

EU as a Global Actor

Report by Ian Koh & Malavika Menon

Federica Mogherini, High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice-President of the European Commission, arrived in Singapore this morning to co-chair the annual Post-Ministerial Conference between the European Union and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). Her visit here kickstarts an official visit to Asia and Oceania.

It has been a packed agenda with a meeting with Singapore Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong and several bilateral meetings with foreign ministers.

A highlight has been her first public lecture – the RSIS Distinguished Public Lecture - in Singapore delivered to a full house.

Over 300 students, academics, journalists and members of the diplomatic corps attended the lecture. Ms Mogherini spoke at length about the cultural, political and economic connections between Europe and Singapore, the need for a rules-based international order and the role of the European Union as a global actor.

She spoke of the role of Singapore and the EU as "honest brokers" – reliable, credible and consistent actors in the global stage. She stated that both the EU and Singapore are "natural partners," and the EU can be counted upon beyond the ambit of trade and economic relations, to connect on matters of education, security and cultural exchange. She stated that peace and stability in the ASEAN region represents "an enduring goal" for both the EU and Singapore.

H.E Mogherini stated that while the EU is often perceived to be slow and complex, examples such as Operation Sophia in the Mediterranean which – from conception to execution - was rolled out within a month.

Reflecting on the deep and intrinsic relationship between Asia and Europe, she told the rapt audience that this was her 16th mission to Asia since the beginning of her tenure and reported on the deepening economic ties, manifested through free trade agreement negotiations underway most notably with Singapore. She stressed that in an increasingly globalized world trade wars are in the interests of nobody, and that good agreements can bring benefits to all sides. The EU, she said, believes in win-win solutions – the only sustainable way to tackle global problems in the world today.

She noted that cooperation between the EU and Southeast Asia goes further and beyond the realm of trade, such as the EU-financed project SHARE, which offers students from this region the same opportunities which European students enjoy under the Erasmus program – the latter of which she dubbed as possibly the most successful initiative convened under EU auspices. She described such programs as vital in furthering the people-to-people contacts that exist between the EU and ASEAN.

HRVP noted that the EU's engagement with Southeast Asia can be traced back to 2005, when it assisted in the peace process in Aceh. Since then, it has continued to support other peace processes in other countries, with the most recent one being in Myanmar.

It also has been working with Australia and Vietnam – in addition to participating in military exercises with ASEAN – in the domain of maritime security. She also noted that in the past couple of years, historic and unprecedented steps have been taken to ensure that the EU will be a more effective global security provider. She placed emphasis, however, on the EU's inherent principles to avoid use of military strength to threaten or impose upon others.

During a lively Q&A segment moderated by RSIS student Benjamin Low, H.E Mogherini said that the EU will continue its strategy of critical engagement, in pertinent global issues ranging from the South China Sea to the Israel-Palestine peace process, while promoting a rules-based international order.

She lauded Singapore for its commitment to peace and diplomacy by hosting the recent summit between the DPRK and the United States. She reiterated the EU's stance on the issue, calling for the complete, verifiable and irreversible denuclearization of the Korean peninsula, which needs to be achieved via dialogue and diplomacy. The Singapore Summit had brought to light an urgent need for all global actors, to recognize "a collective duty to peace and security," she said.

Follow the rest of HRVP's visit on Twitter: @EUinSingapore

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