



## Europe and Asia together against non-traditional security challenges

*The results of the Tenth ASEM Foreign Ministers' Meeting*

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The relationship between Europe and Asia - although more and more common interests and challenges connect them – for a long time has consisted of bilateral relations without a formal supporting structure or framework such as for transatlantic relations in the case of Europe and North America, or the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) in the case of North and South American states and Asia. In 1996, recognizing the need for strengthening this relationship, France and Singapore initiated regular meetings between Asia and Europe. In this way, thus the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) was born.

ASEM is an open forum for dialogue and discussion consisting of 46 countries - the twenty-seven members of the European Union (EU), the thirteen members of the ASEAN, the Plus Three regional grouping with India, Mongolia, Pakistan, Australia, Russia and New Zealand – and two international organizations, the European Commission and the ASEAN Secretariat. Since it is a consultative forum, specific decisions are not taken during the meetings. But a so-called "presidential statement", a final communication, is adopted detailing the results of the dialogue. In the ASEM framework, members engage in discussions as equal partners ignoring differences in economic development, country size and population. Dialogue is based on mutual benefits and mutual respect. The ASEM process is loosely organized. There are three dimensions or pillars of the cooperation, including dialogues on politics, economics, and also other areas such as social politics, education and culture. Heads of governments meet every two years (alternately in Europe and Asia) to set the ASEM agenda, while ASEM Foreign Ministers' Meetings are organised in the interim between Summits. The Foreign Ministers Meeting is responsible for pursuing the ASEM dialogue under the first and third pillars (political dialogue and co-operation in other areas). Apart from the Summit meetings, the ASEM process is carried forward through a series of ministerial and working-level meetings.

The 10th ASEM Foreign Ministers' Meeting held in Gödöllő, Hungary had an over-arching theme: "Working Together on Non-Traditional Security Chal-

lenges". This title - due to the Chairs' Statement - provided an opportunity to address relevant issues of common interest having substantial implications for the prosperity, security and stability of both Europe and Asia. Non-traditional or new types of security challenges include almost every security problem that is not a traditional military conflict. These challenges can be natural disasters, terrorism, the spread of weapons of mass destruction, illegal arms trafficking, organised crime, and also migration or food shortages. János Martonyi, Hungarian Minister of Foreign Affairs, highlighted that several of these challenges are present in Asia simultaneously. Indeed, Japan has recently been hit by both a nuclear and a natural disaster at the same time, which made the meeting and its theme more topical than ever.

All 48 members of ASEM represented themselves at the meeting. 36 of the 46 countries even had ministers attending the meetings, reflecting very high level participation. The Meeting was opened by Hungarian Prime Minister, Viktor Orbán. In his opening remarks, the Prime Minister emphasized that the effectiveness of cooperation between Asia and the European Union will be crucial in the future. Due to global financial and economic competition a new world has emerged where "lone fighters can no longer be successful". He added that the years ahead will be characterized by searching for effective forms of cooperation and alliance. Europe should look for the most effective forms of economic and political cooperation with Asia, because that cooperation will certainly form a starting point for renewing the post-economic crisis world.

A wide range of non-traditional security challenges facing Europe and Asia can seriously impact the stability, security and prosperity of both regions, posing challenges at both the regional and global levels. On behalf of the Hungarian Presidency, János Martonyi stressed the importance of establishing nuclear energy safety where the best way to resolve such problems, both in the field of nuclear safety and environmental protection, is to seek common solutions. Japanese Foreign Minister Takeaki Matsumoto also emphasized that combating terrorism, disaster man-

agement, nuclear safety, climate change and nuclear non-proliferation, are all challenges demanding cooperation. This is in the joint interest of the countries of both Asia and Europe. The Chairs' Statement highlights that environmental degradation, climate change, the loss of biological diversity, the over-exploitation of natural resources and other human pressures on the natural environment are underlying causes for many emerging security threats. Ministers have reaffirmed their commitment to pursue sustainable development in tandem with economic growth and social progress.

The issue of food shortages was highlighted by several countries during the plenary discussion. According to some countries of Southeast Asia, a holistic approach is needed in this field and the members of ASEM should improve their technological and scientific cooperation. Others emphasised the necessity of promoting cooperation, not only on recovery from natural disasters, but also on their forecasting and early warning.

On the second day of the Meeting, the participants dealt with the recovery from economic crisis and the fight against poverty. The Chairs' Statement, unanimously adopted at the meeting, points out that the ASEM partners acknowledge that the world is recovering from the economic crisis, but in an uneven and unbalanced way across and within countries. They expressed deep concern that the recovery has not yet translated into sufficient employment and adequate growth rates for all economies. In some advanced economies unemployment is still high, and fiscal and financial vulnerabilities remain such as slow progress in fiscal consolidation, sovereign debt crises and slow progress on financial sector consolidation and reform. Some emerging economies face the risk of overheating and excessive short-term capital flows, and many confront the threat of food and fuel price volatility, with high levels last seen in 2008. ASEM therefore supports the goals set by the G20 to address and provide collective solutions for ongoing global economic challenges taking into account the interest of all nations. The Hungarian Foreign Minister added that the crisis is not only a challenge, but also an opportunity, as the markets expect jointly-developed solutions from the countries of the world. János Martonyi offered the European Union's growth strategy for Asian countries as an example. This strategy covers several areas ranging from education to employment, as well as boosting innovation. He believes that the Europe 2020 Strategy has formulated objectives that can define an appropriate course of growth for the countries of Asia as well.

Overall, we can be assured that the results of the meeting won't shake the world because no historic, compromising or tough decisions were made. But the consultations within the framework of ASEM do have a *raison d'être* in the future. Informal political meetings are becoming increasingly important in the world as both regional and global problems can be dis-

cussed more openly. In the future these meetings may become even more important, since Asia is rapidly becoming a dominant region in the world economy, global security and politics and has started to consciously influence the international order. As the Statement points out, Asia and Europe are becoming more and more unified, but there are still plenty of things to do till then. Deeper and wider inter-regional relations would offer many opportunities for working together. The ASEM initiative involves partners that constitute over half of the global population, comprise more than 60% of world trade and account greater than half of global GDP. These facts alone make ASEM a significant forum that has successfully provided an important opportunity for interregional cooperation on an equal and reciprocal basis for over one and a half decades.

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