

Deutsch-Singapurische Juristen-Vereinigung e.V. German-Singapore Lawyers' Association



Globalisation has not excluded the legal profession. Knowledge of other legal systems and inter-action between lawyers from different jurisdictions are recognised as essential factors contributing to an attractive business location. The **legal profession** in both Germany and Singapore has undergone radical changes during the last few years to keep up with the changing world of business. German lawyers are increasingly confronted with Anglo-American practices and the past months have seen consolidation amongst smaller firms and a wave of mergers with mainly English law firms to prepare for the challenges ahead. Regional legal services are in demand in Singapore and the Government has allowed joint law ventures and alliances with international law firms to facilitate cross-border transactions and to better understand different legal cultures and practices.

The Association complements this development. In July 2000, German lawyers interested in Singapore and its legal system and Singapore lawyers with

similar interest in Germany have founded the German-Singaporean Lawyers' Association. The Association, registered with the Berlin Registrar of Societies as "**Deutsch-Singapurische Juristen-Vereinigung e.V.**", has more than 50 members from the legal profession of both countries but is open to other individuals and organisations as well. Singapore Minister for Law and Foreign Affairs H.E. Prof. S. Jayakumar, Ambassador Prof. Walter Woon, former Ambassador Volker Schlegel and Prof. Rauschning, founding father of the German Law Student Exchange Programme with the National University of Singapore, are **honorary members** of the Association. It closely co-operates with the Law Society of Singapore, the Law Faculty of the National University of Singapore (NUS) and various organizations in Germany.

In May 2001, the Association held its first **annual conference in Singapore**. Former German Ambassador Schlegel and Mr Chan Sek Keong, Attorney-General of Singapore and guest-of-honor, welcomed 60 guests from Singapore and Germany to an opening



reception at the Ambassador's residence. The presentations and panel discussions on the following day were held at the new auditorium of **Parliament House**. The conference program, the speeches and the presentations can be downloaded from the association's website at www.gsla.de. A similar event is again planned in Singapore for 2003.

The Association was instrumental in preparing a visit of Singapore Ambassador Prof. Woon to the Verwaltungsgericht Freiburg in spring 2002. This administrative court is one of Germany's technology courts and was selected as one of the model courts in Baden-Württemberg's **court and judiciary reform project**. Ambassador Prof. Woon was most interested to learn that the court is highly successful with its offers to the parties in a litigation to interrupt the proceedings and undertake a mediation within the court. The experience with this unusual and unconventional trial project has been so positive that, in the future, there may be more offers of this type. A counter visit of the **Singapore Technology Court** by a German judiciary delegation was envisaged and the Association will also contribute to such visit.

The Association is the **first of its kind in Singapore**, although Germany has similar bilateral tie-ups with several other countries. The Association aims to promote deeper knowledge and understanding of Singapore law in Germany and of German and EU law in Singapore, enhance co-operation and facilitate business relations between both countries, support a regular exchange of law students and pupils, and generally offer a forum for contacts between German and Singaporean lawyers. In the words of Ambassador Prof. Woon, in his Grusswort to the 2001 Conference: "An understanding of the law is a gateway to understanding the culture and mindset of a nation. Stereotypes formed by the Anglo-Saxon press dominate the image of Singapore in Germany and that of Germany in Singapore. It is only through a process of personal contact that we can move beyond the stereotypes to a true understanding of one another's cultures and mores. It is my hope that the German-Singaporean Lawyers Association will play a leading role in fostering a closer people-to-people relationship between our two countries."

As far back as in 1979, Prof. S. Jayakumar, then Dean of the Law Faculty of NUS, and Prof. Dietrich Rauschning from the University of Goettingen had initiated an **exchange**

program for undergraduate law students. The German students who went to Singapore were selected from the Studienstiftung des Deutschen Volkes, the premier German scholarship foundation. Over the years, almost 70 German law students have spent a four-month term as special students at the NUS law faculty. They were able to gain insights in the Singapore legal system, and their experiences have made them friends and ambassadors of Singapore in Europe. In 1997, after Prof. Rauschning had retired from his office at the University, the program came to an end. In a joint effort to re-vitalize this exchange program Ambassador Prof. Woon and the Association have convinced the Studienstiftung to again start sending German students to Singapore as of summer 2003. Ambassador Prof. Woon and the Association will be involved in the selection process and also provide academic guidance for interested students. The Association will further support and contribute to postgraduate research and study projects by students and scholars from both countries, and hopes to also arouse interest among young Singaporean law students to spend some time at a German law school. Fostering the **exchange of young lawyers** will be one of the prime objectives in future. ■

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