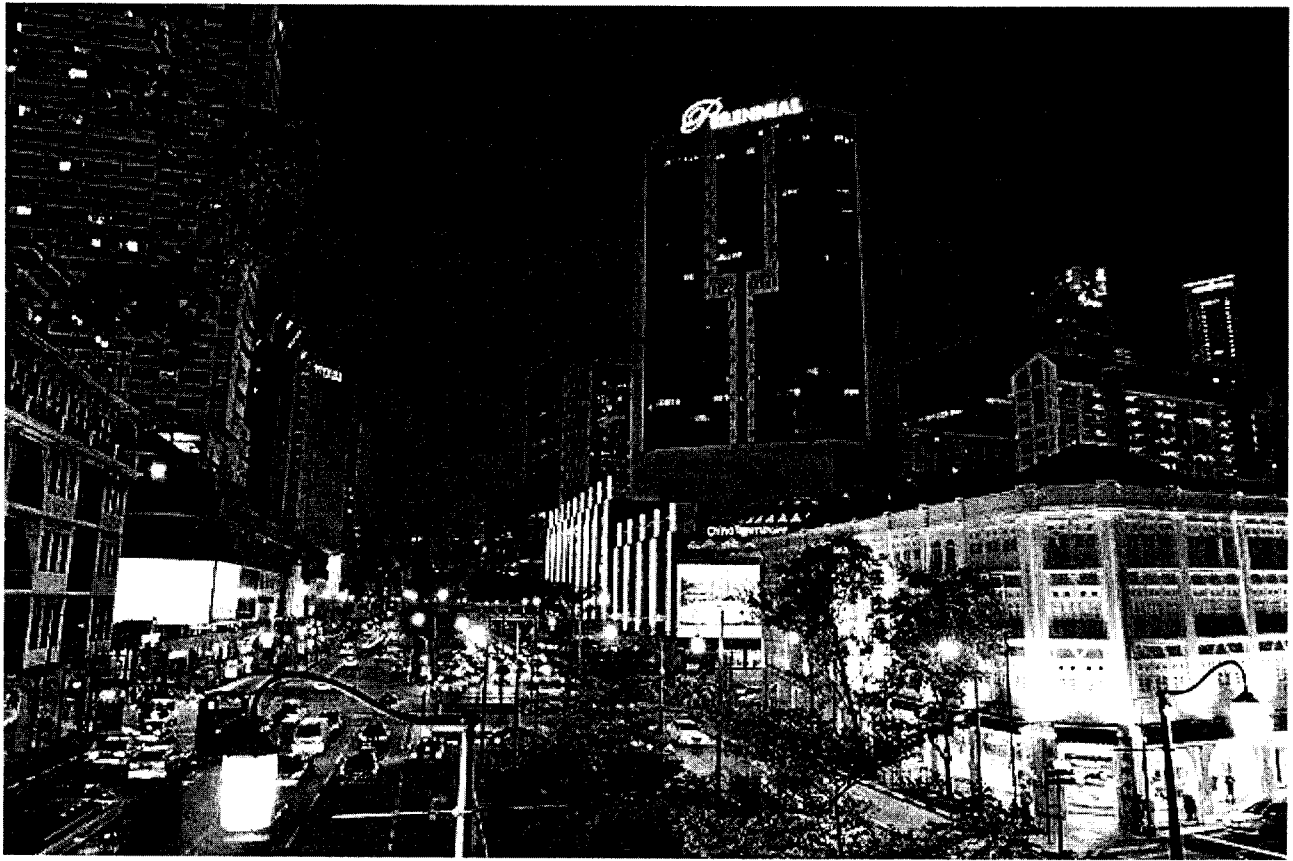




# THE EU-SINGAPORE RELATIONSHIP: THE SECURITY DIMENSION



By Balazs Ujvari (<http://www.egmontinstitute.be/expert-author/balazs-ujvari/>) (22 August 2018)  
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## THE EU-SINGAPORE RELATIONSHIP: THE SECURITY DIMENSION

For most observers, the singificance of the EU-Singapore relationship relates principally to trade. And this is not without reason. While it has a population of 'only' 5.6 million people, Singapore is the EU's 14th largest trading partner. The trade of the two sides is worth more than €50 billion a year, comparable to the EU's trade with Mexico, South Africa or Australia. Singapore is the EU's largest trade partner in Southeast Asia, accounting for one-third of EU trade with the region. The EU, in turn, is Singapore's third most important trading partner behind China and Malaysia. The EU is also Singapore's leading investor, representing 25% of the city state's foreign direct investment stock. While already robust, commercial ties between the two are likely to deepen further in view of the upcoming signature of the long-awaited EU-Singapore Free Trade Agreement (FTA) this autumn.

It is not all about trade, however. The EU-Singapore relationship also encompasses a range of other areas such as science and technology, climate change, cultural diplomacy, and disaster relief, to name but a few. One area, however, where the potential of the relationship is yet to be exploited is security policy. Indeed, there appears to be a significant potential for increased co-operation, especially in non-traditional security areas such as cybersecurity, counter-terrorism, and hybrid threats, but also maritime security. The forthcoming signature of the FTA, which will take place after years of intra-EU debate over the legal aspects of the agreement, could now create a new momentum for the two sides to focus on other areas. In this context, the area of security could come to the fore.

Cybersecurity, to begin with, is a matter of great concern for both sides. On top of several measures taken in the past, European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker proposed in his 2017 annual State of the Union Address a full-fledged EU Cybersecurity Agency to assist Member States in dealing with cyberattacks, as well as a new European certification scheme that will ensure that products and services in the digital world are safe to use. Cyber security is also a key issue for Singapore as showcased by its 2016 Cyber Security Strategy. The strengthening of ties between the Cyber Security Agency of Singapore and the EU Agency for Network and Information Security would improve cyber space trust between the two sides. The EU and Singapore could also strengthen their already ongoing co-operation within the ASEAN Regional

Forum (ARF) and, more specifically, the ARF Inter-Sessional Meeting on Security of and in the Use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT), which envisages confidence building measures with a view to improving the ICT environment in the ARF region. Furthermore, regular EU participation in the Singapore International Cyber Week, the next edition of which is taking place on 18-20 September 2018, could provide an occasion for exchanging best practices and exploring ways of developing further cyber security capacities.

Counter-terrorism is another area where the EU and Singapore could draw more on each other's experiences. In its approach, the EU is focusing mainly on preventing radicalization and has taken a range of measures in the recent years. These include the creation of the Radicalisation Awareness Network, which brings together frontline and grassroots practitioners in order to identify best practices and issue recommendations to policymakers; and the Civil Society Empowerment Programme, which supports campaigns providing alternative narratives to terrorist propaganda and promoting fundamental rights and values. Singapore could also be interested in the work done by the EU Internet Referral Unit which is dedicated to reducing the level and impact of terrorist and violent extremist propaganda on the internet. In turn, the EU could build on Singapore's de-radicalisation and rehabilitation programmes. Such programmes have been in place for nearly two decades in the city state, approaching the problem from both the psychological and religious aspects.

Maritime security is yet another area where the relationship has been underexploited. The maritime sector is critical both for Europe and Singapore. Singapore hosts the Information Fusion Centre (IFC), a 24/7 regional maritime security information-sharing centre, which focuses on the South China Sea, Malacca Strait and Singapore Strait. The EU in turn is a major financial supporter of the recently established Regional Maritime Information Fusion Centre in Madagascar which collects, analyzes and fuses maritime information within Eastern and Southern Africa and Western Indian Ocean, which is complementary to the area of focus of the IFC. Establishing close links between the two centres would allow them to gain further understanding of the key issues affecting maritime security in their respective geographical area of focus. In addition, both the EU and Singapore have gained substantial experience in contributing to counter-piracy operations. The EU's flagship counter-piracy operation, EU NAVFOR Atalanta, has been combatting piracy off the coast of Somalia since 2008. Singapore has also contributed to maritime security efforts, including in the Strait of Malacca (e.g. Trilateral Malacca Strait Patrols) and the Gulf of Aden (e.g. Combined Task Force). Against this background, the two sides would stand to benefit from exchanging best practices in the area of fight against piracy.

Finally, the EU and Singapore are also both susceptible to hybrid threats. In response to such threats, the EU has, among others, established the EU Hybrid Fusion Cell and the European Centre of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats, whereas the Singapore Armed Forces have also recently raised their capabilities to detect and counter such threats. Sharing best practices in this field could provide for a significant prospect for mutual learning.

*Balazs Ujvari is an Associate Fellow at Egmont – The Royal Institute for International Relations.  
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## EGMONT

Royal Institute for International Relations  
Rue des Petits Carmes 24A  
1000 Brussels - BELGIUM

## POSTAL ADDRESS

Rue des Petits Carmes 15  
1000 Brussels - BELGIUM

## CONTACT

☎ +32 (0) 2 223 41 14

✉ [info@egmontinstitute.be](mailto:info@egmontinstitute.be) (mailto:info@egmontinstitute.be)