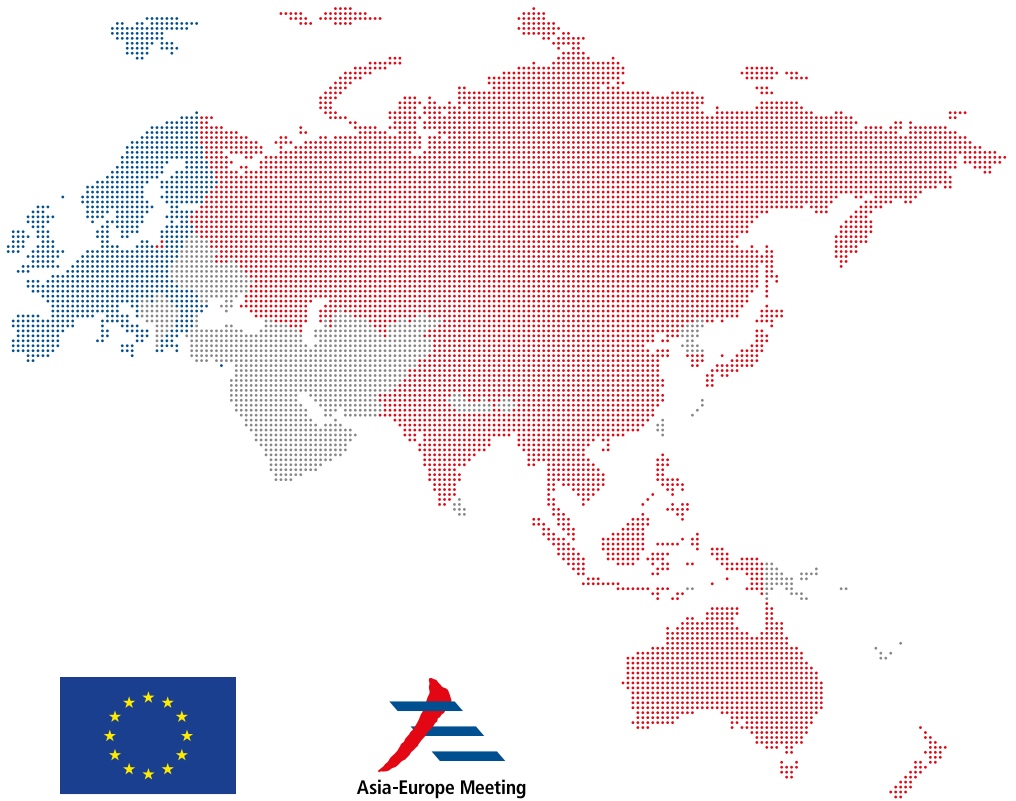


The future of the Asia-Europe Meeting **(ASEM)**

Looking ahead into ASEM's third decade



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• Edited by: Bart Gaens, Senior Research Fellow, The Finnish Institute of International Affairs.

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List of Acronyms

ABAC	APEC Business Advisory Council
ABTC	APEC Business Travel Card
ACP	African, Caribbean and Pacific countries
ACSG	ASEM Chairman's Support Group (ACSG)
ADB	Asian Development Bank
AEH	ASEM Education Hub
AFC	Asian Financial Crisis
AEBF	Asia-Europe Business Forum
AEC	African Economic Community
AECF	Asia-Europe Cooperation Framework
AEMM	ASEAN-EU Ministerial Meeting
AEPF	Asia-Europe People's Forum
AETUF	Asia-Europe Trade Union Forum
AEVG	Asia-Europe Vision Group
AEYPM	Asia-Europe Young Parliamentarians' Meeting
AFC	Asian Financial Crisis
AFTA	ASEAN Free Trade Area
AIIB	Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank
AIPA	ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Assembly
ALBA	Alianza Bolivariana de las Américas
AMU	Arab Maghreb Union
APEC	Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation
APSA	African Peace and Security Architecture
APT	ASEAN Plus Three
ARF	ASEAN Regional Forum
ASC	APEC Study Centers
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
ASEF	Asia-Europe Foundation
ASEFUAN	ASEF University Alumni Network
ASEM	Asia-Europe Meeting
ASEMBAC	ASEM Business Advisory Council
ASEP	Asia-Europe Parliamentary Partnership
AU	African Union
AVS	ASEM Virtual Secretariat

BAC	Business Advisory Councils
BRICS	Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa
CAEC	Council for Asia-Europe Cooperation
CAN	Community of Andean Nations
CELAC	Community of Latin American and Caribbean States
CEN-SAD	Community of Sahel-Saharan States
COMESA	Common Market for East and Southern Africa
COP	Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
CFSP	Common Foreign and Security Policy
CFTA	Continental Free Trade Area
CGPCS	Contact Group on Piracy off the Coast of Somalia
CMM	Culture Ministers' Meeting
COASI	Council Working Group for Asia-Oceania
CSDP	Common Security and Defence Policy
CTBT	Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty
DG	Directorate-General
DRC	Democratic Republic of the Congo
EAS	East Asia Summit
ECCAS	Economic Community of Central African States
ECOWAS	Economic Community Of West African States
EEAS	European External Action Service
EFTA	European Free Trade Association
EMM	Economic Ministers' Meeting
EU	European Union
EUROLAT	Euro-Latin American Parliamentary Assembly
FPA	Framework Participation Agreements
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
FEALAC	Forum for East Asia-Latin America Cooperation
FinMM	Finance Ministers' Meeting
FMM	Foreign Ministers' Meeting
FPA	Framework Participation Agreements
FTA	Free trade Agreement
FTA	Forum on Tax Administration
FTAAP	Free Trade Agreement of the Asia-Pacific
GATT	General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
HOSG	Heads of State and Government
IAP	Individual Action Plan
IBL	Issue-Based Leadership
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
IGAD	Intergovernmental Authority on Development

ILO	International Labour Organization
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IPAP	Investment Promotion Action Plan
aIPR	Intellectual Property Rights
JAES	Joint Africa-EU Strategy
LAC	Latin America and the Caribbean
LAFTA	Latin American Free-Trade Association
LDCs	Least Developed Countries
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
MERCOSUR	Mercado Común del Sur
NAFTA	North American Free Trade Agreement
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
NPT	Non-Proliferation Treaty
NTBs	Non-Tariff Barriers
NTS	Non-traditional security
ODA	Official Development Assistance
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
OLAF	Office Européen de Lutte Anti-Fraude (European Anti-fraud Office)
OSCE	Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe
PBEC	Pacific Basin Economic Council
PECC	Pacific Economic Cooperation Council
PSU	APEC Policy Support Unit
REC	Regional Economic Communities
SAARC	South Asian Association of Regional Cooperation
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SLOCS	Sea Lanes of Communication
SME	Small and Medium-sized Companies
SOM	Senior Officials' Meeting
SOMTI	Senior Officials' Meeting on Trade and Investment
TAC	Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia
TASC	Technical Support to the Coordination of the ASEM Process
TEIN	Trans-Eurasian Network
TFAP	Trade Facilitation Action Plan
TPP	Trans-Pacific Partnership
UNASUR	União de Nações Sul-Americanas
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNFCCC	UN Framework Convention on Climate Change
WB	World Bank
WCO	World Customs Organization
WMD	Weapons of Mass Destruction
WTO	World Trade Organization

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Foreword

by *Federica Mogherini*

High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Vice-President of the European Commission



Throughout the 20th century, a number of political scientists and novelists imagined that the next century would be dominated by continental blocs clashing with one another. When the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) was founded, in 1996, it was becoming clear that our “brave new world” called for a true dialogue between continents and civilisations. The need for intercontinental alliances is even clearer today, as we celebrate ASEM’s 20th birthday: the world we live in has never been this “small”, the challenges we face are truly global in their nature. Worldwide platforms for policy dialogue are more important than ever.

Far from being a liability, the informal nature of ASEM is one of its major strengths. The Meeting helped building “an indispensable bridge” between our continents, as the book you are now holding in your hands rightly states. ASEM now has 53 partners, including two regional organisations (the European Union and ASEAN), 21 countries in Asia and 30 in Europe. Twelve G20 members are part of the Asia-Europe Meeting. It represents an approximate 60 per cent of the world’s population, GDP and trade. ASEM holds an immense potential as a pivot for political, economic and social cooperation on a global scale.

At the same time, ASEM’s 20th anniversary should be seen as an opportunity for reflection. Where do we want ASEM to go? Can we do better and ensure that it brings additional

benefits to the countries and peoples of Asia and Europe? It is with these questions in mind that the European External Action Service has commissioned this study, financed by the European Commission. Six eminent independent researchers and ASEM experts from both Asia and Europe have looked into these questions and have put forward a number of recommendations. These will now serve as an input into the discussions on the future of ASEM in the lead-up to the 12th ASEM Foreign Ministers’ Meeting, which I will chair in Luxembourg on 5–6 November 2015, and, ultimately, the 20th anniversary summit in July 2016.

This book concludes it is time for ASEM to come of age. On its side, the European Union is ready to ensure that ASEM continues to be a success into the next decade. After the Middle East, Asia is the region I visited the most since the beginning of my mandate as EU High Representative. It did not happen by chance: I believe Europe matters to Asia as much as Asia matters to Europe. It matters for our economic prosperity, for our common security and the security of the whole world.

Today we know there is an alternative to a world of conflictual blocs clashing for hegemony, to everyone’s detriment. We need to build a global network of regional partnerships and intercontinental alliances – and ASEM can be at the core of our joint efforts towards a more cooperative world order.

Executive Summary / List of Recommendations

For nearly two decades ASEM has played a key role as a forum for dialogue and cooperation connecting Asia and Europe. ASEM's value and continuing importance in today's politics, diplomacy, and inter-regional relations is uncontested. Yet, as an (informal) institution ASEM is destined to evolve along with a transforming global environment. Since its inception in 1996 the forum has changed significantly. It has enlarged substantially, adapting itself to an increasingly multipolar world, an expanding European Union, and a progressively more interdependent Asian region. As for substance, the process is now covering much more ground, reflecting newly emerging global challenges that Asia and Europe need to tackle together. Furthermore, ASEM has taken incremental steps to strengthen coordination, and to translate the informal dialogue process into tangible outcomes and common policies. Nevertheless, ahead of ASEM's third decade, it is clear that opinions are divided on the future direction of the forum. Tension exists between often all too high expectations and the forum's limited capabilities. A gap can be perceived between those emphasizing the informal dialogue process, and those seeking to increase concrete joint endeavors.

The overall conclusion of this independent academic study is threefold. First, ASEM should build on and further promote its strengths. These include informal dialogue and networking, flexibility, the inclusion of non-state stakeholder groups, and, as a result of the enlargement process, the presence of a large number of key regional and global players. Second, ASEM can draw valuable lessons from other processes, including with regard to vision and objectives, priority areas of cooperation, and more effective coordination. Third, ASEM should adapt in order to meet the new challenges of a changed global agenda. This can be done *inter alia* by focusing on "ASEM added-value" issues, making optimal use of variable geometry, strengthening ties with stakeholder groups, promoting public awareness, and further enhancing coordination mechanisms. The following overview lists the specific recommendations yielded by the different chapters in this study, with a view to addressing ASEM's shortcomings and improving its performance into its third decade.

Vision and Objectives

- Refine ASEM's vision, including clear objectives and strategic priorities, in a short, simple and visionary "Ulan Bator Declaration", outlining ASEM's new narrative of relevance in the 21st century, to be adopted at the 20th anniversary summit in Mongolia in 2016.
- Craft a compelling vision of a bustling Asia-Europe "Marketplace" – a well-connected bazaar where trade and ideas flow both ways from Asia to Europe and Europe to Asia. All ASEM initiatives and projects should be geared towards enhanced connectivity of ideas.
- Focus on a small cluster of issues allowing for real exchanges of views, ideas and experiences. Issue a short and sharp "action plan" outlining the key issues for dialogue and joint actions in the next decade.

Informal Approach

- Facilitate informality at summits and ministerial meetings:
 - ✓ Limit introductory interventions and emphasize free-flowing discussion.
 - ✓ Promote Retreat Sessions, in a “leaders/ministers only” or a “leaders/ministers plus one” format.
 - ✓ Implement a “Working Tables” format, each chaired by one country, and including two short keynote introductions, followed by free, open and informal discussion. Link these thematic small-group discussions to the overarching theme of the plenary. Report outcomes and overall “vision” of the meetings back to the final plenary.

Substance and Content

- Sharpen focus on issue areas in which ASEM can make a difference (which have “ASEM added value”). Link these issues with the agenda of the summit and reflect them in the Working Tables proposed above.
 - ✓ A sharper focus will also rekindle interest and promote representation at the highest levels.
- Promote connectivity: Set focused objectives, share practices and exchange ideas, rather than aim to achieve physical connectivity and infrastructure projects.
 - ✓ Create an ASEM connectivity index. ASEM can only function as an incubator for so-called hard connectivity. It can, however, propose an updated review of major hard-connectivity projects between Asia and Europe, for example.
 - ✓ Include issues related to the Arctic development agenda or Arctic maritime transport routes, making full use of ASEM’s enlarged membership.
- Foster global governance by focusing on non-traditional security.
 - ✓ Focus on common security challenges especially with ASEM’s less-developed partner countries in mind, including growth and jobs; sustainable development; inequality, women and children; protection of minorities; radicalization; counter-terrorism; refugees and immigration.
 - ✓ Define objectives for customs cooperation and facilitation through operational discussions, for example on procedures and standards. Deliverables here include an agreement on planning and developing border security. Explore the creation of a “Customs Training cluster”, bringing together different arrays of specialists.
 - ✓ To contribute to the fight against piracy, provide a platform for consensus building and informal consultations, aiming to share experiences, best practices, and

- expertise, and build a common agenda.
- ✓ Promote sustainable tourism. An ASEM Green Travel Initiative can link tour operators and tourism professionals with Ministries of Tourism and NGOs active in this field.
 - ✓ Organize a yearly ASEM seminar on mediation and peace diplomacy, comparable to the annual ASEM Human Rights seminar.
 - ✓ Organize an official ASEM Cyber-security contest.
 - ✓ Publish and regularly update the ASEM Public Diplomacy Handbook, focusing on the best non-traditional ways to promote the Asia-Europe dialogue.
- Revive the economic pillar, for example through discussions on economic policy development, including on sustainable growth and development, sustainable agriculture, energy efficiency and conservation as well as urbanization.
 - ✓ Launch initiatives conducive of an “investment atmosphere”, acting as a catalyst more than an operator.
 - ✓ Establish a dedicated “Connectivity Forum”, bringing together the private sector, media and civil society organizations to discuss those infrastructure-related issues with an impact on sustainable development, security and climate change. Private sector actors could be invited to meet with ASEM Economic Ministers, serving as an opportunity to revive the EMM.
 - ✓ Strengthen private sector participation to deepen business-to-business cooperation, with a special focus on small and medium-sized enterprises.
 - ✓ Consider the creation of an ASEM Business Advisory Council (cf below).
 - Enhance soft connectivity.
 - ✓ More clearly “brand” ASEM-led educational exchanges and explore the idea of a preferential status/priority given to ASEM students in universities in Asia and Europe.
 - ✓ Explore the idea of an ASEM University, based on the model of the UN University.
 - ✓ Establish dedicated ASEM Boards of Experts/Personalities, in fields such as Academic Exchange, Social and Human Rights, Media, and Youth.

Tangible Cooperation (Issue-based Leadership)

- Organize “policy dialogues” on priority areas of cooperation such as those outlined above, rather than unstructured meetings between like-minded nations.
- Set up 4 to 6 working committees on a few key issues that draw substantial interest and support from at least 8 to 10 members, in order to evaluate projects and initiatives and work to deliver results on the issues identified.

- ✓ Provide for regular follow-up, evaluation and monitoring of progress.
- In order to advance tangible cooperation, promote “Variable Geometry ASEM” through issue-based leadership (IBL). However, initiatives would need to have a clear mandate, focus, and be supported by mechanisms for coordination, reporting, and evaluation.
- ✓ ASEM is well placed to increase civil society involvement and track 2 initiatives in such informal, multi-stakeholder working groups.

Coordination Mechanisms

- Strengthen coordination mechanisms. Three options are viable:
 - ✓ Make minor changes to the current coordination structure, for example by strengthening the role of the ASEAN Secretariat, increasing the number of coordinators on the Asian side from two to four, representing the different sub-regions (Southeast, Northeast, South, and Central Asia; with Australia and New Zealand coordinating with Northeast Asia, and Russia with Central Asia). Include a “troika” consisting of the hosts of the most recent, upcoming, and next summits in the coordination machinery.
 - ✓ Building on the example of the ASEM Education Secretariat, create coordinating offices or appoint rotating coordinating countries based on the idea of sectoral leadership.
 - ✓ Create a secretariat (or a “light yet permanent liaison office”) in order to cope with the growing need for coordination and management of an enlarging institution to achieve effective “institutional memory” and efficient coordination between the different regional groups.
 - ✱ All ASEM partners, including the less-developed countries, would be treated equally.
 - ✱ This solution would remedy the uncontrolled proliferation of initiatives, streamline ASEM projects, and hold the different strands together.

Enlargement

- In order to more fully reflect the inter-continental Asia-Europe character, expand ASEM on the Asian side, to include additional South and Central Asian countries.
- See ASEM enlargement as a catalyst to revitalize ASEM, rather than considering it as an impediment to informal dialogue and tangible cooperation.

Relations with Stakeholders

- Increase civil society input and identify champions within the business and academic

communities that can help support and promote the ASEM agenda.

- ✓ Strengthen engagement with the business community through the creation of a committed ASEM Business Advisory Council.
 - ✓ Allow a representative of the business summit to present the business sector's recommendations directly to the leaders at the summit.
 - ✓ Engage the academic community more systematically through the establishment of an ASEM Studies Center (ASC).
 - ✓ Strengthen the role and participation of young people through "model ASEM" and by organizing annual ASEM "youth summits" following the official agenda.
 - ✓ Enhance the involvement of the Asia-Europe Parliamentary Partnership (ASEP) in ASEM along the lines of other inter-regional processes involving the EU.
- Move away from the pillar structure in order to avoid "segregating" the different stakeholders.
 - ✓ Promote horizontal communication between stakeholder groups by establishing regularized meetings between representations of ASEF, AEBF, AEPF, ASEP and others.
 - Transform stakeholder group meetings into functional, in-depth, sectoral, professional meetings.

Visibility and Awareness

- Improve the quality of ASEM's public profile, and promote a better understanding of what ASEM is and does. ASEM does not need visibility purely for visibility's sake.
- Focus on ASEM's original aim to promote ties and boost mutual awareness between Asia and Europe.
 - ✓ Promote inter-regional awareness and understanding, especially of and in smaller member countries.
- Increase online visibility, building on existing Internet initiatives such as the "Debating Asia-Europe" online debates, in addition to the ASEM InfoBoard.
 - ✓ Link the ASEM InfoBoard as well as information and news of the process to partner countries' Foreign Ministry websites.
- Consider research projects or symposia among experts in ASEM countries on expectations for high-profile initiatives such as the AIIB.

Introduction



*by Bart Gaens, Senior Research Fellow,
The Finnish Institute of International Affairs, Helsinki*

Following the publication of the European Union's New Asia Strategy in 1994, Singaporean Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong in September of that year proposed the creation of an institutional framework to bridge the gap in relations between Asia and Europe. The first Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM), held in Bangkok in March 1996, marked the start of a process that systematically engaged both regions in dialogue and cooperation on political, economic, and social/cultural issues. Initially forming a gathering of 26 participants from Europe and Asia, ASEM nearly two decades later has grown into the prime nodal point for relations between 53 partners from both regions. The forum will celebrate its twentieth anniversary in July 2016 at the eleventh summit (ASEM 11) in Ulan Bator, Mongolia.

Overall, ASEM can be proud of its achievements. Driven by biennial summits, it has provided Europe and Asia with a vital platform enabling policy dialogue on a wide variety of issues. Initially conceived as a "club of like-minded partners", ASEM was not intended to be a forum for negotiating agreements, but rather to function as a political catalyst, to promote common interests in global fora, and to identify priorities for concerted action in pursuit of these common interests. In almost twenty years ASEM has grown substantially, forming an indispensable bridge between both regions in an increasingly complex, multi-polar, and interconnected world.

Policymakers and stakeholders in Asia as well as Europe agree that ASEM is a unique forum with a distinctive format, and that it would have to be created if it did not exist. ASEM's main *raison d'être* is marked by at least three core components: informal dialogue; bilateral contacts and networking; and complementarity to other fora. First, due to its emphasis on high-level yet informal dialogue it fills a niche as a forum in which dialogue is a goal in itself. ASEM's objective to promote a joint awareness of challenges or contribute to a collective recognition of principles through dialogue and engagement at different levels, from Heads of State to civil society, remains as salient today as twenty years ago. The fact that European and Asian countries can discuss any globally relevant issue in the political sphere should be seen as an achievement in itself.

Second, ASEM fosters networking and personal relations between state leaders, ministers, officials and policymakers of both regions. Bilateral contacts between government leaders or between the EU and Asian Heads of State continue to constitute an important element of the biennial summits. ASEM offers economies of scale, allowing states to gain time and expenses by setting up a number of bilateral meetings in the sidelines of summits. It furthermore provides a venue for intra-regional meetings, not in the least in the Asian grouping, thereby promoting regional coherence. At the same time it allows small states to meet with larger ones, bridging the gap to the G20 for example, and it allows for meetings with states that are normally not on the radar.

Third, ASEM offers a comprehensive framework complementing ongoing work in other institutions, without duplication. The upcoming ASEM Foreign Ministers' Meeting in Luxembourg in November 2015, for example, provides a platform to sound out opinions and hold discussions in the margins, ahead of the important COP21 (Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change) in Paris later this year.

Ironically these strengths are often singled out as shortcomings. ASEM is criticized for being little more than a forum for dialogue and networking, or for only functioning as a venue for bilateral meetings that are deemed more important than the actual inter-regional summit itself. Furthermore, it is often difficult to pinpoint any tangible achievements or visible results, including on how effectively ASEM has functioned as a catalyst or has contributed meaningfully to agendas, objectives and solutions pursued in other fora.

Without a doubt one of ASEM's greatest challenges at present is the lack of consensus among its participants and stakeholders on how to proceed. ASEM partners are divided on an overarching vision for the future, and on the way forward in order to enhance the process in terms of coordination, working methods, objectives and outcomes.

“Is it sufficient for ASEM to be an informal dialogue process, or should it aim to achieve more?”

Is it enough for a forum consisting of 51 countries and 2 institutions from Asia and Europe to primarily aim to create a collective consciousness through confidence-building measures? Should coordination and management of the forum be strengthened, in particular in view of ASEM's enlargement process during the past decade, more than doubling its membership? How can informality be maintained with 53 partners around the table, and how can the proliferation of initiatives, meetings and projects obtain focus in view of ASEM's objectives? How can ASEM make optimal use of recent enlargement processes, in particular in the light of a rapidly changing global environment? How can the forum increase its global visibility and outreach? How can ASEM's stakeholders, such as civil society, parliaments, the private sector, the academic community, and the general public be more closely aligned with the process? Importantly, what is ASEM's added value vis-à-vis other multilateral or bilateral fora?

Anniversaries provide excellent opportunities for critical self-reflection. At the tenth ASEM Summit, held in Milan on 16-17 October 2014, *“Leaders tasked the ASEM Foreign Ministers and the Senior Officials to submit concrete recommendations on the future direction of ASEM to the next summit, when the 20th anniversary of ASEM will be marked”* (ASEM 10, Chair's Statement). The *“ASEM Symposium on the Future Direction of ASEM”* (Bangkok, 30 March 2015) provided a first source of input and ideas.¹ In the run-up to the summit in Mongolia in 2016, this independent study aims to make a further contribution to feed into the

¹ The outcomes of the different panel discussions during the symposium were summarized in the *“Bangkok Initiatives on the Future Direction of ASEM”*.

discussions on the future of the process. It critically examines ASEM's strengths and current challenges, with a view to providing concrete input and recommendations.

Rather than looking back on ASEM's accomplishments in the political, economic, and social/cultural pillars, it is the specific goal of this academic study to explore ASEM's current state in order to identify possible future directions. The contributors to this study, three from Europe and three from Asia, have analyzed the process based on both qualitative research and interviews with experts and stakeholders. Research was conducted on primary sources such as ASEM-related policy papers, statements, and official proposals for strengthening working methods and institutional mechanisms. This was complemented by secondary academic sources and media reports. In addition, the study applied a comparative perspective in order to draw lessons from achievements and best practices in other inter-regional fora.

The study consists of six chapters, each followed by policy recommendations. **Chapter One** takes a comparative look at ASEM and the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC). ASEM, launched in 1996, was seen by some as Europe's response to APEC, inaugurated in 1989 when ministers from 12 member economies met in Canberra to call for more effective transpacific economic cooperation. APEC has since then enlarged from 12 to 21 member economies, and its agenda, while still primarily focused on trade and investment issues, has broadened to include various technical and non-traditional security issues. The chapter compares the trajectories, evolving agenda and goals of both fora, and explores possible lessons that ASEM can draw from APEC in "remaking" itself, in order to retain a role and relevance in an ever evolving forum circuit.

Chapter Two as well takes a comparative perspective in order to learn from experiences in other fora, in particular the EU-Africa Strategic Partnership and the EU-CELAC (Community of Latin American and Caribbean States) process. The chapter points out similarities and differences between ASEM and these two other mega "umbrella processes", and explores how they each reflect the EU's search for stronger global relevance and visibility. The chapter examines possible lessons that ASEM can learn to improve the ways in which the dialogue is conducted, and more in general how to revive and renew the Asia-Europe partnership in a rapidly-changing global environment.

Chapter Three deals with ASEM's "open and evolutionary" approach and the resulting enlargement process. After nearly two decades ASEM has evolved dramatically in terms of membership, now including countries from non-EU Europe, Australasia, Eurasia, South Asia and Central Asia. This development clearly reflects a "multipolarizing" global environment, but at the same time it poses a number of challenges. This chapter analyzes the potential of a partnership of 53 members, and looks at future implications of enlargement for the process as well as content. It examines how a gradually expanding inter-regional partnership can maximize institutional effectiveness and achieve "ASEM added value".

Chapter Four focuses on ASEM initiatives and cooperation. It explores the challenges, pertinence, efficiency, credibility and legacy of ASEM's "tangible and result-oriented activities".

ASEM is often criticized for being a talking shop and for lacking concrete achievements. The analysis looks at the forum's track record, and argues that ASEM can make an important contribution in three fields: (1) (soft) connectivity; (2) awareness and sustainability relating to the liberalization of trade and investment; and (3) global governance, in particular within the field of non-traditional security.

Chapter Five looks at the most relevant stakeholder groups in the ASEM process. During the past two decades, ASEM has made remarkable progress in strengthening its bottom-up dimension and in promoting links with parliaments and civil society, for example. Nevertheless, this chapter argues that the different stakeholder groups can be engaged much closer, and that outcome-oriented and functional cooperation should be the domain of stakeholders. The chapter singles out civil society, including youth, academic and research communities, and the businesspeople, as an under-explored stakeholder group that nevertheless buttresses the inter-regional process.

Chapter Six focuses on visibility. It is a fact that general public awareness of ASEM as an actor in the global power structure remains low. It is obvious that ASEM's basic approach of confidence-building and confidentiality, its focus on informal dialogue, and the absence of negotiations or groundbreaking agreements a priori put a limit on the amount of public and media exposure. Nevertheless, this chapter explores ways for ASEM to increase media visibility, and to enhance the appeal of ASEM-related activities to the general public. It argues that ASEM should not seek visibility for visibility's sake, but rather that it should focus the limited resources on improving the quality of its public profile.

The **concluding chapter** of the study summarizes the findings and draws lessons from the comparative and thematic analyses provided by the preceding chapters, culminating in concrete policy recommendations for ASEM's future development.



CHAPTER ONE

A comparative look at ASEM and APEC



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1. Introduction

The Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) and the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) were both conceived in an era of optimism with regard to regionalism, international cooperation and multilateralism as answers to growing interdependence and globalization. The two fora were also a reflection of the economic rise of East Asia, and of the world economy increasingly being driven by three engines of growth as represented by North America, Europe and East Asia. Among numerous other emerging institutions, both were also fora for soft politics in which Asian countries were increasingly actively involved.

Along with the development of a much more complex and uncertain geopolitical and geo-economic landscape, many of these summit-driven processes such as APEC and ASEM born in the immediate post-Cold war era are facing challenges in maintaining their relevance. We have seen a proliferation of multilateral initiatives, at the same time while global governance and multilateralism are being challenged and diminished. Both APEC and ASEM have met with increasing criticisms with regard to their consensus-based approach to dialogue and cooperation. Yet there are not many other clear alternatives. Instead, similar fora seem to emerge, resulting in a phenomenon that some scholars have called “forum-shopping” (see for example, Forman and Segaar, 2006 and Rüländ, 2012).

The purpose of this chapter is to compare the trajectories of APEC and ASEM, and to explore possible lessons that ASEM can learn from APEC in “remaking” itself, to retain a role and relevance in this evolving forum circuit.

2. APEC and ASEM – A Brief Comparison

It was former Australian Prime Minister Bob Hawke who first publicly broached the idea of APEC during a speech in Seoul in January 1989. Ten months later, 12 Asia-Pacific economies —the US, Australia, Canada, New Zealand, Japan, Korea and the ASEAN6, comprising then of Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand— met in Canberra to establish APEC. APEC, as the name implies, had a very specific economic orientation. Its primary goal is to support sustainable economic growth and prosperity in the Asia-Pacific region by enhancing trade and investment flows, and at the same time helping to sustain the momentum of global trade liberalization.

APEC has since expanded to 21 economies, with China, Hong Kong and Taiwan joining in 1991; Mexico and Papua New Guinea in 1993; Chile in 1994; and Peru, Russia and Vietnam acceding in 1998. After this enlargement a moratorium was placed on membership to allow APEC to deepen its cooperation while coping with the increasing diversities. However, although it did not expand numerically, after the 9/11 terrorist attacks, and SARS in 2003, APEC’s agenda widened to include non-traditional or human security issues including counter-terrorism, health and emergency preparedness.

ASEM was in some way a response to the formation of APEC. The strategic rationale behind ASEM presented in 1994 was the concept of closing the triangle to balance the relations between the three engines of economic growth. While transatlantic ties between America and Europe are historically strong, and transpacific ties have been strengthened through APEC, ties between

Asia and Europe remained weak. Hence the idea arose to establish an Asia-Europe meeting to strengthen ties between both regions.

While economy was also the initial driving force behind ASEM, the agenda at the very first summit was comprehensive, encompassing also political and socio-cultural issues. Compared to APEC, ASEM thus has a much broader and multidimensional focus on a wide range of issues, from reforms in the UN and issues relating to the WTO, to people-to-people exchange.

The following are some of the key differences and similarities between ASEM and APEC.

2.1 Goals and Objectives

The goals and objectives of ASEM are broader, less defined and more amorphous —being essentially a dialogue forum, it seeks to address international and regional developments, promote mutual understanding and strengthen cooperation between Asia and Europe. ASEM sees its mission as very broad— as providing a framework for dialogue and cooperation for a whole plethora of issues. In contrast, APEC has its goals and objectives set on a narrower economic focus. As indicated on its website, APEC's primary goal is to support sustainable economic growth and prosperity in the Asia-Pacific region. More specifically, APEC's goal to champion free and open trade and investment has led to a work program that is more focused on promoting regional economic integration, encouraging economic and technical cooperation, and facilitating a favorable and sustainable business environment.

The three pillars of APEC's agenda are therefore: Trade and Investment Liberalization; Business Facilitation; and Economic

and Technical Cooperation. This is in contrast to ASEM's three dialogue pillars —the political, the economic and the socio-cultural pillar (also known as the cultural, intellectual and P2P pillar)— which aim to cover a whole plethora of issues from strengthening multilateralism, addressing international and regional political developments to promoting human rights, fostering sustainable development, enhancing trade and investment, and engaging in dialogue on cultures and civilizations or on higher education, to name just a few.

Much of APEC's scope of work is geared towards the goals of free trade set during the 1994 APEC Summit held in Bogor. Known as the Bogor goals, it envisioned the achievement of free and open trade and investments in the Asia-Pacific by 2010 for the developed economies and by 2020 for the developing economies. This has since been overtaken by events, leading to the current negotiations for a mega free-trade agreement, the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) Agreement among 12 of the 21 APEC members.

2.2 Structure

Because of its strong focus on economics and business, the APEC Business Advisory Council (ABAC) is an integral part of APEC's structure (see **Figure 1.1**). There is a clear institutional arrangement for business leaders to make recommendations to APEC leaders. Indeed, the recommendations provided by the ABAC together with the strategic views of the APEC Ministers feed into the Summit, where the APEC Economic Leaders meet and provide broad policy direction.

Even before the set up of ABAC, APEC's economic and business agenda was pushed by the Pacific Basin Economic Council (PBEC).

PBEC is an independent business association founded in 1967 comprising senior business executives with interests in the Asia-Pacific and involved in business advocacy. Its main priority is to seek to engage governments in the region to improve business environment and reduce trade barriers. The Pacific Economic Cooperation Council (PECC), established in 1980 and comprising members from business, governments and academia from 26 countries in the Pacific, is another precursor. PECC is now the only non-governmental observer² in the APEC process, and its early works in regional community building has been seen as the catalyst that led to the establishment of APEC.

The ASEM process has its own Asia-Europe Business Forum (AEBF). While the AEBF is often held back to back to the ASEM Summit, it differs from the ABAC in that the latter has a Secretariat (in Manila) and meets four times a year. Representatives of the AEBF do get a chance to present their views to the ASEM leaders during the summit, but these views do not necessarily form part of any strategic dialogue among the ASEM leaders.

Both ASEM and APEC have the Leaders' Meeting at their apex. The APEC Summit is held annually whereas the ASEM Summit is only held biennially, that is once every two years. Both processes are in some way "summit-driven" but that does not exclude ample activity in between summits. In fact, APEC has now developed over 150 meetings a year involving ministers, senior officials, academics and business people. ASEM has also seen an increasing number of meetings in between the summits.

Due to its emphasis on informality and dialogue, ASEM does not yet have a Secretariat. On the European side the European External Action Service (EEAS) and the EU Presidency coordinate communication and management in between summits. Two rotating coordinators carry out this task on the Asian side. These coordinators work with their counterparts (senior officials) in the foreign ministries to manage the process, and work towards the organization of the ASEM Summit and the ASEM Foreign Ministers' Meeting, equally held once every two years, alternating with the summit.

APEC has a Secretariat (established in 1993) located in Singapore. According to the APEC website, the Secretariat "*operates as the core support mechanism for the APEC process*" providing a central project management role. This includes "*coordination, technical and advisory support as well as information management, communications and public outreach services*" and also assisting APEC member economies in overseeing various APEC-funded projects. Until 2009, the APEC Secretariat was headed by a politically-appointed Executive Director. An officer of Ambassadorial rank from the host (chair) economy (that is, the member economy that is hosting the Leaders' summit) filled the position on an annually rotating basis. However, as of 2010, the Executive Director is professionally recruited from any of APEC's 21 member economies, and each contract is for three years. The APEC Secretariat is staffed by around 60 people. The Program Directors in the Secretariat are seconded from APEC member economies, while the rest of the support staff is openly recruited. Its annual operating budget of about 5 million USD (approximately 4.4

² The other two observers in APEC are the ASEAN Secretariat and the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat.

million euro) is provided by annual contributions from APEC member economies. Member economies can make additional voluntary contributions to support projects that advance APEC's goals to facilitate trade and investment and to build capacity.

The Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF), established in 1997 to promote people-to-people exchange, is considered an integral part of ASEM's socio-cultural pillar. It is ASEM's only brick and mortar institution. It has recently taken on the task of managing the ASEM InfoBoard, a website functioning as the forum's official information platform. ASEF is staffed by around 40 people. The Executive Director, Deputy Executive Director and several of the Directors of Programs are seconded from member states, and the rest are professionally recruited. According to its 2013 annual report, ASEF has run more than 600 projects since its launch in 1997, engaging over 17,000 participants in primarily workshops, conferences and seminars. The annual operational budget of ASEF is close to 6 million Singapore dollars a year (around 4 million euro), also based on voluntary contributions from ASEM members.

ASEM has seen a proliferation of ministerial meetings since its establishment as it strives to develop comprehensive dialogue and cooperation across all three pillars equally. Economy and Finance ministers met regularly in the first decade of ASEM, but the political and socio-cultural dialogue has since superseded the economic aspect. Ministers of Economy have not met for a number of years, but meetings between Ministers of Environment, Education, Culture, Labor and Employment, and most recently, Transport, have gathered some momentum. APEC has also seen a proliferation

of sectoral ministerial meetings, but most of these meetings, whether on Education, Energy or Environment, are linked back to the goals of facilitating trade and investments. After the 9/11 terrorist attacks on the US in 2001, APEC's agenda has also expanded to include security issues such as counter-terrorism, and following SARS in 2003, pandemic diseases. Several of these emerging issues, including emergency preparedness and health, are related to their impact on trade.

2.3 Working level meetings, projects and initiatives

APEC's working level activities and projects are guided by APEC Senior Officials and carried out by four high level committees – the Committee on Trade and Investment; the Committee on Economic and Technical Cooperation; the Economic Committee; and the Budget and Management Committee. Projects, which take the form of workshops, symposia, publications and research, are seen as a vital part of the APEC process as they are supposed to translate broad policy directions into concrete actions that can create tangible benefits.

The Committee on Trade and Investment coordinates APEC's work on liberalization and facilitation of trade and investments. The Committee on Economic and Technical Cooperation assists Senior Officials in identifying cooperation in the technical area and initiatives that can help build capacity and promote trade and investments. The Economic Committee has a mandate to promote structural reform within APEC by undertaking policy analysis and action-oriented work, while the Budget and Management Committee advises the Senior Officials on budgetary and administrative issues.

In contrast, most of ASEM's initiatives are more ad hoc and not managed by any Committees. Any ASEM partner can propose an initiative under the three broad pillars (usually taking the form of a conference/workshop) as long as it is willing to fund and organize it. There are a few ongoing projects and activities (such as the Informal Human Rights seminar) that have "stood the test" of time, and have become a regular item on ASEM's calendar. Indeed ASEM has developed a number of regular activities and ministerials, which, according to Pelkmans and Hu (2014), *"reduce the fragility and unpredictability"* in between summits and help *"express the ASEM 'common interest' by a certain permanence in exchanging best practices..."*

2.4 Engagement with other sectors of society and stakeholders participation

As noted in earlier paragraphs, APEC's economic focus on trade and investments has made it cognizant of the need to engage the business community. Recognizing the important role that the business community can play, APEC leaders established the APEC Business Advisory Council in 1995 with its secretariat in Manila. ABAC comprises up to three senior business people from each APEC economy. These business representatives are appointed by the respective leaders of the member economies. Members of ABAC meet four times a year, and the representatives also attend Senior Officials Meetings, the annual Ministerial Meetings and the sectoral Ministerial Meetings. The Chair of ABAC comes from the economy that is hosting APEC, and ABAC representatives present recommendations to APEC leaders in an annual dialogue at the Summit and advise APEC officials on business sector concerns and priorities. ABAC organizes the

annual APEC CEO Summit, equally held back to back with the Leaders' Summit.

Besides the business community, APEC also actively engages academics and research institutions through the APEC Study Centers Consortium. It was in 1993 when APEC leaders launched the initiative to promote greater academic collaboration on key regional economic challenges. This led to the creation of APEC Study Centers (ASC) in universities across APEC member economies. There are now 50 ASCs in 20 of the 21 APEC member economies. Together they form the APEC Study Center Consortium, which holds an annual conference hosted by one ASC in the APEC host economy. The functions and funding arrangements of these ASCs are not uniform throughout APEC, allowing for independence, integrity and also flexibility in their research focus and topics.

The launch of ASEM in 1996 was shadowed by the Asia-Europe People's Forum (AEPF), a primarily bottom-up initiative by a network of non-governmental organizations and civil society activists, organized back to the back with the ASEM summit. Since then, the AEPF has continued to be held biennially though not always back to back with the summit.

The inaugural ASEM Summit also "pushed" for a meeting of the business community, resulting in the first Asia-Europe Business Forum (AEBF) held at the end of 1996 and hosted by France. AEBF has continued to be organized regularly, but the AEBF played an entirely different role than the one played by ABAC in APEC, as mentioned earlier. Usually a chairman's statement summarizing the discussions and key recommendations is issued at the end of each AEBF, and presented to the leaders at the Summit.

Besides AEPF and AEBF, there is also the Asia-Europe Parliamentary Partnership Forum (ASEP), bringing together parliamentarians. Indeed, it seems that compared to APEC, there are far more ASEM-related activities involving different sectors of society, from youth (Model ASEM) to editors, journalists, academics and researchers. Yet, despite the numerous Asia-Europe meetings of academics and intellectuals that have mushroomed over the years, no dedicated ASEM Studies Center exists.

2.5 Achievements

While it is relatively easy to compare the “physical” characteristics of APEC and ASEM in terms of goals/objectives, institutional structure, working methods and activities, comparing the achievements and challenges requires us to keep in mind several caveats and nuances.

Both APEC and ASEM are primarily trans-regional dialogue fora, inter-governmental in nature, where non-binding decisions are taken based on consensus. Indeed, in undertaking measures to promote trade and investments, APEC works on the basis of voluntarism and concerted unilateralism to reduce barriers in trade and investments. APEC is also wedded to the desire for both economic and political inclusiveness, which resulted in the idea of open regionalism as its central tenet. Unilateral trade liberalization and economic reforms are major commitments of APEC economies. Each individual member economy has its own Individual Action Plan (IAP) to guide it towards greater trade liberalization and regional integration, in the process contributing to free and open trade in the Asia-Pacific.

ASEM remains very much an information-sharing platform and forum for discussing a whole

range of regional and international developments. Very few decisions are taken at ASEM summits, and in between the summits a series of meetings and conferences take place to further discuss some of these issues and to share best practices. The key characteristics of ASEM as repeated in several of its statements and document are its informality, multi-dimensional character, and flexibility. This has allowed ASEM to address topical issues in response to a changing environment and global events, resulting in declarations on these issues to reflect their relevance.

Because of the diversity of both APEC and ASEM membership, APEC's soft institutional character and ASEM's informal nature, it is not easy to quantify the “achievements” of these trans-regional fora. Supporters of both institutions laud the fact that it is the process and not the outcome that is important.

On its official website APEC is quick to claim for itself the role it played in helping to integrate the region's economies and promoting trade and investments. Concerted efforts by the APEC economies to reduce obstacles to trade and investment in combination with open regionalism have resulted in a lowering of average tariffs and in fewer quantitative restrictions on trade since 1989. Yet while it is true that the Asia-Pacific economies have indeed become more integrated, and practical measures to facilitate trade and investments have saved billions of dollars over the years, no one can really say how much this was due to APEC. As several APEC scholars, such as Andrew Elek (2009: 7-8), admit, “*it is very hard to isolate the contributions of APEC to the reforms undertaken*” by governments to bring down tariffs, encourage freer mobility of people and capital, etc. In fact, many economists would argue that much of the integration of the

economies is market driven. Michael Tay, a former Executive Director of APEC, put an interesting spin on APEC's achievements by comparing it to an organism *"achieving progress, not through legalistic formal mechanisms but through the disparate efforts of the clusters of people working in different sectors to advance regional well being and growth"* (Tay, 2009: x).

Other policy analysts such as Peter Drysdale and Charles Morrison (2009) point out that APEC has helped to facilitate the search for a workable trade-related and economic diplomacy strategy in an incredibly diverse Asia-Pacific region. However, it is not only economy that is important. APEC is also a forum facilitating dialogue on important regional issues and ameliorating political tensions among the various Asia-Pacific powers.

Similarly, dialogue and cooperation between Asia and Europe have increased over the years since the launch of ASEM. In a recent stocktaking exercise, Pelkmans and Hu (2014) noted that *"ASEM has developed a growing number of regular activities and ministerials"* and that *"these regular encounters demonstrate a degree of maturity in Asia-Europe relations"*. Again, the increasing number of encounters and initiatives is probably due to the heightened importance of Asia as a region, not in the least because of rising powers China and India. But also the growing number of common challenges that could not be resolved without cooperation between Asia and Europe, and the proliferation of fora linking Asia and Europe are important factors. For supporters of the ASEM process, this in itself can be taken as an "achievement" as it was envisaged from the beginning that ASEM is not meant to replace other fora but should

stimulate and facilitate progress elsewhere.

More concretely, one of the key achievements of APEC, pushed by the business community, was the launch of the APEC Business Travel Card (ABTC) scheme in 1997. This scheme was to allow for fast and efficient travel for business people within the APEC region as the ABTC allows business people pre-cleared, facilitated short-term entry, and allows multiple entries into participating economies for a three-year period. Valuable time is saved as it removes the need to individually apply for visas or entry permits. Holders of ABTC also benefit from faster immigration process through special APEC lanes at major airports.

According to the APEC website, the scheme is well received, and has shown steady increase in applications. Over 160,000 ABTCs have been issued. A study done by the APEC Policy Support Unit points towards substantial savings in time and money. According to the study, the ABTC scheme reduced transaction costs for ABTC holders by 38% between March-July 2010 and March-July 2011, with monetary savings of 3.7 million USD (approximately 3.3 million euro) and immigration time savings of 62,413 hours (APEC Website).

Besides the APEC Business Card, APEC has produced useful and up-to-date information to promote regional harmonization of standards and conformance procedures and to assist industries and business, for example through the APEC Energy Standards Information System (providing information on energy efficiency standards and labeling that apply to products in the APEC region); the APEC Harmonization Center (promoting regulatory reform and harmonization for the Life Sciences industries); and the APEC

Cross Border Privacy Rules system (to build trust amongst businesses and consumers on the cross-border flows of personal information). Documents such as APEC Building Codes, Regulations and Standards, and a Guidebook on APEC Projects have also been produced. Additionally, APEC has tried to facilitate the mobility of professionals by setting up an APEC registry for Architects and Engineers. It has not been studied how much these systems have been accessed and used, and what has been their impact on businesses and professionals. Nevertheless, APEC can undeniably claim some “tangible” results.

The most concrete manifestation of ASEM has been the establishment of the Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF). Yet, according to critics, ASEM has not generated what is perceived as concrete, tangible benefits.

2.6 Criticisms and Challenges

It is interesting to note that despite a number of differences between APEC and ASEM, they have both faced rather similar criticisms and challenges. The most common criticism against both fora is that they are mere talk shops. In fact, APEC has been derided by some as “A Perfect Excuse for Coffee”. Of course, such criticism misses the point as APEC and ASEM are indeed set up to be dialogue fora, and “talking” is very much part of the process. Perhaps what is more important is to look at what is being “talked about” and the atmosphere in which these talks are taking place. This is where the other criticism comes in, particularly for ASEM, namely that the talks are too broad and not deep enough, and that, as a result, some leaders have not been interested enough to show up for summits.

Other criticisms directed at both APEC and ASEM range from the absence of priorities, leading to a proliferation of meetings and initiatives stretching the already thin resources. The consensus decision-making is also often associated with the “lowest common denominator”, and aspirational goals, rather than binding targets, are seen as a reason for the lack of concrete or tangible results. Critics have also felt that even if it is the process and not the outcome that is important, then the processes should be streamlined in order to prove more efficient and impactful. Additionally, processes should eventually lead to something more, contributing for instance to norms building, or having a transformative impact on the relationships among the members.

The greatest challenge for both APEC and ASEM is that their members do not share a single vision. The fact that both fora have widened before they could be deepened, has compounded the problems of achieving consensus, resulting in multiple visions. For example, those in APEC who were in favor of the grouping becoming a trading bloc were frustrated with the performance and the slow progress achieved through unilateral liberalization. Attention has therefore been diverted from APEC to other preferential trading arrangements such as the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP).

Another challenge that both APEC and ASEM face is finding a “niche” within the proliferation of fora and the expanding regional/trans-regional architecture. Increasing competition exists for attention, time and resources from these other dialogue fora and processes, and political interest in APEC and ASEM has waned. APEC as a forum to facilitate trade and investment is now facing competition, for example from

the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) and the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP). Within the broader Asia-Europe landscape, competition exists from other inter-regional and bilateral processes such as the EU-ASEAN meetings, and the series of summits that the EU holds with its strategic partners in Asia (China, Japan, South Korea and India).

Both APEC and ASEM currently suffer from a lack of ownership and champions, and thus have become bureaucratized processes that will continue to be carefully managed, but are painfully slow to reform and to respond to changing needs. Finding national champions for these two processes is probably another key challenge.

Critics have furthermore singled out the lack of visibility as one of the challenges of ASEM. APEC did not face this problem as acutely as world media tend to congregate when the current superpower, the US, meets its potential challenger, a rising China. Media coverage on APEC is usually higher than that of ASEM, but at the same time, it is usually the bilateral meetings in the sidelines of the summits that seem to generate more interest than the summit itself. Media coverage of APEC has for many years been made “interesting” because of the speculation over the “native” costume that the leaders will wear for the “family photo”. But the truth is that except for the summits, there is very little being reported on both APEC and ASEM.

ASEM has furthermore been plagued by criticisms on its less than ideal working methods. Without a secretariat, there is concern over the “limited institutional memory” as officials handling ASEM matters in national administrations change continually. Several

initiatives have surfaced over the years to try and address deficiencies in the overall working methods and strengthen the role of Coordinators. These have ranged from the idea of having an ASEM Virtual Secretariat to initiatives to provide technical support to the coordination of the ASEM process, including through an ASEM Chairman’s Support Group. Unfortunately all these initiatives have not quite worked and they have all faded into oblivion. The debate on whether ASEM should have a small Secretariat or to perhaps equip ASEM to take on some secretariat functions will likely continue to surface.

APEC and ASEM will continue to be challenged by the extent and pace of changes taking place in their respective regions and globally. APEC comes up short in terms of coping with the demands required in promoting multilateral cooperation, connecting the economic realm to the security and political fields, and providing leadership on global issues. Similarly, questions could be asked if ASEM should continue to be just a forum for the exchange of views and concerns, or whether it should step up to help address major challenges by engaging in collective problem solving.

2.7 Trajectories of development

Looking at the trajectories of both APEC and ASEM, we can detect similar trends, at least from what is gleaned from research papers, academic writings and media analysis – a short period of euphoria leading to hyped up expectations, followed by disappointment and frustrations, and calls to review, rethink and re-energize the goals of the fora and streamline the processes in order to retain relevance. Some analysts have indeed noted that despite important differences between the two fora (APEC

starting clearly with the presence of the US, a hegemonic power, and with a much more limited agenda, and with the assumption of the emergence of an Asia-Pacific community), both *“not only share many specific characteristics, but also very limited policy relevance”* (Maul and Ofken, 2003: 248).

APEC started modestly in 1989, but was then hyped up in 1993 when then US president Clinton decided to call for a summit meeting in Seattle to signal the growing importance of Asia-Pacific trade, and using it as antics to put pressure on the Europeans for the conclusion of the Uruguay Rounds of negotiations at the GATT (General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade), the predecessor of the World Trade Organization (WTO). The 1994 summit in Bogor hosted by Indonesia came up with the ambitious APEC Bogor goals that aimed for free and open trade and investments in the Asia-Pacific by 2010 for the developed economies and by 2020 for the developing economies. However, differences in end goals or vision for the region led to compromises for a voluntary unilateral approach towards liberalization as contained in the Osaka Action Agenda in 1995. The Osaka Action Agenda provides a framework for meeting the Bogor goals through trade and investment liberalization and business facilitation, underpinned by dialogues, economic and technical cooperation, and individual action plans (IAP) submitted by APEC member economies. APEC member economies set their own timelines and goals, and undertake these actions contained in the IAP on a voluntary and non-binding basis.

Those who preferred a stronger, binding commitment to open and free trade and investment in the Asia-Pacific saw this as APEC’s first setback. But it was the inaction or lack of coordinated response to the Asian

Financial Crisis (AFC) of 1997–98 that engendered severe criticism. Alternative fora such as the ASEAN Plus Three (APT), which emerged during the AFC, led to a sense of a nascent East Asian regionalism, seen as potentially challenging a broader Asia-Pacific regionalism. A few years later, the 9/11 terrorist attacks on the US led to the broadening of APEC’s agenda to include security issues, which further diluted the forum’s original goal of achieving free and open trade and investments in the Asia-Pacific.

APEC has since then “suffered” from what was seen as “mission creep”, with more and more dialogue but less and less focus and depth on the key issues of trade and investment liberalization. Several policy analysts attributed the proliferation of dialogue and issues to the enlargement of the membership, and hence from 1998 onwards a ten-year moratorium was placed on APEC expansion.

As APEC celebrated its 20th anniversary, there were various reviews and attempts to “revitalize” it. Some of the measures taken included strengthening the APEC Secretariat by establishing the APEC Policy Support Unit (PSU) —a research and analysis arm within the Secretariat— to be funded by voluntary contributions from APEC members. The open recruitment of the Executive Director was another measure, and all these moves, together with the attempt to refocus APEC’s agenda on technical issues such as standards and conformance, customs procedures and capacity building to facilitate trade and promote investments, can be seen as attempts to identify a “niche” for APEC as it faced competition from other emerging regional structures. In the view of this author, APEC is perhaps moving towards becoming more OECD-like, pointing out a possible future trajectory.

It would work with APEC governments to promote policies that will help to create a more integrated Asia-Pacific through open and free trade and investments.

When ASEM was first conceived, the stated goal was very modest, namely to provide a platform for East Asian leaders to meet with leaders of the European Union and its member states. It was also primarily economy-driven, to connect the two engines of economic growth in Asia and Europe, to complement the historical transatlantic links between the US and Europe and the emerging transpacific ties between America and East Asia. However, the euphoria of the first meeting led to the desire to pursue a comprehensive dialogue that is not just about economy, but also political and socio-cultural, hence the three pillars of ASEM.

The initial years of ASEM did try to promote a more economy-focused agenda with working groups set up to work on a Trade Facilitation Action Plan (TFAP) and an Investment Promotion Action Plan (IPAP). Initial enthusiasm towards trade and investment was also revealed in the early convening of the Asia-Europe Business Forum (the first AEBF in October 1996, half a year after the inaugural summit), followed by a meeting in Bangkok in 1997. The AFC did not quite dampen the economic agenda, but engendered a social dimension, particularly with the discussions on a social safety net in Southeast Asian countries such as Indonesia and Thailand that were badly affected by the crisis. The other pillars of ASEM gained prominence with events such as 9/11 and SARS, and also with the tensions over Myanmar's human rights record and its impending participation in ASEM in view of the respective enlargements

of ASEAN and the EU (see **Chapter Three** in this study). A clear manifestation of the dilution of the economic agenda is the failure to revive the Economic Ministers' Meeting (EMM) which has not convened since 2005.³

As ASEM enlarged, its agenda also widened. The first review of ASEM in 2006, a decade after the inaugural summit, already revealed increasing disappointment and some dissatisfaction with regard to the lack of "concrete achievements" and the broad but shallow dialogue.

Efforts have been made since the 2006 review to address some of the criticisms – such as resisting efforts to bureaucratize the Leaders' meeting and introducing a retreat for a more informal dialogue amongst the leaders, creating instruments such as a Virtual Secretariat, a Technical Support Unit for ASEM Coordination, and an ASEM Chair Support Group to help improve the working methods. Unfortunately, as noted above, not all of these initiatives have worked. At the "cusp" of ASEM's 20th anniversary, the forum faces similar issues: questioning the need for an ASEM Secretariat, balancing informality and "tangible" benefits, curbing the proliferation of issues, setting clear priorities, and finding a niche in a very crowded environment of fora, dialogue platforms and other soft institutions that have emerged in Asia and Europe. So where should ASEM go from here? What lessons can ASEM draw from APEC, which followed a similar trajectory but received a much-needed boost in 2014 following President Xi Jinping's call for a Free Trade Agreement of the Asia-Pacific (FTAAP) (even if this brought APEC back to the original goals deliberated at the Summit in Bogor in 1994)?

³ It concerned a "High Level Meeting within the Framework of the ASEM Economic Ministers' Meeting". The last full-scale EMM took place in Dalian, China, in 2003.

3. Lessons from APEC and policy recommendations

3.1 Goals and objectives – offer a compelling vision

It is laudable that ASEM seeks to pursue a comprehensive dialogue paying equal attention to all three pillars of dialogue, but the experience of APEC shows that having a more specific goal and more focused agenda is useful in crafting a more compelling vision and in drawing attention to the ongoing work. APEC's goal to champion free and open trade and investment in the Asia-Pacific led to the crafting of the 1994 Bogor goals. Though in the end diversities in political and economic systems and development led to an uneven implementation of these goals, the Bogor goals remain aspirational, and APEC work programs revolve around projects and initiatives designed with a view to reducing barriers in trade and investments. That has not stopped APEC from also wading into issues such as environment, education, and food security, but these are often discussed in relation to the broader picture of trade and investments in the Asia-Pacific.

ASEM could consider such an approach, and start to define a more specific goal and vision. A useful starting point would be ASEM's original impulse, the underlying economic drivers and hence the initial focus on the Economic Ministers' Meeting and working groups for the Trade Facilitation Action Plan (TFAP) and the Investment Promotion Action Plan (IPAP).

The Asia-Europe Vision Group (AEVG) in 1999 published a report with recommendations to take ASEM forward. One of the recommendations was to work towards an

ASEM Free Trade Agreement (FTA). Knowing that the feasibility of an ASEM FTA may be some time away in view of the vast diversities, ASEM could instead craft a vision of **a bustling Asia-Europe Marketplace** – a well connected bazaar where trade and ideas flow both ways from Asia to Europe and Europe to Asia. In this vision, all ASEM initiatives and projects should be geared towards a robust exchange of ideas, contributing to enhanced connectivity and eventually resulting in increased trade and investment flows.

3.2 Engagement of stakeholders - the business and academic communities

The role of the business community in helping to push APEC's agenda on free and open trade and investment is notable, especially in the earlier years. It has also resulted in one of the most visible benefit of APEC, the APEC Business Travel Card.

ASEM should strengthen its engagement with the business community and create a committed and core group of business executives from Asia and Europe that are willing to serve in advisory roles similar to the APEC Business Advisory Council (ABAC). **An ASEM Business Advisory Council** could take the lead in organizing the Asia-Europe Business Forum (AEBF), ensuring sustained interest and continuity in following up on the concerns of the business community, and advocating reforms that can help facilitate trade and investments.

Studies Centers have been instrumental in increasing APEC's visibility. Though APEC is only a few years "older" than ASEM, the amount of literature on APEC far outnumbered that on ASEM. Just a cursory check on

Google reveals that there are currently 10 times more articles on APEC than on ASEM. ASEM should therefore consider how it can engage the academic community more systematically for sustained interest on ASEM beyond the official connections. This would also feed into the vision of an Asia-Europe Marketplace of ideas. For a start, creating an **ASEM Studies Center** somewhere in Europe could complement the presence of the Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF) in Singapore. The ASEM Studies Center would also be a useful instrument to support evidence-based policy analysis and recommendations.

In short, ASEM needs to identify champions within the business and academic communities that can help support and promote the ASEM agenda.⁴

3.3 Institutional structure – a Secretariat and Working Committees

The APEC Secretariat was established in 1993 to create a support mechanism for the APEC process. It was then a small Secretariat with a very limited central budget. As APEC's agenda broadened and the scope of its activities proliferated, the Secretariat was deemed too weak to be effective. This led to calls for reforms in the management structure, resulting in the creation of an entire Policy Support Unit (PSU) in 2008 within the Secretariat to boost its capacity in policy analysis. Funding and financial stability remained an issue since the compulsory funding into the central budget is minimal, and additional funding to the APEC Support Fund is based on voluntary contributions. The trajectory of the APEC Secretariat perhaps revealed what officials have always

“feared”, namely that institutions, once created, tend to expand. This perhaps underlies the resistance among several ASEM partners towards the creation of an ASEM Secretariat at this juncture.

However, a Secretariat does offer a focal point, a “number” to call when needed, and provides institutional memory and continuity. If ASEM is to consider a Secretariat, it should draw on APEC's lessons and make careful deliberations on the structure and how it is to be funded.

Other ways to address the current problems faced by ASEM especially on the Asian side with the rotating coordinators is to look at the Committee structure within APEC. Marrying this with the earlier idea of issue-based leadership, ASEM could set up working committees on a few key issues that draw substantial interest and support from at least 8-10 members. ASEM could then have 4-6 working committees to evaluate projects and initiatives and work to deliver results on these identified issues. For example, ASEM could have a working committee on “environmental sustainability and development”. ASEM partners seeking to champion this broad issue, caucus to support policy discussions and projects on this for the benefit of all.

3.4 Membership and enlargement

APEC imposed a moratorium on membership in 1998 when it reached 21. It was an astute move to try and deepen the process before widening. Yet, even at 21, the diversities within do take their toll on the consensus-based approach in decision-making.

⁴ See **Chapter Five** for a more detailed discussion on stakeholder groups in the ASEM process.

ASEM has more than doubled its membership (from the initial 26 to 53) due in part to the respective enlargements in the European Union and ASEAN (see **Chapter Three**). It has expanded beyond its initial perceived bi-regional EU-ASEAN+3 approach to a more contiguous “Eurasian” character, geographically stretching from Australasia, sub-continental Asia to Kazakhstan, Russia and Europe. Should ASEM therefore place a moratorium on membership now, or continue to expand?

If ASEM is to reflect the inter-continental Asia-Europe character, perhaps expansion should be limited to the Asian side, to take in members of SAARC (South Asian Association of Regional Cooperation) that are not yet ASEM participants, such as Sri Lanka, Maldives and Nepal, and then admit Central Asian states such as Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. It would then allow at least four coordinators on the Asian side instead of the current two coordinators —representing the different sub-regions— Southeast Asia, Northeast Asia, SAARC, and Central Asia. Australia and New Zealand could caucus with Northeast Asia, and Russia with Central Asia. This may help in some way to improve the coordination process within the Asian ASEM members, and reduce the need for a Secretariat.

4. Conclusion

This chapter started with a comparison of APEC and ASEM and traced the trajectories of their developments. When discussing key challenges and criticisms, the question comes to mind why members of APEC and ASEM continue their support (even if perfunctory) of these two processes despite their rather meager results. This can arguably be answered by the rise of “diminished

multilateralism” and “forum-shopping”, as argued by German scholar Jürgen Rüländ (2012). Rüländ contended that despite a remarkable growth of global and regional institutions in the 1980s and 1990s, the current system of global governance can be best described as “diminished multilateralism”: institutions or fora are created not for settling collective problems but function as places of contestation for power and representation. Hence these institutions and fora suffer from shallow institutionalization, broad agenda, poor nesting and institutional redundancy (Rüländ, 2012: 256).

APEC and ASEM are manifestations of this broader trend in international relations. They are fora for soft politics, not institutions for collective problem solving. Members of these fora can use them to flag and discuss political issues, not with the intention of resolving them but to learn and understand issues in the hope that mutual accommodation can be achieved (Maull and Ofken, 2003: 248). In an increasingly contentious and fragmented world, however, such fora for dialogue continue to exist amidst a proliferation of many other varieties and configurations of informal networks and groups.

In 2009, when APEC celebrated its 20th anniversary, the then Executive Director of the APEC Secretariat reminded us that “20 years is not a long time in the life of a regional process”. We should perhaps remember this as ASEM enters its 20th year in 2016. There are some lessons that ASEM can draw from the development of APEC. But ultimately both APEC and ASEM need to continue to evolve, albeit at a pace comfortable to their members, and identify their particular “niches” if they are to enjoy a long shelf life.

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Figure 1.1: Institutional Structure of APEC

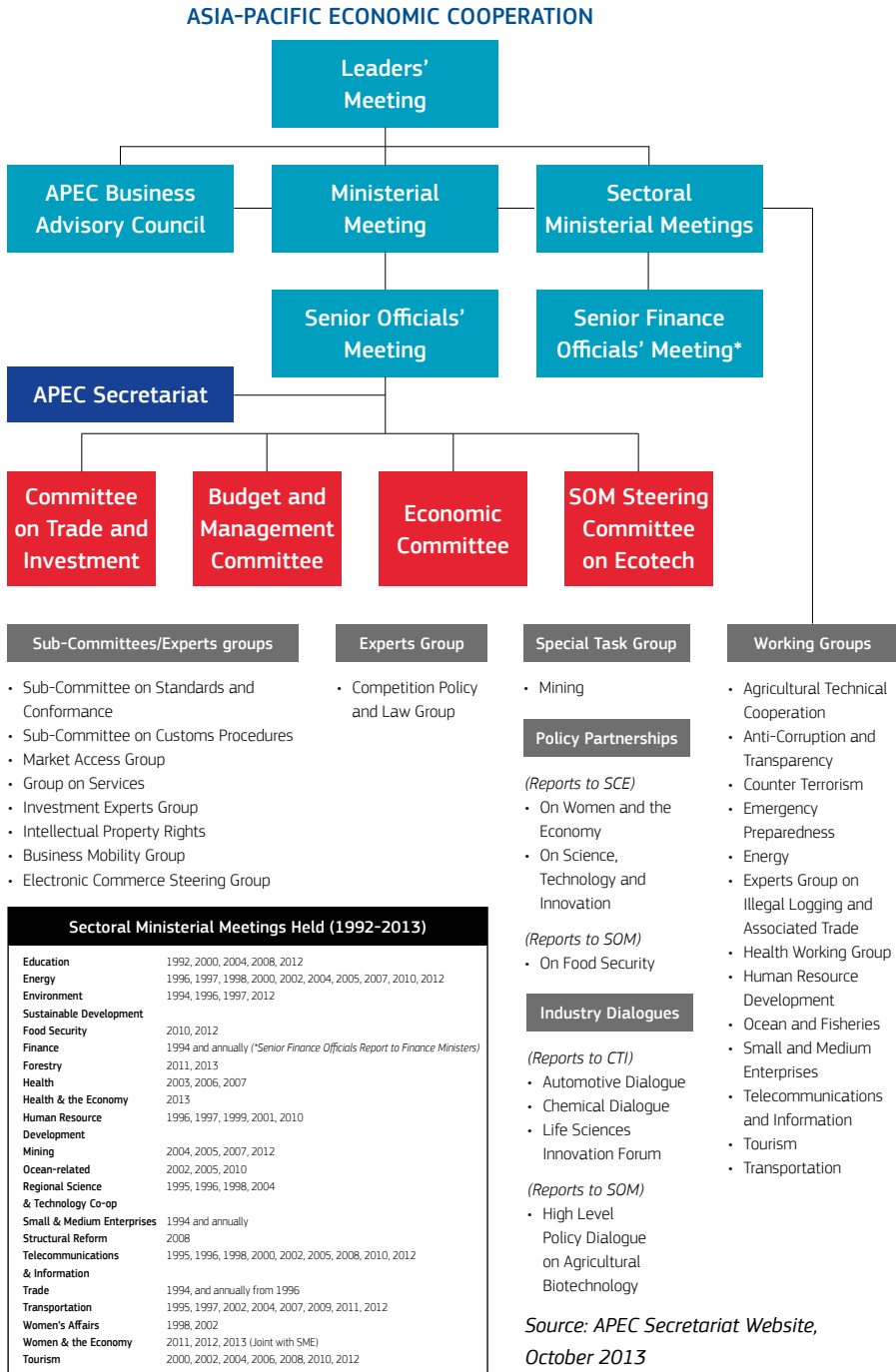


Figure 1.2: Institutional Structure of ASEM

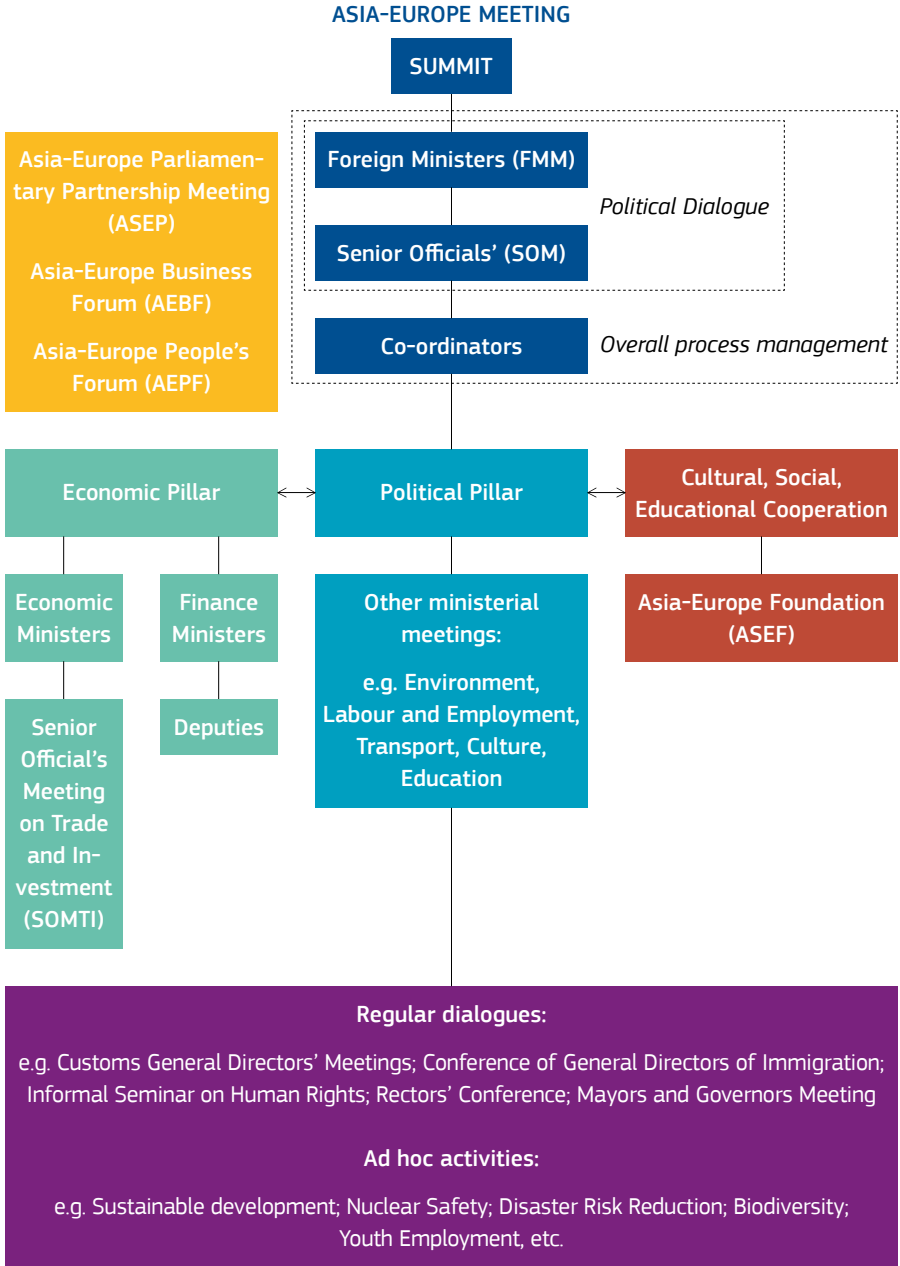


Table 1.1: An Overview of APEC versus ASEM

Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC)

Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM)

<p>21 Member Economies (from both sides of the Pacific).</p> <p>3 Observers – ASEAN Secretariat, Pacific Economic Cooperation Council (PECC) and Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat.</p>	<p>53 Partners from Asia and Europe, including regional entities – EU and ASEAN. (No observers in ASEM).</p>
<p>Goals & Objectives: APEC is a regional economic forum established in 1989 to leverage the growing interdependence of the Asia-Pacific. Its aim is to create greater prosperity for the people of the region by promoting balanced, inclusive, sustainable, innovative and secure growth and by accelerating regional economic integration.</p>	<p>Goals & Objectives: The ASEM dialogue was launched in 1996 to address political, economic and cultural issues, with the objective of strengthening the relationship between our two regions, in a spirit of mutual respect and equal partnership.</p>
<p>The Three Pillars of APEC's Agenda:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trade and Investment Liberalization. • Business Facilitation. • Economic and Technical Cooperation. 	<p>The Three Pillars of ASEM's Agenda:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Economic Pillar. • Political Pillar. • Cultural, Intellectual and People-to-People (P2P) Pillar.
<p>Characteristics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inter-governmental. • Summit-driven (summit held annually). • Economics focus / trade driven. • Policy Direction provided by Leaders at the Summit. • Preparation and Inputs by Foreign and Economic Ministers. These Ministerial Meetings are held before the Summit. • Decisions are taken by consensus and non-binding. • Implementation of decisions and other actions are on voluntary basis. • Institution-light (a small secretariat to support APEC activities and projects). 	<p>Characteristics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inter-governmental. • Summit-driven (summit held biennially). • Multi-dimensional, comprehensive dialogue. • Aspirational goals, and a host of follow-up declared at the end of each Summit. • Preparation for the Summit by Foreign Ministers and Senior Officials from the Foreign Ministries and EEAS. • Follow-up initiatives and projects are organized and hosted by those members who proposed them. • Reluctance to “institutionalize” relying instead on rotating coordination, national contact points instead of having a Secretariat.

Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC)

Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM)

<p>Brick & Mortar Institution: APEC Secretariat (located in Singapore).</p> <p>Key Function: Operates as the core support mechanism for the APEC process and provides coordination, technical and advisory support as well as public communications and outreach services. It also has a central project management role, assisting APEC and its member economies with overseeing more than 250 APEC-funded projects.</p>	<p>Brick & Mortar Institution: Asia-Europe Foundation (located in Singapore).</p> <p>Primary Mission: To promote greater mutual understanding between Asia and Europe through intellectual, cultural and people-to-people exchanges. Also serves as ASEM conduits to the civil society.</p>
<p>Affiliated Fora:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • APEC CEO Summits. • APEC Voices of the Future – key platform for gathering of APEC young leaders. 	<p>Affiliated Fora:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Asia-Europe Business Forum (AEBF). • Asia-Europe People's Forum (AEPF). • Asia-Europe Parliamentary Partnership (ASEP) Forum.
<p>Other APEC-related Entities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • APEC Business Advisory Council (ABAC) (International Secretariat located in Manila). • APEC Study Centers (a consortium of 50 centers exist in 20 of the 21 APEC member economies). • APEC Energy Standards Information System (www.apec-esis.org). • APEC Harmonization Center (Secretariat in Seoul) (www.nifds.go.kr/apec/index.do). 	<p>Other ASEM-related Entities (past & present):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Asia-Europe Environmental Technology Centre (AEETC) located in Thailand (from 1998-2003). • ASEM Aquaculture Platform – supported by funding from FP7 and Flemish Research Council for the years 2003-2013 (www.asemaquaculture.org). • ASEM SMEs Eco-innovation Center (www.aseic.org), from 2011, hosted by Korea in Seoul. • ASEM Water Resources Research & Development Center, from 2011, hosted by China in Changsha (www.asemwater.org). • ASEM Education and Research Hub for Life Long Learning established in 2005 (asemllhub.org). • ASEM Education Secretariat, currently hosted by Indonesia (asem-education-secretariat.kemdikbud.go.id).

CHAPTER TWO

The EU as global player: ASEM, EU-AFRICA and EU-CELAC

- DIFFERENT STROKES FOR DIFFERENT FOLK -



*by Shada Islam, Director of Policy
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1. Introduction

The drive to become a global player is a central element of the European Union's foreign and security policy. It is also an important part of the EU's trade and aid relations, and increasingly evident in almost all sectoral policies, including energy, transport, environment and health. The EU's global ambitions are evident in its many multilateral initiatives, active participation in international fora and expanding outreach regarding foreign and security policy as well as through the signature of trade agreements and sectoral dialogues in areas such as science and technology. On the bilateral level, cooperation and partnership agreements have been signed with an array of countries and regional organizations. In addition, the EU is engaged in three important region-to-region or "continent-to-continent" initiatives with countries in Asia (ASEM or the Asia-Europe Meeting), Africa (the EU-Africa Strategic Partnership) and Latin America (EU-CELAC, the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States), which are the subject of this chapter.

Inevitably more amorphous, less structured and less intense than the EU's ties with individual countries or with regional organizations, these mega region-to-region or continent-to-continent dialogues reflect the EU's desire to engage with some of the world's most exciting and dynamic emerging nations - and to work with them in an increasingly inter-connected, inter-dependent and complex world. At the same time, the focus is also on promoting key sustainable development goals including eradication of poverty, especially in the least-developed countries belonging to these three groupings.

While different in scope and content, all three fora underline the need for international dialogue and cooperation on a range of complicated global challenges including climate change, maritime security and food and water security. Interestingly, since they were conceived at different times and in response to different continental political, social and economic realities, they do not share a common template or common ambitions and goals. The structure of the dialogues is somewhat similar—for example the regular organization of summits is a feature of all three—but not identical, with varying degrees of formality and evaluation and monitoring mechanisms.

As ASEM prepares to enter its third decade and discussions focus on how to revive and renew the Asia-Europe relationship, this chapter takes a closer look at all three of these key EU initiatives. The aim is to point out similarities and differences between these three mega "umbrella processes". The chapter begins with an outline of the origins, ambitions, working methods and key guiding documents of each of the three relationships. It then looks at the common drivers and how they reflect the EU's search for stronger global relevance and visibility. It also seeks to identify what makes each relationship different and distinct. Finally, it explores any lessons that ASEM can learn from CELAC and EU-Africa ties as for its future direction and in order to improve ways in which the Asia Europe conversation is held in a rapidly-changing global environment.

2. “Partners around the world”

Federica Mogherini, the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, has frequently highlighted the need to work with “partners around the world, both with individual countries that have a strategic importance for us, as well as with regional organisations,” and multilateral bodies (Hinton-Beales, 2015). Speaking at the Shangri La security forum in Singapore in June 2015, Mogherini went further by underlining that the EU was not just a big free trade area but also a “foreign policy community, a security and defence provider. For our own people - within our borders and in the rest of the world”. She added:

“We are ready to take more responsibility to bring security and stability in our part of the world, together with our neighbours; and with our global partners - Asia included.”

Federica Mogherini, (2015)



Mogherini’s message of the EU as a global player is especially relevant in today’s complex global environment. But the goal of making the Union “stronger in the pursuit of its essential objectives and more present in the world” was already clearly articulated by the Laeken European Council in December 2001 (European Council, 2001). A clear reference to the EU as “inevitably a global player” is often cited as the hallmark of the European Security Strategy published in December 2003 (European Council, 2003). An updated version of the document released five years later, carried the argument for an expanded European global role even further by underlining an ambition to become “more strategic in our thinking and more effective and visible around the world” (European Council, 2008). The entry into force in 2009 of the Treaty of Lisbon with its provisions to create the post of High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (merging the role of Commission of External Affairs and the High Representative for Foreign and Security Policy), and the establishment of the European External Action Service (EEAS) provides added impetus—and gives additional credibility—to the EU’s search for an expanded and enhanced role on the world stage.

While the 2003 security strategy made the clearest reference yet to the EU’s global ambitions and the significance of building strategic partnerships with an extensive network of countries and organizations, the EU’s international profile stretches back to the 1963 signature of the first Yaounde Convention (named after the capital city of Cameroon) with the group of African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries. Partnership and Cooperation Agreements were also signed in the 1960s and 1970s with, among others, Brazil, India and China (later transformed into “strategic partnerships”)

as well as with regional organizations such as ASEAN (the Association of Southeast Asian Nations), ECOWAS, MERCOSUR and others. The pace of global EU engagement quickened in the 1990s with the launch in November 1995 of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, also known as the Barcelona Process, with 16 countries in the southern Mediterranean, Africa and the Middle East.⁵

Three other major region-to-region (or continent-to-continent) dialogues, were also established in fairly quick succession:

- The Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) brings together 21 Asian countries, plus the ASEAN Secretariat, 28 EU members, plus Norway and Switzerland and the EU. ASEM was launched in March 1996 to strengthen the linkage between Asia and Europe and will celebrate its 20th anniversary in 2016. It is the only international forum launched by the EU which includes non-EU European members.
- The EU-Africa Strategic Partnership covers 54 members of the African Union, plus the African Union Commission, the EU and the 28 EU countries. Africa and the EU have interacted since 1963 through the Yaounde Convention, the four Lomé Conventions and the Cotonou Agreement signed in 2000 between the EU and the African Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) group, but the first EU-Africa summit was held in 2000 and the Joint Africa Europe Strategy (JAES) was adopted in 2007.
- EU-CELAC includes 33 members of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean states, the EU and 28 EU member states. The first EU summit

with Latin America and the Caribbean held in Rio de Janeiro (Brazil) in 1999 established a strategic partnership between the two regions. The creation of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean states (CELAC) in 2011 as a new region-wide political organization and therefore a new counterpart for the EU led to the organization of the first EU-CELAC summit in Santiago (Chile) in January 2013.

3. ASEM, EU-Africa and EU-CELAC: what is similar, what is different – and why

The mega region-to-region/continent-to-continent relationships share certain similarities in their content and structures, including their focus on sustainable development, but are conducted in parallel tracks by different departments of the EEAS. Broadly speaking, socialisation and the encouragement of greater mutual understanding between Europe and Asia are clearly stated as a reason for the launch of ASEM. In contrast, the EU-Africa and EU-CELAC relationships have had a more specific “nuts and bolts” agenda for region-to-region cooperation from the start. In terms of content, trade and business remain the backbone of Asia-Europe relations although the two regions are also increasingly working together on regional and global challenges, including non-traditional security. The EU-Africa partnership gives priority to poverty elimination and sustainable development as well as security issues. The emphasis in the EU-CELAC relationship is on Europe and Latin America as partners linked by strong historical, cultural and economic ties, as well as people-to-people connections and common aspirations.

⁵ The Euro-Mediterranean Partnership was re-launched in 2008 as the Union for the Mediterranean.

3.1 Goals and Objectives

ASEM: Focus on the future

Asia and Europe have long-standing historical, economic and cultural ties but ASEM's launch in 1996 was about the future, not the past. Asian and European leaders who met in Bangkok at the first ASEM summit insisted the process would be informal, encourage greater Asia-Europe understanding, allow for a dialogue on regional and global issues, and boost trade and investment links. Given the business-like approach of the encounter, the leaders did not wax lyrical about a common vision for the future or issue an over-arching guiding document, agenda for action, or strategy document.

The geostrategic argument was simple: ASEM was needed to place the Asia-Europe relationship on a par with the expanding US engagement with Asian states, including through APEC (Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation, see **Chapter One**) and existing close EU-US ties. However, with Asian economies grabbing the headlines with their dynamic economic performance and the beginning of the process of China's economic transformation, ASEM was also very much about building more dynamic Asia-Europe economic connections. The EU wanted a share of the strong growth in Asia while Asians worried about the "Fortress Europe" implications of the Single European Market, the EU's focus on Central and Eastern Europe, and the inward-looking debates on the Maastricht Treaty. Certainly, Asians *wanted to be sure that they would not be shut out of Europe. Engaging Europe is also a way of diversifying their economic and foreign policy dependence away from the Americans*" (Yeo, 2006).

Since it was envisaged as an informal gathering of leaders, the inaugural ASEM summit

did not have a structured agenda, with leaders free to discuss topics of interest. No framework strategic document or long-term vision for the future was released but the Bangkok statement (ASEM, 1996) noted ASEM's key objectives as follows:

To provide Asian and European leaders with an opportunity to get to know one another and build rapport as a foundation for further and continued cooperation amongst the participating countries in more specific areas.

To encourage greater understanding between the peoples of the two regions, provide a unique opportunity to explore new avenues of cooperation in the political, economic and social fields and usher in a new era of closer friendship and cooperation between Asia and Europe built on shared interests and sustained through common understandings.

To provide an opportunity for leaders to exchange views on current regional and global issues, including reform of the United Nations, general disarmament and nuclear non-proliferation, in order to build greater trust and confidence amongst the participating countries, thus contributing to global stability.

To strengthen economic relations through promoting greater trade and investment between the two regions as a complement to existing efforts to achieve an open, rules-based trading system within the framework of the World Trade Organization.

To encourage Asian and European business and private sectors to strengthen their cooperation through increased contact, joint ventures and transfer of technology.

Four years later, however, in Seoul in 2000, ASEM Heads of State and Government adopted the Asia Europe Cooperation Framework (AECF) to set out the vision, principles, objectives, priorities and mechanisms for the process “for the first decade of the new millennium” (ASEM, 2000). According to the AECF:

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.

EU-Africa relations – History looms large

History looms large in the EU-Africa relationship. The EU and Africa have interacted since 1963 through the Yaounde Convention, the four Lome Conventions and the Cotonou Agreement signed in 2000 between the EU and the African Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) group. While these accords were essentially about trade and aid, the first EU-Africa summit in 2000 placed a stronger focus on Africa as a partner for Europe. The EU-Africa Strategic Partnership established in 2007 in Lisbon moved the relationship to a new level as both sides agreed to pursue common interests and strategic objectives which went beyond the focus of traditional development policy, and to forge a partnership of equals.

The overall political framework for the EU-Africa relationship was set out in a Joint Africa-EU Strategy (JAES), adopted in Lisbon in 2007, identifies four main objectives of the long-term strategic partnership (European Council, 2007):

To reinforce and elevate the Africa-EU political partnership to address issues of common concern (peace and security, migration and development, and a clean environment).

To strengthen and promote peace, security, democratic governance and human rights, fundamental freedoms, gender equality, sustainable economic development, including industrialisation, and regional and continental development in Africa, and to ensure that all MDGs are met in all African countries by the year 2015.

To jointly promote and sustain a system of effective multilateralism, with strong, representative institutions, and the reform of the UN system and other key international institutions, and to address global challenges and common concerns.

To facilitate and promote a broad-based and wide-ranging people-centered partnership which should involve non-state actors in order to create conditions to enable them to play an active role in development, democracy building, conflict prevention and post-conflict reconstruction processes.

EU-CELAC – Common aspirations

Their relations have often been marked by important ideological differences but the EU insists that Latin American states and Europe are “*natural partners linked by strong historical, cultural and economic ties*” (EEAS, 2015). Mogherini has reinforced the message by noting the following:

“The people of Latin America, the Caribbean and Europe have a long history of common aspirations... nowadays, we share a wish for peace and prosperity that our cultural and historical roots have helped to strengthen from generation to generation.”

Federica Mogherini, (EEAS, 2015)



The EU and Latin America and the Caribbean held their first bi-regional Summit in Rio de Janeiro (Brazil) in 1999. Six EU-LAC summits were held over the coming years (approximately one every two years), culminating in the adoption of a comprehensive Action Plan at the summit held in Madrid in May 2010 (European Council, 2010).

The establishment in 2011 of a new region-wide political organization—the Community of Latin American and Caribbean states (CELAC)—raised hopes of a more balanced and a better organized relationship between the two regions and was followed by the organization of the first EU-CELAC summit in Santiago, Chile, in January 2013 and the second one in Brussels in June 2015.

The EU's key priorities in its relations with LAC states were set out as follows in 2009 (European Commission, 2012):

More dialogue on macro-economic and financial issues, environment and energy or science and research, intensifying our cooperation in these fields.

More regional integration and interconnectivity (through, for example, a new instrument, the Latin America Investment Facility whose main objective is to mobilise additional financing to support investment in Latin America).

Deepening bilateral relations with LAC partner countries while complementing EU support for regional associations through specific agreements.

Adapting cooperation programmes to the needs of the countries beyond the areas covered by traditional development cooperation.

Involving civil society in the Strategic Partnership, including through the creation of an EU-LAC Foundation.

3.2 Structure and working methods

All three partnerships have generated a plethora of meetings on a wide range of subjects between ministers, senior officials and experts. Meetings among leaders are at the apex of all three dialogues. ASEM and EU-CELAC provide for biennial summits. Leaders' meetings within the EU-Africa context have been less regular, but the aim is to hold such gatherings every three years.

The summits in all three cases are important agenda-setting exercises. Although they may go by different names ("chairman's statements", "declarations", "action plans"), documents issued at the end of summits identify key areas for future cooperation and discussion, thereby driving the partnerships forward, often towards new directions. ASEM has also restarted its original "retreat" session where leaders meet for a real exchange, with the presence of only one aide. EU-CELAC also has leaders' retreats.

Between the biennial summits, foreign ministers and their senior officials have an important overall coordinating role within the ASEM process, and are assisted in this by an informal group of Coordinators (two on the Asian side and two on the European side).

The ASEM Foreign Ministers' Meeting is responsible for the overall coordination of the ASEM process and is a driving force of ASEM's political pillar. While the EU coordinates the European grouping in ASEM, unlike African members of the EU-Africa relations or Latin American and Caribbean states belonging to the AU and CELAC respectively, ASEM's Asian partners do not belong to one over-arching region-wide organization. Ten Asian countries are members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) while India, Pakistan and Bangladesh are members of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC).

Many Asian countries are linked to each other through a "noodle bowl" of free trade agreements but only meet as an "Asian group" in their talks with their European counterparts in ASEM. This leads to challenges in coordinating an Asian approach, even if two informal coordinators have been appointed, one for ASEAN and another for the non-ASEAN countries.

EU-CELAC relations are also structured around biennial summits—which include a "retreat" session—and while there are regular Senior Officials' Meetings, no special role was initially earmarked for Foreign Ministers. At their meeting in Brussels on June 11, 2015, however, EU-CELAC leaders mandated Foreign Ministers to commit to a comprehensive and inclusive exercise of reflection on the future of the bi-regional relationship, including an assessment of the programs and actions adopted by the Summits and of the best way to ensure these common objectives. The results of this exercise will be presented during the bi-regional meeting of Ministers of Foreign Affairs that will be held in 2016.

In addition, CELAC's rotating presidency, which coordinates the Community's internal workings, also acts as a single interlocutor for the EU. The relationship includes a series of ministerial and expert-level "policy dialogues" on issues such as drugs, migration and education.

Interestingly, at an EU meeting with Latin America in Vienna in 2006, leaders were separated into six "working tables", each on a different topic and chaired by a different leader. The experiment was not repeated, however.

Ministerial-level meetings also take stock of progress achieved in between summits in the EU-Africa Strategic Partnership but there is no special role reserved for the two regions' Foreign Ministers. Instead, the focus is on so-called "College-to-College" meetings between the two region's executive bodies—the African Union and the European Commission—which take place on an annual basis to provide political and operational impetus to Africa-EU relations; they are held on an alternating basis in Brussels and Addis Ababa.

In addition, "Joint Annual Forums" (formerly "Joint Task Force" meetings), covering all areas of cooperation within the framework of the Joint Strategy, gather sectoral experts from member states, institutions, civil society organizations and other relevant stakeholders once a year to assess progress made with regard to the implementation of the JAES.

Moreover the ongoing dialogue between the two partners is facilitated through the AU's permanent mission to the EU and the EU delegation to the AU in Addis Ababa.

ASEM's focus on informality is therefore in contrast to the very structured and institutionalized relationship between the EU and the African Union. The latter includes regular meetings of the two organizations' executive commissions which set the agenda for the partnership. The EU-CELAC partnership falls somewhere between ASEM and EU-Africa relations since CELAC's rotating presidency is also the interlocutor in the region's relations with foreign partners and plays an important coordinating role, including in relations with the EEAS.

3.3 Involvement of stakeholders

Provisions for people-to-people contacts and socio-cultural links, with a special emphasis on gatherings of young people, members of parliament and business representatives are a common thread running through ASEM, EU-Africa and EU-CELAC although the manner in which these encounters are organized and their contribution to the overall relationship are different. The EU-LAC Foundation in Hamburg and the Singapore-based ASEF are recognized as responsible, respectively, for promoting stronger connections between civil society actors in the CELAC relationship and in ASEM. But there is also an array of other initiatives which encourage stakeholder involvement in the official dialogues. These include the following:

- Business "summits" aim to encourage region-to-region trade and investment cooperation. In all three cases, such meetings are held back-to-back with leaders' summits. The last EU-Africa Business Forum which took place on 31 March and 1 April 2014, just before the EU-Africa summit, brought together African and European business leaders representing multi-nationals, large

corporations, small and medium-scale enterprises and confederations, and multilateral and regional institutions. As is the case for the Asia-Europe Business Forum (AEBF), the EU-Africa Business Forum is addressed by several EU and African leaders as well as by European and African Commissioners. In both cases, recommendations by business leaders are submitted to the official summits. This is also the case at the EU-CELAC Business Summit but, unlike in ASEM, a business representative was given time to present the business sector's views to the official EU-CELAC summit in June 2015.

- All three dialogues provide for meetings of Members of Parliament. The Euro-Latin American Parliamentary Assembly (EuroLat), created in 2006 and composed of 150 members (75 from each region), seems to be the liveliest, providing for almost a week of deliberations in plenary session on a range of issues. It is also the most structured with, in addition to plenary sessions, an executive bureau, standing committees, working groups and a secretariat. A representative of the EuroLat also presented the assembly's recommendations directly to the EU-CELAC summit in Brussels in June 2015. Meanwhile, the European Parliament's delegation for Africa and the Pan-African Parliament, set up in 2004 by the African Union, meet as the EU-Pan African Parliamentary Assembly to monitor the implementation of the EU-Africa joint strategic partnership and action plans. In comparison, the Asia-Europe Parliamentary Partnership (ASEP) has a less ambitious mandate, serving as a forum for inter-parliamentary contacts, exchanges and diplomacy.

- The Asia-Europe People's Forum (AEPF), an inter-regional network of civil society and social movements across Asia and Europe, emerged in the mid-1990s out of a common desire and need among people's organizations and networks across Asia and Europe to open up new venues for dialogue, cooperation and solidarity. Civil society plays a more active and prominent role in the EU-Africa Partnership through the Africa-EU Civil Society Forum which gathers representatives from African and European civil society organizations to develop ideas to review the implementation of the Joint Africa-EU Strategy, to ensure full participation of civil society in the EU-Africa Partnership, to evaluate past experiences, and discuss the future of the partnership. The role and input of civil society is also significant in the EU-CELAC dialogue. In fact, there are two EU-CELAC civil society fora: one that is organized by the EU's Economic



and Social Committee with its CELAC counterparts and another organized by Concord, the NGO federation for relief and development. There is a third, informal civil society dialogue sponsored by Cuba but this is not part of the official EU-CELAC dialogue.

- Youth participation: In a first for ASEM, "young leaders" were invited to meet ASEM leaders at the summit in Milan in 2014. ASEM is organizing a first-ever "Young Leaders Summit" in Luxemburg in November to coincide with a meeting of ASEM Foreign Ministers. In comparison, meetings between young people are a long-standing feature of the EU-Africa partnership. The Africa-Europe Youth Leaders' Summits provide the opportunity to formulate concrete recommendations to EU-Africa Summits regarding the JAES youth initiatives and engagement of the youth in the future political dialogue. In 2012, the Africa-Europe Youth Platform was established to coordinate, monitor and follow up on the Africa-Europe Youth cooperation, on an annual basis. Before the EU-CELAC summit in June 2015, the EU-LAC Foundation organized "youth days" with the European Youth Forum and the Latin American and Caribbean Youth Forum.
- In addition, there is also an EU-CELAC Academic Summit, while ASEM organizes meetings of journalists and editors. The EU-Africa Joint Annual Forums bring together up to 100 sectoral experts from member states, institutions, civil society organizations and other relevant stakeholders to assess progress made with regard to the implementation of the JAES.

3.4 An ever-expanding agenda

All three dialogues have an ever-expanding and evolving agenda of topics, reflecting a mix of traditional priorities, new bilateral, regional and global realities as well as emerging challenges. The focus on sustainable development is visible in references *inter alia* to human resource development, food security, environmental issues and health in all three partnerships. There is a difference, however, in the way in which these ambitions are articulated and in the monitoring of their follow-up.

Although demands for “tangible cooperation” are now picking up momentum in ASEM, leaders have not yet adopted an over-arching action plan for Asia-Europe relations. The Asia-Europe Cooperation Framework (AECF) adopted at the ASEM summit in Seoul in 2000 aimed to “*guide, focus and coordinate ASEM activities*” and identified some priorities including arms control, the welfare of women and children, human resources development, food security, environmental issues, migration, transnational crime, terrorism and drug trafficking (ASEM, 2000). In the economic and financial fields, the document indicated that 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. The AECF does not include references to mechanisms to review, monitor and assess just how these goals should be implemented.

The Joint Africa Europe Strategy (JAES), painstakingly negotiated by both sides and adopted in 2007, is the over-arching guiding document of the EU-Africa strategic

partnership. Implementation of the JAES is ensured through specific “Action Plans” and a mechanism for evaluating and monitoring progress. In addition, the 4th EU-Africa Summit in Brussels adopted the Roadmap 2014-2017, which focuses on the implementation of the Joint Strategy in five priority areas including peace and security; democracy, good governance and human rights; human development; sustainable and inclusive development and growth and continental integration; global and emerging issues (EU-Africa Summit, 2014). The implementation of the actions included in the Roadmap are assessed in the framework of joint annual forums, which gather all stakeholders of the Africa-EU Partnership.

The “action plan” adopted at the EU-CELAC summit in Brussels on June 11, 2015 includes a number of areas, covering science, research, innovation and technology; sustainable development; environment; climate change; biodiversity; energy; regional integration and interconnectivity to promote social inclusion and cohesion; migration; education and employment to promote social inclusion and cohesion; the world drug problem; gender; investments and entrepreneurship for sustainable development; higher education; and citizen security (European Council, 2015). A short political declaration entitled “Partnership for the Next Generation” was also issued. While there are no provisions for follow-up, the statement for the first time mandates EU-CELAC Foreign Ministers to reflect on the future of the relationship, including the assessment of the programmes and actions adopted by the summits and on the best way to ensure these common objectives. The results of this exercise will be presented during the bi-regional meeting of Foreign Ministers in 2016.

4. Key drivers of the EU's engagement with Asia, Africa and Latin America

4.1 Geopolitics

Significantly, all three of the EU's continent-to-continent relationships reflect the new geopolitical realities of an increasingly inter-connected, inter-dependent and complex world. While different in scope and content, all these mega region-to-region dialogues reveal a desire to respond to the volatile international environment and recognize that international dialogue and cooperation, especially with important emerging nations, is a compelling necessity. Although ASEM, the EU-Africa strategic partnership and the EU-CELAC relationship involve some of the emerging world's most impressive rising powers, the EU's dialogues also contain strong provisions for encouraging sustainable development in all three regions.

Interestingly, many of these dialogue participants are also in the influential Group of 20 or are working together in formats such as BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa). China, India, Russia and the ASEAN states are all members of ASEM, South Africa participates in the EU-Africa strategic partnership, and Brazil and Mexico are members of the EU-CELAC relationship. The three partnerships allow for wide-ranging and all-encompassing dialogues with a range of nations, big and small, rich and poor, democratic or not, on the EU's vision of effective multilateralism and issues covering geo-politics, global and regional hotspots, international trade and economics. 21st century challenges such as climate change, pandemics, trafficking and illegal immigration are often discussed with all three regions, the ambition being that such

exchanges will allow for greater coordination between the EU and its partners ahead of international negotiations on issues like climate change.

Not surprisingly since political dialogue is a key element of the ASEM process, the emphasis on global commons is most prominent in ASEM. High-level ASEM meetings, whether at summit or Foreign Minister levels focus on major global issues on the international agenda, including terrorism, Weapons of Mass-Destruction (WMD), migrations, dialogue of cultures and civilisations, environment, human rights, or the impact of globalisation. Questions related to climate change as well as global drug problems are on the EU-CELAC agenda. Recent EU-Africa discussions have also focused on international terrorism, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and organized crime as well as new challenges, such as climate change and environmental degradation. The three dialogues furthermore allow for regional developments to be addressed in a non-confrontational way whether it is the South China Sea in ASEM, security challenges in Africa or drug trafficking or citizens' security in EU-CELAC.

4.2 Keeping up with the competition

Keeping up with competition from the US and increasingly from China has acted as an important driver for European engagement with all three continents. ASEM was launched to bolster the Asia-Europe relationship by putting it at the same level as the strong ties between Asia and the US and between Europe and the US. The EU's renewed focus on Africa has largely been promoted by increased Chinese engagement with the continent. Furthermore, the

EU is acutely aware that it is losing its traditional economic presence in Latin America as China becomes the second largest source of Latin America's imports after the US, and the third largest destination of its exports after the US and the EU. Beijing announced the formation of a new ministerial meeting with CELAC in February 2014. The China-CELAC Forum met for the first time in January 2015, with Chinese President Xi Jinping presiding over the opening ceremony.

4.3 Sustainable development

Sustainable development has been a fundamental objective of the EU since 1997 when it was included in the Treaty of Amsterdam as an overarching objective of EU policies. EU leaders launched the first EU sustainable development strategy at the Gothenburg Summit in June 2001, which included objectives and policy measures to tackle a number of key unsustainable trends as well as calls for a new approach to policy-making that ensures the EU's economic, social and environmental policies mutually reinforce each other (European Commission DG Environment, 2015).

The EU is the world's leading aid donor providing over 50 per cent of all global development aid. The eradication of poverty in a context of sustainable development is therefore identified as an important goal in the EU's development policy and within the array of projects and programmes implemented in Asia, Africa and Latin America. The EU focuses on certain sectors of intervention, depending on the needs of partner countries and in keeping with the Agenda for Change which outlines a more and more targeted and concentrated allocation of funding for countries in greatest need, where external support can really make a difference

in terms of poverty reduction. Human rights, democracy and other aspects of good governance as well as inclusive and sustainable growth are identified as key criteria for EU assistance, the idea being to help create growth in developing countries – so poor people have the means to lift themselves out of poverty. Areas of priority action include: social protection, health, education and jobs creation, to make growth inclusive; business environment, regional integration and access to world markets; sustainable agriculture and energy (European Commission DG International Cooperation and Development, 2015).

4.4 Security

Security cooperation is becoming the overarching focus of all three partnerships but is undoubtedly most evident in the EU-Africa relationship. The EU is supporting the building of the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) and strengthening the dialogue between the EU and the AU on peace and security issues, such as counter-terrorism disarmament, post conflict reconstruction and weapons of mass destruction. The key EU financial instrument to support security cooperation with Africa is the African Peace Facility which was established at the AU's summit in Maputo in 2003 and receives over 800 million euro in EU funding. EU efforts consist of providing political backing as well as resources to African Peace Support Operations, and to capacity-building and mediation activities at both continental and regional levels.

The EU has carried out civilian and military missions in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) in 2003–2006, and in Sudan in 2005. In 2008, a military mission was deployed along the border between Chad, the

Central African Republic and Sudan in order to curb cross-border violence exacerbated by the humanitarian crisis in Darfur. Since 2000, the EU has also conducted nine election observation missions in sub-Saharan Africa. Concerns about the continuing impact of piracy and armed robbery at sea off the coast of Somalia on international maritime security and on the economic activities and security of countries in the region, led to the launch in 2008 of the European Naval Force Somalia - Operation ATALANTA (Franke, 2009). More recently, the EU's "immigration crisis" has led to an even stronger interest in helping African nations to deal with challenges posed by extremism and ethnic unrest.

Security questions have not figured prominently in EU-CELAC relations although some states like Argentina, Brazil and the Dominican Republic have participated in EU crisis management operations (and in places as diverse as the Democratic Republic of Congo, Haiti, or Bosnia and Herzegovina), while Chile and Colombia have formalized their contributions to CSDP missions and operations by signing Framework Participation Agreements (FPA). If the mooted FPA is signed with Brazil, the EU will be able to further strengthen its inter-operability and boost its legitimacy as a security provider in the eyes of Latin American leaders (Lugengo-Cabrera, 2015).

Meanwhile, discussions on maritime security and ways in which Asia and Europe can work on non-traditional security challenges such as climate change, water, energy security and cyber security are rising on the ASEM agenda. Europe's focus is very much on maritime security and derives largely from implications for navigation and commerce due to cross-border and organized

crime, threats to freedom of navigation, and non-respect for International Law and especially the United Nations Convention on Law of the Sea (European Council General Secretariat, 2012). Several Asian and European countries are working together in the EU-led ATALANTA counter-piracy operation in the Western Indian Ocean. The EU is becoming more ambitious in its security conversation with Asian countries, with Mogherini underlining at the Shangri La dialogue that Asia and Europe had a "*strong interest in global security*" and expressing concerns about re-emerging rivalries and maritime disputes among Asian countries. While the EU was not going to get entangled in the legitimacy of specific claims, it was "*resolute on how they should be resolved – that is peacefully and without the use or threat of force,*" she insisted, adding: "*we need to maintain a maritime order based on international law... [and] support the ASEAN-China negotiations for a Code of Conduct*" (Mogherini, 2015). Two EU-ASEAN high-level dialogues on maritime security have already been organized, with a focus on port security, maritime surveillance and the joint management of resources, including fisheries and oil and gas.

4.5 Trade and investments

An ambition to make its mark as an important *political* global actor may be an important driver in the EU's active search for partnerships with countries outside its immediate neighbourhood, but all three relationships also highlight the EU's strong focus on economic diplomacy both on the multilateral stage and in its bilateral relations with the "rising" powers. With the economic performance of all three regions continuing to impress despite cyclical variations, bolstering trade and investments

remains a key focus of the EU's conversation with Asia, Africa and Latin America. EU exports to and investments in all three continents are pivotal in ensuring a sustainable European economic recovery, while the EU single market attracts goods, investments and people from across the globe, helping partner governments to also maintain growth and development. European technology is in demand across the world. ASEM was launched with a clear EU ambition and stated goal to share in Asia's rising economic dynamism. Latin America's improved economic performance gives the EU-CELAC relationship added lustre, and certainly, the new focus on the trade and investment opportunities opening up in "ascending" Africa are prompting an EU effort to modernize and re-energize relations with the continent.

EU-Asia trade is, not surprisingly, the most buoyant, with Asian nations having surpassed the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) to become the EU's main trading partner, accounting for a third of total trade. Asia-Europe trade in 2012 was estimated at 1.37 trillion euro. More than a quarter of European outward investments head for Asia while Asia's emerging global champions are seeking out business deals in Europe. The increased connectivity is reflected in the mutual Asia-Europe quest to negotiate Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) and investment accords. The FTAs concluded with South Korea and Singapore and similar deals under negotiation with Japan, India and individual ASEAN countries, as well as the bilateral investment treaty under discussion with China are important in consolidating EU-Asia relations.

The new EU focus on "Ascending Africa" also stems from the continent's improving economic outlook. Across Africa, poverty levels are falling, incomes are rising and there have been improvements in education and health. African economies have flourished over the past decade, turning the region into a magnet for foreign investors. Between 2007 and 2012, EU imports from Africa increased by 46%. In 2012, the EU imported African goods worth 187 billion euro (i.e. less than 10% of total extra-EU imports). African imports from the EU amounted to 152 billion euro in 2012. Throughout this time the EU remained Africa's prime source of imports (34% of total African imports) as well as its main export market (40% of African exports). In total 37% of African trade took place with the EU in 2012 (European Commission, 2014).

Trade between the EU and the CELAC region has been growing rapidly for a number of years. Trade in goods between the EU and Latin America more than doubled over the last decade —up to 214 billion euro— (6.5% of total EU trade). However, there is still considerable potential for expansion. This entails further developing the EU's relationship with Mexico and Chile, ensuring the implementation of agreements with the Caribbean, Central America, Colombia and Peru, and concluding negotiations with the MERCOSUR region, which includes the EU's ninth export/import partner worldwide, Brazil. The EU remains the leading foreign investor in CELAC, accounting for 385 billion euro (43% of the region's total) of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) stock in 2010. EU FDI in Latin America and the Caribbean is higher than that in Russia, China and India combined (European Commission, 2013).

4.6 Normative projection

A desire to project its normative ambitions is most clearly visible in the EU's partnership with Africa and CELAC but less clearly so in ASEM. The promotion of democratic governance and human rights is at the core of the Africa-EU dialogue and partnership and also mentioned in EU-CELAC. References to the topics are more muted in ASEM although the topic is discussed at encounters organised by ASEF. References to sustainable development are common to all three partnerships but most frequent in EU-Africa and EU-CELAC relations. But all three relationships have been trammelled by acrimony over human rights and the rule of law, and the presence of unsavoury regimes among the EU's partners. Just as the presence of ASEAN member Myanmar (Burma) created tension in ASEM between European and ASEAN states, Zimbabwe has been a running sore in EU-Africa relations while the hardliner stance on human rights taken by Venezuela, Bolivia and by Cuba — at least in the past— has often put a spanner in EU-CELAC relations.

4.7 Promoting regional integration

Promoting regional integration is a key objective in the Africa and CELAC relationships which are conducted by the EU with the African Union and the rotating CELAC presidency respectively. This goal is missing from ASEM since there is no Asia-wide regional organization including all 21 Asian partners. However, connectivity has emerged as an important topic of discussion and potential

cooperation in ASEM, both as regards the building of traditional transport networks but also in terms of institutions, education and people-to-people contacts (see **Chapter Four**). The concept is also gaining traction in the EU-CELAC context.

The importance of regional integration to support Africa's economic development remains top of the agenda at African Union summits. The continent is home to a large number of Regional Economic Communities (RECs), with policymakers also reflecting on several new initiatives to promote integration across Africa, including plans for a "Continental Free Trade Area" (CFTA). Currently, the eight regional trade blocs which are officially recognized by the African Union are viewed as building blocks of a future African Economic Community (AEC) as laid out in the Abuja Treaty.⁶

Promoting regional integration and connectivity equally features as an objective of EU-CELAC relations. However, regional integration across the continent remains difficult. Significant setbacks, ranging from the failure of the Latin American Free-Trade Association (LAFTA) to the sluggish pace of economic integration inside MERCOSUR and the Community of Andean Nations (CAN) as well as political frictions between leaders of LAC nations have slowed down the region's integration process. In fact, these bilateral bottlenecks sped up the creation of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) in December 2011 (Luengo-Cabrera, 2015).

⁶ These regional trade blocs include ECOWAS (Economic Community of West African States); ECCAS (Economic Community of Central African States); EAC (East African Community); AMU (Arab Maghreb Union); COMESA (Common Market for East and Southern Africa); SADC (Southern African Development Community); CEN-SAD (Community of Sahel-Saharan States); and IGAD (Intergovernmental Authority on Development).

4.8 Changing times

EU relations with countries in all three regions are struggling to keep pace with changing times – and to become more “visible” and relevant in a rapidly-transforming world. The challenge for ASEM is not only to ensure its survival in the 21st century but to create conditions for it to flourish and thrive as a real forum for multilateral consultation, global governance and networking in an increasingly inter-connected, complex and disorderly world. Similar efforts to modernize the EU-Africa and EU-CELAC relationships and to make them more “media-friendly” are also underway, albeit with different ambitions.

The need for fresh thinking by both sides is essential to bolster the EU-Africa Strategic Partnership. For the EU, it is important to stop viewing Africa as a problem and to look at it instead as an opportunity. Discussions on giving a new direction to the EU-Africa partnership are picking up momentum as both sides recognize that to stay relevant in an era of volatile geo-politics, Africa-Europe relations will have to become more strategic, political and better able to tackle 21st-century challenges, including climate change, human trafficking and pandemics. For Europeans, it means jettisoning old stereotypes and fully embracing a new “Africa rising” narrative which reflects the continent’s changing realities. Africa too needs to revisit its views of Europe.

Courted by an array of affluent and dynamic new aid partners, including China, Brazil and Turkey, Africa is no longer as reliant on European development assistance as in the past. Instead, European markets, know-how and technology as well as Europe’s experience in regional integration and preventive diplomacy are important drivers. Europe’s

policies to tackle regional inequalities, build capacity and regulatory frameworks can also benefit African governments. The focus is therefore on switching from a post-colonial donor/recipient relationship towards economic development and to put the partnership on a firmer and more equal footing.

The EU-Africa summit in 2014 did lay the foundations for such change. The meeting’s main focus was on peace and security as well as sustainable economic development whereas democracy, human rights and governance played a minor role. While both the declaration and the new roadmap make ample reference to the governance, democracy and human rights agenda, the summit emphasized the strategic and interest-driven nature of the partnership by focusing primarily on the peace and security and economic components of the partnership (Kammel, 2014).

Despite hiccups, the EU relationship with Latin American and Caribbean states has proved its resilience and capacity to adapt to new circumstances. The Santiago Summit in 2013 which started a novel type of relationship with new topics between the EU and the newly-created CELAC has raised hopes that the two regions will draw closer on major political and economic issues. It is not the first time that the EU and Latin American have sought new beginnings. The Rio de Janeiro Summit in 1999 had given rise to great expectations about the potential of an exemplary bi-regional strategic relationship between the EU and Latin American and Caribbean states. But by the time CELAC was created to better unite the region and bridge gaps between the rival projects and organizations which had flourished in the two past decades (MERCOSUR, ALBA, UNASUR), the ties had run out of steam.

The three partnerships are engaged in a similar drive to reinvigorate relations. This was illustrated at the EU-CELAC summit in Brussels in June 2015, with leaders issuing a two-page political declaration vowing to deepen their *“long-standing strategic bi-regional partnership based on historical, cultural and human ties, international law, full respect for human rights, common values, and mutual interests”*. A separate ten-point Action Plan and a longer “Brussels Declaration” entitled “Shaping our common future: working together for prosperous, cohesive and sustainable societies for our citizens” were also issued (EU-CELAC, 2015).

One of the greatest challenges for the EU in its relations with CELAC is to agree on ways to reinvigorate trade so that the EU can retain its market share in an economically dynamic region with over 600 million consumers. This has already prompted calls, for example, to speed up negotiations on an EU-MERCOSUR free trade agreement during the last EU-CELAC summit in Santiago in January 2013. The proposal of the European External Action Service (EEAS) to strengthen political relations, explore ways to further economic and trade cooperation, as well as tackling global issues together with CELAC partners will serve as an important roadmap ahead of the summit. A significant first step would be to follow-up on the EEAS proposal to hold regular meetings with the foreign ministries of CELAC countries in the year in between summits. Moreover, with EU and CELAC countries constituting over one-third of UN members, the convergence of views on important transnational issues like climate change and the post-2015 development agenda could have a major impact on policy decisions at the global level. Expectations are therefore great and high: the question remains whether the partners will be able to deliver (Luengo-Cabrera, 2015).

5. Lessons for ASEM

Surprisingly, despite their commonalities — and especially their shared quest for relevance, visibility and credibility in a changing world— there is very little exchange of ideas and of lessons learned among key ASEM, EU-Africa and EU-CELAC stakeholders. As it enters its third decade, ASEM can and should look at some of the strengths of the EU-Africa and EU-CELAC dialogues and reflect on whether they can be introduced into the Asia-Europe partnership. Proposals for such a transfer of experience include the following.

5.1 A sharper focus on substance: an Ulan Bator declaration

Having adopted guiding documents and actions plans at the start of their relationships, discussions in the EU-Africa and EU-CELAC fora tend to have a sharper focus on a smaller cluster of issues which allow for real exchanges of views, ideas and experience-sharing. Celebrations of ASEM’s 20th anniversary at the upcoming summit in Mongolia should include the adoption of a short but sharp agenda for cooperation aimed at making ASEM more strategic, relevant and credible as a 21st-century tool for Asia-Europe cooperation. The EU-CELAC summit in Brussels in June 2015 which issued a two-page “Brussels Declaration” on the future of the relationship offers a possible model for an **“Ulan Bator” declaration to be adopted at the 20th anniversary gathering in Mongolia in 2016**. Such a statement would highlight the fundamental objectives of ASEM, its important role as a relevant, dynamic and constructive player in shaping the global dialogue and agenda, and key areas for further joint actions. A short but snappy “action plan” of the kind

issued by EU-CELAC with a focus on a small number of areas could also help to give more direction to ASEM in the coming years.

5.2 Keep it informal and effective

The more structured institutional framework of the EU-Africa relationship cannot be replicated in ASEM given the latter's focus on informality, networking and flexibility. However, ASEM would benefit from the provisions for **regular follow-up, evaluation and monitoring of progress** on key decisions that are a strong feature of EU relations with Africa.

The Africa and Latin American dialogues include a list of priority areas of cooperation which can provide inspiration for ASEM's efforts to engage in voluntary and variable tangible cooperation. A start was made at the ASEM summit in Milan in 2014 where leaders did indeed meet in retreat format allowing for more informality and a real conversation, and where the decision was also taken to issue an indicative list of ASEM members interested in specific cooperation areas. Approximately seven subjects, including disaster management, water and waste management, SME cooperation, renewable energy and energy efficiency, skills development and cooperation in higher and higher education have been identified as having the support of several ASEM partners from both regions. As in EU-CELAC, these areas could be the subject of organized **"policy dialogues"** rather than unstructured meetings between like-minded nations.

Both ASEM and CELAC include a leaders' retreat in order to encourage real interaction and dialogue. In addition, ASEM could follow the EU-CELAC experiment in 2006 of organizing smaller "break-up sessions" for

leaders on specific issues and chaired by different countries.⁷

There should be more regular exchanges between stakeholders, and communication of civil society priorities and concerns to leaders through direct contacts at summits.

5.3 Ensure better coordination

The EU-Africa and EU-CELAC relationships highlight the importance of having a more structured dialogue. EU-Africa relations are driven forward by the summits but most importantly by the annual meetings between the full AU Commission and the European Commission. Whereas EU-CELAC structures are looser, the rotating CELAC presidency ensures coordination with the grouping's foreign partners.

While there is still no agreement on whether or not to set up an **ASEM secretariat**, **more must be done to ensure that the forum has an effective "institutional memory" and there is efficient coordination between the different regional groups.** This is essential if ASEM is to keep evolving in keeping with the changing global and Asia-Europe landscape. Another option would be to set up smaller functional sectoral ASEM "agencies" to reinforce synergies and ensure follow-up in specific areas. One example of such cooperation is the ASEM Education Secretariat which encourages synergies in the areas of higher education and vocational education and training, and was set up in 2009 as a body rotating among ASEM participating nations every four years. The secretariat was initially hosted by Germany and is currently in Jakarta. A similar initiative could be launched in the area of disaster management or indeed on connectivity.

⁷ See Chapter Three.

5.4 Enhance connectivity

As is being done in EU-CELAC, stronger Asia-Europe connectivity through enhanced transport, infrastructure, digital and people-to-people ties should be given centre-stage in ASEM. Enhanced connectivity will support the growth of trade, investments and value-chains within and across ASEM.⁸

5.5 Discuss common security challenges

As in the case of the EU-Africa Strategic Partnership, discussions on **common security challenges** should be an important feature of ASEM. Questions related to maritime security are already on the agenda but ASEM should pay more attention to common challenges relating to terrorism and violent radicalization.

5.6 Revive the economic pillar

Economic cooperation is important in both the EU-Africa Strategic Partnership and in EU-CELAC. As argued in **Chapter One**, there should also be a **revival of ASEM discussions on the economic pillar** in order to promote closer understanding of global economic challenges and to further promote Asia-Europe economic ties.

5.7 Focus on economic cooperation

ASEM should move forward on economic cooperation in such areas as sustainable growth and development, sustainable agriculture, energy efficiency and conservation as well as urbanization.

5.8 Strengthen private sector involvement

Private sector participation in ASEM should be strengthened with a view to deepening business-to-business cooperation, with a special focus on small and medium-sized enterprises. **As is the case in EU-CELAC, a representative of the business summit should be given time to present the business sector's recommendations directly to leaders at the official ASEM summit.**

5.9 Strengthen the participation of youth

The role and participation of young people in the ASEM process should be strengthened through “model ASEM”⁹ and —as is the case in EU-Africa relations— by organising annual ASEM “youth summits”. Young people convened as part of the EU-CELAC dialogue meanwhile send a representative to present their recommendations directly to the leaders' summit. This could also become a feature of ASEM.

5.10 Promote cultural cooperation and networking

ASEM should promote **cultural cooperation and networking** more actively along the lines of the EU-CELAC partnership to promote better understanding between Asia and Europe.

⁸ See **Chapter Four** for a detailed discussion on enhancing Asia-Europe connectivity.

⁹ See **Chapter Five**.

6. Conclusion

Although launched earlier than the EU-Africa and EU-CELAC relationships, with its future-focused agenda and extensive discussions on emerging challenges, ASEM stands out as the most modern and up-to-date of the EU's region-to-region partnerships. Strikingly, unlike the African and CELAC dialogues, “strategic” is not a word that is often used in ASEM. And yet, the content and scope of the conversation between Asia and Europe is as strategic as the topics discussed in the other two partnerships.

Given their diverse membership, all three dialogues cannot be as deep and action-focused as bilateral agreements or those signed with regional organizations such as ASEAN. All three therefore suffer from over-expectations and a general feeling of under-delivering compared to their initial goals and ambitions.

The three relationships are important, however, in signalling the EU's belief that the 21st century requires countries and peoples —whether they are like-minded or not— to work together in order to ensure better global governance and focus on global public goods in a still-chaotic multipolar world. As they grapple with their economic, political and security dilemmas —and despite their many differences— these dialogues allow the EU to pursue its sustainable development goals while also drawing closer to emerging powers in order to consult and cooperate with them.



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CHAPTER THREE

ASEM enlargement

- PITFALLS AND
POTENTIAL OF AN EXPANDING PARTNERSHIP -



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1. Introduction

If expansion of an institution is a measurement of its achievement and relevance, then ASEM has been extremely successful. The first summit, held in Bangkok in March 1996, welcomed 26 participants, including 15 EU member states plus the European Commission, and seven-member ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) in addition to China, Japan and the Republic of Korea (ROK). At present, almost two decades later, the forum has evolved dramatically in terms of membership, after having gone through several stages of enlargement. ASEM has more than doubled its membership, comprising a total of 53 partners.

For some critics, this “open” approach to enlargement has turned ASEM into an unwieldy and diffuse talk-shop that has preferred to widen rather than deepen, and membership expansion has only exacerbated the forum’s inefficiencies and inertia. For other observers and certainly for many policymakers involved in the process, however, the continuing applications for membership are a sign of success – they show that there is a demand for the role ASEM can play and the significance it can have. It is the aim of this chapter to critically examine ASEM’s expansion process, and gauge the ramifications, pitfalls, and potential of a significantly enlarged institution. The chapter first looks at the rules for expansion of the partnership as they have been laid down in ASEM’s guiding charter. These guidelines are highly significant not only for obviously shaping the process of growth, but also because of the expectations and regional preconceptions they implicate. The analysis thereafter examines how enlargement from 26 to 53 partners has impacted the nature and character of the forum. It assesses the ramifications for

ASEM’s approach to dialogue, practical management, coordination, and cooperation on the ground. At the same time the chapter explores possible ways of tackling the challenges that accompany the enlargement process, by proposing policy recommendations looking ahead to ASEM’s future.

2. ASEM’s expansion and its rules for enlargement

2.1 Expansion

According to the official rhetoric, ASEM membership is open, evolutionary, inclusive and conducted on the basis of consensus. Thus far five stages of enlargement have taken place (cf **Table 3.1**). When ten new EU member states joined in 2004, the Asian group came to comprise Myanmar, Laos, and Cambodia who themselves had joined ASEAN already in 1997 (the former two countries) and 1999 (the latter). India, Pakistan, Mongolia and the ASEAN Secretariat formally entered the partnership in 2008, after the EU had further come to include Romania and Bulgaria. The total number of members reached 48 when Russia, Australia and New Zealand joined the gathering in 2010. Bangladesh, and non-EU states Switzerland and Norway were allowed into ASEM in 2012. On the occasion of the Milan summit in October 2014 Croatia joined on the European side, while the forum at the same time expanded into Central Asia with the joining of Kazakhstan. The tally at present thus stands at 53 partners, 31 European and 22 Asian ones. These comprise 2 institutions (the EU and the ASEAN Secretariat), 28 EU member states, and 2 non-EU countries; and 10 Southeast Asian, 4 Northeast Asian, 3 South Asian, and 2 Australasian states, in addition to 1 Central Asian, and 1 “Eurasian” state.

Table 3.1: Growth of the ASEM partnership

Year	Europe	Asia	Total
1996	EU15, European Commission	ASEAN7, China, Japan, ROK	26
2004	EU25, European Commission	ASEAN10, China, Japan, ROK	39
2008	EU27, European Commission	ASEAN10, China, Japan, ROK, India, Pakistan, Mongolia, ASEAN Secretariat	45
2010	EU27, European Commission	ASEAN10, China, Japan, ROK, India, Pakistan, Mongolia, ASEAN Secretariat, Australia, New Zealand, Russia	48
2012	EU27, European Commission, Norway, Switzerland	ASEAN10, ASEAN Secretariat, China, Japan, ROK, India, Pakistan, Mongolia, Australia, New Zealand, Russia, Bangladesh	51
2014	EU28, European Union, Norway, Switzerland	ASEAN10, ASEAN Secretariat, China, Japan, ROK, India, Pakistan, Mongolia, Australia, New Zealand, Russia, Bangladesh, Kazakhstan	53



2.2 Rules for enlargement

ASEM has always had a dual character: it can be regarded as a region-to-region intergovernmental forum. On the one hand the process highlights the roles of national governments and emphasizes a state-to-state approach. ASEM offers its partners opportunities to meet with counterparts from Asia and Europe in a bilateral setting, to promote national interests, and even to launch collaborative initiatives in a certain area of expertise.

On the other hand, ASEM is a region-to-region construction: this is obvious in coordination and management, and certainly in enlargement as well. In Europe in particular, ASEM functions are closely integrated into the regional set-up, namely the institutions and mechanisms of the European Union. The EU regards ASEM as an indispensable tool in its overall policy for Asia, and a vital part of its inter-regional agenda. The Asian grouping is comparatively less integrated, but also there coordination takes place on a regional basis.

ASEM's rules for enlargement are clearly rooted in such a region-to-region construction. The current enlargement policy is based on the Asia-Europe Cooperation Framework (AECF2000), ASEM's core charter. At the first summit in 1996 the partners agreed that the process should remain open and evolutionary, but no membership criteria or concrete plans for enlargement were identified. However, already in 1997 the Commission document "Perspectives and Priorities for the ASEM Process" refers to the "two-step consensus" or "double-key" approach (European Commission, 1997: 7). According to this conception, which clearly reflects EU expectations, either region

can propose a candidate. After the candidate state receives the approval of all the partners in its own region, all ASEM Heads of State and Government have to make a consensus-based decision on its admission. When this two-key approach was codified in the AECF 2000 charter, a number of additional guidelines on future enlargement were added. First, ASEM, as an open and evolutionary process, should reinforce the wider Asia-Europe partnership. Second, enlargement should be conducted in a progressive manner. Third, each candidacy should be examined on the basis of its own merits and in the light of its potential contribution to the ASEM process.

These rules are relatively broad. They see enlargement as an endemic feature of ASEM and a desirable development, the only condition being that it fits a strengthening partnership in which Europe and Asia as two distinct regions remain clearly associated (de Crombrugghe, 2011a: 172). Nevertheless, the rules include certain unwritten implications and anticipations, and fail to address a number of questions that continue to affect the process today. These questions all relate to the extent to which ASEM is a region-to-region (or a so-called bloc-to-bloc) forum or rather a state-to-state Eurasian partnership.

3. Challenges

3.1 Intergovernmental or inter-regional?

In the period following the end of the Cold War, the EU, often regarded as the epitome of institutionalized regional integration, aimed to play a more prominent role in the world by enhancing its possibilities for coherent external action. As a result, it sought

to interact with other regional groupings in the world, leading to “inter-regionalism” getting into a higher gear. Also in Asia multiple, overlapping, and complementary cooperation networks came into being, often with ASEAN functioning as the hub of an “Asianization” process.

ASEM as well had strong features of a region-to-region structure, but as it included a more comprehensive arrangement and the Asian side did not neatly correspond to a regional organization, it can be seen as an example of “trans-regionalism” (Rüland, 2006: 296), rather than pure inter-regionalism.

Along with the EU’s expansion and the geographical extension of the Asian grouping, at present the membership asymmetry and the importance attached to state-to-state interaction has increased, resulting in a rather diffuse, trans-regional (Eurasian) partnership. Whereas the Asian grouping in ASEM until 2008 was limited to the ASEAN+3 constellation, at present it includes strongly emerging global players such as Russia, China and India, and has branched out into Central Asia and Australasia.

The enlargement decision taken by ASEM6 in 2006 has therefore steered the process in a new direction. ASEM is now a significantly more diverse forum, composed of a very large and heterogeneous grouping of 53 in which the emphasis lies much more on the intergovernmental aspect and on bilateral relations (both state-to-state and EU-Asian state). The higher prominence of bilateral relations furthermore reflects the development of a more multipolar world.

The importance of pure inter-regionalism, as championed by the EU, therefore seems to have dwindled, even if only some years

ago it was hailed as forming a new layer in the system of global governance. Also the EU currently places a much stronger emphasis on bilateral relations, as is obvious in the negotiations for free trade agreements with individual Asian countries. Nevertheless, ASEM’s organizational set-up still follows a region-to-region or group-to-group structure. This is confirmed by the Chair’s Statement of the tenth ASEM Foreign Ministers’ Meeting (FMM10) of 2011:

“It must be assured that with the enlargement of ASEM the effectiveness and efficiency of the forum is increased and the bipolar (Europe-Asia) model of inter-regional cooperation is retained as it is set in AECF 2000.”

Chair of the tenth ASEM Foreign Ministers’ Meeting (FMM10), (2011)

The tension between ASEM as a region-to-region forum and as an intergovernmental Eurasian partnership remains. In particular, it has raised questions as to the geographical definition of both regions, the key role played by regional organizations (in the first place the EU, but also ASEAN), and the need for a numerical balance in membership of both regions.

3.2 Definitions of region

First, it is unclear what exactly constitutes Asia and Europe as geographical regions. From the outset a wide variety of candidatures were on the table. India, Pakistan, Australia and New Zealand, the European Free Trade Association (EFTA, consisting of Iceland, Norway, Liechtenstein and Switzerland), Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Russia, Romania, Slovakia, Turkey and Ukraine had all expressed their interest to join (Robles, 2008: 27). Nevertheless, as ASEM can historically be seen as a child of the EU-ASEAN region-to-region relationship, a twofold setup revolving around the European Union and an East Asian regional grouping centered on ASEAN was chosen. These two regional organizations have been in command of definitions of what constitutes Asia and as Europe as geographical regions.

During ASEM's first decade, EU membership became the unwritten rule for joining the European group, thereby limiting the definition of Europe to the EU. This excluded countries such as Russia, a geographically Eurasian state, or Switzerland and Norway, not members of the EU. For ASEM's European side, it was deemed essential that *"the special character of the EU"* was respected, and that *"the Union as Union"* was a key participant in ASEM, present in its own right through the Presidency of the Council and the Commission. For the EU, *"the Union as Union must therefore remain at the core of the ASEM process"* (European Commission, 1997: 8). It was for this reason that in 2010 in the run-up to the Brussels summit, the EU declined to accept Russia as a member of the European group, as it was not a member of the EU (de Crombrugge, 2011a: 173).

Since some Asian states did not see Russia as "Asian" either, Singapore proposed the creation of a third geographical group which could house Russia, Australia and New Zealand, and which in the future could also incorporate Central Asian states, for example. As this seemingly contradicted ASEM's bi-regional character, Cambodia doctored a compromise, proposing a geographically-undefined "temporary third category" which allowed Russia, in addition to Australia and New Zealand, to participate in the 2010 summit in Brussels (de Crombrugge, 2011a: 174-5). The time-buying device of the "temporary third category" was officially abolished in 2012, and the three countries were accepted as belonging to the Asian regional grouping.

In Asia the partnership was built around ASEAN, which in ASEM's early years chose to include China, Korea and Japan in the inter-regional gathering, thereby confining the definition of "Asia" to East Asia. Australia and New Zealand were initially considered too "western" to join the partnership on the Asian side. The participation of India was another bone of contention. Its candidacy was supported in Europe, but Asian states feared that expansion to South Asia would burden ASEM with a new set of problems. The ASEM Summit in Helsinki in 2006 took the landmark decision to reverse this course, and formally expand the partnership beyond East Asia by accepting the membership of India, Pakistan, Mongolia and the ASEAN Secretariat, as proposed by the Asian side. This set in motion an expansion process, which, through three further stages, enlarged ASEM to include countries across the whole Eurasian continent, at the same time showing the fluidity of definitions of what constitutes a region.

3.3 The role of regional organizations

A second, and very closely related issue concerns the role of the EU and ASEAN as regional organizations, and in particular the “automaticity” question, namely whether membership in either organization is inevitably linked with ASEM membership.

Historically the precarious role of regional organizations within ASEM became clear after ASEAN expanded to include Myanmar in 1997. Myanmar’s potential joining of ASEM caused long-lasting disagreements, which culminated in 2004 in a critical freezing of relations, the cancellation of two ministerial meetings, and nearly the cancellation of a summit. The EU opposed membership of Myanmar because of its military regime and human rights violations. ASEAN partners on the other hand maintained that Myanmar, as a full-fledged ASEAN member, should also be included in ASEM. Only a compromise solution, in which the EU consented to Myanmar’s participation albeit at a lower level of representation, prevented the cancellation of the 2004 summit, and allowed the process to move ahead. The case of Myanmar illustrated the fragile nature of the “two-key approach” for enlargement of the bi-regional institution.

For a long time it was clear that a large gap existed between European and Asian views on enlargement. The EU, on the one hand, has always seen itself as a regional, integrated body with a “special status” in ASEM. Not only did the EU and its member states until 2012 claim exclusive representation of “Europe”, it was also paramount for the EU that new members would be allowed to participate in ASEM. On paper, however, the two-key approach stipulated by the

enlargement guidelines of the AECF2000 gives the Asian partners a chance to veto the joining of new EU member states to ASEM. For the EU, however, it was inconceivable that a newly accessed member state would not be allowed to participate in one part of the EU’s common external relations. EU enlargement is seen as an ongoing process and full-fledged member states have equal rights to participate in the common policy-making process, including with regard to ASEM. In view of the EU’s own expansion process, a moratorium on membership was, and still is, therefore not a feasible option. At the same time, as already mentioned in the case of Russia, non-EU members were refused as partners on the European side.

Many Asian members, on the other hand, were strongly of the opinion that there is no automatic correlation between EU membership and ASEM participation. For them, limiting European membership to the EU conflicts with ASEM’s “open and evolutionary” nature. After 2010, when the question of Russian membership was resolved, Asian countries increasingly took issue with the European group automatically linking EU membership and joining ASEM. For Asian countries, it needed to be ensured that also non-EU European countries could accede to ASEM. In other words, the European group needed to “*demonstrate that it did not view ASEM as a bloc-to-bloc cooperation, i.e. as a cooperation driven by the EU bloc on the one side while there was evidently no Asian bloc on the other side*” (de Crombrughe, 2011a: 179). The EU in this sense has compromised, expanding the European side to include non-EU states such as Norway and Switzerland, while at the same time safeguarding the bi-regional (“bipolar”) model. The European grouping thereby can accept countries with

which it already has close cooperation (as was the case with Norway and Switzerland), and now can theoretically more easily admit countries that are candidates to join the EU (Serbia, Turkey), or even countries that seek closer ties with Europe (Ukraine).

It remains unclear, however, whether a prospective member of either regional organization (EU or ASEAN) can join ASEM before it becomes a formal member state of that organization. Could Timor-Leste for example participate in ASEM before it officially accedes to ASEAN? Now that Serbia's candidature is on the table, would it be able to join ASEM before it accedes to the EU? Croatia for example had to wait for EU membership, but the joining of Switzerland and Norway has set a new precedent. As non-EU participants, they are to some extent included in the preparation and coordination of ASEM issues, through informal participation in the EU's Council Working Group for Asia-Oceania (COASI). However, they are not expected to follow the common positions of the EU partners, making it even more difficult to maintain a common European voice in ASEM, and they are of course not involved in other affairs of the EU.

3.4 The question of numerical balance

A third related challenge concerns the numerical balance between the European and the Asian groupings in ASEM. The linking between EU membership and the joining of ASEM has resulted in a numerical imbalance between the European side (31 partners) and the Asian grouping (22 members). "Asia" expanded partly because the widening of the EU had to be matched by taking in additional members on the Asian side. Therefore, as the European side expanded,

the Asian grouping emphasized the need to balance the tally, bringing in candidates on their side at the time as Europe. In other words, it is paradoxically partly the result of the EU's insistence on being treated as a regional actor, that the Asian regional grouping became more heterogeneous and less coherent.

As the EU implicitly links EU membership with ASEM membership, it is bound to show extensive flexibility in allowing the Asian grouping to select new partners. The accession of Romania and Bulgaria to the EU in 2007 therefore excluded a status quo in Asian ASEM membership. As another example, the last-minute joining of Kazakhstan in 2014 at the Milan summit was partly a way to retain a more balanced set-up after Croatia joined the European side. The numerical imbalance might also be a reason why Serbia, Turkey and Ukraine, the new candidates to join ASEM, still have to wait in the sidelines for the time being, in addition to obvious reasons related to geo-political sensitivities.

4. Ramifications and the way ahead

It goes without saying that ASEM's extensive process of enlargement has had a wide-ranging impact on the institution and the dialogue process. This section explores the ramifications of enlargement, and looks ahead to the future by pointing out possible incremental changes in order to ensure that expansion reinforces, rather than weakens, the Asia-Europe partnership.

4.1 Vision and objective

To paraphrase a Singaporean ASEM Senior Official, ASEM is like a teenager with over fifty well-meaning uncles and aunts trying

to shape its growth. While some push for deliverables, others find it more important to stay back and allow the child to grow. Indeed, since ASEM's early years, a tension has existed between the emphasis on ASEM being a political process and a forum for dialogue on the one hand, and an international institution and a framework for cooperation on the other. Not in the least as a result of ASEM's enlargement in recent years, the gap between these two visions on ASEM's core identity has increased. Whereas "minimalist" countries consider dialogue and loose cooperation as having added value as such, "maximalist" countries rather aim to pursue concrete results in and through ASEM, often in connection with efforts to promote institutionalization and achieve more efficient working methods (Vandenkendelaere, 2011: 58).

This gap coincides largely but not exclusively with a Europe-Asia divide. In general Europe values ASEM as a forum for "constructive engagement" with Asian countries, emphasizing political dialogue to complement, but not encroach on, its economic agenda. The EU in general sees informal dialogue with Asia as a goal in itself and as the most appropriate core principle for ASEM's institutional design, in spite of the self-perception and predominant stereotypical view that "Europeans tend to press for tangible results", as an ASEM-related European Commission (2001: 2) document stated. But also in Europe certain member states, especially smaller ones with less institutionalized bilateral ties with Asian countries, would like to see ASEM achieving more results. On the Asian side, countries including China and India eagerly seek to promote more tangible cooperation. Other recently joined partners

such as Australia take a more pragmatic approach and mainly seek to foster diplomatic ties with other participants, not in the least from the same region (Maier-Knapp, 2014: 14). Countries such as Russia primarily see ASEM as a tool to symbolize their new focus on Asia as a dynamic region. Russia has thus far kept a relatively low profile in the forum, in spite of announced objectives to boost the development of Eurasian transport and communications through ASEM (see Lukyanov, 2010: 97).

A good example of this gap between "minimalist" and "maximalist" countries that does not necessarily coincide with a Europe-Asia divide is the position on the need to revitalize ASEM's economic pillar. Many Asian countries but also some European ones would like to discuss trade liberalization among ASEM countries, with a possible ASEM Free Trade Agreement as a long-term objective. Reviving the economic pillar would need to start with the convening of an ASEM Economic Ministers' Meeting, the last one of which took place in 2003.¹⁰ The European Commission, in addition to countries such as Japan and Australia, are rather of the opinion that it is impossible to agree on trade-related generalities with 53 partners, or that it is even difficult to agree on issues to tackle that do not overlap with ongoing bilateral negotiations. For them enlargement has diluted the economic pillar, preventing a tight set of deliverables. ASEM is therefore about political dialogue, not about tangible results or "pipe dreams" such as an ASEM FTA.

The main challenge today for ASEM as an enlarged forum therefore is the lack of agreement on a vision for the forum's future direction. Is it enough to be a debating

¹⁰ As noted in Chapter One, a "High Level Meeting within the Framework of the ASEM Economic Ministers' Meeting" did take place in 2005.

club and a platform for meetings, or should ASEM aim to achieve more tangible outcomes? What is ASEM's main *raison d'être*, dialogue or cooperation? In recent years, the idea that ASEM should include more concrete action programs in support of the dialogue has been building up momentum. At the Milan summit in 2014, for example, the leaders “welcomed more action-oriented cooperation”. It seems indeed essential to agree on concrete objectives and enhance cooperation in order to promote “mutual” awareness and a more fruitful dialogue. As astutely pointed out by Robles (2008: 32), if states share overall objectives and are engaged in cooperation in other fields, a disposition to engage in dialogue ensues. If there are no shared overall objectives, the dialogue process will be more strenuous and its results uncertain. ASEM can thus be said to face a vicious circle:

“ Socialization requires agreement on objectives and cooperation in a number of areas, but without agreement and cooperation in these or other areas, socialization cannot take place. ”

Alfredo C. Robles (2008)

In order to break this circle, ASEM therefore needs to refine its vision and objectives, and find a better balance between high-level informal dialogue and interaction on the one hand, and tangible cooperation leading to visible results on the other.

Policy recommendation 1:

Refine ASEM's vision and objectives. Chapter Two already proposed the release of a short, simple and visionary declaration on the occasion of the upcoming summit in Mongolia in July 2016, in order to underline ASEM's new narrative of relevance and its strategic priorities in the 21st century. Certainly also in view of the recent extensive enlargement process, ASEM needs to refine its vision and prime objectives. The “Ulan Bator Declaration” should call for a political agreement on dialogue as well as cooperation in fields where ASEM can function as a “political catalyst” and where it has added value, in interrelated fields such as economy, (non-traditional) security, sustainable development, and connectivity (including education and people-to-people). Focused and operational discussions can result in specific and concrete objectives, that can be translated into concrete actions on the ground.

4.2 Informality

Informality has been referred to as the “hallmark” of ASEM. It allows for a non-binding exchange of views, experiences, and expertise on any topical and relevant political issue. Leaders of states and representatives of regions can confer with each other on the issues of the day, thereby fostering closer personal and professional relationships between them. This dialogue process results in a socialization process and ideally leads to habits of cooperation. ASEM's informal approach furthermore allows it to address issues that are considered “sensitive”. In other words, it reduces obstacles to dialogue and cooperation, allowing for flexibility, speed, privacy, simplicity, and a swift adaptation to changed circumstances (Lipson, 1991: 500).

However, informality is not so easy to put into practice at the highest political levels, and it requires a constant effort to actively promote informality and interactivity. Before as well as now, summit meetings often focus on read-out statements on a very wide variety of topics and result in increasingly lengthy and pre-negotiated Chair's Statements.

The promotion of informal dialogue in ASEM has been a perennial problem. Already at the summit in Seoul in 2000, when ASEM only counted 26 members, *“Leaders pleaded for more interactivity and informality at the meetings, with the objective to encourage a more spontaneous and substantive discussion”* (European Commission, 2001: 4). Enlargement of the partnership to 53 members has only exacerbated this problem, and the issue will not diminish in importance with more prospective candidates on the horizon. Now that ASEM has seemingly turned into a mini-UN, it is all the more vital to actively promote informality.

Informality is one of ASEM's core strategies and undeniably one of its strengths. Interviews have made it clear that the opportunity for an informal discussion without agenda is highly valued. Nevertheless, the reality is often different, and formal interaction takes over. Three issues can be seen to impinge on informal dialogue. First, at summits and higher-level meetings (more than at technical-level meetings) representation is important. For example, it is hard to achieve informal interaction when some countries are represented by ministers and others by junior officials. The importance of hierarchy and its impact on dialogue should not be underestimated, certainly not when dealing with Asian countries. Second, the EU has a long tradition of frank and open dialogue to achieve consensus building, often

based on informal rules. The EU also has its “Gymnich” format: meetings in an informal setting, with comfortable chairs but no tables, and with an agenda but without decisions. Many Asian countries, on the other hand, place importance on a more rigidly defined framework for dialogue, in spite of the predominant view of the informal “ASEAN Way”, for example. Third, informality is also compromised when leaders are accompanied by too many advisers and supporting staff in the room. Also here “cultural” differences between Asia and Europe play a role.

Policy recommendation 2:

Facilitate informality. How to ensure informality with 53 partners? First, in order not to reinvent the wheel, past proposals can be revived (European Commission, 2001: 4). A **well-prepared and active chair** should encourage interactivity, and **introductory interventions should be kept to a strict minimum**. The emphasis should be on **free-flowing discussion**, without any pre-established list of speakers. There should be sufficiently long informal intervals, in addition to **sufficient time slots for bilateral meetings**. The possibilities for “speed dating” during ASEM summits, allowing Heads of State and Government to engage with their counterparts from other countries in bilateral meetings behind closed doors in rapid succession, has been and still is one of ASEM's main attractions.

An important format facilitating informality is the **Retreat Session**. It is marked by informal seating and more confidentiality, without note-taking or recording, without agenda or even an indicative list of topics, and without detailed reflection in the official summit documents. It allows for a less-structured, free-flowing discussion

with fewer people present in the meeting room. The Retreat format has previously been successfully applied for example in the third ASEM FMM in 2001. It was introduced for the first time at summit level during ASEM4, held in Copenhagen in 2002, which included a Retreat Session under the heading “Dialogue on Cultures and Civilizations”. The Retreat, in a “**leaders/ministers only**” or at most a “**leaders/ministers plus one**” format, is a vital ingredient of other multilateral fora including the East Asia Summit (EAS), the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), and APEC. The ASEM Foreign Ministers’ Meeting in Delhi of November 2013 made an important new start, re-introducing the Retreat format. It also re-launched a factual and concise Chair’s Statement, not negotiated word for word but drafted in close coordination with partners, and more an enumeration of issues that have been discussed rather than a negotiated statement. The Retreat can be seen as complementary to the Chair’s Statement. The Milan Summit equally applied a successful Retreat session in order to allow for the discussion of sensitive or contentious regional issues.

Another possible way to promote informality is **Working Tables and smaller-group discussions**. The most sensitive political issues would still be discussed in plenary retreat sessions, but the working tables format could be useful to promote informality in the other sessions. As noted in **Chapter Two**, the EU-CELAC has experimented with this format. Participants in the meeting could be split up into subgroups for focused discussions, as a possible way to keep all participants as actively involved as possible in the dialogue. Each working table could be chaired by one country, and include 2 short keynote introductions, one

from Asia, one from Europe, followed by free, open and informal discussion. There could be one theme for the plenary, for example non-traditional security. After this, three to five thematic meetings (“Working Tables”), for which Leaders could sign up in advance, would take place. These would all focus on one issue in the sphere of the overall theme of the plenary. For example, working tables could focus on sustainable development (e.g. water management), climate change (e.g. ahead of a major UN climate change conference), transnational crime (e.g. trafficking), maritime security (e.g. the fight against piracy), and connectivity (e.g. border security and migration). The outcomes and overall “vision” of the meetings could be reported back to the final plenary. This Working Table format would also be in line with the smaller group initiatives (see section 4.3 below). It is obvious that there are challenges, in the first place relating to logistics and resources, including room infrastructure and issues relating to interpreters. It is furthermore clear that the choice of a narrowly-defined theme is important in order to improve the quality of the discussion. Nevertheless, informality and interactivity form ASEM’s core strengths. Actively promoting these remains a crucial task.



4.3 Cooperation and working methods: Issue-based leadership (IBL)

Enlargement has an undeniable impact, not only on informal dialogue, but also on ASEM's methods for (non-binding) cooperation. Today more than ever, ASEM needs to show concrete activity, in focused areas where ASEM's approach can make a difference, and through initiatives that are not an end in themselves, but are linked back to and supportive of the dialogue.

As Julie Gilson (2012: 397) has pointed out, ASEM's growth into a large trans-regional forum in which the inter-regional distinctiveness has weakened, can be seen as a blessing in disguise. The forum now offers more opportunities to focus on issues of common concern and interest through an issue-led approach. In recent years ASEM has been increasingly focusing on "variable geometry", or the idea that different interests and priorities should allow for the shaping of informal functional groups of states that drive forward tangible cooperation through "coalitions". The concept of such an "issue-based leadership" (IBL) as guiding tool was first launched at the Helsinki ASEM6 summit, but its implementation was flawed, suffering from relatively low commitment, little information-sharing and follow-up. India, the organizer of the eleventh ASEM Foreign Ministers' Meeting, revived the idea in 2013, renaming it "tangible cooperation". The Milan summit confirmed this list of groups of interested members in sixteen different issue areas.

Also in the EU the principle of "issue-based leadership" exists, and, under the name of "enhanced cooperation", is enshrined in the Lisbon Treaty. Applying this arrangement,

Member States can move forward at different speeds and towards different goals, as long as it furthers the objectives and interests of the EU. In a similar way, through its variable geometry, ASEM can cater to the individual political agendas of member states, in order to complement cooperation in other fora. ASEM offers the chance for the creation of alliances, in the sense of "straight-forward arrangements for non-binding collaboration" that allow for diversity among participants and for ad hoc and loose coalition building for issue-specific ends (Gilson, 2012: 397).

The return of "issue-based leadership" under the banner of "tangible cooperation" is struggling with uneven implementation. In general Asian countries, not in the least China and India, seem the most willing to drive cooperation forward. Major European players are less visible, and the involvement in initiatives of larger EU Member States has decreased. Smaller member states, however, are more involved. Nevertheless, follow-up after the FMM in New Delhi has been flawed, not in the least because of a lack of "ownership" of groups of clustered initiatives. Complications can also arise because foreign ministries of the countries involved have oversight responsibilities, but line ministries are in charge of implementation.

Nevertheless, IBL is very much in line with ASEM's ongoing enlargement process, offering opportunities for alliance building in a certain issue area. The instrument is furthermore in accordance with developments in other fora, such as APEC and the UN. In APEC for example a number of members jointly undertake self-funded projects. Many of them promote the sharing of information and best practices among members. This is based on the idea that different interests and priori-

ties should allow for the shaping of informal functional groups of states that drive forward tangible cooperation through working groups.

Policy recommendation 3:

ASEM à la carte? Similar to the idea of “enhanced cooperation” in the EU, members of ASEM should also be allowed to select issues of interest “as if from a menu”, and drive related initiatives and projects forward. That is, as long as this ranks under the ASEM vision and its common objectives. Under “Variable Geometry ASEM”, a group of likeminded partners from both Europe and Asia can jointly pursue common objectives, with the understanding that others can get involved at a later stage. In order to streamline “tangible cooperation”, Leaders would need to provide the IBL tool with a clear mandate, based on focused issues, and mechanisms for coordination, reporting, and evaluation would need to be established.¹¹ Furthermore, it should remain in line with the guidelines provided by the AECF2000.

4.4 Coordination

Membership expansion inevitably places additional strains on the logistical and managerial side of the ASEM forum. Effective and smooth coordination, administrative support, and functional follow-up increasingly form challenges as not only the number of members grows but also as meetings and initiatives proliferate. It seems therefore almost inevitable to consider taking a further step in strengthening institutional coordination mechanisms.

Proposals and attempts to streamline ASEM coordination are not new. The Asia-Europe Vision Group (AEVG 1999) already 16 years ago proposed the creation of a “lean but effective secretariat” as a point of communication and coordination, and as a focus for continuity also between summits. The 2004 summit made reference to the possibility of creating a secretariat “at an appropriate time”, but numerous ASEM partners have continued to voice strong resistance against increased institutionalization. As a form of compromise the ASEM Virtual Secretariat (AVS) was inaugurated at ASEM6 in Helsinki in 2006.¹² The AVS was supposed to become the main coordinating instrument, particularly in view of the increase of initiatives, ministerial meetings, and sectoral SOM, but the experiment never really took off. The Virtual Secretariat ended before it had well started.

Since 2006, several other attempts have been made to implement incremental measures in order to improve coordinating mechanisms. In 2009 the European Commission funded the “ASEM8 Coordinating Office” (known as the ASEM8 Coordination Team or TASC), an *ad hoc* one-year initiative to prepare, coordinate, and support the ASEM8 Summit in Brussels.¹³ The TASC included two full-time employees and even established an ASEM intranet. The EU-funded TASC initiative can be seen as having provided a model for the creation of a Technical Support Unit, called ASEM Chairman Support Group (ACSG), ahead of the 2012 summit in Laos. This unit, funded by ASEM members, integrated the hosts of the upcoming summit and FMM in the coordination mechanism “from summit to summit”, something which had been

¹¹ As recommended by “The Future of ASEM” workshop, Singapore, 4 April 2008. The workshop was organized by the Asia-Europe Foundation, the China Institute of International Affairs, and the European Institute of Asian Studies.

¹² Japan was the prime mover behind the initiative to establish a virtual secretariat, endorsed by the Seventh Foreign Ministers’ Meeting in Kyoto.

¹³ See the Chair’s statement of ASEM FMM9, paragraph 30.

called for already in the Helsinki Declaration on the Future of ASEM (2006). However, neither the ensuing FMM in New Delhi (2013) nor the summit in Milan (2014) made mention of the ACSG, implying the demise of yet another effort to strengthen coordination. In addition, ASEM has started experimenting with project-based agencies or “sectoral secretariats” to ensure continuity and follow-up. An ASEM Education Secretariat was created in 2009. It works on the basis of rotation and is hosted by one ASEM country for the term of four years, while other ASEM members are invited to second staff to the secretariat.¹⁴

The question, then, is whether ASEM can still afford not to establish a more permanent liaison office, in view of the continuing enlargement process and in order to improve the operationability of initiatives based on “tangible cooperation”.

In practice, a secretariat “would help keep records, create templates, streamline procedures, facilitate communication, foster transparency, and thus would provide institutional memory and ensure that every next step would take into account what had been done before or attempted before” (Vandenkendelaere, 2011: 61). In addition it would offer the following advantages:

- It would greatly enhance ASEM’s achievement orientation, increase public awareness, and equip ASEM to deal with the growing complexity of the process.
- In combination with permanent working groups or committees (see **Chapter One**) in key areas of cooperation, a secretariat can rekindle the interest of some European governments that seem to have

lost their active interest in the process.

- For its institutional memory ASEM would no longer need to depend on frequently transferred national officials.
- It would provide professional, neutral, and objective service to all ASEM members (de Crombrughe, 2011a: 185). Importantly it would treat all partners equally, which would be to the benefit of the less-developed countries in ASEM.
- Questions about the geographical representativeness of coordinators would no longer be relevant (ibid.)
- It could avoid problems related to the lack of experience, expertise, or logistical resources that smaller, less developed or less experienced countries face when being in charge of organizing meetings or summits. This would enhance their effective participation in ASEM events. It would also prevent larger non-coordinator states from having a too strong impact on relatively weak coordinators.
- It can offer a solution to the uncontrolled proliferation of initiatives, and avoid the tendency to propose initiatives for initiatives’ sake (the so-called “laundry list” or “Christmas tree” phenomenon). It can make sure that all partners are on board on a timely basis, streamline ASEM projects, and hold the different strands of initiatives together. It can prevent that ASEM loses track of activities conducted under its label (cf de Crombrughe, 2011b: 42), or that initiatives lack objectivity or transparency. Importantly, it can compile and circulate information, and ensure follow up.

¹⁴ Germany hosted the secretariat in Bonn for four years, after which Jakarta, Indonesia took over in 2013. Belgium (the Flemish community) will host the secretariat as of 2017.

Having said that, setting up a secretariat would bring about issues related to staffing, funding and location, and could even conflict with the existing EU coordination machinery. And to a certain extent the EU as ASEM's only permanent coordinator already functions as a de facto secretariat.

Nevertheless, the positive experience with the ASEM8 Coordinating Office, TASC funded by the European Commission shows that also in the EU resistance against “creeping institutionalization” may be decreasing. According to one interviewed official, a 53-member ASEM necessitates increased coordination and institutionalization; ASEM now needs to show a product as a result of the dialogue, and for that better management is vital.

Either way, it seems inevitable that in the medium to long term, more changes are needed if ASEM wants to turn into a strong and concrete dialogue and cooperation framework with visible impact.

Policy recommendation 4:

Create a **light yet permanent liaison office** in order to cope with the growing need for coordination and management of an enlarging institution. If this is politically infeasible in the short term, coordination on the Asian side could be strengthened as proposed in **Chapter One**; a “troika” consisting of the hosts of the most recent, upcoming, and next summits could be included in the coordination machinery; and, depending on the specific objective within a certain issue area, a coordinating office or rotating coordinating country can be established based on the idea of sectoral leadership, following the example of the ASEM Education Secretariat.

4.5 Substance: Issues for ASEM

New members add potential and dynamism to the ASEM partnership, and steer the dialogue and cooperation in new directions. One of ASEM's missions is to act as a political catalyst contributing to ongoing cooperation at other levels. More than ever the challenge is to find added value to other fora (for example the UN), and to outline topics of bi-regional relevance that do not overlap with competing institutions. Here the subsidiarity principle as applied to the ASEM context by Gerald Segal in 1997 is still valid:

“Not all issues are best tackled at an ASEM level and not all ASEM issues are best tackled by all Asians and all Europeans.”

Gerald Segal (1997)

All too often the informal approach has formed a mismatch with lofty proclaimed objectives. Both dialogue and projects should be focused on cooperation areas in which progress can be made. Examples of such areas include the interlinked themes of connectivity, non-traditional security, and sustainable development.

First, connectivity is closely related to integration and to economy and trade, but is also linked to sustainable development and people-to-people exchanges. In other words, it is a very broad concept that means different things to different countries: it can imply political connectivity (political and diplomatic linkages); physical connectivity

and hard infrastructure (transport by air, road, rail or sea); institutional connectivity and soft infrastructure (customs integration, liberalization of trade and services); technological connectivity (technology and innovation); and people-to-people connectivity (tourism, education, culture, exchanges between think tank and research communities). ASEM can contribute to more narrowly defining connectivity, and setting objectives. Given the nature of ASEM, this would be related to the sharing of practices and the exchange of ideas, rather than to physical connectivity and infrastructure projects. Also within the sphere of connectivity, issues related to the Arctic development agenda or Arctic maritime transport routes can be tackled in ASEM, as it includes Nordic EU countries as well as Norway, and numerous Asian ASEM countries are turning their attention to the region. **Chapter Four** will elaborate further on possibilities for ASEM in the sphere of connectivity.

Issues in the non-traditional security sphere form another field where ASEM can have a comparative advantage. Since the 2000s the security agenda has taken on a much stronger position in the Europe-Asia dialogue. This shift from economy to political/security-related dialogue was due to the Asian Financial Crisis (1997-8) and the ensuing end of the so-called East Asian economic miracle, and more importantly the 9/11 attacks and the war in Iraq, resulting in a “securitization” of the ASEM agenda (Hänggi, 2004: 94). In particular the awareness has grown that, as a result of globalization, the global security agenda is increasingly determined by “new”, “soft” or “non-traditional” security challenges, such as migrations, transnational crime, illicit trafficking, environmental degradation, disaster management, infectious diseases,

etc. As defined by Collins, “(i)t is the centrality of the use, or threat to use, military force for coercive purposes that distinguishes traditional security from non-traditional security (NTS)” (Collins, 2012: 314). In addition, the principal concern is not so much to safeguard territorial sovereignty, but society, communities, and people.

As a result ASEM has increasingly been focusing on this field of NTS, even if it has remained mainly at the level of consensus-building and informal consultations in the form of meetings aiming to share experiences and build a common agenda. As a multilateral, open and informal institution ASEM is ideally placed to tackle NTS, not in the least because it does not lock partners into rigid governmental positions (Menotti et al., 2000: 172). Asia-Europe cooperation is therefore essential because Europe is not immune from Asian challenges and vice versa, and many countries, especially in Asia, lack sufficient technical and financial resources (including training and institutions) (Ahmad and Kuik, 2000: 188-189).

For example, joint international customs operations have achieved tangible outcomes. In 2007, 2009 and 2014 Member States of ASEM and the European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF) collaborated with Interpol, Europol and the World Customs Organization (WCO) in large-scale operations to counter smuggling of excise goods such as tobacco and alcohol. The success of these operations clearly shows that informal dialogue can be complemented by cooperation on the ground in tackling issues such as transnational organized crime. Furthermore, ASEM can contribute to defining objectives for customs cooperation through operational discussions, for example on procedures and standards. Deliverables here could include

an agreement on planning and developing border security.

Another promising issue in the same NTS sphere is the fight against piracy, as freedom of navigation is a theme that unites Europe and Asia. ASEM with the inclusion of India, Russia, China, Japan and the EU is ideally placed to promote and coordinate cooperation in securing the Sea Lanes of Communication (SLOCS). The 2010 ASEM seminar on piracy at sea already emphasized the importance of joint naval operations.¹⁵

Rather than tackling these issues directly on the ground, it is sufficient for ASEM to provide a platform for consensus building and informal consultations, aiming to share experiences, best practices, and expertise, and build a common agenda. ASEM members for example can share intelligence with the specific aim to trace the financial dealings of pirates (Gilson, 2012: 402).

ASEM can facilitate the creation of ad hoc alliances, such as those in place in Operation Atalanta, or as have been used in the customs operations in Europe. Asia-Europe under the ASEM umbrella can furthermore be instrumental in facilitating “multi-stakeholder collaboration” (Huggins and Vestergaard Madsen, 2014). This term refers to a more flexible structure to respond to NTS threats. It is being applied in the Contact Group on Piracy off the Coast of Somalia (CGPCS), involving different actors including the military but also NGOs, industry, and civil society.

ASEM is well placed to increase civil society involvement and track 2 initiatives in such informal, multi-stakeholder working

groups. Also in view of the ongoing “informalization of world politics” (Bueger, 2014), a term indicating that international politics are increasingly conducted elsewhere than in formal international organizations, ASEM can therefore have an impact on a more flexible, informal structure to respond to NTS threats.

Non-traditional security is closely related to sustainable development. The water management project under the ASEM Sustainable Development Dialogue, itself under the overall ASEM objectives to tackle non-traditional security and promote connectivity for example, offers a suitable example. Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania, Laos, Thailand and Vietnam jointly started the Danube-Mekong river basins project in 2012, joined by Austria, China, the EU and Slovakia in 2014. Sharing experiences and best practices has important relevance for sustainable development and development cooperation, and has considerable “ASEM added-value”.

It is furthermore an excellent illustration of how issue-based leadership can work in practice through an “ASEM at different speeds” approach, with a group of “shepherd” countries guiding the way, to be joined by other interested parties at a later stage.

Also education is directly linked to sustainable development. It forms a way to lift people out of poverty, prevents social exclusion, and is a key element to promote more sustainable growth. ASEM can contribute by sharing information, experiences, and good practice, for example on compulsory education, on the use of new technologies in education, or on the development of employment-promoting skills.

¹⁵ Cf. ASEM8 Chair's Statement (2010).

ASEM can furthermore be instrumental in encouraging countries to develop result-oriented initiatives and programs. This could give rise to groups of countries committing to specific projects and activities (for example joint curriculum development), followed by a monitoring of progress.¹⁶ This forms another good example of issue-based leadership in practice. **Chapter Four** provides further concrete recommendations in the field of education as part of “soft connectivity”.

Policy recommendation 5:

Focus on **issue areas in which ASEM can make a difference**, including in the spheres of connectivity, non-traditional security, and sustainable development. Link these issues with the agenda of the summit and reflect them in the Working Tables proposed above.

5. Conclusion

Has ASEM’s far-reaching enlargement process during the past decade made the forum more sluggish and inefficient? Has expansion into sub-regions such as South Asia, Australasia, and Central Asia diluted an already fragile regional cohesion in the Asian grouping? Has the admission of non-EU states burdened the forum with a new set of problems on the European side? Or has enlargement on the other hand enhanced ASEM’s critical mass, and provides greater dynamism to both dialogue and cooperation, making the partnership “better equipped to tackle present and future global challenges” as the Helsinki Declaration on the Future of ASEM contended?

Interviews reveal that it is in particular new

members who display a proactive and enthusiastic attitude towards ASEM. As such it cannot be denied that enlargement has added new vigor to the forum and its discussions, as a recent discussion paper contends (Islam, 2015: 9). Many new members are very eager and active, injecting new energy into certain issue areas. Furthermore, ASEM enlargement is a sign that it has evolved together with important changes in the global environment. These include for example increased multipolarity as a result of the emergence of new global players; and a transformation of inter-regionalism, from pure region-to-region relations to more diffuse transregional frameworks.

It is clear that ASEM’s nature has changed radically from the initial 25+1 set-up to the current 51+2 structure. As this chapter has shown, enlargement undeniably impacts on the forum’s overarching vision and objectives, the informal dialogue, methods of cooperation, means of coordination, and substance and issue areas. Yet, perhaps rather than asking whether enlargement is a sign of strength or not, the question should be raised how expansion can be made into an asset to make ASEM a more streamlined, efficient, and visible forum, and transform it from a “good-to-have” forum into a “must-have” forum connecting Europe and Asia. This chapter has contended that ASEM enlargement should be seen as a catalyst to revitalize ASEM, in particular by refining ASEM’s vision, actively enhancing informality, implementing variable geometry through working groups for tangible outcomes, strengthening coordination and management, and tackling issue areas in which the new constellation can achieve results, within ASEM as well as elsewhere.

¹⁶ This was brought up during the “ASEM Symposium on the Future Direction of ASEM” (Session 4, Social and Cultural Pillar), 20 March 2015, Bangkok.

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CHAPTER FOUR

ASEM

initiatives and
challenges

- SURFING THE ASIA-EUROPE WAVES -



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1. Introduction

The aim of this chapter is not to evaluate ASEM's diplomatic success in general, or to estimate the value of its political priorities enumerated after every summit in carefully drafted Chair's Statements. By definition, as an intergovernmental forum, the Asia-Europe Meeting provides officials, ministers and, above all, political leaders of its member countries and organizations, opportunities to meet, discuss and debate. Some of the debates are then translated for the wider public and for the media into specific and accessible formal declarations and statements. These statements have repeatedly *underlined* the need to promote further co-operation on specific issues, *reiterated* the commitment of ASEM members, or *tasked* senior officials to further study and assess needs and solutions.

In addition, behind this official diplomatic scene summarized in press conferences and press statements, ASEM summits and meetings are places for informal exchanges, offering "under the radar" channels of discussion. The most recent Chair's Statement¹⁷ has, similarly, highlighted the fact that:

“The informal nature of ASEM has allowed it to be responsive to the fast-changing global environment.”

*Herman Van Rompuy,
Chair at the Milan Summit, (2014)*

We assume therefore that this informality may be, in itself, a successful outcome, balancing the sometimes shallow, repetitive communiqués. As one Foreign Minister of an Asian country once told this author at the end of a fruitful summit: *“ASEM does not need to take media-prone initiatives to be politically successful. It needs, before all, to last and to be a resilient forum. My country decided to become a member not because it sees ASEM as an arena where you can do things better or differently. We joined because we felt that Asia and Europe have things to share in this globalized world. And sharing does not necessarily mean showing...”*¹⁸

It is the specific aim of this chapter to focus on ASEM's initiatives and challenges, and to examine, by means of interviews and facts-based reports, the pertinence, efficiency, credibility and legacy of the forum's "tangible and result-oriented activities". These activities are supposed to "benefit the people of both regions and increase ASEM's visibility and relevance" in those issue areas regularly marked as crucial by its consecutive leaders' summits and ministerial meetings: sustainable development, climate change, human rights, education, culture, good governance, trade, social welfare, norms, and all security matters – from maritime security to cyber-security.

2. Overview

2.1 Challenges

A plethora of meetings, conferences, workshops, and dialogues have been organized under the ASEM banner. Some were one-off events, whereas others have become long-term processes. Yet, in spite of its nearly twenty-

¹⁷ Issued at the Milan Summit on 16-17 October 2014. www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/ec/145154.pdf

¹⁸ Private communication, ASEM6 summit, September 11th, 2006, Helsinki.

ty years of existence, ASEM too often gives the impression of not having achieved much. This is mainly due to four factors: 1) a problematic lack of specific ASEM added-value and the absence of a scoreboard. This tends to rapidly transform initiatives into “talking shops” with only a loose focus on results; 2) a meagre follow-up, prompting the concerned actors (governmental or non-governmental) to repeat, from one meeting to another, their very same proposals, and to repackage positions to make them “ASEM compatible”, rather than tasking ASEM with specific and differentiated missions finely in tune with the needs of the time; 3) a lack of dedicated funding compared to other organisations and forums, exacerbated by the present financial pressures the European Union faces; and 4) a lack of visibility, not only media-wise, but also politically (see **Chapter Six**). The chronic absence of European leaders to some ASEM gatherings in the recent past, often noted with regrets by their Asian counterparts, have clearly undermined the impact of the decisions taken during those summits.

It is worth noting, nevertheless, that some decisions have been taken to compensate these challenges. The launch of an EU-sponsored and regularly updated ASEM InfoBoard in 2004, revamped and re-launched last year¹⁹ has brought some solutions to the difficulties mentioned above in terms of visibility and follow-ups. The work carried out, since its inception in 1997, by the Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF)²⁰ should also be commended, while institutions such as the European Commission since ASEM's early years have been addressing these challenges.²¹ In spite of all this, the overall picture remains foggy. ASEM's

work-in-progress does not easily appear on the Asian and European public's screens and radars, diminishing the forum's capacity to become a game changer in both regions.

2.2 Structural impediments

In addition to these concrete obstacles on which this chapter will elaborate, ASEM initiatives are also affected by the process's own structure and design. On the one hand, ASEM since its inception in 1996 has been an intergovernmental forum whose forays into the real Asia-Europe world (including the academic community, civil society, and the corporate sector) have remained somewhat hidden behind its political machinery. ASEM *de facto* encourages its member countries (and their respective Foreign Ministry bureaucracies) to pay prime attention to its regular meetings and summits. Though prominent academics, media editors, social activists or businesspeople are regularly invited to attend symposiums and debates, often held in parallel to summits, their declarations and statements—even when they are delivered to the leaders and annexed to the final documents—rarely carry enough weight to create a dynamic once the summit has come to a conclusion. The Asia-Europe People's Forum (AEPF)²², created alongside the Asia-Europe Business Forum (AEBF) to engage ASEM more in contacts and exchanges with civil society, is a good example. Though the AEPF has managed to retain a regular voice during summits, and has succeeded in obtaining funding - mostly from the European Union - to invite activists from Asia and Europe to discuss sustainable development, social security or climate change

¹⁹ www.asef.org/press/corporate/news-3406-asef-infboard-website-re-launched

²⁰ www.asef.org

²¹ See, for example, “Perspectives and Priorities for the ASEM Process” (1997), eeas.europa.eu/asef/docs/comm_working_doc_perspectives_priorities_asef_en.pdf

²² www.aepf.info

issues, it has failed, in its two decades of existence, to become a prominent initiative, able to have an influence on the intergovernmental agenda.

It is here that the inefficient “talking shop” syndrome is threatening, especially when it is fuelled by political mistrust: we cannot expect an NGO’s Forum to be active when leaders tend to sideline the event because of political concerns, or when an ASEM summit is tragically followed by the disappearance of an AEPF coordinator, as it happened in Vientiane, Laos on December 15th, 2012 when social activist and prominent people’s voice, Sombath Somphone was abducted and never seen again. This disappearance has cast a clear shadow on ASEM social and human rights ambitions.²³

On the other hand, the lack of an ASEM permanent secretariat —a constant subject of debate within the forum— plays undoubtedly a role in hampering its initiatives. Human nature is such that a permanent ASEM team, composed of persons whose own professional future is linked to the success of the organization and its activities, would certainly pay more attention to its profile, reputation and record. A secretariat would also be more efficient to surf on what has been one of ASEM’s more recent tools: “Issue-based Leadership” (2006) or “Tangible Cooperation initiatives” as outlined in the Chair’s Statement of the ASEM FMM 11 (2013).²⁴ In short, a permanent ASEM staff could serve as leverage when approached by a specific member country on a certain issue. The creation of such a secretariat would result in a better sense of appropriation and ownership of the process, at least in terms of ASEM initiatives.

2.3 ASEM’s track record

Surveying closely ASEM’s past achievements, this chapter nevertheless identifies three fields where the Asia-Europe Meeting process has produced a remarkable track record: connectivity, trade and sustainable development, and non-traditional security. Which initiatives have been taken in those three dedicated areas? Why have they been more successful than others, and why has the ASEM process proven to be more conducive in these fields? Can ASEM continue producing added value for its members, while other forums as well are exploring these directions? The following sections will answer these questions, based on available ASEM-related material and on the author’s personal experiences as a journalist covering past ASEM summits and meetings.

Taking into account the challenges, we need to ask ourselves whether ASEM has had, in those three areas, the capacity to respond to the changing political demand and current events, and to develop tools to build up a more efficient Asia-Europe community. Rather than filling its agenda with topics acceptable to government bureaucrats, can ASEM adapt its meeting/framework to the needs of its members? Can the political will to address those issues be complimented by a dedicated capacity to deliver something different from other fora dealing with the same issues? In short, can ASEM produce initiatives clearly identified with the Asia-Europe matrix?

Our reality check proves that ASEM has been productive, but not competitive, in the sense that it has not yet achieved enough to develop an added value beyond its political

²³ sombath.org/global-concern/statements/

²⁴ eas.europa.eu/asem/docs/chairs-statement-asem-fmm11-12112013_en.pdf

goals and framework. What ASEM needs is indeed a focus on areas where progress can be made, in response to the changing international environment and political demand. Interviews with experts and officials have furthermore made it clear that the lack of focus and “holding the initiatives together” is one of the most pressing challenges at present. Not dealing with this challenge risks turning ASEM into a passive pillar, rather than the engine, of a more fruitful and results-oriented Asia-Europe cooperation.

3. Connectivity / Connecting civil societies

The word connectivity is frequently used nowadays as it covers economic connectivity (markets integration, trade links...), cyber-connectivity (the widespread use of the internet), transport connectivity (rail, roads, air routes...) and people-to-people exchange. It is beyond doubt that ASEM has a lot to gain by emphasizing connectivity as a key motto and objective for its future developments, as there will be no lasting Asia-Europe dialogue without existing links to support this political dialogue. The insistence of China, with its “One Belt One Road initiative”, abundantly commented upon in the media,²⁵ shows how this issue can carry political weight for an Asia-Europe forum banking on its continental link.

3.1 Hard connectivity: Breaking the deadlock

It is this author’s assumption that ASEM, through its political dialogue process, cannot be more than an “incubator” for hard connectivity. Regular political meetings can certainly help to promote the idea of

rail links, road links, energy links between Asia and Europe. But it needs to be kept in mind that the informality of ASEM, its lack of available budgets, its lack of technical assistance input, constitute a clear obstacle to foster hard connectivity.

ASEM can help set and strengthen a political agenda, taking the occasion of its numerous gatherings to pinpoint some problems, or try to solve some pending issues by offering leaders an occasion to meet bilaterally. But at the end of the day, investment decisions —the bottom line of “hard connectivity”— will be made at the national/regional level, in consultation with financing agencies such as the Asian Development Bank (ADB) or the new China-based Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB). We tend to disagree here with the view expressed by Polish Expert Patryk Kugiel in his policy paper, published prior to the 2015 Milan Summit, in which he argues that ASEM could play a decisive role in generating *“additional funds for the modernisation and construction of railways and roads in Ukraine. In this way, the large Trans-European transport corridors, which currently end at the Ukrainian border (the Mediterranean and the Rhine–Danube) could be extended further to Asia to connect with Chinese-led projects (the New Silk Road), and to South and South-East Asia.”*²⁶ Rather, ASEM’s mission is to launch initiatives conducive of an “investment atmosphere”, acting as a catalyst more than an operator.

In addition, when it comes to hard connectivity, it cannot be denied that Turkey, Serbia and Ukraine, whose applications to join ASEM have so far not been approved for obvious political reasons, constitute

²⁵ thediplomat.com/2015/04/why-the-one-belt-one-road-initiative-matters-for-the-eu/

²⁶ www.pism.pl/files/?id_plik=18465

some of Central Europe's gateways to Asia. Considering the key geographic location of these countries, hard connectivity and transcontinental links will remain difficult challenges.

Policy recommendation 1:

ASEM could nevertheless take advantage of its regular political meetings, at Foreign Ministers or Heads of State and Government level, to propose **an updated review of major hard-connectivity projects between Asia and Europe**. This ASEM connectivity index, listing all road and railway links, with an update on their progresses and a review on the main concerned investors, plus attached maps and figures will certainly help to embody the idea of connectivity between Asia and Europe. Such an index, regularly updated and annexed to the Chair Statement, could be divided in three sections: 1) Trade integration/agreements 2) Transports 3) Cyber connectivity.

Policy recommendation 2:

Rather than continuing its AEPF and AEBF Forums on the sidelines of the summit, ASEM **could launch a dedicated “Connectivity Forum”** bringing together business sector operators —and possibly media and civil society organisations— to discuss those infrastructure-related issues whose impact on sustainable development, security and climate change is obvious. Private sector actors (corporations, investment funds...) could also be invited to meet with ASEM Economy Ministers, serving as an opportunity to revive their meeting, the EMM, which has somewhat been sidelined by the ASEM Finance Ministers' Meetings (FinMM).

Policy recommendation 3:

This Connectivity Forum could be a regular event, financed by private sponsors and offering an occasion to revive the now defunct ASEM Trust Fund, established in June 1998 to provide support to countries hit by the Asian Financial Crisis (AFC) and operated by the World Bank.²⁷ In the future, it may replace the Asia-Europe Business Forum (AEBF), which has often proven to be too comprehensive to attract prominent business personalities.

3.2 Soft connectivity: major improvements needed

ASEM's objective to foster cultural, social, education dialogue, and its leading role in what I will here call soft connectivity, is a highly promising aspect of its mandate and portfolio of activities. Two initiatives that come immediately to mind are the Asia-Europe People's Forum (AEPF) network and the Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF), whose roles and missions have already been highlighted above.

One particular achievement of the ASEM forum has been its Educational Process, and in particular the EU-Asia Higher Education platform or EAHEP, supported by the biennial ASEM Rectors' Conference whose purpose, since its first meeting in Berlin in 2008, has been to promote a wider Asia-Europe University platform. Beyond these institutional initiatives, it is also important to note the growing interaction between Asian and European universities and campuses. In that regard, the Higher Education “hub” developed by the island-state of Singapore, where numerous EU universities have now delocalized either a

²⁷ web.worldbank.org/archive/website01039/WEB/0__CON-7.HTM#03

campus or a regional headquarter, can serve as a model. Though it may sound as a formal and empty statement, the final declaration of the ASEM Rectors' Conference, held in Seoul in 2010, provides positive guidelines to further higher education cooperation, noting that "the growing level of interdependence between regions in the areas of research has made interregional dialogue particularly relevant (...) in a globalised society".

Beyond these formal educational exchanges, we should also take into account the fact that ASEM leaders have repeatedly pointed out the necessity to address the youngest segment of the Asian and European population, starting from the launch of the forum 20 years ago. The Model ASEM, recently held in Singapore in April 2015, is an excellent initiative with great potential to increase ASEM awareness among the younger segment of the population (cf. also **Chapters Two and Five**).²⁸

There are, nevertheless, enduring risks embedded in these initiatives. These risks include repetition (inviting incessantly the same people and organizations); low representativeness (how to be sure those regular guests are representing the evolving public opinion); an unbalanced approach (Europe being keener than Asia to foster this civil society dialogue); and political correctness (addressing the very same issues while keeping at bay other difficult subjects, linked to the intergovernmental nature of ASEM).

Policy recommendation 4:

We live in a time of brands, labels, and norms. They are not only there to help us recognize and identify products, but also

to guide us in an increasingly dense forest of initiatives and organizations. Education experts interviewed by this author in Brussels after the recently held Education, Youth and Sports Ministers' Meeting on 18 and 19 May 2015 repeatedly expressed their desire to establish a more fruitful educational connection between Asia and Europe, especially at a time when European higher institutions, such as for example the Fontainebleau-based business school INSEAD, have decided to relocate a large part of their operations to Asia.²⁹ **ASEM-led educational exchanges should be marked by a clearly-referenced label**, while more Asia-Europe student exchanges are taking place. This label would underline the huge potential in academic exchanges between ASEM countries. In the meantime ASEM could explore the idea of a preferential status or priority given to ASEM students in universities of both regions.

Policy recommendation 5:

As soft connectivity requires imagination, transnational links and mutual trust, ASEM could explore the idea of an **ASEM University, copied on the UN University based in Tokyo, Japan**. This University could be hosted in two existing academic institutions, one in Europe and one in Asia. It could serve as a bridge for students and professors willing to conduct research, and it could be linked to an ASEM academic grants and scholarships network, whose management could be assigned to the existing Asia-Europe Foundation under its education portfolio.

Policy recommendation 6:

Similar to APEC's committees, ASEM could

²⁸ www.asef.org/projects/themes/education/3492-model-asem-spinoff-editions/3493-model-asem-singapore-2015

²⁹ campuses.insead.edu/asia

support the emergence of dedicated ASEM Boards of Experts/Personalities, in at least four fields: Academic Exchange, Social and Human Rights, Media, and Youth. These “Boards” would be linked to the Asia-Europe Foundation and provide, once every two years, a review of what has been done in their respective field of action. They could meet up biennially, alongside the ASEM meetings. A call for applications could be sent to all ASEM partners to recruit these experts.

4. A new trade/investment environment

This section deals with a rather simple core question, namely whether ASEM trade-led initiatives can have an impact on multilateral negotiations benefitting ASEM members. Can ASEM, at the very least, become a credible forum for trade discussions in the context of emerging regional agreements illustrated by the Transpacific Partnership (TPP)? The difficulty here derives mainly from the fact that ASEM membership has evolved rapidly, as did the EU membership and the role of the WTO. It would be therefore unfair to criticize ASEM for its under-achievements in a field where, in short, bilateral and regional ties have retained the upper hand during the last 20 years, despite multilateral efforts. To add to the complication, trade is by definition a very sensitive topic on which Europe is divided, especially when it comes to possible free trade with an Asian region. The reality check is provided daily when looking at the bilateral negotiations between EU member countries and their Asian counterparts.

Another trap to avoid in terms of trade, is to try to quantify statistically the impact of ASEM initiatives. The general appetite for trade cannot be seen separately from

the economic circumstances of the time. ASEM credibility in that area has therefore suffered from the successive crises its members had to deal with, from the Asian Financial Crisis to the present and ongoing European crisis. The impact of the crisis in Europe is obvious in an eroded competitiveness, political clouds hovering over the euro currency, and the doubts, fuelled by the UK decision to hold a referendum on a possible “Brexit”, on the future of a more integrated European economic cooperation.

Nevertheless, it is probably now, nearly 20 years after ASEM’s creation, that the time is best suited to launch credible/efficient initiatives. Precisely because the very idea of free trade is being challenged, and its benefits are widely debated, ASEM should commit itself to advocate more trade links, more trade arrangements, betting on the fact that **the incoming revolution in transcontinental road/rail transportation through Eurasia will, like it or not, have an overwhelming effect on the present trade environment and schemes.**

ASEM, we believe, does not have the capacity to embark on a global trade/investment promotion course, as it poses obvious conflicts of interest in that field to ASEM member countries. What is therefore important for ASEM is to pinpoint the importance of liberalizing trade and investment within the Asia-Europe area, without losing sight of the benefits this will bring to the local population and to the ultimate goal of a more sustainable development. ASEM can have a clear added value if it endorses free trade promoting the interest of both continents and compatible with the aspirations of the populations concerned. The emphasis should therefore be placed on the awareness of trade benefits, and on trade sustainability.

ASEM will only be able to make a difference if it appears as a forum in which divergent views can be heard and governments meet to discuss issues crucial to the wellbeing of their citizens. There are indications that an ASEM Senior Officials' Meeting on Trade and Investment (SOMTI) and an Economic Ministers' Meeting (EMM) may materialize in Asia in 2016, and Thailand, host of the most recent Senior Officials' Meeting in Bangkok, intends to place this on the agenda.³⁰ If this is the case, the different parties concerned should fully utilize this occasion.

ASEM could also make a difference by being at the forefront of the fight against the rise of transnational criminal activities that have followed the liberalization of trade. The question of corporate waste, now topping the agenda of many cities and regions in ASEM countries, could, for example, be addressed more vigorously within the ASEM framework.

Policy recommendation 7:

Customs facilitation and Standard/Norms collaboration can be enhanced. The fact that Customs Directors General from ASEM countries have been meeting regularly should not prevent ASEM leaders to propose more significant initiatives, without duplicating what is presently done by respective trade ministries or agencies. **ASEM could create a "Customs Training Cluster"**, where directors of these respective agencies meet and have an exchange on their topics of interest.

The difficulty so far, confirmed by experts, is that in the area of customs cooperation ASEM has not yet managed to bring onboard enough players from the private sector and from other enforcement agencies. Too often, ASEM customs officials have been discussing

the crucial issues of standards, norms and procedures, without sufficient awareness of the situation on the ground. This was brought to the attention of this author after the October 2014 meeting of Asia-Europe Customs Officials in Prague, during which, once again, the main aim was to "facilitate legitimate trade but also help enhance supply chain security by allowing for targeted controls of identified high risk cargo". The idea of a "cluster", therefore, would include bringing together different arrays of specialists, from Asia and Europe, without limiting the attendance to bureaucrats of specific administrations.

A model for this already exists and may serve as an example, namely the OECD's global Forum on Tax Administration (FTA). This annual forum brings together Directors of Tax Administration worldwide to discuss standards and norms, and publishes an annual report. It also engages in regular surveys, and has recently promoted an OECD sponsored project of "tax and customs without borders". Inspired by this example, ASEM could promote a more informal gathering, open at the beginning to those who want to participate. Based on several interviews and discussions with the Forum's Director, Pascal Saint-Amans, this author believes that the OECD could be a valuable resource to explore further ASEM initiatives.

Policy recommendation 8:

Though ASEM, as an informal forum, should choose to stay away from sensitive subjects like liberalization or free trade, it may serve as a catalyst for new ideas emerging in Asia and Europe, and eventually to function as a promoter for a "bottom-up" trade approach. In agriculture in particular, producers of European and Asian countries are willing to

³⁰ Based on discussions with officials in Brussels, Milan, and Bangkok where a seminar on the future of ASEM was held in March 2015.

explore more direct opportunities of cooperation, now made possible by the widespread use of the Internet. ASEM, by inaugurating rotating forums, could devote one to agriculture products, linking this to the existing NGO network active through AEPF.

5. Fostering Global Governance

ASEM has taken numerous initiatives in the field of food security, environmental preservation, and the fight against climate change, and has organized discussions and seminars on hard security and cyber-security, as well as on tax evasion and transnational crime. It is not a surprise to see that those subjects have been frequently addressed by ASEM leaders, and are featured prominently in the summits' final declarations. ASEM achievements in this field are even quite impressive. There is a clear will in Asia and Europe to find ways to promote a better global governance, especially on climate change and global warming.

Nevertheless, considering that the international fight against global warming is UN led with a clear agenda and conferences set at a specific date, ASEM has not been able to produce a clear input, or prepare an original contribution. This could have been done if a secretariat, carrying this specific mission, had been in place and working towards that objective. A reinforcement of the Asia-Europe Foundation staff dealing with these issues, especially in the aftermath of the Paris COP 21 conference would definitely be able to foster added value. In particular two governance issues relating to climate change can be made more efficient through a fine-tuning of ASEM involvement, namely environmental preservation and food security.

5.1 Preservation of the environment

ASEM expertise remains too low key. Climate change discussions often suffer from the complexity of the subject, and the proliferation of initiatives. ASEM initiatives, though quite remarkable, have fallen into this trap. Here again it is essential to keep in mind what the added value of ASEM can be. The Asia-Europe Meeting, bringing together a number of countries with a long experience in tourism and a thorough credibility in the area of the hospitality industry, could serve as a platform to promote "green economy" and "green tourism". Experiences could be shared and academics could meet to discuss ways in order to draw lessons from each other's experiences. One example that could be adapted, possibly, within the ASEM framework is the "Green Economy Forum" taking place each year in Brussels. Its success could easily be transferred to the Asia-Europe context, by promoting green businesses, green actors, and green experiences. By doing so, ASEM could put a face on those experiences and convince each government to bring one or two main players alongside their official delegations to the summits.

5.2 Food security

Food security constitutes a crucial field within soft security, even if it has received relatively little attention thus far. Obviously, it is more sexy for governments and experts to discuss cyber-security, but the global race for arable land as well as the fact that Europe remains a leading agricultural producer make food security an obvious topic for debate. More can be achieved in that field, in particular in connection with the relevant UN agencies.

Also here this chapter's core argument is valid, namely that ASEM needs to prioritize some issues relating to global governance. Its strength may derive from its capacity to promote a "lessons learnt" process, and focus on human development and security. This would create a sense of confidence among the general public, as ASEM will be able to portray itself as being committed to human dignity and respectful of sustainable development.

Policy recommendation 9:

One issue to which the ASEM process should give higher priority is food security, while keeping in mind that the sub-regional context in this regard is highly relevant. We doubt that ASEM full membership is the appropriate format for such exchanges, but ASEM "food security clusters", bringing together experts from some parts of Europe and some parts of Asia could prove very useful. This idea has been suggested to this author during an exchange with Greek agriculture officials, who were interested in examining the possibility of including olive oil in the now famous "Okinawa Diet" developed in the Southern islands of Japan. It may sound trivial, but such a request demonstrates the interest that local producers may have in enhanced Asia-Europe exchanges, taking into account the wellbeing of the local populations. It could also serve as a good narrative to illustrate down-to-earth regional cooperation, and might trigger the interest of leaders. **The launch of "food security panels"** by sub-region (as the issue of food highly depends on climate and geography), with the duty to report to the Leaders' summit, could also serve as a reminder that ASEM is honestly committed to the interest of its population.

Policy recommendation 10:

It goes without saying that ASEM Ministers of Tourism can discuss the proper ways to expand the flow of visitors throughout the region. There is as yet no formal arrangement to host an ASEM Tourism Ministerial Meeting, but this could form an important contribution, especially as the economic crisis weighs on European tourist destinations from Greece to Spain. ASEM could also be a highly useful tool for dialogue and exchanges of experiences on sustainable tourism. **An ASEM Green Travel initiative**, linking tour operators and tourism professionals with Ministries of Tourism and NGOs active in this field could serve as a dedicated platform. Once again, the idea is not to multiply the platforms or committees operated by ASEM, but to look for areas where Asia-Europe cooperation can make a difference and, consequently, increase the forum's impact and visibility. Tourism is too often seen as a low-key issue while, in reality, it covers a wide spectrum and is inextricably linked to issues of good governance.

5.3 The Asia-Europe security gap

Security is probably one of the areas where ASEM formal initiatives, despite multiplying channels of discussions on maritime, cyber- or hard security, will face enormous challenges. These challenges derive from the fact that Asia and Europe certainly do not share the same security concerns and preoccupations, and it cannot be ignored that within ASEM competitions, rivalry, and perhaps even tensions reminiscent of a quasi-state of Cold War exist. Pretending to ignore this reality is dangerous and would put ASEM at the risk of becoming irrelevant.

The issue of Islamic radicalization forms an example. There is, for obvious reasons, a trend towards a higher focus within ASEM on this issue, fostering police/intelligence exchanges. Malaysia has recently taken the lead. But again, the risk is great to perceive these encounters as disappointing, as the willingness to trade information between Asian and European countries remains limited. ASEM would probably gain more by commissioning a task force of sociologists/anthropologists whose aim would be to study the different patterns of radicalization among the Muslim youth population. One key factor, often mentioned in Europe as a recurrent problem, is the training of *imams* and the influence acquired by “imported” religious figures from Northern Africa or the Middle East. ASEM, including several countries harbouring a large Muslim population, should do more to comprehensively map out *jihadist* patterns, flux and behaviours. An interesting report produced in 2008 by the Change Institute for the European Commission ended with a list of “Identified beliefs ideologies and narrative for exploration during field work”.³¹ It mentioned in particular the argument of the “clash of civilizations” and the “decadence of western culture”. Bringing onboard Asian experts with a Muslim background, and inviting them to review European policies towards the Muslim minorities may help to foster awareness and to tone down the discrimination factor too often seen as sparking potential violence. Along the same lines, inviting European Muslim scholars to debate with their Asian counterparts on the impact of decolonization on mentalities could trigger a new approach. But once again here, ASEM would gain more by hosting targeted academic exchanges than bringing together administrative/police officials whose cooperation is already the main

task of Interpol or other intelligence-sharing treaties or mechanisms.

A further concern here is the presence of the hidden elephant in the room: the USA and its policy towards the Pacific. ASEM should do more to promote security cooperation, especially in the field of soft security, to address this gap. But the question of security inevitably raises the sub-question of the US-Europe-Asia triangle and the specific needs of each actor in a time of turmoil fuelled by terrorism, nationalism and separatism threats.

It is beyond the scope of this chapter, addressing ASEM initiatives and challenges in general, to look into the details of security-related issues to be debated by Ministers and Leaders. Instead the analysis follows a more journalistic approach, as ASEM can be an occasion to report on those questions from a different angle. As security is not only a matter of weaponry and strategic analysis, but also of perceptions of threats and respective ambitions, we believe that ASEM should concentrate more on these directions, aided by the presence among its members of neutral countries (Switzerland) and of prominent peace-diplomacy actors (Ireland, Norway, Sweden, Finland).

Policy recommendation 11:

Organize a yearly ASEM seminar on mediation and peace diplomacy, comparable to what has been done in the field of human rights, with the annual Human Rights seminar. Countries willing to support this endeavour could be easily found, and efforts could be made to tag this initiative to the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) present in Asia.

³¹ ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/doc_centre/terrorism/docs/ec_radicalisation_study_on_ideology_and_narrative_en.pdf

Policy recommendation 12:

Cyber-criminality and cyber-security are topping the international agenda. ASEM certainly does not have the resources to compete with more prominent organisations. But what ASEM can do, eventually, is to ensure access to information to its members, thereby clearly serving the purpose of a forum where all countries are on an equal footing. More than a seminar bringing together experts, ASEM could take the lead in Asia and Europe by proposing the first-ever official cyber-security contest, with a view to drawing in youth from all its member countries. This would be an exercise-driven initiative, bringing national teams from each member country, to protect/attack a fictional ASEM crucial infrastructure. **The ASEM Cyber-games** would certainly make headlines, maybe even make American corporations envious, while at the same time promoting recognition of a highly-needed cooperation among ASEM members. The Trans-Eurasian Information Network (TEIN), a large-scale research and education data-communications network for the Asia-Pacific region, is an important precursor here, given its emphasis on Internet and education.³²

Policy recommendation 13:

ASEM should promote its public diplomacy exercise. There is no such thing as security without mutual trust and without the feeling that being together offers more opportunities than being at odds. The existing Asia-Europe Public Diplomacy Initiative, operated by the Asia-Europe foundation in partnership with DiploFoundation and NCRE, has already proven to be successful by training diplomats from ASEM countries to the satisfaction of their respective foreign ministries.

An **ASEM Public Diplomacy Handbook**, focusing on the best non-traditional ways to promote the Asia-Europe dialogue should be published and regularly updated. The initiative, presently funded for 2015, should be disseminated and brought forward to the knowledge of all participants at the incoming Foreign Ministers' Meeting in Luxembourg.

6. Conclusion: Identifying future trends

Over its twenty years of existence, the Asia-Europe Meeting process has offered plentiful opportunities for a more fruitful cooperation between an increasing number of partners. In terms of initiatives, the ASEM forum has been particularly active. But unfortunately, its prospects nowadays look more challenging than ever, as many other channels of cooperation and exchange between Asian and European countries are now competing with ASEM's strict—and sometime too restrictive—intergovernmental framework. To surf the Asia-Europe waves without risking to be thrown overboard, ASEM needs to embark on a thorough reality check, and to take into account this increasingly competitive environment.

ASEM should re-direct its efforts and initiatives towards a more prospective mapping out of future trends and challenges for its member countries. ASEM is not equipped to contribute added value when it focuses on present problems, except for the all-important value of political dialogue itself. ASEM can make a difference in pinpointing future trends, and in mobilizing resources to produce reports and evaluations. To remain an active pillar of Asia-Europe cooperation, ASEM should be a prospective Forum.

³² TEIN is now in its fourth phase. ec.europa.eu/europeaid/regions/asia/tein-3_en

CHAPTER FIVE

The role of stakeholders in the ASEM process



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1. Introduction: The diverse stakeholders of the ASEM process - Different interests, different motivations

Member states are the primary stakeholders of the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) process. This chapter offers an additional understanding about the involvement of non-state actors and their roles, achievements and limits as ASEM stakeholders. In doing so it is important to bear in mind that ASEM came to life because of the need to bring the two regions, Asia and Europe, closer to each other. Bridging the gap was a prime goal not only for governments but also for the people. This aspect should not be underestimated, in particular as it reinforces the vision, the spirit, and as this author argues, the very rationale behind the ASEM process.

The diverse actors involved in the ASEM process can be divided into two separate groups: (a) institutionalized stakeholders such as the Asia-Europe Foundation, the Asia-Europe Parliamentary Forum, the Asia-Europe Business Forum, the Asia-Europe People's Forum; and (b) a non-institutionalized group – civil society in the broad sense.

This chapter, however, proposes an analytic, rather descriptive, study of ASEM stakeholders, in order to assess the process thus far and provide policy recommendations. In doing so, it arranges stakeholders not according to “age” (i.e. how long they have been involved in the process) and frequency of meetings, but rather according to their relevance. More importantly, rather than list all groups, the purpose of this analysis is to identify the most relevant stakeholders based on their interests in, commitment to, and influence on the ASEM process.

2. The member states as stakeholders

It is useful to bear in mind that ASEM is a very state-centric organization. It goes without saying therefore that the most relevant stakeholders are the member states.

“ *The way ASEM works and is organized implies that ASEM is very much a process by governments, for governments and of governments.* ”

Pelkmans and Hu, (2014: 5)

Having said that, it is also important to note that ASEM partner states are not equally involved in and committed to the process. Hence, diversity exists also at the prime level of stakeholders, the states.

From the beginning of the process, some members have been more eager to establish ASEM and have been more actively involved in the process than others. Among the founding members, France and Singapore were the key initiators. There is a clear “*inequality among the member states and unequal commitment, unequal interest*” in the process (LeThu, 2014). As a multilateral exercise, it is natural that it appeals more to smaller countries, rather than larger and more resourceful ones that have established stronger bilateral or even unilateral channels of communication. This is especially true in terms of public diplomacy, including through the Asia Europe Foundation

(ASEF). For smaller countries, such as Vietnam, ASEF has proven to be an important forum. It is seen in Vietnam's active participation, initiating new programs and eagerly hosting meetings. ASEF provides a convenient channel for equal communication and for reaching out to multiple actors. Participation in ASEF networks serves well the purpose of self-promotion, raising a country's international profile and enhancing practices of internationalization, at the low cost of multilateral summitry.

China can be seen as an interesting case because of its "reputation" and growing significance in the world. As it is expansively pursuing a "benevolent power" image, participating in multilateral gatherings such as ASEM, including through ASEF and cultural cooperation, provides an excellent platform for Beijing to reach out to a broader public than its direct neighbors. Moreover, with the recent grand vision of "One Belt One Road" that encompasses Eurasia, ASEM has become a convenient tool to promote that strategy. This and other benefits provided by this large forum can explain the recent increased pro-active approach of China to the process.

Member states are important stakeholders that can actively affect the entire ASEM process, by promoting initiatives and advancing their own view on the development and direction of the process. But for the purpose of this chapter I will avoid a country-by-country analysis and instead focus on the different levels of stakeholders.

Even within a single member state, there are different levels of stakeholders. For example, Ministries of Foreign Affairs, Trade, Economy or Culture and Education likely have stronger interests in the ASEM process

than Ministries of Infrastructure or Home Affairs. Although meetings tackle different themes, including health, migration or food safety, the ASEM process is predominantly subject to interests concerning the "external domain" ministries. Despite very different contents and projects, the default "contact person" in each member state is an ASEM desk based in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The overview of ASEM ministerial meetings between 1996 and 2014 suggests an evolution of foci as well as engagement of different ministerial stakeholders. The inaugural years were marked by Finance Ministers' Meetings (FinMM), Foreign Ministers' Meetings (FMM), and Economic Ministers' Meetings (EMM). Since 1997 in total 11 FinMM, 11 FMM, and 6 EMM have been held. They were the only meetings at ministerial level (until 2002) and were held yearly until this pattern was broken in 2004. At a later stage, the three would take turns in gathering in separate years. This pattern suggests that the initial focus of the ASEM process was mainly trade and diplomacy.

The first "non-traditional" meeting was the Environment Ministers' Meeting in 2002. Although only three follow-up meetings took place until 2014, it signalled the inclusion of a third pillar-type of ASEM member governments' meetings. The expansion of thematic ministerial meetings of Culture (5 in total), Education (4), Labour (3), Transport (2) and Energy Security (1) made the list of ASEM gatherings much more diverse. This overview suggests two things. First, member states comprise different levels of stakeholders. Ministries more frequently participating in and committing to ASEM meetings can be seen as having higher relevance as ASEM stakeholders. Second, the balance is changing. A greater inclusiveness

and more intensive links with the third pillar including through ASEF and civil society (cf below), a diversification of topics, and a higher attention given to them suggest that ASEM is maturing into true multi-thematic governance. The diversity of various levels of stakeholders within member states goes hand in hand with growing complexity.

Members of ASEM are not only states but include the European Union and the ASEAN Secretariat, equally representing different levels of stakeholders. While the EU emerges as a long-term supporter (both in terms of financial contributions as well as capacity) of the ASEM process, the ASEAN Secretariat remains a sleeping member. Its membership is primarily nominal because its financial as well as organizational support remains minimal. For this reason, there is no regional equivalent on the Asian side that could be placed at the same level as the EU.

3. ASEF: The “other” long-standing contributor

Second on the list is ASEM’s only institution – the Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF), established in 1997. As a child of ASEM it reflects the political structure of membership and is embedded in the ASEM agenda. ASEF was an initiative by Singapore, which also hosted its physical institution to promote exchanges between Asian and European think tanks, cultural groups, and people. ASEF was designed to act as a clearinghouse and a catalyst or facilitator of dialogue and cooperation. Since its inception its activities have involved over 20,000 participants and over 700 partner institutions (ASEF official website, 2015).

The development of ASEF interestingly reflects the evolution of ASEM itself. Interviews with ASEF staff reveal the discrepancy

between the reality of ASEF’s organization and the official ASEM mandate. The linkages and determinants between ASEM and ASEF need to be explained starting with the organization’s development. Among ASEF’s contributions and achievements, one of the most relevant is the inclusiveness of a variety of actors in the process. By engaging civil society in the dialogue with governmental representations, ASEF has added to the pluralization of the Asia-Europe inter-regionalism. A number of scholars have praised this inclusiveness. They acknowledge the foundation’s contribution to the democratization and pluralization of Asia-Europe inter-regionalism (Bersick, 2008).

As the nature of ASEF activities evolves, some of them result in further policy recommendations to the higher level of Summits and Ministerial meetings. Hence, many of those actors participate indirectly in formulating policies, presenting best practices and contributing to the general dialogue between civil societies and the governments’ representatives of the ASEM members. Working from a mandate of a top-down ASEM process, ASEF is not entirely free from political conditionality embedded in its activities. Created to facilitate cooperation between the civil societies of Europe and Asia, it has struggled with the obstruction from non-democratic member governments regarding some sensitive issues. For example, bringing up the very issue of “civil society” was problematic from the early stages of Asia-Europe inter-regionalism. The presence of civil society in the meetings ignited some disagreement from the PRC and Vietnam in the early years of the ASEM process. But ASEF was persistent in the efforts of engaging civil society, and some observers positively evaluate its success in establishing “*a pre-political civil society within the Asia-Europe dialogue*” (Bersick,

2008: 248). Being a part of the ASEM governmental process, ASEF has to work within the constraints of ASEM, and hence has been criticized as being too elitist and “selective in inclusion”.

Nevertheless, ASEF eventually managed to organize cooperation programs involving non-state actors from both continents in a wide spectrum of fields. Governments in Beijing and Hanoi have accepted the idea of “civil society” after negotiations, and ASEF managed to organize the conference “Connecting Civil Society of Asia and Europe” in Barcelona in 2004. This case serves well as an illustration of ASEF’s contribution and shows a slow buy-in to democratic concepts through cultural and educational cooperation. From this perspective, ASEF has an important potential role as facilitator in terms of the democratization of the Asia-European dialogue.

ASEF is not only a stakeholder in its own right. It also serves as a bridge between ASEM and other stakeholders. In fact, over time ASEF has been “appointed” the responsibility to lead the trend of democratization of the inter-regional dialogue. As it has neither the mandate nor authority to act as representative of civil society, until now most of the meetings have had an informal character. However, along with the multiplicity and intensity of ASEF programs, it helps to open up political networking at the inter-regional level to civil society actors. As civil society has been progressively involved in the ASEM process, participatory democracy has found its way into the Asia-Europe dialogue.

Such inclusiveness is significant in terms of politics “from below” in the context of the current efforts to institutionalize inter-regional cooperation through ASEM. The proliferation of non-state actors and the emergence of

new capacities for associational life and of a political discourse articulated through notions of “public participation”, political reform and accountability are all evidence of rising expectations of a genuine democratic challenge to the powers of the state (Richards, 1999: 147).

Another significant contribution lies in the sphere of education. ASEM has created the ASEM Education Hub (AEH), a sustained program that has engaged a significant number of scholars, researchers, university students, as well as research centers and universities across Asia and Europe. The educational projects have been one of the strongest facets of Asia-Europe inter-regional cooperation, not only within the third pillar, but in the ASEM process overall. An important reason for this can be found in EU’s strong commitment to education programs. European Commission papers illustrate this commitment, recognizing the inter-regional efforts in advancing educational cooperation:

- *The Role of Universities in the Europe of Knowledge* (COM (2003) 58).
- *Education, Training and Research: Trans-National Mobility* (COM (96) 462).
- *Inter-Cultural Dialogue and Understanding* (COM (2002) 401).
- *Teaching and Learning – Towards the Learning Society* (COM (95) 590).

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) has similar intentions to establish educational exchange programs for students, rectors as well as other programs that would include educators and students from its member states. For that it applies EU-led programs as well as ASEF-operated projects

as points of reference. During one of the author's interviews with the ASEAN Secretariat unit concerning the socio-cultural pillar, ASEF was explicitly mentioned as a learning reference point. Education programs including the ASEF Classroom Network or the ASEF Summer University Program, but also "extra-curriculum" activities for students such as the ASEF Volunteer Program or the Young Leaders' Forum, are being set as models for an ASEAN University Network.

Art has become another trademark of ASEF's work. By launching cultural exchange projects, ASEF promotes cultural dialogue and networking among young artists and offers a platform for dialogue at the policy-making level. As one of the ASEF program's participants described:

“Never in the history of mankind have cultural boundaries between nations and civilizations been so fluid as we are now experiencing.”

Mantaha and Tingsabdh, (2003)

Countries once divided by the Iron and Bamboo Curtains now share many similar cultural traits, and countries that used to be separated in the hierarchy of power by colonialism now grow through similar economic welfare, technology, and information development. It is important that citizens can have access to a common platform for creativity and expressions.

ASEF is assessed here as having independent capacity in leading and initiating the cultural agenda. This section argues that through ASEF, the cultural pillar of ASEM, originally considered as the "left-over" one to include all the other items that did not fit in the political and economic pillars, has proved itself to be the most sustainable and effective. This argumentation is supported by the paradigm that "cultural brokerage", at this level seen as interaction and socialization between elites,³³ provide for a certain cultural continuity across national, and in this case, also regional boundaries.

ASEF is not only a key stakeholder in the ASEM process, but its importance lies also in interlinking the different stakeholders, horizontally as well as vertically. Horizontally, as the content of ASEF activities suggests, it provides platforms for different interests groups from Asia and Europe. Vertically, it links civil society, professionals and experts to the governments.

ASEF continues to bear the impact of limitations embedded in the ASEM structure. Lacking a secretariat, ASEM has no coordination mechanisms that include a "system memory" of the process. Rather, member governments take turns in hosting summits and ministerial meetings, often without prior experience. Even though there have been a significant number of ASEM-themed meetings since 1996, those who attend the meetings and are familiar with the process are only involved a limited number of times. This means that meetings are on an "ad hoc" basis, rather than being grounded in institutional memory and organized coordination. ASEF, on the other hand, has been responsible for a number of diverse meetings related to the summits. ASEF has provided

³³ Elites here specifically refer to the various civil groups who take up the elite role of representation in the ASEF setting.

preparatory assistance and support services for the hosting governments or even organized ministerial meetings (for example, Culture, and Education). Even though ASEP is nowhere near a position of overseeing ASEM operations, it is the entity that has accumulated the most institutional memory and knowledge about the ASEM process.

4. The multiple “unstructured” stakeholder groups

4.1 The Asia-Europe Parliamentary Partnership (ASEP)

The decision that parliamentarians from the EU and Asia should have a common platform to meet was made along with ASEM’s inception. The first meeting took place in Strassbourg in 1996 and it has been held biennially since 2002, congruent with the official ASEM summit. The European Parliament with its experience and development modules served as the reference point, but also as a driver for ASEP. Although parliamentarians would gather to discuss different issues relating to ASEM interests, it was not until the ASEM6 in Helsinki in 2006 that ASEP was allowed to provide direct input to the summit. The fact that the Helsinki summit provided the chance for the ASEP chairman to directly address the summit, is a sign of the increased recognition of parliamentary involvement - a stakeholder that should not be overlooked.

ASEP has a lot of potential and is an important platform that could be better utilized. The European Parliament is very well established and has long-standing experience. On the Asian side, the parliamentary system is much more diverse. An informal forum such

as ASEP is a good learning opportunity for some Asian countries and provides an additional opportunity for European partners to promote democratic values and good governance. The European Parliament has developed a dialogue with the ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Assembly (AIPA) but this only includes Southeast Asian partners.

An important spin-off of ASEP in conjunction with ASEP is the Asia-Europe Young Parliamentarians’ Meeting (AEYPM). The initiative, started in 1998, gathers parliamentarians under 40 from the member states to build inter-personal networks and foster a sense of importance of the inter-regional dialogue and cooperation. While both ASEP and AEYPM remain on the informal level and have little “obligations”, they contribute to the Track Two diplomacy, more precisely parliamentary diplomacy, enhancing communication among policy makers and raising awareness about the ASEM process as well as the common interests across the member states.

4.2 Asia Europe Business Forum (AEBF)

The Asia-Europe Business Forum was created with a view to facilitating business and trade between the member states, private-sector activities, business-government links, and business partnerships through dialogue and exchange.

Between 1996 and 2004 AEBF meetings took place every year, after which the gatherings became biennial. The loss of enthusiasm in AEBF was linked to “forum fatigue” and frustration relating to the limited effectiveness of the ASEM process in general. The meetings are held alongside the ASEM Summit and the host or hosts are voluntary.

The AEBF format consists of plenary meetings with business and political leaders and working groups. In that spirit, AEBF is similar to ASEF in communicating the content provided by the working groups to the leader level. Unlike ASEF it does not have a physical institution and its work scope is limited.

Business, investment and trade are core interests between Asia and Europe, both at country and private sector level. For the business communities particularly, involvement in the process is much needed, but platforms such as those provided by ASEF are insufficient to meet their needs. AEBF provides a platform for them to work on common issues of interest, including trade negotiations, business links, but also infrastructure, connectivity, corporate responsibility, social welfare, and business environment stability.

As much as the business communities' linkages with AEBF are needed, the forum's biennial nature and coordination on the voluntary basis of host countries limit its real capacity. Issues relating to business and trade are time-sensitive and of a highly dynamic nature. Discussions on the sidelines ahead of the summit provide direct access to the policy-makers but would benefit more if sustainable mechanisms of communication were in place. Meeting just before the ASEM Summit narrows down the potential that this forum could have. It becomes an ad-hoc event focusing on "reporting" rather than a real platform to serve ever-developing needs of the business communities in Asia and Europe.

Being dependent on the initiative of a government to host the Forum also sets limitations for AEBF to be an autonomous stakeholder. A "Privatization" of AEBF, opening the forum up to Public-Private Partnership in terms of contributions to host the

meetings and organize discussions should be of interest to business communities of the member countries. The bottom-up approach, in a structured form, should lift the AEBF to a higher level of relevance. The recommendation is to develop Asia-Europe Business Forum into an institution of its own and extend the content of its work. AEBF serves as an important agenda-setting forum for up-to-date and practical recommendations that should further develop business-to-government linkages.

4.3 The Asia-Europe People's Forum (AEPF)

The Asia-Europe People's Forum was named as such in 1998 in the second gathering of Asia-Europe NGO conferences. Also operated in biennial modus, it brings together a large group of different civil society organizations ranging from small local activist groups to international NGOs. Despite the limited contacts with the official level, it is important to note that the AEPF has succeeded in increasing horizontal networking between non-governmental organizations in Asia and Europe, both between the two regions as well as within them. For example, the AEPF6 in Helsinki 2006 was the largest civil society event ever organized in Finland and it brought together many Finnish actors for the first time to cooperate at an international level.

The Helsinki Summit and the efforts of the Finnish EU Presidency to facilitate civil society input do form an example of a successful impact by a European host nation on the ASEM agenda, increasing the expectations for ASEM7 to further enhance ASEM's legitimacy. ASEM6 has sought to improve the grassroots-level feedback by providing better opportunities for the different stakeholder

groups to channel their ideas and recommendations into the official process. Events bringing together the different groups were organized in parallel with or just prior to the Helsinki Summit. The ASEM10 Symposium gathered business leaders, scholars, members of parliaments, and representatives of civil society groups and NGOs to debate the future of the ASEM process. In addition the AEPF held its own meeting, to which host country Finland contributed substantial financial resources. Furthermore the different groups had the opportunity to convey their recommendations and messages to the summit through more direct channels. Yet, as illustrated by recent developments, AEPF includes a strong penchant for advocacy and antagonism towards certain governments that could have a negative impact on the summits.

AEPF defines itself as *“an inter-regional network of civil society and social movements across Asia and Europe”* (AEPF official website, 2015). It boasts from 300 to 800 participants from different civil society representation groups in each gathering. Despite its overlapping interests in boosting civil society, AEPF works separately from ASEP and is yet to establish regulated meetings and consultations with ASEM. Another weakness

of AEPF is that it is driven by different agendas pursued by numerous representative groups and as a result cannot satisfy any one group in particular. The separation of the Asia-Europe Trade Union Forum from the AEPF in 2000 is an example.

The shortcomings of the AEBF, ASEP and AEPF are in line with ASEM’s own limitations. The many meetings and summits tend to have a “stand-alone” effect of culminating at the gatherings themselves. Because hosting the meetings is based on rotation, there is a lack of continuity and institutional memory that could advance the process. Organizing an ASEM meeting is often a first for the hosting country, resulting in a persistent “hot potato” syndrome of passing on the responsibility to the next one in line. This is shown clearly in the fact that none of the three stakeholders discussed above have a contactable person knowledgeable about the process. The ratio of follow-up activities that actually expand the ideas and suggestions for cooperation at the meetings are rather disproportional. Similarly, the above-mentioned stakeholders often present a bulky table of events and meetings, but fail to provide an answer to the “...and what came out of that?” question.



5. Civil society: The unleashed potential

5.1 The role of “civil society” in the ASEM process

ASEM is in the process of transforming from an elitist format to more a participatory one, allowing not only smoother horizontal dialogue among the members, but also vertical interaction among the governmental representations and civil societies. Non-state actors have become progressively more involved in the politics of inter-regional relations in a form of “participatory democracy” (Bersick, 2008: 263). By including people’s representatives, the dialogue becomes democratized and ASEM shifts towards a more comprehensive platform engaging top-down and bottom-up processes of interaction. This trend of democratization of the Asian-European dialogue in many ways is the contribution of ASEM stakeholders’ initiatives engaging people in the inter-regional process.

As argued by Jokela and Gaens (2012: 155), “*ASEM started out as a highly exclusive dialogue forum of an informal nature. The ASEM summits were seen as high-level gatherings bringing together Heads of States or Government, at the apex of a top-down process. Civil society is confined to the ASEM’s activities in the third pillar of social, cultural and educational activities.*” The inclusion of civil society actors has been recognized, even if in a very fuzzy way, serving rather as recommendation and as an important factor to strengthen bi-regional relations. In terms of engaging civil society, ASEM was not, from the beginning, designed to be inclusive. In fact, it has been criticized for being a top-down process. Internally, partners could not reach consensus about the role of civil society in the process.

“*European governments and civil society actors have pushed for opening up the ASEM process against the opposition of many Asian governments.*”

ASEM in its Tenth Year (2006: 118)

The European Commission noted in 2000 that “*the active involvement of civil society in the dialogue between our two regions should be encouraged*” (EC 2000).

ASEM6 resulted in the Helsinki Declaration on the Future of ASEM, emphasizing civil society’s role in promoting ASEM ownership and visibility, both concepts closely related to legitimacy. ASEM6 can therefore be seen as a signpost of the increased recognition of civil society as a contributing actor. This positive development continued at the 2010 Summit in Brussels, where leaders acknowledged civil society’s role in the social dialogue (involving governments and social partners), human rights promotion, environmental protection, cultural heritage, and people-to-people contacts. Moreover, it affirmed that the People’s Forum plays a valuable role in achieving ASEM’s objectives.

In sum, engaging civil society into the ASEM process has nurtured the habit of transferring difficult questions from the Heads of States and Government level to networks for a more informal and “safe” environment, where discussions can take place outside a “politico-ideological” context.

5.2 Youth

Youth might not be in the category of the most influential stakeholder, but they are definitely the most promising. They are the most eager to acquire interest in the ASEM process and carry the future duty of furthering the process. Engaging youth is essential, as they are the actors that set the trends for social development. Increasingly Leaders have come to recognize the importance of youth in improving visibility and impact.

Model ASEM is an example of successful engagement of the youth into the process. It was initiated by the ASEF University Alumni Network (ASEFUAN) and engages young people from member states in a three-day event simulating summit activities. The participants debate on relevant political, economic and social issues, take up role-plays of decision makers and representatives in an intellectual exercise of multilateralism. The initial Model ASEM in 2014 received extensive attention from public and leaders. ASEF estimated the impact of an open call for the event at 300,000 online users, received 17,000 applications, and selected 188 participants (ASEF Report, 2015). This large project contributed to boosting ASEM's profile in social media. Facebook and Twitter became prime public outreach tools – and highly significant for enhancing the visibility of the ASEM process.

The Classroom Network, one of ASEF's flagship programs and including school students, has been regarded as having one of the highest impact factors. ASEF evaluations suggest that an overwhelming majority of participants were enthusiastic and that participation was an important experience for learning, interacting and exchanging with counterparts from ASEM members. Through the Classroom Network knowledge about ASEM is propagated to

young people and hence easier cultivated.

Bringing young people together and empowering their debates on important current issues is precisely one of ASEM's strengths – bridging people from across regions and uniting them through common issues of attention. The enthusiastic reception of the initiative and positive feedback of the participants suggest that engaging youth is of high relevance to the process. Young people are energetic and do not suffer from forum fatigue, unlike leaders of government at times do. They crave for knowledge and purpose. It is hence easier to ignite their interest as well as empower them by involving them into the process. Without their interest and support, ASEM in the public domain will remain an unrelated series of meetings of “people in suits”.

6. Assessment

Heads of State and Government launched ASEM in order to commit to enhanced relations between the regions. At present foreign relations are no longer the exclusive domain of governments. In today's inter-connected world, non-state actors are increasingly active and influential in global affairs. The ASEM process has recognized this and has developed initiatives to foster dialogue and better understanding between the two regions, particularly in the educational and cultural sectors. However, reviving the Asia-Europe relationship will require stronger efforts to ensure even more involvement of the public, civil society, and academia – including through the media and the Internet.

In today's reality, ASEM no longer has to serve the role of introducing “Asia” to “Europe”, as was the case in the inception stage. Enhanced connectivity, affordable flights and accommodations have facilitated the

habit of travel, and the Internet has enabled information exchange. ASEM or ASEF no longer can claim the status of the biggest “data-bank” of Asian and European contacts. While connecting should still be continued, it should not draw its main strength from such contact facilitation. Rather, ASEM should push harder for the deeper meaning of collaborations. It should distinguish roles: it should facilitate contacts among those marginalized or those with lower access to such connectivity. ASEM should overcome the criticism of being elitist by engaging various groups and actors.

The EU should further explore the existing and trusted avenue of ASEM to deepen its ties with Asia rather than, or on top of, exploring new channels. In the “Asian century”, the European partners are well aware of the importance of fostering partnership and presence in Asia, hence the two-decade long process should not be considered as no longer relevant but rather as a factual, existing advantage. The connections between the heads of states of the members along with multi-layered and multi-dimensional linkages of various stakeholders strengthen the mutual interests of the two, increasing inter-dependent regions (LeThu, 2013).

European civil society can offer important lessons to Asia and vice versa. “Civil society” and the practice of participation is one such lesson. There is an axis of North-South (as well as South-South and North-North) exchange as well, not only East-West. Depending on the economic and technological development, there are various areas of learning. ASEM can be utilized as another platform to narrow down the gap. The business involvement in ASEM process is central – AEBF reflects the political sophistication of large firms in constructing policy

channels to the ASEM process, notably in a potential “business dialogue” with Economic Ministers. ASEM can take up the role as an enforcer of global competitive conditions in the domestic and regional economies.

Attention to the process by high-profile political leadership, for example when the EU’s Herman Van Rompuy and José Manuel Barroso attended the 14th AEBF meeting in 2014, illustrates the relevance attached to the business linkages for the process.

ASEF was launched as the fourth pillar representing the “*engagement of the civil societies of the two regions*” in order to “*bring to life the vision of Asia-Europe cooperation as seen by the ASEM leaders*” (Richards, 1999: 153). ASEF and other stakeholders are now in the position to “lift up” ASEM and bring back its relevance. Rightfully, after two decades the organization needs new direction, given the change in the environment that first gave birth to it. ASEM needs to adapt to the changes and respond to them. Moving from an elitist organization to a more inclusive and “on the ground” space, it will leverage the distinctiveness that other regional and multilateral organization do not have.

Developing awareness of Asian and European cultures is a complex and slow process. This should be achieved by involving the media, academic institutions, social and cultural foundations and other public institutions in both regions, in an integrated, coherent way. In other words, ASEM’s objective of mutual learning and socializing cannot be complete without ASEF’s activities. The ASEM process benefits from work through other non-state stakeholders in fulfilling what is called “complex multilateralism” - building a system of global governance from the bottom up.

7. Policy recommendations

Based on the preceding analysis, this chapter proposes the following policy recommendations in order to improve ASEM's operationability.

Policy recommendation 1:

Move away from the pillar structure in order to avoid “segregating” the different stakeholders.

Into the third decade of its existence, ASEM could consider moving away from the traditional three-pillar division that segregates different actors and stakeholders. While recognizing the key role of governments, ASEM should exploit the advantage it has already developed over the course of its existence, including informality, inclusiveness, and multi-actor, multi-agenda dimensions. The flexibility and fluidity of its processes result in a “common voice” of bottom-up needs as well top-down interests. In order to successfully communicate this voice, the strict, traditional bureaucratic pillar-style dividing structure of competency and exclusiveness of actors should be avoided.

Policy recommendation 2:

Increase the input from civil society in the ASEM process.

It cannot be denied that “forum fatigue” exists and multiple “leaders’ retreats” overlap in Asia, Europe and globally. ASEM is a fantastic space for socializing among leaders but if it limits its role to that it can be overshadowed by more “hot” or media-exposed retreats. ASEM's unique competitive advantage lies in engaging different stakeholders, providing a model that other multilateral

organizations want to emulate. Even if forum fatigue exists at the government level, there is no such feedback among the bottom-up stakeholders. There is a considerable amount of energy resources among the civil society that can contribute to the process in terms of content as well as direction. This should not be underestimated.

As interchanges between the disciplines, agenda as well as actors are deepening, so should ASEM. For example, security threats in the traditional perception used to be a matter of warfare issues, involving military and defences personnel in official capacities. But security in today's world can relate to economic, environmental, cyber-, and social security threats. A terrorist act or a cyber-attack can cause fluctuation on the economic market, or an environmental disaster can be set off by a single person or group. Often civil societies are more “in touch” with current threats than state mechanisms of responses. The ability to attract and include different stakeholders into the ASEM process will determine its growing or declining importance.

Policy recommendation 3:

Enhance horizontal communication and coordination among various ASEM stakeholders.

A recognized coordination is needed in order to counter criticism that ASEM is a process of weakening relevance. Here in particular overlap and cooperation between different stakeholder groups is important. As much as they have a role in linking governments to the civil society, there is no connection between the mentioned stakeholders. It is crucial that the ASEM process is also more communicative on this level. Horizontal

communication would limit unnecessary competition between the different actors. ASEM decision makers might consider establishing regularized meetings between representations of ASEF, AEBF, AEPF, ASEP, and other stakeholders to improve their efficiency. It would also reinforce the ASEM umbrella spirit rather than losing track because of growing distance and disconnection between stakeholder groups.

Policy recommendation 4:

Clarify the roles and expectations of different ASEM stakeholders and their functions, and align ASEM “spin-offs” with sectoral, professional meetings.

It is important to stress the distinct roles of ASEM as a dialogue forum and as a platform for functional cooperation. The importance of trust-building, creating the habit of meeting for leaders in order to comfortably discuss policies is among the prime functions of ASEM as a dialogue platform. This should be the domain of the leaders’ summit, ministerial meetings and government representatives’ gatherings.

However, other ASEM “spin-offs” should take up the role of creating tangible results through sectoral, professional meetings. This should be the domain of the above-mentioned stakeholders. Rather than emulating the leaders’ style of meetings and retreats, the functionality of professional meetings should be prioritized. Narrowing down the agenda and focusing on in-depth cooperation could be helpful in transforming the habit of “meeting for the sake of meeting” to “meeting for a purpose”.

It is important to clarify the expectations held by the different stakeholders and their

different roles in the process. The long-term interaction, “talk shop-style” meetings serve their purposes and immediate, tangible outputs should not be expected. For civil society and experts level meetings the emulation of a leaders-style “meet and greet” is a luxury that the ASEM process might not be able to afford. This shortcoming is perhaps due to the vagueness in conveying the vision and purpose to the stakeholders themselves. To prevent the “hot potato syndrome”, the meetings of AEBF, AEPF and ASEP should avoid meeting just for the sake of meeting before the summit and discuss “everything under the sun”. Rather, these meetings should be aligned to sectoral meetings in order to deepen their merit. Wide, multi-thematic meetings have been practiced during the two previous decades and have brought about various levels of satisfaction. Instead, for the future development of the process, in-depth, professional meetings should be chosen.

Policy recommendation 5:

Narrow down and deepen cooperation initiatives.

This chapter recommends that in order to revive ASEM’s relevance it should avoid mistakes made during the first two decades. Having had the opportunity to try and test different directions and modules, it should now draw from its strengths and avoid its limitations. For example, rather than duplicating and multiplying numerous activities, it should narrow down, consolidate the existing initiatives and go in-depth. Similarly, rather than creating new formations, it should focus on consolidating the existing networks of stakeholders. Again, the horizontal communication between stakeholder groups is essential in improving ASEM’s work and upgrading its relevance.

Policy recommendation 6:

Recognize and respond to global stakeholders, including the UN.

It is also important to note that with the expansion of the ASEM process to non-EU members as well as Asia-Pacific countries, the traditional perception of Asia-Europe has now gained a new dimension. The stakeholder balance has changed as well, and extends well beyond the scope of member states only.

For example, the long-term process of an Environmental Forum is now included in the United Nations activities related to

sustainable development, climate change, and the Millennium Development Goals. Similarly, ASEF projects of heritage have been included in the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) activities on the diversity of cultural expressions.

That said, the geographical scope of ASEM's stakeholders also expands to global actors, not only to those in the region. Having fostered its name for two decades, ASEM-signalled programs are now recognized beyond its member states. The "global" stakeholders' involvement and recognition speak for the relevance of ASEM-led processes.



8. Conclusions

This chapter has suggested a level-analysis of diverse stakeholders of the ASEM process in accordance with their relevance. Unlike a traditional approach of listing stakeholders in order of size, “age” or frequency of gatherings, this chapter has offered an original framework. It focused on the stakeholders that play the most important roles and have the potential to actually affect the ASEM process. In assessing the relevance, this chapter based its evaluation on commitment, initiatives and “regularity” in the process.

The member states remain the most relevant stakeholders, but with different national interests and even internally within the states, they form a very heterogeneous group of stakeholders. The two non-state entities, the EU and the ASEAN Secretariat, represent two extreme cases of commitment and therefore relevance to the process. While the EU has been committed to advancing ASEM, the ASEAN Secretariat remains a “sleeping” member.

Among all the “spin-offs” of the ASEM process, ASEF, although not without its own limitations, is the most effective and includes high potential to continue feeding into the process. Other groups such as the AEBF, ASEP, and AEPF represent the weaknesses of ASEM and reveal the same drawbacks as ASEM: too many, too fuzzy, too erratic and too discontinuous. It is hard to expect a leading role by these groups given the current restraints of the ASEM process. This diversity of contributions to the process ought to be recognized in order to properly identify the determining factors of other stakeholders involved.

To be fair in evaluating ASEM’s performance, one needs to come into terms with the fact that ASEM is not a problem-solving institution. Taking this into consideration, criticism about the lack of legally-binding solutions, the lack of effectiveness and the weak delivery, can be dismissed. The expectations should be separated depending on the different stakeholders. The trust-building dialogue should be the domain of leaders and governments, whereas the outcome-oriented and functional cooperation should be the domain of other stakeholders.

Civil society, including youth, represents the most unexplored potential stakeholder. Be it academic and research communities, business or artists, their participation in the process justify the inter-regional process. Hence the epistemic value of the ASEM process should be brought to the fore. While high representatives are bothered with forum fatigue and experience difficulties with coming up with any ideas or committing to any initiatives, the civil society and especially the youth of both regions are less-constrained and therefore much more flexible and creative. They are “in-sync” with current issues and challenges in the societies, and serve as a good “middle ground” in terms of policy discussion and recommendation before the government-level meetings. The innovative contribution from civil society presents a good example of “bottom-up governance” – an increasingly important force in the global system.

Into its third decade, the ASEM process should mature in terms of the depth of its work. The forum should leverage its membership scope, and aim for coverage width to fully utilize its governance potential. Clarifying different roles and different expectations of the very diverse groups of stakeholders can assist in that.

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CHAPTER SIX

ASEM's visibility and public awareness



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1. Introduction

Since ASEM's third summit in Seoul in 2000, fostering the visibility and awareness of ASEM among the wider public and increasing the profile of Europe in Asia and of Asia in Europe have been key goals of the process. Moreover, the main objective of ASEM Track Two has been to "*build a greater understanding between the people of the two regions*" (Asia-Europe Cooperation Framework 2000, 2000; ASEM1, 1996) and to engage non-state actors into the process, subsequently adding a bottom-up dimension. An increase in participation of members of civil society, as discussed in **Chapter Five**, will assist ASEM in improving its public profile and awareness. Yet, general public awareness of ASEM has been low. ASEM's focus on informal dialogue, and the absence of negotiations or groundbreaking agreements by definition place a limit on the amount of public and media exposure. Accordingly, this chapter explores ways for ASEM to increase its profile and awareness, and to enhance the appeal of ASEM-related activities among the general public.

While some observers have labelled ASEM as "too elitist" and "too bureaucratic" even after the establishment of the Track Two process (Lim, 2001: 2; Yeo, 2002: 10-11; Yeo, 2004: 21; Reiterer, 2004: 17; Rüländ, 2006: 60; Bersick, 2008: 254), this chapter, first, seeks to provide a more comprehensive analysis of ASEM's engagement with non-state actors. This assessment of ASEM's outreach includes both quantity and quality of the profile promotion, while keeping in mind that quantity does not necessarily bring quality. Whilst the international stage is filled with a plethora of high-level summits and

multilateral meetings, the race for visibility is increasingly challenging. In this context, the chapter proposes policy recommendations for the ASEM members in the future of the ASEM process.

Before assessing the results of ASEM's visibility-promoting efforts in its first two decades, it is necessary to review the exact initiatives taken. The first and most developed one has been the establishment of Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF) to promote mutual understanding between Asia and Europe at the level of citizens. After the Seoul Summit, ASEF was commissioned to hold an ASEM Logo Competition in 2001-2002. The ASEM Foreign Ministers' Meeting (FMM) in 2003 announced the winning design and adopted a permanent logo for the process. It was expected that a single visual symbol, instead of having each member create a new logo for different ASEM activities, would reduce confusion and boost a common identity. In 2004, ASEM's official website, the ASEM InfoBoard,³⁴ was set up as a one-stop information platform. In today's Internet age, having an official website is indeed a basic requirement to engage with the general public and to disseminate information.

On ASEM's tenth anniversary, the 2006 Helsinki summit identified low visibility as an obstacle for the process's successful public outreach. The Helsinki Declaration on the Future of ASEM adopted four recommendations to boost ASEM's visibility, public awareness and links with stakeholders. Another round of profile-promoting initiatives was hence introduced, including a workshop on visibility held in November 2007. Leaders in ASEM7 mandated the Senior

³⁴ www.aseminfoboard.org

Officials to coordinate cultural activities for the enhancement of ASEM visibility. Being the sole regular coordinator and institutional memory of ASEM (as other regional coordinators are rotation-based), the European Commission has been a prime mover in these initiatives. It set up and sponsored the ASEM Visibility Toolkit in 2009, the ASEM Visibility Support Project as well as the Technical Assistance Team for ASEM Coordination in 2010 and the ASEM Dialogue Facility Support in 2012. The 11th FMM, held in New Delhi in November 2013, once more called for higher awareness and visibility of ASEM among non-state actors. The Annex of its Chair's Statement included a list of topics for discussion on ASEM's Press/Public Awareness Management Strategy, in order to explore ways to boost visibility of the process. The following section elucidates the methodological approach applied in assessing these visibility-promotion efforts.

2. Methodology

In order to incorporate a diversity of perspectives in the assessment of ASEM's visibility, this research employs two methods relating to data collection and analysis: content analysis of news reportage of ASEM and public opinion survey. The primary dataset generated provides complementary perspectives.

Media analysis here refers to a systematic counting, assessing, and interpreting of the form and substance of news items referencing "Asia-Europe Meeting" / "Asia-Europe Summit" / "ASEM". Apart from being unobtrusive, content analysis is a reliable research method in which errors can be identified and corrected. Moreover, a longitudinal

study is possible as long as the raw data is available. This research collected and analyzed the news items featuring ASEM from 1996 (ASEM1) to 2014 (ASEM10). Seven English-language dailies each from a different location on the Asian side were chosen for monitoring (see **Table 6.1**). Different locations were chosen in order to diversify the source of information as well as to facilitate cross-country comparisons.

This author is well aware that the English-language dailies are not the most widely circulated press in China, Japan, Korea, Indonesia and Thailand, in which English is not the native language. Furthermore, their target readership may not focus on the local community as the English-language newspapers in the Philippines and Singapore do. Nevertheless, owing to language limitation, this research can only rely on English-language newspapers in all locations in order to generate a cross-country dataset for comparison. Indeed, in China, Japan, Korea, Indonesia and Thailand, English-language dailies are typically read by educated elites (including students) and foreigners (either residing in an Asian location, or following local events from abroad). These English-language dailies are also read by media professionals from outside the locality as a guide for external newsmakers in reporting domestic current events. Due to the profile of their readership and staff, English-language dailies in the Asian locations examined create a unique forum to exchange ideas on regional and international developments. Additionally, most of these chosen papers are the longest-established and most prestigious.

Regarding data collection, the search for news items was based on an online news

Table 6.1: Monitored English-language dailies

Locations	Dailies chosen	Founded	Circulation	Timeframe	Number of ASEM news items collected
China	<i>China Daily</i>	1981	900 000 ³⁵	ASEM1-10	90
Japan	<i>The Japan Times</i>	1897	45 000 ³⁶	ASEM5-10	12
South Korea	<i>The Korea Herald</i>	1953	50% market share ³⁷	ASEM2 - ASEM10	223
Singapore	<i>The Strait Times</i>	1845	459 300 ³⁸	ASEM1-10	192
Thailand	<i>Bangkok Post</i>	1946	1 st in Thailand ³⁹		256
Indonesia	<i>The Jakarta Post</i>	1983	55 000 ⁴⁰		81
Philippines	<i>Manila Bulletin</i>	1900	n/a	ASEM5-10	55

archive, FACTIVA.⁴¹ It was chosen because of its massive collection of sources, user friendliness and the free access provided by the Library account of the author's working university. However, it was found that the reportage from several of the chosen news outlets was

not complete. News from the *Korea Herald* published before 1998 was not available on FACTIVA and the paper's official online archive is not available in English. Also, news published by the *Japan Times* and *Manila Bulletin* before 2002 is not available on FACTIVA.

³⁵ Source: *China Daily* official website, "About Us", www.chinadaily.com.cn/static_c/gyzgrbwz.html (accessed 6 May 2015).

³⁶ Source: as of 2013, according to the official website of *The Japan Times*, it has been the "largest circulation of all domestic English-language newspapers in Japan and reaches by far the largest number of non-Japanese readers living in Japan." See jto.s3.amazonaws.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/jt-inyt-media-information-englishv2.pdf (accessed 6 May 2015).

³⁷ Source: *Korea Herald's* official website, 'The *Korea Herald* occupies over 50% of Korea's English newspaper sector' and is Korea's "top English-language newspaper". Source: *Korea Herald* official website, "Business", company.heraldcorp.com/sec_index.php?nlm=1&nsi=4 and www.koreaherald.com/view.php?ud=20120813001212 (accessed 6 May 2015).

³⁸ Source: *The Strait Times'* official website (accessed 6 May 2015) sph.com.sg/our-businesses/newspapers/the-straits-times-the-sunday-times/

³⁹ Source: official website of *Bangkok Post*. The *Bangkok Post* is "Thailand's number one English-language news media", see www.bangkokpost.com/partner and www.postpublishing.co.th/annualreport/annual2014/AnnualReport2014_ENG_FINAL.pdf (accessed 6 May 2015).

⁴⁰ Source: Publicitas, *Jakarta Post* (Indonesia), 2014. www.publicitas.com/fileadmin/uploads/hongkong/Factsheets/2014/Print/Jakarta_Post_2014.pdf (accessed 6 May 2015).

⁴¹ FACTIVA is owned by Dow Jones & Company. Established in 1999, it offers "a premier collection of the world's top media outlets, trade and consumer publications, and thousands of Web sites", according to www.dowjones.com/factiva/features.asp

Two other online news archives, Press Display and Wise News, were also checked. However, news from *The Korea Herald*, *The Japan Times* and *Manila Bulletin* between 1996 and 2012 were still not complete. Consequently, these three dailies can only be included partially in this research (see **Table 6.1**).

Research experience from *the EU in the eyes of Asia-Pacific*⁴² showed that media's attention on the ASEM process concentrated overwhelmingly around the several weeks when the official summit took place. Hence, this dataset is mainly based on "peak" periods in ASEM's media coverage – one month before

to one week after the two-day summit. Based on this methodology, a total of 920 news items were collected and analyzed.

All news items collected were analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively. They are coded under various aspects of each news report, including length of each news item, source of information, centrality (whether ASEM is the main, secondary or minor focus of the news); evaluation (whether ASEM is reported positively, neutrally or negatively); the actors (individual countries, national leaders, regional organisations or non-state actors); and the relevant actions mentioned

Table 6.2: "Periods" of media data collection

Summit Period for news analysis **Number of news items found (number of dailies included)**

ASEM1	1 February – 9 March 1996	200 (4)
ASEM2	3 March – 11 April 1998	98 (5)
ASEM3	20 September – 28 October 2000	197 (5)
ASEM4	23 August – 1 October 2002	46 (5)
ASEM5	8 September – 16 October 2004	60 (7)
ASEM6	10 August – 18 September 2006	70 (7)
ASEM7	24 September – 1 November 2008	103 (7)
ASEM8	4 September – 12 October 2010	38 (7)
ASEM9	5 October – 13 November 2012	69 (7)
ASEM10	16 September – 24 October 2014	39 (7)
Total		920

⁴² The research project was started by the National Centre for Research on Europe, University of Canterbury, New Zealand in 2002. It identifies the external image of the EU and the attitude and opinions on the ASEM process in Asia-Pacific. For more details, see www.euperceptions.canterbury.ac.nz/

(political, economic, social, environmental or development). The coding was recorded on a standardized Excel template.

In order to diversify the source of insight in this research, it employed also primary data generated by several public opinion surveys to illustrate how the general public receive and conceive the establishment and development of the ASEM process. Surveys reveal perceptions, opinions, attitude, and behavioural reports of the general public. The results provide an “*accurate snapshot of conditions or opinions at the time the survey was carried out*” (Burnham *et al*, 2008: 137).

The high costs involved in a survey mean that it is impossible for an individual researcher to conduct a large-scale public opinion survey. Fortunately, this research has access

to the primary findings of two comparative projects, *the EU in the eyes of Asia-Pacific* and its “mirror” project *Asia in the eyes of Europe*,⁴³ both incorporating public opinion survey components. Each survey had two questions related to the perceptions of ASEM, and the responses to these questions constitute the primary data used in this study.

The public survey data used in this research are extracted from surveys conducted in 2008 (in Indonesia, the Philippines and Vietnam), 2010 (in India, Macau and Malaysia) and 2012 (mainland China, India, Japan, South Korea, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand), where identical questionnaires were used. A professional social research company was hired to conduct these surveys. In total, the dataset included 9448 completed surveys (Table 6.3).⁴⁴

Table 6.3: Sample sizes of the Asian public survey in 2008, 2010 and 2012

Locations	Date	Number of respondents
Indonesia	November 2008	405
The Philippines		400
Vietnam		400
India	February 2010	403
Macau, China		400
Malaysia		400
Mainland China		1009
India		1028
Japan	March 2012	1000
South Korea		1002
Malaysia		1000
Singapore		1000
Thailand		1001
Total		920

⁴³ It concerns a much younger project, started in mid-2010. The two-year project was funded by the Asia-Europe Foundation in partnership with the German Council on Foreign Relations, National Centre for Research on Europe (University of Canterbury) and Tsinghua University. It examined European public, media, and opinion leaders' perceptions of Asia. See also www.asef.org/index.php/projects/themes/education/1148-asia-in-the-eyes-of-europe

⁴⁴ The sample size in 2008 and 2010 phases was set at 400 respondents, sustaining the margin of error at $\pm 4.9\%$ at a confidence level of 95%. The sample size for 2012 increased to 1000 respondents, sustaining the margin of error at $\pm 3\%$ with the same confidence level of 95%.

Two questions from *the EU in the eyes of Asia-Pacific* survey informed this study:

- Question 9: Are you aware of the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) Process?
- Question 10: Which of the EU countries do you have personal or professional connections/ties with?

The “mirror” project *Asia in the Eyes of Europe* covered eight EU member states (Austria, Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, Romania and the UK). Its public opinion survey was completed in February 2011 and used online-panel structured interviews. Again, the project hired a professional social research company to conduct the survey,

with sample sizes varying from country to country to reflect the population composition of the EU (Table 6.4). In total, the dataset profiled 6155 completed interviews.⁴⁵

The questions were posed to the respondents in the respective native language of each location. Two ASEM-focus questions were:

- Question 6a: How familiar are you with the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) (options: not familiar at all, not very familiar, quite familiar or very familiar)?
- Question 7: With which of the following countries (listed below) do you have personal or professional links?

Table 6.4: Public opinion sample in eight EU member states

EU member states	Population in 2011 ⁴⁶	Number of respondents
Austria	8.40 million	496
Belgium (French-speaking area)	10.95 million	224
Belgium (Flemish-speaking area)		368
Denmark	5.56 million	293
France	65.05 million	906
Germany	81.75 million	1033
Italy	60.63 million	930
Romania	21.41 million	451
UK	62.44 million	1454
Total	-	6155

⁴⁵ The margin of error ranged from $\pm 3\%$ to $\pm 7\%$ at a confidence level of 95%.

⁴⁶ Source: Eurostat, epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/tgm/table.do?tab=table&init=1&language=en&pcode=tps00001&plugin=0 (accessed 3 January 2012).

Apart from these two projects, this study also explored the conclusions published by the Asia-Europe Meeting Research Team of the European Studies Centre, China Foreign Affairs University in their public opinion survey conducted in 2006 (Zhu, 2006). Its public survey collected 970 questionnaires completed by students from four prestigious universities in Beijing (Tsinghua University, Peking University, Renmin University of China and China Foreign Affairs University). The results are used for secondary data analysis in this research. In the eighteen-question survey, the Chinese students were first tested on their knowledge on ASEM, after which their general perceptions on the process were explored.

In order to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the ASEM process, a combination

of data collection and data analysis methods are employed in this research. They generate a unique set of empirically rich data and ensure the validity of this research. Thus, this research does not only add to the existing work on ASEM—which is based mainly on indirect observations and theoretical deductions—but also presents the most comprehensive set of empirical findings on ASEM ever collected.

3. Empirical findings: Reporting on ASEM in the Asian press

This research collected and analysed a total of 920 news items mentioning ASEM. From the four dailies monitored in the “ASEM1 period”, 200 pieces of news were found mentioning ASEM (Table 6.5). Noteworthy

Table 6.5: Number of ASEM news items collected in each monitored daily

	<i>China Daily</i>	<i>Japan Times</i>	<i>Korea Herald</i>	<i>Jakarta Post</i>	<i>Straits Times</i>	<i>Bangkok Post</i>	<i>Manila Bulletin</i>	Total
ASEM1	1	n/a	n/a	21	60	118	n/a	200
ASEM2	0	n/a	21	9	47	21	n/a	98
ASEM3	8	n/a	148	7	17	17	n/a	197
ASEM4	7	n/a	14	2	8	15	n/a	46
ASEM5	8	2	7	8	9	14	12	60
ASEM6	12	4	4	5	18	9	18	70
ASEM7	28	3	10	14	17	22	9	103
ASEM8	6	3	9	3	6	8	3	38
ASEM9	13	0	3	11	9	22	11	69
ASEM10	7	0	7	1	12	10	2	39
Total	90	12	223	81	203	256	55	920
Average	9	2	25	8	20	26	9	-

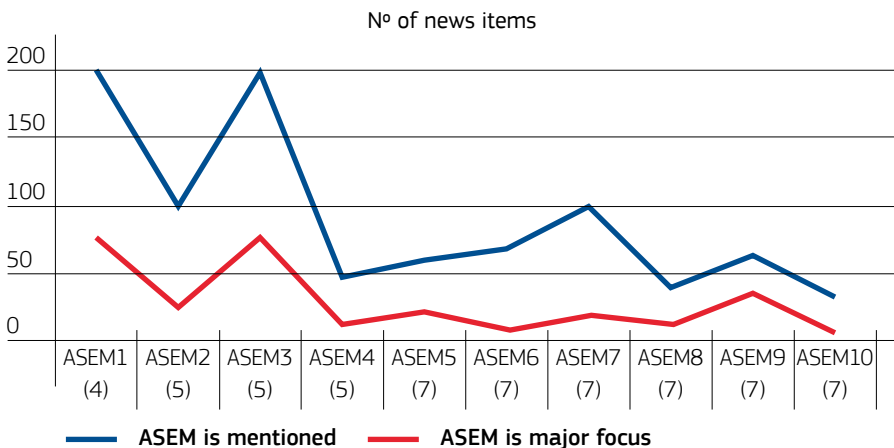
is that, although the number of monitored dailies increased to five (including the *Korea Herald*) for the “ASEM2 period”, the volume of ASEM-related news items was only half of that of ASEM1. Coverage of the Seoul Summit peaked at 197 news items, followed by rather low media attention on ASEM4 to ASEM6. A return of media attention was found in the Beijing ASEM in 2008, with 103 news articles collected from seven newspapers. The coverage stayed low for ASEM8 to ASEM10. There has been a clear drop of media interest of ASEM in the monitored newspapers in terms of the absolute number of news articles.

Media attention given to the ASEM summit has witnessed a significant decline after ASEM3. An exception was the 2008 summit in Beijing, the first large-scale summit after the outbreak of the global financial crisis, which attracted much more attention than the two previous meetings. The most recent

summit in Milan (2014) and ASEM8 (2010) in Brussels received the lowest media attention, with only 38 and 39 news items respectively in total from seven dailies. This trend was shared in all monitored news outlets except the *China Daily*. The Chinese paper demonstrated no interest in covering ASEM before ASEM3. The volume of ASEM coverage then sustained an average of eight pieces, whilst reportage of ASEM7 (held in Beijing) recorded a spike.

Another finding is that Asian media pay more attention to the ASEM meetings which took place in Asia. The odd-numbered editions of ASEM Summits are always reported on more than the even-numbered ones taking place in Europe (see **Figure 6.1**). Media always pay more attention to issues closer to “home”, hence it is unsurprising that they consider ASEM summits less relevant when they take place in Europe.

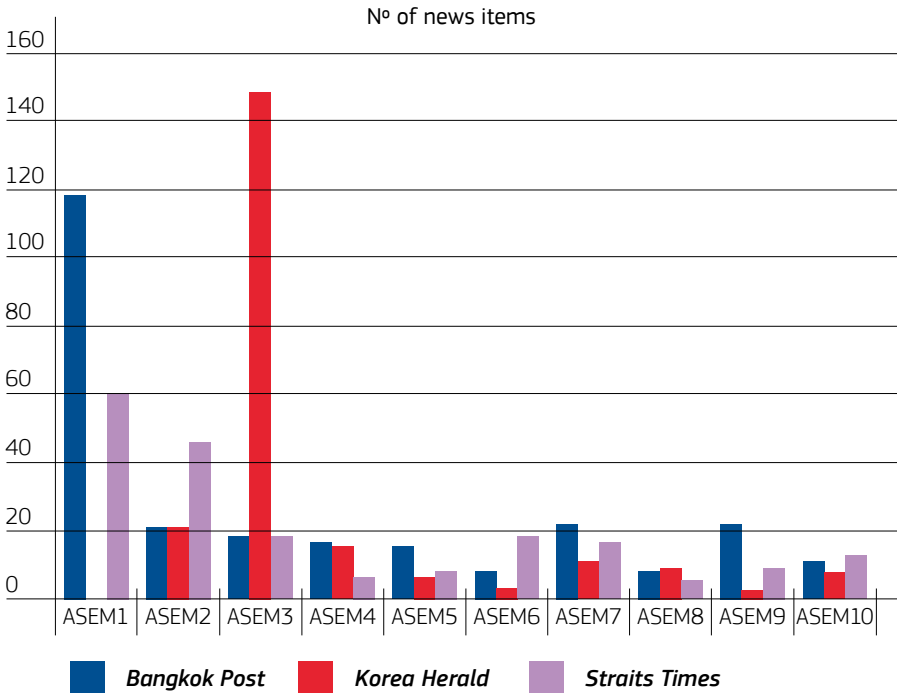
Figure 6.1: Volume of total news items which mentioned ASEM in each of the 10 summit periods and volume of news items in which ASEM was the major focus



Comparing across the news outlets, cumulatively, the *Bangkok Post* from Thailand, the *Korean Herald* from South Korea and the *Straits Times* from Singapore rendered the highest overall attention to reports on ASEM summits. On the other hand, coverage in the *Japan Times* was significantly lower. Noteworthy, reportage in the *Bangkok Post* and the *Korean Herald* concentrated mainly on the specific summit their respective

country hosted. The *Bangkok Post* recorded 118 pieces of news on ASEM1, while 148 news items on ASEM3 were found in the *Korean Herald*. The visibility of ASEM in the *China Daily* also peaked during ASEM7, though it was still low compared to the coverage of ASEM1 in the *Bangkok Post* or of ASEM3 in the *Korean Herald*. As the initiating country of the ASEM process, interest in ASEM has been sustained in Singapore.

Figure 6.2: Volume of news items mentioning ASEM in *Bangkok Post*, *Korea Herald* and *Strait Times*



Looking into the details, among the 920 news items collected, only a third were devoted to covering ASEM itself (Figure 6.2). News writers have been more interested in other events, namely the sideline meetings that took place between the summit's participants. Bilateral state-to-state meetings were the most numerous. In the collected news reportage of ASEM10, for instance, at least 16 bilateral meetings were noted on the margins. The then Chinese Premier Li Keqiang alone conducted bilateral meetings with four of his Asian counterparts and with leaders of the EU.

Apart from holding bilateral talks during the “free time” of the ASEM summit, a national leader’s state visit during the same overseas trip has been another key focus of media attention. For instance, the *China Daily* covered in detail Chinese Premier Li’s official visit to Italy, Germany and Russia after attending ASEM10 in Milan. Similarly, *Korean Herald* wrote in detail about President Park Geun-hye’s extending the trip to ASEM10 to a state visit to Italy as well as to the meeting with Pope Francis in the Vatican.

Unsurprisingly, the reportage of ASEM in the seven monitored newspapers has been very much home-oriented, that is, the main issue is related directed to the home country. This explains the peak of ASEM-coverage in *Bangkok Post* during ASEM1, in the *Korean Herald* during ASEM3 and in the *China Daily* during ASEM7. Also, ASEM-related news in each country usually records what the respective national leader says or does during the ASEM summit or on the margins. Seemingly, news writers pay more attention to issues which have a direct link to the home audience. Owing to such home-country focus, very few of the new ASEM members appeared in the collected newspapers, all belonging to an ASEM founding country. In addition, it is found that the attendance of the heads of state to the respective summit helps to steer media attention to the summit. In ASEM4, ASEM8 and ASEM10, Indonesia was represented at ministerial or lower level. At the same time the interest of the *Jakarta Post* for these three summits was the lowest. Similarly, the number of news items on ASEM8 dropped, supposedly as a result of Singapore Prime Minister Lee’s absence.

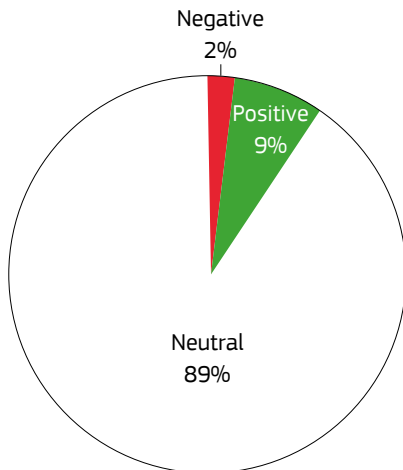
Apart from the relevance to the home country, media analysis from ASEM6 to ASEM10 reportage showed that Asian media, especially

those from Northeast Asia, were fascinated by the interaction between the Japanese leader and his counterparts from China and South Korea. More precisely, *China Daily*, *Japan Times* and *Korea Herald* are consistently interested in reporting the failure of the Japanese side to establish a bilateral meeting with China or Korea. In general, in the collected news mentioning the ASEM summit, interest has been focusing on what happened in the sidelines of the summit. In the reportage, ASEM appears either as a background platform, as one of the legs of an overseas trip of a national leader, or as one of the meetings attended by a national leader.

Looking into the content centring on ASEM itself, i.e. its substance or focus, ASEM is featured mainly as a forum of discussion between leaders from Asia and Europe on a wide variety of issues of common concern. The leading frame shifts according to the central dominant topic of the respective summit. For example, for ASEM2 in 1998, ASEM7 in 2008 and ASEM9 in 2012, the leading frame was economy as the reported discussion concentrated on the Asian Financial Crisis, the Global Financial Crisis and the Eurozone debt crisis respectively. In ASEM3 in 2000 and ASEM4 in 2002, the leading frame was politics as the reported discussion among ASEM summiters concentrated on inter-Korea relations (the then Korean President Kim Dae-jung won that year’s Nobel Peace Prize for his rapprochement with North Korea), and counter-terrorism after the 9/11 events respectively. From the audience’s perspective, ASEM is one of the high-level fora for leaders to discuss international issues, like the G20 or East Asia Summit, but unlike the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) or the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) which focus on a particular policy field.

Furthermore, ASEM's media coverage is mostly based on factual reporting with very little negatively- or positively-toned commentary. As **Figure 6.3** below demonstrates, 89% of the analysed news items offered a neutral depiction of ASEM or the particular summit. 9% of the news reported ASEM with a positive tone, commending ASEM's importance in and contribution to the enhancement of relations between countries from Asia and Europe, as well as for individual countries (especially smaller ones) to manage a number of bilateral relations on a single occasion, and to project profile internationally. An encouraging finding is that the percentage of positive-toned reportage of ASEM has grown in the three most recent summits. One possible explanation is the effect of the series of visibility-promotion projects of ASEM since 2009. Similarly, negative-toned reportage of ASEM, which has been indeed relatively limited, also decreased in recent years. These critiques of ASEM focused on the lack of concrete deliveries, or in other words, on ASEM being a talk-shop.

Figure 6.3: Evaluation of ASEM in the seven monitored newspapers in total for ASEM1-ASEM10



The statistics in this research were generated from the press coverage in seven ASEM member countries, while the membership of ASEM enlarged from 26 in ASEM1 to 53 in ASEM10. The author is aware that this has generated snapshots, yet, these snapshots inform us about a number of important trends in ASEM's media visibility. First, while media attention on ASEM concentrates around the summit period, there has been a visible decline in absolute volume. Yet, this is not all bad news to ASEM as the cut has been on the volume of coverage in which ASEM was mentioned as a minor actor. In fact, the centrality and evaluation of ASEM-news have improved since 2009. This research argues that the articles focusing on the ASEM process itself are the ones that truly matter. In other words, in its **profile-promotion, ASEM should continue to boost the amount of high-quality reports instead of blindly seeking quantity.**

The second main finding is that media always look for two things: relevance and controversy. Regarding relevance, **ASEM is reported more when it is seen as relevant to the local audience.** Such relevance increases when an ASEM event is held in the respective country, or at least the respective region; or the respective national leader plays an active role in the particular ASEM event. This can be explained from a news production perspective, as the newspaper could more easily "sell" news stories with their respective state as a main actor to local readers who are more familiar with national affairs than the international ones. Besides, the **media interest is proportional to the importance given to ASEM by the respective country.** For instance, in Singapore, as initiator of the process and host of the Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF), and in Thailand and South Korea, respective hosts of the first and third summits

and key supporters of the process, media attention on ASEM has been consistently higher than in other countries. Although China and Japan have also been key supporters of ASEM, they also focus on other international fora in which they are involved, thereby diluting the attention given to ASEM.

Controversy is inherent to media practice. Issues such as the Japanese prime minister failing to secure a bilateral meeting with his Chinese or Korean counterpart, and Thai and Cambodian prime ministers seeking to confer on bilateral border disputes on the margins of the ASEM summit are more interesting for the media. On the contrary, ASEM's function as a platform or forum for countries in Asia and Europe to peacefully exchange opinions and views on hot issues are usually conflict-free, which is rather unexciting for news-makers especially given the fact that these discussions do not result in tangible cooperation.

4. Public involvement in ASEM

In ASEM's Track Two, various groups of non-state actors are found, including business community, academia, art professionals, trade unionists, social movement organisations, media professionals and youth. The general public, although mentioned in the official discourses all the time, has only been involved in the ASEM process to a limited extent. In terms of numbers, ASEM now comprises 60% of the world's total population. This section explores the findings of two transnational research projects, *the EU in the eyes of Asia-Pacific* and *Asia in the eyes of Europe*, to demonstrate that a large majority of ASEM countries' public are still

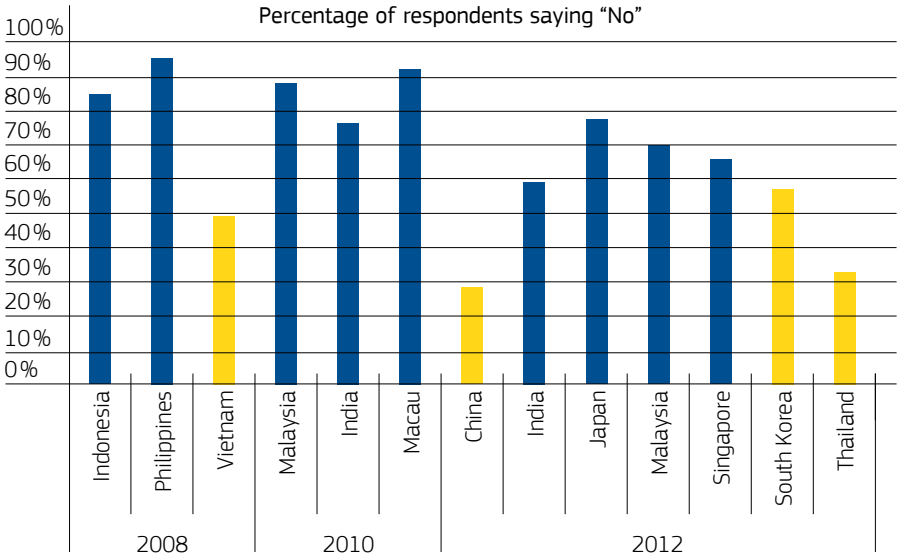
left out of the process. It is crucial to study the public awareness of ASEM because its official discourses have repeatedly emphasized the general public as a key component in the inter-regional interaction.

Three rounds of public opinion surveys conducted in seven ASEM Asian locations in 2008, 2010 and 2012 respectively posed the question "*Are you aware of the ASEM process?*" to randomly selected members of the general public in Asia. In total, the dataset included 9448 completed surveys.⁴⁷

An average of 68% of the public in the surveyed Asian countries remains unaware of the ASEM process after its existence for more than a decade. Remarkably, 95% of respondents in the Philippines, 92% in Macau (China), 88% in Malaysia in 2010, 85% in Indonesia, 78% in Japan, 77% in India in 2010, 70% in Malaysia in 2012, 66% in Singapore and 59% in India in 2012 were found unaware of ASEM (Figure 6.4). Conversely, in the countries which have hosted past ASEM summits (Thailand in 1996, South Korea in 2000, Vietnam in 2004, and China in 2008), the awareness of ASEM among the general public was higher. 67% of Thai respondents, 43% of Korean respondents, 50% of Vietnamese respondents and 70% of Chinese respondents said that they were aware of ASEM. In the two cases in which longitudinal comparison is feasible, Malaysia and India, the awareness of ASEM both increased by 18% between 2010 and 2012. More data have to be obtained, both in terms of years and number of locations, in order to prove whether there exists a universal rise of public awareness on ASEM, as well as to identify the possible reasons for such an increase.

⁴⁷ The sample size in 2008 and 2010 phases was 400 respondents, sustaining the margin of error at $\pm 4.9\%$ at a confidence level of 95%. The target sample size for the 2012 round increased to 1000 respondents in each country, sustaining the margin of error at $\pm 3\%$ with the same confidence level of 95%.

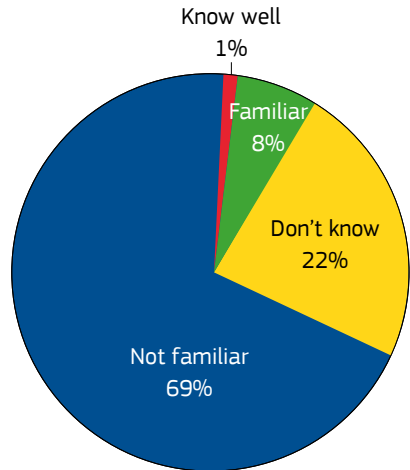
Figure 6.4: Percentage of Asian respondents who were not aware of the ASEM process



This lack of public awareness of ASEM was echoed by the survey conducted by the Asia-Europe Meeting Research Team of the European Studies Centre, China Foreign Affairs University, in 2006.⁴⁸ The survey collected 970 questionnaires filled out by students from four prestigious universities in Beijing. In total, 22% of the respondents admitted that they did not know ASEM at all; another 69% said that they were not familiar with the process although they had heard of it (Figure 6.5). Even among the students who majored in International Relations, 16% did not know about ASEM, whereas 64% has heard of it but were not familiar. In addition, the report found out that most of the interviewed Chinese students did not know about ASEF either. From the answers to the six factual questions on basic information of ASEM,⁴⁹ the research revealed that university students of selected

universities in Beijing know very little about ASEM.

Figure 6.5: Answers of 970 university students in Beijing to the question "Do you know ASEM?"



⁴⁸ The research was commissioned and supported by the Japan Centre for International Exchange. Similar to the *EU in the eyes of Asia-Pacific*, this project focused on public opinion, policy-makers opinion and media representation.

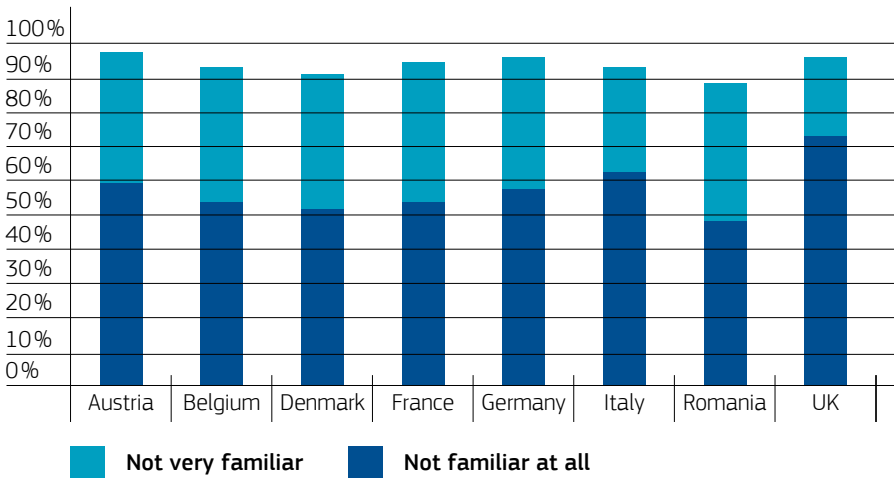
⁴⁹ The multiple-choice questions were "The first ASEM was held in ____ (place).", "So far ASEM has been held ____ times.", "There are ____ states participating in ASEM today.", "Asia-Europe Summit is held ____ (time).", "Asia' in 'Asia-Europe Meeting' refers to ____." and "Europe' in 'Asia-Europe Meeting' refers to ____."

On the European side, a round of public opinion survey was conducted in February 2011, briefly after the ASEM8 summit in Brussels, in eight EU member states. In total, the dataset profiled 6115 completed interviews, while the sample sizes varied from country to country to reflect the population composition of the EU. The margin of error ranged from $\pm 3\%$ to $\pm 7\%$ at a confidence level of 95%. The public opinion survey of *Asia in the eyes of Europe* asked respondents the question “How familiar are you with ASEM?”. In average, more than 90% of the respondents from the eight ASEM European countries were either “not very familiar” or “not familiar at all” with the ASEM process (Figure 6.6). An average of 58% of the interviewed European public stated that they are “not familiar at all”

with ASEM. Despite its existence for one-and-a-half decades, ASEM was far from its European public.

It is noteworthy that the questions posed in the three aforementioned researches were all different. Hence, the findings are not directly comparable. Still, results from these public surveys all point to the same direction, illustrating that the general public has been disconnected from the ASEM process thus far. Although “enhancement of mutual understanding and awareness between the people from Asia and Europe” has been one key objective in ASEM official discourses, a majority of the interviewed public did not know the ASEM process which was created more than a decade ago when the survey was conducted.

Figure 6.6: Percentage of European respondents who were not familiar with the ASEM process

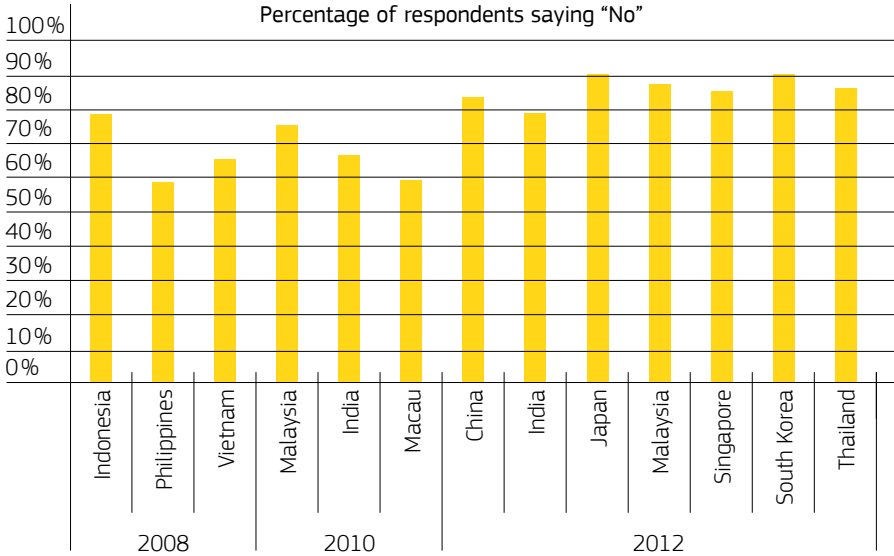


Regarding inter-regional connections, findings from *the EU in the eyes of Asia-Pacific* project as well as *Asia in the eyes of Europe* project indicated the weak influence of the ASEM process on bridging people from the two regions (Figures 6.7 and 6.8). In the two projects, public survey respondents were shown a list of ASEM European/ASEM Asian countries and asked to indicate which countries they had (personal or professional) ties with, and what kind of connection it concerned.⁵⁰

After more than a decade of ASEM and ASEF existences, the inter-regional linkage at the general public level is far from strong. In the Asian locations monitored, an

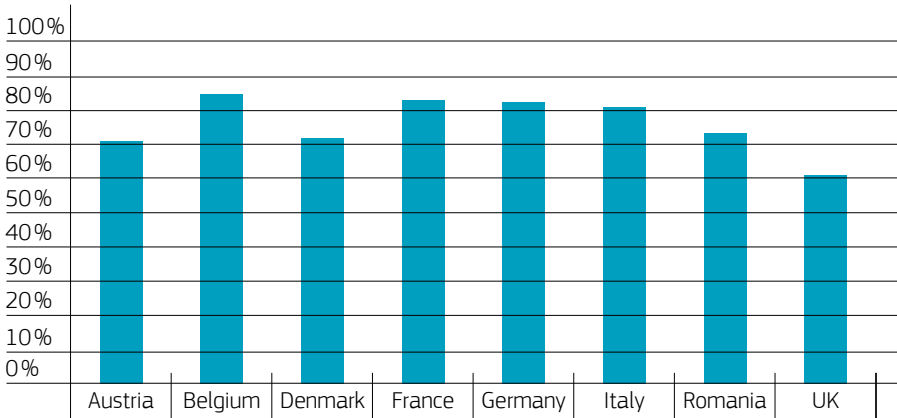
average of 78% of Asian respondents did not have any personal/professional tie with any of the EU countries (Figure 6.7). In the eight EU countries, the average was equally high. 77% of the European respondents did not have personal/professional connection with any ASEM Asian countries. The results of Malaysia and India were also compared across time. It is noteworthy that the number of Malaysian and Indian respondents who responded having ties with EU countries dropped by 11% and 12% respectively. All things considered, the huge “lack of connections” between the public in Asia and Europe revealed that ASEM and ASEF face a great challenge in improving inter-regional relations at the public level.

Figure 6.7: Percentage of Asian respondents who had no personal or professional tie with any EU member state



⁵⁰ Indonesia data were absent because the translation of related data is not available.

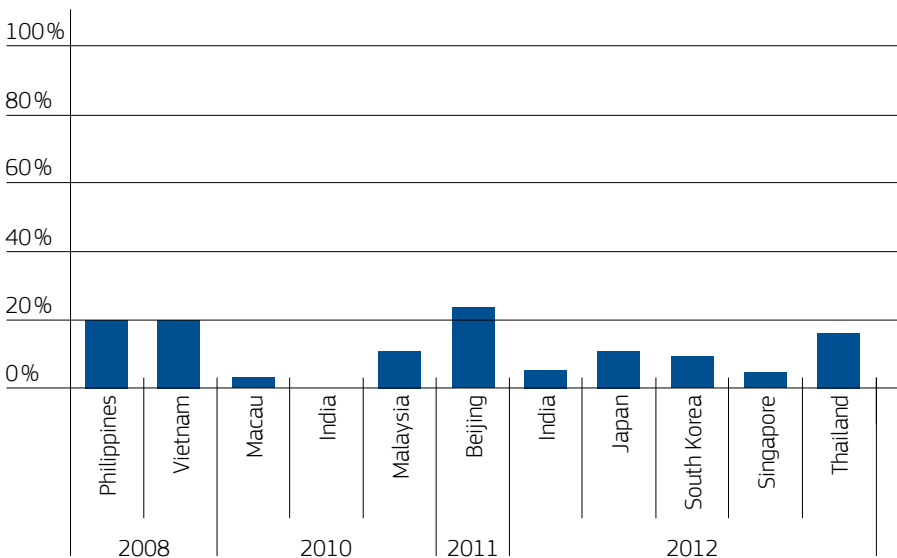
Figure 6.8: Percentage of European respondents who had no personal or professional tie with any ASEM Asian member state



Comparing these results to the degree of awareness of ASEM among the Asian elites collected in *the EU in the eyes of Asia-Pacific*, it can be said that ASEM has been more visible to the elites than to the general public. In addition, the elites were asked to list their professional and personal ties with

the EU and Europe. **Figure 6.9** shows that very few interviewees did not have any links with the EU and/or Europe. Compared with **Figure 6.7**, it is clear that the elites were much better connected, both professionally and personally, to Europe than the general public were.

Figure 6.9: Percentage of Asian elites who had no personal or professional tie with any EU member state



The above empirical findings show that the awareness of ASEM among the general public is worrying. The interviewed members of the public paid little attention on the process. Among various Track Two initiatives, ASEF is mandated to improve the mutual awareness and understanding between the people in Asia and Europe. Compared to ASEM's huge population, the 20,000 individuals (ASEM InfoBoard) involved in the ASEF activities thus far constitute indeed a tiny proportion. While the biennial summit and no less than five regular, institutionalized ministerial meetings⁵¹ are held, the public engagement with the process has lacked regularity or capacity. Different from the claim in the official discourse, the public did not appear to be the central part of the ASEM process. Asia-Europe People's Forum (AEPF) and ASEF activities seem to trickle down insufficiently to the general public in Asia and Europe. In comparison to the general public, the national elites are more involved in the ASEM process. However, the engagement is still limited to a small number of national elites.

5. Conclusions and policy recommendations

The empirical findings from media analysis and public opinion surveys are helpful in assessing ASEM's public outreach in its first two decades. In terms of media visibility and public awareness, ASEM has room to improve. The majority of the surveyed general public is not even aware of the existence of ASEM. The interaction in the ASEM process remains reserved to high politics in which the domestic public is largely irrelevant. Based on the substantial findings listed above, this section proposes several policy recommendations

for the ASEM member state governments on how to improve the process's outreach and mutual understanding between Asia and Europe in the coming decade.

In terms of visibility in news media and in public opinion, ASEM has not achieved much thus far. However, **ASEM does not need visibility purely for visibility's sake.** In today's media and social media, sensational and bad news sell the best. ASEM does not seek this kind of visibility. Instead, the root cause(s) for the inability to reach out to its public should be identified and tackled. The current situation is a result of the process's nature, including non-institutionalization, as a government-driven and summit-centred forum for discussion instead of decision-making. Given the present institutional design of ASEM, its events together with ASEF activities can only reach a rather limited portion of the billions of citizens in the 51 ASEM member countries. Therefore, instead of seeking high visibility, **ASEM should focus its limited resources on improving the quality of its public profile.**

Better quality here refers to a correct understanding of what ASEM is and to a real interest in the process itself. The current media coverage on ASEM only occasionally focuses on what ASEM really is or does, but rather on side issues such as whether the Japanese prime minister managed to talk to the Chinese Premier, or how the Thai prime minister answered questions about the democratic situation in Thailand. One of ASEM's problems is that media and the general public cannot see the relevance of the process to them. **To increase or at least to correctly communicate its relevance to the media and public is what**

⁵¹ Thus far, Foreign, Finance, Culture, Education and Transport ministers convene regularly under the ASEM framework.

ASEM should do. For a good communication with media, the series of visibility-promotion initiatives by the European Commission since 2009 has indeed helped. Similar programs should be continued.

For a wider outreach to the general public, individual member governments have to allocate more human and financial resources to concrete activities or projects. ASEF alone, with its limited human and financial resources, is not sufficient to reach billions of citizens. If the member governments themselves do not consider ASEM important enough to invest more resources, they should not expect their public to actively pay attention to ASEM. As suggested by the 11th FMM, **partner governments should confirm the importance of ASEM by linking the ASEM InfoBoard as well as information and news of the process to their Foreign Ministry websites.**

Increasing ASEM's relevance is more difficult, especially when ASEM remains informal and makes no concrete decisions on policies directly impacting its citizens. The media and public worldwide devote heavy attention to the initiative of Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) and the saga of the Greek debt crisis because they are aware that these issues are influential and will affect them somehow. Besides, a majority of ASEM meetings and initiatives remain elitist, bringing together mainly government officials, experts on various issues, and senior members of businesses. Sectors from the civil society which gain access to the process are mostly the "elites" – senior business executives in the Asia-Europe Business Forum, academics and university students, think tanks, senior media professionals in ASEF's activities and exchange

programmes, law-makers in the Asia-Europe Parliamentary Partnership Meeting, as well as research leaders of NGOs in the Asia-Europe People's Forum. If ASEM member states truly want to promote the public profile of the process, they should **devote concrete support for large-scale initiatives to reach a wide population**, for example, an ASEM Football Cup, an ASEM Singing Contest, an ASEM Movie Festival, ASEM TV programs, or referring to ASEM in textbooks in each country. Another way to increase relevance is to **have each member host more ASEM activities on its soil.** Again, these demand more human and financial resources from the partner governments.

More importantly, **this research calls on ASEM member governments not to boost their own visibility but to focus on the original objective — to promote ties and improve mutual awareness between Asia and Europe.** Therefore, the process should aim to enhance awareness and understanding of Asia in Europe and vice-versa. Indeed, as a side-product, ASEM can promote awareness and understanding among countries in the same region, i.e. among Asian countries in Asia and among European countries in Europe.

In the coming decade, **more efforts are needed to promote inter-regional awareness and understanding, especially of and in smaller member countries lacking diplomatic resources.** For example, ASEM members can choose one European and one Asian member, say Mongolia and Croatia in 2016, and introduce an "ASEM Year of Mongolia" in ASEM European countries and an "ASEM Year of Croatia" in ASEM Asian countries. During this year, all members of ASEM's European members should promote

the awareness and understanding of Mongolia among their citizens. Similarly, the 11th FMM has already suggested introducing a “media exchange program” to annually fund one newsmaker from each ASEM country to travel to two other ASEM countries. The funded newsmakers, in return, should write a certain number of reportage covering ASEM in the year following his/her tour.

As a short-term resolution, ASEM governments can consider establishing an institutional tie with the AIIB. At the moment, 36 out of 53 ASEM members have signed up as the AIIB’s founding members. A high-institutionalized option, for example making the AIIB an institution of ASEM, is unfeasible. Rather, a low-institutionalized option is viable, including **joint projects with the AIIB within the ASEM framework, for example research projects or symposia among experts in ASEM countries on expectations for the AIIB and an assessment of its undertakings.**

Finally, this research suggests that **a different outreach approach is needed in different ASEM member countries.** Discrepancies exist between countries whose public is more familiar with the other region and others with less knowledge and awareness. Other divisions are present between the founding partners of ASEM and the non-founding partners, as well as between ASEM countries with larger and smaller populations.

The empirical data revealed that the general public has not been at the core of the relationship building in the ASEM process. The actual actions taken by the ASEM partners did not promote a bottom-up approach or a mass involvement of the general public. The above-mentioned findings and policy recommendations correspond to the critique of ASEM being elitist. ASEM governments, after understanding what exactly the process should do and can do in terms of public-profile promotion, should make the decisions accordingly.



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Conclusions



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The Asia-Europe Meeting is frequently criticized as a talking shop without tangible objectives, and, in particular in view of a substantive recent enlargement process, as an unwieldy and overly diffuse informal institution. Yet, it unquestionably fills a niche in international relations, providing a forum in which dialogue and networking as such are goals. Importantly it aims to serve as a political catalyst to promote consensus and awareness, and to enhance cooperation between countries from Asia and Europe. Another vital function of ASEM as a trans-regional forum, is to contribute to ongoing cooperation elsewhere, be it bilateral meetings or multilateral structures. Importantly, ASEM draws in businesspeople, parliaments, trade unions, youth, NGOs and civil society actors.

Yet, it cannot be denied that the process also faces numerous challenges, nearly twenty years after its creation. Strong dividing lines exist, between Europe and Asia but increasingly also within both regions, on how to proceed as for overall vision, objectives and outcomes, coordination, and working methods. For some ASEM is a forum for informal dialogue and networking, whereas for others tangible cooperation should be much more at the forefront after almost two decades. Some emphasize political interaction, while others give precedence to the economic pillar. Whereas some vehemently oppose further institutionalization, others see it as the only way to retain relevance in the future. It was the aim of the six chapters in this study to assess these and other challenges and to provide suggestions for future change. The following sections summarize the findings of the different contributions, in terms of lessons learnt from other inter- or trans-regional fora; enlargement; coordination; substance; stakeholder involvement; and visibility and public awareness.

1. Drawing lessons from other fora

The first two contributions took an explicitly comparative approach, in order to examine how structure/processes as well as dialogue/cooperation/substance are embedded in the institutional design of other cooperation frameworks. While providing general background information on the ASEM process in a comparative light, it was the key objective of these chapters to draw lessons for ASEM's future from similar processes.

Chapter One looked at the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC). Both ASEM and APEC are fora for soft politics, rather than institutions for collective problem solving. Nevertheless, they fulfill a clear function in an increasingly contentious and fragmented world. ASEM can draw four lessons from APEC. First, having a specific goal and a focused agenda are vital elements in crafting a more compelling vision for a large forum such as ASEM, and in drawing attention to the work it does.

Returning to ASEM's initial focus on economy, the chapter argued that all ASEM initiatives and projects should be geared towards a robust exchange of ideas, contributing to enhanced connectivity and eventually resulting in increased trade and investment flows. ASEM should therefore craft a vision of a bustling Asia-Europe Marketplace, defined by the author as a well-connected bazaar where trade and ideas flow both ways from Asia to Europe and Europe to Asia.

Second, ASEM should identify champions within the business and academic communities that can help support and promote the ASEM agenda. Similar to APEC, ASEM could create a Business Advisory Council

ASEM BAC), a committed core group of business executives from Asia and Europe who are willing to serve in advisory roles. In order to strengthen its engagement with the academic community, but also to promote evidence-based policy analysis and recommendations, an ASEM Studies Center could be established in Europe to complement the Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF) in Singapore.

Third, APEC has a secretariat to promote coordination, institutional memory and continuity. If ASEM would refrain from institutionalizing further, it could set up working committees, similar to APEC, on a few key issues that draw substantial interest and support from at least eight to ten members. This would be in line with issue-based leadership (cf. **Chapter Three**), and resolve issues relating to the rotating coordinators especially on the Asian side. Four to six working committees could evaluate ASEM projects and initiatives, and work to deliver results on these identified issues.

Fourth, contrary to the moratorium imposed by APEC in 1989, ASEM could enlarge further on the Asian side to better reflect the inter-continental Asia-Europe character. This would open the door for additional members from South and Central Asia. Reflecting this enlargement process, the number of coordinators on the Asian side could be increased from the current two to four, representing the different sub-regions – Southeast Asia, Northeast Asia, South Asia, and Central Asia. Australia and New Zealand could caucus with Northeast Asia, and Russia would be integrated in the Central Asian coordinating mechanism. This would improve the coordination process within the Asian regional grouping, and reduce the need for a Secretariat.

Chapter Two examined ASEM in the light of the EU-Africa and EU-CELAC fora. Little exchange of ideas exists between these three processes, in spite of commonalities such as their shared quest for relevance, visibility and credibility in a changing world. Yet, it is clear that ASEM can draw important lessons from the other two fora.

A recent EU-CELAC summit offers a possible model for creating an “Ulan Bator” declaration to be adopted at ASEM’s 20th anniversary gathering in Mongolia in 2016. The political statement would highlight ASEM’s core objectives and its role as a relevant and dynamic player in shaping the global dialogue and agenda. It would also include a “short but snappy action plan” focusing on a small number of issues that can help steer ASEM in its third decade. Even as an informal dialogue process, ASEM would benefit from more regular follow-up, evaluation and monitoring of progress, as is the case in the EU-Africa partnership. As in the other two fora, ASEM should specify priority areas of cooperation that could become the subject of structured “policy dialogues”.

Furthermore, both the EU-Africa and EU-CELAC relationships highlight the importance of a more efficient coordination. As for substance, ASEM should seek to promote connectivity, address common security challenges, and revive the economic pillar by focusing on areas such as sustainable growth and development, sustainable agriculture, energy efficiency and conservation as well as urbanization. ASEM could strengthen participation of the private sector and young people, and promote cultural cooperation and networking along the lines of the EU-CELAC partnership.

2. Enlargement

Chapter Three examined ASEM's dramatic enlargement process, which more than doubled the membership from the initial 25+1 set-up to the current 51+2 structure. Contrary to criticism that expansion into non-EU states and Asian sub-regions such as South Asia, Australasia, and Central Asia has diluted an already fragile cohesion in ASEM, this chapter argued that enlargement should be utilized as a catalyst to revitalize ASEM. After refining its vision and prime objectives in a political statement to be launched at the upcoming summit in Mongolia, ASEM could streamline its work-in-progress methods in two ways.

First, now more than ever ASEM is in need of actively enhancing informality, one of the forum's core strengths. This can be achieved not only through interactive discussions instead of a tedious reading of statements, but also through longer Retreat sessions, in a "leaders only" or "leaders plus one" format. Also work in smaller groups, in other words a "Working Tables" format can be implemented. These thematic discussions are linked to the overarching theme of the plenary. Leaders/ministers sign up for a Working Table in advance. Each Working Table is chaired by one country, includes two short keynote introductions, one from Asia and one from Europe, and is followed by free, open and informal discussion. Outcomes and overall "vision" of each sub-group are reported back to the final plenary.

Second, enlargement provides opportunities to promote "tangible cooperation", through "issue-based leadership", i.e. what is called "enhanced cooperation" in the

EU and "variable geometry" in other fora. ASEM offers the chance for the creation of loose and *ad hoc* alliances for non-binding collaboration. A group of "shepherd" countries can guide the way in issue areas such as educational exchange or water management, to be joined by other interested parties at a later stage. ASEM members can select issues of interest à la carte, resulting in an "ASEM at different speeds".

The chapter furthermore pointed out that new members can steer the dialogue and cooperation in new directions. Connectivity certainly is an issue area with "ASEM added value" in the light of the enlargement process.

It relates to economic integration, trade and investment but also has crucial ramifications for sustainable development, ecology, think tank and research or educational communities, and political linkages. Rather than promoting physical connectivity and infrastructure projects, ASEM can help to more narrowly define connectivity, set objectives, share practices and exchange ideas.

Relatedly, the discussion of issues related to the Arctic development agenda or Arctic maritime transport routes can profit from ASEM's enlarged membership. In addition, ASEM as a multilateral, open and informal institution is ideally placed to tackle issues in the non-traditional security (NTS) sphere.

It can serve as a platform to define objectives for customs cooperation and facilitation, share intelligence concerning joint anti-piracy operations, or facilitate the creation of *ad hoc* alliances in other NTS-related fields.

3. Coordination

Chapter Three as well as other contributions in this study argued that membership expansion inevitably places additional strains on ASEM's management. Recent years have witnessed several attempts to streamline coordination mechanisms, but resistance against "creeping institutionalization" remains strong.

Nevertheless, it is clear that a secretariat or permanent liaison office offers numerous advantages, including for institutional memory, communication and procedures, transparency, public awareness, political interest, neutrality and geographical equality. Not least importantly it would tackle problems related to the lack of experience, expertise, or logistical resources of smaller, less developed or less experienced ASEM countries.

Furthermore, tighter institutionalization would streamline ASEM's numerous initiatives, holding them together in a structured way. ASEM has never lacked projects or activities. On the contrary, the dialogue has spawned an almost uncontrolled proliferation of initiatives, covering a wide range of topics, not least because new initiatives guarantee better press for the initiators. Often however, initiatives have been plagued by a lack of focus, direction, linkage to the dialogue, or adequate follow-up.

Occasionally they have not entirely been in line with the AECF2000 that stipulates that initiatives should take into account the overall objectives and perspectives of the process, should have the full consensus of all partners (on a timely basis), and include "the participation of a large number of ASEM partners".

When it comes to strengthening coordination mechanisms, ASEM currently faces the choice between four options:

- First, it can keep the *status quo*. For proponents of this scenario, ASEM works well at present, and the objective is a minimalist one: to meet, network, and engage in informal discussion without a formal agenda. An institutional approach would be inappropriate and counter-productive given the informal character of the ASEM process. For this group, enlargement is not a problem. "*The more the merrier*" is ASEM's motto for enlargement, for the simple reason that ASEM is not an operational agency but a forum that can engage a large diversity of partners into dialogue.
- Second, coordination is beefed up on the Asian side. Proponents of this idea argue that the EU already possesses the necessary and well-oiled channels for coordination. The creation of a possible Asian coordination unit should therefore be left up to the Asian ASEM grouping. If the leaders from a wide variety of countries from Asian and Eurasian sub-regions agree on a secretariat, a stronger role for the ASEAN Secretariat can be envisaged. For the time being however, the ASEAN Secretariat seems to be lacking both ambition and resources, in spite of obviously stronger coordinating roles in the East Asian Summit and the ASEAN Regional Forum. Alternately, the number of coordinators on the Asian side can be increased from two to four, each representing one of the sub-regions (cf above, **Chapter One**).

- A third possibility would be to build on the example of the ASEM Education Secretariat and create coordinating offices or appoint rotating coordinating countries based on the idea of sectoral leadership. These could be established for example in fields relating to non-traditional security or connectivity. The 3rd ASEM Transport Ministers' Meeting (TMM3) in Riga (April 2015) for example, proposed instituting a rotating ASEM TMM Coordinating Country to enhance continuity.
- A fourth scenario would entail the establishment of an overarching secretariat or permanent liaison office, as

hinted at in **Chapter Three**. This would inevitably result in lengthy discussions on issues related to staffing, funding and location, however.

For some, as the EU has been the only permanent coordinator, it has de facto functioned as ASEM's institutional memory. Furthermore, in view of the EU's emphasis on effective multilateralism, transparency, legitimacy and meritocracy, the secretariat could be based in Europe. For others, the secretariat should be based in Asia, as it is that vast and heterogeneous region that is most in need of stronger coordinating mechanisms.



4. Substance

Chapter Four argued that ASEM can make highly significant progress in three areas, namely connectivity, trade and sustainable development, and non-traditional security. Similar to the **third chapter**, it contended that ASEM's role is limited to that of an incubator for ideas concerning so-called hard connectivity (railway or road links, or energy routes between Asia and Europe).

What ASEM can do, however, is propose an updated review of major hard-connectivity projects between Asia and Europe, for example. Or it can establish a dedicated "Connectivity Forum", bringing together the private sector, media and civil society organizations to discuss infrastructure-related issues with an impact on sustainable development, security and climate change. Private sector actors could be invited to meet with ASEM Economic Ministers, at the same time serving as an opportunity to revive the EMM.

ASEM can also foster soft connectivity in the sphere of cultural, social, and educational cooperation. It can help in more clearly "branding" ASEM-led educational exchanges and explore the idea of a preferential status/priority given to ASEM students in universities in Asia and Europe. It can even consider establishing an ASEM University, based on the model of the UN University, or creating dedicated ASEM Boards of Experts/Personalities, in fields such as Academic Exchange, Social and Human Rights, Media, and Youth. Education as a field of cooperation is given added importance because its crucial impact on sustainable development.

It is clear that the future transcontinental road/rail transportation through Eurasia will have an overwhelming effect on the present

trade environment and schemes. ASEM does not have the capacity to embark on a global trade/investment promotion course. It can, however, increase awareness of trade benefits for local populations, while at the same time contributing to the ultimate goal of a more sustainable development.

Furthermore, ASEM could create a "Customs Training cluster", where directors of the respective customs agencies can have an exchange on topics of interest, and modelled on the OECD's global Forum on Tax Administration (FTA).

In the field of agriculture, ASEM can inaugurate a rotating forum linked to existing NGO networks active under the AEPF. With a view to fostering global governance through Non-Traditional Security, ASEM can promote sustainable tourism through an "ASEM Green Travel Initiative" linking tour operators and tourism professionals with Ministries of Tourism and NGOs active in this field; it can launch "food security panels" by sub-region, reporting to the Leaders' summit; or organize a yearly ASEM seminar on mediation and peace diplomacy, comparable to the annual ASEM Human Rights seminars.

5. ASEM stakeholders

Chapter Five discussed the numerous groups of ASEM stakeholders, focusing on the involvement of non-state actors and their roles, achievements and limits. It argued that ASEM should more tap into civil society groups, as they are "in-sync" with current issues and challenges in their respective societies, and serve as a good "middle ground" in terms of policy discussion and recommendation ahead of government-level meetings.

Policymakers have pointed out the lack of coordination across ASEM between stakeholder groups, impeding their further constructive involvement in the process. The chapter therefore argued that the ASEM forum should increase civil society input, in the first place by promoting horizontal communication between the different stakeholder groups and by establishing regularized meetings between representations of ASEF, AEBF, AEPF, ASEP and others.

ASEM should therefore move away from the traditional three-pillar division that segregates the different actors and stakeholders. Trust-building and socialization are important for government leaders, and facilitating that is among the prime functions of ASEM as a dialogue platform. However, the meetings of stakeholder groups should be transformed into functional, in-depth, sectoral, and professional meetings.

Civil society, including youth, doubtlessly represents the most under-explored stakeholder group. Be it academic and research communities, businesspeople or artists, their participation in the process bolsters the inter-regional process. Innovative contributions from civil society present a good example of “bottom-up governance”, which constitutes an increasingly important force in the global system.

6. Visibility and public awareness

For some policymakers, media attention and visibility should not be ASEM's main concern, being a process and not an international institution. In addition, there certainly are limitations as to what extent any aspect of an inter-regional forum such as ASEM can be made “gripping” to the general public.

Nevertheless, in view of transparency, accountability, and legitimacy, public awareness and visibility are certainly not irrelevant. **Chapter Six** therefore addressed ASEM's perennial problem of visibility. Based on a meticulous content analysis of media reporting on ASEM and on the results of an extensive public opinion survey, the chapter assessed ASEM's public outreach in its first two decades. It argued that in terms of media visibility and public awareness, ASEM has a lot of room to improve, even if ASEM's activities and projects have made important contributions.

Nevertheless, it needs to be kept in mind that ASEM does not need visibility merely for visibility's sake. For a wider outreach to the general public, individual member governments would need to put more human and financial resources in concrete activities or projects promoting the public profile of the process. First and foremost however, ASEM needs to promote a better public understanding of what it is and does. In other words, people should be made aware that ASEM exists for a reason. The chapter calls on ASEM governments to focus on the original objective, namely to promote ties and boost mutual awareness between Asia and Europe. If ASEM can focus on initiatives that have ASEM added-value and that have an impact on people, as a by-product it will gain markedly in visibility and understanding. The chapter furthermore proposed, as a short-term resolution, that ASEM would organize research projects or symposia among experts in ASEM countries on expectations for high-profile initiatives such as the new Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB). Linking ASEM information to Foreign Ministry websites, establishing media exchange programs, and promoting awareness of smaller member countries are further tools to boost visibility.

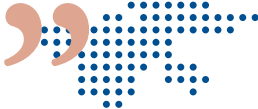
7. Concluding remarks

Ahead of ASEM's twentieth anniversary that will be celebrated in Ulan Bator next year, this study set out to critically explore ASEM's current state and the institutional challenges it faces. A prime objective was to provide input and recommendations, feeding into the discussions on the future of the process. Looking ahead to ASEM's third decade, the different chapters in this study have analyzed the strengths that ASEM should build on and further promote; they have argued that ASEM can draw valuable lessons from other processes; and they have proposed ways to address the forum's limitations and weaknesses.


In 1996, the year of ASEM's creation, Simon Nuttall, a member of the Council on Asia-Europe Cooperation (CAEC) postulated that:

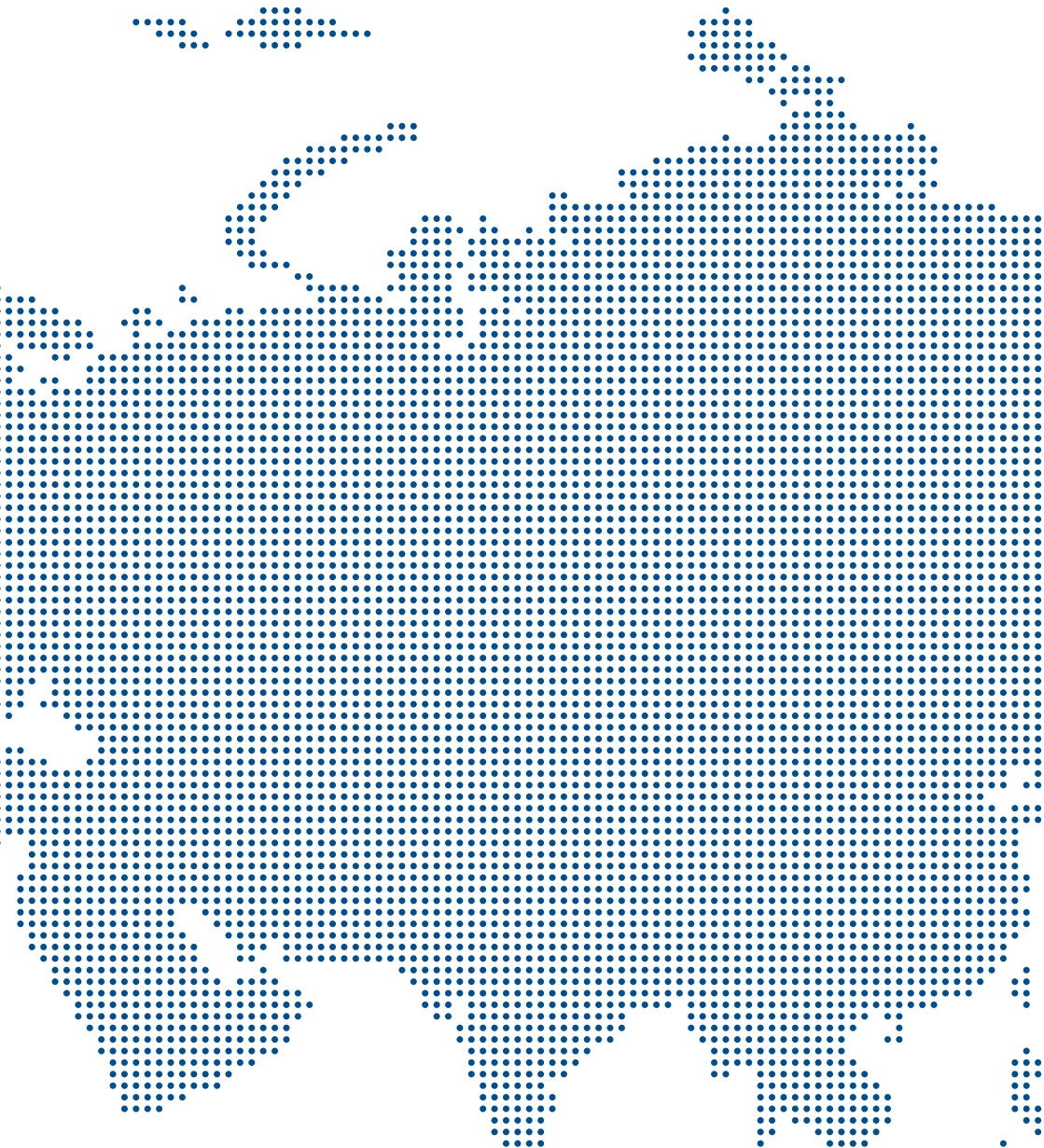
“ Like all the best institutions, ASEM seems fated, not to be created, but to evolve. ”

Simon Nuttall, (1996)



The authors of the different chapters hope that this study can make a modest contribution to the further revitalization of an evolving Asia-Europe Meeting into its third decade.







Throughout the 20th century, a number of political scientists and novelists imagined that the next century would be dominated by continental blocs clashing with one another. When the **Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM)** was founded, in 1996, it was becoming clear that our “brave new world” called for a true dialogue between continents and civilisations. The need for intercontinental alliances is even clearer today, as we celebrate ASEM’s 20th birthday: the world we live in has never been this “small”, the challenges we face are truly global in their nature. Worldwide platforms for policy dialogue are more important than ever.

