



ASEM OUTLOOK WORKSHOP

15-16 April 2010, Brussels

Background

Thirteen years after the launch of the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) and with the recent addition of Russia and Australia, the informal dialogue process now involves 45 countries that represent more than half the world's GDP and two regional institutions, the European Commission and the ASEAN Secretariat. More countries may be lining up. Political interest to join the ASEM process must be seen as an indication of ASEM's success, but ASEM's enlarged – and growing – constituency also means that it is facing a wider range of issues in a world of increasing complexity. To demonstrate the strategic value of informal dialogue and deliver the constructive solutions promised at its conception, the ASEM process needs, more than ever, to adapt and improve its working methods and efficiency.

The form and substance of the ASEM process are shaped by the rotating hosts of its large number of official dialogues. These go beyond pure diplomacy and entail sometimes very concrete work on an array of issues from environment to counter-terrorism. These activities are led by the biennial Summits and by the Foreign Ministers' Meetings that take place in between. In practice, ASEM is coordinated by two European and two Asian coordinators. Most rotate, either on a preset order (the Presidency of the European Union) or following ad hoc arrangements (the ASEAN and NESA coordinators). Given the changeability of this arrangement as well as the 'light' nature of the present coordination function, the need for a clearer system, providing for more transparent orientations and stronger institutional support, appears to be increasingly recognised amongst ASEM partners. There are a number of ways to address this issue, ranging from more stringent working methods to better articulated coordination disciplines. In the past, it has even been proposed to establish a secretariat but an important objection has prevailed up to now. It could limit the highly valued informality of the ASEM process, a unique function that has allowed countries to flexibly articulate and promote their views on a multilateral and inter-regional platform.

Attempts to improve ASEM's working mechanisms without venturing into the risks of institutionalisation have been put in motion in recent years. The ASEM Virtual Secretariat (AVS) launched in 2006 to improve internal communications between the ASEM partners, played a transitional role. It is now coming to an end, given the limitations of a virtual system. A document archive and an external communications function continue to be well served by the ASEM Infoboard hosted by the Asia-Europe Foundation. In terms of leadership, the recently introduced Issue-Based Leadership (IBL) mechanism has produced good results so far and its further development could be assessed. Overall, ASEM can learn from these experiences, which can feed a fresh examination of ASEM's working methods and produce creative and feasible solutions.

Objectives

In support of the ASEM 8 Summit hosted by Belgium, this workshop will devote attention to issues of ASEM's functionality and efficiency.

Specifically, the workshop aims to:

- Identify and describe working methods, procedures and mechanisms that would allow the 45 ASEM partners to operate more smoothly and effectively. Proposals produced by the workshop will be submitted as input to ASEM officials;
- Forecast emergent issues to define a future ASEM dialogue agenda

Key Questions

The 1.5-day workshop will comprise three sessions. Core questions to be considered are:

- What are the existing practices of the Asia-Europe Meeting and the challenges faced vis-à-vis its
 - *Functionality and coordination*
 - *Public impact and visibility*
 - *Organisation of and continuity between Summits and Ministerials*
 - *Agenda definition and identity formation vis-à-vis other international fora?*
- What mechanisms are successfully applied in forums comparable to ASEM, and could be introduced to improve ASEM's working methods?
- What priority areas are likely to dominate the global agenda in the short, medium & long-terms, and should therefore be prioritised by ASEM?

Target Groups

Participation in this Workshop is limited to a select group of 20 experts from the "ASEM community", including the Summit host and ASEM senior officials, the Asia-Europe People's and Business Forums (AEPF and AEBF), the Asia-Europe Parliamentary Partnership (ASEP), and Asia-Europe relations experts. The workshop will also engage experts of other international forums comparable to ASEM.

About the Organisers

The **Asia-Europe Foundation** promotes greater mutual understanding between Asia and Europe through intellectual, cultural and people-to-people exchanges. Through ASEF, civil society concerns are included as a vital component of deliberations of the Asia-Europe Meeting. ASEF was established in February 1997 by the participating governments of ASEM. Since then, ASEF has implemented over 350 projects, engaging over 15,000 direct participants as well as reaching out to a much wider audience in Asia and Europe. www.asef.org

The **Konrad-Adenauer Stiftung** (KAS) is a political foundation of the Federal Republic of Germany. Through its international activities and projects it promotes democracy and the respect of Human Rights, the rule of law and a social market economy, a peaceful resolution of conflicts and the exchange between cultures and religions. Its regional office in Singapore organises and sponsors international conferences and seminars around the ASEAN+3 Region and promotes the strengthening of the relations between Asia and Europe. The European Office in Brussels provides knowledge on European policy and networks with institutions in- and outside the EU. www.kas.de

The **Europe-Asia Policy Forum** (EUforAsia) has been set up to improve Europe's understanding of Asia to contribute to the growing rapport between the two regions. It is based on an extensive network of institutes, universities and think tanks in the European Union and Asia. Supported by the European Commission, EUforAsia will address policy issues of concern both to the EU and to Asia for a three-year period, from 2009 to 2011. EUforAsia is managed by a consortium of four partners, the Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF), the Singapore Institute of International Affairs (SIIA), the International Institute for Asian Studies (IIAS), and the European Policy Centre. The EUforAsia office has been set up in Brussels.

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