

## Seeking joint responses to global challenges -Â Asia and Europe look to the future on ASEM's tenth anniversary

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On 10 and 11 September leaders from 10 ASEAN countries, China, Japan, Korea, 25 EU Member States, and the President of the European Commission will meet at the sixth Summit of the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) in Helsinki. The gathering will be a cause for celebration and reflection, as ten years have passed since the inaugural Summit in Bangkok took place. The Meeting's tenth anniversary provides an excellent occasion to see how far ASEM has lived up to the expectations of its partners and look to the future to consider where the Asia-Europe partnership should be heading after its first ten years.Â

Asia-Europe relations have achieved significant progress during the past decade. Economic relations have strengthened. Trade between the two regions now accounts for more than 43% of total world trade in goods, and ASEM partners together account for about 52% of the world's GDP. The scope of political dialogue has been widened and now covers human rights and the rule of law as well as global threats and broad security issues such as factors conducive to the spread of terrorism and conflict prevention. Moreover, enhanced interaction in the field of cultural dialogue and cooperation has significantly improved mutual awareness and understanding between Asia and Europe.

ASEM has served to build consensus among its membership, thereby facilitating progress in other multilateral fora. ASEM has also been instrumental in developing shared values and interests between the two regions. This has in turn helped to promote regional cooperation and thus has provided momentum for the move towards future community-building in East Asia.Â By acting together, ASEM partners have the critical mass to help bring about global change.

At the trans-regional level, ASEM interlinks Europe's and Asia's business communities, parliaments, NGOs and other representatives of civil society. The Asia-Europe Foundation, the only institution of ASEM, has played a significant role in people-to-people contacts. The Foundation has successfully developed networking as well as cultural and educational exchanges, and has provided an interface between ASEM governments and civil society in the two regions.

Tangible results of ASEM include numerous collaborative projects, programmes, seminars and

initiatives sponsored by groups of partner countries from the two regions. Cooperation has expanded beyond the initial emphasis on the economy to include new fields such as health, environment and energy, employment and labour, and science and technology including information and communication technology (ICT).

To continue to exploit its full potential, ASEM must carry on providing added-value. It has three tools with which to achieve this:

First, ASEM should pay particular attention to certain priority areas, to be followed up through joint initiatives and programmes. These areas include strengthening multilateralism to address security threats; promoting human-centred and sustainable development including cooperation on environment and energy security; managing globalisation; and enhancing dialogue among cultures and civilisations.

Second, ASEM should continue to complement ongoing work in other fora in line with the international agenda. For example, ASEM's contribution to the fight against international terrorism should tie in with ongoing counter-terrorism efforts in the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and the UN framework. ASEM's "Dialogue among Cultures and Civilisations" programme (which includes Interfaith Dialogue) is consistent with activities conducted in other international cooperation structures.

Third, ASEM should continue to strive for greater transparency and a broader sense of ownership. People-to-people contacts as well as educational and intellectual exchanges are of paramount importance, and also increase ASEM's visibility. Further efforts are needed to raise the awareness of the general public and attract media attention.

The ASEM6 Summit in Helsinki will review the first 10 years of the Asia-Europe dialogue and aim to set the direction for the second decade and beyond. Concrete outcomes of the Summit will include the adoption of a Declaration on the Future of ASEM outlining guiding principles for future cooperation, and a Declaration on Climate Change highlighting ASEM's firm commitment to building the international consensus that is needed. Moreover, parallel events will bring together representatives of the business community, parliaments and civil society.

The political decision on further ASEM enlargement is an important milestone in the evolution of the process. ASEM partners believe that enlargement could provide greater dynamism and enrich the diversity of the process as well as help enhance and expand Asia-Europe dialogue

and cooperation.

A lot has already been accomplished during ASEM's first decade, but much more still needs to be done to make the Asia-Europe partnership count when responding to global challenges. Asia and Europe stand firmly united in support of multilateralism, and ASEM offers both regions a framework in which they can join forces in tackling pressing issues and contribute towards global peace, security and prosperity. Together, Asia and Europe can form a partnership that is much bigger than the sum of its parts - the ASEM6 summit in Helsinki will show the way.

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