Four ambassadors with a remit to woo German SMEs

BERLIN – Singapore’s Economic Development Board (EDB) has appointed four heads of medium-sized German companies with extensive experience in Asia as Singapore’s economic ambassadors, as it marks 50 years of trade relations with Germany.

Over the next three years, this pioneer batch of ambassadors will encourage firms like theirs to develop their business in Singapore.

They will also advise German small and medium enterprises — known as Mittelstand — on how to operate successfully in Asia.

Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong presented them with certificates of appointment at a ceremony on Wednesday, as he wrapped up his four-day visit to Germany.

The four ambassadors are Dr Michael Schadlich, former chief executive of automotive manufacturer Dorma Group; Mr Thomas Fischer, chairman of the supervisory board at automotive and filtration equipment supplier Mann+Hummel; Mr Peter Riedel, president and chief operating officer of electronics group Rohde & Schwarz; and Dr Gunther Kegel, chairman of automation and sensor technology manufacturer Pepperl+Fuchs.

EDB chairman Beh Swan Gin said: “They are considered key opinion leaders in their respective fields and are very well-positioned to provide practical advice to Mittelstand companies on undertaking R&D, manufacturing, operations and general management in Singapore and in Asia.”

Dr Beh noted that Singapore shared many of the Mittelstand companies’ core values.

These include a long-term view on investments and business, an emphasis on trust and reliability, ‘investment in research and development and education, and a commitment to excellence.

One of the new ambassadors, Mr Riedel, said: “Singapore not only provides a pool of skilled workers, a stable legal system and the protection of intellectual property, but also offers close proximity to the fastest-growing markets in the world.”

His counterpart Mr Fischer described Singapore as a “trustworthy hub in Asia”, and added: “We can rely on its political and legal conditions, and have access to excellent suppliers.”

German foreign direct investment in Singapore totalled €1 billion ($1.5 billion) in 2013, the largest amount of German investment in South-east Asia.

Some 1,400 German firms have a presence in Singapore.

Dr Beh noted that several Mittelstand companies are sponsoring polytechnic engineering graduates from Singapore to study in German universities of applied sciences, after which they will be offered work opportunities in the companies’ Singapore operations.

Separately, another group of German multinationals and Mittelstand companies are working with the Singapore Institute of Technology to pioneer a dual studies degree programme in Singapore.

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