

# Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM): Speech by the High Representative/Vice-President Josep Borrell at the High-Level Policy Dialogue

Brussels, 22/06/2021 - 15:14

Your Excellences, Ladies and Gentlemen, colleagues,

Thank you for your invitation for me to speak at this High-Level Policy Dialogue Meeting to mark the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Asia Europe Meeting and to discuss common priorities for the future.

First of all, I want to wish everyone well in Vietnam at a time that COVID-19 is causing grave challenges for us all.

The effects of the pandemic are shaping the political agenda and will do so also for ASEM for years to come. How to combat the pandemic was the subject of an important ASEM regional coordinators statement last September. The EU favours vaccine multilateralism and believes that COVAX is the best way to ensure access to vaccines by low and middle-income partner countries in this region.

The EU has demonstrated its credentials by supporting our global partners with a €40.5 billion “Team Europe” package, bringing EU Institutions and member states together. The EU is also one of the largest contributors to COVAX with over €3.2 billion.

In addition, we are the world’s largest exporter of vaccines, with more than 300 million doses so far to 47 countries. We have exported around half of our production. All of us are in solidarity with each other to face this dire challenge.

Dear colleagues, for more than 25 years, ASEM has been the most comprehensive partnership between Asia and Europe. Bringing together 53 partners, ASEM as a platform for cooperation has allowed us to address some of the big challenges of a fast-changing world. From connectivity, to trade & investment, and climate change, to broader security challenges such as counterterrorism, migration, maritime and cyber security.

In many respects, recent developments in the international landscape have increased the value of ASEM as a key building block for an open, cooperative and rules-based international system.

Europe and Asia have been and remain inter-dependent of each other’s economic success. Europe is the biggest investor and development assistance provider for most Asian partners, and one of its most important trading partners. Asia is equally important for Europe as the second largest destination for EU exports; the fastest

growing middle class; a technology hotspot; and home to four out of the top ten EU trading partners.

In the ASEM context, the EU will therefore continue to work with Asian partners to put the global socio-economic recovery on a sustainable and inclusive footing, while reducing global inequalities and combating the climate crisis. This will be the central theme for our Leaders at the next ASEM summit in November in Cambodia. We need to build back our world better and greener, with a recovery that benefits all our peoples.

In the very near future, we will need to work together to secure ambitious climate neutrality commitments ahead of COP26 in Glasgow. Plus an ambitious global biodiversity framework ahead of the Convention on Biological Diversity (COP 15).

Dear colleagues, the economic growth of the Asian region rests on openness, on stable and shared rules, and shared security. With 40% of world maritime trade passing through the Malacca Straits and 30% through the South China Sea, stability in the region is a shared concern for all partners.

And while the Asian region represents the future, insecurity and tensions are rising. Democracy and fundamental freedoms are under attack, as we have seen most recently in Myanmar. Maritime and land disputes, internal crises and conflicts and the geo-political competition are intensifying.

The EU will continue to be a reliable and predictable partner. We remain committed to help ensure that the regional order, maritime trade and supply chains stay free and open. We must ensure full compliance with international law, in particular the *UN Convention on the Law of the Seas*.

In conclusion, the last 25 years ASEM has proven that Europe and Asia are natural partners to face global challenges. I hope we will leave this meeting with a renewed commitment to strengthen our partnership further. And I look forward to a successful ASEM13 Summit in Phnom Penh this November.

Thank you for your attention.