

# Germany and Singapore ‘have forged tight bond’

Both share strategic interests and are trusted friends at global fora, says President Halimah

On the surface, Germany and Singapore look very different, but the two countries have forged a tight bond, President Halimah Yacob said yesterday.

This is because of “like-mindedness and shared strategic interests”, Madam Halimah said at a state banquet for German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier at the Istana.

She noted that their languages and cultures differ, their histories have never really overlapped and Germany is much larger than Singapore and has natural resources.

But both are trusted friends at international fora, a role known in German as “Vertrauter”, she said to applause.

Describing an earlier meeting with her counterpart, she added: “We agreed that in today’s world, where the tide appears to be turning against globalisation and integration, it is more critical than ever to continue to be steadfast proponents of free trade, multilateralism and the rule of international law.”

Bilateral trade links are strong: Germany is Singapore’s largest trading partner in Europe with bilateral trade reaching \$20 billion last year, while Singapore had been Germany’s largest trading partner in Asean for many years.

Both presidents expect this economic partnership to grow further when the European Union-Singapore Free Trade Agreement comes into force.

There are more than 1,600 German companies in Singapore, contributing not just investments but also to the development of the local workforce, especially in advanced manufacturing and biotechnology, said Madam Halimah.

She recalled, from her years as a unionist, the old Rollei camera factory in Kampong Chai Chee, which employed thousands of Singaporeans.

She also cited the bilateral cooperation in defence, education, culture, and science and technology.

Dr Steinmeier is in Singapore for a two-day state visit – the first by a German head of state – that ends today. It is a historic milestone in the two countries' 52-year relationship, Madam Halimah noted.

Dr Steinmeier said Singapore has made great economic and political progress owing to its leaders' foresight, and Germany wants to continue working closely with Singapore, "hopefully along with other European partners, on this basis of political reason and foresight".

He added: "We Germans are increasingly focusing our interests and energy on Asia. In this context, it is of key importance for us to expand our relations with Singapore and work together for a rules-based international and regional order."

Earlier in the day, Dr Steinmeier and his wife received a ceremonial welcome at the Istana, where he called on Madam Halimah and met Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong.

He also delivered a lecture on foreign policy and global issues at Singapore Management University.

Yesterday, the Singapore Tourism Board said it had signed a pact with German trade fair organiser Deutsche Messe AG to hold an Asian edition of the world's largest trade show for industrial technology in Singapore for the next three years. It will be organised with local trade event firm SingEx Group.

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