

The Post-Colonial Meeting of Asia and Europe

Cultural Rapprochement between Asia and Europe

In this article the author discussed a series of presentations by leading figures from the political and academic worlds in the mid-late 1990s, which were published in an IIAS volume on prospects for Asia-Europe cultural rapprochement.

Original source: Velde, Paul van der. 1998. "Cultural Rapprochement between Asia and Europe: An Introduction". *Cultural Rapprochement between Asia and Europe: Five Essays on the Asia-Europe Relationship*, edited by Velde, Paul van der. Leiden: International Institute for Asian Studies. 9-13. IIAS Lecture Series 7.

The Road to Greater Understanding

The complementarity of Europe and Asia was stressed by the Prime Minister of Singapore, Goh Chok Tong, in his address entitled: "The Asia-Europe Dialogue: the Road to Greater Understanding", delivered at the Egmont Palace for the Belgian Royal Institute of International Relations in Brussels on 14 October 1996. The first part of his address was devoted to the importance of strengthening the economic ties and security relations between both continents, a matter which was a key topic at the first Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) in Bangkok in March 1996. This was itself the outcome of several preparatory meetings between Asian and European resource persons, notably the Asia-Europe Forum in Venice in January 1996.

The second part of his address concerned the cultural-scientific dimension of the Asia-Europe relationship. In efforts to forge a durable relationship, Goh portrayed cultural rapprochement as being of equal importance to the intensification of economic ties. In fact the one was closely related to the other. He delineated three stages in this cultural rapport process. In the first or networking phase, the gaps in knowledge of each other's cultures should be filled. In this period the organisational infrastructure of Asian and European Studies should be strengthened and high-level meetings of resource persons should lead to the intensification of the internationalisation of these studies. This was clearly a phase through which we

were then passing. The next phase was seen as permeated by constructive dialogue in which common concerns should take center stage in the discussions. The third or consensus-building phase, in which civil society had a major role to play, was seen as the time when shared values developed.

The Third Dimension of the Asia-Europe Relationship

Wim Stokhof, director of the International Institute for Asian Studies (IIAS) and secretary of the European Science Foundation Asia Committee (ESF-AC) delivered his lecture "The third Dimension of the Asia-Europe Relationship: Reflections on Asian and European Studies in Europe", during the conference "Asia-Europe: Strengthening the Informal Dialogues" organised by the Institut Français des Relations Internationales (IFRI) in Paris on 5-6 November 1996. In this lecture Stokhof labelled cultural and scientific rapprochement as the "third dimension of Asia-Europe relations" (the other dimensions being trade and security). Stokhof saw a trend in which European Studies, previously concentrated on European Law, Economics, and Political and Administrative Science were becoming less and less inward-looking. Likewise Asian Studies in Europe, formerly backward-looking in nature and concentrating on the uniqueness and cultural diversity of Asian countries on the basis of generally held theories of development, now focused more on research into the similarities between European and Asian cultures. Stokhof made a cogent plea for long-term research programmes addressing broad issues which would pay appropriate attention to historical foundations and then move on to predict their future developments in the global, triangular context. The institutionalisation of such a joint research effort would then bear fruit in the building up of a pool of Asian and European resource persons working together in fully fledged multifunctional European institutes in Asia and Asian institutes in Europe. These persons and centers could usher in the constructive dialogue phase outlined by Goh Chok Tong.

Asianisation and Westernisation

The contribution of Tommy Svensson, director of the Nordic Institute of Asian Studies (NIAS) and chairman of the ESF-AC, entitled "Prospects for Improved Pacific and Asia-Europe Cooperation in Research, Education, and Culture", was presented in Leiden at the Dutch Diplomat's Day, 24 August 1996. There Svensson analysed the reasons why there was, until the recent resurgence, hardly any interest about Asia in Europe. He traced this lack of interest back to the framework of thinking associated with the Enlightenment, which came to consider all non-European

civilisations as inferior. This perspective was further reinforced by the nineteenth century evolutionist view on history, in which progress was the key concept. Western civilisation backed by its technological superiority was the yardstick by which to measure all other civilisations. This intellectual climate, he argued, not only influenced important nineteenth-century thinkers but exerted its influence on Western intellectuals down to the present-day.

Svensson saw two possible scenarios for the development of the Asia-Europe relationship. One was the confrontational scenario in which Europe saw Asia as a threat and, in order to reinforce that idea, kept pointing to low wages, child labour, and the alleged lack of human rights in Asia. In the other, more positive scenario, Asia was seen as a challenge and an opportunity, with the emphasis shifted to the similarities between both cultures and the development of common values in a shared learning process in which the under-utilised resource of approximately 10,000 Asianists in Europe would play an important role. It was clear that Svensson opted for the second scenario, in which cooperation with thinkers from Asia would ultimately create the social, cultural, and intellectual framework for political and economic interaction between Europe and Asia.

Eurasia

François Godement, senior research associate at IFRI and professor at the French National Institute of Oriental Languages and Civilisations (INALCO), also delivered his lecture, "The Key to an Asia-Europe Partnership Lies in Europe", during the Dutch Diplomats' Day. Godement focused more on trade and security aspects of the future Asia-Europe relationship, which he considered to be the missing link in international relations; the creation of ASEM having sent a clear signal that outlived, reciprocal prejudices should be relegated to the past. Taking a European perspective on the Asia-Europe relationship, Godement saw a convergence of the initiatives made towards achieving a common European foreign and security policy with an awareness in Europe of the rise of Asia. In this perspective, the Asia-Europe relationship could provide a test of the truth. Only the realisation of a joint European vision of the shape such a relationship must assume could lead to a European offer for cooperation both in economic and security fields. Meanwhile, European businessmen should strive to create a commercial network similar to that which Americans and Asians have been forging over recent decades. In this process, Godement also saw a role for European academicians once they had overcome the rift between orientalist and Asia-oriented research, which severely hampered the study of contemporary Asia. He blamed this on the frame of mind outlined by Svensson. Although basically sound, Godement's assertion that the

Asian perception of Europe, which is one of consumers visiting a cultural museum, may be an exaggeration *pour la bonne cause*.

Towards a New Civilisation

The article by the Japanese author and politician Shintaro Ishihara, entitled "Towards a New Civilization" is a reworked version of the lecture he gave at the Dutch Diplomats' Day. Ishihara was one of the leading figures in the Asian values movement and co-author, with the Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohammed, of the bestseller *The Voice of Asia: Two Leaders Discuss the Coming Century*. In his article Ishihara showed himself to be an outspoken proponent of an Asian model of capitalism, which he saw as a challenge to alleged Western domination and as a vindication of the ancient civilisations of Asia. Ishihara signalled the retreat of the West and an increasing dynamism in Asia, thriving on shared Asian values. Those values would, Ishihara claimed, have a great influence on those values which would ultimately crystallise from a fusion with those of the West.

The emphasis Ishihara gave to Asian values seems to have fallen victim to events. At least this is the conclusion one can gather from the other contributions to this volume, all of which point more in the direction of a cultural rapprochement in which mutual trust and the development of shared values were high on the agenda of the Asia-Europe relationship.



Figure 11. Covers of *Cultural Rapprochement between Asia and Europe*, *ASEM: A Window of Opportunity* and *Asian-European Perspectives*. Photo Cindy Bakker.

ASEM: A Window of Opportunity

In this article, co-authored with Wim Stokhof, director of the IIAS, Paul van der Velde introduced and situated in their proper context a series of papers published by Kegan Paul International on the future prospects and developments of ASEM, the Asia-Europe Meeting.

Original source: Stokhof, Wim and Velde, Paul van der. 1998. "ASEM: A Window of Opportunity". *ASEM: A Window of Opportunity*, edited by Stokhof, Wim and Velde, Paul van der, 1-9. London: Kegan Paul International.

The Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) is a unique interregional forum which consists of six members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), along with China, Japan, South Korea and the 15 members of European Union (EU). ASEM officially came into being at the first summit, held in Bangkok in 1996. It was born out of the necessity, felt as much in Europe as in Asia, of improving the dialogue between both continents, which had been neglected since the end of decolonisation. Although there had been contacts at the level of foreign ministries between ASEAN and the EU dating from the late 1970s, they were of a rhetorical nature and lacked substance. This changed with the inauguration of ASEM. In general the process was considered by both parties involved as a way of fortifying the relations between Asia and Europe, a necessity to balance the triangular world (US, Asia and Europe) of the 21st century. We can begin to distinguish its main components which were, by far, more substantial than the talks between Europe and Asia before the inauguration of ASEM.

The main components of the process included political dialogue, security, business, education and culture. Since the first meeting of heads of state in Bangkok there were a number of follow-up meetings on all of these topics. Political bodies generated some of the meetings, but others spontaneously came into being. A number of the participating countries, realising the importance of the process, created ASEM sections within their respective ministries of foreign affairs in order to closely monitor the multi-faceted ASEM process. This was increasingly propelled by the many new opportunities for communication offered by the rapidly developing information technology boom.

Notwithstanding this positive start, ASEM remained a loosely organised process, making it an easy target for sceptics who often pointed to its non-focused nature. They were of the opinion that only the creation of a more formal body could secure the momentum of ASEM. Steps in the direction of formalisation led to, for example, the creation of the Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF) in Singapore in 1997. The ASEF aimed to increase dialogue between Asia and Europe at all levels of society. Other initiatives such as the Asia-Europe Business Forum (AEBF) and

the Senior Officials Meeting on Trade and Development (SOMTI) also offered the possibility of developing into more formalised bodies. Still the meetings of a more informal nature far outnumbered the formalised ones and could be viewed as a token of the enthusiasm which the process generated.

The articles considered here are a clear reflection of the more informal side of the ASEM process, although not uniquely so. They were written by Asian and European politicians and academics involved in the process from its very beginning and all share the most important belief underlying the ASEM process, namely that it was based on partnership and equality. The contributions deal with a variety of topics such as security, economy, politics, education, culture, exchange of information and so forth. Of course these articles do not cover the whole spectrum of the ASEM process but they do give us an idea of what was not only an exciting experiment but a development which could also be construed as the beginning of a new era in the relationship between Asia and Europe.

The articles were loosely grouped around four themes: The Politicians' View of ASEM; Improving Mutual Contact between Asia and Europe; Challenges and Problem Areas; and the Future of ASEM. The first three articles were concerned with the political dimension of the ASEM process as considered by a Minister of State, a Director for Relations with Far Eastern Countries of the European Commission, and a Euro-parliamentarian. Their contributions touched upon the various levels at which the political dialogue took place.

The Politicians' View of ASEM

Derek Fatchett, in his article "Setting the Agenda for ASEM 2: From Bangkok to London via Singapore", reflected upon the Agenda of ASEM 2, held from 2-4 April 1998 in London. He clearly saw a special role in the ASEM process for the United Kingdom in bridging the gaps between Asia and Europe since it had been a long-time trading partner of Asia and because its economy enjoyed much Asian investment. One of the aims of the British government was to further increase the level of collegiality among the countries of ASEM, which was already high during the Bangkok meeting. This became known as the "Spirit of Bangkok".

According to Fatchett, ASEM was unique because of the strong involvement of the business committees of Asia and Europe, as exemplified in AEBF. The involvement of business in the process would increase the prosperity of both regions and, in a roundabout manner, also stimulate political dialogue (including on sensitive issues such as human rights) which in Fatchett's eyes was at the heart of ASEM. Another cornerstone of the future success of ASEM would be the broadening and deepening of educational exchanges between Asia and Europe. This was the most

effective way of challenging existing prejudices and nurturing new relationships. In this context Fatchett pointed to ASEF as a catalyst in stimulating cultural, educational, intellectual, and people-to-people contacts.

Percy Westerlund brought out the European Commission's perspective on how links between Europe and Asia could be intensified in his article "Strengthening of Europe-Asian Relations: ASEM as a catalyst". Although clearly optimistic about ASEM, he saw three possible traps: the setting of unrealistic goals; proliferation of follow-up meetings; and holding summits too often. Of these three he considered the risk of proliferation the most dangerous because he felt the process would then run the risk of losing its focus. In this context, Westerlund pleaded for a structural approach along the lines of the comprehensive framework programmes applied by the EU, in which priorities are clearly delineated. The establishment in 1997 of the Vison Group, which consisted of resource persons from both continents, was designed to lead to the formulation of such a programme, to be presented during ASEM 3 in Seoul in the year 2000.

Although not necessarily in order of importance, Westerlund saw three priority areas: trade and investment; culture, education and personal exchange; and political dialogue. In the field of trade and investment there were two main forums: the AEBF and SOMTI. Their task was to forge a Euro-Asian alliance in support of a more ambitious and global approach, and to advise the ASEM leaders and governments on how to improve economic ties. The SOMTI in turn would be fed by two advisory groups, which would report on a Trade Facilitation Action Plan (TFAP) and an Investment Promotion Asia Plan (IPAP).

While the articles of Fatchett and Westerlund were written from a perspective of international politics, Michael Hindley, in his article "Involving Politicians in the Political Dialogue: A Parliamentary Perspective", dealt with the question of how politicians should translate the ASEM process to the voters and subsequently generate enthusiasm for a fairly abstract phenomenon. Politics which seems to be rational and explicable at an interregional level did not necessarily always translate into positive scenarios at a local level. The lifting of measures restricting imports from Asia might well be conducive to the ASEM process but if in practice it boiled down to, for example, the foreclosure of a plant with hundreds of workers in a parliamentarian's constituency, it was very difficult for the politician involved to explain the grander political scheme and even more difficult for him to be re-elected.

While such eventualities might diminish popular support for ASEM, Hindley was also aware of the possibilities of democratising the ASEM dialogue and commercial relationship by involving Europe's population of Asian extraction in that dialogue. The European-Asians could play a key role in widening the ASEM dialogue, as could the politicians who represented them. Notwithstanding the fact that Hindley clearly understood the role of European-Asians in the process, he was not convinced that

the advantages of a deeper understanding of each other's cultures was bound to improve the economic ties between Asia and Europe. However, many other people involved in the dialogue attached great value to the role culture could play in bridging the existing gaps between Asia and Europe. Wim Stokhof was one such person.

Improving Mutual Contact between Asia and Europe

In his contribution, "Bringing the Communities Together: What More Can Be Done?" Stokhof focused on the mediating role culture can play in increasing mutual understanding between Europe and Asia. Cultural rapprochement could only enhance economic growth and deepen the political consensus. Knowledge of each other's culture would augment our capacity to recognise prevailing stereotypes and to replace them by ideas and images more deeply rooted in contemporary realities. In order to be able to measure the impact of the process to some extent, Stokhof called for a (permanent) survey executed across both regions which could fine-tune the process of cultural rapprochement.

Stokhof emphasised the critical role education plays in cultural sensitisation. Thus exposure to each other's culture should, he considered, begin at the secondary school level through the teaching of language and culture, with the introduction of one-year exchange fellowships for secondary school students in Asia or Europe. At the university and institutional level, long-term joint research programmes on matters of interregional importance needed to be carried out by mixed groups of Asian and European researchers with disciplinary backgrounds in the Humanities, Social Sciences and technological fields. The formation of strategic alliances between European and Asian research institutes was one means to pave the way for such a development.

András Hernádi, in his article "Increasing Opportunities for Greater Contact: Asia and Eastern Europe", looked at various possible ways to improve contacts between Asia and Eastern Europe. He drew a parallel between ASEM and Central Europe in the sense that ASEM was the missing link in a triangular power equation. In turn he considered Central Europe to be the missing link in ASEM itself. Central European countries were by no means the only countries interested in becoming members of ASEM. More than twenty Asian and European countries also wanted to join in. Hernádi pleaded for the inclusion of what he considered to be the core group of Central Eastern European countries: the Czech Republic, Poland, and Hungary.

Hernádi particularly looked at Hungarian relations with Asia. He predicted a shift of Asian investment from Western to Central Europe, which was more attractive in view of its low wage costs. Added to that, Hungary was a regional centre for tourism, banking and finance. Hernádi quoted three other assets of Hungary:

its openness and multicultural set up; the Hungarian diaspora feeding back to Hungary; and the Hungarians' entrepreneurial and hardworking attitude. He was strongly in favour of increasing bilateral contacts with Asian countries by setting up centres in Asia, which would combine diplomatic, commercial, educational and cultural efforts.

César de Prado Yepes, in his article "Connecting ASEM to the Global Information Society (GIS)", discussed a very important aspect of ASEM's future. The emergence of GIS created a much wider range of opportunities for contact than ever before. Furthermore, those opportunities did not involve great expenditure. De Prado Yepes, like Westerlund, pleaded for the adoption of EU-like framework programs to achieve more focus. For example, in the sphere of communications there were endeavours such as the Golden Bridge Infrastructure Project aiming at the informatisation of China using advanced fiber-optic satellite technologies. De Prado Yepes also strongly favoured the creation of more Internet gateways in Europe and Asia because most Internet traffic searching the fastest route to its destination found its way through the US when flowing back and forth between Asia and Europe.

Challenges and Problem Areas

Dong Ik-Shin and Gerald Segal, in their contribution "Getting Serious about Asia-Europe Security Cooperation", sought a more engaged approach within the ASEM towards security if it wished to achieve a well-balanced global triangular relationship. Although Asia and Europe did not play an important role in each other's security context, they did need to work more closely together in this arena. Segal and Dong pleaded for a flexible understanding of the word "security": economic and military dimensions could not be separated from security in an increasingly interdependent world. They distinguished between "hard security" and "soft security with a hard edge".

After the withdrawal of the colonial powers from Asia there remained little that could be labelled hard security apart from a few remnants of French and British presence in the area of the Five Power Defence Arrangements (FPDA) in which the UK, Singapore, Malaysia, Australia and New Zealand cooperated. The sale of sophisticated weapon systems, training and transfers of intelligence also fell into the "hard" category. After 1992, the European market share in arms-related sales to Pacific-Asia hovered around twenty per cent. Dong and Segal saw a sensible arms-transfer strategy of vital importance to security building in Asia. Defending a stable Pacific-Asia that remained open and connected to the global economy was a vital interest of Europe, which it should want to defend in order not to continue free-loading on the US.

In the field of “soft” security they saw three possible fields of cooperation in the ASEM context. European countries had wide experience in Confidence Building Measures (CBMs) which they could easily share with their Asian partners. Also, European countries were very familiar with preventive diplomacy to help prevent the emergence or escalation of conflicts, which could be carried out in the context of the United Nations (UN), in which one-third of the budget and one-third of the personnel for such UN operations was from Europe, with Asia’s contribution rising. Peacekeeping within the UN framework could enhance the ASEM process.

Another problem area (but at the same time an opportunity) for closer cooperation was international corruption. Jong Bum Kim, in his article “Combating International Corruption: In Search of an Effective Role for ASEM”, described recent international movements to combat corruption against the backdrop of multilateral efforts to develop a framework for investment liberalisation. In the process, Kim argued that ASEM could play a unique role by filtering the discussion on combating corruption before it reached multilateral rule-making bodies such as the World Trade Organisation (WTO). Kim proposed that ASEM should first take up the issue of combating international corruption before tackling domestic corruption issues. This had the advantage that the international community could avoid pointing fingers at corrupt behaviour in one particular country. Thus ASEM could first provide a balanced forum for raising consciousness of the adverse effects of corruption in international business and then make concrete proposals to combat it.

Tetsundo Iwakuni, in his contribution “Developing the Business Relationship between Asia and Europe: Trends and Challenges”, made a clear distinction in the relationship between overall trends, trade related trends and capital market trends. He then focused in particular on the relationship between Europe and Japan, which he did not consider applicable to the rest of Asia. Iwakuni saw four major challenges affecting the future business relationship between Asia and Europe. These related to the environment, political culture, social ethics and education.

By far the biggest challenge lay in the field of education. Ikwakuni pointed out that it was of crucial importance that the opportunities for educational exchange between Europe and Asia be drastically enlarged. Educational exchange was essential in ensuring mutual understanding in the areas of language, culture, economy and plain people-to-people contacts. Without this two-way flow it would be impossible to improve the relationship. He considered it a challenge for non-English speaking countries in Europe to attract more Asian students. The number of Asians studying in Europe was a mere fraction of those studying in the US; while the number of European students studying in Asia was again a mere fraction of Asians studying in Europe. Not only the quantity but also the quality of the existing exchanges would have to be increased by including not only transfers of knowledge or technical skills but also the cultural background of the country

the students were living in. In sum, raising intercultural sensitivity by means of intercultural education was, in the eyes of Iwakuni, the paradigm on which the new Asia-Europe relationship should be founded.

The Future of ASEM

Zao Gancheng, in his article “Assessing China’s Impact on Asia-EU Relations”, first examined China’s domestic development over the previous two decades and secondly discussed its open-door policy. He also discussed the important role China should play in the ASEM process. With its huge population and fast-growing market, China not only had a big influence on developments in Asia as a regional power but also increasingly as a global player. Clearly China would benefit most from a stable Asia-Pacific as the EU does, but cautioned that configurations at a regional level could interfere with those at a global level.

According to Zhao, China would work towards improving its relations with other Asian countries and with the EU, which could be done effectively within the ASEM context. Therefore China would further open its markets and liberalise its domestic economy, which in turn would stimulate the economic relations between the EU, ASEAN, Japan and South Korea. Not only economic benefits would be reaped from this improved relationship: it would also create an environment in which security matters such as arms control and non-proliferation could be put on the agenda of ASEM. Furthermore, the new dialogue between Asia and Europe would help to balance the emerging triangular power structure of the 21st century.

In the last contribution, “The Future of the ASEM Process: Who, How, Why, and What”, Jürgen Rüländ looked at the future of the ASEM process in practical terms. As to “who”, it was no secret that a host of countries wanted to participate in the ASEM process for various reasons. Rüländ singled out six categories of future participants: Australia and New Zealand; India and Pakistan; Russia; Eastern European countries; European Free Trade Association (EFTA) members; Myanmar and Laos. As a yardstick for future inclusion in the process, he used the argument that the candidates should not introduce new lines of conflicts which could endanger the process. In analysing the above-mentioned categories he did not anticipate danger in including Eastern European countries such as Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary, Australia and New Zealand, and even India and Pakistan because *détente* between the latter two countries would be in the interest of all existing ASEM members.

Rüländ continued pleading for a moratorium on membership until the year 2000. However, applicants should be given observer status and the secretary-generals of overlapping regional organisations should be unconditionally admitted to

AEBF and ASEF. Furthermore, task forces should be formed which concentrated on the different aspects of the process. These in turn should feed back to the summits and the foreign ministers' meetings. In order to coordinate all activities, a modest secretariat should be set up and soon the allocation of the budgets would have to be sorted out.

Rüland put forward a number of arguments both of a theoretical and practical nature as to why the process was functional and positive for all parties involved. As such, the interregional approach in international relations promised to be the most fruitful in terms of efficiency. Multilateral bodies with too many players and too widely diverging interests had become unmanageable, with rounds of negotiations which could stretch out over decades. ASEM in particular could be a stimulus for the emerging triangular global power structure. Furthermore, it could clarify intra-regional positions on all kinds of topics and increase the efficiency of international decision making.

Practical motives from a European point of view to actively stimulate the ASEM process were: making good lost opportunities and recapturing the initiative in global affairs against the backdrop of its unification: using ASEM as a platform for discussion on issues which could be solved at a supranational level; and shared security interests with Asia. From the Asian point of view, bolstering the ASEM process would increase its bargaining power with the EU, which could become increasingly inward-looking as a result of the unification of the "fortressed" Europe. Asia could use ASEM to press for a more open EU economic system.

As to what should be done in the future in the ASEM context, Rüland shared many of the ideas put forward by other contributors to this book. However, he clearly stressed that the involvement of civil society at all imaginable levels should be stepped up immediately because otherwise the ASEM process ran the risk of petering out. Needless to say, the media in Europe and Asia, which so far had paid remarkably little attention to this important process, needed to be more alert in picking up news that did not originate in the US but on our own doorstep in Eurasia. So the big question remaining to be answered was how popular ASEM really was.

ASEM for the People!

There can be no doubt that a new interregional dialogue between Asia and Europe, devoid of either colonial or new value rhetoric, was not only useful in the global triangular context but also *per se* a means to boost the intraregional contacts of the Eurasian landmass and between two neighbouring cultures made to believe that they were completely different in nature and texture. Such sayings as the "East is East and the West is West and never the twain shall meet" were engraved not only

in the collective memory of Europeans but also in that of Asian peoples. In retrospect, a picture emerges of two cultures learning from and accepting each other. While this once occurred on a very small scale, we could not escape the conclusion looking to the future that a phase of cultural rapprochement was rapidly emerging, and on a more pervasive scale. Therefore the academic and cultural community should build on this new window of opportunity, which the ASEM process offered, by increasing communication at all levels.

Science and culture – the two most important cornerstones of the Eurasian civilisation that brought into being a meaningful transfer, not only of people, but also of human matters such as ideas, technology, services, goods and food – had to involve themselves across the board to integrate the challenge of the ASEM process. The process elevated the promise of a multicultural world in which twains stem from the same tree. It is not very likely that many people noticed the banner flying from Nelson's Column in Trafalgar Square during ASEM 2. But the text written on it not only encapsulated the essence of the ASEM process but also its precondition for success: ASEM for the People!

Asian-European Perspectives

By 2001, it had become possible to identify trends and suggest possible future approaches to the development of ASEM. This article by Wim Stokhof and Paul van der Velde gives space to discussing these trends and possible future approaches.

Original source: Stokhof, Wim and Velde, Paul van der. 2001. "Asian-European Perspectives". *Asian-European Perspectives: Developing the ASEM Process* edited by Velde, Paul van der and Stokhof, Wim. London: Curzon Press. ix-xvi.

The Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) was officially established in 1996 at the first summit in Bangkok. At the beginning of the new millennium there seemed to be all the more reason to deepen this process because the US was downscaling its involvement worldwide. In Europe, we saw a host of new developments emerging. The Monetary Union was finally established after many years of debate. Unfortunately a political union which would make the EU more resolute still seemed far away, although there was a continuous political consultation on foreign policy between the most important countries in Europe. In the field of security, a European Rapid Deployment Force (ERDF) was in the making. Additionally, some people did not realise that Europe was also a nuclear power. In the field of education the Declaration of Bologna would go a long way towards the uniformisation of the curricula of higher education. That development of an accreditation system for higher education was an unequivocal sign that Europe was striving towards integration. The Convention of Nice which gave the official go ahead to the further expansion of the EU also created its own dynamism. In Asia, there were also numerous initiatives towards achieving further integration.

Thus we produced a new book, *Asian-European Perspectives: Developing the ASEM Process*, as a sequel to the work discussed above: *ASEM: a Window of Opportunity*. In the first volume we looked at the politicians' view of ASEM, the possibilities of improving mutual contact between Asia and Europe, while simultaneously trying to delineate the challenges and problem areas and hence map out the future of ASEM. In the second volume the contributors tried to answer questions of a more practical nature or present views of the process, such as: How had the ideas of the ASEM Vision Group developed? How could ASEM's potential be realised? How could we create a usable ASEM vocabulary? How could we create a Eurasian research culture? The answers to these questions were of paramount importance to the continuation of the process.

The contributions to this book were written by Asian and European academics, politicians, and businessmen. Most of them had been involved in the ASEM from its inception and freely supported the necessity of the process. This does not mean that they were not critical. On the contrary, many expressed strong doubts about the

feasibility and durability of the ASEM process, but at the same time were conscious of the fact that without it the world would be a far less stable place in which to live. We, and all the contributors too, were involved in the ASEM process because we were convinced that if it had not been invented, it should have been invented. It was timely because the “triangular world” – of which we saw the glimmerings earlier – was fast growing into a reality which we had to grasp before it was too late.

The Vision Group's Vision

The first three contributions were written by persons closely connected with the ASEM Vision Group which drew upon a report entitled, *For a Better Tomorrow: Asia-Europe Partnership in the 21st Century*. This can be considered the guidebook to ASEM for the ensuing twenty-five years. Niels Helvig Petersen, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Denmark, a country which would host ASEM in 2002, struck a positive note in his article “ASEM: Realising the Potential for the Next Millennium”, although he was not blind to the shortcomings of the ASEM process. He was of the opinion that ASEM should serve as a facilitator and a bridge builder in creating a deeper understanding between Europe and Asia concerning some of the key issues which are on the global agenda. Therefore ASEM should gradually integrate Asia and Europe into an area of peace and shared development. In that context, both regions should broaden their concepts of security and build regionally-based crisis management capabilities. This broadening clearly anticipated a partial US military withdrawal from both the Asian and European theatres.

The title of the article by John Boyd, “Being Serious about Asia”, sounds like an overt warning to all Europeans who had not yet grasped the importance of Asia for Europe. He openly warned the countries of Europe that they could not afford to ignore Asia whatever the “distractions” – such as the enlargement of the EU or the introduction of the Euro – might be. At the same time he called upon individuals to boost the process. Being a man with a wealth of Asian experience, Boyd knew that long-term personal relationships would not only give more substance and flavour to the process, but at the same time they would bolster the institutional framework of ASEM. In his argumentation, he pleaded for the reinforcement of cultural contact and more transparency through the establishment of an international degree accreditation system with benchmarking between the two regions. He considered that this would serve to shed more light on testing systems and also result in the use of “best practices”. This could be one of the most promising outcomes of the ASEM process as a whole.

Robert S. Arendal, who was a declared representative of the business community and a member of the Vision Group, voiced the private sector's point of view

most clearly. In his article, which bears the same title as the Vision Group's report, he made a strong plea for a multilateral trading system, a free flow of goods by 2025, and such meaningful initiatives as the Asia-Europe Trade Week. He was convinced that the ASEM process had to move beyond government circles and therefore needed strong input by businessmen and academics. Whereas in the beginning the ASEM process was first and foremost seen by politicians as a way to increase and develop economic co-operation, Arendal expressed some disappointment at the meagre concrete results which had so far been achieved in this domain.

Realising ASEM's Potential

In his article "Resolving the Paradox", Anthony Murphy pointed out the paradox underlying the relationship between the private sector and the government in the ASEM process. Some saw this relationship as its greatest strength while others conceived of it as its most serious weakness. The paradox had to be resolved otherwise ASEM, as a process in which the private sector had an active role, would lose its credibility. Among the reasons ASEM might have to cede this credibility in the eyes of the business community was the lack of such crucial factors as focus, engagement, continuity, and feedback. Quick results served to get by on but they rarely endured or had a long-lasting impact. Therefore, ASEM business forums needed to learn from other similar forums such as the Transatlantic Business Dialogues (TABD) and the APEC Business Advisory Council (ABAC) in order to increase their own bargaining power.

In his contribution "The ASEM Process: New Rules for Engagement in a Global Environment" Leo Schmit took a bird's eye view of the sociological and historical development of the process during the first five years of its existence. He referred to Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong of Singapore, who stated (as above) that there were three stages the ASEM process would have to go through before it reached a mature status: getting to know each other, constructive dialogue, and consensus-based policy making. Schmit felt that we had moved into the second stage. He saw a clear role for Europe in Asia when it came down to balancing US influence in the area, which would set the stage for a more stable world. In view of the fact that the EU was the biggest lender to and investor in Asia, the Euro had the potential to become more widely used in international transactions and could help to prevent a *de facto* inclusion of Asian countries in the Dollar zone. The EU had other important advantages over the US as it had a more highly developed capacity for inter-governmental co-operation and for the building up of regional institutes across natural borders, which were and are highly relevant in Asia where regional diversity is also a matter of course.

In his article “Does ASEM function as a Transregional Forum?”, Jürgen Rüländ gave us the global setting of the ASEM process and the way he perceived its development. Whereas after World War Two global organisations such as the UN were founded, in the fifties these seemed to give way to regional organisations such as the EU, which were primarily established to create a unique identity. However, they lost weight again in the sixties and seventies. At the end of the eighties they again began to gain strength. Rüländ labelled this second wave open regionalism – regional organisations becoming complementary to global organisations. Regional co-operation was now a chance to build up more bargaining power in international forums.

As a transregional forum ASEM could assume an intermediary role between the regional and global policy levels, but to do this ASEM had to become more result-oriented. In turn this would require the institutionalisation of ASEM as an organisation. Rüländ argued that Europe-Asia identity building had already gone much further at an informal level than at a governmental level. He specifically referred to the work done by NGOs on sensitive issues which had not been tackled at the governmental level: issues such as human rights, democracy, and child labour. This remark gave the next contribution by Kiyoko Ikegami an extra dimension.

Inventing an ASEM Vocabulary

In her contribution “Legal Status of Non-Profit Organizations in Japan” Ikegami gave an insightful example of Japanese law-making while at the same time demonstrating how the meaning of a concept such as NGO can differ completely from one context to another. Ikegami zoomed in on the increasingly important role NGOs play in contemporary Japan. She referred to the earthquake in Kobe in 1995 where volunteers rushed in to do the job the paralysed government bureaucracy was incapable of undertaking. Thus the NGOs were clearly pushed into the public realm because the government could not produce an effective response. The upshot was the emergence of a debate on the position of NGOs, organisations which up to that point in time had had a very feeble legal basis and therefore were hampered in their development. Ikegami stated that it was the first time the citizens won a role in political decision making. The NGO Act was passed in 1998 as a consequence of negotiations between citizens’ organisations and the legislature. She saw this as a positive development which carried the potential of giving an increased Japanese grassroots level input to ASEM. Present-day Japanese NGOs are now more readily comparable to their ASEM counterparts or branches in Europe.

In his contribution “How to Facilitate Integration of Developing Nations into the ASEM Process”, Ngyuen Son viewed ASEM primarily as a co-operation based on mutual benefits with preferential policies from developed countries to support

resource-development programs in the developing countries. These countries in turn were doing their utmost to abolish any obstacles which stood in the way of a multilateral trade system and a free flow of capital, goods, and services. Despite this positive note, he sounded a warning, stating that trade-development thinking should move beyond ideas of pure trade growth to include the enhanced participation of all nations in international trade, the reduction of the inequality between rich and poor nations, and an improved quality of life for all. He hoped that these high-set goals could be achieved by the improvement of technological and scientific co-operation.

Daljit Singh addressed another increasingly important topic in his article "Europe and Asia: Promoting Security and Political Co-operation". He made a plea for more European involvement in Asia, because he considered Europe (after two world wars) in contrast to Asia, to provide a relatively peaceful environment. The investments in security should be brought more in balance with the major European investments in the Asian economy. Europe should strive primarily to transfer its knowledge and experience in the fields of preventive diplomacy, confidence building, and peace keeping. This would be specifically useful in potential, or actual, areas of conflict in Asia such as the South China Sea, the Taiwan Straits, and the Korean Peninsula. Singh believed the Asians would welcome this because at that point in history Europe did not have any interest in dominating any part of Asia. Europe could also be of assistance in facilitating the rise of China as a peaceful player in the global arena.

Creating a Eurasian Research Culture

In her contribution, "ASEM: Time for an Overhaul", Nuria Ofken tried to find an answer to the question of what had been achieved by ASEM and what direction it should take. She examined the main components of ASEM, political dialogue, economic co-operation, and cultural exchange to find out whether progress had been made in those fields in fostering a closer relationship between the two regions, something she considered to be the fundamental goal of the process. In the fields of political dialogue and economic co-operation she saw little progress being made and quoted the failed attempts to advance customs' co-operation and investment facilitation, and the fact that no common position could be arrived at on the necessary reform of the United Nations (UN), as examples. She was more optimistic about cultural rapprochement between the two regions, pointing out the activities of ASEF. Notwithstanding small successes in the field of cultural exchange, she pleaded for a clear-cut ASEM agenda because only in that manner would ASEM fulfil its objective of initiating and sustaining collective learning processes, thereby contributing to mutual understanding between the two regions.

In their contribution, “The Need for an ASEM Research Platform”, Sabine Kuypers and Wim Stokhof gave high priority to education and research. Although treated in an off-hand manner over the preceding years, they could now re-emerge as prime factors because of the slow progress made in developing the economic, political, and security pillars of ASEM. Many contributors to this book were inclined to adopt the point of view that deepening the relationship and solidifying the foundation of the process were essential but remain largely unknown, because the results were not immediately visible. Given that politicians are very result-oriented, academics should play a more important role in the process in order to make it more balanced. Petersen underlined this point of view by pleading for the setting up of a focal point to facilitate twinning arrangements and other forms of institutional co-operation between universities and technical colleges in Asia and Europe. Could this be the ASEM Research Platform (ARP) Kuypers and Stokhof pleaded for? ASEM is not only about the exchange of elements of civilisations, but also about the creation of a new civilisation: the Eurasian which will co-exist alongside other great civilisations.

In the last contribution by Cesar de Prado Yepes, entitled “Towards a Virtual ASEM: From Information to Knowledge”, the author accentuated the role new technology could play in boosting the ASEM process. He quoted President Kim Dae-Jung of Korea who made a strong plea for a Trans-Eurasian e-Network. This network would not come as a bolt from the blue because there has been intensive co-operation between Asian and European multinationals in developing standards for GSM and UMTS. Although English is the language used most on the Internet, joint Asian and European efforts have paved the way for a multilingual Internet by developing software for characters. De Prado Yepes hoped that Asian-Europe co-operation in the electronic field would stimulate the creation of virtual cultural and educational spaces even more. He was also aware that the convergence of existing structures at university and research level would be greatly enhanced by benchmarking and the development of an accreditation system which would create the critical mass the ASEM needs in order to achieve its goals.

Mobilising the Eurasian Senses

One could arrive at the conclusion that ASEM had lost its momentum. But appearances deceive. Because the process was first and foremost perceived as a way to increase economic co-operation, the “Asian crisis” of 1998 became an annoying spoil-sport. At a political level ASEM has not yet been able to formulate real common views leaving aside more rhetorical agreement on such hot issues as sexual abuse and so forth. Security has played a very limited role in the process but has become

somewhat more important as the US is scaling down its world-wide operations. In the meantime the cultural pillar, which received the least attention from the politicians, has done what it could with the meagre funds allocated to it. The foundation of ASEF gave cultural co-operation an institutional basis from which to operate and produce results, which it did. Therefore the majority of those mentioned here, who represent all the layers of the process, came more or less to the conclusion that for the time being culture is the way ahead for ASEM. Thanks to the activities of ASEF and other informal initiatives, for instance at NGO level, great progress in lasting co-operation has been made, not least because these organisations made it possible to deal with sensitive issues which lie at the heart of ASEM, such as labour relations and human rights. These had to be solved first before many other aspects of ASEM could be treated in a meaningful manner.

The vast majority of the populations of the Asian and European countries were not aware of the process as such and therefore they were also ignorant of the importance of the intensification of the Eurasian relationship. This low degree of popular participation was reflected in the near absence of interest shown in ASEM by the press. When ASEM 3 was held in Seoul, the main newspapers passed over it in virtual silence. We previously concluded that ASEM should be for the people or it would not survive. We abide by this remark and propose that alongside the intensification of exchange programs for students and high-school pupils, popular sitcoms with a mixed Eurasian cast addressing problems of day to day life in both areas should also be developed. These would contribute enormously to the sensitisation of the populations of the ASEM countries. Europeans could come to the conclusion that the Asianisation of Europe has advanced much further than they could ever have imagined, while Asians could see the Europeanisation in a completely different perspective. If we are talking about the exchange of elements of civilisations, we should open ourselves to it. Asian-European Perspectives are everywhere. One only has to develop one's senses to see, hear, feel, and enjoy them. ASEM should become synonymous with the mobilisation of the Eurasian Senses!

Building an ASEM Research Platform

This article from 2002 examines what had been done in the preceding decade to develop a Eurasian research culture and indicated how those efforts could be expanded within the ASEM context by focusing on the cultural, and above all on the intellectual exchange between Europe and Asia.

Original source: Velde, Paul van der and Stokhof, Wim. 2002. "Building an ASEM Research Platform". *ASEM 2020: A Backgrounder. A Publication of the Strategic Alliance for Asian Studies on the Occasion of the Fourth Asia-Europe Meeting Copenhagen, 22-24 September 2002*, edited by Köllner, Patrick. *Südostasien aktuell*, September: 32-35.

The work of the European Science Foundation (ESF) demonstrated the scope for encouraging a European research culture in various fields. It also highlighted some of the practical difficulties involved in achieving it. Ineluctably it clearly revealed the importance and value of the multilateral endeavours taking place within its framework. The introduction of the concept of a European Research Area (ERA) by the European Commission must be considered a very important step towards enhancing and expanding collaborative research in Europe.

The establishment of a European research culture to complement and take its place alongside the various national research cultures was a way of ensuring that issues spanning the continent received the best possible analytical attention. The rich European experience could be taken a step further to develop a Eurasian research culture in which issues of common interest could be explored in more depth. More important still are the ideas, analyses, and solutions that can be drawn from the various research cultures in Europe and Asia.

Research as an Integrating Force

The emergence of formal Europe-Asia links through the ASEM process was an important moment in the history of the Eurasian continent. The era of European colonialism in Asia ended four decades ago. Since then relations between the two regions have been relatively distant and fragmentary. This state of affairs was able to prevail so long because of the aftermath of the colonial legacy, the Cold War, and the overwhelming political, economic, and cultural presence of the US in both Asia and Europe.

After the fall of the Berlin Wall, the shape of international relations changed radically. Europe-Asia relations strengthened and by seizing the opportunity this created, the ASEM process began to establish a partnership between the two regions on an unprecedented basis of parity. The rub is that ASEM had been

devised primarily to address economic, political, and security issues. Research was virtually absent from its agenda, even though multilateral research and education are the most essential tools by which to reinforce an Asia-Europe rapprochement. The importance of an intellectual partnership that also pays attention to cultural co-operation is of primary importance.

Research linkages between Asia and Europe, especially in the Humanities and Social Sciences, have remained relatively weak since the end of the colonial era, in particular compared with the contacts between both regions and the US. Many Asian scholars continue to work within the scientific paradigms acquired during their studies in the US unaware of the developments in Europe. European scholars have tended to be academically self-sufficient but at the same time have been aware of the developments in the US.

Although Europe and Asia have much to offer to the other, the construction of a durable relationship, which deals in more than goods and services requires careful attention being paid to Europe-Asian interaction in the world of ideas. The rapprochement between Asia and Europe has been rapid but in the process outdated cultural stereotypes still tend to dominate the minds of the decision-makers and the general public in both regions when communicating.

These stereotypes were perhaps useful in the days when contacts were sparse, but they are inadequate to deal with, and at times are indeed actively injurious to, the complex, multifaceted relationship between Asia and Europe which emerged in the final decade of the twentieth century. The global communications revolution gives the misleading impression that the rapid delivery of information brings with it immediate understanding. In fact, rapid communication tends to reinforce the use of stereotypes as an easy tool for sorting (over)abundant information. Establishing a framework for replacing stereotypes with operative solutions based on recent comparative research is the main challenge.

An important part of the search for solutions is the development of a Eurasian research culture in the Humanities and Social Sciences. It is an inescapable fact that each of the national participants in the process works with distinctive national research paradigms, and each of these systems has both strengths and weaknesses. To the extent that ASEM participants take part in international research projects – and this extent varies greatly from country to country – that research is often linked to paradigmatic approaches developed in the US. The research preoccupations of the US are not alien to those of the rest of the world, but nor are they entirely congruent with those of Asia and Europe.

Without relinquishing existing research links with the US, complementary research cultures which are more attuned to Eurasian interests should be developed. While national boundaries are disappearing from the economic map, the need to understand the factors that shape a regional or national culture becomes

more pressing. Culture is not just a matter of heritage and history, it is also an integral part of our daily lives. It is a reality upon which progress, including economic growth and welfare, depends.

It would be extremely timely to enrich the process of Europe-Asia rapprochement by setting up research programs in the Humanities and Social Sciences. Long-term joint research programs in these fields will deepen our understanding of respective cultural backgrounds. They will serve to ensure peaceful co-existence, meaningful and productive integration, and lasting co-operation. They will also enhance a much-needed mutual understanding. Needless to say, they will encourage people-to-people contact and create links and networks based on trust and mutual respect.

European and Asian Initiatives

The activities of ESF-AC were terminated in 2001 on the bureaucratic grounds that the second (and last) mandate of three years had expired. Its aim had been to bring together the fragmented forces of Asian Studies in Europe and thereby to improve standards of research and expertise on Asia to the benefit of both the national participants and the EU as a whole. In the six years of its existence, the ESF-AC developed a wide range of activities to achieve its goal, such as the sponsorship of more than fifty interdisciplinary and joint Asian-European workshops; seed money given to elaborate on the most promising scientific themes deriving from these workshops; the initiation of three long-term research programs implemented by Asian and European researchers; a post-doctoral fellowship designed for leading young scholars to promote mobility between different European institutions thereby improving the quality of scholarly training and simultaneously diffusing new ideas to participating centers; dissemination of research-related information on European Asian Studies worldwide; travel grants given to young scholars for exploratory visits to centers of excellence in Europe; (financial) support given to the six professional European associations for Asian Studies and an annual meeting of presidents of these associations. All of these have been initiated and improved links between European centers and researchers and their counterparts in Asia. This support has been firmly based in both the Humanities and Social Sciences arenas, and a substantial share of it has focused on contemporary issues of importance to European policy makers. In this context it should be emphasised that the Humanities and Social Sciences are not independent fields of study, but are closely related and are both indispensable to understand the workings of Asian societies in the broadest sense.

The ESF-AC was also valuable in another way. Apart from the direct results of its activities, European and Asian networking were greatly improved with real

but necessarily unquantifiable results. Delegates on the Committee represented a wide range of Research Councils, scholarly institutions and constituencies. This variety and breadth of experience was what enabled ESF-AC to obtain an unusually comprehensive and considered view of the resources, as well as the strengths and weaknesses of Asian Studies in Europe. A view which was certainly beyond that available to any national body or any other European body.

One of the most important results of the ESF-AC is the creation of new networks at various levels that survived the demise of the ESF-AC. The national associations of Asian Studies, which were founded in a number of countries continue to operate. The European Alliance for Asian Studies (EAAS, established 1997) in which six European research institutes in the field of Asian Studies co-operate, has grown from an initial two to six members in 2002 and is expected to add more members in the future. The annual meeting of the presidents of the six regional Associations for Asian Studies also continued. The latter joined its voice to that of the ESF-AC in supporting the idea of the International Convention of Asia Scholars (ICAS), which is also supported by the Association for Asian Studies (AAS) and in a sense can be seen as a global platform for Asian Studies. Last but not least, the Asia-Europe workshops continued with the support of the EAAS and ASEF.

So far, the activities of the European Commission (EU) in the field of the Humanities and Social Sciences research have been very limited. The Sixth Framework Program (FP6) showed a clear interest in research. A closer look reveals that this interest focused mainly on problem-solving work, technology and science. The aim of the FP6 was defined as helping EU companies meet the challenges of the twenty-first century and, through research, to come up with answers to a wide range of issues that are important to European society. Clearly, this attitude was too Europe-focused to be instrumental in the general Asia-Europe dialogue. Fortunately, some initiatives in the field of joint Asia-Europe research were taken.

Its Asia-Link Programme echoed the ESF-AC activities in that it wanted to promote regional and multilateral networking between higher education institutions in EU member states and South Asia, Southeast Asia and China. However, grant support was exclusively given to human resource development, curriculum development, and institutional and systems development. If we take a closer look at where the management of Asia-Link was located, we find out that it operated from the Unit D2 or the Economic Co-operation with Asia Unit. The EU also supported several initiatives such as the Postgraduate Technological Studies Programme, European studies programmes in the Philippines, Thailand, and Malaysia and the ASEAN-EU University Network Programme.

The degree of national and regional institution building in the Asian ASEM member countries was still at the teething stage. Although on several occasions member states stressed the importance of national and regional co-operative links,

for several reasons this co-operation developed at a very slow pace. Cross-national professorial associations such as those existing in Europe have not yet developed. One positive development was the introduction of the ASEAN University Network (AUN) in 1995. Under this, some ten universities signed an agreement on co-operation between ASEAN scholars, pertaining to developing human resources, plus the dissemination and exchange of scholarly knowledge. Other networks were the Association of Southeast Asian Institutions of Higher Learning (ASAIHL), the Association of Universities in Asia and the Pacific (AUAP), and the University Mobility in Asia and the Pacific (UMAP). These activities, however, were not focused on joint collaborative research.

Joint Initiatives

At the inaugural summit of ASEM in 1996, the objective of ASEF was stated as being: "To enhance mutual understanding between Asia and Europe, through greater intellectual, cultural, and people-to-people exchanges". Given its brief and its restricted funding possibilities, ASEF concentrated on short-term activities. In its intellectual exchange programme ASEF stimulated academic discourse. It supported the Education Hub Programme proposed at the second ASEM in London in 1998. Notwithstanding useful initiatives taken, we believe it necessary that ASEM should pay more structural and long-term attention to joint research and education as two major elements in a (cultural) rapprochement between the two regions. Initiating and implementing joint multilateral research could play an important role in achieving ASEF's objectives.

A step in that direction was the Programme for Europe-Asia Research Linkages (PEARL), a network of researchers from Asia and Europe, representing leading Asian and European Studies institutes in the field of the Humanities and Social Sciences. PEARL was established in Seoul in October 1998 under the patronage of the ESF-AC and ASEF. PEARL was a broad-based research partnership encompassing the Humanities and Social Sciences of the Eurasian continent, which was poised to deliver great intellectual benefits to scholarship at national, regional, and global levels. PEARL was an open network and its members, belonging to the ASEM countries, were concerned that research did not receive the attention it deserved in the agenda of ASEM. It was established out of a need felt on both Asian and European sides for research interaction between the two regions, and out of a sense of opportunity created by the growing strength of the ASEM process and the establishment of ASEF.

PEARL set its sights on developing a Eurasian research culture by tightening links between Asia and Europe in order to develop long-term joint Asia-Europe research projects on a multilateral basis. This would not only enrich the quality

of research, but would also ensure attention was directed to issues pertinent to both Asia and Europe. It intended to promote and initiate studies of contemporary developments in Asia and Europe in a comparative perspective and against their historical and cultural backgrounds. It tried to integrate the best of the European and Asian Studies and to provide an institutional framework for collaboration on topics of common interest.

Within the existing relevant bodies such as the ASEM or the ASEF, no substantial possibilities existed to develop and implement joint multilateral Asia-Europe research and educational programmes. PEARL thus provided a unique structure for Asia-Europe co-operation in the field of research but for a number of reasons this did not materialise. But PEARL, like other initiatives which were discontinued, has not been a waste of time because the experiences gained in the process could be used in building a solid ASEM Research Platform (ARP).

Towards an ASEM Research Platform (ARP)

ASEM is a unique mechanism for dialogue. It is an informal process and it has no permanent organisational body. This poses a problem because if certain programmes, beneficial to the ultimate aim of the ASEM (co-operation in the economic, political, and cultural fields), are to be implemented successfully, they need to take place within an organisational structure. This has been done in a few cases. But the need was being urgently felt by different parties and at various levels that an ASEM Research Platform should be specifically designed to encourage multilateral scientific co-operation at an Asia-Europe level.

Three major reasons for seeking top-level presence for Asian and European Studies in the ASEM process could be identified. First, the need for a creative and well-informed policy on both the European and Asian sides had in many cases outstripped the capacity of government administrations to deliver it. The Asia-Europe rapprochement caught officials and policy-makers across a wide range of fields unprepared. The perceptions of Asia entertained by European officials and politicians, precisely like these of their counterparts' perceptions of Europe, were often restricted, blurred by historical reminiscences and time constraints, or the one or the other, which prevents officials from specialising in certain fields and areas. These are busy people who are sometimes forced to rely on aphorisms and stereotypes as tools for ordering the complex new world in which they find themselves. As the policy-making apparatus at the ASEM level grew, there needed to be a visible Asian and European Studies presence at the same level to ensure that officials and policy makers could quickly lay their hands on the best advice on complex inter-regional issues.

The second major reason was the need for cross-national co-operation. The distinctive national traditions of research and scholarship in various aspects of Asian and European Studies which exist throughout the ASEM community are a precious resource. In the environment of globalisation, however, these traditions needed to be brought together into complementary partnerships. No single nation could sustain a research endeavour on the scale needed to fully address the issues arising from globalisation. Co-operation and collaboration in Eurasian study centers could raise the awareness of the richness of each other's culture. The work of the ESF-AC has shown that internationally oriented bodies can play a major stimulating role both in bringing small centers of excellence out of isolation and in promoting innovative research which would not normally find support within any single national framework. By bringing Asian and European studies in Asia and Europe into a facilitating framework, it becomes possible to evolve further creative synergies without in any way detracting from the existing strengths of national research efforts.

The third cogent reason was the need to link academia to the ASEM process. The reason for acting was that the key institutions for ASEM co-operation were in the process of formation. Long-term joint research projects, on a multilateral basis, were a most effective tool for reinforcing links between Asia and Europe. Especially in the Asian context, these long-term ventures were conditions for sustainable success. Experience had proven that such personal relationships, once established, continue to thrive, even after the project had finished. The Humanities and Social Sciences were particularly important in this respect. They formed an integrating force by contributing to a better insight into each other's political, social, and economic concepts and in the way in which parties cope with issues of common interest.

The ARP should monitor and implement co-operative activities in research. The platform should be an umbrella organisation for the wide range of high-quality scientific research in general and should be composed of representatives from major research institutions from both continents. It should be committed to promoting high quality science at a Eurasian level. In this platform Asia and Europe can work closely together on topics of common interest. Research agendas and strategies will be designed and developed by a number of committees in which renowned scholars from Asia and Europe should participate. It should be funded by the ASEM member states. Scientific work to be sponsored by the ARP should not be restricted to the Humanities and Social Sciences, but should link to other forms of sciences as well. The ARP will have to work closely with already existing bodies such as ASEF, AEETC, and with EU-projects such as the Asia-Link Programme.

The establishment of an ASEM Research Platform under the aegis of ASEF, could lead to a division of labour between the intellectual exchange division of

ASEF, which could concentrate on short-term projects, and the ARP working on long-term projects. Such a construction could remedy the overemphasis in ASEM on trade and security issues. Needless to say, the ARP can build on its assembled expertise in Asia-Europe relations. A first step in the direction of building ARP is gathering all relevant information about ASEM which is now dispersed over a wide and unstructured number of sources. A portal is being constructed at IIAS where all information about ASEM will be systematically ordered and made available, not only for research purposes but also to a wider audience, because the ultimate success of ASEM will depend on the active participation of the citizens of both continents. Researchers can contribute to this goal by taking a Eurasian stance as a starting point of their research endeavours.

The Eurasian research culture may directly engage the efforts of a couple of thousand scholars across the ASEM community. The spin off from their endeavours could be enormous. It derives its influence on the one hand through the formulation and analysis of the issues that move Asian and European governments and the media and on the other hand through the students trained and educated in this culture who move outside academia to other positions in society. The cost of developing and sustaining such a Eurasian research culture represents a small financial investment in comparison to the fruits that would certainly be derived from it. With the growing unilateral attitude of the US in practically all matters, it seems more necessary than ever that Europe and Asia should rediscover their own rich cultural and intellectual traditions for the benefit of the whole world.



Figure 12. Covers of *The Eurasian Space: Far More Than Two Continents*, *Multiregionalism and Multilateralism: Asian-European Relations in a Global Context*, *The Asia-Europe meeting: Contributing to a New Global Governance Architecture. The Eight ASEM Heads of State Meeting in Brussels* and *What about Asia? Revisiting Asian Studies*. Photo Cindy Bakker.