



Press release

For immediate release

First EU-Malaysia maritime counterterrorism training for security practitioners in Sabah, followed by EU Delegation visit to ESSCOM

- *Bringing together 35 experts from EU and the Indo-Pacific, the cross-thematic training on counterterrorism and maritime security was specifically designed for security practitioners operating in the Tri-Border Area between Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines.*
- *The seminar focussed on furthering EU-Malaysia collaboration in security and defence, safeguarding maritime interests, and equipping security practitioners with the necessary tools to counter evolving threats.*
- *The training was followed by an EU Delegation visit to the Eastern Sabah Security Command (ESSCOM), a joint command centre between the Malaysian Armed Forces, Royal Malaysia Police, and the Malaysian Maritime Enforcement Agency.*

Kota Kinabalu, Malaysia, 25 April, 2024: A total of 35 experts took part in the first European Union (EU)-Malaysia maritime counterterrorism training seminar for security practitioners in Sabah.

The two-day event was specifically designed for stakeholders operating in the Tri-Border Area between the Philippines, Malaysia and Indonesia. A decade ago, over 200 militants from the Sulu islands landed on boats in Eastern Sabah to lay territorial claims, prompting a standoff that saw dozens lose their lives, including several Malaysian security personnel. The area remains a flashpoint for regional security to this day.

Organised by the **EU Delegation to Malaysia**, the Southeast Asia Regional Centre for Counter-Terrorism (**SEARCCT**) and the EU project Enhancing Security Cooperation In and With Asia (**ESIWA**), the seminar convened experts from several Malaysian security agencies and their EU counterparts representing the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex), France, Hungary and Spain, among others.

The interactive gathering focussed on furthering EU-Malaysia collaboration in security and defence, safeguarding maritime interests, and equipping security practitioners with the necessary tools to counter evolving threats in the Tri-Border Area.

“As mentioned by EU High Representative & Vice-President Josep Borrell at the Shangri La Dialogue, June 2023, the EU intends not only to play a more important role as a smart enabler in the field of security and defence, but to be recognised as such, particularly in the Indo-Pacific region,” said Colonel **Sylvain Louvet**, Military Adviser at the EU Delegation to ASEAN, who addressed experts in Kota Kinabalu.



“The EU and its Member States have suffered many appalling terrorist attacks, particularly over the past 20 years. But during this time, our agencies and institutions have developed substantial experience and expertise in countering the immediate threats of terrorism, while further preventing violence through tailored programmes involving diverse stakeholders,” Col Louvet said.

“I am confident that these trainings will lead to a stronger collaboration of Malaysia and the EU in counterterrorism and preventing/countering violent extremism. Together, we can continue fighting terrorist threats across the globe,” he added.

Supt. **Yong Thain Foh**, Director, Planning & Training, SEARCCT, said: “This seminar serves as a crucial platform for addressing pressing security concerns pertinent to the region. In the past decade, the escalation of violent extremism and non-state maritime threats in Sabah State and the Tri-Border Area has underscored the imperative for comprehensive and collaborative counterterrorism strategies.”

Topics covered during the training included specialized sessions on maritime domain awareness and unmanned aerial systems (UAS), where participants gained insights into cutting-edge technologies vital for augmenting maritime security capabilities.

The seminar was followed by an EU Delegation visit to the Eastern Sabah Security Command (ESSCOM) in Lahad Datu. This joint command centre between the Malaysian Armed Forces, Royal Malaysia Police, and the Malaysian Maritime Enforcement Agency was established in 2013 and oversees several coastal districts throughout the state. In 2017, Malaysia, Indonesia, and the Philippines signed a trilateral cooperative agreement to jointly patrol the Sulu and Celebes Seas.

Having visited the command centre with a delegation of EU experts, **Joanna Wasiewska**, First Counsellor, EU Delegation to Malaysia, said: “ESSCOM has clearly done an excellent job at suppressing a range of threats. We are grateful for this opportunity afforded to EU practitioners to study firsthand the local security context and to allow for future collaboration and capacity building.”

DCP Datuk **Victor B Sanjos**, Commander, ESSCOM, said: “We welcome this opportunity to engage in peer-to-peer exchange with our EU counterparts. Given the range of illicit activities, the history, and the mixture of criminal and ideological motivations involved, this maritime border region remains a national security priority for the foreseeable future. Malaysia and the EU can learn from and support each other in building a stronger security collaboration.”

“In fact, we encourage and welcome visitors from the European Union to our most beautiful state of Sabah. Our Eastern Sabah Security Zone is safe and sound,” he added.



ESIWA: The ESIWA project works to enhance the EU's security and defence cooperation with the Indo-Pacific in four thematic areas: counterterrorism and preventing violent extremism, crisis management, cyber security, and maritime security. The project is co-funded by the European Union, the German Federal Foreign Office, and the French Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs. ESIWA is co-implemented by the German Corporation for International Cooperation (GIZ) & Expertise France.

In the domain of counter-terrorism and preventing violent extremism (CT-PVE), ESIWA aims to contribute to information exchange, capacity building and mutual learning. ESIWA's activities in maritime security aim to promote a fair, transparent, rules-based maritime order, strengthen maritime responses to security challenges, and enhance visibility of the EU as a maritime security provider.

Previous ESIWA activities in Malaysia include an EU-Malaysia seminar to strengthen Malaysia's capacity to legislate, regulate and respond to cyber risks with the National Cyber Security Agency in early 2023; and in mid-2023 supporting the SEARCCT conference on digital resilience, which eventually led to this EU-Malaysia training seminar in Sabah.

In May 2024, there will be another EU-Malaysia roundtable on the societal reintegration of former extremists, jointly organised by the EU Delegation to Malaysia, the Royal Malaysia Police Special Branch Counter Terrorism Division (E8), and ESIWA. The broader goal of these activities is to facilitate future policy-level dialogue between the EU and Malaysia, and to build on the series of engagements between the EU and SEARCCT.

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