(BEIJING) - During yesterday’s session delegations tried to focus on the future of ASEM. There were many ideas about the way Asia-Europe relations should develop and most of the representatives saw the future in the bright colors even though the obstacles might make the road a bit rocky. But if it all depended on delegates to Model ASEM, the organization would expand to the whole world and have its own university and even airlines. No country would use nuclear plants and people would enjoy peace and prosperity all over the Earth.

At the beginning participants were thinking how to increase the efficiency of Asia-Europe Meeting. One of the obstacles at this field stressed by the delegates is the lack of promotion of ASEM, which makes the forum almost unknown. Many politicians in the ASEM member countries don’t even know they actually take part in the process. Very few of them can name the reasons of existence of such a forum. Because of the lack of knowledge and information about ASEM, it’s not surprising that authorities of member states are not really keen to increase the level of contributions to common budget. What’s more, if politicians are not aware of ASEM activity how can we expect such an awareness from ordinary people, societies of member countries? So, better promotions of ASEM activities should be an objective in the future, and this was emphasized during yesterday’s meetings.

Another interesting issue that was widely discussed was the ASEM’s permanent secretary. Nowadays, the organization has a virtual secretary (since September 2006) which should coordinate the activities realized by ASEM and influence the work of forum by encouraging member countries to even stronger cooperation on various issues. But as one of the delegates noticed the virtual forum is dead (just like its website: the latest news - about environmental ministers’ meeting - are from... April 2007). So, according to many countries creating a real secretary would improve many things. As Singapore delegate stated “ASEM would not develop without a permanent secretary”. Just by having a secretary ASEM would move to another level of cooperation.

But, as for many representatives setting up a secretary is just another step that has to be made to prevent the whole forum from collapse, others called it a nail to ASEM’s coffin. First of all, because of beurocracy, which grows in every institution all over the world and would most likely spread in ASEM as well. Second of all, if ASEM had its own permanent secretary it would have lost its unique asset as an open forum for member countries’ leaders. Now politicians come to Asia-Europe Meetings to have a debate with partners from other countries, they come to exchange the views, very often in a rather informal atmosphere, off the record, without the pressure of an agreement that has to be signed. Instead of setting up the secretary an to save all the good things about ASEM few delegates proposed having meetings of leaders from member countries more often than once every two year. This would allow leaders to have more and better discussions on current issues without the necessity of having formal frames.

When it comes to role of ASEM in the future, delegates came up with very different approaches. Some of the participants stressed the importance of the forum as a bridge that link and bring closer together countries from Europe and Asia. Thanks to such cooperation and exchange of ideas developing states for instance may follow the path of their developed partners, democratic countries may influence those which are non-democratic, people from one place can...
The Future of ASEM: Bridge over Troubled Water

inspire people from other places etc. So, ASEM should be a bridge, or rather a highway between two parts of the same Eurasian continent.

Other interesting idea concerned setting up “Business conference”, which could work similarly to economic pillar but could attract businessmen rather than politicians. Few delegates mentioned creating ASEM University which heated up the discussion, because many representatives wanted to host such an institution in their countries. Some went even further in presenting future challenges and proposed setting up... ASEM Airlines.

Although we may not know the future but guessing from yesterday’s debate it will definitely be... Interesting.

Quotes of the Day:

“I got my opening statement off Wikipedia”
– anonymous delegate. At least someone here is being honest!

“US are fully responsible for the current crisis on financial markets. Asian countries should change their economy form dollar oriented to euro oriented.”
Representative of the Netherlands.

“I don’t understand why are you (The Czechs) so into the international human rights thing. You should be more into business economy.”
Representative of the Czech Republic to the member of the Media Team.

“One delegate kindly volunteered to let us print his:

Participant’s Feedback Sheet

Which country do you come from / live in and how did your learn about this event?

Well, I come from Texas. It’s a very beautiful country by the way, and we welcome all people who would like to visit us here. I learned about this event from my Italian friend, I mean, he just called me up like: Yeah, I’m organising this cool event in Beijing, come along dude!

What were the strong points / weaknesses of the organization (academic programme) prior to and during the conference?

I noticed like on Thursday that I never got a chance to speak for Texas during discussions, and also there was no one to work with me, on my delegation thingy. But I spent a lot of time with the delegation from this Laos place, thought it was Texas delegation cus there was an American dude on the delegation. It turned out it was the delegation of some other country, but talking to those guys was fun anyway.

I mean, like, there are some waaay awesome dudes here, like total checkers. So often I was like: “hey, I don’t get a thing, stop speaking Chinese, dude!” Half the time they were actually speaking it, but it made no difference really if it was in English or not. I mean what’s this ASEM thing anyway people keep mentioning?? And boy I was sooo shocked when I heard there had actually already been a nuclear accident in Iran.

What were the strong points / weaknesses of the organization (logistics) prior to and during the conference?

These people in Beijing here are like so up to date! I like called my family immediately after I heard about the Iran thingy, and they like hadn’t heard of it yet. I’m so amazed that China’s news is faster than ours. I always thought developing countries don’t even bring the news...

And the food was like so good! I missed god old Burgers and stuff, but it was yummy as hell anyway. The Tee was kinda overdone, though.

What do you take home from your participation in the 2008 Model ASEM?

I bought some really nice Chinese red cloth keychanes, you know which ones I mean. I bought like 4, for my mom and my sister and my girlfriend. I bought them for 150 yuan, only around 15 bucks, that’s so cheap and such a good deal! Otherwise I didn’t really make too many friends here, I had the feeling people were avoiding me... I think it’s ‘caus I’m from Texas, the same as our wonderful Sir President, and European news has been kinda unfairly dissing him. Some people are very biased about that, I mean, like, that dude is just great actually.
Win Win Solution for all?
Making Myanmar the happiest country of all...

It seems that “the happiest country at the end of this model ASEM is Myanmar.” And that, ladies and gents, is a scary thought for the democratic world...

Let us recall what we have been told by Mr. Molina so often: apparently, we have a vital role to play in the whole ASEM process and our words will be read by the true politicians at ASEM. If indeed the original version of proposals would have been submitted to the true ASEM, the Daily Compass would not be particularly be happy for its name to be brought in connection with this paper. This is supposed to be a role play, so why is it that the delegations representing big players such as France and Germany have spoken up so little in total, and specifically never protested against proposals that their actual governments, eager to help developing countries only in realistic ways, would refute as impossible if not outrageous.

We know France is a leader when it comes to nuclear power, but since when does France offer to share its nuclear technology with countries such as Myanmar? Would its nuclear energy companies volunteer this information?

It’s even more surprising to see how the leaders of Europe want to voluntarily cooperate on the intelligence services. An Interpol for East and West is a quite unrealistic idea. Of course, like always, it all depends on the wording. Using the “law enforcement” in the final version was a much more feasible.

The host country’s delegation expressed its overall satisfaction with the discussions, saying there were very good concrete proposals put forward. Still, there was a definite lag observable in the reactions of the European countries. Irene Leino told the compass that she felt she had to gather the head of delegations of several European countries (UK, Germany, France…) before the plenum discussions to make sure they would mention topics like Human Rights, as this is the tradition of those countries at the ASEM forums. And yet, even over that reminder, only the UK managed to bring up that issue.

“The political pillar, Myanmar was becoming more and more impertinent and provocative, announcing it would buy nuclear weapons and demanding technology from the European Countries.”, Mrs. Leino told us. To her surprise, not one European country protested or tried to put a halt to Myanmar’s escapades.

The split into Asian and European countries during the first plenum session in order to consolidate proposals on the ASEM’s reaction to the Iran nuclear reactor accident should also not go unnoticed. It demonstrated the underlying purpose of the European Union, and also some ASIAN members, not only to facilitate east-western cooperation, but also to strengthen the regional (European or Asian) identity. This is by no means an illegitimate motivation of the ASEM process. In light of this though it might be quite important to improve the coordination between some countries’ (otherwise very successful) opening statements.

ASEM Musical Chair(s)

Sadly, the ASEM chair, head of the Chinese delegation, was apparently slightly less than magical during yesterday’s plenum discussions, as the Compass received many complaints about the way the Chair monitored the talks. An anonymous delegate said “the chairwoman is way too authoritarian”, and some countries voiced their concern over the equality of the speaking rights for other countries. “She should respect the sovereign nations present, and limit her own time to speak to match ours.”, said a Japanese delegate.

China defended its position as host. The Chinese head delegate Irene Leino said that she was “just trying to represent China correctly! Also, authority was necessary to keep order.”

The ASEM 2008 was by closed by a fabulous dinner. It was a complete success. During the past three days, participants from all over the world gave their best to discuss the future of Euro-Asian relations.

Even though it wasn’t easy to reach consensus, many interesting point were raised. Let us go home with good memories of ASEM and our own work.

We did a great job!

See you all on ASEM 2009.