

# Ahead of the 12<sup>th</sup> ASEM Foreign Ministers' Meeting

Ask scientists whether Europe and Asia are one big continent or two: they will look at geography, geology, history. But just look at the daily news: Europe and Asia face the same global challenges, the same threats. Dialogue and cooperation among us are more crucial than ever. The intuition of a great forum for our continents – the Asia-Europe meeting – is even more meaningful today than it was twenty years ago, when ASEM kicked off.

We share an incandescent neighbourhood, the Middle East. We have the same interest in addressing the terrorist threat, and stem the flow of foreign fighters converging on the region from Europe and Asia alike. We are all facing a global rise in human mobility: our European public opinion often forgets about the massive movements of migrants and refugees in the other continents, including inside Asia. Some of the underlying causes of these fluxes are also issues of common concern: conflicts, economic imbalances, natural disasters linked to climate change.

Europe and Asia need one another. Asia is one of the fastest growing regions on Earth. To keep the current pace, improved connections between our continents will be vital. And connectivity is a keyword at ASEM. This is not only about connecting Asia and Europe by sea, air or railway, but also digitally and through people to people contacts – between businessmen, students, academics or just tourists. An increase of trade and investments in both directions must be a priority for the whole of us. For this reason, the European Commission has decided to work full-time on strengthening our existing trade agreements and building new ones.

But the greatest threat to Asia's development is instability. Last May I attended the Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore, one of the main global dialogues on security and defence. I was impressed by a growing demand of cooperation between the European Union and Asian countries on security issues. Our Union is not just a big free trade area: we are a global security provider. And we are an increasingly relevant partner for peace and security in the whole of "Eurasia".

In mid-October the EU signed as an international witness the nationwide ceasefire agreement in Myanmar. We consistently supported this agreement – politically and financially –, responding to a wish by all parties for us to be involved. This has paid off. We also remain involved in supporting a comprehensive peace deal in the Philippines.

There is much more we can do together, in the Far East as well as at the crossroads between our regions. Think of Afghanistan. After too many years of conflict the country needs a new covenant inside its society, a new covenant among all regional powers, and a new covenant between Kabul and the whole international community. The European Union will co-host an international conference on Afghanistan in Brussels next year. It can be the place where this threefold new covenant sees the light.

The deal we reached last summer on Iran's nuclear programme shows the way: when global powers from all continents cooperate – Europe, Russia, China and the US – the chances of success escalate.

This is why the potential of ASEM is so high. At our meeting in Luxembourg, on 5-6 November, 51 countries and two regional organisations are represented, accounting for 60 per cent of the world's population, trade and economic output. This includes twelve G20 members and half of the current UN Security Council. The 'retreat session' between ministers will create the perfect setting to compare notes on all the issues of common concern. Our shared peace and prosperity very much depends on cooperation between Europe and Asia. Let us make the Luxembourg meeting a cornerstone towards a stronger partnership.

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