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## Indonesia to chair ASEAN in 2023

**What is the  
ASEAN Chair-  
manship?**

At the beginning of the new year, the chairmanship of ASEAN will once again change among the ten member states, with Indonesia taking over in 2023. The member states rotate annually in the alphabetical order of their narrow names. In accordance with Article 31 of the ASEAN Charter, the country holding the chairmanship chairs the ASEAN Summit and related summits, the ASEAN Coordinating Council, the three ASEAN Community Councils, the relevant ASEAN sectoral ministerial bodies, and the Permanent Representatives Committee. The ASEAN Chair acts as host country for key meetings throughout the year and hosts them locally.

**Importance of  
the ASEAN  
Chairmanship**

The role of the ASEAN Chair is further defined in Article 32 of the ASEAN Charter: The respective member state should actively promote and strengthen the interests and welfare of ASEAN, including efforts to build an ASEAN community through policy initiatives, coordination, consensus, and cooperation. To this end, he said, the chair has three key responsibilities: First, he acts as the spokesperson for the regional group; second, he chairs and moderates official meetings and working groups; and third, he proposes new initiatives to promote regional cooperation. However, the Chair's most important and often overlooked role is as an informal consensus builder. ASEAN's high unanimity threshold requires comprehensive agreement and demands leadership and diplomatic acumen from the chair to find common ground on policy issues.

**Indonesia as  
ASEAN Chair**

Last November, the symbolic handover of the ASEAN chairmanship from Cambodia to Indonesia took place at the ASEAN Summit in Phnom Penh. Since January 1, Indonesia under President Joko Widodo has now officially led ASEAN under the slogan "ASEAN Matters: Epicentrum of Growth," after Indonesia already held the G20 presidency last year. In addition to the official slogan, Widodo's remarks also indicate that economic growth in the Southeast Asian region will be a central item on the agenda of Indonesia's ASEAN chairmanship: "ASEAN must be a region with robust, inclusive and sustainable economic growth. Economic growth has been and always will be the story of ASEAN."

As Southeast Asia's largest nation and the world's third-largest democracy, Abdul Ghafur Hamid, a law professor at the International Islamic University Malaysia, believes Indonesia can play a strong leadership role in ASEAN. The most populous and economically powerful country in Southeast Asia is not only home to the individual organs of ASEAN in the capital Jakarta, but also has the political and economic resources to drive change in the region. Indonesia's ASEAN chairmanship this year thus appears promising.

However, Jakarta faces three potentially divisive diplomatic challenges that are likely to determine the success of Indonesia's chairmanship: the military regime in Myanmar, territorial disputes with China in the South China Sea, and East Timor's bid to join the bloc. On geopolitics, Widodo said that ASEAN's

main goal under the Indonesian chairmanship would be "not to be a proxy for any powers." According to observers, Indonesia appeared to be alluding to the tensions between the United States and China, which compete for influence in Southeast Asia. Widodo's statement follows a trend among Southeast Asian leaders who have expressed serious concern and anxiety about the impact of great power competition on ASEAN's strategic autonomy.

Indonesia will host the next and 42nd ASEAN summit as early as the first quarter of 2023. At the end of the year, Widodo is expected to hand over the ASEAN chairmanship to its successor Laos.

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If you have any questions about the usage of Free Trade Agreements in the Asia-Pacific region, you can contact Mr. Robin Hoenig, Divisional Head for Trade Policies (Asia/ASEAN). E-Mail: [robin.hoenig@sgc.org.sg](mailto:robin.hoenig@sgc.org.sg)

**Resources**

<https://asean.org/category/chairmanship/#:~:text=The%20Member%20State%20holding%20the,effective%20and%20timely%20response%20to>  
<https://www.iias.asia/the-newsletter/article/asean-chairmanship>  
<https://jakartaglobe.id/news/and-so-begins-indonesias-2023-asean-chairmanship>  
<https://www.benarnews.org/english/news/indonesian/indonesia-2023-asean-chair-expectations-12302022142956.html>  
<https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/high-expectations-for-indonesias-asean-chairmanship/>

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