



Asia-Europe Meeting

ASEM Pathfinder Group on Connectivity

21 June, Brussels

Chair Summary

The first meeting of ASEM Pathfinder Group on Connectivity (APGC) took place in Brussels on 21 June 2017. The APGC was hosted by the European Union. All ASEM Partners, as well as the Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF) took part in the meeting, underlining the shared commitment strengthening dialogue and cooperation on Connectivity in the ASEM framework. To nurture the discussions at the APGC, non-papers had been produced by the EU as well as China and Japan.

The APGC started with short presentations, on the state of play and suggestions for strengthening Connectivity between Europe and Asia which were structured around four clusters:

1. Transport Connectivity (covering road, sea and air transport) in view of the preparations for the upcoming 4th ASEM Transport Ministers' Meeting taking place on 21-23 September in Bali, Indonesia (European Commission – DG MOVE, Indonesia).
2. Customs and trade facilitation in view of the preparations for the 6th ASEM Economic Ministers' Meeting, 21-22 September in Seoul, ROK and 12th ASEM Customs DG-Commissioners' Meeting, 16-17 October in Berlin, Germany (European Commission – DG TAXUD, DG TRADE, R. of Korea).
3. Digital connectivity incl e-commerce which included feedback from the informal High Level Forum on Digital Connectivity held in Qingdao, China on 19-21 June (PR China, European Commission – DG CONNECT).
4. Investment financing and quality infrastructure which featured a presentation by Japan and of the European Investment Bank.

In line with its mandate, the APGC had a first exchange on how to arrive at a definition of Connectivity that meets the needs of ASEM. The following common elements were discussed and agreed by the APGC, to guide future, action-oriented work:

1. The need for a broad definition of Connectivity - in both a geographic and functional sense - covering all three pillars of ASEM (economic, security and people-to-people contacts). This should include both 'hard' and 'soft' aspects, including all modes of transport (land, sea and

air) but also energy and digital links, higher education and research, as well as customs and trade facilitation.

2. The future definition should stress the need for all Connectivity activities in ASEM to be in line with key principles and agreed international standards (labour, social and environmental standards), full transparency, market principles, a level playing field, equal treatment, equal access, with mutual benefits based on consultations on an equal footing.

3. In line with previous ASEM statements, the future definition of Connectivity needs to stress the importance of sustainability as a quality benchmark, and make the link with the implementation of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

4. ASEM work on Connectivity should build on already existing forms of regional cooperation, avoiding duplication of efforts.

5. The ASEM definition of Connectivity should be action-oriented, focused on tangible results and articulate Connectivity as a facilitator of access, i.e. as a means to foster deeper economic and people to people links.

Based on these elements and following further discussions at the 2nd meeting of the APGC, back to-back with the next ASEM SOM meeting in September, a formal definition of Connectivity should be agreed at the 13th ASEM Foreign Ministers Meeting in Myanmar in November.

The next meeting of the APGC will also discuss how ASEM Partners see the possible development of an ASEM strategic work plan on Connectivity. Some initial ideas were presented such as a Sustainable Connectivity Index and a network of think tanks. Discussions on the work plan will continue at the next APGC.

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