

ASEM AT 20

The challenge of connectivity



Autumn 2015

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EUROPE* & ASIA**

Debating Europe

62.3% WORLD POPULATION
57.2% WORLD'S GDP



TRADE (2012)



48% 22% 16% 4%

809 €
BILLION

562 €
BILLION



34% 28% 22% 6% 3%



FOOD and
LIVE ANIMALS



MACHINERY
and VEHICLES



CHEMICALS



MANUFACTURED
GOODS/ARTICLES



ENERGY
PRODUCTS

MAIN SOURCE OF EU28 IMPORTS (2013)

CHINA



37.6% ↓ ↑ 28.4%

RUSSIA



27.6% ↓ ↑ 22.9%

JAPAN



7.6% ↓ ↑ 10.4%

KOREA



4.8% ↓ ↑ 7.7%

INDIA



5.0% ↓ ↑ 6.9%

MAIN DESTINATION OF EU28 EXPORTS



WHAT IS IT?

INFORMAL PROCESS OF DIALOGUE
AND COOPERATION BETWEEN:
30 EUROPEAN COUNTRIES
21 ASIAN COUNTRIES
2 ORGANISATIONS (ASEAN Secretariat & EU)



Strengthen the relationship between regions,
with mutual respect and equal partnership



POLITICAL
FIELD



ECONOMIC
FIELD



CULTURAL
FIELD

...NEXT

The 11th ASEM Summit will be held
15-16 July 2016 in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia

ASEM AT 20

The challenge of connectivity

Report of the Conference

co-organised by Friends of Europe,

and the European External Action Service (EEAS)

with the support of Debating Asia Europe

with media partner Europe's World

Autumn 2015

Brussels

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FOREWORD



As preparations gather pace for the 20th anniversary celebration of ASEM to be held in Ulaanbataar in July 2016, it is clear that there is much to celebrate. ASEM has come a long way since its launch in Bangkok in March 1996. It now deserves a new lease of life so that it can adapt and adjust to a rapidly-changing world.

If we play our cards right, ASEM's third decade could be one of renewal and revival. To re-energise ASEM, it is important to view it as an integral and vital part of a much-needed global conversation on 21st Century economic, societal and security challenges.

Importantly, ASEM is about connecting countries, regions and people. Connectivity is therefore undoubtedly – and justifiably – the new ASEM buzzword. It should secure enhanced ASEM attention.

Asia-Europe connectivity is now a fact of life and developing these networks further – in transport and infrastructure, digital communications and people-to-people contacts- will help to revive and renew ASEM.

Connectivity is already a part of the European Union agenda while the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) has its own Connectivity Masterplan. China has come up with the ambitious One Belt, One Road strategy for promoting Asia Europe connectivity. The EU and China have launched a joint connectivity platform. The ASEM summit in Ulaanbataar can bind these initiatives and take them further.

Connectivity will not automatically transform ASEM. But it will sharpen ASEM's focus and enhance its credentials as an incubator of new ideas. Crucially, it will meet some of the demands for more tangible ASEM cooperation and greater visibility. The challenge will be to turn words into action.

These and other issues were discussed at Friends of Europe's high-level conference on "ASEM at Twenty: the challenge of connectivity" held in autumn 2015. Working in cooperation with the European External Action Service, we brought together leading Asian and European policymakers, business representatives and academics to provide insights into ways in which a stronger focus on connectivity and network-building could make ASEM stronger and more relevant.

We think this publication makes a constructive and stimulating contribution to the reflection on ASEM's future. We wish you happy reading!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Shada Islam'.

Shada Islam
Director of Policy
Friends of Europe



Asia-Europe Meeting



OP-ED

CONNECTIVITY IS KEY TO ASEM RENEWAL

Asian and European leaders will celebrate the twentieth anniversary of ASEM (Asia-Europe Meeting) at their summit in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, next July. ASEM has come a long way since its launch in Bangkok in March 1996. Even as leaders take stock of past achievements, however, the ASEM summit in 2016 must upgrade the Asia-Europe partnership by setting it on a renewed and reinvigorated track for its third decade.

ASEM today is more energised and vibrant than at any time in recent years, with governments seeking new ideas to ensure ASEM's relevance in an increasingly inter-dependent and inter-connected world. The economies, societies and people of Asia and Europe are ever-more closely linked. Compared to 1996 or even ten years ago, there is now a stronger EU-Asian conversation on trade, business, security and culture. More than in the past, two-way trade and investment flows are vital to the security, well-being, growth and development of both Asia and Europe.

Although launched in the last century, with its focus on connecting countries, regions, businesses and people, ASEM is a relevant 21st Century construct. Asia-Europe connectivity is now a fact of life. And enhancing these networks through stronger institutional, infrastructure, digital and people-to-people linkages is rightfully emerging as a central element of efforts to revive and renew ASEM.

Milan summit sets out vast agenda

The significance of Asia-Europe connectivity – including digital connectivity – was underscored by the ASEM summit in Milan in October 2014, with leaders underlining the contribution increased ties could make to economic prosperity and sustainable development and to promoting free and seamless movement of people, trade, investment, energy, information, knowledge and ideas and greater institutional linkages.

The summit set out a clear – albeit vast – agenda for further reflection and action by urging the establishment of an “integrated, sustainable, secure, efficient and convenient air, maritime and land transportation system, including intermodal solutions, in and between Asia and Europe”. Leaders noted the usefulness of an exchange of best practices and experiences on areas of common interest, relating for example to the governance of the EU Single Market and the implementation of the Master Plan on ASEAN Connectivity. Significantly, they underlined that enhanced connectivity requires the engagement of all stakeholders, including the industry and the think tank and academic community.

From words to action

The challenge ahead of the summit in Ulaanbaatar is to turn the leaders’ words into policies and actions. The Milan summit and recent conferences in Riga and Chongqing, China, have tended to centre on an obvious priority: transport and infrastructure connectivity in order to build what the meeting of ASEM transport ministers in Riga in April referred to as “Eurasian multimodal transport corridors” and supply chains to provide additional connectivity. The meeting in Chongqing in July ambitiously referred to the improvement and building of new “Eurasian Land Bridges, Trans-Eurasian transport corridors” the upgrading of sea routes, high-speed rail links and work on an “information highway”. The importance of public-private partnerships was emphasised at both meetings. The conference in Chongqing further underlined the need to upgrade Asia-Europe cooperation in the industry, value and innovation chains.

Certainly, the focus on trucks, trains, ships and airplanes is justified. Business and trade are the backbone of Asia-Europe relations and the establishment of new and faster connections will boost trade, facilitate investments and create

new business opportunities for European and Asian enterprises. This in turn will generate more employment, growth and development in Europe and Asia and open up exciting new markets across the routes.

In addition, joining forces on such projects will unleash more resources. Europe's experience in implementing the investment plan drawn up by European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker is that it requires the mobilisation of billions of euros of private and public funds as well as capital from the European Investment Bank (EIB) – money that has so far been in short supply.

As such, it is interesting that – as noted at the meeting in Chongqing – at least some ASEM projects could benefit from China's multi-billion dollar "One Belt, One Road" initiative. The economic gains could be immense as the projects come on stream and business opportunities open up for construction, transport, digital and logistical companies.

Let's talk about good practice...

An ASEM working group on connectivity could be the right forum to discuss connectivity projects by setting focused objectives, sharing practices and encouraging cooperation through an exchange of ideas. But once the initial work is done, eligible projects will have to meet strict governance, environmental and technical standards – and result in sustainable development. Significantly, given the focus on expanding flows of goods, services, investment, information and people along new economic corridors, ASEM will be drawn into a reflection on institutional connectivity. This, in turn, is likely to result in a convergence of legal, technical and administration norms and regulations among widening groups of economies. ASEM can also of course provide an inventory of the different projects being discussed in other fora and by other organisations.

ASEM connectivity, however, is not just about transport and infrastructure links – it's also about establishing strong networks between institutions in areas such as education, science and technology as well as through trade, business, security, tourism and culture. ASEM is already working on these and other issues and is well-placed to help further expand synergies on such "soft" connectivity.

Europe, ASEAN and China

Europe, Southeast Asia and China have their separate connectivity initiatives – and are beginning to explore ways of cooperating.

The European Union's many-faceted efforts at building a frontier-free Single Market include work on the digital single market, an energy union and a single market for financial services as well as the construction of Trans-European Networks. In addition, connectivity is an important element of the €315 billion investment blueprint drawn up by Commission President Juncker to encourage the financing of Europe-wide projects. As such, the EU's connectivity ambitions (even though the EU does not explicitly use the term) are often described as the "gold standard" for others.

Certainly, leaders of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) are working hard to build stronger intra-regional networks through the "ASEAN Master Plan for Connectivity". Adopted in Hanoi in 2010, the Master Plan is seen as a vital step in the building of an ASEAN Community in 2015 by bringing peoples, goods, services and capital closer together. The project provides for enhanced physical infrastructure development (physical connectivity), effective institutions, mechanisms and processes (institutional connectivity) and empowered people (people-to-people connectivity).

The EU has identified support for ASEAN connectivity as a central element of its upgraded relationship with the region. So far, ASEAN has selected 15 priority projects, including the ASEAN Highway Network, the Singapore-Kunming Rail Link, the ASEAN Broadband Corridor and the National Single Windows. However, project funding remains a challenge. Although ASEAN countries have established an ASEAN Infrastructure Fund of US\$485.2 million and promoted a public-private partnership mode of financing, developing bankable projects that have a regional impact has remained a challenge. (For more details see our commentary on ASEAN connectivity: <http://www.friendsofeurope.org/global-europe/asean-eu-challenge-connectivity/>)

Most recently, it's China's ambitious "One Belt, One Road" (OBOR) initiative that has grabbed international attention. Backed by the 40 billion dollar Silk Road Fund and the \$100 billion Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), the Chinese

blueprint aims to link China and Europe through Central and Western Asia while also connecting China with South and Southeast Asian countries. Initial activities will be geared towards building basic infrastructure, a sector where China is well-equipped to provide engineering skills, construction experience, machinery and equipment as well as materials such as cement and steel in which it has excess capacity. The initiative provides an overarching framework for many ongoing efforts to improve connectivity and cooperation between China and other economies. (for more details see our commentary: <http://www.friendsofeurope.org/global-europe/eu-china-connectivity-thinking-big-acting-small/China>). Significantly, China and the EU have agreed to launch a “connectivity platform” in order to study possible synergies between the “Juncker Plan” and the OBOR blueprint.

Speaking at the ASEM seminar in Chongqing, Chinese Vice-Premier Zhang Gaoli said Beijing is mulling six economic corridors with countries along the OBOR route to better connect Asia and Europe with funding from the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank and the Silk Road Fund. Corridors are set to run through China-Mongolia-Russia, New Eurasian Land Bridge, China-Central and West Asia, China-Indo-China Peninsula, China-Pakistan, and Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar, said Zhang.

Asia needs infrastructure

Asia's infrastructure needs are huge and growing. The Asian Development Bank (ADB) predicts that Asia will need to spend approximately \$8 trillion on developing its infrastructure between 2010 and 2020. According to PwC, infrastructure spending in the Asia-Pacific region must be around 5.36 trillion annually by 2025 (representing nearly 60 percent of the world's total). It says the region needs: new transport and utilities infrastructure to mobilise work forces, transport products and connect economic centres; social infrastructure including schools, healthcare facilities and aged care; “soft” infrastructure to ensure faster and cheaper access to broadband networks and to expand e-commerce; urbanisation infrastructure including housing, transport, water supply, waste management.

Examples of Asia's hunger for infrastructure abound.

India alone needs to spend \$1 trillion on infrastructure in the five years through 2017. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's most ambitious initiative is the \$100 billion Delhi-Mumbai Industrial Corridor Project, which calls for creating seven industrial cities, high-speed railways, six airports and three sea ports.

In Vietnam, the focus is on a proposal for a \$15.8 billion second airport for its business capital, Ho Chi Minh City.

Thailand has a \$92 billion building plan for 2015-22 that includes high-speed train routes that eventually will stretch from China in the north through Malaysia in the south to Singapore.

In the Philippines, President Benigno Aquino III in May approved \$1.4 billion in spending for commuter rail in Manila and other projects. That brought the total for infrastructure investment to \$31.8 billion since Aquino took office in 2010.

Indonesia is ratcheting up infrastructure spending to upgrade roads, ports, water facilities and power plants. Instead of leaning heavily on public funds to get them done, the government is inviting the private sector to foot a good chunk of the bill and take advantage of investment opportunities.

The Asian Development Bank says if the required facilities are built, the region's people could get an extra \$4.5 trillion in income in the decade through 2020 and another \$8.5 trillion after that.

With demand for funding in the sector running so high in Asia (also in Africa and Latin America), infrastructure is now front and centre at most international and national financial institutions. While the Chinese-led AIIB centres exclusively on the development of Asia's infrastructure, the World Bank (which has launched the Global Infrastructure Facility for infrastructure projects that can mobilise private investment), the Asian Development Bank and national institutions such as the Japan Bank for International Cooperation are now focusing on financing transport and other infrastructure projects. Japan has in fact announced a credit package of \$110 billion's worth of infrastructure financing in Asia.

Information highways

Despite the high penetration of smartphone usage in both Asia and Europe, the scope for stronger digital connectivity remains high, with both regions focused on developing e-commerce and on-line trading possibilities, especially for SMEs. The European Commission has identified the completion of the Digital Single Market (DSM) as one of its 10 political priorities and said completing the project could contribute €415 billion per year to Europe's economy, create jobs and transform public services. Asian economies are becoming increasingly wired, but there is still some way to go as regards access to mobile and broadband connectivity. According to ASEAN's Business Advisory Council Chairman Tan Sri Munir Majid, the potential for expanding digital connectivity is immense in the region. Currently, only 1% of the total retail business turnover in ASEAN is conducted via the Internet, compared to 9% in developed economies.

Education

Work on promoting ASEM-wide links in education have gained momentum since the first ASEM ministerial on education in 2008. There is an ASEM education secretariat – the only ASEM structure of its kind – currently established within the Indonesian Ministry of Education in Jakarta. Meeting in Riga in April, ASEM education ministers agreed to increase result-oriented cooperation activities in the following areas: quality assurance and recognition; engaging business and industry in education; balanced mobility; lifelong learning in technical and vocational education and training. They also focused on the strategic role of education in promoting sustainable and inclusive development and innovation and encouraging the mobility of students, teachers, researchers and ideas. A special seminar was held on an ASEM Cooperation Centre on Science, Technology and Innovation in Beijing.

The way ahead

As highlighted above, discussions on promoting various facets of connectivity within ASEM have already begun, with conferences held this year in Riga (transport and education), Chongqing (industrial connectivity) and Seoul (inter-modal transport). A conference on tourism (people-to-people connectivity) will be held in Tokyo in September. The Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF) is actively engaged in promoting people-to-people networks in an array of sectors. Connectivity is also expected to be top of the agenda at the Ulaanbaatar ASEM summit in July next year.

The focus on connectivity is no surprise. ASEM is after all about creating new connections and consolidating existing ones between Asia and Europe. As ASEM seeks renewed relevance as a forum for informal dialogue in an ever-changing world, enhanced communication and exchanges between Asia and Europe become even more important. A focus on connectivity will help further boost Asia-Europe trade and investments but also link-up people, institutions and ideas. It also means an exchange of good practice on issues of governance, transparency, sustainability and trade facilitation.

ASEM at twenty can become more exciting, relevant and credible. A focus on connectivity will not automatically transform ASEM into a more dynamic and vibrant forum, but it will contribute to giving ASEM a sharper focus, encourage the forum's credentials as an incubator of new ideas and through the creation of a "connectivity forum" also bring together policymakers, businesses, media and civil society organisations to discuss relevant ideas. Crucially, it will meet at least some of the demands by ASEM participants for more tangible cooperation and greater visibility.



The European Union plays an important role in international affairs through diplomacy, trade, development aid and working with global organisations.

The Lisbon Treaty (2009) led to major developments in the area of external action, with the creation of the post of High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, and the establishment of the EU's diplomatic arm, the European External Action Service (EEAS), which was formally launched on 1 January 2011.

The High Representative – a post currently held by Federica Mogherini – exercises, in foreign affairs, the functions previously held by the six-monthly rotating Presidency, the High Representative for Common Foreign and Security Policy and the European Commissioner for External Relations.

According to her mandate, the High Representative:

- conducts the Union's common foreign and security policy;
- contributes by her proposals to the development of that policy, which she carries out as mandated by the Council, and ensures implementation of the decisions adopted;
- presides over the Foreign Affairs Council of Ministers;
- is one of the Vice-Presidents of the Commission and thus ensures the consistency of the Union's external action.
- represents the Union for matters relating to the common foreign and security policy, conducts political dialogue with third parties on the Union's behalf and expresses the Union's position in international fora.
- exercises authority over the European External Action Service and over EU delegations in third countries and at international organisations.

The EEAS is the European Union's diplomatic corps. The EEAS assists the High Representative in ensuring the consistency and coordination of the Union's external action as well as by preparing policy proposals and implementing them after their approval by the Council. It also assists the President of the European Council and the President as well as the Members of the Commission in their respective functions in the area of external relations and ensures close cooperation with the Member States. The network of EU delegations around the world is part of the EEAS structure.

In the ASEM context, the External Action Service, on behalf of the EU, is the only permanent coordinator, exercising the role of a coordinator along with the country exercising the EU Presidency and the two coordinators representing the ASEAN and non-ASEAN groups on the Asian side.





CONFERENCE REPORT

ASEM AT TWENTY: THE CHALLENGE OF CONNECTIVITY

Work on enhancing Asia-Europe connectivity will give added momentum to the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) in the run-up to the forum's 20th anniversary celebrations in Mongolia in July 2016, according to a Friends of Europe conference on 9th September. Organised in cooperation with the European External Action Service (EEAS), the conference focused on ways of injecting new dynamism into Asia-Europe relations through a greater emphasis on building stronger transport, digital and people-to-people connections.

"I think we have a fairly strong wind in our sails," said [Andrejs Pildegovičs](#), Latvian State Secretary for Foreign Affairs. "The wind is there because of the understanding that connectivity is the answer. If you avoid globalisation, it doesn't crush you but leaves you out – and the same goes for connectivity."

"I think we have a fairly strong wind in our sails"



▲
[Andrejs Pildegovičs](#), Latvian State Secretary for Foreign Affairs

ASEM's 20th anniversary summit is expected to give a new lease of life to ASEM, which was launched as an informal dialogue between Europe and Asia. The forum has often been criticised for too much conversation and too little action. With the focus now switching to more concrete initiatives, connectivity – from transport to educational exchange – has emerged as an important point. ASEM could soon set up a working group on connectivity to discuss and identify concrete proposals to enhance Asia-Europe connections. “The first step in real actions is to set up a working group on connectivity,” said [Zhang Xiaokang](#), Ambassador and ASEM Senior Official at the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs. “That would be the first time to connect all the stakeholders together so they can engage in a comprehensive and systematic manner. In this way, the roles of the stakeholders can be brought into full play.”

ASEM has been criticised for having become more of a bureaucratic exercise, lacking “deliverables” and losing its initial lustre. Giving ASEM more visibility on a crowded global stage is also a concern.

“The first step in real actions is to set up
a working group on connectivity”



▲
Zhang Xiaokang, Ambassador and ASEM Senior Official
at the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs

ASEM's informality is an asset

But many argue that there's a case to be made for ASEM's loose structure, as it provides a low-pressure and informal environment for exchange. This has been a factor in the meeting's constant enlargement, said [Ugo Astuto](#), Acting Managing Director for Asia and the Pacific, European External Action Service (EEAS) and EU ASEM Senior Official. It now has 30 European and 21 Asian country members, plus the European Union and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

"I think we should have a look at the assets, such as the competitive advantage that ASEM has acquired in the past 20 years or so," he said. "If I may try to identify this as a comparative advantage, I think the fact of being such an informal, agile framework has worked. ASEM has proved to be a facilitator, an incubator of ideas, a place where leaders, ministers and officials can meet and exchange ideas in a pretty informal way and then bring those ideas elsewhere. So it has acted as disseminator of ideas."

"I think the fact of being such an informal, agile framework has worked."



[Ugo Astuto](#), Acting Managing Director for Asia and the Pacific, European External Action Service (EEAS) and EU ASEM Senior Official

That was an unusual idea 20 years ago, and it is proving its worth now, he said. "Can we do better? Well, I am sure, I am sure we can. But I think it's very effective having a constant dialogue, and open conversation is positive. It is not something one should understate."

A new “Ulaanbaatar Declaration”

Next year's meeting will provide an opportunity to underline a new direction for ASEM. At its 10th anniversary in 2006, the meeting issued the Helsinki Declaration on its future. The July 2016 meeting in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, could produce something similar, said [Orgil Luvsantseren](#), Ambassador and ASEM Senior Official at the Mongolian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. “We are proposing to issue a document similar to the Helsinki Declaration,” he said. “Celebration activities will increase public awareness of ASEM in individual countries.”

Looking for a focus point, ASEM leaders decided at their last meeting – in October 2014 in Milan – to work in smaller groups, or clusters, on 16 “tangible cooperation areas” including disaster management, renewable energy and higher education.

Meanwhile, discussions on connectivity are also picking up pace. Digital and transport connections are an ongoing part of the EU single market project. ASEAN has its Connectivity Masterplan and China has come up with its ambitious “One Belt, One Road” initiative – a framework for connectivity and cooperation, which consists of a land-based “Silk Road Economic Belt” and a sea-based “Maritime Silk Road”. The EU and China, meanwhile, have launched their joint “Connectivity Platform”.

“We are proposing to issue a document similar to the Helsinki Declaration. Celebration activities will increase public awareness of ASEM in individual countries.”



Orgil Luvsantseren, Ambassador and ASEM Senior Official at the Mongolian Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Connectivity is being discussed in many national and international fora. “What we believe ASEM can do is bring all of these different conversations into one coherent, consistent whole,” said [Shada Islam](#), Director of Policy at Friends of Europe and moderator of the event. “We think connectivity offers the way forward. It will not automatically transform ASEM and make it more vibrant or more dynamic. But it will sharpen ASEM’s focus and enhance its credentials as an incubator of new ideas. This is especially important as we talk about the future, and it meets some of the demands we have had throughout these years for a more tangible and visible ASEM.”



“Connectivity offers the way forward. It will not automatically transform ASEM and make it more vibrant or more dynamic. But it will sharpen ASEM’s focus and enhance its credentials as an incubator of new ideas. ”

[Shada Islam](#), Director of Policy at Friends of Europe

From Milan to Riga to Chongqing

After the ASEM summit in Milan, which highlighted the importance of connectivity in Asia-Europe relations, ASEM Transport Ministers met on 30th April in Riga, during the Latvian Presidency of the European Union. They emphasised the need to expand transport networks in order to accommodate the growing trade flows between Asia and Europe, in particular trans-Eurasian overland transport as an alternative to ocean routes. Railway transport was highlighted as an environmentally friendly mode of transport, and the ministers stressed new rail-based supply chains and intermodal logistics.

ASEM Education Ministers also met in Riga and agreed to increase result-oriented cooperation activities in quality assurance and recognition; engaging business and industry in education; balanced mobility; lifelong learning in technical and vocational education and training.

In May, China hosted the ASEM Industry Dialogue on Connectivity in Chongqing, a city which has grown into a major manufacturing centre and transportation hub. The dialogue brought together participants from government, academia and business to discuss how to advance connectivity, the opportunities and challenges it presents, and ways to promote and finance connectivity initiatives and projects.

The resulting “Chongqing Initiative” called for enhanced Asia-Europe infrastructure connectivity; an open trade and investment regime between Asia and Europe; the promotion of open financial markets and innovative investment and financing mechanisms; an upgrade to cooperation in industry, value and innovation chains; deeper people-to-people contacts; and improved policy exchanges and coordination mechanisms between Asia and Europe.



By focusing on connectivity, ASEM will fill a gap, said [Marc Ungeheuer](#), Secretary General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Luxembourg, which currently holds the EU presidency. “It has been said that connectivity has already existed for a long time, but the concept has been in regional fora, such as within the EU and ASEAN,” he said. “It was actually only two years ago with the Chinese ‘One Belt, One Road’ initiative that we began to speak about it more internationally and more between Asia and Europe. So I think ASEM could be the institutional home of connectivity, because there is not yet any other international institutional home.”

The meetings on connectivity since Milan have produced progress, he said. Now it is the turn of the Luxembourg EU presidency to continue this. “What we want to do now in Luxembourg, is to prepare further discussions on connectivity, so that we can take some really concrete steps in Ulaanbaatar when we decide the future of ASEM.”

“ASEM could be the institutional home of connectivity, because there is not yet any other international institutional home.”



Marc Ungeheuer, Secretary General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Luxembourg

Planes and ships

For Europeans, better connections with Asia present an opportunity to tap into high-growth economies. “To be honest, there is a relatively low base to build on,” said [Henrik Hololei](#), European Commission Deputy Secretary-General and incoming Director-General for Mobility and Transport (DG MOVE). “Europe does not have a significant business or political presence in Asia, particularly Southeast Asia. I think we can do much more. When you talk to people, it’s clear that one of the ways to reach out and to build a stronger partnership is particularly through connectivity.”

“Europe does not have a significant business or political presence in Asia, particularly Southeast Asia. I think we can do much more.”



Henrik Hololei, European Commission Deputy Secretary-General and incoming Director-General for Mobility and Transport (DG MOVE)

One sector with great potential is aviation, he said. The Asia-Pacific region is by far the fastest growing in the world, and will more than triple its present number of passengers and flights over the next 15 years. “So Europe has to tap into this if it wants to be in the real growth markets,” he said. “We have competitive airlines but we are not really tapping into the markets where the growth will be generated in the years to come. That’s absolutely essential in order to maintain our position globally.”

One area that's already booming in Europe is maritime trade. The European Union was built on intra-European trade, and external trade was less than half the total as recently as 2008. Now the proportion is more than 65%, and it will continue to rise, said [Paolo Costa](#), President of the Venice Port Authority. By 2030, the pressure on European ports will have more than tripled.

"The growth in maritime traffic is coming from trade with Asia," he said. Because the Suez Canal can handle bigger ships than the Panama, "people are only deploying these so-called mega ships on the connection between Europe and Asia." The future will see a greater variety of routes being tried, including the Arctic Ocean and the Black Sea.



"The growth in maritime traffic is coming from trade with Asia."

Paolo Costa,
President of the Venice Port Authority

Focus on railways

DB Schenker began rail freight services between China and Germany in 2008, and has been running regular weekly train services since 2011. Most customers are from the automotive and electronics industries. Some are so-called "company trains", which are booked by a single customer. These include an electronics company that produces in Chongqing and exports to Europe, and an automaker that exports components from Leipzig to its plant in Shenyang.

"This year, we will have approximately 500 trains from the Chinese mainland into Europe, and approximately 100 trains from Europe eastbound going to China," said [Uwe Leuschner](#), Vice President for Business Development, East Region at DB Schenker Rail. "Over the last few years, we have had growth every year of approximately 25% to 30%. That means this product is coming on."

The company's two routes are long and arduous. The northern one uses the Trans-Siberian Railway and runs to the north of Mongolia. The southern one runs through Kazakhstan, Belarus and Russia. It normally takes trains between 16 and 19 days to make the trip of over 10,000 kilometres. Trains cross different climate zones and have to change rail gauge twice during the journey – China uses the same gauge as Europe, but Belarus, Russia, Mongolia and Kazakhstan use a broader gauge. Cranes transfer the containers to carrier cars with the correct gauge.

“This product is only possible through the cooperation of a lot of different people, different cultures and different structures,” said Leuschner. “You have to go across borders; you have to go across mountains of 4,000 metres. In winter, it is sometimes minus 40 or 45 degrees. You have to go across borders with customs clearance processes, and different understandings of values. And you have to bring people together. Our slogan is that we are closing the distance. But that also includes communication and bringing together people – procedures, technologies, cultures and ideas for new innovations.”

“Our slogan is that we are closing the distance. But that also includes communication and bringing together people – procedures, technologies, cultures and ideas for new innovations.”



Uwe Leuschner, Vice President for Business Development, East Region at DB Schenker Rail

Apart from the speed of rail freight compared to sea, it produces less carbon dioxide, something that also attracts customers. That makes it a competitor for both air and sea transport. Moreover, there is an increasing range of ways to use rail connections. “We have not just developed products for electronics producers, which is quite a valuable cargo,” said Leuschner, “we have also just developed products for small and mid-sized companies and for logistics between Asia and Europe. It is a learning process in our company. We are very well connected; we have a lot of meetings and it takes a lot of time. If it were easy, everybody would do it.”

Rail services could be even faster, but that will require overcoming non-physical obstacles too, said [Miodrag Pesut](#), Chief of the Transport Facilitation and Economics Section in the Sustainable Transport Division of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE). If trains didn’t have to change railway gauge en route from China to Europe, a 19-day journey could probably be shortened to just 14.



From left to right: Shada Islam, Friends of Europe; Uwe Leuschner, DB Schenker Rail; Zhang Xiaokang, Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs; Andrejs Pildegovičs, Latvian Ministry of Foreign Affairs; Henrik Hololei, Mobility and Transport (DG MOVE); Paolo Costa, Venice Port Authority; Miodrag Pesut, United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE)

Beware of borders

Delays due to customs and border controls that have not been harmonised could be reduced by using UN conventions. For example, the TIR (Transports Internationaux Routiers) Convention allows the movement of goods in sealed vehicles or containers between customs offices in different countries without extensive checks at intermediate borders, while still providing customs authorities the needed security and guarantees. The convention has 69 contracting parties after Pakistan joined in July, and China is said to be about to announce its accession. “These are useful tools, which can improve connectivity, and it’s up to countries to use them,” said Pesut. “When it comes to removing non-physical barriers, there are things that could be improved even with smaller investments – low-hanging fruit.”

“When it comes to removing non-physical barriers, there are things that could be improved even with smaller investments – low-hanging fruit.”



Miodrag Pesut, Chief of the Transport Facilitation and Economics Section in the Sustainable Transport Division of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE)

Pilot projects a few years ago measured the border stopping times for container block trains coming from Asia and going through to eastern Europe. They varied from 45 minutes to six, eight or even 12 hours, said Pesut. “There are calculations of how much each hour of stopping the whole train costs, and they are huge,” he said. “Technically, the problem of different gauges can easily be solved and solutions exist already. But other controls imposed by or on railways are still persistent. Railways are very old systems, and they change very slowly.”

At the Mongolian border, a train can sometimes be allowed to pass through smoothly, but on another day may find itself stopped for 48 hours without any explanation, said Hololei. For different reasons, a number of the countries that are on the way have not been interested in boosting the efficiency of border crossings, he said. “Until that happens, we are going to have unnecessary delays and we are not going to have the fastest route. The most significant bottleneck is related to border crossings and customs procedures. That is very much up to the political will of the countries in question. It is not so much a technical issue.”

Regulatory connectivity

One key to better links between Europe and Asia is, therefore, regulatory connectivity. Connectivity is normally seen in terms of physical connections, many of which might be best built by the private sector. But these require a framework to work effectively, said [Anita Prakash](#), Director General of Policy Relations at the Economic Research Institute for ASEAN and East Asia (ERIA). “There is no connectivity which is completely free,” she said. “You have to have some regulations in place which guide connectivities. Governments have to facilitate connectivity and it is for this that you have regulations in place.”

“There is no connectivity which is completely free. You have to have some regulations in place which guide connectivities.”



Anita Prakash, Director General of Policy Relations at the Economic Research Institute for ASEAN and East Asia (ERIA)

Problems, she said, arrive when there is asymmetrical regulation instead of coherent regulations between different countries and regions. “When we say that one must have a seamless movement of people or movement of capital or investment or even businesses, then what we mean is that you put your regulations under review,” said Prakash. “You put your regulations under the scanner. You look at the validity, and find there are some regulations that have outlived their validity – and you guillotine some of them.”

Relieving yourself of unnecessary regulatory burdens is called RURB in Indonesia. “That is a very important part of this whole exercise, which requires institutionalised cooperation and commitment,” she said. “For that, the end targets must be put in place and thereafter the work begins. That’s how regulatory coherence emerges, and it is a great tool for the seamless movement of people, capital and businesses.”

ASEAN was there first

ASEAN could contribute to Asia-Europe connectivity through its own integration. Plans to turn ASEAN into a single market and production base, where goods, services, investment and skilled labour flow freely as of 1st January 2016, will imply enhanced cooperation in customs and standards, and should help ASEAN to become more competitive and, eventually, more inclusive and equitable. The ASEAN Economic Community’s final pillar aims to develop and adopt a coherent approach towards external economic relations, and to enhance participation in global supply networks. These ambitions are a close match to ASEM’s connectivity goals.

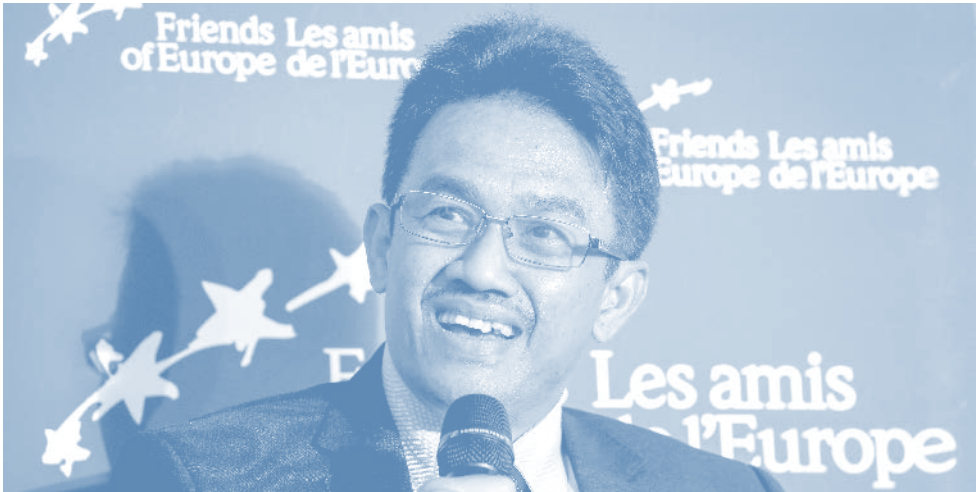
“Most of the success stories of ASEAN have come precisely out of such connectivities,” said Prakash. “The Economic Community is the most visible one to people outside ASEAN. The other community progresses and achievements are more visible inside as of now.”

Regulatory convergence can also play a big role in people-to-people contacts, another big aspect of ASEM’s connectivity goal. For example, ASEAN integration involves countries’ mutual recognition of their professional qualifications; at least seven have been recognised so far, including accountancy and architecture. However, the process is gradual and is unlikely to lead to a mass transfer of skilled labour between countries.

“To say that such exchange of labour would be perceived with negative emotions is not quite true,” said Prakash. “In fact, there is a very positive element prevailing in ASEAN at this time. However, what really needs to be done is more outreach. More education is required about what the ASEAN Community will bring to people.”

To boost links in education, ASEM in 2009 set up a rotating Education Secretariat – first in Germany, and from 2013 in Indonesia. This organises and coordinates ASEM Education activities and meetings between education ministers. “The commitment among ASEM member countries is high,” said [Aris Junaidi](#), Director of ASEM Education Secretariat at the Indonesia Ministry of Education and Culture. “One of the future expectations is that education cooperation between Asia and Europe will be further developed and promoted to enhance the connectivity.”

“The commitment among ASEM member countries is high. One of the future expectations is that education cooperation between Asia and Europe will be further developed and promoted to enhance the connectivity.”



Aris Junaidi, Director of ASEM Education Secretariat at the Indonesia Ministry of Education and Culture

Tourism connects people

Tourism is the source of huge numbers of people-to-people contacts. As well as economic benefits, it generates cultural, social and educational benefits. "Tourism has amazing, intangible benefits on the psyche of the opinion-building class," said Prakash. The contact built by tourism makes people more aware of what's going on in other countries and regions. "So when crisis is happening in Europe, Asia is watching it carefully now. Everybody is concerned as to how Europe is taking care of the refugee problem. We now see it as our problem too, because ultimately we are able to see that it is a human problem, not a European problem. This happens only through people-to-people physical contact and the empathy that breeds."

Last year, according to the World Tourism Organization, more than 1.1 billion people travelled to a foreign country – about one in seven of the world's population. Europe was the destination for 53% of travellers, while about 24% visited Asia, so the two combined were the destination for three-quarters of all international travellers.



From left to right: Yasuhiro Watanabe, J.F. Oberlin University; Anita Prakash, Economic Research Institute for ASEAN and East Asia (ERIA); Ugo Astuto, European External Action Service (EEAS); Orgil Luvsantseren, Mongolian Ministry of Foreign Affairs; Marc Ungeheuer, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Luxembourg; Aris Junaidi, Indonesia Ministry of Education and Culture

Tourism could be further boosted by visa-free arrangements, or otherwise by faster procedures to issue visas. “Movement of people cannot be totally free, but processing can be expedited,” said [Yasuhiro Watanabe](#), Professor of Tourism at the J.F. Oberlin University, Tokyo, Japan. “For instance, the form you had to fill out to get the visa – isn’t that almost the same as the passport form? We can expedite the visa process, which will enhance the volume of international travellers.”

Long-haul low-cost carriers (LCCs) could be another key to greater tourist numbers. “If you live in Europe, LCCs are familiar,” said Watanabe. “But in Asia, especially in Northeast Asia, LCCs are still new, and there are no long-haul LCCs of course due to restrictions. But in order to promote Asia-Europe Tourism, I think long-haul LCC is going to be the key word.”

“Movement of people cannot be totally free, but processing can be expedited.”



Yasuhiro Watanabe, Professor of Tourism at the J.F. Oberlin University, Tokyo, Japan

The 12th ASEM Foreign Ministers’ Meeting will be hosted by Luxembourg on 5-6 November and will be chaired by Federica Mogherini, the EU’s foreign affairs chief. This will be attended by the largest collection of foreign ministers outside the UN General Assembly – 30 European and 21 Asian. “I think that’s a good, graphic example of why ASEM is relevant as a marketplace of ideas,” said Astuto. “As we all know, when plants need to be nurtured, they also need some open air, and that they cannot be too constrained. That’s why ASEM has worked so far, and it has a potential to continue working.”

“I would prefer to see ASEM as a laboratory for ideas, which can then be implemented where you already have mechanisms in place,” he said. “Regulatory reforms, for instance; that is not something you do in ASEM. I think ASEM has been performing well, and I think we have to build on its strengths rather than stray into fields where we have other institutions already at play.”

Looking ahead, conference panellists agreed that ASEM's 20th anniversary celebrations in Mongolia should go hand in hand with a determination to give new impetus and momentum to the Asia-Europe partnership. The future “Ulaanbataar Declaration” should therefore chart a new post-2016 course for ASEM, updating the partnership so it better reflects Asia-Europe priorities in a complex, interdependent and globalised world.



ANNEX I – Programme

SESSION I

Transport and infrastructure connectivity

ASEM is about connecting countries, regions and people. The significance of Asia-Europe infrastructure connectivity was underscored by the 2014 ASEM summit in Milan with leaders urging the establishment of an integrated, sustainable, secure, efficient and convenient air, maritime and land transportation system, including intermodal solutions, in and between Asia and Europe. Is connectivity a credible recipe for reinforcing and reviving ASEM? What are the different projects and ideas which should get special attention when discussing Asian-European connectivity? Can Asia and Europe work together on digital connectivity? What lessons can be shared from the EU's experience in establishing a single market, building transport networks and connecting member states and regions as well as the Master Plan on ASEAN Connectivity ASEAN's Master plan on connectivity? What is the role of the private sector in helping to connect ASEM?

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President of the Venice Port Authority

Henrik Hololei

European Commission Deputy Secretary-General and incoming Director General for Mobility and Transport (DG MOVE)

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Andrejs Pildegovičs

Latvian State Secretary for Foreign Affairs

Xiaokang Zhang

Ambassador and ASEM Senior Official at the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Moderated by **Shada Islam**, Director of Policy at Friends of Europe

SESSION II

Connecting people, institutions and ideas

Connectivity is an important ASEM buzzword but it is not just about transport and infrastructure links – it's also about establishing strong networks between institutions and in areas such as education, science and technology as well as through trade, business, security and culture. ASEM leaders last year underlined the contribution increased ties could make to economic prosperity and sustainable development and to promoting free and seamless movement of people, trade, investment, energy, information, knowledge and ideas and greater institutional linkages. What is being done to encourage institutional and people-to-people connectivity in ASEM? What are the results of recent ASEM meetings on education in terms of enhancing connectivity? Is ASEM doing enough to involve all stakeholders, including industry and the think-tank and academic community in connectivity initiatives? What is the special role of youth and women in the drive to connect Asia and Europe?

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Andrejs Pildegovičs

Latvian State Secretary for Foreign Affairs

Yasuhiro Watanabe

Professor of Tourism at the J.F. Oberlin University in Tokyo

Moderated by **Shada Islam**, Director of Policy at Friends of Europe

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