



DOI: 10.22363/2313-0660-2024-24-3-427-438

EDN: YSJDTK

Research article / Научная статья

Cooperation Between Cambodia and Russia Within the ASEAN Framework

Panha Pichkhun✉, Ousaphea Yuok

Embassy of the Kingdom of Cambodia in Russia, Moscow, Russian Federation

✉ panhapk@yahoo.com

Abstract. The study examines the nature of the bilateral cooperation between Cambodia and Russia within the framework of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). The authors employ the neorealist theory, which allows explaining the foreign policy of states by the desire to ensure their national interests. The principles of historicism and scientific objectivity are used, which allowed establishing how Cambodia and Russia build bilateral relations, relying on such an authoritative regional organization as ASEAN. The most interesting aspect of relations is the political one, since in the modern realities of globalization, in addition to the military and economic aspects of bilateral interaction between states claiming a significant role in the system of international relations, it is the political aspect that is of particular importance due to the need to create a new model of global governance. The purpose of the article is to determine the role of cooperation between Russia and Cambodia in the development of the international regime under the leadership of ASEAN, which is the core of regional integration processes. To achieve this goal, the authors analyze the evolution of relations between Russia and ASEAN from their inception to giving them the status of a strategic partnership in the context of Russia's turn to the East. The authors then focus on the dynamics of Cambodia's participation in ASEAN in the context of the national interests that this state seeks to implement in its foreign policy. In the final part, it was established how the Russian Federation and the Kingdom of Cambodia interact on the ASEAN platform. The authors emphasize the large-scale structure of cooperation between Russia and ASEAN. Based on the results of the analysis of the development of the bilateral dialogue, it was revealed that Cambodia's accession to ASEAN became an impetus for the formation of mechanisms of bilateral cooperation, which was often carried out "on the sidelines" of the Association's events. ASEAN's core values have influenced Cambodia's foreign policy, contributing to strengthening its cooperation with Russia at the present stage.

Key words: bilateral relations, political dialogue, dialogue partnership, Southeast Asia

Conflicts of interest. The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

Authors' contributions. The authors made an equal contribution to the design, research and preparation of the final article's text.

For citation: Pichkhun, P., & Yuok, O. (2024). Cooperation between Cambodia and Russia within the ASEAN framework. *Vestnik RUDN. International Relations*, 24(3), 427–438. <https://doi.org/10.22363/2313-0660-2024-24-3-427-438>

© Pichkhun P., Yuok O., 2024



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License

<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/legalcode>

Сотрудничество Камбоджи и России в рамках АСЕАН

П. Пичкхун✉, У. Юок

Посольство Королевства Камбоджа в России, Москва, Российская Федерация
✉panhapk@yahoo.com

Аннотация. Анализируется двустороннее сотрудничество Камбоджи и России в рамках Ассоциации государств Юго-Восточной Азии (АСЕАН). Авторы опираются на теорию неореализма, которая позволяет объяснить внешнюю политику государств стремлением обеспечить свои национальные интересы. Принципы историзма и научной объективности позволили установить, как Камбоджа и Россия выстраивают двусторонние отношения, используя такую авторитетную региональную организацию, как АСЕАН. Наиболее интересен политический аспект отношений, так как в современных реалиях глобализации помимо военных и экономических аспектов двустороннего взаимодействия государств, претендующих на значимую роль в системе международных отношений, именно политический аспект приобретает особую значимость ввиду необходимости создавать новую модель глобального управления. Цель исследования — определение роли сотрудничества России и Камбоджи в развитии международного режима под руководством АСЕАН, являющейся ядром региональных интеграционных процессов. Для достижения поставленной цели прослежена эволюция отношений России и АСЕАН от их зарождения до придания им статуса стратегического партнерства в контексте российского «поворота на Восток». Затем изучена динамика участия Камбоджи в АСЕАН в контексте национальных интересов, которые данное государство стремится реализовать во внешней политике. В заключительной части было установлено, как взаимодействуют Российская Федерация и Королевство Камбоджа на площадке АСЕАН. Авторами сделан акцент на широкомасштабности структуры сотрудничества России и АСЕАН. По итогам анализа развития двустороннего диалога было выявлено, что вступление Камбоджи в состав АСЕАН стало импульсом для формирования механизмов двустороннего взаимодействия, которое зачастую осуществлялось «на полях» мероприятий Ассоциации. Базовые ценности АСЕАН оказали влияние на внешнюю политику Камбоджи, поспособствовав укреплению ее сотрудничества с Россией на современном этапе.

Ключевые слова: двусторонние отношения, политический диалог, диалоговое партнерство, Юго-Восточная Азия

Заявление о конфликте интересов. Авторы заявляют об отсутствии конфликта интересов.

Вклад авторов. Авторы внесли равнозначный вклад в разработку дизайна, проведение исследования и подготовку текста статьи.

Для цитирования: Пичкхун П., Юок У. Сотрудничество Камбоджи и России в рамках АСЕАН // Вестник Российского университета дружбы народов. Серия: Международные отношения. 2024. Т. 24, № 3. С. 427–438. <https://doi.org/10.22363/2313-0660-2024-24-3-427-438>

Introduction

Currently, Asia as a whole and Southeast Asia in particular are beginning to play an increasingly important role in the global economy and politics. And the countries of the region owe much of their success to the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). The strengthening of ASEAN as a recognized international organization, with its Charter, norms, principles and values has enabled it to play a central role in Southeast Asian regional affairs, to make solid progress towards the creation of the ASEAN Community, as well as to establish a strong mechanism for dialogue partnerships involving nine countries

and the European Union. As a regional organization, it has contributed greatly to the maintenance of peace, stability and development in a region torn apart by internal contradictions and conflicts.

The relevance of the research topic is related to the intensification of Russia's foreign policy in the Asian direction as part of the Pivot to the East in order to strengthen political and economic cooperation with Asian countries due to the crisis in relations with the countries of the "Collective West." In the 21st century, the countries of Southeast Asia ceased to play the role of only recipients of international changes, and increasingly these states are

becoming significant subjects of international transformations seeking to defend their point of view on issues on the international agenda. The most illustrative example is Cambodia, which, after joining ASEAN in 1999, gained significant diplomatic weight and is increasingly participating in the work of this regional organization.

The cooperation between Russia and Cambodia within the framework of ASEAN serves to embody the national interests of both countries. Structurally, the proof of this thesis is presented in the article as follows. At the beginning, an analysis of the development of relations between Russia and ASEAN, from their inception to the status of a strategic partnership in the context of Russia's pivot to the East is presented. The authors then proceeded to analyze the dynamics of Cambodia's participation in ASEAN in the context of the national interests that this state seeks to implement in its foreign policy. In the final part, it was established how the Russian Federation and the Kingdom of Cambodia interact on the ASEAN platform.

The purpose of the study is to identify the role of cooperation between Russia and Cambodia in the development of the international regime under the leadership of ASEAN, which has integrated the entire Southeast Asia and is the core of regional integration processes.

The theoretical basis of the study is the theory of neorealism. The principles of historicism and scientific objectivity were also used in the work, which made it possible to consider the cause-and-effect relationships of the development of cooperation between Russia and Cambodia. The authors relied on the works of a number of outstanding Russian scientists on East Asia and the Asia-Pacific region. Among them, a special place is occupied by the fundamental works of academician M.L. Titarenko (2008), as well as Professor A.D. Bogaturov (1997) and Professor A.D. Voskressenski (2010; 2020). For an in-depth analysis of the peculiarities of Cambodia's foreign policy, the authors relied on the works of N.N. Bektimirova (2015; 2016),

N.P. Maletin,¹ D.V. Mosyakov (2010). The processes of regional integration in Southeast Asia and the activities of ASEAN for their development are highlighted in the works of E.V. Koldunova (2015; 2017), G.M. Kostyunina (2017; 2019), E.A. Kanaev (2017; Kanaev & Korolev, 2019), G.M. Lokshin, E.V. Kobelev and V.M. Mazyrin (Lokshin, Kobelev & Mazyrin, 2019).

The History of ASEAN's Development as a Region-Wide Organization

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations was established in 1967 at the initiative of Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand and the Philippines. It emerged in a difficult historical context, marked by the early stages of nation-building in the region and the violent decolonization of Eastern Indochina.

During the Cold War, there was no idea of Southeast Asia as a single political region, as the region was the object of geopolitical competition between the United States, the Soviet Union and China. By the 1970s, relations between Moscow and Beijing had deteriorated, which led to increased internal discord within the communist camp and had an impact on the countries of Southeast Asia. Against this backdrop, the ASEAN member countries expressed their desire to rid the region of external interference by signing two important documents: the Declaration on the Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality (ZOPFAN) in 1971² and the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia in 1976.³ The latter document enshrined the principles of sovereignty and non-interference.

¹ Maletin N. P. Cambodia's Foreign Policy 1953–1998 : Student Book. Moscow : MGIMO Universitet publ., 2004. (In Russian). EDN: QOXNHB

² 1971 Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality Declaration // International Center for Not-for-Profit Law. November 27, 1971. URL: https://www.icnl.org/wp-content/uploads/Transnational_zone.pdf (accessed: 05.02.2024).

³ Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia // United Nations Treaty Collection. February 24, 1976. URL: <https://treaties.un.org/doc/Publication/UNTS/Volume%201025/volume-1025-I-15063-English.pdf> (accessed: 05.02.2024).

The principle of non-interference is one of the fundamental principles of international law, and its proclamation by ASEAN member countries had a dual purpose. On the one hand, it emphasized the unwillingness of regional countries to be the object of external intervention. On the other hand, it helped maintain the stability of internal structures and isolate local opposition from external assistance (Jones, 2012, p. 97). This enabled the ASEAN countries to demonstrate their political and economic viability, while maintaining autonomy from international players, including the United States. This principle became especially important during the conflict between Cambodia and Vietnam, which resulted in the intervention of neighboring States and devastating consequences in the region (Mosyakov, 2010, p. 391). The organization became actively involved in conflict resolution, isolating the new Cambodian Government and taking measures to limit its access to international assistance (Jones, 2007, p. 527). In the future, ASEAN aimed at closing regional problems to itself, excluding external forces from the negotiation process and demonstrating a collective position on key issues in the region.⁴

ASEAN's active involvement in resolving the Cambodian problem has led to international negotiations in the late 1980s and early 1990s that took into account the interests of the region and provided guarantees of non-interference by third parties. This period also marked the time when ASEAN developed new methods of managing the region and neutralizing external influence. The end of bipolarity allowed ASEAN to unite all ten Southeast Asian countries, despite differences in ideologies and political systems. The regional organization was able to maintain a reasonable level of competition between external players in order to benefit from their rivalry and become a central element of regional cooperation in East Asia and the Asia-Pacific region (Severino, 2007, p. 406).

⁴ Bogaturov A.D. Leadership and Criteria of Leadership in the World System // Modern World Politics: Applied Analysis: Training Manual / ed. by A. D. Bogaturov. Moscow: Aspect Press publ., 2009. P. 161. (In Russian).

The regional institutional network formed around ASEAN includes dialogue partnerships with key players in the region and beyond, such as the ASEAN Regional Security Forum (ARF), the Asia — Europe Meeting (ASEM) and the East Asia Summit (EAS). The Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation Forum (APEC), although informally linked to ASEAN, reflects its normative culture, known as the “ASEAN Way,” which emphasizes a preference for consultation, consensus and movement towards a common goal (Koldunova, 2017, p. 60).

Since its inception in the 1970s, ASEAN has sought to establish privileged relationships with key non-regional partners. This was reflected in the establishment of a dialogue with Australia, the European Economic Community, the United States and Japan. In the following decades, ASEAN expanded its partnerships to China, India, Russia and South Korea, and formed the ASEAN+3 (China, Japan, Republic of Korea) and ASEAN+6 (China, Japan, Republic of Korea, India, Australia, New Zealand) formats, which served as the basis for the EAS. By the end of the 20th century, ASEAN had become an influential participant in macro-regional processes and an equal partner with leading international players.

In the early 2010s, there was a notable shift in regional dynamics, especially with the strengthening of China's economic role. This caused mixed reactions from the political elites of the Southeast Asian countries. The territorial disputes in the South China Sea, which began in 2011, have increased the concerns of small and medium-sized countries about Beijing's strategy (Ponka, Belchenko & Trusova, 2017). The American policy of rebalancing in the Asia-Pacific region, launched in 2011 under Barack Obama, also contributed to the polarization of the region, designed to limit China's influence. This has brought the Sino-American contradictions to the forefront of regional politics and highlighted the need for ASEAN to expand its foreign policy contacts.

Russia's Policy in ASEAN: From Dialogue Partnership to Strategic Partnership

Over the past 30 years, relations between Russia and ASEAN have gone from casual

contacts to the establishment of a strategic partnership. The concept of a “strategic partnership” gained widespread acceptance after the end of the Cold War and now takes on various forms and content. Such partnerships usually help to balance foreign policy contacts and highlight key areas in international relations. Nevertheless, these developments have not resulted in the formation of alliances or blocs.

The initial official interactions between Russia and ASEAN took place in 1991, when the Russian Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs took part in the ASEAN Ministerial meeting at the invitation of Malaysia and 5 years later, a dialogue partnership was established.⁵ In 1994, Russia joined the ARF.⁶

In order to establish a dialogue partnership with ASEAN, Russia had to sign the Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation in Southeast Asia of 1976. Russia joined this treaty in 2004, and the first Russia — ASEAN summit was held in 2005. During this summit, key documents were signed that defined the areas of cooperation between Russia and ASEAN.⁷ These areas included security cooperation, fight against crime, and strengthening of economic ties.

⁵ History of the Dialogue Partnership Between Russia and ASEAN // Russia — ASEAN Summit. 2016. (In Russian). URL: http://russia-asean20.ru/russia_asean/20160309/7163.html (accessed: 05.02.2024).

⁶ Participation of Russia in the Activities of the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) (Background Information) // The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation. March 13, 2002. (In Russian). URL: https://www.mid.ru/ru/foreign_policy/rso/regional-nyj-forum-asean-po-bezopasnosti-arf-/1741131/ (accessed: 05.02.2024).

⁷ See: Order of the Government of the Russian Federation of December 9, 2005 No. 2150-R “On the Signing of the Agreement Between the Government of the Russian Federation and the Governments of the Member States of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations on Cooperation in the Field of Economy and Development” // Consultant Plus. 2005. (In Russian). URL: <https://rulaws.ru/government/Rasporozhzenie-Pravitelstva-RF-ot-09.12.2005-N-2150-r/?ysclid=ls8y3wpbe0467540425> (accessed: 05.02.2024); Comprehensive Action Program for the Development of Cooperation Between the Russian Federation and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations for 2005–2015 // The President of Russia. December 13, 2005. (In Russian). URL: <http://www.kremlin.ru/supplement/3708> (accessed: 05.02.2024).

The institutional cooperation between Russia and ASEAN included ministerial-level exchanges, expert events, and participation in summits and conferences. Partnership instruments have been established, such as the Joint Cooperation Committee and the Dialogue Partnership Financial Fund, to finance joint projects. Russia joined the EAS in 2010,⁸ which indicates the growing interest of ASEAN and its desire for a central role in institutional cooperation outside its region.

The second summit between Russia and ASEAN was held in Hanoi in 2010, and in 2016, the twentieth anniversary of their dialogue partnership was celebrated with the holding of the anniversary summit in Sochi. Prior to this summit, a Group of Eminent Persons was formed, which presented its recommendations on bilateral relations, including proposals for closer strategic partnership through improved coordination in the international arena and intensification of summit meetings.⁹

After the anniversary Russia — ASEAN summit, the Sochi Declaration and the Comprehensive Action Plan for 2016–2020 were approved.¹⁰ The Declaration emphasized the importance of multipolarity and the need to create a transparent and comprehensively inclusive regional security based on international law. The desire for mutually beneficial cooperation between ASEAN, the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) was also noted. This has added a new, trans-regional dimension

⁸ East Asia Summit (Reference Material) // The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation. December 29, 2023. (In Russian). URL: https://www.mid.ru/ru/foreign_policy/rso/vostocnoaziatski-j-sammit-vas/1923920/ (accessed: 05.02.2024).

⁹ Report of the ASEAN — Russia Eminent Persons Group ASEAN and Russia: A Future-Oriented Multidimensional Strategic Partnership // Russia — ASEAN Summit. 2016. (In Russian). URL: <http://russia-asean20.ru/load/194089> (accessed: 05.02.2024).

¹⁰ Sochi Declaration of the Russia ASEAN Anniversary Summit on the Occasion of the 20th Anniversary of the Establishment of a Dialogue Partnership Between the Russian Federation and ASEAN “On the Way to Mutually Beneficial Strategic Partnership” // Russia — ASEAN Summit. 2016. (In Russian). URL: <http://russia-asean20.ru/load/194715> (accessed: 05.02.2024).

to the Dialogue Partnership, including the search for opportunities for interaction not only at the bilateral but also at the regional level.

In November 2018, at the third summit of Russia and ASEAN in Singapore, a statement was adopted on the transition to a strategic partnership.¹¹ The statement stressed the importance of respecting international law, equal relations and the development of free trade, as well as the strengthening of the EAS as a forum for strategic discussions. However, the process of moving towards a strategic partnership was not straightforward. Initially, Russia was seen as a less active participant than other ASEAN partners, more as an additional player that should constrain the ambitions of other major powers in the region.

Partially fulfilling this role, Russia supported military-technical cooperation with Vietnam, Indonesia and Malaysia, and also became an alternative partner in political and military-technical terms for Thailand, the Philippines and Myanmar. For example, after the military coup in Thailand in 2014¹² and in Myanmar in 2021,¹³ the new leadership turned to Russia. However, in the conflict between the Philippines and China over disputed islands in the South China Sea, Russia preferred to remain neutral without aggravating relations with either side.¹⁴

Thus, in the context of worsening regional antagonisms, Russia is interested in developing

¹¹ Belouza A. Leaders of Russia and ASEAN Countries Adopt Statement on Strategic Partnership // *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*. November 14, 2018. (In Russian). URL: <https://rg.ru/2018/11/14/lidery-rf-i-stran-asean-priniali-zaiavlenie-o-strategicheskoy-partnerstve.html> (accessed: 05.02.2024).

¹² Ehrlich R. S. Russia Boosts Prayuth Chan-ocha's Military in Thailand as U.S. Steps Aside After Coup // *The Washington Times*. February 21, 2016. URL: <https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2016/feb/21/russia-boosts-prayuth-chan-ochas-military-in-thail/> (accessed: 05.02.2024).

¹³ Russian Arms and Influence in Myanmar // *East Asia Forum*. November 5, 2022. URL: <https://eastasiaforum.org/2022/11/05/russian-arms-and-influence-in-myanmar/> (accessed: 05.02.2024).

¹⁴ Russia Supports China's Efforts to Develop a Code of Conduct for the South China Sea // *RIA Novosti*. July 14, 2016. (In Russian). URL: <https://ria.ru/20160714/1465931510.html> (accessed: 05.02.2024).

cooperation with ASEAN, since this organization is brought closer to Russia by the desire to form a polycentric global and regional system. Russia, in turn, provides effective support to the idea of ASEAN centrality, which strengthens its position in cooperation with other external actors. Moscow's assets include a policy of Pivot to the East, which is gradually beginning to take visible shape, and a willingness to build productive, mutually beneficial relations with the Association. At the same time, Russia demonstrates an unwillingness to compete for the economic and political attention of the Association only in order to balance the actions of China and the United States in a convenient way for ASEAN.

Cambodia's ASEAN Policy: From Isolation to Proactive Membership

The accession of Cambodia to the Association was delayed due to the Cambodian conflict, which began in 1979 after the liberation of Phnom Penh from the Khmer Rouge regime. During this period, the main danger for ASEAN was the spread of communism (Keo, 2012, p. 10) and involvement in conflicts affecting the interests of the USSR and the United States. The situation improved after the meeting of representatives of the conflicting parties in Paris in 1987 and the reduction of Soviet support for Vietnam. In 1991, the internal situation stabilized with the signing of the Paris Peace Accords,¹⁵ which facilitated Cambodia's accession to ASEAN. The country became an observer in 1995 and a full member in 1999, after which it began to actively participate in strengthening peace, stability and prosperity in the region.¹⁶

Cambodia has made significant contributions to ASEAN by serving as a member and Chair of ASEAN in 2002, 2012 and 2022.

¹⁵ 1991 Paris Peace Agreements // *Cambodian Information Center*. URL: <https://web.archive.org/web/20140923163627/http://www.cambodia.org/facts/?page=1991+Paris+Peace+Agreements> (accessed: 05.02.2024).

¹⁶ Cambodia's ASEAN Chairmanship 2022: Priorities and Challenges // *Konrad Adenauer Stiftung*. 2022. URL: <https://www.kas.de/en/web/kambodscha/ausgaben/detail/-/content/cambodia-s-asean-chairmanship-2021-priorities-and-challenges-2> (accessed: 05.02.2024).

The country has put a lot of effort into hosting ASEAN summits and related meetings and has successfully contributed to the creation of many key documents for ASEAN. Cambodia has actively used the core values of ASEAN in its foreign policy and diplomacy, including the principle of non-use of force and peaceful settlement of disputes, in particular on the border with Thailand in 2008.¹⁷

In 2002, Cambodia ensured that ASEAN and China jointly signed the Declaration on the Conduct of the Parties in the South China Sea (DOC), which provided for the settlement of uninhabited islands, reefs and other objects.¹⁸ Cambodia has also reached an agreement on tourism within the framework of ASEAN, aimed at developing the region as a single tourist destination.¹⁹

At the 21st ASEAN Summit in 2012 in Phnom Penh, under the chairmanship of Cambodia, the ASEAN Declaration on Human Rights and the document on the establishment of the ASEAN Regional Mine Action Center were adopted (Strangio, 2014, p. 218). Under Cambodia's leadership, several important agreements were reached in 2012, including the Declaration of the VII East Asian Summit on Malaria Control and the Phnom Penh Declaration on the Development of East Asian countries.²⁰ In addition, during the chairmanship, the ASEAN Declaration on Human Rights and the Bali Action Plan of the III Accord (2013–2017) were adopted, the first ASEAN Global Dialogue was held and the ASEAN Institute for Peace and

Reconciliation was established.²¹ In addition, Cambodia actively participated in the adoption of the Six-Point Principles on the South China Sea (Var, 2021, p. 198).

As the ASEAN Chair at the 2022 summit, Cambodia chose the motto “ASEAN: Together Against Challenges” (Lin, 2023). The main objectives of ASEAN's activities were the maintenance of multilateralism, sustainable development and youth exchanges within the framework of the creation of the ASEAN Security Community, Economic Community and Socio-Cultural Community.²² At the closing ceremony, Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen noted that, in light of the difficult international and regional situation, the ASEAN countries had conducted effective consultations to strengthen the Association's role in developing relations with external partners (Chuvilov, 2023).

The ASEAN summits in 2022 did not make significant decisions on key issues of regional and global political and economic development. During Cambodia's presidency of the association, the parties preferred not to make significant changes to regional relations. As a result of Cambodia's diplomatic efforts, an agreement was reached on East Timor's accession to ASEAN as a full member (Bunthorn, 2022).

On November 13, 2022, the 17th East Asia Summit was convened in Phnom Penh under the leadership of Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen. The meeting was attended by delegates from ASEAN member states, Australia, China, India, Japan, New Zealand, South Korea, Russia and the United States. In his speech, Hun Sen underscored the necessity of reinforcing the summit for its relevance and effectiveness in a rapidly changing region.²³

¹⁷ Kesavapany K. ASEAN and the Cambodia — Thailand Conflict // East Asia Forum. March 1, 2011. URL: <https://eastasiaforum.org/2011/03/01/asean-and-the-cambodia-thailand-conflict/> (accessed: 05.02.2024).

¹⁸ Chairman's Statement of the 21st ASEAN Summit // ASEAN. November 18, 2012. URL: <https://www.asean.org/wp-content/uploads/images/documents/Chairman%E2%80%99s%20Statement%20of%20the%2021st%20ASEAN%20Summit.pdf> (accessed: 05.02.2024).

¹⁹ ASEAN Tourism Agreement // ASEAN. November 4, 2002. URL: <https://asean.org/asean-tourism-agreement/> (accessed: 05.02.2024).

²⁰ Outcomes of the 21st ASEAN Summit Phnom Penh // ASEAN. November 19, 2012. URL: <https://asean.org/outcomes-of-the-21st-asean-summit-phnom-penh/> (accessed: 05.02.2024).

²¹ Heng S. A Job Well Done: Cambodia as ASEAN Chair in 2012 // East Asia Forum. January 19, 2013. URL: <https://eastasiaforum.org/2013/01/19/a-job-well-done-cambodia-as-asean-chair-in-2012/> (accessed: 05.02.2024).

²² The 40th and 41st ASEAN Summit Opened in Cambodia's Capital // Xinhua. November 11, 2022. (In Russian). URL: <http://russian.news.cn/20221111/5c16454e947b407aabc21deb52d990e4/c.html> (accessed: 05.02.2024).

²³ Chair's Statement of the 17th East Asia Summit // East Asia Summit. November 13, 2022. URL:

Cambodia is actively acting as the ASEAN chair state, striving to maintain regional stability and solve common problems such as the pandemic, economic crises and the political crisis in Myanmar.

Dialogue Between Russia and Cambodia Within the Framework of ASEAN

The relationship between Moscow and Phnom Penh dates to the mid-20th century. The USSR provided logistical support to Cambodia by building a hospital and a Higher Institute of Technology. In addition, Cambodia retains a positive historical memory of Russia due to the assistance it received in rebuilding the country after the USSR, together with Vietnam, overthrew the Khmer Rouge genocide regime. The formation of the National Liberation Front of Cambodia and the new Government of the country in 1979 marked the beginning of the most active period of cooperation between the USSR and Cambodia. Extensive supplies of food, textiles, petroleum products, the dispatch of numerous advisers and specialists, the training of new managers in the USSR, marked the advent of a new phase in relations.²⁴

Foreign Minister Hor Namhong first visited Moscow in 2001.²⁵ The intensification of the dialogue was facilitated by Russia's accession to the Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation in Southeast Asia in 2004, which led to Russian-Cambodian consultations in Phnom Penh.²⁶ The parties discussed ways to expand cooperation in

the political, trade, economic and investment fields, as well as ways to deepen the Russia — ASEAN dialogue partnership. Such a shift in emphasis indicates the key role of the Association in the development of bilateral contacts.

The period since 2014 has become more saturated with political contacts, as a result of which trade indicators between the states increased to 132.7 million USD (Kostyunina, 2019), and an increase in the number of tourists visiting Cambodia was noted. The following year, following the results of the Russian-Cambodian Intergovernmental Commission, a joint action plan for 2015–2017 was signed between Rosturizm and the Ministry of Tourism of Cambodia.²⁷

In November of this year, Prime Minister of the Russian Federation D.A. Medvedev visited Phnom Penh. During this visit, agreements on air transportation, memorandums on cooperation in the sphere of investment, an agreement on cooperation between Russian and Cambodian media and some others were signed.²⁸

The year 2016 was a jubilee year in the history of both the dialogue partnership with ASEAN and diplomatic relations between Cambodia and Russia. In commemoration of the anniversary, the Russia — ASEAN summit was convened in Sochi, during which the President of the Russian Federation and the Prime Minister of Cambodia met. At that moment, the implementation of narrowly oriented initiatives began, and a project for the construction of a hydropower hub in the western part of the Kingdom of Cambodia was developed.²⁹

In 2017, the Foreign Ministers of the Russian Federation and the Kingdom of Cambodia, S.V. Lavrov and Prak Sokhonn, held

https://eastiasummit.asean.org/storage/chairmans_statements_file/UbWVlu6F71lxHrXxqgZyu3TZBSXnidVBrS7toIMH.pdf (accessed: 05.02.2024).

²⁴ Mosyakov D. V. The Complicated History of Russian-Cambodian Relations // The ASEAN Center at MGIMO of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russia. June 4, 2021. (In Russian). URL: <https://asean.mgimo.ru/news/2021/russia-cambodian-complicated-history?ysclid=lt6813nfk429838153> (accessed: 05.03.2024).

²⁵ Russian-Cambodian Political Contacts (Background Information) // The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation. September 6, 2003. (In Russian). URL: <https://www.mid.ru/ru/maps/kh/1739821/> (accessed: 05.02.2024).

²⁶ On Russian-Cambodian Consultations in Phnom Penh // The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation. February 8, 2005. (In Russian). URL: <https://mid.ru/ru/maps/kh/1657009/> (accessed: 05.02.2024).

²⁷ VIII Session of the Russian-Cambodian Intergovernmental Commission Was Held // Ministry of Digital Development, Communications and Mass Media of the Russian Federation. March 4, 2015. (In Russian). URL: <https://digital.gov.ru/ru/events/32796/> (accessed: 05.02.2024).

²⁸ Russian-Cambodian Negotiations // The Government of Russia. November 24, 2015. (In Russian). URL: <http://government.ru/news/20698/> (accessed: 05.03.2024).

²⁹ Sokhon P. Cambodia and Russia: 60 Years of Strong and Dynamic Partnership // The International Affairs. 2016. No. 6. (In Russian). URL: <https://interaffairs.ru/jauthor/material/1494> (accessed: 05.03.2024).

talks. The agenda of the meeting in Moscow between Russian and Cambodian Foreign Ministers addressed matters that reflected the essence of the agreements reached at the meeting between President Vladimir Putin and Prime Minister Hun Sen on the sidelines of the Russia — ASEAN summit.³⁰

The meetings of the heads of government of Russia and Cambodia, which took place annually before the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, have become a good tradition. This format of interaction acts as an important channel of communication and allows the countries to share views on pressing issues of bilateral relations.

Public, scientific and educational organizations make an important contribution to strengthening cooperation between the two countries. In particular, in 2018, the signing ceremony of the Memorandum of Understanding and Cooperation between the Civic Chamber of the Russian Federation and the Forum of the Civil Society Alliance of Cambodia took place.³¹ In 2019, a memorandum of cooperation in the field of science and education was signed between the National Institute of Diplomacy and International Relations (NIDIR) of the Kingdom of Cambodia and MGIMO University.³² In 2021, a Memorandum of Understanding was signed between the Russian Academy of Sciences and the Royal Academy of Cambodia.³³ This

momentum demonstrates that the scientific and academic community is becoming a significant participant in the bilateral dialogue, promoting the tools of public diplomacy.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the process of bilateral cooperation was suspended, since the dialogue was carried out only through the Russian Embassy in Cambodia, and all attention was focused on maintaining the dialogue formats in the new reality. In particular, in 2020, during the conversation, the parties discussed aspects of the idea initiated by Phnom Penh of holding an online conference of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the regional coordinators of ASEM and Cambodia as the host country of the XIII summit of the said Forum on the problems of COVID-19.³⁴

The tradition of maintaining regular political contacts makes a positive contribution to the bilateral relations between Russia and Cambodia. In particular, among the coinciding views of Russia and Cambodia on international problems and the world order in general is “the right of every people to choose its own development paths.” This is a solid foundation for bilateral cooperation in the United Nations, in the Asia-Pacific region and on other international platforms.

The bilateral cooperation between Russia and Cambodia is characterized by new joint projects in the field of energy, in the trade and economic sphere, in military and military-technical cooperation, in the training of specialists from Cambodia in Russian universities. It is known that *Gazprom* is considering the possibility of geological exploration and development of gas fields on the shelf of Cambodia.³⁵ Through the Ministry of

³⁰ Foreign Ministers of the Russian Federation and Cambodia to Discuss the Development of Bilateral Cooperation and the Situation in the Asia-Pacific Region // RIA Novosti. August 24, 2017. (In Russian). URL: <https://tass.ru/politika/4503068> (accessed: 05.03.2024).

³¹ Observers from the Public Chamber of the Russian Federation Have Recognized the Parliamentary Elections in Cambodia as Fair // TASS. July 30, 2018. (In Russian). URL: <https://tass.ru/politika/5413622> (accessed: 05.03.2024).

³² Delegation of the National Institute of Diplomacy and International Relations of Cambodia to MGIMO // ASEAN Center at MGIMO of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russia. February 19, 2019. (In Russian). URL: https://asean.mgimo.ru/news/2019/delegatsiya-natsionalnogo-instituta-diplomatii-i-mezhdunarodnykh-otnoshenij-kambodzhii-v-mgimo?ysclid=lxufmuu0cu968757027&utm_source=ya.ru&utm_medium=referral&utm_campaign=ya.ru&utm_referrer=ya.ru (accessed: 05.03.2024).

³³ Signing of a Memorandum of Understanding Between the Academies of Russia and Cambodia // Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation.

June 24, 2021. (In Russian). URL: https://www.mid.ru/ru/press_service/photo/meropriyatiya_v_zagran_uchrezdeniyah/1766643/ (accessed: 05.03.2024).

³⁴ Representatives of Russia and Cambodia Discussed the Online Meeting of the Foreign Ministers of ASEM // RIA Novosti. May 27, 2020. (In Russian). URL: <https://ria.ru/20200527/1572040026.html?ysclid=lxugb9szag599777128> (accessed: 05.03.2024).

³⁵ *Gazprom* Is Considering Gas Production Projects Jointly with RTT on the Shelf of Thailand and in Russia // Neftegaz.RU. April 27, 2017. (In Russian). URL: <https://neftegaz.ru/news/partnership/210649-gazprom->

Defense, the parties are interested in joint actions in the fight against terrorism, humanitarian demining, and training Cambodian military personnel at universities of the Russian Ministry of Defense.³⁶ The prospects for mutually beneficial economic cooperation between Russia and the Kingdom of Cambodia are determined within the framework of the Intergovernmental Russian-Cambodian Commission on Trade, Economic, Scientific and Technical Cooperation.

The effectiveness of the work of the Russia-Cambodia bilateral Intergovernmental Commission can be judged by the fact that in 2016 a Memorandum of Understanding was signed between the Eurasian Economic Union, which includes Russia, and Cambodia, which is a member of ASEAN, which opens up prospects for concluding an agreement on a free trade zone between the EAEU and the Kingdom of Cambodia. Within the framework of this Memorandum, a wide range of areas has been outlined, cooperation in which will allow the countries to bring relations to a qualitatively new level. The document identifies 17 areas: from economic integration to information technology.³⁷

Despite the positive dynamics, it is worth noting the weakness of bilateral relations. This can be considered a relatively low intensity of the implementation of the adopted political agreements. However, this characteristic can be regarded as a promising growth zone. In the authors' opinion, the broad involvement of political and business circles in the activities of the ASEAN formats will allow the countries to

accelerate the implementation of all plans and projects.

The influence of the Association on the strengthening of bilateral relations between Russia and Cambodia can be described as significant. Both states are committed to the ASEAN principle of neutrality in foreign policy, therefore, after the start of a Special military operation in Ukraine, Hun Sen declared that he did not support Western sanctions.³⁸ As a result of this foreign policy approach, bilateral cooperation was sustained. Later in 2022, Russia took part in the East Asian Summit in Phnom Penh, and again in 2023, in Jakarta.

In addition, Cambodia is the coordinating country of Russia — ASEAN relations for 2021–2024. According to the Deputy Head of the ASEAN Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom, Chun Sovannarith, Cambodia intends to bring the strategic partnership between Russia and ASEAN to a new height.³⁹ Cambodia's initiative in this matter has already borne fruit. Thanks to its mediation, Russia and ASEAN previously adopted a Strategic Partnership Plan for 2021–2025, which defines the priorities of both sides and the measures they should take to fully realize the potential of Russia — ASEAN partnership in all areas of mutual interest.⁴⁰ This document allowed Russia and ASEAN to bring together their foreign policy interests and strengthen the legal framework for cooperation.

In June 2024, the Royal Cambodian Army and the Russian Ground Forces signed a

rassmatrivaet-proekty-po-dobyche-gaza-sovmestno-s-rtt-na-shelfe-tailanda-i-v-rossii/ (accessed: 05.03.2024).

³⁶ The First Ever Meeting of the Russian and Cambodian Defense Ministers Took Place in Moscow // The Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation. April 26, 2016. (In Russian). URL: https://function.mil.ru/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12083979@egNews (accessed: 05.03.2024).

³⁷ Order of the Board of the Eurasian Economic Commission Dated May 10, 2016 No. 56 "On the Draft Memorandum of Understanding Between the Eurasian Economic Commission and the Government of the Kingdom of Cambodia" // Alta-Soft. May 10, 2016. (In Russian). URL: <https://www.alta.ru/tamdoc/16r00056/> (accessed: 05.03.2024).

³⁸ The Cambodian Prime Minister Said That He Does Not Believe in Ukraine's Military Victory, the Media Reports // RIA Novosti. June 15, 2023. (In Russian). URL: <https://ria.ru/20230615/kambodzha-1878411581.html> (accessed: 05.03.2024).

³⁹ The Momentum of ASEAN — Russia Cooperation Continues to Rise // Khmer Times. April 24, 2023. URL: <https://www.khmertimeskh.com/501278052/the-momentum-of-asean-russia-cooperation-continues-to-rise/> (accessed: 05.02.2023).

⁴⁰ Comprehensive Action Plan for the Implementation of the Strategic Partnership Between the Russian Federation and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (2021–2025) // The President of Russia. October 28, 2021. (In Russian). URL: <http://www.kremlin.ru/supplement/5726> (accessed: 05.02.2023).

Memorandum of Understanding aimed at strengthening cooperation ties between the armies of the two countries based on mutual respect and assistance. Both parties expressed their appreciation for the Russian-Cambodian military cooperation and committed to further strengthening the collaboration between the armies of the two countries, which has already made steady progress to achieve fruitful results.⁴¹ Despite the fact that this memorandum covers only one branch of the armed forces of the two countries, the very fact of concluding a document on bilateral military cooperation at a time of unprecedented pressure from Western countries against Russia indicates the emergence of Russian-Cambodian relations to a new level and the transformation of Russia into a security provider for developing countries.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it is worth noting that relations between Russia and Cambodia, implemented in the ASEAN format, are at the very dawn of their development. Russia plays an important role in building and maintaining the balance of power in the Asia-Pacific region. Cambodia is interested in Russia's presence in the region, as its foreign policy is aimed at

promoting an inclusive, multilateral approach to solving international problems based on international law, principles of justice and equality. Cambodia's leadership role in ASEAN in 2002, 2012 and 2022 reflects a greater degree of trust of the international community in Cambodia and, consequently, its increased diplomatic influence in the international arena.

The development of relations between Russia and the Kingdom of Cambodia throughout their history has been influenced by the peculiarities of the global political and economic environment. In the complex and contradictory situation in Southeast Asia, where the confrontation between the United States and China is most noticeable, small states are especially interested in having strong friends to balance. For Cambodia, Russia can become one of these counterweights, reducing Phnom Penh's dependence on one or another great power. This course is noticeable in the steps of the two countries at the present stage. At the moment, the countries are on the verge of signing an agreement on a free trade zone between the EAEU and the Kingdom of Cambodia, and also signed the first military agreement in history, which will open up opportunities for military-technical cooperation and military exchanges between the two countries. This degree of engagement represents a historic high point in the bilateral relationship between the Russian Federation and the Kingdom of Cambodia.

⁴¹ RCA and Russian Ground Forces Sign Cooperation MoU // Khmer Times. June 24, 2024. URL: <https://www.khmertimeskh.com/501510889/rca-and-russian-ground-forces-sign-cooperation-mou/> (accessed: 24.06.2024).

Received / Поступила в редакцию: 08.02.2024

Revised / Доработана после рецензирования: 16.06.2024

Accepted / Принята к публикации: 26.06.2024

References

- Bektimirova, N. N. (2015). Traditional factors in Cambodia's foreign policy in the contemporary era. *South East Asia: Actual Problems of Development*, (26), 114–137. (In Russian). EDN: UNZFTH
- Bektimirova, N. N. (2016). *Cambodia in the 21st century: Modern political processes*. Saarbrücken: LAP LAMBERT Academic Publishing. (In Russian). EDN: XVWUKL
- Bogaturov, A. D. (1997). *The great powers in the Pacific Ocean. History and theory of international relations in East Asia after World War II (1945–1995)*. Moscow: Suita publ. (In Russian). EDN: TOHSEH
- Bunthorn, K. (2022). Small state dilemma: Cambodia between the ASEAN and China in the Indo-Pacific context. *Journal of Liberty and International Affairs*, 8(1), 116–137. <https://www.doi.org/10.47305/JLIA2281116b>
- Chuvilov, I. A. (2023). Cambodia's foreign policy in 2022: Key achievements. In E. A. Dostanko (Ed.), *International relations: History, theory, practice: Proceedings of the XIII scientific-practical conference of young scientists of the international relations faculty of Belarus State University* (pp. 80–84). Minsk: BSU publ. (In Russian).

- Jones, L. (2007). ASEAN intervention in Cambodia: From Cold War to conditionality. *The Pacific Review*, 20(4), 523–550. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09512740701672001>
- Jones, L. (2012). *ASEAN, sovereignty and intervention in Southeast Asia*. London: Palgrave Macmillan. <https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230356276>
- Kanaev, E. A. (2017). Sources of ASEAN's success and emergence of Greater Eurasia. *International Trends / Mezhdunarodnye Processy*, 15(3), 81–89. (In Russian). EDN: ZTCGRZ
- Kanaev, E. A., & Korolev, A. S. (2019). Greater Eurasia, Indo-Pacific region and Russia — ASEAN relations. *Outlines of Global Transformations: Politics, Economics, Law*, 12(1), 26–43. (In Russian). <https://www.doi.org/10.23932/2542-0240-2019-12-1-26-43>; EDN: LRLAQV
- Keo, Duong. (2012). *Role of ASEAN in Cambodia conflict: Road towards peace agreement (1979–1991)* [MA thesis]. Bangkok: Chulalongkorn University. Retrieved from https://www.academia.edu/33214683/ASEAN_Role_in_Cambodian_Conflict_Road_towards_Peace_Agreement_1979_1989_pdf
- Koldunova, E. V. (2015). ASEAN at the present stage and the problems of regional stability. *South East Asia: Actual Problems of Development*, (28), 13–19. (In Russian). EDN: VZENYR
- Koldunova, E. V. (2017). “Dialogue partnerships” in ASEAN's external relations. *International Trends / Mezhdunarodnye Processy*, 15(3), 55–66. (In Russian). EDN: ZTCGRF
- Kostyunina, G. M. (2017). The integration model ASEAN+1: The main norms of agreements and effect on foreign economic ties. *Vestnik RUDN. International Relations*, 17(3), 441–457. (In Russian). <https://doi.org/10.22363/2313-0660-2017-17-3-441-457>; EDN: ZEWEPT
- Kostyunina, G. M. (2019). Russia — ASEAN foreign trade: Key development trends. *Russian Foreign Economic Journal*, (3), 43–59. (In Russian). EDN: HPPSTO
- Lin, J. (2023). Cambodia's ASEAN chairmanship in 2022: Rising above doubts and pushing through a difficult year. In Thi Ha Hoang & D. Singh (Eds.), *Southeast Asian Affairs 2023* (pp. 89–104). Singapore: ISEAS Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1355/9789815104189-007>
- Lokshin, G. M., Kobelev, E. V., & Mazyrin, V. M. (2019). *ASEAN community in the modern world*. Moscow: ID “Forum” publ. (In Russian). EDN: JIQJKP
- Mosyakov, D. V. (2010). *History of Cambodia. 20th century*. Moscow: Institut vostokovedeniya RAN publ. (In Russian). EDN: QPQMKF
- Ponka, T. I., Belchenko, A. S., & Trusova, A. A. (2017). The dual-track approach of the PRC to the resolution of disputes in the South China Sea. *Vestnik RUDN. International Relations*, 17(3), 518–529. (In Russian). <https://doi.org/10.22363/2313-0660-2017-17-3-518-529>; EDN: ZEWESV
- Severino, R. C. (2007). ASEAN beyond Forty: Towards political and economic integration. *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, 29(3), 406–423.
- Strangio, S. (2014). *Hun Sen's Cambodia*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Titarenko, M. L. (2008). *The geopolitical significance of the Far East. Russia, China and other Asian countries*. Moscow: Pamyatniki istoricheskoy mysli publ. (In Russian). EDN: QPKSJB
- Var, V. (2021). Cambodia's South China Sea policy: From ASEAN aligned to echoing Chinese clientism. In G. Houlden, S. Romaniuk & Nong Hong (Eds.), *Security, strategy, and military dynamics in the South China Sea* (pp. 193–214). Bristol: Bristol University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1332/policypress/9781529213454.003.0011>
- Voskressenski, A. D. (2020). The logic of the new world architectonics: Praxis and theory of rethinking the multidimensional world and China's search of its place. *Comparative Politics Russia*, 11(4), 5–26. (In Russian). EDN: MLBEJL
- Voskressenski, A. D. (Ed.). (2010). *'Greater East Asia': World politics and regional transformations*. Moscow: MGIMO-Universitet publ. (In Russian). EDN: PJBXVZ

About the authors:

Pichkhun Panha — Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Cambodia to Russia, Embassy of the Kingdom of Cambodia in Russia; e-mail: panhapk@yahoo.com

Yuok Ousaphea — Commercial Attache, Embassy of the Kingdom of Cambodia in Russia; e-mail: yuokphea2015@gmail.com