

4th Connecting Civil Societies of Asia and Europe Conference: Changing Challenges, New Ideas

1-3 October 2010, Brussels (Belgium)
An official side-event of the ASEM 8 Summit

Eight Points for ASEM 8

Belgian Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Steven Vanackere opened the 4th Connecting Civil Societies Conference to an audience of more than 150 leading representatives from diverse sectors in ASEM countries. The Asia-Europe Foundation and the Europe-Asia Policy Forum organised the event in cooperation with 15 Asian and European institutions across a wide field of expertise. The conference also featured the 5th Asia-Europe Editors' Roundtable, which brought 17 eminent editors and commentators to examine recent trends in global governance.*

I. Advance Inter-regionalism and Regional Integration

Asia and Europe need more knowledge about each other and about their inter-regional relations. ASEM should therefore mobilise civil society organisations, higher education institutions and think-tanks in order to facilitate the creation of an ASEM knowledge community that enhances mutual understanding. Three concrete avenues for this are proposed:

- ASEM should create more space for mutual learning by facilitating civil society exchanges between Europe and Asia and by increasing the civil society participation to ASEM processes.
- ASEM should put Higher Education and Research cooperation as one of its top priorities and take measures to stimulate long-term research cooperation between young researchers on topics of common interest.
- ASEM should contribute to strengthen the capacity of academic research institutes and think-tanks in Europe and Asia to understand each other's societies by facilitating exchanges, mobility and collaboration, as well as by facilitating the set-up of an ASEM network of think tanks.

II. Mobilise Resources for Higher Education

- Higher education is a public good and a fundamental element of economic, social and cultural development. Governments need to provide continued support to ensure continuity, quality, diversity, equity and access.
- Governments need to facilitate an effective and efficient degree of autonomy in higher education institutions. Higher education institutions should actively involve other stakeholders, including students, in the management of their resources, in defining strategic priorities and in evaluating outcomes.

* The 4th Connecting Civil Societies Conference was jointly organised by the Asia-Europe Foundation and the Europe-Asia Policy Forum consortium: the European Policy Centre (EPC), the International Institute for Asian Studies (IIAS) and the Singapore Institute of International Affairs (SIIA). The content of this Briefing is derived from the workshop discussions and does not reflect the official position of the conference organisers, nor their sponsors.

- Costs and funding models should be defined by the needs and expectations of students as well as employers and the wider society. In the ASEM context, an effort should be made to explore supra-national and cross-regional strategies.

III. Harness Voluntary Service for Lifelong Learning

Living and working in the ASEM area increasingly demands new and more complex skills and competences in personal, social and professional spheres. Therefore, experts on lifelong learning, non-formal education and voluntary service, recommend:

- The development, maintenance and updating of these skills and competences through lifelong learning to build and enhance constructive and closer co-operation in the ASEM region;
- The development of sustainable and participative learning societies by redesigning relations between all forms of education and working activities through lifelong learning;
- Strengthening of civil societies through lifelong learning that encompasses formal, non-formal and informal learning and by recognition of prior learning and voluntary activities.

IV. Build Regional Communities for Post-Conflict Reconciliation

Civil society organisations urge ASEM leaders to identify a common regional vision founded on common goals, affirmed by historical recognition, and supported by trans-regional and multi-stakeholder cooperation. There is a critical and urgent need for Northeast Asia in particular, and East Asia as a whole, to develop a mechanism for, at minimum, dialogue and confidence-building in order to guard against violent conflict. The region remains divided, with the Korean peninsula divide one of the most dangerous flashpoints in the world. There remain many other points of potential conflict, including unresolved territorial disputes linked to natural resources such as those over the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands and the Spratly Islands. ASEM governments are urged to:

- Set up an independent, multi-stakeholder grouping (comprising educators, education ministries, media and NGOs) to address issues of historical recognition based on or connected to existing mechanisms in Northeast Asia and the European Union.
- Strengthen the ASEAN+3 dialogue specifically at an informal working level, for example, amongst mid-level government officials.
- Critically assess the successes and failures of both Asian and European post-war reconciliation experiences, like the European Coal and Steel Commission and Article 9 of the Japanese Constitution, with a view to building strategies for regional stability and trust building.

V. Guarantee the Right to Information

The right of individuals to access information which is held by public authorities is essential for civic engagement, to make governments accountable and ensure sustainable development – including the fight against poverty and corruption. ASEM governments are urged to:

- Recognise and respect the right of the public to seek, receive and impart information by adopting and implementing comprehensive national rights to information legislation based on international standards; and to ensure the fullest transparency and citizen's access to information in all bilateral and multilateral negotiations leading to treaties and agreements.
- Accede to and extend their commitment to international treaties and conventions which advance the right to information, in particular the UNECE Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (Aarhus Convention). Furthermore, they should require that the international institutions (to which they are a party) adopt transparency policies. In particular, they should proactively provide information needed by the public, especially vulnerable groups, to hold these institutions accountable.
- ASEM leaders should enable and encourage civil society initiatives that promote the right to information and facilitate the exchange of experiences and resources across ASEM countries to effectuate this right.

VI. Promote Public Health through "Young" Ideas

- Relevant government ministries, in cooperation with civil society, are called upon to develop and address greater inter-regional mechanisms for sharing knowledge on the development and delivery of school curricula on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) and on healthy lifestyles including nutrition, sports and avoiding drug abuse. Similar financial and policy support can also be extended to informal and non-formal education as well as to strengthen web-based access to youth-friendly health information and services.
- Considering that the current level of engagement of both governmental and non-governmental actors in the promotion of public health for the youth is still insufficient, equal weight must be accorded to the youth sector as a valued partner in policy-making, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of public health programmes for young people in both regions.
- ASEM governments should empower and mobilise young people in public health promotion by strengthening Asian regional youth structures as a partner to their existing European counterparts. Governments, in cooperation with civil society, are called upon to enable capacity development such as inter-regional youth camps and leadership trainings. Particular support to encourage social entrepreneurship is needed. Examples include training young people in social entrepreneurial skills as well as providing incentives to young entrepreneurs active in public health promotion.

VII. Apply the Arts in Sustainable Urban Development

To meet the demands of living well together in the future, the art of "city-making" must embrace ecological growth to mean social, environmental, cultural and economic diversity. Inter-sectoral, transversal and sensitive approaches to urban development are needed, e.g. creating indeterminate common spaces for shared use in cities. Governance must involve transparent forms of dialogue, mutual learning as well as genuine and effective participation. The arts can serve these processes as a dynamic catalyst and generate imagination among all other disciplines. To this end, it is recommended that:

- ASEM governments need to integrate the significant contributions of artwork and art-creating processes in urban development. They are urged to establish an enabling environment for the active involvement of artists and other creative practitioners in urban development policies. In particular, they should create enabling environments for the development of greater numbers of small arts organisations/initiatives. These initiatives must be engaged in participatory and trans-disciplinary processes that respond to the needs of diverse communities.
- ASEM governments should actively consider looking beyond arts education towards a deeper role for art-in-education. This should include artistic ways of learning (such as experiential learning, question-based learning and non-linear problem-solving skills). The arts have a relevant role to play in formal, informal and non-formal education as well as in lifelong learning. Artists and other creative practitioners should be included in consultative bodies on education policies.

VIII. Asia and Europe: Engaging for a Post-Crisis World

The 5th Asia-Europe Editors' Roundtable

The ASEM 8 Summit is occurring at a critical moment of profound global transition. There is an urgent need for Asia and Europe to learn from each other as challenges and risks are increasingly inter-connected across borders as well as across sectors. The issue of global governance reflects the impact of a shift in power from the West to the East. Europe is over-represented in global institutions and growing focus on the legitimacy of institutions has led to a questioning of this over-representation. However, it is difficult to conceive of EU member states willingly giving up global political power. Consequently, a flourishing of ad hoc G20-like institutions (or indeed the entrenchment of the G20) seems more plausible than the adaptation of existing institutions.

- European engagement with Asia therefore needs to recognise widespread Asian distrust of the EU's perceived morally-superior agenda predicated on human rights; this agenda is undermined by, for instance, the treatment of immigrants to the EU. In short, Europe-Asia engagement should focus on institutional processes, issues of governance enabling Asia to learn practical lessons from the EU; projects need to be constructive, and Europe needs to recognise its own limitations.
- More than this, the EU needs vision. A serious intra-EU dialogue on over-representation in global institutions would allow for a more serious, deeper partnership with the rising powers of Asia and a concrete acceptance of the importance of Asia. ASEM Leaders are aware of the real challenges posed by a rising Asia. However, Leaders should also persuade the public that this development provides a good opportunity for both regions to engage each other and to work towards international mechanisms that will facilitate cooperation and minimise friction.

Full information about the conference is available on the ASEF website:

http://asef.org/index.php?option=com_project&task=view&id=630

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