



European Union
Delegation to Singapore

SPEECH BY H.E. BARBARA PLINKERT

European Union Ambassador to Singapore

Europe Day 2019

At Asian Civilisations Museum, Singapore

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Your Excellency S. Iswaran, Minister for Communications and Information and Minister-in-charge of Trade Relations,

Dr. Chia Shi-Lu and Ms. Joan Pereira, Members of Parliament for Tanjong Pagar Group Representation Constituency,

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Dear friends and colleagues,

Welcome to all of you to the celebration of Europe Day!

It is a great pleasure to see so many friends and partners here tonight on this festive occasion. This year's Europe Day in Singapore is indeed **special**, as this time, we have a lot to celebrate **together**: in October last year, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong, alongside European Council President Donald Tusk and European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker signed the EU-Singapore Free Trade Agreement in Brussels. They also witnessed the signing of the Investment Protection Agreement and the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement. All three landmark agreements subsequently received the consent of the European Parliament in February this year. And while the Investment Protection Agreement and the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement are now in the process of ratification by Member States' parliaments, we look forward to the entry into force of the Free Trade Agreement hopefully at the end of this year.

It is therefore my pleasure and a great honour to have with us tonight Minister Iswaran who has accompanied and continuously supported the process of negotiating the FTA over the years to reach this point. My sincere thanks to you, Minister, for your personal engagement and for going on this journey together with us. I would like to acknowledge also the excellent cooperation with your colleagues at the Ministry for Trade and Industry. A long journey it was, some would argue, but, as the Greek Stoic philosopher Epictetus said (I

quote): *"No great thing is created suddenly, any more than a bunch of grapes or a fig. If you tell me that you desire a fig, I answer that there must be time. Let it first blossom, then bear fruit, then ripen."* (unquote). Well, our negotiations certainly have borne fruit, as the EU-Singapore FTA is one of the most ambitious trade deals that we have accomplished around the world. It is symbolic of the excellent and deep economic and trade ties that already exist between us. It will serve as a stepping stone towards other bilateral FTAs in the region, ultimately paving the way towards an EU-ASEAN Free Trade Agreement.

These three agreements are also symbolic of our joint commitment to multilateralism and a rules-based international order in an increasingly multipolar and uncertain world. Indeed, we believe that the major challenges that the world is facing today require global solutions and intense collaborative efforts. To achieve this, we will have much more cooperation across borders, regions and continents.

The EU-Singapore Partnership and Cooperation Agreement will provide a perfect platform to take matters of common concern forward. This includes, to name only a few, working together on threats to security and the rule of law, reducing unprecedented ecological pressures, and dealing with the fast pace of digital transformation while promoting connectivity. These topics are also part of the EU-ASEAN agenda that we are advancing together with Singapore as the current ASEAN coordinator for dialogue relations with the EU.

Allow me to make a few remarks on these important priorities.

On security, the EU and Singapore face the same challenges and we confront similar threats. We also share a common interest in promoting peace in our regions, as well as international cooperation on issues such as counter-terrorism, cybersecurity, maritime security and hybrid threats. In a few weeks, the European Union's High Representative for Foreign and Security Policy, Federica Mogherini, will again participate in the Shangri-La Dialogue. Her presence here underpins the importance the EU attaches to a deepening strategic engagement with this rapidly evolving region.

On sustainability and climate change, the EU and Singapore are like-minded and indeed natural partners. We have set ourselves very ambitious targets in reducing greenhouse gas emissions under the Paris Climate Agreement. We are both working together on innovative solutions to move towards a more

circular economy in a bid to reduce our carbon footprint, to protect our world's resources and to reduce the ever rising pressure on the environment.

On connectivity, the transport links between us are thriving, facilitated, for example on the aviation side, through the presence in Singapore of the European Aviation Safety Agency which allows for close cooperation with the Civil Aviation Authority of Singapore on topics such as cybersecurity in aviation and aircraft maintenance.

In an increasingly inter-connected world, cooperation and dialogue between the EU and Singapore on digital connectivity is also intensifying, focusing on issues such as data driven innovation, emerging technologies, e-government, and protecting data while facilitating e-commerce.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

All these topics are and will no doubt remain high on the European strategic agenda also internally within the EU. In fact, as we speak, EU leaders meet in the Romanian city of Sibiu to reflect on the European Union's future orientations and strategic priorities for the next five years – and it is obviously not by coincidence that this date has been chosen:

Firstly, today we commemorate the 69th anniversary of laying the foundation of what is now the European Union. We look back at almost 7 decades of peace, stability and prosperity across Europe – a fact that cannot be recalled often enough at times where these attributes can no longer be taken for granted. The EU has significantly developed in size and scope since its founding fathers embarked on the path towards making their vision of European integration a reality. Only a few days ago we celebrated the 15th anniversary of the unprecedented enlargement of the Union by 11 Baltic, Central and South Eastern European countries.

Secondly, the Sibiu Summit takes place at the end of the current parliamentary term and just a few weeks ahead of the European Parliament elections which will see citizens in all countries of the EU heading to the polls. People will do so with a wide range of expectations and concerns. But it is very important to note that, despite our internal and external challenges, a strong majority of Europeans, with steadily rising numbers, are convinced that being a member of the EU is a good thing for their country and support their country's EU membership. This is reflective of the acknowledgement that, by pulling our

strengths together, we can achieve peace and prosperity and can make difference in shaping our future.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

Our Europe Day celebrations will continue beyond this evening. I am very happy to announce that, tomorrow, we will launch another edition of the European Union Film Festival, featuring movies from 27 European countries, to take place at the National Gallery of Singapore. The festival opens its doors already for the 29th time, an excellent occasion to showcase the multiple facets of Europe. The opening film this year comes from Romania and we are delighted to have in our company tonight its director Tedy Necula who will present his directorial debut "Beside Me" tomorrow.

This is by far not the only event that we organise together with Member States, but there is a multitude of joint activities throughout the year. These range from promoting sustainability with the first-ever EU-Singapore cycling rally held last year; a beach cleaning exercise on East Coast to reinforce the global message to protect our oceans; our annual higher education fair; and next week we will launch a new joint initiative, together with the Ministry of Education, that will deepen our engagement with Singaporean high school students. None of these projects on scale would be possible without the unconditional support we receive from our Member States and our Singaporean partners and my team and I are grateful for this support.

I extend my sincere thanks for another year of great cooperation also to the EU Centre in Singapore, the Asia Europe Foundation, the European Chamber of Commerce, the EU-ASEAN Business Council and the cultural and educational institutions of our Member States. I look forward to our next joint endeavours in bringing the EU and Singapore closer to each other.

Finally, I would like to take a moment to recognise the many contributions that have added so much to our event tonight:

I invite you to enjoy a range of European delicacies and drinks. My thanks to the European Member States' Embassies and their sponsors for these contributions.

I would also like to thank the European Chamber of Commerce and the European Aviation Safety Agency, as well as Pernod Ricard and BeerCellar Asia for their generous support.

A word of special thanks goes to the voice studio Artyfakt Singshui and particularly to Dr. Thomas Manhart for his support in organising today's musical performance that we will soon enjoy, featuring the two singers Mr. Nigel Howe and Ms. Choy Siew Woon, accompanied by Ms. Tabitha Gan on the piano.

I wish each of you an enjoyable evening.