

# **The Asia-Europe Cooperation Framework (AECF) 2000**

## **I. Introduction**

1. At the inaugural Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) in Bangkok on 1-2 March 1996, all participants agreed to work together to create a new Asia-Europe partnership, to build a greater understanding between the people of the two regions, and to establish a strengthened dialogue among equals.
2. The second ASEM in London on 3-4 April 1998 confirmed the important role which ASEM has played, and will continue to play, in reinforcing the partnership between Asia and Europe in the political, economic, cultural and other areas of cooperation. That Meeting also adopted an Asia-Europe Cooperation Framework (AECF) to guide, focus and coordinate ASEM activities, and commissioned an Asia-Europe Vision Group to develop a medium to long-term vision to help guide the ASEM process into the 21<sup>st</sup> century.
3. The third ASEM in Seoul on 20-21 October 2000 was a historic milestone in the evolution of the ASEM process and provided an opportunity to review progress and achievements so far and to consolidate this foundation for a comprehensive and sustained cooperation between the two regions.
4. The AECF adopted by Heads of State/Government at ASEM 3 in Seoul in 2000 sets out the vision, principles, objectives, priorities and mechanisms for the ASEM process for the first decade of the new millennium.

## **II. A Vision into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

5. Recognising that the Asia-Europe Meeting was initiated with the aim of strengthening links between Asia and Europe in this era of growing global interdependence, ASEM partners have agreed to strive for a common goal of maintaining and enhancing peace and stability as well as promoting conditions conducive to sustainable economic and social development. ASEM Leaders envisage Asia and Europe as an area of peace and shared development with common interests and aspirations such as upholding the purposes and principles of the UN Charter, respect for democracy, the rule of law, equality, justice and human rights, concern for the environment and other global issues, eradication of poverty, protection of cultural heritage and the promotion of intellectual endeavours, economic and social development, knowledge and educational resources, science and technology, commerce, investment and enterprise. To this end, Asia and Europe, building a comprehensive and future-oriented partnership, should work together to address challenges and to translate them into common opportunities. They should in particular be addressed through our dialogue and joint endeavours in relation to political, economic, and social, cultural and educational issues. ASEM partners also recognise the need to work together in addressing the new challenges posed by, among other things, globalisation, information technology, e-commerce and the New Economy.
6. Synergy between Asia and Europe will be of tremendous value, not only for the two regions but also for the global community as a whole. Strengthened dialogue and cooperation between Asia and Europe in a spirit of equal partnership and mutual benefit will also enhance international cooperation, thereby contributing

positively to security, prosperity and sustainable development for the benefit of all and to building a new international political and economic order, taking into account changes in the international arena including globalization.

### **III. Key Principles and Objectives**

7. The first ASEM in Bangkok agreed to develop a common vision of the future, to foster political dialogue, to reinforce economic cooperation, and to promote cooperation in other areas.

8. The second ASEM in London reaffirmed the key role which the partnership between Asia and Europe should play in a highly-interdependent world, and pursued our work in fostering political dialogue, reinforcing economic cooperation, and promoting cooperation in other areas, including social, cultural and global issues. The Summit confirmed that the ASEM process should :

- be conducted on a basis of equal partnership, mutual respect and mutual benefit;
- be an open and evolutionary process: enlargement should be conducted on the basis of consensus by the Heads of State/Government;
- enhance mutual understanding and awareness through a process of dialogue and lead to cooperation on the identification of priorities for concerted and supportive action;
- carry forward the three key dimensions with the same impetus: fostering political dialogue, reinforcing economic cooperation, and promoting cooperation in other areas;
- as an informal process, ASEM need not be institutionalised. It should stimulate and facilitate progress in other fora;
- go beyond governments in order to promote dialogue and cooperation between the business/private sectors of the two regions and, no less importantly, between the peoples of the two regions. ASEM should also encourage the cooperative activities of think tanks and research groups of both regions.

9. Reflecting the common desire to strengthen the political dialogue between Asia and Europe, this should be fostered by highlighting and expanding common ground, by enhancing understanding and friendship, and by promoting and deepening cooperation. As agreed at the Bangkok and London Summits, this comprehensive political dialogue should be conducted on the basis of the principles reflected in paragraphs 5,6 and 7 of the Bangkok Chair Statement.

9. Acknowledging that the growing economic links between the two regions formed the basis for a strong partnership, the Bangkok Summit had agreed to forge a new comprehensive Asia-Europe Partnership for Greater Growth. Events since then have amply confirmed the importance of this partnership in a highly-interdependent global economy, as emphasised at the London Summit.

11. In promoting cooperation in other areas, the Bangkok and London Summits had likewise affirmed the importance to be attached to cooperation in the cultural and social fields, responding to and encouraging the wide interest in strengthening links

between the two regions shown by the public, think-tanks, research groups, universities and all sectors of society generally, thereby promoting the human dimension in the ASEM process. Building on the discussions in Bangkok, the London Summit had also reiterated the importance to be attached to enhancing the ASEM dialogue on global issues.

#### **IV. Key Priorities**

12. In the political field, ASEM efforts should focus on issues of common interest, proceeding step-by-step in a process of consensus-building, with a view to enhancing mutual awareness and understanding between partners, drawing strength from our diversity while not excluding any issue beforehand but exercising wisdom and judiciousness in selecting the topics for discussion. The political dialogue should be conducted on the basis of mutual respect, equality, promotion of fundamental rights and, in accordance with the rules of international law and obligations, non-intervention, whether direct or indirect, in each other's internal affairs.

13. In this context, key priorities shall include :

- intensifying the high-level political dialogue, including at SOM level;
- taking forward the dialogue on issues of common interest arising in the context of relevant international institutions, including on UN reform;
- enhancing our informal political dialogue on regional and international issues of common interest, in line with the principles laid down in Bangkok and London and confirmed in this present AECF, including informal ASEM seminars and workshops, proposed by individual partners and endorsed by SOM, in the fields of international relations, politics and economics.

14. ASEM efforts should also address global issues of common concern such as :

- strengthening efforts in the global and regional context towards arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction;
- combating illicit trafficking in and accumulation of small arms and light weapons;
- promoting the welfare of women and children;
- enhancing the ASEM dialogue and cooperation on other global issues such as human resources development, community health care improvement, and food security and supply;
- tackling the global environmental issues, striving for sustainable development, and supporting the work of the Asia-Europe Environmental Technology Centre;
- managing migratory flows in a globalized world;
- combating transnational crime, including money laundering, the smuggling and exploitation of migrants, the trafficking of persons in particular women and children, international terrorism and piracy, and fighting against illegal drugs;

- combating racism and xenophobia.

15. In the economic and financial fields, ASEM efforts should focus on strengthening dialogue and cooperation between the two regions, with a view to facilitating sustainable economic growth, contributing together to the global economic dialogue and addressing the impact of globalisation.

16. In this context, key priorities shall include :

- intensifying dialogue in Economic Ministers' Meeting and Senior Officials' Meeting on Trade and Investment (SOMTI), with particular regard to :

- complementing and reinforcing efforts to strengthen the open and rules-based multilateral trading system embodied in the WTO. Full participation in the WTO by ASEM partners will strengthen the organization;
- strengthening two-way trade and investment flows between Asia and Europe, notably through the active implementation and further enhancement of the Trade Facilitation and Investment Promotion Action Plans (TFAP and IPAP);
- establishing an enhanced climate for business-to-business dialogue and cooperation between the two regions, emphasising the central role of the Asia-Europe Business Forum (AEBF) and the importance of continuity therein, facilitating two-way dialogue between government and the business/private sector in order to respond to the concrete issues facing our business community, and paying particular attention to the problems faced by SMEs;
- enhancing dialogue and cooperation in priority industrial sectors, focusing on high technology sectors of common interest, for example, agro-technology, food processing, bio-technology, information and telecommunication (including e-commerce), transport, energy, environmental engineering, etc.;

- intensifying dialogue in Finance Ministers' Meeting and Finance Deputies' Meeting with particular regard to :

- enhancing our dialogue on global financial issues, including the international financial architecture;
- enhancing cooperation, inter alia on technical assistance, the exchange of expertise, and the monitoring of trends, in relation to the prevention of possible future crises;
- enhancing macro-economic policy consultation;
- strengthening cooperation in financial supervision and regulation;
- strengthening cooperation against money-laundering;
- strengthening customs cooperation;

- enhancing our dialogue in the field of science and technology, promoting networking and exchanges among researchers and policy-makers, particularly in priority fields of common interest;

- enhancing a broad-based dialogue on key issues relating to the sustained development of our two regions and of the global economy including important socio-economic issues.

17. In the social, cultural and educational fields, ASEM efforts should focus on promoting enhanced contact and strengthened mutual awareness between the people of our two regions, with a view to helping peoples in Europe and Asia to be more aware of the common issues affecting our common future, and to better understand each other through dialogue.

18 In this context, ASEM partners should continue strong support and encouragement for ASEM which is an important vehicle to promote and catalyse cultural, intellectual and people-to-people exchanges.

19. In this same context, key priorities shall include :

- enhancing our contacts and exchanges in the field of education, including student, academic and information exchanges, inter-university cooperation, facilitating electronic networking between schools, exploring the possibilities for mutual recognition of degrees and licenses between our educational and related institutions, and substantially increasing student exchanges between our two regions, reflecting work being carried forward through, inter alia, the ASEM Education Hubs, the Asia-Europe University and other initiatives;
- strengthening our dialogue and cooperation in the protection and promotion of cultural heritage;
- promoting networking and sharing of experience in the social sciences, arts, humanities and sports;
- encouraging a broad-based dialogue and networking among all sectors of society, including inter alia parliamentary representatives;
- improving dissemination of information about ASEM in the public and about the importance of closer Asia-Europe relations.

20. These priorities will be updated by Heads of State and Government at their Summit meetings. They will form the basis of two-year work programmes drawn up by Foreign Ministers on the occasion of each Summit, and reviewed and updated at the Foreign Ministers' meetings between Summits.

## **V. Mechanisms for Coordinating, Focusing and Managing ASEM Activities**

21. Foreign Ministers, Economic Ministers and Finance Ministers will meet on a regular basis, normally once a year. Occasional conferences bringing together other Ministers may be decided upon by Heads of State/Government as appropriate.

22. As established by the Bangkok Summit and confirmed in London, Foreign Ministers and Senior Officials (SOM) are responsible for the overall coordination of ASEM activities. ASEM Coordinators, to be appointed by their respective regions, shall facilitate the coordination of the ASEM process.

23. To facilitate a rapid and effective exchange of information among all ASEM partners and their relevant officials, the network of ASEM contact officers, appointed by Foreign Ministers, will provide a direct and informal channel of communications.

24. Economic Ministers (including SOMTI) and Finance Ministers (including their deputies) should be the primary channels for carrying forward the ASEM work programme in their respective areas. They would each provide their inputs to the work programme to be coordinated and put together by the SOM and Foreign Ministers. Their respective senior officials will liaise closely with the SOM through a regular exchange of information. Officials from the coordinating partners will assist in this coordination and liaison.

25. To be included in the ASEM work programme, any proposed ASEM initiative should have the support of all ASEM partners, and should be in line with the principles, objectives and priorities set out in this AECF. In addition, any proposed ASEM initiative should meet the following guidelines :

- the proposed initiative should be of mutual benefit, and must receive the full consensus of all ASEM partners;
- it should contribute to advance the overall objectives and perspectives of the ASEM process;
- the participation of a large number of ASEM partners must be ensured;
- the proposal should clearly state goals, prime actors (government, business, civil society), target audience, likely cost, and possible means of finance;
- duplication with existing ASEM initiatives should be avoided;
- initiatives should, where suitable, have a counterpart Asian and European partner;
- participation will be open to ASEM partners only, though SOM may, on a case-by-case basis and with the consensus of all ASEM partners, agree to extend an invitation to a non-ASEM country as well as appropriate international organizations and institutions to take part in a specific event;
- the activity must receive SOM's blessing and its results reported to the ASEM SOM.

26. Any proposals for new ASEM initiatives will be presented to all ASEM partners. They may be channelled via the Coordinators, who will rapidly disseminate the information to their respective regional partners, and collate comments as necessary. ASEM partners may in addition use the network of contact officers to share new proposals on an informal basis. Proposed initiatives will then be considered and selected by SOM, who will include them as appropriate in the updated work programme to be considered by Foreign Ministers.

27. The results and outputs of all ASEM initiatives will be reported to SOM on a timely basis. SOM shall also be responsible for reviewing the progress achieved under all ASEM initiatives on a regular basis, and for recommending if individual initiatives be continued or terminated. To facilitate this review process, it shall be

carried out in such a way as to group activities addressing related issues into thematic clusters.

## **VI. ASEM participation**

28. Building on the conclusions of ASEM 1 in Bangkok and ASEM 2 in London, the following principles should guide future enlargement of the ASEM participation :

- the ASEM process, which is open and evolutionary, is intended to reinforce the Asia-Europe partnership,
- enlargement should be conducted in progressive stages,
- each candidature should be examined on the basis of its own merits and in the light of its potential contribution to the ASEM process,
- the two-key approach: a final decision on new participants will be made by consensus among all partners only after a candidate has first got the support of its partners within its region,
- any decision regarding the admission of new participants will be taken by the Heads of State and Government on a consensus basis.

## **VII. Review of AECF**

29. The application of this Framework will be kept under review by SOM and Foreign Ministers on a routine basis, and any necessary adjustments may be recommended by Foreign Ministers for consideration at a future Summit.