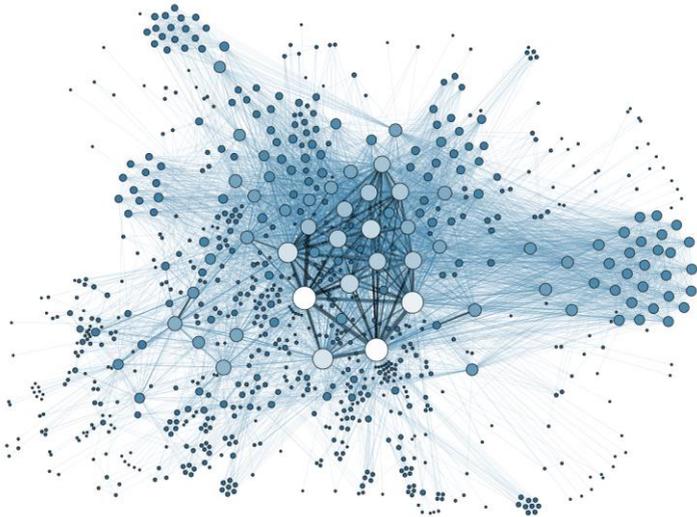


# ASIA-EUROPE MEETING (ASEM) IN THE AGE OF CONNECTIVITY

Yeo Lay Hwee · Bart Gaens · Shada Islam



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## INTRODUCTION

The Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) was launched in 1996 with an inaugural summit in Bangkok. Since then, the Summits have been held biennially, alternating between Asia and Europe. The 11<sup>th</sup> ASEM Summit which coincides with the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of ASEM will be hosted by Mongolia on 15-16 July 2016.

To commemorate the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of ASEM, the European Union Centre in Singapore with the support of the Mongolian Ministry of Foreign Affairs has prepared this booklet on “Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) in the Age of Connectivity”.

This booklet gives an analytical account of ASEM's history and background, assesses ASEM's developments and achievements since the inaugural summit, and provides some thoughts on the future of ASEM.

In an increasingly volatile and uncertain, and yet inter-connected world, Asia and Europe must make full use of existing multilateral forums such as the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) to reinforce the message of our mutual interdependence and connections. We need more dialogue to understand the insecurities and fears arising from developments and events that seem increasingly beyond our control, and we need more cooperation to navigate through the storms and headwinds arising from a more turbulent world. ASEM can be a platform to generate new ideas for cooperation, and strengthen our connectivity for a mutually enriching partnership between Asia and Europe.

Yeo Lay Hwee  
Bart Gaens  
Shada Islam

European Union Centre in Singapore, 2016

# CHAPTER 1 – ASEM’S HISTORY AND BACKGROUND

## 1.1 ASEM’s roots

Celebrating its twentieth anniversary in July 2016 at the eleventh ASEM summit in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, the Asia-Europe Meeting currently forms the prime nodal point for relations among 53 partners from both regions. In two decades ASEM has grown substantially, forming an indispensable bridge between two continents in an increasingly complex and interconnected world.

Mongolian President Tsakhiagiin Elbegdorj announcing the decision to host ASEM 11 (Photo: ASEM Infoboard)



ASEM’s historical roots can be traced back to the post-Cold-War environment of the early 1990s. The collapse of the Soviet Union signified the end of the notion of a bipolar political power structure. However, while the US remained the only “superpower”, particularly in military terms, in the economic arena the global structure came to be described in terms of “tripolarity”. This was based on the idea that economic competitiveness forms a source of political power, and three major blocs, namely North America, East Asia, and Europe, drive the global economy. Yet, whereas institutional links between North America and Europe and between North America and East Asia were flourishing, the connection

between Europe and East Asia was seen as underdeveloped. ASEM's broad strategic rationale was therefore to "close the triangle" or "bridge the missing link" by balancing the relations between the three engines of the global economy.

As regional players, Europe and East Asia each had additional motivations to engage in the ASEM project. For Europe, East Asia's "miraculous" economic growth as of the 1980s formed an important incentive. The impressive growth of Newly Industrialized Economies and the gradual increase of intra-regional trade and investments made East Asia the most dynamic region in the world. The creation of the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) in 1989 only added to the sense of urgency for Europe to re-establish deeper links with countries and groupings in the Asian region. The European Commission's Communication entitled "Towards a New Asia Strategy" of 1994 clearly articulated Europe's incentive to assign a higher priority to the region, grasp the economic opportunities, and raise the EU's profile. This went hand in hand with deepening political integration in Europe, with the 1992 Maastricht Treaty introducing the Common Foreign and Security policy (CFSP) as a milestone. Europe's Asia Strategy therefore also emphasized the EU's role as a political actor in the region, in particular with regard to the promotion of stability, alleviation of poverty, and the spread of democracy, rule of law and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. Last but not least, reinforcing relations with the Association for Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), while at the same time engaging and socializing China into the global system were items high on the EU's agenda.

For East Asia, awareness of the growing interdependence between Europe and Asia, as well economic competition and the fear of a protectionist EU ("Fortress Europe") were key factors. Europe was gradually gaining in importance as an export market and as a source of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in developing

Asia. The promotion of economic ties with the EU was therefore an important underlying reason for seeking stronger ties. Not least importantly, ASEAN aimed to promote itself as the driver of regional economic integration, and a dynamic and confident political actor. Also the aim to balance an economically powerful and potentially unilateral US was a local incentive to intensify relations with Europe. Furthermore, East Asia was eager to establish relations between equals with the EU, in contrast to the old donor-recipient relationship the EU had entertained with many Asian countries, including former colonies. In the management of international affairs East Asia's new global status therefore had to be reflected in a partnership of equals with Europe.

## 1.2 ASEM's birth

1st ASEM Summit,  
March 1996, Bangkok,  
Thailand  
(Photo: ASEM  
Infoboard)



The initiative to establish ASEM came from Singapore in Autumn 1994, when then Prime Minister of Singapore, Goh Chok Tong first floated the idea of a summit-level dialogue to forge the link between the two regions in the tripolar economic world. The proposal to create an Asia-Europe forum for leaders to meet received the backing of ASEAN, and resonated in leading EU member states including France. After the European Council

endorsed the initiative in June 1995, Europe and Asia set out to build a new, interregional partnership in order to promote political dialogue, deepen economic relations, and strengthen social/cultural ties.

When ASEM saw the light at the first summit in Bangkok in March 1996, it welcomed 26 participants, including 15 EU member states plus the European Commission, and then seven-member ASEAN (Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam) in addition to China, Japan and the Republic of Korea (ROK). The ASEM1 summit, characterized by an optimistic spirit of cooperation, was heralded as a major success. Europe and Asia agreed the time was ripe to “re-discover” each other and increase “mutual” awareness by fostering political dialogue, reinforcing economic links, and promoting cooperation in fields such as science and technology, education, environment, development, and people-to-people exchanges. The Bangkok summit marked the beginning of the ASEM process, including biennial summits at the level of Heads of State and Government, but also resulting in a plethora of meetings, seminars, workshops, and activities at ministerial, senior official, expert, business community and civil society levels.

### 1.3 ASEM’s founding principles

The process’s founding principles, core philosophy, working methods and meeting format, are enshrined in the year 2000 in the Asia-Europe Cooperation Framework (AECF). The “ASEM Way” remains largely unchanged until the present, and includes the following principles:

First, both regions endorse the need for a **comprehensive and multi-dimensional approach to building ties**. The ASEM’s agenda therefore covers all aspects of relations between the two regions, multilateral as well as bilateral, including issues related to

politics and security, economy and trade, and the socio-cultural field.

Second, ASEM is to serve as a platform **fostering understanding and awareness** among the partners through a process of dialogue but also leading to the identification of priorities for concerted and supportive action. The process is to be conducted **on the basis of equal partnership**, mutual respect and joint benefit.

Third, ASEM is intended to be an **open and evolutionary** process. This applied in the first place to partnership expansion, which aimed to be inclusive and conducted on the basis of consensus. But also the topics and themes tackled by ASEM are to evolve. ASEM's agenda inevitably changes along with the transforming global environment, not in the least because it is one of ASEM's missions to act as a political catalyst contributing to ongoing cooperation at other levels of global governance, including the UN and WTO. ASEM's internal development and dynamics also determine the evolving agenda - new members add potential and dynamism to the ASEM partnership, and steer the dialogue and cooperation in new directions.

Fourth, **informal dialogue** between regions and countries in itself is seen as one of the core goals, and can even be considered ASEM's "hallmark". It allows for a free and frank exchange of views, experiences, and expertise on any topical and relevant political issue without the political pressure of negotiating binding agreements. Leaders of states and representatives of regions can confer with each other on the issues of the day, thereby fostering closer personal and professional relationships between them. This dialogue is seen as part of a socialization process leading to habits of cooperation which smoothen progress in other multilateral, interregional or bilateral contexts.

Fifth, ASEM is a **high-level gathering as well as a bottom-up process**. The forum offers the opportunity for group-to-group and intergovernmental contacts at the Head of State and Government level as well as at ministerial and official levels. At the same time the explicit goal is to broaden the dialogue beyond the government level, and allow for bottom-up input in the discussions at higher levels. ASEM therefore comprises an inter-parliamentary dialogue and a meeting of business leaders, and also fully involves civil society, including academic and research communities, NGOs, and youth.

#### **1.4 ASEM's objectives**

Based on the above principles, ASEM aims to be a dialogue facilitator, a policy-making laboratory, and a process managing growing Asia-Europe relations. It serves as a dialogue platform to address a wide variety of international matters, and at the same time helps to increase understanding through people-to-people contacts. ASEM's added value lies not in decision-making or the negotiation of treaties, but in the policy-shaping effects that the combined weight of the European and Asian groupings can achieve.

The informal policy-shaping discussions at top level ideally contribute to the adoption of a common stance in other relevant, more formal fora. The summit-level dialogue furthermore provides the blueprint for specific initiatives and projects at the intergovernmental level. ASEM is therefore also an intermediary "delivery instrument", even if concrete outcomes may only materialize elsewhere. The forum is not a substitute for, but a complement to other bilateral and multilateral fora linking Asia and Europe, promoting overall Europe-Asia relations on international and inter-regional issues of common interest.

## **CHAPTER 2 – ASEM’S DEVELOPMENTS AND ACHIEVEMENTS**

### **2.1 An overview of ASEM’s achievements**

ASEM has gone through several phases. Initial euphoria following ASEM’s launch was followed by a more passive period. Over the last decade, however, successive ASEM summits have driven the Asia-Europe relationship forward. The ASEM summit in Helsinki, Finland, in 2006 underlined the importance of revitalising ASEM. The summit in Beijing in 2008 was important in signalling Asia-Europe solidarity in the face of the global economic slowdown. Efforts to revise ASEM working methods were a priority for the Belgian government in the run up to the ASEM summit held in Brussels in 2010. Significantly, the gathering of ASEM leaders in Vientiane, Laos, in 2012 highlighted the importance of EU-Asia cooperation on non-traditional security challenges.

The 10<sup>th</sup> ASEM summit held in Milan in October 2014 provided proof that efforts to reinvigorate and streamline ASEM were beginning to show results as countries agreed to work in smaller groups or clusters on 16 “tangible cooperation areas” including disaster management, renewable energy, higher education, connectivity and information technology. In addition to the plenary sessions, the Milan meeting brought back much of the informality that marked the first few ASEM summits by including a “retreat” session during which leaders - with only one aide in attendance - were able to have a free-flowing discussion on regional and international issues, including the Ebola pandemic and the threat posed by the so-called “Islamic State”.

Meetings of ASEM foreign ministers have similarly maintained the momentum and provided a steer in the lead up to the summits. At their meeting in Luxembourg in November 2015, foreign ministers



Hor Namhong, Foreign Minister of Cambodia and Johannes Matyassy, Swiss Assistant State Secretary at the retreat session of 12<sup>th</sup> ASEM Foreign Ministers' Meeting (Photo: ASEM Infoboard)

adopted a long and ambitious ASEM work programme for 2016-2017 which includes ministerial and expert level meetings on questions as diverse as health, migration and employment.

Asian and European leaders can thus justifiably claim that their relationship has come a long way in the last two decades - and while ASEM cannot claim sole credit for enhanced Asia-Europe engagement, it has worked as a catalyst for spurring a growing dialogue and cooperation between Asia and Europe.

The economies, societies and people of Asia and Europe are ever-more closely connected. Compared to 1996 when ASEM was launched or even ten years ago, there is now a stronger EU-Asian conversation on trade, business, security and culture. Asia and Europe are linked through an array of cooperation accords. Discussions on important global and regional issues, and common challenges including climate change, pandemics, illegal immigration, maritime security, urbanization and green growth, among other topics, are frequent between multiple government ministries, agencies and other non-government actors in both regions. These conversations and contacts reflect a growing recognition that 21<sup>st</sup> century challenges can only be tackled first

through improved understanding and then common actions involving cross-border and cross-regional alliances, feeding into the broader regional and global governance networks.

Today's volatile international environment, and the diffusion of power from West to East, makes Asia-Europe dialogue and cooperation a much more compelling necessity. Encouragingly, ASEM today is more energised and vibrant than at any times in recent years, with governments seeking and implementing new ideas to ensure the forum's relevance in an increasingly inter-dependent and inter-connected world.

Recent ASEM meetings, including the summit in Milan in October 2014 and meetings of foreign ministers in Delhi in 2013 and in Luxembourg in 2015 have injected new momentum into the Asia-Europe relationship by reviewing and simplifying ASEM's content, procedures and outreach. New formats have been introduced for meetings and there is a sharper focus on content as well as on stronger engagement with civil society and the media.

## **2.2 Meeting many goals – ASEM and its parallel forums**

Although launched in the last century, with its focus on political leaders' meeting, and strengthening region-to-region and people-to-people ties, ASEM remains a relevant 21<sup>st</sup> Century construct. In fact, in this age of networking and connectivity, ASEM because of its amorphous and informal character can become an agile and flexible networked entity pioneering new ways of collaboration and taking Asia-Europe relations to a new height. ASEM can help facilitate and catalyse the emergence of different networks. These different networks can come together in different constellations to strengthen Asia-Europe connections. The central element of efforts to revitalise and re-energise the Asia-Europe partnership is

through stronger institutional, infrastructure, digital and people-to-people connectivity.

ASEM has met many of its original goals by providing Asian and European leaders with opportunities to get to know one another, encouraging greater people-to-people understanding and providing avenues to explore new areas of cooperation in the political, economic and social sectors. From the initial focus on meetings between Foreign ministers, Finance and Economic ministers, now regular ministerial meetings also take place on education and culture matters, labour and employment issues, transport and communication, and on the environment. These dialogues on political and socio-cultural issues have grown, and in contrast, the economic dimension of ASEM which used to include regular Economic ministers meeting and Working groups on Trade facilitation and Investment promotion have been overshadowed. The Economic ministers have not met for almost a decade now, and discussions are now ongoing to revitalise ASEM dialogue on trade and investments, so crucial as talks in the World Trade Organisation made little progress and mega-FTAs such as the Trans-pacific Partnership (TPP) and the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) are being negotiated.

The business community needs to be mobilised and actively engaged when discussing trade and investment matters. The Asia-Europe Business Forum (AEBF) which began in 1996 and used to meet annually has also scaled down its meeting to once in two years to coincide with the summits. As ASEM partners consider the reviving of trade and investments dialogue, the AEBF should be mobilised for inputs.

Beyond the business community, ASEM has since its very first Summit attracted the interest of civil society groups and NGOs, and the Asia-Europe People's Forum (AEPF) has been an

enduring parallel feature of ASEM, creating its own networks, giving rise to other forums such as the Asia-Europe Labour forum and strengthening civil society connections.

Additionally, meetings between parliamentarians, academics and think tanks – and young leaders - have allowed ASEM to make important headway in enhancing mutual Asia-Europe understanding and upgrading the quality and diversity of the Asia-Europe conversation.

### **2.3 ASEM's institutional framework and initiatives**

The biennial summit which brings together all Asian and European leaders stands at the apex of ASEM's institutional structure, with foreign ministers, backed by senior officials, steering the process in between the leaders' meetings.

Beyond this simple institutional structure, ASEM make progress through its various initiatives. These initiatives take different forms – some are one-off usually taking place in conjunction with preparation of Summits, and some topical often arising from events that spark concerns and need for better understanding such as the Interfaith Dialogues arising from international terrorism committed in the name of religion, and the Nuclear Safety Workshops that emerged in response to the nuclear disaster in Fukushima.

Many of these initiatives have become regular fixtures in the ASEM Calendar. One of these is the Informal Seminar on Human Rights which was launched in 1997, to deepen understanding and exchange perspectives on human rights between government officials, academics and activists in Asia and Europe.

The plethora of issues discussed in ASEM at different levels and with different participants is wide-ranging and reflects the growing

consensus that many of these issues cannot be addressed without deeper understanding and participation by Asia and Europe.

Work on promoting ASEM-wide links in education have gained momentum since the first ASEM ministerial on education in 2008. There is an ASEM education secretariat – the only ASEM structure of its kind – currently established within the Indonesian Ministry of Education in Jakarta. There is also the ASEM Education and Research Hub for Life Long Learning established in 2005. Other activities related to education include regular seminars on innovative education which aims to share knowledge within ASEM on how the education sector can proactively involve children and youth towards innovation and creativity. There are also regular meetings of university rectors.

There is a dialogue on the municipal level between Governors and Mayors of cities in ASEM countries in Europe and Asia reflecting the importance of these actors in offering solutions to urbanization and sustainable development.

With the new focus on connectivity, seminars were held in 2015 in Riga on transport connectivity. The meeting of ASEM transport ministers in Riga underlined the importance of developing new international multimodal transport corridors that are efficient, secure and economically and environmentally sustainable as an alternative or supplement to traditional ocean routes. In the same year, Chongqing hosted a dialogue on industrial connectivity and in Seoul, on inter-modal transport. Participants at the meeting in Chongqing supported the establishment of the ASEM Cooperation Centre on Science, Technology and Innovation.

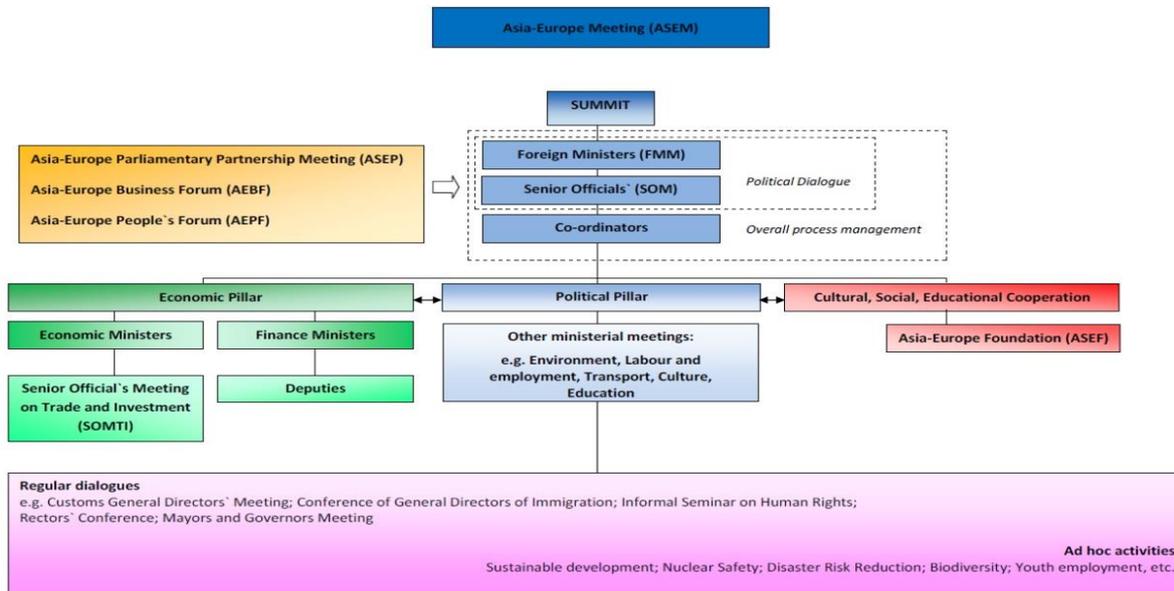


Figure 1: Institutional Structure of ASEM (Source: [eeas.europa.eu/asem/docs/asem\\_structure\\_en.pdf](http://eeas.europa.eu/asem/docs/asem_structure_en.pdf))

A conference on tourism (people-to-people connectivity) was organised in Tokyo in October. The Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF) is actively engaged in promoting people-to-people networks in an array of sectors.

## **2.4 ASEM's brick and mortar institution – the Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF)**

The Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF), established in 1997 to promote intellectual, cultural and people-to-people exchange, is considered an integral part of ASEM's socio-cultural pillar. As the only permanently established institution of ASEM, it has recently taken on the task of managing the ASEM InfoBoard, a website functioning as the forum's official information platform.

ASEF is staffed by around 40 people. The Executive Director, Deputy Executive Director and several of the Directors of Programs are seconded from member states, and the rest are professionally recruited. ASEF now has four programme departments which deal with political and economic issues, education, culture, and public affairs. According to its 2014 annual report, ASEF has run more than 650 projects since its launch in 1997, engaging over 17,000 participants in primarily workshops, conferences and seminars. The annual operational budget of ASEF is close to 6 million Singapore dollars a year (around 4 million euro), also based on voluntary contributions from ASEM members.

## **2.5 ASEM's enlargement: bigger and livelier**

ASEM has now gone through a few rounds of enlargement (Figure 1). The first enlargement was driven by institutional reasons to accommodate the respective enlargements of the European Union (EU) and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). These two regional entities were the initial

driving force behind the launch of ASEM. Hence in 2004, ASEM enlarged to embrace all ten members of ASEAN and on the EU side, it grew from EU-15 to EU-25. From 26 partners, ASEM became 39, but essentially still retaining a certain inter-regional character between the EU and East Asia.

The second round of enlargement confirmed in 2008 brought in two more members of the EU (Bulgaria and Romania) and to balance the growth in numbers on the European side, the Asian side expanded to include Mongolia and South Asian countries, India and Pakistan. The ASEAN Secretariat also became a partner with the ASEAN Charter conferring ASEAN with a legal personality.

The next round of enlargement in 2010 saw the inclusion of Australia, New Zealand and Russia on the Asian side, essentially broadening the geographical contours of Asia in ASEM.

In 2012, ASEM took a step towards enlarging Europe beyond the EU members, taking in Norway and Switzerland, and on the Asian side, Bangladesh became a partner, growing ASEM into an entity of 51. Croatia became the 28<sup>th</sup> member of the EU in 2014 and joined ASEM during the summit in Milan. Additionally, Kazakhstan was also admitted to ASEM in 2014.

Enlargement (from 26 partners in 1996 to 53 in 2014) has certainly made ASEM livelier, with new members injecting vitality and enthusiasm into ASEM and bringing in new areas of interest. ASEM also takes on a much more inter-continental character rather than the initial inter-regional (EU-East Asia) construct.



## 2.6 Diplomacy at work

As ASEM enlarges, its inclusiveness, informality and diversities provides an invaluable platform for members to engage in both multilateral and bilateral diplomacy. ASEM is an integral and vital part of a much-needed global conversation on 21<sup>st</sup> Century economic, societal and security challenges. These discussions also take place in other fora, including the United Nations, its agencies and the G20. But even in a crowded global landscape ASEM as an informal club of nations, big and small, rich and poor, like-minded and non-like-minded, has become a critical part of the expanding global conversation on dealing with the new world and its multiple challenges. As relations between states have become more complex and multi-dimensional and countries vacillate between cooperation and competition, ASEM provides a platform for a discussion of such complexities.

Judging from the increasing number of bilateral meetings that take place at the side-lines of ASEM Summits and Ministerial Meetings, ASEM is also proving to be a useful platform for countries to engage in bilateral diplomacy, and to communicate with different partners within a specific time frame. This is particularly useful for leaders faced with an increasingly crowded agenda in their diplomatic calendar.

## CHAPTER 3 – THE FUTURE OF ASEM

ASEM will reach two decades in 2016. The 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary Summit in Mongolia not only celebrates the achievements of ASEM, but will lay the ground for ASEM's future development.

ASEM cannot be complacent. As the world becomes more volatile and complex, and countries big and small scramble to position themselves and defend their own interests and goals, ASEM needs to rethink its value-proposition and modus operandi. It has served well as a platform for the exchange of views, for creating understanding, and for catalysing further dialogue and cooperation within other multilateral or bilateral settings. It has spawned a great number of initiatives that touched on a wide range of topics. However, it will be increasingly challenged by a proliferation of similar forums and the need to compete for the scarce attention and resources that many leaders and countries find themselves in an increasingly fast-moving and fast-changing world.

Changes in the strategic landscape in Asia and Europe have also left both regions distracted from each other as they search for a new geopolitical equilibrium first and foremost within their own regions. However, as globalization continues apace, regional balance and equilibrium is no longer sufficient to guarantee security and prosperity. This is particularly so for Asia and Europe which are geographically connected by the Eurasian landmass, and only through common understanding and joint actions can peace and prosperity prevail.

To remain relevant and useful to its 53 members, ASEM needs to be versatile to coalesce and aggregate the diverse interests. At the same time, being a purely inter-governmental entity, ASEM can only be as good as what its members want it to be. Hence, in

the decade ahead, ASEM members need first and foremost to reflect and reaffirm their commitment to the ASEM process by participating actively in ASEM meetings.

ASEM needs to send a clear message that despite its diversities as reflected in its membership, dialogue and cooperation is the cornerstone of international relations. In the current challenging environment of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, there is a need for real dialogue to build trust, to straddle the divides and prevent further polarization and fragmentation of the international system, and instead build on our connections. There is also the need to reaffirm the importance of building links to foster international cooperation and sustain global free trade, promote development, and engender more institutional linkages, intellectual exchanges and people-to-people connections. Indeed as acknowledged during the 11<sup>th</sup> ASEM Foreign Ministers Meeting, connectivity should be mainstreamed into all relevant ASEM cooperation frameworks.

The essence and spirit of ASEM is as relevant now as of 20 years ago, but its content and format needs some rethink. To accommodate and turn diversities into strength, there is a need to reinforce the multiple tracks of dialogue during the ASEM Summits, a retreat for strategic dialogue that is important for political symbolism, smaller group conversations in different constellations to catalyse further actions and a series of bilateral and trilateral meetings at the margins of the ASEM Summit.

Pragmatic measures have been proposed to help ASEM become more versatile and flexible so as to respond to different emerging priorities under a common framework. This includes the idea of a "Working Table" format to have smaller group discussions on different issues related to overall themes of summits or ministerials. To ensure continuity of initiatives that could progress

from discussions to actions, and advance tangible cooperation that will benefit the peoples of Asia and Europe, there is also the suggestion to implement issued-based leadership revolving around a few key priority areas.

ASEM also needs to harness the energy, wisdom and resources of different stakeholders – from academics, wise men, to business, civil society and citizens - to generate answers and solutions to the common challenges faced by Asia and Europe. Though there are various parallel forums – the Asia-Europe Business Forum (AEBF), the Asia-Europe People’s Forum (AEPF), the Asia-Europe Parliamentary Partnership (ASEP), there is currently a lack of regular communication and engagement to generate a cross fertilization of ideas. Appropriate consultation channels can be set up to involve relevant stakeholders in official ASEM meetings.

Many of these forums can also become more dynamic by exploring different workshop and conference styles. More importantly, they should lead to creation of small work groups and networks to intensify and deepen dialogue and focus on issues that can lead to tangible projects and outcome.



Experts discussing the future of ASEM at ASEM Symposium on the Future Direction of ASEM (Photo: ASEF)

The role of the Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF) in the coming decades has to be buttressed. ASEF can act as facilitator and connector of the different forums and different stakeholders. ASEF also needs to harness its almost 20 years of good work of connecting people and institutions to build a strong alumni network that could have a multiplier effect on strengthening Asia-Europe connections.

To transform ASEM ready for the 21<sup>st</sup> century world, there is a need to transform the mind-set of those involved – from one of merely managing and controlling the process to one of leading and empowering the change. ASEM members need to think global but act through networks and coalitions within the ASEM framework to generate the energy and momentum to sustain itself, and deliver tangible benefits in connecting institutions, businesses and people. The new compelling narrative of ASEM should be that of an open and dynamic marketplace resulting in beneficial interactions and transactions.

The 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of ASEM provides opportunities for reflection. The Mongolian Summit in 2016 provides the leaders the opportunity to reaffirm their commitment to ASEM and to take ASEM to a new height by rethinking ASEM's content and format. ASEM should harness its diversity and turn it into strength in encouraging different networks to evolve within the ASEM framework with connectivity as the overarching theme.

## **APPENDIX - FACT SHEET ON ASEM**

### **What is ASEM?**

The Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) is an **informal forum for dialogue and cooperation** bringing together 53 partners from across **Europe** and **Asia**. Its main purpose is to provide a platform for fostering political discussions, strengthening economic cooperation and reinforcing joint commitments in various spheres like environment, education, culture and social issues.

ASEM is conducted as an informal and flexible process on the basis of equal partnership, mutual respect and benefit. ASEM aims to stimulate and facilitate progress in other fora without duplication. To summarise, ASEM is the most influential comprehensive partnership between Asia and Europe, crossing hands across continents.

### **Current members of ASEM:**

The initial ASEM partnership in 1996 consisted of just 15 EU member states and 7 ASEAN member states plus China, Japan, Korea and the European Commission.

Today **ASEM comprises 51 partner countries**: the 28 Member States of the European Union plus Norway and Switzerland on the European side and the 10 ASEAN countries plus Australia,

Bangladesh, China, India, Japan, Kazakhstan, Republic of Korea, Mongolia, New Zealand, Pakistan and Russia on the Asian side. It also includes **two institutional partners**: the **European Union** and the **ASEAN Secretariat**.

Representing about 60% of the world's GDP, of its population and of global trade, ASEM embraces virtually the whole of Asia and Europe.

### **How it works:**

ASEM works through **meetings** and **activities** organised at different levels.

The **ASEM Summit** is a meeting between the 51 Heads of State or Government, the President of the European Council, the President of the European Commission, and the Secretary-General of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). The summits are held every second year, in Asia and Europe alternatively.

**Ministerial Meetings** are organised in-between the ASEM Summits, gathering ministers of foreign affairs, finance, economics, labour and employment, culture, education, transport and environment. Occasionally other ministerial conferences are held on specific issues and areas that are not covered by the main ministerial meetings.

**Senior Officials' Meetings (SOM)** bring together high-level civil servants from the Foreign Ministries of all ASEM partners for the overall coordination of the ASEM process. Sectoral SOMs are also held in preparation of the various Ministerial meetings.

**Activities and initiatives** are organised by ASEM partners on a wide range of issues of mutual interest.

**ASEM has no secretariat.** Foreign ministers and their senior officials have an overall coordinating role within the ASEM process. They are assisted in this by an informal group of **coordinators**: two from the Asian side (one representing the ASEAN and the other representing the non-ASEAN (NESA) countries) and two from the European side (the European External Action Service (EEAS) as the permanent coordinator and the rotating EU Presidency).

**The Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF)** is the only brick and mortar institution that is established after the inaugural ASEM Summit. It is an international non-profit organisation, based in Singapore, tasked with promoting intellectual and cultural ties and to foster people-to-people contacts between both civil society and business leaders from the two regions.

### **Other ASEM-related/inspired forums**

The official ASEM meetings are complemented by an increasing number of Asia-Europe meetings and forums involving different

sectors of society. There are the Asia Europe Parliamentary Partnership (ASEP) bringing together parliamentarians, the business-led Asia-Europe Business Forum (AEBF) and the Asia-Europe Peoples' Forum (AEPF) connecting civil society and NGOs, which also meet every two years alongside the ASEM Summits.

### **More information**

More information on ASEM is available from the following websites:

<http://www.asem11.mn/>

<http://www.aseminfoboard.org/>

[http://eeas.europa.eu/asem/index\\_en.htm](http://eeas.europa.eu/asem/index_en.htm)

[www.asef.org](http://www.asef.org)

**Table 1: Growth of the ASEM partnership**

YEAR	EUROPE	ASIA	TOTAL
1996	EU15, European Commission	ASEAN7, China, Japan, ROK	26
2004	EU25, European Commission	ASEAN10, China, Japan, ROK	39
2008	EU27, European Commission	ASEAN10, China, Japan, ROK, India, Pakistan, Mongolia, ASEAN Secretariat	45
2010	EU and 27 EU Member states	ASEAN10, China, Japan, ROK, India, Pakistan, Mongolia, ASEAN Secretariat, Australia, New Zealand, Russia	48
2012	EU, 27 EU Member states, Norway, Switzerland	ASEAN10, ASEAN Secretariat, China, Japan, ROK, India, Pakistan, Mongolia, Australia, New Zealand, Russia, Bangladesh	51
2014	EU, 28 EU Member states, Norway, Switzerland	ASEAN10, ASEAN Secretariat, China, Japan, ROK, India, Pakistan, Mongolia, Australia, New Zealand, Russia, Bangladesh, Kazakhstan	53

ASEAN=Association of Southeast Asian Nations; EU=European Union;  
ROK= Republic of Korea.

EU15=Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece,  
Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Sweden and  
the UK.

EU25=EU15+Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania,  
Malta, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia.

EU27=EU25+Bulgaria and Romania

EU28=EU27+Croatia



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