

For Immediate Release

**INAUGURAL MEETING OF THE
EUROPEAN UNION-SINGAPORE FREE TRADE AGREEMENT (EUSFTA)
TRADE AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT (TSD) BOARD**

1. Singapore and the EU convened the inaugural meeting of the EUSFTA TSD Board on 17 and 18 November 2020 via videoconference. The timeline for this first meeting was successfully brought forward to within one year of the EUSFTA's entry into force¹, demonstrating the EU and Singapore's strong commitment towards ensuring the effective implementation of the TSD Chapter.
2. The TSD Board comprises officials from the Ministry of Trade and Industry (MTI), the Ministry of Sustainability and the Environment (MSE), the Ministry of Manpower (MOM), and their EU counterparts. During the meeting, the EU and Singapore officials had fruitful discussions under the theme of "*Towards a Resilient and Sustainable Recovery*". They exchanged experiences in managing the COVID-19 pandemic and agreed on the importance of working towards a resilient and sustainable post-pandemic economic recovery. They also discussed possible areas for future bilateral exchanges and collaborations, including areas such as clean energy, the circular economy, and measures to support workers through the global economic slowdown.
3. Alongside the TSD board meeting, the EU and Singapore also organised the first TSD Public Stakeholders' Forum on 20 November 2020 via videoconference. Chaired by Singapore and EU officials, the Forum was attended by business, labour and environmental stakeholders from Europe and Singapore. The Forum saw a rich and lively exchange where stakeholders discussed potential areas of cooperation between the Singapore and EU governments and civil society, and shared perspectives on trade, environment and labour issues.
4. The joint statement of the first EU-Singapore TSD Board Meeting to the TSD Public Stakeholders Forum can be found in [Annex A](#). An overview of the EUSFTA and the TSD Chapter can be found in [Annex B](#).

Ministry of Trade and Industry
26 November 2020

**Annex A: Joint statement of the first EU-Singapore TSD Board Meeting
to the TSD Public Stakeholders Forum**

Annex B: Background on the EUSFTA and the TSD Chapter

¹ Under the EUSFTA, the EU and Singapore had committed to hold the first TSD Board meeting within two years of the agreement's entry into force. We eventually managed to do so within one year.

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ANNEX A

**JOINT STATEMENT OF THE FIRST EU-SINGAPORE TSD BOARD
MEETING TO THE TSD PUBLIC STAKEHOLDERS FORUM**

(20 November 2020)

1 On 17 and 18 November 2020, European Commission and Singapore officials held the first European Union-Singapore Free Trade Agreement (EUSFTA) Trade and Sustainable Development (TSD) Board meeting via videoconference from Brussels and Singapore. From the EU, the representatives from the Directorates-General TRADE, ENV, CLIMA, ENER and EMPL and from the EU Delegation to Singapore participated. From Singapore, representatives from the Ministry of Trade and Industry (MTI), Ministry of Manpower (MOM), Ministry of Sustainability and the Environment (MSE), Economic Development Board (EDB), Infrastructure Asia, Energy Market Authority (EMA), Enterprise Singapore (ESG), National Climate Change Secretariat (NCCS), and the Singapore Mission to the EU participated.

Establishment of TSD Board

2 The parties agreed to establish the TSD Board in accordance with the provisions of Article 12.15 (2) of the FTA. The meeting agenda was adopted by the board.

3 The TSD Board recognised that the EU and Singapore are like-minded partners upholding the open and rules-based multilateral trading system that has underpinned global peace and prosperity. Against the backdrop of global uncertainties, the EUSFTA builds on our longstanding cooperation at the World Trade Organization (WTO), and other international fora, reaffirming our shared commitment to free trade and our strong stand against protectionism. In addition, the EU and Singapore are keen to continue strengthening our collaborations on trade and sustainable development.

4 Under the theme of "*Towards a Resilient and Sustainable Recovery*", the TSD Board had a fruitful and constructive exchange of views on the ongoing implementation of the EUSFTA's TSD Chapter. The TSD Board also agreed on major themes and topics that could form the basis for further cooperation, with a particular attention to salient issues of the day, such as enabling a resilient and sustainable post-COVID-19 recovery.

Updates on the Institutional Setup

5 Both sides recognised that the timeline for the TSD Board's first meeting had been successfully brought forward to within one year of the EUSFTA's entry into force. This early commencement of the TSD Board reflected the EU and Singapore's strong commitment towards ensuring the effective implementation of the TSD Chapter and was the result of expedited preparatory work on both sides.

6 The TSD Board also confirmed that both sides would continue their work towards establishing the rules of procedure for the Panel of Experts as well as a list of individuals who would be willing and able to serve as experts, as envisioned in paragraphs 2 to 4 of Article 12.17 of the EUSFTA.

Trade, Climate, and Energy

7 Both sides exchanged on recent developments in the area of climate action. The EU presented its over-arching climate-neutrality objective and the European Green Deal that underpins its achievement in a long-term, whole-of-society approach. In particular, the EU presented actions and initiatives, such as the climate law, its comprehensive plan to upgrade its 2030 target, and the forthcoming revision of its legislative framework. The EU provided also an overview of the planned Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM). The EU shared that details on the CBAM design were still under consideration but that it was looking forward to further bilateral and multilateral conversations as part of its broader consultation on views. Singapore welcomed the EU's confirmation that the CBAM will be consistent with its international commitments, including under the WTO, the Paris Agreement, and the EUSFTA.

8 The EU presented key features of its energy policy that is geared to a clean energy transition, whilst improving energy security and ensuring competitiveness of the economy and affordability for end-users. The EU outlined energy technologies to support the building blocks of its decarbonisation strategy, namely offshore wind energy, energy system integration, and, in the context of smart cities and communities, positive energy districts. The EU and Singapore concurred on the importance of renewable energy, energy efficiency, as well as a liberalised and flexible energy market as part of a sustainable energy system.

9 Singapore presented its overall climate action plan and approach to pave the way for Singapore's transition to a low-carbon future, including efforts to manage its alternative energy constraints. Singapore also presented its ongoing efforts to grow the green economy, including the development of a sustainable energy ecosystem and harnessing opportunities in green finance, innovation and carbon markets. Singapore highlighted potential areas for collaboration with European governments and companies in industrial energy efficiency, solar energy, energy storage systems, and low-carbon technologies such as hydrogen, and carbon capture, utilisation and storage, among others.

10 The Parties outlined the recovery efforts towards rebuilding a climate neutral, more resilient economy and underlined the key role of trade in this. The EU and Singapore concurred on the need for a green recovery that would (i) accelerate the reduction in GHG emissions; (ii) decouple economic growth from the use of resources; (iii) steer investment towards sustainable development; and (iv) improve environmental protection and the well-being of society.

11 The EU and Singapore noted their shared commitment to the full and timely implementation of their respective commitments under the Paris Agreement and reviewed key domestic policies to support its achievement and economic growth.

Trade and Environment

12 Both sides informed each other of their respective policy developments on trade and environment related matters. Under the European Green Deal presentation, the EU provided an overview of the 2nd Circular Economy Action Plan, Biodiversity Strategy 2030, Chemical Strategy, the upcoming Zero Pollution Strategy and Forestry Strategy. Furthermore, the EU highlighted the importance of continuous implementation of multilateral environmental agreements.

13 The EU invited Singapore to exchange views on a global proposal to address plastic pollution. The EU also shared its plans to organise two workshops on green public procurement and environmental footprint, both of which would be organised under the “Rethinking Plastics” project. Singapore shared its ongoing efforts to address plastic waste in the context of circular economy and our holistic approach to waste management and took note of the EU’s proposals.

14 Both sides agreed to continue to exchange information regarding trade and environment in future TSD Board meetings, and other fora where appropriate.

Trade and Labour

15 The EU presented its measures to support workers throughout the COVID-19 crisis, including instruments for temporary support to mitigate unemployment risks in an emergency (SURE), the Next Generation EU (NGEU) recovery effort and practical guidelines to ensure that the right to work, the right to social protection and the right to health are well protected throughout the EU. In addition, the EU underlined its commitment to promote the respect of labour rights in global supply chains for a fair, sustainable and resilient recovery from the COVID-19 crisis.

16 Singapore presented on how tripartism and social dialogue are the foundation for overcoming key challenges in addressing the impact of COVID-19 on the Singapore labour market. This included setting wage norms, fair cost-saving and retrenchment practices, and other appropriate and practical employment measures, during the pandemic. Singapore also shared how tripartite partners came together under the National Jobs Council to provide jobs and skills opportunities for jobseekers.

17 The EU informed on its anti-discrimination legislation, including Directives against discrimination on grounds of race, ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age, sexual orientation, on equal treatment for men and women, as well as EU Treaties prohibiting any discrimination on grounds of nationality and the rights incorporated in the EU Charter of fundamental rights.

18 Singapore informed on the steps taken to respect, promote, and effectively implement the principles concerning the fundamental rights at work, including:

- (i) the role of the Industrial Relations Act and Trade Unions Act concerning freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining, and the strong and growing labour movement and healthy union landscape in Singapore, including formation of new trade unions and rising union membership (increased by 50% over the last 10 years);
- (ii) Singapore's stance against forced labour and amendment of legislation to reflect this position, and effective tackling of Trafficking in Persons; and
- (iii) Singapore's position against workplace discrimination and multi-prong strategy to enforce merit-based employment practices through (a) education to change mindsets and (b) enforcement against errant employers. Singapore has seen positive labour outcomes, including rising employment rates for women and older workers (increased by 6%-points and 10%-points over last 10 years respectively), narrowing adjusted gender pay gap (reduced to 6.0%), and reduction in complaints of workplace discrimination (fallen by more than 50% over past five years). In 2020, Singapore continued to strengthen enforcement against workplace discrimination by stiffening penalties against employers and introducing new licensing conditions for employment agencies.

19 Singapore provided an update on its efforts made towards ratifying and effectively implementing the fundamental ILO conventions, including (i) amending relevant legislation, (ii) the continued work towards the elimination of discrimination in the workplace, and (iii) the ongoing policy reviews and gap analyses conducted.

20 There was constructive discussion of the EU and Singapore measures. The EU welcomed the measures and efforts taken by Singapore and raised clarifications which Singapore addressed. Singapore and EU agreed to continue to exchange information regarding trade and labour in future TSD Board meetings.

ANNEX B

**BACKGROUND ON THE EU-SINGAPORE FREE TRADE AGREEMENT
AND THE TRADE AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT CHAPTER**

EU-Singapore Free Trade Agreement (EUSFTA)

The EUSFTA, which entered into force on 21 November 2019, is the first free trade agreement (FTA) between the EU and an ASEAN Member State. As an ambitious and forward-looking agreement, it provides increased market access, addresses non-tariff barriers, and contains provisions on 21st century trade issues such as e-commerce, intellectual property, and sustainable development including renewable energy generation. As a pathfinder towards an eventual EU-ASEAN FTA, the EUSFTA also enhances region-to-region connectivity between the EU – the world’s largest single market, and ASEAN – the fourth largest economic bloc by 2030.

Trade and Sustainable Development (TSD) and the EUSFTA

The EUSFTA contains strong rules on TSD, including the protection of labour rights and the environment. It reflects the EU and Singapore’s shared belief that economic development, social development, and environmental protection are interdependent and mutually-reinforcing components of sustainable development.

Under the TSD Chapter, the EU and Singapore agreed to set up a Board on Trade and Sustainable Development (TSD Board), comprising EU and Singapore officials who are tasked with the effective implementation of the TSD Chapter. The EU and Singapore also agreed to establish new consultative mechanisms or make use of existing consultative mechanisms to seek advice from relevant domestic stakeholders on the implementation of the TSD Chapter.