KEYNOTE SPEECH BY AMBASSADOR MORIKAWA TORU, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, ASIA-EUROPE FOUNDATION (ASEF) AT THE EUROPEAN UNION SUPPORT TO HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE ASEAN REGION (SHARE) HELD ON THURSDAY, 29 JULY 2021 AT 2.00PM (SG TIME)

Your Excellencies, distinguished participants;

My name is Morikawa Toru, the Executive Director of the Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF). It is a great honor for me to speak at the Policy Dialogue of the EUROPEAN UNION SUPPORT TO HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE ASEAN REGION (SHARE) co-organized by the European Union and the ASEAN Secretariat. From Singapore, I wish a good afternoon to the friends in Asia and a good morning to the partners in Europe.

ASEF is an intergovernmental not-for-profit organisation which brings together the peoples of Asia and Europe through intellectual, cultural and people to people exchanges so that Asians and Europeans address common global challenges together. It is the sole permanent institution of the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM), a dialogue process involving senior officials, ministers and leaders.

For ASEF, education is one of our key thematic areas, and our work in education aims to foster collaboration between youth, students, teachers and educators, higher education and EdTech experts with policy makers across Asia and Europe. One of the pillars of our activities is to promote equity and inclusion in higher education. It contributes to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

ASEF is contributing to the vision of the ASEM Education Process (AEP). By 2030, the AEP will contribute to a more prosperous, resilient, and sustainable Asia-Europe education region, better prepared for current and future global challenges. The AEP seeks to promote inclusive and equitable quality education and training through equal and mutually beneficial partnerships, leveraged by people-to-people connectivity.

At the last Ministerial Meeting, ASEM Education Ministers had highlighted that the AEP should aim at ensuring inclusion and equality in education by building comprehensive systems that are accessible to all. The ASEF Regional Conference on Higher Education (ARC) is the Official Dialogue Partner of the ASEM Education Ministers’ Meeting (ASEMME). It is the only bi-regional multi-stakeholder dialogue platform for university and student leaders, policy-makers and ministers to discuss higher education issues to shape the education landscape in Asia and Europe.

The 8th edition of ARC is inviting Asian and European higher education and student leaders to leverage on the current COVID-19 disruption and make inclusion and diversity central values. Titled “Outlook 2030: Inclusive and Diverse Higher Education in Asia and Europe”, ARC8 will explore how universities and students can foster inclusion and diversity in the final decade for the Agenda2030. The theme aligns with the priority areas of the ASEM Education Process5 and the upcoming 8th ASEF Education Ministers’
Meeting (ASEMME8). In addition, ASEF will organise spin-off activities focusing on disseminating findings of the ARC8 Outlook Report 2030 and build capacity for local and regional stakeholders.

Distinguished participants,

It is in this context that ASEF plays its part in the discussion at today’s policy dialogue. ASEF applauds the partnership between the European Union and ASEAN which is taking steady steps guided by the Bangkok Declaration on Advancing Partnership in Education for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in ASEAN, through different projects such as SHARE. The mutual recognition of the higher educational system such as credit across the ASEAN countries would be a key institutional back-bone to promote equity and inclusion in Higher Education not only between the Members but also in respective domestic educational system for different groups of the society, as well as with different ASEAN partners.

According to the SHARE Infographic on Higher Education in Asia, I quote, “Southeast Asia is one of the most vibrant and fastest-growing regions in the world. With a population of over 630 million, the region accounts for a significant share of global trade and investment. Southeast Asia is home to some 7,000 Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) with around 12 million students. As connectivity increases and the ASEAN Community expands, national Higher Education systems are rapidly changing and internationalisation in the sector is accelerated in the emerging ASEAN Higher Education Area.”

If I allow myself to add an element to this remark, it is the diversity in the region. It is a region extremely rich in diversity with different religions, cultures and academic traditions. The Higher Education System of each country is different because it stems from such different backgrounds. The mutual recognition is only possible based on the mutual understanding and trust through a long-lasting communication with political will and endurance.

The experience over a number of decades by EU in bridging such difficulties would be a good source of reference for ASEAN Members. I remember well my younger days in France to mingle with the students from every corner of Europe and the world. The conversations with them opened my eyes to a greater world. At the same time, I believe that the cooperation between the two major regional organizations will provide the Europeans with good food for thought for their ongoing further efforts.

Distinguished participants,

Allow me to quote an extract from the European Commission website: “higher education and its links with research and innovation play a crucial role in individual and societal development and in providing the highly skilled human capital and the engaged citizens that Europe needs to create jobs, economic growth, and prosperity”. The higher
education is one of the important keys for our societies to step into the greener economy in the post Covid-19 era which will be built back better from the pandemic. To ensure the equity and inclusiveness in Higher Education is the best investment for the future for all of us in Asia and Europe.
I wish all of you a fruitful discussion. Thank You.

. . . . .