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Maintaining momentum in the climate change debate

7 June 2011

By **Nick Malkoutzis**

I have been fortunate to take part for the past two days in the 6th Asia-Europe Journalists' Seminar in Szentendre, Hungary, which has been organised by the Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF) in conjunction with the 10th ASEM Foreign Ministers' Meeting.

Our main topic of discussion has been the climate change debate and the role that the media can or should play in it. The meeting has provided a fascinating insight into the often different but sometimes converging views and experiences of climate change in Europe and Asia. It is clear that the need for action on both continents is becoming more urgent by the day. It is equally clear that the media has to play a role in informing the public about the growing challenges and opportunities that are emerging on both sides of the globe.



In this spirit, ASEF has helped put together a press release and those who took part in the debate over the last two days have agreed to a communique being made public on our behalf. Both of these follow. I will attempt to provide a further insight into the issues raised in Hungary in the days to come. In the meantime, many thanks to the organisers for providing this vital opportunity to exchange ideas.

Nick Malkoutzis

Climate change is an international threat that has no geographical boundaries. Asia and Europe, home to 58% of the world's population and connected by land, need to cooperate on climate change issues.

With this in mind, over 30 participants and energy experts representing key media in Asia and Europe gathered in Szentendre, Hungary, from 4 to 6 June for the 6th Asia-Europe Journalists' Seminar. They discussed how the media can play a more effective role in increasing public awareness to collectively address the long-term challenge of climate change and the need to take concrete action now to speed up the global response to this challenge.

The participants represented leading media organisations in Asia and Europe, including the Times of India, China Daily, The Straits Times (Singapore), The Star (Malaysia), Kompas (Indonesia), Radio Voice of Democracy (Cambodia), Chosun Ilbo (Korea), Nikkei (Japan), Vientiane Times (Laos), Irish Times, Lidove Noviny (Czech Republic), NRC Handelsblad (Netherlands), Kathimerini (Greece), De Standaard (Belgium), Nepszabadsag (Hungary), Lrytas (Lithuania) and Delo Slovenia. They took stock of recent trends in climate change negotiations and examined how the media can play a role in promoting global response to climate change.

Participants acknowledged the complexity of international climate change negotiations. They also underscored the importance of better public communication of the UN process. Through candid discussions, the journalists studied the lessons learnt from recent international climate change negotiations (COP 15 and COP16) and exchanged views on the implications of common but differentiated responsibilities for climate change. They also discussed how the media could play a more effective role and suggested some ways for media coverage of climate change-related issues to be more relevant, in order to resonate better with the local population (see [Annexe](#) for details).

The seminar was held in conjunction with the 10th ASEM Foreign Ministers' Meeting (6-7 June 2011) held in Gödöllő, Hungary, which focussed on non-traditional security issues, including threats arising from climate change.

The 6th Asia-Europe Journalists Seminar, Szentendre, Hungary (4-6 June 2011) Annexe

Acknowledging the science of climate change as established by the IPCC, and the Cancun Agreements signed on 11 December 2010, the participants in the 6th Asia-Europe journalists seminar reaffirmed the important role the media can play in increasing public awareness to collectively address the long-term challenge of climate change and the need to take concrete action now to speed up the global response to this challenge.

To foster better local understanding of climate change-related issues, some participants suggested ways that the media could work towards better communication of climate change and other related topics, including the need to look into the ideas of systemic transformation, existing and future plans to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and the need to help developing nations protect themselves from the impacts of climate change and build their own sustainable futures. Some of the suggested ideas for improved media involvement in these issues include:

1. Climate change stories should be more connected to locally relevant issues, including people, places and examples that help audiences understand their role in the challenge;

2. Climate change reporting should emphasise wider issues beyond the environment, by linking impacts to other perspectives such as cultural, social or economic issues;
3. Journalists should aim to balance stories about the negative impacts and consequences of climate change with solutions-based approaches and stories highlighting the positive opportunities presented by this global challenge;
4. The media should challenge itself to discuss the ways in which climate change impacts may cause us to consider the need for a systemic transformation of the global economy, including alternative models of economic growth and alternatives to the way global and local economies are measured, tracked and evaluated for success;
5. Better information gathering and dissemination is needed to assist journalists in providing information that is more regionally sensitive and relevant, including improved information sharing between the science community and the media;
6. More effort must be made to increase understanding of the actual processes of climate change negotiations so that the public can better understand what is occurring behind the scenes of a sometimes obtuse process – the UNFCCC has a responsibility to share this information with the media and the wider public;
7. Countries should fulfil their agreed-upon Article 6 requirements to enhance their media outreach and help raise public awareness of climate change and international negotiations, meaning that member parties should actively help journalists publicise and disseminate information on these topics;
8. Journalists should work to avoid false balance in the coverage of climate change issues, while still reflecting any new developments in the science of climate change and the subsequent debate inspired by new developments;
9. Active participation from a wider and more diverse range of journalists must be encouraged, through proactive visa regimes and funding support for journalists from countries or organisations where costs are the prohibiting factor in effective coverage;
10. Media access at COP events should be improved, preferably with the press centre located at the same venue as the COP meeting to facilitate media access to decision-makers who have an interest to explain to their respective publics the significance of developments during protracted negotiations. Moreover, international coverage of all COP events (including NGO and side events) can be improved by hosting them in the same venue.