Ambassador Zenon KOSINIAK-KAMYSZ, Former Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary from the Republic of Poland to Singapore 2014-2018, served both as the Governor of Poland to the Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF) as well as a supporter of Asia-Europe education exchanges. Ambassador KOSINIAK-KAMYSZ joined the 2nd ASEF Young Leaders Summit (ASEFYLS2) in Seoul, Korea, in 2017, for an intergenerational dialogue – sharing his insights and take-aways from a rich and long experience in the diplomatic corps. It is through Ambassador KOSINIAK-KAMYSZ that ASEF’s Education Department conducted its 2nd ASEFYLS Navigators Training at College of Europe at the Natolin Campus in Warsaw, Poland. ASEF’s Governors play a crucial role in establishing partnerships between ASEF and local organisations across the 51 Asian and European partner countries – and from these initiatives, ASEF rolls out civil society-led projects connecting Asia and Europe.

The following interview was conducted by Ms Aleksandra GRISHINA (Russian Federation), when she joined ASEFYLS2 as an ASEFEdu Young Reporter.

Published on 20 August 2018

The views and opinions expressed in this article are solely by the author(s) and do not represent that of the Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF)

Your Excellency, you represent the mutual connection between Asia and Europe yourself. Coming from the heartland of rural Poland, you have been working in Singapore for the past four years. Why do you think this Asia-Europe cohesion is so essential, especially nowadays?

First, Asia is booming in terms of economy. It is no longer considered “a third world”, for Asia has fantastically developed in a very short period. Meanwhile in Europe there are certain problems with overproduction — it is in need of the new markets. From an economical perspective our connection is vital.

But we are basically talking more about Eurasia, rather than about separate regions. I do like this idea of Eurasian connectivity. That is why we must find ways to understand each other, to fill the gaps of the knowledge we lack. And these ways can and should be creative. Before going into a foreign market and understanding the consumer needs, why cannot one visit an art exhibition or conservatory? Or start with the national poetry? In my opinion, these should be the first steps to foster partnership and mutual understanding. Open-door policy is the policy of open-mindedness.

At the same time, many young people nowadays are trying to refrain from politics — there is too much controversial information circling around. Why do you believe the young generation should still get involved in policymaking?

This is a complicated question. We should engage young people in politics, but we must keep in mind the huge generation gap between us. We grew up in completely different circumstances; our starting positions are different, too. The level of mobility and the accessibility of information nowadays are something young people should take use of.

Though I believe that actual political involvement should be the last stage of mutual understanding. Meanwhile, I encourage young people to read, read as much as possible; to use this amazing time of mobility and travel, explore different cultures, engage with your peers from all over the world at international events. This primary knowledge is the key to stable peace in the future.

#ASEFYLS2

CHALKS & USB Rapid technological and socio-economic changes call for innovative approaches to education and training, while still valuing traditionally proven methods. The use of chalks and USB in the ASEFYLS design is to signify both past and present-day learning tools coupled with the importance of adaptability and cohesion.
As for your own experience, what is the most significant lesson you have learnt while working in Asia?

Well, there are many of them. We in Europe are still confident that our civilization is one of the oldest and the most developed one. But we should not underestimate the Asian experience, for there is so much to learn. Our sense of time is completely different. The history of such countries as China and India is lasting for several thousands of years, which implies a totally different approach to goal-setting. People in Asia know how to combine a dynamic life with patience. And this is fantastic that we can learn from each other.

There are also the little things that matter. Whenever I meet the ambassadors or the ministers of foreign affairs from Asian countries, I am always amazed by their manners. They bring you to the entrance after the meeting is done, wait until your driver arrives... This is something which is forgotten in Europe. People there are always in a hurry, striving to take the most out of every minute. Asians are in constant hurry as well, but they never forget to demonstrate their respect to others. This is just one of my observations.

Did you have any role models at the beginning of your diplomatic career? Who was your inspiration?

I had a chance to meet a few experienced ambassadors back then... But still I cannot assign my inspiration to a specific professional. Across the globe, in every country I have visited, there were people I have learnt something from. This is what I especially appreciate about my job.

How do you define the most important trait of an aspiring leader nowadays?

I cannot help but to mention that you are much better prepared to whatever life is about to give you. You are more open to the world, and the world opens to you in return. I still recall my experience when I studied abroad, the way it had such a lasting and profound impact on my career. But back then there were only few of us. So, the opportunities the youth has nowadays are tremendous. It was impossible to imagine when I was of your age.

What would you recommend to those of aspiring leaders who are ambitious, but are currently searching their way or experiencing problems with employment?

You should not give up your ambitions. You should not give up your curiosity and aspiration to change the world for the better. Unfortunately, we are facing problems due to high unemployment rates among young and even educated people, in many countries. But I strongly believe that over-national openness is the key solution. We will not be able to deal with this world problem separately. And this is where I take pride in finding common ground with your generation.