Mr. Secretary-General,

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my great pleasure to address this distinguished audience with a keynote speech on EU – ASEAN Regional Integration. As a matter of fact, the idea for this conference crossed my mind when I visited Thailand and Myanmar last March. And since diplomacy is not only about preaching virtues, but also about getting things done, I am particularly grateful that you all have taken time out of your busy schedules to engage with each other on this important topic here today.

I wish to extend a warm welcome to all of you in Val Duchesse which is the historical setting where many chapters of the European integration have been negotiated. This was notably the case for the
Treaty of Rome called after the city where the text eventually was signed. Val Duchesse is also a symbol of “Belgian compromise” and a place where many nightly decisions were taken which ultimately profoundly reformed the Belgian state. In any case I hope that these walls will also inspire our discussions on regional integration today.

Since the EU and ASEAN are the two major regional integration initiatives in the world today, we are natural partners. And as High Representative and Vice President Catherine Ashton remarked at the ARF Ministerial last July, the EU and ASEAN are finding their own path forward but both organizations also share the same DNA.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In a globalized world size matters and scale is an asset, both economically and politically we can use our collective weight to shape the international order and promote our interests. However, regional integration is not only about size and scale. It is also about the model. In an interdependent and polycentric world we need powerful assets including great human capital, vibrant civil societies, a market economy with high labor and environmental standards, world-class companies and, last but not least, a model of governance that reconciles national sovereignty with inter-state cooperation and political integration.

The EU model of regional integration is based on leadership and political will to share sovereignty and to build strong, legally based, common institutions to oversee the integration project. A deep sense of constitutionalism based on legally binding treaties has led to a supra-national legal order with well-established enforcement mechanisms. This form of rules-based integration has become a hallmark of the European Union.
The ASEAN way of integration, however, is much more informal. The institutional structure is also much thinner. The breakthrough in terms of institutionalization came about with the signing of the ASEAN Charter in 2007, entering into force late 2008. At the level of its objectives the Charter echoes the EU’s experience by envisaging a single market. It also embraces a number of security objectives such as to keep Southeast Asia free of all weapons of mass destruction. However, decision-making continues to be consensual without supra-national character and elaborate enforcement systems. Also, the input of the ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Assembly remains limited.

Still, ASEAN is the most advanced example of regional integration when compared with all other attempts of regional integration outside Europe. The African Union, the Gulf Cooperation Council and Mercosur, to quote only these, are less integrated. Also, I do not wish to contend that the creation of a supra-national legal order based on shared sovereignty is the only way forward for ASEAN. There are other important principles of integration such as internal cohesion, solidarity and tolerance.

A consensus approach combined with solidarity and tolerance is an extremely important tenet for regional integration. Quantitative majority voting in the EU is not an approach based on isolating any Member State if there is a major problem. Consensus, solidarity and tolerance have served the EU extremely well to survive many crises, from President Charles de Gaulle’s “empty chair” tactic to failed referendums on new treaties in a number of Member States such as in 2005 and 2008. And consensus, solidarity and tolerance have also played their role in handling the eurozone crisis. Therefore, at times there has been a natural hesitance in the EU’s integration process to move forward with policies until the vast majority of Member States
are ready. COREPER and Council deliberations will always try to get as many Member States on board, even when consensus is legally unnecessary to make the decision. Belgium in particular has always championed the compromise and has always taken on the role of an honest broker in this regard.

Besides, rather than being frozen in rigid supra-nationalism the EU has adopted at several intervals more flexible approaches to advance integration resulting in a multi-speed Europe. For example, not all Member States are in the eurozone. And purely intergovernmental integration laid at the basis of the Schengen passport-free zone. However, I think some form of supra-nationalism is necessary to complete the integration process and it remains in our case extremely important for the effectiveness of our model.

Mr. Secretary General,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

All of the countries you represent in this room started their integration project as pioneers, but it is important to move from pioneers to settlers. Together we can build on the foundations that already exist. And despite our institutional differences we can draw inspiration from this to advance on our respective paths to economic and political integration.

As far as economic integration is concerned, ASEAN and the EU are very complementary and trade is undoubtedly an important engine for economic integration. ASEAN is a strong and valuable trade partner for the EU. Trade in goods has increased by 39.5% and trade in services by 27% over the last two years. The EU is the second main trading partner of ASEAN. On investments, the EU is the largest
investor in the region and the potential of development is extremely important. However, as far as the integration process is concerned, we still have to deal with high tariff and non-tariff barriers to trade.

It was of course an ambitious project to negotiate a region-to-region EU-ASEAN FTA. Because these negotiations came to a standstill in 2009, the EU is now negotiating trade and investment agreements with ASEAN countries. However, a region-to-region agreement should remain our ultimate objective and we hope that this will be facilitated once the creation of the ASEAN Economic Community is achieved.

The temporary setback in region-to-region trade negotiations should not hold us back from engaging with each other in other economic sectors. The EU is keen to support ASEAN goals on so-called ‘Connectivity’ – an important unifying concept for ASEAN. There is much potential for knowledge sharing and peer support to push the implementation of the ASEAN Connectivity Masterplan, drawing on EU experiences with Trans European Networks, Single Market program, Schengenzone free movement, public private partnerships etc. I have been informed also that next February the ASEAN Coordinating Committee on Connectivity is invited to Brussels for an exchange of best practices involving also European businesses.

I hope that during this afternoon’s breakout session we can look for concrete synergies and partnerships, and identify already some deliverables for future cooperation in this field.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Following the good-old tradition of the European “spill-over” approach where regional integration started with less-sensitive
economic integration to “spill-over” to increasing political integration, I would now like to proceed with some remarks about EU-ASEAN political and security cooperation.

Several studies on how Asia views the EU show an inclination to point out an important shortcoming: The EU is seen as a soft power that is rather a “regional organization” than a great power. I wish to comment that there is nothing wrong with being a “civilian power” and it is true that the final goals of the EU as an international actor will always remain civilian such as the protection of certain norms and values. However, in order to fix this perception of weakness and to improve the overall power of the EU as an international actor we need to reinforce our capacity aimed at stabilizing regions in conflict. We need to assume our responsibilities in the world as a force of stability. This will require overtime a more effective EU defense policy to add credibility to a more influential and effective foreign policy.

As far as maritime security is concerned, I strongly believe that the EU has a vital interest in a secure, open and clean maritime environment that allows the free passage of commerce and people. The EU should come to the defense of the peaceful, legal, fair and sustainable use of the oceans’ riches. Maritime flows represent the lifeblood of European trade and the high seas are conduits of European prosperity and influence. Our institutions should therefore be further developed in order to provide for the objectives, means and capabilities necessary to meet that responsibility.

Furthermore, Belgium has always underlined that UNCLOS provides the legal framework for all types of activities carried out in the oceans and seas and that it can serve as a guide for the peaceful resolution of maritime disputes. We wish to promote the universality of
this Convention and to insist on the need for uniform and consistent implementation of its provisions.

The EU already possesses some of the necessary means and instruments to respond to global maritime security challenges through the EEAS and the European Commission, the financial instruments, development cooperation, humanitarian assistance, crisis management, and trade cooperation. But we need to ensure an integrated and comprehensive approach, focusing specifically on the threats, risks, challenges and opportunities present at sea.

Together with ASEAN we should identify potential threats, from conventional ones to those posed by natural disasters and climate change, from threats affecting the protection of vital marine resources to the security of maritime infrastructure and trade flows. We should identify together the specific means and capabilities needed to address these challenges, intelligence, surveillance, patrolling, search and rescue, sealift, evacuation of EU and ASEAN nationals from crisis zones, enforcing embargoes, etc.

Building a strong partnership with third countries and regional organizations, such as ASEAN and its members, should ensure the security and the stability of commerce and resource exploitation. We should avoid that established principles of international maritime law are called into question because it will lead to an unmanageable race for marine, natural and mineral resources having a damaging impact on the marine ecosystem and other activities at sea. A strong maritime dimension of the EU’s foreign policy would provide us with the ability to act as an effective international arbitrator when needed.

Together with ASEAN we should consider all diplomatic attempts to prevent states which are unwilling to cooperate with the
international community, which do not abide by international treaties and standards and which have the geographical position to block trade routes to do so, in order to engage with them in dialogue and cooperation. The perpetuation of frozen conflicts near various maritime areas presents a danger for instability worldwide. This is notably the case in the South China Sea where one third of the world’s trade is transported. We should all be alarmed at the escalating tension. Parties involved should refrain from unilateral political and military actions. The negotiation and joint implementation of a code of conduct for the peaceful exploitation of the maritime areas in question, including the establishment of safe trade routes and quotas for fishing or attribution of areas for resource exploitation, is a preferable option.

EU-ASEAN cooperation is also needed with regard to non-traditional security threats. Our countries remain concerned by problems posed by piracy, international terrorism and organized crime in general for the security of navigation in vital maritime transit choke points. Moreover, Increasing traffic at sea is likely to increase the potential for disasters such as oil spills and other environmental pollution incidents such as toxic waste dumping. Whenever it is possible, EU and ASEAN should intervene in a coordinated manner and in a spirit of solidarity.

I hope it is clear from my words today that the EU and Belgium are very well aware of the security challenges in Asia. This is exactly why we also would like to see a deeper engagement with ASEAN and the ARF. This was also a main reason why the Council decided in 2004 to negotiate broad-based Partnership and Cooperation Agreements with individual ASEAN countries. We have now signed PCA’s with Indonesia, Vietnam and the Philippines. Negotiations with Singapore and Thailand came to an end and we are continuing them with
Malaysia and Brunei Darussalam. We equally would like to engage further with the “ASEAN Defense Ministers’ Meeting Plus” process and the East Asia Summit.

What can ASEAN expect from EU commitment to these groups? In my view, the EU can offer ASEAN help to address the root causes of instability, to mediate in conflicts, to enforce peace and to assist state-building, governance and development, including energy supply, trade and transport security, environment protection and the impact of climate change. To this end the EU supports ASEAN’s integration and ASEAN centrality in an evolving regional architecture. We want a strong united and self-confident ASEAN which we can address in a block-to-block dialogue.

Please allow me to underline here that Belgium also contributes to the institution and capacity building of ASEAN. In 2010 we decided to enhance our cooperation with ASEAN in close cooperation with EU institutions. In this context, I would like to recall the visits to Brussels of the ASEAN Coreper, the Human Rights Commission and the Commission on the Rights of Women and Children, as well as the successful seminars in Jakarta on host national policy, project management and disaster response. Belgium also made a major contribution to the Disaster Relief Exercise 2013 which took place in Thailand last May. We are also pleased that the EU and Myanmar are teaming up to Co-Chair the next ARF Inter-sessional Support Group on Confidence Building Measures and Preventive Diplomacy. And Belgium stands ready to support Myanmar’s transition as the country prepares to take over the role of ASEAN Chair in 2014. I also wish to congratulate ASEAN with the way in which it facilitated the transition process in Myanmar. What happened in Myanmar is living proof of ASEAN’s capacity.
Ladies and Gentlemen,

By no means did I want to lecture you today on EU achievements, because regional integration is a process that witnesses both success and failure. Mistakes equally serve the steep learning curve of this process. We should learn from each other on how providing welfare and prosperity for our citizens, on how to be successful models of political stability, on how to display a high level of income and to be welfare driven by a high tech industry. Together we should promote an effective multilateral diplomacy with increased responsibilities in terms of global governance. ASEAN and the EU should demonstrate that open regionalism is more welcomed in the world than unilateral approaches. For us ASEAN’s open regionalism in different degrees promotes inclusiveness, diversification and it can decrease concerns about tension. In a similar fashion the EU is coping with its three major relationships: firstly the relationship with neighboring countries, secondly the relationship with hegemonic powers and thirdly with the international community.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I know that the European model of integration is often criticized and I am not refuting all this criticism as unjust, but I can tell you that making war between former archenemies in Europe has become virtually impossible whereas additionally the re-unification of East and West Germany was achieved. This should provide at least also some inspiration for solving political hostilities and insecurities in Asia. The enthusiasm about the European model has faded of course by the perceived inability of the EU to solve its problems posed by the eurozone crisis, but economic crises come and go as your own experience with the Asian Financial Crisis has shown. The fact that
regional integration finally can overcome heavy historical burdens, lack of trust and different political systems has much more lasting effects. This is what we should learn from each other.

I thank you for your attention and look forward to your comments and questions.