

ASEM Conference of Ministers Responsible for Education

Education and Training for Tomorrow: Common Perspectives in Asia and Europe

Berlin, 5/6 May 2008

Conclusions by the Chair

The first meeting of the Ministers responsible for education of the ASEM countries was held in Berlin on 5-6 May 2008.

The meeting was chaired by the German Federal Minister of Education and Research, Dr. Annette Schavan, and supported by the President of the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the *Länder*, Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer. The meeting was co-sponsored by China, Denmark and Japan.

The discussion on the first day was focussed on strengthening cooperation in higher education by forging strategic partnerships. Exchanges of views on the second day concentrated on enhancing employability and lifelong learning by bringing together education and the labour market.

The Meeting congratulated Germany on having taken the initiative for this first meeting of ASEM Education Ministers and underlined the importance of a stable and productive dialogue, thus supporting the key role of education and training in each country's efforts towards economic and social development as well as in making globalisation a success for all parties concerned.

The Meeting recognised that:

1. There is a growing need for more intensive relations and cooperation between Europe and Asia in a globalising world and stressed the increased economic interdependence of the two regions. ASEM plays a vital role as a platform for dialogue and cooperation among the European and Asian partners of the ASEM process.
2. The ASEM Education Ministerial Meeting in Berlin is an important first step towards strengthening the dialogue and fostering cooperation between ASEM partners in the field of education and training. The two regions look back on a history of long and successful bilateral partnerships in science and education. Experience with cultural and academic diversity has created many opportunities for personal growth, has promoted tolerance and has reduced discrimination by helping to develop a global democratic culture. The knowledge of languages and cultures of the ASEM partners is considered important by the Meeting.
3. Ensuring the quality and competitiveness of higher education systems and institutions is a key element for educating qualified and employable citizens

and promoting economic growth in Asia and Europe. Higher education is therefore regarded as an important area of exchange and cooperation. The internationalisation of education in general, and of higher education in particular, is an important factor for making education systems and institutions more attractive and competitive worldwide.

4. The visibility of and the information on European and Asian education systems and institutions still leave room for improvement in both regions. Obstacles that may prevent the extension of individual exchange and institutional partnerships must be defined and tackled. Structural cooperation (e.g. bilateral agreements, partnerships, joint study programmes and research projects, off-shore activities) is crucial for creating sustainable links between European and Asian universities.
5. In view of the rapid social and economic changes and demographic challenges in both regions, education systems have to deliver both broad general knowledge and labour-market related competences and skills. Close cooperation between education and industry at international, national, regional and local level is a core element for ensuring the employability of the young generation entering the workforce as well as the employability of older generations.

The Meeting agreed:

- (1) To set up a strategic Asia-Europe education partnership for the 21st century, to strengthen the ASEM dialogue and cooperation in the field of education to include stakeholders at all levels and to convene a second Ministerial Meeting on Education in Vietnam in 2009.
- (2) To send key messages from the Berlin Conference to the ASEM summit in Beijing for acknowledgment and to pass on the chair's conclusions to the Asia-Europe Higher Education Leadership Dialogue Meeting in Berlin in October 2008 for further discussion.
- (3) To invite ASEM members to join an EU-Asia working group including Senior Officials and stakeholders from the education sector to identify the challenges connected with strengthening the mobility of students, teachers and researchers, and to make suggestions for improving the framework conditions for bi-regional exchanges with special regard to recognition of qualifications and degrees.
- (4) To propose the establishment of a bi-regional forum involving stakeholders from the education and economic sector to strengthen the dialogue and cooperation between education and industry at local, national and international level. A regular exchange of experience on how to promote knowledge, skills, and competences relevant to the labour market could thus be established.

- (5) To continue to internationalise their education systems and to encourage the internationalisation of institutions, especially in higher education. The Meeting acknowledged the role of internationalisation processes in the field of higher education in both regions and expressed its interest in exchanging views and experiences between Asia and Europe.
- (6) To encourage international educational mobility between both regions and to especially enhance more balanced exchanges of talented students, graduates and researchers by strengthening the potential of national, bilateral and multilateral mobility schemes (such as ASEM DUO and ERASMUS Mundus). Bi-regional exchanges, including foreign language learning, intercultural training and practical work experience, should be considered. The Meeting acknowledged the efforts of the European Commission and the Asia Europe Foundation (ASEF) to enhance bi-regional people-to-people-exchanges. Exchanges with less economically developed countries are encouraged.
- (7) To promote all kinds of structural education cooperation among ASEM partners in both regions to increase sustainability. Special attention should be given to university partnerships and networks (e.g. AUN-SEED Net, ASEA and EURASIA-PACIFIC UNINETS) and to the joint development of study programmes (possibly with double or joint degrees) and common research projects. Joint off-shore activities, such as the organisation of summer schools, joint study programmes and the foundation of area study centres, could be of considerable value. The activities of the German Academic Exchange Service in this field could be a source of inspiration.
- (8) To intensify EU-Asia cooperation in the field of lifelong learning. The Meeting encouraged the ASEM Lifelong Learning HUB to extend its network to all ASEM partners and to increase its research activities. Higher education institutions play a key role in lifelong learning, especially as regards the continuing education and further training of post-graduates and non-academics.
- (9) To increase the visibility of the education systems and institutions of both regions by improving information and stimulating joint marketing initiatives. Existing transnational platforms for dialogue and information (as implemented by Asia-Link and ASEF) as well as existing marketing tools at international (e.g. European Higher Education Fairs in Asia) and national level should be used and developed further. Alumni and their networks are encouraged to contribute to the dissemination of information.

The Meeting welcomed

Vietnam's offer to host the next ASEM Education Ministerial Meeting in Hanoi in 2009 and encouraged all ASEM members to contribute to the preparation of this event.