

**OFFICE OF THE PRESS SECRETARY**  
**News and Information Bureau**

**PRESS BRIEFING OF DEPARTMENT OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS-OFFICE OF ASEAN AFFAIRS**  
**ASSISTANT SECRETARY DANIEL ESPIRITU**  
**DECEMBER 9, 2022 [3:02 – 3:23 P.M.]**

**ASEC. DE VERA:** Magandang hapon Malacañang Press Corps at welcome sa ating press briefing ngayong araw; kasama natin si Assistant Secretary Daniel Espiritu ng DFA-Office of ASEAN Affairs. Asec. Dan...

**DFA ASEC. ESPIRITU:** Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. I'm here today to brief you on the next trip of the President which will be to Brussels, Belgium. He's going to attend the ASEAN-EU Commemorative Summit and this is important because this will mark the 45<sup>th</sup> anniversary of ASEAN-EU relations.

If we will remember, ASEAN-EU relation was established actually in 1977, three years ahead of the conferment of a dialogue partnership status to EU by ASEAN in 1980. Now since then, the relations between EU and ASEAN has grown by leaps and bounds, so much so that by 2020 we were already able to confer upon EU the status of a strategic partner.

The trip will last from 12 December to 14 December. The summit proper itself will be on the 14<sup>th</sup> and this is what is expected of the President – this is very important for the Philippines and for the President because the Philippines is currently the country coordinator of ASEAN in its relations with the European Union, and for two more years we will be the country coordinator. So we were instrumental, of course, in cooperation with the European Union and the other members of ASEAN in preparing for this summit. We lead ASEAN in the preparations for this summit, so the role of the President is very important in this regard.

Now, the summit proper will be on December 14. The President will speak on several occasions during the plenary of the summit proper itself, of the commemorative summit. He's one of the leaders of ASEAN-EU who will deliver the opening remarks. After that, he will be giving an omnibus intervention as a head of the delegate of the Republic of the Philippines.

Then after that, at the closing ceremony, he's also expected to be one of the officials who will give the closing remarks. And in fact right after that, even at the press conference, he'll be one of the ASEAN and EU officials to participate in the press conference. Apat lang sila doon sa press conference; but the President will be one of them.

But this trip will not only focus on ASEAN-EU relations; kinagabihan mayroong gala dinner itong ASEAN-EU Summit. But earlier in the day, in the first half of the day of the 14<sup>th</sup> mayroon ding meeting si Presidente with the business community. In fact, there will be one-on-one meetings with the big corporations who will be expanding their presence in the Philippines – that means more investments and more jobs for us, Filipinos.

And then there will be business roundtable with the EU and European corporations during which the President will have the opportunity to expound on our trade and investment policies to attract more, of course, trade and investments from Europe; then, kasama rin dito iyong networking among Filipino businessmen and European businessmen. Hopefully for this networking, the Filipino businessmen will be able to come up with deals with their European counterparts.

Now to provide more details on the one-on-one meetings of the President with key European corporations, suffice it to say that he will be meeting with Unilever. And this is important because this corporation is intending to establish a new state-of-the-art manufacturing facility for personal care products in Cavite, so expansion of investments to 'no, to the tune of 4.7 billion pesos. Now, it's expected to generate at least 130, projected employment for the Philippines – 130 new jobs.

He is also expected to have a one-on-one meeting with the AUSEA, the shipbuilding and navigation and Logistics Company who are intending to develop a shipyard with an investment of 1.5 billion pesos and which will create 500 to 600 direct and indirect jobs, and then also with Acciona, it's an infrastructure and renewable energy company which intends to invest in renewable energy sector in the Philippines.

Then SEMMARIS, it's a wholesale market in international logistics hub management company or corporation, that intends to develop an agro-logistics at the New Clark City that will build and operate a wholesale market for fresh products with an organized and efficient food supply and value chain.

So, these are only among the few companies na kakausapin ni Presidente which we believe will expand investments in the Philippines and therefore generate more jobs.

But there will also be a meeting with the Filipino community on December 12, 2022.

Now on the 13<sup>th</sup> of December, there will be further meeting with the business sector – but this time with ASEAN and EU themselves, within the framework of the ASEAN-EU dialogue partnership relations. So the President, on December 13, noontime, will participate at the C-suite or the CEO Suite Luncheon for the EU-ASEAN Business Summit where he is expected to speak.

And then at the same time, he will also participate in the 10<sup>th</sup> ASEAN-EU Business Summit proper itself where again he will be expected to deliver his remarks. So this will be a very busy trip for the President and we hope that this will redound to a lot of benefits for the Filipino people, not only for ASEAN.

We also expect to hold around ten bilateral meetings on the side with ten countries. Belgium? He will call on the King of Belgium and this is important kasi we will be marking the 76<sup>th</sup> year

of the diplomatic relations between the Philippines and Belgium. And at the same time, this intends to expand cooperation between this country, our country, and Belgium in terms of agricultural cooperation and renewable energy.

He will also have a bilateral meeting with Estonia in which we can discuss cyber cooperation and a pending extradition treaty. And then with the Czech Republic which we will be celebrating the 50<sup>th</sup> year of our diplomatic relations. Czech Republic is also important because we have defense cooperation with the Czech Republic and there are also proposed technology transfers in the realm of defense.

Now, he will also have bilateral meetings with Spain, which is again important because they will be the EU Council President of the second half of next year, in 2023. And then Spain has just acceded to the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation of ASEAN. Dapat sana nga pipirmahan na during the last summit 'no kaya lang dinelay muna 'no, but the signing will come. Then we have defense cooperation with Spain also from which we also purchased some heavy-lift air transports.

Then further bilateral meetings will be held with Denmark, with which we will also celebrate the 75<sup>th</sup> year of bilateral cooperation. And Denmark is important because we have maritime cooperation with Denmark as well as shipbuilding cooperation. In fact there is a shipbuilding facility in Cebu, the Austal Philippines na recently produced passenger ferry for the Philippines, from Cebu.

Then other bilateral meetings will be held with Germany, Poland, Finland, The Netherlands and of course the European Union. With the European Union, it's important because they are our partner as co-coordinators in the ASEAN-EU Commemorative Summit. So, mag-uusap iyan about the preparations and the way forward for ASEAN-EU relations as well as Philippines-EU relations including the way forward for a pending Philippine-EU Free Trade Agreement.

So I guess I'll stop at this point and open myself to your questions. Thank you.

**ASEC. DE VERA:** Maricel Halili from TV-5...

**MARICEL HALILI/TV 5:** Sir, magandang hapon po. Sir, aside from the business issues, what are the other issues that the President will bring up during the ASEAN-EU Summit?

**DFA ASEC. ESPIRITU:** Oh, marami. kasi sabi ko nga kanina magkakaroon ng plenary, during which, this is very big – not only the nine ASEAN countries will speak but also the leaders of the 27 EU countries. So, including the ASEAN Secretariat and the leadership of EU nowadays probably 38 leaders ang magsasalita.

So, the President will carry all our priorities and concerns. Of course, hindi lang iyong concerns ng Pilipinas but also concerns natin sa ASEAN 'no. But for the Philippines, the important issues are, of course, the most important is the post-pandemic recovery not only in terms of public

health recovery but also in terms of economic recovery. So, diyan papasok niyan iyong issues of energy and food security, addressing the disruption in the supply chain, and then, of course, Maritime security, digital economy or digital transformation kasi that's the wave of our future na nakita na natin noong magkaroon ng pandemic. We have been adopting e-commerce, e-delivery and the like which is the new area of expansion for our economy.

And also, climate action and biodiversity management and conservation which are very important for all of us. Of course, MSMEs are further concerned and of course, kasama din diyan iyong discussion of international and regional developments which includes discussions on the South China Sea, UNCLOS, Ukraine and other developments around the world.

**MARICEL HALILI/TV 5:** Sir, how about the delegation? Sino po iyong makakasama sa Philippine delegation?

**DFA ASEC. ESPIRITU:** Hindi pa tapos iyong delegation 'no, binubuo pa. But suffice to say that the President is to be accompanied by the officials of the Department of Foreign Affairs, as well as of the Department of Trade and Industry kasi nakita ninyo ang daming business meetings. And iyong latest list, nakita namin iyong pangalan ni former President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, si DICT Secretary Jonathan Uy and also Senator Mark Villar. But, hindi pa tapos itong delegation list.

**MARICEL HALILI/TV 5:** Salamat po.

**DFA ASEC. ESPIRITU:** Thank you.

**NESTOR CORALES/INQUIRER:** Good afternoon, sir. The European Union early this year flagged the Philippines for deficiencies in local seafarer training and education. Will the President discuss this issue with European Unions since 50,000 Filipinos working in EU vessels are at risk of losing jobs if the EU imposes a ban on Filipino seafarers?

**DFA ASEC. ESPIRITU:** Okay. I don't have the details but that's one of the matters that will be discussed para ma-address na natin iyan.

**RACQUEL BAYAN/RADIO PILIPINAS:** ASec., do we have data po how many Filipinos are there in Brussels po?

**DFA ASEC. ESPIRITU:** I don't have the figure right now. I'm sorry, I don't have the figure right now.

**RACQUEL BAYAN/RADIO PILIPINAS:** All right. Sir, you mentioned po kanina iyong possible na EU and Philippine Free Trade Agreement. How about po iyong ASEAN and EU Free Trade Agreement po?

**DFA ASEC. ESPIRITU:** Okay. Pareho iyan pending, ongoing iyong negotiations. But at this point, may mga issues between the two sides na medyo pending pa so nakatengga iyan. In fact, the last we heard was that ASEAN already made its comments on the latest draft. So kumbaga iyong papel ngayon nasa court na ng EU. So, we are waiting for their response on this one.

But napakarami noong issues na nakalagay doon and we have to make sure that all national interests of the ASEAN member-countries and especially the Philippines, for us, would be addressed at hindi naman madi-disadvantage. So, we do not have to hurry that up. We'd rather have a truly advantageous free trade agreement than a hurried one na nasasakripisyo iyong interes ng mga Pilipino. Thank you.

**EDEN SUAREZ/NET 25:** Hi, sir. May mga nabanggit po kayong figures kanina regarding doon sa mga pledges, investment, ganiyan. Siyempre po inaasahan ng business sectors dito sa atin especially po iyong mga Pilipino kung how much po ba. Mayroon na ba tayong estimate na kung magkano iyong maiuuwing investment ng Pangulo from the Brussels trip po?

**DFA ASEC. ESPIRITU:** Yeah. Gaya nga ng sabi ko kanina, dito pa lang sa Unilever, we are now looking at 4.7 billion pesos in investments. And then dito naman sa AUSEA, doon sa shipyard development, 1.5 billion at ang most important is iyong initial employment that maybe generated 'no. Dito sa Unilever, mga 130; dito sa shipbuilding, 500 to 600 direct and indirect jobs. So iyong iba, of course, lahat iyan kapag may investment, that means employment 'no. Wala pang figures iyong iba but there will be. Thank you so much.

**EDEN SUAREZ/NET 25:** Positive po ba tayo na magpapasok itong mga ito? Kasi sabi ng ECOP, iyong mga previous na investment pledge, iyong mga negos (negotiation) and agreement po, hindi naman halos lahat natuloy.

**DFA ASEC. ESPIRITU:** Yeah. Kasi iyong iba kung minsan pa lang 'di ba. But these ones are in the pipeline already.

**EDEN SUAREZ/NET 25:** Thank you so much po.

**PIA GUTIERREZ/ABS-CBN:** Hi, sir. Sir, nabanggit ninyo po na isa sa pag-uusapan ay iyong Ukraine-Russia conflict. So, do we expect the ASEAN to at least express stronger support for the EU's position on the Ukraine-Russia conflict, sir?

**DFA ASEC. ESPIRITU:** Okay. When it comes to position, ASEAN has its own position; in the same way that we have our own position. Klaro naman iyong position ng ASEAN on that ever since this conflict begun: We are for the self-restraint of the parties concerned. Na sana ay hindi na mag-escalate further itong bakbakan na ito and we have expressed serious concern doon sa humanitarian crisis which it generated and at the same time we are calling on all parties to go to the negotiating table para kung puwede ay mabigyan na ng peaceful

resolution itong conflict na ito. At the same time, ASEAN has always expressed serious concern about the global impact of this conflict especially economically.

Now, in terms of disruption of the supply chain: Energy shortage, food shortage and also iyong shortage of fertilizers and the like. And of course overall, ang laki ng impact nito sa inflation around the world which is being felt ng lahat ng bansa including the Philippines. In fact, this is the parang albatross that's dragging down economic growth across all countries.

So, these are the things na sinabi na ng ASEAN and this will be reflected dito sa discussions sa coming plenary ng ASEAN and EU.

Kung magkatugma man iyong posisyon ng EU at ASEAN, nagkatugma lang talaga simply because—probably because we share a lot of values, and we share iyong the same negative impact noong effects of that war. But of course, we are united in our recognition of the principle of sovereignty, non-aggression and of course, territorial integrity.

**PIA GUTIERREZ/ABS-CBN:** Sir, during the summit, will the ASEAN explore the possibility of imposing unilateral sanctions against Russia?

**DFA ASEC. ESPIRITU:** Not that we heard of. Kasi it's a matter of consensus, hindi ba? Kahit may ilang countries na gusto, kung mayroong ayaw or cautious kasi hindi lang naman sanctions ang possible response diyan. Anyway, sanction is already here hindi ba, it's already imposed by Western countries. So, probably we could explore other actions.

**NESTOR CORRALES:** Sir, you mentioned earlier that one of the issues to be discussed during the summit was the South China Sea issue. So, will the President seek European support for the Philippines' effort to resolve maritime dispute with China in the South China Sea? And if yes, what particular support will the Philippines government ask from the European Union?

**DFA ASEC. ESPIRITU:** Well, at this point the European has already been supporting the Philippines on the South China Sea 'no including sa arbitral award. And this is not only true in terms of European Union as a whole but may mga individual members who have supported us even sa arbitral award but of course continued iyong pag-carry ng Philippines government noong mga position natin diyan sa ASEAN, and sa pakikipagtalakayan with EU sa relations natin.

**NESTOR CORRALES:** Are there commitments from the EU that the President would like to seek like stronger support in terms of patrol in the disputed sea?

**DFA ASEC. ESPIRITU:** Iyong aktuwal patrol siguro, medyo malaki kasi iyong EU, malayo tayo. But enough na iyon, ang lakas ng pronouncements nila paulit-ulit in support of the Philippines on the issue.

la-arrange mo pa iyong actual patrol; we are not discounting that but of course malaking undertaking iyan kung sakali. Wala naman sa cards iyan, so far.

**ASEC. DE VERA:** Asec. Daniel, may we ask for closing statement?

**DFA ASEC. ESPIRITU:** Okay. Thank you very much, ladies and gentlemen for coming on a short notice. We just gave this briefing so that you would already, more or less, have an idea of what to cover in the next few days during the progress of this summit, not only from the perspective of Philippine interest but also from the perspective of the region.

We hope that at the end of the summit there will be an adoption of the ASEAN-EU Leaders Declaration, and among the deliverables would also be the Program of Action on ASEAN-EU Comprehensive Cooperation for the Next Five Years from 2023 to 2027 kung saan napapaloob iyong sinabi na nating areas of priority kanina ‘no – post-pandemic public health recovery and economic recovery, energy security, food security, maritime cooperation and maritime security, MSMEs, digital transformation and digital economy, climate action and biodiversity management and conservation, and other areas. Napakamakapal ho iyong program of action, and I cannot describe all the details but puno po iyon ng areas of cooperation between ASEAN and EU.

So, iyon lang po. Thank you very much po sa inyong lahat.

**ASEC. DE VERA:** Thank you very much, Assistant Secretary Daniel Espiritu, of DFA Office of ASEAN Affairs, and maraming salamat Malacañang Press Corps. Magandang hapon.

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