Asia faces up to globalisation threats

By Le Minh

Better security dialogue between Asia and Europe will help address new threats arising from globalisation, participants said at a conference in Beijing from April 21 to 23.

The conference, entitled "New security challenges for Asia and Europe," was organised by the Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF) and the China Institute of International Studies (CIIS) with support from the French government and the European Aeronautic Defence and Space Company (EADS).

Around 60 eminent scholars, researchers and policymakers from Asia and Europe in the field of regional security discussed the prospects and challenges of greater Asia-Europe cooperation on security. Its outcome will be presented to ministers of foreign affairs, defence and home affairs of 25 Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) member countries.

"Due to globalisation, Asia and Europe are no longer facing only traditional security threats, but also unconventional ones. This is a growing trend," remarked Bertrand Fort, Director for ASEF's Intellectual Exchange.

"The modern international system has conventionally been the arena of the nation-state. However, the two last decades of the 20th century have been marked by the emergence on the international scene of non-state actors, whose scope of action now transcend the borders of the state. Non-state actors currently have tremendous influence on international security and Asia is no exception," he said.

Globalisation has benefited economies as well as bringing associated risks

He said such a development had both positive and negative aspects with the dark side of globalisation seeing organised crime engaged in illegal trafficking of goods and people and piracy, religious fundamentalists and terrorist organisations presenting serious threats to regional security and stability.

"The globalisation of technology, information and economy is also a globalisation of the arena for international actors, in other words, a globalisation of the threats as well," said Bertrand Fort.

According to Professor Xu Jian, CIIS Vice president, many unconventional security threats are the result of non-state actors rather than the direct outcome of actions by nation-states. For instance, security problems concerning environment, population, drug trafficking, AIDS and terrorism have become a result of actions by many individuals and social groups.

"Challenges posed by unconventional security issues raise many new questions for international security cooperation. For until very recently, international security cooperation had been focused on coping with conventional security threats," he wrote in a paper presented at the conference.

ASEF's Bertrand Fort said as governments and societies dealt with such non-state actors that present a threat to security, the danger increased with their mobility, travelling fluidly across various borders.

"This leads to the necessity for more cooperation and, especially in Asia and Europe, for deeper bi-regional cooperation... Regional relations have become more significant for stability and the regional level has become a substantially more important venue for conflict and cooperation than in the past, both at the inter-state and intra-state level," he said.

Given this, participants agreed with Bertrand that the ASEM process could have a better dialogue between Asia and Europe in a bid to enhance regional security cooperation.

"The ASEM process has successfully opened up a security dialogue between Asia and Europe, resulting in several concrete cooperation efforts between the two regions," he said.

The main success of ASEM, according to Bertrand, is perhaps the highest degree of confidence that has been progressively reached between member countries by the creation of a favourable background for better cooperation linkages on security issues.

"All ASEM governments... reiterated the interest for ASEM as a major body for substantial political debate, not only on European and Asian issues, but also on global questions."

He said that concrete cooperation between two or several ASEM countries had resulted from dialogue efforts. Various security-related initiatives have been carried out under the ASEM framework with regard to organised crime. For instance, a three-year ASEM anti-money laundering project aims at developing sustainable institutional capacity in the Asian region to address money laundering at various levels.