



**EUROPEAN COUNCIL
THE PRESIDENT**

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**Introductory remarks by
Herman VAN ROMPUY
President of the European Council
at the 8th Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM)**

Distinguished Heads of State and Government, Foreign Ministers, Ambassadors, Ladies and Gentlemen, Dear Friends,

It is an honour to chair the Eighth Summit of the Asia-Europe Meeting. We are meeting in this magnificent Royal Palace, a testimony to the cultural achievements of our continent. I should like to thank his Majesty for putting this Palace at our disposal. I should like to thank the host Country, Belgium, its government and its Prime Minister for its excellent organisation and wonderful hospitality.

On behalf of us all, I should like to welcome Russia, Australia and New Zealand, who today join ASEM. A growing membership is sign of vitality!

Dear Friends,

The relations between our two continents are as old as our respective civilizations themselves. Over 25 centuries commercial and political networks carried back and forth the human science and philosophy between Asia and Europe. But they are ever evolving. Since ASEM was launched in 1996, Asia has exhibited a strong economic performance, allowing hundred of millions of people to be lifted out of the poverty, Asia is now very present on the world stage.

P R E S S

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Europe too has changed over these last 14 years. Not least because countries from east and west Europe joined forces. In Europe, the division between East and West is part of history now! Yesterday in Bremen we celebrated the twentieth anniversary of the German unification. New generations grew up without the Berlin wall and know it only from pictures in the news. The EU provides a major contribution to world peace and ending the Cold War.

The world has also changed. It has become intertwined and interdependent as never before. Gathered around this table are Leaders who represent 58% of the world's population and 60% of world trade. Numbers that impose on us great responsibility on for peace and prosperity. To deliver results for the people we represent.

This is precisely why we have chosen "Quality of Life" for our citizens as a *leitmotive* of the ASEM 8.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The European Union is committed to be a stronger actor on the world stage and a stronger partner for Asia. The 27 Heads of State and Government - who are seated here today - gathered in the European Council which I chaired some three weeks ago, decided that the EU needs to look East. Not only in words, but also in facts.

We took two concrete decisions to improve our relations with Asia.

Firstly, we decided to substantially help an Asian country, after it was so severely struck by devastating floods. With more aid and more trade.

Secondly, we found internal consensus to sign the first Free Trade Agreement with an Asian country. This will stimulate economic growth and create jobs in both our regions. Because the Asian economies are increasingly integrated, it will boost economic relations between the EU and other Asian countries as well and it will pave the way forward for other agreements.

Mesdames et messieurs,

Cette rencontre entre l'Europe et l'Asie s'inscrit aussi dans la gouvernance mondiale. Nous sommes ces jours entre le Sommet de l'ONU sur les "Objectifs du Millénaire pour le Développement" d'un côté, et le prochain Sommet du G20 à Séoul ainsi que la rencontre à Cancun de l'autre côté.

Le G20 a bien travaillé en période de crise. Maintenant il doit faire ses preuves dans l'après crise. Je suis heureux qu'autour de cette table nous ayons les deux Pays, la Corée et la France, qui en détiennent la Présidence en 2010 et l'année prochaine.

Les deux prochains jours, nous aurons trois priorités.

La première priorité, c'est la gouvernance économique et financière mondiale. Notre dernière rencontre, à Beijing en 2008, sous la présidence du premier ministre Wen Jiabao, a eu lieu juste après le déclenchement de la crise financière. Depuis, nous avons tous retrouvé le chemin de la croissance économique grâce à nos efforts conjoints. Il nous reste toutefois un travail important pour prévenir qu'une telle crise puisse se reproduire.

La deuxième priorité, c'est le développement durable. Cela inclut un meilleur accès aux marchés, qui permettra d'accélérer l'adoption de techniques innovatrices. Cela inclut également la lutte contre les effets nocifs du changement climatique. L'enjeu pour le genre humain est trop important.

En troisième lieu, nous parlerons d'un ensemble de sujets de politique internationale et régionale. La coopération dans le domaine de la sécurité et dans celui de l'assistance de l'aide humanitaire. L'importance de la dignité humaine et du respect des droits de l'homme.

Sur ces sujets, en tant que président de cette rencontre, je ferai tout pour que nous puissions avoir un échange franc et fructueux. La confiance est la seule base d'une vraie coopération. La confiance entre nos pays, et entre l'Europe et l'Asie.

Excellencies, Distinguished Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I think it is only fitting to quote from the wisdom of Confucius who said that "a journey of a thousand miles begins with but a single step". Let us take yet another step in enhancing understanding and cooperation between our two continents. The same philosophy is enshrined in the Roman proverb "*Festine lente*" Hasten slowly. A sense of urgency but gradual action.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I declare the ASEM 8 open and I wish us all fruitful and rewarding discussions.
