Dear Ambassador Zhang, Dear Professor Zima, Rectors Magnificus, Excellencies, Distinguished Business Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am delighted to have the opportunity to address this distinguished and diverse audience of the 5th ASEM Rectors’ Conference - even more so that this year, ASEM celebrates its 20th anniversary.

First of all, let me thank the hosts - Charles University in Prague, which I proudly call my Alma Mater, and Asia-Europe Foundation - for organising this conference, as well as all the partners and sponsors for enabling its smooth operation.

In our interconnected and globalised world, meeting people from different backgrounds - academia, business, NGOs, government - is not only intriguing and stimulating but also necessary. In the audience today I can see high representatives of universities from Asia and Europe. Some of the participants this gathering, both rectors and students, have travelled long distances to reach Prague. That brings me to conclude that the further we live from each other, the greater need is to learn from our partners about their lives, work, culture and experience.

I am excited that the Czech Republic accommodates – albeit for a rather short period of time – on one hand an immense body of experience, wisdom and leadership of the professors and on the other hand restlessness and promising eagerness to learn of the talented students – future leaders. The topic of the conference: “Employability: Asia and Europe prepare the New generation” stirs a couple of thoughts:

Firstly, the word employability. Employability is a potential of young educated people to start their careers thus contributing to the economic development of their respective societies. With that goal, it is our responsibility to create and extend the framework in which graduates and young professionals acquire knowledge and experience which make them succeed in the labour market. There is no doubt that ambition and hard work still remain pre-requisites for success. However they must be accompanied by an ability to handle the differences among people – colleagues from different geographical, social and cultural environments.

Secondly, when it comes to Asia and Europe, we all know the buzzword of our current cooperation: connectivity. Within connectivity we usually concentrate on discussing issues like transport, digital market, financial issues, but also “people to people” relations including education. They all are important topics full of opportunities that need to be explored and turned into benefits. They can facilitate conditions for young people to travel, to learn, to broaden experience, to come back home and help build-up better future for their countries. In that respect, discussions about connectivity should also concentrate on motivation building for young people to
seek their future careers between Europe and Asia and focus their professional training, studies and internships accordingly.

Lastly, the combination of employability and connectivity between Europe and Asia – lead me to the yet missing element. Should the two work together, they must be well interlinked: The avidity of youth, its expectations and force must be sensibly balanced and guided by wisdom, experience and restraint of middle and older age. This need of balance applies universally. And this is primarily your mission, distinguished rectors. What counts is the effort, the passion for work, the team spirit, respect, the ability and will to learn constantly from one another across the continents as well as across the generation.

All in all, I would like to wish this conference best of success. May all of you find this unique gathering inspiring and enriching. As a member of Prague city Assembly I would also like to wish you a pleasant stay in Prague.

Thank you