

**KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY
THE HONOURABLE SENATOR DATO' MARZUKI YAHYA,
DEPUTY MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF MALAYSIA,
AT THE VALDAI DISCUSSION CLUB ASIAN REGIONAL
CONFERENCE**

**HILTON KUALA LUMPUR
21 NOVEMBER 2018**

Yang Berbahagia Tan Sri Rastam Mohd Isa,
Chairman and Chief Executive,
Institute of Strategic and International Studies (ISIS) Malaysia

Mr Andrey Bystritskiy,
Chairman of the Board,
Foundation for Development and Support of the Valdai Discussion Club

His Excellency Valery Yermolov,
Ambassador of the Russian Federation to Malaysia

Ms Tatiana Naumova,
Deputy Head of the Federal Agency for Press and Mass Media of the
Russian Federation

Distinguished participants, guests, ladies and gentlemen,

Selamat datang – Welcome to Kuala Lumpur and to Malaysia.

1. First and foremost, allow me to congratulate the Valdai Discussion Club and ISIS Malaysia for convening this timely conference. I find it

encouraging that deeper links are being forged between the analytical communities of Russia and the wider Asian – particularly Southeast Asian – region.

2. Discussions at the Track Two level provide an important outlet for a free and frank exchange of perspectives, for testing new ideas against the rigours of spirited and healthy debate, and for the development of mutual understanding. And these will hopefully provide a basis for more robust links between our various nations at the official level.

3. It would appear to many people that the countries of Southeast Asia have generally not accorded enough attention towards our links across the Eurasian continent. There appears to be a maritime bias to how we prioritise our relationships. For many decades, the focus has been on creating a deep web of cooperation between the nations of the Pacific Basin. In more recent times, that perspective has widened to include the nations around the Indian Ocean.

4. Given the present geopolitical and geo-economic environment, I believe it is time for those of us here in Southeast Asia to additionally direct our collective gaze to the north: towards Russia and the countries of Central Asia. At the same time, we welcome our friends from Russia to look south and east, including towards Southeast Asia.

Ladies and gentlemen,

5. Russia is much more than just the host of this year's remarkable World Cup. In terms of territory, Russia is the largest country in the world. A large portion of the country resides in the Asian continent. Yet,

speaking for Malaysians at least, in our daily lives, we speak less of Russia than we do about Europe, China or the United States.

6. Geographical distance accounts for this to a certain extent. However, we must acknowledge that there is still a lot that we can reap from a closer engagement with Russia. In this regard, I believe this Valdai Discussion Club Regional Conference presents an opportunity to overcome barriers and foster greater cooperation between Russia and regional actors in Southeast Asia, including Malaysia.

7. Malaysia and Russia celebrated their 51st anniversary of bilateral relations in 2018. However, the ties between our people go back for centuries. Russian travellers and navigators have ventured to what is now Malaysia since the 19th century. Formal bilateral ties were established in 1968, which facilitated cooperation particularly in the socio-economic sphere. Our people-to-people relations are particularly prominent in the areas of education, tourism and culture. In the years to come, I hope Malaysia and Russia could further strengthen our cooperation in this direction. Prime Minister Yang Amat Berhormat Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad and His Excellency Vladimir Putin, met on the sidelines of the ASEAN Summit recently and discussed the state of our bilateral ties.

8. Trade is also an important aspect of our bilateral relations. Russia remains an exporter of defence technologies to many Southeast Asian countries, Malaysia included. But there is room for improvement. Two-way trade between Malaysia and Russia reached US Dollar 2.2 billion in 2016. I believe we can significantly boost this by considering a diversification of portfolios and items. For example, we should consider

the prospects of such industries as energy, medicine, aviation and aerospace, and IT-related services and products. Cooperation in high value-added industries is the way to go.

9. Russia's intention to develop its Far East region also provides Moscow with greater drive to engage major actors in East Asia. Establishing closer relations with ASEAN is an imperative that cannot be ignored. There is a wealth of opportunities that we can develop in socio-cultural and economic areas. Moreover, there are also avenues in political-security issues that we could pursue. Therefore, the plan to elevate the ASEAN-Russia relations to a strategic partnership could not have come at a more opportune time.

10. ASEAN-Russia cooperation in political-security issues is primarily focused on countering terrorism and transnational crime, which go back to 2004. Cooperation, in this regard, has undoubtedly been fruitful to all the parties concerned. I therefore look forward to Russia and Indonesia co-chairing the 17th ASEAN Regional Forum Inter-Sessional Meeting on Counter-Terrorism and Transnational Crime in 2019.

11. Throughout the years, the sectors of education, youth and culture have seen a number of activities that range from the ASEAN-Russia Youth Symphony Orchestra to the ASEAN-Russia University Forum. I believe we should continue these activities in the future. After all, only by increasing interactions between our youth can we build a strong basis for cooperation in other areas in the future.

12. The participation of President Putin in the 13th East Asia Summit in Singapore demonstrates Russia's determination to enhance its

engagement with ASEAN. In this era of changing power dynamics, ASEAN remains central to the evolving regional architecture. Russia has an important role to play in keeping the region peaceful, stable and prosperous.

Ladies and gentlemen,

13. At this juncture I wish to say a few words on ASEAN. There can be no doubt that ASEAN has come a long way since its founding on 8 August 1967 in Bangkok. The Southeast Asia that ASEAN was born into was a lot less peaceful, stable and prosperous than the region we know today. Conflicts and uncertainties, coupled against the backdrop of post-colonisation jitters and the Cold War were the order of the day. ASEAN's main aims, then and now, are focused on ensuring peace, security, stability and prosperity in the region. It would not be far off the mark to say that ASEAN has successfully met these aims and continues to strive to maintain these achievements.

14. ASEAN is now at the driving seat of several key regional security and cooperative initiatives that work to maintain regional and global peace and a sustainable regional architecture. These include the East Asia Summit, the ASEAN Regional Forum and the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting Plus. Many of these initiatives now serve as key platforms for leaders and senior officials of major strategic stakeholders to meet and hash out the issues.

15. The peace dividend brought about by ASEAN's efforts has enabled it to progress significantly on the economic and social front as well. ASEAN has a combined population of over 640 million people and,

when taken together, is a global economic powerhouse. It is the world's sixth largest economy with a vibrant labour force and expanding middle class that drives domestic consumption.

16. During Malaysia's Chairmanship of ASEAN in 2015, the ASEAN Community was formally established, a realisation of the ASEAN Charter adopted in 2007 which provided the basis for a Community built on three pillars. Those pillars are the ASEAN Economic Community, the ASEAN Political-Security Community, and the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community. ASEAN is now working hard towards the goals within the ASEAN 2025 document, which charts the path for ASEAN Community building. What we are aiming for is a community that is more integrated, cohesive, resilient, and people orientated.

17. The ASEAN Community will continue to progress, guided by its fundamental principles as enshrined in the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation. These include the mutual respect for the independence, sovereignty, equality, territorial integrity, and national identity amongst all member states, non-interference in the internal affairs of one another, peaceful settlement of differences, and rejection of the threat or use of force, amongst others.

18. ASEAN has been and will always remain the cornerstone of Malaysia's foreign policy. The establishment of the ASEAN Community in 2015 has significantly elevated Malaysia's approach and engagement at the regional level. As a founding member, Malaysia is heavily invested in ASEAN and has played a major role in the progress of the regional organisation. Malaysia will therefore support any efforts by Dialogue

Partners, including Russia, that will strengthen ASEAN's capacity and centrality.

Ladies and gentlemen,

19. The theme of this conference, "A Changing Asia in a Transforming World", is particularly apt in capturing the multiple waves of change that is happening both in the region and around the world. And as most of you are surely aware, Malaysia has also undergone a profound change of its own.

20. The 14th Malaysian General Election brought about a major shift in the country's political landscape. Malaysia was previously governed by a coalition helmed by the same set of political parties since the country's Independence in 1957. On May 9th of this year, Malaysians exercised their democratic rights and realised the hopes of the vast majority of the people in ushering Malaysia into a new era. The new Government led by Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad embodies this aspiration for a Malaysia that is democratic, just and prosperous.

21. The New Malaysia has emerged amidst a crisis of governance in many countries throughout the world. At a time when democracy appears to be on the decline and toxic forms of populism are on the rise, Malaysians have placed their faith in bringing about a democratic and peaceful change in government. In doing so, Malaysians have not only left a significant mark in our own history – they have also taken the world by surprise and have become an inspiration to people in other countries.

22. The overwhelming focus of the new Government of Malaysia is to restore the rule of law, the integrity of its domestic institutions and the health of our finances. The new Government also realises that democracy is not just about elections, but a change in mindset where there is consultation with the wider society in policy making.

23. This includes the formulation of Malaysia's foreign policy. My colleague, Foreign Minister Dato' Saifuddin Abdullah, has recently announced the formation of a 15-member Consultative Council on Foreign Policy, comprising of former ambassadors, representatives of NGOs as well as the private sector. The Foreign Ministry also engaged in intensive consultations with relevant NGOs in preparation for the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) on Malaysia's human rights initiatives, held recently in Geneva.

24. All of this is just the beginning. Indeed, I look forward to engaging the various think-tanks in this country, including ISIS Malaysia, in charting the future course of our international strategy.

Ladies and gentlemen,

25. Platforms such as the Asian Regional Conference of the Valdai Discussion Club are vital to kick-start conversations that could help shape the direction of policies. It is through platforms like this that policies and initiatives have been conceived and articulated. The ASEAN Regional Forum, ASEAN Plus Three and the ASEAN Post-Ministerial Conference are some of the forums that resulted from discussions in think-tank circles. It is therefore not too far-fetched to think that ideas

from today's conference would develop into concrete policies in the near future.

26. I encourage you to engage in frank and stimulating discussions with the aim of shaping a better tomorrow.

27. Please have a fruitful conference and enjoy Malaysia's hospitality.

Thank you.