



European Union
Delegation to Singapore

As part of its *New Global Order*, a series which explores how the changing world landscape is reshaping business, politics and beyond, leading business daily The Business Times published this Opinion Editorial by the EU Ambassador to Singapore Artis Bertulis in both its digital and print editions.

THE BUSINESS TIMES

Opinion

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Europe and Singapore: A
reliable partnership in
contested times

Artis Bertulis

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[Link](#)

NEW GLOBAL ORDER

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ARTIS BERTULIS

At a time of profound global change when countries have to navigate geopolitical uncertainty and rapid technological transformation, partnerships anchored in trust and rules matter more than ever.

Recent events that made international headlines, such as the finalisation of negotiations for a Free Trade Agreement between the European Union and India at the end of January, signal that global economic actors like the EU and India continue to put confidence in rules-based global trade at a moment when protectionist instincts are in resurgence around the world.

The EU is one of the largest foreign investors in Singapore. According to the Economic Development Board of Singapore, European investors led foreign direct investment into Singapore in 2025, accounting for 24.9 per cent of total fixed asset investments.

The European Union-Singapore Digital Trade Agreement (EUSDTA), which entered into force on Feb 1, marks another milestone in EU-Singapore relations.

As the EU's first-ever standalone digital deal, it demonstrates a shared determination to work together amid the heightened global economic uncertainty. Through this agreement, the EU and Singapore are joining forces to contribute to the future of digital trade—advancing a vision of a trusted, interoperable digital economy.

The EUSDTA builds on the strong foundation of the EU-Singapore Free Trade Agreement (EUSFTA), which delivers tangible benefits for both sides. For instance, when the Covid-19 pandemic disrupted global supply chains, the EUSFTA provided predictability and continuity in our bilateral trade relations, demonstrating that open economies can also be fair and resilient.

Since the entry into force of the EUSFTA in November 2019, annual bilateral trade in goods and services has risen by an impressive 24 per cent, from 107 billion euros (\$158.7 billion) in 2019 to 131 billion euros in 2024.

The EUSDTA also strengthens the well-functioning cooperation under the EU-Singapore Digital Partnership. This partnership is a tool for boosting innovation, competitiveness and resilience in critical technologies. It helps create a safer, more secure and interoperable digital environment that puts citizens and businesses at the core.

Diversifying and deepening economic ties

In the current times of global uncertainty, these agreements bring benefits to thousands of Singapore and European companies. Deepening economic ties between Singapore, South-east Asia and the EU open new business opportunities, including for small and medium-sized enterprises, by reducing tariffs, eliminating non-tariff barriers and streamlin-



As the EU's first-ever standalone digital deal, the EUSDTA demonstrates a shared determination to work together amid the heightened global economic uncertainty. PHOTO: REUTERS

ing customs procedures.

Alongside robust trade and investment flows, the EU and Singapore converge in their shared ambition for sustainable and inclusive growth.

The EU's Green Deal and Singapore's Green Plan 2030 prioritise efficiency, innovation and accountability. The EU's taxonomy for green investment and Singapore's Green Finance Action Plan are opening pathways for co-investment in renewable energy, sustainable mobility, and low-carbon infrastructure across Asean.

Blending Singapore and European technology and capital with financial expertise, we access regional networks to drive the next decade of green growth.

Making multilateralism work

The EU and Singapore are strong, like-minded partners, with cooperation in a wide range of political and economic policy areas at bilateral, regional and multilateral level. Together, we uphold and strengthen the international order, which has been for Singapore and the EU the cornerstone of economic success.

Both our regions share numerous complex challenges, from strategic competition to neighbourhood crises and conflicts, cyber and hybrid threats, the weaponisation of trade and the impacts of climate change. The EU is committed to being a credible, reliable and predictable partner to the region. Our cooperation with Singapore across all these areas will only continue to strengthen.

People-to-people connectivity

Above all, enduring partnerships are shaped by people.

In the spirit of the EU's Global Gateway strategy that fosters sustainable, trusted connections worldwide, placing a significant focus on people-to-people connectivity through investments in education and research, we share strong networks of research, academic and cultural exchanges.

Singapore's universities collaborate active-

ly with European counterparts under programmes such as Horizon Europe and Erasmus+. Collaboration through programmes and projects such as the Study in Europe higher education fair and the European Film Festival have over time enabled the EU to have direct links, exchanges and conversations with Singaporeans.

Navigating the path ahead

As Singapore prepares to assume the Asean Chairmanship next year, our partnership has the potential to grow even further. It arrives at a timely moment as we look ahead to the 50th anniversary of EU-Asean relations in 2027.

Asean is the world's fifth-largest economy, home to nearly 700 million people. The EU is a single market of over 450 million people with high purchasing power, strong investments and legal security. Our economies are deeply interlinked, and this partnership drives opportunities, growth and stability.

As European Council President Antonio Costa noted in his speech at the Asean Summit held in Kuala Lumpur in October 2025: "The European Union is proud to engage with Asean as a reliable partner in today's shifting geopolitical environment. We live in a multipolar world. A world facing increasing fragmentation and uncertainty. And so, it is crucial that we weave a global network of cooperation across regions."

In this evolving landscape, the EU-Singapore partnership offers a compelling model: one that combines openness with resilience, innovation with trust, and ambition with responsibility. At a time when profound changes are challenging and shaping the world around us, this matters—economically, politically and strategically.

The writer is the European Union ambassador to Singapore

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