

Model ASEM Manila conference
Wednesday 28th February 2007
University of the Philippines Diliman

On behalf of the European Commission's Delegation to the Philippines, please let me thank you for your kind invitation to the University of the Philippines Diliman, and your Model "ASEM conference", organized by the Asia-Europe Foundation University Alumni Network – ASEFUAN.

ASEM is the main multilateral channel for communication between Asia and Europe. It represents an informal process of dialogue and cooperation between the two regions. The origins of the ASEM process lay in recognition by both, Asia and Europe, that the relationship between the two regions needed to be strengthened to reflect the new global context of the 1990s. Asia and Europe have become more interdependent as trade linkages and cooperation in other fields have increased. Just to highlight the importance of the Asia-Europe cooperation: Today ASEM partners represent some 40% of the world's population, some 50% of the global GDP and 60% of the world trade.

In November 1994, Singapore and France proposed that an Asia-Europe summit meeting be held to consider how to build a new partnership between the two regions. In 1996, the first ASEM Summit was held in Bangkok, followed by four subsequent Summits at London (1998), Seoul (2000), Copenhagen (2002) and Hanoi (2004). The event of the ASEM 6 Summit, held in Helsinki in September last year, marked the 10th anniversary of this process. Interestingly, and I congratulate you to that prominent and challenging choice you made, the agenda and the topics discussed during this last gathering of the ASEM members represent also the framework under which you will simulate your Model ASEM conference.

To keep the ASEM process going, numerous ministerial and senior official meetings in different fields such as finance, economy, culture and environment have been held between the Summits. Expert-level and thematic working

meetings and symposia in the political, economic, social and cultural fields, often involving the business communities and civil society groups, contributed to a steady networking. ASEM's only permanent institution, the Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF) has also organized numerous cultural, intellectual and people-to-people exchange programmes, to strengthen the links between civil societies in Asia and Europe, as well as civil societies and ASEM movements.

ASEM has made remarkable achievements during the past decade. Its work has been instrumental in enhancing mutual understanding, promoting experience-sharing and building consensus on issues of common interest, thus helping develop shared values and interests between the two regions. It has also helped facilitate progress in other bilateral and multilateral fora. Success stories directly attributable to ASEM's work are, for example, the joint actions undertaken to overcome the problems brought about by the economic and financial crisis in Asia. Also, ASEM partners' efforts have helped to rally support for the UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions, which was adopted by the UNESCO General Conference in October 2005. On the information technology front, the Trans-Eurasian Information Network (TEIN) provides a dedicated, high-capacity network linking the research and education networks in a number of Asian countries with Europe's research network, therefore making possible many intra-regional collaborative projects which require rapid transfer of massive amounts of data. Many of the applications supported by TEIN, such as medical training, are bringing tangible benefits to the population at large. One other key priority of ASEM's work is to complement and reinforce efforts to strengthen the open and rule-based multilateral trading system embodied in WTO. Also here, ASEM's modus-operandi as an informal process of dialogue and cooperation between the two regions, with its effects on the necessary political will and flexibility, will help to smoothen the way forward in the ongoing WTO DDA negotiations.

Looking ahead, ASEM partners will continue to strengthen ASEM's role as a prime point of convergence between the two regions, with a strong commitment to multilateralism in tackling the various global challenges. It will focus on issues in which cooperation at the interregional level could generate significant benefits. These include strengthening multilateralism and addressing global threats of common concern; globalisation, competitiveness and structural changes in the global economy; sustainable development with special focus on the Millennium Development Goals, climate change, environment, and energy; and intercultural and interfaith dialogue as a means to promote understanding. By acting together, ASEM has the critical mass to help bring about global change.

The Commission is strongly in favour of strengthening and deepening relations and cooperation with Asia within the ASEM framework, and has been an active player in supporting its various activities, not least through its role as a permanent coordinator of the process. ASEM is an important forum for the European Union to address regional issues and it also provides an opportunity to engage ASEAN, China, Japan and Korea into the discussion. The Commission will continue to work in this direction as ASEM enters its second decade, and we look already forward with anticipation to the next ASEM summit in Beijing 2008.

Before that outlook of important work and achievements to be made, I would like to conclude in wishing you all the best in your future studies and undertakings, and to encourage you to have lively and interesting exchanges in YOUR ASEM Manila conference 2007.

Salamat Po.