



Chairman's Statement of the Sixth Asia-Europe Meeting Helsinki, 10-11 September 2006

The sixth Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM6) was held in Helsinki on 10-11 September 2006. The Summit was attended by the Heads of State and Government of thirteen Asian and twenty-five European nations and the President of the European Commission. The Prime Minister of Finland, acting also as the President of the European Council, chaired this historic meeting.

Leaders, recalling their previous meetings in Bangkok (1996), London (1998), Seoul (2000), Copenhagen (2002), and Hanoi (2004), held comprehensive, in-depth and fruitful discussions on various topical issues of common interest under the overarching theme **10 Years of ASEM: Global Challenges - Joint Responses**.

Leaders noted with appreciation the positive outcomes of Foreign and Financial Ministers' Meetings as well as Culture and Labour Ministers' Meetings since ASEM5, and endorsed their recommendations.

10 Years of ASEM: Global Challenges – Joint Responses

1. Leaders acknowledged the significant growth in the importance of Asia and Europe as global political and economic actors during the past decade. They welcomed the intensification of Asia-Europe relations and enhanced interaction in all major areas of cooperation, reflecting the common efforts of both regions to develop joint responses to the profound changes in the international environment, including increased global interdependence.

2. Looking back at the first ten years of ASEM, Leaders welcomed ASEM's overall achievements in promoting peace and stability, emphasising that during its first decade ASEM has gained strength as a multifaceted dialogue facilitator and established its role as a platform for policy development between Asia and Europe. They noted with satisfaction the expansion of political interaction, progress in the accomplishment of a stronger economic partnership, closer dialogue between peoples of various cultures, and a better awareness of cross-dimensional issues affecting both regions. Moreover, Leaders appreciated the wealth and diversity of activities carried out during ASEM's first decade as evidenced by the comprehensive list of initiatives (as annexed) based on the Overview Report on ASEM Initiatives.

Regional Developments

3. Leaders discussed the continuing integration process of the European Union, which has promoted peace, stability, and development in Europe since its inception. They exchanged views and reaffirmed their support for the ongoing processes of community-building in East

Asia and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), noting also the Vientiane Action Programme. They further welcomed the first East Asia Summit (EAS) held in Kuala Lumpur in December 2005 and its role as an integral part of the overall evolving regional architecture, with ASEAN as the driving force. Furthermore, Leaders took note of the EU's intention to accede to the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC) and looked forward to the EU's participation in the rapidly evolving regional cooperation, recognising that building an East Asian community would contribute to peace, security, prosperity and progress in the region and beyond. Leaders discussed and took stock of regional developments and experiences related to regional security dialogue and cooperation, in particular as regards the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), the European Security and Defense Policy (ESDP) and the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) as a model for regional security cooperation and confidence-building. Leaders also welcomed the co-operation between the EU and countries in Southeast Asia contributing to the Aceh Monitoring Mission, as a positive reflection of close cooperation between Europe and Asia in promoting peace and security.

4. Leaders exchanged views on developments on the Korean Peninsula. They emphasized that the denuclearisation of the Korean Peninsula is essential in maintaining peace and stability in Northeast Asia, and voiced support for the peaceful resolution of the DPRK nuclear issue through dialogue. They reaffirmed their support for the Joint Statement of the Six Party Talks unanimously adopted on 19 September 2005 in Beijing. They also stressed that any action that might further aggravate the situation should be refrained from, and urged the DPRK to return immediately to the Six-Party Talks without precondition and to work towards the expeditious implementation of the Joint Statement. Leaders expressed serious concern over the recent test-firing of missiles by the DPRK that jeopardised peace, stability and security in the region and beyond, reaffirming their support for UN Security Council resolution 1695. They also emphasised the importance of addressing the humanitarian concerns.

Leaders shared the view that, reflecting the European experiences of successfully transforming their mistrust and confrontation into dialogue and cooperation, promoting multilateral security cooperation in Northeast Asia would enhance mutual understanding and confidence among the countries in the region and thereby lay the foundation for greater peace and common prosperity in Northeast Asia.

5. Leaders took note of the briefing on the recent political developments in Myanmar given by the Head of the Myanmar delegation. Leaders welcomed ASEAN's efforts and their statement on Myanmar in the Joint Communiqué of the 39th ASEAN Ministerial Meeting (Kuala Lumpur, July 2006). They also welcomed UN Under Secretary General Ibrahim Gambari's visit to Myanmar in May 2006 and reaffirmed their continued support for the efforts of the UN Secretary General to bring about peaceful political change. They encouraged the Government of Myanmar to engage constructively with ASEAN, the UN, and the international community. Leaders expressed deep concern on the lack of tangible progress and lack of inclusiveness in the process towards national reconciliation and called for a transition via an inclusive process to a democratic government, in line with the assurances given by Myanmar at the ASEM5 Summit (Hanoi, 2004). They also called for the early lifting of restrictions placed on political parties, the early release of those placed under detention, and for effective dialogue between all parties concerned.

6. Leaders exchanged views on the recent developments in Timor-Leste and welcomed the adoption of UNSCR 1704, which led to the establishment of the United Nations Integrated Mission in Timor-Leste (UNMIT) for restoring stability, law and order in Timor-Leste. They also welcomed the contribution of countries, including ASEM partners, which had responded to the request of the Timor-Leste Government in May 2006 to assist in stabilizing the situation there.

Leaders called upon the international community to extend assistance to Timor-Leste while respecting the country's integrity and ownership of its national development process.

7. Recalling the need to assist the Afghan Government in establishing its control throughout the country, Leaders reaffirmed their long-term commitment to assist the Afghan Government in the stabilisation and rebuilding of Afghanistan within the framework of the Afghanistan Compact. They noted that although much has been achieved during recent years, formidable challenges still lie ahead in the arena of security, rule of law, governance and human rights as well as economic and social development. Leaders also stressed the importance of the moves to enhance governance, the importance of increased and better coordinated counter-narcotics efforts in and around Afghanistan and the security sector reform including disbandment of illegal armed groups. Leaders expressed their support for the reinforcement of regional cooperation and dialogue with regard to Afghanistan, in particular in the framework of SAARC. They also welcomed the 2nd conference on economic regional cooperation, which will take place in New Delhi (18-19 November).

8. Leaders welcomed the adoption of UN Security Council Resolution 1701 which led to the cessation of hostilities between Israel and Hezbollah, mindful of the high incidence of civilian casualties and heavy losses on both sides. They confirmed that UNSCR 1701 sets the principles and elements for a political solution of the crisis supported by the reinforced UNIFIL forces. They also acknowledged the leadership role played by the EU as well as the offers to contribute troops to UNIFIL by some ASEM partners. They urged all concerned parties to lift all obstacles to the free access to the Lebanese territory of persons and goods, notably in order to allow the reconstruction of Lebanon. They recalled the necessity for all states to comply with the embargo on arms and related material to any entity or individual other than those authorized by the government of Lebanon or by UNIFIL, in accordance with the terms of UNSCR 1701. They also stressed the importance of strengthening the Lebanese government and of supporting all its efforts to extend its authority over its territory. Leaders urged all parties in the region to continue to play a constructive role in helping to swiftly and fully implement this resolution. They called on the international community to extend humanitarian assistance to the victims of the recent war.

9. Leaders reaffirmed their support for efforts to reach a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East. They also reaffirmed their support for a negotiated settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict based on existing agreements, which include the relevant UN Security Council Resolutions and the principles laid down in the Road Map.

10. Leaders emphasised their commitment to seek a diplomatic and peaceful solution which addresses international concerns about Iran's nuclear programme. They called on Iran to implement UN Security Council Resolution 1696 (2006) and all Resolutions of the IAEA Board of Governors, and noted with concern the IAEA's 31 August report detailing Iran's failure to suspend enrichment activity and Iran's continuing failure to co-operate with the IAEA. Leaders welcomed the proposals put forward by China, France, Germany, the Russian Federation, the United Kingdom, the United States of America, and the High Representative of the European Union, for a comprehensive arrangement with Iran, based on mutual respect and the establishment of international confidence in the exclusively peaceful nature of Iran's nuclear programme. They called on Iran to respond positively to these proposals.

11. Leaders welcomed the formation of a constitutionally elected government in Iraq and the priority given in its programme to promoting national reconciliation and the rule of law. They noted the International Compact put forward by the Iraqi government. They reaffirmed their

support for the Iraqi government in its efforts to ensure unity, security, stability and prosperity of the country, and encouraged further international engagement with Iraq.

Strengthening Multilateralism and Addressing Security Threats

12. Leaders underlined that modern challenges and threats recognise no national boundaries, are interlinked and require common solutions. They reconfirmed their strong support for a fair, just, and rules-based multilateral international system with the United Nations playing a central role, and reaffirmed their commitment to promoting peace and security, sustainable development and human rights in accordance with the UN Charter and international law. Leaders stressed the importance of the continued implementation of the reforms and commitments agreed at the 2005 UN World Summit, including the necessity of reforming the UN's principal organs. They welcomed the establishment of the Peacebuilding Commission and the Human Rights Council as well as the continued progress on the UN management reform and the High Level Panel set up to examine more effective delivery of UN development, humanitarian, and environmental operations. Moreover, Leaders reaffirmed their continued commitment to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and poverty reduction. They also emphasised the need for more efficient environmental activities in the UN system and for exploring the possibility of a more coherent institutional framework, building on existing institutions. Leaders referred to the need to ensure that there is no impunity for the most serious international crimes and discussed in this context the role of the International Criminal Court (ICC). Within the ASEM context the Leaders also noted the value of initiatives such as the Informal Human Rights Seminars.

13. Leaders emphasised the importance of multilateral efforts for strengthening disarmament and the non-proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) and their means of delivery. They stressed the importance of universalisation, implementation and compliance with the international disarmament and non-proliferation treaties, including the need to implement UNSC Resolution 1540/2004. They reiterated the importance of cooperation to ensure a successful outcome of the 2006 Review Conference of the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BTWC) as well as the importance of the early entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT). Furthermore, they welcomed the ongoing efforts to establish standards for the global transfer of conventional arms and reconfirmed their commitment to enhancing cooperation to prevent trafficking of illicit small arms and light weapons.

14. On the 5th anniversary of the September 11 terrorist attacks, Leaders observed a moment of silence in commemoration of all victims of terrorism. They reaffirmed their commitment to the fight against terrorism, which still poses a threat to the international community, and underlined the need for a comprehensive approach. Leaders stressed that the fight against terrorism must be carried out in accordance with international law, in particular the UN Charter, respect of human rights, refugee law and international humanitarian law. They agreed that it is equally important to identify and address the conditions conducive to the spread of terrorism, as a means of preventing radicalisation and recruitment into violent extremism and rejected any attempts to associate terrorism with any religion, race, nationality, or ethnic group. Leaders welcomed the recent adoption of the General Assembly Resolution on the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy and called on states to become parties to and fully implement all UN Conventions and Protocols related to terrorist acts as well as relevant UN Resolutions, and called for the finalisation of the negotiations on the Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism. Moreover, they asserted their determination to prevent the use of nuclear weapons and other WMD to commit terrorist acts, and underlined the need to ensure the early entry into force of the International Convention on the Suppression of

Nuclear Terrorism and the Amendment to the Convention on the Physical Protection of Nuclear Material. They acknowledged the importance of preventing the financing of terrorism and related efforts against money-laundering in accordance with the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) recommendations. Leaders noted with appreciation the ongoing practical ASEM cooperation on counter-terrorism, including within the framework of the UNCTC, and endorsed the recommendations made at the ASEM Conferences on Counter-Terrorism.

15. Taking into consideration the shared interest in ensuring an effective response to serious forms of organised crime, such as trafficking in persons, money-laundering, terrorism financing and corruption, drugs-trafficking and illicit arms-trade, Leaders recognised the important role of the multilateral system and particularly the implementation of the UN Convention Against Transnational Organised Crime and its Protocols, as well as the UN Conventions on corruption and illicit drugs. In this context they welcomed the positive outcomes of the first ASEM Prosecutors-General Meeting. Furthermore, recognising the importance of mitigating threats to the Sea Lanes of Communication between Asia and Europe, Leaders discussed maritime security, and safe and secure conditions of air and maritime transportation, including safety of international energy transporting routes.

16. Leaders emphasised the need to promote global health security and reiterated their determination to combat global health threats, such as HIV/AIDS, avian influenza and a possible human influenza pandemic, tuberculosis and malaria. They took note of the Political Declaration of the UN High Level meeting on AIDS in 2006 and reaffirmed their commitment to pursuing all necessary efforts towards achieving the goal of universal access to comprehensive prevention programmes, treatment, care and support by 2010. Leaders also affirmed their commitment to facilitating access to antiretroviral treatment (ARV) in the developing world. Moreover, Leaders recognised the efforts made in various international fora to fight highly pathogenic avian influenza, stressing the importance of research cooperation and of establishing monitoring systems and prompt initial responses, including at grass-roots level. In this context they also stressed the importance of honouring commitments made at relevant international pledging conferences and the implementation of the recently revised International Health Regulations. Leaders welcomed the concrete common actions on global health issues within the ASEM framework and invited partners to continue their cooperation.

17. Leaders recalled the unprecedented loss of life and destruction caused by the 2004 tsunami and other devastating natural events and expressed their solidarity with the people and communities affected. They commended the efforts made to respond to these disasters and expressed appreciation for the actions taken to build resilience through people-centred regional early-warning systems and other emergency response mechanisms. Leaders underlined the need to strengthen global disaster reduction activities and capabilities, including mitigating the risk and the impact of disasters and facilitating effective civil-military response to disasters, building upon relevant international commitments and frameworks and reaffirming the vital coordinating role of the UN system. In this respect Leaders took further note of the important work on disasters management and emergency response within the ASEAN. Leaders also welcomed the establishment of the UN Central Emergency Response Fund.

Globalisation and Competitiveness

18. Leaders discussed globalisation, the acceleration of exchanges, and the opportunities for economic growth that globalisation is bringing about both in Asia and Europe. They exchanged views on how to manage the rapid transformation and structural change of their countries' economies while recognising the need to tackle the challenges of globalisation and

to extend its benefits to all. Leaders reconfirmed that the process of market opening provides irreplaceable benefits overall and boosts productivity. They underlined that structural reform and effective policies at all levels, are needed to address the challenges posed by adjustment to globalisation and to seize the opportunities that it provides, stressing at the same time that protectionism has to be resisted in defining these policies.

19. Leaders discussed the state-of-play of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) negotiations. They expressed deep regret about the suspension of the negotiations on the Doha Development Agenda (DDA) and underlined the importance of preserving the integrity and credibility of the multilateral trading system and of realising the development promise of the DDA. They called on all parties to the negotiations to show the necessary political will and flexibility to allow the negotiations to resume as soon as circumstances allow. They emphasised the importance of achieving an ambitious and balanced outcome resulting in new commercial opportunities and improvement of existing global trade rules, while taking into account the needs and interests of developing and least-developed countries. Leaders underlined the importance of flanking such an agreement with appropriate measures aimed at further integrating developing and least developed countries in global trade. They encouraged all WTO members to bridge their differences and redouble their efforts to achieve a successful conclusion of the DDA. Bearing in mind the need for greater flexibility to be accorded to developing and least developed countries, Leaders expressed their strong support for Vietnam's entry into the WTO by November 2006 and for the early accession of the Lao PDR to the organisation.

20. Leaders took note of the increase in Regional Trade Agreements (RTAs) and underscored that these agreements should support and further the objectives of the multilateral trading system. Leaders agreed on the importance of ensuring that all RTAs are ambitious and comprehensive in scope, fully complying with WTO rules, taking into account the different levels of development of the parties to an RTA, and ensuring the long-term inclusion of developing countries in the world economy. They stressed that such considerations have become even more critical in the light of the recent suspension of the WTO negotiations. In order to maintain a level playing field for all ASEM partners and their respective businesses, they emphasised the need for improvements in market access to be undertaken on a multilateral basis, in parallel with steps to enhance regional or bilateral trade. Similarly, Leaders recognised the need to improve and clarify rules for RTAs in the WTO, once the DDA negotiations are resumed, and in this light welcomed the progress already secured through the proposed new Transparency Mechanism for RTAs.

21. Leaders asserted their commitment to deepening the economic cooperation between the two regions through constructive policy dialogue and action-oriented programmes. In this respect Leaders called on the Economic Ministers to convene at an early date to review past performance and implementation of the Hanoi Declaration on Closer Economic Partnership (CEP). They noted the need to review and consider further action within the Trade Facilitation Action Plan (TFAP) and the Investment Promotion Action Plan (IPAP) further focussing in particular on areas of direct business interest. In this context Leaders took note of the ASEM Customs Directors-General/Commissioners Meetings and the progress made in the customs fora. They stressed their commitment to the promotion and the implementation of effective IP protection worldwide and to combating IPR piracy and counterfeiting, underscoring the importance of international cooperation on and capacity-building in supply chain security. They also noted the dialogue on IP related matters, including in the area of geographical indications. Moreover, Leaders noted with satisfaction the recommendations of the Asia-Europe Business Forum (AEBF) and emphasised the importance of further engaging the business sector as an active stakeholder in the ASEM process, also welcoming the ASEM Trade and Investment

Expo. Leaders further emphasised the important role of SMEs in promoting economic development and employment and welcomed the offer by China to host the first Ministerial Meeting on SMEs in 2007.

22. Leaders reaffirmed the need to strengthen ASEM financial cooperation and welcomed the conclusions of the Finance Ministers' meeting in Vienna in 2006, regarding appropriate policy responses for securing balanced and sustained economic expansion. To this end, they welcomed the progress made in the implementation of the Tianjin Initiative on Closer ASEM Economic and Financial Cooperation, in particular the ASEM Contingency Dialogue Mechanism for Emergent Economic and Financial events. Leaders appreciated the positive results of the ASEM Trust Fund II and looked forward to advancing cooperation in new areas. In this regard they noted the work of the Finance Ministers in exploring ways to support efforts in policy dialogue and capacity building, including the possibility of establishing a new instrument. They also acknowledged proposals to develop national and regional bond markets in Asia. Leaders noted their willingness to strengthen global governance structures by supporting the proposal for the IMF governance reform. They highlighted the importance of the IMF annual meeting for reaching an agreement on and expeditiously implementing the quota revision, which would give a higher share of influence and responsibility to emerging and developing countries, according to objective criteria, and which could be followed by parallel reforms in other organisations. Leaders welcomed with satisfaction the offer by the Republic of Korea to host the next Finance Ministers' Meeting in 2008.

23. Recalling that structural adjustment is inherent to a changing global economy and that industries and people must be prepared to tackle it, Leaders underlined the need for active labour market policies. In this context, Leaders highlighted the importance of the first ASEM Labour and Employment Ministers' Conference in Germany in 2006 and its results, as well as the need to sustain the substantive ASEM dialogue and cooperation in this field, including with social partners. Leaders also recognised the need to strengthen the social dimension of globalisation, underlining that productive employment, decent work, the protection of the rights of all workers, and social cohesion are crucial for sustainable socio-economic development. They welcomed the Indonesian offer to host the second Ministerial Conference in 2008. Furthermore, Leaders underlined that countries stand to benefit from an orderly and managed process of international migration and agreed to take forward actively cooperation on migration between Asia and Europe, such as through the ASEM Director-General level meetings on migratory flows.

24. Leaders emphasised that qualified human resources constitute a key factor for economic and social development. They recognised that globalisation poses challenges to human resources development affecting the entire field of education and training, and that both Asia and Europe are facing common issues such as managing financing and ensuring quality education and training for all. Leaders also underlined the importance of basic education, vocational training, and life-long learning as investment in human resources. With this in mind, Leaders stressed the value of continued dialogue and exchange of best practices on questions related to education and training, and welcomed the offer by Germany to host the first ASEM Ministerial Meeting on Education in 2008. They also recognised the role of the ASEM DUO Fellowship Programme in promoting exchanges in the field of education.

25. Leaders recognised that investments in know-how and knowledge infrastructures play a key role in the promotion of scientific excellence, competitiveness and well-being of societies, also stressing the need for constructive interplay between different policy areas. To this end, Leaders discussed ways to enhance cooperation in the fields of innovation, science, and technology between all ASEM partners, and emphasised the importance of the EU Research

Framework Programmes. In particular, they expressed their support for the ICT Ministerial Meeting to be organised in Vietnam in December 2006, and agreed that the possibility of a follow-up to the first Science and Technology Ministerial Conference should be studied. Furthermore, Leaders acknowledged the important role of the Trans-Eurasian Information Network (TEIN2) in extending connectivity between Asia and Europe in the fields of research and education, and supported its application in broader areas.

Sustainable Development including Environment and Energy Security

26. Leaders reiterated that economic development, social development, and environmental protection are interdependent and mutually reinforcing components of sustainable development. They endorsed the outcome of the 14th session of the Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD), and expressed their support for a successful and action-oriented outcome of CSD-15 in 2007. Moreover, Leaders reaffirmed their commitment to eradicate poverty, to ensure the timely and full realisation of the MDGs and to promote global prosperity. To this end they emphasized the need for a substantial increase of resources from all sources, including domestic resources, official development assistance and other resources, as well as effective technical cooperation and capacity building to promote sustainable development and to support developing countries, in particular least developed ones.

27. Leaders emphasised the importance of respecting the limits of the planet's natural resources and of ensuring a high level of protection and improvement of the quality of the environment, including the marine environment. To this end, they underlined the need to manage sustainably and safeguard forest resources, to combat desertification and illegal logging, and to strengthen international cooperation on oceans and seas. Leaders also reiterated the importance of significantly reducing the rate of biodiversity loss by 2010. Furthermore, Leaders emphasised the importance of accelerating actions to promote sustainable production and consumption, such as the 3R (Reduce, Reuse, Recycle) Initiative and programmes of education for sustainable development. Leaders underlined the need to carry on the ASEM dialogue on environmental issues, and welcomed the offer by Denmark to host the next Environment Ministers' Meeting in 2007. In this respect, they also noted the valuable role of related activities including the ASEM Oceans Initiative and the Asia-Europe Environment Forum.

28. Leaders recognised that climate change poses a serious threat to sustainable development and the future of our planet. Acknowledging that the global nature of climate change calls for the widest possible cooperation and participation in an effective and appropriate international response, in accordance with the principles of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, they expressed their determination to respond to climate change through international cooperation, based on the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities, with a view to achieving the ultimate objective of the Convention. To this end, Leaders adopted the ASEM6 Declaration on Climate Change (as annexed).

29. Leaders underlined the synergies between the promotion of energy security and addressing environmental concerns. They reaffirmed that encouraging energy efficiency and the use of renewable and alternative sources of energy improves access to sustainable, reliable, affordable and modern energy services, noting also that some countries have chosen nuclear power as an option. Furthermore, Leaders emphasised that providing access to energy for the poor contributes to the eradication of poverty in developing countries, as called for in the MDGs.

30. Leaders thoroughly discussed questions related to energy security, reiterating their earlier calls for multilateral measures to promote stable, effective, and transparent global energy markets, and agreed to cooperate in relevant international fora with a view to meeting these challenges. In this context, they noted the importance of the Energy Charter Treaty. Leaders also stressed the importance of strengthening mutually beneficial, open and stable legal conditions conducive to new investments in infrastructure both upstream and downstream. Moreover, they acknowledged that energy security can be enhanced by the diversification of energy sources and geographical origin, appropriate policies affecting energy demand, as well as by collaboration on research and development of renewable and alternative sources of energy. They also recognised the common interest in decreasing the dependency on oil in economies, emphasising measures such as better end-use efficiency and targeted investment and research programmes.

31. Leaders encouraged both public and private actors to further stimulate technological innovation, aiming at sustainable energy resources and energy efficiency through development, transfer, and deployment of technology, and foreseeing the implementation of a well-diversified and climate-friendly mix of technologies adapted to local circumstances. Leaders recognised the immediate mutual benefits of energy efficiency measures such as technology and best practices dissemination, supported by multi-stakeholder involvement including government and market incentives and extension of financing. They also underlined the need for investments in capacity building, such as energy audits and assessments, which enhance the systematic identification of cost-effective energy efficiency measures.

Dialogue among Cultures and Civilisations

32. Reiterating their commitment to further promotion of interactions between the peoples of Asia and Europe, Leaders underlined that dialogue and cooperation among cultures and civilisations are essential means to prevent and overcome ignorance and prejudice and to promote mutual understanding and tolerance. They reaffirmed their determination to respect, protect, and promote cultural diversity and the equal dignity of all cultures, and encouraged the implementation of the UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions. Leaders approved the Cultural Action Plan adopted in the 2nd ASEM Culture Ministers' Meeting in Paris in 2005, encouraging the Ministers, assisted by preparatory work undertaken by the Culture Senior Officials, to meet regularly from now on and welcoming Malaysia's offer to host the 3rd ASEM Culture Ministers' Meeting in 2007. Furthermore, Leaders expressed their support for actions to be carried out in Asia in the field of intercultural dialogue, parallel to and in cooperation with the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue in 2008, also appreciating the richness and variety of cultural festivals and cultural years in both Asian and European countries.

33. Leaders underlined the importance of the ASEM Interfaith Dialogue in contributing to the creation and reinforcement of an environment conducive to building harmony and understanding within the international community. In this context, they also noted the value of initiatives such as the UN Alliance of Civilisations and the UN Tripartite Forum on Interfaith Cooperation for Peace. Leaders firmly condemned the use of violence in the name of religion, denouncing any stereotyping on the basis of religion and reiterating their determination to stand united in the global efforts to cultivate a culture of peace, to increase mutual respect and to build confidence amongst people of all faiths. Furthermore, Leaders welcomed the outcomes of the Interfaith Dialogue, stressing the importance of translating the shared values of peace, compassion, and tolerance expounded in the Bali Declaration into practical actions.

With this in mind, they expressed their support for the implementation of the Larnaca Action Plan.

Asia-Europe Foundation

34. Leaders reaffirmed their support for the role played by the Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF) in enhancing dialogue and cooperation between the peoples of Asia and Europe through intellectual, cultural, and people-to-people exchanges, underlining in particular the importance of involving the young and reaching out to civil society. They emphasised the importance of ASEF's flagship programmes in further aligning ASEF activities with ASEM priorities and encouraged ASEF to pursue this orientation. Furthermore they stressed the need to optimise ASEF's capacity in enhancing the visibility of ASEM. Leaders welcomed and endorsed the solution to secure ASEF's long-term financial sustainability as prepared by the ASEM Senior Officials.

The Future of ASEM

35. Leaders agreed that while continuing the process within the framework of three pillars, ASEM should start 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 finance, labour issues, education and human resource development; health; science and technology including Information and Communication Technology (ICT); sustainable development with special focus on the MDG's, climate change, environment, and energy; and intercultural and Interfaith Dialogue as a means to promote mutual understanding. They adopted the ASEM work programme for 2006-2008 (as annexed) reflecting the important role of ASEM in further developing the comprehensive Asia-Europe relations.

36. Leaders warmly welcomed the two acceding EU Member States Bulgaria and Romania on the European side, as well as India, Mongolia, Pakistan and the ASEAN Secretariat on the Asian side, as from the time of completion of the respective internal procedures by the European and the Asian sides, to participate in the ASEM process. Leaders tasked the next Foreign Ministers' Meeting in Germany in 2007 to report on these internal procedures by the European and Asian sides and looked forward to the formal celebration of the admission of the new partners at the 2008 ASEM Summit in China.

37. Leaders adopted the Helsinki Declaration on the Future of ASEM and its Annex on Working Methods and Institutional Mechanisms (as annexed). They tasked the Senior Officials to continue policy discussions, and reflect on the possible need to adapt the Asia-Europe Cooperation Framework (AECF) 2000 to the requirements of ASEM's second decade and the new developments in the process.

38. Leaders accepted with gratitude the offer by China to host ASEM7 and looked forward to meeting again on 24-25 October 2008.

Helsinki, Finland
September 11, 2006