Fortifying Eurasian security
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Barry Buzan, a professor at London School of Economics and Political Science, argued in his article "New Patterns of Global Security in the 21st Century" that the end of the Cold War and globalization broadened the nature of security.

Buzan theorized that political, economic, societal and environmental dimensions, which are often beyond the conventional military concerns in the past, have widened global security concerns.

Against this new backdrop, do Asia and Europe share common security threats? What role can the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) play in enhancing co-operation on security?

Experts and scholars attending the Asia-Europe Dialogue on Security, held in Beijing from April 21-23, gave a positive answer.

As interdependence grows between East Asia and the European Union, the two regions have found more and more shared security concerns, including arms control and disarmament, proliferation of weapons of massive destruction and disposal of nuclear weapons and wastes.

In addition, other security issues like respect for the environment, prevention of drug trafficking, smuggling, piracy, and preventing the spread of infectious diseases like AIDS also form part of a long list of common concerns for the two regions to strengthen co-operation.

Unlike many traditional security issues, unconventional security problems have their roots in the social, economic, and cultural fabric of different countries. Threats of unconventional security are rarely confined to a single state or region. They instead often influence the living and developmental environment of the entire global community.

For instance, in the aftermath of the September 11, 2001 attacks in New York and Washington, terrorism has become a daunting threat worldwide and has become interwoven with many conventional security issues.

As a result, according to Professor Xu Jian, vice-president of China Institute of International Studies, the line between conventional and unconventional security is "becoming more blurred and the transformation of one type of security into the other is more likely."

Neither Asia nor Europe is exception in coping with the world-wide threat of terrorism.

The interplay of unconventional and conventional security issues is imbuing and changing the mission and modes of international security co-operation, and has raised new demands for international co-operation.

As Xu argued, international security co-operation first calls for new security concepts and emphasis on common security.
Second, co-operative security on the basis of common security should be promoted and developed.

Third, the management of many problems in international security, especially in the field of unconventional security should take into consideration not only their superficial symptoms but also their root causes.

Fourth, it is important for international security co-operation to strengthen the concept of comprehensive security in an attempt to thwart mutual transformation of security issues of different types.

To deal with the transforming security situation, different countries and regions are actively seeking new approaches, which may differ greatly from each other.

However, when it comes to sharing common interests in maintaining world and regional peace and stability, strengthening dialogue and cohesion between Asia and Europe on security co-operation is pressing.

Given the two continents' economic clout and collective population, their concerted stance on such issues will inevitably have far-reaching impact on the rest of the world.

In this sense, as the key body for Euro-Asian relations, the ASEM process of multi-dimensional dialogue, according to Bertrand Fort, director of Intellectual Exchange of Asia-Europe Foundation, plays a "prominent role" in addressing issues of transnational security in both regions.

ASEM, an intergovernmental forum created in 1996, is an informal process of dialogue and co-operation bringing together the 15 EU member states and the European Commission with 10 Asian countries - Brunei, China, Indonesia, Japan, the Republic of Korea (ROK), Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam.

Addressing political, economic and cultural issues, the ASEM dialogue is designed to foster contacts between Asia and Europe by engaging them on a regular basis and to narrow existing cultural distances by deepening cultural and intellectual exchanges between the two regions.

The first ASEM Summit was held in Bangkok in March 1996, giving rise to an ongoing process including Summit-level meetings every second year, Ministerial-level meetings in the intervening years, plus a range of meetings and activities at the working level.

Since ASEM offers a forum for dialogue in political, economic and cultural/intellectual areas, it can enhance the exchange of views on related issues in an informal way, which is conducive to building confidence and reaching concession between the two regions in their negotiations.

Moreover, bringing together the heads of state or government ministers, various-level officials and experts from 10 Asian countries and the European Union, ASEM has undeniably encouraged a process of socialization of governmental and non-governmental elites of its member countries and a more positive attitude towards multilateralism.

Since the Asian participants in ASEM have decided to consult each other prior to meetings and entrust one Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) member country with the role of co-ordinating the process, the ASEM process has helped promote contact within Asia.

In this way, as Bertrand Fort pointed out, ASEM has played the role of catalyst in order to hearten Asians to express openly and harmonize their positions, thereby stimulating "a new mechanism of inter-Asia consultations and co-operation which did not previously exist between ASEAN states and the "Big 3," namely, China, Japan and the Republic of Korea.

Deciding to address security issues through its political pillar, ASEM process has successfully opened up a security dialogue between Asia and Europe by including more non-state actions when dealing with comprehensive security issues.
Concrete co-operations between ASEM countries have resulted from such dialogue efforts, as Bertrand Fort pointed out. "Various security-related initiatives have been carried out under the ASEM framework with regard to organized crime," though "security issues are only dealt within the context of informal consultation, focusing on issues of common interests and aimed at gradually building consensus."

With its achievements at the recent summit, ASEM has laid down a cornerstone and shown that a positive future exists for enhancing security co-operation between Asia and Europe.

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