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Asia - Europe Institute

Austrian Perspective on Key Foreign and
Security Challenges Affecting EU and
Southeast Asia and Austrian-Malaysia
Bilateral Relations

AEI Occasional Paper 20

H.E. Ambassador Christophe Ceska

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Austrian Perspective on Key Foreign and Security Challenges Affecting EU and Southeast Asia and Austrian-Malaysia Bilateral Relations

H.E. Ambassador Christophe Ceska

I would like to start by thanking Professor Dr. Md Nasrudin Md Akhir and his team for his invitation to address the Asia-Europe Institute of the University of Malaya in the context of the Ambassadors Lecture Series. The list of all previous speakers is impressive and I feel more than honoured to have the opportunity to provide you the Austrian and, let's say, Central European perspective on key foreign and security challenges affecting the EU and Southeast Asia today. And I shall not omit as well some key facts about the long-standing and excellent bilateral relationship between Austria and Malaysia.

Allow me one remark from the outset:

Even though we live in a globalised world our politics remain very much regional or national. This holds particularly true for my country, Austria, whose foreign policy priorities essentially remain focussed on Europe, the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy and our direct neighbourhood. I make this remark to underline my government's particular belief in the fact that what the world needs today is more political and economic integration, not less, and in that regard in view of our two countries being geographically so far apart, we believe that a multilateral approach to global challenges has a greater impact than strictly bilateral actions. I trust Malaysia shares the same approach which is why I would like to focus on the EU-ASEAN ties first.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I think we can all agree today that this century poses new security challenges that affect us all everywhere in the world. We can only deal with them if we work together. So for us working with many Asian countries is an opportunity for cooperation and strong partnership to tackle common problems.

Here, both the EU and Asia share the objective of securing peace and prosperity in our regions and beyond. We are partners facing global problems such as non-proliferation, terrorism and violent extremism and we also jointly face the threats of climate change and energy security.

Non-proliferation is a key challenge for us all. In Asia, the EU sees North Korea's nuclear tests as a big challenge to the global non-proliferation regime and a violation of North Korea's international obligations not to produce or test nuclear weapons. The EU is working with its partners to build a firm and unified response aimed at demonstrating to North Korea that there are consequences for its continued violations.

Terrorism and extremism pose a threat to our peaceful co-existence. We have a shared interest in working together to prevent it in all of its forms. The spread of terrorism and extremism are the negative sides of globalisation: we need to be equally global in our work to counter these threats, be that through police training in Afghanistan or support to justice reform in Pakistan. Cyber attacks are not just a military threat. They can affect our daily lives by targeting critical infrastructure such as energy grids or hospitals.

Climate change poses a growing and imminent risk to us all. If this leads to parts of our continents becoming uninhabitable as a result of severe droughts or floods, the effects will be disastrous. And of course greater prosperity for all of us depends on our ability to secure energy resources, despite increasing scarcity while at the same time avoiding this becoming a source of conflict.

We all face the same threats. We already have a partnership between the EU and Malaysia and the ASEAN since the 80s but I believe we can do much more to deepen our cooperation even further. Our commitment to security and stability in Asia is for the long term. We will continue to be an active and constructive member of the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF). Last year the EU signed the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC) and it is now looking forward to the prospect of joining the East Asia Summit.

The new-generation of partnership and cooperation agreements which the EU has recently concluded with Indonesia, Vietnam, the Philippines, Thailand and Singa-

pore provide us with an ambitious framework for cooperation in fighting terrorism, human trafficking, and countering proliferation. We are hopeful that the talks underway to have similar agreements with Malaysia but also with Brunei, Australia and New Zealand will make progress.

Another good example of our partnership is our work on disaster prevention and response with ASEAN and individual countries. The EU has provided RM 230 million to help the victims of natural disasters. We are currently establishing a regional network of information-sharing and early warning systems for emergency situations with ASEAN. We are supporting the ASEAN centre for humanitarian response. We have recently participated with more than 60 people in disaster and relief exercises with ASEAN and other countries under the ARF.

The EU also works together on civilian and military operations - we have concluded a framework agreement with New Zealand and hope to sign soon with Australia and South Korea for participation in EU-led missions. We look forward to further participation in worldwide missions with all our partners in the Asia-Pacific. So our partnership on the full range of security challenges is strong and growing which brings me to why the EU can now become an even more effective and innovative partner.

Our strength lies in our ability to respond to a crisis with a wide range of tools and instruments, short and long term, humanitarian and development, security and diplomatic. We call this the comprehensive approach, an approach that we believe is particularly suited to tackling the new security challenges we face today. For us the comprehensive approach implies combining hard and soft power to achieve lasting security and prosperity. This approach, we believe, makes us a unique global partner for Asia on security issues.

It comes from the changes that were made by the EU Lisbon Treaty which created the job of an EU Foreign Minister called High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy by combining the jobs previously done by three people and allowed him to create the European External Action Service – the diplomatic service of the EU. This new service is more than a foreign ministry – it combines elements of a development and of a defence ministry.

A good example of this in action and one that is particularly relevant to Asia is the threat posed by maritime piracy. As many of you will know, for several years now, the EU has been deeply engaged in fighting piracy at the Horn of Africa.

The EU's actions off the coast of Somalia are particularly relevant to our Asian partners for a number of reasons. First of all, seafarers from Asian countries pay the highest price: of the 54 hostages currently being held by pirates, 53 are nationals from Asian countries. Secondly, piracy is a particular challenge in this region and our success at the Horn of Africa and the great cooperation we've enjoyed with Asian partners can make a real contribution to developing a regional approach to tackling piracy in Asia. This operation has shown impressive results: In the last two years, piracy off the coast of Somalia has decreased by 95%. The mission has detained and transferred 149 suspected pirates to judicial authorities for prosecution and conviction through a network of agreements with the coastal countries.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Let me now say a few words about our bilateral relations:

Despite a considerable geographic air line distance of 9480km and a relatively few touching points with Malaysia's foreign policy, Austria and Malaysia have always enjoyed excellent relations that were carried by mutual appreciation and respect. Interestingly the geopolitical situation and the focus on regional integration by both countries have created commonalities which led to closer cooperation in various fields.

Indeed, one being a muslim country, the other a secular catholic country, both with a very different history, one could conclude that both countries are too different to be able to find common ground in anything. And yet, one could also point out that we share universally recognized norms and principles forming the backbone of the common law, that we are both members of the UN and have been working hard to join its highest level as non-permanent members of the Security Council for example. In the same vein, one could also highlight the fact that both countries have been traditionally supportive of a military but not ideological neutral status - Malaysia as a member of the Non Aligned Movement, Austria as a neutral country since its regained independence in 1955. Also the Austria Federal Ministry for European and

International Affairs is proud to work closely with Malaysia when it comes to non-proliferation where our two countries support all efforts for the abolition of nuclear and mass-destruction weapons – a long-term task obviously. And I am happy to also mention our recently agreed new cooperation on anti-corruption between our respective Anticorruption authorities. It seems therefore that we have much more in common than originally expected!

Already in the 19th century, the expeditions of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy reached as far as to today's Malaysian shores. The most famous Austrian visiting Malaysia in the old days was Archduke Franz Ferdinand, successor to the thrones of Austria and Hungary, who during his journey around the world paid a visit to Johor on 7 April 1893, travelling aboard the Austro-Hungarian cruiser HMS 'Elisabeth'. Franz Ferdinand was an experienced hunter and had hoped to go hunting with the Sultan of Johor but unfortunately the Sultan had left for the Spa of Karlsbad in Bohemia, then part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, where he used to spend several months every year.

The diplomatic relations between Austria and the territory of today's Malaysia (then part of the British Empire) reach as far back as to the 19th century too. In September 1866, Emperor Franz Joseph of Austria authorized the establishment of an Austrian Honorary Consulate at Penang, then Prince of Wales Island. After the compromise with Hungary it became in 1868 an Imperial and Royal Austro-Hungary Honorary Consulate. One of the problems finding suitable candidates for this post was 'that the climate is such that Europeans, after a stay of a few years, are forced to take a long vacation in order to restore their health in Europe'. It seems that after 1900 there were a considerable number of often destitute Austrian and Hungarian citizens in Penang relying on help from the Honorary Consulate. When the United Kingdom declared war on Austro-Hungary in August 1914, the last Honorary Consul was deported by the authorities to a concentration camp in Australia.

The Republic of Austria did not maintain a consulate in the territory of today's Malaysia between 1918 and 1938. Austrian consular interests in the area were looked after by the German consulate in Singapore.

After Austria's regained independence and after Malaysia's Independence, Austria and Malaysia established diplomatic relations on 6 August 1962. In the beginning,

the respective Austrian Ambassador to Thailand used to be co-accredited to Malaysia until in 1973 Austria set up her Embassy in Kuala Lumpur, in the same year when Malaysia set up her first Embassy in Vienna.

In general, the intensified relations are probably best reflected in the size of the Austrian community in Malaysia: whereas in 1973 you could not find more than a handful of Austrians living in Malaysia for more than a couple of months, today a few hundred of Austrians are spending whole period of their life happily in Malaysia.

During the first decade of our diplomatic relations, Austria ran a few development support projects in Malaysia, esp. in the vocational education and tourism sectors, both by sending experts and by granting scholarships to Malaysian students for respective studies in Austria. However, as Malaysia was maturing fast, these projects phased out and instead the economic relations intensified considerably.

Although the 'cultural superpower' of Austria enjoys a good reputation with Malaysians and the Volksoper Symphony Orchestra, the Vienna Boys Choir and world renowned ensembles performed in Malaysia, the cultural relations took some time to intensify until only recently. In the jubilee year of 2012, the first three Malaysian boys were admitted as student and singers in the famous Vienna Boys Choir.

Furthermore, Austria, due to its history and geopolitical situation, has a long-standing tradition in intercultural and inter-religious dialogue activities, in particular with the Muslim world and Islam in Europe. The legal recognition of Islam as early as 1912 has contributed to the fact that interfaith dialogue has featured prominently on Austria's policy agenda for decades. The early recognition of Islam established the basis for an orderly and respectful co-existence between Christians and Muslims in Austria. With about 450.000 Muslims, Islam now ranks second in Austria. With more than estimated 15 million Muslims in the EU, their full integration in our societies, their participation in the development of Europe and its identity is crucial.

Integration, by the way, is also central to my government's foreign policy: My Foreign Minister who happens to be the youngest foreign minister in the world, was State Secretary for Integration for 3 years prior to being appointed foreign minister. With his hands-on approach he successfully introduced long-term strategic planning in the integration policies in my country. The first generations of migrants

coming to Austria usually were left to their own devices. Today, we are working toward integrating immigrants into our job market as early as possible. We aim to communicate the values and principles of our country to those newly arrived and provide them with support in leading a prosperous life in Austria. Qualified immigration and successful integration are key in securing Austria's prosperity and further enrich our artistic, cultural and media landscape. Our Minister also managed to change the perception of what integration signifies. Integration used to be mixed up with emotionally charged themes such as asylum-seeking and migration but he succeeded in rendering the public discourse on integration more factual and objective.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Since diplomatic relations were established in 1962, bilateral trade relations between Malaysia and Austria have developed tremendously. In the last ten years alone, the export volume from Austria to Malaysia has increased five-fold and has reached a new record level in 2013 with RM 1.9 billion. This impressive record volume in 2013 has also made Malaysia the biggest export market for Austrian products in the whole of Southeast-Asia, even overtaking Singapore. Especially in the past few years Austrian companies became increasingly confident in the Malaysian market and entered it more aggressively, which clearly reflects its increasing diversification and the rising demand for high quality products made in Austria. Plastic and metal working machinery, automation equipment, high tech parts for the Malaysian electronics and electrical industries, advanced technologies for the energy, water, communication and transport sectors but also plants and equipment for the fast expanding Malaysian green technology sector are exported to Malaysia.

A highlight in the recent economic activities was the visit by the Austrian Federal President Dr. Heinz Fischer in November 2010. He was accompanied by a big business delegation of representatives of 45 Austrian companies. Consequently, many Austrian companies showed high interest in Malaysia not only as an export market but also as an investment alternative to China and India.

So far, nearly 60 Austrian companies opened their offices and invested in Malaysia. To date, by far the biggest investment is in the electronics sector, but Austrian companies also produce paper products, plastic pipes or geo textiles in the country.

For many companies, Malaysia has been an important market in South East Asia. The toll system that can be found all over the country on Malaysian highways has been developed by an Austrian company and Malaysia was their first overseas market. Austrian health care companies have a long successful history in Malaysia. In the education and research sector, co-operations have been initiated by Austrian companies like the technical cooperation between the Technical University Graz and Universiti Teknologi Petronas. Many environmental plants have been installed with Austrian know how like the water treatment plants in Putrajaya or Penang, a bioethanol plant and biogas generators or photovoltaic inverters. An outstanding project was executed with the cable car in Langkawi which is now a major attraction on the famous Malaysian tourist island. Austrian consumer goods can be found more and more in Malaysian supermarkets and shopping centers. Since last year, KTM, Europe's second largest manufacturer of motorcycles, is assembling the KTM Duke motorcycles in Malaysia. The MINI Countryman is being assembled in Malaysia with parts manufactured by MAGNA in Austria. Similarly, the PROTON Preve was co-engineered with the same Austrian company MAGNA. And once the KL MRT System will be finalized, it will be equipped with fully automatic driverless electric trains made by Siemens Austria.

Conversely, Malaysian companies discovered Austria as an interesting market for their products. Whereas exports from Malaysia to Austria amounted to only RM 580 million in 1995, they rose to RM 1.3 billion in 2013 – an increase by 132%. Especially electronic products made in Malaysia are well-known in Austria for their reliable quality.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Let me conclude with the words that there is still much space for more economic development and political cooperation between Austria and Malaysia, and that I am in the happy position to continue working on deepening this already long-lasting and mutually enriching relationship.

Terima kasih!

About the Author

Education

1976 – 1984 Lycee Français in Brussels, Vienna, Berlin
1991 Master's degree in law at University of Salzburg
University of Vienna, University of Paris II

Professional Experience

September 1990:

Appointment as reserve Lieutenant, Jagerbataillon 21, Kufstein, Tyrol

October 1991 – August 1992:

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January 1993 – August 1993:

Federal Ministry for European and International Affairs, Law and Consular Affairs
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August 1993 – Sept. 1995:

Office of the Foreign Minister, Law and Consular Affairs, Section of Cultural and
Educational Policy

September 1995 – Feb. 1997:

Austrian Embassy in Paris

February 1997 – Aug. 1999:

Austrian Embassy in London

August 1999 – Dec. 2001:

Permanent Representation of Austria to the European Union, Council Working
Group for the Western Balkans, Stability Pact for South-East Europe

December 2001 – Feb. 2004:

Federal Ministry for European and International Affairs, Head of Department for
EU policy on cooperation in Justice and Home Affairs

March 2004 – May 2008:

Federal Ministry for European and International Affairs, Deputy Head of Permanent Mission of Austria to the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

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