

Innovation in Southeast Asia and the role of the European Union

The EU Centre in Singapore, the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (ISEAS) and Sociedade Portuguesa de Inovação (SPI) co-organised a seminar by Dr Sara Medina (Member of the Board, SPI) entitled “Innovation in Southeast Asia and the role of the European Union” on 15 April 2015 at ISEAS.

This seminar presented the innovation policies and support structures of Singapore, Malaysia, Vietnam, The Philippines, Thailand and Indonesia, providing an analysis of the key strengths and weaknesses in each country. Best practices of some European Union Member States were also shared to provide useful examples for policy learning and exchange with the ASEAN region. The study was conducted through in-depth semi-structured expert interviews with different stakeholders in these countries by the European and Southeast Asian researchers during their field trips, and supplemented with comprehensive literature reviews and research into secondary sources.

The project was financed by the European Union 7th Framework Programme for Research and Innovation. It aims to assist and encourage research cooperation between Southeast Asia and Europe. It focused on three societal challenges: health, food security and safety and water management. Singapore best practices were their strong public sector engagement in research and development investments and their solid long-term planning with continued infrastructure investments. On the other side, the lack of talent pursuing science and technology and the difficulty for local small and medium enterprises to grow and move upstream were areas in need of improvement.

The study also presented the best practices of three EU members state that are identified as leaders in innovation: Sweden, Germany and Finland. These three countries had a higher level of business research & development expenditure, good linkages between the academia and business and an excellent record of the commercialization of their technological knowledge.

The results can serve as input to further discussions among policy makers, especially in the context of ASEAN-EU Dialogue Meetings or in the development of the next ASEAN Plan of Action on Science, Technology and Innovation. It also acts as a

platform for governments, funders, practitioners and private sector for a complete approach to develop sustainable science, technology and innovation collaboration.