

EU – SINGAPORE DIALOGUE

SIIA- Clingendael Dialogue: Enhancing EU- Singapore Connectivity

A seminar co-organised by the SIIA and Clingendael
Singapore, 27 June 2019

Open Letter

The Singapore Institute of International Affairs (SIIA) and Clingendael – The Netherlands Institute for International Relations are pleased to share the outcomes of the “SIIA-Clingendael Dialogue: Enhancing EU-Singapore Connectivity”. The event, held at the Mandarin Orchard hotel in Singapore on 27 June 2019, was the second in a series of four EU-Singapore Think Tank Dialogues.

The event was organised at the initiative of H.E. Barbara Plinkert, Ambassador of the European Union to Singapore, as part of a broader effort to engage with the expert community to exchange views and explore opportunities for cooperation between the EU and Singapore bilaterally, as well as in the context of EU-ASEAN relations.

EU-Singapore ties have improved steadily in recent years. Beyond trade, cooperation in terms of connectivity is thriving, with the EU signing a Partnership and Cooperation Agreement with Singapore, as well as a Free Trade Agreement, Investment Protection Agreement and Partnership and Cooperation Agreement in October 2018. The adoption of the EU Connectivity Strategy to Asia in October 2018 also reflects the EU’s interest in the region, and the necessity of forging and reinforcing connectivity with ASEAN to boost the development of both groupings.

Aiming to promote strategic discussions and practical steps to deepen EU-Singapore cooperation in the realm of connectivity, the dialogue addressed three areas outlined in the EU Connectivity Strategy: physical connectivity via infrastructure, digital connectivity, and people-to-people connectivity in culture and research.

The input was provided by European and Singaporean experts, industry leaders and policy practitioners from the EU and Singapore. The event was attended by 150 participants from research institutions, universities, diplomatic missions and the private sector. Dr Janil Puthucheary, Senior Minister of State, Ministry of Transport and Ministry of Communications and Information of Singapore delivered the keynote address. Ms Zsuzsanna Felkai-Janssen, Coordinator for Artificial Intelligence, Directorate General for Migration and Home Affairs, European Commission delivered the opening statement.

MAIN TAKEAWAYS

The appended takeaways summarise the key points raised during the dialogue panels, and suggest potential areas of cooperation that could be taken into consideration by the relevant government agencies. Joint research projects to feed in to think tank dialogues and more intensive engagement of the private sector could also be pursued to help realise the points below.

Multilateralising Infrastructure (Physical Connectivity)

Infrastructure is necessary for ASEAN to realise its economic potential, but the region lacks the capacity to secure financing and uphold high standards by itself. European companies are deepening their involvement in the region, but government level involvement remains scarce. As a key Dialogue Partner of ASEAN, the EU's new Connectivity Strategy has the potential to mobilise governments to support ASEAN in meeting its infrastructure needs, and should be operationalised further.

Possible areas of cooperation:

- > Third Country Cooperation (private sector cooperation)
 - > Encourage the European private sector to partner with foreign firms – including from China, Japan, the United States and ASEAN – possibly through Singapore-based platforms such as Infrastructure Asia;
 - > Narrow the gap between vision and implementation of governments.
- > Knowledge Transfers (good practice sharing)
 - > Mobilise private companies and public institutions to provide training programmes for local counterparts.
- > Multilateralise Standards for Infrastructure Development (EU-ASEAN level; high level dialogue)
 - > Work together with Singapore and other partners, possibly under the EU Connectivity Strategy, to craft new, acceptable (i.e. technological, commercial) standards and avoid competitive connectivity.
 - > Raise awareness of new standards without imposing them on recipient countries.
 - > Avoid politicising standards, which could deter countries from accepting them.

Digital Connectivity

The advent of the digital age is not the end of distance between societies. More should be done to support the digital development of different regions, particularly in ASEAN, where the digital economy is emerging as the next growth engine. Issues such as data privacy are complex, and the temptation is to clamp down hard. There is ample room for the EU and Singapore to jointly address common challenges (i.e. data privacy) and learn from each other (i.e. utilising digital services).

Possible areas of cooperation:

- > Harmonisation of Standards (EU-ASEAN level; high level dialogue, good practice sharing)
 - > Create working groups to discuss the commonalities between EU's GDPR and regional equivalents (i.e. Singapore's PDPA; APEC's CBPR; and ASEAN's framework), as well as opportunities for cooperation to avoid legal fragmentation.
 - > Avoid thinking in terms of models (i.e. rights-based, economics-based).

- > Business Applications of Digital Services (good practice sharing)
 - > Study how business strategies incorporate digital services in Singapore and the region; raise awareness in Europe of the impact of technology in ASEAN economies.
 - > Remain open to change and further exchanges; digital policies can quickly become outdated.

People-to-People Connectivity

People-to-People (P2P) Connectivity is inseparable from other aspects of connectivity, but must be maintained and renewed. The EU and Singapore/ASEAN have enjoyed strong P2P ties, with regular channels for academic and research exchanges. Exchanges in performance art can also enhance the mutual understanding of each region's society, politics and values, and should be promoted as a societal investment.

Possible areas of cooperation:

- > Promote Educational Exchanges (financial cooperation)
 - > Encourage the creation of more inter-regional scholarship opportunities (e.g. SHARE programme), and open them to all students.
 - > Mobilise private sector money to support these programmes.
- > Performance Art Exchanges (raising awareness, institutional cooperation)
 - > Raise awareness of Southeast Asian art forms in Europe, and of contemporary European art forms in ASEAN.
 - > Encourage co-productions between European and Singapore art centres.

The quality of discussions and the level of interest generated by the event was significant, and revealed the appetite for similar events on specific sub-topics in the future.

On behalf of the co-organisers,



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