Chair’s Statement of the

3rd ASEM SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT SEMINAR
Water Management – Fostering Prosperity and Stability Through (Inter)Regional Cooperation

Tulcea, Romania, 2 – 3 June 2014

1. Reinforcing the partnership between Asia and Europe within the ASEM framework, participants, representing government officials and experts from ASEM countries, representatives of the European Commission, the European External Action Service, as well as the International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River (ICPDR), the World Bank, the International Commission for the Protection of the Rhine, representatives of local authorities, academics, researchers, NGOs etc., gathered in Tulcea, a city in the Danube Delta, Romania, on 2 – 3 June 2014, for the 3rd ASEM Sustainable Development Seminar on Water Management – Fostering Prosperity and Stability Through (Inter)Regional Cooperation. The meeting was chaired by the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and it had as special guests H.E. Mr. Nguyen Minh Quang, Minister of Natural Resources and Environment of Vietnam, and H.E. Ms. Doina Pană, Minister Delegate for Waters, Forests and Fisheries, Romania.

2. Aiming at further developing the ASEM 9 Summit’s decision to launch the ASEM Sustainable Development Dialogue – a joint initiative by Bulgaria, Hungary, Lao PDR, Romania, Thailand and Vietnam, consisting in a sequence of seminars, to be held in Asia and Europe - the 3rd ASEM Sustainable Development Seminar had as theme Water Management – Fostering Prosperity and Stability Through (Inter)Regional Cooperation. At the 3rd edition of the seminar, Austria, China, the European Union and Slovakia joined the co-sponsorship of the meeting.

In line with the 11th ASEM Foreign Ministers Meeting (2013) orientation to achieve result-oriented and tangible outcomes under ASEM initiatives, as well as a follow up for the next ASEM 10 Summit in Milan, October 2014, and the implementation assessment of the Bandar Seri Begawan Plan of Action to strengthen the ASEAN-EU enhanced partnership on the occasion of the next EU-ASEAN Foreign Ministers’ Meeting in July 2014, the seminar aimed at concrete actions on medium term, bearing in mind the mutual benefits of best practices exchanges between Europe and Asia in water resources management and other related aspects.

3. Water as a resource and instrument to foster prosperity and stability, as well as its contribution to economic development through (inter)connectivity and to fostering different regional cooperation models was also approached. Participants have underscored the need to transform jointly the challenges related to food, water and energy security into opportunities for growth and sustainable development.
4. Flood management was identified as a key challenge nowadays. Finding sustainable solutions to floods is important for the socio-economic development of both Danube and Mekong regions. The participants presented solutions on flood management and common areas of concrete cooperation between experts from both regions on flood management issues were identified. Sharing expertise in addressing climate change challenges (water scarcity, droughts) and ways for future cooperation were explored.

5. Climate change, economic and demographic development, various ways to use water resources were highlighted as water-related challenges. Rivers and river basins do not abide by political borders; hence challenges of water pollution, flood risks or water scarcity are of regional nature and require common solutions. These challenges require comprehensive responses taking into account the close links with energy, climate change and food security.

Participants underlined that enhancing regional cooperation and building partnerships at the local, national and regional levels is critical to address water-related challenges. They highlighted importance of international conventions and fora to manage common river basin. They saw the nexus of water, food and energy as a major global trend in the next decades. Experiences and best practices, including bilateral, sub-regional and regional arrangements, were shared. Presentations were made with the objective to share best practices and identifying ways to cooperate between experts from Danube and Mekong, as well as South Asia regions on sustainable cooperation mechanisms regarding water-related challenges.

6. Sustainable and high quality, intermodal transport infrastructure, including through water corridors, represents a crucial condition for economic development of the riparian states. Common areas of interest for enhanced cooperation between experts from Danube and Mekong regions were presented and possible solutions shared. The role of tourism in connecting regions and people was also approached.

7. Participants discussed and proposed a number of follow-up actions to achieve sustainable management of water resources and river basins, including:

(i) Further stimulate tangible cooperation between Europe and Asia in water management area, including through exchange of good practices between administrative units from countries in the Danube and Mekong regions on issues of mutual interest;
(ii) Create a network of experts on flood management with the aim to share best practices and expertise, complemented by a communication mechanism to consolidate basin-wide water cooperation and ensure sharing of best practices;
(iii) Gather useful inputs for the inclusion of “water diplomacy” in the curricula of the courses and/or training programmes dedicated to global issues and related horizontal themes organized by the ministries/diplomatic institutes of the participating countries;
(iv) Strengthening ASEM’s engagement with and support to sub-regional and regional cooperative mechanisms, such as the Danube, Mekong region and South Asia, for river basin management conducted by its members.

8. The participants expressed their appreciation to Lao PDR for the offer to host the next event of the ASEM Sustainable Development Dialogue in 2015. The Seminar welcomed the series of events to be held on the occasion of Danube Day (29 June), organised within the framework of the ICPDR and supported by the European Union Strategy for the Danube Region.

9. The outcomes and recommendations of the Seminar will be reported to the next ASEM SOM Meeting and 10th ASEM Summit (16-17 October 2014, Milan, Italy).

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