

# Singapore-Poland relations going strong: Ambassador

**Q:** RELATIONS between Poland and Singapore are growing ever stronger. Some examples include the regular business dialogues and agreements signed. What is your assessment of ties between the two countries?

**A:** Perhaps the best way to summarise it is to say: "Go Poland, Go". Singapore and Poland ties are definitely on the rise.

After the visit of Polish Prime Minister (Donald) Tusk to Singapore last November, the highlight this year was the visit of Prime Minister Lee (Hsien Loong) to Poland. Next to France, Poland was chosen as PM Lee's other European destination this year. It was definitely an appreciation for Poland's position, described by PM Lee himself as "one of the fastest growing bright lights of Europe".

It was PM Lee's first visit to Poland and a chance for him and the Singaporean business delegation to see how far we have progressed in building a stable and modern economy. PM Lee met his Polish counterpart and called on other Polish leaders; he spoke at the bilateral Singapore-Poland Business Forum and witnessed the signing of the next Memorandum of Understanding between A\*Star and the Polish National Centre for Research Development. This was a very good visit and results will follow.

Notably, the Poland-Singapore double taxation treaty, signed last year during PM Tusk's visit to Singapore, will soon come into force.

Minister for the Environment and Water Resources Vivian Balakrishnan also visited Poland this year in the process of preparation for the UN Climate Change Conference COP 19, which gathers key world experts and policy-makers. Poland and Singapore worked remarkably well together on the occasion.

COP 19, the second COP organised in Poland in just five years, starts in Warsaw today at the ultra-modern National Stadium in Warsaw.

There are nearly 500 Poles in Singapore. Most of them are highly qualified professionals – in particular in the banking and IT sectors – businessmen and scientists, as well as capable students. Insead, for example, has a sizeable Polish representation.

One of the most known Poles in Singapore is A\*Star's Professor Wieslaw Nowinski, who



**Mr Waldemar Dubaniowski:** Poland's Ambassador to Singapore gives his views on the growing ties between the two countries in this Q&A.

was this year named Pioneer in Medicine by the Society of Brain Mapping and Therapeutics in the US and presented his work in the US Congress.

**Q:** There is much to be gained from trade as well as mutual exchanges in other areas such as culture, among others, between the two countries and from our respective countries and beyond into the regions around them. How has this progressed and what are some of the trends you see going forward?

**A:** Mutual trade between Poland and Singapore is expected to reach a record this year. Trade volume has grown around 2½ times since 2009. Singapore continues to be Poland's leading trading partner among Asean countries and a regional hub for Polish operations in South-east Asia.

Traditionally, its core exports include shipbuilding industry products and machinery, though Polish meat exports to Singapore went

up more than 10 times last year. Well regarded in Europe for its quality and taste, Polish meat is increasingly entering Asian markets. Besides Singapore, you can find it in China, South Korea and, soon, Taiwan. Again, one can only say: "Go Poland, go."

While economic cooperation remains the backbone of our relations, areas such as culture are important. Culture, in particular, is often in the forefront of forging other links. Polish concerts within the "Chopin by the Lake" series in the Singapore Botanic Gardens regularly gather thousands of Singaporeans for musical treats. One of the finest living pianists, Krystian Zimerman, received a standing ovation at the Esplanade Theatres. A popular Singaporean beatboxer Dharni chose to launch his international career in Poland.

Students and youth contacts are increasing on both sides. Exchange programmes at the Nanyang Technological University, the National University of Singapore and the Singapore Management University with Poland are well liked and many Singaporean students are happy to extend their stay once there. They appreciate the quality of Polish education, and also enjoy the vibrant student life, friendliness of its people, safety and perhaps surprisingly, the white, snowy winter landscapes – well at least for some of them.

More young Singaporeans, as well as families, are going to Poland for holidays and sight-seeing tours.

**Q:** Poland and Singapore have a good base with some investments from either side. What further cooperation do you see in the economic sphere and how can we mutually benefit from upcoming trends such as the drive towards greater regional economic integration and free-trade agreements (FTAs), among others?

**A:** The Singapore-EU FTA initialled last month was an important milestone. The comprehensive FTA is expected to boost trade volumes between Singapore and European countries, Poland included, via elimination of tariffs and technical barriers such as duplicative testing requirements, among other things. Both our countries will benefit from smoother

procedures and competitive pricing, while the high quality of products or services remains unchanged. It should also facilitate the transfer of Singapore technologies and knowhow to Poland.

From the perspective of our countries as natural regional hubs, the FTA ties in well with the economic regional integration trends within the EU and Asean. The resulting potential for economic cooperation is thus huge, but we need to create more awareness of business opportunities on both sides.

Recent events, such as a seminar on Poland held in August by IE Singapore and the Polish Singaporean Business Forum in Warsaw with the participation of Poland's Deputy Prime Minister Janusz Piechocinski and Singapore Minister for Trade and Industry Lim Hng Kiang are welcome developments.

**Q:** As one of the economies that is doing relatively well amid the current economic problems, what would you tell Singaporean investors thinking of going into the Central European region?

**A:** Good question. Easy to answer by quoting PM Lee: "Singapore can be a gateway for Polish companies in Asia, just as Poland can be one gateway for Singapore companies into Europe, particularly, Central and Eastern Europe." Poland gains regional prominence, in particular in central and eastern Europe, due to its convenient location, business law reforms, friendly taxes and improved infrastructure. The deepwater container terminal in Gdansk, which PM Lee visited, for example, is the only deep-water, ice-free terminal on the Baltic Sea, able to handle vessels with a capacity of more than 700,000 cu m and is linked to Asia and Singapore by Maersk Line.

In the next three years, Poland will be the second most attractive country in Europe, after Germany, for investment, said the report of 2012 European Attractiveness prepared by Ernst & Young.

Growth-wise, Poland remains one of the EU's strongest performers. Amid the global economic slowdown, the Polish economy has grown a fifth since the start of the crisis five years ago. This is the best result in the EU.

You must understand why I keep saying "Go Poland, go".

Poland attracts major international companies. Credit Suisse's Centre of Excellence in the Polish city of Wroclaw has grown to become its second biggest office in the Europe, Middle East and Africa (EMEA) region.

Online retail giant Amazon just announced the opening of three logistics centres near Wroclaw and Poznan, each of them the size of 95,000 sq m, or 13 football fields.

Poland boasts a level of reinvestment three times higher than the European average. The Polish economy proved resistant in times of crisis and continues to have the faith of foreign investors. They appreciate the country's stable macroeconomic situation, highly skilled workforce, competitive rates and business-friendly climate. Additional incentives, such as tax reliefs, are offered to investors in the Special Economic Zones.

As a bonus, you will also enjoy Poland's excellent food, natural beauty and numerous leisure opportunities. So, come to Europe, start in Poland.

**Q:** What have you noticed that has been important, interesting or remarkable to you since arriving in Singapore to take up this post?

**A:** Since I arrived in 2009, I have witnessed the remarkable growth of Singapore – the red dot which became one of the more important players internationally. I truly admire Singapore's drive for excellence – the never-ending urge to make things even more modern, beautiful and efficient.

I could compare Singaporeans to Winston Churchill, who once said: "I am a simple man who is easily satisfied by the best."

In fact, if I were to name one thing that impressed me most in Singapore, it would be its people. Over my four years here, I have met many kind and talented people and enjoyed the richness of their different cultures and traditions, peacefully co-existing in a multicultural society. I made many good friends here and often with a surprise discovered how similar we actually are – no matter if you are a chicken rice lover or have a taste for Polish *pierogi* dumplings.