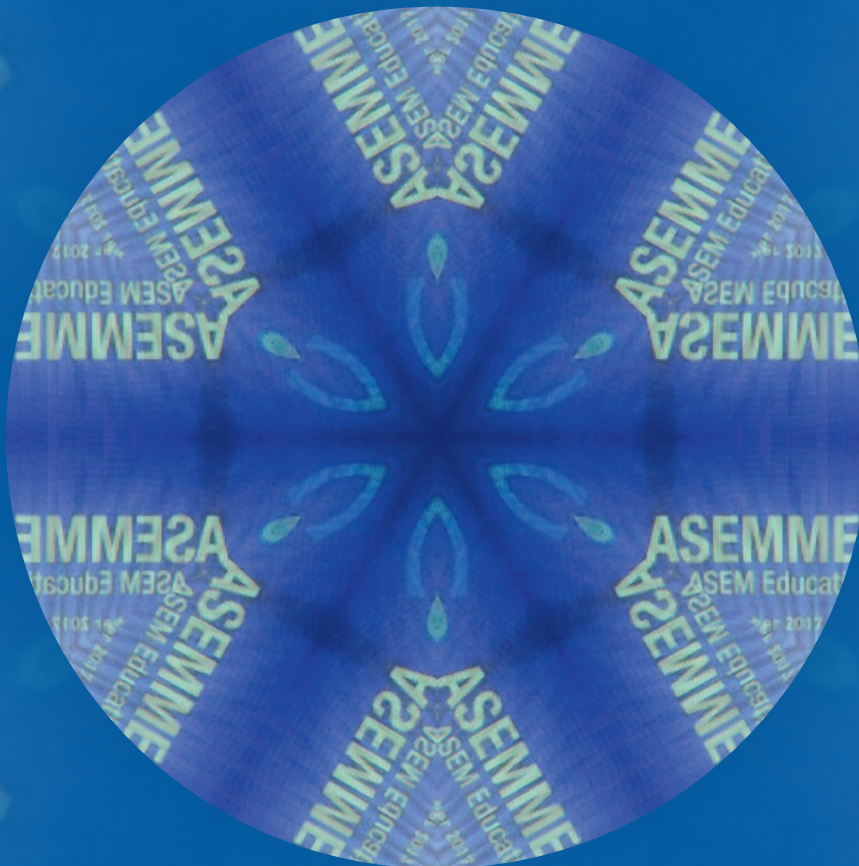


Alexandra Angress & Siegbert Wuttig (Editors)

LOOKING BACK AND LOOKING AHEAD:

# The ASEM Education Process – History and Vision

2008 – 2018





Alexandra Angress & Siegbert Wuttig (Editors)

Looking Back and Looking Ahead:  
**The ASEM Education Process –  
History and Vision**  
(2008 – 2018)

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# Preface by editors

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ASEM has developed into the central forum for dialogue and cooperation in various policy areas between Asia and Europe. Launched in 1996 with the first political Summit of Heads of State or Government held in Bangkok, the overall ASEM process was established as an interregional forum that has now evolved to encompass 53 partners – including 51 member countries in Asia and Europe, the ASEAN Secretariat and the European Commission. Education forms an integral policy part of ASEM's social, cultural and educational pillar and is seen as key to enhance mutual understanding and development of the two regions. This year, the ASEM Education Process (AEP) celebrates its tenth anniversary and anniversaries provide an excellent opportunity to reflect upon the past, the present and the future.

This publication examines AEP as a multilateral, transregional forum for dialogue and cooperation from different perspectives while acknowledging the very basis it has been built upon – openness, tolerance, trust and respect for each other. Upholding these principles seems more important than ever in this time of rapid changes, ambiguity and shifting paradigms from multilateralism to unilateralism as well as political tendencies to prioritise national egoisms over multilateral intergovernmental collaboration.

Education plays a pivotal role not only in providing the fundament for peaceful and fruitful cooperation and collaboration but is also key for addressing common future global challenges such as climate change, security, (im)migration and unemployment. This is what was recognised ten years ago with the launch of the ASEM Education Process and why education became one of the priority policy areas in the overarching ASEM dialogue.

With AEP entering now its second decade, the time is ripe to look back with a view of assessing what has been achieved already and look ahead as to what role AEP can play in order to successfully harness its potential. The ASEM Ministers of Education have already made their first reflections on this issue with the Seoul Declaration on the eve of AEP's tenth anniversary during the sixth ASEM Education Ministers' Meeting in 2017. One year before, the Heads of State or Government had started similar discussions on the overarching ASEM process through the Ulaanbaatar Declaration.

Against this backdrop and based on analyses of key policy documents of AEP, academic literature, working documents and written questionnaires as well as interviews conducted at ministerial conferences, senior officials' meetings or expert/working group meetings, we drafted the present publication with the aim to create, for the first time, a comprehensive, multifaceted portrait of AEP.

In the first part, we elaborate the context, history and development of the Education Process and identify achievements and challenges in order to draw lessons for the future. Taking consideration of these lessons and reflections made by the editors as well as ASEM members and stakeholders, the second part of this publication presents a number of ideas and possible scenarios that may serve as source of inspiration and discussion for future direction of AEP.

The way we are looking at the history and future of AEP creates the feeling of looking through a kaleidoscope. Different aspects of the Process are highlighted from different perspectives and represent persons with different fields of experience in AEP: ministers, senior officials from education ministries and senior experts of ASEM members and stakeholders, some of whom have accompanied AEP for the last ten years with many of them playing still an active role in the Process. The authors describe from their respective angle and role in AEP a different aspect resulting into a multifaceted picture of AEP – just like a kaleidoscope that can produce an infinite number of designs each time the cylindrical tube with coloured pieces of glass or pebbles at the bottom is rotated. Each new perspective, and this is the underlying rationale, can provide a valuable input and add diversity and value in drawing a wider picture of successful Asian-European cooperation and dialogue.

For this very reason, we would like to express our sincere gratitude to all authors that have contributed to this publication as well as experts who provided helpful insights in Asia-Europe relations.

We acknowledge, in particular, the valuable contributions made by key contributors and stakeholders and are first and foremost grateful to Dr Fiona Croke for her excellent and continuous support and guidance regarding improvements to quality, synthesis and content.

We also thank Martin Schifferings and Saskia Weißenbach at DAAD as well as Nadia Reyners and David Urban from the ASEM Education Secretariat (AES) Belgium for their highly appreciated input and support, in particular on questions pertaining to AEP policy-related matters.

Our special thanks go to our publishers, the Lemmens Verlag, for their wonderful support and cooperation throughout this project.

We would like to express our sincere gratitude for the support of Aschaffenburg University of Applied Sciences – both in providing logistical and technical support in managing this project and, in particular, by granting Professor Alexandra Angress half of a sabbatical semester to work on the project as co-editor and author.

Finally, we have great pleasure in acknowledging our gratitude to the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) whose financial support made this publication possible and enabled us to create something new, a kaleidoscope of AEP with the help of all participating contributors from Asia and Europe, our respected colleagues and friends.

Our sincere gratitude goes to all that have contributed their time and expertise to this book. Thank you – it has been a pleasure and honour to work with all of you.

We hope you find this publication useful and wish an inspiring reading.

**Prof. Dr Alexandra Angress**      **Dr Siegbert Wuttig**

*"... it is the right time  
to take stock of what  
has been achieved  
and what remains  
to be done to further  
develop Asian-  
European educational  
relations."*

# Executive Summary

Alexandra Angress/Siegbert Wuttig

*Ten years after the first ASEM Education Ministers' Meeting and the launch of the ASEM Education Process (AEP) it is the right time to take stock of what has been achieved and what remains to be done to further develop Asian-European educational relations and advance AEP in the future. In order to do so ASEM experts from both regions have contributed to this publication and supported the editors to draw a multifaceted picture of AEP's first decade and to present opinions and reflections.*

## LOOKING BACK: EDUCATION – ASEM'S RISING STAR DURING THE LAST TEN YEARS

In order better to understand the general context of AEP the publication, first of all, highlights the nature and role of the overall ASEM process. This political platform for informal dialogue and exchange of views in various policy areas between Asia and Europe establishes the wider background of AEP and is characterised by several key features such as informality, a broad agenda and non-institutionalisation. Since 2008, AEP has been part of ASEM's cultural, societal and educational pillar. Conceived originally as a top-down process, it has been exposed to a steady pluralisation of ASEM's structure regarding the involvement of stakeholders. Given the geo-political and geo-economic context that has changed dramatically compared to ASEM's founding days over twenty years ago, a new balance is needed between informality and effectiveness of the forum in order to enhance its institutional capacities and to produce more tangible results. This would help counteract voices criticising ASEM for being a mere "talking shop".

Education was not high on the political agenda in the early years of the ASEM process. It was only in 2006 during the Helsinki Summit that ASEM leaders "stressed the value of continued dialogue and exchange of best practices on questions related to education and training" leading to the establishment of regular ASEM Education Ministers' Meetings (ASEMME) as a logical consequence. Germany has been one of the key advocates and driving forces for the promotion of education and training onto the ASEM agenda volunteering also to host the first ASEMME in Berlin during 2008 as well as the first ASEM Education Secretariat (AES).

The rotating ASEM Education Secretariat is a unique structure in the ASEM process. Its establishment was agreed during ASEMME2 in Hanoi, Vietnam (2009). The reports of the first two Secretariats located in Bonn, Germany (2009-2013) and Jakarta, Indonesia (2013-2017), respectively, lay out in great detail the tasks and responsibilities of AES and the way of implementing AEP policies together with members and stakeholders in line with the informal

and voluntary nature of the process. The Secretariats demonstrate their strong dedicated coordination and close monitoring of ASEM education related projects and measures, contributing as “institutional memory” to an enhanced engagement and dialogue between Asia and Europe. The original AES mandate established during ASEMME2 was reconfirmed during the latest ASEMME6 in Seoul, Korea (2017), acknowledging AES as being “vital for the translation of dialogue between ASEM members into policy recommendations and practices” and thus playing a key role in further enhancing the collaboration and cooperation in the field of education.

Both AEP’s thematic agenda with the focus on higher education and the concept of the ASEM Education Secretariat were, particularly in the first years, very much influenced by ideas stemming from the European intergovernmental Bologna Process aiming at the creation of a common Higher Education Area. For this reason and in order to increase understanding of two outstanding large-scale projects of regional and interregional higher education cooperation – AEP and Bologna Process – a specific chapter in this publication analyses similarities and key differences in terms of governance models and outcomes of the two processes. Compared to the early years where AEP was modelled on the Bologna Process, it has changed over time: “Some discourses on the ASEM agenda appear to resemble the Bologna Process action lines, but the real meanings are constructed differently over time.”

In comparison to higher education, (T)VET has so far only played a minor role in AEP with only four cooperation activities put into practice up to date. However, more and more voices are being raised to give greater consideration to (T)VET which in the face of new global and (inter)regional challenges (e.g. 4th Industrial Revolution, climate change, (im)migration), is becoming increasingly important for “providing individuals with the core skills and personal competences required to access decent work and to adapt for better employability”. Against this backdrop, the wish expressed to advance (T)VET as a priority area of ASEM/AEP in the future is understandable and addressed to AEP’s policy level.

The Ministerial Conferences, the Senior Officials’ Meetings and the AES are considered to be key drivers of the ASEM education agenda and the Education Process. The analysis of their founding rationale, role and working methods as well as their interaction shows that there is room for improvement: introducing more informality and interaction during the meetings, prioritising the AEP agenda with fewer topics and utilising relevant stakeholders more are suggestions put forward in this context. Enhanced working methods and interaction of the three AEP key drivers contribute to making AEP more effective and enable more informed policy choices while ensuring regular outreach to relevant stakeholders, experts, working groups and civil society members. When further developing AEP, the dual nature of the Education Process, i.e. informality vs institutionalisation and dialogue vs delivery of tangible outcomes, will remain an important challenge that AEP key drivers will have to take into account.

Together with stakeholders such as the Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF), the three AEP key drivers are also main actors in the AEP political opinion forming. The interaction and collaboration between Senior Officials of ASEM Education Ministries, stakeholders and AES when preparing policy meetings and documents is democratic, respectful and inclusive. Common

political opinions in ASEM are achieved by way of consensus and are laid down in two types of non-binding documents agreed by Ministers: Chair's Conclusions of Ministerial Conferences and Declarations as outcomes of the meetings.

The Chair's Conclusions of the ASEM Education Ministers' Meetings in Berlin (2008), Hanoi (2009), Copenhagen (2011), Kuala Lumpur (2013), Riga (2015) and Seoul (2017) show a continued and stable focus of AEP on more or less the same four thematic priorities: (1) quality assurance and recognition; (2) engaging business/industry in education; (3) balanced mobility; (4) lifelong learning including (T)VET. The Conclusions also reveal that AEP produces numerous initiatives and projects, however, with a very limited number of participating ASEM countries. The latter and the trend of a waning number of Ministers attending the Ministerial Meetings can be interpreted as a challenge to consider when seeking to improve the political relevance of AEP.

## ACHIEVEMENTS, SHORTCOMINGS AND CHALLENGES

The impressive number of AEP initiatives and projects, as listed in the Chair's Conclusions, demonstrate the richness and dynamism of Asian-European collaboration and the commitment of members and stakeholders – both from top-down and bottom-up. That is why the editors decided to present some programmes, projects and (flagship) initiatives more in details such as ASEM-DUO, Asia-Europe Institute, the Joint Curriculum Development Project, the pilot project ASEM Work Placement as well as the EU initiative SHARE. All these activities contribute to advance the ASEM education agenda by illustrating success factors as well as lessons learned and showcase the (potential) benefit for the people in Asia and Europe.

An important achievement of the overall ASEM process is the establishment of ASEF – the only permanent institution of ASEM. ASEF is the most active stakeholder in AEP and supports AEP's educational priorities with numerous projects and initiatives in the field of people-to-people exchanges. ASEF has also the great merit of having initiated the biennial ASEM Rectors' Conference and Students' Forum (ARC), which gives valuable stakeholder input to the Ministerial Conferences.

To obtain a more representative picture of achievements and shortcomings of AEP, the editors analysed relevant policy documents and academic literature and asked ASEM experts and insiders for contributions and opinions on this. The findings show that considerable achievements have been realised in the past ten years both in quantitative and qualitative terms: launching numerous initiatives in the area of education and training; making education a priority of the ASEM process; developing mutual understanding and exchanging information on topics of common interest; and setting up a new model and structure for communication and collaboration including the ASEM Education Secretariat, which brings stability and continuity to AEP. The findings also provide evidence that a great many of strengths of ASEM and AEP resulting in achievements can at the same time also be seen as potential weaknesses, shortcomings or challenges: Some key features of ASEM dialogue, such as informality and consensus as well as the broad range of initiatives witnessing AEP's

very dynamism, can also be interpreted as shortcomings or challenges by those that would like to see a more institutionalised Education Process and plead for more tangible results, a more effective and systematic output orientation as well as the establishment of working mechanisms and processes of monitoring and follow-up. The findings on AEP's achievements and shortcomings provide an important basis to reflect on how to harness constructively the potential of ASEM/AEP to advance the Education Process and successfully prepare the Asia-Europe strategic partnership in education for its next decade.

## LOOKING AHEAD TO AEP'S SECOND DECADE – OPINIONS AND REFLECTIONS ON THE FUTURE

Many aspects of the future development of AEP are addressed in the Seoul Declaration agreed by Ministers during ASEMME6 in 2017 – this official document is an important milestone as it is the first Declaration in AEP's history and encompasses for the first time a common political vision for AEP's future shared by the entire ASEM family. The visionary, non-binding document seeks to pave the way for advancing AEP with a focus on people-to-people connectivity and a number of other priorities such as increasing the employability of young people or the use of new technologies to increase accessibility of education for everyone. "However, unfortunately [and probably due to the informal nature of the AEP], the ambition has been left wanting as there is no clear vision or commitment." Even if the Declaration is in some respects too vague and noncommittal, it has the potential to impact strongly the political and practical agenda of AEP going forward into the next decade – provided the main political actors of the Education Process can agree on a coherent policy framework and corresponding strategic implementation goals.

During the Seoul Meeting, Ministers also confirmed the important role of the ASEM Education Secretariat (AES) and welcomed Belgium as host of the Secretariat for the period 2017 to 2021. AES Belgium will be a key driver in shaping AEP's future and concentrate their work in the coming years on facilitating the collaboration and dialogue in education between Asia and Europe. The Secretariat's two main strategies in this context are: (1) to support the optimisation of AEP (e.g. by modifying the format of official meetings); (2) to make information and dissemination more efficient and AEP more visible.

With regard to the future of Asia-Europe cooperation in education, the European Union can play a major role. The EU, a partner of ASEM since its inception, "shares the strong interest of ASEM members in modernisation and internationalisation, enhanced use of ICT in education, increased mobility and the promotion of links between education, research, and business, as well as the promotion of the 'global citizenship' concept". Asia-Europe relations are part of the EU's Global Strategy and cooperation of both regions in the fields of education and research profits greatly from EU programmes such as Erasmus+ and HORIZON supporting cooperation and mobility of students, researchers and academic staff. Looking ahead, the EU believes that AEP should remain a forum for practical cooperation and informal dialogue "rather than becoming a result-oriented process or decision-making body".

In order to cover a wider range of opinions on the future of the ASEM Education Process, the editors analysed AEP policy documents and results of the member survey carried out by the Korean host in preparation of ASEMME6, and asked ASEM members, stakeholders and other experts in the field from Asia and Europe for contributions which were analysed and clustered in the next step. In conclusion, eight key areas where action is needed were identified: (1) Implementing new ideas while maintaining the “tried-and-tested”; (2) Bringing AEP closer to the overarching ASEM process; (3) Developing people-to-people connectivity as a guiding principle of AEP; (4) Meeting new global challenges by expanding both AEP’s current thematic priorities as well as its scope of educational areas; (5) Strengthening dialogue and cooperation; (6) Ensuring a more tangible cooperation and producing concrete results; (7) Improving effectiveness of AEP; (8) Making AEP and its success stories more visible.

In the concluding chapter of this publication, the editors present four options for AEP’s future – ranging from terminating the Education Process to its complete institutionalisation – with a clear preference for Option 3, which suggests continuing AEP in its current form based on dialogue and cooperation but with a wide range of modifications and new elements, including enhanced political management tools for AEP. To advance AEP in the identified key areas with need for action, a catalogue of political objectives, fields of action and potential activities is proposed.

Which activities and at what time ASEM members are willing and ready to implement and support, has to be decided at policy-making level. In this context, the editors suggest the introduction of a strategic AEP action plan including commonly agreed activities, defined political targets and follow-up measures with the aim of optimising the political steering of the Education Process and making AEP fit for the future – not least to improve its capacity to deepen Asia-Europe relations and solve global challenges together.

# Welcome Address

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**Anja Karliczek**

Member of the German *Bundestag*,  
Federal Minister of Education and Research, Germany

Europe and Asia have enjoyed close ties for centuries, also in the realm of education and research. Because we can only solve global challenges if we work together I welcome the growing significance of this cooperation. The cooperation focuses on questions of sustainable economic development and environmental protection but also migration.

The Asia-Europe Meeting, or ASEM, is the right forum for this dialogue. We expect the meeting to build bridges, develop trust and strengthen cooperation. With 51 partner countries in Asia and Europe, ASEM represents 62 percent of global population and more than 57 percent of global economic output. These figures are especially impressive because the regions, states and institutions involved in ASEM are widely divergent in terms of their culture and political systems.

As the German Federal Minister of Education and Research, I am particularly delighted that many Asian countries are key partners for us also in the area of education, research and academia. We initiated the ASEM Education Process in 2008, and it was an honour for the Federal Ministry of Education and Research to host the first ASEM Education Ministers' Meeting under the theme "Education and Training for Tomorrow: Common Perspectives in Asia and Europe". That first meeting in Berlin laid the foundation for a more in-depth exchange. From 2009 to 2013, the first ASEM Education Secretariat played an important role in starting joint initiatives and activities. It was established at the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) in the city of Bonn. The DAAD went on to firmly anchor Germany's position in the ASEM Education Process – in the name of the Federal Ministry of Education and Research.

The ASEM Education Process is now celebrating its tenth anniversary. We are proud of the progress we have made: Asian and European higher education institutions have launched ASEM modules in a number of different study programmes. Master's courses have been initiated. And many young people have participated in the ASEM Work Placement Programme to do an internship in a company on the other continent and gain insights into that continent's world of work. The programme has shown that German students, apprentices and teaching professionals see Asian countries as attractive destinations. I believe that we in Europe can learn a lot from Asia, for example when it comes to new technologies and smart manufacturing.

It is therefore crucial that we expand this cooperation – to my mind notably in the areas of vocational education and training and lifelong learning as digital technology will profoundly change the world of work. It is very important to me that we take advantage of the opportunities offered by an interconnected world and advance internationalisation.

We should be breaking down boundaries instead of erecting new ones in order to make the bridge between European and Asian regions, countries and institutions stronger and stronger.

I am delighted that this publication supported by the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research enables us to take stock and turn our eyes to the future.

I would like to thank the editors and all the authors from Asia and Europe who contributed their perspectives and visions.

Last but not least, I wish you an interesting read!

*“We should be breaking down boundaries instead of erecting new ones in order to make the bridge between European and Asian regions, countries and institutions stronger and stronger.”*

# Welcome Address

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**Prof. Dr Mohamad Nasir**  
Minister of Research, Technology and Higher Education,  
Republic of Indonesia

First and foremost, on behalf of the Government of the Republic of Indonesia, I would like to extend my deepest gratitude to Prof. Dr Angress and Dr Wuttig for their valuable contribution in upholding the significance of the ASEM Education Process by creating a book entitled “Looking Back and Looking Ahead: The ASEM Education Process – History and Vision”. The intentions of the two well-known editors, who have been involved in the ASEM Education Process since the first ASEM Education Ministers’ Meeting (ASEMME1) in Berlin, are symbiotic and appropriately suited to capturing the achievements and visions of ASEM education cooperation to the world of education.

The ASEM Education Process has a political focus in four priority areas namely: Quality Assurance and Recognition; Engaging Business and Industry in Education; Balanced Mobility and Lifelong Learning including Vocational Education and Training. The four priority areas have crafted pathways and opportunities for ASEM partners to cooperate and collaborate and to strengthen the education system of their countries. Indonesia has also participated in the Process by contributing to initiatives such as ASEM Joint Curriculum Development, ASEM Work Placement Programme and ASEM Recognition Bridging Declaration. One of the most significant and major contributions Indonesia has made in terms of progressing the ASEM Education Process agenda was to host the ASEM Education Secretariat (AES) in Jakarta from 1 October 2013 to 30 November 2017. During this period, AES Jakarta introduced and published the ASEM Education Gazette which increased the visibility and uniqueness of the ASEM Education Process and also created a space for members to reflect on achievements and challenges while also improving communication between ASEM partners. Moreover, AES Jakarta successfully assisted Latvia and Republic of Korea in preparing the fifth ASEM Education Ministers’ Meeting (ASEMME5) and sixth ASEM Education Ministers’ Meeting (ASEMME6) and also worked in collaboration with ASEM partners and stakeholders to establish working groups and expert level meetings and to enhance communication between partners using newsletters, website and regular email updates.

In a globalised world and in view of the advancement of digitalisation, more intensive relations and cooperation between Asia and Europe are imperative particularly in the field of education. In this context, I wish to complement the ASEM Education Ministers, Senior Officials, partners and stakeholders for establishing a strategic education network. The creation of network type cooperation through the ASEM Education Process has enhanced the internationalisation of higher education for ASEM partners for over a decade, since 2008, and to

date has achieved more than 100 meetings at Ministerial, Senior Official, working group and expert level and bears witness to the development of a strategic network between ASEM partners in Asia and Europe in the field of education.

As we move through the 4th Industrial Revolution, education and knowledge has become the prime mover and the engine that energises societal progress and economic development. It is in this context that I believe this book will serve as a scholarly contribution to all readers and especially to ASEM partners to understanding the ideologies of ASEM Heads of States and Leaders who agreed to boost the education pillar during the ASEM6 Summit in Helsinki, Finland in 2006.

Furthermore, this book will be beneficial to ASEM partners, stakeholders, international organisations and the wider public who want to explore and learn from successful ASEM Education Process initiatives and projects. The publication also will recall to memory the successes of the ASEM Education Process and increase the synergies created through ASEM education cooperation and collaboration between Asia and Europe.

I also believe this book could stimulate and guide researchers to conduct more research into the ASEM Education Process, which will ultimately contribute to the enhancement of networks and activities between Asia and Europe in the field of education.

Lastly, I would like to extend my sincere appreciation and congratulation to the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research, authors, contributors and editors for their excellent and diligent work, effort and support in making the publication of this book a success.

Thank you and happy reading!

*“In a globalised world and in view of the advancement of digitalisation, more intensive relations and cooperation between Asia and Europe are imperative particularly in the field of education.”*

# Looking back – History and taking stock

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*“The idea of an  
Asia-Europe  
Meeting (ASEM)  
has Asian roots.”*

## THE POLITICAL CONTEXT

# ASEM – (more than?) a forum of dialogue between Asia and Europe

Sebastian Bersick/Julia Schwerbrock

*The idea of an Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) has Asian roots. At the most fundamental level ASEM's rationale is to connect Asia and Europe. ASEM was established in 1996 to provide Heads of State or Government from both regions a platform for informal dialogue and exchange of views and to enable cooperation on an equal basis, and to achieve consensus in order to develop common ground and interests. By now, ASEM has developed into the central forum for dialogue and cooperation between Asia and Europe.*

## EVOLUTION AND RATIONALE OF ASEM

During 1994 and as a consequence of the end of systemic bi-polarity in international relations, Singaporean Senior Officials in the Prime Minister's office developed the idea of a regular meeting between Asian and European leaders. An "Asia-Europe Summit" was proposed as a new forum for dialogue and cooperation between interested Asian and European countries with the aim to deepening economic relations specifically. In addition, the then seven members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam, had the ambition to engage the emerging People's Republic of China (henceforth China) at both an intra- and inter-regional level through engagement with Europe. Facing both strong American-European relations (e.g. North Atlantic Treaty Organization, NATO) and deepening American-Asian relations (e.g. Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation Forum, APEC), but also weak Asian-European relations, ASEM was expected to become the "missing link" in a newly developing post-cold war trilateral international environment. A mixture of economic, geo-economic, geo-political and politico-security motives thus triggered the start of the ASEM process. In addition, it was felt by all participants that the evolution of stronger Asian-European relations would contribute to preventing the "Clash of Civilizations" hypothesised by Samuel Huntington in his 1993 Foreign Affairs article.

The first ASEM Summit was held in Bangkok in 1996. Participants considered the Summit as the start of a process – the ASEM process. The framing of ASEM as a process demonstrates

*"The idea of an Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) has Asian roots. At the most fundamental level ASEM's rationale is to connect Asia and Europe."*

*First  
ASEM Summit,  
Bangkok 1996*



Photo: Asia-Europe Foundation

the evolutionary approach of this new initiative. ASEM was established as an inter-regional forum including the ASEAN Member States, China, Japan and the Republic of Korea on the Asian side as well as the then 15 EU Member States (Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Greece, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Ireland, Luxembourg, Portugal, Spain, the Netherlands, Sweden and the United Kingdom) and the European Commission on the European side. ASEM Summits are held on a biennial basis ever since with venues alternating between Asia and Europe (London 1998, Seoul 2000, Copenhagen 2002, Hanoi 2004, Helsinki 2006, Beijing 2008, Brussels 2010, Vientiane 2012, Milan 2014, Ulaanbaatar 2016). The twelfth ASEM Summit will be held in October this year in Brussels. ASEM Summits are complemented by Ministerial Meetings on foreign affairs, finance, economy, culture, education, labour, environment and transport. Furthermore, various Senior Officials' Meetings as well as seminars and meetings on a broad variety of topics are organised. Because ASEM was originally conceptualised as a top-down process, only government representatives participated in the first ASEM Summit. Yet, there has been a steady pluralisation of ASEM's actor structure and as a consequence, the private sector (Asia-Europe Business Forum, AEBF), parliaments (Asia-Europe Parliamentary Partnership Meetings, ASEP) as well as civil society (Asia-Europe Foundation, ASEF, Asia-Europe People's Forum, AEPF, Asia-Europe Young Leaders Summit, ASEFYL) have been incorporated into ASEM to various extents and limitations. As Gilson puts it: "[T]here is a lot of rhetoric about [the] inclusion of [civil society] that is not backed by serious commitment."<sup>1</sup>

## ASEM CHARACTERISTICS

Over time, ASEM has grown from 26 to currently 53 members. The number of members has more than doubled within two decades which is a clear sign of the attractiveness of this forum. Today, the European side comprises all 28 members of the EU plus Switzerland and Norway. On the Asian side, all ten ASEAN members (the original seven plus Cambodia, Laos and Myanmar), India, Australia, New Zealand, Mongolia, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Russia and Kazakhstan have joined ASEM. Besides these 51 countries, also two regional organisations participate in ASEM: the EU, since 1996, and ASEAN, represented by the ASEAN Secretariat since 2008. ASEM members combine approximately 60% of the world's population, 60% of global GNP and 60% of global trade.

While the Heads of State or Government, the Presidents of the Council of the European Union and of the European Commission as well as the ASEAN Secretary General represent the highest level of decision making, the responsibility for steering the overall ASEM process lies within the Foreign Ministers' Meeting. In addition, ASEM affairs are managed by four coordinators, two from each region. The coordinators represent the inter-regional structure of ASEM. Whereas the European External Action Service (EEAS) is the only permanent member, the second European coordinator is the country holding the presidency of the Council of the EU. Consequently, the second European coordinator changes every six months. On the Asian side, ASEAN is represented by one coordinator (presently the Philippines) and the non-ASEAN countries by the other coordinator (presently Pakistan), both rotating every two years.

ASEM activities and initiatives cover a broad variety of issue areas ranging from security challenges and climate change to trade and investment and fall into three thematic clusters, the so called ASEM pillars: the economic pillar, the political pillar and the cultural, social and educational pillar. The economic pillar had been severely weakened by the fact that the Economic Ministers' Meeting (EMM) had been suspended for more than a decade until last year when a ministerial meeting took place in Seoul.<sup>2</sup> The EMM is now to be held on a biennial basis.

European and Asian ASEM participants are quite unlike regarding their approaches to regional integration: the EU is a self-proclaimed normative power *sui generis*, partially pooling national sovereignty via EU structures whereas Asian state actors refrain from pooling sovereignty. The latter results in a preference for inter-governmental rather than supra-national forms of governance. Consequently, potential tensions with regard to the normative-institutional asymmetry between Europe and Asia need to be addressed. Consensus and equality are key concepts of ASEM in order to ensure a basis for dialogue. Furthermore, informality and openness (open regionalism) are key features. This implies that statements and declarations issued within the scope of ASEM are non-binding. Cooperation within ASEM, therefore, shall not compromise national sovereignty and shall not be institutionalised. According to the Asia-Europe Cooperation Framework (AECF) "as an informal process, ASEM need not to be institutionalised. It should stimulate and facilitate progress in other fora"<sup>3</sup>. ASEM's only institutionalised, legally binding structure is the Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF) founded in 1997 and located in Singapore. The founding of ASEF and the formation of the ASEM Trans-Eurasia Information Network (TEIN) launched in 2000, which is the world's largest research and education network connecting over 50 million academics, are considered to be key achievements of the ASEM process.

### **ASEM exhibits eight essential characteristics, each of which incorporates its own respective strengths and weaknesses<sup>4</sup>:**

**1. Enlargement:** On the one hand, the doubling of participants since 1996 signals ASEM's attractiveness and relevance. On the other hand, the enlargement is accompanied by an increased problem of collective action which impedes on the development and implementation of common interests or collective goods as well as their potential enforcement outside of ASEM, e.g. in the UN, WTO or G20.

*"ASEM activities and initiatives cover a broad variety of issue areas ranging from security challenges and climate change to trade and investment and fall into three thematic clusters, the so called ASEM pillars: the economic pillar, the political pillar and the cultural, social and educational pillar."*

**2. Exclusion of the USA:** On the one hand, the exclusion of the USA provides ASEM with a comparative advantage, because ASEM allows for discussing policy issues detached from US interests. On the other hand, ASEM lacks political importance, because it functions without the political weight of the USA.

**3. Informality:** On the one hand, informality shall allow for non-binding exchanges and prevent from an institutionalisation of ASEM. On the other hand, there is no agreement on how the flexibility resulting from informality could be transformed into an advantage by generating tangible and concrete results.

**4. Open regionalism:** On the one hand, the concept of voluntary and unilateral trade liberalisation and legally non-binding regional economic integration constitutes an alternative model to the legally binding approach to regional economic integration as it is practiced in the EU. On the other hand, ASEM has not succeeded in fostering inter-regional economic integration, neither based on the Asian, nor based on the European approach.

**5. Political projects:** On the one hand, ASEM provides participants with a framework for dialogue and cooperation as well as for increasing the awareness of Asia-Europe relations in the public perception by means of a joint political project. On the other hand, ASEM has so far not developed an appropriate political project.

**6. Pluralisation:** On the one hand, the ASEM process has opened up to also include non-state actors. On the other hand, civil society actors have so far been denied an agenda-setting function.

**7. Broad agenda:** On the one hand, it is ASEM's core objective to enhance dialogue and cooperation of state and non-state actors from both Asia and Europe. On the other hand, ASEM's broad agenda results in a lack of focus.

**8. Non-institutionalisation:** On the one hand, non-institutionalisation was a *de facto* precondition for ASEM's launch as there was no interest among the original participants to establish a more formal institution and – probably even more important – the USA would have prevented ASEM in the first place because Washington feared that a formal institution could provide a stepping stone for an East-Asian economic bloc to evolve.<sup>5</sup> On the other hand, by now the international environment has changed quite fundamentally and so have the functional and managerial issues that are dealt with in the ASEM context.

## THE ASEM EDUCATION PROCESS

One important policy field ASEM members deal with is education. The ASEM Education Process, which is part of ASEM's cultural, social and educational pillar, started in 2008. As early as the year 2000, it was noted in the Asia-Europe Cooperation Framework (AECF), that in the social, cultural and educational fields, "[...] **key priorities** shall include enhancing our contacts and exchanges in the field of education, including student, academic and

information exchanges, inter-university cooperation, [...], exploring the possibilities for mutual recognition of degrees and licenses between our educational and related institutions, and substantially increasing student exchanges between our two regions, [...] [emphasis added]". The ASEM Education Process has a political level, i.e. ministerial meetings, as well as a stakeholder level comprising, inter alia, ASEF, the ASEM Lifelong Learning Hub, the OECD, the UNESCO as well as several European and Asian institutions.<sup>6</sup>

The ASEM Education Ministers' Meeting (ASEMME) alternates between Asia and Europe and takes place on a biennial basis. ASEMME6 was held in the Republic of Korea in 2017. Previous ASEMME were held in Germany (2008), Vietnam (2009), Denmark (2011), Malaysia (2013) and Latvia (2015). The next meeting is scheduled for 2019 in Romania. ASEM Education Ministers proactively shape the structure of their cooperation. In 2009, during ASEMME2, Ministers decided to establish a rotating ASEM Education Secretariat with the Asian and the European side taking turns in hosting the Secretariat.<sup>7</sup> The first such Secretariat was hosted by Germany (2009–2013) before Indonesia took over (2013–2017).<sup>8</sup> Currently, Belgium is hosting the Secretariat (2017–2021).<sup>9</sup>

Over the past decade a variety of different initiatives emerged within the scope of the ASEM Education Process, like a summer university that is annually organised by ASEF and the biennial ASEM Rectors' Conference and Students' Forum to strengthen the role of civil society actors in the ASEM Education Process and to provide policy recommendations for the ASEMME. The creation of an ASEM Curriculum Development Project and the establishment of an ASEM Education Task Force are both German initiatives. The latter was announced in 2016 and aims at fostering transparency and strengthening the visibility of the ASEM Education Process.<sup>10</sup>

The pattern of involvement showcases that Asian countries appear to have a stronger interest in the Process than their European counterparts. Three out of ASEM's current twenty so-called tangible cooperation areas are education-related: Higher Education, Vocational Training & Skills Development and Education and Human Resources Development – with Finland, India, Indonesia and the Republic of Korea, i.e. one European and three Asian members, being the only countries that have signed up as participating partners for all three education-related areas. Whereas almost half of the Asian ASEM members signed up for the Vocational Training & Skills Development, only one third of the European ASEM members did so. Regarding Higher Education as well as Education and Human Resources Development the Asian participants outnumber the European ones by far<sup>11</sup> – despite the fact that ASEM has only 21 Asian member countries and 30 European ones.

The results of a study on European perceptions of Asia point to the important role of the ASEM Education Process. There is sound reason to invest in an Asia-Europe Knowledge Community and to enlarge and strengthen ASEM's educational activities and research collaboration further. There is a need to share both regions' "epistemological strength by linking and integrating the production and communication of knowledge". Investment in research and education is seen "as the key to promote enhanced mutual understanding and development of the two regions' peoples [...]"<sup>12</sup>. In this context the importance of the

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bottom-up dimension in Asia-Europe relations is demonstrated by the demand from civil society actors to become stakeholders and play an active role in the broader process of Eurasian integration. An example is the new initiative of the Young Eurasian Forum (YEF) for junior academics from Europe and Asia. The first YEF, themed “Transboundary Energy Relations: Promoting Cooperation and Addressing Conflict” was held in July 2018 at Ruhr-University Bochum (RUB) in Germany.

### ASEM, CHINA AND THE “BELT AND ROAD INITIATIVE”: TOWARDS EURASIAN INTEGRATION

ASEM is increasingly challenged by the question of whether or not it is suited and able to have a shaping influence on the growing cooperation and economic integration within and between Asia and Europe. The latter is for instance becoming evident in the increase of bilateral free trade agreements as well as China’s “Belt and Road Initiative” (BRI), also known as “One Belt, One Road” initiative or the “New Silk Road”. The initiative is, arguably, the boldest and most ambitious foreign policy strategy in China’s history. Civil society actors emphasise that ASEM plays an important role in this context. In the framework of AEPF 2016, NGOs have for example urged ASEM to establish a joint “ASEM Masterplan for Asia-Europe Sustainable Connectivity”.

BRI was announced by Chinese President Xi Jinping in 2013 and provides China’s diplomacy with a new framework including institutions such as the Belt and Road Forum as a platform intended to be held biennially. By highlighting the topic of connectivity, BRI adds new impetus to intra-regional integration and inter-regional integration across the Eurasian landmass and beyond. Yet, BRI is not only an infrastructure initiative, but also aims at economic and financial integration and comprises so-called people-to-people bonds with academic and student exchanges being explicitly named.<sup>13</sup> BRI even reaches far beyond Eurasia, spanning Africa to a significant extent and thus providing prospects for cooperation.<sup>14</sup> China has started to provide leadership in regional economic and financial governance by creating new financial institutions that support the development of BRI. Within the Asian Infrastructure and Investment Bank (AIIB) Asian, African and European actors are cooperating upon a Chinese initiative. The AIIB receives technical support from the European Investment Bank (EIB). The EIB also allows for future co-funding of AIIB projects. Furthermore, the EU-China Connectivity Platform was established and experts from the European Investment Bank (EIB), the EU Commission and China’s Silk Road Fund formed a joint working group in 2015.

With the onset of BRI the role of Russia, and the role of China-Russia relations, in contemporary processes of Eurasian integration is growing. Russia joined the ASEM process on the Asian side and the implications of Moscow’s general Asia-turn for the EU are considerable<sup>15</sup>, especially with regard to the China-Russia strategic partnership which is progressively deepened, e.g. within the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). The SCO is a regional institution, initiated by China and formally established in 2003. Its founding members are China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. Pakistan and India acceded last year. The accession is surprising for two reasons: firstly because of the conflict between

Pakistan and India, and secondly because India perceives China as a strategic competitor in the region. India – like Japan – thus did not participate in the Belt and Road Forum in May 2017 in Beijing. At the same time, the development of the SCO, which is primarily dealing with security issues, demonstrates the potential for cooperation and for conflict in Eurasia and the political will of the involved actors to address the related challenges cooperatively in a regional organisation.

China-Russia relations do also extend to the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), which is considered to be an alternative approach to regional economic integration in what Stefanova calls wider Europe.<sup>16</sup> China signed a trade and economic cooperation agreement with the EAEU in May 2018, that covers, inter alia, customs cooperation and electronic authentication.<sup>17</sup> The EAEU comprises Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Russia, with Moldova having been granted observer status. Negotiations on an interim free trade agreement between the EAEU and Iran as well as negotiations between the EAEU and Israel, Serbia and Singapore are ongoing.<sup>18</sup>

ASEM leaders have only recently started to react to the changing geo-political and geo-economic Eurasian environment by strongly emphasising the importance of connectivity during the ASEM Summit in 2016 and, as Gaens holds, “officially turned the promotion of connectivity into ASEM’s main mission”<sup>19</sup>. As initial steps, the ASEM Pathfinder Group on Connectivity was founded in 2016<sup>20</sup> and ASEM Foreign Ministers in 2017 agreed on an ASEM definition of connectivity. ASEM leaders are thus reacting to China’s interest in connectivity and its impact on Eurasian economic integration. China is particularly active in organising connectivity-related ASEM events<sup>21</sup> and is hosting four major diplomatic events in 2018/19, including the SCO Summit, the Bo’ao Forum, the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC), and the first China International Import Expo. With regard to ASEM, Beijing was also pushing for a restart of the Economic Ministers’ Meeting. Against the backdrop of China’s interest in the BRI and the further economic integration of Eurasia, its mid- to long-term goal of establishing a free trade agreement with the EU and the ongoing negotiations for an EU-China investment agreement, Beijing strongly advocated for the revitalisation of the EMM as it hopes to gain economically and strategically from strengthening ASEM’s economic pillar.

In view of the geo-political changes and due to the new regional and global dynamics the EU has also recently agreed to deal with the security implications of Eurasian connectivity and ASEM’s role in it more closely by endorsing the need for “Enhanced EU Security Cooperation in and with Asia”.<sup>22</sup> Accordingly, “[t]he Council recognises the increasing importance of Asian security for European interests and emphasises that Asian countries, regional organisations and platforms, such as the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM), are crucial to help secure a more stable and peaceful world. The Council stresses that efforts to enhance EU-Asia security cooperation on Euro-Asia connectivity should be reinforcing”<sup>23</sup>.

The EU is thus increasingly taking into account that the geo-political and geo-economic context of ASEM has changed dramatically since the first ASEM Summit took place 22 years ago. Given the changing systemic environment as well as the rising focus on geo-politics,

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*“ASEM is criticised for being a talking shop. Nonetheless, further proposals for a reform of ASEM’s modus operandi were not addressed during the eleventh ASEM Summit in Mongolia in 2016. ASEM’s institutional set-up needs to be improved in order to fully tap its potential by producing more tangible results. It is therefore time to enhance ASEM’s institutional capacities.”*

the importance of cooperation between Asia and Europe is increasing. In view of recent developments such as China’s BRI, the US’ unilateral turn, especially in matters relating to regional and global governance, as well as the worsening of EU-Russia and EU-US relations, the need for an institution that deals with the Eurasian dimension of Asia-Europe affairs is evolving. It remains to be seen though how the different Eurasian institutions and organisations will impact on the further evolution of the international political economy of Eurasia. Within this development, ASEM has the potential to play a pivotal role since major Eurasian actors are already involved. Nevertheless, it is an open question whether processes of Eurasian integration, like BRI, SCO, or the EAEU will complement the EU’s approach to regional integration or whether largely competitive patterns or even conflict will dominate.

Under these new systemic conditions ASEM is challenged to live up to its potential. Due to the informality, the principle of consensus, the legally non-binding nature of the cooperation, the lack of tangible results, the lack of a secretariat as well as institutional memory and because of a multitude of actors and their often diverging interests, ASEM is criticised for being a talking shop.<sup>24</sup> Nonetheless, further proposals for a reform of ASEM’s modus operandi were not addressed during the eleventh ASEM Summit in Mongolia in 2016.

ASEM’s institutional set-up needs to be improved in order to fully tap its potential by producing more tangible results. It is therefore time to enhance ASEM’s institutional capacities. The original reasons for the policy of non-institutionalisation and informality are losing relevance as the room for manoeuvre increases to develop a new balance between informality and effectiveness. During 1999, the Asia-Europe Vision Group<sup>25</sup> proposed a “lean but effective secretariat” and as such the establishment of the ASEM Education Secretariat has provided the overall ASEM process with a valuable example.

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- <sup>9</sup> Ibidem, p. 3.
- <sup>10</sup> Ibidem, p. 2 and p. 8.
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*"The early years – the growing  
interest of ASEM countries in education."*

## DISCOVERING EDUCATION IN THE ASEM PROCESS (1996 – 2008)

# Views from within and Germany's role

Susanne Burger

*Since 2004, in particular, the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) has been increasingly dealing with the ASEM process. One reason for this development is the growing interest of ASEM countries to give education, as major issue for the future, a more prominent role in the political dialogue of ASEM. Furthermore, the initiatives Germany had taken in this field, not least by hosting the first ASEM Ministerial Meeting on Education in 2008, required significant input and contributions in order to lay the foundations for the ASEM Education Process. Within the BMBF, the unit responsible for EU programmes and international vocational education and training, which I headed at that time, was ideally positioned when education became a priority area in the ASEM dialogue. But first let us take a look at how things had developed prior to this and before education became a core issue on the ASEM agenda.*

## THE EARLY YEARS: EDUCATION IN ASEM BETWEEN 1996 AND 2006

When the sixth ASEM Summit in Helsinki (2006) welcomed Germany's offer to host the first ASEM Conference of Ministers responsible for Education in 2008, a little more than 10 years had passed since the launch of the political ASEM process in 1996. At an early stage of ASEM, education had not been high on the political agenda for Heads of State or Government. It was only at the ASEM Summit in Seoul (Korea) in 2000 that education became more prominent and "Leaders recognized the crucial importance of education and agreed that a key priority should be to enhance the contacts and exchanges in this field, including student and academic exchanges, interuniversity cooperation and the facilitation of electronic networking between schools in the two regions."<sup>1</sup> In this context, ASEM leaders "undertook to explore the possibility of mutual recognition of degrees" between educational institutions across Asia and Europe.

A paper presented by the Asia-Europe Vision Group in 1999<sup>2</sup> provided the decisive momentum for giving education a more prominent role in the ASEM process. In its report, the Vision Group, which had been established at the London ASEM Summit in 1998, urged ASEM leaders to "issue an ASEM Declaration on Education" at their next summit in Seoul. In the same document, the Vision Group recommended quite a number of concrete actions to encourage exchange and cooperation between Asia and Europe (e.g. ASEM Scholarship Scheme for post-graduate students and ASEM Visiting Professorships). Finally, they proposed regular meetings of the ASEM Education Ministers "to discuss, decide upon, benchmark and review the progress of ASEM education initiatives."<sup>3</sup>

*"At an early stage of ASEM, education had not been high on the political agenda for Heads of State or Government. It was only at the ASEM Summit in Seoul (Korea) in 2000 that education became more prominent."*

*“During the Helsinki Summit, ASEM leaders ‘stressed the value of continued dialogue and exchange of best practices on questions related to education and training’. In this context, the establishment of regular ASEM Ministers’ Meetings on Education (ASEMME) became a logical consequence. Germany, as one of the driving forces for the promotion of education and training onto the ASEM agenda, volunteered to host the first ASEMME.”*

At the ASEM Summits in Copenhagen (2002) and Hanoi (2004), ASEM leaders stressed the importance of education to increase employability<sup>4</sup> and even outlined some priorities in the field of education, higher education and training, such as “stepping up educational exchanges” and “giving a greater place in education to improving knowledge of other cultures and civilizations”.<sup>5</sup>

During the technical meetings of 2002 in Beijing and 2003 in Hanoi, ASEM countries informally dealt with employment issues for the first time. During the ASEM Employment Conference (“Future of Employment – a European-Asian dialogue”) held in Berlin in June 2004, which I attended on behalf of the BMBF, it became clear that the topic of VET was very positively received, especially by Asian ASEM countries. In addition, the conference was an important milestone on the way to include the Employment Ministers in the ASEM dialogue.

Against this background, the German Foreign Office and Federal Chancellery asked the BMBF to organise a workshop in the area of VET. As a consequence, and in the context of the Hanoi Summit, which took place on 8 and 9 October 2004 and explicitly recommended to extend ASEM cooperation to areas such as “social development, labour and employment, education and training”,<sup>6</sup> Germany organised the VET workshop with the focus to promote the discussion of skills development and qualification needs in ASEM countries. The workshop was integrated into the official ASEM work programme and was originally scheduled for October 2005. However, due to the Bundestag elections in autumn 2005, the workshop was postponed and finally took place in Berlin on 13 and 14 February 2006 at Director General level and was entitled “Strengthening human resources through vocational education and training”. The meeting proved to be a useful platform for discussion, exchange of information and good practices. In its final statement, the BMBF underlined that “participants agreed on the importance to continue the dialogue on VET and asked the responsible bodies to integrate this topic into future ASEM events”.<sup>7</sup>

In the very same year, the importance of education and training was emphasised once again at the first ASEM Labour and Employment Ministers’ Conference “More and Better Jobs – Working Jointly to Strengthen the Social Dimension of Globalisation” in Potsdam, Germany (3-5 September), as well as at the ASEM Summit of Heads of State or Government in Helsinki, Finland (10-11 September).

During the Helsinki Summit, ASEM leaders “stressed the value of continued dialogue and exchange of best practices on questions related to education and training”. In this context, the establishment of regular ASEM Ministers’ Meetings on Education (ASEMME) became a logical consequence. Germany, as one of the driving forces for the promotion of education and training onto the ASEM agenda, volunteered to host the first ASEMME. In the run-up to the Helsinki Summit, the German Foreign Office, in consultation with the BMBF, proposed to introduce a small paragraph into the draft Chairman’s Statement outlining Germany’s commitment in this field.<sup>8</sup> The wording of the final version of the Chairman’s Statement begins by acknowledging that “Leaders [...] welcomed the offer by Germany to host the first ASEM Ministerial Meeting on Education in 2008”.

Germany's commitment can however also be situated in a wider political context. At the time, Germany was interested in Asian-European cooperation in general and in this way taking the lead to push forward the ASEM Education Process stemmed from a very positive political attitude towards Asia as well as a strategic commitment to intensify cooperation in education and research between the regions. The related process of rapprochement had been influenced by the increasing role of Asian countries vis-à-vis globalisation and a reorientation of German policies towards Asia following the terrorist attacks of 9/11.<sup>9</sup> The Asia Concepts proposed by several Ministries at the beginning of the 21st century (including the one of the Federal Ministry of Education and Research in 2002)<sup>10</sup> emphasised that it was "necessary to cooperate with certain Asian countries for political, economic and especially scientific and technological reasons".<sup>11</sup> A strategy paper by BMBF also commented that, in the context of growing globalisation, international cooperation and competition are two sides of the same coin. Germany, for the first time, presented itself "as a location for education and research on the international education market, whereby Asia is one of the priority regions".<sup>12</sup> BMBF, with a bundle of concrete measures, new tools and financial support, wanted to increase cooperation and secure international competitiveness. The Ministry also felt a sense of "responsibility in the important area of bilateral cooperation [including the one with Asia; the author] in education and research".<sup>13</sup>

## MAKING EDUCATION A PRIORITY: THE FIRST ASEM MINISTERS' MEETING ON EDUCATION (ASEMME1) IN BERLIN

In January 2007, as a follow-up to the Helsinki Summit of 2006, the unit I headed within BMBF produced a first draft roadmap for the ASEM Ministerial Conference to be held in Berlin in May 2008 entitled "Education and Qualification for tomorrow's world". Due to various circumstances (mainly BMBF's involvement in the German EU Council Presidency and the European launch conference for EU's Lifelong Learning Programme), we began preparations for the first ASEM Ministers' Meeting on Education only in May 2007 with the drafting of a first concept paper for the conference. The ASEM Foreign Ministers' Meeting, which took place in Hamburg in this same month, again emphasised the "pivotal role of education and training for qualified human resources", pointed to the first ASEM Ministerial Meeting on Education and Qualification, which was scheduled to take place in Germany in 2008, and also noted Vietnam's willingness to host the second ASEM Ministerial Meeting on Education in Hanoi, which was scheduled to be held one year later during 2009.<sup>14</sup>

In June 2007, BMBF set the date for the first ASEM Ministerial Meeting on Education to be held in Berlin on 5 and 6 May 2008. The Federal Ministry, in consultation with the Foreign Office and the Federal Chancellery, agreed that the content of the meeting should focus on higher education: the overlap between Asia and Europe in the area of higher education were much greater than in vocational education and training due to a long-standing experience and stable links developed through bilateral and multilateral cooperation activities; in addition to which Europe had successfully implemented the Bologna Process and the Erasmus programme as regional models for higher education cooperation and mobility, which had generated huge interest in Asia. It was therefore consistent with current thinking

*“Europe had successfully implemented the Bologna Process and the Erasmus programme as regional models for higher education cooperation and mobility, which had generated huge interest in Asia.”*

to propose higher education as both the nucleus and overarching educational theme of the ASEM Education Process and as such provided necessary thematic delineation between ASEM Education Ministers and ASEM Labour Ministers. The approach was accepted by ASEM members and still applies today. Although VET as a sector and theme has not disappeared, on the contrary, it attracts great attention in both education and labour market policies and particularly when it is connected to questions concerning employability and lifelong learning and as such I am certain that VET will come more to the centre of the ASEM Education Process in the future.

In order to prepare the first meeting of ASEM Education Ministers in Berlin, we identified the need for an experienced support structure with a particular focus on higher education. At this point, the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) with long and rich experience in international cooperation and twenty years as National Agency for EU education programmes, and especially the head of the National Agency, Dr Siegbert Wuttig, became the right choice for this task. DAAD actively began to organise the Berlin Conference during late summer 2007 and in the following months preparations for the Ministerial Conference stepped up booking the conference venue in Berlin, drafting a schedule, drawing up a preliminary programme and managing organisational details for the event. Furthermore, a concept paper and a discussion document were drafted with the aim to prepare the content of the meeting to be held for Senior Officials from ASEM Ministries of Education. In spite of the relatively short preparatory period and the nature of diplomatic protocols surrounding high-level summit meetings at ministerial level, the first Senior Officials’ Meeting (SOM) was held in Bonn in March 2008. Successfully many ministries from Asian and European ASEM countries attended and I remember very well the strong commitment of the Asian participants and their enthusiastic feedback. Thematically, Senior Officials representing Asian Ministries showed great interest in the Bologna Process as a blueprint for regional cooperation and also in Erasmus as a role model for transnational mobility. This is undoubtedly one reason why a number of European concepts can be found in the ASEM Education Process.

During the SOM, themes and organisational details for the Berlin Conference as well as possible key messages of the ASEM Education Ministers were discussed with the Senior Officials. Subsequent to this meeting, we prepared, together with DAAD, a first draft of the Chair’s Conclusions, which was forwarded to ASEM members and stakeholders for comment. Members were also asked to produce a national report on their activities in the context of the conference themes. DAAD later compiled a comprehensive summary of the various national reports as well as a revised draft of the Chair’s Conclusions, which was agreed upon by ministerial representatives during the second Senior Officials’ Meeting held one day before the Ministerial Conference.

During the Ministerial Conference, the great enthusiasm and overwhelming commitment of ASEM participants that we felt during the Bonn SOM and later during the ASEM seminar held in Frankfurt on 4 and 5 December 2007 were confirmed and evidenced by the presence of many high-level government representatives attending the meeting. All in all, 22 Ministers were present. The Ministerial Meeting, a two-day event, was chaired on the first



Photo: David Ausserhofer/DAAD

day by Federal Minister of Education and Research Annette Schavan and on the second day by the President of the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the Länder in the Federal Republic of Germany (KMK), Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer. Discussion during the meeting once again demonstrated participants' genuine interest to advance the ASEM Education Process as a platform for a common dialogue on education and the testing of joint activities. Vietnam's readiness to organise the next Ministerial Conference in Hanoi was an important step forward in terms of keeping the momentum of the Process going. From a political perspective, the Berlin Conference is viewed as a key milestone in the development of the ASEM process giving specific attention to education as a policy development and also in terms of placing the theme of education high on ASEM's overarching political agenda.

Given the numerous countries and education systems involved, the ASEM Education Process can be complex and sometimes even complicated. It is precisely for this reason that the informality of the ASEM (Education) Process with its non-binding documents and soft law approach can be considered as advantageous. This "informality" enables members to collaborate in a flexible way, testing joint procedures and pilot projects in variable formats and without overly bureaucratic obligations, to exchange examples of best practice, and to learn from each other.

*First  
ASEM Education  
Ministers' Meeting,  
Berlin 2008*

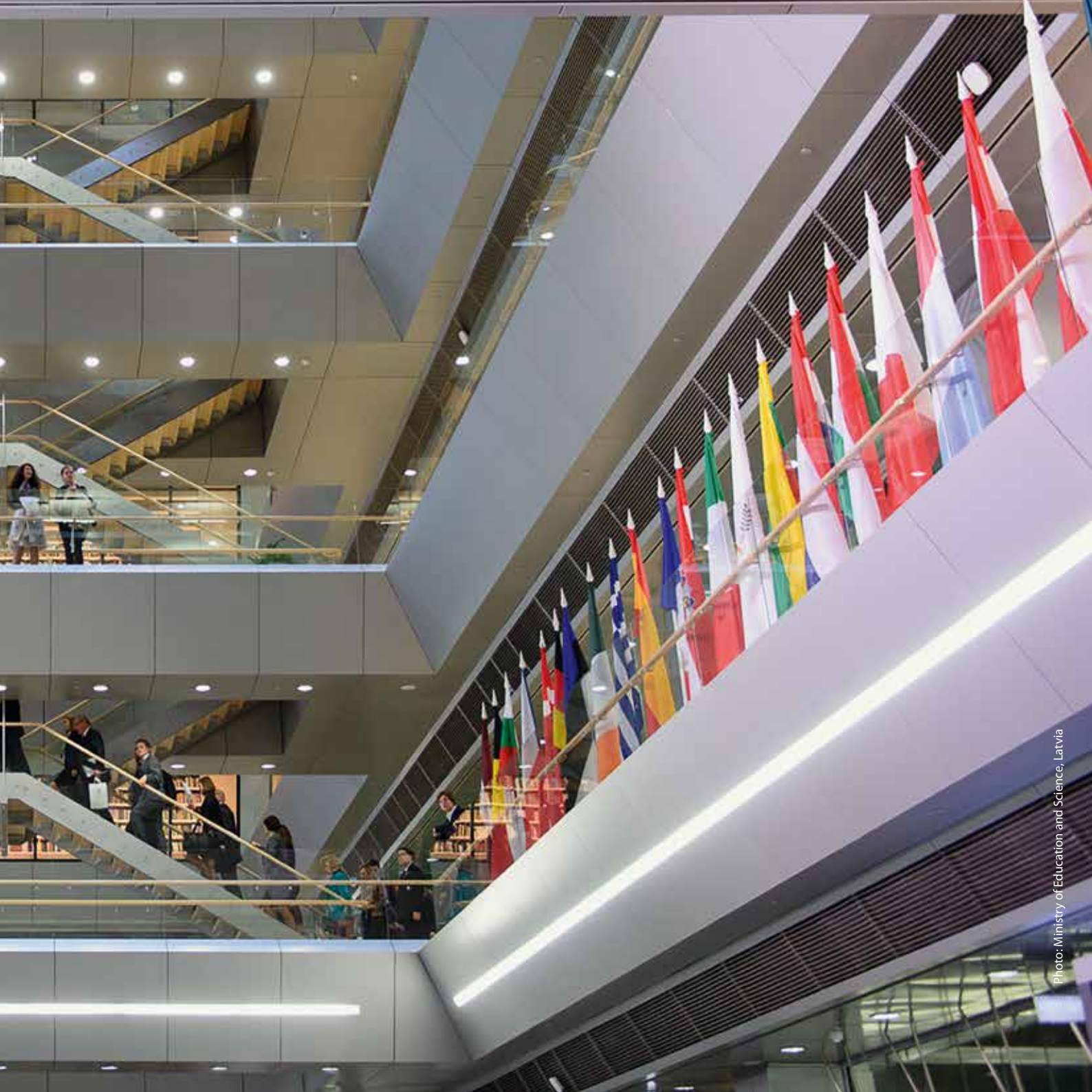
*“Our strong commitment to ASEM dialogue on education continues, knowing that the ASEM Education Process is a long and winding road rather than a linear path leading to quick tangible results.”*

Germany has been involved in the ASEM Education Process from the very beginning and remains a dedicated advocate of the Process. BMBF gladly contributed to the further development of ASEM cooperation in the field of education by supporting the Ministerial Conference held in Hanoi during 2009 and more specifically by implementing and funding the first international ASEM Education Secretariat, which was located in DAAD in Bonn from 2009 to 2013 and later transferred to Jakarta, Indonesia.

Our strong commitment to ASEM dialogue on education continues, knowing that the ASEM Education Process is a long and winding road rather than a linear path leading to quick tangible results. I am deeply convinced that it is worth taking this path to enhance mutual understanding and common action, even more so now in view of current world events, and I am certain that Germany, together with our European partners, will further pursue efforts to strongly support the development of cooperation and dialogue in the context of ASEM into the future.

- <sup>1</sup> Third ASEM Summit (ASEM3) (2000). *Partnership for Prosperity and Stability in the New Millenium. Final Chair Statement*. 20-21 October. Seoul, p. 10.
- <sup>2</sup> Asia-Europe Vision Group (1999). *For a better tomorrow: Asia-Europe Partnership in the 21st century. Report*. Seoul, p. 11.
- <sup>3</sup> Ibidem, p. 22.
- <sup>4</sup> Fourth ASEM Summit (ASEM4) (2002). *Chairman's Statement*. 23-24 September. Copenhagen, p. 4.
- <sup>5</sup> At the Fifth ASEM Summit (ASEM5) held in Hanoi, Vietnam on 8 and 9 October 2004, the Heads of State or Government of 13 Asian and 25 European nations and the European Commission adopted the *ASEM Declaration on Dialog among cultures and civilisations* (quotation on p. 2).
- <sup>6</sup> Fifth ASEM Summit (ASEM5) (2004). *Chairman's Statement*. 9 October. Hanoi, p. 5.
- <sup>7</sup> Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung (2006). *ASEM Dialogue on Vocational Education and Training. Final Statement*. 14 February. Berlin, p. 2.
- <sup>8</sup> For example, during the Senior Officials' Meeting in Singapore on 22 May 2006.
- <sup>9</sup> See <https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/de/aussenpolitik/regionaleschwerpunkte/asien/asienpolitik-text-node> [Accessed: 22-1-2018].
- <sup>10</sup> One year earlier than the BMBF, the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development as well as the Federal Ministry of Economics and Technology had already published their strategies for Asia. In 2002, the Federal Ministry for Foreign Affairs followed with its paper entitled *Aufgaben der deutschen Außenpolitik. Südostasien, Australien sowie Neuseeland und Pazifische Inseln am Beginn des 21. Jahrhunderts*.
- <sup>11</sup> Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung (BMBF) (2002). *Asia Concept 2002*. Bonn, p. 3.
- <sup>12</sup> Ibidem, p. 4.
- <sup>13</sup> Ibidem, p. 10.
- <sup>14</sup> Cf. Eighth ASEM Foreign Ministers' Meeting (2007). *Chair Statement*. 29 May. Hamburg, p. 8.

*“The Bologna Process and ASEM Education Process create a new layer of regional governance in higher education.”*



## THE BOLOGNA AND ASEM EDUCATION PROCESSES

# Comparing governance models and outcomes

Que Anh Dang

*The Bologna Process (BP) and the ASEM Education Process (AEP) have been recognised as outstanding examples of regional and inter-regional higher education projects. Despite their different histories, governance structures and trajectories of development, today each process brings together some 50 countries and a dozen of international organisations in a sectoral space that shapes the global higher education landscape. This article reviews and explains the governance models and outcomes of regional higher education cooperation by analysing the causes of major differences and similarities of the two processes. By comparing some key features, this contribution aims at enhancing the understanding of the two large-scale regional projects and improving the collaborative practices in the future.*

## THE GENESIS AND OBJECTIVES

The Bologna Process originated from a meeting of the German, French, Italian and British Ministers for Higher Education in May 1998 on the occasion of the 800th anniversary of the founding of Sorbonne University. They publicised a joint declaration on the harmonisation of the architecture of the European higher education systems and called on all EU members as well as other European countries to join them in creating a European area of higher education. The Sorbonne Declaration emphasises:

*“Europe is not only that of the Euro, of the banks and the economy: it must be a Europe of knowledge as well. We must strengthen and build upon the intellectual, cultural, social and technical dimensions of our continent. These have to a large extent been shaped by its universities.”<sup>1</sup>*

In June the following year, 29 European Ministers of Education gathered at the University of Bologna to sign a new declaration – the Bologna Declaration, that lay the foundations for the creation of the Bologna Process.

The ASEM Education Process was initiated by the Heads of State or Government at the ASEM Summit in 2006 when they reaffirmed their resolve to take the ASEM process forward by “widening and deepening the partnership to enhance and consolidate the process and increase its global visibility”. The German Chancellor invited Ministers of Education to embark on a new inter-regional high-level education partnership to find solutions to the common challenges to

*“The Bologna Process was set up to follow a set of rules and objectives (i.e. Bologna action lines) in specified timetables, making it possible to follow up on the implementation by means of regular stocktaking reports. Such clearly defined objectives and benchmarks also enable us to identify the unintended consequences of the process. By contrast, ASEM was not set up in that way.”*

human resources development brought about by globalisation. The proposal was generally seen as a diplomatic endeavour emphasising the value of dialogue and exchange in education between Europe and Asia, which used to take place at a bilateral national level, and now rescale to an inter-regional level, hence, fostering the ties between Asia and Europe. Subsequently, Berlin hosted not only the first ASEM Education Ministers’ Meeting (ASEMME1) but also the first ASEM Rectors’ Conference in 2008, which brought together education leaders from over 40 countries and marked the genesis of the “ASEM Education Process”. Generally, the BP can be viewed as a “bottom-up” initiative and the ASEM process as a “top-down” approach. However, the underlining rationale for both processes is similar – that is to bring higher education more central to the economic agenda for building the knowledge economy. Both processes manifest the collective response of states to changing global contexts. Europe collectively invests in constructing a “Europe of Knowledge” and the Asian countries of ASEM build on the European experience to re-evaluate and devise their development strategies.

Additionally, higher education is a multi-dimensional sector that has many other roles to play in political and cultural spheres. The BP aims to create a sense of European citizenship and identity and partake in the implementation of the revised Lisbon Strategy (2005) to improve Europe’s competitiveness, whereas the AEP contributes to ASEM three core geo-strategic purposes, namely foster inter-regional trade and investment, increase security and peace, counterbalance the dominant influence of the United States.

The two regional higher education projects also have their own characteristics. The BP was set up to follow a set of rules and objectives (i.e. Bologna action lines) in specified timetables, making it possible to follow up on the implementation by means of regular stocktaking reports. Such clearly defined objectives and benchmarks also enable us to identify the unintended consequences of the process. By contrast, ASEM was not set up in that way. There is no set of concrete objectives, but only vague and broad ideas announced at the first ministerial meeting:

*“The Ministers agreed to set up a strategic Asia-Europe education partnership for the 21st century and strengthen the ASEM dialogue”<sup>2</sup>*

The numerous meetings and activities in past ten year of the AEP have been carried out to define what the “partnership” entails and how the “dialogue” ought to be conducted. Therefore, we can understand the AEP not by a set of concrete objectives but by what it does and how it does so.

## THE GOVERNANCE MODELS

Both the BP and AEP create a new layer of regional governance in higher education. That means the policy making power, which used to be solely within the national sovereignty, is now shared in a regional space. In one perspective, regionalism constitutes a positive sum game in which states can cooperate to increase their collective power by means of raising the total output of goods and services available for trade and distribution. Arguably, higher education can be included in such total output of services. In another perspective, the

relationship between region and state can be viewed as a zero-sum game where the regional is strengthened as the national weakens. Consequently, the cost/benefit calculations are often the starting point for understanding the behaviours of the policy actors involved.

To a certain extent, these two perspectives in action can be seen in both processes. However, there are nuances in the behaviours of policy actors when comparing the BP and AEP. In the more developed and institutionalised setting of the BP, the regional governance model has become more powerful in the sense that regional policies strongly impact on national policies in terms of structural reforms, and country progress is monitored at the regional level by the agreed benchmarks. The BP claims that it is a voluntary process. Countries can voluntarily join the BP, but once they are admitted, the voluntarism is gradually replaced by compliance. This may lead to a kind of façade conformity in some cases. In a loosely institutionalised grouping, ASEM achievements depend heavily on the genuinely voluntary and active participation of members because regional policies and recommendations can only be enacted and enforced if the national actors respond positively through a kind of “soft” and consensual mode of regional governance in ASEM. In other words, the AEP is about an emergence of a politics of regionalism that is simultaneously regional and national.

At the 2014 Senior Officials’ Meeting (SOM) in Riga, there were some suggestions to introduce a monitoring mechanism, but the majority of the delegates disagreed with a formalised monitoring and emphasised the primary objective of ASEM as a “dialogue platform”. One European official stated:

*“Monitoring required structural changes. So far there is nothing to monitor in ASEM. We have come together and we have done some good work. We have some good ideas, and we can develop our vision and road map if we take the ASEM Education Process seriously.”<sup>3</sup>*

The frank statement brought many nods around the table. Instead of monitoring with indicators, the Senior Officials prefer effective communication and face-to-face meetings as the working methods for this large and heterogeneous group. The ASEM Education Gazette, which is published annually by the Secretariat in order to feature the pilot projects with “stories from the field”, has been well received by both Ministers and Senior Officials, who are overwhelmed with numbers and statistics in the “name and shame” game from other international organisations.

### Working modalities

Both processes started out as meetings and continue to be a conglomeration of meetings at different levels. ASEM education meetings operate without voting or a veto, but with consensus-based decision making and in a non-hierarchical style. The Bologna meetings do use voting sometimes.

The table<sup>4</sup> below juxtaposes the working modalities of the two processes and highlights their key similarities and differences. The ASEM Education Process, though still in the making, is not simply the extension of a European or Asian regionalism model; it is a construction of a new form of regionalism, which builds ASEM region through interactions at forums and multilateral

*“Both the Bologna Process and ASEM Education Process create a new layer of regional governance in higher education. That means the policy making power, which used to be solely within the national sovereignty, is now shared in a regional space.”*

## Working modalities of the two processes

The Bologna Process since 1999	The ASEM Education Process since 2008
<p><b>Ministerial Conferences</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Ministers convene every 2-3 years;</li> <li>· Structural reforms of members' higher education systems;</li> <li>· Participants: 48 countries (of which 28 are EU member states) and the European Commission are full members, and 8 consultative members;</li> <li>· Bologna Policy Forum: dialogue with non-Bologna countries;</li> <li>· Bologna Process Communiqué;</li> <li>· Stocktaking/Implementation Report.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Ministerial Meetings (ASEMME)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Every 2 years;</li> <li>· Participants: 53 full members, including the European Commission and the ASEAN Secretariat;</li> <li>· Other regional stakeholders (EUA, AUN, OECD, ETF, CEDEFOP, UIL, etc.) are ad-hoc participants and at invitation by the host;</li> <li>· ASEMME Chair's Conclusions;</li> <li>· Stocktaking Report.</li> </ul>
<p><b>The Bologna Follow-Up Group (BFUG)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Regular meetings: every 3 or 6 months; voting is used at meetings but inconsistently;</li> <li>· Stocktaking/Implementation report is compiled by a dedicated task force of experts or a special working group with professional data providers; sponsored by the European Commission;</li> <li>· Rotating chairmanship: 6 chairs (3 EU presidency troika and 3 non-EU countries). Vice-chair is the host of the next Ministerial Conference;</li> <li>· The Board established in 2010 to oversee the work of the BFUG. The Board consists of 6 chairs, one vice-chair as above, the European Commission and 4 consultative members (Council of Europe, EUA, ESU, and EURASHE);</li> <li>· Rotating secretariat: 2 to 3-year cycle provided by the host of the next Ministerial Conference;</li> <li>· Working groups: topic-based working groups and ad-hoc working groups, lately advisory groups were added;</li> <li>· Seminars and Networks.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Senior Officials' Meeting (SOM)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Annual meetings. No voting, only consensual decision-making;</li> <li>· Status/Stocktaking report is compiled by the ASEM Education Secretariat (AES) based on the review of the action points in the Chair's Conclusions and information provided by member countries;</li> <li>· Chair: the host country of Ministerial Meeting in Asia or Europe alternately;</li> <li>· Co-chair: Director of AES;</li> <li>· There is no Board of SOM;</li> <li>· Rotating secretariat: 4-year cycle, countries volunteer to host the secretariat alternately in Asia and Europe;</li> <li>· Special stakeholder (non-member): Asia-Europe Foundation established in 1997 in Singapore as a coordinating body for people-to-people activities in the ASEM socio-cultural pillar, including education (ASEM Rectors' Conference and Students' Forum);</li> <li>· Working groups: member-led, topic-based, volunteer working groups as specified in the Chairs' Conclusions;</li> <li>· Seminars, conferences, research networks.</li> </ul>
<p><b>National level</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· National Bologna contact point;</li> <li>· National reports.</li> </ul>	<p><b>National level</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· ASEM desk officer/contact point for Asia or Europe at the Ministry of Education.</li> </ul>

projects. This means that the formal European and informal Asian institutional models are not simply passed along, copied and imitated via international policy networks; they are actually put together and reproduced as a hybrid form through these networks of region builders.

Many members of SOM are also members of BFUG. Although the roles of SOM are very similar to the roles of the BFUG, the major difference is that SOM initiates many pilot projects involving universities. These are the main activities between meetings and each project involves a dozen of Asian and European countries volunteering to work together on a specific theme, in many cases, under the leadership of, and with a budget allocated by the Senior Officials in each participating country. Whereas common projects in the Bologna Process are launched and financed by the European Commission, including the stocktaking reports, there is no “ASEM budget”. Individual governments are willing to take part and sponsor the pilot projects, be they a joint curriculum programme in tourism, a comparative study in vocational education, or a new website on the recognition of qualifications.

Generally, both the Bologna and ASEM Education Secretariats assume similar primary functions of facilitating the regional and inter-regional cooperation in higher education. One notable difference is that the AES has so far been the lead author of all ASEM stocktaking reports whereas the Bologna Secretariat has not been an author but a technical assistant for gathering information. The BP stocktaking reports are crafted by a BFUG working group involving the secretariats, many individuals (ministerial officials, academics, independent consultants), and institutions (statistical agencies, sponsor – the European Commission). Consequently, the delegated authority of the two secretariats is determined not only by the level of involvement of the secretariats, but more importantly, by the nature and objectives of the two kinds of stocktaking reports. The BP report is to monitor and benchmark the performance of member countries against a set of criteria and objectives.

By contrast, the ASEM stocktaking reports (initially “Status Report”) have so far been a narrative of connected events, whose stories began in the Chair’s Conclusions and are waiting to be written by the Secretariat based on the member countries’ self-reporting. The AES has greater delegated authority to compose the narrative reports which generally showcase positive progress of the joint activities and pilot projects that has been proposed and implemented voluntarily by various small groups of member countries. There are no criteria to compare them; rather the reports are to trigger more ASEM joint projects because the density of such projects and emergent networks will thicken the connections between the two regions.

In contrast to the Bologna Communiqués, which rarely mention any country by name, the ASEM Chair’s Conclusions focus on writing the country names into the text. Therefore, the drafts always leave blank spaces as an invitation for the names to be filled in. For example, the early draft conclusions before ASEMME3 in May 2011 reads as follows:

*“The topic of balanced mobility was presented by XXX. The second topic of quality assurance and recognition was introduced by the representative of XXX. The introductory remarks on the third topic of lifelong learning were given by XXX. XXX focused on the fourth topic of involving business and industry in education.”<sup>5</sup>*

*“The ASEM Education Process, though still in the making, is not simply the extension of a European or Asian regionalism model; it is a construction of a new form of regionalism, which builds ASEM region through interactions at forums and multi-lateral projects.”*

*“Members of the ASEM Education Process are not required to change their higher education systems, whereas signatories of the Bologna Process must ‘pursue and implement the objectives of the Bologna Process in their own systems of higher education. Their applications should contain information on how they will implement the principles and objectives of the [Bologna] declaration.’”*

Such blank spaces can be seen as the “switches” that activate decision-making processes of the Senior Officials who review the drafts. This action may involve finding justifications for their country’s endorsement of a position or participation in a specific project, and subsequently their proposal(s) to their Ministers prior to the ASEM meeting. Often there are several drafts at different stages and more country names are filled in as the draft comes closer to the final version. Once a country name is filled in, it also signals that the Ministers or Deputy Ministers of that country will participate in the meeting. These countries are active at the meeting and often take the lead in follow-up activities or initiate new pilot projects. In essence, these blank spaces “energise” the Senior Officials, spur their actions in their countries when reviewing and commenting on the drafts, and when discussing the text at SOM or during the drafting/consultation process.

### **Membership and collective identity formation**

The evolving membership of ASEM has blurred the geographical boundaries between Asia and Europe. ASEM membership does not require political criteria (e.g. signatories of the European Cultural Convention) or structural reform of higher education systems as in the Bologna Process. ASEM membership is not decided by the Ministers of Education but by Heads of State or Government based on the proposals from the Ministers of Foreign Affairs. Once a country becomes a member of ASEM, it automatically has the right to participate in all sectoral cooperation under the ASEM framework including the ASEM Education Process. While there is a broad agreement on some procedural norms and working methods, there are currently no substantive rules or duties or sanctions associated with the membership of ASEM.

Members of the ASEM Education Process are not required to change their higher education systems, whereas signatories of the Bologna Process must “pursue and implement the objectives of the Bologna Process in their own systems of higher education. Their applications should contain information on how they will implement the principles and objectives of the [Bologna] declaration”.<sup>6</sup> Some stakeholders, such as OECD, and the two EU institutions ETF, CEDEFOP<sup>7</sup> are in the ASEM Education Process, but not in the Bologna Process.

When it comes to putting social pressure on actors to cooperate, a larger group is better because there are greater status rewards at stake for any particular actor. However, the size of groups also has an impact on the regional cooperation. The realists see large numbers as a matter of greater powers and larger markets, but institutionalists see an increasing number of participants as reducing the prospects for successful cooperation due to the greater difficulties in managing the group dynamics. Moreover, each member country will receive a smaller

*“The Bologna Process is an intergovernmental cooperation of 48 European countries in the field of higher education. It guides the collective effort of public authorities, universities, teachers, and students, together with stakeholder associations, employers, quality assurance agencies, international organisations, and institutions, including the European Commission, on how to improve the internationalisation of higher education.”*  
(European Commission: [https://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/higher-education/bologna-process\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/higher-education/bologna-process_en))

share of the overall benefits and therefore be less inclined to invest resources in working towards their realisation. Undoubtedly, the breadth of ASEM membership, geographically and politically, influences the way it operates also sets limitations on what it can do.

## THE PROCESSES, POLITICS AND OUTCOMES

Compared to other sectors, such as finance, economics, environment, and security, the ASEM higher education cooperation was a revival, and hence well received by both European and Asian countries. As mentioned at the outset, it is in the economic sphere where the greatest impetus to inter-regionalism has been felt in ASEM, and higher education is viewed as having huge economic potential.

Some discourses on the ASEM agenda appear to resemble the Bologna Process action lines, but the real meanings are constructed differently over time. The idea of “balanced mobility” is no longer about the balance between the number of Asian students studying in North America and those who study in Europe (i.e. an aim to attract more Asian students to Europe); in today’s ASEM context it is about motivating more European students to study in Asia and creating more joint programmes. Moreover, “balanced mobility” is also a way to conceal the brain drain issue, where ASEM meetings make policies aimed at improving reciprocal exchange.

The European Commission, after having initially been side-lined, has gained a stronger role in the BP and become a full member as other nation states, and a member of the BFUG Board which oversees the activities between the ministerial meetings. The production of the stocking reports has been financially supported by the Commission over the years, but the visibility of the Commission has been increased particularly in the last three EHEA Implementation Reports, which became the European Commission’s publications prefaced by the Commissioner responsible for Education. The European Commission also shows an increasing interest in the ASEM Education Process by sending more senior representatives to the ASEM meetings. However, the Commission does not have the same influence in the AEP.

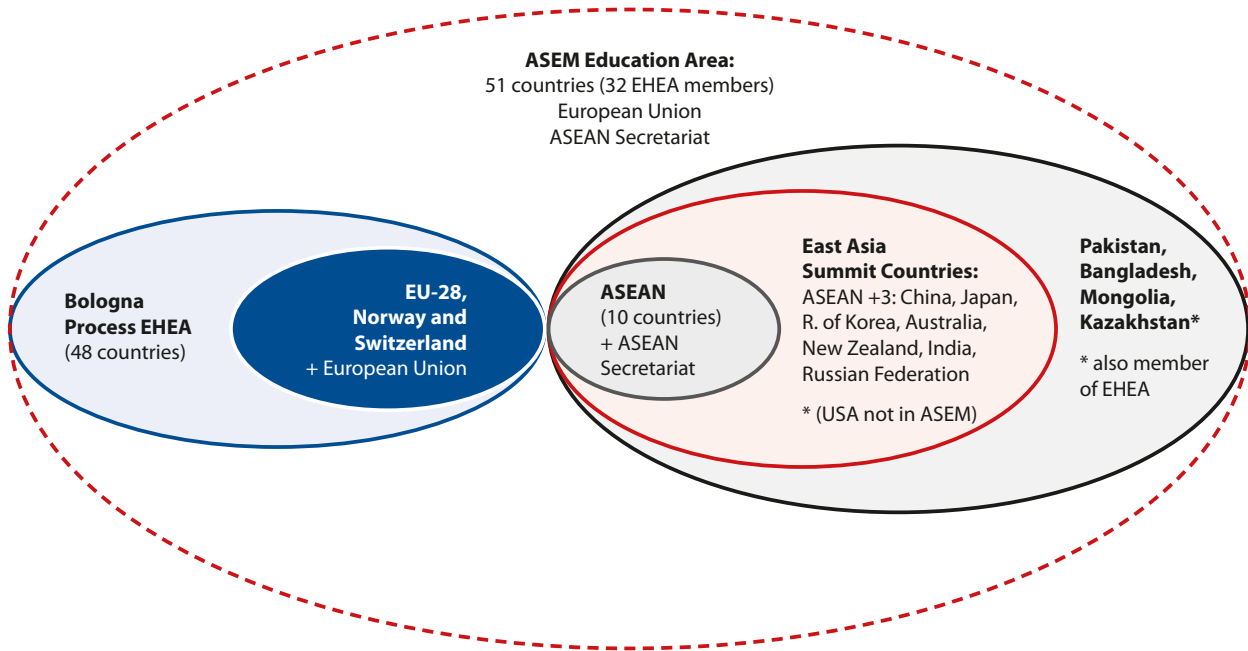
ASEM is a more ambiguous type of cooperation and its evolving membership makes it even more complex to define. Although from the beginning ASEM was not a gathering of two pre-existing regions (at least for the Asian side), member states enshrined the principle of equal partnership between Asia and Europe, which represented an explicit attempt to create a region-to-region dialogue. Since 2006, the membership of ASEM has become diffuse, with non-EU members states (Norway and Switzerland) joining the EU-28 to make up the European side, and 11 countries stretching from Russia to Australia joining the ASEAN to create the Asian side.

ASEM operates with the logic of appropriateness and its “beating heart” is the SOM. The levels and forms of appropriateness are set by the participants. This implicit logic of appropriateness is developed through the style of interaction, language of communication and

*“Some discourses on the ASEM agenda appear to resemble the Bologna Process action lines, but the real meanings are constructed differently over time.”*

*“ASEM operates with the logic of appropriateness and its ‘beating heart’ is the SOM.”*

Figure 1: The Composition of the ASEM Education Area



Source: The author's own compilation

*“The nature of ASEM is a platform of dialogue, so the added value is clear: the dialogue and information sharing for mutual understanding and learning that the ASEM process brings about. But we move from dialogue to operational level with concrete activities. By now we need both.”*

persuasion. SOM creates and modify norms, SOM determines not only the details of procedures, but also the tacit understanding of what is appropriateness in the ASEM context.

At SOM there were different viewpoints, but there was no voting and the conclusions were drawn on consensus. The Senior Officials stressed the distinctive “added value” of the ASEM:

*“The nature of ASEM is a platform of dialogue, so the added value is clear: the dialogue and information sharing for mutual understanding and learning that the ASEM process brings about. But we move from dialogue to operational level with concrete activities. By now we need both. [...] we are open to new ideas and suggestions, but we need to prioritise. Too many priorities mean that we have no priority”.*<sup>8</sup>

In shaping the way ASEM works, SOM proposed:

*“to build the ASEM education cooperation on a two-pillar system. The first pillar would represent the dialogue-oriented cooperation, providing a platform for mutual learning and exchange of experiences strengthening mutual understanding [...]. The second pillar would represent the result-oriented cooperation composed of tangible activities and measures”.*<sup>9</sup>

On the one hand, this model creates a space for testing new ideas, but on the other hand, it filters them through concrete joint projects signalling the levels of national interests. This model, essentially based on a logic of appropriateness, designs ASEM processual cooperation, in which the process is as important as the outcome and the process determines the outcome.

Furthermore, ASEM is being built not only by regional partnership alone but also by bilateral partnerships between Asian and European countries. Therefore, unlike the EHEA ministerial conference, bilateral meetings are an integral part of the official programme of ASEMME. This practice is a hybrid of multilateral and bilateral forms of cooperation which explains another hybrid of collective interests of the grouping and individual interests of member countries, all of which come together to make ASEM.

*“ASEM is being built not only by regional partnership alone but also by bilateral partnerships between Asian and European countries.”*

- <sup>1</sup> *Sorbonne Joint declaration on harmonisation of the architecture of the European higher education system*. Paris, p. 1. Available from: [http://media.ehea.info/file/1998\\_Sorbonne/61/2/1998\\_Sorbonne\\_Declaration\\_English\\_552612.pdf](http://media.ehea.info/file/1998_Sorbonne/61/2/1998_Sorbonne_Declaration_English_552612.pdf) [Accessed: 2 June 2018].
- <sup>2</sup> First ASEM Education Ministers' Meeting (ASEMME1) (2008). *Conclusions by the Chair – Education and Training for Tomorrow: Common Perspectives in Asia and Europe*. Berlin, p. 2.
- <sup>3</sup> First Senior Officials' Meeting (SOM1) of the fifth ASEM Education Ministers' Meeting (ASEMME5) in Riga, Latvia on 10 and 11 November 2014.
- <sup>4</sup> The information on the Bologna Process in this table is based on the author's interview with a member of the Bologna Follow Up Group. The information on the ASEM Education Process is largely based on the author's first-hand experience and direct observations during her PhD research.
- <sup>5</sup> *Draft Chair's Conclusions for ASEMME3* in Copenhagen. March 2011. [not published].
- <sup>6</sup> *Communiqué of the Conference of Ministers responsible for Higher Education – Realising the European Higher Education Area (2003)*. Berlin, p. 8.
- <sup>7</sup> EFT: The European Training Foundation, CEDEFOP: The European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training.
- <sup>8</sup> First Senior Officials' Meeting (SOM1) of the fifth ASEM Education Ministers' Meeting (ASEMME5) in Riga, Latvia on 10 and 11 November 2014.
- <sup>9</sup> *Ibidem*.



*"First steps in Germany  
on the way to an ASEM  
Education Secretariat."*

## TAKING STOCK

# The first international ASEM Education Secretariat in Germany (2009 – 2013)

Siegbert Wuttig/Nina Scholle-Pollmann

*Although the Asia-Europe Ministers' Meeting on Education (ASEMME) decided to implement the first ASEM Education Secretariat (AES) in 2009, the beginnings of the Secretariat actually date back to 2007. In August 2007, the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) almost casually asked the Director of the National Agency for EU Higher Education Cooperation at DAAD (NA DAAD)<sup>1</sup> whether he could imagine organising, on behalf of the Ministry and together with his team, the first ASEM Ministerial Conference on Education scheduled for May 2008.<sup>2</sup>*

## FIRST STEPS IN GERMANY ON THE WAY TO AN ASEM EDUCATION SECRETARIAT

At the end of the ASEM Summit in Helsinki in 2006, Chancellor Merkel had volunteered to host such an event in Germany, certainly also to underline the specific role of education in the political dialogue of ASEM countries and to demonstrate Germany's interest to collaboration with Asia in the area of education.

In many ways, the National Agency located in DAAD was ideally positioned for this task: The Agency had already organised numerous conferences at national and international level on behalf of the BMBF (e.g. the Bologna Ministerial Conference in Berlin 2003 and various national launch conferences for EU programmes such as SOCRATES and Erasmus Mundus). The National Agency is responsible for the implementation of intra-European higher education cooperation and mobility schemes in Germany and also has specific responsibility for the global Erasmus Mundus programme. It is in this capacity operating as a National Contact Point that the NA DAAD became a natural partner for BMBF within the ASEM Education Process. The Ministry's first deliberations on the themes of the ASEM Conference being held in Berlin revolved around topics "relating to Erasmus Mundus, mobility and higher education cooperation", which was the core of NA DAAD's expertise.

Following consultation with the Secretary General of DAAD<sup>3</sup>, the National Agency was happy to accept BMBF's offer and also received additional funding from the Ministry which allowed the Agency to secure additional staff and the resources required to implement the

*“At the preparatory SOM held in Hanoi on 19 and 20 January 2009, the Vietnamese Chair suggested the implementation of an ASEM Secretariat with a view to making the ASEM Education Process more stable and efficient and also to facilitate dialogue, projects and further activities including the preparation of Ministerial Conferences.”*

task. Thanks to excellent cooperation, this new ASEM unit of two permanent staff, located in DAAD under the aegis of the National Agency Director and in collaboration with the responsible unit from BMBF, worked to create the content-related basis and organisational prerequisite for the first ASEM Conference of Ministers Responsible for Education<sup>4</sup> (ASEMME1), which was held in Berlin on 4 and 5 May 2008.

Prior to the ASEMME1 and in order to discuss and agree the theme of the Berlin Conference and the topics of the Chair’s Conclusions, Senior Officials of the ministries responsible for education were invited to the first Senior Officials’ Meeting (SOM) in Bonn. With a view to preparing the SOM, the ASEM team in DAAD and BMBF jointly drafted a discussion paper which was circulated to ASEM members for comment. The team also asked member states to prepare national status reports on activities related to the two main topics (*Higher education cooperation* and *Education and the labour market*) proposed by the German Ministry as host for the Berlin Conference (ASEMME1).

During this first Senior Officials’ Meeting in Bonn, representatives agreed the main themes for the Ministerial Conference in addition to which BMBF presented a road map for the conference including important organisational information (size of delegation, seating arrangement, language regime, etc.). The SOM also agreed the key messages of the Chair’s Conclusions with a first draft prepared by the DAAD team in close collaboration with BMBF and in April 2008, the German Ministry as conference host sent the draft to the ASEM members for further comments. Due to the volume of feedback received from ASEM countries and stakeholders, DAAD found themselves constantly adapting the wording of the Conclusions during the weeks preceding the SOM and the Ministerial Conference. Further to discussions that took place during the SOM, final amendments proposed by the Senior Officials were included in the draft. Two days later, on 6 May 2008, ASEM Education Ministers agreed and adopted the final version of the Chair’s Conclusions.

Overall, ASEMME1, chaired by the Federal Minister of Education and Research, Annette Schavan, on the first conference day and by the President of the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the Länder (KMK), Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer, on the second conference day, was a great success both for Germany as the host country and for ASEM. The enthusiasm for education as a new priority theme within the ASEM process was shared by all conference participants and also by the large number of Ministers attending the meeting and was evidenced by lively discussions during the meetings which carried over into the breaks. Furthermore, the meeting provided Germany with the opportunity to present itself as dedicated supporter of ASEM and demonstrated its commitment to furthering collaboration with Asia in the area of education.

In the wake of this first Ministerial Conference on Education, Germany also underlined its readiness to continue its commitment to the ASEM Education Process by supporting ASEF and the German Rectors’ Conference (HRK) who were in the process of organising the first ASEM Rectors’ Conference to be held in Berlin during September 2008; and by offering to host a follow-up seminar to ASEMME1 entitled “Enhancing mobility by removing obstacles” to be held in Frankfurt on 4 and 5 December 2008.

Understandably, given its central role as the host of the first ASEM Education Ministers' Meeting, Germany was generally viewed as driving force for the ASEM Education Process in the following years. The ASEM team in DAAD had passed the acid test for ASEM Ministerial Conference organisation and content-related preparations and for providing supports for the wide range of bilateral talks taking place on the margins of the conference. It was therefore only logical that the BMBF set up a national ASEM contact point in the NA DAAD with the existing ASEM staff who had organised ASEMME1 and the subsequent follow-up meeting held in Frankfurt; and as such the establishment of a national contact point for ASEM marked an important step towards the nomination of DAAD as the ASEM Education Secretariat.

*"In a letter to the Vietnamese Ministry of Education and Training (MOET), BMBF expressed a willingness to set up and finance a small secretariat."*

## THE LAUNCH OF THE ASEM EDUCATION SECRETARIAT IN 2009

As was announced by the Vietnamese Minister of Education and Training during ASEMME1 held in Berlin, ASEMME2 took place in Hanoi on 14 and 15 May 2009 and as such played a decisive role in implementing the ASEM Education Secretariat. At the preparatory SOM held in Hanoi on 19 and 20 January 2009, the Vietnamese Chair suggested the implementation of an ASEM Secretariat with a view to making the ASEM Education Process more stable and efficient and also to facilitate dialogue, projects and further activities including the preparation of Ministerial Conferences. The Chair also suggested a mandated time period of four to five years at most.<sup>5</sup> The proposal was a seminal move given that there was no comparable support structure within ASEM with specific responsibility for individual policy areas.

During the preparatory phase for ASEMME2, BMBF and the ASEM team located in DAAD supported the idea: an internal paper outlines a recommendation by DAAD to set up a secretariat and also to rotate responsibility for the secretariat between Asia and Europe after a four-year period and that working procedures should be similar to that of the Bologna Process Secretariat.<sup>6</sup> In a letter to the Vietnamese Ministry of Education and Training (MOET), BMBF expressed a willingness to set up and finance a small secretariat. MOET accepted the offer which in early May was entered into the Draft Chair's Conclusions. During the SOM held on 13 May, the proposal was adopted by the Senior Officials following intense discussions supported by the ASEM members and in no small part due to Germany's and more specifically BMBF's willingness to bear the costs of the secretariat as well as a desire on the part of the ASEM member countries to establish a solid support structure in the shape of a secretariat for the education sector.

At the Ministerial Conference immediately following the SOM, Ministers welcomed Germany's offer to host the first ASEM Education Secretariat, which was officially put forward by the State Secretary Cornelia Quennet-Thielen of BMBF. The Ministers agreed that the location of the Secretariat should rotate every four years between Asia and Europe and defined the tasks of the Secretariat to "coordinate ASEM education activities, help with preparations for ASEM ministerial meetings, and facilitate the implementation of output-oriented activities that contribute to educational policy development and practices".<sup>7</sup>

Following their return from Hanoi, BMBF made preparations for the launch of the Secretariat, which was located at DAAD. On the first of September 2009, the Secretariat officially

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Photo: Asia-Europe Foundation

*Symbolic handover of AES from Germany (State Secretary Cornelia Quennet-Thielen, Federal Ministry of Education and Research) to Indonesia (Director General Djoko Santoso, Ministry of Education and Culture).*

took office in Bonn. The core team of the Secretariat comprised Director Dr Siegbert Wuttig, Deputy Director Nina Scholle-Pollmann and Bettina Onyango as Project Officer. The team was completed by temporary staff seconded from Belgium (with financial support from the Netherlands and Luxembourg), China and Indonesia.<sup>8</sup>

#### **FOUR YEARS OF EXCITING WORK: THE ASEM EDUCATION SECRETARIAT IN BONN (2009 – 2013)**

During the four-year mandated period, the Secretariat in Bonn initially focused on coordinating and monitoring ASEM activities outlined in the ASEMME2 Chair's Conclusions and supported by ASEM members. Numerous meetings and working groups took place across Asia and Europe. The Secretariat assisted hosting countries with organisational and content-related preparations for workshops, seminars and conferences. Very often staff members of the Secretariat took the roles of moderator, speaker and rapporteur of these events.

The Secretariat produced papers and documents for ASEM members, the SOM and the Ministerial Conferences, including a compilation of data concerning higher education systems, credit systems and learning outcomes for all ASEM member countries. In line with similar administrative activities taking place in the Bologna Process, the Secretariat also prepared a comprehensive status (or stocktaking) report for the SOM and Ministerial Conferences.<sup>9</sup> The report delineated three categories "accomplished", "partly accomplished" and "not accomplished" while the AES were responsible for assessing progress made in relation to those activities decided by the ASEM Ministers in Hanoi. The Secretariat also published a monthly newsletter informing ASEM members and stakeholders about latest news and developments concerning educational topics in Asia and Europe. To make the work of ASEM as transparent as possible, the Secretariat set up a website to announce important dates, events and documents relating to the ASEM Education Process.

The Ministerial Conferences ASEMME3 held in Denmark on 9 and 10 May 2011 and ASEMME4 held in Malaysia on 13 and 14 May 2013, as well as the respective preparatory SOMs, were important milestones during the Secretariat's four-year term of office. For these events, the Secretariat provided assistance to both hosting countries, in particular preparing the content of the meetings. The themes as well as the documents (especially the Chair's Conclusions) of ASEMME3 and 4 were prepared by the Secretariat in cooperation with colleagues from the respective hosting Ministries and following consultation with ASEM members and stakeholders.

Draft Chair's Conclusions were thoroughly discussed during each SOM. In consideration of all requests for changes, the AES produced preliminary drafts of the text for each Ministerial Meeting. Additional amendments resulting from Ministers' debate were immediately included so that the Ministers could agree on the text at the closing session.

At the end of the mandated period, the ASEM Education Secretariat was officially handed over to Indonesia during the second day of ASEMME4 in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. The formal handover was made by State Secretary Cornelia Quennet-Thielen of BMBF, who thanked the outgoing Secretariat with an entertaining speech accompanied by hearty applause: the baton (in fact, a ship made out of glass) was passed to Indonesia. The mandate of the first Secretariat officially ended on 30 September 2013: their last activities was a training session for staff members of the incoming ASEM Education Secretariat located at the Indonesian Ministry for Education in Jakarta.

The training session, which took place in Bali by invitation of the Indonesian Government, was the closing act and culmination of a four-year odyssey of hard work, numerous working sessions and great successes for both Asia and European countries and as such the first Secretariat came to an end in one of the most beautiful places in the world which was an encouraging sign for the future of educational collaboration between Asia and Europe.

*"In retrospect, it is worth noting that the Education Ministers' decision to set up a designated secretariat for the ASEM Education Process was wise and far-sighted. In the beginning, the working philosophy of the ASEM Education Secretariat was inspired by the concept of the Bologna Process Secretariat. However, the AES soon understood its role went far beyond that of a typical secretariat."*

## LOOKING BACK: MAIN OUTCOMES OF THE FIRST ASEM EDUCATION SECRETARIAT'S MANDATE

In retrospect, it is worth noting that the Education Ministers' decision to set up a designated secretariat for the ASEM Education Process was wise and far-sighted. In the beginning, the working philosophy of the ASEM Education Secretariat was inspired by the concept of the Bologna Process Secretariat. However, the AES soon understood its role went far beyond that of a typical secretariat.<sup>10</sup>

During ASEMME2 in Hanoi, Ministers had defined the tasks of the Secretariat and specifically made reference to coordination of ASEM educational activities, preparation of Ministerial Conferences and support for the "implementation of output-oriented initiatives". Subsequent Education Ministers' Meetings held in Copenhagen and Kuala Lumpur mandated the AES "to observe and assist the member countries in implementing the proposed initiatives and inform Ministers on the progress achieved with the stocktaking report".<sup>11</sup> Taking this into account, the Secretariat deduced two guiding principles for its work: a dedicated

*“During ASEMME2 in Hanoi, Ministers had defined the tasks of the Secretariat and specifically made reference to coordination of ASEM educational activities, preparation of Ministerial Conferences and support for the ‘implementation of output-oriented initiatives’.”*

coordination and a close monitoring of the numerous ASEM projects and measures. In the eyes of the Secretariat, these factors were decisive to the successful work achieved by the ASEM Education Process during this period: making it possible to keep the momentum of the Process on track, to measure the progress of the activities carried out by ASEM members, to compile the results and achievements and to inform Ministers. The expertise, the personal commitment and the understanding to include all members in the discussions, certainly contributed to the general acceptance of DAAD’s ASEM team.

Above all, it was the political backing of the ASEM Ministers (by granting and renewing the Secretariat’s mandate in the Chair’s Conclusions), the financial and content-related support given by BMBF as well as a certain room for manoeuvre that enabled the AES in Bonn to hold the ASEM education family together, to boost the ASEM Education Process with initiatives, and to open new horizons for the educational collaboration between Asia and Europe.

Despite its successful work, the AES met quite a number of challenges within its limited European context and way of thinking. There were, among other things, cultural differences in negotiating at international level, a different understanding of concepts and definitions in the education sector (e.g. credit point systems across academia), a strong heterogeneity of ASEM regions coupled with a broad variety of education systems, a lack of supranational partners and organisations (e.g. comparable to the European University Association and the European Students’ Union in Europe) in the higher education sector in Asia and the differing implications of both young and aging societies across Asia and Europe vis-à-vis initial education, training and lifelong learning. The AES attempted to be neutral and not to act in a European way when addressing such themes and issues.

However, looking more closely, for example, at the themes of the ASEM Education Process and the Ministerial Conferences or at project proposals such as the University-Business Forum, one can see the influence of European agendas and educational debates (in particular of the Bologna Process and EU policies). It is precisely for this reason that it is important for the location of the Secretariat to rotate every four years enabling a change of perspective, as evidenced by contributions made to this publication by the second ASEM Education Secretariat based in Indonesia between October 2013 and November 2017 demonstrating how the Secretariat’s tasks and activities have been interpreted from an Asian point of view.

- <sup>1</sup> DAAD means Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst (= German Academic Exchange Service).
- <sup>2</sup> Earlier in this publication Susanne Burger already described the background to BMBF's request. See Burger, Susanne. *Discovering education in the ASEM Process (1996-2008) – views from within and Germany's role*.
- <sup>3</sup> Dr Christian Bode at that time.
- <sup>4</sup> This was the official title of the Berlin Conference. Today, the title "ASEM Education Ministers' Meeting" is used.
- <sup>5</sup> Vietnamese Ministry of Education and Training (2009). *Draft of the Chair's Minutes of the Senior Officials' Meeting (SOM) in Hanoi, 19/20 January 2009 in Preparation of the ASEM Conference of Ministers Responsible for Education in Hanoi, 14/15 May 2009*. Hanoi, pp. 3-4. [not published].
- <sup>6</sup> Wuttig, Siegbert (2009). *Vorschlag zur Einrichtung eines internationalen ASEM-Sekretariats mit Sitz in Deutschland*. Bonn, pp. 1-2. [internal paper; not published].
- <sup>7</sup> ASEMME2 (2009). *Conclusions by the Chair. Sharing Experience and Best Practices on Higher Education*. Hanoi, p. 4.
- <sup>8</sup> Seconded staff from Belgium: Johan Geentjens, Benedikte Custers; from China: Shanshan Zhang; from Indonesia: I Made Yulistya Negara, Dr Wahyu Supartono, Dr Ir Johan Setianto, Ari Asnani, PhD, Dr Maria Prihandrijanti, Dr Adhitya Wardhono, Dr Aris Haryanto.
- <sup>9</sup> The title of the Stocktaking Report (e.g. "From Berlin to Copenhagen") was borrowed from a document drawn up by the European Commission for the Bologna Ministerial Conference in London. See European Commission (2007). *From Bergen to London*. Brussels.
- <sup>10</sup> When comparing the Bologna and ASEM Education Secretariats, Que Anh Dang's analysis is right (as regards AES): "[...] they are not passive agents, rather they play an influential role and make contributions – albeit behind the scenes on most occasions – to different stages of the policy process, including agenda setting, norms and rules making, implementation and monitoring/evaluation." See Dang, Que Anh (2016). *The Bologna and the ASEM Education Secretariats. Authority of Transnational Actors in Regional Higher Education Policy Making*. Paper presented at the ECPR Conference. Prague. 7-10 September 2016, p. 21. Published by the Centre for Globalisation, Education & Social Futures, University of Bristol. Available from: <https://edgesf.files.wordpress.com/2015/05/dang-qa-2016-the-bologna-and-asem-education-secretariat-transnational-actors-in-he-policy-making-ecpr-prague.pdf> [Accessed: June 2018].
- <sup>11</sup> ASEMME3 (2011). *Conclusions by the Chair. Shaping an ASEM Education Area*. Copenhagen, p. 6 and ASEMME4 (2013). *Conclusions by the Chair. Strategizing ASEM Education Collaboration*. Kuala Lumpur, p. 8.

*“Challenges in bridging the education cooperation between Asia and Europe.”*



# Lessons learned from the second international ASEM Education Secretariat in Indonesia (2013 – 2017)

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Enda Wulandari

*The Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) is an informal meeting between states in the two old continents of the world, Asia and Europe. Currently, ASEM comprises 53 partners: 30 European countries, 21 Asian countries, the European Union and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Secretariat. ASEM addresses political, economic, social, cultural, and educational issues of common interest, in a spirit of mutual respect and equal partnership.<sup>1</sup> The educational issues appeared during the sixth ASEM Summit (ASEM6) in Helsinki, Finland, where ASEM leaders “stressed the value of continued dialogue and exchange of best practices on questions related to education and training, and welcomed the offer by Germany to host the first ASEM Ministerial Meeting on Education in 2008.”<sup>2</sup> This was a milestone for education cooperation between Asia and Europe.*

## THE SECRETARIAT FOR THE ASEM EDUCATION COOPERATION

The Education Ministers of ASEM gathered for the first time in the ASEM Education Ministerial Meeting in Berlin, Germany, during 2008. In the Meeting, the Ministers emphasised the pivotal role of education and training to ensure economic and social development in both regions.<sup>3</sup> The main issue discussed by the Ministers was to strengthen the cooperation in higher education by forging strategic partnerships. To ensure effective coordination and sustainable progress of ASEM education cooperation, the Ministers later highlighted the need to establish a secretariat for ASEM education during the second ASEM Education Ministerial Meeting in Hanoi, Vietnam in 2009.<sup>4</sup>

The first ASEM Education Secretariat (AES) was hosted by Germany under the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) in Bonn from 2009 to 2013 – following the rule of thumb that the Secretariat would rotate between Asian and European countries every four years. During the third Asia-Europe Meeting of Ministers for Education (ASEMME3), Indonesia expressed its commitment to host the next AES after Germany.<sup>5</sup>

*“The journey of AES in Jakarta, as second international ASEM Education Secretariat, began in 2013 with a strong commitment to contribute to greater engagement and dialogue between Asia and Europe in education by organising and coordinating agreed initiatives to strengthen the Asia-Europe education cooperation.”*

## THE JOURNEY OF THE ASEM EDUCATION SECRETARIAT (AES) IN JAKARTA

The journey of AES in Jakarta, as second international ASEM Education Secretariat, began in 2013 with a strong commitment to contribute to greater engagement and dialogue between Asia and Europe in education by organising and coordinating agreed initiatives to strengthen the Asia-Europe education cooperation.<sup>6</sup> Before the official handover, Indonesia proactively sought a knowledge transfer from AES Bonn (the first international ASEM Education Secretariat) by conducting a training for future AES team members to explain ASEM and the ASEM Education Process, describe the origin and tasks of the Secretariat, justify the rationale behind the Secretariat tasks, prepare a biennial work plan of the Secretariat based on the Chair’s Conclusions of ASEMME, plan the development of the website, and design the ASEM Education Newsletter. The knowledge transfer provided a clear picture and motivation for officials from the Ministry of Education and Culture (MoEC) to commence the operation of AES Jakarta effectively.

In undertaking its functions, AES Jakarta successfully developed a website as a main communication tool among ASEM partners. The Secretariat also launched a new communication media for ASEM partners and stakeholders namely the “ASEM Education Gazette” as an official publication for the ASEM Education Process. The main ideas of the Gazette are to increase the visibility and uniqueness of the ASEM Education Process, to improve communication with and among ASEM partners and stakeholders, to create a space for reflecting on achievements and challenges, to disseminate information to the public and to enhance the coordinating role of the ASEM Education Secretariat. More than 20 Newsletters and a compilation of the Newsletters have been published by AES Jakarta since October 2013.

In terms of coordinating and implementing the agreed initiatives of the Chair’s Conclusions, AES Jakarta successfully coordinated the projects/activities/programmes under the four priority areas of the ASEM Education Process. Some of the initiatives are ASEM Joint Curriculum Development Programme in Tourism and Hospitality, Working Group on ASEMME Innovative and Entrepreneurial Skills and Competences, ASEM Work Placement Pilot Programme and Working Group Meeting on the Implementation of the ASEM Recognition Bridging Declaration. The coordination of such meetings and programmes generates imperative opportunities for the Secretariat to disseminate relevant information to ASEM partners and stakeholders. These enable ASEM partners and stakeholders to further enhance their higher education system in line with developments achieved in other member countries.

One of the major tasks of the Secretariat is to coordinate the Senior Officials’ Meetings (SOMs) and Ministerial Meetings. AES Jakarta has supported and coordinated with host countries, namely China, Latvia, the Russian Federation and South Korea, in successfully organising the Intermediate Senior Officials’ Meeting (ISOM) of ASEMME5 in China, the first and second SOM of ASEMME5 in Latvia, the ISOM of ASEMME6 in the Russian Federation as well as the first and second SOM of ASEMME6 in Seoul, South Korea. ASEMME6 was the last meeting being coordinated by AES Jakarta before AES moved to Belgium (Flemish Community and French Community). AES Jakarta conveys a sincere appreciation and gratitude to the host



countries for their wonderful support and cooperation in organising successful meetings as mentioned above.

The Secretariat is also mandated to monitor the implementation of initiatives committed by the ASEM partners and stakeholders within the framework of the ASEM Education Process as stated in the ASEMME Chair's Conclusions; maintain the directory of the ASEM Education Process contact points; support ASEM partners and stakeholders in implementing their commitments; assist the establishment of expert groups; coordinate with relevant stakeholder bodies; publish a regular newsletter and ASEM events calendar as well as share success stories and maintain a website. Managing the bulk of the responsibilities at AES Jakarta is a very challenging task.

The AES Jakarta also received many visitors from ASEM partners to share new initiatives and information in strengthening education cooperation under the ASEM framework. The courtesy visit by various ASEM partners and stakeholders to the AES Jakarta showed the significance of the Secretariat in managing the coordination of ASEM Education Process and the interest of partners to work closely with the AES.

Furthermore, AES Jakarta also organised several events to promote the ASEM Education Process among Indonesian academics, students and higher education institutions in several major cities in Indonesia to encourage Indonesian higher education institutions to take part in the ASEM Education Process projects/activities/programmes.

*AES Jakarta co-chaired the second Senior Officials' Meeting (SOM2) of ASEMME6, Seoul, Republic of Korea, 2017.*

*“AES is no longer seen merely as an information clearinghouse for ASEM education initiatives and activities. AES is increasingly seen as vital for the translation of dialogues between ASEM members into policy recommendation and practices.”*

## CHALLENGES IN BRIDGING THE EDUCATION COOPERATION BETWEEN THE TWO REGIONS

Although there were many challenges encountered by the Secretariat, the Secretariat managed to overcome all the challenges through the negotiation and support of ASEM partners. During ASEMME5 in Riga, Latvia, Ministers invited AES to consider several matters:

*“to make better use of the website of the ASEM Education Secretariat as a main channel of communication (this can reflect the ongoing ASEM education activities and their results, uploading the documents related to the ASEM education etc.) and to encourage regular e-mail updates among the ASEM members and stakeholders.”<sup>7</sup>*

This suggestion and encouragement from Ministers served to make AES Jakarta more visible to ASEM partners and stakeholders. Soon after ASEMME5, the website of AES was redesigned to better meet the needs of ASEM partners by disseminating relevant information. The staff at the Secretariat also regularly send emails to ASEM partners and stakeholders to collect updated status of projects/activities/programmes and disseminate updated information of the ASEM Education Process. The swift action of the AES Jakarta has benefited many ASEM partners and stakeholders to further enhance the cooperation and collaboration in the field of higher education.

A recent survey conducted by the Ministry of Education of South Korea in 2016 further highlights the aspirations of ASEM partners to strengthen the capacity of AES in managing outcomes of the ASEM Education Process and establish a transparent policy recommendation mechanism within AES. Hence, AES is no longer seen merely as an information clearinghouse for ASEM education initiatives and activities. AES is increasingly seen as vital for the translation of dialogues between ASEM members into policy recommendation and practices.<sup>8</sup>

The resources made available to AES are thus in line with its informal, voluntary, and rotating nature. Each host country of the AES has the freedom to appropriate funding to AES and there is no set amount made available to AES to undertake its activities each year. Each ASEM partners also assigns as many or as few full-time staff to the AES. ASEM partners can contribute to AES by seconding officers or experts for a limited period voluntarily, which unfortunately is an opportunity rarely taken by most ASEM partners.

Germany’s initiative to form the ASEM Education Task Force comprising of national experts to assist AES in undertaking analyses and formulating policies is much welcome.<sup>9</sup> Taking into account the nature of ASEM education cooperation, resources at AES and the commitment of ASEM partners, it is such a challenge for AES to undertake more in-depth analyses and develop policy recommendations. However, one of the key elements in meeting the aspiration of ASEM partners is the need of strong, continuous support from ASEM partners to implement the policy recommendations. This is vital for ASEM education cooperation, given its informal nature.

The ASEM Education Process within the framework of ASEM was established nearly a decade ago. However, there is still a small glitch in the process. Some ASEM partners need more encouragement than others to participate in initiatives under the ASEM Education Process and often overlook to update the Secretariat about their initiatives. To overcome this, AES Jakarta encouraged ASEM partners by sharing success stories of ASEM education activities and best practices of other members through the website and regularly sent reminders to all members by emails. The Stocktaking Report of ASEMME illustrates progress as regards the implementation of initiatives relating to the four priority areas and including success stories. This report provides opportunities for ASEM partners and stakeholders to update their current status of the countries' development in the higher education sector and initiatives under the ASEM Education Process. Analysis on the implementation of the initiatives is also found in the Stocktaking Report. Though AES Jakarta was facing some challenges in collecting data from ASEM partners and stakeholders, the Secretariat successfully produced relevant documents for ASEMME5 and the latest documents for ASEMME6.

## WAY FORWARD OF ASEM EDUCATION SECRETARIAT

The four years' service of AES Jakarta ended after ASEMME6 in Seoul, South Korea, in November 2017. The journey of AES Jakarta since 1 October 2013 at Level 6, Building C in the Ministry of Education and Culture (MoEC) will be a memorable accomplishment for MoEC Indonesia including its seconded staff. The staff at AES Jakarta returned to their original tasks in the Ministry, but their aspiration and contribution for the development of ASEM Education Process is not coming to an end yet. The staff of the MoEC will continue supporting the ASEM Education Process by sharing their experiences with the upcoming Secretariat in Belgium. To date, various consultations through online meetings and face-to-face meetings between AES Jakarta and AES Belgium have been conducted to transfer the knowledge and experiences.

Hosting a secretariat for the ASEM education cooperation in ASEM brings many benefits for a country. First and foremost, AES has the command to negotiate and request all ASEM partners to work closely for the success of ASEM Education Process. Besides that, AES acts as an intermediary for ASEM partners to discuss and achieve decision in a particular project or programmes. The host country of AES is the first entity that will be consulted by ASEM partners and stakeholders to conduct a particular programme under the ASEM education priority areas or to contact other ASEM partners and stakeholders. The host country has the opportunity to launch initiative(s) with the support of ASEM partners. These benefits are to the benefit of the host country for managing the Secretariat for the period of four years.

For the next host country of AES, Belgium and beyond (after 2021), a knowledge transfer from the outgoing Secretariat and additional planning in accordance with the current educational development are necessary to ensure that AES is in a position to undertake its role efficiently to produce tangible outcomes for the ASEM Education Process. So far, the Ministers during ASEMME3, ASEMME4, ASEMME5 and ASEMME6 recognised and appreciated the work of the ASEM Education Secretariat for its excellent works in effectively coordinating

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the ASEM educational activities, providing a comprehensive progress report on the implementation of these activities, assisting the ASEM member countries to implement various ASEM educational activities, initiating the idea to gather suggestions from ASEM members and stakeholders for developing a vision document, and publishing newsletters. Since 2013, the ASEM Secretariat Jakarta also produced the ASEM Education Gazette, an official publication for the ASEM Education Process and a channel of communication with the ministries of education in member countries, with stakeholders and partners.

In the coming years with the development of the 4th Industrial Revolution, the operation of the Secretariat will be a challenging task. However, we believe that the pioneering initiatives undertaken over the last four years have strengthened cooperation among ASEM partners and the next host of AES undeniably will be able to deepen cooperation with the support and expertise from ASEM partners and stakeholders.

AES Jakarta will pass on the knowledge gained and lessons learned to AES Belgium to make the AES hosting highly successful in strengthening ASEM education cooperation. Lastly, ASEM partners are also encouraged to send their seconded staff to the next host of the AES to show their commitment and to contribute to the work of Secretariat. The AES Jakarta will continue to provide strong support to the ASEM Education Secretariat in Belgium and ASEM partners to continuously connect the two regions more closely, and to further enhance the collaboration and cooperation in the field of education.

- <sup>1</sup> See <http://www.aseminfoboard.org/pages/1/about> [Accessed: June 2018].
- <sup>2</sup> Available from: <http://asem-education-secretariat.kemdikbud.go.id/asem-education-process/> [Accessed: June 2018].
- <sup>3</sup> ASEM Education Ministers' Meeting (ASEMME1) (2008). *Conclusions by the Chair – Education and Training for Tomorrow: Common Perspectives in Asia and Europe*. Berlin, p. 1.
- <sup>4</sup> ASEM Education Ministers' Meeting (ASEMME2) (2009). *Conclusions by the Chair – Sharing Experience and Best Practices on Higher Education*. Hanoi, p. 5.
- <sup>5</sup> ASEM Education Ministers' Meeting (ASEMME3) (2011). *Conclusions by the Chair – Shaping an ASEM Education Area*. Copenhagen, p. 6.
- <sup>6</sup> *AES Newsletter*. October-November 2013 Edition.
- <sup>7</sup> ASEM Education Ministers' Meeting (ASEMME5) (2015). *Conclusions by the Chair – ASEM Education Collaboration for Results*. Riga, p. 10.
- <sup>8</sup> ASEM Education Ministers' Meeting (ASEMME6) (2017). *Stocktaking Report from Riga to Seoul*. Annex 5: Summary report of the first SOM prior to ASEMME6, Seoul, 9-10 November 2016.
- <sup>9</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 8.



*“The three main political drivers  
of the ASEM Education Process  
during the last ten years.”*

## DRIVERS OF THE ASEM EDUCATION AGENDA

# Ministerial Conferences, Senior Officials' Meetings and the ASEM Education Secretariat

Siegbert Wuttig/Alexandra Angress

*From the onset, ASEM was intended to be both a high-level forum as well as a bottom-up process characterised mainly by two key ingredients – dialogue and networking.<sup>1</sup> Increasingly and more so in recent years, support has been growing for ASEM to become a more robust forum of “interaction and action”<sup>2</sup>*

The following chapters will discuss the role, working methods and interaction patterns of ASEM Education Ministers, SOMs and the ASEM Education Secretariat (AES) as the three main political drivers of the ASEM Education Process during the last ten years. We will seek to analyse the extent to which recommendations adopted during the ASEM Hanoi Summit of 2004 “to improve the ASEM working methods”<sup>3</sup> have, inter alia, been taken into account in the field of education vis-à-vis enhanced interaction, efficiency of Ministerial Meetings as well as involvement of civil society and stakeholders.

Having developed education as a separate theme of the overarching ASEM process, the political pillars and drivers of the ASEM Education Process (AEP) are the Ministries responsible for education across Asia and Europe. They meet at defined intervals within a framework of Senior Officials' Meetings (SOMs) and Ministerial Conferences to discuss topics of common interest. To date, the focus has mainly been on higher education. The working methods of the ASEM Education Process are very similar to the format used by ASEM Foreign Ministers, Transport Ministers and Finance Ministers. However, in contrast to the other pillars of ASEM, education has a secretariat to support and prepare for SOMs and Ministerial Conferences.

The founding principles, working methods and formats for meetings of ASEM were officially agreed at the third ASEM Summit meeting held in Korea in 2000 and detailed in the Asia-Europe Cooperation Framework (AECF) which remains the basic charter outlining “the ASEM Way”<sup>4</sup>. The latter is characterised by being a multidimensional dialogue as a goal in itself and was conceived as a process to evolve in an open fashion characterised by informality as

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one of the key components of the process. The first ASEM Chair’s Statement of 1996 (ASEM1) stipulated that “the dialogue among the participating countries should be conducted on the basis of mutual respect, equality, promotion of fundamental rights and in accordance with the rule of international law and obligations, non-intervention, whether direct or indirect, in each other’s internal affairs”<sup>5</sup>, which was later reinforced in AECF of 2000.

During the ASEM Foreign Ministers’ Meeting held in Beijing on 24 and 25 May 2001, voices were raised in favour of reforming the working methods of the Forum with the aim to reintroduce “more substance, efficiency and vitality” into the ASEM process.<sup>6</sup> Taking the discussion results of Beijing into account, the European Commission soon produced a Vademecum, summarising and assessing the various proposals.<sup>7</sup> In Madrid on 6 and 7 June 2002, the Foreign Ministers discussed the topic and endorsed guidelines submitted by the Senior Officials “to improve the ASEM working methods”<sup>8</sup>.

At the Hanoi Summit of 2004, Heads of State or Government finally adopted the “Recommendations for ASEM working methods” prepared by Senior Officials during the SOMs in Rome on 13 and 14 November 2003 and in Kildare on 16 April 2004. In Annex 2 of the Chairman’s Statement of the Hanoi event, concrete recommendations regarding the working methods of Ministerial Meetings and SOMs were outlined which were to apply to all policy areas, including education.<sup>9</sup> As stated above, the recommendations mainly refer to the tasks and interaction of Ministerial Meetings, SOMs and Coordinators of both regions.<sup>10</sup>

During the Ministerial Conference held in Kuala Lumpur in 2013, questions began to emerge regarding the further development of an ASEM Education Process, which has been *grasso modo* successful, and the broadening of the political impact of the meetings.<sup>11</sup> Such questions concern the structural cooperation of the three main actors as well as the role of political statements issued during the informal policy dialogues.

After ten years it is perhaps now timely to analyse the respective roles of the three main actors and to review the working methods and results delivered in terms of political statements and documents and use this as a basis upon which to reflect on how to further optimise the AEP.

## THE ASEM EDUCATION MINISTERS’ MEETINGS<sup>12</sup> – THE POLITICAL HEART OF THE ASEM EDUCATION PROCESS

When the ASEM Education Process started with the Ministerial Conference in 2008, the political responsibility for the Process resided with the Ministries of Education. However, the distribution of ministerial responsibility particularly in the field of education can be differently assigned in each country. In Germany, for example, the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) is responsible, at federal level, for higher education and vocational education and training (VET) in an international context. BMBF’s political responsibilities and its role as organiser of the first ASEM Education Ministers’ Meeting (ASEMME) may have contributed to make higher education and – to a lesser extent – VET thematic priorities of the ASEM Education Process.

The political responsibility for both education areas can be quite different in other ASEM countries. For example, in the early years of the ASEM Education Process, higher education and VET were assigned to separate ministries in Austria and Denmark<sup>13</sup> with the result that each country was represented by two ministries at ASEM Ministerial Conferences, whereas other countries such as Malaysia and Vietnam, with a similar distribution of political responsibilities in the field of education, attended these events only with one ministry.<sup>14</sup> In several other countries, one ministry covers the whole spectrum of education, such as the Ministry of Education in China or the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) in Japan.

During the Ministerial Conferences, as a rule, Ministers are heads of delegation. Where appropriate, Ministers may be represented by high-level officials of their ministry or even by their respective embassies. At the last Ministers' Meeting in Seoul during November 2017, only seven of the 40 participating countries were represented by their Minister of Education and a further 13 by ambassadors. In other cases, the ministries were represented by Vice-Ministers, State Secretaries, Director Generals or other Senior Officials. The number of Ministers in attendance has been in decline since ASEMME1, which was held in Berlin during 2008 and attended by 22 Ministers of Education.

While the number of Ministers representing the ASEM countries in the ASEM Education Ministers' Meetings has decreased through the years, this is also true for ASEM Ministerial Conferences in other political areas and in ASEM Summits. The declining participation of Ministers has been evidenced as a European phenomenon and applies not only to ASEM but to other interregional fora.<sup>15</sup>

In order to counteract this trend, Senior Officials, in their recommendations to ASEM Foreign Ministers in 2004, explicitly requested for "best efforts should be made to realize full participation by Foreign Ministers"<sup>16</sup>. Proposals on how to achieve this goal range from organisational issues (e.g. facilitating ministerial travel schedules) to meeting content and as such agreed "that FMM [i.e. Foreign Ministers' Meetings] agendas should be focused on major strategic issues within one overarching theme of mutual interest [...]".<sup>17</sup> With this proposal, the Senior Officials of Foreign Ministries addressed a question that was also to become an issue for the ASEM Education Process. What can be done to make Ministers more enthusiastic about attending the Ministerial Conferences – a question that has been raised since 2013 and as such led to proposals, initiated by Germany in 2016, to set up a temporary Task Force. More information on the Task Force is provided in the subchapter "Strengthening the role of Senior Officials".

In their recommendations, the Senior Officials of Foreign Ministries also advised on the frequency of Ministerial Meetings suggesting that they should be held every second year. Although this has never been directly related to the recommendations of ASEM5, this cycle of meetings has been practised by the ASEM Education Process since the Hanoi Conference of 2009 with each biennial Ministerial Meeting being held alternately either in Asia or Europe.

Apart from ministerial representation, the size of delegations has varied from country to country and from conference to conference. For the first ASEM Education Ministers' Meeting held in Berlin during 2008 the general rule of "three participants per delegation" applied, however

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*“The core political document of Ministerial Meetings is the Chair’s Conclusions which is prepared by the host country together with the ASEM Education Secretariat and in consultation with Senior Officials. The Conclusions include planned and completed activities by ASEM members and stakeholders as well as a list of recommendations.”*

this rule was later softened or abandoned. During the Ministers’ Meeting in Seoul in 2017, for example, the size of delegation varied from one participant representing Australia to 13 participants representing China (not including the Republic of Korea as host with 20 participants).<sup>18</sup>

During Ministerial Conferences, as a rule, only the heads of delegation are permitted to speak. Open discussions rarely take place. Very often the heads of delegation present statements which have been prepared in advance and have only little impact on the final Chair’s Conclusions. Occasionally, during the debate on the Conclusions, the heads of delegation put forward additions and amendments to the text which, in most of the cases, are then added to the Conclusions without further ado.

At the ASEMME5 Conference in Riga during 2015, the heads of delegation were provided the opportunity to meet informally through coordinated sessions (e.g. retreat meetings, working breakfasts) held around the fringe of official Ministerial Meetings. Events of this nature certainly support informality and are suited to the ASEM Education Process in that they allow, without constraints imposed by protocol, for deeper discussions on certain topics and the development of new insights with regard to advancing the future of the ASEM Education Process.

The formal sessions of the heads of delegation are regularly accompanied by bilateral meetings of the delegations aimed at discussing themes of mutual interest (e.g. in Hanoi 2009, the establishment of the Vietnamese-German University was one of the topics discussed bilaterally by the delegations from Vietnam and Germany). Although these so-called bilaterals can be perceived as being less important in terms of their role or numbers when compared to the overarching ASEM process (with up to 100 bilaterals during the 2016 ASEM Summit in Mongolia), they are an attractive added element in the context of Ministerial Conferences.

The core political document of Ministerial Meetings is the Chair’s Conclusions which is prepared by the host country together with the ASEM Education Secretariat and in consultation with Senior Officials. The Conclusions include planned and completed activities by ASEM members and stakeholders as well as a list of recommendations. In advance of each Ministerial Meeting, a Stocktaking Report is also compiled by the ASEM Education Secretariat, detailing the status of activities implemented as a result of the Chair’s Conclusions agreed two years previously. Collectively, this document serves the purpose of informing about the progress made in the ASEM Education Process since its beginning and also summarising results and recommendations from various AEP seminars and conferences.

Occasionally, political documents known as Declarations are used as a second policy tool in addition to the Conclusions. In Seoul during 2017, for the first time in the ASEM Education Process, such a Declaration (entitled “Enhancing Collaboration between Asia and Europe in Education and Training – A vision for the Next Decade”) was agreed by the Ministerial Meeting. Albeit that the Chair’s Conclusions and Declarations are recognised as the core political documents of the ASEM Education Process, it is worth noting that the documents are legally unbinding in nature.<sup>19</sup> The nature and role of both the Conclusions and Declarations is specially addressed in an article to this publication entitled “From shared views to a common vision – Political opinion forming in the ASEM Education Process”.

## THE SENIOR OFFICIALS' MEETINGS: PREPARING THE GROUND FOR MINISTERIAL MEETINGS

As is normally the case in the field of international politics, Senior Officials from participating countries play an important role in supporting the host country preparing for Ministerial Meetings. This is also true for ASEM Summits and ASEM Ministers' Meetings.

Senior Officials are high-level government and ministry officials (e.g. Director Generals) appointed to represent their country at Senior Officials' Meetings (SOMs) which precede Ministers' Meetings. Their role is to prepare agenda and content. However and unfortunately due to the rotational nature of personnel, officials attending one SOM may not attend the next or may be represented by embassy staff. While this situation is quite normal in the political arena, given the desired job rotation and heavy work load, it does mean that it becomes rather difficult to draft common proposals and content for Ministerial Meetings. The high turnover of personnel is evident when we review the participants list from two successive SOMs: there are few ministries with officials attending both meetings which serves to highlight the importance of creating a mechanism to ensure greater continuity. In many respects, continuity has been achieved primarily through the setting up of the ASEM Education Secretariat, whose role will be analysed further in this article.

Let us now take a look at the working methods of SOMs. As a rule, two preparatory Senior Officials' Meetings (SOMs) take place in the host country and precede the Ministers' Conference. This is in accordance with the recommendations of the Hanoi ASEM Summit.<sup>20</sup> While the overall ASEM process holds a prior regional coordination, it is not a feature of the AEP working methods. The tasks of the SOMs were clearly defined during the Hanoi Summit as "a place for substantial policy discussion as well as for preparation of FMMs and Summits"<sup>21</sup> and as such applies to SOMs focusing on the Education Process.

Preparing the content and, in particular, the Conclusions of the next Ministerial Conference together with the host country is one of the most important tasks of the SOMs. In addition to which and in line with the Hanoi recommendations, SOMs "should be empowered to approve and/or filter individual initiatives" and "better monitor the follow-up of initiatives"<sup>22</sup>. However, when it comes to AEP initiatives as mentioned in the Chair's Conclusions, these are for the most part bottom-up activities developed and implemented by ASEM members and stakeholders in the context of the thematic priorities, and without political influence from the SOMs or the ASEM Education Secretariat: as such there is no formal approval, filtering or top-down identification of activities. However, the initiatives and projects do gain some kind of official recognition characterised by being included in the Chair's Conclusions and reflected in the wording of the document, especially by the use of verbs such as "welcomed", "appreciated" or "thanked". SOMs do not monitor activities; however, the Stocktaking Report, which is prepared by the AES in cooperation with the Senior Officials, does include a progress report detailing the implementation status of individual activities.

The first preparatory SOM is held some months prior to the Ministerial Meeting. The second preparatory SOM typically takes place one day before the Ministers' Meeting. The period of

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time between both SOMs may vary and is dependent on circumstances. For the German Ministerial Meeting (2008), the interval between SOMs was only two months, for Vietnam (2009), Denmark (2011) and Malaysia (2013) the interval was four months, for Latvia (2014/2015) the interval was five months and for Korea (2016/2017) more than one year due to the specific political situation in the region. Until 2013, it took more or less two years from the preparatory SOMs of one Minister Conference to the SOMs of the next Ministers’ Meeting. As Ministers observed during the Kuala Lumpur ASEMME of 2013, two years is a far too long time period without any contact between the Senior Officials and therefore invited Senior Officials to meet once a year “in order to discuss the implementation of the ASEM activities from a policy perspective and to agree on priority areas for the next Ministerial Meeting proposed by the host of the next meeting in consultation with the ASEM Education Secretariat (AES)”<sup>23</sup>. As a consequence, Ministers introduced so-called Intermediate SOMs (ISOMs) as of 2014.

## STRENGTHENING THE ROLE OF SENIOR OFFICIALS

The Chair’s Conclusions following the Ministerial Meeting in Kuala Lumpur during 2013 mentioned for the first time the role of Senior Officials in the ASEM Education Process and some of their tasks. Similar to the Hanoi Summit of 2004, the Ministerial Meeting held in Kuala Lumpur had formed the opinion that a more policy-oriented preparation of the Ministerial Conferences could lead to an increased participation of Ministers and as such the decision to introduce ISOMs and to list some of the Senior Officials’ tasks was welcomed. However, early indications suggest that there was no increase in the numbers of Ministers attending subsequent Ministerial Meetings held in Riga 2015 and Seoul 2017. The Conclusions of both meetings, therefore, explained in more detail the Senior Officials’ tasks to “exchange information on the results of the ASEM education activities, analyse the achieved results from a policy perspective, identify barriers to the implementation of the agreed activities and propose definite measures to overcome them, further developing and submitting proposals to the Ministers”<sup>24</sup>. In Seoul during 2017, the Ministers encouraged the Senior Officials “to review the implementation of the ASEM education activities and to deliberate on the on-going and future initiatives of the ASEM Education Process”<sup>25</sup>. Ministers also reassigned tasks to the Senior Officials which had originally been allocated to the ASEM Education Secretariat in the Chair’s Conclusions of Hanoi during 2009.

Compared with the period between 2008 and 2013, the current role of the Senior Officials has been strengthened by Ministers, in particular since the Chair’s Conclusions of Kuala Lumpur 2013 and even more clearly since the Ministerial Meetings of Riga 2015 and Seoul 2017 with the result that Senior Officials and the SOMs have been given a more prominent role in steering the Process and as such provide for Ministerial Meetings to have a more political orientation: as illustrated in the Chair’s Conclusions of ASEMME6 (2017), which recommends a more effective monitoring of the implementation process and optimisation of the stocktaking exercise in order “to provide valuable input to the Senior Officials’ Meetings”<sup>26</sup>.

It remains to be seen how Senior Officials will fulfil this role and how they will interact with the host country and the AES to achieve the desired effect. Introducing ISOMs alone is not sufficient to meet the proposed goal and for this reason, during the second ISOM in Moscow in April 2016

the German delegation proposed to set up a Task Force with the aim “to establish a structured and harmonised stocktaking of the existing ASEM initiatives within the priority areas and to improve mechanisms to formulate policy recommendations for the Ministerial Meetings”<sup>27</sup>. The contribution to this publication entitled “Observations on optimising and building the ASEM Education Process (AEP) in the future” will take a closer look at aspects of process optimisation as proposed by the Task Force during 2016 and in particular with regard to AEP.

## THE ASEM EDUCATION SECRETARIAT: ENSURING CONTINUITY AND STABILITY IN THE ASEM EDUCATION PROCESS

During the Hanoi Meeting of 2009, Ministers agreed to establish a secretariat for the ASEM Education Process which was to rotate between Asia and Europe after a four-year term of office.<sup>28</sup> With this decision, the Ministers had created something unique that does not exist in other areas of ASEM.

The first two ASEM Education Secretariats were located in Germany (2009-2013) and Indonesia (2013-2017). The current Secretariat is hosted by Belgium (2017-2021). While the Secretariats in Indonesia and Belgium were/are part of the respective Ministries of Education, the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research commissioned the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), as an independent national higher education organisation in the field of international exchange and cooperation, to host the AES at its headquarters in Bonn.

## TRULY “ASEM” – ASEM EDUCATION SECRETARIAT AND SECONDED STAFF

The difference in the structural integration of the three Secretariats is reflected in the staff working in the Secretariats. In Germany, the Secretariat comprised two full-time and one half-time core staff from DAAD. In contrast, the Secretariat in Indonesia was managed by ministry staff who acquired responsibilities on top of their normal duties. In Belgium, both the Flemish and Walloon Ministries of Education designated one full-time staff member from each Ministry to ASEM Secretariat's tasks. All three Secretariats complemented their staff with a small number of seconded staff from ASEM members across Asia or Europe and as such ensures that the AES is truly “ASEM” in character.

The portfolio assigned to AES was initially “to coordinate educational activities, help with preparations for ASEM Ministerial Meetings, and facilitate the implementation of output-oriented initiatives that contribute to educational policy development and practices”<sup>29</sup>. It was hoped that the Secretariat, in particular with a multiannual mandate, contributes to greater stability and continuity of the ASEM Education Process: an ambition that has been fully realised. With its four-year mandate, the AES became an essential constant feature and a reference point for ASEM education activity and served to provide a communication bridge between Senior Officials, host countries of SOMs and Ministerial Meetings, ASEM stakeholders and partners such as the Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF), the ASEM Lifelong Learning Hub, SEAMEO, ASEM-DUO and the European University Association (EUA).

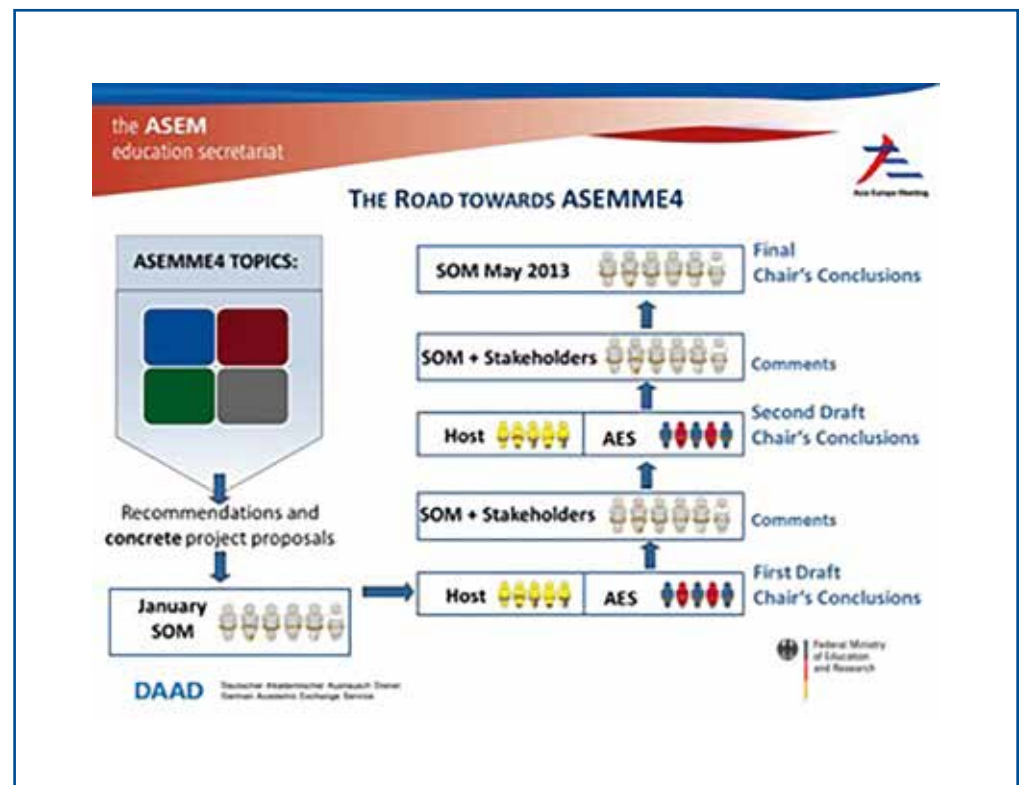
*“The portfolio assigned to AES was initially ‘to coordinate educational activities, help with preparations for ASEM Ministerial Meetings, and facilitate the implementation of output-oriented initiatives that contribute to educational policy development and practices.’”*

The Chair's Conclusions of Copenhagen (2011) acknowledged the work of the first AES while limiting the scope of their tasks inviting the Secretariat to "observe and assist the member countries in implementing the proposed initiatives and to inform the Ministers on the progress achieved with the stocktaking report for ASEMME4 in 2013"<sup>30</sup>. In more concrete terms, the AES was asked to continue updating the compendium on credits and learning outcomes on its website<sup>31</sup> and was urged to "organise a workshop to develop with experts from ASEM members a strategy for balanced mobility and prepare a first draft with recommendations for the next ministerial meetings"<sup>32</sup>.

### ASEM EDUCATION SECRETARIAT – ONE OF THE KEY SUPPORTERS IN IMPLEMENTING THE ASEM EDUCATION PROCESS

Although there is no mention of coordinating the educational activities or assisting with the preparations for Ministerial Meetings, in practice nothing changed for the first ASEM Education Secretariat (located in DAAD in Bonn). The Secretariat continued to maintain and develop a dedicated ASEM website, to distribute monthly newsletters, to regularly communicate with the Senior Officials, to participate in numerous workshops and conferences as speakers or rapporteurs, to advise hosts about events in thematic issues, to produce documents and overviews, and to help host countries of SOMs and Ministerial Conferences prepare and organise meetings and, in particular, compile a Stocktaking Report and draft the Chair's Conclusions in cooperation with the host country and the Senior Officials.

*Interaction  
between ASEMME  
host, AES and  
SOM to prepare the  
Chair's Conclusions  
of 2013.*



The Kuala Lumpur Conclusions (2013) described the main tasks of the second AES located in Indonesia in a similar way<sup>33</sup> but also asked the AES, in a more concrete way, to “observe and assist the member countries in implementing the proposed initiatives”<sup>34</sup> and to “give organisational support to launch the ASEM Work Placement Pilot Programme”<sup>35</sup>.

The Chair’s Conclusions of Riga (2015) noted that tasks were complemented by a communication component which resulted in Ministers asking the Secretariat to develop a communication plan with the aim “to facilitate the exchange of information among ASEM members and stakeholders”, and also to “provide public access to the results of ASEM education cooperation”<sup>36</sup>. Ideally, visibility would be strengthened with more effective online communication in particular through the AES website as the main communication channel and the ASEMInfoBoard.<sup>37</sup>

The Chair’s Conclusions of Seoul (2017) did not focus on communication; instead, the Minister reaffirmed the two original tasks of the Secretariat which were to support the implementation of activities and to prepare a Stocktaking Report and also mandated AES “to reorganise the stocktaking [...] towards process reporting” and “to improve the effectiveness of (I)SOM”<sup>38</sup>. Both the ISOM to be held in Indonesia in June 2018 and the SOM in Austria in October 2018 will evidence whether and how suggested proposals may be implemented. The need for better communication and greater transparency remains and it is therefore most welcome that the current AES located in Belgium has put communication high on its agenda.

*“ASEM has been and continues to be perceived as a forum for informal dialogue, with the ambition to enhance but not implement strategic interregional or global policy.”*

## CONCLUSION: IN SEARCH OF MORE ACTION AND INTERACTION

ASEM has been and continues to be perceived as a forum for informal dialogue, with the ambition to enhance but not implement strategic interregional or global policy. ASEM therefore operates at a low priority level in terms of policy implementation, member countries do not have an official ASEM policy strategy or documents.<sup>39</sup> Apart from some flagship cooperation initiatives/projects of the overarching ASEM process and the AEP respectively, such as ASEM-DUO, Asia-Europe Institute (AEI) or ASEM Work Placement Project<sup>40</sup>, there are also no separate national or international budget lines for ASEM priorities or defined activities.

In terms of enhancing the ASEM Education Process, two key questions emerge as a result of the very dual nature of the Process itself: First, how do we constructively harness the creative tension that arises between formal and informal elements of the AEP; second, how do we maintain the very nature of ASEM as a platform for informal dialogue while striving to achieve more tangible outcomes.

To date, the ASEM Education Process in tandem with the overarching political ASEM process has undergone similar and parallel developments. In more recent years, AEP has gained momentum, however, and more concrete action and tangible outcomes are needed as was clearly underlined during the ASEM Ulaanbaatar Summit (2016). Both Ministerial Meetings and SOMs are guided by fundamental principles of informality and respect, as set out in

*“Future challenges for the AEP will be to address the dual nature of the Process, i.e. informality and institutionalisation on one hand and dialogue and delivery of tangible outcomes on the other.”*

AECF 2000, and underpinned by ideologies of independence and non-interference, which also characterise the very political ambition and objectives of the overarching ASEM process as well as its educational pillar.

The Education Process has also been characterised by specific features and institutions, in particular by the creation of a dedicated Secretariat, which has served to “ensure effective coordination and sustainable progress of the ASEM process”<sup>41</sup>, rotating every four years between Asia and Europe and welcoming seconded staff from ASEM countries making it truly and culturally an informal institution within ASEM. The development of four thematic educational priority areas as well as the introduction of a two-pillar system has enabled the streamlining of concrete project initiatives on one hand and progress reporting on the other, while also providing a reference point linking political top-down commitment to bottom-up initiatives and involving a greater number of experts, stakeholders and representatives from civil society.

The duality of the ASEM process – conceived both as a high level forum and with the involvement of civil society – is very much alive within the ASEM Education Process and in fact is its very asset: combining top-down initiatives initiated by Senior Officials with the involvement of civil society and stakeholders from the very onset during ASEMME1 in Berlin during 2008 and shortly after through students’ and rectors’ conferences and the establishment of expert and working groups. This vitality of AEP is particularly illustrated in the numerous initiatives that have either directly received financial support from respective participating ASEM countries or indirectly been acknowledged in the respective Stocktaking Reports or Chair’s Conclusions. Collectively, these initiatives have been instrumental in creating, sustaining and at times even developing AEP further. They have resulted in a well-established structure for interregional interaction leading to an ASEM Education Area or an “ASEM regional education space” that has been shaped from within<sup>42</sup> and encompasses dynamic elements such as agenda setting and the impressive number of initiatives.

Future challenges for the AEP will be to address the dual nature of the Process, i.e. informality and institutionalisation on one hand and dialogue and delivery of tangible outcomes on the other.<sup>43</sup> For AEP, “improving the working methods” translates into creating more “institutionalised” processes and enhanced formats for interactions between the three key players Ministers, Senior Officials and AES; also, for a more effective follow-up to optimise the basis of the Stocktaking Report to enable more informed policy choices while ensuring regular outreach to relevant stakeholders, experts, working groups and civil society members. This should be achieved in a spirit of striking the balance between an emphasis on dialogue while concentrating on “effective fulfilment” (cf. the title of ASEMME6) and delivering tangible results in key areas identified.

Reflecting on our initial question as to whether and to what extent the Hanoi recommendations of improving the ASEM working methods have been taken into account in the educational pillar: three major points – more informality and interaction, agenda setting with fewer topics, utilising stakeholders more – will serve to address the issue in the field of education.

With regard to advocating for “more informality and interaction” during the meetings, a response was created accordingly through the introduction of informal meeting formats such as the working breakfast (ASEMME5) and through the Task Force initiative to enhance policy discussions, decisions and – ultimately direction, based on enhanced Stocktaking Report elements in preparation of the (I)SOMs and Ministerial Meetings.

Regarding the recommendation for “agenda setting with fewer topics”, the introduction of four thematic priorities as well as the introduction of the two pillars (result- and dialogue-oriented) has been successful in terms of structuring reporting and dialogue and allowing for the emergence of priority themes.

When it comes to “utilising stakeholders more” in order to reach a wider public and civil society – this has been achieved through the establishment of the series of working and expert groups as well as the biennial students’ and rectors’ conferences and through the considerable number of ASEM-related initiatives as summarised in the respective Stocktaking Report.

Parallel to face-to-face interactions (meetings/seminars, etc.), ASEM/AEP has gone viral and a virtual ASEM /ASEM education space has emerged with the creation of the ASEMInfoBoard website, online ASEM education newsletters as well as a new, interactive website developed by the AES.

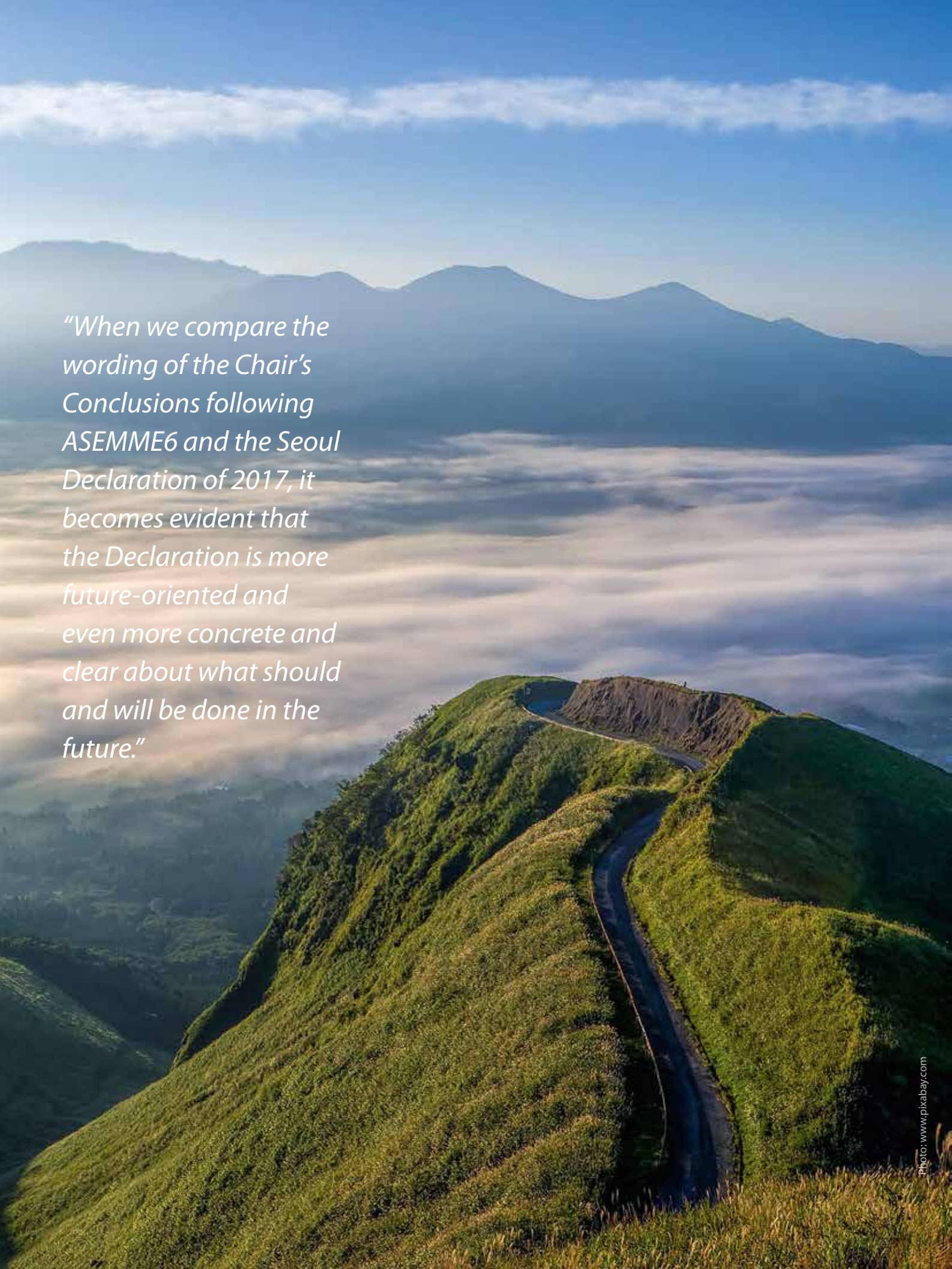
These physical and virtual forms of interaction and cooperation have over the years supported and strengthened the dual nature of AEP by successfully linking the two levels of high level forum and civil society – to further build and shape a robust/vigorous ASEM educational space with the potential of turning informal dialogue and tangible cooperation into mutually reinforcing processes.

Physical and virtual spaces are constituent elements of the AEP that has its strengths when looking at the number of initiatives and dynamic agenda setting and AES as institution to guarantee continuity and follow-up. Keeping the momentum by a more structured and informed follow-up and involving more ASEM members in ongoing or new initiatives will be two major challenges and tasks ahead for the main political actors described here – Ministers of Education, Senior Officials and ASEM Education Secretariat.

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- <sup>1</sup> European Commission (1996). *Communication to the Council and Parliament Regarding the Asia-Europe Meeting*. Bulletin EU 1/2-1996 (Asia 1/10). Brussels, p. 12.
- <sup>2</sup> Khandekar, Roopmati (2018). ASEM: An Asian Perspective. In: Gaens, Bart and Khandekar, Gauri (eds.). *Inter-Regional Relations and the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM)*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, p. 210.
- <sup>3</sup> Fourth ASEM Summit (ASEM4) (2004). *Chairman's Statement*. Annex 2. 9 October. Hanoi.
- <sup>4</sup> Gaens, Bart (2018). Two Decades of the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM). In: Gaens, Bart and Khandekar, Gauri (eds.). *Inter-Regional Relations and the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM)*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, p. 14.
- <sup>5</sup> First ASEM Summit (ASEM1) (1996). *Chair Statement*. Bangkok, p. 2.
- <sup>6</sup> The wording was used in: Fourth ASEM Summit (ASEM4) (2004). *Chairman's Statement*. Annex 2. 9 October. Hanoi, p. 1.
- <sup>7</sup> European Commission (2001). *Vademecum. Modalities for Future ASEM Dialogue – Taking the Process Forward*. 18 July. Brussels.
- <sup>8</sup> Fourth ASEM Foreign Ministers' Meeting (2002). *Chair Statement*. 6 – 7 June. Madrid, p. 1.
- <sup>9</sup> Fourth ASEM Summit (ASEM4) (2004). *Chairman's Statement*. Annex 2. 9 October. Hanoi.
- <sup>10</sup> There are two regional coordinators on the Asian side (one ASEAN country, one non-ASEAN country) and two on the European side (European Commission, Member State holding the EU Council Presidency). "The ASEM coordinators [...] facilitate the coordination of the ASEM Process" (see <http://www.aseminfoboard.org/pages/1/about> [Accessed: 29 June 2018]). The coordinators do not play a role in the ASEM Education Process and therefore will not be included in this article. On the other hand, we have, as an exception in ASEM, to take into account a sector-specific secretariat as key player supporting the Education Process.
- <sup>11</sup> The Kuala Lumpur Meeting asked the Senior Officials to meet annually in order to "give additional political momentum to the ASEM Education Process" and to deepen the political discussion. The Ministers wished to enable a more in depth political discussion in the Ministerial Meetings by implementing an additional preparatory SOM.
- <sup>12</sup> Up to now, there has been no formal decision on an official name for the Ministerial Meetings in the field of education. However, the Latvian Chair proposed to use the title "ASEM Education Ministers' Meeting" (in accordance to the naming of ASEM Ministerial Meetings in other areas). See Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Latvia (2014). *First Senior Officials' Meeting. Summary Report*. 26 November. Riga, p. 4. The proposed title was used in the Riga (2015) and Seoul (2017) Conclusions by the Chair.
- <sup>13</sup> Today, in both countries, higher education and VET are under one single ministerial "roof".
- <sup>14</sup> Malaysia: Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE); Vietnam: Ministry of Education and Technology (MOET).
- <sup>15</sup> Cf. Keva, Silja and Gaens, Bart (2008). ASEM's Institutional Structure. In: Gaens, Bart (ed.). *Europe-Asia Interregional Relations. A decade of ASEM*. Aldershot, p. 120.
- <sup>16</sup> Fourth ASEM Summit (ASEM4) (2004). *Chairman's Statement*. Annex 2. 9 October. Hanoi, p. 1.
- <sup>17</sup> Ibidem.
- <sup>18</sup> According to ASEMME6 Participants List. Version of 17 November 2017. [not published].
- <sup>19</sup> The non-binding character of the two main documents of the Ministerial Meetings is reflected in the wording of the Conclusions and Declarations. In particular the use of verbs such as "consider", "recognise", "emphasise", "welcome" etc. is revealing in this respect.
- <sup>20</sup> Fourth ASEM Summit (ASEM4) (2004). *Chairman's Statement*. Annex 2. 9 October. Hanoi, p. 2.
- <sup>21</sup> Ibidem.
- <sup>22</sup> Ibidem.
- <sup>23</sup> Fourth ASEM Education Ministers' Meeting (ASEMME4) (2013). *Conclusions by the Chair*. Kuala Lumpur, p. 2.
- <sup>24</sup> Fifth ASEM Education Ministers Meeting (ASEMME5) (2015). *Conclusions by the Chair*. Riga, pp. 9-10.
- <sup>25</sup> Sixth ASEM Education Ministers' Meeting (ASEMME6) (2017). *Conclusions by the Chair*. Seoul, p.11.
- <sup>26</sup> Ibidem.
- <sup>27</sup> Sixth ASEM Education Ministers' Meeting (ASEMME6) (2017). *From Riga to Seoul. Stocktaking Report*. Compiled by the ASEM Education Secretariat and the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Korea in consultation with ASEM partners and stakeholders. Seoul, p. 20.
- <sup>28</sup> Wuttig, Siegbert and Scholle-Pollmann, Nina. *Taking Stock: The first international ASEM Education Secretariat in Germany (2009 – 2013)* in this book.
- <sup>29</sup> Second ASEM Education Ministers' Meeting (ASEMME2) (2009). *Conclusions by the Chair*. Hanoi, p. 3.
- <sup>30</sup> Third ASEM Education Ministers' Meeting (ASEMME3) (2011). *Conclusions by the Chair*. Copenhagen, p. 6.
- <sup>31</sup> Ibidem.
- <sup>32</sup> Ibidem.

- <sup>33</sup> Fourth ASEM Education Ministers' Meeting (ASEMME4) (2013). *Conclusions by the Chair*. Kuala Lumpur, p. 8. In fact, the concrete tasks and daily work of the AES in Indonesia were very similar to the ones of the Bonn Secretariat.
- <sup>34</sup> Fourth ASEM Education Ministers' Meeting (ASEMME4) (2013). *Strategizing ASEM Education Collaboration. Conclusions by the Chair*. Kuala Lumpur, para. 37ff.
- <sup>35</sup> Ibidem, para. 22.
- <sup>36</sup> Fifth ASEM Education Ministers' Meeting (ASEMME5) (2015). *ASEM Education Collaboration for Results. Conclusions by the Chair*. Riga, p. 10.
- <sup>37</sup> Ibidem, para.15.
- <sup>38</sup> Sixth ASEM Education Ministers' Meeting (ASEMME6) (2017). *Collaboration for the Next Decade: From Common Perspectives to Effective Fulfilment. Conclusions by the Chair*. Seoul.
- <sup>39</sup> Cf. Khandekar, Roopmati (2018). ASEM: An Asian Perspective. In: Gaens, Bart and Khandekar, Gauri (eds.). *Inter-Regional Relations and the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM)*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, p. 210.
- <sup>40</sup> Cf. article "ASEM Education Process in practice" in this publication.
- <sup>41</sup> Second ASEM Education Ministers' Meeting (ASEMME2) (2009). *Conclusions by the Chair*. Hanoi, p. 4.
- <sup>42</sup> Dang, Que Anh (2016). Shaping an ASEM (Higher) Education Area: hybrid sectoral regionalism from within. In: Robertson, Susan; Olds, Kris; Dale, Roter and Dang, Que Anh (eds.). *Global Regionalism and Higher Education. Projects, Processes and Politics*. Cheltenham, pp. 143-166.
- <sup>43</sup> Gaens, Bart and Khandekar, Gauri (2018). Conclusion. In: Gaens, Bart and Khandekar, Gauri (eds.). *Inter-Regional Relations and the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM)*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 257ff.



*“When we compare the wording of the Chair’s Conclusions following ASEMME6 and the Seoul Declaration of 2017, it becomes evident that the Declaration is more future-oriented and even more concrete and clear about what should and will be done in the future.”*

## FROM SHARED VIEWS TO A COMMON VISION

# Political opinion forming in the ASEM Education Process

Siegbert Wuttig

*In my capacity as director of the first ASEM Education Secretariat (AES) and previously as one of the organisers of the ASEM Education Ministers' Meeting (ASEMME) in Berlin, I witnessed at close proximity political opinion forming in the ASEM Education Process and had the opportunity to play a part in drawing up the Chair's Conclusions for several Ministers Meetings (including ASEMME4 held in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia 2013). The opinion forming process in these meetings applies mutatis mutandis for the following Ministerial Meetings held in Riga, Latvia 2015 and Seoul, Republic of Korea 2017. A similar process was observed during the drafting of the Seoul Declaration.*

The formulation of political opinion through an informal political process such as the ASEM Education Process is consensual and also requires extensive and intensive communication among the stakeholders involved. At the end of the day, diplomatic skills and linguistic sensitivity are required to draw up Chair's Conclusions and Declarations in such a way that their non-binding character is evident and so that all ASEM Ministers can adopt the agreements.

Based on my own experience, I will seek to report in this article how the exciting dialogue and interactive communication of the Process works to create ASEM ministerial "soft law" documents such as Conclusions and Declarations.

## PREPARING THE CONCLUSIONS OF THE FIRST EDUCATION MINISTERS' MEETING IN BERLIN

Forming political opinion with regard to the themes and the content of upcoming Ministerial Meetings begins several months prior to the event. The first milestone in terms of agenda-setting takes place with the first Senior Officials' Meeting (SOM), which is scheduled four to five months prior to the Ministers' Meetings with the aim to identify priority themes and prepare for the event. In exceptional circumstances or where the external political environment dictates, the SOM can take place one year prior to the Ministerial Meeting, as

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was the case for the first preparatory SOM hosted by the Korean Government in Seoul, in advance of ASEMME6 2017. The preparatory work of the SOMs and the Ministerial events is coordinated by respective host countries – since 2009 with support from the ASEM Education Secretariat.

The German Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) organised and prepared for the first ASEM Education Ministers' Meeting held in Berlin during May 2008. With assistance from DAAD<sup>1</sup> colleagues, who later became the core team of the first ASEM Education Secretariat, BMBF informed all ASEM members during December 2007 of the upcoming Ministerial Meeting and invited national Ministers responsible for education to attend the event. From the very beginning, the German Federal Ministry had a clear idea about the themes of the event, which was entitled "Education and Training for Tomorrow – Common Perspectives in Asia and Europe". To set the agenda, BMBF together with DAAD developed two main topics: (1) Higher education cooperation between Asia and Europe and (2) Education and the labour market. In January 2008, the German host invited Senior Officials from the ASEM Education Ministries to the first Senior Officials' Meeting, which was held in Bonn during March 2008. The invitation also circulated two draft concept papers to focus the SOM agenda and discussion. The papers on "Aspects of EU-Asia higher education cooperation" and "Education and the labour market" detailed the aims and topics of the Berlin Conference. In particular, Germany proposed various topics organised around two sessions scheduled to take place during ASEMME1 and requested Senior Officials to send their comments and complements to the BMBF in advance so that the host country could collate and summarise responses for presentation and analysis during the SOM. In addition, Senior Officials were asked to compile a brief status report on their countries' experience of higher education cooperation and exchange between Asia and Europe. These national reports contained valuable data on national activities in the fields of academic mobility, university-business cooperation and lifelong learning and "put discussions in Berlin on a basis of sound information"<sup>2</sup>.

At the first SOM held in Bonn on 10 and 11 March 2008, some 50 representatives of 31 ASEM countries and the European Commission were present. In the first part of the meeting, the German Chair informed participants about organisational details of the upcoming ASEMME1 Conference due to be held in Berlin. The second and third items on the agenda were dedicated to agreeing topics and possible key messages of the ASEM Education Ministers. Senior Officials raised questions and discussed the content of the concept papers. The discussion concluded that all delegations agreed in principle to the two main themes proposed by the German Chair. There was also consensus to concentrate on a select number of sub-topics to the two main themes. Last but not least, the SOM agreed on some key messages of the Ministers.

In the weeks following the first SOM, BMBF with support of the DAAD drafted a first version of the Chair's Conclusions taking into consideration the results of the SOM held in Bonn and the informal character of the ASEM process.<sup>3</sup> The six week period between the first SOM and dispatch of the draft Conclusions to the Senior Officials' Meeting provided for the development and refining of the wording of the text, which was first of all done in coordination

with political stakeholders in Germany (BMBF, Foreign Office, Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the Länder). Finally, the draft, together with national reports and an executive summary prepared by DAAD (see above), was sent to Senior Officials on 24 April 2008. The ASEM members, therefore, had little time to discuss the documents within their respective ministries or to prepare comments or amendments for the second SOM due to be held in Berlin one day prior to the Ministers' Meeting, which was scheduled for 4 May 2008.

During the second SOM, the German host went through a draft of the Chair's Conclusions paragraph by paragraph and asked Senior Officials for amendments or additions. Some delegations used the opportunity to bring forward proposals or to suggest slight linguistic changes.<sup>4</sup> With the consensus of the SOM, the German Chair took note of the proposed changes and included them in the final draft version, which was circulated to the delegates in a track changes version on the same day. During the Ministers' Meeting on 5 and 6 May, the heads of delegations (in many cases, Ministers responsible for education) put forward statements addressing the two main conference themes officially introduced by the co-sponsors China, Japan, Denmark and the European Commission. The statements of the heads of delegation were in many cases contributions prepared prior to the conference – which is quite a normal phenomenon in the formal setting of political meetings. Although the discussions did not lead to any change in the content of the Chair's Conclusions, the text of the document exactly reflects the great enthusiasm and the pioneering spirit of the delegations which was "to set up a strategic Asia-Europe education partnership for the 21st century, to strengthen the ASEM dialogue and cooperation in the field of education to include stakeholders at all levels"<sup>5</sup>.

The involvement of stakeholders at all levels of ASEM education dialogue and during the political opinion forming process has been a matter of utmost importance for policymakers and AES. During ASEMME1, the Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF) was present in the Ministers' Meeting and also made a presentation. Later, other ASEM stakeholders such as ASEM-DUO, the ASEM Lifelong Learning Hub, the European University Association (EUA), the ASEAN University Network (AUN), the South East Asia Ministers of Education Organisation (SEAMEO), the European Students' Union (ESU), the Erasmus Student Network (ESN) and UNESCO, attended the Ministerial Meetings and, in many cases, made contributions to surveys and other documents tabled for discussions at future SOMs and ASEMME.

In retrospect, the interactive communication process between ASEM members and stakeholders in the run-up to the Ministers' Meeting in Berlin led to a common political opinion on a new chapter of Asia-Europe cooperation in the field of education and defined priority areas through which cooperation could take place and can be considered as a promising starting point for future years and the next Ministerial Meetings.



*"The involvement of stakeholders at all levels of ASEM education dialogue and during the political opinion forming process has been a matter of utmost importance for policymakers and AES."*

*“In preparation for ASEMME2, the Vietnamese Chair moderating the SOM advanced discussions leading to consensual results and provided for an ad hoc proposal suggesting the implementation of an ASEM Education Secretariat.”*

## REACHING SHARED VIEWS THROUGH POLITICAL COMMUNICATION AND INTERACTION – CONCLUSIONS OF THE MINISTERS’ MEETINGS HANOI, COPENHAGEN AND KUALA LUMPUR

The preparatory work and communication process for the second ASEMME held in Hanoi (2009) was very similar to that of ASEMME1 held in Berlin. However, at a very early stage, the Vietnamese host invited ASEM members to provide thematic input for ASEMME2. It was in fact during ASEMME1 that Vietnam circulated a survey questionnaire to all delegations asking for topics to be discussed in the Ministerial Meeting.

At the first preparatory SOM for ASEMME2 held in Hanoi on 19 and 20 January 2009, the Vietnamese Chair presented the two topics that received greatest attention from the ASEM members: (1) Quality assurance, credit recognition and transfer in ASEM and; (2) Sustainable human resource development for ASEM future needs. Subsequent discussion on the part of Senior Officials agreed both issues as the main topics for the upcoming ASEMME2. Similar to the SOM held in Bonn, which preceded ASEMME1, Senior Officials attending the preparatory SOM held in Hanoi also discussed possible sub-topics and key messages for agreement in advance of ASEMME2 and to be included in the Chair’s Conclusions. In this context and to emphasise the importance of non-governmental stakeholders in the ASEM Education Process, it was agreed to incorporate, for the first time, a paragraph into the Chair’s Conclusions acknowledging the results of the ASEM Rectors’ Conference held in Berlin during September 2008.

In preparation for ASEMME2, the Vietnamese Chair moderating the SOM advanced discussions leading to consensual results and provided for an *ad hoc* proposal suggesting the implementation of an ASEM Education Secretariat<sup>6</sup> and invited the ASEM members to express interest in hosting it. However, given that such a decision required discussion at a national level, Senior Officials returned to their respective ministries with the proposal. Germany emerged as the only ASEM member volunteering to host a secretariat and forwarded an expression of interest to the Vietnamese Chair who recorded Germany’s willingness in the first draft of the Chair’s Conclusions. This draft was sent to the ASEM delegations on 5 May 2009 with a request for comment. The Ministers’ Meeting (ASEMME2) was scheduled to be held in Hanoi on 14 and 15 May 2009, with the result that the majority of comments were submitted in person by ASEM delegates attending SOM held one day before ASEMME2. Senior Officials, for the first time, had a lively discussion on the nature and tasks of the proposed ASEM Education Secretariat and while the Chair’s Conclusions adopted by Ministers outline the consensus reached, it does not reflect the exchange of opinion, the intensity of discussion or the nature of the debate.

With regards to procedures and methods, in my experience preparations for ASEMME3 and ASEMME4 held in Copenhagen and Kuala Lumpur did not deviate much from the benchmark set by ASEMME1 and ASEMME2. However, in contrast to ASEMME1 held in Berlin and ASEMME2 held in Hanoi, there now was the newly established ASEM Education Secretariat to underpin and strongly support the Danish and Malaysian host countries tasked with organising ASEMME3 (Copenhagen 2011) and ASEMME4 (Kuala Lumpur 2013). In the run-up to the preparatory SOM held in Copenhagen (27 and 28 January 2011) and Kuala Lumpur

(28 and 29 January 2013), the Secretariat and the host countries worked together to prepare agenda and content and to draft key documents such as the Chair's Conclusions and the Stocktaking Report.

By way of providing an example, the following is a description of the steps taken by AES and the Danish host of ASEMME3 during the opinion forming process which lead to agreeing the draft Chair's Conclusions presented to the Ministerial Meeting:

**(1)** In September 2010, AES compiled a draft synthesis report on the implementation status of the Chair's Conclusions agreed during ASEMME2 (Hanoi, Vietnam 2009). On the basis of this analysis, the Danish Chair developed four thematic priority areas (quality assurance, university-business cooperation, balanced mobility, and lifelong learning including VET). The synthesis report was circulated to Senior Officials and ASEM stakeholders for comment during November 2010, together with the draft Stocktaking Report and an invitation to the preparatory SOM scheduled for January 2011 in Copenhagen. The draft Stocktaking Report also contained a questionnaire relating to the four identified priority themes proposed for discussion during ASEMME3.

**(2)** Throughout December 2010 and early January 2011, AES continued to collect and analyse member and stakeholder responses with the aim to present a summary of the comments for further discussion during the preparatory SOM scheduled to be held in Copenhagen on 27 and 28 January.

**(3)** In January 2011, Senior Officials, the Danish host and AES met to discuss the draft Stocktaking Report (including the responses to the questionnaire) and agreed possible key messages for inclusion in the Chair's Conclusions.

**(4)** Subsequent to the Senior Officials' Meeting, the Danish host and AES drafted a first version of the Chair's Conclusions for circulation in February 2011 and invited ASEM members and stakeholders to provide comment and/or additions to both the draft Chair's Conclusions and the draft Stocktaking Report. The volume of reply led to several revisions of the texts.

**(5)** During the next SOM held one day before the Ministerial Meeting (May 2011), Senior Officials, without proposing substantial changes<sup>7</sup>, agreed the final text of the Chair's Conclusions and the Stocktaking Report, which were tabled for adoption during the Ministers' Meeting.

The process of drafting ASEM education documents for the Copenhagen Meeting clearly demonstrates that opinion forming within the ASEM Education Process is democratic and respectful and includes all ASEM members and stakeholders in both an interactive and reiterative communication and from an early stage: which is also true for the opinion forming process that takes place prior to the other ASEM Ministerial Meetings.

The inclusion of stakeholders at all levels of the Education Process was highlighted as a political aspiration of ASEM. It was therefore adroit that the Danish host and AES attended the

*“The process of drafting ASEM education documents for the Copenhagen Meeting clearly demonstrates that opinion forming within the ASEM Education Process is democratic and respectful and includes all ASEM members and stakeholders in both an interactive and reiterative communication and from an early stage.”*

*“Although the Chair’s Conclusions are non-binding by nature, Ministers sometimes wish to initiate certain developments and, in this respect, employ verbs such as ‘encourage’ or ‘invite’ to incentivise and motivate ASEM member countries and stakeholders.”*

ASEM Rectors’ Conference, which took place in Seoul during October 2010, to present and discuss the themes identified for the upcoming ASEMME3. Feedback and recommendations from the Rectors’ Conference were later taken into account by the Danish Chair and the Secretariat when drafting the Chair’s Conclusions. Applying a similar format, Rectors’ opinions were also considered by delegates attending the preparatory SOM held in Kuala Lumpur during January 2013 in advance of ASEMME4. This time, ASEF together with the ASEAN University Network (AUN) and the University of Groningen organised the Rectors’ Conference in the Netherlands from 24 to 26 September 2012. During the meeting, a representative of the Malaysian Ministry of Education and the Director of the AES discussed proposed themes for ASEMME4 and provided space for comment/feedback from higher education representatives. ASEF also invited students from ASEM countries to attend the Rectors’ Conference, which established a Student Forum and together with the Rectors now produces recommendations for Ministerial Meetings. Including students in the ASEM Education Process was an important step towards opening the opinion forming process to those who are directly impacted by ASEM education policies. The ASEMME4 Chair’s Conclusions of Kuala Lumpur commented on this new departure and underlined the importance of actively involving stakeholders and learners in the ASEM Education Process.

Undertaking a review of the Chair’s Conclusions of the first four ASEM Education Ministers’ Meetings reveals that beyond the political statements an increasing number of activities are being carried out or planned by ASEM members and stakeholders. These bottom-up initiatives and projects identified by AES during their analysis of national reports represent the more practical level of the ASEM Education Process and reflect the interest and commitment of the ASEM members involved. Successfully completed activities and new initiatives are collated during the drafting of the Chair’s Conclusions and the Stocktaking Report and presented during Senior Officials’ and Ministerial Meetings. Considering the various activities presented in the Chair’s Conclusions and the Stocktaking Report, Senior Officials and Ministers acknowledge the positive impact of initiatives undertaken by member countries using verbs such as “welcome” and “appreciate” to express their positive opinion on these activities and to emphasise the projects and measures that contribute in a significant way to the development of the ASEM Education Process.

Although the Chair’s Conclusions are non-binding by nature, Ministers sometimes wish to initiate certain developments and, in this respect, employ verbs such as “encourage” or “invite” to incentivise and motivate ASEM member countries and stakeholders. As a rule, ministerial communications are more definitive and direct vis-à-vis their dialogue with Senior Officials and AES. For example, the Chair’s Conclusions following ASEMME4 note that Ministers “expected” Senior Officials to meet in China during 2014 and “mandated” AES “to observe and assist the member countries in implementing the proposed initiatives and to inform the ministers on the progress achieved with the stocktaking report for ASEMME5 in 2015”<sup>8</sup>.

By the time Germany had completed their tenure as AES in 2013, five years of ASEM dialogue on education had led to a well-structured framework for political opinion forming, to a clearer picture of key policy areas and thematic priorities and to the inclusion of a wider spectrum of stakeholders. Many ASEM members and stakeholders had demonstrated a willingness to

take part in joint initiatives, to learn from each other and to develop a common understanding of issues relating to educational collaboration between Asia and Europe: which was a good basis for the next phase of the ASEM Education Process.

In spite of the many achievements, there remains a general feeling that the Ministerial Meetings, in particular, should be enhanced so as to become more attractive to Ministers from a policy point of view. Ministers, therefore, “wished to give additional political momentum to the ASEM Education Process by asking the Senior Officials to meet yearly in order to discuss the implementation of ASEM activities from a policy perspective and to agree on priority areas for the next Ministerial Meeting proposed by the host of the next meeting in consultation with the ASEM Education Secretariat (AES)”<sup>9</sup>. As a result of this, Ministers strengthened the role of Senior Officials within the ASEM Education Process and also added a new element to the political opinion forming process by introducing the so-called Intermediate SOM (ISOM) with the aim to include Ministries in the political preparations for Ministers’ Meetings on a more continuous and regular basis and to ensure that events were more policy-relevant.

*“In spite of the many achievements, there remains a general feeling that the Ministerial Meetings, in particular, should be enhanced so as to become more attractive to Ministers from a policy point of view.”*

## DEVELOPING A COMMON VISION FOR THE ASEM EDUCATION PROCESS – THE CHAIR’S CONCLUSIONS OF THE MINISTERS’ MEETINGS IN LATVIA AND KOREA AND THE SEOUL DECLARATION

Although the working methods and procedures to prepare for the Ministers’ Meetings held in Riga and Seoul did not differ in essence compared to previous ASEMME, different approaches were introduced to enhance the opinion forming process. The introduction of an Intermediary Senior Officials’ Meeting (ISOM) in particular, and also the intention of the Latvian and Korean host countries to stimulate a debate on the future of the ASEM Education Process had a positive impact on political opinion forming.

The first ISOM was held in Hangzhou, China on 7 and 9 May 2014 to coincide with the preparatory phase for ASEMME5 scheduled to be held in Riga, Latvia during 2015. The stocktaking exercise in particular “aiming to discuss the implementation of ASEM activities from a policy perspective”<sup>10</sup> benefitted from this more detailed discussion. In the following months, AES in cooperation with the Latvian host developed a draft Stocktaking Report involving ASEM members and stakeholders in the usual iterative communication process. Between June and October 2014, the Latvian Chair consulted with ASEM members and stakeholders on “possible priorities and activities for the post-ASEMME5 period and the ASEMME5 agenda”<sup>11</sup>. The results of the consultation and subsequent discussions held during the SOM in Riga on 10 and 11 November 2014 indicated that the four key priorities of the ASEM Education Process should be maintained with “tangible and more result-oriented activities” encouraged. Senior Officials’ discussions also agreed the proposal by Latvia to delineate ASEM Education Process discussions into dialogue-oriented cooperation (pillar 1) and result-oriented cooperation (pillar 2) and underlined the need to involve stakeholders, “especially students, rectors and teachers” and to develop a vision document. Subsequently, AES drafted a document (“ASEM Education Vision Survey”) on the future of the ASEM Education Process incorporating ideas and comments from ASEM members and stakeholders. A summary report

*“By agreeing the Seoul Declaration, however, Ministers took an important step that went beyond routine Chair’s Conclusions and reflected first of all the view of ASEM members and stakeholders in terms of formulating a common political vision for AEP which is shared by the ASEM family.”*

of the vision survey was later presented by the AES during the second preparatory SOM, which took place in Riga on 26 May 2015 one day before the ASEM Education Ministers’ Meeting. Although 20 ASEM countries took part in the vision survey, the Chair’s Conclusions of ASEMME5 only briefly references the vision document.<sup>12</sup>

A working breakfast for the heads of delegations was organised by the ASEMME5 Latvian host “to discuss future prospects, the main challenges, opportunities and expected outcomes of ASEM education collaboration”<sup>13</sup>, and was also not considered in the Chair’s Conclusions. However, this omission is quite understandable given the informality of the working breakfast. Albeit the results of fringe meetings/informal discussions were not considered in the Chair’s Conclusions of Riga, their inclusion on the schedule of events is viewed as a promising step forward providing for a more open and spontaneous exchange of opinions in terms of both the ASEM opinion forming process and with regard to the future development of the ASEM Education Process. By providing space for a new informal element to the opinion forming process, the Latvian host made tangible the various fringe activities, consultations and discussions and “confirmed that there is an eagerness for fewer speeches and more of real conversations and exchange between the ministers at ASEMME to allow [...] for the real policy setting to be done by the ministers”<sup>14</sup>.

Creating a vision for AEP was a major theme during the preparations for ASEMME6 held in Seoul during 2017. Prior to the preparatory SOM, which was held in Seoul on 9 and 10 November 2016, Korea as host country undertook to survey members and stakeholders on the future and direction of AEP. Less than half of ASEM members and ASEF took part in the survey with 21 responses presented and discussed during the meeting. The results of the survey were tabled and laid the foundation for ASEMME6 which, according to the Korean host, was to “search for a vision [for the next decade; the author] of the ASEM Education Process”<sup>15</sup>. In this respect, the host suggested to draw up, for the first time, an ASEM Declaration in the field of education and initiated an interactive communication process which included all ASEM members and stakeholders and led to the drafting of the Seoul Declaration. Korea as host prepared the initial draft of the document and circulated it to the ASEM community for comment, change or addition. Working in collaboration with a Drafting Committee which included ASEM members and stakeholders, the host country drew up the final draft of the Seoul Declaration, which was tabled for discussion during the second SOM held on 20 November 2017 and later adopted by Ministers during their Meeting of 22 November 2017.

By adopting the Seoul Declaration, the Ministerial Meeting, for the first time, agreed a visionary policy document “that will lead to the next chapter of the ASEM Education Process”<sup>16</sup> and while Ministers expressed their satisfaction with the progress of AEP, they clearly also wanted to develop the Process and to strengthen the dialogue and cooperation between Asia and Europe in order “to face emerging global challenges”<sup>17</sup>. Although it is true that the Seoul Declaration is a non-binding document, it is perhaps more important that Ministers jointly demonstrate their goodwill and underline their political support of the Process: which is ultimately the real value of the Declaration as a political tool to create both a spirit of joint responsibility and a political climate that motivates members and stakeholders to actively cooperate. It remains to be seen whether future Declarations can retain a positive

motivating effect and/or even be strengthened by going beyond the political intentions of the Declaration to seek tangible objectives, which are lacking in the Seoul Declaration and in the overall ASEM process.<sup>18</sup>

## CONCLUSION

The administrative process of the Seoul Declaration and the drafting of documents like the Stocktaking Reports and Chair's Conclusions, demonstrate the democratic, respectful and inclusive approach ASEM members and stakeholders have towards political opinion forming. By agreeing the Seoul Declaration, however, Ministers took an important step that went beyond routine Chair's Conclusions and reflected first of all the view of ASEM members and stakeholders in terms of formulating a common political vision for AEP which is shared by the ASEM family. In other words, the Declaration "should not be owned by a specific entity, but rather owned by all ASEM partners and stakeholders"<sup>19</sup>. Declarations are often issued "in response to global events and specific challenges"<sup>20</sup>, for example the "Helsinki Declaration on the future of ASEM" (2006) and the "Ulaanbaatar Declaration on Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) into the Third Decade" (2016). In a political process where Declarations are non-binding by nature, they can explain what has been achieved in a certain political area and also express the common opinion of the parties involved, which is exactly what the Seoul Declaration does. When we compare the wording of the Chair's Conclusions following

*Discussing  
the future of AEP,  
Seoul 2017*



ASEMME6 and the Seoul Declaration of 2017, it becomes evident that the Declaration is more future-oriented and even more concrete and clear about what should and will be done in the future. For example, in the Seoul Declaration Ministers declare that they “will continue to strengthen our cooperation in sharing best practices to enhance our education systems and to pursue capacity-building of policymakers and policy implementers” and also “declare their support” for stronger collaboration in the field of ICT and “are ready to make our cooperation more tangible and effective by engaging in active dialogue and action to realise our common vision in the next decade”<sup>21</sup>. Statements and concepts like this are certainly non-binding legally, but they do have a strong impact on the political and practical agenda of the ASEM Education Process going forward into the next decade. Ministers have therefore set the agenda for the next decade. However, it remains to be seen if and how ASEM members and stakeholders will comply with the strategic view expressed. Ultimately, the Process relies on a “gentleman’s agreement” as sanctions have not been built into the mechanisms (unlike the Bologna Process which uses the naming and shaming method) and in the cases of non-compliance it can therefore become difficult to achieve a coherent policy framework and a convergence of the Process that leads to a genuine ASEM Education Area.<sup>22</sup>

In informal political fields, the journey to setting up, implementing and achieving strategic goals is long and winding and sometimes it is the journey towards the process that is actually the reward; and this is particularly true for the ASEM Education Process.

- <sup>1</sup> German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) in Bonn, Germany.
- <sup>2</sup> Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) (2008). *ASEM Conference of Ministers Responsible for Education – Education and Training for Tomorrow. Common Perspectives in Asia and Europe. Draft Discussion Paper*. Bonn, p. 3. Annex to BMBF's invitation letter to Senior Officials for the first SOM; Bonn 14-1-2008. [not published].
- <sup>3</sup> To emphasise the non-binding character of the document, the three main verbs used in the text are "recognised", "agreed" and "welcomed". Verbs such as "decided" cannot be used in this context.
- <sup>4</sup> For example, the sentence "The activities of the German Academic Exchange Service in this field could serve as a model" was changed to "The activities of the German Academic Exchange Service in this field could be a source of inspiration" in order to better underline the informality of the ASEM Education Process.
- <sup>5</sup> First ASEM Education Ministers' Meeting (ASEMME1) (2008). *Education and Training for Tomorrow: Common Perspectives in Asia and Europe. Conclusions by the Chair*. Berlin, p. 2.
- <sup>6</sup> ASEM Senior Officials' Meeting (SOM) Hanoi 19/20 January 2009 in preparation of the ASEM Conference of Ministers responsible for education in Hanoi 14/15 May 2009. *Minutes*. Hanoi, p. 2.
- <sup>7</sup> The amendments mainly concerned editorial points.
- <sup>8</sup> Fourth ASEM Education Ministers' Meeting (ASEMME4) (2013). *Strategizing ASEM Education Collaboration. Conclusions by the Chair*. Kuala Lumpur, p. 8.
- <sup>9</sup> Ibidem, p. 2.
- <sup>10</sup> Fifth ASEM Education Ministers' Meeting (ASEMME5) (2015). *From Kuala Lumpur to Riga. Stocktaking Report*. Composed by the ASEM Education Secretariat and the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Latvia in close cooperation with ASEM members and stakeholders. Riga, p. 3.
- <sup>11</sup> Ibidem, Annex IV, pp. 2-3. In the run-up to the Ministers' Meeting in Kuala Lumpur, the first ASEM Education Secretariat undertook a similar consultation for the post-ASEMME4 period.
- <sup>12</sup> However, the Stocktaking Report refers to the survey *in extenso*.
- <sup>13</sup> Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Latvia (2015). *Results of the 5th ASEM Education Ministers' Meeting "ASEM Education Collaboration for results"*. Riga, p. 3.
- <sup>14</sup> Fifth ASEM Education Ministers' Meeting (ASEMME5) (2015). *From Kuala Lumpur to Riga. Stocktaking Report. Annex IV*. Composed by the ASEM Education Secretariat and the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Latvia in close cooperation with ASEM members and stakeholders. Riga, p. 4. The observation made by the Latvian Chair is fully in line with my own impressions of previous Ministerial Meetings.
- <sup>15</sup> Korean Ministry of Education (2016). *Survey result. First Senior Officials' Meeting (SOM1) 9-10 November 2016 for the Sixth ASEM Education Ministers' Meeting (ASEMME6)*. Seoul, p. 1.
- <sup>16</sup> Sixth ASEM Education Ministers' Meeting (ASEMME6) (2017). *Seoul Declaration. Enhancing Collaboration between Asia and Europe in Education and Training – A Vision for the Next Decade*. Seoul, p. 5.
- <sup>17</sup> Ibidem, p. 2.
- <sup>18</sup> Keva, Silja and Gaens, Bart (2008). ASEM's Institutional Structure. In: Gaens, Bart (ed.). *Europe-Asia Interregional Relations. A decade of ASEM*. Aldershot, p. 123.
- <sup>19</sup> Korean Ministry of Education (2016). *Summary Report of the First Senior Officials' Meeting (SOM1) 9-10 November 2016 for the Sixth ASEM Education Ministers' Meeting (ASEMME6)*. Seoul, p.10.
- <sup>20</sup> Gaens, Bart (2018). Two Decades of the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM). In: Gaens, Bart and Khandekar, Gauri (eds.). *Inter-Regional Relations and the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM)*. London, pp. 9-32.
- <sup>21</sup> Sixth ASEM Education Ministers' Meeting (ASEMME6) (2017). *Seoul Declaration. Enhancing Collaboration between Asia and Europe in Education and Training – A Vision for the Next Decade*. Seoul, p. 4.
- <sup>22</sup> Cf. Veiga, Amélia and Amaral, Alberto (2012). Soft Law and the Implementation Problems of the Bologna Process. In: *Educação, Sociedade & Culturas*. Nº36, pp. 121-140. These authors have a similar view with regard to the Bologna Process. As regards the ASEM Education Area, see Dang, Que Anh (2016). Shaping an ASEM (Higher) Education Area: hybrid sectoral regionalism from within. In: Robertson, Susan L. et al. (eds.). *Global regionalism and higher education. Projects, Processes and Politics*. Cheltenham (UK), pp. 143-166.



*"Launching  
the ASEM  
Education  
Process."*

## KEY AREAS AND RESULTS OF THE MINISTERIAL CONFERENCES IN

# Berlin, Hanoi, Copenhagen, Kuala Lumpur and Riga

Siegbert Wuttig

*The first ASEM Education Ministers' Meeting was held in Berlin during 2008 and since then there has been a strong thematic focus on higher education. Vocational education and training (VET) as well as lifelong learning (LLL) have also been part of the political discourse in ASEM, although not in the centre of attention. During the ASEM Summit of 2006 held in Helsinki, Germany declared its readiness to organise the first ASEM Ministerial Conference on Education and as such the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF), who were in charge of coordinating the event and who also had responsibilities in the area of VET and LLL, took the view that it would be easier to commence the ASEM dialogue on education by starting with higher education in the first instance. In part, the decision was due to the fact that there were many bilateral and multilateral contacts in the area of higher education with active cooperation projects taking place between Asia and Europe for many years or even decades. BMBF chose DAAD, who had a long experience in national and international cooperation and exchange with Europe and Asia in the field of higher education, as support structure for the ASEM Education Process. In my capacity as Director of DAAD's National Agency for EU Higher Education Cooperation and later on of the first ASEM Education Secretariat, I had the pleasure to observe and even play an active part in shaping the ASEM Education Process between 2007 and 2014 and as such the following observations and remarks are therefore based on my personal experience.*

## LAUNCHING THE ASEM EDUCATION PROCESS: THE FIRST ASEM MINISTERS' MEETING ON EDUCATION (ASEMME1) IN BERLIN, GERMANY (2008)

During August 2007, BMBF asked DAAD to help prepare and organise the first ASEM Ministerial Meeting on Education. Ten months later, ASEMME1, with the overarching theme "Education and Training for Tomorrow: Common Perspectives in Asia and Europe", took place at the InterContinental Hotel located in Berlin on 5 and 6 May 2008. The event was preceded by two Senior Officials' Meetings (SOM): one held on 10 and 11 March 2008 in Bonn and the second held on 4 May 2008 in Berlin. The focus of the SOMs was to prepare the main topics and the Chair's Conclusions for ASEMME1. During the SOM held in Bonn, participants discussed possible themes for the Ministerial Conference based on two concept papers<sup>4</sup> which were circulated by the German Chair in January along with comments and responses from the different ASEM members. The discussions made clear that the delegations agreed in principle with two topics:

*“When we reflect on the Chair’s Conclusions following ASEMME1, it is evident that higher education had a predominant position. Lifelong learning is mentioned only twice in the Conclusions, the second time in connection with higher education, while vocational education and training does not appear at all.”*

1) Aspects of EU-Asia higher education cooperation including mobility of students, staff and researchers as well as structural cooperation between higher education institutions of both regions and visibility and attractiveness of higher education systems and institutions in Asia and Europe and;

2) Education and the labour market including education and industry cooperation, lifelong learning and employability with special regard to higher education.

Following intense communication between ASEM members, the German Chair and DAAD, the final wording of the main conference topics was amended to “Strengthening European and Asian cooperation in higher education: Forging strategic partnerships” and “Bringing together education and the labour market: Enhancing employability and Lifelong Learning”. However, the basic orientation of ASEMME1 remained unchanged. Topic 1 focused on higher education with an emphasis on structural and strategic cooperation (including academic mobility and recognition) between institutions from Asia and Europe, aimed at strengthening stability and sustainability of academic relations.

ASEM member discussions made clear how crucial it is in a globalising world to bring education and industry together and how important it is to include lifelong learning (especially for countries with aging societies) and VET in ASEM, which was reflected in Topic 2, whereby education was originally understood in the broader sense to include lifelong learning as well as vocational education and training.<sup>5</sup> However, when we reflect on the Chair’s Conclusions following ASEMME1, it is evident that higher education had a predominant position. Lifelong learning is mentioned only twice in the Conclusions, the second time in connection with higher education, while vocational education and training does not appear at all.

The reason higher education plays such prominent role on the agenda for ASEMME1 and subsequently in the ASEM Education Process dates back to the early years of the overarching ASEM process and was mentioned at the beginning of this chapter. However, its position was certainly further strengthened by DAAD’s involvement, being a joint organisation of German higher education institutions with a long-standing experience in academic cooperation and exchange with Asia, EU higher education policies and programmes and having a supportive role in implementing the Bologna Process in Germany.

Let us now have a look on some other aspects of ASEMME1. The Meeting agreed “to set up a strategic Asia-Europe education partnership for the 21st century”<sup>6</sup> and the Chair’s Conclusions described the Meeting as “an important first step towards strengthening the dialogue and fostering cooperation between ASEM partners in the field of education and training”<sup>7</sup>. Although the Chair’s Conclusions tried to emphasise common interests and joint collaborative efforts of ASEM members, an in-depth reading of the text reveals the influence of intra-European higher education policy debate (e.g. Bologna Process, EU policies)<sup>8</sup> which becomes obvious when we review the key thematic areas laid down by Ministers for the ASEM Education Process during their meeting in Berlin, including terms such as balanced exchanges, obstacles to mobility, structural cooperation (e.g. joint degree programmes) and joint marketing initiatives, which are all well-known buzz words from EU and Bologna papers and circles.<sup>9</sup> For the ASEM team members

located in DAAD, who later became the core staff of the first ASEM Education Secretariat, the higher education philosophy of the Bologna Process, in particular, played a decisive role in shaping the ASEM Education Process, at least in the early years of the ASEM Education Process.<sup>10</sup>

What were the main results of the Berlin Meeting? Firstly, the German initiative launched a broad dialogue on (higher) education between the ASEM countries and stakeholders and helped place education as a theme specifically on the political agenda of ASEM. ASEM members and their respective Education Ministers showed great interest in attending the first ASEMME with 38 of the 43 member countries in attendance, 20 of which were Ministers and 3 Vice-Ministers. Secondly, ASEMME1 confirmed its commitment to continuing the ASEM dialogue on education and defined action fields of mutual interest. Vietnam volunteered to host ASEMME2 in 2009 and the Meeting agreed on a set of concrete measures including the establishment of a bi-regional education-business forum<sup>11</sup> and the setting-up of a working group to focus on obstacles to mobility. A seminar of ASEM representatives, held on 4 and 5 December 2008 in Frankfurt/Main (Germany), discussed both measures and developed some ideas for the upcoming ASEMME2. The main value of the Frankfurt meeting certainly was to maintain the momentum of the ASEM Education Process that had been established during the Ministerial Conference held in Berlin eight months previously.

## GOING TO ASIA: THE SECOND ASEM MINISTERS' MEETING ON EDUCATION IN HANOI, VIETNAM (2009)

During ASEMME1, the Vietnamese representatives distributed a questionnaire to all delegations asking for topics for ASEMME2. During the SOM held on 19 and 20 January 2009 in Hanoi, the Vietnamese host presented the results of the questionnaire and highlighted two of the main topics mentioned by the majority of ASEM members. The SOM agreed that these themes should become the main topics for the upcoming Ministerial Meeting planned to take place in Hanoi during May of that year: (1) Quality assurance, credit transfer and recognition in ASEM and; (2) Sustainable human resource development for ASEM future needs.

The Vietnamese Chair also carried forward the recommendation for an ASEM Secretariat "in order to make the ASEM education process more stable and efficient and to facilitate the dialogue, projects and further activities including the preparation of Ministerial conferences"<sup>12</sup>. In its country report submitted to the Vietnamese Chair during April 2008<sup>13</sup>, Germany supported this proposal and volunteered "to host the Secretariat for four years (2009-2013)"<sup>14</sup>. During ASEMME2 held in Hanoi on 14 and 15 May 2009, Ministers agreed to establish a rotating ASEM Education Secretariat (AES) and also welcomed Germany's offer to host and finance the Secretariat for the first four-year cycle.<sup>15</sup>

ASEMME2 also defined a considerable number of concrete activities in the context of the two main conference topics, including working groups and seminars on quality assurance, recognition, credits and learning outcomes, and lifelong learning. The proposal of ASEMME1 to set up an ASEM University-Business Forum was renewed and Thailand volunteered to host the first meeting of the Forum.

*"Although the Chair's Conclusions tried to emphasise common interests and joint collaborative efforts of ASEM members, an in-depth reading of the text reveals the influence of intra-European higher education policy debate (e.g. Bologna Process, EU policies) which becomes obvious when we review the key thematic areas laid down by Ministers for the ASEM Education Process during their meeting in Berlin."*

*“On reflection, the major results of ASEMM2 can be summarised as achieving the decision to implement an ASEM Education Secretariat (AES) and defining a ‘work programme’ for the ASEM Education Process with concrete actions linked to two conference topics.”*

On reflection, the major results of ASEMM2 can be summarised as achieving the decision to implement an ASEM Education Secretariat (AES) and defining a “work programme” for the ASEM Education Process with concrete actions linked to two conference topics. The strong commitment of the ASEM members and their readiness to organise the activities described in the Chair’s Conclusions were equally important in terms of giving impetus and continuity to the further development of the ASEM Education Process. In this context and to keep the momentum of the process going, the newly formed AES did not only facilitate ASEM activities but also analysed the main outcomes and recommendations and compiled the main results, together with interesting information from the ASEM country reports, in a comprehensive document which could be brought forward to the next Ministerial Meeting due to be held in Denmark in 2011.

Finally, it is important to note that ASEMM2 also made a significant step forward in terms of including more stakeholders into the ASEM Education Process by recognising the ASEM Rectors’ Conference as a dialogue partner. The university rectors from Asia and Europe had met in Berlin during 2008 (just some months after ASEMM1) for the first time and mandated the Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF) with the ambition to make their voices heard in the Ministers’ Meetings.<sup>16</sup> At a later stage, ASEF also represented the interests of students in these events.<sup>17</sup>

### **DENMARK TAKES THE BATON: THE THIRD ASEM MINISTERS’ MEETING ON EDUCATION IN COPENHAGEN (2011)**

The Danish Government contacted AES in Bonn at very early stage to ask for support in preparing for ASEMM3, which was due to be held in Copenhagen during 2011, and to discuss possible priority topics for the meeting. Working in close cooperation, both parties developed a roadmap and a preliminary agenda for ASEMM3. Furthermore, AES drafted a report synthesising ASEM activities carried out since the previous Ministerial Meeting and also asked ASEM members for comments and additions. During the ASEM Rectors’ Conference held in Seoul on 27 October 2010, Jørn Skovsgaard from the Danish Ministry of Education and I presented a draft agenda and possible topics for the upcoming Ministerial Conference. As the host country for ASEMM, Denmark proposed the following four main conference topics which were agreed with ASEM members and AES in the run-up to ASEMM3: balanced mobility, quality assurance and recognition, lifelong learning and vocational education and training, and university-business cooperation. In order to collect information on recent developments and recommendations for future action in these four areas, AES forwarded a questionnaire to 46 ASEM member states (including the new members Australia, New Zealand and Russia), the European Commission, the ASEAN Secretariat and relevant stakeholders. The responses, together with a draft progress report on the implementation of conclusions and tasks agreed during ASEMM1 and 2, were presented by AES during the SOM held in Copenhagen on 24 and 25 January 2011. The final AES progress report including some comments from the SOM later became part of the conference documents for ASEMM3. The Ministerial Meeting, entitled “Shaping of the ASEM Education Area”, took place in Copenhagen on 9 and 10 May 2011 with, as in previous meetings, the main (four) topics introduced by high-ranking representatives from ASEM member countries: on this occasion, the European Commission and Korea advanced discussions in the area of quality assurance and recognition; Malaysia tabled discussions regarding engaging

business and industry in education; China introduced balanced mobility and Vietnam commenced dialogue on the topics of lifelong learning and VET. During the meeting, Ministers acknowledged “that the ASEM Education Process [had] made good progress since the first ministerial conferences in Berlin and Hanoi and noted with appreciation the numerous initiatives taken by ASEM Members”<sup>18</sup>. Going forward, Ministers agreed concrete activities and measures (e.g. organisation of seminars and conferences, setting-up of expert groups, compilation of relevant information) outlined in 29 chapters to be carried out and implemented by members who volunteered.<sup>19</sup> This step certainly was critical for maintaining the enthusiasm of the ASEM countries and keeping the ASEM Education Process on track. Given the number of proposals tabled for the following two years, it was only logical that the Ministers officially mandated AES to “observe and assist” members implementing these initiatives and to prepare a Stocktaking Report for presentation to ASEMME4 scheduled to take place in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia during 2013. AES gladly took responsibility for carrying out these tasks confident in their belief that real political decisions and progress relating to the ASEM Education Process could only be made by collating, analysing and preparing the results and recommendations of initiatives and activities for presentation to Ministerial Meetings.

Although the number of Ministers, only seven, attending the Copenhagen Meeting was significantly lower than in ASEMME1 and 2, the remarkable dedication of ASEM members to the Education Process was still in evidence: 40 ASEM countries out of a total 46 attended the Copenhagen Meeting. Malaysia, Latvia and the Republic of Korea volunteered to host the subsequent three Ministerial Conferences in 2013, 2015 and 2017, and Indonesia offered to host the ASEM Education Secretariat for the next four-year period due to commence in October of 2013. These medium-term commitments clearly demonstrated the high value ASEM members attributed to the ASEM Education Process.

*“As the host country for ASEMME, Denmark proposed the following four main conference topics which were agreed with ASEM members and AES in the run-up to ASEMME3: balanced mobility, quality assurance and recognition, lifelong learning and vocational education and training, and university-business cooperation.”*

## THE NEXT PHASE OF THE ASEM EDUCATION PROCESS STARTING IN MALAYSIA: THE FOURTH ASEM MINISTERS’ MEETING ON EDUCATION IN KUALA LUMPUR (2013)

During 2012, the AES in Bonn started preparing for ASEMME4, which was scheduled to be held in Malaysia during 2013. In the first draft of a preparatory document to the SOM, which was held on 28 and 29 January 2013, AES chose “From theory to practice” as the subtitle of the paper. The impetus behind the title held the view that AES and Malaysia as the host country did not want to change the thematic priorities of the previous Ministerial Meetings but rather “deepen discussions on the four [conference] topics dealt with before and to substantiate cooperation”<sup>20</sup>. Along the same line of reasoning, the Malaysian Ministry later chose “Strategizing ASEM Education Collaboration” as title of ASEMME4 to “reflect the spirit in which the ASEM ministerial community shall convene and debate activities that bring about further development”<sup>21</sup>. During their meeting held in Kuala Lumpur on 13 and 14 May 2013, Ministers “felt that the time has come to put policy into practice and strengthen efforts to further develop the ASEM Education Area by continued joint initiatives and concrete measures focused on the four key policy areas”<sup>22</sup>. This statement may seem to contradict the many initiatives undertaken by ASEM members to date. However, the Chair’s Conclusions and the

*“During their meeting held in Kuala Lumpur on 13 and 14 May 2013, Ministers ‘felt that the time has come to put policy into practice and strengthen efforts to further develop the ASEM Education Area by continued joint initiatives and concrete measures focused on the four key policy areas.’”*

Stocktaking Reports of Berlin, Hanoi and Copenhagen revealed that the number of decidedly active members was inhibited and also that the countries involved were predictably reoccurring, given that it is not always easy to motivate members to participate or take the lead even when the activities are approved by their Ministers.

On review of the Chair’s Conclusions following Kuala Lumpur, it is apparent that a multitude of new initiatives and actions were agreed by ASEM Ministers. In total, 38 measures are listed across four main areas of collaboration, including endorsement of the ASEM Recognition Bridging Declaration, which combines the Lisbon Convention and the Revised Asia-Pacific Regional Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications in Higher Education (Tokyo Convention), and the launch of an interregional ASEM Work Placement Pilot Programme to promote the acquisition of practical experience as well as cross-cultural skills and competences for Asian students in Europe and European students in Asia. Ministers also welcomed the setting-up of an ASEM Joint Curriculum Development Pilot Scheme and the intention of some countries to financially support it. In fact, this was the first time since 2008 that Ministers agreed on concrete multilateral programmes for implementation under the ASEM umbrella.

ASEMME4 was a seminal moment in the Process in that it laid the ground for future ASEM cooperation in the field of education, which was fully in line with the expectations of the Malaysian host and the ASEM Education Secretariat in Bonn whose mandate was due to come to an end some months after the meeting. Closing ASEMME4, Cornelia Quennet-Thielen, State Secretary to the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research, officially handed AES over to Indonesia with a mandate to host the Secretariat from October 2013 to 2017 (including ASEMME6 in Seoul). ASEM members officially thanked the first AES for its good work, which can be interpreted at a bureaucratic level not only as a sign of approval but also acceptance for the important role AES plays in terms of coordinating the ASEM Education Process and as a central contact point for the numerous partners across different regions around the world. AES as a functioning support and co-ordination unit passed the ASEM litmus test and developed into a strong pillar of the ASEM Education Process with ASEM members in agreement that there is no denying the added value of having a shared Secretariat – provided the Secretariat is set up with sufficient resources, competence and political acceptance. Support for which was also evidenced by the number of countries offering to host the next mandated AES and as such Belgium was approved to host the Secretariat for the next four-year period commencing November 2017.

In order to “give additional political momentum to the ASEM Education Process” and to bridge the two-year period between Ministerial Meetings, ASEMME4 asked Senior Officials to meet on a yearly basis to prepare for Ministerial Meetings and to discuss themes and political priorities and as such China proposed to organise the first Intermediate SOM (ISOM) for 2014. This procedural change, which was initiated by the AES in February 2013 when drafting the Chair’s Conclusions, was an important first step towards providing, in principle, space and time for in-depth discussions and to better substantiate the political decisions being made by Ministers. To further underpin the work of the ISOM, a Task Force was created during 2016 and demonstrates, at least according to some countries, that the existence of ISOMs was not sufficient enough on its own to move the ambitions of the ASEM Education Process forward politically.<sup>23</sup>

## LABDIEN LATVIA: THE FIFTH ASEM MINISTERS' MEETING ON EDUCATION IN RIGA (2015)

During the ASEM Education Ministers' Meeting held in Copenhagen in 2011, Latvia expressed the readiness to host the ASEM Ministerial Conference during 2015, which coincided with their term of office holding Presidency of the EU. AES supported Latvia as incumbent host country to prepare for ASEMME5, which was scheduled to be held on 27 and 28 April, and for the preceding two SOMs.

In an impressive Stocktaking Report<sup>24</sup>, Latvia as host and AES produced a comprehensive overview of the state of play of the ASEM Education Process, thus providing an excellent basis for the discussions in the Senior Officials' and Ministers' Meetings. The report was collated in close cooperation with ASEM members and stakeholders and took consideration of the main findings and recommendations of ASEM events as well as the results of the first ISOM held in Hangzhou China on 10 and 11 May 2014 and the second SOM held in Riga on 10 and 11 November 2015. The Stocktaking Report makes clear that ASEMME5 will focus on the four thematic priorities as defined and agreed by ASEM members and stakeholders during ASEMME3 and subsequent to a consultation carried out by Latvia as host during 2014.

The above-mentioned SOM of 10 and 11 November also "agreed to keep the four priorities"<sup>25</sup> with Ministers confirming their commitment to the four policy areas in the Chair's Conclusions of ASEMME5. However, Senior Officials felt the "need for stronger focus and/or evaluation"<sup>26</sup> and as such Ministers underlined the importance of carrying out tangible and result-oriented activities and making progress in the four key policy areas.<sup>27</sup> This was very much in line with the political desire of ASEMME4 which was to achieve more practical results. However, during their Riga Meeting, the Ministers went one step further and agreed "result-oriented cooperation composed of tangible activities and measures", which is the second pillar of a "two-pillar system" on which the ASEM Education Process is based.<sup>28</sup> The first pillar focuses predominately on "dialogue-oriented cooperation" between ASEM members and stakeholders.



Photo: Ministry of Education and Science, Latvia

*“Providing for a strong political interest on the part of the Ministries and a high participation rate on the part of Ministers to underline the political significance of the dialogue between Asia and Europe would above all achieve continued stability of the ASEM Education Process and ensure progress into the future.”*

The conference participants from 46 ASEM countries (with Croatia and Kazakhstan as new members) and stakeholder organisations took part in lively discussions regarding the future format of Ministerial Meetings and on the need of more subject-oriented debates: improving employability (by establishing closer collaboration between universities and businesses) and the removal of obstacles to mobility were mentioned as important topics for the future. These priority areas were not new and had already been tackled in previous Ministerial Meetings and while ASEM members and stakeholders had organised seminars and conferences and set up programmes in these fields, the results were evidencing as unsatisfactory with little progress being made. ASEMME5 participants also proposed new topics. In particular on the occasion of a high-ranking ASEM representative working breakfast, during a discussion on “goals, objectives and the future vision of the ASEM educational process”, a number of ideas were advanced such as skills development for better employability and the use of ICT in education and teacher training. Furthermore, participants gave consideration to broadening the ASEM Education Process remit to include primary and secondary education in addition to the already mandated sectors of higher education and VET. This discussion and the issues raised together with questions relating to the future format of SOMs and Ministerial Meetings were brought forward for consideration during ASEMME6 in Seoul, Korea, the detail of which is presented by Martin Schifferings later in this publication.

Reflecting on the evolution of both the ASEM Education Process and the Ministerial Conferences since 2008, the enthusiasm for the Education Process as well as collaboration in the area of education between Asia and Europe still appears to continue at the working level of many ASEM Education Ministries and ASEM stakeholder organisations. This positive attitude has led to the active participation of ASEM members both in concrete joint activities and measures. However, the number of countries who actively participate in initiatives beyond the political dialogue is too low. The situation could be improved if ASEM Senior Officials were to be involved to a greater extent in the debate on joint interests and political priorities in the area of educational cooperation during the run-up to Ministerial Conferences. In this context, the organisation of ISOMs since 2014 certainly has been a step in the right direction and the ASEM Education Secretariat has an important role to play here in terms of initiating and coordinating the exchange of information as well as to summarise and evaluate the results of ASEM activities and to prepare proposals and recommendations that have political relevance for the Senior Officials. In particular, during the (I)SOMs preceding Ministerial Meetings more emphasis should be placed on political issues and for Senior Officials to be actively involved in the debate. This appears to be an appropriate approach and would result in more ministerial staff becoming motivated and enthusiastic about the aims of the ASEM Education Process and to develop a sense of ownership, presumably leading to a greater participation of high-level government representatives in the Ministerial Meetings. In particular, the number of Ministers present in recent Ministerial Meetings has significantly diminished compared to ASEMME1 in 2008. However, providing for a strong political interest on the part of the Ministries and a high participation rate on the part of Ministers to underline the political significance of the dialogue between Asia and Europe would above all achieve continued stability of the ASEM Education Process and ensure progress into the future.

- <sup>1</sup> Cf. the strategic document of the Asia-Europe Vision Group (1999). *For a better tomorrow: Asia- Europe partnership in the 21st century*.
- <sup>2</sup> Cf. also Susanne Burger's contribution to this publication.
- <sup>3</sup> The ASEM Education Process started in Berlin, even though the term was officially used for the first time in the Chair's Conclusions of Copenhagen in May 2011. Informally, AES already introduced the term in its Draft Status Report "From Berlin 2008 via Hanoi 2009 to Copenhagen 2011". 16 January 2011. Bonn, passim.
- <sup>4</sup> Bundesministerium für Bildung und Wissenschaft (2008). *Aspects of EU-Asia higher education cooperation and Education and the labour market*. Bonn. [not published].
- <sup>5</sup> In the Minutes of the Bonn SOM (10/11 March 2008), the Chair noted with regard to Topic 2: "Although the discussion will focus on higher education, reference to vocational education also should be made, especially with regard to lifelong learning and employability." Quoted from Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung (2008). *Chair's Minutes*. Bonn. 16 March, p. 3. [not published].
- <sup>6</sup> First ASEM Education Ministers' Meeting (ASEMME1) (2008). *Conclusions by the Chair- Education and Training for Tomorrow: Common Perspectives in Asia and Europe*. Berlin, p. 2.
- <sup>7</sup> Ibidem, p. 1.
- <sup>8</sup> The influence is obvious. BMBF and DAAD, who drafted the Chair's Conclusions, have been dealing with these policy debates at national and international level. The author of this article, who organised with his team the Ministerial Bologna Conference in 2003 and ASEMME1 in 2008 on behalf of BMBF, became later the Director of the first ASEM Education Secretariat and was involved in the intra-European debates on higher education in his capacity as Director of the National Agency for EU higher education cooperation at the DAAD.
- <sup>9</sup> Some of these areas (balanced student mobility, obstacles to mobility, recognition of academic achievements, dual degree programmes) were already mentioned in the Asia-Europe Vision Group's Report (see footnote 2). However, this report played no part when drafting the Chair's Conclusions.
- <sup>10</sup> Cf. also the chapter on the ASEM Education Secretariat in this book.
- <sup>11</sup> The Chair's Conclusions of Hanoi (2009) renewed this idea but changed the wording to "ASEM University-Business-Forum".
- <sup>12</sup> Ministry of Education and Training of Vietnam (2009). *Minutes of the ASEM Senior Officials' Meeting on 19/20 January 2009*. Hanoi, p. 2. [not published].
- <sup>13</sup> The idea of using Country Reports as source of information and best practices but also to get ideas and proposals for the Ministerial Conferences had already been developed by the German organisers of ASEMME1 in Berlin and was inspired by a similar procedure in the Bologna Process.
- <sup>14</sup> Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung (2009). *Country Report Germany – Comments and Proposals on the Topics of the Second ASEM Education Ministerial Conference in Hanoi, 14/15 May 2009*. Bonn, p. 1. [not published].
- <sup>15</sup> Second ASEM Education Ministers' Meeting (ASEMME2) (2009). *Conclusions by the Chair – Sharing Experience and Best Practices on Higher Education*. Hanoi, p. 5. During the SOM that took place one day before the Ministerial Meeting also the Asia-Europe Foundation expressed its willingness to host the Secretariat. After an intense discussion, the SOM, however, adopted the German proposal.
- <sup>16</sup> The European University Association (EUA) is not an official member of the ASEM Education Process but has the status of an observer in the Ministerial Conferences.
- <sup>17</sup> The first ASEM Students' Forum was held together with the ASEM Rectors' Conference in Groningen (NL) in 2012.
- <sup>18</sup> Third ASEM Education Ministers' Meeting (ASEMME3) (2011). *Conclusions by the Chair – Shaping an ASEM Education Area*. Copenhagen, p. 2.
- <sup>19</sup> Ibidem, pp. 3-6.
- <sup>20</sup> ASEM Education Secretariat (2012). *From Copenhagen to Kuala Lumpur – From Theory to Practice*. Draft Preparatory Document for the Senior Officials' Meeting 28/29 January 2013 in Kuala Lumpur, p. 40. [not published].
- <sup>21</sup> ASEM Education Secretariat (2012). *From Copenhagen to Kuala Lumpur – Strategizing ASEM Education Collaboration*. Preparatory document for the Senior Officials' Meeting 28/29 January 2013, Kuala Lumpur. [not published].
- <sup>22</sup> Fourth ASEM Education Ministers' Meeting (ASEMME4) (2013). *Conclusions by the Chair – Strategizing ASEM Education Collaboration*. Kuala Lumpur, p. 2.
- <sup>23</sup> Cf. also Wuttig, Siegbert and Angress, Alexandra "Drivers of the ASEM education agenda: Ministerial Conferences, Senior Officials' Meetings and the ASEM Education Secretariat" in this publication.
- <sup>24</sup> ASEM Education Secretariat and Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Latvia (2015). *From Kuala Lumpur to Riga. Stocktaking Report*. Riga.
- <sup>25</sup> Ibidem, p. 22.
- <sup>26</sup> Ibidem.
- <sup>27</sup> Fifth ASEM Education Ministers' Meeting (ASEMME5) (2015). *Conclusions by the Chair – ASEM Education Collaboration for Results*. Riga, pp. 1-2.
- <sup>28</sup> Ibidem, p. 2.



*"One of the reasons the ASEM Education Process (AEP) can be considered a success story is the added value it has contributed to foster multilateral cooperation through concrete projects and initiatives ..."*

## ASEM EDUCATION PROCESS IN PRACTICE

# Selected initiatives, programmes and projects

Alexandra Angress

*with contributions from Patricia Burssens; Sandra Fikawati; Werner Gronau; Azirah Hashim; Mai Hong Quan; Michael Horig; Aris Junaidi; Anneli Lindberg; Miandy Munusamy; OHEC Thailand; Darma Putra; Martin Schifferings; Keuk-Je Sung; Marc Wilde*

*One of the reasons the ASEM Education Process (AEP) can be considered a success story is the added value it has contributed to foster multilateral cooperation through concrete projects and initiatives – some of them reaching back to the beginning of ASEM, such as ASEM-DUO and ASEF, and play a vital role in fostering socio-cultural and intellectual exchange between the two regions. Another factor evidencing the dynamism of AEP is the impressive number of practical initiatives illustrating that AEP is very much alive and also has great potential in terms of advancing the AEP agenda.*

This article seeks to illustrate how AEP has been translated into practice: selecting (flagship) programmes and multilateral initiatives that contribute to achieving the identified priorities of AEP – with a focus on mobility as one of the cornerstones of AEP. Some of these initiatives were initiated under the auspices of the first political pillar of the overarching ASEM forum such as ASEM-DUO and the Asia-Europe Institute, while programmes such as the ASEM Work Placement Programme (ASEM WPP or AWPP) were directly initiated by Senior Officials to the ASEM Education Process along with the ASEM Education Secretariat (AES) and others were initiated by a consortium of National Agencies and funded by EU programmes with the aim of addressing topics of common interest to both regions such as in the case of the SHARE initiative. All of the projects and initiatives share the ambition to contribute to advancing the ASEM Education Process or AEP agenda.

A restructuring of the Stocktaking Report during ASEMME5 (Riga 2015) resulted in projects and initiatives being clearly presented under four educational priorities: Quality Assurance and Recognition; Engaging Business and Industry in Education; Balanced Mobility; and Lifelong Learning including TVET, and also into respective stages of progression: ongoing; completed and withdrawn. The Stocktaking Report gives a fascinating overview detailing the high level of commitment demonstrated by the ASEM member countries through numerous and wide range of activities. Notably in the Stocktaking Report of ASEMME5, almost one third of the initiatives were completed and two-thirds of the initiatives ongoing while only two of the proposed initiatives were withdrawn.<sup>2</sup>

*Table:*  
*Four Priorities*  
*of the ASEM*  
*Education Process<sup>3</sup>*

In this chapter examples will be outlined and categorised according to the protocols applied to the Stocktaking Report and discussed in relation to the four identified education priorities. The author's input is complemented by contributions from Senior Officials, actors on the ground, participants and relevant stakeholders. Based on this and complemented by an analysis of relevant official policy documents as well as working documents we will also seek to identify success factors and insights that might serve as a possible source of inspiration for the further development of AEP as well as the progression of the ASEM agenda on education.

No.	Priority	Aims
1.	Quality assurance and recognition	Build trust among higher education systems to promote attractiveness, transparency, comparability and permeability of each system
2.	Engaging business and industry in education	Intensify dialogue and collaboration between education, business and industry sectors within and between Asia and Europe to improve knowledge and innovation interchange, increase employability of graduates, economic growth, and societal development
3.	Balanced mobility	Identify and remove obstacles for student and staff mobility between Europe and Asia and address imbalanced one-way mobility from Asia to Europe
4.	Lifelong Learning (LLL) including Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET)	Develop policies and create learning opportunities for all citizens to access continuing professional development and enhance their skills throughout their lives to cope with the negative side effects of globalisation, demographic changes, and rapid technological developments

## PRIORITY 1: QUALITY ASSURANCE AND RECOGNITION

### **Initiative presented: The SHARE initiative**

SHARE is a flagship project of the ASEAN Education Sector which has been jointly formulated by EU and ASEAN to facilitate the creation of an ASEAN Higher Education Space in support of a people-centred ASEAN community. The EU funded project promoting regional harmonisation of higher education within ASEAN is also highly relevant to advancing the

ASEM Education Process (AEP). Of the 21 ongoing initiatives mentioned in the latest ASEM Stocktaking Report of November 2017, the SHARE initiative (2015-2018) among others addresses the first educational priority “Quality assurance and recognition”.

The SHARE experts Michael Hörig and Marc Wilde, located in DAAD, Bonn, Germany discuss the rationale behind SHARE as an EU-ASEAN initiative and also comment on the contribution SHARE has made to higher education across the ASEAN region and beyond:

### **The SHARE Initiative, Michael Hörig and Marc Wilde, DAAD, Germany**

A consortium comprising British Council (lead), Campus France, the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), Nuffic, the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) and the European University Association (EUA) have been working with their ASEAN counterparts to implement the European Union Support to Higher Education in the ASEAN Region (SHARE) programme from 2015 to 2019. The EU-ASEAN initiative has the broad remit to strengthen regional cooperation, enhance the quality, competitiveness and internationalisation of ASEAN higher education institutions and students, contributing to an ASEAN Community beyond 2015. By the end of SHARE in early 2019, the following outcomes are envisaged:

- Increased and enhanced mobility for university students across ASEAN through improved qualifications frameworks, quality assurance, an ASEAN-wide credit transfer system and scholarship scheme.
- Improved equality in opportunities for exchange, as students benefit from SHARE’s technical assistance across ASEAN member states (AMS), thereby improving connectivity across higher education in ASEAN.
- Strengthened ties between ASEAN universities and increasing opportunities for EU-ASEAN university partnerships.

There are three main components (called “Result Areas”) during the implementation of SHARE, among them Result Area 2: Qualifications Frameworks (QFs) and Quality Assurance (QA). This Result Area is coordinated by DAAD in partnership with EUA and ENQA and aims at supporting the ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework (AQRF) and the ASEAN Quality Assurance Framework (AQAF) with a focus on higher education. The European partners share their experiences gained during the Bologna Process and build on the work already underway across the ASEAN region, especially the achievements by the AQRF Committee and the ASEAN Quality Assurance Network (AQAN).

*Fourth SHARE  
Capacity-Building  
Workshop on Credit  
Transfer Systems,  
Vietnam 2017*



### Results and first conclusions

In order to widen the body of available knowledge on the state of the art of ASEAN higher education, SHARE commissioned a series of studies focusing on Qualifications Frameworks, Quality Assurance, Credit Transfer Systems and Degree Structures. The studies provided recommendations both to policymakers at regional and national level as well as to bodies responsible for SHARE's programme implementation with regards to the further development of activities in the field of QFs and QA and were used to provide for more concise policy briefs.

During the autumn of 2015 a study visit to Europe kickstarted the implementation phase, while two ASEAN-European Expert Working Groups were established to advise on the conceptual design of SHARE events and also to ensure that all activities met the demands of ASEAN beneficiaries, which proved particularly useful regarding the implementation of a series of national dissemination workshops aimed at raising awareness for the regional frameworks and implications at national levels. To date eleven national dissemination workshops in eight AMS have been conducted successfully in close collaboration with the relevant national authorities in each country. The national dissemination workshops addressing experts, policymakers, university leadership as well as representatives from the labour market targeted nearly 1,000 stakeholders and more than 500 institutions in the ASEAN region. In order to sustain the work at national level and to set the foundation for dissemination activities in the future, a regional 'Peer-Multiplier-Training' was conducted in June 2018 with the ambition to create a pool of SHARE higher education and quality assurance reform "champions".

The foundations for the ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework (AQRf) were laid down prior to the implementation of SHARE while the framework for the initiative was formally adopted early in the programme. SHARE mainly focused on what was needed at national and institutional level to make national qualification framework(s) successful in the field of higher education. Furthermore, deriving from research that was undertaken at the beginning of SHARE, outcome-based education has been identified as the unifying factor for the advancement of both quality assurance and qualifications frameworks including credit transfer systems and degree structures across ASEAN partner countries.

As a Programme funded initiative SHARE made extraordinary progress concerning the endorsement of the ASEAN Quality Assurance Framework (AQAF). And in this respect the Policy Dialogue on Regional Quality Assurance which was jointly organised by SHARE and the ASEAN Quality Assurance Network (AQAN) was truly a milestone event. The conference took place during October 2016 in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia and offered the opportunity to officially launch the AQAF as well as to celebrating the recognition of AQAN as an accredited ASEAN body.

Another key component of the work undertaken by SHARE in the area of quality assurance focused on a review of four External Quality Assurance Agencies (EQAAs) as well as the institutional assessment of eleven universities across eight countries. These pilot activities were initiated to test the newly developed AQAF and to stimulate benchmarking according to regional principles.

Reflecting on the results and achievements of SHARE so far, the following conclusions can be drawn regarding the effective implementation of regional higher education frameworks:

- **Political Back-up:** Regional Frameworks will only become relevant when ASEAN Member countries commit to it: a certain degree of compliance is needed. Progress needs to be communicated and monitored at ASEAN level on regular basis.
- **Stakeholder Involvement:** Regional Frameworks will only become credible and widely accepted when relevant stakeholders are involved in shaping the framework in a participatory process.
- **Capacity Development:** Regional Frameworks can only be implemented effectively when Ministries and regulatory bodies, i.e. Higher Education Commissions, External Quality Assurance Agencies (EQAAs), and universities (are willing to and) know how to embed regional standards into their institutional policies and practice.
- **Dissemination & Communication:** Regional Frameworks will only have an impact on higher education provision and the realities of the classroom when technical language of qualifications frameworks (QF) and quality assurance (QA) terms are communicated in a user-friendly way and can be understood by academics and students at grassroots level.

A regional conference is scheduled to be held in Bangkok, Thailand from 29 to 31 October 2018 with the aim to take stock of all the activities that have so far taken place in the field of QF/QA; to discuss the present needs of higher education and to advance the sustainability of measures initiated. An important focus of the conference is to identify the role regional frameworks can play in terms of preparing the higher education sector for the future societal needs of a digitalised age.

### **Why is SHARE relevant to the ASEM Education Process?**

During 2015, the fifth ASEM Education Ministers' Meeting (ASEMME5) was held in Riga, Latvia. During the meeting, Ministers took note of SHARE and even though the initiative is currently funded within the ASEAN-EU cooperation, the activities and results were receiving attention within the framework of ASEM Education Process for a number of reasons:

Firstly, the partner organisations involved from Europe and ASEAN overlap. DAAD (former and first AES) evidenced active collaborations with (among others) the European University Association (EUA), the ASEAN University Network (AUN) and SEAMEO RIHED. From the viewpoint of the organisations involved, such synergies and cooperation under different initiatives make sense and facilitate the implementation of joint activities. For example, SEAMEO RIHED and DAAD will be cohosting the aforementioned SHARE Regional Conference on QF/QA and the two bodies organised – independently of SHARE – a joint seminar and study visit to Germany during December 2017; and this is something that is illustrated time and again, when the same actors meet under different pillars be that UNESCO regional conferences, SHARE Policy Dialogues, ASEM Peer Learning Activities or bilaterally funded project (e.g. by the German Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, BMZ).

Secondly, DAAD actively drew on expertise from ASEM countries to implement initiatives in the area of QF/QA. Experts from Australia, Hong Kong, New Zealand and Switzerland

*“Regional Frameworks will only have an impact on higher education provision and the realities of the classroom when technical language of qualifications frameworks (QF) and quality assurance (QA) terms are communicated in a user-friendly way and can be understood by academics and students at grassroots level.”*

contributed to the success of SHARE jointly with experts from across the EU and ASEAN illustrating that knowledge relating to global higher education developments is not pigeonholed to certain regions.

Finally, from a content-related point of view the outcomes of the SHARE initiative contribute to the ASEM education agenda. Quality Assurance, Lifelong Learning and the engagement of industry in higher education feature prominently in the DAAD-led Result Area; and given that the project outcomes are publicly available, the ASEM Education Process can draw on the outcomes to further develop and enhance agenda setting. The previously mentioned policy briefs may provide useful guidance albeit they require some alignment to relevant regional and interregional agenda and processes. Given the horizontal cross over of topics within the ASEM Education Process, further discussion regarding collaboration opportunities between ASEM activities and the Asia-Europe Foundation would advance the success of future SHARE activities.

### **SHARE – Lessons learned going forward**

One success element of SHARE that we have seen besides the EU support both in financial terms and in terms of dissemination policies is the impressive outreach to target groups and stakeholders across ASEAN which clearly helps to make this initiative and its aims visible as a reference model and good practice project – not least since it has been officially integrated into the Stocktaking Report although it is not strictly speaking an AEP initiative as such.

SHARE has truly established a new quality of interregional collaboration and succeeded in addressing a clearly identified need – learning more about quality assurance and recognition related topics – and satisfying the need by gathering a pool of relevant stakeholders and experts on the identified topics in different regions on identified topics of common interest.

## **PRIORITY 2: ENGAGING BUSINESS AND INDUSTRY IN EDUCATION**

### **Initiative presented: The ASEM Work Placement Programme (AWPP)**

The ASEM Work Placement Programme (AWPP) is a truly multilateral ASEM initiative established jointly by members and the AES. At first, we will take a look at the programme, its history and founding rationale, then explore the benefits and challenges also evidenced by insights from members and actors and beneficiaries participating in the pilot phase of the programme and conclude by drawing lessons learned for its future development and contribution to advancing AEP.

The ASEM Work Placement Programme (AWPP) was established in 2011 during ASEMME3 when Ministers, following a recommendation by the second ASEM University-Business Forum held in Germany during 2011 to “consider the establishment of an ASEM placement programme”, agreed the establishment of a pilot project/scheme.<sup>4</sup> A proposal document was drafted with the aim to outline the expected benefits at individual and institutional level.<sup>5</sup> For participating higher education institutions, the aim of the pilot programme was to: support students to develop the know-how and skills required for the world of work;

smooth their transition into the labour market and provide high quality education while seeking to establish international links with employers in participating ASEM countries. For the companies and organisations hosting student trainees and interns, the aim of the pilot programme was to internationalise (further) and provide access to fresh ideas from qualified students and also to recruit young talent from the ASEM region. A target number of five to ten students was set as the maximum participation per country with an envisaged exchange duration of two to six months.<sup>6</sup>

The proposal was then launched to interested ASEM members. In 2013 during ASEMME4, Ministers requested for AES “to give organisational support to launch the programme”<sup>7</sup> and also “welcomed Belgium (Flemish Community), Brunei Darussalam, Germany and Thailand’s intention to take part in the pilot phase”<sup>8</sup>. Guidelines for the pilot programme were drafted and DAAD, who were the outgoing AES, presented a proposal<sup>9</sup> for an overview of the programme outlining the background, benefits for stakeholders and possible modalities. A first meeting was subsequently held in Bangkok during 2015 and was attended by representatives from the countries participating in the pilot phase: Belgium, Brunei Darussalam, Germany and Thailand with the addition of Indonesia.

Based on a letter of intent signed by participating countries during April 2015, the pilot programme was officially launched during ASEMME5 which was held in Riga, Latvia<sup>10</sup> with the objective to establish a “balanced student exchange” to promote and sustain the exchange of interns between Europe and Asia on the basis of reciprocity and mutual benefits. Ministers also extended an invitation to ASEM member countries interested to participate in the pilot programme aimed at BA/MA students at undergraduate/graduate level with a priority to be given to Master students.<sup>11</sup> The work placements were required to form an integral part of the students’ curriculum either as compulsory credit bearing element or a voluntary component highly recommended and endorsed by the home institution.

A working group was established to advise on and implement the pilot scheme comprising a small group of experts and representatives of so-called University-Business Networks (UBNs). The latter were created for this very programme as contact points located in one of the participating universities per country. AES would host a website linking participating countries through their respective UBNs websites. Where possible, a three-year cycle of funding in each participating country was to support the programme providing for student travel expenses in particular as well as some staff costs.<sup>12</sup> The second meeting of the expert or working group was held in Ghent, Belgium<sup>13</sup> and concentrated particularly on the implementation of the pilot programme with a focus on defining the role of the UBNs who were to coordinate and communicate with sending institutions and receiving companies, define internship requirements and identify host

*Second ASEM WPP  
Expert Meeting  
Ghent, Belgium 2015*





*Fifth ASEM WPP  
Expert Meeting  
in Bangkok,  
Thailand 2017*

We will now seek to identify achievements and challenges of this multilateral ASEM education programme by starting with two contributions from ASEM countries that have been participating in the programme. The feedback from Thailand and the Flemish Community of Belgium is on the first implementation phase and lessons learned from the participating UBNs:

**Thailand Experience of ASEM WPP, Office of the Higher Education Commission (OHEC)**

The increasing competitiveness of modern society in every sphere and dimension requires more from this generation than ever. International experience acquisition, along with essential 21st century skills, is becoming highly valuable in today's job market, and youth nowadays are expected to be readily equipped with sufficient knowledge, experiences and skills when they have to go out and face real-world challenges.

To prepare its students for the labour market, Thailand has adopted the ASEM Work Placement Programme: a collaborative project between European and Asian governments, aiming to facilitate the exchange of interns in each other's region. Overseas internships provide an opportunity for students to gain real-life work experience while enjoying living in another country and learning a new culture. The international experience acquired through the internship would benefit not only the students themselves, but also their home universities.

One of the apparent benefits for the students attending the programme is their acquisition of first-hand experiences on the work processes, starting from preparation of application forms and related documents, job seeking and self-preparation for the real work. Then they learn, in the next steps, to step out of their comfort zones as they are confronted with unfamiliar settings and situations. They have to adapt and adjust to life in a foreign country while striving to fulfil their assigned work requirements. This circumstance can help develop the students' problem-solving skills and allow them to become more independent. Furthermore, being in direct contacts with people from a different culture encourages students to be more open-minded, tolerant and understanding. We believe that our students can gain a lot from this programme and that it can help them to develop necessary skills to cope with global challenges.

companies to participate in the programme. UBN was also in charge of identifying participant selection criteria and drafting training schedules in coordination with the receiving organisations.<sup>14</sup> During the subsequent three working group meetings of the pilot phase in Asia and Europe, respectively, implementation issues for collaboration were discussed ranging from the management of the student application process via a future common information system to prescreening candidates for companies as well as building content for publication through the UBN websites.<sup>15</sup>

As for the benefits for higher education institutions, we believe that the programme will enhance their opportunities to learn more about one another and that they can strengthen their collaboration not only through this programme but also through a number of other potential programmes/projects in the future.

However, some obstacles for the Asian side regarding the participation in the programme seem hard to control from our side. The two major challenges we are referring to are finding workplaces in Europe for our Asian interns and supporting them in getting a visa for the purpose of doing their internship in Europe. Feedback from a Thai university: “The European countries participating in the pilot scheme (Germany and Belgium) should designate/establish a proactive acting agent to facilitate the negotiation and application process for universities. It is quite difficult for Thai universities to contact workplaces in Germany/Belgium directly because we are not well recognised by them. The first connection should be done by organisations that they already have contacts with.”

As a government support programme, we think that ASEM Work Placement Programme (ASEM WPP) should receive some privileges such as the commitment to reserve the workplaces for the qualified candidates of the participating countries in the agreed number, at least at an early stage, until it becomes more stable or well-known among ASEM member countries and stakeholders. This will help to promote the programme both locally and inter-regionally.

Lastly, as the co-secretariat of the ASEM WPP with Belgium (Flanders), we hope our students and partners, also other ASEM members, could utilise the programme as a tool to develop our human resources and strengthen our collaboration in higher education and in people-to-people connectivity.

*“Lastly, as the co-secretariat of the ASEM WPP with Belgium (Flanders), we hope our students and partners, also other ASEM members, could utilise the programme as a tool to develop our human resources and strengthen our collaboration in higher education and in people-to-people connectivity.”*

### **Belgium, Flemish Community Experience of ASEM WPP – Patricia Burssens, UBN 2015 – 2017, University of Ghent**

In 2015, Ghent University was assigned to deal with the ASEM Work Placement Pilot on behalf of the Ministry of Education. It was agreed to help building a structural framework and try things out – both with regard to outgoing students as well as to give support to incoming students. In 2017, this assignment shifted back to the Flemish Ministry with the intention to expand the programme to all institutions of higher education in Flanders.

Ghent University had two outgoing students (one bio-engineering student and one business economics student) each going to Thailand and one incoming student from Brunei who did an internship in an international organisation in Brussels. There surely was an enthusiastic interest from the side of the students (about 50 students over three years; about half of this group handed in an application form). The main challenge, however, remains how to convince companies or potential host organisations to take an international intern on board. Most companies refer to the language problems as one of the obstacles. So, one of the lessons learned so far is: if candidates want to raise their chances for getting into a company, (English) language skills are of the utmost importance.

*“A continuation of financial support from the ASEM WPP partner countries stays very important.”*

During the former three years, Belgium UBN only received one application from Asia (from Brunei), and we luckily managed to find the student an internship position.

I kept wondering why we did not receive applications from our Asian partners. Later on, I learned that many of the Asian students seemed to prefer to go to Germany – but it is still not clear why, they do not know what they are missing out in Belgium.

Although it is true that the ASEM Work Placement Pilot Scheme cannot really be considered a success in terms of the total numbers of outgoing and incoming interns, there are many good reasons to develop this exchange programme further – even if it is step by step.

I am convinced of this highly beneficial programme especially when reading students reports and notes. For example, our intern **Ben Carvalho** from Brunei, reported really very positively about his internship in Belgium. I also met him personally and his enthusiasm and gratefulness for the internship chance he got were really heart warming. Here is what he said:

*“The ASEM experience was beyond fruitful, and I felt that it affected my own personal development in a very positive way. Academically, I have had the opportunity to learn more about the world and better understand it from all perspectives in major policy fields such as the global economy and international security. As a whole, it has also given me a sense of better confidence and much more optimism in both my professional and personal development; something I feel will continue to develop long after the ASEM experience.”*

Another statement that deserves quoting in my view is from the former intern Fu Iris Jiang, one of our bio-engineering students. In 2016, she went for a two-month internship at Eco-Bay Ltd. thanks to the support received from KMUTT University (i.e. the corresponding UBN in Thailand) on the ground who brought the company and our intern in touch. She was very positive as well about her internship experience for various reasons and seen from many angles. Here are **Fu Iris Jiang**'s comments:

*“My recommendation for future ASEM candidates is: make sure you arrive at your destination having some cultural background, be able to let stereotypes go, try to make new friends and understand the people and their setting. Try new things but still stay safe. It is okay to be pushed out of your comfort zone a bit, sometimes it is difficult adapting to so many new things. But remember you are there to learn, on your internship place but also on the street. Be curious and reflect. Don't forget to write a card to the people at home.”*

Even if the work placement is only about relatively small numbers of exchange, every single internship is worth to be made a success. (Intercultural) pre-departure preparation and solid language skills are key to success in realising ASEM work placements. Furthermore, to raise the chances for a successful experience for both intern and host organisation, management of experiences is at stake and deserves to be taken seriously.

For the outgoing European candidates, we welcome of course the financial support of the EU for internships outside EU via the Erasmus+ International Credit Mobility (ICM) programme – this is a valuable incentive for the ‘European’ side of the ASEM exchange programme as it may complement the grants that are given by the (ASEM WPP) partners to their candidates to get the pilot started – as we did here in Flanders. On the other hand, a financially unbalanced exchange programme may seriously encumber further development. Therefore, a continuation of financial support from the ASEM WPP partner countries stays very important.

In line with the programme objectives, the benefits for students participating in this programme range from receiving the opportunity to acquire work-related and cross-cultural skills and competences and be able to enhance their employability. This is clearly expressed by the coordinator of Indonesia for the programme and can also be seen in the following testimonial of students that were supported by UBN Germany.<sup>16</sup>

*“This is a unique chance to be able to live in a totally different country and experience a different culture such as during my internship in Jakarta. I liked my work a lot and the people were very helpful and friendly.”*

*(Maren Dieterich, Mercedes Benz, Jakarta, Indonesia)*

*“I served an unpaid internship at the German-Thai Chamber of Commerce in Bangkok as part of my BA International Management and was able to learn a lot about the economy of Thailand and marketing as well as to improve my Business English and even gained some working knowledge in the Thai language and would recommend this opportunity to everyone.”*

*(Melanie Petschmann, German-Thai Chamber of Commerce and Trade, Bangkok, Thailand)*

For Martina Link, coordinator of UBN Germany during the pilot phase, financial support for students is fundamental to make this programme attractive and competitive vis-à-vis other opportunities for students to gain practical work experience abroad.<sup>17</sup>

During the pilot phase, a number of obstacles were encountered by all participating UBNS/ countries ranging from foreign language skills over financial assistance to visa issues and lack of feedback from the side of companies – these were particularly highlighted as areas requiring additional time and resources from both Asian and European countries involved in the programme. The time lapse between application letter and official acceptance letter from the side of the host company created bottlenecks for students and often resulted in students rejecting or withdrawing from internships. Other reported delayed response rates by companies and delays in processing visas and in some cases visa application rejections.

Another difficulty encountered related to the application process with students from Asia applying directly to companies without a recommendation letter endorsed by a corresponding UBN or sending university. Dr Sandra Fikawati, coordinator of UBN Indonesia/

*“Financial support for students is fundamental to make this programme attractive and competitive vis-à-vis other opportunities for students to gain practical work experience abroad.”*

*“The ASEM WPP can be a good pathway for students’ international career prospects.”*  
 (Dr Sandra Fikawati, UBN Indonesia)

Universitas Indonesia, stressed the importance of mutual understanding in this process in order to adjust for expectations especially from Europe in terms of accepting the reality that Asian students may in general need more advice and greater support during the organisation of their internship than their European counterparts.<sup>18</sup> Other obstacles identified by her and Prof. Aris Junaidi relate to the still limited role of practical experience/work placements in the academic curricula of Indonesian higher education institutions.

Following the successful completion of the pilot phase in 2017, the programme was agreed during ASEMME6 to continue and this was endorsed in the respective Chair’s Conclusions. Thailand and the Flemish Community of Belgium committed to co-sharing a secretariat to coordinate the next, structured phase of the ASEM Work Placement Programme following a proposal tabled to establish a permanent ASEM Work Placement Programme and to support the “upscale of the ASEM WPP and to address the practical obstacles” and experiences encountered during the pilot phase.<sup>19</sup>

Finding suitable workplaces is considered to be one key issue in seeking to successfully implementing the future programme on a wider scale. Possible approaches to be adopted were presented and discussed at the latest working group meeting: They consist, for example, of working with university support structures such as in the case of Universitas Indonesia and the University of Duisburg-Essen with its liaison office, the Mercator Office, which was set up more than 15 years ago in Indonesia with the aim to provide services for local students, researchers as well as guest professors.<sup>20</sup> Dr Sandra Fikawati sees great potential in this new approach building on successful bilateral academic cooperation initiatives: “Through the Double Degree Programme our students will have qualification of German competency level B 2 and be awarded a degree from a German university which can open more chances also to secure an internship position in Germany.” Other approaches with the potential of securing suitable work placements range from working with agents and expats (Belgium, Flemish Community) over seeking to identify a number of companies from the participating Asian countries based in Europe (Thailand) to empowering students more to apply professionally while helping to build a relevant network through career counselling and guidance (Germany with partner countries).<sup>21</sup>

There is consent among all participating countries that creating a dedicated ASEM brand or label would help to make the programme more known across participating institutions and in particular companies and help overcome the majority of the identified obstacles.

#### **AWPP – Lessons learned going forward**

As stated in the ASEM Work Placement Programme proposal and as underlined during seminars and meetings the potential benefits of multilateral ASEM education initiatives are manifold:<sup>22</sup>

- Students undertaking a work placement enhance their skills, competences and work experience in an international setting, create networks with representatives from the world of work and become more interculturally competent and employable on a global scale.

*“There is consent among all participating countries that creating a dedicated ASEM brand or label would help to make the programme more known across participating institutions and in particular companies and help overcome the majority of the identified obstacles.”*

- Higher education institutions benefit by using the programme to offer high quality education through a curriculum embedded in practice and through the establishment of international links and alliances.
- Industry/business enhance their competitiveness through the transfer of academic know-how and also from access to a skilled (international or internationally trained) labour force.
- Governments benefit from the programme as it supports and underpins a correlating workforce development strategy, contributes to economic growth and helps meet the challenges of an aging society as experienced by some countries.

One of the major achievements of the AWPP is the strengthened collaboration between universities and companies in the participating ASEM members. While the benefits and positive impact of this programme can be seen at an individual and institutional level, it is above all implementation questions such as identifying suitable workplaces operating across the two regions that remain a key challenge.

Extending participation to more countries and making the programme more visible and known in the ASEM community including addressing more potential stakeholders in particular could provide for traction if involved parties with an interest in the programme agreed to collaborate in the future to overcome key obstacles identified in the pilot phase. This could be achieved, for example, by organising workshops to discuss work placements within the framework of possibilities and challenges resulting from the Erasmus+ programme initiative International Credit Mobility Scheme (ICM).

Strong impact would be achieved and a strong signal sent out across ASEM community by introducing an ASEM education label or brand for this and other programmes that are deemed suitable to advance the ASEM education agenda and its key objectives.

*“Strong impact would be achieved and a strong signal sent out across ASEM community by introducing an ASEM education label or brand for this and other programmes that are deemed suitable to advance the ASEM education agenda and its key objectives.”*

### PRIORITY 3: BALANCED MOBILITY

#### **Programmes/Projects presented:**

- ASEM-DUO
- The Asia-Europe Institute (AEI)
- THE ASEM Joint Curriculum Development Project

#### **ASEM-DUO**

ASEM-DUO is a “Fellowship Programme with the objective of balanced exchange through pairing” and was established under the first pillar of the overarching ASEM political process.<sup>23</sup> During 1999, the Asia-Europe Vision Group identified the need for a scholarship programme within the ASEM framework<sup>24</sup> subsequent to which the first concrete proposal was approved in 2000 during the third ASEM Summit in Seoul, Korea<sup>25</sup> entitled the ASEM-DUO Fellowship Programme and jointly proposed by Korea, France and Singapore with a target

budget total USD 25 million over 5 years and a financial commitment from Korea, France, Singapore.<sup>26</sup> The first International Expert Meeting for ASEM-DUO was held in Seoul April 2001 during which the ASEM-DUO Programme Secretariat was established with the actual exchange of students and teachers commencing early in 2002.

With a track record of over 15 years, ASEM-DUO has become a respected reference point within the ASEM community given the core central principle of one-to-one exchange (“pairing”) in order to address one of the fundamental objectives of ASEM education collaboration: to exchange students and staff between Asia and Europe and to enhance mutual understanding by promoting academic mobility. ASEM-DUO, therefore, clearly contributes to the overarching ASEM objective of people-to-people connectivity which was confirmed at the highest political level by all ASEM members during the ASEM11 Summit held in Ulaanbaatar in 2016, endorsed and ratified by the Education Ministers during ASEMME6 (2017) in both the Seoul Declaration and the Chair’s Conclusions of this meeting.<sup>27</sup>

To date, ASEM-DUO has facilitated almost 3,500 of academic students and academic staff exchanges between Asia and Europe with Korea realising the highest number of mobilities (more than 1,600) followed by Singapore and Thailand, respectively.<sup>28</sup> The ASEM-DUO Fellowship is granted on semester basis. A call for submission to the ASEM-DUO Fellowship Programme is announced once a year in all participating countries. ASEM-DUO is considered an umbrella scheme whereby countries can give consideration to principles of derogation so as to provide for individual operating protocols: at present from the European side Belgium Flanders and Wallonia, and Sweden<sup>29</sup> plus Korea, Singapore and Thailand from the Asian side are participating in the programme.

The objective of balanced mobility is achieved through reciprocity (“pairing”), support is granted by the international offices within universities while sustainability is secured through institutional cooperation and exchange agreements.<sup>30</sup> Exchange agreements and partnerships can also be initiated by students and professors themselves (as highlighted further down in the interview with Anneli Lindberg, programme coordinator of ASEM-DUO, Sweden). Implementation is flexible in that the programme is open to all ASEM member countries and any field or discipline. Applying principles of derogation countries defining their own eligibility criteria and selection processes from the ASEM-DUO Secretariat located in Seoul, Korea. The Secretariat also assists in the selection process and is responsible for the overall management and monitoring of the ASEM-DUO Programme.

ASEM-DUO has achieved a great deal and in doing so has also met with a number of operational challenges some of which are outlined below from the perspective of the ASEM-DUO Secretariat in Korea as well as in Sweden as one of the ASEM-DUO participating countries.

## ASEM-DUO Secretariat, Seoul, Korea – Interview with Dr Keuk-Je Sung, Director

### What have been the most impressive results of the ASEM-DUO programme so far?

“The success of the programme that has enabled more than 3,400 students and academics throughout the seventeen years of its existence has been noteworthy and helped to build understanding between our two regions through people-to-people links. In recognition of these achievements, the fourth phase (2016-2020) of ASEM-DUO has been extended at ASEM10 (2014). Although the support is mostly for one semester, universities continued exchanges, even after the financial support has been terminated. The main reason is the pairing, which is the major difference from any other scholarship programme. Most scholarship programmes receive applications from individuals.

However, ASEM-DUO requires pairing of students/professors, which is virtually impossible for individuals to find partners in a foreign university who would come to his/her university. Thus, in practice, the pairing is facilitated by staff members in the international exchange offices. Once the staff members become aware of the ASEM-DUO, then they continue to look after partner students and also encourage students to study in the partner universities. Also, the scholarship amount is quite generous under ASEM-DUO, thus the award could be considered as one of their work-related achievements.

It is encouraging to note that several Asian and European members, recognising the effectiveness of the programme, showed interest in becoming additional contributing members during the past years. This programme is more attractive to small and medium-sized members, since most students/professors tend to visit larger-sized members if pairing is not required; pairing allows them to attract more students/professors from the other region.”

## Testimonials – Participant experience of ASEM-DUO

### **DUO-Korea, Youngsang Seo (Korea) in Spain**

*“I’d like to start with my sincere gratitude to ASEM-DUO Fellowship Programme for granting me this so much great opportunity. My exchange experience might not have been this much dynamic without the support of the fellowship programme. I am sure that this was one of the most invaluable opportunities I could possibly ever get in my lifetime.”*

### **DUO-Korea, Herman Richardsen (Norway) in Korea**

*“Living in Korea was to me a very different experience than anything I have ever done before. I would thank ASEM-DUO for granting me their scholarship. This helped me a lot during my exchange period and was a great motivator for making the days count during my stay. If there is one last advice I can give to exchange students, it would be to apply for the ASEM-DUO scholarship!”*

### **DUO-Belgium/Flanders, Sovat Khay (China) in Belgium**

*“It was such a great chapter in life that I could get a chance to have an exchange life in Europe, a region where I always dreamed to study and live in. Coming to this point, I never forget to express my gratitude to all related individuals and organisations. I am very thankful to the ASEM-DUO*

*“If the European Commission accepts to (financially) support ASEM-DUO, then ASEM-DUO can become a much more popular and universal programme. Currently, there are not many potential candidates that could become contributing members from the Asian region.”*

*fellowship programme for the great support. Without each of them, I would not get a chance to learn all of these priceless lessons and experiences in my life. I always remember and keep in mind to share what I have learned from the exchange programme to the younger generation in our country who are in need of these knowledges and experiences, and I promise to make use of what I have learned to help develop our nation with my future thesis and career.”*

**DUO-Belgium/Flanders, Tobias Géron (Belgium) in Korea**

*“It was an awesome and eye-opening adventure. I don’t have a single regret going abroad. One semester might seem really long, but it really is over in a blink of an eye. I would like to thank ASEM-DUO from the bottom of my heart because they made this experience possible for me. They did not only change my life but that of many others as well.”*

**What are in your view key challenges that need to be addressed to enhance participation in the programme to further contribute to realising the ASEM education objectives?**

“The programme is currently supported by six contributing members (Republic of Korea, Singapore, Thailand, Sweden, and Belgium (Flemish Community and French Community)). Even with the same number of contributing member countries from the two regions, the amount of contribution is tilted towards Asian members with 76% of contribution being made by Asian members since 2008.

More contributions from European partners is highly encouraged in order to tackle the imbalance existing at present. Continuation is the key to success for any international programme. In this regard, more contributing members into ASEM-DUO would be critical for its continuation into the future. As mentioned above, this programme would squarely fit into the need for internationalisation of education by small and medium-sized members.”

**Looking ahead – what are you wishing regarding ASEM Education Process in general or ASEM-DUO in particular?**

“The best way ASEM-DUO can expand is receiving financial contribution from the European Commission, which has been proposed several times, to no avail. If the European Commission accepts to (financially) support ASEM-DUO, then ASEM-DUO can become a much more popular and universal programme. Currently, there are not many potential candidates that could become contributing members from the Asian region.”

## ASEM-DUO Sweden – Interview with Anneli Lindberg, Coordinator

### What were the main achievements of ASEM Duo in your view?

“It is a little hard to say but I think it is the big interest among students for the programme: for example, when we started some years ago, it was a lot of students that wanted to participate in the programme and we could only grant fellowships to around one out of three applicants.”

Anneli Lindberg adds that while visiting the Republic of Korea and the ASEM-DUO Secretariat in Seoul four years ago she met with former interns from Korea to Sweden, who all described their student exchange as an eye-opening experience, and comments:

“When I was in Seoul, I had the opportunity to meet some former students and their reflection of their semester abroad was that it had a positive effect on their CV when applying for work.”

*“I wished that more students got the chance to go and study in an Asian country. The budget so far has been quite limited and because of that also so far teachers have not been included yet in the ASEM-DUO Programme in Sweden.”*

### Testimonials/Participant experiences

*Swedish student from Örebro University: “On my exchange I definitely learned to do stuff outside my comfort zone.”*

*Chinese Student from University of Hong Kong: “I wish I could do it all over again. It was a wonderful experience.”*

### What are in your view key challenges that need to be addressed to enhance participation and the programme to contribute to ASEM education objectives?

“One of the key challenges is that the students receive timely information about the programme. We have created now a website directly addressed to our students and the enhanced usage of social media has also helped us to target more effectively and directly students in Sweden. Another challenge is that universities participating in the programme need a working cooperation agreement between each other and that requires the support through international offices that facilitate the exchanges and ultimately create the institutional and logistical basis for the pairing.”

### Looking ahead: What would be your wish or expectations from the ASEM-DUO Programme?

“I wished that more students got the chance to go and study in an Asian country. The budget so far has been quite limited and because of that also so far teachers have not been included yet in the ASEM-DUO Programme in Sweden. I wish we will be able to do that in the future and also send out more students. Students should feel comfortable working or study abroad and inspire others to go abroad - and this programme can contribute to that aim effectively.”

### ASEM-DUO: lessons learned going forward

During ASEMME4 in Kuala Lumpur (2013), a report was presented by the ASEM-DUO Secretariat based on a programme evaluation carried out following a request from Senior Officials during their meeting at ASEMME3 in Copenhagen (2011).<sup>31</sup> The report highlights an overwhelming majority of participants as satisfied with the programme (98% of students and 84% of staff/professors).<sup>32</sup> Another success element is confirmed in the findings that 95% of participants continued exchange cooperation activities even after official supports from the ASEM-DUO Programme concluded. This points to another structural success factor that can be identified here which is the integral role the international offices of the participating universities play when facilitating the institutional framework for the exchange/pairing and helping make the programme a success. Barriers to success according to the report were mostly concerned with the transparency of the selection process from the side of the beneficiaries. To overcome this, selection criteria – as confirmed, for example, with Anneli Lindberg, ASEM-DUO Sweden (cf. also interview above) – have been communicated and shared on dedicated websites for student applicants as well as increasingly through social media.

There is unanimous support for the continuation of the programme with 100%<sup>33</sup> respondents clearly advocating for ASEM-DUO to be continued as one of the uncontested success stories of ASEM in the field of education providing support for the advancement of what has remained so far at the heart of the ASEM education agenda: the promotion and enhancement of balanced academic mobility between Asia and Europe.

### The Asia-Europe Institute (AEI)

Balanced mobility is and remains one of the cornerstones of ASEM education and we will now reveal another flagship initiative that was created in 1997 during the early days of the ASEM process, established as the Asia-Europe Centre in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia<sup>34</sup> and now more commonly identified as the Asia-Europe Institute (AEI).

**The following contribution on the Asia-Europe Institute is by Prof. Dr Azirah Hashim, Executive Director of AEI at the University of Malaya (UM) and Miandy Munusamy, PhD student at UM:**

#### The Asia-Europe Institute

The Asia-Europe Institute (AEI) is one of Southeast Asia's leading institutions for postgraduate studies in the field of social sciences and humanities. Following the positive indication by the inaugural first Summit of the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) held in Bangkok in 1996, the Malaysian Government set up the Asia-Europe Centre (AEC) in December 1997 at the University of Malaya. The AEC was subsequently upgraded to be a full-fledged post-graduate centre in 2000 devoted to the Social Sciences and renamed the Asia-Europe Institute (AEI). Hence, AEI welcomes graduate students every year from ASEM countries to pursue International Masters and PhD programmes. In addition, the Institute also appoints many European Visiting Professors and conducts public lectures which in many instances are given by individuals and ambassadors of ASEM members serving in Malaysia as well as visiting officials and academics.

In view of the experience that AEI has gained, AEI has been entrusted by the Fourth ASEM Education Ministers' Meeting (ASEMME4) to put forward proposals to promote balanced mobility between Asia and Europe. During the Third ASEM Education Ministers' Meeting (ASEMME3) in Copenhagen, the Ministers shared the view that learning mobility between Asia and Europe should be more balanced. Therefore, the ASEMME4 held in Kuala Lumpur from 12 to 14 May 2013 welcomed "the willingness of Malaysia and its Asia-Europe Institute at the University of Malaya to develop – in cooperation with other interested ASEM members – a strategy for a better balanced mobility [...]". In accordance with the agreement in ASEMME4 and suggestions from the ASEM "International Seminar on Balanced Mobility" held on 24 and 25 August 2014 in Kuala Lumpur, AEI/UM representing the Ministry of Higher Education of Malaysia (MOHE) presented a proposal to establish a series of AEI-ASEM Summer Schools or Summer Camps (AEI-ASC) each year for better balanced mobility of students, academic staff and researchers between Asia and Europe in the Fifth ASEM Education Ministers' Meeting (ASEMME5) at Riga, Latvia in April 2015 and the Ministers "supported the proposal of Malaysia and the Asia-Europe Institute (AEI) to organise AEI-ASEM Summer Camps (AEI-ASC)".



Photo: Asia-Europe Institute

The first summer school of AEI-ASC with the theme "Biodiversity and Cultural Heritage" was officially launched on 2 August 2015 and participated by nine students comprising one each from Italy, the Philippines, China, and Japan, three from Indonesia, and two Malaysians. The two-week programme consisted of a series of lectures and relevant educational oriented field trips to attract the flow of European students to Asia towards promoting balanced mobility. The AEI-ASC modules follow a coherent approach that introduces Malaysia and its cultural diversity to the participants, followed by multiculturalism and religious pluralism in Asia and Europe. Lecture modules are assimilated with a strategic mix of activities, field trips and knowledge as well as skill building activities to provide practical and valuable learning experiences to all participants. Vira Maulina, a student representing Indonesia, shared her experience of participating in the first AEI-ASC as follows:

"We definitely didn't just learn about biodiversity and cultural heritage, but we also learn about how to be a good leader by soft skill exercises [...]. So, we can get a great opportunity to learn about the richness and diversity of Asian culture."

The second AEI-ASC summer school with the theme "Multiculturalism and Multiethnicity in Asia and Europe" was held from 7 to 21 August 2016 and attended by twenty-one participants from nine countries comprising one each from Korea, Germany, Nigeria and Palestine, six from Thailand, four from Czech Republic, three from Japan, two from Indonesia and Malaysia: providing opportunities and experiences for students to explore various cultures, ethnicities and religions, ethnic backgrounds as well as to examine political, economic and sociocultural issues through lectures, field visits, and interactive activities by prominent speakers.

### *3rd AEI-ASC 2017 – Field Trip to Kuala Lumpur City Centre (KLCC) and Petronas Twin Towers*

*"We definitely didn't just learn about biodiversity and cultural heritage, but we also learn about how to be a good leader by soft skill exercises [...]. So, we can get a great opportunity to learn about the richness and diversity of Asian culture."*

Timotheus J. Krahl from Germany describes the second AEI-ASC as follows:

“It was a great mix of seminars, cultural activities and sightseeing. Lecturers from both Malaysia and abroad taught on various subjects ranging from history, culture, business and current affairs. With seven different nationalities participating we did not only enjoy learning about each other’s culture and lifestyle but shared many moments of fun and laughter.”

The third AEI-ASC summer school attracted 30 participants from Bulgaria, Cambodia, Germany, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Malaysia, Poland, Singapore and the United Kingdom. The programme was held from 24 July to 4 August 2017 with the theme “Cultural Pluralism in Asia and Europe” in two different countries, Malaysia and Belgium. In Malaysia, from 24 July to 4 August 2017, students took part in ten modules and in the inaugural Asia-Europe Conference. In the second part, students spent one week, from 7 to 11 August 2017, attending interactive lectures, seminars and field visits which took place in Brussels in collaboration with Maastricht University’s campus in Brussels, Belgium.

Yordanka Vasileva Dimcheva, student participant from Bulgaria, summarises here experience: “For me, the summer school taking place both in Kuala Lumpur and Brussels was [...] an incredible opportunity to meet passionate young people full of ideas from all over the world and to spend three unforgettable weeks with them exploring the peculiarities of the European and Southeast Asian culture, historical heritage and, of course, delicious cuisine.”

The fourth AEI-ASC summer school with the theme ‘Cultural Diversity in Asia and Europe’ will be held from 30 July to 10 August 2018 with the hope of more participation from Asia, Europe and beyond. The summer school programme is an excellent platform to bring together academic staff and experts as well as students from Asia and Europe to exchange knowledge about multiculturalism and to promote better balanced mobility between Asia and Europe.

Besides achieving the objective of better balanced mobility, other programmes offered at AEI such as the International Masters on ASEAN and European Integration, EU-ASEAN projects and activities as well as its status as a Jean Monnet Centre of Excellence contribute toward supporting the initiatives under the ASEM Education Process. This is with the aim to further enhance the internationalisation of education in Asia and Europe as stated in the Conclusions by the Chair of the first ASEM Education Ministers’ Meeting: “The internationalisation of education in general, and of higher education in particular, is an important factor for making education systems and institutions more attractive and competitive worldwide.”

### **The Asia-Europe Institute (AEI): lessons learned going forward**

The overall and reiterated emphasis on the role that informal dialogue plays in the ASEM process has not impeded the systematisation and normalisation of cooperation initiatives and activities throughout the political pillar. This is evidenced through the creation of ASEF and other programme specific secretariats and centres such as in the case of ASEM-DUO and AEI portrayed in this chapter.

In this context, it is interesting to note Bart Gaens' assessment of varying degrees of implication and commitment of Asian and Europeans in ASEM which may run counter to widely held beliefs: "Most often this happened at the initiative of Asian countries."<sup>35</sup> The author continues to argue that – based on the "Asian style" of dialogue, meetings and networking and consensus – it is in fact mostly Asian countries pursuing individual projects for concrete implementation rather than Europeans.

Regarding AEP, we can indeed see a clear preference for the Asian side when it comes to suggesting and hosting concrete initiatives: looking at the actionable initiatives from the last Stocktaking Report for ASEMME6 in 2017, it is true that these are often many one-off initiatives (with the latter being sometimes criticised – mostly by Europeans, cf. article on "Achievement and shortcomings of AEP"; for their limited impact in the overall AEP); this does, however, not impede the creation of institutionalised – success story – programmes such as ASEM-DUO and AEI both hosted by Korea and Malaysia, respectively (with ASEM WPP now being jointly coordinated by Thailand and Belgium, Flanders). Taking a look at contributions evidenced in this publication, this perspective could add an interesting dimension when seeking to identify potential drivers of the ASEM education agenda and process (more details on analysing this statement for AEP cf. the article "Achievements and shortcomings of AEP" and regarding the discourse on AEP-related process optimisation cf. the article "Observations on optimisation and building the AEP"). The AEI has now become an Asia-Europe reference centre with a focus on academic mobility, teaching and research and centres of excellence on Asia-Europe topics and would also be ideally suited to put research on Asia-Europe related education higher on the ASEM education agenda as suggested as one area of future development of AEP (cf. article on "Vision 2025").

As we have seen, the provision of an institutionalised structure and framework based on the commitment of selected ASEM member countries has been instrumental in securing support and continuously and significantly contributing to implementing one of the key educational objectives of the ASEM education agenda – academic mobility between Asia and Europe.

### **The ASEM Joint Curriculum Development Project – Impressions from Indonesia and Germany in the field of tourism and hospitality**

The ASEM Joint Curriculum Module is one of the initiatives to support balanced mobility in the field of tourism and hospitality initiated by Germany and Indonesia through AEP. We will in the following present the initiative and analyse its added value for AEP/ASEM education agenda as well as challenges encountered with the support by contributions from actors involved on programme and policy level to conclude with some lessons learned to be considered for future development of AEP.

#### **Background**

The ASEM Joint Curriculum Pilot Scheme was initiated by the ASEM Education Ministers in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. During ASEMME4, Ministers "shared the view

*Joint Curriculum  
Development Project,  
Welcome of Master  
students at Udanaya  
Universty, Bali*



that attractive education offerings would positively influence interregional mobility and therefore supported the proposal to set up an ASEM Joint Curriculum Development Pilot Scheme. They welcomed the intention of Belgium (Flemish Community and French Community), Brunei Darussalam, Germany, Indonesia, Lithuania and Malaysia to facilitate the implementation of the pilot scheme with financial support.”<sup>36</sup>

Through a series of meetings and seminars hosted by the Director General of Learning and Student Affairs, Ministry of Research, Technology and Higher Education, Republic of Indonesia, and initiated by DAAD, Germany in 2014, it was agreed that the University of Udayana, Bali and the University of Applied Sciences of Stralsund, Germany would run a Joint Curriculum Development Programme.

With both universities signing an institutional agreement for student exchanges, it was hoped that this would also be a starting point for wider and deeper academic collaboration between the two institutions. The programme’s objective was to enable a minimum of five students of each institution to spend one semester at the respective partner university and receive a transcript of records as basis for academic recognition in the respective home university. In 2016 and 2017, each five students from Udayana University received a scholarship from the Indonesian Ministry of Research, Technology and Higher Education to support them to participate in the programme while, in 2016, five of their German counterparts received scholarships from the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research through DAAD.

**Interview with Prof. I Nyoman Darma Putra, Head of Masters Programme in Tourism Studies (until February 2018), University of Udayana, Bali, Indonesia**

**How was your ASEM Joint Curriculum Programme designed?**

“In our 2-year Master Programme in Tourism Studies at Udayana University, we identified a total of six courses for the creation of the ASEM module with 30 ECTS. All courses of our Master in Tourism have an international dimension and are taught exclusively in English. During the first semester of our programme and besides our regular students, a cohort of five students from our partner university in Stralsund joined in 2016 and one student in 2017.

The courses of the ASEM joint curriculum range from cultural heritage tourism over tourism destination, marketing in tourism, to ‘Community based Tourism and Entrepreneurship in Tourism to Sustainable Tourism’.<sup>37</sup> Likewise, five of our students had the opportunity to build an international profile of Tourism Studies by studying a semester at our respective partner university in Stralsund (while Stralsund students attended courses here for four weeks). Based on a transcript of records issued upon successful completion of this semester abroad, we have been able to recognise all of the courses taken at our partner.

This joint curriculum initiative resulted in the creation of an international dimension of tourism in the second semester while enabling at the same time mobility through the creation of optional courses that could be completed at our partner and recognised automatically back home with us.”

### **What problems/key challenges did you encounter?**

“Creating integrated curriculum structures alone are not enough if corresponding funding for students is missing. The creation of this ASEM education-based initiative has remained at the level of adding an international dimension to our curriculum of Tourism Studies through the identified courses and/or the possibility for a number of students to spend this semester also abroad at our partner. As for the creation of the integrated semester to be spent abroad, however, this means that without accompanying guaranteed sources of (co)funding for these selected candidates the latter will not be able to realise this given opportunity.”

### **What are lessons learned?**

“The most important thing is that we will be able to continue what we have initiated. For us in order for the programme to be working and adopted by our students is that we can provide a minimum amount of funding/scholarships per selected candidate. Otherwise students will seek alternative options outside structured programmes as the one we built or rather stay at home.

From our side, we have learned that the intention to create integrated modules/curricula or degrees is not sufficient to boost mobility between Indonesia and Germany/between Asia and Europe if there is no underpinning scholarship strategy. Student participants will need a certain share of guaranteed funding for the mobility to enrol for modules and structures that we have created under ASEM education-based collaboration.”

### **What is the added value of ASEM education-based cooperation?**

“Our students were happy and proud to be able to study in a Western style of education and able to establish networking with international students. They enjoyed the style of studying and work in group for a topic of presentation as much as they did for individual paper presentation. Resource centres like the university library provided them with almost every book they required for study. While in Germany, they also took the opportunities to explore main tourist attractions and that provided them with comparative knowledges on management aspects of tourist attractions back in their home country. But they have to go home during Christmas and New Year holiday because of lack of financial support, so they cannot stay there until final exam of the semester due. When they go home they got a certificate of course attendance without specific mark.

At institutional level, the ASEM Joint Curriculum Programme has helped us enormously to boost the international dimension of our Master programme studies in Tourism. This international profile was an essential element of success when the course was accredited in 2017 and that with the best possible result (A for Tourism Master/University overall also got A).”

*“From our side, we have learned that the intention to create integrated modules/curricula or degrees is not sufficient to boost mobility between Indonesia and Germany/between Asia and Europe if there is no underpinning scholarship strategy. Student participants will need a certain share of guaranteed funding for the mobility to enrol for modules and structures that we have created under ASEM education-based collaboration.”*

*“Of course, such programmes always need a high degree of intercultural engagement and patience in order to overcome institutional and administrative barriers, nevertheless they are always an enrichment.”*

**Interview with Prof. Dr Werner Gronau, Head of Masters Programme in Tourism Studies, University of Applied Sciences Stralsund, Germany**

#### **How was your ASEM Joint Curriculum Programme designed?**

“The project was planned to go through different phases towards a joint curriculum programme, in the initial phase an exchange semester (30 ECTS) was successfully implemented and students from both institutions took part in the exchange programme in 2016 and 2017. Already right after the first exchange the second phase started while focusing on an increased coherence of the subjects taught and first talks on opportunities to also support joint master thesis started. As a first result of the third phase aiming on clearly structured joint curriculum programme, the master thesis of Anna-Lena Sperlich on ‘Community Based Tourism in Bali’ supervised by Prof. Dr Werner Gronau and supported by Prof. I Nyoman Darma Putra has to be mentioned.”

#### **What problems/key challenges did you encounter?**

“Of course, such programmes always need a high degree of intercultural engagement and patience in order to overcome institutional and administrative barriers, nevertheless they are always an enrichment. The high ambitions of such programmes might be sometimes hard to reach in the given timeframe, as the implementation of a joint curriculum includes a number of administrative and legal changes, but they prepare without a doubt the ground for more substantial cooperation in the future.”

#### **What are lessons learned?**

“In order to successfully implement such a programme, there has to be a common understanding of all partners as to what each partner aims at. In other words, is it the aim to get engaged towards a certain goal or is the successful implementation of the goal the aim. Furthermore, there have to be clear responsibilities and contact persons at all involved entities on all levels, in order to avoid communication problems and facilitate decision-making processes, especially in the case of multi-level hierarchical administrations. Last but not least, there has to be a strong commitment from all partners expressed by financial as well as administrative involvement.”

#### **What is the added value of ASEM education-based cooperation?**

“Such exchange programmes are always a great opportunity for students to work on their international and intercultural competences, students are exposed to new environments and definitely benefit a lot from such opportunities.

As the Tourism Programmes at the University of Applied Sciences Stralsund are involved in several international programmes including international double degree programmes, the project can rather be seen as a territorial enrichment by also including Southeast Asian partners in the existing portfolio of international relations than a new field of operation. Nevertheless, the programme opens up new opportunities for students as well as faculty members and helps to further enrich international activities of the department.”

### The ASEM Joint Curriculum Development Project: lessons learned going forward

Student reports show that participation in the project increases the understanding of the other region and the growing importance of Asia-Europe relations: students from Hochschule Stralsund who attended courses on community based tourism or development of tourism in Indonesia emphasised that they had gained an increased understanding about the growing importance of Asia-European relations in the area of economic and educational cooperation for the future.<sup>38</sup>

Martin Schifferings, DAAD, on the rationale of supporting this project: “Initiatives such as the ASEM Joint Curriculum Programme are essential for the sustainability and relevance of the ASEM Education Process as a whole. At the same time, such initiatives demonstrate the importance for enhanced dialogue on all levels in Asian-European higher education cooperation. To implement such initiatives successfully, it is crucial to define precise channels of communication taking account of the structural realities of the higher education systems involved.”

The idea to cooperate in the field of tourism and hospitality as designed and implemented in the ASEM Joint Curriculum Development Project has also resulted into the creation of a corresponding MOOCs initiative with other partners: Dusit Thani College and Mae Fah Luang University, Thailand and Jeju National University, Korea have signed a Memorandum of Understanding. From early next year, these institutions will start designing MOOCs on hospitality and tourism together.<sup>39</sup>

Sectoral ASEM initiatives such as the Joint Curriculum Programme in Tourism Studies, therefore, could act in the future as catalyst for new initiatives in other fields or sectors as shown here for tourism and hospitality.

### PRIORITY 4: LIFELONG LEARNING (LLL) INCLUDING (TECHNICAL AND) VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING (T)VET

#### Initiatives presented:

- TVET related seminars
- Regional LLL Hub Vietnam

According to the latest Stocktaking Report of ASEMME 6 there are currently six initiatives<sup>40</sup> advancing the themes of the fourth AEP priority of LLL and (T)VET: the Working Group on Innovative Competences and Entrepreneurship Education; promoting a dialogue on sharing best practices and future perspectives in TVET; the ASEM Forum on Lifelong Learning; the ASEM LLL Hub Conference; the ASEM Reviews of National Policies on Lifelong Learning; and the Global Inventory on Regional and National Qualification Frameworks.

The promotion of dialogue on sharing best practices and perspectives on the future of (T)VET has been a horizontal theme in the area of (Technical) Vocational Education and Training

*“Initiatives such as the ASEM Joint Curriculum Programme are essential for the sustainability and relevance of the ASEM Education Process as a whole.”*

since the launch of AEP. While (T)VET was enshrined in the official ASEM education related documents agreed during ASEMME1 in Berlin during 2008 there have been to date, however, very few concrete practical initiatives (usually as symposia or workshops) that address (T)VET specifically. As a matter of fact, five such events took place to promote a dialogue on (T)VET. The first one on “How to Improve the Attractiveness and Employability of TVET in the Current Global Economic Situation” was held in Qingdao, China during 2011. One year later, the symposium entitled “Putting Frameworks into Practice: Demand, Development and Decision”, which focused specifically on TVET Qualification Frameworks, was held in Berlin, Germany. In the same year, a TVET workshop was hosted by Austria with a specific focus on the field of tourism education (cf. contribution by Patrizia Jankovic/Reinhard Nöbauer in article on “Achievements and shortcomings of AEP”). During 2014, AES Germany organised an ASEM TVET symposium on dual study programmes in Nuremberg, Germany. And more recently, Latvia organised a TVET seminar in spring 2018 with the objective to “exchange best practices on TVET policies in ASEM countries through dialogue, specifically focusing on presenting examples of involvement of industry in TVET planning, education and training process, skills development and international cooperation.”<sup>41</sup>

More details on the role of (T)VET in AEP and the respective events in this field have been elaborated by Fiona Croke in her article on TVET in this publication.

### **Lifelong learning – The example of the Regional LLL Hub Southeast Asia**

Regional or interregional LLL Hubs play an important role in strengthening the role of Lifelong Learning as fourth educational priority in the overall ASEM education discourse. One example of a regional LLL Hub is portrayed briefly here to illustrate the role and potential LLL can play in and for ASEM member countries as well as the overall AEP.

#### **Background**

The online portal to LLL resources is a component of the project “Towards a lifelong learning agenda in Southeast Asian countries” funded by UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL) and implemented by SEAMEO CELLL.<sup>42</sup> The compendium “Lifelong learning in transformation: Promising practices in Southeast Asia” is another component of the aforementioned project including 15 good practices in the Southeast Asian region and can also be found on the online portal in English, Lao and Vietnamese language.<sup>43</sup>

### **Interview with Mai Hong Quan, Deputy Manager of Research and Training, SEAMEO Regional Centre for Lifelong Learning Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam**

#### **Can you give an example of the role lifelong learning plays in Southeast Asia?**

“Throughout history, Vietnam has a long tradition of studiousness and in the modern time lifelong learning is considered to play an important role in the industrialisation and modernisation of the country. With more than 11,000 community learning centres covering 99.7% of total communes nationwide and the implementation of the national project ‘Building a Learning Society’ by multiple sectors in the society, LLL is effectively contributing to the improvement of the citizens’ skills and competencies, thus enhancing the national labour force’s quality and people’s standard of living.”

### What lessons can be learned for ASEM Education Process regarding LLL?

“In terms of national scale, it is important to have lifelong learning as a course/module in tertiary curriculum or even better, a separate major. As far as I know, hardly can we find such a programme in the Southeast Asian region. Therefore, a piloting programme on this is a good idea to try.

SEAMEO CELLL aims to be ‘a regional centre of excellence in research and training on lifelong learning, a regional forum for educational policy development on lifelong learning and a focal point for linkage among Southeast Asian, Asian and European countries to promote cooperation in lifelong learning.’

From this vision, we believe that SEAMEO CELLL will play an active role in promoting LLL in Asia and Europe, which effectively responds to the ASEM education priorities, particularly ‘Lifelong Learning including TVET’.”

*“Collectively, these multifaceted and wide-ranging cooperation activities are living proof of the dynamism of actions and actors operating vertically and horizontally at all levels of policy development or practice implementation.”*

### (T)VET and LLL – lessons learned going forward

Implementing in particular more (T)VET-based initiatives under the ASEM framework has been and continues to be a challenge for a number of reasons: first, given the diverse nature and differences between ASEM member country (T)VET systems and the different stages of maturation of these (T)VET systems it is not easy to agree on a common denominator; second, a number of Ministries of Education participating in AEP do not hold the (T)VET portfolio, which can come under the auspices of the Ministry for Labour or the Ministry for Skills and Training. This, in part, could explain why ASEM (T)VET policy advancements not communicated to the relevant national ministry fails to achieve traction in the same way as, for example, measures on higher education cooperation.

More recently it seems, however, that (T)VET has been gaining some new ground and has become a priority on the ASEM education agenda with the “Seoul Declaration – Enhancing Collaboration between Asia and Europe in Education and Training – A vision for the new decade” highlighting the importance of “lifelong learning programmes including technical vocational education and training”<sup>44</sup> and a significant number of Senior Officials and Ministers from both Europe and Asia tabelling (T)VET interventions during ASEMME6 emphasising (against the backdrop of enormous upcoming societal and technological challenges such as the 4th Industrial Revolution) that LLL, and in particular (T)VET, need to be upscaled and prioritised. In this context, lessons learned from a good practice example from Kazakhstan were presented at ISOM 2018, introducing the method of the Torino Process, an evidence-based approach of the EU of educational policy reform in a partner country based on qualitative and quantitative studies of the sector and with the identification and involvement of key stakeholders through all stages of the reform process of (T)VET.<sup>45</sup>

It remains to be seen whether actions follow words – and whether (T)VET given its profile by comparison to that of higher education stands a realistic chance of moving higher up the agenda of ASEM education collaboration, there are at present promising signals as outlined.<sup>46</sup>

*“Success factors that are key to AEP advancement are based on identifying strategic educational objectives that shape and support the future direction of the ASEM education agenda and provide the basis for establishing concrete actions or initiatives.”*

## CONCLUSION

Significantly, the ASEM education initiatives identified in this chapter have received overwhelming support in their realisation of the AEP agenda – albeit in different ways and through different channels and with different actors as well as to varying degrees. Furthermore, the initiatives discussed in this chapter are but a small representation of the numerous ongoing (bilateral and multilateral) projects and activities taking place throughout the 51 ASEM member countries and carried out by important stakeholders such as ASEF or the ASEM LLL Hub.

These initiatives contribute to the implementation of four identified educational priorities and demonstrate that ASEM in the field of education (the third ASEM pillar) has produced many concrete results – some initiated as a result of top-down strategies, others arising from bottom-up processes. Most initiatives are funded through contributions from the participating ASEM member countries while initiatives such as SHARE or Jean-Monnet Centres of Excellence or modules on EU integration research topics in relation to Asia are funded through the European Union.

A significant number of cooperation activities have been successfully operating for a number of decades such as ASEM-DUO, AEI and ASEF Summer Universities whereas others, for example one-off activities such as seminars that target specific topics take place on a continuum.

However, the Education Process has yet to establish clear approaches to harness these initiatives in terms of extracting lessons learned and providing for policy development that are grounded in practice. Sustainability is also an issue with questions raised in relation to the upscaling pilot schemes such as the ASEM WPP: not only in terms of continuation but also in terms of extending the initiative into the future to create a more discernible impact and to ensure the involvement of a greater number of ASEM countries. Advisably and key to harnessing the successful outcomes of initiatives so as to ensure an effective contribution to the enhancement and advancement of the education agenda will be to establish a functional evaluation process with mechanisms embedded in an overall strategy.

Alongside identified good practice examples, we can equally establish success factors such as a clear demonstration of high-level political commitment both within the overarching framework of the political ASEM process, for example, through the “institutionalisation” of several initiatives including the Asia-Europe Institute (AEI) or the ASEM-DUO Programme as well as building up know-how and sharing expertise through a series of working groups. Also, a wide variety of projects have been successfully initiated under the four educational priorities at grass-root level with the involvement of civil society, for example, the Rectors’ and Students’ Conferences (ARCs) by ASEF. Collectively, these multifaceted and wide-ranging cooperation activities are living proof of the dynamism of actions and actors operating vertically and horizontally at all levels of policy development or practice implementation.

The identified (flagship) initiatives evidence a strong focus on higher education and given that higher education has a long-standing history of cooperation it is perhaps understandable that ASEM member countries have predominately focused ASEM education agenda advancement

in this area, despite regular efforts and rhetoric calling for (T)VET and lifelong learning to be placed higher on the agenda. Any focus (T)VET has achieved has understandably been initiated by countries either with a history and a strong tradition of involvement in the sector such as Germany and Austria or other member countries such as China that have a vested interest in (T)VET because of the quantitative challenges they face in terms of upskilling and certifying human capital and the workforce. That said, countries who are currently undertaking or planning to undertake major reforms of their education systems hope to benefit from lessons learned by other ASEM members countries who have recently modernised their national systems of education.

Success factors that are key to AEP advancement are based on identifying strategic educational objectives that shape and support the future direction of the ASEM education agenda and provide the basis for establishing concrete actions or initiatives. One example could be linking universities with their socioeconomic environment by ASEM countries upscaling their investment in the intensification of concrete collaboration between universities and business within and across the region. Linking dialogue- and result-oriented measures could also be a way forward to increase impact, for example by linking the university-business dialogue with concrete projects such as work placements with a focus on promoting an interregional practical mobility experience for students – and in the medium-term consider future opening-up of the scheme and allow access of other target groups such as (T)VET learners.

With regard to the future direction of AEP and given the changing context of our societies there is an onus on AEP to ensure that the four identified priority areas do not become a “corset” but that they evolve to maintain relevance and flexibility so as to accommodate newly emerging themes and priorities as in the context of the 4th Industrial Revolution.

Creating synergies through a cross-referencing exercise across the four educational priorities would be an obvious place to start while also thematically reviewing or grouping recently launched initiatives. For example, MOOCs could be screened for their potential for supporting student services (cf. interview with ESN representative in the article on “Vision 2025”) or to better prepare students across ASEM in cultural, linguistic and logistic terms for a study or work placement experience abroad. Another example could be to use existing flagship programmes such as AEI or ASEM-DUO and their infrastructure and key principles and build on them by integrating e.g. company visits into the AEI summer school that could be a way to identify ASEM work placements or by building on the successful ASEM-DUO pairing principle to facilitate company and university staff exchanges or student placements.

AEP initiatives have created a framework of operation that provides for deepening cooperation, relationships and learning from and between each other on several levels while also promoting each region and culture (e.g. through additional respective bilateral exchanges and site visits).

These initiatives and examples all serve to illustrate the potential for advancing the AEP agenda both from bottom-up as well as top-down by increasing impact and visibility through more investment in successful (ongoing) initiatives and fostering synergies and innovation through cross-fertilisation of educational priorities and strategic choices on policy level.

- <sup>1</sup> Sixth ASEM Education Ministers' Meeting (ASEMME6) (2017). *From Riga to Seoul. Stocktaking Report*. Compiled by the ASEM Secretariat and Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Korea in consultation with ASEM partners and stakeholders. Seoul, p. 10.
- <sup>2</sup> Ibidem.
- <sup>3</sup> Sixth ASEM Education Ministers' Meeting (ASEMME6) (2017). *From Riga to Seoul. Stocktaking Report*. Compiled by the ASEM Secretariat and Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Korea in consultation with ASEM partners and stakeholders. Seoul, p. 8 (Table 4).
- <sup>4</sup> Third ASEM Education Ministers' Meeting (ASEMME3) (2011). *Shaping an ASEM Education Area. Conclusions by the Chair*. Copenhagen, B. Engaging Business in Industry in Education para 8/9.
- <sup>5</sup> AES. *ASEM Work Placement Programme: Proposal for a pilot scheme*. Bonn 2013.
- <sup>6</sup> ASEM Education Secretariat (AES) (2013). *ASEM Work Placement Programme: Proposal for a pilot scheme*. Bonn.
- <sup>7</sup> Fourth ASEM Education Ministers' Meeting (ASEMME4) (2013). *Strategizing ASEM Education Collaboration. Conclusions by the Chair*. Kuala Lumpur, p. 5.
- <sup>8</sup> Ibidem.
- <sup>9</sup> ASEM Education Secretariat (AES) (2013). *ASEM Work Placement Programme: Proposal for a pilot scheme*. Bonn. This proposal was drafted by the AES together with Edmund Zirra and Alexandra Angress and presented first as a draft to members of the 2nd University-Business Forum in Bonn and the 3rd University-Business Forum in Kuala Lumpur (2012). See Fourth ASEM Education Ministers' Meeting (ASEMME4). *From Copenhagen to Kuala Lumpur. Stocktaking Report of the ASEM Education Process*. Drafted by the ASEM Education Secretariat. Kuala Lumpur. 2013. Annex 6.5 "2nd ASEM-University Business Forum Germany 2011"; Annex 6.8 "3rd ASEM University-Business Forum Malaysia 2012".
- <sup>10</sup> Fifth ASEM Education Ministers' Meeting (ASEMME5) (2015). *Conclusions by the Chair*. Riga, p. 6.
- <sup>11</sup> Ibidem.
- <sup>12</sup> *ASEM Work Placement (AWP)*. Presentation by Prof. Aris Junaidi, PhD in the framework of DAAD's ASEM Seminar "Bridging the Continents: Fostering intercontinental cooperation for ASEM Higher Education" Berlin. 24 November 2016.
- <sup>13</sup> Report of the 2nd Expert Meeting on ASEM Work Placement Programme (2015). Ghent. The results of the second meeting were not included in the Stocktaking Report of ASEMME5 (as it took place afterwards) nor in the subsequent Stocktaking Report preparing for ASEMME6; for details see Prof. Junaidi's presentation in FN 12.
- <sup>14</sup> Ibidem.
- <sup>15</sup> The three subsequent meetings were held in Indonesia in May 2016, in Berlin in November 2016 and in Bangkok in August 2017. See Stocktaking Report for ASEMME6 (2017). Seoul, p. 27. Annexes 15-17 featuring reports of the 3rd, 4th and 5th Expert Meeting of ASEM Work Placement Programme.
- <sup>16</sup> Interview (written statement) with Martina Link, coordinator of UBN Germany (February 2018). The two student reports were made available by Martina Link and authorised by the students.
- <sup>17</sup> Ibidem.
- <sup>18</sup> Input by Dr Sandra Fikawati, UBN Indonesia. Interview during 6th Expert ASEM Work Placement Meeting in Jakarta, 6 June 2018.
- <sup>19</sup> Sixth ASEM Ministers' Meeting (ASEMME6). *Collaboration for the Next Decade: From Common Perspectives to Effective Fulfilment. Conclusions by the Chair*. Seoul, p. 5.
- <sup>20</sup> Implementation of ASEM Work Placement Programme in Indonesia in the framework of the sixth Expert Meeting of ASEM Work Placement Programme (6 June 2018, Jakarta, Indonesia).
- <sup>21</sup> AES. Work Placement Programme (WPP) Meeting. Jakarta 6 June 2018. *Report*. Brussels. Available from AES website. [www.asem-education.org](http://www.asem-education.org)
- <sup>22</sup> *ASEM Work Placement (AWP)*. Presentation by Prof. Aris Junaidi, PhD in the framework of DAAD's ASEM Seminar "Bridging the Continents: Fostering intercontinental cooperation for ASEM Higher Education". Berlin. 24 November 2016.
- <sup>23</sup> Third ASEM Summit (ASEM3) (2000). *Chairman's Statement*. Seoul, p. 11.
- <sup>24</sup> Asia-Europe Vision Group Report. (1999). *For a better tomorrow: Asia-Europe Partnership in the 21st Century*, pp. 21-22. See <https://www.aseminfoboard.org/sites/default/files/documents/2000%20-%20AEVG%20-%20Final%20Report.pdf> [Accessed: July 2018].
- <sup>25</sup> Third ASEM Summit (ASEM3) (2000). *Chairman's Statement*. Seoul, p. 11.
- <sup>26</sup> Secretariat for ASEM-DUO Fellowship Programme. (2002). *ASEM-DUO Fellowship Programme*. PPT Presentation. Available from: [www.asemduo.org/down/Presentation%20Material.ppt](http://www.asemduo.org/down/Presentation%20Material.ppt) [Accessed: August 2018].
- <sup>27</sup> Sixth ASEM Education Ministers' Meeting (ASEMME6) (2017). *Conclusions by the Chair*. Seoul, p. 2 and *Seoul Declaration - Enhancing Collaboration between Asia and Europe in Education and Training - a vision for the Next Decade*. Seoul, p. 1 (preamble).

- <sup>28</sup> Secretariat for ASEM DUO Fellowship Programme (2017). *ASEM Duo Fellowship Programme. Balanced Exchange through Pairing*. Seoul.
- <sup>29</sup> France and Denmark ended their participation. Cf. Secretariat for ASEM-DUO Fellowship Programme (2013). *Report on ASEM-DUO Fellowship Programme*. Seoul, p. 6.
- <sup>30</sup> Pairing here means one student/professor from Asia with one student/professor from Europe), duration units (one semester = 4 months for students or one month for professors) and fellowship bursary units (for students the amount ranges between €1000 to €2000 per pair/duo per month and for academic teaching staff/professors the amount ranges between €1500 to €3000 per pair/duo for a month). The grant amount for scholarships (“fellowship”) can therefore vary, but on average European participants receive €800, Thai participants receive €1,200 while Korea and Singapore participants receive on average €4,000 per pair.
- <sup>31</sup> Fourth ASEM Education Ministers’ Meeting (ASEMME4) (2013). *Strategizing ASEM Education Collaboration. Conclusions by the Chair*. Kuala Lumpur, p. 6.
- <sup>32</sup> Secretariat for ASEM-DUO Fellowship Programme (2013). *Report on ASEM-DUO Fellowship Programme*. Seoul, p. 6.
- <sup>33</sup> *Ibidem*.
- <sup>34</sup> Gaens, Bart (2018). Two Decades of the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM). In: Gaens, Bart & Khandekar, Gauri (eds.). *Inter-Regional Relations and the Asia-Europa Meeting (ASEM)*. London, p. 24.
- <sup>35</sup> *Ibidem*.
- <sup>36</sup> Fourth ASEM Education Ministers’ Meeting (ASEMME4) (2013): *Strategizing ASEM Education Collaboration*. Kuala Lumpur, p. 6.
- <sup>37</sup> Interview with Prof. I Nyoman Darma Putra, Head of Master Programme in Tourism Studies, University of Udayana, Bali, Indonesia. (8 June 2018). See also University of Udayana – Master Programme in Tourism Studies. Program Magister Kajian Pariwisata (2016): *Course Outline, Joint Curriculum. 1st semester 2016/2017*, University of Udayana. Bali, Indonesia.
- <sup>38</sup> Skelnik, Nicole and Bluhm, Tobias. Tourism Development Strategies - Hochschule Stralsund. In: Nationale Agentur DAAD (ed.). *Erasmus+ Jahresbericht 2016*. Bonn, p. 25. Available from: [https://imperio.daad.com/medien/eu.daad.de.2016/dokumente/service/medien-und-publikationen/jahresberichte/na\\_jahresbericht\\_2016.pdf](https://imperio.daad.com/medien/eu.daad.de.2016/dokumente/service/medien-und-publikationen/jahresberichte/na_jahresbericht_2016.pdf) [Accessed July 2018].
- <sup>39</sup> Korean Ministry of Education (2017): *ASEM MOOC Stakeholders Forum Executive Summary. November 2017*. Available from: <https://www.asem-education.org/documents/initiatives-priority-themes/lifelong-learning-including-tvet/asem-mooc-network/260-meeting-2-executive-summary-docx/file> [Accessed: July 2018].
- <sup>40</sup> Sixth ASEM Education Ministers’ Meeting (ASEMME6) (2017). *From Riga to Seoul. Stocktaking Report*. Compiled by the ASEM Secretariat and the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Korea in consultation with ASEM partners and stakeholders. Seoul, p. 10 + Annex 2: D.27-D.32.
- <sup>41</sup> ASEM Technical and Vocational Education and Training Seminar. Latvia (24 - 26 April). Available from: <https://www.asem-education.org/events/lifelong-learning-including-tvet/asem-technical-and-vocational-education-and-training-seminar> The report of the seminar is available from: [https://www.asem-education.org/images/report\\_TVET\\_Seminar\\_Riga\\_April\\_2018\\_FINAL.pdf](https://www.asem-education.org/images/report_TVET_Seminar_Riga_April_2018_FINAL.pdf) [Accessed: July 2018].
- <sup>42</sup> Interview at ISOM Jakarta. Available from: <https://www.sea-illportal.org> [Accessed: July 2018].
- <sup>43</sup> Cf. <https://www.sea-illportal.org/towards-a-ill-agenda-sea-compendium> [Accessed: July 2018].
- <sup>44</sup> Sixth ASEM Education Ministers’ Meeting (ASEMME6) (2017). *Collaboration for the Next Decade: From Common Perspectives to Effective Fulfillment. Seoul Declaration - Enhancing Collaboration between Asia and Europe in Education and Training - A vision for the next Decade*. Seoul, p. 3.
- <sup>45</sup> Cf. presentation published on AES website: <https://www.asem-education.org/documents/senior-official-meetings-and-ministerial-meetings/isom-jakarta-2018/288-plenary-session-2-rauza-shirgatova/file> [Accessed: July 2018].
- <sup>46</sup> ASEM Education Secretariat (2018). *Report TVET seminar Riga. 25-26 April 2018*. Brussels. Available from: <https://www.asem-education.org/events/lifelong-learning-including-tvet/asem-technical-and-vocational-education-and-training-seminar> [Accessed: July 2018].



*"In search of a balance  
between innovation  
and continuity."*

# Achievements and shortcomings of the ASEM Education Process – views and reflections

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Siegbert Wuttig/Alexandra Angress

*Anniversaries are always a good opportunity to take a look back and formulate ideas about how to build for the future based on the experiences gained in the past. That is exactly what Heads of State or Government did during their Meetings in Helsinki (Finland) 2006 and in Ulaanbaatar (Mongolia) 2016, when they met to celebrate the 10th and 20th anniversary of the ASEM process. In 2017, on the eve of the tenth jubilee of the ASEM Education Process (AEP), Ministers responsible for education, during the sixth ASEM Education Ministers' Meeting (ASEMME6) in Seoul, took stock of what had been achieved and what had not been achieved in the field of education and developed a medium-term vision of AEP. Following these political debates and research made in the context of the ASEM anniversaries and taking into account the input of ASEM members and stakeholders, we will identify, in the first part of this article, major achievements of the overall ASEM process and in particular of the AEP. In the second part, we will look at shortcomings and challenges of the AEP, again by building upon expertise and opinions from ASEM insiders. Based on the results obtained in part one and two, we will draw first conclusions for the vision of AEP in the last part of this article.*

## **PART ONE: Major achievements of ASEM and AEP**

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### **MORE THAN TWENTY YEARS OF ASEM: AN INFORMAL PROCESS WITH IMPACT**

On the occasion of the tenth anniversary in 2006, a Japanese-Finnish research team from the Japan Centre for International Exchange and the University of Helsinki had analysed in detail the strengths and weaknesses of ASEM.<sup>1</sup> The ASEM Heads of State or Government made reference to this study in their Helsinki Declaration of 2006<sup>2</sup> but did not mention the quite critical results of the study in greater detail. Among other things, the research team found “that while progress has been made in improving dialogue between Asia and Europe on a wide range of issues, the dialogue while broad has not been deep. The dialogue process

has furthermore stayed at information-sharing level and has not moved into substantive cooperation.<sup>3</sup> The research team's overall critical and sometimes maybe even too critical assessment of ASEM's achievements can also be seen with regard to the three thematic pillars of ASEM: "Focusing on informal dialogue to facilitate greater understanding, promote transparency and enhance knowledge between the two regions, ASEM's three pillars have yielded modest concrete outcomes."<sup>4</sup> There is, however, "a general perception that progress has been most significant in the areas of socio-cultural and intellectual exchange."<sup>5</sup> ASEM-related initiatives in this field "have a crucial importance in developing 'ASEM soft power'" and cultural issues are doubtlessly the fields "that can display 'ASEM's added value'".<sup>6</sup> According to the authors of the study, the activities of ASEF, ASEM-DUO and the educational hubs, for example, play a major role in this context.

Ten years later, on the occasion of ASEM's 20th anniversary in 2016, the Heads of State or Government in Ulaanbaatar (Mongolia) looked back on the history and achievements of the ASEM process and, based on their conclusions, developed a vision 2025. The Ulaanbaatar Declaration identifies six major contributions of ASEM: (1) Fostering greater understanding between Asia and Europe; (2) Broadening political dialogue, enhancing economic cooperation and increasing socio-cultural exchanges; (3) Deepening Asia-Europe inter-connectedness, shaping and forging links and mutually beneficial, multi-layered cooperation for peace and development; (4) Creating opportunities for broader people-to-people connections, including through the Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF); (5) Addressing the challenges faced by both regions as well as at the inter-regional and global levels; (6) Promoting effective multilateralism and strengthening other multilateral processes.<sup>7</sup> The Chair's Statement of this Summit quotes two studies mainly dealing with the future of ASEM but also taking into account some of its achievements. According to one of the studies, the overall ASEM process "has provided Europe and Asia with a vital platform enabling policy dialogue on a wide variety of issues", "fosters networking and personal relations between state leaders, ministers, officials and policymakers of both regions" and "offers a comprehensive framework complementing ongoing work in other institutions, without duplication."<sup>8</sup> The Symposium on the future direction of ASEM held in Bangkok on 30 March 2015 also reviewed the achievements of ASEM in order to "set out the framework for ASEM's future direction towards its third decade". Similar to findings of previous assessments, Shada Islam's symposium paper describes in particular soft power elements as achievements. "ASEM may still lag behind in terms of concrete achievements but compared to ten years ago, there appears to [be] a real dialogue and sharing of norms and best practice on questions of common interest."<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, "progress has been made in meeting ASEM's key goal of enhancing Asia-Europe understanding on regional and global challenges."<sup>10</sup> Last but not least, enlargement from the 26 members who joined in 1996 to the now 53 members, combined with the additional vitality, enthusiasm and new ideas injected by new members, is seen as an achievement of ASEM.

Shada Islam describes the positive results of ASEM's 20-year history going far beyond the mere findings that ASEM is a "talk show". She shows that ASEM provides a platform enabling countries in Europe and Asia to jointly address complex relations and global challenges. She also finds that "compared to 1996 or even ten years ago, there is now a stronger EU-Asian conversation on trade, business, security and culture."<sup>11</sup> Connectivity of both regions

has grown over the years, not only in economy but also in areas such as climate change, (im)migration, etc. Surprisingly, however, seven years after its inception, achievements of the ASEM Education Process have not been tabled for greater discussion during the Symposium. Deputy State Secretary Liga Lejina, representative of the Latvian host of ASEMME5 in Riga, focused her contribution on the ASEM Education Process but more from the view point of future development. Concerning its achievements, Deputy State Secretary Lejina repeated only the well-known observation: “ASEM education collaboration is a benefit – it serves as a platform for dialogue exchange of perspectives for mutual understanding and benefits ministries, the higher education community, quality assurance agencies and other bodies and stakeholder groups.”<sup>12</sup>

*“The ASEM Education Process has mainly been successful in developing mutual understanding and exchanging information during the last decade.”*

Taking consideration of the different assessments and political statements, we conclude that ASEM is in fact an informal process with positive results mainly in the areas of stimulating and facilitating dialogue and discussions on various issues.<sup>13</sup> The overall ASEM process, however, has also had an impact and contributes to addressing themes of mutual interest, to enhanced Asia-Europe understanding of common challenges, to closer collaboration in certain fields and to the growing connectivity of both regions. Certainly, critical voices may regard the results and achievements of ASEM as too minimal and not concrete enough but when assessing political processes such as ASEM, especially between two culturally different regions of the world, the common discourse on political, economic, social and cultural themes is a key outcome and should not be underestimated as it lays the foundations for future political decisions.

Having discussed major achievements of the overall ASEM process, let us now take a closer look at the achievements of the ASEM Education Process – also including contributions from ASEM members and stakeholders.

*“The overall ASEM process, however, has also had an impact and contributes to addressing themes of mutual interest, to enhanced Asia-Europe understanding of common challenges, to closer collaboration in certain fields and to the growing connectivity of both regions.”*

## TEN YEARS AFTER ITS INCEPTION: KEY OUTCOMES OF THE ASEM EDUCATION PROCESS

In 2016, almost ten years after the first ASEM Ministerial Meeting on education in Berlin, Korea as host of ASEMME6 and the preceding SOMs carried out a survey on major achievements and future developments of the ASEM Education Process. Regarding achievements during the last decade, the Korean Ministry of Education asked ASEM members and stakeholders to evaluate the accomplishment of four aspects of the ASEM Education Process: (1) Enhancement of mutual understanding between Asia and Europe through educational and cultural exchanges; (2) Enhancement of information sharing of education policies and best practices among member countries; (3) Promotion of exchanging human resources and technology among member countries; (4) Formation of network between policymakers, experts, and other stakeholders.<sup>14</sup> The 22 answers showed a clear tendency of the respondents to choose the “medium” category for these four aspects. Interestingly, about 41% of the respondents decided to choose the category “very high” or “high” for the first aspect. 36.4% preferred the same categories for the second aspect. The category “very low” was not selected for any of the four aspects. However, regarding the third and fourth aspect 36.4%

and 22.7% respectively of the respondents assessed the accomplishment of the ASEM Education Process as “low”. Overall, in terms of the perceptions of parties directly involved, the ASEM Education Process has mainly been successful in developing mutual understanding and exchanging information during the last decade.

The ASEM Education Process, however, is not limited to such soft power elements. It has also carried out numerous concrete initiatives leading to tangible results. Our analysis of the last three Stocktaking Reports reveals that Ministers, during ASEMME3 in Copenhagen (2011), ASEMME4 in Kuala Lumpur (2013) and ASEMME5 in Riga (2015), agreed a total of 87 tasks and initiatives of which 70 (i.e. 80%) were assessed as “accomplished” or “partly accomplished” by the ASEM Education Secretariat. This is certainly a remarkable success, even if the assessment may be too optimistic here and there. With regard to the four thematic priorities of the ASEM Education Process, our analysis of initiatives provides the following results:

Stocktaking Reports	P1 = Quality assurance/ recognition	P2 = Business & industry in education	P3 = Balanced mobility	P4 = Lifelong learning / VET	Total
Kuala Lumpur 2013	4 (3)	5 (4)	7 (6)	13 (10)	29 (23)
Riga 2015	7 (5)	4 (4)	10 (5)	5 (3)	26 (17)
Seoul 2017	7 (7)	7 (6)	12 (11)	6 (6)	32 (30)
<b>Total</b>	<b>18 (15)</b>	<b>16 (14)</b>	<b>29 (22)</b>	<b>24 (19)</b>	<b>87 (70)</b>

*Table 1.*  
*Thematic*  
*Priorities*

Numbers outside parentheses relate to actionable initiatives mentioned in the Chair’s Conclusions of the previous Ministerial Conference; numbers inside parentheses indicate how many initiatives have been assessed as “accomplished” or “partly accomplished”. The Stocktaking Report of Kuala Lumpur, for example, indicates that Ministers in ASEMME3 in Copenhagen adopted four initiatives related to priority 1 (P1) of which three were at least partly accomplished.

Looking at the Chair’s Conclusions of Seoul, it is obvious that the number of actionable initiatives had increased to reach a record level of 33 activities. The Stocktaking Report compiled by AES for the next Ministerial Meeting to be held in Romania in 2019 will track how many of these initiatives have been successfully implemented.

A thorough analysis of the Conclusions during ASEMME5 at Riga reveals that most of the initiatives are result-oriented (almost 60%) and their thematic focus is on balanced mobility (as is the case with previous ASEMME Conclusions). The Stocktaking Report of Seoul correctly notes that this finding “indicates the strong commitment of ASEM partners to bring out tangible results to foster the partnership in education and push for greater mobility between Asia and Europe [...]”<sup>15</sup>

Further analysis of the Stocktaking Report for Seoul evidences a very limited number of ASEM members as active coordinators of joint initiatives. Only nine countries plus the EU coordinated 17 ASEM activities<sup>16</sup> with the remaining 13 initiatives coordinated by stakeholder organisations such as ASEF, ASEM-DUO, the ASEM LLL Hub and UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning. Six of the nine coordinating countries are from Asia while three are from Europe. These findings prove that only ten of 53 ASEM member countries have been active as coordinators in the time period between Riga (2015) and Seoul (2017). Furthermore, there is a clear imbalance between Asia and Europe with regards the willingness to coordinate activities: while Asian members more often take the role as coordinators, their European counterparts often take the responsibility to coordinate several initiatives.

Let us now take a look at important achievements and political conclusions of the different ASEM Education Ministers' Meetings, which will be presented in the following table for the period 2008 to 2017 on the basis of the respective Chair's Conclusions.<sup>17</sup>

*Table 2.*  
*Key achievements*  
*and conclusions*  
*of ASEM Education*  
*Ministers' Meetings*

Meeting	Theme of Ministerial Meeting	Key achievements/conclusions
<b>ASEMME1</b> <b>Berlin</b> <b>2008</b>	"Education and training for tomorrow: Common perspectives in Asia and Europe"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• launch the ASEM dialogue on education</li> <li>• set up a strategic Asia-Europe education partnership</li> <li>• initiate first joint initiatives</li> </ul>
<b>ASEMME2</b> <b>Hanoi</b> <b>2009</b>	"Sharing experience and best practices on higher education"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• establish an ASEM Education Secretariat</li> <li>• recognise the ASEM Rectors' Conference as dialogue partner</li> <li>• agree on various working groups and seminars in the fields of higher education (incl. a University-Business Forum) and lifelong learning</li> </ul>
<b>ASEMME3</b> <b>Copenhagen</b> <b>2011</b>	"Shaping an ASEM Education Area"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• AES provided a progress report on the implementation of activities (precursor of the stocktaking report as of 2013)</li> <li>• adopt four thematic priorities of the AEP (see previous table: P1 – P4)</li> <li>• introduce the concept of ASEM Education Area</li> <li>• agree on 29 initiatives related to the four priorities</li> </ul>
<b>ASEMME4</b> <b>Kuala Lumpur</b> <b>2013</b>	"Strategizing ASEM education collaboration"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• put policy into practice, strengthen efforts to further develop the ASEM Education Area</li> <li>• welcome stakeholder involvement (e.g. students)</li> <li>• introduce an Intermediate SOM to discuss ASEM activities from a policy perspective</li> <li>• agree on 26 initiatives related to the four priorities</li> </ul>
<b>ASEMME5</b> <b>Riga</b> <b>2015</b>	"ASEM education collaboration for results"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• introduce an informal working breakfast on the future of the AEP</li> <li>• build the ASEM education cooperation on a two-pillar system (dialogue- and result-oriented cooperation)</li> <li>• discuss the impact of global developments and future prospects for ASEM education cooperation from a political point of view</li> <li>• encourage tangible and more result-oriented activities</li> <li>• adopt a catalogue of 32 future initiatives related to the four priorities</li> </ul>
<b>ASEMME6</b> <b>Seoul</b> <b>2017</b>	"Collaboration for the next decade: From common perspectives to effective fulfillment" and "Enhancing Collaboration between Asia and Europe in Education and Training – A vision for the Next Decade" (Seoul Declaration)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• focus on producing outcomes, induce tangible cooperation</li> <li>• concentrate on global issues, address challenges such as employability and ICT in education</li> <li>• enhance connectivity between Asia and Europe</li> <li>• improve effectiveness of (I)SOMs as proposed by the ASEM Education Task Force</li> <li>• strengthen the role of Senior Officials and the ASEM Education Secretariat</li> <li>• adopt the first Education Ministers' declaration (Seoul Declaration) on the future of AEP</li> <li>• promote mobility and skills development in the era of the Industrial Revolution 4.0</li> <li>• encourage active participation of various stakeholders</li> <li>• envision closer cooperation with the ASEM political process</li> <li>• adopt a catalogue of 33 future initiatives related to the four priorities</li> </ul>

*“In the Seoul Declaration, Ministers expressed their willingness to link the ASEM Education Process closer to the overall ASEM process and to take greater account of future challenges, in particular those of the 4th Industrial Revolution.”*

The overview demonstrates that considerable achievements have been realised in both quantitative and qualitative terms: there is, on one hand, an impressive number of concrete results during the first ten years of the ASEM Education Process, and on the other hand, a qualitative development can be seen with the first two Ministerial Meetings in Berlin and Hanoi focusing on establishing a new ASEM dialogue platform in the field of education, identifying topics of common interest and setting up a structure for communication and cooperation including the ASEM Education Secretariat. During the Copenhagen Meeting, Ministers agreed four thematic priorities that are still valid today. Stakeholder participation has been a major asset of the ASEM education dialogue since the very beginning and even more so by considering the opinion of students during the Kuala Lumpur Meeting where Ministers also launched the discussion on how to make their meetings more efficient and invited Senior Officials to meet annually in order to prepare the Ministerial events from a political perspective. In the following years, this issue was pursued by the temporary ASEM Education Task Force and the Ministers’ Meeting in Seoul. During the meetings in Kuala Lumpur and even more so in Riga and Seoul, Ministers asked for stronger result-orientation, even though the Stocktaking Reports mention a substantial number of AEP initiatives. In the Seoul Declaration, Ministers expressed their willingness to link the ASEM Education Process closer to the overall ASEM process and to take greater account of future challenges, in particular those of the 4th Industrial Revolution.

Before we discuss shortcomings and challenges both for the overarching ASEM process as well as the AEP in particular, let us first review the important achievements of the ASEM Education Process from the perspective of ASEM members and stakeholders.

## MAJOR ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE ASEM EDUCATION PROCESS IN THE EYES OF SOME ASEM MEMBERS AND STAKEHOLDERS

Following requests from the editors, some ASEM members and stakeholders expressed their view or commented on important achievements of the ASEM Education Process which we print in full in this chapter as integral text or extract from interviews and other sources.

## Major achievements of the ASEM Education Process – the Austrian view

Patrizia Jankovic/Reinhard Nöbauer, Ministry for Education, Science and Research, Austria

Austria has been an active member of the ASEM Education Process from the very beginning and underlines the importance of the dialogue on all levels of education, including the tertiary education, TVET and adult learning and therefore supports all four priorities of the ASEM Education Process.

The ASEM process is to be seen as a strategic Asia-Europe partnership which initiated the ASEM Education Process. Although we started from a cooperative basis we have achieved a lot and strengthened the mutual dialogue and cooperation. Governments try to actively improve the international competitiveness of their economies and strive for national educational and scientific excellence. To achieve this, they can act collectively as shown at EU level or actively promote the competitiveness of their universities by encouraging the exploration of new student markets.

Furthermore, to improve or retain national competitiveness in global markets for finance, commodities, services and labour, the quality of education and the availability of knowledge are important, especially in knowledge intensive sectors. Governments, therefore, want to attract qualified researchers and high-quality students in order to make their universities competitive and produce a qualified labour force, compatible with the demands of the knowledge economies.

The investment in higher education in the future is a focus of Europe and Asia. Higher education is viewed as one of the pillars to solving the ongoing financial crisis. The knowledge triangle of Education, Science and Innovation is the main goal to be achieved as knowledge societies can only emerge and be sustainable if higher education systems are strong.

Quality assurance, as a main pillar for trust building, reinforces the attractiveness of institutions as does recognition which is one of the most evident claims for a balanced mobility scheme between study branches and countries. Without mutual trust and gathered common rules and guidelines balanced mobility will not work. This is also true for the exchange of students and graduates between ASEM countries in Europe and Asia. Recognition in terms of academic and professional recognition and the focus on learning outcomes comprises the whole educational system and overarches formal, non-formal and informal education. The development of qualifications frameworks in Europe and Asia is progressing; improvements in transparency will open up higher education to greater possibilities and will make it more flexible. Recognition of qualifications is essential for both academic and professional purposes. The work on and the acknowledgement of the ASEM Recognition Bridging Declaration was essential to Austria in this context and its adoption has been one of the major achievements of the ASEM Education Process so far.

*“Wherever we are located, in Europe or in Asia, the issues sound similar. Learning from our respective partners is crucial. Cooperation and communication are most relevant for a successful and fruitful working.”*

*“Austria welcomes the fact that the new Seoul Declaration underlines the importance of TVET and hopes that high-level dialogue on this topic as well as on university education will lead to further improvements in this area.”*

Wherever we are located, in Europe or in Asia, the issues sound similar. Learning from our respective partners is crucial. Cooperation and communication are most relevant for a successful and fruitful working. Our differences are sometimes similarities and we can, through cooperation activities such as the ASEM Education Process, work together and make apparent contributions so that our respective human capital can learn, search, work under the best conditions for the sake of the knowledge society and of course for an innovative and creative future.

Austria as a country with a long tradition of technical vocational education and training also attaches high importance to the fourth priority of the ASEM Education Process (Lifelong learning including Technical and Vocational Education and Training). Despite of the increasing importance and the undeniable relevance of Vocational Education and Training (VET) for the labour markets the social and economic development TVET continues to be a second choice in many other countries. VET suffers from a low esteem and young people and their families prefer academic programmes, even if they offer less job opportunities and also lead to lower wages or even unemployment.

Many nations have made considerable efforts to expand their education systems in the past decades. However, the majority of these efforts appear to be concentrated in the areas of primary and lower secondary education within the framework of the UNESCO initiative “education for all” and more specifically to academic and especially tertiary education. In Austria, as in other Central European countries, TVET constitutes a major part of the education system at upper secondary level: almost 80% of the 16-year old Austrians are enrolled in VET programmes. In addition, Austria has both, the dual training system combining schools with in-company training and also school-based TVET with the result that Austria traditionally has a very low youth-unemployment rate and a well-trained labour force and as such many countries are interested in an exchange of experience with Austria, among which there are also many Asian ASEM countries.

In November 2012, the Austrian Federal Ministry for Education organised an ASEM seminar on tourism education in Vienna. Tourism is one of the fastest growing economies and stands for the creation on many new jobs on both continents and as such training in this field becomes more and more important. Almost 50 experts from 20 countries and international organisations such as the EU, UNIDO and UNESCO participated in the conference. The intensive exchange of experience later resulted in partnerships and cooperation projects between countries in Asia and Europe.

Austria welcomes the fact that the new Seoul Declaration (“Enhancing Collaboration between Asia and Europe in Education and Training – A vision for the new decade”) underlines the importance of TVET and hopes that high-level dialogue on this topic as well as on university education will lead to further improvements in this area.

Austria as the host of the ASEM Senior Officials’ Meeting in October 2018, which takes place in the beautiful city of Krems located at the Danube River, will continue to engage in the ASEM Education Process in order to further develop the education dialogue between our two continents, which represent two thirds of the world population.

## Major achievements of the ASEM Education Process in the eyes of the Flemish part of Belgium

Magalie Soenen/Noël Vercruyse, Flemish Ministry of Education and Training, Belgium

In 2013, at the ASEM Education Ministerial Meeting, our Minister of Education, Mr. Pascal Smet, opened his keynote speech with the following words: “Thanks to my passport I was able to easily pass the border and enter wonderful Malaysia. That feeling of easiness, the openness of entering a new country with a passport, that is exactly the feeling we want to give our and your students in their learning experience. We want them to be able to move around with their degree and build on to that. We want to give them a passport to the global world of learning!” These words are very true and they should form the basis of our cooperation between Asia and Europe. Our main focus should be to deliver graduates who have obtained the necessary 21st century skills required for the globalised world of today.

We are living in an age of growing uncertainty and in a complex world in which people are facing challenges related to health, climate, food, energy, urbanisation, migration and security. In this context, there is a growing worldwide consensus that (higher) education and research have a central role to play in taking the global society forward. This has put higher education at the heart of the knowledge society. The idea that knowledge, ideas, innovation, understanding and creativity are the foundations on which the future of the society will be built, has been accepted. Higher education institutions are essential suppliers of products and services on which society is highly dependent, such as advanced training, expertise, new ideas, new knowledge, and new applications.

Enhancing collaboration and partnerships, within Europe as well as with higher education institutions in other parts of the world, is therefore important in the pursuit of a common purpose and it encompasses:

1. new forms of cross-border institutional cooperation: active consortia and teaching and research partnerships with other regions in particular Asia;
2. joint study programmes within Europe but also with institutions around the world;
3. pooling knowledge, expertise and research capacity;
4. strengthening higher education-business partnerships both for learning, research and innovation.

In general, strengthening teaching and research collaboration is vital if higher education and science are to address the global challenges mentioned above. The scale of resources needed to address these challenges, requires global partnerships through which to mobilise the very best researchers and innovators. Connecting with partners in both advanced, emerging and developing countries is an important component to addressing societal challenges at a global level.

*“Thanks to my passport I was able to easily pass the border and enter wonderful Malaysia. That feeling of easiness, the openness of entering a new country with a passport, that is exactly the feeling we want to give our and your students in their learning experience.”*

*“AEP should now progress to a next level with more commitment from more countries to actively participate not only in the Senior Officials’ Meetings and Ministerial Meetings, but also in the different initiatives that feed the Process.”*

We may summarise our objectives in a causal chain:

- favourable and supportive structural conditions, mutual learning and better mutual understanding of the different national higher education cultures and contexts;
- establishing trust, more academic collaborations, more exchange of students and researchers;
- production of more relevant knowledge and better understanding of the global challenges;
- better (global) solutions to the global problems;
- more prosperity, sustainable societies, peace, a better world to live in.

The Flemish Community of Belgium entered the ASEM Education Process (AEP) for the production of knowledge and to gain a better understanding of the different global challenges and problems. Our aim was to see the ASEM Education Process emerge as a field of multi-coloured flowers and blossoms, each representing an academic collaborative initiative involving European and Asian institutions and including both student and staff exchanges as well as collaboration regarding quality assurance. To realise this ambition, ASEM Education Ministers have a crucial role to play in developing a favourable framework that can support institutions.

The Flemish Community of Belgium has been very supportive of AEP since it was established in 2008. We believe in the identified goals, and that the Process contributes to the mutual understanding of each other’s higher education systems, quality assurance and qualification frameworks, as well as to the promotion of mobility and recognition between Europe and Asia. We have also learned from our experiences in different working groups that the Process is not only about the higher education systems themselves but is also about the understanding of different cultures, values and traditions.

An important characteristic of AEP is the informal nature of dialogue and activity which is based on the voluntary cooperation of individual countries and stakeholders. Over the years, we have seen a slow but steady growth in the involvement of countries and stakeholders in the Process. We have planted the seed. Now is the time to let the seed grow. Governments involved in ASEM need to take up responsibilities and foresee favourable and supportive conditions to further allow international cooperation.

In our opinion, AEP should now progress to a next level with more commitment from more countries to actively participate not only in the Senior Officials’ Meetings and Ministerial Meetings, but also in the different initiatives that feed the Process. It is only with a joint and concerted effort that requires commitment, that we can make the necessary steps forward.

Overviewing the current ASEM garden, we can see some fragile plants waiting for some fertilisers so that they can grow up and begin to flourish. We, therefore, want and need to intensify our cross-regional activities.

The commitment of the Flemish Community of Belgium to AEP during the last 10 years has been strong, both on policy level and on practical level. From the very beginning, we planted a number of seeds with the expectation that those seeds would germinate, grow up and develop nice flowers.

For several years, the Flemish Community of Belgium seconded two delegates to the first ASEM Education Secretariat in Bonn. We also organised peer learning activities and policy seminars regarding quality assurance, qualifications frameworks, academic work, credit transfer and university-business cooperation involving European and Asian countries and stakeholders. Peer learning activities and seminars are necessary for us to learn from each other and to understand the different contexts and cultures related to higher education. In the framework of initiatives like this, we need to gather Asian and European policymakers at a governmental level, as well as experts from the field. It is our intention in the future to focus more on the dissemination of the ASEM Education Process across Flanders and in doing so to increase the involvement of higher education institutions in ASEM education initiatives.

The Flemish Community of Belgium has supported the ASEM-DUO Programme since 2011 and to date has sent and received more than 200 students. We sincerely believe that learning mobility is essential to ensure the quality of higher education, to enhance student employability and to expand cross-border collaboration. We also therefore support explicitly the interregional ASEM Work Placement Programme (WPP), which promotes the attainment of practical experience as well as the development of cross-cultural skills and competences for Asian students in Europe and European students in Asia. The Flemish Community of Belgium has agreed upon a joint coordination role with Thailand to extend the ASEM WPP and to develop a more permanent support structure.

The Flemish Community of Belgium has also participated in working groups, for example on recognition, MOOCs, joint curriculum development, etc. and is an active member of the Expert Group on Credit Transfer Systems and Learning Outcomes. During the coming year, we will support the revision of the “Compendium on Credits and Learning Outcomes” – a joint initiative with all members of the Expert Group and the ASEM Education Secretariat aimed at improving the applicability and user-friendly nature of the compendium as an information tool. Last but not least, Flanders is pleased to announce, together with the French Community of Belgium, that we have taken responsibility to host the next tenure of ASEM Education Secretariat from November 2017 onwards.

The Flemish Community of Belgium strongly believes that as a group of stakeholders we should also try to find synergies between the AEP and other international processes/initiatives in higher education for example the Bologna Process in the European Higher Education Area. Many topics from the field of education are tackled in different ways by different regions of the world and as such we should tap into this expertise and learn from each other by really working together on different levels so as to evolve towards a strong cooperation between Asia and Europe.

If we want to give our students a passport to the global world of learning, we need an intensive collaboration between our quality assurance agencies, our recognition organisations and our higher education institutions. It is very important to promote academic collaboration between our institutions and staff members, which can build more trust among the different countries and institutions and will allow us and our future graduates to cope with the challenges of global society.

*“If we want to give our students a passport to the global world of learning, we need an intensive collaboration between our quality assurance agencies, our recognition organisations and our higher education institutions.”*

## Major achievements of the ASEM Education Process – the German perspective

Henk van Liempt, Federal Ministry of Education and Research, Germany

### Making education an independent policy area of ASEM

Just over a decade after the launch of ASEM, Heads of State or Government accepted, for the first time, education as independent policy area to the overarching ASEM process. As a result, education became an important and distinct component of ASEM aligned with foreign policy, economic affairs and trade. Germany and the BMBF are proud to have contributed to this development by organising, together with China, Denmark, Japan and the European Commission, the first ASEM Meeting of Ministers responsible for education.

### Creating an informal platform for dialogue in education

Ministries for education and stakeholders from 53 ASEM members succeeded in establishing an informal dialogue platform for education. Since then, the ASEM Education Process allows to regularly discuss issues of common interest and to agree on joint initiatives in the field of education. The ambitions of the ASEM Education Process are fully in line with German policy, with education understood in the broader sense and taking into account higher education and lifelong learning (including VET).

### Establishing the ASEM Education Secretariat – a wise decision

Ministers responsible for education agreed to set up a rotating ASEM Education Secretariat (AES). In retrospect, this was a far-sighted move. Why? Unlike the other policy areas of ASEM, education now has a dedicated Secretariat, with the possibility to constantly motivate and support ASEM members to carry out joint projects, to monitor the implementation of activities and to measure the progress of implementation. The Secretariat contributes to moving the momentum of the ASEM Education Process forward. Germany is deeply convinced that a well-functioning Secretariat is a key factor to keeping the flame of the ASEM Education Process burning. For this reason, Germany volunteered to set up the first ASEM Education Secretariat in Bonn.

### Seeking added value through multilateral cooperation

Bilateral agreements and collaboration between Asian and European partners have a long history, which is also a key feature of German policy. A major achievement of the ASEM Education Process was to add another dimension to this approach by initiating an impressive number of multilateral projects and activities across and between Asian and European partners. From a German perspective, this multilateral approach has a clear added value and is a positive extension to bilateral collaboration. The inclusion of several partners from Asia and Europe ensures progress beyond the interests of individual states and has a broader impact on the results achieved. Besides the Students' and Rectors' conferences organised by ASEF, two more examples may help to illustrate this: (1) ASEM modules or entire Asia-European Master programmes have been created in both regions; (2) the creation of ASEM Work

*“Bilateral agreements and collaboration between Asian and European partners have a long history. A major achievement of the ASEM Education Process was to add another dimension to this approach by initiating an impressive number of multilateral projects and activities across and between Asian and European partners.”*

Placement Programme has resulted in the inclusion of companies and the identification of so-called University-Business Networks (cf. article on ASEM Education Process in practice) in Asia and Europe that both students and universities in the participating countries can tap into. This can help develop state-of-the-art know-how. The participants also acquire the necessary skills and competences to be better prepared to meet future societal and technological challenges.

Initiatives and projects established through ASEM have a direct impact on the individual and at local level, and also create sustainable structures to foster Asian-European cooperation.

### **Involving stakeholders – an important development in the political process**

Following an initial start-up period, the ASEM Education Process succeeded in involving stakeholders more closely. With support from ASEF, both rectors/presidents and students from higher education institutions are now recognised as official partners to the ASEM Education Process and as such contribute their ideas and proposals to Senior Officials' and Ministerial Meetings. It is of utmost importance, especially in informal political dialogue, to address and include opinions from stakeholders at grass-root level, and as such, BMBF welcomes this development.

### **Less is more – making progress by concentrating on a few thematic priorities**

The ASEM Education Process has so far focused on a small number of important educational topics. To date, Ministers of Education have concentrated on four thematic priorities grouped under two headings, which are considered important to improving collaboration and exchange between the regions:

#### **Promoting mobility and people-to-people connectivity**

1. Quality assurance and recognition,
2. Balanced mobility

#### **Improving youth employability**

3. Engaging business and industry in education
4. Lifelong Learning including TVET.

In a complex political process between such heterogeneous regions, it was agreed at the first Ministerial Meeting held in Germany in 2008 to focus on a few fields of common interest. Concentrating on a few topics is a successful way to make progress in the Education Process. And it certainly is a major achievement of the ASEM Education Process that ASEM members and stakeholders have agreed on these four topics and actively take part in numerous activities implementing these priorities. This also reflects the broad consensus and enthusiasm of the ASEM family and the political will to make the Education Process sustainable and successful. Bi-regional processes in education are marathons, not sprints. Germany and BMBF are convinced that it is a worthwhile undertaking to go down a long and sometimes winding road when the road ultimately leads to greater institutional collaboration. As a result, exchange between institutions of higher learning as well as between universities and businesses in Asia and across Europe lead to improved employability of citizens, stronger political and economic cooperation, and a better intercultural understanding through people-to-people contact. It is for this reason that Germany fully supports and participates in such a wide variety of ASEM projects and initiatives.

## Major achievements of the ASEM Education Process from the Latvian point of view

Anita Vahere-Abražunne, Ministry of Education and Science, Latvia

On 27 and 28 April 2015, the then Minister of Education and Science of the Republic of Latvia, Ms Mārīte Seile, Chair of the Fifth ASEM Education Ministers' Meeting (ASEMME5), told delegates: "Education can be a powerful instrument for enhancing understanding and tolerance between people from different parts of the world who have different views; there is also significant evidence for this within the framework of ASEM. Direct collaboration between European and Asian countries can enrich experience, enhance skills, open new opportunities and provide everyone with positive contacts. This enables better understanding of others and trust based on experience and so ensuring peaceful co-existence in our global world."<sup>18</sup>

These words, to a large extent, characterise the nature of the ASEM Education Process; the benefits it provides today and can provide for the future in terms of joint cooperation between Europe and Asia and the field of education.

Looking back at the first decade of the ASEM Education Process, it can be said that during these years the ASEM Education Process has provided extensive possibilities for the improvement of the quality of education systems, better mutual understanding and awareness of achievements in education of the other ASEM country or region, understanding of cultural diversity and friendly people-to-people contacts.

Making internationalisation and quality of education a priority, Latvia has been an active member of the ASEM Education Process since the very beginning<sup>19</sup>, and has a unique insider perspective that takes into account the hosting of ASEMME5 in 2015.

The ASEM Education Ministers' Meeting was held in Riga and was organised also within the framework of the Latvian Presidency of the EU Council, gathering together 46 member states, the European Commission and 11 stakeholder organisations. The meeting was attended by 196 members, including the Commissioner for Education, Culture, Youth and Sport, Mr Navracsics, rectors and student representatives, employers and social partners which made the Meeting in Riga the largest Ministerial gathering with a focus on education that ASEM has ever experienced. This can be said both in terms of the number of members and the diversity of members. Having officially joined the ASEM political dialogue process during the enlargement ceremony, held at the Tenth ASEM Summit on 16 and 17 October 2014 in Milan, Italy, the countries of Croatia and Kazakhstan participated in the Fifth ASEM Education Ministers' Meeting for the first time as full members.

ASEMME5 consisted of an introductory session, two plenary sessions and an informal discussion at political level scheduled as a working breakfast. The purpose of the plenary sessions entitled "Investing in skill development for increased employability" and "New learning technologies

*"Direct collaboration between European and Asian countries can enrich experience, enhance skills, open new opportunities and provide everyone with positive contacts. This enables better understanding of others and trust based on experience and so ensuring peaceful co-existence in our global world."*

in education” was to enable profound discussions between representatives in their respective fields about matters that were then, and remain, topical in the field of education. Members viewed these topics with great interest and were actively involved in the exchange of opinions and information. Likewise, the purpose of the working breakfast was an exchange of opinion between Ministers and high-level Ministry representatives about the future vision and goals of the ASEM Education Process as an incentive for new initiatives and activities that provide for higher value added as well as the sustainability of results of ASEM cooperation.

The experience of these years evidences that informal dialogue is both valued and effective when it comes to both the ASEM Education Ministers’ Meetings and the ASEM Education Process. It has enabled education ministers, high-level representatives of ministries, experts, researchers, university representatives, students and stakeholders involved in education to jointly discuss topics of mutual interests. Regular exchange of experience, opinions and information between Europe and Asia helps us to understand each other better, makes our education systems more transparent and identifiable, builds confidence, mutual understanding and respect. Asia and Europe vary in many respects, however through ASEM we are learning to accept our differences through cooperation. At the same time, Europe and Asia have similar challenges in education: the need to prepare children and young people for successful future in a changing world and the impact fast technological and digital developments have on both the education system and the labour market, etc.

ASEMME5 introduced a two-pillar system with Pillar 1 focusing on dialogue-oriented cooperation and Pillar 2 enabling result-oriented cooperation. The creation of two Pillars came about as a result of successful cooperation experience within ASEM, and in consultation with member states prior to ASEMME5. Reaching consensus on any matter for such a large number of members is a challenge: taking account of the voice of all stakeholders involved is important. Some members preferred to retain the informal dialogue in the format that existed before, others looked to more tangible and measurable results from the process while some, including Latvia, viewed the ASEM Education Process has having this purpose which we refer to today as Pillar 1 and Pillar 2 and which are equally important for successful, closer and cooperation-oriented partnership. Having agreed on the establishment of these Pillars ASEM partners and stakeholders are now in a position to further build and develop them.

When preparing ASEMME5, Latvia agreed the following foundational “*C principles*” of *Continuity, Consultation, Commitment and Collaboration* which are still topical, and Latvia believes are essentially the key to the success of the ASEM Education Process. Our experience is that host countries of ASEM Education Ministers’ Meetings and receiving countries of the ASEM Education Secretariat change, and while this diversity has big benefits we should, however, try to ensure a development-oriented *continuity* of the initiated process without trying to start building it from the very beginning each time. Decisions should be based on *consultation* with all ASEM partners involving stakeholder organisations and where possible representatives of education institutions, students, etc. and a *commitment* on the part of ASEM member states to involve themselves as actively as possible and to implement jointly decisions taken as well as to *collaborate* jointly based on voluntary participation and

“ASEMME5 introduced a two-pillar system with Pillar 1 focusing on dialogue-oriented cooperation and Pillar 2 enabling result-oriented cooperation.”

respect to ensure valuable contributions to our education systems, excellence and closer people-to-people contacts in general. Latvia also believes that a more visible and targeted communication on an international scale and between member states regarding the ASEM process as such and the results achieved, is currently one of the most important and also pressing tasks. From our point of view, countries who actively get involved in cooperation are the biggest beneficiaries. Synergy with other international cooperation formats and platforms will also enrich ASEM cooperation and international cooperation between countries.

During ASEMME5, Ministers, Senior Officials and experts were also provided with the possibility to organise additional meetings. Members used this possibility extensively holding more than 20 bilateral meetings. Within this framework a number of bilateral cooperation agreements were signed, meetings with existing partners were organised, new cooperation partners were found and different side-events were organised. For example, the European Commission organised an informative event on the possibilities of cooperation between Europe and Asia within the scope of the Erasmus+ programme while the ASEM-DUO Secretariat organised a meeting to not only evaluate the achievements of ASEM-DUO scholarship programmes but to popularise the benefits of the programme and the possibilities for a balanced mobility. These rich and varied events provide for national, and joint Asian and European cooperation opportunities.

We are now at the very beginning of the second decade of the ASEM Education Process: Ministers have adopted the Seoul Declaration, approved the Conclusions by the Chair of ASEMME6, and agreed on basic priorities and directions of further cooperation. It is now in the hands of ASEM partners and stakeholders to reach the jointly agreed targets, and to make the ASEM Education Process even more visible to education institutions, students and communities and to bring them together for friendly and mutually important contact.

## **A reflection on the journey of the Bridging Declaration – in the context of the ASEM Education Process**

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**Cloud Bai-Yun, National Recognition Information Centre, United Kingdom**

The history of the ASEM Working Group on recognition (WGR) dates back to 2011 as a follow-up action on the Chair's Conclusions of ASEMME3. The Group was constituted with the view to "Drafting the Convention on the Recognition of Qualification in Higher Education in the Asian and European Regions". The first WGR meeting took place in December 2011 in Vienna which initiated the scoping and the designing of the intended "Convention" and the drafting of the desired document in April 2012.



On reflection, it was a complicated process for the Group to reach consensus on the purpose and the tone of the proposed “Convention” in the context that there exist already six regional Conventions governing the recognition of qualifications in higher education. Furthermore, consideration was needed in order to identify the roleplay of qualification recognition in the ASEM Education Process placed in the changing landscape of international education as a whole.

The European Community has had relatively more extensive experience in qualifications recognition and supporting measures including:

- (1) Legal framework(s) at community and regional level;
- (2) Developing instruments as tangible policy support measures notably:
  - a. the well-established ENIC/NARIC networks as a result of the relatively well implemented Lisbon Recognition Convention;
  - b. common frameworks in the form of NQF, QF-EHEA, ECTS, Diploma Supplement; and
  - c. quality assurance system with identifiable common standards.

In Asia, the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) have played a key role in developing regional economic and educational cooperation with demonstrable but varied progress at national level. Against such a backdrop, the ASEM community were faced with the arduous task to progress towards systematic and mutually acceptable practices.

The WGR reached the conclusion that in place of a new Convention, the most effective step forward would be a clear statement to ensure accelerated effort in forging closer links across the regions building on the existing regional Conventions. The evolution of thought processes resulted in the transformation of the proposed Convention to the *Declaration of intentions*.

In September 2012, the WGR met for the second time in Beijing and agreed the final draft for presentation to ASEMME4. Following the Chair’s Conclusions of ASEMME4 in 2013 and with the creation of the *Declaration of intentions*, the focus of the WG also evolved and shifted from a legalistic approach to that of developing concrete steps to implement the *ASEM Recognition Bridging Declaration*.

### *Bridging Recognition Declaration, Working Group Meeting in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia*

Fast forward, the refocused “implementation WGR” progressed further through continued discussions in Kunming (2013), Riga (2014), Hangzhou (2015), Tallinn (2016) and Kuala Lumpur (2017). The renewed mission of the WGR was to “strengthen and facilitate dialogue, coordination, collaboration and promotion of qualification recognition in higher education among the ASEM member countries [...] in order to foster a strategic cooperation in qualification recognition, credit transfer, comparative researches on national qualification frameworks and harmonization of academic standards”.

To this end, progress had been made in building the Asian National Information Centres Coordinating Website (ANICCW) – a platform to enhance the development of the Asian network and the national centres; drafting guidelines, principles and practices on recognition in the ASEM Region; and establishing a cross-border quality assurance network in higher education (CBQAN).

From the ASEM Education Process perspective, the journey we took from developing the Bridging Declaration to establishing tangible measures was a modest step towards the continued efforts in enhancing cooperation between Asia and Europe, the cornerstone and the ultimate objective of ASEM dialogue. This experience also demonstrated that while it is useful to have mutually agreeing guiding principles, the real challenge is in the practical application of and finding workable solutions for a diverse community such as ASEM.

The implementation of the Lisbon Recognition Convention and the well-established ENIC-NARIC networks set an example that regional instrument can be effective with joint efforts at regional, national and institutional level. Similarly, the established Asian national centres will need to play a key role in their respective countries in the implementation of common principles in the region, in the same way that the ENIC-NARIC centres have at the level of European region. [...] <sup>20</sup>

## **Major achievements of the ASEM Education Process – interview answers by ASEM Senior Officials, experts and stakeholders**

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“AEP is a dialogue-oriented platform dedicated to higher education, the framework of which provides for Ministers of Education to gather biennially with meetings rotating between Asia and Europe. Compared to similar platforms for dialogue within ASEM, the commitment and interest of ASEM partners in the area of higher education is high, evidenced by more than half of the 53 partners attending in particular the Ministers’ and Senior Officials’ level meetings. Therefore, in terms of collaboration, AEP provides opportunities for partners to establish strong networks for the benefit of the higher education system operating within each partner country. For the past decade we can conclude that collaboration between ASEM partners is moderate and needs to be further strengthened through innovative networks. [...]”

In my experience, the most impressive result of AEP is the establishment of a rotating ASEM Education Secretariat. Within the overarching ASEM framework, only education has a secretariat to coordinate activities related to education. In addition, the establishment of the Secretariat provides opportunities for partners to send their staff for secondment to the Secretariat. For instance, when Indonesia hosted the Secretariat from October 2013 to October 2017 both Malaysia, Latvia and Belgium seconded staff. The experience gained is valuable and an asset available to ASEM partners planning to host the Secretariat in the future.”

**Prof. Dr Aris Junaidi, Ministry of Research, Technology and Higher Education, Indonesia**

“For the Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia (MOHE) the most impressive result of AEP has been the establishment of a rotating ASEM Education Secretariat (AES) to coordinate all activities related to higher education. The establishment of the Secretariat provides opportunities for stakeholders to promote and disseminate activities to ASEM partners using a number of platforms such as websites, emails and newsletters. For example, AES Jakarta promoted the AEI-ASEM Summer School Programme from 2015 to 2017 and published news on its website, in its gazette and newsletter. Facilitation provided by AES has encouraged ASEM partners to be actively involved in AEP programmes and initiatives.

Secondly, the commitment to discuss four priority areas of AEP as agreed during the ASE-MME3 in Copenhagen, Denmark during 2011 demonstrates the assurance of ASEM partners to further enhance higher education systems in terms of mobility, quality assurance, lifelong learning including TVET and university-industry cooperation. The four priority areas of AEP combine policy transfer elements to underpin the internationalisation of higher education of each ASEM partner.

Thirdly, AEP has provided opportunities for various stakeholders to be involved in ASEM programmes. Malaysia hosted the Third ASEM University-Business Forum on 5 and 6 November 2012, the Senior Officials’ Meeting to prepare for ASEMME4 which was held on 28 and 29 January 2013, the Fourth Asia-Europe Meeting of Ministers for Education (ASEMME4) which took place between 12 and 14 May 2013, the ASEM International Seminar on Balanced Mobility, the ASEM International Seminar on Lifelong Learning, the ASEM Dialogue on Quality Assurance and Recognition which took place on 25 and 26 August 2014 and the 5th Working Group Meeting for Implementation of the ASEM Recognition Bridging Declaration which was held on 20 and 21 April 2017.

The Faculty of Education of Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) has also been active in Research Network since 2005 which comes under the auspices of the ASEM Education and Research Hub for Lifelong Learning. Such programmes and networks provide a platform for and positively contributed to shared best practices as well as contributing to the capacity building of Malaysians as organisers working in partnership with ASEM members, stakeholders, participants and speakers. ASEM programmes also provide opportunities for the higher education institutions of Malaysia and ASEM partners foster close ties, strong partnerships and networks to enhance the mobility of students, faculty members and staff.”

**Datuk Nik Ali Mat Yunus, Ministry of Higher Education, Malaysia**

*“The most impressive result of AEP is the establishment of a rotating ASEM Education Secretariat. Within the overarching ASEM framework, only education has a secretariat to coordinate activities related to education.”*

*“The four priority areas of AEP combine policy transfer elements to underpin the internationalisation of higher education of each ASEM partner.”*

“First of all, it is amazing that the process is still running and that it has been able to run a rich variety of activities in working groups that are attractive for member states to join and invest in.

Secondly, I believe that the understanding between Asia and Europe has improved significantly so that stereotypes in the views on one another cross the region are undermined. I myself feel indeed that my view on Asian countries and insight into the rich diversity of cultures has enabled me to act more reasonable and productive when it comes to actions in ASEM as well as in bilateral settings.

This will in turn prove to be an important effect of the work, as we move into an era where we must cooperate cross-nationally and cross-regionally to address the challenges to our education systems resulting from business and industry’s increasing participation in global value chains and other decisive developments like digitalisation’s action across borders. When production goes off-shore, our education will have to follow if our national knowledge base is to survive.”

***Jørn Skovsgaard, formerly Ministry of Education, Denmark***

“I think a major achievement of the ASEM Education Process was the establishment of a rotating ASEM Education Secretariat (AES) on a voluntary basis, as agreed by the ASEM Ministers of Education during the second ASEM Education Ministers’ Meeting (ASEMME2) in Hanoi, Vietnam during 2009. The German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) served as the inaugural host of AES until 2013 and paved the way for a structured and continued coordination among ASEM Education Ministries and stakeholders. The Indonesian Government took over the responsibility of AES in October 2013.

The current Secretariat is hosted by Belgium, by both the French Community (Ministry of Wallonia-Brussels Federation) and the Flemish Community (Ministry of Education and Training). Over the past ten years, the AES in consultation with ASEM partners has successfully developed a set of four core priorities, set up a two-pillar system that focuses on dialogue- and result-oriented cooperation, and established processes that enhance internal cooperation procedures.

The second major achievement is the inclusion of young people in the official ASEM Education Process. At the fifth ASEM Education Ministers’ Meeting (ASEMME5) held in Riga, Latvia during 2014, ASEF laid the foundation for this development in partnership with the hosting Latvian Ministry of Education and Science. For the first time, representatives from student and youth organisations attended an ASEM Education Ministerial Meeting and presented their views and recommendations to the Ministers during a plenary session. Since then, student and youth organisations have been legitimately recognised as stakeholders in the ASEM Education Process.”

***Ambassador Karsten Warnecke, Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF), Singapore***

“Personally, I found the peer learning activities and policy forums very valuable. I have met a lot of interesting people and I learnt a lot from them about the possibilities within quality assurance: what is possible in other countries and what is not. It also supported my own policy work in relation to quality assurance in higher education. It is a lot of extra work to organise this type of activities, it is often on top of your daily tasks. But the satisfaction that you get after a successful activity makes it worth.

I also think that the pilot project on work placement, even though it is very limited regarding the number of students, is very valuable as a test case and is a good starting point to further develop a work placement programme in which more companies and students from Asia and Europe are involved.

For Flanders, I think that participating in ASEM-DUO is one of our best results. Even though the budget for scholarships is limited, there is an increasing interest: students and institutions want to apply. After students come back from their experience in Asia, they are extremely positive and grateful that they had this opportunity. Also students with a work placement experience provided very positive feedback.”

**Noël Vercryse, formerly Ministry of Education and Training, Flemish Community, Belgium**

“Even though it was launched before the first ASEM Education Ministers’ Meeting, I think that for Belgium and especially for the Wallonia-Brussels Federation, ASEM-DUO is one of the most successful results of the ASEM Education Process. The Wallonia-Brussels Federation joined the programme in 2014 and has been so far involved and very interested in this programme which allows and promotes balanced mobility of professors between Europe and Asia. The last Call was very successful and professors from several universities and from a wide range of academic fields applied and now have the opportunity to build new or strengthen existing international collaborations.

As a Belgian representative to the ASEM Education Process, I also have to mention the good collaboration and transition that we have had between Indonesia and Belgium regarding the ASEM Education Secretariat. This smooth and fruitful transition also showed us that a permanent dialogue and a mutual understanding of European and Asian cultures are key factors for a successful cooperation between all partner countries and stakeholders of the ASEM Education Process.

To conclude, I want to mention that personally the ASEM Education Process is also a very good opportunity to meet brilliant, interesting and warm-hearted people from all around Europe and Asia. It is an occasion to discover new cultures, an occasion to open our minds and an occasion to fulfil the goal of a better cooperation and mutual understanding between Europe and Asia.”

**Benjamin Monnoye, Ministry of the Wallonia-Brussels Federation, Belgium**

*“Over the past ten years, the AES in consultation with ASEM partners has successfully developed a set of four core priorities, set up a two-pillar system that focuses on dialogue- and result-oriented cooperation, and established processes that enhance internal cooperation procedures.”*

*“The ASEM Education Process is also a very good opportunity to meet brilliant, interesting and warm-hearted people from all around Europe and Asia.”*

## Opinions of ASEM members and stakeholders from other sources

History of AEP,  
ASEMME6,  
Seoul 2017

“ASEM Education Process has been recognized globally as a key to harmonizing education system [s], increasing human capacity building, fostering cross-cultural understanding, and developing strategic engagement between Asia and Europe for the sustained and inclusive growth of the two regions.”<sup>21</sup>

**Ministry of Education, Thailand.** In: *Survey on achievements and the vision of the ASEM Education Process*, carried out by the Ministry of Education, Republic of Korea (2016).



Photo: Alexandra Angress/Ministry of Education, Republic of Korea

“The ASEM Education Process has greatly contributed to the enhancement of people-to-people connectivity between the two regions. Connectivity is the keyword that describes what ASEM stands for.”<sup>22</sup>

**Yoonchul Nam, Ministry of Education, Republic of Korea**

“ASEM [...] has served as a dialogue facilitator and helped increasing mutual understanding through people-to-people contacts. [...] ASEM is a policy-making laboratory. By promoting an open and inclusive dialogue, ASEM has allowed its participants to develop and test new ideas for future policy-making. [...] ASEM also creates opportunities for exchanging experiences and share knowledge. [...] As a new layer of dialogue and cooperation, ASEM has enhanced synergies in Europe-Asia relations [...] and has helped Europe and Asia to have a more global vision of the two regions.”<sup>23</sup>

**ASEMInfoBoard, c/o Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF), Singapore**

*“The Asia-Europe Meeting has often been criticised as a mere ‘talking shop’ without concrete results.”*

## **PART TWO:**

### **Shortcomings and challenges of ASEM and AEP**

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#### **Shortcomings and challenges of ASEM and the ASEM Education Process – views and reflections**

Major strengths of ASEM and the AEP as have been identified and illustrated in this chapter, leading to a wide range of concrete achievements can at the same time also be considered as their major shortcomings or challenges.

While facilitating dialogue across ASEM, the Asia-Europe Meeting has often been criticised as a mere “talking shop” without concrete results. Given its evolving nature and substantial enlargement from 26 to 53 members, ASEM is also often considered to be diffused and unwieldy in terms of facing a number of challenges it has yet to solve in order to fulfil its role in the international arena.<sup>24</sup> Two of its main shortcomings referred to in this chapter (and identified in 2006 during the tenth anniversary of ASEM) are: the establishment of a broad but not deep dialogue and also the criticism that ASEM dialogue has not moved beyond the level of information sharing.<sup>25</sup>

#### **Incompatible principles or principles in creative tension? Informality vs institutionalisation and dialogue vs outcome orientation?**

ASEM is based on a set of principles of which some seem to be incompatible with one another or at least being in creative tension<sup>26</sup>: the first one results from the fact that while ASEM has been conceived as a forum of leaders characterised by its very informal nature there have been increasingly voices recently calling for more institutionalisation of ASEM – not least given its constructive potential on global stage at present. The creation of institutions and corresponding formal procedures, however, would in turn risk to undermine one of the key principles and

*“ASEM has no identifiable strategy or vision which again has an impact on the agenda progressing effectively.”*

rationales of the meetings: meeting in an informal way which makes ASEM a peaceful and non-compromising arena with a focus on dialogue and networking based on ASEM principles laid down in the Asia-Europe Cooperation Framework 2000 (AECF). The key principle of informality and the related format of meetings also enable for the inclusion and encounters of states that may have conflicting interests or political conflicts among each other.

Informality as guiding principle alone is necessary but not sufficient, however, in the light of future challenges and the need for an identification of a common direction as well as in the absence of corresponding enforcement mechanisms translating policy objectives into action. The question arises as to how we constructively harness this very tension resulting from formal and informal elements with informality being both ASEM’s biggest asset while acting at the same time out as impeding further deepening and effective follow-up of the process if not accompanied by more binding elements.

Another tension results from the fact that ASEM’s prime focus on dialogue seems diametrically opposed to allowing for binding commitments that is needed to reach tangible cooperation results and corresponding follow-up.

Looking at AEP, it is true that the considerable number of initiatives illustrate a strong commitment of ASEM members that are actively involved as coordinators/participants; participation, however, is unevenly spread and at times random with the dividing line being not Asia on one side and Europe on the other but within the regions themselves. Here again dialogue is the overarching principle for the format of the meetings despite the availability of potential instruments such as the Stocktaking Report that would allow for monitoring and follow-up in scaling up common efforts to reach more tangible results.

Before presenting the views of individual ASEM members and stakeholders regarding shortcomings of AEP, we will, in the following sub-chapter, analyse some more features of ASEM/AEP that we have identified as weaknesses or shortcomings on the basis of relevant policy documents and academic literature.

### **High diversity and unbalanced ownership of commitment to initiatives**

As already introduced above, another strength which can be seen at the same time as a major weakness of ASEM (and is linked to the latter point of informality) is the diversity of members and, related to this, the differing perspectives in terms of policy related objectives: not all policies and initiatives can be addressed at macro level – and this holds true for the educational pillar as well. However, without corresponding high-level political commitment and endorsement, ASEM is unlikely to not move beyond a fraternity meeting “emphasizing equal partnership, favouring general process of dialogue and cooperation based on mutual respect and benefit”<sup>27</sup>.

One area to illustrate this regarding AEP is the uneven distribution of ownership regarding AEP initiatives with only a few members involving themselves actively as coordinator or member in practical initiatives. The latter, however, are at present the major tool to implement AEP agenda through its four key objectives.

Another indicator to illustrate this is participation and commitment: While it is true that the overall number of attendees reached a maximum headcount of 216 delegates during ASEMME6 in 2017 representing 44 ASEM member countries and ten stakeholders, the decreasing number of Ministers attending the Ministerial Meetings over the years<sup>28</sup> has been interpreted by some as weakening of high level political commitment. If ASEM is first and foremost a process characterised as a high level political gathering and also as a top-down policy process and if strategic policy direction is to be taken from this highest level of policy decision-making actors, then the decline in ministerial participation means that fewer and fewer decision-makers are presiding over strategic policy decisions. If you then also consider the impact of extremely high turnover in SOMs, continuity of decision as well as follow-up also becomes a factor. Added to this, ASEM has no identifiable strategy or vision which again has an impact on the agenda progressing effectively.

*“One of the key shortcomings of ASEM is visibility and public awareness.”*

Given the diverse nature of participation, the apparent lack of formality and unbalanced ownership, it may be all the more surprising to see the high number of actionable initiatives – on a positive note, this goes to show the great dynamism of ASEM and that ASEM education is indeed being “constructed from within”.

Taking a closer look at these initiatives, it is, however, also true to say that the majority are one-off activities with a moderate or modest impact in terms of their contribution to further implementing AEP and as such ASEM/AEP should look to provide for larger constructs/programmes/initiatives to achieve widespread participation and cohesive policy direction.

### **Dialogue and consensus – blessing or a burden?**

One of ASEM’s key assets – the value of non-confrontational dialogue and the search for consensus – can at the same time be its very weakness. If we take the point of departure to be that “the overarching consensus is to have a consensus, usually in the form of a post-summit joint statement”<sup>29</sup> – or in AEP the Chair’s Conclusions, respectively. Based on the overarching objective of enhancing Asia-Europe relations, ASEM is often seen as having remained so far comparatively vague and directionless with dialogue forming a key result of ASEM. With regard to the overarching ASEM process, Khandekar summarised: “Dialogue is overwhelming the key deliverable of ASEM without any concrete goal or significant, practical cooperation initiatives. The ASEM agenda is open and flexible to include or exclude topics.”<sup>30</sup>

For AEP, this means that in addition to the core value of facilitating mutual understanding through dialogue as a key deliverable there are documents and activities, i.e. Chair’s Conclusions and the Stocktaking Report that boast a considerable number of in fact very concrete cooperation initiatives under the four educational priorities. What is missing, however, is an effective, analytical and policy-oriented follow-up mechanism as well as the commitment by all to agree on a mission or direction endorsed by all and based on the identification of a roadmap with tangible outcomes and indicators to monitor and assess progress. The Seoul Declaration is a first step in this direction with common ownership stressed both in the preparation process by the drafting host Korea as well as stipulated in the Seoul Declaration.<sup>31</sup> Concrete actionable initiatives, however, are still missing at this stage.

### Lacking visibility and public awareness

One of the key shortcomings of ASEM is visibility and public awareness.<sup>32</sup> The lack of awareness for ASEM is often explained by way of its own nature – given it is a process and not an international institution like the UN or a *sui generis* body like the EU. An analysis of media reporting and the extensive public opinion survey carried out to assess ASEM's public outreach during the first decades<sup>33</sup> indicate that there is a lot of room for improvement in this area, and in particular in the area of outreach and involvement of youth. Overall, governments across ASEM have not been successful in communicating to the general public the main objective of the ASEM process, promoting ties and boost mutual awareness between Asia and Europe. In this context, there is a lack of focus in terms of communicating to the general public a clear message both in terms of added value and a personal development. Even if some ASEM/AEP initiatives or related projects pertaining and relating to AEP educational objectives stand out and are good practice examples such as ASEM-DUO, Asia-Europe Institute or ASEF's students forums or initiatives such as SHARE aiming at the involvement of a series of key actors of civil society – they are rather exceptions than the rule. While it is certainly true that all of these contribute to advancing the ASEM education agenda, public awareness of the latter as well as their overall political clout in terms of (systemic) impact on ASEM members' educational policies remains limited.

### ASEM – a deficient forum and/or underutilised?

While ASEM is the only forum, outside of the UN meetings, where Asian, EU and EEA countries meet, the strategic importance of ASEM as an operational forum has so far remained significantly limited with the result that ASEM has in this context been criticised for being a deficient and underutilised forum.<sup>34</sup> ASEM is also considered a low priority level of policy-making in participating member countries: which is further complicated given ASEM has no official policy strategy or documents let alone corresponding implementation tools/mechanisms. Given that there is no designated ASEM strategy, the public profile of the process is individualised and not cohesive.<sup>35</sup> In the field of economic cooperation, for example, there is no evidence of ASEM cooperation impacting on WTO matters.<sup>36</sup>

Existing bilateral relationships in the field of education that have remained so far rather untapped could in the future provide momentum for establishing horizontal cooperation and multilateral initiatives also across ASEM pillars. The same logic applies to ASEM meetings whose format could allow even more to explicitly include in the agenda the organisation of bilateral meetings between existing partners or by facilitating networking and thus creating new partnerships in the framework of the meetings supported by corresponding staff or institutions in charge of these bilateral programmes. It is in this spirit that with the ISOM meeting in Jakarta in 2018 the Indonesian Ministry in their invitation letter called on member states to use the meeting also to organise bilateral meetings.<sup>37</sup>

### No dedicated ASEM strategy or budget

ASEM also forms a low priority level of policy making in the participating member countries. As mentioned above none of them has an official ASEM policy strategy or documents let alone corresponding implementation strategies. Since there is no designated ASEM

strategy by the participating member states, the public profile of the process has not been promoted by individual governments cohesively. It is individual governments with their willingness and allocation of resources that take the decision to participate and sponsor projects.

The last Stocktaking Report for ASEMME6 in Seoul 2017 listed a number of “actionable initiatives”. However, there is a very limited number of ASEM members participating across the activities. This selective government-led process is reinforcing the unbalanced relationship between ASEM countries and hindering the practical implementation of the AEP agenda despite the fact that AEP “is constructed from within”<sup>38</sup>, i.e. through deliberate acts of initiative taking and agenda-setting resulting from interactions of key actors and decision makers in this field.

### **Combining the top-down approach with bottom-up elements**

ASEM is managed through a top-down and intergovernmental format. In AEP, the role of Senior Officials was strengthened by putting them into the driving seat to initiate actions/projects and also to follow up on policy recommendations. In the future, more actors of civil society such as students, universities or business should be strategically involved in informal and non-binding discussions which would have the benefit of boosting ASEM’s visibility among relevant stakeholders and would also improve accountability and legitimacy.<sup>39</sup>

### **Lack of interaction and systematic follow-up**

Regarding the format of meetings, the lack of interaction and discussions and genuine personal exchange of opinions and experience by political decision-makers has been addressed and while informal retreat sessions lend themselves to the facilitation of dialogue so far only one informal breakfast/retreat session has been realised (ASEMME5 in Riga). Another shortcoming relates to the lack of interaction and effectiveness regarding the policy-orientation of Ministerial Meetings which led to the establishment of a Task Force with the objective to propose (new) formats to allow for interaction between participants on one hand and to provide information for more informed policy decisions on the other.

Undertaking a review of the objectives of Ministerial and Senior Officials’ Meetings as well as the initiatives implemented and documented through the Stocktaking Reports, it appears that no formal filtering, approval or follow-up mechanism exist. And while it is true that the number of delegates attending ASEMME6 has never been so high, it does not necessarily correlate that the attendees are in the driver seat making political decisions or launching new initiatives in line with both domestic and ASEM priorities.

The following shortcomings and challenges of the ASEM Education Process have been identified by ASEM members and stakeholders.

## SHORTCOMINGS AND CHALLENGES OF THE ASEM EDUCATION PROCESS IN THE EYES OF ASEM MEMBERS AND STAKEHOLDERS

### A critical review: strengths and weaknesses of the current ASEM Education Process

Henk van Liempt, Federal Ministry of Education and Research, Germany

#### A good start with room for improvement

With their decision to make education a separate pillar of the ASEM process, the Heads of State or Government of ASEM member countries attained an important milestone in terms of achieving collaboration between Asia and Europe. Almost ten years ago, ASEM Ministers responsible for education launched the ASEM Education Process providing a platform for a political dialogue to foster opportunities for cooperation and to encourage people-to-people contact. The ASEM Education Process relates to four educational priority areas: Quality assurance and recognition, business and industry in education, balanced mobility and lifelong learning including TVET. From the German perspective, this has been an important step forward to better understanding and closer collaboration, in a rapidly changing world when existing political and economic alliances need to be stabilised and new alliances have to be built. However, there is still work to be done in terms of transforming political words into action. This was noted by the ASEM Education Ministers who advanced this opinion during the Ministerial Conference in Seoul with the revealing title of “Collaboration for the Next Decade: From Common Perspectives to Effective Fulfillment”. The Seoul Declaration of 2017 states: “We commit to making our cooperation more tangible and effective by engaging in active dialogue and action to realise our common vision in the next decade.” On reflection for this to be achieved, the number of active ASEM members could be higher. Too often, it is the same countries who commit themselves to taking part in joint projects and initiatives. In order to encourage more active participation, Germany officially supports the Seoul Declaration which calls upon Member States to work towards a “closer collaboration between the ASEM Education Process and the ASEM Political Process”.

#### Higher education is important – but VET must not be neglected

Thematically within the ASEM Education Process, Ministers for Education have traditionally focused on higher education, namely because there is a long tradition of global collaboration and exchange in the area of higher education. Moreover, stable structures for cooperation in bilateral programmes and multilateral projects already exist. However, VET should not be overlooked. Therefore, Germany has proposed to members and stakeholders to consider prioritising vocational education and training as a possible field of cooperation in ASEM. Up to now, the VET sector has been underrepresented in terms of initiatives and activities within the ASEM Education Process. This is a weak point of the current process, especially when we consider that the education and training of the younger generation is key to achieving economic growth and social welfare, which many delegates underlined during the ASEMME6 meeting in Seoul during 2017. Moreover, a number of ASEM countries have aging societies,

especially in Europe. For these countries, lifelong learning “from cradle to grave” is critical to policy development and is addressed by priority four of the ASEM Education Process which has so far been implemented with activities carried out by some ASEM countries, the ASEM LLL Hub and the UNESCO Institute of Lifelong Learning. However, the activities listed by the Ministers in the Chair’s Conclusions are not part of an overarching strategy but rather originate from the context of the organisations carrying out these activities. This is also true for the other thematic priorities. As a starting point for a stronger focus on VET, ASEM countries with a strong interest or expertise in developing the VET sector could launch pilot projects, which could – if tested successfully – be opened to partners for wider participation.

#### **Personal commitment needs to be complemented by a stable organisational structure**

The success of the ASEM Education Process depends, first of all, on the personal commitment of individuals but also on a sufficient continuity of the political actors involved. The constantly changing composition of SOM and Ministerial delegations attending conferences makes this difficult to achieve. Such a situation often prevents a seamless development of dialogue at the technical and political level. In order to avoid this, Ministers have agreed to set up the ASEM Education Secretariat as an appropriate structure to ensure continuity when it comes to exchanging views and the development of the ASEM Education Process. However, in order for this to be achieved the Secretariat must have a mandate to coordinate activities and monitor progress. Germany fully supports the concept and development of a Secretariat. ASEM Education Ministers, too, appreciated the work of the Secretariat and recognised in the Seoul Declaration of 2017 “that the function and role of the ASEM Education Secretariat should be strengthened”. In addition to this, Ministers have ensured that the working procedures of the Secretariat are based on different cultural contexts by establishing a rotating Secretariat. This decision has clearly had a positive impact on the acceptance and the development of the ASEM Education Process in both regions.

#### **Many activities – too few political conclusions**

In advance of the Ministerial Conferences, the Secretariat prepares stocktaking reports. Among other things, these reports assess progress made during implementation of the activities agreed during Ministerial Conferences. In the Chair’s Conclusions, Ministers usually acknowledge the activities carried out and express their gratitude to the active ASEM members and stakeholders. However, Ministers rarely take the next step which is to draw conclusions to advance political measures and decisions regarding joint initiatives and projects in the future. While the Process is founded on informal dialogue, the inability to achieve traction or upscale successful initiatives has been a weak point in the political dialogue and represents a bottleneck to the strategic development of the ASEM Education Process. Likewise, Ministers take note of recommendations from stakeholders (e.g. rectors and students) and of developments rather than drawing political conclusions or initiating concrete joint actions. If ASEM intends to be more than a dialogue forum discussing educational themes without political consequences, the Senior Officials’ Meetings need to be advised by the results and recommendations of previous activities. These results can be the basis to discuss the results and topics in more depth during Ministerial Conferences and to prepare joint political agreements aiming at achieving common strategic objectives. Going forward, the question arises how the interaction of the Secretariat, the Senior Officials and the hosting country of a Ministerial

*“While the Process is founded on informal dialogue, the inability to achieve traction or upscale successful initiatives has been a weak point in the political dialogue and represents a bottleneck to the strategic development of the ASEM Education Process.”*

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Conference as well as the structure and frequency of SOMs could be made more efficient and effective. To this end, Germany is willing and ready to support measures leading to better procedural interaction and improved cooperation between the actors involved.

## **Weak points of the ASEM Education Process – interview answers by ASEM Senior Officials, experts and stakeholders**

“With the structure of the ASEM Education Process in place, it is time to maximise the values of the various activities run by ASEM partners and to focus on impact creation and evaluation. For example, let us take a look at the many platforms and interactions between the official and the civil society level of the ASEM Education Process. How can, for instance, the policy recommendations and the research results from various ASEM Initiatives and by ASEF’s projects be better compiled and channelled to the Ministers and policymakers for consideration? How can we follow up on these policy recommendations more effectively and research and enhance their impact – in individual ASEM countries and on a regional level? What is needed so that the cross-sectorial and multi-stakeholder consultation and collaboration processes result in concrete commitments and actions to further develop into a vibrant and dynamic environment?”

***Ambassador Karsten Warnecke, Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF), Singapore***

“Although the AEP was established one decade ago, there are some weak points in its development. The commitment and support of the partners participating in the AEP projects and programmes has been decreasing in recent years. In our opinion this is because the projects and programmes have not contributed substantially to the development of the higher education system of a country. Besides that, although Ministers agreed on a two-pillar system during ASEMME5, there is still confusion as to how to segregate projects and programmes according to the two pillars and partly because the definition of each pillar is open to interpretation.”

***Prof. Dr Aris Junaidi, Ministry of Research, Technology and Higher Education, Indonesia***

“The ASEM Education Process is a voluntary dialogue between a large number of countries and partners across Europe and Asia. In my point of view, the main weakness of the ASEM Education Process is that sometimes it is difficult to have a clear view of where we are going and what are the concrete results of the multitudes of initiatives that have been taken. Also, even if I know that the ASEM Education Process is not always a priority for the different Education Ministries, it is clear that all countries do not have the same level of involvement. To face that, we could maybe imagine to have a sort of work programme or concrete timeline on a four-year basis that will steer the work done within the ASEM Education Process.”

***Benjamin Monnoye, Ministry of the Wallonia-Brussels Federation, Belgium***

“I feel that there are too many one-off activities and that there should be more follow-up after each activity. Of course, this requires a stronger commitment on the part of the countries that are involved and of the initiative taker to follow-up after the activity has ended. More coherence should be created between activities and initiatives to work towards some concrete results.

I also think that the Senior Officials’ Meetings are often too formal, there is never enough space for discussion on following-up of activities or initiatives. We should use the platform to create more discussion and interaction. This is the best way to build further on what happened.

Personally, I feel very positive towards all activities that we have organised mainly because of the commitment of partners to participate and to contribute. Of course, there were activities that were only partly successful or even have failed, but even then, there was always something that gave me a warm and positive impression. For example, the ASEM University-Business Forum can be considered as a failed activity as there were few participants and the meeting was much shorter than planned. Still there were some very interesting questions and issues have been raised and there were inspiring speakers.

Even though these single activities seem sometimes unproductive, there are always interesting aspects that can be taken further on for follow-up or as inspiration for new initiatives, but this follow-up should be encouraged and organised.”

**Noël Vercryse, formerly Ministry of Education and Training, Flemish Community, Belgium**

“There is an unsolved dilemma as to whether the ASEM Education Process should develop an organisation or not. It is clear to me that without the ASEM Education Secretariat (AES) – first placed in Bonn, later in Jakarta and now moving on to Brussels – the Process would be dead by now. And it has been a sound principle that the activities have been driven by working groups that could only survive if they were supported by nations – they have no organisation to rely on. This has aligned the Process with a lot of ‘fresh air’. On the other hand, continuity, keeping a clear line and retention of results is indeed vulnerable in this construction. The limited capacity of the Secretariat does not match this challenge which in turn makes it less binding for nations to maintain their engagement. So national engagement in many cases relies on the effort of passionate fireballs and when they burn out or retire the engagement of the nation in question is not sure any more. I have no practical solution to this but Senior Officials should discuss how this dilemma can be addressed so that the fairly loose arrangement of the ASEM Education Process can be maintained for the benefit of the variety and vitality of activities and at the same time organising a more binding scheme for national engagement.”

**Jørn Skovsgaard, formerly Ministry of Education, Denmark**

“Firstly, although the AEP was established a decade ago, the strong commitment and support for ASEM partners to participate in the projects and programmes under AEP has not diminished. However, the participation of European partners in AEI-ASEM Summer School needs to be encouraged to enhance desirable participation of European students in order

*“I feel that there are too many one-off activities and that there should be more follow-up after each activity.”*

*“In my point of view, the main weakness of the ASEM Education Process is that sometimes it is difficult to have a clear view of where we are going and what are the concrete results of the multitudes of initiatives that have been taken.”*

to strike a balance between Asian and European participants. Secondly, although Ministers agreed for a two-pillar demarking system during ASEMME5, there is still a misperception to segregate the projects and programmes according to the two pillars.”

*Datuk Nik Ali Mat Yunus, Ministry of Higher Education, Malaysia*

## PART THREE: Conclusion

### Strengthening ASEM as soft power system of global governance with education as key priority

The key achievements of the overall ASEM process as identified in the Ulaanbaatar Declaration range from fostering greater understanding between the two regions to addressing common challenges and promoting an effective format of multilateralism in our times. This could be interpreted as emergence of some new kind of soft “global governance power”<sup>40</sup> in the overall international system suggesting that ASEM is much more than a “talking shop”.

Regarding AEP, achievements are in particular the numerous and successful activities of ASEP, ASEM-DUO and educational hubs as highlighted in the study for the Helsinki Summit of 2006 and mentioned here above.<sup>41</sup> All these initiatives share a high level of commitment by a number of ASEM members and a great continuity over the years focusing in the area of education on mobility and young people as well as commonly identified fields of actions of policy research and educational hubs.

### Enhancing collaboration and dialogue in education between Asia and Europe

One of AEP’s major achievements and strengths has been clearly the creation of an “institutional memory” through AES<sup>42</sup> as well as the power of its own agenda-setting<sup>43</sup>. The latter is demonstrated by the change of the educational discourse over time, e.g. in making higher education a key priority of the Asia-Europe education cooperation and departing from employability and mobility in the beginning and focusing exclusively on higher education to the inclusion of four priority education areas as guiding themes for subsequent Ministerial and Senior Officials’ Meetings. This shows the dynamism of AEP as well as the underlying commitment of its members who not only seek to identify common future challenges but also seek to commit to collaboration across ASEM members to meet the latter such as Industry Revolution 4.0 and new formats of learning such as MOOCs initiative.

### AES and four educational objectives as key deliverables

Looking at the achievements identified in particular by contributors in this article in the field of AEP, it may suffice to reiterate some major points here such as the potential of using AEP as catalyst to make education systems globally more attractive and equip future graduates with relevant skills for the next decades; to make our education systems more competitive across the region by way of international collaboration and sharing good practices and experiences in facing common future challenges – and thus leading to the motivation of some ASEM members to actively engage in and even coordinate some of the collaboration activities. One key

achievement of AEP referred to almost in unison by contributors are genuine forms of institutionalisation and the resulting continuity of the Process that has been achieved through the establishment of a permanent AES. The identification and shared vision of the common four educational priorities in the area of education is also a commonly held major achievement of AEP. Other achievements highlighted (apart from the impressive and growing number of initiatives under the four headings) an appreciation for AEP as a dialogue process that comprises ALL levels of education – albeit to varying degrees – with TVET continuing to be the poor relation of higher education despite regular references to the importance of the sector in particular with regard to future challenges as Industry Revolution 4.0. Key success factors of ASEM-related collaboration such as mutual trust and common rules and guidelines have led in AEP, for example, to common reference points such as illustrated by way of the Bridging Declaration. This approach can be considered a genuine “ASEM way” in identifying a common basis upon which further collaboration activities are defined to happen and be implemented (e.g. academic student mobility, youth exchanges). The consistent involvement of stakeholders, in particular through ASEF (e.g. university rectors, students), quality assurance and recognition centres in both regions or representatives from industry have also been highlighted as major achievements of AEP.

*“A great many of strengths of the ASEM process that result in achievements are at the same time also weaknesses, shortcomings or challenges.”*

### **Two sides of the coin: ASEM features as potential strengths and weaknesses**

A great many of strengths of the ASEM process that result in achievements are at the same time also weaknesses, shortcomings or challenges. Let us look at first at three essential features that are very much characteristic of the overarching ASEM process as well as of AEP, in particular: first, the informality of the process; second, the fact that ASEM is essentially a high-level political forum and third, the notion that ASEM is in essence and continues to be – and this is the common denominator also regarding visions for the future as expressed in the latest member survey<sup>44</sup> – a platform for dialogue and exchange across ASEM member states and stakeholders.

Informality is a strength in that this can ultimately be considered as the “glue” that holds this diverse community together, facilitating the inclusion of all members and stakeholders based on the principles of equality and mutual trust, as laid out in AECF 2000; on the other hand, this informal nature of the process seems to impede or at least not suffice to ensure clear and binding commitment and consistent follow-up. The ASEM community has deliberately refrained from mechanisms such as naming and shaming as known, for example, in the “open method of coordination” of the EU or in the intergovernmental Bologna Process (traffic lights/peer review) that seek to put pressure on comparatively inactive members of the community to increase their efforts in order to achieve (more) progress in the areas identified. Regarding the latter processes, the role of the European Union and the allocation of a dedicated EU budget in support of the identified measures and stocktaking report should not be underestimated.

Another strength which is at the same time a weakness is the very nature of ASEM as a high-level forum – an arena where political decision-makers meet in a format that is quite unique. The very nature of the meeting – based on the principle of informality and non-confrontation – often referred to as “the ASEAN way” is however criticised by some for prioritising “form over substance”<sup>45</sup> with formal and setting-related elements of this international gathering such as the choice of highly prestigious venues for Ministerial Meetings and Dinners, the importance attached to the family photo providing a continuous and crucial framework

*“For some the very raison d’être of ASEM seems to reside in its key principle of informality promoting dialogue and networking while others seek to reach more tangible cooperation-based results.”*

to be remembered rather than educational policy-/content-related (controversial) points of discussions regarding common challenges or possible ways of future direction. ASEM is also an ultimate international dialogue and platform with a unique format which enhances mutual understanding while lacking enforcement and follow-up and the streamlining of tangible results. The lack of a designated ASEM strategy or budget and the overall rather low policy role it plays compared to other competing international gatherings can further impede effective operationalisation of objectives agreed upon during ASEMME.

With regard to ASEM and AEP’s future, there seems to be no clear and binding consensus on how to proceed on its overall vision, direction and outcomes – for some the very *raison d’être* of ASEM seems to reside in its key principle of informality promoting dialogue and networking while others seek to reach more tangible cooperation-based results. If ASEM’s main challenge is the lack of agreement and binding commitment on its future direction, then the question arises as to whether ASEM should stay as a platform for dialogue – or in order to survive – it needs to change and evolve and press for more tangible results.

#### **Creating added value by benefiting national educational priorities more**

As demonstrated also in this chapter, referring to the overall ASEM process as well as to its educational pillar in particular, ASEM has great potential as a forum to create greater interaction for individual member countries in both regions. However, bilateral projects and multilateral projects are not well or not sufficiently connected to each other. Also, funding mechanisms and support such as those provided through the EU, e.g. international credit mobility or the international dimension of the Erasmus+ programme, are underutilised.

The Ulaanbaatar Declaration has highlighted elements of ASEM leading to a new form of what we would call “soft power of global governance” in the international arena. In the field of education, these soft elements have been complemented over the years by the impressive number of concrete initiatives that illustrate AEP as a dynamic process with an evolving agenda and an agenda-setting that is initiated by the very actors of AEP themselves. Thus, ASEM educational space (in particular with its focus so far on higher education) can be indeed seen as being “constructed from within” with elements of “institutionalisation” such as AES, along with highly successful and sustainable flagship initiatives such as ASEM-DUO or AEI.

#### **Scaling up (European) commitment in practical cooperation matters**

Regarding the high level of European commitment in the ASEM process, it is interesting to reiterate in this context that – contrary to what may be a commonly held belief<sup>46</sup> – a certain lack of commitment and initiative taking can be observed for European countries concerning further extension of and participation in these flagship programmes. This holds true for the overarching ASEM process<sup>47</sup> as well as for AEP in that Asian countries appear to have a much stronger interest in the Process regarding, in particular, the launching of practical initiatives than their European counterparts.

Rather than involving themselves more in ongoing (very successful) initiatives, such as ASEM-DUO or AEI, many European countries either seem to be satisfied with the *status quo* or would like to see a focus on AEP process optimisation – a priority that is probably

shaped by their policy-making experiences in creating a common Higher Education Area in the context of the Bologna Process. This could also explain the emphasis in the discourse on result-orientation of AEP as well as the invoked need for more informed policy decision-making regarding input.

### **Harnessing ASEM's potential in promoting collaboration for a peaceful globalised world**

The contributors to this chapter also highlight the very characteristic dual nature of AEP leading to a tension between actionism (“fresh air”) manifested through the creation of ever new (mostly one-off) initiatives on one side and the lack of binding commitment, sustainability and follow-up, on the other. Another tension characteristic of AEP arises from the focus on a common vision – a vision “owned by all” as endorsed during ASEMME6 in the Seoul Declaration but without any concrete road map nor operationalisation agenda that would allow for a path to take to operationalise the vision. The implementation of a common vision is being further exacerbated by a clear imbalance of coordinators and lack of ownership regarding the existing initiatives. And it will be vital for AEP to strike a good balance between the continuation of success stories and allowing for kicking in “fresh air” that it needs to breath to stay alive.

ASEM's potential is yet to be unleashed: as was pointed out by Shada Islam, “ASEM can do much more by playing a more central role than it has so far in generating, nourishing and disseminating new ideas about living and working together in a globalised world.”<sup>48</sup>

### **In search of a balance between innovation and continuity**

ASEM will have to find its own way in striking a balance between innovation and keeping continuity by building on success factors, seeking to focus in the future more on streamlining processes and procedures – capitalising on its very asset of informality while working towards more concrete outcomes.<sup>49</sup> In this context, we may be well advised to overcome (Western) binary thinking (rooted in European history of ideas based on the principles of categorisation and rationality) and the resulting assumption that an exclusive choice needs to be made between the two paths: ASEM is a platform and forum for dialogue AND a setting that allows to embark upon a path leading to more outcome-based, structured cooperation in specific areas of common interest. Through its focus on principles and values of dialogue, respect and equality in the partnership it has great potential to overcome cultural and political differences. As “institutional memory” for AEP, the AES in particular, along with a circle of dedicated members and stakeholders, will certainly continue to play a pivotal role in this, encouraging also further synergies between different areas of education, such as between higher education and TVET or the academic world and the socioeconomic world, as well as to help to create more synergies and visibility between the three ASEM pillars in a joint effort striving for “the most of available solutions.”<sup>50</sup>

ASEM (educational) partnership can lead to the enhancement of common interests: A more focused agenda with more result-oriented goals and the further involvement of stakeholders and a more dedicated engagement – politically and financially – by more European and Asian countries regarding participation in cooperation initiatives are all ways to explore how to make the partnership successful and sustainable for its third decade.

*“ASEM will have to find its own way in striking a balance between innovation and keeping continuity by building on success factors, seeking to focus in the future more on streamlining processes and procedures – capitalising on its very asset of informality while working towards more concrete outcomes.”*

- <sup>1</sup> Japan Center for International Exchange and University of Helsinki Network for European Studies (eds.) (2006). *ASEM in its Tenth Year: Looking Back, Looking Forward*. Tokyo.
- <sup>2</sup> Sixth Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM6) (2006). *Helsinki Declaration on the Future of ASEM*. Helsinki, p. 3.
- <sup>3</sup> Japan Center for International Exchange and University of Helsinki Network for European Studies (eds.) (2006). *ASEM in its Tenth Year: Looking Back, Looking Forward*. Tokyo, p. 7.
- <sup>4</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 9.
- <sup>5</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 10.
- <sup>6</sup> *Ibidem*.
- <sup>7</sup> Eleventh Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM11) (2016). *Ulaanbaatar Declaration*. Ulaanbaatar, p. 1.
- <sup>8</sup> Gaens, Bart (ed.) (2015). *The future of the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM). Looking ahead into ASEM's third decade*. Available from: [http://eeas.europa.eu/archives/docs/asem/docs/20150915-final-future-of-the-asem\\_website\\_en.pdf](http://eeas.europa.eu/archives/docs/asem/docs/20150915-final-future-of-the-asem_website_en.pdf), pp. 17-18. [Accessed: June 2018].
- <sup>9</sup> Islam, Shada (2015). ASEM: Renewal and revival for the third decade. In: Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Thailand (ed.). *ASEM Symposium on the future direction of ASEM*. 30 March. Bangkok, p. 17.
- <sup>10</sup> *Ibidem*.
- <sup>11</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 21.
- <sup>12</sup> Lejina, Liga (2015). Contribution to Session 4. In: Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Thailand (ed.). *ASEM Symposium on the future direction of ASEM*. 30 March. Bangkok, p. 119.
- <sup>13</sup> The ASEMInfoBoard, therefore, called ASEM a "dialogue facilitator". Available from: <http://www.aseminfoboard.org/content/achievements> [Accessed: June 2018].
- <sup>14</sup> Sixth ASEM Education Ministers' Meeting (ASEMME6) (2017). *From Riga to Seoul. Stocktaking Report*. Compiled by the ASEM Education Secretariat and the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Korea in consultation with ASEM partners and stakeholders. Seoul. Annex 3, p. 2.
- <sup>15</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 10.
- <sup>16</sup> Two initiatives coordinated by Vietnam and Indonesia were withdrawn.
- <sup>17</sup> The Indonesian ASEM Education Secretariat and the Korean Ministry of Education compiled a similar overview (however limited to the period 2008 – 2015) in their Stocktaking Report for Seoul. See Sixth ASEM Education Ministers' Meeting (ASEMME6) (2017). *From Riga to Seoul. Stocktaking Report*. Compiled by the ASEM Education Secretariat and the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Korea in consultation with ASEM partners and stakeholders. Riga, p. 6.
- <sup>18</sup> Ministry of Education and Science of Latvia (2015). *Results of the 5th Education Ministers' Meeting "ASEM Education Collaboration for Results"*. Riga, p. 6. Available from: [http://www.izm.gov.lv/images/presidency/ASEMME5/59522\\_IzM\\_brosura\\_ASEM\\_kopsavilkums\\_v6\\_10.pdf](http://www.izm.gov.lv/images/presidency/ASEMME5/59522_IzM_brosura_ASEM_kopsavilkums_v6_10.pdf) [Accessed: June 2018].
- <sup>19</sup> See <http://www.mfa.gov.lv/en/news/latest-news/59325-1-march-the-asem-day> [Accessed: June 2018].
- <sup>20</sup> The last part of Cloud Bai-Yun's contribution can be found in the article on the vision 2025 in this book.
- <sup>21</sup> See Sixth ASEM Education Ministers' Meeting (ASEMME6) (2017). *From Riga to Seoul. Stocktaking Report*. Compiled by the ASEM Education Secretariat and the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Korea in consultation with ASEM partners and stakeholders. Seoul. Annex 3, p. 13.
- <sup>22</sup> Nam, Yoonchul (2017). The 6th ASEM Education Ministers' Meeting and 10th Year of ASEM Education Process. In: ASEM Education Secretariat hosted by the Ministry of Education and Culture, Republic of Indonesia (ed.). *ASEM Education Gazette*. Volume 3. Jakarta, p. 11.
- <sup>23</sup> ASEMInfoBoard c/o ASEF. See <http://www.aseminfoboard.org/pages/2/achievements> [Accessed: June 2018].
- <sup>24</sup> Gaens, Bart (2015). Conclusions. In: Hofmeister, Wilhelm and Rueppel, Patrick (eds.). *The future of the Asia-Europe Meeting. EU-Asia Dialogue. Shaping a Common Future for Europe and Asia. Sharing Policy Innovation and Best Practices in Addressing Common Challenges*. Konrad Adenauer Stiftung and European Union. Brussels, p. 138.
- <sup>25</sup> Japan Center for International Exchange and University of Helsinki Network for European Studies (eds.) (2006). *ASEM in its Tenth Year: Looking Back, Looking Forward*. Tokyo, p. 7.
- <sup>26</sup> Gaens, Bart and Khandekar, Gauri (2018). Conclusion. In: Gaens, Bart and Khandekar, Gauri (eds.). *Inter-Regional Relations and the Asia-Europe Meeting*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, p. 238.
- <sup>27</sup> *Ibidem*.
- <sup>28</sup> Cf. article "Drivers of the ASEM Education Agenda: Ministerial Conferences, Senior Officials' Meetings and the ASEM Education Secretariat in this publication.
- <sup>29</sup> Banyan (2016). Agreeing to Agree. *The Economist* September 3 (2016). Quoted in: Gaens, Bart and Khandekar, Gauri (eds.) (2018). *Inter-Regional Relations and the Asia-Europe Meeting*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, p. 17; also available from: <https://www.economist.com/asia/2016/09/01/agreeing-to-agree> [Accessed: May 2018].
- <sup>30</sup> Khandekar, Roopmati (2018). ASEM: An Asian Perspective. In: Gaens, Bart and Khandekar, Gauri (eds.). *Inter-Regional Relations and the Asia-Europe Meeting*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, p. 213.

- <sup>31</sup> Sixth ASEM Education Ministers' Meeting (ASEMME6) (2017). *From Riga to Seoul. Stocktaking Report*. Compiled by the ASEM Education Secretariat and the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Korea in consultation with ASEM partners and stakeholders. Seoul. Annex 3, p. 2; Sixth ASEM Education Ministers' Meeting (ASEMME 6) (2017). *Collaboration for the Next Decade: From Common Perspectives to Effective Fulfillment. Seoul Declaration – Enhancing Collaboration between Asia and Europe in Education and Training. A vision for the next Decade*. Seoul.
- <sup>32</sup> Gaens, Bart (2015). Conclusions. In: Hofmeister, Wilhelm and Rueppel, Patrick (eds.). *EU-Asia Dialogue. Shaping a Common Future for Europe and Asia – Sharing Policy Innovation and Best Practices in Addressing Common Challenges*. Konrad Adenauer Stiftung and European Union. Brussels, p. 144.
- <sup>33</sup> Ibidem, p. 137ff.
- <sup>34</sup> Khandekar, Roopmati (2018). *ASEM: An Asian Perspective*. In: Gaens, Bart and Khandekar, Gauri (eds.). *Inter-Regional Relations and the Asia-Europe Meeting*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, p. 210.
- <sup>35</sup> Ibidem.
- <sup>36</sup> Ibidem, p. 214.
- <sup>37</sup> Ministry of Research, Technology and Higher Education, Republic of Indonesia (2018). *Invitation letter to ASEM Partners and Stakeholders and Senior Officials of the ASEM Member States. Subject: The 3rd ASEM Intermediate Senior Officials Meeting (ISOM)*. Jakarta. 3-5 June 2018 (letter dated 3 April 2018).
- <sup>37</sup> Ibidem.
- <sup>38</sup> Dang, Que Anh (2016). Shaping an ASEM (Higher) Education Area: hybrid sectoral regionalism from within. In: Robertson, Susan L. et al. (eds.). *Global regionalism and higher education. Projects, Processes and Politics*. Cheltenham (UK), p. 161.
- <sup>39</sup> Rüländ, Jürgen (2016). Peoples-to-Peoples Connectivity. "By the people" instead "for the people." In: Prakash, Anita (ed.). *Asia-Europe Connectivity Vision 2025 – Challenges and Opportunities*. Jakarta, p. 146. Available from: <http://www.eria.org/publications/asia-europe-connectivity-vision-2025-challenges-and-opportunities/> [Accessed: June 2018].
- <sup>40</sup> Cf. Gaens, Bart (ed.) (2015). *The future of the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM). Looking ahead into ASEM's third decade*. Available from: [http://eeas.europa.eu/archives/docs/asem/docs/20150915-final-future-of-the-asem\\_website\\_en.pdf](http://eeas.europa.eu/archives/docs/asem/docs/20150915-final-future-of-the-asem_website_en.pdf), p. 8; we have added the word „soft“.
- <sup>41</sup> Japan Center for International Exchange and University of Helsinki Network for European Studies (eds.) (2006). *ASEM in its Tenth Year: Looking Back, Looking Forward*. Tokyo, p. 7.
- <sup>42</sup> Gaens, Bart (2015). Conclusions. In: Hofmeister, Wilhelm and Ruppel, Patrick (eds.). *EU-Asia Dialogue. Shaping a Common Future for Europe and Asia – Sharing Policy Innovation and Best Practices in Addressing Common Challenges*. Konrad Adenauer Stiftung and European Union. Brussels, p. 138.
- <sup>43</sup> Dang, Que Anh (2016). Shaping an ASEM (Higher) Education Area: hybrid sectoral regionalism from within. In: Robertson, Susan L. et al. (eds.). *Global regionalism and higher education. Projects, Processes and Politics*. Cheltenham (UK), p. 152.
- <sup>44</sup> Sixth ASEM Education Ministers' Meeting (ASEMME6) (2017). *From Riga to Seoul. Stocktaking Report*. Compiled by the ASEM Education Secretariat and the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Korea in consultation with ASEM partners and stakeholders. Seoul. Annex 3, p. 2.
- <sup>45</sup> Khandekar, Roopmati (2018). *ASEM: An Asian Perspective*. In: Gaens, Bart and Khandekar, Gauri (eds.). *Inter-Regional Relations and the Asia-Europe Meeting*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, p. 210 ff.
- <sup>46</sup> Gaens, Bart (2018). Two Decades of the Asia-Europe Meeting. In: Gaens, Bart and Khandekar, Gauri (eds.). *Inter-Regional Relations and the Asia-Europe Meeting*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, p. 21.
- <sup>47</sup> Cf. article by Bersick/Schwerbrock in this publication.
- <sup>48</sup> Islam, Shada (2016). ASEM at a Crossroad: A Mix of Ideas and Connectivity will Revive ASEM in the Next Decade. In: Gorawantschy, Beatrice; Sarmah, Megha and Rueppel, Patrick (eds.). *The Age of Connectivity – ASEM and beyond*. Konrad Adenauer Stiftung. Singapore, pp. 1-17. Available from: [http://www.kas.de/wf/doc/kas\\_47307-1522-2-30.pdf?161206095935](http://www.kas.de/wf/doc/kas_47307-1522-2-30.pdf?161206095935) [Accessed: June 2018].
- <sup>49</sup> Ibidem, p. 3.
- <sup>50</sup> Gaens, Bart and Gledic, Jelena (2016). Tangible Cooperation and Continuous Policy Dialogue in the ASEM Process. In: Gorawantschy, Beatrice; Sarmah, Megha and Rueppel, Patrick (eds.). *The Age of Connectivity – ASEM and beyond*. Konrad Adenauer Stiftung. Singapore, p. 17.

*“Education projects provide input to the political dialogue by creating a unique platform for multi-level dialogue.”*

## THE ASIA-EUROPE FOUNDATION'S CONTRIBUTION TO THE ASEM EDUCATION PROCESS

# Enhancing mutual understanding through tangible outputs

Leonie Nagarajan/Reka Tozsa

*The Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF) is an intergovernmental not-for-profit organisation located in Singapore. Founded in 1997, it is the only institution of the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM). ASEF was established with the mission to promote understanding, strengthen relationships and facilitate cooperation among the people, institutions and organisations of Asia and Europe. Given that educational projects have significant potential to facilitate interregional cooperation, ASEF has developed a comprehensive portfolio of education projects. The projects are aligned with the priorities of the ASEM Education Process (AEP) and for the past ten years have contributed to the dialogue and the output-oriented dimension of AEP.*

From the beginning ASEF recognised the power of mobilising young people, and as such has been developing people-to-people exchange programmes since 1998. ASEF was therefore well positioned to add value to the ASEM Education Process when it was launched in 2008. During the last ten years ASEF's education portfolio has become more complex but has also become more streamlined and integrated with the priorities of the AEP.

The Education Department within ASEF (ASEFEdu) ensures that education projects provide input to the political dialogue by creating a unique platform for multi-level dialogue among youth, experts, policymakers and government leaders and to provide a space for stakeholders to discuss their agenda and inspire each other. Participants of ASEFEdu projects regularly develop policy recommendations for submission to ASEM leaders and policymakers, which are subsequently tabled during ASEM Ministerial Meetings. This inclusive approach provides civil society with a platform to contribute to the policy discussion and development and to be acknowledged by Ministers and Senior Officials in the Chairs' Statements and Ministerial Declarations. The ASEF Rectors' Conference and Students' Forum (ARC) became an official dialogue partner to the ASEM Education Ministers' Meetings, and in 2016 the ASEF youth forums (e.g. ASEF Young Leaders' Summit) were endorsed as an official stakeholder to the ASEM Summit Meetings.

*"From the beginning ASEF recognised the power of mobilising young people, and as such has been developing people-to-people exchange programmes since 1998."*

ASEFEdu projects are output-oriented and as such ensure that abstract political dialogue translates into everyday life and that civil society can relate to it. In the last two years more than 30 projects addressing AEP priority areas were organised in 26 countries, which attracted about 49,000 applicants from across the 51 ASEM partner countries.<sup>1</sup> These projects contributed to the aims of AEP: enhancing mutual understanding and information sharing, fostering network building and the exchange of human resources across Asia and Europe.

ASEFEdu projects are grouped into two pillars. The first pillar entitled *ASEF Education Policy Programme* focuses on building policy-oriented dialogue between youth, higher education, policymakers and business representatives. Our flagship project, the ASEF Rectors' Conference and Students' Forum (ARC), provides policy recommendations for Education Minister Meetings while the Education Policy Conference Series explores urgent policy issues identified by ASEM partner countries. The academic and research outcomes of these projects are subsequently fed into the AEP. The second pillar *ASEF Young Leaders' Programme* incorporates projects specifically focusing on youth leadership development and capacity-building of potential young leaders and professionals. These projects provide a platform for pragmatic skills development and enable young people to establish bi-regional networks and spin-off activities as well as establish direct links with policymakers.

The following table provides an overview of how each of ASEFEdu's projects contribute to the four priorities of the ASEM Education Process:

*Table 1.*  
*ASEF Education Projects' Contribution to the ASEM Education Process – Streamlined with ASEM Education Priorities*

		Balanced Mobility	Lifelong Learning	Engaging Business and Industry	Quality Assurance and Recognition
		ASEM ME Priorities			
ASEF Education Projects					
Education Policy Programme	<b>ASEF Rectors' Conference and Students' Forum (ARC)</b> Official Dialogue Partner of ASEM ME; high-level multi-stakeholder platform for interregional dialogue on emerging issues in ASEM				
	<b>ASEF Young Leaders' Summit (ASEFYLS)</b> Experts' meetings for researchers, academics, practitioners to contribute to evidence-based educational reform and innovation based on ASEM needs				
Young Leaders Programme	<b>ASEF Young Leaders' Summit (ASEFYLS)</b> Experts' meetings for researchers, academics, practitioners to contribute to evidence-based educational reform and innovation based on ASEM needs				
	<b>ASEF Summer University (ASEFSU)</b> Interdisciplinary project with experiential learning for students and young professionals to engage with local communities, governments and businesses, to develop solutions for societal challenges				
	<b>ASEF Classroom Network (ASEFClassNet)</b> Network for secondary, high and vocational teachers and students to connect in person and flourish through online collaborations and intercultural exchanges				
	<b>ASEF Capacity Trainings</b> Skills development for ASEM youth in their local environment				
	<b>Model ASEM</b> Youth conference and political simulation to enhance diplomacy, negotiation, and public speaking skills, with the opportunity of personal meetings with ASEM Foreign Ministers				



**ASEFEdu projects explore education topics relating to Asia and Europe from nine different angles:**

- 1) age,
- 2) disability,
- 3) finance,
- 4) gender,
- 5) location,
- 6) social background,
- 7) access,
- 8) employment and
- 9) technology.

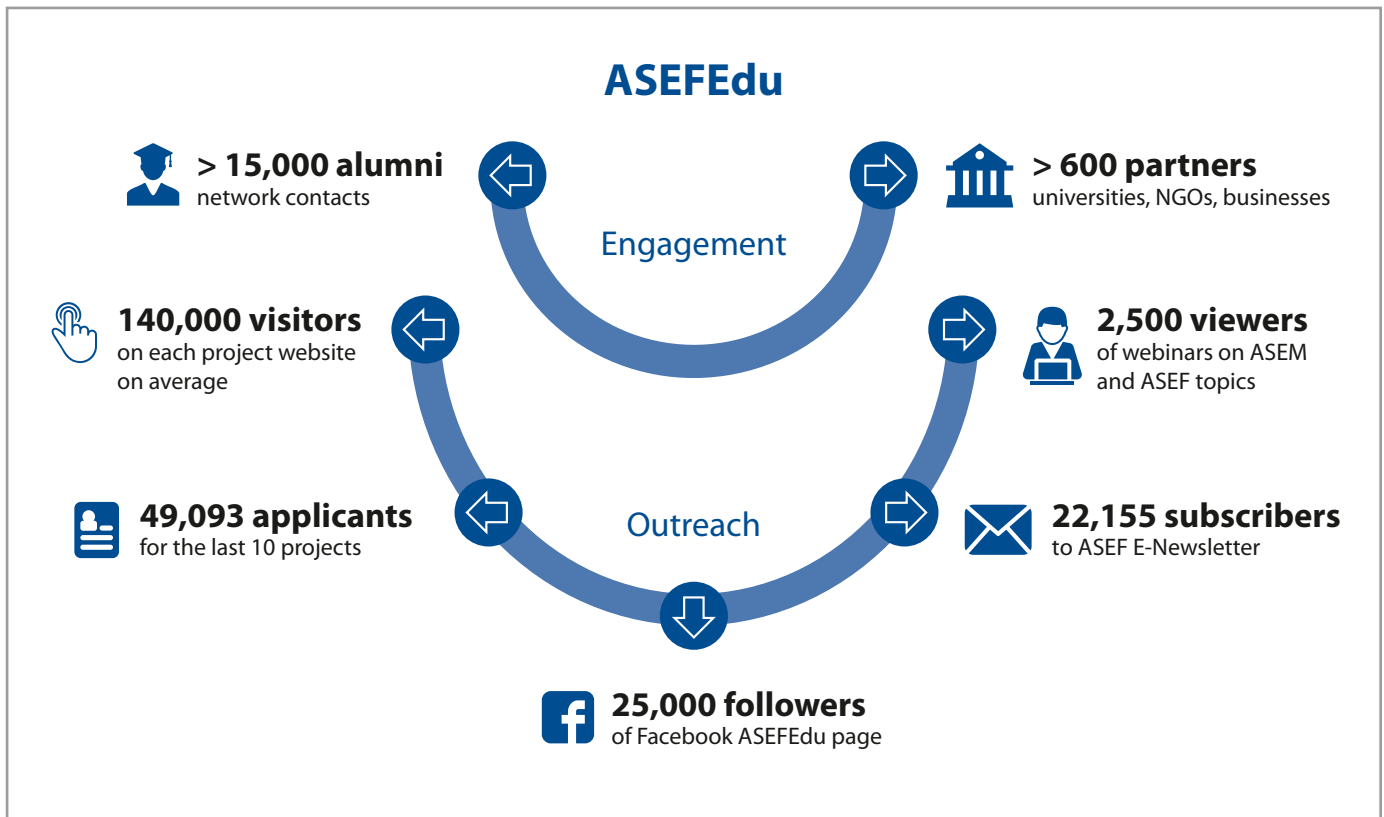
**The combined aim of the projects is to:**

- enhance ASEM policies through research and the development of policy recommendations by formal and informal education stakeholders;
- create opportunities for personal interaction and foster sustainable networks among ASEM youth, education practitioners, university, business and government representatives;
- contribute to the Sustainable Development Goals on quality education (SDG 4), gender equality (SDG 5), decent work and economic growth (SDG 8), innovation and infrastructure (SDG 9), reduced inequalities (SDG 10), and partnership for the goals (SDG 17).

ASEFEdu projects are successful in terms of impacting individuals lives and creating sustainable networks across ASEM. According to an impact study of ASEFEdu projects: 93% of the participants believe that these projects contribute to their overall professional development; 68% feel that their attendance to ASEFEdu project(s) has had an impact on their perceptions of other ASEM countries/cultures; and almost all of participants remain in touch with each other (95%) and one third of them (30%) continue cooperation with their ASEM peers through spin-off activities.<sup>2</sup>

ASEFEdu also has an outreach to a significant number of target audiences which supports the dissemination of information and advances public perception of AEP. ASEFEdu social media and e-newsletter channels attract several thousand subscribers, while the individual ASEF education project sites invite hundreds of thousands of viewers. In addition, webinars conducted as part of the online preparatory phase rolled out to successful projects are shared with the public to disseminate knowledge and information. ASEFEdu designs and guides projects in partnership with reputable youth and higher education organisations such as: the European Association of Universities (EUA); the International Association of Universities (IAU), the ASEAN University Network (AUN); the Erasmus Student Network (ESN); and the European Student Union (ESU). As a result, our network currently consists of more than 600 not-for-profit and professional organisations, universities and businesses who intellectually provide peer support to the projects.

*Figure 1.*  
**Engagement  
and Outreach**  
*Raising Awareness  
on ASEM Education  
Process*



One of the main achievements of ASEF is that it enables talented youth leaders to participate in high level ASEM meetings, to represent their organisations and to submit recommendations. The first youth intervention took place at the 12th ASEM Foreign Ministers' Meeting (ASEM FMM12) during 2015 and since then ASEF has been ensuring youth participation at most ministerial meetings. ASEF also facilitates personal meetings between youth representatives and ASEM Leaders. For example, during the ASEM11 Summit held in Mongolia in 2016, ASEF facilitated 24 personal meetings between Heads of States or Governments and student leaders. ASEF is also looking forward to the first triple joint session of students, rectors and ministers which is scheduled to take place during ASEMME7 in Bucharest, Romania 2019.

ASEF is very much looking forward to contributing to the next decade of the ASEM Education Process given that the ambition of the Seoul Declaration, a visionary document adopted by the ASEM Education Ministers in 2017,<sup>3</sup> states that "In the next decade, people-to-people contacts should be recognised as a critical form of cooperation to promote connectivity between Asia and Europe, boosting inter-cultural and inter-religious understanding and contributing to peaceful and sustainable development". ASEF will therefore remain committed to advancing Asian-European education collaboration through a blend of experiential and interdisciplinary learning, evidence-based research, and the dissemination of practical recommendations to formal and non-formal education stakeholders. ASEFEdu will continue its work with a focus on Access to Education and Youth Employment, empowering young people to navigate and develop skills for an ever-changing society, and fostering links between key players in society and those with shared ambitions in the field of education.

*"One of the main achievements of ASEF is that it enables talented youth leaders to participate in high level ASEM meetings, to represent their organisations and to submit recommendations."*

<sup>1</sup> ASEF internal statistics.

<sup>2</sup> Evaluation of Online Impact Survey among ASEFEdu Alumni. ASEF Projects implemented October 2014 – December 2016.

<sup>3</sup> Sixth ASEM Education Ministers' Meeting (ASEMME6) (2017). *Seoul Declaration. Collaboration for the Next Decade: From Common Perspectives to Effective Fulfillment*. Seoul. Available from: <http://www.aseminfoboard.org/documents/6th-asem-education-ministers-meeting-asem-me6-seoul-declaration> [Accessed: June 2018].

*"Promoting dialogue  
and the exchange  
of knowledge."*

# The ASEM Education Process moving towards dialogue in the area of Technical Vocational Education and Training – TVET<sup>1</sup>

Fiona Croke

*Given the cohesive nature of university and academic collaboration, and a motivation for partnership coupled with a tradition for research and development underpinned by identifiable structures and mechanisms, it was somewhat predictable that the ASEM Education Process (AEP) as a cooperation initiative to foster dialogue and the exchange of knowledge immediately focused on and achieved traction across the higher education sector. Conversely, the same cannot be said for AEP activity in the education sectors of VET and TVET and as such a leitmotif has begun to emerge from within the membership which is perhaps reflective of anticipated global challenges and the level of unprecedented change unfolding across economic and social environments: identifying as the shift towards the 4th Industrial Revolution and evidencing as rapid technological advances in artificial intelligence (AI), digitalisation, automation and robotisation which directly impacts policy development in the AEP priority area of TVET and Lifelong Learning (LLL).*

ASEM dialogue at the level of ministerial meeting continues to encourage TVET and LLL cooperation and activity and while progress to date specifically in the area of TVET evidences member countries as informed and aware, the emergence of cooperation initiatives has been slow to gather momentum and somewhat passively engaged in activity with the following cooperation activities identified to date: the ASEM TVET Symposium (China 2011), the ASEM Symposium on TVET entitled “Putting Frameworks into Practice Demand, Development and Decision” (Germany 2012), the ASEM Expert Seminar to exchange experience and lessons learned in the field of dual education engaging industry, academia and society in the dialogue (Germany 2014), the ASEM workshop on TVET in the Tourism and Catering Sector (Austria 2012) and more recently the ASEM TVET Seminar (Latvia 2018).

Specifically, the third ASEM Education Ministers’ Meeting (ASEMME3) in Copenhagen, Denmark (2011) notes the TVET symposium held in Qingdao, China in 2011 with follow-up

*“Moving forward ASEMME4 in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia (2013) saw VET as both a priority area and agenda item replaced by Technical VET (TVET).”*

recommendations demonstrating an enthusiasm to collate and share information in a bid to develop understanding and bring cohesion to key issue and future dialogue by: linking existing European Network for Quality Assurance in VET (ENQA-VET) with initiatives in Asian countries to exchange experience and practices on the implementation of Quality Assurance in VET; making ASEM TVET Symposium a regular event to establish and enhance an international TVET policy dialogue mechanism; establishing an expert group to elaborate the development of joint TVET initiatives; sharing models of best practice in the area of developing cooperation between multinational enterprises and local vocational schools; encouraging member countries to conduct bilateral and multilateral TVET technical assistant programmes; supporting member countries to cooperate in area of curriculum and teacher professional development, quality assurance, recognition of prior learning and learning methods; documenting best practices, particularly industry-school partnerships; and also welcomed a commitment from Germany to host the second ASEM TVET Symposium.

The summary report of the meeting (Conclusions by the Chair) requested for member countries to document best practices in VET, particularly those reflecting industry-school partnerships to be shared during a future workshop hosted by Austria and suggested the establishment of an expert group in order to elaborate the development of joint VET initiatives. On reflection and perhaps of significance in terms of assessing the progression of AEP policy in the field of VET is that the AES Status Report presented during ASEMME3 updating progress on activities proposed during ASEMME1 in Berlin, Germany (2008) and ASEMME2 in Hanoi, Vietnam (2009) evidences that only two of the seven activities agreed had progressed towards completion: to make the ASEM TVET Symposium a regular event and for Germany to host the second ASEM TVET Symposium.

Moving forward ASEMME4 in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia (2013) saw VET as both a priority area and agenda item replaced by Technical VET (TVET), albeit dialogue was focused on encouraging initiatives to enhance the employability of students in higher education through the provision of entrepreneurial skills and competences, entrepreneurial curriculum in schools education, the development of monitoring strategies for education-business cooperation and collaboration and awareness raising for the Global Inventory of National and Regional Qualification Frameworks compiled by the European Training Foundation (ETF), CEDEFOP and UNESCO and UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL). On reflection, the only VET or TVET specific dialogue evidenced was Germany’s offer to host an expert seminar on best practices in dual education. Notably, a review of AEP reports and documentation evidences a gap in reporting regarding either the recategorisation of VET as TVET or to provide a reason for the shift in lexicon.

During ASEMME5 in Riga, Latvia (2015), Ministers advanced a policy direction to encourage the creation of TVET partnerships and initiatives to foster dialogue in the areas of teaching and learning, quality assurance mechanisms and mobility with ministers recommending for the creation of new education partnerships between ASEM countries. Ministers welcomed further discussions in the area of new learning approaches and work-based learning, TVET institution and industry partnerships, and activities to cultivate transparency and comparison of education systems in both regions. Latvia proposed an initiative to share best

practice and future perspectives on TVET while ministers affirmed the role of AES to support member country implementation and to provide a platform for dissemination/visibility. Notably and perhaps of significance to ascertaining AEP progression in relation to TVET and Lifelong Learning as a priority area, the meeting report (Conclusions by the Chair) record a ministerial request for senior officials to identify barriers to implementation and to ensure the identification of clear goals and objectives as well as a plan for the advancement of policy agenda including a definition of tasks and expected outcomes taking account of stakeholder feedback: albeit the priority area appears to vacillate between VET and TVET with TVET recently replacing VET on the agenda and official stakeholder dialogue predominantly representing the opinions of higher education institutions (ASEM Rectors' Conference and Students' Forums) with membership represented by higher education authorities (ministers for higher education and government department senior officials responsible for higher education).

ASEMME6 in Seoul, Korea (2017) saw a shift in dialogue with ministers and senior officials looking to the future of AEP, expressing the view that the profile of TVET and LLL needs to be raised if member countries are to meet the future needs created by economic demand and subsequent changes to society. Member countries lobbied for more concrete initiatives (dialogue-orientated cooperation to enhance learning and results-orientated cooperation to produce tangible activities) and for pilot project activity led by member countries with a reputation and strong tradition in the area of VET (e.g. Austria, Denmark, Germany and the Netherlands) and a vested interest in progressing future policy development in this area. The meeting report (Conclusions by the Chair) acknowledges Lifelong Learning and TVET as priority areas, however, the narrative concentrates predominately on the priority area of Lifelong Learning articulating that "the ASEM Education Process recognises lifelong learning opportunities as the key element to ensure employability of people in both regions, equipping them with skills needed to thrive in a globalised world. With the spirit of inclusive, emancipatory, humanistic and democratic values, lifelong learning within the framework of the ASEM Education Process".

Additionally a review of initiatives listed in the Stocktaking Report evidences member country activity principally in the area of entrepreneurship education, lifelong learning and ICT with a specific focus on Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) which is perhaps reflective of current trends and also evidenced in the results of the Korean Survey of ASEM Partners and Stakeholders (2016) gathering opinion on the future direction of AEP which indicates 63% of respondents in agreement that global advances in ICT would have the biggest impact on TVET and Lifelong Learning. On reflection, the only TVET focused activity listed in the Stocktaking Report evidenced as a proposal to organise a seminar to promote TVET dialogue and the sharing of best practice and future perspectives (led by Latvia in collaboration with Austria, Brunei Darussalam, the Flemish Community of Belgium, France, Germany, Indonesia, the Philippines and the Russian Federation).

The TVET seminar proposed during ASEMME6 was held in Riga, Latvia in 2018 with the ambition to exchange best practice and methodologies from across member countries in the area of TVET policy development specifically focusing on the involvement of industry

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in TVET planning, education and training processes, skills development and international cooperation. Given this seminar is the most recent TVET cooperation initiative undertaken by ASEM member countries, it serves to provide valuable insight into AEP VET and TVET policy progression. The topics discussed and the recommendations made reflect the status of TVET within AEP in terms of topics for cooperation and dialogue, the initiation of initiatives, the creation of momentum and potential to achieve traction: European Commission TVET policy development overview (VET, Apprenticeships and Adult Learning); recent reforms and the development of national VET policy; national TVET systems; TVET legislation, administration, institutional arrangements, industry and employers; validation of learning outcomes (informal and formal learning) principles, procedures, conditions and stakeholders; channels for communication and information sharing and platforms to provide visibility (skills competitions, centres of excellence, fairs and exhibitions).

Five themes emerged: vision and strategy (advancement and legislation); economic and labour market demand (factors shaping demand for skills, identification of demand, matching skill demand with supply, access and transition to employment, self-employment and business creation); social inclusion (factors shaping the demand for VET, access, participation and progression, delivering on demand); internal efficiency of VET systems (teaching and learning, learning conditions, quality assurance, learning outcomes); and governance and policy practices (update on governance, management and assessment of policy implementation). Looking to the future, member country delegates spoke of raising the profile and reputation of VET and TVET, advancements in the area of joint qualifications, capacity building and teacher training, systematic policy reform, and the internationalisation of TVET.

Rather interestingly, the seminar emerged with a consensus for TVET policy development to adopt a systematic approach to TVET policy reform in that TVET becomes a cradle to grave concept of learning integrated into education provision from entry level compulsory education (initial VET and TVET) through to higher education (advanced VET and TVET) and on to adult and continuing education (continuous professional development, reskilling and upskilling) and as such reframes VET policy reform to advance concepts of continuity and the development of vocational pathways that place the learner at the centre of the dialogue and brings coherence to policy development. The realisation of a flexible adaptable TVET system that places provision along a continuum, underpinned by quality assurance mechanisms and transparent frameworks for validation and recognition coupled with flexible modes of delivery through blended, distance and online learning in the classroom or in the workplace requires for a paradigm shift both by government, education and training bodies, stakeholders, employers and learners.

Additionally, a central tenet to successful implementation requires for effective employer collaboration, which demands institutions to develop strong collaborative links with local, regional, national and international employers and business fora while also staying open to global events, external forces and changes in the wider economy; and also for effective employer engagement that is cohesive and sustainable and provides for long-term strategic cooperation which demands institutions to develop mutually beneficial partnership agreements with business and industry. Building the level of trust required for effective and

sustainable employer engagement is not simply a matter of inviting business fora to assist with curriculum develop or asking employers to provide work placement opportunities for students but provides for employer and employee access to high quality education and training that is adaptable to blue sky thinking and innovative solutions; communication that is collaborative and effective and also ensures capacity building and the sharing of best practice that is aligned to and responsive to economic demand and technological advancements; and the development of occupational standards and quality assurance mechanisms to ensure provision meets both employer need and labour market demand which is often set against the backdrop of a rapidly changing and dynamic environment.

Reflecting on AEP progress in the priority area of TVET, it is obvious that cooperation activities have not yet gathered momentum or achieved traction and as such the next steps require for careful consideration and the identification of foundational building blocks to support collaboration if TVET is to avoid being lost to the Process. A clear role for AEP emerged during the most recent TVET seminar in terms of advancing dialogue and cooperation activities in the area of policy development to: strengthen collaboration and the exchange of best practice innovations in the area of policy reform and practice implementation; share best practice education and training models that involve business and industry; advance the development of curriculum to blend both the academic and the practical aspects of education and training and to take consideration for access to and flexibility delivery; encourage international benchmarking as a key component to improving quality assurance, validation and transferability; recommend for government investment particularly in the area of creating TVET institutional networks and also to developing effective employer engagement; and to advance collaboration and information sharing across future skills needs expert groups. Given that TVET plays an important role in the development, reskilling and upskilling of society, providing individuals with the core skills and personal competences required to access decent work and to adapt for better employability, it is interesting to note that both Asia and Europe are experiencing challenges to improving the reputation of TVET which is often linked with social class and learning ability and framed as an alternative education route as opposed to legitimate choice and as such raising the profile of TVET emerges as a key area for AEP. Additionally, there is an overarching role for AEP to play in terms of fostering dialogue between the ASEM pillars of education and labour: given the new rhetoric of employability as aligned to the insecure workforce (often characterised by zero contract hour employment underpinned by unethical and opportunistic behaviours) and increasing concerns for social imbalance and inequality.

Reflecting on the role of ASEM as an overarching political process advancing AEP and TVET as a priority area, it becomes apparent that fostering a culture of lifelong learning that engages business (as learning organisations) in the process of education and training is greatly enhanced when members learn from the experiences of their counterparts in Europe and Asia and from experts who are ahead of the curve. Undoubtedly, the transfer of knowledge from one member country to another is the first step in a much lengthier process that requires contextualisation and adaptation of practice at a national level. However, the importance of internationalisation when it comes to developing our capabilities cannot be understated: we learn from the experiences of members who have tackled similar challenges and while

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*“Cooperation that combines top-down approaches with the bottom-up initiatives is essential and necessary both in terms of engaging citizens and developing systems that are fit for purpose and of benefit to the learner and society as well as employers and the economy and also in terms of creating opportunities for learners to enhance their knowledge, skills and personal competences throughout life both in terms of personal fulfilment, active citizenship and social inclusion.”*

strong bilateral partnerships and sustainable cooperation advance policy development in the field of education and training, there is also significant value to be found in upscaling programmes and projects to achieving traction across member countries.

Cooperation that combines top-down approaches with the bottom-up initiatives is essential and necessary both in terms of engaging citizens and developing systems that are fit for purpose and of benefit to the learner and society as well as employers and the economy and also in terms of creating opportunities for learners to enhance their knowledge, skills and personal competences throughout life both in terms of personal fulfilment, active citizenship and social inclusion. Without doubt tangible results provide evidence of progress and also indicate a move away from surface level dialogue to achieve the levels of deep and concentrated dialogue required to advance political issues in a more meaningful manner. However there is a hidden assumption at play here, in that while member countries are indeed moving at various speeds we have a tendency to believe that everyone is heading to the same destination, which in effect advances a policy environment that is “multi-speed” with “experts” leading the way as opposed to a policy environment that is “multi-track” and “synergistic” and therein provides for choice and variety (as well as pace) which is ultimately far more beneficial to member countries in terms of scope and benefit. It would therefore be pertinent for ASEM leaders and AEP policy developers going forward, and particularly given the recent shift in political narrative towards reassertion of sovereignty, to give greater consideration to the different contexts and developmental needs of member countries and stakeholders and to provide for a “multi-track” policy development that accounts for choice and variety, as well as pace.

With societal and economic environments experiencing the impact of a global shift towards the 4th Industrial Revolution it is justifiable that the slow progress of policy development in the area of TVET and Lifelong Learning and the subsequent passive engagement by member countries in both cooperation initiatives and project activities is emerging as a significant *leitmotif* throughout the membership; and given the view that TVET and Lifelong Learning are critical components to solving future challenges in the field of education and skills development and employability it is of no surprise that membership aspiration and resolve is beginning to gather momentum. Clearly for AEP attention has shifted towards strengthening cooperation activities and project initiatives in the area of TVET and Lifelong Learning as reflected by ASEM Education Ministers in Seoul, Korea (2017) stating that “the ASEM Education Process should focus on producing outcomes and inducing a tangible cooperation in the coming years by encouraging more Asia-Europe partners to concentrate on global issues and enable societal changes to address challenges such as employability [...]”.

However advisedly and as evidenced, policy development should also be cognisant to not only to provide a platform for TVET dialogue in fundamental areas such as: vision and strategy (advancement and legislation); economic and labour market demand (factors shaping demand for skills, identification of demand, matching skill demand with supply, access and transition to employment, self-employment and business creation); social inclusion (factors shaping the demand for VET, access, participation and progression, delivering on demand); internal efficiency of VET systems (teaching and learning, learning conditions,

quality assurance, learning outcomes); and governance and policy practices (update on governance, reform agenda, management and assessment of policy implementation), but also in terms of providing for foundational building blocks to be embedded if policy implementation is to achieve traction not least of which is the inclusion of ministers, government officials and stakeholders responsible for TVET policy development and practice implementation and the development of support structures and mechanisms to foster international research and partnership collaboration in the field of TVET: that also takes consideration for “multi-track” policy advancement both internationally, nationally and at a grassroots level across learning providers and employers thereby providing for a shift towards greater sectoral cohesion and the development of coherent frameworks that are fit for purpose and of benefit to the learner and society and through which learners have the flexibility and choice to advance not just at a national level but also internationally.

<sup>1</sup> This contribution is an excerpt from the paper entitled “An Outsider Perspective: Reflecting on the evolution of Asia Europe Meeting (ASEM), the Asia Europe Education Process (AEP) and the recent shift towards a dialogue on Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET)” written by Dr Fiona Croke.

# Looking ahead – vision

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*“Build up and deepen the mutual understanding and trust among ASEM members.”*

## THE WAY FORWARD

# The ASEM Ministerial Meeting on Education in Korea

Martin Schifferings

*Ten years ago, Ministers responsible for education across Asia and Europe gathered for the first ASEM Ministerial Meeting on Education in Berlin, Germany, on 5 and 6 May 2008. At that time, the attending Ministers “congratulated Germany on having taken the initiative for this first meeting of ASEM Education Ministers and underlined the importance of a stable and productive dialogue, thus supporting the key role of education and training in each country’s efforts towards economic and social development as well as in making globalisation a success for all parties concerned.”*

These ambitions formulated self-imposed challenges which have proven to be rather difficult to tackle in an informal setting such as the ASEM Education Process (AEP). The following contributions seek to look ahead and into the future of ASEM education cooperation. This journey, however, can only be conducted, after taking a brief inventory of where we stand and what has been accomplished so far.

What does the AEP look like today? The 51 member states, plus the European Union and the ASEAN Secretariat, as well as many ASEM partners (e.g. UNESCO, ASEF, SEAMEO-RIHED) make for a very heterogeneous picture of stakeholders, education systems, political, historical and cultural backgrounds. To move closer and to foster cooperation, the dialogue between Europe and Asia has clearly focused on the following aspects: getting to know and understanding each other, offering platforms for exchange and creating mutual trust with the aim of intensifying and expanding cooperation between the regions.

The focus during the first decade was very much on the development of shared perspectives and relevant content. The themes of (balanced) mobility, quality assurance and recognition, but also the link between higher education and business, lifelong learning and vocational education, are the four thematic priorities identified by ASEM Education Ministers as connecting and meaningful. Since the meeting of Education Ministers in Riga 2015, the Education Process has been supplemented by a two-pillar approach: dialogue and results. “Dialogue” includes informal gatherings in the shape of events, workshops, seminars and expert groups while “results” focus on ASEM project results and outcomes. The interaction of these two dimensions – as important as they are – has proven to be the greatest

*“The conclusion as adopted by the ASEM Education Ministers stresses that AEP ‘should focus on producing outcomes and inducing a tangible cooperation in the coming years by encouraging more Asia-Europe partners to concentrate on global issues and enable societal changes to address challenges such as employability and development of information, communication and technology (ICT) in education’.”*

challenge for cooperation within the ASEM Education Process. In addition, the world has changed significantly in recent years and many of the most important political and societal achievements of modern times assumed and taken for granted are currently experiencing rigorous stress-testing. International, intercultural dialogue and cross-border cooperation in education has therefore gathered momentum and is significantly increasing in importance.

As described earlier in this publication, the ASEM (Intermediate) Senior Officials’ Meetings are well placed to follow-up on the identified demands and agreed initiatives of the Ministerial Conferences. Unfortunately, these meetings very often put a strong emphasis on stocktaking of conducted initiatives – usually leaving rather limited time or space for discussion of results and developments. In order to reinforce the feedback from the two pillars of dialogue and outcomes, and to increase the results of the ASEM project initiatives as well as the experience of the higher education institutions in the political agenda, an international Task Force was set up in 2016 to improve the structural effectiveness of AEP. The Task Force was originally initiated by Germany in the realm of the Intermediate Senior Officials’ Meeting in Moscow, Russia, in April 2016. The proposal provided for a rethink in terms of the potential of existing AEP meetings and immediately appealed to many AEP members. The Task Force was affiliated by Austria, Belgium, China, Indonesia (AES), Korea, Latvia, Romania, Russia, Thailand, ASEF, EUA and SEAMEO-RIHED – to name only the most active participants of the Task Force. The aim of the Task Force was to introduce a restructuring proposal to the Ministerial Conference agenda of 2017, aimed at improving the structure of all AEP meetings and to allow for an enhanced stocktaking of existing ASEM initiatives while also leaving room for political and forward-thinking discussion.

The sixth Meeting of ASEM Ministers of Education was held in Seoul, Korea from 21 to 22 November 2017. The Meeting was tied to the ambition to search for a new vision for AEP and to emphasise the importance of achievements relating to the ASEM priorities which had taken place during the last ten years. The sixth ASEM Education Ministers’ Meeting was titled *Collaboration for the Next Decade: from Common Perspectives to Effective Fulfillment*. In the run-up to the meeting, the Korean Ministry of Education conducted a survey<sup>2</sup> of all ASEM partners and stakeholders to reflect on the achievements of the AEP. The sample survey asked questions relating to the structural organisation of AEP (the importance and interconnection of the two pillars), as well as regarding the thematic priorities of AEP. The survey was answered by 22 of the 53 member states and partner organisations. Key findings include the perception that the promotion of mutual understanding was both, a strong focus and a core result of AEP in the last decade. At the same time, the survey raised a discouraging, although not a surprising result: “AEP mainly focused on promoting dialogue rather than on producing outcome.”<sup>3</sup> Regarding the thematic priorities of AEP, the survey results indicated an ongoing need for increased cooperation within and between the four thematic priorities. Additionally, respondents stressed the demand for a more specific AEP approach towards overarching topics, or “Environmental Factors”.

It is clear from the feedback of ASEM partners that AEP should recognise an increasing demand for developing new skills and competences and strengthening lifelong learning systems in light of the 4th Industrial Revolution. In this regard, it becomes essential to commit

to the lifelong acquisition of knowledge, skills and competences which society will demand from pupils, students, youths and adults in the future. Furthermore, the potential of ICT as a tool for education innovation needs to be strongly acknowledged. Based on lessons learned, AEP respondents advised the need to use technology to its full potential and to help close the education gap between regions and countries. Furthermore, all stakeholders involved sought to develop and use formats such as blended learning to improve the quality of teaching and learning and to employ learning innovations and tools to prepare and improve cross-border mobility.

Although not even half of all ASEM member countries and stakeholders contributed to the survey, the results clearly identified important fields of improvement and realignment of the AEP. The conclusion as adopted by the ASEM Education Ministers stresses that AEP “should focus on producing outcomes and inducing a tangible cooperation in the coming years by encouraging more Asia-Europe partners to concentrate on global issues and enable societal changes to address challenges such as employability and development of information, communication and technology (ICT) in education.” The introductory remarks of the ASEMME6 Chair’s Conclusions certainly point in the right direction. Tangible outcomes and sustainable cooperation has been a catchword for too long. Almost certainly, fixing what has been neglected in the last decade will not be enough to keep AEP relevant throughout the next decade. In this regard, ASEMME6 could have missed a great opportunity – and potentially may not have lived up to its own ambitions. The conference agenda<sup>4</sup> tried to address the identified needs for action during two thematic sessions on “Improving Youth Employability” and “Promoting Mobility and People-to-people Connectivity”. And while the preparatory

*Sixth ASEM  
Education Ministers’  
Meeting,  
Seoul 2017*



*“The Declaration calls to ‘build up and deepen the mutual understanding and trust among ASEM members’ with the focus clearly on people-to-people connectivity, for which mobility is a central element.”*

documents for these sessions addressed the above described aspects quite specifically, the presentations were followed by little discussion and failed to create ideas in terms of how to actually reach more tangible outcomes and closer cooperation. Moreover, the structure of the Chair’s Conclusions – being the main documentary of the Ministerial Meeting – did not address these issues at all. The document follows the exact structure and retrospective character of its predecessors. Each initiative, project, expert group, etc. is briefly described under the respective thematic priority. The document itself gives little to no answers as to how to address the demands for the development of new skills and competences, or how to strengthen lifelong learning systems in light of the 4th Industrial Revolution – which were the core results of the survey. The end note of the Chair’s Conclusions directs to further reading with regard to visionary issues: “Ministers thanked [for] building a common goal for the ASEM Education Process for the next decade as documented in the Seoul Declaration.”

## THE SEOUL DECLARATION AS A VISION FOR THE NEXT 10 YEARS

In an attempt to pave the way for a successful AEP for the next decade, the Korean Ministry for Education, during the Moscow ISOM in April 2016, announced the development of the so-called Seoul Declaration. The aim of the Declaration was to develop a vision which clearly focuses on a future that should intensify exchanges and cooperation between the regions. The document entitled *Seoul Declaration: Enhancing Collaboration between Asia and Europe in Education and Training – A Vision for the Next decade* provides a framework for the goals of the coming years and was adopted during ASEMME6.

The Declaration calls to “build up and deepen the mutual understanding and trust among ASEM members” with the focus clearly on people-to-people connectivity, for which mobility is a central element. In addition, the following priorities were defined:

- Strengthen intercultural and inter-religious understanding to contribute to peaceful and sustainable development.
- Increase the employability of young people, including the 4th Industrial Revolution.
- Deepen key competences; promote flexible, creative and critical thinking through direct contacts and joint projects.
- Use of new technologies, ICTs and MOOCs with a view to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, to increase accessibility of education for everyone.

The Seoul Declaration is far more specific with regard to identifying the socioeconomic demands and developments expected to affect the future AEP. It addresses issues such as the 4th Industrial Revolution as well as the issue of digitalisation in the context of education. The Declaration can be viewed as an important attempt to further develop AEP, however unfortunately, the ambition has been left wanting as there is no clear vision or commitment. It is important to stress that this is not the fault of the authors. Discussions on the Seoul Declaration during ASEMME6 made clear just how difficult it is to link an informal and (financially) non-binding process, such as the AEP, with tangible and measurable outcomes. Dialogue on the other hand has never been a real problem within AEP – given its informal nature.

Looking ahead, AEP might face difficulties in terms of maintaining relevance. The attendance rate of Ministers has been decreasing for some years now. Prior to ASEMME6, some prominent voices posed the question as to whether to continue the Process or if ten years of AEP accomplishments would suffice. Reflecting on the rapidly changing world order, these same voices rather swiftly agreed to the ongoing – if not increasing – importance of inter-regional dialogue, especially in the field of education, while acknowledging at the same time that AEP needs the impetus to revitalise in order to avoid fading to irrelevance.

The international ASEM Task Force elaborated a proposal aimed at improving existing mechanisms. One important underlying assumption of this proposal was (and still is) that the different actors, meetings and mechanisms have the potential to achieve the AEP goals. The close cooperation of government officials, education experts and relevant stakeholders in different settings and formats is somewhat unique and is an important precondition to create relevant, tangible and robust results. Furthermore, such a stakeholder-setup is well equipped to translate project results into both policy recommendations and enhanced cooperation and commitment on a political level. Regrettably, this potential is scattered by personnel fluctuation and very dense agendas, leaving little time for forward looking discussion.

Hopefully, the 2018 ASEM Intermediate Senior Officials' Meeting in Indonesia will be the first trial run of the revised meeting format. Of course, a reconsidered conference agenda alone will not solve all the challenges AEP will be facing during the next decade but maybe, this will prove to be the first step towards "Enhancing Collaboration between Asia and Europe in Education and Training". Only time will tell.

*"Prior to ASEMME6, some prominent voices posed the question as to whether to continue the Process or if ten years of AEP accomplishments would suffice."*

<sup>1</sup> ASEM Education Ministers' Meeting (ASEMME1) (2008). *Conclusions by the Chair*. Available from: <https://www.asem-education.org/documents/senior-official-meetings-and-ministerial-meetings/29-asemme1-chairs-conclusions/file> [Accessed: 2 March 2018].

<sup>2</sup> Korean Ministry of Education (2016). *ASEM Education Process Survey*. Available from: <https://www.asem-education.org/documents/senior-official-meetings-and-ministerial-meetings/asemme6-seoul-2017/57-stocktaking-report-asemme6/file> [Accessed: 20 August 2018].

<sup>3</sup> Ibidem, Annex 3, p. 2.

<sup>4</sup> ASEMME 6 conference agenda. Available from: <https://www.asem-education.org/documents/senior-official-meetings-and-ministerial-meetings/asemme6-seoul-2017/52-asemme6-agenda/file> [Accessed: 20 August 2018].

*"Genesis and  
Strategies  
2017-2021."*

the **ASEM**  
education secretariat

# Genesis and strategies of the third ASEM Education Secretariat in Belgium (2017 – 2021)

Nadia Reynders/David Urban

*The third configuration of the ASEM Education Secretariat located in Belgium is a unique structure that brings together two Ministries of Education each with a focus on a specific sector of education provision. Before we address the genesis of the Belgian ASEM Education Secretariat (AES), we will first explain the unique character of the Secretariat as set against the backdrop of the Belgian political system. The first Article of the Belgian Constitution states: “Belgium is a federal state, composed of communities and regions” which mandates for decision-making powers to be distributed among local, regional and national government organisations that independently hold authority respective to their assigned competences. Each competence is assigned either to the communities or the regions. Education is a competence of the communities. The federal government has been granted limited authority. All levels of education (compulsory education, higher education, adult education), are a community competence: the Dutch-speaking Community in the north, the French-speaking Community in the south and the German-speaking Community in the east of the country.*

## GENESIS OF THE BELGIAN ASEM EDUCATION SECRETARIAT

As a consequence, education policy and particularly higher education policies have developed independently throughout the Flemish and French speaking regions of the country. The Bologna Process launched in 1999 has not resulted in unity but has brought about even greater differentiation between Belgian higher education systems of the north and south. Both communities and regional education ministries are recognised within the ASEM Education Process (AEP) as separate governments or entities (and therefore treated as different “states”), and collaboration between the Flemish and French education ministries is quite close with regard to the AEP. Due to its relatively small higher education system, the German-speaking Community is not represented in most international higher education processes such as the ASEM Education Process.

The fact that the Flemish and French Communities have been closely involved in AEP from the beginning is not just because Senior Officials were represented and participated very actively in Senior Officials’ Meetings (SOMs) and at ASEM Education Ministers’ Meetings (ASEMME)

*“During ASEMME5 held in Riga in 2015, both the Flemish and French Communities reaffirmed their commitment to host the AES and from that moment on, the education ministries from both Communities began preparations of the AES.”*

but because lessons were learned during the Bologna Process and also because collaborative projects were gathering momentum themselves. Between July 2007 and June 2010, the Bologna Secretariat operated out of the Benelux countries (Flemish and French Communities of Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg) and received additional support from Austria and Hungary from July 2009 onwards. The Bologna Secretariat office was located in Brussels and was hosted by the Flemish Community. The Belgian Communities’ working together at a joint Benelux Secretariat has influenced AEP and any new resources for international cooperation that have been allocated. Prior to hosting the ASEM Education Secretariat, the Flemish Community seconded two staff members to the AES hosted by DAAD in Germany. The success of the Benelux Bologna Secretariat and the fact that both communities were strongly committed to AEP is reflected in their expression of interest to host the AES. During ASEMME4, which was held in 2013, the Flemish Minister of Youth, Education and Equal Opportunities, Pascal Smet, in agreement with members of the French-speaking delegation, offered to host the AES from October 2017 and as such began the formal proposal for Belgium to become the location for the next AES. During ASEMME5 held in Riga in 2015, both the Flemish and French Communities reaffirmed their commitment to host the AES and from that moment on, the education ministries from both Communities began preparations of the AES.

The Flemish and French Communities agreed to each assign a full-time officer to coordinate AES. In addition, it was decided that AES Belgium would invite partner countries to support the Secretariat with secondments. The first staff member was selected through an internal selection procedure in the Flemish Department of Education and began their work for the Secretariat during March 2017. Part of their brief was to assure a smooth hand-over of the Secretariat from Indonesia to Belgium and as such this Flemish staff member was seconded to AES in Indonesia to engage in the daily work of the Secretariat and be informed about the ASEM Education Process as well as operational procedures. A second staff member, assigned by the French Community, started work in the Secretariat at the beginning of November. A second hand-over period was organised with two Indonesian AES colleagues seconded to Brussels during the initial set-up period.

## TASKS AND STRATEGIES OF THE ASEM EDUCATION SECRETARIAT BELGIUM

Both the tasks and objectives of AES have changed and been reformulated several times since the Secretariat was established in 2009. The Chair’s Conclusions following ASEMME3, ASEMME4 and ASEMME5 officially formalised the mission of AES from 2011 until 2017. Although the specific tasks of the AES had been expressed differently during each Ministerial Meeting, the general mandate given to AES has remained the same. In summary, AES should observe and assist ASEM member countries to implement proposed initiatives on the one hand and, through the Stocktaking Report, inform Ministers about progress achieved.

In November 2017 during ASEMME6, Ministers mandated AES “to continue effective coordination and assist ASEM partners and stakeholders in implementing programmes, activities and initiatives under the four priorities of the ASEM Education Process”. Point 47 of the Chair’s

Conclusions focuses on the effectiveness of Intermediate Senior Officials' Meeting (ISOM) and proposed a new workshop format that "can compile concrete proposals for discussion in the SOM and be co-chaired by senior officials from Europe and Asia". Furthermore, Ministers mandated AES to reorganise the Stocktaking Report believing that the biennial report should be developed without duplicating inter- and supranational level reports already in existence. During ASEMME6, the Seoul Declaration was adopted with the aim of targeting a more tangible and effective cooperation of the ASEM Education Process for the next decade. The Seoul Declaration stresses that Ministers are "recognising that the function and role of the ASEM Education Secretariat should be strengthened": with the result that the mandate for AES goes much further today than it did five years ago and that objectives of the AES have been specified given the now concrete challenges of the ASEM Education Process.

The Secretariat was officially handed over to Belgium during ASEMME6, which took place in Seoul. The Belgian Minister for Education from both the Flemish and the French Communities crystallised the main tasks of AES in a speech delivered by the Belgian Ambassador to South Korea. It was stated that AES "coordinates all ASEM Education activities, supports preparations for ASEM ministerial meetings and Senior Official Meetings, and facilitates the implementation of output-orientated initiatives that contribute to educational policy development". The mission of the AES cannot be to recommend policies; however, the role of the Secretariat is "to facilitate the participation of all ASEM partners and to support them in their dialogue and initiatives that enhance the collaboration in education". Moreover, "the ASEM Education Process should lead to more structured and well harmonised stocktaking of existing ASEM initiatives without the creation of additional structures or bodies."

*"AES Belgium believes that the most important objective of the AEP is to enhance collaboration and dialogue in education between Asia and Europe."*

*Handover of ASEM Education Secretariat to Belgium during ASEMME6 in Seoul 2017*



AES Belgium believes that the most important objective of the AEP is to enhance collaboration and dialogue in education between Asia and Europe and have therefore focused their ambition for the next four years under two main strategies with the aim to facilitate collaboration and dialogue:

- (1) to support AEP and to facilitate the continuation, coherence, and follow-up of existing and new initiatives within the Process; and
- (2) to identify and implement the most efficient communication and dissemination strategies and tools.

### STRATEGY 1: TO SUPPORT THE OPTIMISATION OF THE ASEM EDUCATION PROCESS

This first strategy is linked to the mandate assigned to AES during ASEMME6 with the aim to develop effective ways to optimise the ASEM Education Process by facilitating the continuation and coherence of existing and new initiatives within the Process.

We will focus on two main actions to optimise the AEP.

Firstly, we intend to adapt the methodology of stocktaking by applying different stages. In a first stage, current stocktaking format and information gathering methods will be analysed. Objectives to optimise the stocktaking process will be set out. Subsequently, the AES will develop a first draft of a new structure as well as a new format and/or questionnaire to collect input from the partners. In this stage, partners will be invited to give feedback and advice on the new structure in order to reach a consensus and draw support. In a next stage, information will be collected through the new format and a draft report will be compiled.

Secondly, we will organise workshops, as part of the (I)SOMs, to discuss progress and results in light of policy development in Europe and Asia. These workshops will be supported with input from experts to feed the discussions. Both Asia and Europe will be assigned as Co-Chairs to the workshops, with the role to formulate and present the conclusions of the workshops. A moderator will be assigned to prepare the workshop and lead the discussion. The Co-Chairs and the moderator will be supported by AES. The workshops are meant to lead to conclusions and recommendations that further feed and optimise the Process as well as contribute to policy developments in the partner countries. The conclusions and recommendations from the workshops will be presented during the plenary sessions in the (I)SOM. Partner countries will be called to action to develop initiatives that provide answers, tackle challenges and/or meet the recommendations to further feed the AEP.

This methodology will lead to a more result-oriented approach to the stocktaking exercise through which the ASEM education initiative can be further developed into a coherent process of policy development in higher education, vocational education and training and lifelong learning.

## STRATEGY 2: EFFICIENT COMMUNICATION AND DISSEMINATION

AES Belgium considers communication, information provision and dissemination as a crucial strategy towards fostering dialogue and collaboration between ASEM partners. Therefore, the Secretariat will identify and implement the most appropriate means of communication for its partners.

AES plays a crucial role in informing ASEM partners about the planning, progress and results of initiatives. This includes announcing and promoting events and activities, reporting and stocktaking and also highlighting best practices and collecting testimonials. The aim is to identify and select relevant information (for example research, events, theories, etc.) related to the ASEM education priority areas and also seek to integrate this type of information in the SOMs by involving experts, in consultation with the host country. An important task for the Secretariat is to collect, update and disseminate information to partner countries regarding education systems with the aim to create more transparency, to stimulate collaboration and to enhance dialogue. AES Belgium will build on the work of former Secretariats, for example the *Compendium on Credit Systems and Learning Outcomes*, and will identify the needs of partners in relation to this type of information as well developing further initiatives to support these needs.

The website ([www.asem-education.org](http://www.asem-education.org)) will be the main platform for communication and dissemination and has been developed as a stand-alone website that can be used by future ASEM Education Secretariats. The website was developed using open source software (Joomla) which will allow future Secretariats to adapt the structure and design according to their own needs and requirements. A second important information tool will be a newsletter. AES Belgium will create a new newsletter format that is easy to read and share. The newsletter will be circulated using e-mail format with information circulated regularly and responded to quickly when there is a communication need or an opportunity occurs. The e-newsletter will provide an overview of the latest information with short articles and a link to the website for further reading. AES Belgium will also identify the most efficient ways of communication through social media (Twitter, Facebook) and experiment with new types of communication relevant to the ASEM Education Process.

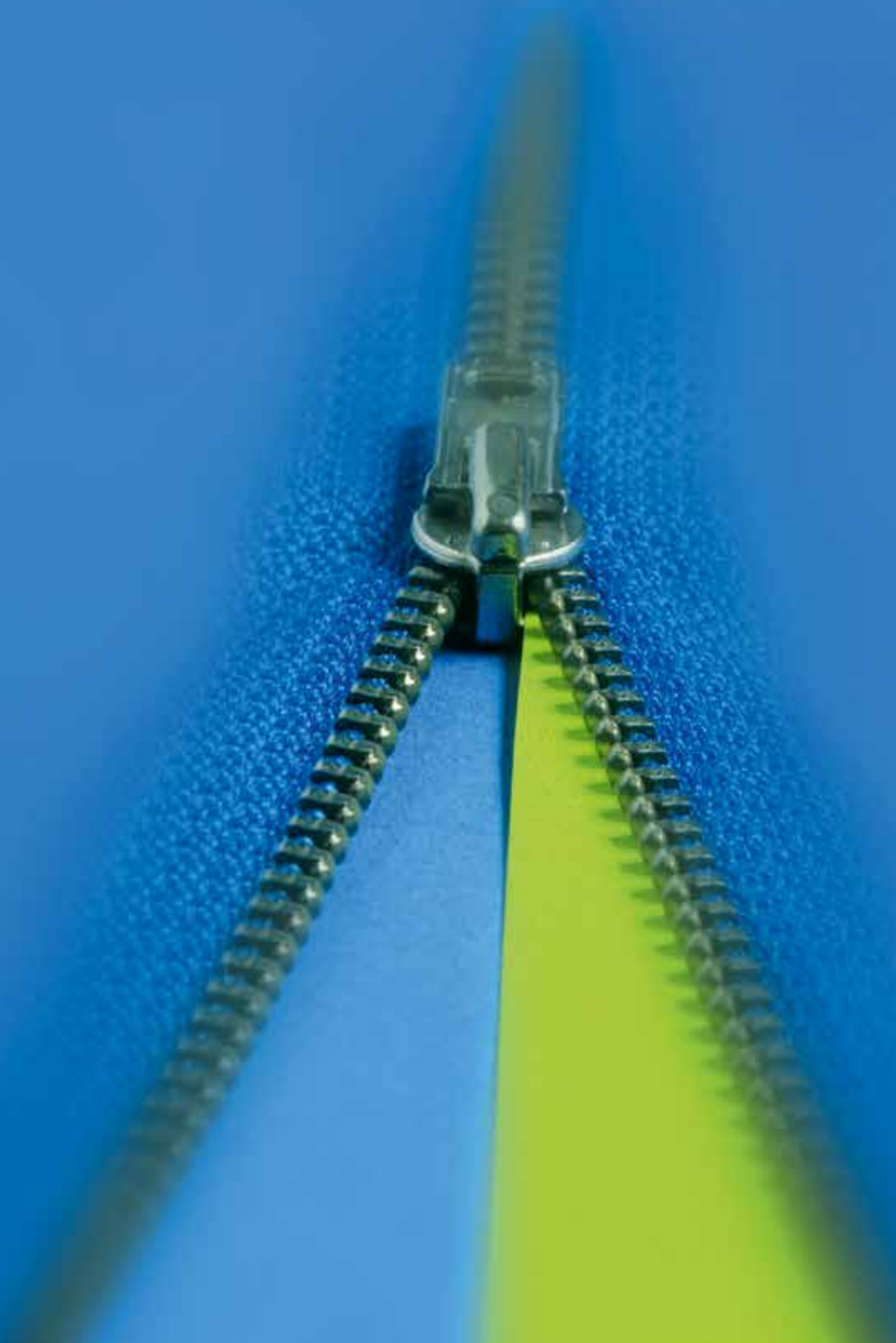
Overall, AES Belgium aims to increase the visibility of AEP among its partner countries and beyond. We believe that there needs to be a broader international recognition of the Process and that its initiatives will contribute to more collaboration opportunities and a stronger dialogue while wider acknowledgement will serve to reinforce and stimulate active commitment of the partners.

AES Belgium believes that the ASEM education community is ready for this next chapter and given the support of its partners, it is confident that this next chapter will achieve its ambition. AES Belgium is also convinced that partners will acknowledge the added value of a more process-based approach, in which initiatives support each other and contribute to a better dialogue and more collaboration in the area of education across and between Europe and Asia.

*“We believe that there needs to be a broader international recognition of the Process and that its initiatives will contribute to more collaboration opportunities and a stronger dialogue while wider acknowledgement will serve to reinforce and stimulate active commitment of the partners.”*

*“The website ([www.asem-education.org](http://www.asem-education.org)) will be the main platform for communication and dissemination and has been developed as a stand-alone website that can be used by future ASEM Education Secretariats.”*

*“The way for ever-closer  
cooperation between  
Asia and Europe.”*



# The ASEM Education Process in the context of the EU's Global Strategy

Martine Reicherts

*Europe and Asia face many similar challenges and opportunities in the area of education. The ASEM partnership and particularly the ASEM Education Process is a valuable forum for the European Union (EU), allowing for informal dialogue and exchange of best practices. It can contribute to improved opportunities for young people, modernisation of education processes, social inclusion, mutual understanding and economic growth in an increasingly globalised world.*

The EU shares the strong interest of ASEM partners in modernisation and internationalisation, enhanced use of ICT in education, increased mobility and the promotion of links between education, research, and business, as well as promotion of the “global citizenship” concept.

In particular, the ASEM Education Process focuses on four priorities for education – Quality Assurance and Recognition; University-Business Cooperation; Balanced Mobility; and Life-long Learning (including Technical and Vocational Education and Training) – and are concepts that fit well with the overall education developments in Europe.

The EU continues to be faced with multiple challenges: more than 20% of its pupils still have difficulties with reading, mathematics and science, and many lack sufficient digital competences. Sixty-four million European adults are considered as low-qualified while learners from vulnerable socioeconomic backgrounds remain over-represented among the low achievers.

Europe continues to face an important mismatch between the educational outcomes of its learners and the forward-looking knowledge, skills and competences needed to fulfil the potential for technological, digital and economic innovation, creativity and entrepreneurship.

More should be done to steer young people into forward-looking study fields where Europe needs expertise (e.g. STE(A)M, robotics, digitalisation, data analysis, and artificial intelligence), based on best practice observed in some ASEM partners.

Against this background, the European Commission during 2017 adopted two landmark Communications: *The Renewed Agenda for Higher Education*<sup>1</sup> (modernisation agenda) and *Strengthening European Identity through Education and Culture*<sup>2</sup> (the so-called “Gothenburg Communication”), which puts forward the idea of a European Education Area. Both

*“Education is crucial to successfully adapt to a fast-evolving world, to understand and embrace different cultures and to gain the skills needed in a society that is more and more mobile, multicultural and increasingly digitalised.”*

documents highlight the unique role of education to ensure fair, open and democratic societies, together with the need for universities to sustain growth and employment. The renewed strategy for higher education identifies four main priority areas, which link to the priorities under the ASEM Education Process. In particular: i) Ensuring graduates leave higher education with skill sets they and the modern economy need; ii) Building inclusive and connected higher education systems; iii) Making sure higher education institutions contribute to innovation in the rest of the economy; and iv) Supporting higher education institutions and governments in making the best use of the human and financial resources available.

Education is crucial to successfully adapt to a fast-evolving world, to understand and embrace different cultures and to gain the skills needed in a society that is more and more mobile, multicultural and increasingly digitalised. The text of the Gothenburg Communication stresses in particular that “it is in the shared interest of all Member States to harness the full potential of education and culture as drivers for jobs, social fairness, active citizenship as well as a means to experience European identity in all its diversity.”

The notion of EU identity and EU values are also central to the EU Global Strategy for the European Union’s foreign and security policy (EUGS), which was presented by High Representative and Vice President of the European Commission (HRVP) Federica Mogherini in June 2016.<sup>3</sup> Public diplomacy is one of its pillars, to project a clear vision of what the EU stands for and seeks to achieve in the world. In particular for Asia, the Global Strategy calls for enhanced economic diplomacy and an increased role in security for the EU, where supporting a successful implementation of the ASEM multilateral framework is also highlighted.

The 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) adopted by the United Nations in September 2015 also recognise the role of education and training as an essential foundation to address global challenges.<sup>4</sup> In particular under SDG 4, ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities represent the main priorities. The European Commission’s global support will target four main areas: securing education and training for all in crisis situations; promoting inclusion and equity – leaving no one behind; improving the quality of teaching and learning, by addressing in particular the shortage of teachers and the “learning crisis”. With approximately 250 million children currently leaving school unable to read, write or do basic maths; strengthening young peoples’ skills and employability by strengthening vocational education and training (TVET) and higher education to enhance employability, economic growth and employment as well as to promoting and managing regular labour migration which reflect the shared challenges and priorities prioritised by ASEM.

The EU has grounded experience to offer on modernising and internationalising higher education institutions and systems. This includes initiatives to support university-business cooperation, improve quality assurance and other tools for transparency and recognition of studies and diplomas, as well as use of new technology in education and lifelong learning.

With the Bologna Process and the development of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), interest in European developments from outside of the EHEA is growing. More



recently Asia, and in particular South East Asia, have become more actively engaged in the development of regional associations or at least in the design of specific national or regional integrative instruments to strengthen intraregional recognition and mobility. The European Union project *Support to Higher Education in ASEAN Region (SHARE)* is a good example of joint efforts to establish a space for higher education.

Since 2009, the primary international arena for information on the Bologna Process is the Bologna Policy Forum, arranged back to back with Bologna Ministerial Conferences, that now take place every three years. A selected number of non-EHEA countries and organisations from around the world, including Asia, are invited to participate.

While the EHEA is no longer the only paradigm to emulate, it still has a very important role to play in raising quality and is seen worldwide as a repository of good practice. The focus of the Bologna Ministerial Conference during 2018 was on issues such as widening access, social inclusion and the role of higher education in a changing society which resonate with higher education stakeholders world-wide and demonstrates the wide-ranging value of the EHEA in an international context.

Asia-Europe cooperation is developing positively, thanks also to the large array of opportunities made available through EU-funded instruments such as Erasmus+ and Horizon 2020:

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initiatives that support cooperation between both regions and encourage increased two-way mobility for individual students, researchers and academic staff.

Erasmus+ is proving very effective, especially through students and staff mobility, but also capacity building projects aimed at supporting modernisation and internationalisation of higher education in partner countries. For the period 2015-2017, Erasmus+ funded approximately 18,000 students and staff from Asian ASEM countries to come to Europe and approximately 11,400 students and staff from Europe to going to Asian ASEM countries on short-term assignments. Additionally, more than 1,500 scholarships were awarded to Asian ASEM students completing joint Erasmus Mundus Master Degree programmes in Europe and 159 capacity building projects in higher education involving Asian ASEM partners were also funded.

Horizon 2020 funding for Marie Skłodowska-Curie actions (MSCA) supports the career development and training of researchers – with a focus on innovation skills across all scientific disciplines. MSCA funding provides grants for researchers at all stages of their career from PhD candidates to experienced researchers. Since 2014, MSCA has funded close to 700 Asian ASEM fellows to undertake “innovative training networks” (inexperienced researchers, including PhD candidates); nearly 500 individual fellowships for experienced researchers; around 400 fellows for Research and Innovation Staff Exchange (RISE); and over 150 fellows for co-funded actions.

All of which contributes to the modernisation and internationalisation of higher education and research and creates closer links between Europe and Asia. The EU believes that ASEM should remain a forum for informal discussion rather than becoming a result-oriented process or decision-making body. Making the ASEM Education Process more formal would risk overlapping with other initiatives while losing its principal advantage of being an arena for informal discussion and exchange of ideas. Higher education stakeholders should be encouraged to develop joint initiatives and use available opportunities such as those offered under Erasmus+ and Horizon 2020.

The Seoul Declaration, adopted in November 2017, has paved the way for ever-closer cooperation between both regions and demonstrates the high value of the EU-ASEM partnership.

<sup>1</sup> COM(2017) 247 final, 30 May 2017.

<sup>2</sup> COM(2017) 673 final, 14 November 2017.

<sup>3</sup> Available from: <https://europa.eu/globalstrategy/en> [Accessed: June 2018].

<sup>4</sup> Available from: [http://www.un.org/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/70/1&Lang=E](http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/70/1&Lang=E) [Accessed: June 2018].

## PHOTO GALLERY: ASEM EDUCATION MINISTERS' MEETINGS (ASEMME 1 TO 6)



**ASEMME1** in Berlin, Germany 2008  
*Photo: David Ausserhofer/DAAD*



**ASEMME2** in Hanoi, Vietnam 2009  
*Photo: private*



**ASEMME3** in Copenhagen, Denmark 2011  
*Photo: Ministry of Education, Denmark*



**ASEMME4** in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia 2013  
*Photo: Ministry of Higher Education, Malaysia*



**ASEMME5** in Riga, Latvia 2015  
*Photo: Ministry of Education and Science, Latvia*



**ASEMME6** in Seoul, Republic of Korea 2017  
*Photo: Ministry of Education, Republic of Korea*

*"Propelling the joint  
vision and mission."*

# Reflections on the future of the ASEM Education Process

Chantavit Sujatanond

*When speaking about ASEM Education Process (AEP), we are referring to the broader Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) inter-regional cooperation platform on education and more specifically to the higher education process. AEP engages in cooperation, collaboration, as well as the coordination of higher education development, policy, and practice of all ASEM member states both in Asia and Europe. The mechanism to propel the joint vision and mission of AEP are the Education Ministers', Senior Officials', and Expert Group Meetings as the ground work for the national actions and implementations facilitated by the ASEM Education Secretariat (AES).*

ASEM being a multilateral and inter-regional platform, implies an interaction process to align and harmonise intra- and inter-regional higher education systems and practices among countries in and between Asia and Europe. In order to smoothly and successfully launch or translate policies and plans into practice by ASEM member states, AES is deemed to be most vital instrument to play the role of trans-regional/trans-national facilitator and mediator to ensure alignment leading to create the open space for higher education.

From the first ASEM Education Ministers' Meeting (ASEMME1) in Berlin, Germany to ASEMME6 in Seoul, South Korea, member states have agreed to initiate and cooperate in several themes and domains. Actions jointly taken between Asia and Europe include increasing the mobility of students, academics, and researchers; and enhancing structures such as recognition of credits and degrees, student visa, common language of instruction and language requirement in order to link higher education with the labour market and employability, with industry, with technical/vocational education and training (TVET); and with lifelong learning.

It is well noted that all sectorial growth and development of a nation, a region, or the world relies essentially on highly qualified human resources with advanced skills and knowledge. Therefore, higher education systems and outputs tremendously contribute to the wealth and growth of a nation. We have AEP to thank for setting a firm platform of strong relationships and understanding of common concerns and goals among higher education systems and higher education institutions (HEIs) in Asia and Europe.

The interaction among ASEM member states through official mechanism of AEP during the first decade of numerous multilateral cooperation activities has yielded multi-dimensional impacts on peoples of both regions. To mention few examples, namely, student and academic mobility, cross-cultural mindset, essential skills to survive in multi-cultural environment,

*“There is a need for a permanent AES, staffed with personnel from ASEM member states with a coordinating unit each in Asia and in Europe.”*

*“AEP is an ideal model to make the East-meet-West higher education alignment work through a harmonisation framework on most dimensions.”*

and student competitiveness in the global community among the efforts of governments and the HEIs to nurture a new generation abreast of global interdependence and synergy.

The examples of activities mentioned above have been driven by the interaction stimulated by AEP and translated into actions under main agreement to encourage and enhance inter-regional mobility and to increase attractiveness for students of both regions. Learning from and be mentored by Europe, Asia has begun to initiate links from higher education to technical/vocational education and training (TVET). The notion of lifelong learning in Asia is shifting from non-formal adult education as a second chance of education to continuous learning throughout one's life for both personal and professional development.

More and more emphasis is being put on linking higher education to employment and the world of work with some special interests in the promotion of entrepreneurship or start-ups through internship and work placement.

The immediate efforts and tasks of the two regions are, first of all, to address the gaps of higher education capacity and development within the region, particularly Asia. Capacity building for ministerial staff and for higher education institutions' (HEIs) administration and management will be required to align and harmonise to some extents so as to promote transnational flow of knowledge, persons and employment. Frameworks for mutual recognition of quality and outcome of higher education services and also HEIs need to be jointly established.

Secondly, there is a need for a permanent AES, staffed with personnel from ASEM member states with a coordinating unit each in Asia and in Europe. Formula of contribution, in kind and in cash, can be taken up at Senior Officials' Meetings. Recognising that Education Process is much more complicated than manufacturing products, taking turns to host AES between the two regions will not build up synergy to the fullest to maintain continuity or sustain cooperation. If alignment, harmonisation or internationalisation of higher education systems between the two regions or continents are deemed to be pathways branching out to connect to employment and the world of work or to have strong links with other development sectors, there is a need for a firm strong steering force – the AES.

Thirdly, the structure of ASEMME needs to be revisited as higher education is a very complex system yet universal enough for member states to leverage common policy and practice. Clusters of issues can be addressed collectively and together – rather than being taken by separate working groups whose participating members may not be able to repeatedly travel to all the meetings held at different time and place.

AEP is an ideal model to make the East-meet-West higher education alignment work through a harmonisation framework on most dimensions. Mobility of people as students or as workforce is anticipated to increase, cultural adaptation is to be expected, and professional expertise is foreseen to be closely shared among the countries and the regions.

*“ASEM being a multilateral and inter-regional platform, implies an interaction process to align and harmonise intra- and inter-regional higher education systems and practices among countries in and between Asia and Europe.”*

*“Optimising and  
building the ASEM  
Education Process.”*



# Observations on optimising and building the ASEM Education Process in the future

Alexandra Angress/Siegbert Wuttig

*The ASEM Education Process (AEP) is a success story with numerous positive initiatives that has led to rapprochement in key areas and to intensified multilateral collaboration among ASEM members and stakeholders. The implementation of Intermediate Senior Officials' Meetings (ISOMs) during ASEMME4 in Kuala Lumpur (2013), the establishment of a temporary Task Force during the ISOM in Moscow (2016) and the strengthening of the Senior Officials' role during ASEMME5 Riga (2015) and ASEMME6 Seoul (2017) clearly demonstrate that ASEM members are making progress towards further improved cooperation and towards more tangible outcomes on one hand and more policy-oriented preparation of Ministerial Meetings, on the other. This development is mirrored at a political level in the overarching ASEM process where, already at the beginning of the 21st century, ASEM members have been trying to achieve greater efficiencies by improving working methods with leaders during the ASEM11 Summit in Ulaanbaatar (2016) expressing their "strong resolve to work together to energize ASEM".*

With regards to the ASEM Education Process, recommendations to optimise AEP can be found in the Chair's Conclusions of the last three Ministerial Meetings. However, it remains to be seen whether and how these recommendations will be put into practice. The first two ISOMs, which were held in China (2014) and Russia (2016), provided Senior Officials with an additional opportunity to meet and to discuss matters concerning the upcoming Ministerial Meetings. For example, the AES presented at the ISOM in Hangzhou (China) a first draft of the Stocktaking Report for the Ministerial Meeting due to be held in Riga (2015) "aiming to discuss the implementation of the ASEM activities from a political perspective"<sup>2</sup>, which reflected ASEM member country opinion that further improvement of the working methods and the establishment of a Task Force would "optimise the ASEM Education Process"<sup>3</sup>; subsequent to which Germany initiated the establishment of a Task Force, which was tabled for discussion at the ISOM held in Moscow during 2016.

The Task Force was established "in order to create synergies and enhance coherence among four priority areas of collaboration" and to draft a proposal on the further improvement of

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*“Member countries represented in the Task Force proposed to improve ‘the layout and the effectiveness of (Intermediate) Senior Officials’ Meetings’ and the ‘mechanisms to formulate policy recommendations for the Ministerial Meetings’.”*

operational practices with the aim to present and discuss a draft proposal during the SOM scheduled for ASEMME6 in Korea during 2017.<sup>4</sup>

The draft proposal sought to address two operational practices: the need to communicate, given different engagements and initiatives taking place within the ASEM education context; and the increasing challenge to motivate the participation and commitment of ASEM member countries in the time periods between biennial Ministerial Meetings. Based on the ASEM principles of informality, sovereignty and non-interference (AECF 2000), a new AEP follow-up mechanism was sought to streamline and monitor policy efforts and initiatives: “It is important to stress that the proposed Task Force and the intended outcome do not seek to control or even hinder national activities, but to increase visibility, transparency, and synergies within the existing frameworks.”<sup>5</sup> Equally important was the notion that additional structures or principles would not to be created and that the Task Force could not interfere with or seek to influence national activities and expert groups.

Member countries represented in the Task Force proposed to improve “the layout and the effectiveness of (Intermediate) Senior Officials’ Meetings” and the “mechanisms to formulate policy recommendations for the Ministerial Meetings”. The Task Force met several times and made a number of concrete recommendations.<sup>6</sup> The focus of the Task Force recommendations was to foster transparency of actions and strengthen visibility as well as to optimise the process of stocktaking by strengthening reciprocity between the two pillars of the ASEM Education Process through different forms of engagement and the involvement of experts or stakeholders at different levels. The recommendations also hoped to modify existing structural components such as agenda-setting and interface facilitation during Senior Officials’ Meetings. In addition to an enhanced communication and visibility of the collaboration process, the Task Force also endeavoured to: increase effectiveness regarding needs assessment at process level; enhance interaction and policy deliberation during SOMs and Ministerial Meetings and to create more policy-driven content-related discussions and tangible results for a more structured Stocktaking Report.

*“The ASEM Education Secretariat will serve as an important conduit and bridge between the three ASEM members operating as a quasi-troika and can play a strong coordinating or even guiding role during the preparatory phase of ASEMME7.”*

The Task Force met for the last time in Hamburg during October 2017, one month before the sixth ASEM Ministerial Meeting, which was scheduled for Seoul 2017, and drafted a paragraph summarising their recommendations for inclusion in the Chair’s Conclusions. Unfortunately, following ASEMME6 when the Chair’s Conclusions were approved and circulated, they contained only a short description of the original intentions of the Task Force recommendations and omitted their proposal for a “detailed and standardised collection and analysis of results (projects and experts groups) prior to the ISOM meetings which can provide a better basis for in depth discussions and improve the mechanisms to formulate policy recommendations for the ministerial Meetings”<sup>7</sup>. As a consequence, Ministers were left to believe “that the biennial stocktaking report being further developed/optimised with a view providing a detailed and standardised collection and analysis of results without duplication existing reports on OECD, UNESCO, EU level, etc. can provide valuable input to the Senior Officials’ Meetings”<sup>8</sup>. Notably recommendations made for greater discussions and the improvement of mechanisms to formulate policy recommendations were omitted with the result that ambitions to optimise the Stocktaking Report as basis for informed discussions



Photo: DAAD/Ziegert

and policy-making fall short as the latter *can* now only serve as “valuable input to the Senior Official Meetings”.

Nevertheless, ASEMME6 did mandate for AES to implement the proposals made by the Task Force to improve the effectiveness of (I)SOMs by making the SOM more interactive, producing summaries of the discussion results and compiling “concrete proposals for policy recommendations”<sup>9</sup>.

Regarding both the content and political messages of the AEP, the Task Force recommendations did not put into question the responsibility for preparing the SOMs and the Ministerial Meetings, which still lies with the host country working closely and in collaboration with AES and Senior Officials. Ministers did however decide, during ASEMME6, on a change concerning the preparation of their next meeting ASEMME7, which was scheduled for Romania in 2019, that the ISOM and, for the first time, both preparatory SOMs would not take place in same country. The ISOM would now be hosted by Indonesia and the first SOM would be organised by Austria. Only the second SOM would take place in Romania, as the host of ASEMME7. As (I)SOMs are important milestones on the way to the Ministerial Meeting in 2019, the new format of these meetings will require close thematic coordination between Indonesia, Austria and Romania, given that all three countries may have different priorities on their political agenda. In this context, the ASEM Education Secretariat will serve as an important conduit and bridge between the three ASEM members operating as a quasi-troika and can play a strong coordinating or even guiding role during the preparatory phase of ASEMME7.

Meeting  
of the Task Force  
in Hamburg,  
2017

*“Ministers should regularly complement the Chair’s Conclusions with strategic declarations to underline the common ambition of all ASEM members and to create a spirit of joint responsibility and a political climate that motivates members and stakeholders to actively cooperate.”*

## REFLECTIONS ON FURTHER OPTIMISING AEP

Based on the Task Force recommendations and the mandate approval contained in the ASE-MME6 Chair’s Conclusions, we are now in a position to consider concrete ideas about what might be done to further improve both the working methods and the effectiveness of meetings with the aim to identify and prepare relevant policy proposals for Ministerial Meetings and to ultimately ensure that these events are politically more attractive and effective:

### **Increasing political commitment while ensuring informality**

To make the Ministerial Meetings politically more relevant for Ministers and more effective, the events should give space for a more detailed development of common priorities and joint initiatives with the ambition to go beyond the routine adoption of conclusions and without the formal constraints of protocol. Informal elements such as the working breakfast organised during ASE-MME5 by the Latvian hosts are ideally suited to accommodate for this.

The non-binding nature of policy documents (e.g. Chair’s Conclusions) adopted by the Ministerial Meetings should be maintained to keep the informal character of the process and to leave room for spontaneous interaction as well as peer learning activities and testing of multilateral pilot projects.

### **The way forward – linking strategy and action**

Ministers should regularly complement the Chair’s Conclusions with strategic declarations to underline the common ambition of all ASEM members and to create a spirit of joint responsibility and a political climate that motivates members and stakeholders to actively cooperate. In this way, strategic declarations should not only provide for more detail but should also be translatable into a number of identifiable and tangible objectives to be achieved within a given time period. An example of this might be “by 2025, we wish to develop multilateral cooperation in the field of academic mobility in the ASEM Education Area and would like to launch a minimum of ten pilot mobility projects to include participant countries across Asia and Europe”.

### **Hosting ASE-MME – Driving content and political messages**

The responsibility for preparing the content of the policy documents continues to lie with the host country of the next Ministers’ Meeting in cooperation with Senior Officials from all ASEM member countries and supported by the AES. Concerning the three (I)SOMs that precede the Ministerial Meeting, the host country should take the lead with regard to the content and the political messages of the Ministers’ Meeting in order to ensure the continuous and consistent development of the four thematic priorities as well as the thorough preparation of the Education Ministers. This responsibility on the part of the country hosting the ASEM Ministerial Meeting should also apply to the (I)SOMs and/or the first preparatory SOM even though they tend not to take place in the respective host country.

### **(In search of) more interaction for more action**

Further to the Task Force recommendations, it is advisable to make the (I)SOMs more communicative and interactive. The hosts of (I)SOMs meetings should consider appropriate

formats for shaping the discussions of the Senior Officials in order to achieve substantial progress and to agree on tangible objectives for the Ministerial Meeting. Senior Officials could make, on the basis of a progress report compiled by the AES and under the aegis of the host country, a political assessment of the ongoing bottom-up ASEM activities and draw political conclusions for Ministerial consideration; and also propose (multilateral) projects and initiatives to develop the thematic priorities (top-down approach).

In addition to seeking to create synergies and interlinkages between the two pillars, as was proposed by the Task Force regarding process optimisation, there is also an opportunity to explore the creation of synergies between the four priorities and also to translate these into concrete initiatives/proposals. Examples could be the introduction of Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) for student mobility or work placements for intercultural and language training or combine work-based learning/work placement opportunities created through the ASEM Work Placement Programme (ASEM WPP) with successful well-established initiatives such as the summer school of the Asia-Europe Institute (AEI) and by integrating host companies/site visits into curriculum.

#### **Capitalising/Building on key ASEM principle of informality**

Informality is both a challenge and an asset and an indispensable ingredient of the ASEM process. The strength of the latter key principle of ASEM could be exploited by creating more opportunities for ASEM members to meet e.g. during breakfast meetings and over round tables discussion on a given subject or through brainstorming formats such as the world café.

Bilateral meetings can be used to explore the feasibility extending topics into multilateral initiatives. A basis for discussion could begin with presentation on the status, objectives and challenges of the education sector in each of the given ASEM country: sharing this in an informal setting without documentation can be a good source of discussion as well as inspiration.

#### **Ensuring top-down commitment for bottom-up initiatives**

In order to motivate ASEM members and stakeholders to participate in ASEM activities, some multilateral pilot projects and initiatives targeting thematic priorities could be identified by the Senior Officials, adopted by the Ministers, financially supported by interested ASEM countries and piloted on a voluntary basis by member countries and stakeholders. Following successful implementation, the pilot projects and initiatives could then be rolled out to a wider group and more participants ideally to develop a genuine ASEM cooperation model.

Good practice projects and initiatives in each of the four thematic priorities demonstrating the added value to the ASEM Education Process could be identified by the Senior Officials and presented by the project coordinators during the Ministerial Meeting. The Ministers could then award a symbolic AEP prize to these flagship projects. This ASEM Education Award will give greater visibility to the ASEM Education Process. In this context, synergies to the overarching ASEM political process should be explored and promoted during ASEM Day held on 1 March.

*“Informality is both a challenge and an asset and an indispensable ingredient of the ASEM process.”*

*“In the future, AES will certainly need to play a more proactive role regarding the coordination of the ASEM Education Process.”*

### **Strengthening uniqueness of AEP by upscaling AES mandate**

AES should remain responsible for supporting ASEM members and stakeholders during the implementation of their ASEM activities and also to summarise the results of these events in a progress report for submission to Senior Officials. The progress report is part of a more comprehensive Stocktaking Report prepared by the AES for the Ministerial Meeting. During the respective (I)SOMs and Ministers’ Meeting, AES takes the minutes and helps the Chair prepare and hold the meetings (especially when discussing the draft policy documents with the Senior Officials): as laid down in the Seoul Declaration, “the function and the role of the ASEM Education Secretariat should be strengthened” when it comes “to intensify the follow-up and enhance the coherence of all the activities, projects and initiatives taken”<sup>10</sup>.

In the future, AES will certainly need to play a more proactive role regarding the coordination of the ASEM Education Process, in particular with respect to the collaboration between and among the host of (I)SOMs and Ministerial Meetings, Senior Officials and other stakeholders. To this end, the Secretariat will need to enhance communication between the members and partners of the ASEM family. By way of example, the current Secretariat hosted by Belgium has focused on communication and enhancement of visibility of AEP accordingly by creating a new format for the ASEM Newsletter and by launching a state-of-the-art website with the ambition to actively disseminate information. An electronic ASEM discussion forum for Senior Officials and a specific area on the website with important ASEM documents for ASEM members could be introduced to further facilitate the internal communication in the ASEM Education Process and increase commitment between members during the meetings and give overall greater visibility.

- <sup>1</sup> Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM11) (2016). *Ulaanbaatar Declaration on Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) into the third decade*. Ulaanbaatar, p. 3.
- <sup>2</sup> Fifth ASEM Education Ministers' Meeting (ASEMME5) (2015). *From Kuala Lumpur to Riga. Stocktaking Report*. Composed by the ASEM Education Secretariat and the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Latvia in consultation with ASEM partners and stakeholders. Riga, p. 3.
- <sup>3</sup> Internal paper. *Revised Work process ASEM task force: Optimizing of the ASEM Education Process*. Version of 8 July 2016, p. 1. [not published].
- <sup>4</sup> Task Force (2016). *Terms of References*, p. 1. [not published].
- <sup>5</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 2.
- <sup>6</sup> The full proposal of the Task Force can be found in the Stocktaking Report of Seoul. See Sixth ASEM Education Ministers' Meeting (ASEMME6) (2017). *From Riga to Seoul. Stocktaking Report*. Compiled by the ASEM Education Secretariat and the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Korea in consultation with ASEM partners and stakeholders. Seoul, pp. 19-20.
- <sup>7</sup> Task Force (2017). *Internal draft paper*. [not published].
- <sup>8</sup> Sixth ASEM Education Ministers' Meeting (ASEMME6) (2017). *Conclusions by the Chair*. Seoul, p. 11.
- <sup>9</sup> Sixth ASEM Education Ministers' Meeting (ASEMME6) (2017). *From Riga to Seoul. Stocktaking Report*. Compiled by the ASEM Education Secretariat and the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Korea in consultation with ASEM partners and stakeholders. Seoul, p. 20.
- <sup>10</sup> Sixth ASEM Education Ministers' Meeting (ASEMME6) (2017). *Seoul Declaration. Enhancing Collaboration between Asia and Europe in Education and Training – A Vision for the Next Decade*. Seoul, p. 5.

*“Vision 2025 –  
opinions and  
reflections.”*



## THE ASEM EDUCATION PROCESS

# Vision 2025 – opinions and reflections

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Alexandra Angress/Siegbert Wuttig

*In this contribution, we will analyse survey results, policy documents and views of experts, members and stakeholders with regard to a vision for the future of the ASEM Education Process (AEP). Based on the insights gained, the proposals made in this context will then be summarised and clustered into eight categories of findings which are a key input into our concluding article “AEP – the road ahead” in this publication.*

## PART ONE: The need to further develop AEP

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### THE WIDER CONTEXT – DEBATING THE FUTURE OF ASEM

Since its inception more than two decades ago, the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) has played a key role as a forum for dialogue and cooperation connecting Asia and Europe. Along with the evolving nature of Asian-European relations, ASEM has expanded in size and scope with cooperation activities – and concrete interactions between the two regions have strengthened significantly. Today, ASEM countries make up more than 60% of the world’s population, generate almost 60% of the global GDP and represent 60% of the world’s trade.<sup>1</sup> With investment and trade growing between Asia and Europe, no other intergovernmental forum spanning the Eurasian landmass and stretching from the Atlantic to the Pacific is characterised by a considerable degree of diversity as ASEM.

The tenth and twentieth anniversary of ASEM in 2006 and 2016 provided an excellent opportunity to critically review the process, evaluate progress and develop ideas for the future of the forum. However, the premise for analysis on both occasions was different. In 2006, there was the question as to how ASEM could meet a number of changes and new challenges (e.g. rise of globalisation, enlargement of ASEM from 26 to 39 members). Ten years later, the focus was on how this kind of unique partnership could be better structured and dialogue intensified so as to prepare for future common challenges and how the process could move forward to ensure that ASEM would “bring additional benefits to the countries and people in Asia and Europe”<sup>2</sup>.

*“The results of the survey underline that AEP contributes above all to enhancing mutual understanding and sharing best practice.”*

During the discussions on the future development of ASEM, there was and still is a tension between both the overarching political process of ASEM and the educational process of ASEM with high expectations on one hand and ASEM’s limited capabilities as a forum on the other.<sup>3</sup> This is also reflected in the discourse with some advocating the need to upscale the role of the forum and increase concrete tangible outcomes, while others continue to emphasise the key role of ASEM as a platform for informal dialogue and exchange of ideas into the future.

At the Ulaanbaatar Summit (2016) marking the twentieth anniversary of ASEM, Heads of State or Government underlined the need for a future direction grounded in the rationale that if ASEM was to stay relevant, it needed to evolve.<sup>4</sup> Based on the key principles informality, networking and flexibility already outlined in the Asia-Europe Cooperation Framework (ACEF) 2000<sup>5</sup>, the Ulaanbaatar Declaration emphasises the necessity to reinforce partnerships and to focus on cooperation for tangible benefits fostering connectivity.

## FIRST STEPS TO A VISION FOR THE ASEM EDUCATION PROCESS – MEMBER SURVEY

The need for a new ASEM vision has been widely accepted in recent years and has been highlighted by members also in the area of the ASEM Education Process (AEP) and was illustrated in a survey of members carried out by the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Korea in preparation for ASEMME6<sup>6</sup> with two thirds of the respondents indicating the need to set up a vision for AEP as the highest priority (nine out of 16 scored high and seven very high) while the next highest priority identified was to confirm the goal of AEP collaboration. As highlighted in the summary report of the survey<sup>7</sup>, informal dialogue was stressed and appreciated by respondents; however, the role, scope, objectives and outcomes of AEP needed to be clarified further.<sup>8</sup>

The survey was conducted to review the contributions of AEP but also discuss the future direction for the next decade regarding vision, directions, content, approaches for reshaping AEP in its four key areas: (1) Quality assurance and recognition; (2) Engaging business and industry in education; (3) Balanced mobility; (4) Lifelong learning including Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET). Less than half of the 53 ASEM members responded: 15 European countries, five Asian countries, the European Commission, and ASEF as stakeholder.

## CONSENSUS ON THE NEED OF A VISION FOR FUTURE AEP – DIFFERENCES IN EXPECTATIONS AND PRIORITIES

The majority of respondents emphasised the facilitation of networking among members as one of their major expectations for the future. The results of the survey underline that AEP contributes above all to enhancing mutual understanding and sharing best practices (cf. article on achievements and shortcomings of AEP in this publication). All four key educational areas were confirmed to be crucial components of AEP and it was also emphasised that new areas of collaboration should be included such as Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Global Citizenship Education (GCE).

Respondents also commented that communication channels should be strengthened and diversified while network building with various groups of stakeholders should be fostered.<sup>9</sup> The enhancement of information sharing in the domain of education policies and best practices among member countries were given highest priority of the areas identified as “key areas” (with twelve respondents scoring “high” and seven scoring “very high”).

Respondents were in agreement on future challenges regarding a shared understanding that advancements in Information and Communication Technology (ICT) would have the biggest impact on TVET and LLL (14 out of 22 respondents). Participants were not in agreement on identifying additional measures to be adopted to enhance outcome-oriented management of AEP with the variety of responses classified into three groups: 1) those advocating to continue AEP without any proposed changes and additional measures (e.g. Austria, Singapore, Switzerland,); 2) those who want to use existing tools and measures more effectively and efficiently (e.g. Denmark, Finland, France, Latvia, Lithuania, Sweden) – for example through strengthening the ASEM Education Secretariat (France) or through using AEP as platform to ensure transparency and visibility (Lithuania) and finally 3) those who wish to take AEP to the next level by creating new formats for example of SOMs, to enhance effectiveness of AEP (Flemish Community of Belgium, Germany, Romania). Some Asian partners stressed the role of AEP for strategic educational objectives such as equity (Indonesia) or public private partnership (Thailand) or excellence in education services (Philippines), while some Europeans draw on lessons learned from the Bologna Process such as increasing transparency tools and websites on education systems (Latvia, Lithuania). The demarcation line is not Asia on one side and Europe on the other but within each region with some countries looking to advance beyond the present AEP and as such have committed to doing so in various ASEM related initiatives (Flemish Community of Belgium, Germany, Indonesia, Thailand), while others stress the consultative nature of the forum and its ability to meet future challenges (Czech Republic, Japan, Singapore, Switzerland).

While there is agreement on the need of a vision for AEP, there is a lack of agreement on a common strategic direction which holds true for both the overarching ASEM process and the ASEM Education Process. There has also been no consensus on a more effective follow-up of the numerous initiatives carried out by ASEM members and stakeholders or on moving beyond the informal nature of the Process.

## THE SEOUL DECLARATION – A SHARED VISION OF AEP’S FUTURE ORIENTATION

Despite the varied results of the member survey on the vision as depicted here, ASEM members did develop a common position on the future development of AEP during the drafting of the Seoul Declaration. The Declaration, which was adopted by ASEM Education Ministers during ASEMME6 in 2017, contains a vision for AEP for the next ten years while also highlighting the importance of the ASEM education collaboration.<sup>10</sup> During the preparation of the Declaration, the then Task Force Director of ASEMME6 of Korea emphasised that the Declaration was not only about the vision itself but also about various concrete measures to fulfil the vision in a more effective way: emphasising the all-inclusive approach to crafting the agreement.<sup>11</sup>

*“Respondents were in agreement on future challenges regarding a shared understanding that advancements in Information and Communication Technology (ICT) would have the biggest impact on TVET and LLL.”*



In the Seoul Declaration, Ministers explained what is needed in the future: “In the next decade, countries and regions around the world will be required to strengthen dialogue and cooperation to achieve sustainable development in order to face emerging global challenges”<sup>12</sup> (e.g. employment insecurity in view of the 4th Industrial Revolution). Above all, Ministers felt that AEP should contribute “to promote mobility, to stimulate connectivity and boost employability” which can be achieved mainly by making dialogue and cooperation more tangible and effective, considering skills development and using new technologies (such as ICT and MOOCs), while sharing best practice supports the enhancement of education systems and strengthens cooperation. Ministers also see “the need to encourage more active participation of stakeholders including students, teachers, education and training institutions, industries, services, public administration at national and regional level and civil society, as well as the expansion of the overall partnership.”<sup>13</sup> To this end, a closer cooperation with the overarching ASEM process is envisaged. In order to make the process more effective and “to intensify the follow-up and enhance the coherence of all the activities, projects and initiatives taken”, the supportive and coordinative role of the ASEM Education Secretariat was to be strengthened. In summary, the Seoul Declaration demonstrates the clear commitment of ASEM members to AEP, advances proposals to overcome the identified shortcomings of AEP and creates a vision for Asian-European cooperation. Although the

Declaration provides direction for AEP to meet the challenges of the future, it does so without setting tangible and measurable targets.

## PEOPLE-TO-PEOPLE CONNECTIVITY – A KEY CONCEPT FOR THE FUTURE

During the ASEM Summit in Milan (2014), both Asian and European leaders underscored the significance of connectivity between the two regions in terms of “economic prosperity and sustainable development and to promoting free and seamless movement of people, trade, investment, energy, information, knowledge and ideas, and greater institutional linkages.”<sup>14</sup> With the Ulaanbaatar Declaration of 2016, connectivity again became a key concept for future ASEM cooperation. Connectivity generally relates to economic integration, trade and investment as well as to sustainable development of educational communities and political linkages.<sup>15</sup> In the Ulaanbaatar Declaration, Heads of State or Government discussed “Partnership for the Future through Connectivity” and clearly stated that connectivity would be mainstreamed into all ASEM cooperation frameworks. Consequently, the Seoul Declaration refers to people-to-people connectivity as a central component of the AEP vision.

At ASEMME6 in Seoul (2017), the centrality of the concept of people-to-people connectivity for the future direction of AEP was also highlighted by high-profile participants such as Ambassador Michael Reiterer, EU Delegation Seoul, Republic of Korea:

*“Connectivity has become the new slogan but, in the EU’s understanding, is no longer limited to physical infrastructure. Connecting people, the third pillar of ASEM, is the prime task in which ASEM engages – Connectivity offers ASEM a chance to re-invent itself. People-to-people relations has always been one of the three guiding principles of the dialogue process. Terminology changes, but the principle remains unchanged: Education is the engine of development; without education no development, the end of history. Against the background of mounting tensions, ASEM has to live up to the challenge of facing the return of geopolitics, to push back in bringing peoples together, to foster education and exchanges, scholarships and create a common space to meet through connecting peoples.”*

*“Connecting people, the third pillar of ASEM, is the prime task in which ASEM engages.”*

Addressing common challenges and working together for the benefit of all are aspects of people-to-people connectivity in AEP referred by Minister Richard Bruton (Ireland) and former Deputy Minister Mary Yap Kain Ching (Malaysia) in interviews during ASEMME6:

*“We are all facing the same challenges in education, whether they be equipping our people with the right competencies for a fast changing world; preventing those who come to education at a disadvantage from falling behind or the challenge of continuing to promote innovation across education and training.*

*The ASEM Education Process has allowed us to come together to share our experiences in addressing these challenges. It has allowed us to promote mobility and design projects which we can collaborate and work together on. We will only benefit in a shared future. By coming together, we can continue to leverage more opportunities and achieve better outcomes for all.”*

*Richard Bruton, Minister of Education, Republic of Ireland*

*“The ASEM Education Process has allowed us to promote mobility and design projects which we can collaborate and work together on.”*

*“Participating in the ASEMME6 in Korea was a meaningful privilege for all 51 countries as it had provided a platform for the meeting of the educational minds to get together to share knowledge and at the same time to establish collaboration for the next decade. [...] I am confident that ASEMME6 2017 has in one way or another connected us to look at the challenges in the advent of the Industrial Revolution 4.0 and find possible solutions to address them.”*

*Datuk Dr Mary Yap Kain Ching, former Deputy Minister of Higher Education, Malaysia*

*“I am confident that ASEMME 6 2017 has in one way or another connected us to look at the challenges in the advent of the Industrial Revolution 4.0 and find possible solutions to address them.”*

The aspects of enhanced people-to-people connectivity including individual mobility and collaboration as well as other potential components of the future AEP have been addressed by a number of articles and comments received from senior ASEM experts from Asia and Europe.

The contributions are a valuable source of inspiration for forthcoming discussions and will be presented in the following chapter.<sup>16</sup> We will start with the latter and then reflect voices and views expressed in written interview statements and interviews conducted during ASEMME6 in Seoul (2017) and the Intermediate Senior Officials’ Meeting in Jakarta (2018).

## PART TWO: Opinions and reflections of ASEM senior experts on the future of AEP

### ASEM EDUCATION PROCESS – VISION 2025 – OPINIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Henk van Liempt, Federal Ministry of Education and Research, Germany

#### Towards effective fulfilment through cooperation, multilateral initiatives and projects

For centuries Asia and Europe have exchanged ideas, cultures and goods that have enriched and inspired both regions and contributed to the well-being and prosperity of society. The first decennial of the 21st century has witnessed a strong economic growth in Asia and a shift in prospects for worldwide trade and cooperation that favours Asian-European ties. Education plays a pivotal role in science, innovation and production, and should be reflected in the aims of ASEM with the overarching ambition for securing security, peace and prosperity. In this line, the Seoul Declaration of 2017 articulates for a more “tangible and effective” cooperation through the engagement of active dialogue and action with the ambition to realise a “common vision”. Priority areas within the overarching political process of ASEM will include employability, sustainability and equity.

EU’s Erasmus+ programme for cooperation in education plays a pivotal role in bringing together participants from diverse European countries, which could be an inspiration for the ASEM Education Process when it comes to bringing together partners and providing opportunities for peer learning between the two continents. The differences between the continents in terms of demography, levels of industrialisation and culture provide a compelling environment for deep and meaningful learning. We can be inspired by the experiences of other countries, expose our learners and teachers to different environments and cultures and foster a global perspective that is so much needed for generations to come. Each of our countries has a vested interest in the aims of ASEM, which may be linked to a strong domestic internationalisation strategy. Examples of traditional international cooperation exist. ASEM provides a platform to further develop these existing projects into multilateral initiatives focusing on common areas of interest.

#### In search of short-term goals and long-term strategies (“missions”)

For Germany, the Seoul Declaration 2017 provides a valuable guiding framework that allows ASEM member countries to jointly confront future challenges. Considering the importance of the thematic priorities of the ASEM Education Process, the declaration provides for member countries to be better prepared and to more effectively tackle global and societal challenges. However, in order for these priorities to be achieved, they need to be underpinned

*“The Seoul Declaration 2017 provides a valuable guiding framework that allows ASEM member countries to jointly confront future challenges.”*

by short term goals (“missions”) including a concise action plan with clearly defined initiatives, targets and indicators.

In preparation for ASEMME7 and in advance of the next phase of Senior Officials’ Meetings (SOMs), member countries need to clearly identify a number of strategic objectives, i.e. targets to be achieved by 2025. In addition, a number of identified flagship projects could support areas of multilateral collaboration such as the ASEM work placement (pilot) programme. The selection of good practice examples should have the objective to demonstrate the true spirit of the ASEM Education Process and serve to promote among all ASEM member states the benefits of participation while also creating tangible results and measurable impact.

### **New meeting formats for better communication**

Building on suggestions advanced by the Task Force, with regards to the ASEM stocktaking process, priorities should be reorganised with a view to not only achieving effective reporting but also to provide for interaction and the exchange of lessons learned as outlined during the meetings of the Senior Officials. For this reason, Germany strongly supports a workshop format for the first day of the (Intermediate) Senior Officials’ Meetings which would provide for policy recommendations and concrete proposals to be identified and shared. In order to underpin the joint character and nature of collaboration, these workshops should be co-chaired by Senior Officials from both regions, identified by the ASEM Education Secretariat and the ASEMME conference host country.

More fruitful and in-depth discussion could be achieved through a detailed and standardised collection as well as evaluation and analysis of results via the project and experts’ groups which take place prior to the (Intermediate) Senior Officials’ Meetings. A move away from the traditional format of “standardised presentations only”, which allows for little or no interaction, would also create opportunities for enhanced and in-depth discussion. Such a format would also provide for a more informed decision-making process leading to improved mechanisms for policy recommendation and formulation. In this context, Germany fully supports and is willing to engage in the facilitation of concrete ways to create a more effective interface between the ASEM Education Secretariat, the SOM and the hosting country of the SOM/ASEMME.

### **Mobility and people-to-people connectivity as cornerstone of the ASEM Education Process**

Mobility and people-to-people connectivity is and will remain a cornerstone of ASEM education objectives. In this respect, Germany will identify programmes and support structures to increase the overall numbers of mobile individuals between and across ASEM regions – including staff and students from higher education as well as companies hosting work placements. Looking to the future, it would be desirable to expand the initiative to other sectors of education, specifically VET and LLL (Lifelong Learning).

It has however become apparent, and is evidenced through a number of projects, that reliable and comparable data is not being gathered so as to provide a valid basis for informed policy decision-making. Therefore, Germany suggests the development of an initiative to collect and to analyse mobility data.

*“In preparation for ASEMME7 member countries need to clearly identify a number of strategic objectives, i.e. targets to be achieved by 2025.”*

*“The selection of good practice examples should have the objective to demonstrate the true spirit of the ASEM Education Process and serve to promote among all ASEM member states the benefits of participation while also creating tangible results and measurable impact.”*

*“It is important to highlight the success stories of the ASEM Education Process.”*

#### **Strengthening the priority area of VET and LLL in the ASEM Education Process**

So far, and with good reason, the ASEM Education Process has focused on higher education initiatives. However, VET and LLL are also among the four priority areas of the ASEM process and are gaining more and more importance. In light of identified challenges, such as industry 4.0 and aging societies, it is perhaps predictable that during ASEMME6 both SOM and Ministerial Meeting delegates expressed the view that the profile of VET and LLL should be raised. Germany also advises for more concrete initiatives to be encouraged (result- and action-oriented). Pilot projects could be initiated and implemented by the member countries with a strong tradition in VET (e.g. Germany, Austria, the Netherlands and Denmark) and who, along with their Asian partners, have a vested interest in progressing future policy development in this area. To this end, Germany has hosted two VET initiatives: the ASEM Symposium on TVET held in Berlin 2012 entitled “Putting Frameworks into Practice: Demand, Development and Decision” and the ASEM Expert Seminar held in Nuremberg in 2014 with the aim to exchange experience and lessons learned in the field of dual education engaging industry, academia and society in the dialogue.

#### **Spreading the word of the win-win situation of the ASEM Education Process**

It is important to highlight the success stories of the ASEM Education Process. In this respect, both regions can only benefit from continued informal dialogue and by working together in identified areas of educational policy with the aim to respond to common challenges.

One way of paying tribute to and making visible the benefits of the dialogue that has so far taken place over a period of ten years is to actively engage in concrete initiatives. The active dissemination of information is also mutually beneficial, feeding into horizontal and vertical processes such as ASEM Economic Ministers’ Meetings, ASEM Labour and Employment Ministers’ Meetings and the overarching political process of ASEM. Where applicable, forums that contribute to the internationalisation of educational policy should be involved. It is a good moment to pay credit to Asian-European collaboration by actively disseminating success stories. In this way, there will be a wider awareness of this well-chosen path that builds trust and ensures peaceful development of societies in both regions.

## ASEM EVOLUTION: PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

**Ekaterina N. Reshetnikova, Ministry of Education and Science/Sophia A. Permiakova, Far Eastern Federal University Vladivostok, Russian Federation**

The Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) is an international forum with the main goal to foster cooperation between the countries of Asia and Europe. Since the establishment of ASEM in 1996, the participating countries have built a dialogue to advance opportunities and implement initiatives uniting two historically and culturally remote civilisational poles. The main purpose of this format is to overcome the remaining obstacles to the development of equal and mutually beneficial cooperation between Asia and Europe, and to exchange knowledge, best practices, experiences and ideas.

Today, ASEM unites 51 states of Asia and Europe, being the largest inter-regional organisation in the world. Despite the initial economic specialisation, today we witness further enlargement of agenda to include not only economics, but also socio-humanitarian and educational areas.

Despite the declared equality of all activities, cooperation in the field of education, science, and technology is one of the most significant areas for all ASEM member countries. We realise that education is the foundation for the development of innovative potential, ensuring sustainable economic growth and social and humanitarian development.

Nowadays, ASEM educational track incorporates several levels of cooperation and a variety of institutions, creating a dense network of meetings and projects, interactive mechanisms, involving not only the governments of member states, but non-state actors, university management, researchers, professors and students.

Recent years witnessed active development of the architecture of educational cooperation within the ASEM framework. Education became one of the most important collaboration areas of the ASEM member states.

Today in the era of 4th Industrial Revolution our countries have the resources and tools necessary to strengthen our cooperation in education. We all agree that high-quality and inclusive education is the key to our future and it is extremely important to act together to make education accessible for everyone.

Asian countries appear to be an extremely promising market where the demand for quality education is increasing due to high population growth rate alongside the increasing percentage of the middle class. European countries occupying the leading positions in education can provide support to countries in need. Our main goal is to reduce the existing gap between our countries, to modernise education and make education accessible for everyone. To achieve this goal, we need to act together in the sphere of student and teacher exchanges and by doing so adopt the best practices of educational processes and organisation.

*“We realise that education is the foundation for the development of innovative potential, ensuring sustainable economic growth and social and humanitarian development.”*

*“Thus, an important element of the educational cooperation in ASEM is the so-called ‘hybridisation’ of education: a combination of Asian and European approaches and best practices in the field of education and a phenomenon that can be explained as an attempt to connect the Bologna Process with Asian higher education systems.”*

*“It is important to focus on improvement of educational regulations, development of quality assurance and recognition systems as well as creation of enabling environment for foreign students studying in ASEM member states.”*

Thus, an important element of the educational cooperation in ASEM is the so-called “hybridisation” of education: a combination of Asian and European approaches and best practices in the field of education and a phenomenon that can be explained as an attempt to connect the Bologna Process with Asian higher education systems.

An important role of ASEM is to increase people-to-people connectivity: bringing together representatives of different countries, peoples, cultures to build more stable, trusting and inclusive relations. At the same time, educational interaction plays the role of a mechanism for disseminating best practices in the economic and social spheres that contribute to the development of countries both in Europe and in Asia.

Russia joined ASEM in 2010, alongside with Australia and New Zealand. Since its accession, Russia has been actively engaged in the educational track cooperation: Russia held the High-Level Conference on Intercultural and Interreligious Dialogue (St. Petersburg, 2014), an Intermediate Senior Officials’ Meeting on Education (Moscow, 2016) and a Round Table on Migration Issues (Moscow, 2016). In 2015, during the fifth Meeting of ASEM Education Ministers, Russia proposed an initiative to develop cooperation between universities and enterprises through the introduction of team building programmes in the teaching process that later became the project *Students Teambuilding as an Instrument of Engaging Business in Education*.

Lying between Asia and Europe, connecting two poles, with its great cultural diversity and educational traditions Russia plays an active role in promoting cooperation between Europe and Asia, especially in the field of education. Over the past ten years, since the formation of the educational cooperation, ASEM has made significant progress in this area: successful educational projects include the ASEM-DUO academic exchange programme; the ASEM Recognition Bridging Declaration and the initiatives of the Asia-Europe Foundation, which carries out a large number of projects at the sub-governmental level.

Of course, we cannot ignore obvious challenges that we face when trying to achieve our joint goals. First of all, the geographical factor is still complicating the implementation of joint projects. The difficulties associated with the need to overcome great distances, the high travel costs and the time difference makes it difficult to coordinate the joint work on the projects and initiatives. Secondly, there are more than fifty States in ASEM, differing from each other at the level of economic development, political structure and cultural features that affect the perception of certain projects and their capacity for implementation. Therefore, it is quite difficult to discuss projects and make decisions that equally involve and take into account interests of all ASEM member countries. However, these challenges make ASEM a unique institution and prove that despite distance and culture, linguistic, economic and structural differences we can still collaborate and together overcome any difficulties that come our way.

In the age of the 4th Industrial Revolution online technologies in education bear a great potential to create better conditions for continuous, high quality and inclusive education, thus it is important to pay special attention to online courses and the ways of possible cooperation in the field of digital education.

At the same time development of an effective recognition system and academic mobility should also be of the key priorities of the ASEM educational framework. It is important to focus on improvement of educational regulations, development of quality assurance and recognition systems as well as creation of enabling environment for foreign students studying in ASEM member states. We believe that we need to strive for making our education systems more attractive and open towards international collaboration, realisation of joint programmes and educational projects.

Overcoming these challenges requires proactive position and more action from the participants. Shared perception of education as a sphere of mutual interest allows for further unhampered evolution of cooperation between the member states, as it may serve as a platform for strengthening mutual trust, aligning interests and finding new opportunities for enhancing Asia-Europe cooperation.

In general, the success of the ASEM framework is illustrated by the progress in the field of mutual recognition of education, as well as notable contribution to the development of dialogue and expansion of ties between the peoples and countries of the two regions.

## THE VISION 2025: THE FUTURE DEVELOPMENT OF THE ASEM EDUCATION PROCESS

**Hervé Tilly, Ministry of National Education/Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, France**

The ASEM Education Process is a milestone in the relations between Asia and Europe. Since its inception in 2008, numerous conferences, workshops and projects have greatly contributed to facilitate dialogue and joint activities between European and Asian partners in the fields of formative education, higher education, Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) and lifelong learning.

The French Ministry of Education is very pleased with all the progress made within the framework of the ASEM Education Process, which facilitates and encourages dialogue, exchanges and partnerships. The ASEM Education Process has contributed to overcome geographic distances as well as cultural and educational differences between Asia and Europe, paving the way for a better reciprocal understanding between people. Such an initiative is highly commendable as it offers large and diverse opportunities for exploring and working together to develop new educational responses to the great challenges our societies have to face (inclusive education, education of girls, youth employment, knowledge society, use of new technologies, ecological transition, sustainable development, living together better, etc.). The French Ministry of Education is convinced that Asian and European countries have a lot to learn from each other on these major challenges through a fruitful dialogue and a wide range of exchanges and experimentation. With their remarkable results in some educative fields, Asiatic countries are really worth visiting and can be a source of inspiration for our teachers.

*“It offers large and diverse opportunities for exploring and working together to develop new educational responses to the great challenges our societies have to face (inclusive education, education of girls, youth employment, knowledge society, use of new technologies, ecological transition, sustainable development, living together better, etc.)”*

*“Special attention should be taken by the SOM stakeholders to enlarge existing successful bilateral projects to a multilateral level.”*

International benchmarking is viewed as a key issue in order to improve our systems of education, and as such the ASEM Education Process should continue to encourage more and more activities in this field.

After this first decade, the ASEM Education Process is going to embark on a new decade of joint actions and cooperation which should consolidate the initial steps and give opportunities for new partnerships between Asia and Europe in order to improve education, facilitate mobility and promote connectivity.

In order to meet future challenges there is an obligation on the ASEM Education Process stakeholders to propose new additional ways for working together; and to this end the French Ministry of Education would like to make three proposals:

1) The ASEMME Summit could take place in a special Week dedicated to the ASEM Education Process where a larger number of activities could be organised: Euro-Asian *Salon* for students; Euro-Asian *Salon* for public and private companies involved with education; joint forums and workshops for experts in education, vocational training, lifelong learning, and higher education. A more active participation of the civil society, including pupils, students, teachers, researchers, and representatives of NGOs, industries and services should be encouraged especially during such a Week, with their advices and proposals channelled to the Ministers meetings on a larger scale. Such a special Week would certainly bring higher visibility of the full ASEM Education Process.

2) The SOM should include the organisation of working groups on the different priorities of the ASEM Education Process, with the objective to propose more tangible and effective actions during the ASEMME Summits. Special attention should be taken by the SOM stakeholders to enlarge existing successful bilateral projects to a multilateral level, which would contribute to the development of the cooperation between Asia and Europe. Many European and Asian countries have developed strong bilateral partnerships, cooperation programmes and projects. It would be certainly valuable to capitalise on these in a larger multilateral scale in order to create a snowball effect. France has developed since many years a strong and sustainable cooperation with Asian countries in the field of technical and vocational training, as well as in the field of higher education, and would like to extend this on a multilateral scale within the ASEM Education Process. The successful cooperation that has been developed by the French universities and “Grandes Écoles” with many Asian countries and partners to train engineers and management staff could be successfully extended through the ASEM Education Process. France also looks forward to a stronger internationalisation of the technical and vocational training systems, which would reinforce and adapt them to the globalisation of employment opportunities.

3) A special focus should be made in the next years on the ASEM Network of Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), which is an initiative of great importance for Asian and European students. France, as a member of this network, would like to share its experience in this field with Asian countries, and is very pleased, as a first step, with the Memorandum of Understanding signed in November 2017 between France Université Numérique and K-MOOC of the Republic of Korea.

## VISION 2025 FOR THE ASEM EDUCATION PROCESS

Lim Yi Jia / Georgiana Phua, Ministry of Education, Singapore

### Singapore's view of the ASEM Education Process

1. The ASEM Education Process has come a long way since its inception in 2008. Against a backdrop of political and economic uncertainty, the strength and value of the ASEM Education Process, which connects 51 Asian and European countries and two regional organisations, lies in its capacity to bring together such a culturally diverse collective, to work towards the common goal of building ties between the regions of Asia and Europe through education.
2. In the current global political and economic climate, education remains of great importance to all members. Not only does education prepare individuals for life and work, it also supports social cohesion through the enabling of sustainable and inclusive development, and social mixing. The importance of developing quality education in all our countries is underscored by the goal of ensuring “inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all”<sup>17</sup> under the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals. This is similarly emphasised in the goals of the ASEM Education Process, which was further distilled into four priority areas during the third ASEM Education Ministers’ Meeting (ASEMME3) in Copenhagen in 2011.
3. At that meeting, four priority areas – Lifelong Learning and Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET); Engaging Business and Industry in Education; Quality Assurance and Recognition; and Balanced Mobility – were identified for the ASEM Education Process. These four priority areas, identified through consensus, ensured that the process would be focused on the collective key interests of all members. It also reflected the most pressing concerns facing all members – how each can overcome the challenges and ride the opportunities presented by globalisation, demographic change, skills gaps and technological advancement.

### The SkillsFuture Movement – Singapore's Educational Priorities

4. These priority areas mirror closely the areas of focus for Singapore. In particular, two of these areas – Lifelong Learning and TVET; and Engaging Business and Industry in Education – are key elements in the Singapore SkillsFuture movement, a national movement that aims to provide Singaporeans with opportunities to develop their fullest potential throughout life, regardless of their starting points. SkillsFuture is based on the belief that the skills, passion and contributions of every individual will drive Singapore's next phase of development towards an advanced economy and inclusive society.
5. The goals of SkillsFuture are supported through four approaches – helping individuals make well-informed choices in education, training and careers; developing an integrated

*“The strength and value of the ASEM Education Process [...] lies in its capacity to bring together such a culturally diverse collective, to work towards the common goal of building ties between the regions of Asia and Europe through education.”*

- high quality system of education and training that responds to constantly evolving needs; promoting employer recognition and career development based on skills and mastery; and fostering a culture that supports and celebrates lifelong learning, one where individuals are encouraged to go beyond competence to attain expertise and mastery of skills.
6. Individuals across various stages of their learning and career journeys can access SkillsFuture initiatives to take charge of their learning, develop their own skills sets and meet personal aspirations.
  7. To assist individuals to make informed choices for their learning, the Government launched SkillsFuture Advice, a community outreach initiative that complements existing advisory services and resources. SkillsFuture Advice helps Singaporeans understand the importance of career planning and skills upgrading, as well as provide information about SkillsFuture and how to use various resources and tools for career planning and skills upgrading.
  8. Having identified relevant courses for skills upgrading, individuals may tap on various schemes to access these courses. One example is the SkillsFuture Credit, which provides credits to all Singaporeans aged 25 years and above to be used for a broad range of courses supported by Government agencies. Within the first two years of its launch in 2016, this scheme had benefited over 285,000 Singaporeans.
  9. Companies, industry associations and unions also have a role to play in SkillsFuture. Industry players can help to identify skills gaps at the industry level and provide feedback that would help to shape the initiatives. As employers, they can also play a role in employee training and skills-based career progression. To support this, the Government has invested in new initiatives with industry.
  10. One such initiative is the development of Skills Frameworks for the Singapore workforce by the Government together with employers, unions, and professional bodies. These frameworks provide up-to-date, sector-specific information, career pathways, occupations, job roles, existing and emerging skills, as well as relevant education and training programmes. Employers can use the Skills Frameworks to design progressive human resource practices to recognise skills and make informed decisions on skills investment. To encourage more employers to do so, the Government gives out SkillsFuture Employer Awards in recognition of exemplary employers who have made significant efforts in investing in their employees' skills development and have developed skills-based career pathways for their employees.
  11. Training providers equip the workforce with the relevant skills required for the jobs of today and tomorrow. They need to work closely with industry partners to design and deliver quality training. Training providers can also use the Skills Frameworks to gain insights into industry trends and skills-in-demand and also innovate and contextualise their curricula design and training programmes to suit the needs of the industry and support flexible and accessible learning.

12. The Singapore Government also works with institutions of higher learning, including the Autonomous Universities, Polytechnics and the Institute of Technical Education, to deliver a wide range of initiatives under SkillsFuture. Apart from educating younger students, these institutions also support working adults in attaining skills mastery through providing a wide range of part-time programmes that meet diverse training needs. Singapore's Autonomous Universities have also set up their respective Lifelong Learning Units that provide shorter, bite-sized modular certificate courses to help Singaporeans stay job-relevant and competitive.

### Benefits of Collaboration

#### Sharing of Best Practices

13. In developing the SkillsFuture movement, Singapore had learned from the experiences of other ASEM member countries. The industry-education partnership model for SkillsFuture initiatives for example, draws on elements of the German and Swiss models of apprenticeship and dual training that involve business and industry partners in education and training, blending the academic and the practical aspects of education.

14. Informal knowledge sharing with ASEM members has allowed us to develop the capacity and capability of our own education and training system. We continue to learn from our European and Asian counterparts who are ahead of the lifelong learning curve, especially in developing a culture of lifelong learning and engaging businesses in education. The transfer of knowledge from one member country to the next is the first step of a lengthier process of adaptation and contextualisation of practices, and the access to experts with deep experiences in the implementation of these best practices is a valuable resource. The importance of internationalisation in developing our capabilities cannot be understated. We learn from the experiences of members who have tackled challenges similar to our own, and hope to be able to share our own experience with other members.

15. We believe that the ASEM Education Process plays a vital role in facilitating learning and cooperation with member countries. The development of capabilities through leveraging on the strengths of member countries is one clear benefit of the ASEM Education Process. The robust discussions and candid sharing, like the dialogue at ministerial level during the most recent ASEMME6 in Seoul, provide openings for closer multilateral and bilateral collaboration and allow us to be in touch with leading trends and good practices in education and training, and understand the pertinent concerns of other ASEM members. As friendships are cultivated with Asian and European members, partnerships may develop organically, underpinned by a foundation of trust and mutual understanding.

### ASEM-DUO

16. The ASEM Education process has been a fruitful one for Singapore in other areas as well. In addressing the priority area of Balanced Mobility, the ASEM-DUO student exchanges have drawn many European students to Asia, and vice versa.

*“Singapore had learned from the experiences of other ASEM member countries. The industry-education partnership model for SkillsFuture initiatives for example, draws on elements of the German and Swiss models of apprenticeship and dual training that involve business and industry partners in education and training.”*

*“We hope that [...] knowledge management practices can be improved to expand the databases on the ASEM website, such as a repository of best practices and contact points for learning projects.”*

17. People-to-people exchanges in education are desirable because it encourages interaction that facilitates mutual understanding, which in turn inspires us and unites our diverse communities from the ground up. Student exchanges broaden minds and provide authentic experiences of a distinct culture. Being a country small in size and population, the exposure to different cultures and environments is an important aspect of education for our students. To date, more than 220 pairs of students have benefited from the DUO-Singapore grants and DUO initiatives that help to cover travel and lodging costs.

#### **Hopes for Vision 2025**

18. As we continue working together in the ASEM Education Process, we would like to see members build on existing fora, such as workgroups and one-off events, that focus on the four priority areas. In the spirit of innovation and experimentation, workgroups could consolidate solutions and best practices and develop prototypes which could be taken up voluntarily by members to pilot and test them. This can help create a better understanding of the implementation challenges on the ground, in a range of contexts in different member countries. Through this, a range of case studies could be documented for future learning.

19. As the ASEM process is one that is informal and non-binding, outcomes may be inconsistent among members and appear far from concrete. In spite of this, the informal process lends well to prioritisation of, and selective participation in proposed initiatives by each member country. Each member country is able to work at its own, while allowing the process of collective learning to continue under this non-formal structure.

20. In addition, we hope that, assisted by the Secretariat, knowledge management practices can be improved to expand the databases on the ASEM website, such as a repository of best practices and contact points for learning projects, so that insights can be consolidated to benefit members in tangible ways.

21. Ultimately, the focus areas of the ASEM Education Process must remain relevant to all members. While the stocktaking of the progress made in each of the priority areas at every ASEMME has been useful for accountability, we should also consider an update of the priority areas when necessary, should newer challenges overtake existing priorities.

#### **Conclusion**

22. In celebrating the 10th anniversary of the ASEM Education Process, we look towards a promising future for both Asia and Europe, as we come together to tackle shared challenges in education.

## STRENGTHENING THE ROLE OF NATIONAL RECOGNITION CENTRES IN THE FUTURE <sup>18</sup>

**Cloud Bai-Yun, National Recognition Information Centre, United Kingdom**

Developing measures for good practice in qualification recognition is not, of course, the only priority for the ASEM community. The priority for the ASEM Education Process needs to be placed in a much broader context of the ASEM. This means that the national centres from European and Asian regions, as well as the network at the regional level must be actively involved in the future agenda setting. There are clearly identified common interest areas and priorities in developing enhanced quality assurance measures, engaging business and industry in education and the desire to ensure balanced mobility between Asia and Europe in recent years. But with the extensive economic globalisation and internationalisation of education, it would be timely to review holistically the evolving priorities and challenges we face, taking into consideration the developing characteristics of Asia and Europe. This is not a mean task given the scale and the diversity of the two regions.

## LOOKING AHEAD – EXPECTATIONS FOR THE NEXT DECADE OF AEP: INTERVIEW ANSWERS BY ASEM SENIOR OFFICIALS, EXPERTS AND STAKEHOLDERS

“I have two wishes for the next decade of the ASEM Education Process: Firstly, I wish that the ASEM Education Process develops into a stronger multi-stakeholder process which connects policymakers with representatives from civil society both the formal and the non-formal education sectors. It is important to integrate diverse perspectives into the discussions and facilitate necessary communication channels and interactions between the official level and the civil society. This will allow the ASEM Education Leaders to follow a more inclusive approach and provide an ASEM people-oriented perspective to the global education agenda. Secondly, we need to be open to adjust and/or expand the current four priority topics of the ASEM Education Process, and to develop new programmes and activities with innovative methods. The inclusion of a fifth priority area, namely Education and Sustainable Development, or at least its integration into the existing priority areas with well-defined objectives is crucial. The ASEM Education Process follows a rather practical education-centred approach. Given the leading role of education in the advancement of societies and economies, more emphasis needs to be placed on the importance of education for sustainable development and educational efforts that promote values and knowledge and foster attitudes and behaviours among citizens that are indispensable for creating a more sustainable future in economic, environmental, societal and cultural terms.”

**Ambassador Karsten Warnecke, Asia-Europe Foundation (AEF)**

*“I wish that the ASEM Education Process develops into a stronger multi-stakeholder process which connects policymakers with representatives from civil society both the formal and the non-formal education sectors.”*

“I consider the ASEM Education Process as a field where we have planted seeds. But we need fertilisers now to let them grow. We have already germs for quality assurance and recognition, for academic work, for mobility and work placement, for university-business

*“We should build further on all the seeds that have been planted and find ways on how we can strengthen existing initiatives but also how we can develop new initiatives based on conclusions that have already been made.”*

collaboration, etc., but they are still fragile germs or little plants. What we have to do now is giving them fertilisers and water to make them grow. We should build further on all the seeds that have been planted and find ways on how we can strengthen existing initiatives but also how we can develop new initiatives based on conclusions that have already been made, based on the experience and lessons learnt. But I am truly convinced that collaborating with people from different cultures and countries is really necessary to tackle global challenges. To understand global problems and to solve them, it does not make sense to find solutions within each country or region. We have to work and to think together to make this happen. Therefore, we should make use of the ASEM education platform and strengthen our collaboration, as education plays an important role to tackling global challenges.”

**Noël Vercruyse, formerly Ministry of Education and Training, Flemish Community, Belgium**

“The AEP has evolved and contributed to improve and internationalise the higher education systems of ASEM partners during the past decade. For the next decade, AEP must focus on innovative projects and programmes in line with the development of the 4th Industrial Revolution, while communication between ASEM partners must be strengthened through focus groups addressing each priority area of AEP. This approach will help working groups to identify suitable and productive projects and programmes for the benefit of ASEM partners. Finally, research by experts on AEP needs to be encouraged and intensified in order to increase the visibility of AEP globally.”

**Prof. Dr Aris Junaidi, Ministry of Research, Technology and Higher Education, Indonesia**

“With the new structure of the ISOM and SOM, we can maybe expect a better follow-up and feedback of the different initiatives, a better involvement of experts from the field and a better commitment from different stakeholders. In the future, I hope that the results of the different initiatives will also be better shared with all partners. Personally, I also hope that we will have more countries involved in the ASEM-DUO programme. Of course, in the coming ten years I strongly expect that we will continue the fruitful dialogue and very good cooperation that we have today between all partners, stakeholders and national representatives.”

**Benjamin Monnoye, Ministry of the Wallonia-Brussels Federation, Belgium**

*“For the second decade, AEP should focus on innovative projects and programmes in line with the development of the 4th Industrial Revolution.”*

“The AEP has evolved in various ways to improve and to internationalise the higher education systems of ASEM partners during the past decade. For the second decade, AEP should focus on innovative projects and programmes in line with the development of the 4th Industrial Revolution. A focus or expert groups for each of the AEP priority areas needs to be established in order to produce tangible outcomes through suitable and productive projects and programmes and to strengthen communication between ASEM partners for mutual benefit. Involvement of industry and students’ leaders in the group should be encouraged. Finally, research underpinning the AEP needs to be encouraged and elevated to enrich the visibility of the Process.”

**Datuk Nik Ali bin Mat Yunus, Ministry of Higher Education, Malaysia**

“First of all, I hope that the Process will continue and as I have indicated I believe that this will be dependent on the set up of a more robust yet slim and dynamic organisation.

Secondly, I hope that the challenges deriving from the 4th Industrial Revolution – global value chains, digitalisation, globalisation of markets and economies – will be addressed with steps taken to organise a global education community where national systems can inspire one another.

Thirdly, I hope that the ASEM Education Process will also make sense to those who it is all about – the children and young people in our schools and institutes of education. ASEF is doing a wonderful job in facilitating young people from across regions to meet. This agenda must be taken forward and by means of new technology a global classroom should no longer be regarded as a distant utopia but an obvious option for further breaking down borders, stereotypes and distrust between people of this small and wonderful blue planet.”

**Jørn Skovsgaard, formerly Ministry of Education, Denmark**

“We in the Philippines are interested in lifelong learning to ensure that Filipinos can continue to learn at any stage of their life enabling them to adapt and meet the changing expectations and demands of the labour market. We are also interested in quality assurance and recognition given that a sizeable number of Filipinos are working or planning to work overseas. We want benefit from quality assurance mechanisms that could facilitate mutual recognition to qualifications.

ASEM is a venue for us to learn best practices across two continents – Europe and Asia. For instance, we are currently working on a national policy on lifelong learning. The model on lifelong learning presented here in the ISOM [Jakarta 2018] by the next SOM host, Danube University Krems, was an interesting and concrete operationalisation of lifelong learning in a higher education institution. We want to have these kinds of models that we can experiment with to ascertain which are suitable to our context and can be adopted to meet our needs.

The ASEM-DUO fellowship scheme, which is being coordinated by South Korea, is one programme where previous Philippine delegates in SOM are interested in. We are interested in exchange and our researchers gaining access to Europe through scholarships both at the undergraduate and graduate level. We are also contributing in the Compendium on credit transfer and learning outcomes systems to facilitate the exchange of students and university staff. Through this, we also hope to make universities in Europe aware and gain understanding of the higher education system of the Philippines.

For me, the biggest challenge is the gap in resources and capacity between developed and developing countries. It is a major challenge in moving forward especially in balance mobility and mutual recognition. My wish is to narrow the gap by sharing best practices and fostering collaboration with the aim of enhancing institutional standards in developing countries. Higher education institutions in developing countries might not be ranked in the top 100, but the practices and standards at least should be in line with international standards.”

**Nelson G. Cainghog, Commission on Higher Education, The Philippines**

*“ASEM is a venue for us to learn best practices across two continents – Europe and Asia.”*

*“We support the programmes that help develop the students’ skills set in internationalisation perception, integrated learning, experiential education, digital literacy and other new capabilities to cope with the global disruptive change.”*

“Helping to increase the attractiveness of Asia for our European students – we have some homework here to do as Europeans. In addition to the undoubtedly extremely important technical discussion on, for example, grade conversion and recognition, we need at the same time discussions about student support services which is a commonality in Europe and which I have so far heard nothing of in ASEM.

It is important to bring in the social dimension of student exchange into the AEP. Bring student organisations in and make AEP more effective by adopting not only recommendations but also create an action plan to follow up on.”

**João Pinto, Erasmus Student Network (ESN)**

“Thailand encourages the collaboration in the ASEM education framework both intra-regionally and inter-regionally to co-develop our education efficiency, mobility quality and innovation creation. We support the programmes that help develop the students’ skills set in internationalisation perception, integrated learning, experiential education, digital literacy and other new capabilities to cope with the global disruptive change.”

**Lakhana Dockkiao, Office of the Higher Education Commission, Thailand**

## PART THREE:

# How to develop the future of AEP?

## Summary and clusters of main proposals

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Taking into account the results of the vision survey in preparation of ASEMME6, the proposals of the Seoul Declaration and the opinions and reflections presented above, the following main proposals have been identified as key areas for the future development of AEP.

### Implementing new ideas while maintaining the “tried-and-tested”

The most important message emerging from the political documents, contributions and comments presented above is unanimity in terms of the continuation of AEP. In fact, ASEM members, stakeholders and experts confirm the key characteristics of AEP, such as informality of the process, recognition and acceptance of differences between regions and countries, as well as cooperation in the spirit of mutual understanding and respect, combined with proposals for improving AEP.



### **Bringing AEP closer to the overarching ASEM process**

Taking into account the important role education plays in addressing and seeking to solve global challenges and risks (e.g. in environment, energy, employment) and wishing to strengthen Asian-European relations in all fields, closer cooperation of AEP with other policy areas of the overarching ASEM process should be given priority by all leaders involved in ASEM. It is ASEM's aspiration to build "an inclusive, sustainable and radiant future for our people and to ensure a peaceful life and shared prosperity for present and succeeding generations."<sup>19</sup> Education can contribute much to the achievement of this goal. The shape closer cooperation between AEP and ASEM takes (i.e. beyond being presented as favourable references in the Chair's Statements of Summits) has yet to be addressed in practical terms.

### **Developing people-to-people connectivity as guiding principle of AEP**

Connectivity has been a feature of the overarching ASEM process since 2014. However, since ASEMME6 in 2017, connectivity has increasingly become a guiding principle for AEP and as such has to be maintained and developed in the years to come. In the AEP context, people-to-people connectivity and the mobility of individuals play a primary role and this is not limited to higher education only. Rather, it is necessary to expand cross-regional personal contacts from different educational and societal sectors in order to strengthen institutional cooperation across education which will contribute to deepening both personal and structural relations between Asia and Europe, improve mutual understanding and help develop joint initiatives/projects in areas of common interest. ASEF's education projects, ASEM-DUO, EU's Erasmus+ programme, and numerous bilateral initiatives are an ideal basis for enhancing connectivity between both regions.

### **Meeting new global challenges by expanding both AEP's current thematic priorities as well as its scope of educational areas**

One important task for the future will be the adaptation of the current thematic priority areas of AEP, which will provide for members to be better positioned to respond to and address emerging global challenges. While there seems to be an overall consensus that AEP should continue to focus on the four existing priorities, it is felt that the 4th Industrial Revolution, the Sustainable Development Goals and related challenges in the fields of education and employability require the consideration of new topics and the expansion of the existing educational sectors in AEP. Thematic examples to be addressed are skills development and especially new technologies (ICT, MOOCs) while the expansion of existing education sectors requires for a shift towards the inclusion of other fields of lifelong learning as priority areas, in particular TVET.

### **Strengthening dialogue and cooperation**

Since the very beginning, dialogue and cooperation have been the cornerstones of ASEM and AEP. These elements should be strengthened and developed in every respect. It is proposed to increase stakeholder participation and to develop AEP "into a stronger multi-stakeholder process", for example through greater involvement of civil society. Given the fact that in the past only few, and often the same actors, were active in AEP activities, more partners and stakeholders should be motivated to participate in joint projects and initiatives such

as ASEM-DUO or the ASEM Work Placement Project (ASEM WPP) or the working group on learning outcomes and credit transfer. The exchange of good or best practices and peer learning is still considered to be the best way to learn from each other and can help create new “hybrid” ASEM education products (i.e. a mixture of Asian and European approaches), such as joint study modules and programmes, or develop national initiatives in the field of education. A genuine ASEM added value can be reached in the Asian-European relations in education if it is possible “to enlarge existing successful bilateral projects to a multilateral level” or set up new multilateral projects such as the ASEM WPP after a trial phase, which up until now has been an underutilised spin-off. In order to stimulate commitment and broader participation of Asian and European countries, successful multilateral flagship projects need to be accompanied by increased visibility and dissemination of practices that publicise the added value of participation to potential and future participants at the level of political decision-making.

### **Ensuring a more tangible cooperation and producing concrete results**

AEP has made a distinction between dialogue-oriented and result-oriented cooperation since ASEMME5 in Riga.<sup>20</sup> While dialogue-oriented cooperation works quite well both in AEP and in the overarching ASEM process, voices are increasingly calling for a more tangible cooperation and more concrete outcomes that go beyond common dialogue. At the same time, it is also underlined that “both dialogue and outcome should be emphasised” in order to not lose sight of the informal nature of AEP. To strengthen the result-oriented pillar of AEP, ASEM members, stakeholders and experts have suggested a number of common measures, such as the establishment of a cross-regional network of institutions to reinforcing academic cooperation, setting up multilateral pilot projects with a genuine ASEM character (e.g. joint Masters programmes), and the development of MOOCs. What is however often forgotten in this context, is the fact that there are numerous AEP initiatives and projects already in existence. What is actually lacking is a strategic action plan for selecting and coordinating these activities with a view to informing political objectives as well as a coherent monitoring and follow-up process of undergoing measures and initiatives. This touches on questions concerning the effectiveness of AEP which will be discussed below.

### **Improving effectiveness of AEP**

Similar to an identified demand for more tangible cooperation and concrete results, the desire for improved effectiveness has been a topic of discussion in both the ASEM process and AEP since inception. Discussions have focused in particular on aspects of dialogue-oriented cooperation. Among other things, it is proposed to improve the design and working methods of meetings such as SOMs and Ministerial Meetings. The main changes in this field (e.g. new format of (I)SOMs including a stronger focus on thematic discussions and preparing the political content of Ministerial Conferences), originally proposed by the Task Force, have been tested for the first time during the ISOM in Indonesia 2018 and will be continued in the framework of SOM in Austria in the same year. To advance the political discussion during the meetings, the coordinating role of AES was also strengthened. Ministers in this context asked AES to prepare an improved stocktaking report with the aim to provide “a detailed and standardised collection and analysis of results” for the SOMs.

Enhanced effectiveness is also required in the field of communication and cooperation. Communication tools such as websites, newsletters, etc. have to be revised and cooperation needs to be more effective for example through “intensifying and diversifying networks among stakeholders”.

Partners, stakeholders and experts have, however, not addressed the issue of optimising the political monitoring and strategic development of AEP. An overarching political strategy with clearly defined objectives and a related action plan are clearly lacking. Only one author (see Henk van Liempt in this article) proposes to develop short-term goals and long-term strategies including measurable targets to increase the effectiveness of AEP, formulate a clear vision for 2025 with defined indicators, and measure progress towards achieving the objectives that have been agreed upon. The fact that such a strategy with measurable objectives and progress indicators has not been put on the political agenda of AEP could be explained by a potential concern on the part of some members that this could impose obligations on individual ASEM members which are not compatible with the current informal and non-binding process. Some members in Europe particularly may remember the “spill-over” process of what started as an informal Bologna Process but which later resulted in substantial higher education reforms in most Bologna member countries.

#### **Making AEP and its success stories more visible**

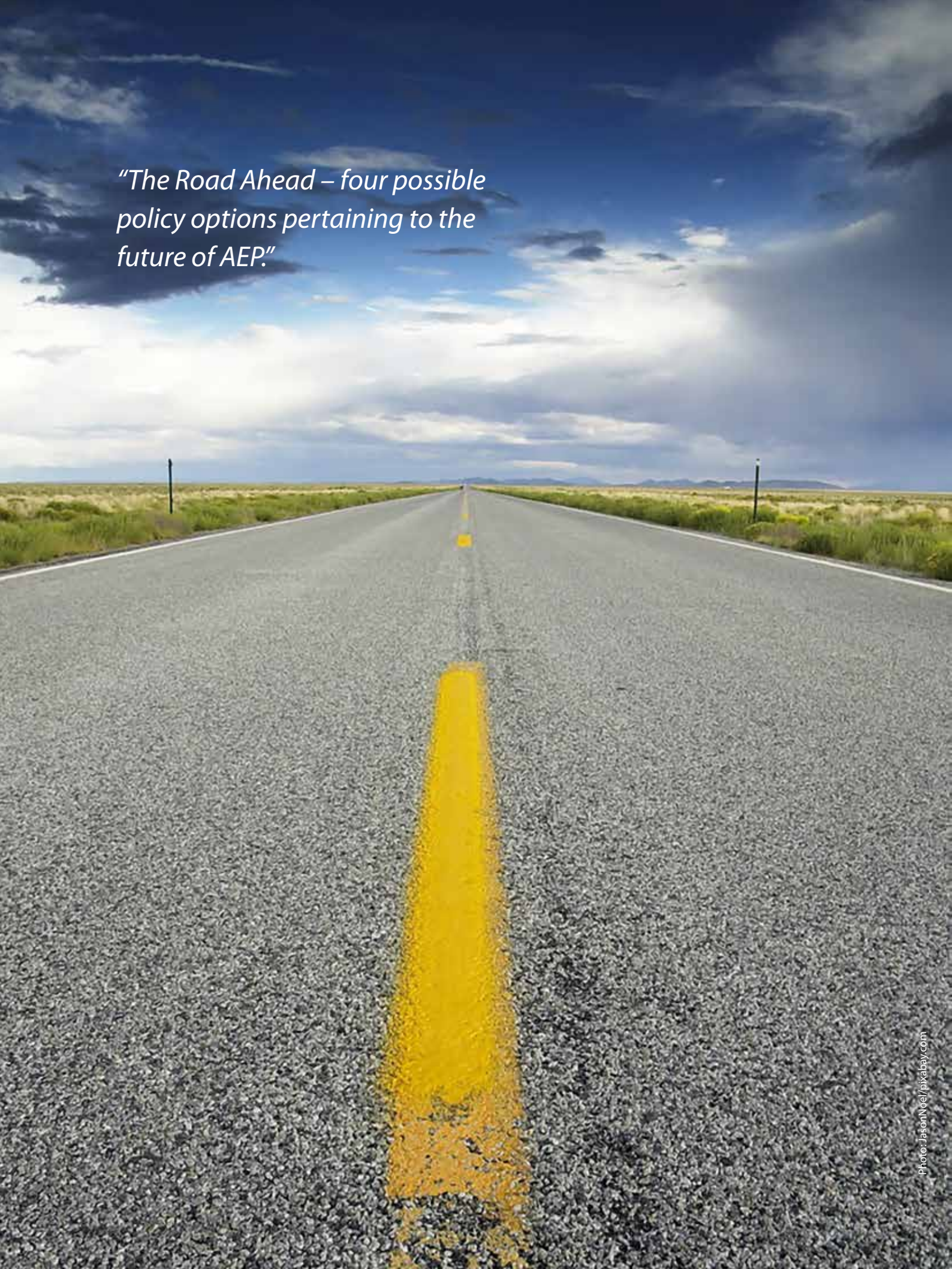
To demonstrate and legitimate the continued relevance and benefits of AEP to society and to motivate more members and stakeholders to actively participate in AEP initiatives, it is necessary to disseminate examples of best practice and success stories of Asia-Europe collaboration in ASEM and to make AEP more visible. Besides the already existing yearly ASEM Day on political level, a special biennial ASEM Week could take place in connection with the ASEM Ministerial Conference with the aim to present AEP related activities and their results to a wider public and to discuss Asia-Europe educational issues with experts and other representatives of civil society. Some feel that intensified research on AEP could help to make the process more visible, not least by spreading it to international research collaboration communities.

In the overview above, we have sought to identify central elements of opinions and reflections of ASEM members, stakeholders and experts on the future development of AEP.<sup>21</sup> The results give a snapshot of ASEM education perceptions concerning the need to develop certain areas of AEP and to adapt AEP as a whole.

In the chapter entitled “ASEM Education Process (AEP) – the road ahead”, we will conclude with lessons learned and additional personal reflections on the future development of AEP which hopefully can provide for further discussion between members of the ASEM (education) community.

- <sup>1</sup> Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) (2016). *A Statistical portrait*. European Union. Luxembourg (in particular pp. 12, 16 and 18).
- <sup>2</sup> Cf. Mogherini, Federica (2015). Foreword. In: Gaens, Bart (ed.). *The future of Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM). Looking ahead into ASEM's third decade*. European Union. The Finnish Institute of International Affairs. Brussels, p. 9.
- <sup>3</sup> The deficiency of the forum was already highlighted on the occasion of ASEM's tenth anniversary by the Japan Center for International Exchange and the University of Helsinki Network for European Studies (eds.) (2006). *ASEM in its Tenth Year – Looking Back, Looking Forward. An Evaluation of ASEM in its First Decade and Exploration of its Future Possibilities*. Helsinki.
- <sup>4</sup> Eleventh Asia-Europe Meeting. (ASEM11) (2016). *Ulaanbaatar Declaration. 20 Years of ASEM: Partnership for the Future through Connectivity*. Ulaanbaatar. See also Turner, William (2016). *Connectivity, Youth and the Future of ASEM!* In: *The Diplomat* (20 July 2016).
- <sup>5</sup> Asia-Europe Cooperation Framework (2000). 23 October 2000. Seoul. Available from: [www.aseminfoboard.org](http://www.aseminfoboard.org) [Accessed: May 2018].
- <sup>6</sup> Ministry of Education of the Republic of Korea (2016). The 1st Senior Officials' Meeting (SOM1) for the 6th ASEM Education Ministers' Meeting (ASEMME6). Survey result. In: Sixth ASEM Education Ministers' Meeting (ASEMME6) (2017). *From Riga to Seoul. Stocktaking Report*. Compiled by the ASEM Education Secretariat and the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Korea in consultation with ASEM partners and stakeholders. Seoul. Annex 3, pp. 1-20.
- <sup>7</sup> Ibidem, Annex 5. Para 7, p. 2.
- <sup>8</sup> Ibidem.
- <sup>9</sup> Ibidem.
- <sup>10</sup> Ibidem.
- <sup>11</sup> Ibidem, p. 10.
- <sup>12</sup> The Sixth ASEM Education Ministers' Meeting (ASEMME 6) (2017). *Collaboration for the Next Decade: From Common Perspectives to Effective Fulfillment. Seoul Declaration*. Seoul, p. 2.
- <sup>13</sup> Ibidem, p. 4.
- <sup>14</sup> Tenth Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM10) (2014). *Responsible Partnership for Sustainable Growth and Security. Final Chair Statement*. Milan, p. 2. For a holistic concept of peoples-to-peoples (P2P) connectivity see also Rüländ, Jürgen (2016). Peoples-to-Peoples Connectivity in the Asia-Europe Meeting. "By the people" instead "for the people". In: Prakash, Anita (ed.). *Asia-Europe Connectivity 2025*. Jakarta, pp.145-158. William Turner distinguishes between economic connectivity, for example trade facilitation, infrastructure connectivity (rail, road, etc.) and soft connectivity (people-to-people [here and in the Seoul Declaration without "s" vs Rüländ] exchanges and interactions taking place outside of or alongside official channels). See Turner, William (2016). *Connectivity, Youth and the Future of ASEM*. In: *The Diplomat* (20 July 2016).
- <sup>15</sup> Gaens, Bart (2015). ASEM in the Wake of the Milan Summit. In: Hofmeister, Wilhelm and Rueppel, Patrick (eds.). *The future of Asia-Europe Cooperation. EU-Asia Dialogue. Shaping a Common Future for Europe and Asia – Sharing Policy Innovation and Best Practices in Addressing Common Challenges*. Konrad Adenauer Stiftung and European Union. Singapore, p. 11.
- <sup>16</sup> In the title of their contributions, some authors make explicit reference to the concept of vision 2025 which was introduced on the occasion of ASEM's twentieth birthday in the context of the Ulaanbaatar ASEM Summit (2016) with a view to discuss the development of the ASEM process in the next decade.
- <sup>17</sup> Cf. <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/education> [Accessed: June 2018].
- <sup>18</sup> For the first part of Cloud Bai-Yun's contribution see article "Achievements and shortcomings of the ASEM Education Process".
- <sup>19</sup> Eleventh Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM11) (2016). *Ulaanbaatar Declaration. 20 Years of ASEM: Partnership for the Future through Connectivity*. Ulaanbaatar, p. 3.
- <sup>20</sup> Fifth ASEM Education Ministers' Meeting (ASEMME5) (2015). *ASEM Education Collaboration for Results. Conclusions by the Chair*. Riga, p. 2.
- <sup>21</sup> We regret that not all countries we invited to share their views on the future of AEP did accept our offer. We hope, however, that our findings still resonate with the majority of ASEM members and stakeholders.

*“The Road Ahead – four possible policy options pertaining to the future of AEP.”*



# ASEM Education Process (AEP) – the road ahead

Alexandra Angress/Siegbert Wuttig

*In the previous chapter and in the article entitled “Observations on optimising and building the ASEM Education Process (AEP) in the future” recurring themes from the ASEM document review have been outlined along with a number of key proposals that both members and stakeholders consider important for the future development of AEP. On the basis of this, we present four possible policy options pertaining to the future of AEP.*

## **Option 1: Ending AEP**

After ten years of existence, AEP terminates due to marginal gains or a lack of interest or because AEP has completed its mission.

## **Option 2: Continuing AEP in its *status quo* with moderate modifications**

AEP continues in its current form with some improvements, for example, in the format of meetings, the reporting and the visibility of the Education Process.

## **Option 3: Making AEP fit for the future by introducing a wide range of modifications**

In order to further enhance dialogue and cooperation between Asia and Europe, to make AEP more effective and output-oriented, and to adapt AEP to future needs (cf. political objectives/fields of action in Table 1), AEP continues in its current form but with a wide range of modifications and new elements, including enhanced political management of AEP.

## **Option 4: Turning AEP into a clear top-down strategic governance process**

AEP continues with substantial changes regarding strategic governance and coordination of AEP, as well as enhancing the effectiveness of dialogue and cooperation, and developing clear top-down processes.

*“The findings rather stress the political and practical importance members and stakeholders attach to AEP, underlining their future willingness and commitment to (further) maintain and harness dialogue and cooperation as key principles of AEP.”*

A review of ASEM documents and stakeholder statements evidences a clear message that there is no appetite or consent for Option 1 to end AEP.<sup>1</sup> On the contrary, the findings rather stress the political and practical importance members and stakeholders attach to AEP, underlining their future willingness and commitment to (further) maintain and harness

dialogue and cooperation as key principles of AEP. There is also no support for Option 4 to continue AEP with substantial changes regarding strategic governance and coordination of AEP. This option would imply a radical change of AEP's current approach (with numerous bottom-up initiatives) into a clear top-down system including elements such as common annual or biennial work programmes with measurable targets and benchmarks, national implementation reports and a catalogue of sanctions in cases of non-compliance.

Option 2 describes the current form of AEP including some changes as adopted by the Ministers during ASEMME6 in Seoul and documented in the Chair's Conclusions and Seoul Declaration. This option is currently the most realistic one, as it is supported by the vast majority of ASEM members and stakeholders from Asia and Europe. It also reflects the politically agreed *status quo* of AEP and expresses that ASEM members and stakeholders do not only wish to continue AEP but also want to moderately enhance the Process so that AEP is better prepared to address future global challenges as well as the needs of people. Core elements of this option are dialogue and cooperation on equal footing, mutual understanding and respect, bottom-up initiatives on a voluntary basis, informality and consensus.

Let us now take a closer look at Option 3, which we call the seminal option and which could serve as source of inspiration for the debate of ASEM members and stakeholders on the future development of AEP. Option 3 continues AEP in its current form with a wider range of modifications and contains all elements of Option 2 but goes one step further, beyond the *status quo* of AEP, by suggesting a more comprehensive reform of AEP while respecting fundamental ASEM principles (as outlined under Option 2). Although Option 3 has much in common with Option 2, e.g. improving format of meetings and reporting to make AEP more effective, it also includes some characteristics of Option 4. The latter pertain to top-down policy elements in particular such as governance and strategic planning of AEP in this sense, while respecting the basic nature of the Process. Option 3 is open to introducing a number of new elements in AEP without "revolutionary" changes.

The following table elaborates Option 3 and provides an overview of identified political objectives/fields of action, potential activities and actors to further develop AEP. The political objectives/fields of action outlined below reflect the results of the document analysis and feedback from ASEM members and stakeholders.<sup>2</sup> The second column contains potential activities proposed by ASEM members and stakeholders<sup>3</sup> and complemented by the editors. The third column lists the actors responsible for endorsing or implementing the proposed activities.

Table 1. Option 3 – Elements for a modified ASEM Education Process

Political Objectives – Fields of Action	Potential Activities	Actors
<b>Bringing AEP closer to the overarching ASEM process</b>	(1) Present short report of previous Ministerial Meeting by ASEMME host in ASEM Summit	ASEM Leaders <sup>4</sup> (decision); ASEMME host (report)
	(2) enable participation of AES in ASEM Summit (incl. presentation of AEP initiatives for Summit participants at information booth)	ASEM Leaders (decision); AES (participation; information booth)
	(3) identify fields of common interest and initiate cooperation between different ASEM pillars (on a policy level: cooperation between Ministries of Education with other Ministries, e.g. with Ministries of Labour to combat unemployment; or with Ministries of Foreign Affairs on common challenges in the area of immigration and integration; or with Ministries of Trade on international trade related matters)	Senior Officials (preparation); Ministers (thematic discussion in Ministerial Meetings); ASEM Leaders (policy conclusions)
	(4) organise joint initiatives for the ASEM Day on 1 March between the three pillars (e.g. expert conference based on a joint call for proposal on interdisciplinary subjects such as “Education, training and retraining in a digitalised world of work -concepts of ASEM countries”)	Ministries (political aspects); stakeholders (implementation)
<b>Developing people-to-people connectivity as guiding principle of AEP by boosting academic and non-academic short-term and long-term mobility</b>	Use and extend existing exchange and cooperation programmes: e.g.	ASEMME (policy); education institutions (development/implementation); EU/Ministries (funding)
	(5) motivate more countries and individuals to take part in bilateral and multilateral mobility programmes such as ASEM-DUO; ASEM Work Placement Programme; AEI and ASEF activities; international mobility of Erasmus+ <sup>5</sup>	
	(6) inform education institutions in ASEM countries about opportunities for mobility	EU; National Agencies; AES; ASEF, AEI, ASEM-DUO (information)
<b>Expanding AEP’s current thematic priorities and its scope of educational areas in order to meet new global challenges (e.g. 4th Industrial Revolution; Sustainable Development Goals)</b>	(7) expand existing regional programmes to Asia-Europe schemes (e.g. combine ASEAN International Mobility for Students programme AIMS with Erasmus+ mobility)	Ministries/EU (policy; funding); education institutions (implementation)
	(8) Complement the four AEP priorities with new thematic fields (e.g. skills development for better employment, ICT, MOOCs) and support related projects (e.g. ASEM Network of MOOCs)	Senior Officials, Ministers (policy); stakeholders/education institutions (implementation)
<b>Strengthening, widening and deepening dialogue and cooperation</b>	(9) put stronger focus on TVET and LLL (e.g. set up an ASEM expert group on skills needs and labour market issues) and identify 1-2 multilateral pilot projects that aim at increasing the attractiveness and raise profile of TVET in the participating countries (e.g. in the fields of tourism, hotel and catering industry, health care, or ICT)	Senior Officials, Ministers (policy); TVET/LLL stakeholders (development/implementation)
	(10) Intensify dialogue and cooperation with international forums (e.g. Bologna Policy Forum <sup>6</sup> , APAIE, EAIE, NAFSA)	Ministers (policy); AES (participation in policy events; presentation of AEP initiatives in information booth)
	(11) widen and deepen dialogue and cooperation between Asian and European Quality Assurance Agencies and Recognition Centres (e.g. develop a common ASEM framework for academic recognition based on lessons learned in the SHARE initiative and the Bridging Recognition Declaration)	SHARE, AQAN, ENQA, etc. NARICs, CBQAN
	(12) improve communication and networking among ASEM members and stakeholders between Ministerial Meetings by providing a closed ASEM information online forum	AES (implementation)
	(13) motivate and convince more ASEM members to participate in agreed multilateral ASEM initiatives (e.g. ASEM Joint Curriculum Project)	Ministers (policy); Senior Officials (implementation); AES (coordination)

Political Objectives – Fields of Action	Potential Activities	Actors
	(14) widen and deepen stakeholder participation in AEP (e.g. by including selected external ASEM experts in the political dialogue; closer follow-up of ARC recommendations; stronger involvement of students/student organisations in ASEM meetings)	Senior Officials (preparation); Ministers (policy); AES (coordination)
	(15) intensify peer learning and exchange of examples of good/best practice (e.g. organise open discussion forums in connection with ASEM Summits and ASEMME; present success story projects in SOMs and ASEMME)	Senior Officials (political aspects); host country; AES (organisation)
	(16) develop “hybrid” joint ASEM study modules or programmes (e.g. in Global Citizenship Education)	Ministries/EU (funding); higher education institutions (development/implementation)
	(17) build interregional learning partnerships for capacity building at Ministerial level	Ministries (development; implementation)
	(18) initiate thematic networks/ strategic partnerships between Centres of European Studies and Centres of Asian Studies, including research and exchange of staff and students	Ministries/EU (funding) Centres (development/ implementation)
	(19) establish an ASEM University building on existing structures	ASEM Leaders/Ministries/EU (policy/funding); universities (development/implementation)
	(20) create synergies between the AEP priorities (e.g. use MOOCs for intercultural and language predeparture training of mobile students for studies or work placements)	Ministries/EU (funding); higher education institutions (development/implementation)
	(21) enlarge successful bilateral projects to a multilateral level (e.g. develop double degree to multiple/joint degree Master programmes; expand bilateral training programmes for engineers and management staff to multilateral ASEM projects)	Ministries/EU (funding); higher education institutions (development/implementation)
	(22) establish cross-regional networks and strategic partnerships of educational institutions	Ministries/EU (funding); educational institutions (development/implementation)
	(23) develop more genuine multilateral ASEM projects (e.g. Asia-Europe summer schools offering inter-cultural communication and training)	Ministries/EU (funding); Asia-Europe Institute, ASEF, educational institutions (development/implementation)
<b>Improving effectiveness of AEP – towards more action and interaction</b>	(24) Develop a vision 2025 with clearly defined objectives/targets regarding policy and result-oriented pillar (e.g. further elaborate the Seoul Declaration and define some measurable targets such as “By 2025, we will have implemented 10 new multilateral ASEM mobility projects and have increased the number of participating individuals in ASEM-DUO/AEI/ASEM WPP by 25%”)	Senior Officials (preparation); Ministers (policy/adoption)
	(25) prepare and adopt a strategic AEP action plan	Senior Officials/AES (preparation); Ministers (adoption)
	(26) introduce monitoring and follow-up of initiatives	Senior Officials (preparation); Ministers (adoption); AES (implementation)
	(27) build and address collectively clusters of topics (e.g. boosting mobility, obstacles to mobility, recognition) and define realistic milestones to achieve the policy objectives/targets step by step	Senior Officials (preparation); Ministers (policy/adoption)

Political Objectives – Fields of Action	Potential Activities	Actors
	(28) invite ASEM members to prepare country reports including national educational priorities and their proposals for participation in initiatives related to the identified clusters of topics	Ministers (policy); AES/Ministries (implementation)
	(29) consistently implement the new meeting format for (I)SOMs as adopted in Seoul 2017	AES; host countries of (I)SOMs (coordination)
	(30) prepare Draft Chair’s Conclusions already for ISOM	Host of ASEMME; Senior Officials; AES (coordination)
	(31) develop the ASEMME format (e.g. introduce more informal elements such as retreat sessions) to allow more room for political discussions	Host of ASEMME (coordination); Senior Officials; AES
	(32) strengthen the coordination role of AES (e.g. regarding the preparation of an action plan)	Senior Officials (preparation); ASEMME (policy/adoption)
	(33) establish a permanent Secretariat (with a coordinating unit each in Asia and in Europe) or provide funds for permanent staff members in a rotating secretariat	ASEMME (policy); members (funding)
	(34) ensure monitoring and follow-up of ASEM objectives and initiatives (e.g. interim report to ISOM and final report to ASEMME on progress in dialogue and result-oriented pillar of AEP)	AES (coordination/monitoring)
<b>Making AEP and its success stories more visible</b>	(35) Develop a dissemination strategy	Senior Officials (policy); AES (proposal)
	(36) develop an AEP label for successful initiatives (e.g. a special AEP logo for exchange and cooperation projects mentioned in the Stocktaking Report)	Senior Officials (policy); AES (proposal)
	(37) provide examples of good practice online on AEP website	AES
	(38) disseminate examples of good practice and ASEM success stories to a wider public with support of students and professors from Asia and Europe (e.g. “ASEM Student Ambassadors” and Jean Monnet Chairs) during the ASEM Day on 1 March and during an ASEM Week/ASEM education fair in connection with ASEMME)	Ministries; AES; host of ASEMME; EU; stakeholders
	(39) during ASEMME, Ministers award an ASEM prize to success story projects in each AEP priority and disseminate information through press releases	Senior Officials (selection); AES (organisation/ dissemination); Ministers (award ceremony)
	(40) stimulate research about AEP priority themes and disseminate results (e.g. impact of cross-regional study/training abroad on employability of students in ASEM countries)	Ministries (political aspects); research institutes (implementation); AES (dissemination)

The activities presented in the above table can be viewed as a catalogue of elements proposed by ASEM members, stakeholders and the editors (bottom-up approach) serving to develop a clearer vision for the future of the ASEM Education Process including greater vitality (e.g. through improved effectiveness and increased participation of stakeholders and civil society) and better visibility of AEP dialogue and cooperation. In the long-term, these elements will also contribute to creating a “breathing” ASEM Education Area with increased and enhanced student and staff exchange, improved recognition of study achievements, closer cooperation of academia and the world of work, and a stronger focus on lifelong learning and TVET as intended by ASEM Education Ministers during ASEMME3 in 2011<sup>7</sup> and confirmed during ASEMME4 in 2013<sup>8</sup>.

Given the impressive number of now 53 members, the existing discrepancies between educational systems in Asia and Europe and different national political interests, it is, however, not very likely that all ASEM partners will have the same priorities or will be equally willing to implement the same reform elements at the same time. Considering the different interests and political realities of ASEM members, it may be difficult to reach agreement, in particular in the area of educational policy. While with regard to policy level (e.g. introduction of a common action plan) an overall consensus of all ASEM members is needed, practical initiatives and projects can be carried out in “variable geometry” according to the interests and needs of the participating members and stakeholders.

In order to advance AEP and develop a vision 2025 for the Education Process, we propose that ASEM members, as a next step at the level of policy decision-making, define a couple of clear targets and agree which activities – and at what time – they are willing and ready to include and support with regard to the six identified political objectives/fields of action listed in the table above. Some activities could be implemented immediately or in different phases while others could be implemented in the medium or long term. The defined targets, the agreed activities and a road map for implementation provide the main ingredients of a strategic AEP action plan to be prepared by Senior Officials, to be adopted by Ministers and to be followed up by AES.

We are aware that – depending on which objectives, targets and activities will be given priority at political level – this will have an impact on the responsibility and workload for Senior Officials and, in particular, for AES. This is why decisions about immediate reforms should be carefully reflected. In the medium term, establishing a permanent secretariat or appointing permanent staff members to work in a rotating secretariat (see proposed activity 33) would play a strong supporting role in successfully implementing elements to advance the Education Process.

The new procedural approach (top-down component) would allow to go far beyond the current listing of dialogue- and result-oriented bottom-up AEP initiatives in the Annex of the Chair’s Conclusions of ASEMME in relation to the four AEP thematic priorities, their date, venue and organisers.<sup>9</sup> In contrast, the strategic AEP action plan would focus on political objectives/fields of action, targets and activities identified and agreed by members and stakeholders to advance the AEP. The action plan could take the following form (demonstrated by way of an example):

Political objective/ field of action	Defined Target	To be achieved by (date)	Activity	Actors	Follow-up
<b>Develop people-to-people connectivity/boost mobility</b>	Increase number of participating students in ASEM-DUO by 25%	ASEMME 2025	identify and disseminate ASEM-DUO success-stories	ASEM-DUO Secretariat; AES	Yearly progress report by ASEM-DUO Secretariat to AES (results to SOM)
			motivate more ASEM members to participate in ASEM-DUO	ASEM-DUO Secretariat; ASEM members already participating in the programme	
			explore with European partners possibilities to use Erasmus+ (and its successor) for co-funding	ASEM-DUO Secretariat; Erasmus+ National Agencies; EU	
			inform more universities and students about opportunities	ASEM-DUO Secretariat; ASEM members and stakeholders	
<b>Strengthening, widening and deepening dialogue and cooperation</b>	Intensify dialogue and cooperation with Bologna Policy Forum by:	2020			
	increasing the number of participating Asian Ministries		inform and motivate Asian ASEM Education Ministries	AES (coordination); Senior Officials; Bologna Secretariat; BFUG	AES (monitoring)
	presenting AEP during Ministerial Conference		discuss with SOM and BFUG	AES (coordination); Bologna Secretariat; Senior Officials; BFUG	AES (monitoring)
	organising an AEP/ Bologna workshop during the Conference		discuss/organise with Bologna Secretariat/ BFUG	AES (coordination); Bologna Secretariat; Senior Officials; BFUG	AES (monitoring/ organisation)
	presenting AEP success stories in a conference booth		discuss/organise with Bologna Secretariat/ BFUG	AES (coordination); Bologna Secretariat; BFUG	AES (monitoring/ organisation)

The strategic action plan can be an Annex to the Chair's Conclusions. AES would inform Senior Officials on a yearly basis as to the achievement of political objectives and targets and include a progress report in the Stocktaking Report for the Ministerial Meeting.

We believe that this approach, which combines bottom-up activities/initiatives and top-down governance elements with the aim to develop AEP and its political management, could advance the current *status quo* of AEP and keep the momentum of the Process going while, first and foremost, enhancing AEP's capacity to help solving global challenges and to better demonstrate the added value and the benefits of AEP for people in Asia and Europe.

The Seoul Declaration (2017) is a first important step leading "to the next chapter of the ASEM Education Process". However, further political steps will have to be taken to keep AEP dynamic, timely and relevant. And the prospects are good as there is political backing from ASEM Leaders:

*“Education is and remains key to provide a fundament that allows individuals and societies alike to develop, progress and thrive peacefully and collaboratively.”*

with the development of the Ulaanbaatar Declaration (2016), the ASEM Heads of State or Government have expressed their willingness “to energize ASEM, to promote further connectivity, mutually beneficial partnership and cooperation between Asia and Europe with a view to building an inclusive, sustainable and radiant future for our people and to ensure a peaceful life and shared prosperity for present and succeeding generations”. This very positive policy orientation and the great dedication and strong commitment of ASEM members, ASEM Education Secretariat and stakeholders give reasonable grounds for believing that the moment is right: ASEM Education Process will be even more successful in the next decade and advance Asia-Europe educational relations, provided that the ASEM community remains prepared to constantly meet new challenges and adapt AEP accordingly by introducing new components, for example, as proposed above. If this is achieved, and we strongly believe that this can be done, AEP will be an even more powerful driver for shaping the ASEM Education Area in the years ahead.

Education is and remains key to provide a fundament that allows individuals and societies alike to develop, progress and thrive peacefully and collaboratively. Elements identified in this chapter that form part of a vision of AEP with educational objectives to be translated into corresponding policies are the strengthened investment in people-to-people contacts, an enhanced widened and deepened dialogue and cooperation including a number of new initiatives as well as improved working methods. This basis as well as the openness and readiness to learn from each other will allow the ASEM community to work closer and more effectively together, to develop and progress further in identified fields of common interest and in the convergence of different educational systems with the aim to (further) enhance personal and institutional collaboration in education between Asia and Europe – for the benefit of almost two-thirds of the world’s population and beyond.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. articles “Achievements and Shortcomings of the ASEM Education Process – Views and Reflections” and “The ASEM Education Process: Vision 2025 – Opinions and Reflections”.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. article “The ASEM Education Process: Vision 2025 – Opinions and Reflections”.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. articles by editors and authors in this publication, particularly the chapters on the vision of AEP.

<sup>4</sup> Heads of State or Government.

<sup>5</sup> The current Erasmus+ programme, which ends in 2020, offers a broad spectrum of opportunities for participation of higher education institutions from ASEM member countries such as international credit mobility, Erasmus Mundus joint Master degree mobility, capacity building projects and Jean Monnet chairs and modules. On 30 May 2018, the European Commission published the proposal for the next generation of Erasmus (2021-2027). In this document, the Commission expressed its intention to “intensify international mobility and cooperation” with countries outside the EU.

<sup>6</sup> Bologna Policy Forums take place in connection with the Bologna Ministerial Conferences and offer European Ministers of Education the opportunity to meet their colleagues from other parts of the world. During the last Bologna Ministerial Conference in Paris 2018, the European Ministers agreed “to enter into a global policy dialogue to improve regular cooperation with other regions and international organisations”. The Statement of the Fifth Bologna Policy Forum in Paris explicitly mentioned the ASEM process as “an example of a successful transnational cooperation initiative between Asia and Europe” (cf. <http://www.ehea2018.paris/Data/ElFinder/s2/Communique/BPFStatement-with-Annex.pdf>). These are good prospects for a closer cooperation between the Bologna Process and the ASEM Education Process in the future.

<sup>7</sup> Third ASEM Education Ministers’ Meeting (ASEMME3) (2011). *Conclusions by the Chair – Shaping an ASEM Education Area*. Copenhagen, pp. 1-2.

<sup>8</sup> Fourth ASEM Education Ministers’ Meeting (ASEMME4) (2013). *Conclusions by the Chair – Strategizing ASEM Education Collaboration*. Kuala Lumpur, p. 1.

<sup>9</sup> Sixth ASEM Education Ministers Meeting (ASEMME6) (2017). *Collaboration for the Next Decade: From Common Perspectives to Effective Fulfilment. Conclusions by the Chair*. Seoul, pp. 13-17.

## Notes on contributors

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**Martin Schifferings** is Head of Section "Erasmus + Key Action 3: Policy Support" within the National Agency for EU-Higher Education Cooperation at the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD). On behalf of the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research, he is in charge of the coordination of the German participation in the ASEM Education Process. Martin Schifferings and his DAAD team also support university policymakers and universities in the implementation of European higher education reforms in Germany and the further development of the European Higher Education Area.

**Nina Scholle-Pollmann** is currently Head of Section "DAAD Network" at the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) in Bonn, Germany. She looks back to many years of experience in various positions at the DAAD among others as Deputy Director of the first ASEM Education Secretariat (2009 - 2013) as well as Head of the TEMPUS, EU-Third Country Cooperation and ERASMUS Mundus unit and Head of Section "Erasmus + Key Action 3: Policy Support".

**Julia Schwerbrock** is a PhD candidate and a scholarship holder within the Doctoral Programme of the Alliance for Research on East Asia Ruhr, Germany. Previously, she worked as a research assistant at the Department for International Political Economy of East Asia of Ruhr University Bochum. Julia Schwerbrock holds an M.A. degree in East Asian Politics from Ruhr University Bochum as well as a B.A. degree in Chinese Studies and Sociology from the University of Hamburg.

**Jørn Skovsgaard** was Senior Adviser in the Danish Ministry of Education and joined the ASEM work on education as chairman for a thematic working group on lifelong learning running from 2001 to 2005. Since then, he supported the formation of the ASEM Education Process and ensured Denmark's active participation in the ASEM Education Ministers' Meetings. Jørn Skovsgaard was the key coordinator of the Danish chairmanship of ASEMME3 in Copenhagen during 2011. He retired from the Ministry in June 2018.

**Magalie Soenen** works as Policy Adviser in higher education at the Flemish Ministry of Education and Training. She is the official representative of the Flemish Community of Belgium within the Bologna and ASEM process. Among a broad range of themes, her main specialisation lies in the field of internationalisation and mobility strategies. Magalie Soenen is the chair of the ASEM expert group on Interregional Credit Transfer Mechanisms and Learning Outcomes Systems as well as the co-chair of the working group on the ASEM Work Placement Programme.

Dr **Chantavit Sujatanond** is Director of the Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organisation (SEAMEO) Regional Centre for Higher Education and Development (RIHED). The Organisation, established in 1965 as a regional inter-governmental organisation among governments of Southeast Asian countries, has the mandates to promote regional cooperation in education, science and culture in the region. Chantavit Sujatanond attended ASEM Senior Officials' Meetings, Ministerial Meetings, Rectors' Conferences and contributed to various ASEM working groups and the EU-funded project SHARE.

Dr **Keuk-Je Sung** is a professor at Kyung Hee University in Korea. He served as an adviser to the Minister of Communications, an economist at the President Office and also as a diplomat and chief trade negotiator for WTO services negotiations. He is the Director General of the Secretariat for ASEM-DUO Fellowship Programme since its inception.

**Hervé Tilly** is Head (ad interim) of the European and International Department of the Ministry of National Education and the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation. He is a former teacher of history and alumnus of the École Nationale d'Administration (ENA). Hervé Tilly also worked for some time at the Directorate General for Research of the European Commission.

**Reka Tozsa** is responsible for the coordination of ASEF's Education Policy Programme. Her main responsibility is to design and implement dialogue and capacity building projects for education institution managers, policymakers and student leaders to exchange at an Asia-Europe level. Prior to joining ASEF, Reka Tozsa worked as the Head of International Office at the National University of Public Service in Hungary. Previously, she had been working as a chief of cabinet for the State Secretary for Higher Education and Science Policy in Hungary; and as a civil servant at the National Institution of Public Administration in Hungary.

**David Urban** is appointed by the Directorate-General for Non-Compulsory Education and Scientific Research of the Ministry of the Wallonia-Brussels Federation and is currently working for the ASEM Education Secretariat. Prior to his current position, he worked as a research assistant on higher education policies at the Université Catholique de Louvain.

**Anita Vahere-Abražune** has been working at the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Latvia since 2003 and is currently Deputy Director of EU and International Cooperation Affairs Department of Policy Initiatives and Development. One of her tasks is to coordinate Latvia's participation in the ASEM Education Process. Between 2013 and 2015, during Latvia's Presidency of the Council of the EU, she was designated as Presidency coordinator at the Ministry; and, among other events, was responsible for preparing ASEMM5 in Riga during 2015.

**Noël Vercauteren** was actively involved in the ASEM Education Process from the very beginning as policy adviser in higher education at the Flemish Ministry of Education and Training before he retired in 2016. He was also senior project leader for the internationalisation of higher education and special adviser for the Bologna Process and member of the Bologna Follow-up Group, representing the Flemish Community of Belgium. He initiated different ASEM activities and was the driving force to get the Minister's commitment for taking up the ASEM Education Secretariat.

Ambassador **Karsten Warnecke** is the seventh Executive Director of the Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF). He joined ASEF as the sixth Deputy Executive Director in August 2012. Before joining ASEF, he dealt mainly with Germany's and the EU's involvement in ASEAN and in the ASEM process as part of his portfolio as Counsellor at the German Federal Foreign Office in Berlin, where he served as Deputy Head of Division for Regional Organisations and Cooperation in Asia-Pacific.

**Marc Wilde** is Senior Expert at the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) and is in charge of the overall coordination of capacity development programmes in the field of higher education management for developing countries. In the SHARE Project he serves as Lead Expert on Quality Assurance and coordinates DAAD-led activities related to the ASEAN Quality Assurance Framework in cooperation with European partners and ASEAN counterparts.

**Enda Wulandari** is currently Education and Culture Attaché at the Indonesian Embassy in Singapore. Between 2013 and 2017, she was Deputy Director of the ASEM Education Secretariat at the Ministry of Education and Culture in Jakarta, Indonesia.

Dr **Siegbert Wuttig** was Director of the National Agency for EU higher education cooperation at the DAAD and Director of the first international ASEM Education Secretariat (2009 – 2013) before he retired in 2014 and started to work as Independent Higher Education Expert. He took part in many international working groups, organised numerous international, national and regional conferences on internationalisation and cross-border mobility and contributed to the political discussions on EU education programmes, the European Higher Education Area and ASEM educational topics.

**Datuk Nik Ali bin Mat Yunus** currently serves as Deputy Secretary General (Development) at the Ministry of Higher Education in Malaysia. Under his tenure, his vision is to improve excellence achievement of higher education in Malaysia, especially in International Relations affairs. Prior to his current position, he held several other posts at various Ministries and was Executive Chairman at Malaysia Cooperative Society Commission (MCSC) from 2013 until 2015 before he worked in the Implementation Coordination Unit (ICU), Prime Minister's Department until November 2015.

## Acronyms

<b>AECF</b>	Asia-Europe Cooperation Framework 2000
<b>AEH</b>	ASEM Education Hub
<b>AEI</b>	Asia-Europe Institute
<b>AEI-ASC</b>	Asia-Europe Institute's ASEM Summer Camps
<b>AEP</b>	ASEM Education Process
<b>AEPF</b>	Asia-Europe People's Forum
<b>AES</b>	ASEM Education Secretariat
<b>AEU</b>	Asia – Europe University
<b>AIIB</b>	Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank
<b>AIMS</b>	ASEAN International Mobility for Students
<b>ANICCW</b>	Asian National Information Centres Coordinating Website
<b>APEC</b>	Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation
<b>APEL</b>	Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning
<b>AQAF</b>	ASEAN Quality Assurance Framework
<b>AQAN</b>	ASEAN Quality Assurance Network
<b>ARC</b>	ASEM Rectors' Conference and Students' Forum
<b>ASEAN</b>	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
<b>ASEF</b>	Asia – Europe Foundation
<b>ASEFYLS</b>	ASEF Young Leaders Summit
<b>ASEM</b>	Asia – Europe Meeting
<b>ASEMME</b>	ASEM Education Ministers' Meeting
<b>ASEM LLL Hub</b>	ASEM Education and Research Hub for Lifelong Learning
<b>ASEM WPP/AWPP</b>	ASEM Work Placement Programme
<b>AUN</b>	ASEAN University Network
<b>BFUG</b>	Bologna Follow-Up Group
<b>BMBF</b>	Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung (Federal Ministry of Education and Research)
<b>BA/MA</b>	Bachelor/Master
<b>BP</b>	Bologna Process
<b>BRI</b>	Belt and Road Initiative
<b>CBQAN</b>	Cross-border quality assurance network in higher education in Asia and Europe
<b>DAAD</b>	Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst (German Academic Exchange Service)
<b>EAEU</b>	Eurasian Economic Union
<b>ECTS</b>	European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System
<b>EEA</b>	European Economic Area
<b>EEAS</b>	European External Action Service
<b>EHEA</b>	European Higher Education Area
<b>EIB</b>	European Investment Bank
<b>EMM</b>	Economic Ministers' Meeting
<b>ENIC</b>	European Network of Information Centres in the European Region
<b>ENQA(–VET)</b>	European Network for Quality Assurance (in Vocational Education and Training)
<b>EQAA</b>	External Quality Assurance Agency

<b>ESN</b>	Erasmus Student Network
<b>ESU</b>	European Students' Union
<b>ETF</b>	European Training Foundation
<b>EU</b>	European Union
<b>EUA</b>	European University Association
<b>EURASHE</b>	European Association of Institutions in Higher Education
<b>FMM</b>	Foreign Ministers' Meeting
<b>FOCAC</b>	Forum on China-Africa Cooperation
<b>GNP</b>	Gross National Product
<b>G20</b>	Group of Twenty (19 individual countries and EU)
<b>ISOM</b>	Intermediate Senior Officials' Meeting
<b>IUA</b>	International Association of Universities
<b>KMK</b>	Kultusministerkonferenz (Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the Länder in the Federal Republic of Germany)
<b>LLL</b>	Lifelong Learning
<b>MOOCs</b>	Massive Open Online Courses
<b>NARIC</b>	National Academic Recognition Information Centre
<b>NATO</b>	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
<b>NGO</b>	Non-governmental organisation
<b>NQF</b>	National Qualification Framework
<b>OECD</b>	Organisation for Economic and Co-operation Development
<b>OHEC</b>	Office of Higher Education Commission Thailand
<b>QA</b>	Quality Assurance
<b>QF</b>	Qualification Framework
<b>QF-EHEA</b>	Qualifications Frameworks in the EHEA
<b>RUB</b>	Ruhr-University Bochum
<b>SCO</b>	Shanghai Cooperation Organization
<b>SDGs</b>	Sustainable Development Goals (United Nations)
<b>SEAMEO</b>	Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization
<b>SEAMEO-RIHED</b>	SEAMEO Regional Centre for Higher Education and Development
<b>SHARE</b>	European Union Support to Higher Education in the ASEAN Region
<b>SOM</b>	Senior Officials' Meeting
<b>STE(A)M</b>	Science, Technology, Engineering, Art and Mathematics
<b>TEIN</b>	Trans-Eurasia Information Network
<b>(T)VET</b>	(Technical and) Vocational Education and Training <sup>1</sup>
<b>UBN</b>	University-Business Networks (under ASEM WPP)
<b>UIL</b>	UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning
<b>UM</b>	University of Malaya
<b>UNESCO</b>	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
<b>UNESCO-UNEVOC</b>	UNESCO International Centre for Technical and Vocational Education and Training
<b>UNIDO</b>	United Nations Industrial Development Organization
<b>WGR</b>	ASEM Working Group on Recognition
<b>WTO</b>	World Trade Organization
<b>YEF</b>	Young Eurasian Forum

<sup>1</sup> In the context of the ASEM Education Process VET and TVET are often used synonymously.

## ASEM at a glance

- ASEM is an informal intergovernmental forum for dialogue and cooperation between Asia and Europe in the political, economic, and social, cultural and educational area.
- Established in Bangkok, Thailand on 1 May 1996.
- 53 members (partners)<sup>1</sup> in 2018: 51 member countries and 2 institutional partners.
- **Member countries from Asia (21):** Australia, Bangladesh, Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, China, India, Indonesia, Japan, Kazakhstan, Korea, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Mongolia, Myanmar, New Zealand, Pakistan, Philippines, Russian Federation, Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam.
- **Member countries from Europe (30):** Austria, Belgium (Flemish Community, Wallonia-Brussels Federation), Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom.
- **Institutional partners (2):** ASEAN Secretariat, European Union.

18-19 OCTOBER 2018  
12th ASEM SUMMIT  
BRUSSELS, BELGIUM

**Global Partners  
for Global Challenges**



ASEM: CONNECTING ASIA AND EUROPE



ASEM members represent about 60% of global GDP, 60% of the world's population and 60% of global trade.

Heads of State or Government meet biennially for **ASEM Summits**, held alternately in Asia and Europe, to discuss issues of common interest. The last Summit (ASEM11) took place in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia during 2016. The next Summit (ASEM12) is scheduled for 18 and 19 October 2018 in Brussels, Belgium.

In between the Summits, **Ministerial Meetings** in different political areas take place; since 2008, ASEM Ministers of Education have been meeting regularly to develop the **ASEM Education Process** (AEP).

The Ministerial Meetings are prepared by **Senior Officials** (high-level staff) of respective Ministries. Senior Officials from ASEM Ministries of Education meet three times in the run-up to a Ministerial Conference (two Senior Officials' Meetings, one Intermediate Senior Officials' Meeting).

During the **ASEM Education Ministers' Meeting** (ASEMME) in Hanoi (2009), Ministers agreed to establish an **ASEM Education Secretariat** (AES) with the mandate to help prepare Senior Officials' Meetings (SOMs) and Ministerial Meetings, coordinate ASEM educational activities, facilitate the implementation of output-oriented initiatives, and produce a stocktaking report for ASEMME. The AES is currently hosted by Belgium and rotates every four years between an Asian and a European member. Before, it was hosted by Germany (2009-2013) and Indonesia (2013-2017). Only the educational pillar of ASEM has a secretariat.

The last Ministerial Meeting (ASEMME6) took place in Seoul, Korea during 2017. The next ASEM Education Ministers' Meeting (ASEMME7) is scheduled for 2019 in Bucharest, Romania.

**Stakeholders** (e.g. Asia-Europe Foundation) are invited to take part in ASEM/AEP, attend SOMs and Ministerial Meetings, and implement ASEM/AEP initiatives.

**More information about ASEM/AEP can be found on:**

<http://www.aseminfoboard.org/>

<https://www.asem-education.org/>

**ASEM factsheet/broschure:**

[https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/28972/asem-factsheet-and-asem-brochure\\_en](https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/28972/asem-factsheet-and-asem-brochure_en)

[https://eeas.europa.eu/diplomatic-network/asia-europe-meeting-asem\\_en](https://eeas.europa.eu/diplomatic-network/asia-europe-meeting-asem_en)

**ASEM Key Data:**

[http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Asia-Europe\\_Meeting\\_\(ASEM\)\\_-\\_a\\_statistical\\_portrait](http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Asia-Europe_Meeting_(ASEM)_-_a_statistical_portrait)

**More information and key data of ASEM member countries with a focus on education as well as this publication are available online via the following link:**

[www.lemmens.de/medien/buecher-ebooks/wissenschaft-hochschule-forschung/asem](http://www.lemmens.de/medien/buecher-ebooks/wissenschaft-hochschule-forschung/asem)

<sup>1</sup> In many ASEM documents the terms "ASEM members" and "ASEM partners" are used as synonyms (members = partners) whereas the term "stakeholders" is often understood as "non-members" who are involved in ASEM/AEP or have an interest in its success (e.g. organisations such as ASEF or groups of persons such as rectors and students). Even though this definition is – strictly speaking – not quite correct (as ASEM members/partners are also stakeholders), the term "stakeholders" is used in this sense throughout this publication.

## Milestones of the ASEM Education Process

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- 10-11 September 2006:** ASEM Summit (ASEM6) in Helsinki, Finland; Germany offered to host the first ASEM Ministerial Meeting on Education in 2008
- 10-11 March 2008:** First Senior Officials' Meeting (SOM1) on Education in Bonn, Germany
- 4 May 2008:** Second SOM on Education (SOM2) in Berlin, Germany
- 5-6 May 2008:** First ASEM Education Ministers' Meeting (ASEMME1) in Berlin, Germany
- 27-29 October 2008:** First ASEM Rectors' Conference (ARC1) in Berlin, Germany
- 19-20 January 2009:** Third SOM on Education (SOM1)<sup>1</sup> in Hanoi, Vietnam
- 13 May 2009:** Fourth SOM on Education (SOM2) in Hanoi, Vietnam
- 14-15 May 2009:** Second ASEM Education Ministers' Meeting (ASEMME2) in Hanoi, Vietnam
- 1 September 2009:** Launch of the first ASEM Education Secretariat in Bonn, Germany
- 26-27 October 2010:** Second ASEM Rectors' Conference (ARC2) in Seoul, Republic of Korea
- 24-25 January 2011:** Fifth SOM on Education (SOM1) in Copenhagen, Denmark
- 8 May 2011:** Sixth SOM on Education (SOM2) in Copenhagen, Denmark
- 9-10 May 2011:** Third ASEM Education Ministers' Meeting (ASEMME3) in Copenhagen, Denmark
- 24-26 September 2012:** Third ASEM Rectors' Conference<sup>2</sup> and First ASEM Students' Forum (ARC3) in Groningen, The Netherlands
- 28-29 January 2013:** Seventh SOM (SOM1) on Education in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
- 12 May 2013:** Eighth SOM on Education (SOM2) in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
- 13-14 May 2013:** Fourth ASEM Education Ministers' Meeting (ASEMME4) in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
- 1 September 2013:** Launch of the second ASEM Education Secretariat in Jakarta, Indonesia
- 7-9 May 2014:** First Intermediate SOM on Education in Hangzhou, China
- 10-11 November 2014:** Ninth SOM on Education (SOM1) in Riga, Latvia
- 26-27 March 2015:** Fourth ASEM Rectors' Conference and Second ASEM Students' Forum (ARC4) in Hangzhou, China
- 26 April 2015:** Tenth SOM on Education (SOM2) in Riga, Latvia
- 27-28 April 2015:** Fifth ASEM Education Ministers' Meeting (ASEMME5) in Riga, Latvia
- 4-8 April 2016:** Fifth ASEM Rectors' Conference and Third ASEM Students' Forum (ARC5) in Prague, Czech Republic
- 13-14 April 2016:** Second Intermediate SOM on Education in Moscow, Russia
- 9-10 November 2016:** Eleventh SOM on Education (SOM1) in Seoul, Republic of Korea
- 9-13 October 2017:** Sixth ASEM<sup>3</sup> Rectors' Conference and Fourth ASEM Students' Forum (ARC6) in Singapore
- 20 November 2017:** Twelfth SOM on Education (SOM2) in Seoul, Republic of Korea
- 21-22 November 2017:** Sixth ASEM Education Ministers' Meeting (ASEMME6) in Seoul, Republic of Korea
- 3-5 June 2018:** Third Intermediate SOM on Education in Jakarta, Indonesia
- 15-17 October 2018:** Thirteenth SOM on Education (SOM1) in Krems, Austria
- 11-14 May 2019:** Seventh ASEM Rectors' Conference and Fifth Students' Forum (ARC7) in Bucharest, Romania
- 13 May 2019:** Fourteenth SOM on Education (SOM2) in Bucharest, Romania
- 14-15 May 2019:** Seventh ASEM Education Ministers' Meeting (ASEMME7) in Bucharest, Romania

<sup>1</sup> There are two Senior Officials' Meetings (SOM1 and 2) and (since 2014) an Intermediate SOM preceding each ASEM Education Ministers' Meeting (ASEMME). In the list above, the editors have numbered the SOMs and ISOMs from 1 to n in order to demonstrate how many times Senior Officials met. The official acronym of the Senior Officials' Meetings, SOM1 or SOM2, is indicated in parentheses.

<sup>2</sup> The editors have numbered the ASEM Rectors' Conferences and Students' Forums separately to illustrate how often rectors and students met. Officially, ASEM Rectors' Conference and ASEM Students' Forum is seen as one single event for which the acronym ARC is used.

<sup>3</sup> In 2017, the Conference title was changed to "ASEF Rectors' Conference". See <http://www.asef.org/projects/programmes/529-ARC> [Accessed: 29 June 2018].



**Launched in 1996 with the first political Summit of Heads of State or Government held in Bangkok, the ASEM process was established as an interregional forum that has now evolved to encompass 51 member countries in Asia and Europe, the ASEAN Secretariat and the European Commission. Education has become a key area of ASEM since 2008, in particular. This year's tenth anniversary therefore provides an excellent opportunity to reflect upon the past, the present and the future of the ASEM Education Process (AEP).**

This publication creates, for the first time, a multifaceted portrait of AEP – just like a kaleidoscope: The Education Process is highlighted from different perspectives by the editors and various authors from ASEM members and stakeholders.

The first part of the publication elaborates the context, history and development of the ASEM Education Process and presents its achievements and challenges. In the second part, key areas where action is needed for future direction of AEP are identified and a number of activities for further development of AEP are proposed in order to meet future global challenges to the benefit of the people in Asia and Europe.