Good afternoon from Singapore, it is a great pleasure for me to welcome you to this roundtable that aims to commemorate a collection of essays that grapples with a pertinent issue of our time – the Future of Asia-Europe Cooperation.

Coming out of the COVID-19 pandemic, the world found itself confronted with a fresh series of challenges such as the retreat of globalization, the decoupling of interdependent economies and the rise of geo-political tensions.

It is evident that in the face of such complex challenges, no singular country or region can stand above or hold a monopoly on formulating solutions for the rest of the world. Devising truly comprehensive solutions calls upon the collective effort and representation from a wide range of stakeholders.

This underscores the strategic role that ASEF and its work can play in bridging these challenges – to promote better mutual understanding through intellectual, cultural and people-to-people exchanges. This was long established by the Dublin Agreed Principles by the ASEM leaders in 1996 at the formation of ASEF.

There is also a positive change in these years. It is the rise of the Southeast Asia and the South Asia. ASEAN will soon become a 4th economic power in the world and India alone is already 5th economic power. This change gives a fresh perspective to Asia-Europe partnership that Asians and Europeans work together for the betterment of the world.

It was therefore, against the global complexities, ASEF chose to pose a challenge to our stakeholders – a call for a reflection on “The Future of Asia-Europe Cooperation”.

You answered this call – In a short span of two months, we received well over 120 contributions from across our two continents.
These compositions, born out of ASEF’s first-ever essay competition, offer a rich tapestry of ideas and insights that resonate with the very essence of our existence as an interconnected global community.

It also serves as a testament to ASEF’s commitment to fostering dialogue and the exchange of ideas – to seek innovative and sustainable solutions for our shared global challenges.

In our discussions today, it is my hope that we navigate through this era of complexity and change and reinforce our commitment to finding common ground and shared solutions. May it remind us that our differences can be our greatest strengths when we unite for a common purpose.

I would like to thank all contributing authors as well as the Judging Panel for playing a role in this process. May their collective work ignite conversations, deepen understanding, and motivate us to work together to shape a better future for Asia and Europe.

I look forward to the enlightening discussions that will follow.

Thank you very much.