



5.2.2024

MISSION REPORT

following the Ad hoc delegation to Bangkok, Thailand, 17-21 December 2023

Committee on International Trade

Members of the mission:

Bernd Lange	(S&D) (INTA Chair, Leader of the mission)
Heidi Hautala	(Verts/ALE)
Iuliu Winkler	(PPE)
Anna-Michelle Asimakopoulou	(PPE)
Margarida Marques	(S&D)
Marie-Pierre Vedrenne	(Renew)
Maximilian Krah	(ID)

Introduction

The INTA delegation, composed of 7 high-ranking INTA MEPs, including the INTA Chair, the standing Rapporteur for the ASEAN region (and Vice-President of the EP) and three INTA Vice Chairs, had a very useful and meaningful visit to Thailand, with high-level meetings taking place between 18 and 20 December 2024.

The INTA delegation to Thailand took place at a moment when the strategic importance of the ASEAN region for the EU is more vibrant and more relevant than ever, with a strong focus on cooperation and partnership. The visit of the INTA delegation was also related to the resumption of the negotiations on a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) between EU and Thailand (the first round of which took place in September 2023), as bilateral FTAs with countries in ASEAN represent the alternative to a region-to-region agreement with ASEAN, which is a long-term project and does not seem to be materialising in the near future.

The delegation was very well received by all stakeholders, and had very open and sincere exchanges with the high-level representatives of the Thai government, such as the Deputy Prime-Minister or the Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs, and of the Thai Parliament, such as the President of the Senate. Moreover, the delegation also met with relevant stakeholders with a strong presence on the ground, from EU and Thai business representatives, to social partners. Such appointments were complemented by a field visit to the Eastern Economy Corridor, to observe first-hand the reality of the trade relations between the EU and Thailand.

Summary account of meetings

The last time an EP delegation had been in an official visit to Thailand was in July 2018, when a small INTA delegation (1 Member) and the DROI delegation had visited Thailand. That is why the current visit had a symbolic significance, being a testament of the high regard of the EU towards Thailand and a turning point in the bilateral relations.

General bilateral relations

- Thailand is traditionally among the EU's closest and most long-standing friends and partners in Asia, as well as a key partner for the EU in the region.
- The INTA delegation encouraged Thailand to ratify the EU-Thailand Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA), which had been signed by the two parties in December 2022 and was ratified by the EP on 14 June 2023. The European Union looks forward to early implementation of the PCA under the new administration. The Thai authorities are aware of the need to ratify the PCA, for it to enter into force and produce its favourable effects.
- Politically, the PCA with Thailand marks an important step towards strengthening the EU's role in the Indo-Pacific, based on shared universal values such as democracy and human rights. It paves the way for enhancing political, regional and global cooperation between two like-minded partners.
- It is also important that the political space in Thailand remains open and that the re-established political pluralism and fundamental freedoms be protected as per obligations stemming from international conventions to which Thailand is party.
- The overall objective of the mission was to constructively discuss and better understand

trade-related opportunities and challenges in Thailand, since Thailand and ASEAN are very important for the Union.

FTA EU-Thailand

- The INTA delegation welcomed the recent resumption of negotiations on an EU-Thailand Free Trade Agreement, as the relaunch presents significant opportunities for both sides: Thailand is the 2nd largest South-East Asian economy, but ranks 4th as trading partner for the EU in the region – there is therefore an important economic potential to be explored through the FTA.
- Furthermore, the relaunch of negotiations with Thailand sends a strong signal on the EU broader engagement with South-East Asia and the Indo-Pacific.
- Good momentum for a modern, high-quality FTA, which would include, apart from trade in goods, also market access for services, public procurement, regulatory issues, intellectual property rights (IPR), investments, as well as sustainability chapters, in line with the latest EU FTA.
- In relation to industry (automotive sector, food sector, chemicals etc.) and tourism, the Thai side is keen to cooperate with the EU (and its companies) and form partnerships provided that it also brings benefits to Thailand.
- The issue of IPR in the context of access to (patented) medicines was also raised by several Thai counterparts, with a special focus on compulsory licensing of such products, especially with a view to an IPR chapter in the upcoming FTA.
- The Thai counterparts have a very ambitious timeframe for the FTA, as they would like to conclude the negotiations in two years (2025), at the same time with attaining a fair result for all parties concerned.
- The EP and the INTA committee strongly supports a robust chapter on Trade and sustainable development, as the protection of human and labour rights and of the environment are closely linked to economic activities.
- The issue of sustainable supply chains was underlined on numerous occasions. The importance of the respect and protection of labour and migrant rights was also shared. The condition of human, social and labour rights, as well as gender balance in Thailand was discussed with all interlocutors (the government, businesses, trade unions, civil society organisations).
- The field visit to the Eastern Economic Corridor (close to Bangkok) was very beneficial to experience first-hand the European investments and port/logistics facilities.

EU domestic legislation with global impact (unilateral, autonomous trade measures)

- EU existing or upcoming legislation indented to mitigate climate change, which has impact at global level (CBAM, the Due diligence Directive, the Deforestation Regulation), was very well communicated.
- With the deforestation legislation, the EU takes its responsibility as one of the biggest consumer markets in the world, to contribute to ending deforestation; EU legislation is about fostering sustainable supply chains and creating opportunities for sustainable agricultural and forestry supply chains across the globe.

- Concerning the Deforestation Regulation, Thailand is one of the impacted countries, as it is the second rubber exporter to the EU, but they see it as an opportunity to develop and adapt, as the government promotes re-forestation; While one of the concerns expressed by the Thai counterparts was linked to the EU Deforestation Regulation alleged potential to damage the agricultural sector, in particular the smaller farmers, their general attitude was very constructive, and the main message was that Thailand stands ready to learn from the EU, be it at regulatory, implementation or capacity-building levels.
- In relation to CBAM, the Thai counterparts are considering their own carbon tax legislation, so they have a positive view on the corresponding EU initiative.
- The Thai Climate Act is in preparation, which would introduce a dual system (legal and market place)

Trade and sustainable development

- The issue of sustainable supply chains was underlined on numerous occasions.
- The importance of the respect and protection of labour and migrant rights was also shared. The condition of human, social and labour rights, as well as gender balance in Thailand was discussed with all interlocutors (the government, businesses, trade unions, civil society organisations).
- The Thai interlocutors underlined the fact that sustainable trade is also a concern for the banking sector, as well as the fact that the economic operators in Thailand, especially the SMEs, need EU support in the context of the green projects and energy transition.
- Thailand wants to learn from the EU also in relation to the sustainability of the food industry.

Illegal Unreported and Unregulated (IUU fishing)

- A strong message was sent on the worrying prospect of a roll-back of all reforms and legislations to combat IUU fishing designed mainly with EU support during the ‘yellow card’ period (2015-2019). The Thai authorities argued that the changes to the respective legislative framework are determined by the need to mitigate its impact on smaller fishermen, and to allow them to earn their livelihoods; the Thai representatives assured the INTA delegation that they are willing to cooperate, but a transitional period is required to allow for the needed adjustments.

Other relevant topics

- The Russian war of aggression against Ukraine was briefly touched upon in various meetings, with the Thai counterparts sharing the European concerns and views, but trying to be as neutral as possible in relation to Russia (but also towards China or USA).
- The issue of migration from the bordering countries (i.e. Myanmar), with big consequences at all level of the Thai society was also discussed.
- The Thai authorities expressed on several occasions the request for Thai citizens to access the Schengen area visa-free, based on a reciprocity criterion (All EU citizens, except for Bulgaria, Cyprus, Malta and Romania can travel visa-free to Thailand for touristic purposes).

Conclusions

The visit of the INTA delegation to Thailand was a significant event, marking a renewed EU enthusiasm in the region in general, and in the country, in particular. It represented another successful example of parliamentary diplomacy in the trade field and a clear message to all ASEAN partners. The Members of the delegations were very well received by all interlocutors and benefitted from rich exchanges with a diverse range of stakeholders.

The visit also allowed for a better engagement with civil society and trade union representatives, by highlighting the general philosophy behind the EU's trade policy and by underlining in particular the sustainable trade aspects that the EU is striving to promote in its FTAs. Members had the opportunity to explain how INTA scrutinizes the implementation of FTAs and the processes in place for the interaction with civil society in the monitoring of implementation.

The INTA delegation chair published an article in one of the main newspapers (Bangkok Post) on the first day of the visit, and on the third day of the delegation, a press breakfast with 3 Thai journalists was organised.

There was a very close cooperation with the EU Delegation (and engagement of the EU Ambassador to Thailand) throughout the preparation and during the visit in Thailand, which enabled an efficient running of the programme, which met the expected objectives; there was also close involvement of the DG PART colleague both before and during the visit.

As a follow up, INTA will continue to follow the FTA negotiation rounds between the Commission and Thailand, both at committee and Monitoring Group levels.

Annex: Final programme
 EP press release and B. Lange article in the Bangkok Post



INTA delegation to Bangkok (Thailand)

17- 21 December 2023

FINAL PROGRAMME

Sunday - 17 December

Travel from Brussels to Bangkok

Monday - 18 December

Bangkok

09.00-10.00	Meeting with the EU Ambassador, and colleagues from the EU delegation
10.00-11.00	Meeting with Ambassadors of EU Member States
11.15-12.15	Meeting with EU Business Community: <ul style="list-style-type: none">– the Board European Association for Business and Commerce (EABC)– the Thai-Europe Business Association (TEBA)
13.30-14.45	Meeting with the Civil Society Organisations <ul style="list-style-type: none">– Environmental Justice Foundation– Solidarity Centre– Migrant Working group– The Freedom Fund– Thai Network of People Living with HIV/AIDS– BIOTHAI– FTA Watch– Human rights and Development Foundation
15.00-15.45	Meeting with Trade Unions: <ul style="list-style-type: none">– National Congress of Thai Labour– National Congress of Private Industrial of Employees

- Thai Trade Unions Council
 - State Enterprises Workers' Relations Confederation
- 16.00-17.30 Meeting with the Business Community in Thailand:
- Federation of Thai Industries (FTI)
 - International Trade Agreement Negotiation Committee Board of Trade of Thailand (BoT)
 - Thai Bankers Association (TBA)
 - Joint Standing Committee on Commerce, Industry and Banking (JSCCIB)

Tuesday - 19 December	Bangkok
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| 09.30-10.30 | Meeting with the Chair of the Committee on Commerce and Intellectual Property of the House of Parliament |
| 10.30-11.30 | Meeting with the First Deputy Speaker of the House of Representatives |
| 11.30-12.30 | Meeting with the President of the Senate, and the Chair of the Senate Committee on Commerce and Industry |
| 14.30-15.30 | Meeting with the Thai Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs |
| 16.00-17.00 | Meeting with Thai Deputy-Prime Minister and Minister of Commerce |

Wednesday - 20 December	Bangkok and Eastern Economy Corridor
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| 11.00-12.30 | Visit of the Michelin Factory |
| 14.15-15.00 | Visit of the Observatory Tower of Laem Chabang Port |
| 15.30-16.30 | Terminal presentation at LCMT Company Ltd. |
| 18.30 | End of programme |



Press service
European Parliament

Press release

14-12-2023

INTA

MEPs travel to Thailand after trade talks resume

A delegation of seven MEPs from the International Trade Committee will travel to Bangkok, Thailand between 17 and 21 December 2023.

A delegation representing the International Trade Committee, led by the Chair, Bernd Lange, will visit Bangkok and meet with Thai authorities and representatives of European and Thai businesses. This visit follows the recent agreement between Thailand and the EU to [restart](#) negotiations on a free trade agreement, which had stalled in 2014. Thailand holds significance as an important trading partner for the EU and a key player in the Indo-Pacific region, and it is important for MEPs to have the opportunity to closely monitor developments on the ground.

The delegation will be led by the Chair of the International Trade Committee (INTA), [Bernd Lange \(S&D, DE\)](#), and will include [Heidi Hautala \(Greens/EFA, FI\)](#) (INTA standing rapporteur for Thailand and Parliament Vice-President), [Juliu Winkler \(EPP, RO\)](#), [Anna-Michelle Asimakopoulou \(EPP, EL\)](#), [Margarida Marques \(S&D, PT\)](#), [Marie-Pierre Vedrenne \(Renew, FR\)](#), and [Maximilian Krah \(ID, DE\)](#).

Quote

"The delegation's timing marks the pivotal step of restarting negotiations for the Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with Thailand. Leading this initiative as the head of the International Trade Committee, I'm proud to spearhead efforts aimed at strengthening our trade bonds. However, our visit transcends trade talks, it underscores the EU's deep appreciation for Thailand's vital role as a regional powerhouse and stabilising force. Central to our visit is bolstering institutional ties through parliamentary diplomacy. It presents a platform for constructive dialogue, sharing best practices, and laying the groundwork for ongoing collaboration. Our delegation is also dedicated to aiding Thailand in adapting to the EU's unilateral trade measures. Recognising the challenges posed, we're committed to closely working with Thailand to navigate these complexities. Our objective is to ensure mutually beneficial and sustainable trade relations. This visit holds particular importance as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) is a strategic partner for the EU in Asia. Our focus expands beyond economic alliances to broader regional cooperation. Given Thailand's dynamic economy and substantial influence in ASEAN,

it's an ideal ally in advancing these inter-regional relations," **Bernd Lange** said ahead of the visit.

Background

The EU and Thailand first launched negotiations for a trade agreement in 2013. These were put on hold in 2014, following the military takeover in the country. The EU and Thailand relaunched discussions for an FTA in March 2023. EU Commission Executive Vice-President Valdis Dombrovskis [recently told](#) the Trade Committee that the two sides had a "positive kick-off round" in September, which "confirmed our joint commitment to aim for a modern, high quality FTA with sustainability at its core". The next round of negotiations is scheduled for January 2024 in Bangkok. Trade in goods between the EU and Thailand was worth over €42 billion in 2022, while trade in services was worth over €8 billion in 2020, according to data from the Commission. The EU is Thailand's 4th largest trade partner. Thailand, the second largest economy in the ASEAN region, is the EU's 4th most important trading partner in the region. The EU is the 3rd largest investor in Thailand, representing around 10% of total foreign direct investment in the country.

Further information

- > [EP Think Tank: Trade negotiations between the EU and ASEAN member states](#)
- > [EU trade relations with Thailand \(EU Commission\)](#)

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<https://www.bangkokpost.com/opinion/opinion/2707561/thailand-eu-deal-in-sustainability>