



The ASEM 8 Visibility Team would like to present you the following report of the *EU for Asia Brussels Briefing: Asia-Europe Meeting: priorities and challenges* event which took place in Brussels on 16 September 2010.

## **Event report**

### **EU for Asia Brussels Briefing**

#### **Asia-Europe Meeting: priorities and challenges**

Thursday 16 September 2010

Max Kohnstamm Room, Résidence Palace, Brussels

#### **Introduction**

The eighth Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) to be held in Brussels on 4-5 October offers both regions a unique opportunity to build a stronger and more effective 21<sup>st</sup> Century partnership to tackle key global challenges. The summit, attended by 48 Asian and European leaders (or their representatives), will discuss joint action to reshape the international financial system, review global and regional hotspots and seek ways to tackle sustainable development challenges. Australia, New Zealand and Russia will be officially welcomed as new ASEM members. The European Policy Centre held a special pre-summit "Brussels Briefing" as part of its contribution to the Europe-Asia Policy Forum, an initiative which is funded by the EU and includes the EPC, the International Institute for Asian Studies in the Netherlands, the Asia Europe Foundation and the Singapore Institute for International Affairs.

The high-level panel included Thomas Roe, Asia Adviser; ASEM Counselor at the European Commission, Bertrand de Crombrugghe, Belgian Ambassador and Head of the ASEM 8 Task Force; Enrique A. Manalo, Ambassador of Philippines Mission to the European Union; Norio Maruyama, Head of the Political Affairs Section of the Mission of Japan to the European Union and Christopher Dent, Professor at Leeds University. Lay Hwee Yeo, Director of the EU Centre in Singapore and Wilhelm Hofmeister, Regional Programme Director of KAS's "Political Dialogue Asia" presented the new book they have jointly edited entitled "The Asia Europe Meeting: Engagement, Enlargement and Expectations." The debate was moderated by Shada Islam, EPC Senior Programme Executive.

#### **Focus on consultation, not breakthroughs**

Launched in 1996 as a forum for informal dialogue between Asian and European leaders, ASEM is not expected to produce "deliverable results" at each summit, panelists said. Talk shops such as ASEM can, however, be useful in creating mutual understanding and ASEM meetings can help facilitate decision-making in other fora such as the United Nations and the World Trade Organization. ASEM also facilitates EU-Asia relations on a bilateral and regional level. ASEM has in

some ways helped to foster stronger regional links among Asian countries and provides for more inter-action between smaller countries and larger nations in both Europe and Asia. Additionally, with its focus on politics, economics and culture, ASEM has injected a more multi-sectoral approach into the previously trade-dominated Asia-Europe agenda.

### **Major agenda items for ASEM8**

The ASEM8 agenda is the result of intense consultation with all ASEM partners. Global economic governance, especially reforming the international financial architecture will figure high on the agenda, following up on the ASEM 7 summit in Beijing in 2008 which was held only weeks after the outbreak of the financial crisis. Discussions in Brussels are likely to focus on how best to tackle global imbalances including in trade, income and development as well as questions related to international exchange rates, banking regulation and reform of international financial institutions such as the International Monetary Fund. Leaders will in fact use the opportunity offered by ASEM8 to help prepare for the G20 Summit which will be held in Seoul on November 11-12.

The summit's second day will be devoted to discussions on "sustainable development". With energy-rich Russia now set to join ASEM, issues related to energy security are expected to be discussed. Leaders are likely to discuss technology innovation and energy efficiency, with a focus on how governments can boost private sector investment in this area. The summit is expected to send out a message against trade protectionism and also discuss the state of play on climate change negotiations ahead of the conference to be held in Cancun, Mexico, from November 29-December 10. Additionally, Asia and Europe have an interest in talking to each other on establishing "social protection" safety nets, a relatively new concept which needs to be elaborated in further detail. Other topics on the agenda include the proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction, human rights, instability in the Korean Peninsula, the coming elections in Myanmar and the reinforcement of people-to-people contacts.

### **Leaders on their own**

Heads of state and government will take part in the summit, behind close-doors, with no advisers or assistants at their side. This is an ASEM tradition designed to ensure a free and frank exchange of views. Note-takers are in another room. The Brussels summit will be chaired by the President of the EU Council, Herman Van Rompuy but all 27 EU states will be able to express their views individually. Asian countries are especially insistent that ASEM is a forum for dialogue among countries.

Although ASEM is driven by the biennial summits, there is no dearth of activity in the two-year period between the leaders' meetings. There are frequent meetings of ASEM ministers, including foreign ministers, and senior officials on a range of issues including economics and finance, trade and labour.

Panelists admitted that some leaders, including a few from Asia, would not be able to attend the meeting but said that this was the exception since – unlike ministerial meetings – ASEM summits were traditionally well-attended. Those who were staying away had good reasons for their absence. A 100% attendance rate is understandably unachievable, especially given the increase in ASEM membership.

### **New ASEM members**

The entry of Russia, Australia and New Zealand will inject new dynamism into ASEM. All three countries see ASEM as vehicle to improve their links with Asian and European countries. Australia sees itself as an active middle power while Russia, as a "re-emerging power" wants concrete gains from ASEM. Participating in ASEM allows Russia to reassert its identity as an important regional power in both Europe and Asia.

### **ASEM's challenges**

While there is no agreement on setting up an "ASEM Secretariat", there is an emerging consensus on the need for a "minimum administrative tool" which would allow the collection and dissemination of information on ASEM. For the moment, the European Commission acts as a permanent coordinator of ASEM. ASEM members also want to increase the visibility of their relationship but this will require a stronger commitment from leaders and a stronger outreach programme to civil society actors. Additional bilateral meetings between leaders may help attract more attention to ASEM.

Among ways of enhancing ASEM visibility were suggestions that ASEM could initiate a "big project" – such as ASEM games – to attract public attention. Energy projects of interest to both Asia and Europe were also mooted and panelists agreed that ASEM must engage not only elites but also grass-root representatives.