



Helsinki Declaration on the Future of ASEM

Helsinki, 10-11 September 2006

We, Heads of State and Government from thirteen Asian and twenty-five European nations and the President of the European Commission, gathered in Helsinki on 10 and 11 September 2006 for the 6th Asia-Europe Meeting,

- Recognising the growing weight of Asia and Europe in the global economy and the increased economic interdependence between our regions, as well as the dramatic growth of Asia-Europe relations in all fields since ASEM's establishment;
- Recalling the landmark inaugural meeting held in Bangkok in 1996;
- Conscious that the first decade of our partnership has resulted in broadened political dialogue, stronger economic relations, deeper cultural exchanges, and has given rise to more than one hundred collaborative initiatives;
- Reaffirming our resolve on the tenth anniversary of the Asia-Europe Meeting to take the process forward;
- Commending the open and evolutionary nature of the ASEM process, and underlining that a widening as well as deepening of the partnership significantly enhances and consolidates the process and increases its global visibility;
- Mindful of ASEM's vocation to be a framework for fostering the Asia-Europe comprehensive partnership in the 21st century, as emphasised at the 2004 ASEM 5 Summit in Hanoi;

Commit to the following guiding principles in order to lead ASEM successfully into its second decade.

Deepening the partnership - Facing future challenges

1. We emphasise ASEM's continuing vital role as a framework for dialogue and cooperation, serving as a prime point of convergence between Europe and Asia. We reiterate our commitment, in accordance with the Asia-Europe Cooperation Framework (AECF) 2000, to maintaining and enhancing peace and stability as well as to promoting conditions conducive to sustainable economic and social development through ASEM.

2. We reconfirm ASEM's mission as a partnership between equals committed to multilateralism and a fair, just and rule-based international order with a strong UN at the core.

With a view to achieving optimal results it is important that ASEM reflects the combined weight of Asia and Europe in order to promote effective multilateralism, and that it focuses on issues in which the ASEM framework can add value to ongoing processes in other multilateral frameworks. ASEM offers the partners a unique chance to continue to build common ground with a view to strengthening multilateral cooperation. ASEM enables Asia and Europe to reap the benefits of globalisation, tackle the challenges posed by growing global interdependence, and contribute to the well-being of present and future generations. In this respect we acknowledge the importance of the implementation of the decisions taken at the UN Summit in 2005 including the realisation of the UN Millennium Development Goals.

3. We reassert ASEM's role as a catalyst in the broader context of EU-Asia relations, as a means to implement action-oriented initiatives which synchronise with other relevant cooperation at the regional, sub-regional and bilateral levels. As cooperation and regional integration represent a major contribution to peace, security and welfare, we emphasise ASEM's potential for reinforcing regional identities and processes of community-building.

Defining broad perspectives - Marking out focussed areas for action

4. We underline that ASEM will build on its strengths and accomplishments, in particular the multidimensional dialogue and cooperation on political, economic, as well as social, cultural and educational issues. ASEM will commence its second decade by focussing on key policy areas such as strengthening multilateralism and addressing global threats of common concern; globalisation, competitiveness and structural changes in the global economy, including labour issues, education and human resource development; health; science and technology including Information and Communication Technology (ICT); sustainable development with special focus on the MDGs, climate change, environment, and energy; and intercultural and Interfaith Dialogue as a means to promote mutual understanding. In addition we reaffirm our commitment to deepening the economic and financial cooperation between the two regions through constructive policy dialogues and action-oriented programmes.

5. We emphasise that ASEM will address such policy areas while remaining faithful to its character of informality, networking and flexibility. ASEM will continue to offer the opportunity for informal dialogue on topical priority issues at the level of Heads of State and Government, following but also shaping the international policy agenda, in order to define joint responses to global challenges. We underline that ASEM will further promote focussed cooperative initiatives linked to this policy dialogue, which maintain the momentum from one summit to the next. These initiatives may involve other relevant stakeholders, including the social partners and civil society.

Reinforcing institutional mechanisms - Forging a stronger partnership

6. While reaffirming the validity of the principles of the Asia-Europe Cooperation Framework, we recognise the need to strengthen ASEM's instruments for dialogue and cooperative initiatives to accompany the deepening and widening of the process and to enhance efforts to achieve results through action-oriented initiatives. The ASEM Virtual Secretariat will be a key tool to that end, as it will ensure more interaction among partners and expand stocktaking and sharing of information.

7. We endorse the appended recommendations for improved working methods and institutional mechanisms in order to steer the process into its second decade. These proposals build on the course of action, initiated at the Hanoi summit and carried forward by the Seventh Foreign Ministers' Meeting in Kyoto, aiming to substantiate the ASEM process. In addition the

Evaluation Report on Ten Years of ASEM commissioned by the Finnish and Japanese Governments, and the Overview Report on ASEM Initiatives prepared by the Republic of Korea provided valuable contributions.

8. We welcome the decision on ASEM enlargement taken at the Helsinki Summit, which underlines the inclusive character of the process and highlights the key role that ASEM plays in the international framework. We emphasise that ASEM's expansion provides greater dynamism, enhances dialogue and cooperation, and makes the Asia-Europe partnership better equipped to tackle present and future global challenges.

Annex to "Helsinki Declaration on the Future of ASEM" - ASEM Working Methods and Institutional Mechanisms -

The tenth anniversary of the Asia-Europe Meeting is an excellent opportunity to take stock of past achievements, take the process forward and enhance its internal working methods. Taking into account ASEM's ten-year legacy and building on the AECF 2000 as well as previous recommendations for ASEM's working methods and future course made by the ASEM5 summit in Hanoi (2004) and by the Foreign Ministers' Meetings in Madrid (2002), Kildare (2004) and Kyoto (2005), the following guidelines are designed to implement the principles agreed upon by the Heads of State and Government and the President of the European Commission, and ensure a smoother overall management, increase the continuity of the process, and enhance the efficient and effective administration of initiatives.

I. Areas of Asia-Europe cooperation

1. Addressing clustered issues and initiatives, and providing political guidance

While maintaining its three-pillar structure, ASEM should seek to address cross-dimensional linkages between political, economic, and social/cultural issues in order to tackle effectively the challenges posed by globalisation and growing global interdependence. These clusters of related issues and projects should support the overall priorities in the core areas of substantive cooperation, as defined by the Heads of State and Government on the occasion of ASEM Summits, and as reflected in two-year work programmes. Political guidance is vital in order to identify the key priority clusters based on the three pillars of cooperation for the next summit. The ASEM Summits and Foreign Ministers' Meetings should determine, review and update the orientations for the relevance of the clusters according to the changes in the international arena.

2. Recognising issue-based leadership

Taking into account that ASEM is a forum of equal partners and that decision-making is by consensus, leadership should be issue-based. Without prejudice to the role of Coordinators, countries can take the lead in sectors and on issues in which they have a particular interest and expertise. Building on existing cooperation patterns, a mechanism revolving around a number of co-sponsoring countries willing to drive projects and initiatives in a certain policy area can produce tangible benefits for all. The ASEM Virtual Secretariat, e-mail networks and preparatory meetings in the margins of the SOM can function as tools for coordination. The SOM will review the progress achieved, and provide guidance if and when necessary.

The implementation of initiatives with a clear direction and a mid- to long-term vision relevant to ASEM's evolving priorities, as well as their systematic and efficient monitoring based on issue-specific leadership, is important in order to maintain the momentum from one summit to the next. This goal can be advanced by the development of Sectoral and Thematic Dialogue Facilities following the call by the 7th Finance Ministers' Meeting to explore possibilities for the creation of a new instrument pertaining in particular to policy dialogue and capacity building through ASEM channels. Such Dialogue Facilities could provide expertise and support to drive the dialogue and carry out tasks relating to monitoring, reviewing and reporting to ensure the necessary continuity and follow-up. The establishment of the ASEM Contingency Dialogue Mechanism for Emergent Economic and Financial Events, already agreed upon by the Finance Ministers' Meeting and part of the Tianjin Initiative on Closer ASEM Economic and

Financial Cooperation, is another example of a concrete initiative which aims to strengthen ASEM's capacity-building.

II. Steering and coordination of the process

While issue-based leadership is encouraged as a prime instrument to drive the process, the need for smooth overall steering, coordination, and management mechanisms remains.

1. Overall coordination

The summits play a pivotal role as platforms to provide political guidance and as benchmarks for progress achieved in the ASEM process, whereas Foreign Ministers are responsible for the steering and ASEM SOM for the overall coordination of the process. The partners should recognise the importance of Ministerial Meetings to the ASEM process and continually strive to increase their effectiveness and efficiency.

In the area of trade and investment promotion between the two regions the SOMTI already functions as an ASEM cornerstone and a well-established coordinating mechanism. In the area of financial cooperation, Finance Deputies perform a similar function. Given the new cooperative initiatives in areas such as culture, environment, energy, health, science and technology, Information and Communication Technology (ICT), and labour and employment, the establishment of additional sectoral SOM related to these fields can be taken into consideration as and when needed.

2. Role of the ASEM Coordinators and the hosts of next summits and FMM

Current coordination mechanisms comprise the ASEM Coordinators appointed by their respective regions. The European Commission and the EU Presidency are the European Coordinators, while on the Asian side the Coordinators alternate every two years and are composed of one ASEAN and one non-ASEAN partner. Supported by the ASEM Contact Points, the Coordinators facilitate the overall coordination of the process, and act as communication channels in their respective regions.

In order to deepen regional coordination, the role of Coordinators should be strengthened by establishing a regular meeting schedule, and by standardising the holding of meetings ahead of Ministerials to complement the role of the SOM. Also ministerial-level Coordinators' meetings could be considered, when necessary, to enhance the development of policy orientations.

Taking into account the deepening and widening of the process, the central role of the hosts of the next summit and Foreign Ministers' Meeting should be recognised, while ensuring that the geographic balance of the Coordinators' group is maintained. Enhancing the function of the next host(s) can add continuity to the coordination, and facilitate and complement the leading role of the Coordinators' group.

3. The ASEM Virtual Secretariat (AVS)

The ASEM Virtual Secretariat will function as ASEM's coordination and information-sharing device, offering technical assistance to the Coordinators. It will facilitate the management of the agenda and working programme (for example, the circulation of updated versions, collections/reminders of ASEM-initiatives and the dissemination of their results) and enhance

its institutional memory. The AVS supports the roles of the ASEM Coordinators, operates as a closed intranet system and combines mailing, document and notification posting, a bulletin board system (BBS) for exchange-of-opinions, and archival functions.

4. Regular contacts between ASEM embassies

In order to reinforce the coordination between ASEM partners, regular contacts between embassies/permanent representations, for example in Brussels, the EU headquarters, and Jakarta, the location of the ASEAN secretariat, or Beijing, the host of the next Summit, can enhance the channelling and sharing of information on the ground, facilitating the tasks and duties of the Coordinators.

III. Visibility, public awareness, and links with stakeholders

In order to achieve greater visibility and promote general awareness of the ASEM process, a public communication strategy to disseminate the results of ASEM summits, other meetings and initiatives, should be developed and implemented as a matter of priority.

Foreign Ministries of ASEM partners are invited to create an ASEM page on their website, including links to ASEF, the ASEM Infoboard, and other relevant sites, in order to ensure easy access to ASEM-related information.

The role of the Asia-Europe Business Forum (AEBF) is important in shaping the agenda and improving interaction with the business sector through consultation. A closer involvement of parliaments, academia and civil society in the broad sense will furthermore greatly contribute to a stronger feeling of ownership and enhance the visibility and awareness of ASEM among the wider public. The Asia-Europe Parliamentary Partnership Meeting (ASEP), the Asia-Europe Business Forum (AEBF), and the different stakeholders of civil society can play an important part in developing the outreach.

The Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF) continues to play a key role in further developing the interlinkages between the Asia-Europe cooperation and the different civil society actors. While continuing to align ASEF with the ASEM process, the partners are encouraged to consider the recommendations resulting from seminars co-organised by ASEF. Furthermore, with a view to sustaining and increasing public interest and support for the ASEM process, ASEF should persist in exploring new ways to effectively attract public attention to ASEM initiatives and ensure media attention.