



SOUTH EAST ASIA: BALANCING ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND JOINT RESPONSES TO THE CLIMATE CHALLENGE

Report on the visit of the France – South East Asia interparliamentary group to Thailand, Malaysia and Singapore

April 20th to 28th, 2015

A delegation of the France-East Asia friendship group composed of Mr Gérard Miquel, Chair of the group, and Mr Bernard Saugey, Deputy Chair for Thailand, Ms Marie-Hélène Des Esgaulx, Deputy Chair for Singapore, and Mr Simon Sutour, Deputy Chair for the Philippines, travelled successively to Thailand, Malaysia and Singapore.

Beyond matters relating to each of these countries' own interest, the main goal of the visit was to raise awareness among the authorities about the importance of preparing adequately for the 21st Conference of Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP21), to be held in Paris from November 30th to December 11th, 2015.

I. Preparing for COP21 : a challenge for everyone

In the three countries visited, meetings on environmental and climate issues were organised. Indeed, the Senate delegation wanted to stress – in line with the priorities of the President of the French Republic and Government – **the urgent need to reach an ambitious agreement in Paris.**

In this perspective, the delegation enquired about the progress on Intended Nationally Determined Contributions (INDC).

The subject of contributions is central to discussions: the effectiveness of the

agreement and the goal of keeping the average rise in global temperature below 2°C compared to pre-industrial levels will depend on the level of collective commitment.

The delegation met with Mr Wijarn Simachaya, deputy Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment of Thailand. He confirmed a target of reducing greenhouse gas emissions (GHG) by between 7 % and 20 % based on securing external funding.



Meeting at the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment in Thailand

In Malaysia, the delegation met with NGOs discussing with the authorities on climate change and preparations for COP21.

In Singapore, the delegation had a long meeting with Mr. Kwok Fook Seng, "climate" chief negotiator within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Due to its geographical position, size and high urban

density, Singapore is highly exposed to the consequences of rising temperatures and sea levels. Such characteristics may also help it play a driving and unifying role within ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations bringing together ten countries) and the entire region.

In all three countries – which are members of the G77 bringing together 134 southern countries – **the financial commitment of developed countries towards climate** is a key element for reaching an agreement. The issue of expertise and guidance, for example in terms of training, is also highlighted as a success factor.

The Senate delegation called for the promotion of an environmental protection policy generating wealth and jobs. The Chair of the delegation, Mr Gérard Miquel, has consistently stressed the importance of developing alternative energy sources, such as **biomass**, a technique that already exists in many countries and proves particularly promising for the future.



KMUTT University (Thailand): cooperation project of the French Agricultural Centre for International Development (CIRAD) aiming to produce biogas and biofuels from biomass

II. Thailand : moving on after the coup

For fifteen years, Thailand has been trying to secure democracy despite great difficulties. In a context of crises and recurring tensions, marked by a highly polarised political life, a coup was announced on May 22nd, 2014.

A month later, the European Union decided to suspend official visits until democratic constitutional order was restored in Thailand and to postpone the signing of the agreement on cooperation and partnership indefinitely.

In keeping with the continuity of relations long established between the two countries (a Siamese delegation visited France for the first time in 1684 and met Louis XIV) and considering the importance of Thailand in Southeast Asia, the group delegation wanted to visit the country in order to assess the political situation, whilst respecting the decisions of the European Union and France.

Among others, the Senators met with officials from the *Puea Thai* party, which had been in power before the Government was overthrown in May 2014, and with representatives of NGOs defending human rights.

The delegation called for a swift return to constitutional order respecting civil liberties and human rights, and for the implementation of a fair and lasting voting process.

III. Malaysia : consolidating the economic development on the political level

In Malaysia, the Senate delegation conducted several political meetings. In particular, it met with the President of the Malaysian Senate, Mr. Tan Sri Abu Zahar Ujang, along with three Senators from the majority.



Mr Simon Sutour, Ms Marie-Hélène Des Esgaulx, Messrs Christophe Penot (French Ambassador to Malaysia), Bernard Saugey, Gérard Miquel and the President of the Senate of Malaysia

Besides the issue of climate negotiations, talks focused on the political situation in Malaysia, especially following the 2013 elections and the arrest of opposition leader Mr Anwar Ibrahim. He was sentenced in February 2015 to five years in prison for breaching public morality, a few years after being convicted on the same charge.

The Senate delegation actually met with Mr Anwar Ibrahim's eldest daughter, Ms Nurul Izzah Anwar, MP, who was recently imprisoned herself for "sedition". Also attending this meeting was another member of the opposition, Mr Ong Kian Ming, whom the friendship group welcomed to the Sénat in June 2015, since he had been invited to France as a "Promising Personality" by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

During the meetings, the Parliamentarians exchanged views on a number of **recent legislative provisions** in Malaysia (Sedition Act, Prevention of Terrorism Act) and the evolution of society, particularly with regard to **the religious issue**.

The delegation also met with Mr Datuk Amar Douglas Uggah Embas, Minister of Plantations and Raw Materials, and with Mr Dato' Ar Wan Mohammad Khalri-il, President of the Malaysian Palm Oil Board, which is responsible for promoting palm oil culture and research.

IV. Singapore: a unique example and partnership

The senators then went to Singapore, a country with which relations are particularly close and rich. Ms Jacky Deromedi, Senator of the French outside France, who joined the delegation, was able to share her great knowledge of the country with her colleagues.

The visit took place in the special context of the Singapore Jubilee and the fiftieth anniversary celebrations of our diplomatic relations, but also a few weeks after the death of the founder of the country, Mr Lee Kuan Yew, and shortly before the State visit to France of the President of the Republic of Singapore, Mr Tony Tan.

Among meetings with the country's political authorities, the delegation was received by Mr Lui Tuck Yew, Minister of Transport and Vice-Minister of Defence. The France-Singapore **cooperation in the field of defence** is a platform for bilateral cooperation. Ms Marie-Hélène Des Esgaulx especially stressed how pleased she was to welcome in her *département* 300 Singapore citizens involved in the training programme for fighter pilots at the Cazaux air base (Gironde).



Mr Bernard Saugey, Mr Benjamin Dubertret, French Ambassador to Singapore, Ms Marie-Hélène Des Esgaulx, Mr Gérard Miquel, Ms Jacky Deromedi and Mr Simon Sutour surrounding Ms Grace Fu, Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs

The delegation also met with **Ms Grace Fu**, Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs and in charge of the environment, with whom they notably raised issues relating to climate change and urban development.

The theme of **sustainable urban development** is of particular importance in Singapore because of the size of the territory. The delegation visited the Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA) -responsible for urban planning– and the Housing Development Board (HDB) -responsible for housing construction and financing their acquisition by the population.

Since the country was founded, the Government has planned and controlled urban development in Singapore. It has especially carried out a proactive housing policy, while respecting the social and ethnic mix. 90% of the population may well own a home, but the HDB retains powerful means of action on the sale and resale of apartments.

At the Parliament, the delegation was welcomed by the **President, Ms Halimah Yacob**, and by the Singapore –Europe Inter-Parliamentary Group. Talks focused on issues relating to climate negotiations, innovation, urban development, cooperation in defence matters as well as the role of Singapore in the region.



Mr Bernard Saugey, Ms Marie-Hélène Des Esgaulx, Mr Gérard Miquel, Ms Halimah Yacob, Ms Jacky Deromedi and Mr Simon Sutour

In the three States visited, the Senat delegation noted **the growing concern of political authorities and the population regarding the fight against climate change, and an approach consistent with their development.**

Indeed, Thailand and Singapore have submitted their contribution to COP21, with **ambitious targets for GHG reduction, respectively 20% and 35% by 2030, compared to 2005.**

Members of the delegation



Mr Gérard Miquel
Chair
of the Friendship Group
Senator of Lot (Socialist and
Republicans)



Mr Bernard Saugey
Deputy Chair
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Senator of Isère
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Mr Simon Sutour
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Members of the Friendship group: http://www.senat.fr/groupe-interparlementaire-amitie/ami_609.html