



ASEM CONFERENCE ON CULTURES AND CIVILISATIONS
1st ASEM Culture Ministers' Meeting
"Unity in Diversity"

CONCEPT PAPER

Background

1. The tragic events of September 11 have shed new light on the crucial importance of inter-civilisational understanding and dialogue for promoting global peace and security. As for the relationship between Europe and Asia, these events have rendered it desirable to strengthen the inter-regional dialogue in order to avoid misunderstanding and reject the concept of a "clash of civilisations" based on the notion that inter-civilisational understanding is unattainable.
2. ASEM is a particularly well suited forum for embarking upon a dialogue on cultures and civilisations in a constructive and consensual manner because of its primary goal of building confidence and increasing mutual understanding between Asia and Europe. That is why Heads of State and government have decided to take up this topic on the occasion of their informal retreat session, during the Fourth Asia-Europe Summit held in Copenhagen on 22-24 September 2002.
3. As a follow-up to this dialogue at the highest level, China, Denmark, France, Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore propose a joint initiative of a conference on promoting understanding among cultures and civilisations in ASEM. "Unity in diversity" might be a suitable catch phrase for this dialogue. Discussions could focus on the common values of ASEM partners across the cultural, ethnic, geographical, religious and socio-economic diversity of Asia and Europe.

Aim

4. The key aim of the conference would be to promote better understanding among the rich cultures and civilisations in ASEM. A concrete deliverable would be to propose practical ways of overcoming and preventing pre-conceived opinions, stereotypes and prejudices among present and future generations in both regions, in order to bring together the diverse cultures and civilisations within ASEM.

Format

5. The conference could take place over two days in the first half of 2003. Each country could recommend one or two persons to participate in the conference. Those invited could include representatives from all sectors of society. These participants would be involved in workshops and panel discussions during the two-day conference.

6. The conference will be held in China and co-chaired by the six partner countries. Each sponsoring country could nominate one partner institute think-tank to co-organise the conference.

Possible follow-up Activities

7. The conference report, drafted under the responsibility of the chair, will be circulated to ASEM Heads of State and government and Foreign Ministers and made simultaneously available to the general public.
8. ASEM Foreign Ministers could recommend at their 5th Meeting in 2003 additional follow-up activities to promote greater inter-civilisational understanding. Such activities could be organised as ASEM Track II events under ASEF. For instance, ASEF could include themes on inter-civilisational dialogue at its events like the Asia-Europe Young Parliamentarians Meeting, the ASEF Summer School, the Asia-Europe Youth Camp and the Asia-Europe Young Leaders' Symposium.