Muslim Tatars in Poland). With the exception of Indonesia and Brunei, Poland shares traditional political ties with most of ASEAN countries, although the economic cooperation is only developing. Vietnam, Thailand and Singapore are biggest trade partners of Poland. In socio-cultural area tourism and exchange of Poland with Indonesia, Thailand and Vietnam are on the rise.

**Table 6. The general sectoral cooperation and exchange of Slovakia and ASEAN**

Country	Political	Economic	Cultural
<b>Brunei</b>	limited	limited	limited
<b>Cambodia</b>	limited	recognized	limited
<b>Indonesia</b>	hub to ASEAN	strong	vivid, dialogue, exchange
<b>Laos</b>	recognized	recognized	limited
<b>Malaysia</b>	limited	limited but developing	limited
<b>Myanmar</b>	recognized but limited	limited	limited
<b>Philippines</b>	recognized	recognized	exchange
<b>Singapore</b>	limited	recognized, investing	recognized, limited
<b>Thailand</b>	hub to Indo-China, 1 <sup>st</sup>	developing	exchange, tourism, fashion
<b>Vietnam</b>	limited	developing, SK 2 <sup>nd</sup>	exchange, tourism

Source: own elaboration.

The Table 6 summarizes general cooperation of the smallest V4 country – Slovakia with the ASEAN countries. Comparing to Czechia, Hungary, and Poland, except for Thailand, Indonesia and Vietnam, the cooperation across the political, economic and socio-cultural areas is limited. Relations with Brunei, Cambodia, Laos, and Myanmar are reduced. Thailand has become a Slovak diplomatic hub in continental Southeast Asia while Indonesia in maritime Southeast Asia, these two countries are the major Slovak partners in Southeast Asia.

## 6. Conclusions

This analysis looked at the nature of diplomatic representation of the V4 countries in Southeast Asia and the ASEAN countries in Central Europe. It aimed at the coverage of the diplomatic representation of the V4 countries in Southeast Asia and the ASEAN countries in Central Europe, and to generalize major contours in relations leading to cooperation in political, economic, and cultural areas. The results displayed in the Tables 1–6 follow a vertical and horizontal levels based on inter-governmental interaction and main areas of cooperation that were traceable at the websites of various foreign ministries and relevant articles in the spring and summer 2021.

The vertical level of V4-ASEAN cooperation shows a distribution of diplomatic missions in Southeast Asia and Central Europe. The least contacts are visible with Brunei, Myanmar, Laos, and Cambodia, in this order. Poland to this date operates as the only V4 country consulates in Brunei and Timor Leste. Contact with these countries are held in mediation or at multilateral meetings where individual ASEAN representatives can meet the representatives from the V4 countries. In Southeast Asia, four countries have particular significance for the V4 countries. Thailand is a diplomatic hub for continental Southeast Asia in case for almost all V4 countries. Indonesia is a diplomatic hub for maritime Southeast Asia and has the highest potential for the development of ties in Central Europe. In Central Europe the smaller ASEAN countries such as Laos, Cambodia and Myanmar provide consular services located outside of the V4 countries in Berlin or Vienna. Malaysia, relatively known for an Italian fictional movie character Sandokan in Central Europe, has a rising significance for Czechia. Limited contacts with Brunei are often delegated from Malaysia. Vietnam enjoys traditional ties with V4 countries given by socialist histories.

With regards to horizontal level of V4-ASEAN cooperation, the results confirm a limited interaction among V4 and ASEAN formats except for rare initiatives such as Visegrad Group clusters, which was a one-time project. From the ASEAN countries there has been a limited number of initiatives and exchanges, in which the V4 steps up a joint multilateral representation, such as with Indonesia in 2019. However here the V4 operates only formally as an unified format, in the end such talks follow business delegations of individual countries. Best practices in cooperation of the V4 with the ASEAN are aimed at individual projects with the possible support of the Visegrad Fund. Individual projects *per se* are aimed at development-related areas such as cleaning water supply projects (Czechia, Hungary), or disaster relief support (Czechia, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia). Potential has a recent opening of the Central European universities to cooperation in science and exchange with universities across Southeast Asia. In the economic area there have been occasional talks of joint economic commissions and business chambers (Indonesia, Thailand, Singapore). Singapore and Thailand are the most significant economic partners for most of the V4 countries, while Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines show the growing trends.

The V4 does not profit enough from supranational diplomatic representation, rather the V4 serves as an umbrella in establishing exchange of ideas and business interests that are further followed separately in national diplomatic missions in various countries of Southeast Asia. One reason is that the V4 countries are not bound formally to executive supranational entity such as the member states to the EU. The ASEAN operates more globally and as a supranational institution it binds its member states closer in economic terms, but politically it does not intervene in domestic affairs that much. This reminds of the V4, although in a very different setting. Thus, the ASEAN is rather a referential umbrella, the relations are followed at national/country levels individually.

The V4 as a part of the EU does not use much a joint diplomatic representation, although it holds ministerial meetings within the member states or with a third party, so it doesn't use common instruments at disposal of national states, such as the EU. Soft power is becoming relevant for the V4 in strengthening democracy and civil societies in the Balkans and countries of EU's Eastern Partnership, so does the soft power is important for the ASEAN countries that hold a key role of the international mediator. In the case of V4, the individual V4 countries do not have a full coverage of diplomatic missions across all ASEAN states.

In few cases, a successful diplomatic mission in the countries without a direct representation depends on the personality of a diplomat and his/her abilities to gather regional intelligence in the neighboring countries with external representation from a host country, its evaluation and implementation (for instance the Slovak ambassador in Thailand for Laos, Cambodia, Myanmar).

The limits for unfulfilled potential of V4-ASEAN exchange are mostly based on geographic distance, financial and cultural differences and still a relative unawareness of both sides of the potential. Knowledge of local language is another problem that hinders in penetration to domestic markets in ASEAN. This is connected to limited capacities of the diplomatic missions. This is partly balanced with sharing and delegating diplomatic representation of one V4 country to another, such as the Hungarian Embassy in Singapore providing consular services for Slovak subjects. Or by operating in one country for the whole region, which is the case of the Slovak Embassy in Thailand.

Another limits stem on the fact that official information from diplomatic missions is often limited, untraceable without a coherent follow-up. The challenge lies in a relative unavailability of detailed or comparable published information by the ministries of foreign affairs and embassies of the V4 countries in Southeast Asian states, and of the ASEAN countries in Central Europe *vice versa*.

The foreign ministries often publish limited, poorly-structured or no information on cooperation and mutual projects in different countries. Websites of consulates are often insufficient, displaying the address of a stone branch of a given representative office or consulate, without history of local interaction, or a scale of services for the citizens. This makes the tracking of cooperation challenging. Since diplomatic missions are funded by national governments, this ambiguity prevents the new research, people-to-people exchanges, country branding, knowledge and experience. Local markets and mutual understanding. It shows the activities seem to take place behind closed doors with results hidden from the public. The only sphere that can be a good example is the higher education, here the universities with the support of foreign ministries have the leading role and potential for further inter-cultural spill-overs. However, the current COVID-19 pandemic had literally paralyzed this exchange for a time being.

The perspectives of V4-ASEAN cooperation will develop along the broader EU-ASEAN relations. The EU has been active in Southeast Asia. With publishing the EU's Indo-Pacific strategy in April 2021,



a further development can be expected, as it aims at engagement with the ASEAN-led regional architecture. Highlighting the geographical centrality of ASEAN in the Indo-Pacific, the EU prepares a new EU-ASEAN Strategic Partnership. With this initiative it is a question of time the V4 will strengthen its presence in ASEAN. Recommendations ask for a joint V4 strategy to ASEAN, or a joint V4-ASEAN memorandum of understanding; then intensification of intra-V4 cooperation in sharing diplomatic infrastructure and support for opening the joint consular services of all ASEAN countries in a given V4 country, which would be an optimal hub for interaction and exchange. One potential key activity here will be the future possible organization of the first historical V4-ASEAN meeting, which will open a new chapter in the V4-ASEAN relations.

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