At the beginning of this week, I had the honour of chairing in my capacity as High Representative the ASEM, the “Asia-Europe Foreign Ministers Meeting”. What might seem to be a rather bureaucratic acronym, actually is a politically highly relevant event for our continents.

ASEM brings together 53 partners made up of the 28 EU Member States, Norway, Switzerland and the
EU, and on the Asia side, 21 countries and the ASEAN Secretariat. Together we represent:

- 55% of global trade
- 60% of global GDP
- 60% of the global population
- 75% of global tourism

So ASEM matters for the sheer weight it represents. In Madrid, we discussed how to put this collective weight at the service of promoting rules-based multilateral solutions on the key challenges we face.

Simply bringing countries together does not, of course, guarantee any results. It does however create opportunities. As geopolitical changes and a backlash against globalisation take hold, ASEM has become increasingly relevant and strategic. So this ASEM meeting was well timed and an important opportunity to further strengthen cooperation between Europe and Asia.

The range of views around the ASEM table is quite diverse. But we managed to come together in a spirit of real dialogue, with key joint messages. All Ministers underlined the value of ASEM as a building block for strong and effective multilateralism and the rules-based international order. This was in itself a key message as we see that very rules based order is increasingly being challenged.

All ASEM partners also agreed on the urgent need to tackle climate change and stand behind the Paris Agreement. And on the need to uphold the WTO and enable its crucial dispute settlement system to function. We also discussed pressing security issues, which shows the maturity of the ASEM process. A few years ago, this focus on security issues would not have happened.

We called on the DPRK to abide by its commitment for full denuclearisation and expressed our support for diplomatic efforts to that effect. We all expressed our support for the Iran nuclear deal, which again was an important message. Other top regional issues that were discussed, include the crisis in and around Rakhine with a focus on accountability and returns, the peace process in Afghanistan and the wider Middle East.

Connectivity and the need for it to be sustainable and based on clear rules and standards was another big theme for our discussions. As Europe, we could promote the EU Green Deal including the groundbreaking commitment to make Europe the first climate-neutral continent by 2050. But our ambition must be global. We cannot solve this only in Europe. To safeguard our planet and to promote sustainable development, cooperation with our Asian partners is key. Both the COP25 and the ASEM meeting made clear how much work there remains to be done.

Chairing the ASEM Foreign Ministers Meeting was a chance to meet many Asian partners right at the start of my mandate. Relations with Asia will form a big priority for the EU. Asia is the most dynamic part of the world and the new centre of gravity in global politics. It is also clear that big global challenges will not be solved without active support from Asia. As Europe, we therefore need to be actively engaged in and with Asia. ASEM was a good opportunity to hold bilateral meetings with the Chinese State Counsellor Wang Yi and the Foreign Ministers of Japan, Singapore, Cambodia, Thailand, Vietnam and Kazakhstan.

In Madrid, we worked hard to ensure effective multilateralism, at the COP25 and ASEM. But multilateralism takes time. It rarely produces quick and decisive outcomes. It is however vital for us Europeans. The alternative is a world of power politics and might makes right. So we need to continue to invest in it. And it is good to know that in Asia we have many partners and friends we can work with to build rules-based solutions.

For the Chair’s statement of the meeting please see here.
www.eeas.europa.eu

Source URL: