



## 8<sup>th</sup> ASEM Sustainable Development Dialogue

**Enhancing Water Partnership Towards Sustainable Development and Inclusive Growth**

19-20 September 2019, Apsara Palace Resort and Conference Center

Siem Reap City, Kingdom of Cambodia

### **RECORDS FOR THE 8<sup>TH</sup> ASEM SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT DIALOGUE**

#### Preface

It is our great pleasure to present the RECORDS FOR THE 8TH ASEM SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT DIALOGUE on Enhancing Water Partnership Towards Sustainable Development and Inclusive Growth. The Dialogue was held on 19-20 September 2019, Apsara Palace Resort and Conference Center, Siem Reap City, Kingdom of Cambodia, hosted by Cambodia Government, coordinated and facilitated by Cambodia National Mekong Committee.

In the spirit of foresight of working together ASIA-Europe Meeting as since its establishment in March 1996. The Asia-Europe Dialogue Partnership brings together 53 partners from across Europe and ASEM and ASEM is the main multilateral forum that connects Europe and Asia with the essential and important of the world, ASEM partners represent 65% of the global economy, 60% of the global population, 55% of trade World Tourism and 75% of world tourism.

The ASEM main purpose is to provide a platform to foster political dialogue, strengthen economic cooperation and tackle global challenges of a fast-changing world, such as connectivity, trade and investment, climate change, and broad security challenges such as counter-terrorism, migration, maritime security and cyber issues. In many respects, recent developments in the international landscape have increased the value of ASEM as a key building block for an open, cooperative and rules-based international system.

The 1st ASEM-Sustainable Development Dialogue (SDD) was hosted by Hungary in 2012 in Budapest on the topic of "Water's Role in Sustainable Regional Development Strategies". Sustainable Development (SD) is for sharing experiences and best practices between macro-development strategies such as Strategy for Danube River in providing an additional benefit for the initiatives of the sub-region through the strengthening of international co-operation areas. Following seven times of ASEM SDD hosted respectively by Hungary, Viet Nam, Romania, Bulgaria and Lao PDR have further contributed to the growing scale of the water framework.

We are grateful to **H.E. Mr. Lim Kean Hor**, Minister of Water Resources and Meteorology and Chairman of Cambodia National Mekong Committee, Kingdom of Cambodia; **Mr. Zoltán György Horváth**, Chargé d' Affaires a.i. of the Hungarian Embassy to the Kingdom of Cambodia as the host country of the 7th ASEM Sustainable Development Dialogue in 2018; **H.E. Dr. Sok Siphana**, Senior Advisor to the Royal Government of Cambodia and ASEM SOM Leader; **Mr. Franck VIAULT**, Head of Cooperation of the Delegation of the European Union to the Kingdom of Cambodia; **Dr. An Pich Hatda**, CEO of the Mekong River Commission Secretariat; **H.E. Angela Corcoran**, Ambassador of Australian Embassy to the Kingdom of Cambodia; **H.E. Mr. Te Navuth**, Permanent Vice-Chairman, Cambodia National Mekong Committee who are honorary persons who expressed their remarks, welcome and opening remarks and closing remarks during the opening and close sessions.

We would like to thank all key note speakers, all four session chairs and all presenters, session facilitators who contributed their times and expertise as well as teams of CNMCS, MRCS for their great efforts and support in the Dialogue organization.

We thank to the Government of Cambodia for the financial support to the Dialogue organization as well as the Mekong River Commission financial support to the Member countries representatives. We appreciate and thank to all participants for their participation and support on their own finance.

The Dialogue's speeches and remarks, presentation materials are included as annexes of the Records.

October 2019

HE Mr. Pich Dun, Head of 8<sup>th</sup> ASEM SDD Organizing Committee  
Cambodia National Mekong Committee

## I. Opening Session

### 1. Remark by Mr. Zoltán György Horváth, Chargé d' Affaires a.i. of the Hungarian Embassy to the Kingdom of Cambodia as the host country of the 7<sup>th</sup> ASEM Sustainable Development Dialogue in 2018

On Behalf of the Hungary, on behalf of the Ministry of Foreign Policy and Trade of Hungary and as previous host of the event, He was honoured to speak some words.

Hungary launched the initiative of an ASEM Sustainable Development Dialogue by hosting the first event of the sequence of seminars in 2012 in Budapest, focusing on the 'Role of Water in Sustainable Regional Development Strategies'

Sharing experience and best practices between macro-regional development strategies such as the Danube Region Strategy or the Greater Mekong Subregion, we can provide additional benefits for other sub-regional initiatives by significantly strengthening interregional co-operation capacities.

As the conclusion of the 7<sup>th</sup> ASEM Sustainable Development Dialogue several needs were highlighted by the participants and speakers. For example, 1. the need towards the widely available open data sources, which would trigger multiple references for decision-makers as well; 2. the investment need of the water sector with improved pricing and investment efficiency to reduce maintenance costs; 3. the lack of human resources and capacity-building in different fields of the water sector 4. There was also a tangible need for more project experiences in the future. Since the last ASEM Sustainable Development Dialogue several high-level political meetings were held with Cambodian, Chinese, Lao PDR, Thai and Vietnamese delegations, discussing possible investments in the water sector or student exchange possibilities. Hungarian companies participated the Viet Water Expo and started cooperation in the Mekong region on the field of thermal water usage, wastewater treatment, or for the safe drinking water supply.

Water security is the key not only to peace, but also to sustainable development. Hungary is committed to sustainable, integrated water management.

Due to its geographic location, Hungary has suffered from a number of water-related challenges, including major floods and droughts. In addition, over 95% of our surface water resources originate outside of Hungary's borders.

Despite these challenges, over the past few decades Hungary has managed to transform its geographic disadvantage into an asset by amassing considerable experience and knowledge in various aspects of water management that we are open to share.

Hungary is highly devoted to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals and believes that the fulfilment of Agenda 2030 requires an integrated and comprehensive approach. In order to share its best practices and contribute to the global dialogue on water, Hungary participated last year in the Voluntary National Review of the High-Level Political Forum.

The Budapest Water Summit organised in 2013 contributed in its own way to averting the global crisis through its role in the formulation of a standalone Sustainable Development Goal on water in the 2030 Agenda.

Three years later, the Budapest Water Summit 2016 – attended by over 2,200 participants from 117 countries – represented a milestone in the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 6, the stand-alone goal in the 2030 Agenda involving water and sanitation. The Summit identified the water-related tasks that we are to carry out in the coming fifteen years. The Summit likewise connected those individuals whose are best places to discharge these tasks most effectively. Indeed, along the margins of the Summit, leading representatives of the multilateral financial sector agreed to double their institutions investments into the water sector.

The Budapest Water Summit 2019, under the motto ‘Preventing Water Crisis’ aims to promote solutions that tackle the problems of the emerging water crisis we have to face, building around the issues of abundant, scarce and polluted water. The Summit will provide a platform for political decision makers, representatives of the economic and finance sectors, as well as the members of the scientific society to discuss the challenges and find solutions on how to achieve a water-secure world.

Hungary also plays a key role in the water management of the Danube Region, hosting the Secretariat of the Danube Commission since 1954. Hungary also took over the Presidency of the International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River in 2019 and co-ordinate the ‘Water quality’ and ‘Environmental risks’ priority areas of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region since 2011, which involves 14 countries of the most international river basin of the world.

The action plan of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region – as the second macro-regional strategy of EU – is under renewal. The new action plan is planned to be adopted by the 14 Danube countries in early 2020, addressing new challenges of the water management as well e.g. plastic pollution, hazardous substances, measures to enable fish migration, promoting alternative wastewater treatment solutions for small settlements, elaborating drought forecasting and proactive drought management, to harmonize the operation and improve the collaboration of volunteer rescue teams in the Danube basin ..., etc.

Finally, he expressed his thanks the Royal Government of Cambodia and the Cambodia National Mekong Committee for the organization of this event.

## **2. Remark by Mr. Franck Viault, Minister Counsellor and Head of Cooperation of the Delegation of the European Union to the Kingdom of Cambodia**

As representing the European Union, he addressed at the opening of this **important dialogue between Europe and Asia on enhanced Water Partnerships**.

- The European and Asian countries attach great importance to the **ASEM partnership and respect to multilateralism**, which means we are reaffirming our longstanding commitment to international cooperation and the rules-based international order, with the UN and regional organisations.
- We believe that through dialogue and cooperation under ASEM on topics of mutual interest, such as enhanced water partnerships, transboundary water cooperation and sustainable development, we are reinforcing the global partnership between Europe and Asia. Together Asia and Europe represent 60% of the global population and 65% of the global economy! This shows the magnitude of our intertwined interests and the global power that we present.
- This morning I would like to start my intervention on general messages and principles first, then I will focus on three (3) main partnerships the European Union has with ASEAN, with the Mekong River Commission and also give you the example of our successful partnership with the Kingdom of Cambodia with very concrete examples related to water and natural resources management. These partnerships are of course closely interlinked also to other principles of collaboration developed at

ASEM high-level dialogue on “Enhanced Water Partnerships” which is the focus of this 2 days’ conference.

## GLOBAL EU

- The EU has presented last year a Communication that sets out the EU's vision for a new and comprehensive strategy to better connect Europe and Asia. We have recognized the need to strengthen connectivity between our two continents in a sustainable and comprehensive way. Our High Representative and Vice-President of the Commission, Mrs Federica Mogherini said: “Connectivity is the way to the future. The more connected we are, the more opportunities we have – to find common political solutions and to bring economic prosperity to citizens”.
- This ASEM High-Level Dialogue on Enhanced Water Partnerships brings out the real essence of our partnership: gathering people together in order to use the full potential of our cooperation.
- He said he is confident that this event organised by our Cambodian friends – expressed thank very much for that to the Royal Government and the event organisers - on the Northern shore of the Tonle Sap Great Lake – which represents a unique ecosystem of the lower Mekong- will be an excellent opportunity to discuss concrete policy initiatives that can help to achieve sustainable use of shared water resources in particular in the region.

## EU & ASEAN

- The EU and ASEAN have also been strengthening their cooperation over the years. We have a truly multidimensional partnership on the basis of our jointly agreed **ASEAN-EU Plan of Action 2018-2022**, with over 75% of it already under implementation. This displays the width and depth of our relations.
- We strongly welcome the **Thai Chairmanship of ASEAN** decision of putting sustainable development and ‘sustainability’ in all of its aspects so high up on the Chairmanship agenda, and the efforts for promoting partnerships for sustainability. This confirms and consolidates the decision taken back in 2012 – already 7 years ago- by ASEAN and European Ministers of Foreign Affairs to add “sustainable development” and notably “environment, climate change and disaster risk reduction” as a top priority of EU and ASEAN cooperation, in addition to our support to strengthening ASEAN Economic Community.
- Environment is therefore an important pillar of our cooperation with ASEAN, covering today many areas: biodiversity conservation, forest peatlands’ management, but also circular economy, marine litter and oceans’ conservation; many of those programmes and projects are also implemented by and with European Member States. We consider direct exchanges and networking as central in addressing global and trans-boundary challenges such as environment and climate change.
- During the EU-ASEAN ministerial meeting on 21 January 2019, we have also jointly endorsed the establishment of an ASEAN – EU Dialogue on Environment and Climate Change. So we really see this dialogue as a further concrete step in strengthening our bilateral cooperation in these important areas.

## Climate Change

- **Climate Change** is one of the defining challenges of our times. The 2015 Paris Agreement shows that the multilateral approach can offer us fair, operational and pragmatic solutions. The EU stands ready to step up our cooperation and dialogue to enhance the implementation of the Paris Agreement.
- Many countries, not least in the Mekong Region, are classified as highly vulnerable to the effects of climate change and this is the case for Cambodia. Increased salinity, river erosion, pollution, and the increasing global demand for food and energy, present concrete dangers for the regional freshwater systems and fisheries; including in Cambodia where the Mekong / Tonle Sap ecosystem -where we are discussing today- has the richest freshwater fisheries in the world.

- Back to Climate Change, we believe that economic development, biodiversity conservation, better resilience and emission reductions are not conflicting objectives. On the contrary. We can achieve them all by means of smart environment, water and climate policies. One of them is to **protect precious river ecosystems and the multiple, essential services they provide**. As we were recently discussing with the Prime Minister of Cambodia, this ecosystem and fisheries are vital for the country food security as the main source of proteins for the Kingdom.

## MRC

- **The Mekong River Commission (MRC)** is the only treaty-based organization in the Mekong region mandated to provide effective support for sustainable management and development of water and related resources.
- **Being treaty based makes the MRC unique**; it also shows the commitment of its members and promises a certain amount of sustainability for the work of the organization.
- The cooperation among the four lower Mekong Countries is an example of regional cooperation among (almost) equals for which the member countries are taking an ever-increasing ownership role.
- The European Union is a **proud supporter of the Mekong River Commission**, which we see as an example of practical regional cooperation in an area where the need for cooperation will only continue to grow as the many – at times conflicting – demands for the use of the Mekong River increases.

## SDGs

- The EU is committed to the implementation of the UN 2030 Agenda and highlights that progress on Goal 6 (“Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all”) is essential for the achievement of other Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). With current progress insufficient, as the 2018 Synthesis Report on Water and Sanitation has highlighted, the EU is committed to increase this effort through its development cooperation efforts and calls on all partners and stakeholders to take the necessary further steps to implement Goal 6, with a particular focus on targets 6.5 (integrated water resources management) and 6.6 (protect and restore water-related ecosystems).
- This is also the case for the other water-related SDGs such as SDG15 (protect and restore ecosystems) with its target 15.1: “conservation and sustainable use of freshwater ecosystems, wetlands, etc.”.
- All stakeholders should play their role in realising integrated water resources management (IWRM) objectives, including at transboundary level. Updated and reliable indicators and data, are required not only to monitor progress, but also for accountability and transparency, for citizens to realise that informed decisions are taken on what can impact their environment and their lives!

## Example of EU / Cambodia partnership

- First, he informed that since 2014 we have a successful **European Joint programming** mechanism in place in Cambodia, which is supporting the development of the country with one single European strategy signed by 11 European Partners (the EU, 9 EU Member States and Switzerland), this strategy also aims at supporting the sustainable management of natural resources in Cambodia, which are today at risk. We are now formulating the next European strategy and sustainable water management is, I can tell you, at the core of our discussions.
- He brought attention on the importance of the Mekong ecosystem here in Cambodia; more particularly the unique Tonle Sap Lake ecosystem is now **identified as one key landscape for biodiversity conservation in the EU's strategy for biodiversity conservation in Asia "Larger than Tigers"** (launched simultaneously in Brussels last year and by the EU and ASEAN here in Siem Reap, the same day!).
- The Mekong is the source of one of the most productive freshwater fisheries in the world and the EU is committed to supporting Cambodia's efforts to manage sustainably its fisheries to sustain the livelihoods of the millions of people who depend upon it, through the CAPFISH programme, **the**

**largest fisheries' programme funded by the European Union in the world** (EU funding of EURO 87 million so around USD 100 million!) which is starting implementation now.

- CAPFISH programme will contribute to improving inter-sectoral coordination mechanism for the preservation and sustainable development of the **Tonle Sap Biosphere Reserve** on the model of the International Committee for the Conservation of Angkor archaeological zone.
- Through another project (**WAT4CAM**) co-funded with France (AFD), we will also provide assistance to the Ministry of Water Resources and Meteorology to implement IWRM processes and support IWRM governance schemes at the level of Tonle Sap tributaries and the whole Tonle Sap sub-basin.

Finally, he mentioned clearly the importance of developing a “**Landscape approach**” for which we are also planning additional support to better balance economic, social and environmental needs in the management of the Tonle Sap.

## CONCLUSION

- The EU is fully committed to promoting integrated Water Resources Management and effective sustainable and integrated water governance as it is also essential for long term stability. This requires appropriate institutions, reliable data, capacity building, awareness raising and funding. It should foster sustainable water management as well as the consideration of interlinkages with for instance energy, food security and ecosystems.
- There are no quick fixes to many of these issues, but we are here today and tomorrow to exchange experiences and learn from each other. Europe and Asia and Australia, we have all learned valuable lessons. The European Union stands ready to support global, regional and national institutions; local authorities, communities and civil society to this end.
- Angkor is a reminder of the importance of Water. The control and management of water was an important factor to the rise (and – according to researchers – the fall) of the Angkor empire!
- Finally, he expressed his thanks to the Royal Government of Cambodia and the Cambodian National Mekong Committee for the organisation of the event for today and tomorrow. He hopes will all participants leave inspired – by the Tonle Sap and he hopes the great Angkor Temples - and ready to build an even stronger cooperation between Asia and Europe on this very important challenge which is water, a global public good that is essential to sustain any life on our planet.
- He is sure many things we will be discussing these days will be brought to the attention of our ASEM leaders who will be meeting in one-year here also in Cambodia!

### **3. Remarks by Dr. An Pich Hatda, Chief Executive Officer Mekong River Commission Secretariat**

It is indeed an honour for me to speak at this important event, especially as the Mekong River Commission is underpinned by an Agreement to cooperate on the sustainable development of the Mekong River System for the benefit of governments and basin's more than 65 million people.

It's also a pleasure to join you in focusing on building a more sustainable and inclusive future for the Mekong region, and a wider partnership across the content. A future which depends on reconciling our needs for economic growth with our desire to continue peaceful cooperation and increasing collaboration for regional growth and improved management of our shared water resources.

In fact, the concept of sustainable development has transformed itself in many ways. It shifted from the global limit concepts first highlighted by Rachel Carson's documentation of the indiscriminate use of pesticides in “The Silent Spring” in 1962, and then Gareth Hardin's “The Tragedy of the Commons” in 1968, which warns of the implications of the indiscriminate use of common resources without consideration of others who use the same resource.

This is something that is clearly relevant to the MRC's mandate.

If you may recall, the 1987 Brundtland Report "Our Common Future" defines sustainable development as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs." Similarly, the MRC Member Countries – Cambodia, Lao PDR, Thailand and Viet Nam – have indicated that they give equal importance to regional and basin wide perspectives as they do to their national development and interests. They have repeatedly reaffirmed their commitment to this principle and to the 1995 Mekong Agreement.

In this context, the MRC's approach to sustainable development could be expressed as "the development and use of the Mekong River System that meets the needs of each Member Country without compromising the ability of the others to meet their own needs, now and into the future."

Perhaps more importantly for the MRC is the recognition of the concepts driven by the global south in the run-up to the first World Summit on Sustainable Development in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. They are the concepts that are now encapsulated in the globally accepted principle of a common but differentiated responsibility towards the environment. They are the concepts that reflect the right of developing nations for judicious development, and the responsibility of the developed nations to do more to limit their impacts on the global environment.

Indeed, one may argue that for the MRC's Member Countries development is necessary for sustainability. But the highly interlinked nature of the Mekong River ecosystem means that the development of the shared watercourse must be judicious, fair, reasonable and equitable. It must benefit everyone sharing the same River.

This is where we're fortunate. We're lucky that our 1995 Mekong Agreement and the 5 MRC Procedures place the Commission in a unique position to tackle the above challenge. Together these play a key role in securing and monitoring the sustainable development of our shared watercourse.

For example, the Procedures for Notification, Prior Consultation and Agreement – or PNPCA – provide a framework for identifying potential impacts on the shared water resource and proposing measures that can avoid, minimise and mitigate these impacts.

The Procedures for Water Use Monitoring – or PWUM – provide the means to monitor the gradual development of the water resources in the basin, while initiatives like a Joint Environmental Monitoring program tracks the impacts of these developments and the efficacy of the measures agreed in the PNPCA. Similarly, the Procedures for Water Quality and the Procedures for the Maintenance of Flows on the Mainstream help track changes in water quality and ensure that flows on the mainstream stay within agreed thresholds.

But the MRC's activities extend beyond this. Other initiatives like the Preliminary Design Guidance for Mainstream Dams outline design and operational measures to advise developers and the governments of the Member Countries on how to do "a dam better". A Sustainable Hydropower Development Strategy helps the Member Countries achieve their collective energy needs in the most sustainable way. Most importantly, the Basin Development Strategy considers the proposed development plans for the basin and stipulates priorities and actions to optimise benefits while minimizing adverse impacts.

The Council Study has provided a detailed assessment of the potential impacts of current national development plans and has produced a set of tools and recommendations to improve planning and implementation, while the State of the Basin Report has provided a framework for evaluating progress towards key economic, social, environmental, and cooperation objectives championed in the 1995 Mekong Agreement.

The MRC has the legal platform, tool and framework to enable the sustainable, reasonable and equitable development of the Lower Mekong Basin. But now we also need to examine a couple of key things, having been in the fourth year of SDG implementation. We need to examine the role that the MRC must play in achieving the targets for 2030 through the update of our Basin Development Strategy for 2021-2030 and the

next Strategic Plan for 2021-2025. With an expanded set of 17 Goals and 165 integrated targets, SDGs provides a clear direction to the role the MRC must play in supporting the sustainable development of the Lower Mekong Basin. SDG 6 on Water specifically mentions the implementation of Integrated Water Resources Management at all levels including through transboundary cooperation.

Many of the other SDGs are important to us. For example, SDG 10 on Reduced Inequalities within and between countries, SDG 7 on Clean and Affordable Energy, SDG 8 on Decent Work and Economic Growth, SDG 13 on Climate Action, and SDG 17 on Partnership, are – at the very least – also key to achieving the objectives and principles of the 1995 Mekong Agreement. Indeed, we recognise that for the Member Countries to sustainably achieve any of the SDGs, they need to work towards achieving them all. The 1995 Mekong Agreement, its Strategies and Procedures, are well placed to perform this role. As we move forward into this Dialogue, I hope that we maintain a focus on the nexus nature of the SDGs, the need for open minds, integrated thinking, and a broad perspective on what sustainable development means for our region.

#### **4. Remark by H.E. Dr. Sok Siphanna, Senior Advisor to the Royal Government of Cambodia and ASEM SOM Leader**

H.E. Dr. Sok Siphanna provided some general remarks about the honour Cambodia has received in hosting the important ASEM Summit in 2020 with participants from EU and ASEAN of 53 countries in addition to this important 8<sup>th</sup> ASEM Dialogue on Sustainable Development. His remark also touched on the importance of water cooperation for sustainable development, particularly on water security, geo-political competition and regionalism in both regional and international contexts that form a nexus with the need for water, energy demand and food security.

#### **5. H.E. Angela Corcoran, Australian Ambassador to the Kingdom of Cambodia.**

She is very pleased to be here today at the opening of this ASEM Sustainable Development Dialogue focusing on enhancing water partnerships. She congratulates Cambodia on leading this important dialogue as the incoming ASEM Chair.

The countries of the Mekong region, including Cambodia, have experienced phenomenal growth in the last few decades, lifting millions of people out of poverty.

This economic dynamism has been underpinned by peace and stability in our region. By the capacity of ASEAN and neighbouring Indo-Pacific countries to cooperate, to resolve disputes peacefully, to steadily integrate economies and strengthen trade, and to attract investment from outside partners.

Since the Mekong Agreement in 1995, Mekong countries have also developed institutions, rules and scientific cooperation to manage joint water resources for mutual benefit.

Australia has been a partner in this from the start, with a long history of providing expertise and financial support. She acknowledge also the valuable Mekong-Danube partnership integral to this Dialogue.

The challenges though are now intensifying.

Rapid economic and population growth are generating ever-growing demands on river systems. Water for agriculture and fisheries, for energy generation, for urban populations for industry, for transport and for recreation. All undeniable needs.

Yet, the growing body of scientific knowledge tells us that if all regional countries pursue their river-related development plans in all sectors, then the cumulative results may be catastrophic.



Loss of fish stock and biological diversity, reduced agricultural fertility, riverbank erosion leading to heightened exposure to damaging floods, and increased salinity.

Up to 60% of protein needs here in Cambodia are currently supplied by the Mekong. This kind of scenarios could see Mekong populations go backwards in terms of nutrition, food security and poverty levels.

The World Bank has estimated that GDP growth rates in some regions of the world could decline by more than 6 percent by 2050 because of water-related losses.

It could pose a real risk to regional stability. As Mark Twain once said – “Whisky is for drinking, water is for fighting”

Climate change exacerbates these risks. We are already seeing increased frequency of extreme flooding and drought, of less predictable conditions that make planning and adaptation more difficult.

But she do not see it as all doom and gloom.

As she said, countries in this region have proven that they can work together, can evolve the institutions, rules and practices to meet more demanding circumstances.

This means taking the science seriously and taking a more integrated approach to managing water resources across all six Mekong Region countries.

She said we need to consider the trade-offs and synergies between food security, energy, and environmental sustainability.

And we need stronger engagement between different Mekong platforms such as the Mekong River Commission, Lancang Mekong Cooperation, ACMECs, the Greater Mekong Sub-Region, and the Lower Mekong Initiative.

There are positive signs. She is encouraged for example by Australian-supported work to develop transboundary river-basin cooperation across the Vietnam and Cambodian border areas.

And by the recent Sustainable Irrigation Road Map and Investment Program led by Excellency Minister Lim Kean Hor that puts water availability and sustainability at its centre.

Australia has also been on a similar journey.

As a country with scarce water resources and extreme climactic conditions, we’ve seen our river systems under serious strain, affecting our food security, economy and environment.

In the last ten years, we’ve been forced to come together across different jurisdictions and negotiate plans and develop systems to manage water for the benefit of all. This has not been easy with a range of interests and trade-offs to be reconciled.

There have been failures along the way. We have learnt hard lessons, and in-so-doing, built up world-leading expertise on integrated water resource management.

In the 2017 Australian Foreign Policy White Paper, our Government committed to “share our water management expertise to enhance agricultural productivity, improve health outcomes, strengthen economies and reduce poverty.”

We are already doing this here in the Mekong Region. Through our support for regional organisations such as the Mekong River Commission which recently signed a twinning arrangement with Australia’s Murray Darling

Basin Authority. Or through Australian-funded programs such as the Cambodian Agricultural Value Chain Program that have helped develop sustainable irrigation systems, benefiting thousands of farming households.

We are committed to building on this work to support Cambodia and other Mekong region countries to bolster resilience, strengthen habits of regional cooperation and contribute to a prosperous and stable region.

## **6. Welcome and Opening Address by H.E. Mr. Lim Kean Hor Minister of Water Resources and Meteorology, Chairman of Cambodia National Mekong Committee,**

It is the great honor for Cambodia to host the 8<sup>th</sup> ASEM Sustainable Development Dialogue under the theme: “Enhancing Water Partnership towards the Sustainable Development and Inclusive Growth”, being held today and tomorrow in Siem Reap City, Cambodia, and it is my great pleasure indeed to be here to open this Dialogue.

Allow me on behalf of the Royal Government and people of Cambodia, Ministry of Water Resources and Meteorology and Cambodia National Mekong Committee, to express my warmest welcome and sincere thanks for your presence at this important gathering. Given the regional and global water challenges we’ve been facing, water partnerships become more essential and have received higher attention and become one among other priority actions, requiring joint efforts by every country in the region and the world at large to work together towards the achievement of the shared prosperity and sustainable future through better cooperation and partnerships. Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, Cambodia is geographically endowed with abundant water resources and is considered a “water wealthy” country. Water resources are seen increasingly important to support the needs of many sectors of the economy and society and form a crucial component of our Nation’s environment and natural resources base.

In the national development policies and strategies of the Royal Government of Cambodia, water resources sector is given higher strategic priority among others and has been playing more important role in contributing significantly to the achievement of our ultimate goal towards the sustainable development and growth of the national economy and social progress as well as the environmental sustainability, now and in the future. In the changing context, due to the emerging climate change, increasing needs for development and the well-being of the people and the environmental protection, water availability becomes a major challenge demanding for immediate attention and actions to ensure that water resources are managed, conserved and used effectively and sustainably for the above-mentioned goal. To that end, since its establishment in 1998, the Ministry of Water Resources and Meteorology in its plans and strategic actions up to now and in the future is to promote the more effective water resources sector development and management and to ensure the sustainable water security to address the increasing needs of water for the well-being of the people and all sectors and fields of development. In its own efforts and with the assistance and support from the development partners and international financial institutions, Cambodia has been implementing its strategic priorities on the water resources sector development and management, focusing on continued human resources and institutional development and strengthening, integrated water resources and river basin management, flood and drought management and mitigation, development and rehabilitation of irrigation systems and reservoirs, development and strengthening of the technical knowledge base, improved networking and partnerships, stakeholder engagement and public awareness raising, sharing and exchange of information, knowledge, experiences and best practices on water resources management and development and some others. Investment in water resources sector development and management towards the better outcomes in supporting the development is critically needed and important. To meet this outlined demand, the Royal Government of Cambodia is committed to further increase its national budget and in addition, continues to mobilize support and additional funds from development partners, international financial institutions and other partners through technical assistance, grants, financing and loans and so on for development.

Taking this special opportunity, I would like, on behalf of the Government and People of Cambodia and the Ministry of Water Resources and Meteorology, to express my sincere thanks and high appreciations to all

development partners, international financial institutions and other partners for their past, present and continued support and assistance for the development of Cambodia in general and for the water resource sector development and management in particular, enabling this sector to play more active and important role in contributing more effectively to the development and growth of Cambodia. Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, As mentioned earlier, in the changing world, the transboundary, regional and international water cooperation becomes more essential. As of now, there have been many related regional and international mechanisms and initiatives that have been established and operationalized, and it is expected that many others will be newly established in the future. All of the existing and new mechanisms and initiatives create platforms to jointly discuss the common challenges and opportunities and aim to promote water cooperation for the sustainable development. The effective water resources management at the transboundary, regional and international contexts for the sustainable development and shared prosperity is our shared responsibility and joint actions, and this requires high level political commitments and support towards its successful implementation. On behalf of the Royal Government of Cambodia, I would like to emphasize our firm commitment in supporting and promoting the regional and international cooperation and partnership for the sustainable water management and development. Among others, regular high-level political dialogues are considered very important platforms to discuss the common challenges and find ways to jointly address and to strengthen cooperation, partnerships and joint efforts through joint planning and implementation of the set strategic priorities and actions on development and management. For this related matter, in 2018, Cambodia hosted successfully the Third Mekong River Commission Summit where the Prime Ministers of the four Member Countries and high-level representatives of the Mekong Partners discussed and set out the strategic areas of actions ahead on enhancing joint efforts and partnerships towards the achievement of the sustainable development goal in the Mekong River Basin.

And in 2020, it is the great honor indeed for Cambodia to host another historic event, called the Thirteenth Asia-Europe Summit. Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, At this two-day Dialogue, there will be a number of topics tabled for deliberations and it will provide us with opportunity to share and exchange experiences, know-how and best practices within ASEM framework through strengthening and enhancement in the bi-regional cooperation, multilateral partnerships and better connectivity for the better transboundary water management towards the achievement of the sustainable development and inclusive growth within and between Asia and Europe and beyond. I would like to take this occasion, to express my sincere thanks with high appreciations to the organizers for their immense efforts and arrangements to make the Dialogue possible. I wish the Dialogue every success.

Finally, HE declared the 8<sup>th</sup> ASEM Sustainable Development Dialogue under the theme: Enhancing Water Partnerships towards the Sustainable Development and Inclusive Growth, open. HE wished all of participants a very pleasant and memorable stay in Siem Reap - land of wonder of the Angkor Complex.

## **II. Technical Session (4 Sessions) for Days 1 and 2**

### **Session 1: Key drivers and stress on the River Basin natural and social systems - e.g. population growth, urbanization, water, food, energy, climate change and governance**

It goes without saying that rapid economic and population growth in the Mekong region as well as other parts of the world are generating increasingly growing demands, thus putting tremendous pressure on ecological and river systems across regions, one of which is the Mekong.

As the Australian Ambassador observed, “the countries of the Mekong region, including Cambodia, have experienced phenomenal growth in the last few decades, lifting millions of people out of poverty. This economic dynamism has been underpinned by peace and stability in our region, by the capacity of ASEAN and neighbouring Indo-Pacific countries to cooperate, to resolve disputes peacefully, to steadily integrate economies and strengthen trade, and to attract investment from outside partners. However, if all regional countries pursue their river-related development plans in all sectors, then the cumulative results may be catastrophic”.

This has been echoed and supported by a recent study of the four Ministers of Water Resources and Environment of the Mekong River Commission (MRC) on the impacts of hydropower development on the Mekong mainstream, called the “Council Study”. The Council Study/Study has provided a detailed assessment of the potential impacts of current national development plans among the four Member Countries and has produced a set of tools and recommendations to improve planning and implementation. The Study also indicates, despite gains from the development and investment mainly on hydropower and navigation, various impacts made on environmental conditions such as flow, sediment, salinity intrusion, bank erosion, habitat, ecology, fish losses, aquatic ecology, impact on people’s livelihood and well-being and employment, impact on macroeconomy of the countries, sustainability and high vulnerability and risks. The Study found there are trade-offs for all water resources investments in the LMB between water, food, energy. Fisheries in the LMB under all scenarios will significantly decline as the direct consequence of water resources investments and changes of habitats. Overinvestment in agriculture and hydropower will be to the detriment of existing food security, which is likely to negatively affect GDP growth in the LMB. Future’s growth of all the Member Countries would decline by \$233 billion in net present value (NPV) by 2020 and by \$250 billion by 2040.

And these potential disasters and risks have only been exacerbated by the uncertain climate conditions. Climate change makes the identification of impacts and outcomes more complex. It will likely make negative impacts worse as a result. Sharing similar findings with studies by other stakeholders, the Study has provided some key recommendations including 1) the outcome of joint policy formulation and development planning is objectively the better approach for all parties, including the investor, 2) Establishment of a mechanism for balancing benefits and costs on a water resources sector-wide scale in the LMB, rather than that of individual water resource investments or between countries to take advantage of an unprecedented scale to (e.g. climate) financing otherwise not available, 3) A unique opportunity for all the Member Countries to develop a model of cooperation in water resources development, guided by the knowledge gathered in this Council Study, which sets an example for all other cross-boundary river basins in the world.

Similarly, Hungary who launched the initiative of an ASEM Sustainable Development Dialogue by hosting the first event of the sequence of seminars in 2012 in Budapest, focusing on the ‘Role of Water in Sustainable Regional Development Strategies’, notes sharing experience and best practices between macro-regional development strategies such as the Danube Region Strategy or the Greater Mekong Subregion, they can provide additional benefits for other sub-regional initiatives by significantly strengthening inter-regional co-operation capacities.

Another study of the MRC called the State of the Basin Report has provided a framework for evaluating progress towards key economic, social, environmental, and cooperation objectives championed in the 1995 Mekong Agreement.

As remarked by **H.E. Angela Corcoran**, the Australian Ambassador to the Kingdom of Cambodia, “over 60 million of the population depends on the Mekong for their livelihoods, and for Cambodia alone, 60% of protein needs in Cambodia are currently supplied by the Mekong. So, accumulated unregulated and uncontrolled development of the Mekong would inevitably see the Mekong populations go backwards in terms of nutrition, food security and poverty levels. The World Bank has estimated that GDP growth rates in some regions of the world could decline by more than 6 percent by 2050 because of water-related losses. This would potentially pose a real risk to regional stability, and climate change would exacerbate these risks, as a result of which, we are already seeing increased frequency of extreme flooding and drought, of less predictable conditions that make planning and adaptation more difficult”, she added.

In this context, the Mekong region in particular needs to examine the role that the MRC must play in achieving the targets for 2030 through the update of its Basin Development Strategy for 2021-2030 and the next Strategic Plan for 2021-2025. With an expanded set of 17 Goals and 165 integrated targets, SDGs provides a clear direction to the role the MRC must play in supporting the sustainable development of the Lower Mekong Basin. SDG 6 on Water specifically mentions the implementation of Integrated Water Resources Management at all levels including through transboundary cooperation, remarked Dr. An Pich Hatda, Chief Executive Officer of the MRCS.

## **Key Recommendations from the Session 1 and Panel Discussions:**

The following were recommendations provided throughout the presentations and discussions:

- There is a clear need for taking science seriously and adopting a more integrated approach to managing water resources across all six Mekong Region countries.
- All stakeholders need to consider the trade-offs and synergies between food security, energy, and environmental sustainability. This has been reflected in the MRC's work including its current Basin Development Strategy and the updated Basin Development Strategy for 2021-2030 and the next Strategic Plan for 2021-2025.
- Stronger engagement is needed than ever before between different Mekong platforms such as the Mekong River Commission, Lancang Mekong Cooperation, ACMECs, the Greater Mekong Sub-Region, and the Lower Mekong Initiative.
- Transboundary water cooperation must be prioritized among the countries sharing common water and river system. For example, in the national development policies and strategies of the Royal Government of Cambodia, water resources sector is given higher strategic priority among others and has been playing more important role in contributing significantly to the achievement of our ultimate goal towards the sustainable development and growth of the national economy and social progress as well as the environmental sustainability, now and in the future.
- In 2018, Cambodia hosted successfully the Third MRC Summit where the Prime Ministers of the four Member Countries and high-level representatives of the Mekong Partners discussed and set out the strategic areas of actions ahead on enhancing joint efforts and partnerships towards the achievement of the sustainable development goal in the Mekong River Basin.
- Setting a good example of transboundary water cooperation and integrated water resources management, the MRC has championed through its work, ranging from the transboundary water cooperation among the four Member Countries to application of its 5 Procedures to water diplomacy, to its meetings and dialogues among the Member Countries as well as with its Dialogue Partners such as China and Myanmar.
- The need to increase joint policy formulation and development planning must be prioritized when it comes to transboundary water partnership building and cooperation.
- Policy efforts to transfer to the renewable energy sources must be committed.
- There is an evident need to establish a mechanism for balancing benefits and costs on a water resources sector-wide scale in the LMB in the face of water resources management and development.
- The use and sharing of geospatial information should be enhanced to support sustainable development and disaster resilience.
- Enhanced collaboration with UN system, regional and global partners will help expedite the efforts to reduce pressures on the river basin natural and social systems.
- Investment in resilience to outpace risks related climate change must be made in a timely manner.
- There is an urgent need to enhance and secure political commitment at the highest level and translated them into visions and strategies to improve river basin natural and social systems.
- Optimizing data and information sharing across borders is part of the synergy needed to tackle the transboundary water security and cooperation.
- Promoting benefits sharing mechanism in water development and collaboration is to be upheld as part of the transboundary water cooperation.

## **Session 2: Transboundary River Basin Management: e.g. cases of flood, water scarcity and drought management, monitoring quality and quantity of surface and ground waters due to demand changes and climate conditions**

One of the common calls throughout the Session 2 and its Panel Discussions is that in the face of current climate change and climate resilience strategy, the need toward the widely available open data sources has become priceless if water cooperation is to be of essence. The Session also saw similar views and observation regarding the impacts of the uncertain climate conditions affecting water resources around the regions.

As remarked by Mr. Franck Viault, Minister Counsellor and Head of Cooperation of the Delegation of the European Union, "Climate Change is one of the defining challenges of our times. The 2015 Paris Agreement shows that the multilateral approach can offer us fair, operational and pragmatic solutions. The EU stands ready to step up our cooperation and dialogue to enhance the implementation of the Paris Agreement. During the EU-

ASEAN ministerial meeting on 21 January 2019, the EU also jointly endorsed the establishment of an ASEAN–EU Dialogue on Environment and Climate Change”. The Minister Counsellor was quoted as saying the EU has infused environment as one of the important pillars of its cooperation with ASEAN, covering today many areas: biodiversity conservation, forest peatlands’ management, but also circular economy, marine litter and oceans’ conservation. The EU believes that economic development, biodiversity conservation, better resilience and emission reductions are not conflicting objectives. On the contrary. We can achieve them all by means of smart environment, water and climate policies, he added.

Coming onboard with other regional initiatives, Australian Ambassador observed, “Current situation has already seen GDP growth rates in some regions of the world decline by more than 6 percent by 2050 because of water-related losses according to the World Bank, and climate change aggravates these risks, possibly leading to regional stability.

Sharing its common view, Hungary noted “Water security is the key not only to peace, but also to sustainable development, and Hungary is committed to sustainable and integrated water management”. Agreeing to Hungary and the EU, the Australian Ambassador continued that “as a country with scarce water resources and extreme climactic conditions, Australia has seen its river systems under serious strain, affecting its food security, economy and environment”. We are already seeing increased frequency of extreme flooding and drought, of less predictable conditions that make planning and adaptation more difficult, she added. The Ambassador observed that studies have also pointed to the loss of fish stock and biological diversity, reduced agricultural fertility, riverbank erosion leading to heightened exposure to damaging floods, and increased salinity. In the last ten years, we’ve been forced to come together across different jurisdictions and negotiate plans and develop systems to manage water for the benefit of all, she continued adding that given a range of differing interest to be merged and trade-offs reconciled, Australia has learned a valuable lesson and built up its world-leading expertise on integrated water resource management, sharing its water management expertise to enhance agricultural productivity, improve health conditions, strengthen economies and reduce poverty in its White Paper on Australian Foreign Policy 2017.

As part of the transboundary river basin management support, Australia has provided cooperation supports for regional organization as well as countries in the region.

One of the support projects is Australian-supported transboundary river basin cooperation across the Vietnam and Cambodian border areas. Australia has provided other support for the MRC which recently saw the latter sign a twinning arrangement with Australia’s Murray Darling Basin Authority. Australia has also funded other Programmes including the Cambodian Agricultural Value Chain Program that has helped develop sustainable irrigation systems, benefiting thousands of farming households. Another support comes in the recent Sustainable Irrigation Road Map and Investment Program led by Cambodian Minister of Water Resources and Meteorology that puts water availability and sustainability at its centre. As the Cambodia’s Minister of Water Resources and Meteorology put it, *“the effective water resources management at the transboundary, regional and international contexts for the sustainable development is our shared responsibility and joint actions, and this requires high level political commitments and support towards its successful implementation.*

## **Key Recommendations from the Session 2 and Panel Discussions:**

- Countries must take the science seriously and thus a more integrated approach to managing water resources across all six Mekong Region countries to convert a possible regional tension to common prosperity.
- It is essential to increase water treaties, enhance cooperation frameworks, framework agreements and legally binding agreements and contracts, to be filled by clear rules and procedures, for example, the MRC 1995 Mekong Agreement.
- Countries in the region should make the best use of both traditional and emerging cooperation frameworks to increase partnership for water management and development.
- Coordination across different cooperation frameworks should be improved with regard to the water cooperation among all the stakeholders for a more efficient river basin development.
- There is a need to translate various political commitments into development prosperity, through rules and procedures, knowledge and treaties-based strengthened cooperation and partnership.

- There is a need to use data and information sharing as a key to enhancing partnership and cooperation in water resources management and development.
- There is a clear evidence of benefits received from sound legal frameworks in place when it comes to forging more enhanced international cooperation and partnership in sustainable transboundary river basin management.
- International co-operation frameworks should be adopted in the water sector to promote transboundary water partnership and cooperation.

### **Session 3\_Public and Private Partnership, North-South and South-South Partnership for sustainable and inclusive development and achieving related SDGs**

There is a common recognition that only through partnership building will water cooperation be possible and sustainable when it comes to transboundary river basin management and development. And that should be a way forward for the future that is more sustainable and equitable for generations to come. In this light, EU believes that through dialogue and cooperation under ASEM on topics of mutual interest, such as enhanced water partnerships, transboundary water cooperation and sustainable development, we are reinforcing the global partnership between Europe and Asia.

However, it is also widely recognized that a number of constraints and barriers have to be tackled and removed for the partnership to be more effectively built and water cooperation expanded. These include: 1) Lack of human resources in different fields of the water sector and thus appropriate training and capacity-building in water sector, 2) Lack of ability to absorb technology needed to make use of the science and to increase resilience in the face of uncertain climate conditions, 3) Lack of investments in the water sector, and 4) Lack of legal framework, treaties and agreements. In light of this, various initiatives around the world have been taken in an attempt to forge more partnerships in water sector.

The Budapest Water Summit organized in 2013 contributed in its own way to averting the global crisis through its role in the formulation of a standalone Sustainable Development Goal on water in the 2030 Agenda. Hungary places great importance to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals and believes that the fulfilment of Agenda 2030 requires an integrated and comprehensive approach. Budapest Water Summit 2016 – attended by over 2,200 participants from 117 countries – represented a milestone in the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 6, the stand-alone goal in the 2030 Agenda involving water and sanitation. As a result, leading representatives of the multilateral financial sector agreed to double their institutions investments into the water sector.

Helping to keep the focus on water cooperation, as the incoming ASEM Chair, Cambodia is particularly committed to hosting the 13<sup>th</sup> Water Summit in 2020 to foster more partnerships and expand further water cooperation among the partners in both regions and beyond.

EU has recognized the need to strengthen connectivity between the two continents, Asia and Europe, in a sustainable and comprehensive way. This recognition was made thanks to the perceived importance in practical regional cooperation in the Mekong region where the need for the use of the Mekong River increases. In this context, the EU has developed a number of partnerships both bilaterally and multilaterally with the Mekong region including 1) EU's main partnership: European Union-ASEAN, 2) EU-MRC, 3) EU-Cambodia) with very concrete examples related to water and natural resources management, 4) ASEAN-EU Plan of Action 2018-2022.

The EU is committed to implementing the UN 2030 Agenda and highlights that progress on Goal 6 (“Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all”) is foundation for the achievement of other Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Since 2014 the EU has had a successful European Joint programming mechanism in place in Cambodia, which has been supporting the development of the country with one single European strategy signed by 11 European Partners (the EU, 9 EU Member States and Switzerland). This strategy also aims at supporting the sustainable management of natural resources in Cambodia, which is at risk. The EU has also been planning additional support to better balance economic, social and environmental needs in the management of the Tonle Sap. The unique Tonle Sap Lake ecosystem is now identified as one key landscape for biodiversity conservation in the EU's strategy for biodiversity conservation in Asia.

One of the avenues resulting from Asia-Europe partnership is ASEM. This 8<sup>th</sup> ASEM High-Level Dialogue on Enhanced Water Partnerships is set to increase synergies among all partners. It's an excellent opportunity to discuss concrete policy initiatives that can help to achieve sustainable use of shared water resources in particular in the region, prevent today's water crisis before it turns to tomorrow's regional and world's catastrophe and build better connectivity and more effective partnership on both regional and international scale.

### **Key Recommendations from the Session 3 and Panel Discussions:**

- A number of constraints and barriers have to be tackled and removed for the partnership to be more effectively built and water cooperation expanded. These include: 1) Lack of human resources in different fields of the water sector and thus appropriate training and capacity-building in water sector, 2) Lack of ability to absorb technology needed to make use of the science and to increase resilience in the face of uncertain climate conditions, 3) Lack of investments in the water sector, and 4) Lack of legal framework, treaties and agreements.
- There's a need to establish a clear policy and international cooperation frameworks and mechanism on partnership building for sustainable and inclusive development to increase policy dialogues, assure policy commitment and political prioritization. Among others, regular high-level political dialogues are considered very important platforms to discuss the common challenges and find ways to jointly address and to strengthen cooperation, partnerships and joint efforts through joint planning and implementation of the set strategic priorities and actions on development and management.
- Modalities to support and promote partnership building include 1) facilitate Joint Research in water development, 2) enhance trust, 3) increase networking and 4) promote multi-level Cooperative Mechanism.
- Countries in the region should place their emphasis on establishing appropriate institutions, reliable data, capacity building, awareness raising and funding to enhance partnership and collaboration. And the partnership should foster sustainable water management as well as the nexus between water, energy, food security and ecosystems.
- All partners should be committed to building on their respective work to support countries in the region to bolster their resilience, strengthen their habits of regional cooperation and contribute to a prosperous and stable region.
- There are no quick fixes to many of the issues related to water, but effective partnership, water cooperation and synergies among partners are ways forward for the sustainable future and regional peace and development.
- It is widely recognized that partnership building would neither be sustainable nor effective should the promotion of training, capacity building and knowledge dissemination be absent.
- The Mekong River Commission (MRC) - the only treaty-based organization in the Mekong region mandated to provide effective support for sustainable management and development of water and related resources – is well positioned to promote partnership building and strengthen connectivity. The commitment of its members would ensure a certain amount of sustainability for the work of the organization.
- Public Private Partnership could be a modality to increase the efficiency and effectiveness in water partnership and cooperation.

### **Session 4: Science and Technology for Water Resources Management and Climate Change Adaptation and Mitigation**

A consensus as a result of the discussions is that there's a need to translate science and technology into simple language for better outcomes. Science and policy interface would require effective human resources and good governance system in place to be interacting. Application of the science and technology requires human resources development, investment in water sector, research cooperation and partnership, and high political commitment to applying IWRM principles, especially in the case of transboundary river management to result in policy actions. This has been raised and addressed throughout the three earlier sessions of this important Dialogue on Partnership Building and Water Cooperation. Experiences in the use of science and technology in integrated water resources management have also been shared and best practices exchanged throughout the discussions.



Hungary has shared a range of good practices in flood and droughts management, for example, drought and water scarcity monitoring system, detection and evaluation systems (water balancing, extreme period, wetness), flood management including new strategy focusing on adaptation after 2000 (hard and soft - flood mapping (including financial risks) – management strategy & local plans which is periodically updated as well as R&D.

To enable countries in the region to apply the science and technology in the integrated water resources management, Australia and the World Bank have provided a lot of support for the work of the MRC. MRC's Member Countries including Cambodia and Viet Nam have shared some positive outcomes as a result of the use of the MRC Decision Support System (DSS) as part of the scientific tools to manage their transboundary water cooperation between the Member Countries to provide uniform and informed decision on integrated water resources planning and management including transboundary water management in the basin and sedimentation issues in reservoirs; flood forecasting and warning including near real time, short-term and long term and reservoir operation management; data and information sharing; and other socio-economic development regarding 1) the case of 2Ss Sub-basin – Sesan and Srepok between Cambodia and Viet Nam and Sekong sub-basin between Cambodia and Lao PDR.

The use of such technology enables the Member Countries to see the level of impacts their development would have on the ecological environment of both sub-basin and basin, thus appropriate prevention and mitigation measure.

Despite challenges in addressing progress on Goal 6 “Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all” which is essential for the achievement of other Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the EU is committed to building partnerships, thus increasing their development cooperation efforts and calling on all partners and stakeholders to take the necessary further steps to implement Goal 6, with a particular focus on targets 6.5 (integrated water resources management) and 6.6 (protect and restore water-related ecosystems).

### **Key Recommendations from the Session 4 and Panel Discussions:**

- Science and technology play a crucial role in water resources management and should thus be taken seriously, while a more integrated approach be adopted to sustainably manage water resources across the region.
- To prevent today's water crisis before it becomes tomorrow's catastrophe, investment in water cooperation, science and technology and thus peace and regional sustainability is essential and should be prioritized.
- Water cooperation and partnership for sustainable and inclusive development and common prosperity are the future ahead and way forward.

### **III. Wrap-up Conclusion with Key Messages from the 8th ASEM SDD:**

Dr. Pech Sokhem made the summary of Key Messages from our Dialogue, that can be recorded as follows:

1. Strengthening Governance to address regional and world's water challenges through increasing law and treaty-based institutions and cooperation mechanism to promote water cooperation and enhance partnership for sustainable development and Preventing today's water crisis before it turns to tomorrow's catastrophe. *For example, the Mekong River Commission (MRC) - the only treaty-based organization in the Mekong region mandated to provide effective support for sustainable management and development of water and related resources that has been working to promote joint efforts and partnership building and strengthen connectivity.*
  - Enhanced partnership in water cooperation (*Asia-Europe Partnership and Water Cooperation, MRC, ASEM, Lancang Mekong Cooperation, ACMECs, the Greater Mekong Sub-Region, and the Lower Mekong Initiative*)
  - Promoting rules-based institutions and joint policy formulation across borders. *One practical example of the rules-based institutions is the Mekong River Commission (MRC), a regional river basin organization whose 1995 Mekong Agreement has thus far promoted economic growth and development while also conserving the ecological environment of the Mekong Basin and resolving differences among the Member Countries based on the said Agreement. As another example of rules-based institutions is the case of International Commission for the*

*Protection of the Danube River. One example related to the joint policy formulation is: Hungary took over the Presidency of the International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River in 2019 and co-ordinate the 'Water quality' and 'Environmental risks' priority areas of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region since 2011, which involves 14 countries of the most international river basin of the world.*

- Other countries in the region have also supported the rules-based institutions when it comes to transboundary water cooperation among countries sharing the same river to resolves either differences or disputes. *As the Australian Ambassador put it “As I said, countries in this region have proven that they can work together, can evolve the institutions, rules and practices to meet more demanding circumstances”.*
2. All stakeholders must consider the trade-offs and synergies between food security, energy, and environmental sustainability. This has been reflected in the MRC’s work including its current Basin Development Strategy and the updated Basin Development Strategy for 2021-2030 and the next Strategic Plan for 2021-2025.
  3. Stronger engagement is needed than ever before between different Mekong platforms such as the Mekong River Commission, Lancang Mekong Cooperation, ACMECs, the Greater Mekong Sub-Region, and the Lower Mekong Initiative.
  4. The need to increase joint policy formulation and development planning must be prioritized when it comes to transboundary water partnership building and cooperation.
  5. Policy efforts to transfer to the renewable energy sources must be committed.
  6. There is an evident need to establish a mechanism for balancing benefits and costs on a water resources sector-wide scale in the LMB in the face of water resources management and development.
  7. Promoting benefits sharing mechanism in water development and collaboration is to be upheld as part of the transboundary water cooperation.
  8. Enhanced collaboration with UN system, regional and global partners will help expedite the efforts to reduce pressures on the river basin natural and social systems.
  9. Investment in resilience to outpace risks related climate change must be made in a timely manner.
  10. There is an urgent need to enhance and secure political commitment at the highest level and translated them into visions and strategies to improve river basin natural and social systems.
  11. Building trust and enhancing connectivity (Asia-Europe Partnership and Water Cooperation, MRC, ASEM, Lancang Mekong Cooperation, ACMECs, the Greater Mekong Sub-Region, and the Lower Mekong Initiative) through the following mechanism:
    - Technical exchange and collaboration (*For example, among Asia, Europe, MRC, ASEM, Lancang Mekong Cooperation, ACMECs, the Greater Mekong Sub-Region, and the Lower Mekong Initiative*)
    - Wider data and information sharing. *One best example is from the MRC who has long used its data and information sharing mechanism with not only its Member Countries in the Lower Mekong Basin, but also shared and exchanged data and information with its Dialogue Partner like China when it comes to disaster prevention. Recently, the MRC has taken a bold initiative to re-invigorate and advance its data and information systems with Australian support, aiming to make it more practical and useful in strengthening the MRC capacity in river monitoring, forecasting and timely communication of information to the public and communities in case of disaster management and mitigation in the face of such uncertain climate conditions. For MRC, data and information sharing was also a support for the transboundary water cooperation between and among the Member Countries. For Hungary, free data policy offering data on irrigation, fisheries and hydropower with some limitation to support the water management.*

12. A number of constraints and barriers have to be tackled and removed for the partnership to be more effectively built and water cooperation expanded. These include: 1) Lack of human resources in different fields of the water sector and thus appropriate training and capacity-building in water sector, 2) Lack of ability to absorb technology needed to make use of the science and to increase resilience in the face of uncertain climate conditions, 3) Lack of investments in the water sector, and 4) Lack of legal framework, treaties and agreements.
13. There's a need to establish a clear policy and international cooperation frameworks and mechanism on partnership building for sustainable and inclusive development to increase policy dialogues, assure policy commitment and political prioritization. Among others, regular high-level political dialogues are considered very important platforms to discuss the common challenges and find ways to jointly address and to strengthen cooperation, partnerships and joint efforts through joint planning and implementation of the set strategic priorities and actions on development and management.
14. Modalities to support and promote partnership building include 1) facilitate Joint Research in water development, 2) enhance trust, 3) increase networking and 4) promote multi-level Cooperative Mechanism.
15. Countries in the region should place their emphasis on establishing appropriate institutions, reliable data, capacity building, awareness raising and funding to enhance partnership and collaboration. And the partnership should foster sustainable water management as well as the nexus between water, energy, food security and ecosystems.
16. All partners should be committed to building on their respective work to support countries in the region to bolster their resilience, strengthen their habits of regional cooperation and contribute to a prosperous and stable region.
17. There are no quick fixes to many of the issues related to water, but effective partnership, water cooperation and synergies among partners are ways forward for the sustainable future and regional peace and development.
18. It is widely recognized that partnership building would neither be sustainable nor effective should the promotion of training, capacity building and knowledge dissemination be absent.
19. Sharing experience and best practices among institutions and countries in the region and promoting policy discussions. *For example, this 8<sup>th</sup> ASEM on Sustainable Development Dialogue provides a unique platform to discuss water related issues to increase partnership and cooperation in water across continent. Another example is the sharing of experience and best practices between macro-regional development strategies including the Danube Region Strategy or the Greater Mekong Subregion, which can provide additional benefits for other sub-regional initiatives by significantly strengthening interregional co-operation capacities. Last but not least, despite water scarcity and challenges, over the past few decades Hungary has managed to transform its geographic disadvantage into an asset by amassing considerable experience and knowledge in various aspects of water management that is ready to be shared.*
20. Promoting the use of science and technology to address challenges in Integrated Water Resources Management for more efficiency and effectiveness. *As a common call from countries in the region both Asia and Europe during the 8<sup>th</sup> ASEM, all the six Mekong Region countries should take the science seriously and apply a more integrated approach to managing water resources across the basin.*
21. Improving human resources and capacity-building in different fields of the water sector. *For example, over 95% of our surface water resources originate outside of Hungary's borders. Despite these challenges, over the past few decades Hungary has managed to transform its geographic disadvantage into an asset by amassing considerable experience and knowledge in various aspects of water management.*
22. Enhancing and promoting inclusive investment and financing for water. *For example, along the margins of the Budapest Water Summit 2016, leading representatives of the multilateral financial sector agreed to double their institutions investments into the water sector.*
23. A common call from all partners is the water resources management using the integrated and comprehensive approach. *One important example is from the UN as it suggested "Fulfilment of Agenda 2030 requires an integrated and comprehensive approach".*

#### **IV. Closing Remarks**

H.E Te Navuth, Permanent Vice-Chairman of Cambodia National Mekong Committee closed the Dialogue by emphasising that the 8<sup>th</sup> SDD was productive and is concluded with fruitful results, reflected in the Summary of Key Messages from our Dialogue, as presented by Dr. Pech Sokhem.

H. E Navuth acknowledged all what the Dialogue has shared and exchanged the knowledge, experiences, best practices and lessons learned among us at this important Dialogue. Those are essential and considered as a main contributing basis that can be used to find better ways and means to strengthen and to further enhance water cooperation and partnerships at the national, transboundary, regional and international levels for the overall interest of sustainable development.

H.E Navuth informed that next host country for 9<sup>th</sup> SDD for 2020 will be rotated to one of countries in Europe. With this, H.E requested for the assistance from the Ministry of Foreign Policy and Trade of Hungary to coordinate, consult and identify the country in Europe as the next hosting and then inform the ASEM partner countries accordingly through the ASEM focal points.

Finally, H.E concluded his remarks, by wishing all of participants a safe journey back to your home countries and for those who are continuing your stay in Siem Reap, please have an enjoyable stay further.