

**Edited Transcript of Remarks by Minister for Foreign Affairs Dr Vivian Balakrishnan for the Opening of the New Campus of the German European School Singapore (GESS) on Thursday, 13 September 2018, 10:00 AM**

Excellencies

Ladies and Gentlemen

I am delighted to be here with you on this very auspicious day for the opening of this beautiful new campus of the German European School Singapore. It's particularly meaningful for me, as I attended the groundbreaking for the school in May 2016. I was also privy to the earlier plans for the school, which I think I saw in 2015. And course, I would like to bid a big welcome to all of you, as the local Member of Parliament for this district.

Singapore has always enjoyed a very close partnership with Europe, and in particular, with Germany. Even before Singapore's independence, German and European companies and businesspeople were present on this tiny island. Just to give you a couple of examples of how you have made a significant difference to Singapore's future, for instance, if you go back to 1960, some of you may have heard of Dr Albert Winsemius from the Netherlands, who was Singapore's chief economic advisor. Much of what you see of Singapore's development today – the genesis of those ideas we gladly attributed with gratitude to Dr Winsemius. Similarly, although we have already celebrated the 50th anniversary of diplomatic relations with Germany three years ago, our ties go back much further. I remember visiting Hamburg in July last year together with my Prime Minister. One of the most pleasant evenings was when we were hosted to a meal by Dr Dirk Lorenz-Meyer, our Honorary Consul in Hamburg. He proudly shared that his great-great-grandfather founded Behn Meyer, a trading, shipping, and insurance company, which in fact celebrated 175 years in Singapore recently. On the same trip, I went to the Siemens HQ in Munich with my Prime Minister and was reminded that the company has been here since 1908. And if you think about the petrochemical industry in Singapore, everyone will remember Royal Dutch Shell, which has been here for more than a century, and made a key difference to our economic growth in the world.

So the point is that relations between Singapore and Europe have always been deep and comprehensive. At the political level, our leaders exchange visits regularly. It's no secret that my Prime Minister holds German Chancellor Angela Merkel in very high regard, and when they meet, it's not just a meeting of political leaders, but there is a meeting of minds.

Another factoid worth emphasising is that the EU is the largest investor in Singapore. In this day and age, when many people are focused on trade frictions between the US and China, very often, people do not pay enough attention to the EU and its critical role in Asia. I wish to highlight that in fact, the EU is the largest investor in Singapore, and our third-largest trading partner. Trade is flourishing, and Singapore is host to more than 10,000 companies from the EU, many of which view Singapore as a gateway to the rest of Asia. Indeed, that's also a key reason why your enrolment has grown – because your companies and your people are based here. Within the EU, Germany is our largest trading partner, accounting for slightly more than a fifth of our total trade with the EU. There are more than 1,700 German companies in Singapore involved in key sectors such as automotive, chemicals, electronics, engineering and logistics.

I am confident that this already deep relationship will reach new heights when the EU-Singapore Free Trade Agreement comes into force. We appreciate the continued strong support from Germany and our other EU partners for this agreement.

While we often focus on politics and economics, it is also worthwhile reflecting that money, resources, and companies, do not paint the whole picture. There have to be strong people-to-people relationships, trust and comfort at an emotional and psychological level as well. I've already mentioned the example of Dr Albert Winsemius. But we need to continue to not take this relationship for granted, and continue to invest in more opportunities for young people in Germany and Europe to live here, grow up here – as our two young emcees have – as well as Singaporeans to also experience what life is like in Germany and Europe.

I am glad that there is a popular Study in Europe Higher Education Fair which reinforces educational opportunities, while the European Film Festival remains Singapore's longest-running foreign film festival. It has enjoyed great success and helped to bring the Singapore and European communities together. Singaporeans on our part have always shown interest in learning European languages. For example, many Singaporeans study German at the Goethe Institut to prepare themselves for work, study, or holidays in Germany. The popularity of the German lessons is matched by Singaporeans' increasing familiarity with Oktoberfest – it's a pity we don't have German beer right here to toast this event! – and the enthusiasm and support cheering on German clubs in football championships!

We have a vibrant German and European community in Singapore, and all of you, in a sense, represent this coming together of both communities. I believe this is the largest German school in Asia, and I'm sure it is a significant size even compared to others on the global stage. Again as the local Member of Parliament, I welcome you to our neighbourhood. I remember the speech I made before to say this piece of land is a very precious one, which has both heritage and history. I'm very glad that you've done your best to respect that in the way you have planned and developed this campus.

I would like to just leave on a note of encouragement to you to further integrate yourselves into the local community, provide more activities where the people living in this neighbourhood can feel they are a part of your community, feel a sense of ownership and camaraderie with you.

On that note, let me again welcome all of you to Singapore, to this neighbourhood, and congratulate all the people who have worked so hard to make this a reality. Please allow me to congratulate the parents, congratulate the alumni, congratulate the current students and the students that will come to this campus. The reason why you have loyal alumni and your board will continue to support this school, I believe, goes beyond just location, resources, and planning. It is really because this is a cause that is larger than yourselves. This is a cause that is worthwhile, and I think nothing gives you more pride than to see your babies grow up, children become adults, and to see them become independent, vibrant bridges between our communities and cultures. So once again, congratulations, and I wish you all the very best in the future. Thank you very much.