

## **SPEECH**

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**Asia in the Eyes of Europe**

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(The views presented here are personal to the speaker and do not necessarily represent the position of the European Commission)

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to thank the Asia-Europe Foundation and the International Convention of Asian Scholars for inviting me to speak this morning at the launch of the project "Asia in the Eyes of Europe".

The project is tasked with assessing how Asia is seen by Europeans. So how do Europeans see Asia? Some first responses might be — images of bustling overcrowded cities, the mysticism of ancient religions, the latest technological gadgets, even restaurants offering exotic delights on the high streets of European cities.

Most Koreans and other East Asians I know have visited several European countries; they speak English and often other European languages. They are able to describe the work of classical European composers and artists and name 19<sup>th</sup> European kings and queens. I am often surprised by the level of knowledge about the current European integration process.

At the same time, few of my European colleagues speak Asian languages, I am not sure if any could name Korean composers in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and most would be baffled by the names Park Ji-song or Yao Ming. Indeed, from first

appearances one could easily assume that Europeans' awareness and knowledge about Asia is less than the other way around.

However, I want to warn against concentrating too much on assumptions and general awareness. Europe-Asia relations are more than a general knowledge quiz. Although your aim is to look at public perceptions, it will be important for your study to look at what is actually happening on the ground. In ten years time perceptions of Asia will be formed by the lines of substantive cooperation between Asia and Europe. And I have to say, a lot is happening on the ground.

15% of EU trade is with the United States, a country which for historical and social reasons Europeans tend to be more familiar, However, 18.4 % is with China, Korea and Japan. A further 2.2% % is with India and ASEAN as an entity has in recent years been the EU's fifth largest trading partner. It is no surprise that the European Commission selected Korea, India and ASEAN as the first partners in a new generation of Free Trade Agreements.

Investment follows access to markets. I believe that Korea's FTA policy will make it a hub of investment. Economic operators in Europe know this. They are aware of Asia and they are transmitting their hopes and concerns into the political process in Europe. This could be seen in some of the difficulties we faced during the negotiations, for example in the automobile sector. And it could be seen in the political will that has enabled us to reach a conclusion.

Of course, our relationship with Asia goes much further than trade and investment. The Free Trade Agreements are being negotiated in parallel with agreements to deepen cooperation across a wide range of political and economic areas.

For Europeans it is essential that we get Asia on board in our vision of a multilateral system. The EU has always had an ambitious agenda of promoting multilateral and regional cooperation. It is a natural consequence of our history. The EU is after all the most successful example ever of countries rejecting the competition of power politics for effective regional cooperation.

The EU pushes its multilateral agenda in a number of ways:

- i) by taking the lead in the struggle to stem climate change, the most dangerous challenge facing mankind
- ii) via our own process of economic reforms that make the EU the largest market, the largest trader and largest source of investment in the world
- iii) a commitment to an open and fair global trading system via an ambitious agenda in the Doha Round

iv) by being the largest donor of overseas development assistance in the world and offering preferential access to our markets for the least developed countries

v) via support for multilateral and regional conflict prevention through the use of a range of political, diplomatic, economic and humanitarian instruments

vi) by supporting multilateral bodies such as the International Criminal Court.

In all of these areas the involvement of Asia is vital. Many Asian countries were themselves victims of colonialism and proxy wars during the Cold War. Despite this they have emerged as dynamic economies and in most cases democracies. When Asian countries join the EU in pursuing a multilateral agenda they add not only weight but in many cases a moral authority.

A key example is the effort to stem climate change. 27% of global emissions of CO<sub>2</sub> originate from Northeast Asia. The position of Asian countries is critical in settling the political question of how emerging economies that are not responsible for the current level of global warming accept the commitments necessary to ensure that the tide is slowed and reversed. If some of the options for Korean targets for emission cuts announced this week are realized it may well send a stronger message to other countries than the ambitious commitments of the EU.

The frontline of many international security concerns also lies in Asia. It is Asia where China and the United States come face-to-face with each other with the giants of Russia, India directly adjacent. Europe has a strong interest in ensuring that the trajectory of international relations in Asia develops into regional and multilateral frameworks of cooperation during the next decade. A bi-polar superpower competition would go against the interests of all. In a similar fashion, Europe has an interest in promoting regional economic cooperation in East Asia. A common East Asian currency might have prevented some of the problems we saw last year.

Most of you will recall the European Commission's first Asia Strategy in the early 1990s that called for the EU to increase its political presence in East Asia to a level commensurate with its economic presence. Fifteen years later – we may not have troops on the ground in this region and were not at the table of the Six Party Talks, but, for the reasons I have explained, we are certainly present.

The increased trade and investment with ASEAN+3 nations has been accompanied by wider and deeper political cooperation in the expanded G-8 and the G-20 processes. Climate change has opened a new area of dialogue and

hopefully increased cooperation. Our work in multilateral forums has increased – in the UN, in peacekeeping, at Doha and in promoting sustainable development in Africa. As this has occurred more Europeans and Asian are interacting with each other in increasingly diverse social and cultural forums.

My key point to you this morning is that European political, business and civil society decision makers are acutely aware of Asia and what it can deliver and this awareness has created very strong channels of interaction.

I look forward to reading the results of this research. As you set out on the endeavor, I might suggest that some interesting areas could be:

Where do political / economic / civil society decision makers in Europe want to take the relationship in the next fifteen years?

How and to what extent are these desires being fed into the political system in Europe – both from the top down, and from the bottom up?

The European media gives plenty of focus to East Asia when things go wrong – natural disasters, nuclear tests, civil unrest –but to what extent are European electorates aware of the good news from Asia, i.e – the potential for Europe and Asia to work together in framing an international order that is in our common interests?

To what extent are Europeans aware of Asian contributions and potential to contribute to multilateral initiatives in preventing climate change, in peacekeeping and reconstruction and in development?

Does anything need to be done in increasing general awareness of Asia amongst Europeans (for example making better use of immigrant populations as bridges) or is the Europe-Asia relationship a self-sustaining process whereby people with interests are able to pursue them in a natural process?

You are embarking on a fascinating study about a relationship that will be critical shaping the international order in the next century. I thank you for your efforts, look forward very much to reading the results and wish you all the very best in this endeavor.

Thank you

