

# Fostering stronger ties

Fabrice Filliez, the new Swiss ambassador to Singapore, shares some of the new and exciting activities taking place in the coming months that will further strengthen bilateral relations between both countries. BY NARENDRA AGGARWAL

**T**HE new Swiss ambassador, Fabrice Filliez, is a career diplomat. Prior to his appointment as ambassador to Singapore and Brunel, he served in Bern for five years at the Swiss State Secretariat for International Financial Matters with the title of Ambassador in charge of multilateral tax matters.

**Narendra Aggarwal:** As the new Swiss Ambassador to Singapore, how would you describe the state of bilateral relations in various fields – political, business, education, research and innovation, etc?

**Ambassador Fabrice Filliez:** Relations between Switzerland and Singapore are excellent at all levels. Just last year, we celebrated 50 years that were characterised by a progressively growing partnership. We regularly provide many frequent high level visits, both Swiss officials coming to Singapore, as well as Singapore representatives being warmly welcomed in my country.

We also have strong and dense business ties. Nearly half of all Swiss exports to South-east Asia go to Singapore. A similar picture can be drawn for investments. Switzerland is the seventh largest investor in Singapore, and ranks fourth in Europe in terms of destination for Singapore ODI. We have over 400 Swiss firms represented in Singapore, employing more than 25,000 people.

And last but not least, we share a lot of common interests when it comes to education, science and technology. Some of the top Swiss universities are represented in Singapore. For example, ETH Zurich was invited by Singapore's National Research Foundation and has vast research fa-

cilities at the Campus for Research Excellence and Technological Enterprise (CREATE). The University of St Gallen is offering Asian-related academic activities through its own subsidiary, the St Gallen Institute of Management in Asia Pte Ltd (SGI). The Swiss Hospitality School (EHL, Lausanne) one of the best hospitality management schools in the world, is also very active in Singapore.

**Narendra Aggarwal:** Can you share with us your priorities as the new Swiss Ambassador in the coming months?

**Ambassador Fabrice Filliez:** I am focusing on getting to know the various stakeholders who are active in the Swiss-Singapore relationship. I am talking about the Swiss community here, the numerous Swiss companies and institutions, as well as the competent Singapore authorities and Singapore business entities. This enables me to grow a better understanding of how we can profit from each other and further strengthen the Swiss-Singapore ties.

As already mentioned, both in political and economic domains the two states enjoy good and sustainable relations. We both face challenges in similar fields such as education, fintech or innovation. I see strong potential in working together on these topics and learning more from each other. In the coming months, I will therefore continue to feel the pulse of the various parties involved to make sure we can profit from synergies and opportunities arising.

**Narendra Aggarwal:** I understand that a diplomatic job also addresses some targeted, if you permit me to say, popular activities. What are initiatives of such a kind that will be taking place in the near future, if any?



Swiss ambassador Fabrice Filliez will focus on getting to know the various stakeholders in the Swiss-Singapore relationship. PHOTO: EMBASSY OF SWITZERLAND IN SINGAPORE

**Ambassador Fabrice Filliez:** You are absolutely right, we see our mission in doing our best in nourishing the Swiss-Singapore relations from all angles, including "from below", while stimulating a positive involvement of civil society entities and all interested people. For this, we have a number of upcoming new events. We are planning a new sport format for kids: the Switzerland-Singapore Tennis Festival, which will take place at the end of October. It will build on the success of a similar football tournament, which has been a big highlight in our calendar for many years and is co-organised with Sport Singapore since our 50-year diplomatic relations anniversary edition. Just like our football tournament, the Switzerland-Singapore Tennis Festival will embrace boys and girls from various backgrounds and aim to foster passion for sports and cultural exchange among the youth in both countries.

Another exciting project is the so-called "Swiss Week" – a series of

public and private events centring on Switzerland and its culture. This will be taking place in the spring of 2019.

**Narendra Aggarwal:** Getting back to diplomatic activities, are there any official visits from Switzerland to Singapore that are being planned? If so, who are likely to be coming to the city-state soon?

**Ambassador Fabrice Filliez:** The professional interaction at all levels is the important ongoing process. Just recently, Federal Councillor Guy Parmelin attended the Shangri-La Dialogue. It was a great honour for me to welcome this delegation in my role as the new Swiss Ambassador here.

For the Asean Foreign Ministers Meeting in Singapore at the beginning of August, we will be welcoming our State Secretary for Foreign Affairs, Pascale Baeriswyl.

In November, the State Secretary for International Financial Matters, Jörg Gasser, will be visiting us in the

context of the FinTech Festival taking place here. There are also some meaningful contacts within research and innovation, for example the planned visit in late November of the State Secretary for Education, Research and Innovation Mauro Dell'Ambroglio. The above list is, of course, hardly exhaustive.

**Narendra Aggarwal:** Talking about research and innovation, we have heard about the Cooling Singapore initiative by ETH, the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology Zurich. Why in your view is it an exciting thing to look forward to?

**Ambassador Fabrice Filliez:** We are talking about a project that unites research, technical applications, and citizen participation. Cooling Singapore not only showcases the excellence in research of ETH and other Swiss institutions: it also demonstrates that their know-how combined with remarkable Singapore's ambition can lead to tangible measures to mitigate the effects of climate change and even further improve the island's attraction.

It is both a task force obtaining and exchanging knowledge. But it also aims at developing clear roadmaps to actually coordinate measures to fight the problem. I truly think that this is only the beginning of even more high level collaborations between our two countries. If such an exciting project like Cooling Singapore proves to be successful, this will surely boost enthusiasm for even deeper cooperation in finding responses to the major urbanisation challenges in the future.

**Narendra Aggarwal:** What can Singapore expect from F10's fintech activity planned for September this year at Singapore Management University (SMU)?

**Ambassador Fabrice Filliez:** F10 is a proven expert, ranked multiple times among the 10 best European incubator and accelerators. It is a non-profit organisation that supports and guides start-ups in transforming their ideas into successful companies. Working together with SIX (the Swiss Stock Exchange), Baloise Group, Julius Bär, Generali Group Switzerland, PwC Switzerland, Rafflesen, Zürcher Kantonalbank, eny Finance and ERI Bancaire, F10 is at the forefront of the new financial paradigm. The association aims to bridge the gap between exciting new ideas and tomorrow's leading products.

F10 is organising a FinTech Hackathon event with the theme "Get access to FinTech trends and young talents" from Sept 21-23 at SMU. This event will be open to the community within the whole region, and is targeted to have a good mix of corporate and non-corporate individuals. Through the 48-hour hackathon, F10 aims to reformulate the Swiss and Asian fintech ecosystems, and to facilitate cooperation between young talents and corporations. Through its partners that are crucial for Switzerland's banking and insurance industry, the participants will also have the opportunity to access the latest global fintech trends and meet like minded people with a common goal, to reshape the global finance world. All in all, the event aims at continuing to write successful stories akin to the ones in Switzerland, forging valuable partnerships and giving birth to new game changing fintech ideas.

**Narendra Aggarwal:** Ambassador, based on your first impressions, what would you say if you were permitted only a single word reply to the question "What should one come to Singapore for?"

**Ambassador Fabrice Filliez:** Inspiration.