
Asia-Europe Vision Group (AEVG)

Final Report

Executive Summary

Asia and Europe find themselves in the midst of an economic, social and communications revolution, set to accelerate. These pose new challenges in the 21st Century. Given their history, cultural strengths and talents, it is imperative that Asia and Europe work together to make a strong and specific contribution, and to address these issues with urgency and tenacity.

Since the inaugural meeting of ASEM leaders in Bangkok in 1996, the ASEM process has got off to a good start. However, it is far from enough. After four years, it is time to move to a new and deeper phase of Asia-Europe relations. This second phase needs to be guided by an overarching vision which articulates the overall goal of strengthening relations between the two regions. It should be the vision which drives the process, and not vice versa.

Our vision is gradually to integrate Asia and Europe into an area of peace and shared development, a prosperous common living sphere in the 21st Century. This is a sphere in which our knowledge, wealth, cultural heritage, democratic ideals, educational assets, intellectual aspirations and our new technologies are closely intertwined and exchanged, without specific barriers or constraints. We envision the active integration of our intellectual forces and a vibrant exchange of culture and the arts between Asia and Europe. We envision correction in today's imbalance in student numbers between Europe and Asia, with a five-fold expansion in student exchanges between the two regions by the year 2025. We also visualise the progressive opening of markets with the eventual goal of free flow of goods and services by the year 2025. Integral to our vision are concrete actions to meet the serious environmental challenges today.

We include in our report **nine major recommendations** and **22 other recommendations** which will help us achieve the vision.

Sustaining Economic Partnership

- a. Liberalisation and Open Markets**
- We need to ensure that liberalisation will continue and that protectionism will not rear its ugly head. It is critical for ASEM partners to undertake early action to reinforce the multilateral trading system and to co-operate to achieve, as soon as possible, the success of the next round of international trade talks. At the same time, the Vision Group recommends that ASEM partners set the eventual goal of free trade in goods and services by the year 2025 by adopting a strategic framework for the progressive freeing of trade in goods and services among themselves.
- 1. Asia-Europe Cooperation for Financial Stability**
- The Vision Group welcomes the introduction of the Euro, and calls for closer macroeconomic policy coordination between the major economic players. In the area of international finance, we see a need for Asia and Europe to work together in order to achieve a co-ordinated response matching rapid financial globalisation.
- 2. Enhancing Asia-Europe Trade and Investment**
- Asia and Europe should take a quantum leap in cooperation regarding trade and investment. The Vision Group recommends that the ASEM Leaders establish Asia-Europe Business Advisory Councils (BACs). The main objective of the BACs would be to institute high level dialogue to promote Asia-Europe investment, with a membership including national government leaders and the CEOs of companies, domestic and foreign. Other initiatives include an Asia-Europe Trade Week, an ASEM work programme on electronic commerce and the establishment of an ASEM Advisory Network of Senior Executives.
- 3. Improved ASEM Infrastructure Framework**
- The Vision Group recommends that ASEM adopt an improved ASEM infrastructure framework for all key areas (energy, telecom, transport, water, environment, etc.), which are critical to inter-regional trade, technology sharing and investor confidence. All modes of transportation between Asia and Europe, such as air transport, should be expanded through further liberalisation. Energy-related technology and infrastructure development is also important.
- 4. Science and Technology**
- The Vision Group proposes that an ASEM Information Technology Council be formed comprising members from both the public and private sectors to promote information infrastructure development in such areas as technical standards, electronic translation software and satellite TV broadcasting. We recommend that the ASEM Ministers responsible for Science and Technology (R&D) meet on a regular basis to discuss common areas of concern. A virtual Asia-Europe Technology Transfer Centre should be established on the Internet.

5. Meeting the Environmental Challenge

One of the key priorities on the global action agenda is the enormous environmental challenges which both industrialised and developing countries face today. The Vision Group proposes that ASEM develop closer long-term environmental cooperation: defining priority areas and objectives, with annual reviews, along with specific measures to attain these objectives; developing institutional capacity adequate to implement environmental policies. In order to realise these goals through concrete cooperation, and ensuring symmetry with other current environmental programmes outside the ambit of ASEM, the Vision Group recommends establishment of an ASEM Environment Centre.

6. Enhancing Educational, Cultural and Societal Exchanges

The Vision Group believes that educational exchanges lie at the heart of achieving a deeper understanding between Asia and Europe. To this end, we urge ASEM Leaders, at their meeting in Seoul in 2000 to issue an ASEM Declaration on Education.

Our vision regarding educational exchanges is three-fold: a significantly better balance in student numbers between Europe and Asia within the next five years; a five-fold increase in the total number of students exchanged between Europe and Asia by the year 2025; and an improved balance between the numbers of Asian foreign students studying in North America and those studying in Europe.

A clear signal of the commitment of ASEM governments to the development of young talent and leadership potential on both sides is now urgent. The Vision Group recommends creation of a prestigious, high-profile ASEM Scholarship Scheme. ASEM scholarships will be awarded to the best and brightest of students for postgraduate study on an inter-regional basis, chosen for their quality of intellect and level of attainment.

The Vision Group proposes that the Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF) be strengthened, so that it can better carry out an extended objective of promoting cultural cooperation and exchange between Asia and Europe. This can be done at ASEM III after ASEF submits a report card on its visions, achievements and aspirations. We also propose a biennial ASEM cultural festival and the establishment of ASEM twin cities.

7. Promoting Political and Security Cooperation

In order to promote better understanding between the two regions, the Vision Group, subscribing to the guiding principles laid down in Bangkok Summit, sees the dialogue between Asia and Europe on good governance in international relations as part of their political cooperation. The Vision Group therefore recommends that ASEM Leaders at their meeting in Seoul in 2000 affirm the principles of good governance.

Given the importance of political and security issues, ASEM should lend itself as a vehicle for political and security dialogue between Asia and Europe at different levels, and encourage, co-ordinate and support the involvement of both governmental and non-governmental organisations in political and security dialogue. ASEM partners could also explore ways and means to promote cooperation between the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE).

8. The ASEM Process

The Vision Group notes that the ASEM process will become more complex, not less. There is a need for a point of coordination, a focus for continuity ensuring momentum of the ASEM process and for communication on ASEM activities and achievements. The Vision Group therefore recommends the establishment of a lean but effective secretariat.