

**Deputy State Secretary Johannes MATYASSY**

**Sustainable Development in a post-  
COVID-19 world – How ASEM can  
contribute as a multilateral forum**

**4<sup>th</sup> ASEF Young Leaders Summit**

**Youth Dialogue**

**Virtual via WEBEX, 6 May 2021**

**(1pm CET / 7pm SGP Time)**

## ***INTRODUCTION***

Excellencies,

Dear participants of the 4th ASEF Young Leaders summit,

Let me warmly thank you for your invitation and the opportunity for this exchange with you as the future leaders in Asia and Europe.

I also wish to congratulate the team of ASEF who managed to adapt the ASEF Young Leaders Summit program in these challenging circumstances. COVID-19 requires flexibility and innovation from all of us and this format exemplifies how crisis can be met with creative solutions.

As a former Swiss ASEM Senior Official (2014-18) I highly appreciate the ASEM process and the valuable projects by ASEF to foster the connectivity between Asia and Europe.

This format is a great opportunity for young leaders to exchange directly with today's ASEM leaders. But let me also make clear that it is an equal enrichment for the ASEM leaders themselves to learn from you as the future generation.

What are your ideas for the future relations between Asia and Europe? I am very much looking forward to our discussion later on.

**Let me begin by talking briefly about the importance of multilateralism.**

### ***Importance of Multilateralism***

Defending and advancing multilateralism is a difficult task, but the outcome is **worth the effort**.

Modern multilateralism was born with the creation of the **League of Nations**. However, only **after the Second World War** did multilateralism find a formula that proved to be successful. The biggest tragedy of our time triggered the common will of all countries in the world to try a new way to address conflicts, one that privileges dialogue and a system of global rules and principles over confrontation and open conflicts.

Thanks to this system – as imperfect as it might be – large scale conflicts have been avoided over the last 75 years. This success cannot be underestimated: it is a world record. And I can tell you, I am convinced that multilateralism can and will provide also the **answers to global challenges ahead**.

The **United Nations**, with its worldwide membership and universal legitimacy, are essential. The UN Charter is as relevant today as it was in 1945: it's the foundation that unites us all.

As you know, Switzerland is a **host country** of the UN offices, and a central hub of international organizations: we strongly believe in the system, we defend the values and achievements of multilateralism, and we believe it must be continuously developed and strengthened. To do so, we need to build on **inclusive, innovative and forward-looking** partnerships.

## ***Two Examples of Multilateral Cooperation***

Excellencies,  
Young Leaders,

Let me give you two examples why multilateral cooperation remains crucial.

We are all greatly affected by the **COVID-19 crisis**. Vaccination is the key to ending this public health emergency. In order to accelerate research, development, production and equitable access to diagnostics, therapies and vaccines, as well as to strengthen health systems: the WHO, the European Commission, and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation launched the ***Access to COVID-19 Tools Accelerator initiative*** (ACT-A) in April 2020, in response to a call from G20 leaders. It is a joint effort supported by many countries around the globe.

One of the pillars of this initiative is the **COVAX initiative**. It supports the development and manufacture of COVID-19 vaccines, and aims to guarantee fair and equitable access for every country in the world. Currently, more than 83 million doses of vaccine were distributed in over 100 countries.

This Initiative actually goes beyond classical multilateralism: it is **multi-sectoral** as it has brought together public and private sector entities, foundations, the global fund and the World Bank. It shows us that global challenges can only be tackled together: a single state cannot successfully get out of the pandemic on its own, but only a **common effort** of states, international organization, private economy and academia can eventually find the solution.

## ***Second Example: Climate Change***

The current global health crisis is linked to another pressing issue of our time: climate change. Climate change affects everyone on this planet and unfortunately, it affects the most vulnerable disproportionately.

To limit the effects of climate change, the global community adopted an international treaty - the **Paris Agreement**.

Its goal is to limit global warming to well below 2°C and to strive for a 1.5°C limitation.

The global community also agreed on the goal of jointly providing 100 billion USD annually by 2020 and beyond for **mitigation and adaptation measures**. This is a great success for multilateralism since large-scale investments are required to significantly reduce emissions and build forward better.

Another example for the importance of multilateralism in climate issues are the **nationally determined contributions** (NDCs). Every signatory of the Paris Agreement has submitted a target for reducing its emissions. The Paris Agreement calls on all Parties to update and strengthen these NDC every five to ten years. We are currently in this very process which seeks to scale up the ambition of pledges over time.

Challenges related to climate change are huge, and commonly agreed solutions are very difficult to find. Discussions and negotiations are harsh. But working together, exchanging and engaging all countries as much as possible is the only possible way to successfully address this global issue. A better world can only be built if we work together towards a common goal. **No one can succeed alone in a challenge that concerns everyone.**

## ***The Role of ASEM***

The Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) offers an **innovative and open exchange opportunity between Asia and Europe**.

Through this **informal and open platform**, 53 influential partners from Asia and Europe can have a frank and creative dialogue on how we approach our common future. ASEM can serve as a **source of ideas as well as encourage progress**.

In order to maintain and develop this space, Switzerland strongly supports the fundamental principles of ASEM, which are **informality, cooperation, equal partnership and better mutual understanding**. Informality is here a very important element: in order to maximize their potential, ASEM and ASEF should be **free from the formalities and predetermined processes** that sometimes threaten to paralyze other multilateral organizations. Informality can create creativity.

Project like the Young Leaders Summit can be the living examples of this open exchange among Asia and Europe.

## CONCLUSION

Excellencies,  
Young Leaders,

As I have outlined, the most pressing issues that affect our lives today – the COVID-19 pandemic and climate change – show how effective multilateralism is more essential than ever.

Switzerland is firmly convinced that **international cooperation and a regulated international system** are the right instruments to build a fair and equal world for all. For this reason, I commend you all for engaging in a program that enhances mutual exchange and understanding, thus creating the right basis for finding the solutions for tomorrow. This is the way to go, congratulations and thanks for your engagement!

Thank you, and I look forward to the upcoming discussion.