



EUROPEAN COMMISSION

José Manuel Barroso

President of the European Commission

Speech by President Barroso at the Opening Ceremony of ASEM Summit

Check Against Delivery
Seul le texte prononcé fait foi
Es gilt das gesprochene Wort

ASEM Summit /Vientiane, Laos
5 November 2012

Your Excellencies, President, Prime Minister of Laos People Democratic Republic, Thank you so much for hosting the 9th Asia Europe Meeting so efficiently and graciously here in Vientiane. It is always a pleasure to experience the legendary Asian hospitality and the friendly nature of its people.

Distinguished Heads of State and Government, dear colleagues, Delegates to ASEM 9,

On this stage we represent half of the world population, more than half of the world's GDP and 55% of the world's trade. These are impressive figures which show the centrality of Europe-Asia relations in today's world. But more important than statistics and figures is the common political will to jointly address today's challenges. This relation is indeed key for the world's prosperity and security.

This 9th meeting will also witness the accession of three new members to our group. I would like to warmly welcome: Norway, Switzerland and Bangladesh. This is the best evidence of the attractiveness and importance of our Asia-Europe partnership.

Excellencies, Distinguished delegates,

We are currently going through a period of affirmation by Asia. The Asia-Pacific's share in the global economy has tripled in the last two decades, from almost 6% to 18% today. We welcome this evolution. We believe it can be a win-win situation for Europe and Asia and indeed a very important contribution for global sustainable growth.

And if the main responsibility for this success lies in the region, with its leadership and its people, I can also say that Europe has been playing an important role in it. The European Union's open market has been the main destination of Asian exports. European Union trade with ASEM partners has increased by 50% in the last 6 years. The European Union is also the biggest source of foreign direct investment in the region.

Our development policies have also been helping to lift people out of poverty, through cooperation with many Asian partners. This shows that we are not a recent acquaintance. We are old friends. And it also shows that we are not just partners for good weather. We are partners for all seasons.

In the European Union we are building a solid framework for our relations with Asia, based on three pillars: Partnership Agreements, aimed at discussing and cooperating on topical issues of mutual interest, from political to scientific, cultural, social matters; Free Trade Agreements to increase prosperity through further opening of our economies; and multilateral cooperation of which this forum, the Asia – Europe Meeting, is the main example.

This dialogue was established 17 years ago. The original goals of ASEM were to maintain and enhance peace and stability and to promote sustainable economic and social development. These goals are more relevant than ever in this era of growing interdependence.

Our interdependence means that geographical distance is becoming less and less important. We have a joint interest in fostering sustainable growth and prosperity, to benefit the most advanced as well as the least developed among us. Moreover, achieving sustainable development on a planet of finite resources is a challenge that we can only address jointly. The European Union and the European countries in general stand ready to intensify work in this direction. I am convinced that we – Asia and Europe – have only to gain from increasing our cooperation. So, on behalf of the European Union let me underline our desire to further develop our region-to-region relations.

I very much look forward to open and frank exchanges on all issues of relevance for today and tomorrow – and I wish you all a successful ASEM 9.