



Speech by Ambassador Holger Standertskjöld

ASEF: “EU Perceptions in Asia”

18 April 2008

Ambassador Cho, Professor Lai Choy Heng,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me first thank Professor Turner for that insight into Asian perceptions of the EU, it certainly raises some interesting questions.

As the representative of the European Commission in Singapore, I would like to take this opportunity to look at this study from the other side of the coin and to give these results further context.

Firstly, the **European Union perceives Asia as a partner. Indeed, we believe that we have much in common with the region.** We are key economic partners. Both regions are keen to create open and integrated markets. We both equally want to strengthen our trade and investment links and successfully conclude the current WTO round. We both believe in effective multilateralism, respect and promote diversity and value cultural and educational exchange. And we are similarly committed to fighting the ‘dark side of globalisation’ – poverty, environmental degradation, the trafficking of drugs, arms or people, and terrorism.

To this aim, Singapore in particular, is a valued ally and an important bridge-builder in the region. It plays a vital role in ensuring a peaceful, prosperous and stable South East Asia. It is also a catalyst for closer economic integration in ASEAN. Singapore has greatly contributed to the ASEM process. And Singapore has been one of the driving forces behind the ASEAN Regional Forum and East Asia Summits. Just this week, the EU co-chaired with Singapore, the ASEAN Regional Forum Seminar on Energy Security; one of the many areas in which both Asia and Europe have common concerns and are seeking joint responses.

For much of Asia, Europe is an important export market. At the same time, for the less developed nations in Asia, the EU is an important source of development and humanitarian assistance.

Hence, it is not a surprise that this study identified the **euro** and **trade** as the two most visible aspects of the EU. The EU is the world's largest economy with a 30% share of world GDP. With a population of about 500 million people over 27 countries, it is a lucrative consumer market for Asia's exports. I certainly **do not agree** with those who have suggested that the EU can only stand to lose from the rise of Asia. Not only is the EU a major trading entity accounting for 30% of world trade, it is also the world's largest outward investor accounting for half of global outward Foreign Direct Investment. In a reciprocal manner, the EU is an attractive destination for investments and receives 45% of global inward FDI. So as I said earlier, it is no surprise that the EU is seen as a trading power above all else.

This is of course not all the EU has to offer. The EU, through the European Commission and its 27 Member States, has an important role to play in global politics. The current problem with EU visibility on this front is due to our construction. We do not have one single voice on foreign policy. We have recognised this and this is why the issue is being addressed through the Lisbon Treaty that is in the process of being ratified by the Member States. Thanks to the proposed changes, the EU will have a more cohesive voice on the world stage.

Europe is also home to a diverse range of people and cultural pursuits. From the classic to the cutting edge, the sheer variety of what it has to offer is indeed impressive. We need to highlight this more to our partners in Asia. ASEF has a considerable part to play in this and has made excellent inroads during the last 10 years. In Singapore, the EU Member States are also banding together to showcase our cultural diversity through a new initiative called the European Cultural Season. This Season kicks off with the European Union Film Festival on 6 May and will continue until the end of the year.

Undeniably, the responsibility for the visibility of the EU lies with all of us. The member states, individually and as a group; ASEF and the European Commission especially through the Delegations, each have a role to play. To that aim, the European Commission will soon be signing a Memorandum of Understanding with an NUS/NTU consortium for a **Europe Centre** that will promote dialogue, on the EU, in Singapore. Considerable resources will be invested in the

Europe Centre and its activities will complement already existing efforts. All will serve the interests of the European Union as a whole.

This book as a whole gives us an excellent snapshot of public perceptions in Asia. The results will help us in formulating our communication policies. What we do today will impact on how we are perceived in the future. It reminds us that we must definitely continue to engage young Asians who are the future leaders and opinion-shapers of Asia. This leads me to conclude with the words of a famous Asian, Mahatma Gandhi. “The future depends on what we do in the present.”

Thank you.