



In dialogue with Mr. Freddie Höglund, CEO- the European Chamber of Commerce Taiwan



Q

What took you to Asia and what has your experience been like working in a different culture?

A

My journey to Asia began as a traveler in the 80s when I took two trips in between my university studies. During my second trip, I had initially planned to go to China to study Chinese, but ended up coming to Taiwan for a two-week holiday instead. Little did I know that this short visit would turn into a 33-year adventure, and here I am still exploring and learning. As for my experience of working in a different culture, it's actually the only business culture I have known for the past 33 years, as my time working in Europe was limited before coming to Asia. So, the European culture feels less familiar to me now, as I have immersed myself in the unique cultural nuances of working in Asia, particularly in Taiwan.

Q

What is the role of the European Chamber of Commerce in Taiwan as a representative of European Business?

A

As with most European Chambers, our primary purpose is advocacy work, which is carried out through our industry committees. Our chamber serves as a platform for our members, across nationalities and industries, to engage with the Taiwan government, leveraging members' expertise together with the chamber's resources to push for the adaptation of European standards and best practices. Through the committee work, we identify and define the issues and challenges and coordinate suggestions and recommendations based on European standards and best practices. Common issues we deal with include SPS (Sanitary and Phytosanitary), homologation, Minimum Residue Levels (MRL), Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT) etc.

In addition to advocacy, networking is also a crucial part of a chamber's mission, providing opportunities for both European and local companies to collaborate, share best practices and create business opportunities. These two aspects, advocacy, and networking, are core functions of a chamber.

Q

What value does a European Chamber provide to European Business when there may already be many other business chambers in the country?

A

European trade policy is the competency of the European Union, which is why it is important to have a chamber that represents the interests of European business. As mentioned, we as the European chamber advocate for the adoption of European standards, which have not only been adopted by the EU countries but also by most other countries in Europe due to their proximity and trade with the European Union.

In Taiwan, we face unique challenges in standard setting due to the fact that Taiwan is not able to join many international standard-setting bodies. This presents greater challenges because standards in Taiwan may not only deviate from European standards, but Taiwan also tends to develop its own Taiwan standards. Therefore, an important role of the European Chamber in Taiwan is to provide information and best practices about international standards and standard settings to the local authorities.

Additionally, the European Chamber plays an important role in sharing best practices in areas where Europe is a global leader, such as the energy transition, the transition to EV mobility, ESG, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), etc. We Europeans are proud to showcase and share our expertise with local governments in our host countries, highlighting the innovative and advanced practices of European businesses in these fields.

Q

What advice services do you provide to European businesses prospecting new markets like Taiwan?

A

We focus on providing support to businesses that are already established and operating in Taiwan, rather than offering investment advice or consultancy for market entry. However, if you're looking for insights on the investment environment in Taiwan, rest assured that it's generally considered a favorable destination for business. Taiwan offers a level playing field, a highly skilled and educated workforce, and robust infrastructure, making it an attractive location for international investment. Additionally, Taiwan consistently ranks high in international rankings for quality of living, making it an appealing destination for expats.

Q

What in your view can drive increased investment and growth from European businesses particularly SME's in the GCC market?

A

In my view, to encourage increased investment and growth from European businesses, particularly SMEs, in the GCC market, it is crucial to establish a stable and predictable business environment. This means avoiding abrupt policy changes without prior announcement, as it can create uncertainty and erode business confidence. For instance, sudden implementation of new regulations could pose challenges for companies with existing stock or ongoing operations, resulting in additional costs and manpower requirements. Ensuring a level playing field is also essential, where foreign companies are treated on par with local companies, without discriminatory regulations. A favorable business environment should provide equal opportunities for all businesses to compete fairly based on the quality of their products and services. Additionally, it is important to have a clear and easily understandable investment framework, with readily available information, especially in English, to support SMEs that may have limited resources for extensive research.