



ROBERTO BENETELLO

CEO of the EU-Malaysia Chamber of Commerce and Industry (EUMCCI)

Could you provide us with a brief overview of your role?

As CEO of EUMCCI, I facilitate trade relations between the EU and Malaysia, as well as strengthen the role of the EU business community in EU's third largest trading partner among ASEAN. This means advocating for all 28 EU member states and offering business facilitation to smaller EU countries without a strong representation in Malaysia. There are business excellencies in terms of SMEs among smaller EU countries and those need help expanding into new markets.

What do you think was EUMCCI's greatest achievement in the past year?

In few words: a complete turnaround! The Chamber required a profound restructuring, both in terms of strategic direction and operations, as well as staff competencies and experience. Our renewed positioning towards a stronger advocacy role required senior staff experienced in engaging and communicating with prominent, high-level stakeholders. Several of our projects inherited a high executional complexity which needed excellent veteran project and event managers. My experience at the helm of such a team ensures successful, accurate and timely delivery of the measurable output. Furthermore, we have made paramount efforts to establish a systematic, proactive and friendly dialog with all stakeholders to find opportunities for collaboration and create win-win situations.

How do you bring fresh approaches and insights into your work as CEO?

As someone driven by curiosity, I like to surround myself with new challenges all the time. Throughout my career, I have had the chance to hold prestigious positions within large corporations as well as taking on challenging entrepreneurial projects. Working in several sectors, and living and studying in different countries provided me with a strong international background. I have also worked in start-ups and have executed companies turn-arounds. This extensive private sector experience makes me very result-oriented and focused. In my current job as CEO of the EUMCCI, it is important that we deliver tangible results across our scope of activities, and I believe I can deliver that with the right team.

What do you see as the biggest challenges facing your sector in 2017?

I see challenges in three different areas for 2017 and beyond: 1) Establishing a clear positioning of EUMCCI vis-à-vis the other EU member states chambers to maximise the impact of our activities. Our focus on becoming a "one single voice" advocacy platform will allow us to achieve this goal. 2) The need to portray to Malaysian stakeholders and policy makers an image of a single, united and strong Europe as a strategic trade partner that will benefit all parties moving forward. 3) Helping Malaysia's economy grow and flourish in ASEAN while embracing the values of sustainability and corporate social responsibility the EU stands for.

Are there any major projects being undertaken by the EUMCCI that you are particularly looking forward to?

I am proud to be a part of many exciting projects of various kinds. On one hand, continuing the success of long-term, established events such as the EU-Malaysia Trade and Investment Forum and EU-ASEAN Food Safety Forum, while on the other hand, also embarking on a year full of project initiations in order to respond to recent market developments in 2017, such as our Internet of Things trade mission or revitalising EUMCCI's Sustainable Business Award. Besides having a noticeable impact in the region, these projects will continue to tighten the linkages between Malaysian, European and ASEAN stakeholders.

Could you share if there was a particular moment in your career path that led you to where you are today?

There has been not the one momentum, but a continuous and straightforward progress towards my passionate engagement for EUMCCI.

I travelled to Southeast Asia in 2013 with the purpose finding a location to settle down. The strategic location of Malaysia tempted me to discover more about the country. While working as freelance consultant, I took the decision to set up my own consultancy. After joining the Italy Malaysia Business Association (IMBA) as member, I was elected as Committee Member of IMBA which allowed me to work closely with the EUMCCI.

In April 2016, I was elected as the chairman of EUMCCI and the Chamber soon became a full-time role for me until November 2016, when I was offered the full-time position of CEO. I decided to take on the new challenge, stop projects at my own consultancy and turn my focus towards EUMCCI completely.

What motivates or inspires you?

I love to see the success of others, especially when I was able to support them in their progress. It is rewarding when I can contribute to someone's life and help them reach their goal by using my expertise, such as through bringing together different parties and finding common ground for mutual benefit. Similarly, I like to help young adults achieve their aspirations in their profession or private life. Spending time with these young people and sharing with them my curiosity for new things often creates novel and inspiring ideas. I love experimenting and being taken out of my comfort zone which I find always teaches me something meaningful at the end of it.

How do you keep a healthy work-life balance?

I have been practicing meditation for many years and I believe that this has helped me tremendously in developing and maintaining a good mind and balanced life. Meditation is something that can help in many aspects of life by providing focus, clear your mind and prevent the accumulation of stress. Although it is probably not an insider tip anymore, I can highly recommend it!

Thank you for your time, Roberto!