Asia is increasingly establishing itself as the continent most open to crypto and the widespread interest, regardless of age, is unique to the region, according to SEBA chief executive Franz Bergmueller in a conversation with finews.asia.

Youth interest in digital assets is already a prevalent matter worldwide with innumerable stories of young bankers moving to cryptocurrency firms in SEBA’s home market of Switzerland and beyond. But what distinguishes Asia is that this interest is not exclusive to people that grew up in the digital era.

«People in Asia are more open to crypto. They have a longer term view and a lot of entrepreneurial spirit. I hear a lot of talk about Web 3.0, NFTs and the future of crypto,» said SEBA CEO Franz Bergmueller in a conversation with finews.asia.

«My biggest surprise is the age of those interested in crypto from Asia.»
Franz Bergmueller: «The Young and Old in Asia Are Interested in Crypto»
Monday, 5 December 2022 05:41

Major Families

Crypto interest amongst older investors is especially notable in the region’s billionaire class, with numerous headline examples such as 94-year-old Li Ka-shing’s 2019 backing of US-listed bitcoin platform Bakkt.

«I had the pleasure of being introduced to some of the largest families in the region and they were as interested in crypto as the younger generation,» Bergmueller observed.

«Maybe not so much from a technological perspective but the interest as investors was tremendous. The young and the old in Asia are both interested in crypto. This is really unique to the region.»

Hong Kong Office

As a result of this widespread interest, SEBA decided to expand its presence in Asia with the opening of a new office in Hong Kong last week as a «strategic location» to extend its regional reach.

Currently, the Hong Kong office cannot actively market to clients but it can provide general insights and address specific inquiries. Through the office, the crypto lender also plans to identify and potentially engage with new strategic partners in the region.

«We have seen the signals and we also have a pretty strong network in Hong Kong, including existing investors and strategic partners,» Bergmueller said. «We’ve discussed opening this office for our Hong Kong subsidiary for a long time, even before the latest news of Hong Kong’s reopening which is an additional positive driver.»

License Pursuit

In addition to establishing a regional presence, SEBA's major goal is to obtain regulatory approval to do business in Asia through Hong Kong as well as its existing Singapore office.

«Right from the very beginning, the idea was for SEBA to be a regulated bank. That was never in question,» said Bergmueller, explaining the Zug-based firm’s vision at the point of its inception. «Our ultimate intention is to seek licenses in Hong Kong and Singapore to conduct regulated activities in the near future.»
Target Clients

SEBA’s Asia business will also mirror its global strategy in terms of target clients. The Swiss crypto lender has made a conscious decision not to pursue the retail market for now and focus on two segments: traditional investors and crypto natives.

For traditional investors, many have basic needs such as access to research or simpler ways to custodize crypto assets. SEBA typically receives such clients through direct inquiries or via asset managers, family offices and banks. And for crypto natives, they may not necessarily require asset class expertise but, in fact, have even simpler needs, most commonly the opening of a bank account.

«If you go to a traditional bank and you tell them you are a 35-year-old with a net worth of $400 million in crypto, it is hard to open a bank account,» Bergmueller said. «We welcome these legitimate investors here to SEBA because we are a crypto bank with robust internal controls and systems.»