



Excellencies,

Distinguished participants,

Ladies & gentlemen,

Introduction

On behalf of the Asia-Europe Foundation – also known as ASEF – I am very pleased to join the 8th ASEM Culture Ministers' Meeting at the kind invitation of the Bulgarian Government.

Yesterday was not only Baba Marta Day in Bulgaria, it was also ASEM Day all over Asia & Europe. I congratulate Bulgaria for organising the 8th ASEM Culture Ministers' Meeting here in Sofia on 1 March, ASEM Day, and thereby reminding us of the importance of the ASEM process for stronger Asia-Europe relations, during its presidency of the Council of the European Union.

Today, I am here to share a report of ASEF's recent work in culture as well as to convey some of the key messages of the *ASEF Policy Panel* organised as part of the Senior Officials Meeting on Wednesday. Since the very 1st ASEM Culture Ministers' Meeting in 2003 in Beijing, China, we at ASEF have participated in these Ministerial meetings & reported on our active ities in arts & culture to ASEM partners at this platform. I am happy to be able to continue this tradition.

Introducing ASEF & its mandate

The Asia-Europe Foundation – or ASEF, as many of you know it – turns 21 years old this year. It remains the only permanently established institution of the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM), which now brings together 31 European and 22 Asian members. We are funded by annual voluntary contributions from the 53 ASEM partners, through your Ministries of Foreign Affairs.

We work to promote greater understanding and exchange between people, institutions and organisations in Asia and Europe.

Our work complements the ASEM political dialogue process with people-to-people exchanges at the civil society level.

ASEF works in 6 key areas, including culture.

Since 1997, we have consistently reached out to over 3000 Asian and Europeans every year through our projects. We also reach over 400,000 online users annually.

This is made possible only by the financial and political support we receive from the 53 ASEM partners and by the trust you place in us. On behalf of ASEF, I would like to sincerely thank all ASEM partners for this continuing support.

Part 3: ASEF's work in culture: responding to ASEM & global priorities

One of ASEF's key areas of work is arts & culture.

In articulating our culture portfolio, we respond to ASEM priorities as well as to existing gaps in multicultural co-operation.

The cultural agenda of ASEM as set by the Ministers through the ASEM Culture Ministers' Meetings has been particularly important in giving direction to our work in arts & culture. You will be happy to note that the topics of this Ministerial meeting - namely cultural heritage, intercultural dialogue and harnessing creativity for socio-economic development – are high on the ASEF agenda as well.

Other key issues shaping our work include:

- Need for reliable and updated digital information platforms on arts & culture from across Asia and Europe
- Need for greater travel support for artists to explore new regions and connections
- Need for more co-production grants for Asian and European artists to create new art works together
- Need for regular skills upgrading/training opportunities for arts managers, museum professionals, policy researchers and Ministry officials
- Need for platforms of dialogue for policy makers and artists to exchange views together

Part 4: culture360 - what we offer – what we need from ASEM Ministries of Culture (MoCs)

In response to these priorities, ASEF's work in culture offers the following products and services to both artists and policy makers.

Firstly, ASEF offers an information platform with the latest news and special analysis on arts & culture from across Asia and Europe. This is our arts portal: culture360.ASEF.org, which I hope all of you know of and use actively.

culture360 was developed by ASEF in response to the recommendation of the 1st ASEM Culture Ministers' Meeting to develop an ASEM information portal for arts and culture, as a first step towards strengthening Asia-Europe exchange. I am happy to report that ASEF has been successfully managing this portal for the last 10 years. It attracts over 275,000 users annually. The website was recently re-launched with new more user-friendly features.

I would like to highlight 4 key features of the portal that would be of particular interest to you, as officials working in Ministries of Culture;

- We compile and publish news about grants, jobs, residencies & other opportunities for artists & cultural professionals from your countries
- In particular, we focus on information related to travel grants available for artists: we publish special Mobility Funding Guides for each of the 51 ASEM partner countries. Here artists from your country can see a full list of grants available to them. This is one of the most important services we offer artists. In its most recent global monitoring report on the contemporary arts, UNESCO has also acknowledged these guides as important information tools to support cultural mobility
- We compile and publish arts news from each of your countries through a special Country page on the website.
- We run a special website for museum professionals through the Asia-Europe Museum Network (or ASEMUS)

culture360 was an idea from ASEM and so, we are keen to strengthen our link to Ministries of Culture to further develop this website:

- We would like to feature arts news from your country including activities from your Ministries. To this end, we would like to receive your press releases and set up a contact point with the ASEM desk or international relations desk at your Ministry.
- We would like to partner with the Ministries of Culture to commission special reports about your country

I invite you to discuss ideas and suggestions with ASEF's Director for Culture, Ms Anupama SEKHAR who is here at the CMM. Visit our ASEF booth outside and talk to us about how we could share your information on this website.

Part 5: *Mobility First!* - what we offer – what we need from ASEM MoCs

In addition to being an information hub, ASEF is also a funder and facilitator of exchanges and collaborations among artists and arts organisations in Asia and Europe.

As many of you are aware, travel support for artists continues to be a major gap impeding cultural exchange. Opportunities abound but often airfare, visa costs & accommodation costs can be prohibitive and prevent artists from travelling in the ASEM region for residencies or co production projects. In response to this, ASEF launched a new travel grant last year called *Mobility First!*

This travel fund is open to artists and cultural professionals from all ASEM countries. Selection is through a competitive open call. In its first year in 2017, *Mobility First!* was able to support 73 artists to travel to over 20 countries in Asia and Europe.

I am also happy to report that *Mobility First!* has been recognised by UNESCO as a successful practice for promoting multilateral cultural co-operation in the ASEM context. I would like to share with you a short video on our *Mobility First!* travel grant.

So, I invite all of you, Ministries of Culture to promote *Mobility First!* among artists in your country.

Part 6: *ASEMUS* - what we offer – what we need from ASEM MoCs

In facilitating exchanges, ASEF strongly prioritises work in the area of cultural heritage.

Through the Asia-Europe Museum Network or ASEMUS, ASEF supports knowledge exchange, training and networking among museum professionals. The ASEMUS network now brings together over 140 museums from over 40 countries in Asia and Europe.

We invite museums from your countries to join the network and benefit from the opportunities it offers. I also take this opportunity to invite you to promote the next 8th ASEMUS General Conference in your countries – we welcome museum professionals from your countries to this Conference, which will offer several training programmes for young museum professionals.

Part 7: *Cultural Policy Work* - what we offer – what we need from ASEM MoCs

ASEF's third area of work is facilitating multi-stakeholder policy dialogue. We facilitate conversations on arts and culture among civil society as well as between civil society and policy makers. This we do through ASEF Public Forums & ASEF Policy Panels that are organised in different countries and at various platforms including at the SOM of this Culture Ministers' Meeting and at key global events such as the IFACCA World Summits, which our ASEM partners from

Malaysia will host in 2019, as presented by Her Excellency Tan Sri Norliza Rofli yesterday in Workshop 1.

We have worked with many of your Ministries to host these forums and panels in recent years, and, we welcome new partnerships with your Ministries to hold more of these events in your countries.

I would also like to take this opportunity to introduce ASEF Unplugged, a new dialogue platform of ASEF with all of you.

ASEM is a vast landscape of 51 countries and we are well aware that we have not engaged enough with some countries. To remedy this situation, we are organising ASEF Unplugged forums in several ASEM countries this year. These informal roadshow-style events are meant to introduce what ASEF has to offer to local audiences. And, for us to hear from local artists what they need to further their work in international cultural co-operation. Local artists, arts organisations, museums and agencies working in culture will be invited to these forums.

We are also happy to do special ASEF Unplugged presentations for International Relations Departments at your Ministries of Culture, so we can better synergise our mutually reinforcing work.

Should you feel that we should introduce or re-introduce our work in your country, please approach us and we will be happy to organise such forums. The work we do at ASEF is done with your financial and political support to multilateral co-operation through ASEM – so, please help us complement your work in international cultural relations by becoming visible to your Ministry colleagues and to the arts sector in your country.

Part 8: Added value to ASEM - what we offer – what we need from ASEM MoCs

In sharing our work, I would particularly like to reiterate ASEF's role & function in complementing the ASEM dialogue process.

It has been a pleasure for ASEF to support the preparation for this 8th ASEM Culture Ministers' Meeting which has so ably been conceptualised and hosted by Bulgaria. In particular, we are very happy to have been able to present an ASEF Policy Panel at the SOM in collaboration with the Bulgarian hosts to offer some 'food for thought' to the Ministerial meeting.

On behalf of the Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF), I am happy to share with you that we will be organising an "ASEF Cultural Forum" this October in Brussels, alongside the 12th ASEM Summit. It has been our wish to bring the spotlight on arts & culture alongside the Summit. With this Forum,

we hope to start a tradition of cultural conversations at the Summit, alongside those on political, security and economic issues.

The “ASEF Cultural Forum” will create a new platform for thinkers, artists, & cultural commentators from Asia & Europe to meet in Brussels and discuss the state of play of Asia-Europe relations before a public audience.

We hope the Forum this year will be the first of a regular series that will serve to put arts & culture even higher on the ASEM agenda.

Part 9: ASEM Policy Panel – key messages

Here, I would like to take a minute to highlight the key messages of the ASEF Policy Panel on the topic, *From Cultural Diplomacy Towards Cultural Cooperation: What Future Directions for Asia-Europe Relations?*

Speakers reminded us that the times of cultural diplomacy are, indeed, a’changing.

Greater emphasis is being placed on people-to-people exchanges and on co-curation of jointly-funded cultural projects.

There are now many more opportunities for artists and cultural professionals to collaborate with governments on international cultural initiatives.

On the other hand, the cultural sector has also emerged as an important actor that independently initiates and implements international cultural projects.

However, some gaps and challenges remain. For instance, greater reciprocal mobility is needed to ensure balanced cultural exchange between Asia and Europe.

Part 10: Sum up – what we offer – what we need from MoCs

To sum up, I would like to say that, with your support, we offer through ASEF an institutional framework for ongoing cultural exchange between Asia and Europe.

As we enter our third decade, we look forward to renewed collaboration with Ministries of Culture to further strengthen the ASEM process.

If you would like to know more about our work or collaborate, please get in touch with me and my colleagues who are here and do visit our information booth outside as well.

Part 11: Conclusion

Once again, I would like to thank ASEM partners for their continued support to ASEF. We sincerely hope that this support will continue, strengthen & increase in the years to come.

Thank you also to the Bulgarian government for their collaboration with us since last year & for their gracious hospitality during this ASEM Culture Ministers' Meeting.

Thank you for your attention.

Blago Darya!