

**(1) “What do you see as the main achievements of the EU? Offer some ideas on what Singapore and ASEAN can learn from this.”**

Dear European Union,

As a long-tailed shrike, part of the illustrious bird family *Laniidae*, I would like to congratulate you on your achievements regarding travel between countries, promoting inter-country cooperation, cultural preservation, and environmental protection! They have served as a great inspiration to many birds in Singapore, and I feel that Singapore and ASEAN can learn from your excellent example!

I admire how the European Union has been able to implement the Schengen Area among many of its member states, a factor which has greatly enhanced freedom of movement within the European Union and beyond. Every time I read the list of fundamental rights guaranteed by the European Union, particularly the right for the free movement of persons, I feel like chirping out loud with glee! When I heard the news that ASEAN was planning to set up an ASEAN common visa along the lines of the Schengen system, I was practically dancing on my favourite branch with joy! I certainly hope that more ASEAN countries will sign on to this plan in the near future, and that ASEAN will learn from the EU's efforts to ensure ease of travel across borders, as I highly encourage human attempts to emulate the freedom of birds.

The Schengen Area proposal has succeeded due to the European Union's mastery at promoting peaceful relationships between countries, thus fostering cooperation. A key example is the reconciliation between France and Germany — a factor behind the European Union winning the 2012 Nobel Peace Prize. While I leave the promotion of peace to my friends the doves, learning from the European Union would help curb internal feuds between ASEAN member states, such as the long-standing dispute between Thailand and Cambodia regarding the ownership of Preah Vihear Temple. As ASEAN is an organisation founded on mutual consultation and consensus, I feel that following the EU's example of fostering amity between states would allow for more effective regional cooperation.

I also admire the European Union's efforts to conserve Europe's heritage sites through the European Union Prize for Cultural Heritage, also known as Europa Nostra. I have been particularly inspired by Europa Nostra's efforts to promote community involvement in the conservation of cultural heritage sites, and have taken it upon myself to maintain the nest of one of my ancestors, who is known among our community for his python-slaying exploits. I have even tweeted about my future plans to conserve the nest, which you can read about on my Twitter account, [@RufusTheShrike](#). Singapore can also learn

from the EU's example — many of my sparrow and mynah friends have been alarmed by Singapore's plan to construct a highway through Bukit Brown cemetery. It will be a great loss if Bukit Brown were to go, as it would diminish the tangible weight of history that one can experience by hopping through the lalang grass (or walking, as the case might be) and observing the carvings on the gravestones. I feel that Singapore has a lot to learn from the EU in this respect — conservation, rather than demolition, will enable future generations of Singaporean birds and humans to appreciate their nation's history.

Finally, on a more personal note, I appreciate the EU's efforts in the field of wildlife conservation. The EU's habitats and birds directives have allowed native populations of birds and other animals to make a comeback in the last few decades, and have also aided in the conservation of endangered species such as the Ortolan Bunting and the Scops owl. I am particularly enthusiastic about this cause, as I often fly over to Chek Jawa to enjoy the sea breeze, observe the marine life, and have lively chats with my fish-owl and hornbill friends. It would be a terrible shame if the land were to be reclaimed in the near future to build a road link to the Singaporean mainland, as it would deny Singaporean birds and humans the privilege of experiencing wildlife in its natural, unaltered habitat. I hope that Singapore will learn from the EU's achievement, and step up efforts to conserve Chek Jawa's unique and diverse ecosystem.

In conclusion, emulating the European Union would produce beneficial results both locally and regionally, and I truly hope that both ASEAN and Singapore can learn from the European Union's myriad of achievements. I congratulate you on your achievements, and wish you the best of luck in the future!

Yours sincerely,

Rufus, the Singaporean long-tailed shrike  
(*Lanius schach*)

