

The ASEM 8 Agenda

Factsheet

1. Introduction

On the 4th and 5th of October 2010, the European and Asian participants in ASEM representing about 58 % of world population and 60 % of world trade, will hold their Eighth Summit. This meeting, at Head of State and of Government level, provides a privileged opportunity to promote international peace and security in equal partnership and to pursue the region to region dialogue on issues of common concern. This factsheet, destined to ASEM friends and to the wider public, aims at providing information on the themes that are in perspective as the substantive preparations for the Summit meeting proceed. However, one should also bear in mind that at the time of their gathering, and as has happened before, Leaders may be guided by topical issues resulting from ongoing developments.

2. The preparation process

At the preceding Summit in Beijing, in his closing speech, the Prime Minister of Belgium Yves Leterme shared his idea about the overarching theme of the upcoming ASEM 8 Summit. He suggested that the Brussels 2010 Summit should be a further step in "*Achieving greater well-being and more dignity for all citizens*". This theme, since captured by the short expression "*Quality of Life*", now stands as the title of ASEM 8.

To facilitate the process of issue identification and on the basis of consultations with ASEM partners, host country Belgium circulated in October 2009 a 'non-paper' among Asian and European ASEM partners. The written reactions produced a more clear view of the issues and priorities which ASEM partners wished to pursue. Hence, a 'concept paper' was produced to reflect the progress in the collective thinking. By now, ASEM delegations have at their disposal an Annotated Agenda (non-public document) reflecting the combined position of the prospective participants in the ASEM Summit in regard of subjects and priorities.

3. Prospective issues

So far, ASEM partners seem to have identified the following issues as deserving more substantial engagement:

- 'the economic and financial crisis': The world is being transformed by the latest economic and financial crisis, which also has severely affected the prosperity and dignity of millions of citizens. What to do next? Financial markets and companies are gradually adjusting but new supervisory arrangements are still to be defined. Coordinated stimulus packages sustain economic activity but the significant public deficits they produce have now to be urgently addressed. Is the world community equipped and ready to address these challenges? In particular, the capacity of the international financial institutions to respond to the unfolding situation has come under the purview of international discussions.

- 'sustainable development': Sustainability has become a guiding principle as rich and poor ASEM partners strive to define a common and mutually satisfactory development model. Taking this ambition forward, as the ASEM 7 Summit in Beijing already did, should also contribute to the realization of the Millennium Development Goals. Actually, simultaneous progress in terms of economic development, social advance and environmental protection is called for.

(a) Economic development is dependent upon the restoration of private sources of demand and hence, on open and free international trade, on market liberalization, on the Doha Development Agenda and on innovation of products, services and production processes. Innovation in particular is perceived as a potential contributor to the conversion of the world's economies to a more sustainable model. How to facilitate this process might become the subject of a new form of dialogue destined to ensure that flows of trade, investments and technologies that support sustainable developments are encouraged and further liberalized. In addition, attention might go to sectoral developments such as in transportation, information and communication technologies and financial services. The need to ensure food security for all through improvement of foodstuff production and trade practices will certainly be raised. The future of development cooperation between Europe and Asia in reaching all of these objectives will naturally be discussed.

(b) Social development is a common objective. In June 2009, and in response to the crisis, the ILO adopted a "Global Jobs Pact" supported by Asian and European ASEM members alike. It aims at creating jobs, protecting workers and stimulating economic recovery. Further issues include effective social safety nets, decent working conditions, dialogue between social partners, social security schemes with a.o. the ability to take on the care for ageing populations, and inclusiveness of labor markets. All these reveal a shared concern to create societies that are both equitable and inclusive.

(c) Environmental protection mobilizes the world community more and more, with combating climate change recognized as the most pressing task. The next step after the Copenhagen meeting of December 2009 is to be defined. Energy consumption and production patterns matter in this respect, even when the relationship with security of energy supply is sometimes pointed to as a separate issue. More generally, the environment is affected by a range of human activities such as urbanization, industrialization, construction, expansion of transportation networks or tourism. The management of water and of forests is raised, also for their particular relevance to climate change. One overarching issue is the availability of green technologies that help preserve the earth's resources and the environment for future generations, perhaps opening an era of new 'green growth' opportunities with a positive effect on economic development. Finally, this year is the United Nations Year for Biodiversity. The further conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity should be a priority.

- 'global issues': Cross-border challenges, including terrorism and organized crime will be addressed. Disaster relief and disaster prevention, as demonstrated by recent events, require increased attention and organization of solidarity. Better guarantees for human security will be sought. In the light of the Washington Nuclear Security Summit and the New York NPT Review Conference, the issue of non-proliferation will be raised. Reflection will be given to possible ways to reform the United Nations Organization in order to make it better suited to address the challenges of the 21st century. Finally, trade between Asia and Europe greatly depends on the security of sea lanes but these are disrupted by persistent piracy. There is an inherent interest among ASEM partners in improving international cooperation in the fight against this scourge.

- 'regional issues': At the ASEM 7 in Beijing in 2008 and at the last Foreign Ministers' Meeting in Hanoi in 2009, specific attention was devoted to Burma/Myanmar, the Korean Peninsula, and the Iranian nuclear issue. In addition, developments in Afghanistan are part of the recurrent agenda of ASEM partners. At ASEM 8, ASEM leaders may revert to these and to other regional issues relevant to Europe and to Asia.

- 'people to people, visibility and future of ASEM':

(a) People to people relations are the ultimate foundation of long-lasting and robust relationships between Asia and Europe. ASEM partners devote constant attention to the work of the Asia Europe Foundation and its programs to facilitate social, cultural and youth exchanges. Academic exchanges (teachers and students) are in the limelight with a new educational secretariat set up in Bonn. A permanent goal of ASEM is to bring

an ever growing number of business travelers, tourists, academicians, students, opinion makers, civil society representatives and local and regional leaders to know and understand each other better. Specific tools in this regard are the Duo Fellowship Program and the establishment of a Trans-Eurasian Information Network. Also, the latter year has been characterized by two outstanding occasions of interfaith dialogue.

(b) ASEM now counts 48 members with the prospective accession in Brussels of the Russian Federation, Australia and New Zealand. With this type of numbers, working methods do matter to preserve and further advance the ASEM process. About sixty ASEM activities are held annually. Each Summit has devoted some attention to the way ASEM goes about doing its business and so will ASEM8. Also, new initiatives to increase the visibility of ASEM might emerge.

15.06.2010