

ASIA–EUROPE MEETING

High-level International Conference on Intercultural and Interfaith Dialogue

St. Petersburg, July 3–4, 2014

Harmony between civilizations as a prerequisite for sustainable development

One of the defining trends of the present stage of development of international relations is the increasing importance of maintaining harmony between civilizations in the world. These processes are largely fuelled by globalization, which endangers the cultural and civilizational diversity of the world. The danger of the world divided between civilizations is becoming one of the top challenges of our time.

The increasing global and regional interdependence coupled with a dangerous tendency of expanding international conflicts of various origins dictates the need to strengthen mutual trust, to ensure constructive dialogue and cooperation between representatives of various social and cultural paradigms. Intercultural dialogue aimed at maintaining peace and creating optimal models of sustainable development is a pillar of global security and stability.

ASEM is an important inter-regional forum for finding joint solutions for the rapidly changing international situation. The unique advantages of geographically diversified ASEM format coupled with the cultural and religious variety of many of its countries provide an opportunity to conduct targeted, systematic dialogue on contemporary modalities of cultural diversity, to exchange relevant practical experience and identify promising areas of multilateral cooperation in this field.

The dialogue between civilizations has been firmly anchored at the core of

ASEM agenda. There have already been seven meetings on this subject that significantly contributed to promoting and strengthening mutual understanding, social cohesion and tolerance amid growing social interdependence and religious and cultural diversity of Asia and Europe. In Chair's Statement of the 9th ASEM Summit held in Vientiane, the leaders "supported efforts in establishing inter-religious dialogue and underlined the necessity to involve more participants into this process to increase its efficiency. They resolved to take concerted action to further promote mutual understanding, tolerance and exchanges, taking global leadership in working towards building a world where human beings in their diversity of faiths, religions, languages and cultures co-exist in harmony, and enjoy equal rights and mutual respect".

These are the goals pursued by the Russian initiative to hold high-level conference on intercultural and interfaith dialogue. Our country has a vast experience in, as well as scientific and practical potential for preserving and promoting national cultural heritage and maintaining religious peace.

We consider the key objectives of the forthcoming conference to be the facilitation of networking between ASEM member countries to establish equal partnership and inter-civilizational and inter-religious dialogue, to build relationships between European and Asian communities based on mutual understanding, to develop a common platform for constructive interaction between different religious and cultural traditions, and to ensure common understanding of the priority areas and the most effective methods to promote intercultural and inter-religious relations in the modern society. The conference will be an important component of international efforts aimed at finding effective ways to overcome fragmentation and unlock the positive potential of world's cultural diversity. As a high-profile forum open to the informal international communication between countries that represent all major religions of the world, ASEM is one of the best

platforms for this dialogue.

During the Conference we suggest focusing on three main topics:

– ***Cultural and civilizational diversity: challenge to State's prosperity or important component of progress***

In an increasingly globalizing world and greater political and economic interdependence of various regions, countries and nations, our main task is to identify how to preserve cultural and civilizational diversity, identity and national character without compromising the future of the stable and safe development of the contemporary society.

– ***Capabilities of the State to develop intercivilizational dialogue***

To create an enabling environment for useful cooperation among various religions and cultures the State and civil society should make cooperative efforts to strengthen social and cultural foundation for their interaction both at national and regional levels. What are State bodies' objectives and capacities in the field?

– ***Promoting dialogue among members of various ethnic groups and faith communities in the context of efforts to prevent and settle conflicts***

Intercultural cooperation and inter-religious collaboration as its integral part become critical at this historic stage in the context of increasing political, social/economic and ethnic and faith-based contradictions, as well as any attempts to use religion as a justification for extremism, including terrorism as its extreme manifestation. How to use the potential of this cooperation to prevent interethnic and inter-religious conflicts and settle them?

ASEM members may find the topics of the forthcoming Conference highly relevant. We invite all partners to make their active and meaningful contribution to the meeting.