



## Fourth Asia-Europe Meeting of Ministers for Education (ASEMME4) Kuala Lumpur, 13-14 May 2013

### Strategizing ASEM Education Collaboration

#### Conclusions by the Chair

1. The Fourth Meeting of the Ministers for Education of the ASEM countries was held in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia on 13 and 14 May 2013 and attended by 152 participants from 34 ASEM members and 7 international organisations. The Meeting was chaired by H.E. the Secretary General, Ministry of Higher Education of Malaysia.
2. The Meeting warmly welcomed the new ASEM members Bangladesh, Norway and Switzerland who joined the ASEM process during the 9<sup>th</sup> ASEM Summit held in Vientiane, Laos in November 2012.
3. The Meeting expressed its sincere appreciation to the Malaysian host for the warm hospitality and excellent arrangements made for the Fourth Asia-Europe Meeting of Ministers for Education and thus providing the right framework to push forward the ASEM Education Process and deepen the education policy dialogue started in Berlin 2008 and continued in Hanoi 2009 and Copenhagen 2011.
4. Under the overarching theme of “Strategizing ASEM Education Collaboration”, the Meeting exchanged views on areas of common interest, took note of the results achieved so far and discussed four main topics to set out future direction of the ASEM Education Process and define concrete activities to put policy into practice. These topics, namely “Quality Assurance and Recognition”, “Engaging Business and Industry in Education”, “Balanced Mobility” and “Lifelong Learning including Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET)” were already identified by the Ministers in the previous Ministerial Meeting in Copenhagen as key policy areas of the ASEM Education Process which should be given particular attention. In order to set the scene for the debate, the four topics were introduced by speakers of different ASEM members: the topic “Quality Assurance and Recognition” by China and Estonia; the topic “Engaging Business and Industry in Education” by the Republic of Korea and Germany; the topic “Balanced Mobility” by Malaysia and Austria and the topic “Lifelong Learning including TVET” by Indonesia and Denmark.

In their meeting the Ministers:

5. Renewed their commitment to strengthen the Asia-Europe Education Process and shape an ASEM Education Area on the basis of mutual respect and benefit, thus contributing to the overall dialogue and cooperation between Asia and Europe in the political, economic and socio-cultural fields, as reaffirmed by the ASEM Leaders during their Summit in Vientiane on 5 and 6 November 2012.
6. Reiterated the importance of education and training for balanced, sustainable and inclusive growth in Asia and Europe, as well as for democracy, cultural diversity and social cohesion in both regions. Ministers, therefore, acknowledged the necessity to invest in all sectors of education and training in order



to further improve the quality and attractiveness of education and training systems, to provide opportunities for lifelong learning in all its aspects and contribute to the development of highly qualified and active citizens who have a strong sense of social responsibility, are open-minded and respect cultural diversity.

7. Underlined the pivotal role of the ASEM Education Process for dialogue and cooperation in the field of education and training between Asia and Europe. Ministers noted with satisfaction that the manifold activities and the outcomes of the ASEM Education Process have received high political attention and attracted great interest from stakeholders. In this context, special recognition is given to the collaboration with the ASEM Summits of Heads of State and Government, the Bologna Policy Forum and the ASEM Rectors' Conference (ARC), with the Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF) as its permanent secretariat.
8. Recognised that the ASEM Education Process has achieved considerable progress since the first three Ministerial Meetings in Berlin, Hanoi and Copenhagen and noted with gratitude the numerous initiatives described in the Stocktaking Report and carried out by ASEM members, the Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF) through its ASEM Education Hub (AEH), the ASEM Education and Research Hub for Lifelong Learning and the ASEM Education Secretariat in order to achieve more transparency, improve understanding of the different education systems within and between both regions, thus making education systems more comparable, and facilitating mobility and enhancing cooperation.
9. Felt that the time has come to put policy into practice and strengthen the efforts to further develop the ASEM Education Area by continued joint initiatives and concrete measures focused on the four key policy areas. The Ministers also wished to give additional political momentum to the ASEM Education Process by asking the Senior Officials to meet yearly in order to discuss the implementation of the ASEM activities from a policy perspective and to agree on priority areas for the next Ministerial Meeting proposed by the host of the next meeting in consultation with the ASEM Education Secretariat (AES). In this regard, Senior Officials are expected to meet in the middle of 2014. This meeting will be hosted by China with support of the ASEM Education Secretariat.
10. Expressed their appreciation to the ASEM Education Secretariat, which has been hosted by the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) in Bonn, Germany, and sponsored by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) since 2009, for its excellent work during the last four years, especially for effectively coordinating the various ASEM educational activities and providing a comprehensive stocktaking report on the implementation of these activities and their outcomes. The Ministers welcomed the report as a source for the policy-making process and asked the ASEM Education Secretariat to prepare a descriptive stocktaking report on the results of ASEM and related activities for the next Ministerial Meeting. In this context the Ministers renewed their gratitude to Belgium, China, Indonesia, Luxemburg and the Netherlands for the secondment of staff to the current Secretariat.
11. Welcomed the involvement of stakeholders, through the ASEM Rectors' Conference (ARC) and other initiatives from higher education institutions and students' representatives, in the ASEM Education Process to achieve broad consensus on the aims and measures of the Process and acknowledged the recommendations from the 3<sup>rd</sup> ASEM Rectors' Conference (ARC3) and the contributions of the 1<sup>st</sup> Asia-Europe Students' Forum, both initiated by the Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF) and held back-to-back in Groningen, the Netherlands in September 2012. The Ministers recognised the Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF)'s efforts to include students in the ASEM Process. Convinced that involvement of higher educa-



tion institutions and students as constructive and active partners in the ASEM Education Process is needed, the Ministers asked the Senior Officials to explore how increased and active involvement of those stakeholders could be ensured in the future.

With the aim to further develop and strengthen the ASEM educational cooperation in the four key policy areas of their meeting and to achieve better understanding of and greater comparability between the different education systems in the ASEM Education Area, the Ministers agreed on a number of concrete activities and measures to be carried out and implemented in the coming years.

#### **A. Quality Assurance and Recognition**

Quality assurance systems and recognition mechanisms are critical for the attractiveness, transparency, comparability and permeability of education systems. This is also true for educational cooperation and mobility between Asia and Europe. From the very beginning, quality assurance and recognition, therefore, have been high on the agenda of ASEM Ministerial Meetings. In the years to come, more efforts are needed to improve transparency and understanding of the different quality assurance and recognition systems and tools, developed in Asia and Europe, and to make the education systems of both regions better comparable.

In this context, the Meeting thanked Germany for having held an interregional quality assurance seminar in the field of external quality assurance in July 2011 and France for having hosted a seminar on quality assurance in November 2012.

The Ministers:

12. Acknowledged that quality assurance, qualifications frameworks and recognition are essential for building trust and facilitating the recognition of degrees and diplomas. The Ministers reaffirmed the need for a regular dialogue in the field of quality assurance and recognition between ASEM experts from quality assurance agencies, recognition organisations, higher education institutions, students and governments and welcomed Malaysia's initiative to facilitate this dialogue. In this context, they welcomed Japan's initiatives to establish a higher education quality assurance centre for Asia and to set up a new working group under the ASEAN+3 Education Ministers Meeting with a view to further promoting mobility of higher education and ensuring quality assurance in Asia. The Ministers also welcomed China's initiative to establish a Cross-border Quality Assurance Network in Higher Education (CBQAN).
13. Invited quality assurance agencies to consider their inclusion in the European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR) since the membership in EQAR is open to European and non-European countries.
14. Encouraged quality assurance agencies to invite peers from Asia to Europe and vice-versa to take part in external quality assurance procedures in order to facilitate the dialogue and understanding in the field of quality assurance.
15. Welcomed Belgium's (Flemish Community and French Community) initiative to organise peer learning activities related to new approaches in quality assurance in Higher Education and/or to governance of higher education (autonomy, responsibility and accountability).



16. Noted with appreciation Austria's successful initiative and China's organisational support in drafting an ASEM Recognition Bridging Declaration, based on the Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region (Lisbon Recognition Convention) and the Asia-Pacific Regional Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications in Higher Education (Tokyo Recognition Convention) and thus contributing to improve recognition of higher education qualifications between Asian and European regions. The Ministers fully endorsed this Declaration and urged ASEM countries to explore concrete steps to implement the Declaration, in close cooperation with existing structures, active in the recognition field. The Ministers welcomed China's offer to coordinate a working group to this end and the willingness of Australia, Austria, Belgium (Flemish Community and French Community), Brunei Darussalam, Germany, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Portugal and the United Kingdom to participate in this working group. Results from the Bologna Process working group on structural reforms should be considered.
17. Affirmed the need to improve information on education systems and on recognition procedures as this is essential for students going abroad. Noted the differences in establishing National Information Centres (NIC) and networks of NICs between the Asian and European regions. In this context the Ministers proposed to build NICs in the Asian region and welcomed China's offer to set up a website including information on NICs, in order to share information and facilitate joint research and collaboration on qualification recognition in the ASEM region. Moreover, cooperation between Asian and European recognition experts and between Asian NICs and ENIC-NARICs should be encouraged to improve communication between the ASEM regions.
18. Aware of the different regional credit systems for academic recognition, they emphasised the need to make these systems more transparent in order to facilitate recognition of study achievements abroad and to stimulate cross-border mobility. The Ministers welcomed the readiness of Australia, Belgium (French Community), Brunei Darussalam, China, Estonia, Lithuania, Malaysia, Portugal and Thailand to establish an expert group to discuss interregional credit transfer mechanisms among ASEM member countries. In order to give valuable input to the discussions in this expert group, the Ministers asked the ASEM Education Secretariat to constantly update its "Compendium on Credits and Learning Outcomes in ASEM countries", providing current information from ASEM countries. Furthermore, they underlined the need to discuss information on education systems, recognition procedures and interregional transfer mechanisms comprehensively on the stakeholder level, e.g. during the next ASEM Rectors' Conference (ARC).

### **B. Engaging Business and Industry in Education**

Close and effective cooperation and permanent transfer of knowledge and innovation between education institutions and the world of work are influential factors for the employability of graduates, economic growth of countries and regions and the development of societies at large. The ASEM Education Process therefore aims at intensifying the dialogue and collaboration between education, business and industry within and between both regions by proposing concrete measures for discussion and implementation. In this way, the ASEM Education Process also contributes to the general wish of ASEM Leaders to reinforce the Asia-Europe cooperation in fields such as economy and education.



The Ministers:

19. Encouraged all stakeholders involved in education and business to engage in further debate and efforts with a view to enhance the employability of higher education and TVET students and their entrepreneurial skills and competences by developing and monitoring strategies for education-business cooperation and collaboration. In order to realise those goals the business sector should be encouraged to define the competences they need and will need in future.
20. Noted with interest the results and recommendations of the 3<sup>rd</sup> ASEM Rectors' Conference (ARC3) underlining the role of universities as motors for economic growth and development and emphasising the need to equip students with skills that benefit society and reflect the changing demands of the labour market and enhance the entrepreneurial mind-set by offering specific courses. The Ministers asked the Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF), through the projects of its ASEM Education Hub (AEH), particularly the ASEM Rectors' Conference (ARC), to continue the stakeholders' dialogue on this issue and report on the progress made in the next Ministerial Meeting.
21. Recognised with satisfaction that Germany and Malaysia held the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> ASEM University-Business Forum (UBF) and made this Forum a regular platform to exchange information and to share good practices, thus strengthening the dialogue on University-Business cooperation. The Ministers welcomed Belgium's (Flemish Community and French Community) willingness to organise the 4<sup>th</sup> UBF in 2014 and Viet Nam's readiness to host the 5<sup>th</sup> UBF and invited the Forums to discuss how to combine study with work-based learning. They also asked the European Commission to give special attention to the ASEM Education Process in its European University-Business Forum.
22. Emphasised that work placements in higher education play a key role in enhancing graduate employability and endorsed the launch of an interregional ASEM Work Placement Pilot Programme that promotes practical experience and cross-cultural skills and competences of Asian students in Europe and European students in Asia. The Ministers asked the ASEM Education Secretariat to give organisational support to launch the programme and welcomed Belgium's (Flemish Community), Brunei Darussalam's, Germany's and Thailand's intention to take part in the pilot phase.

### **C. Balanced Mobility**

Interregional exchange of students and staff leads to an increase in internationally trained and experienced labour force and lays the ground for new partnerships in Asia and Europe. However, student mobility between both regions is notably imbalanced. Many more Asian students study in Europe than Europeans in Asia. It was felt in previous Ministerial Meetings that measures should be taken to better balance mobility flows, especially by motivating more European students to spend at least part of their studies in Asia. To this end, mobility-friendly frameworks concerning information, funding and study conditions must be further developed.

The Ministers thanked Thailand for organising the 'International Asia-Europe Conference on Enhancing Balanced Mobility', which took place in Bangkok, Thailand in March 2012, as well as the countries supporting the ASEM-DUO Fellowship Programme, that specifically addresses the imbalance in exchange and encourages balanced mobility by supporting pair-based and two-way exchanges.



The Ministers:

23. Welcomed the willingness of Malaysia and its Asia-Europe Institute (AEI) to develop – in cooperation with other interested ASEM members – a strategy on better balancing mobility for ASEMME5 in Latvia. The strategy will include proposals for concrete activities to overcome the imbalance in mobility between Asia and Europe.
24. Acknowledged the Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF)'s efforts to improve information on study opportunities and scholarship schemes in ASEM countries with its Database on Education Exchange Programmes (DEEP) and welcomed the possibility of integrating the DEEP database as part of REDBOOK, a database that aims to facilitate research collaborations among higher education institutions and businesses. The Ministers expressed their expectation that the DEEP database would be further developed and disseminated.
25. Took note with interest of initiatives promoting educational opportunities, involving students and staff with a mobility experience in Asia or Europe as mobility ambassadors. The Ministers commended this successful approach to spread first-hand information on mobility and asked higher education institutions to appoint ASEM mobility ambassadors to inform and advise on educational opportunities.
26. Welcomed the idea to promote and inform on study and training opportunities in both regions via annual ASEM Education Fairs back-to-back with expert group meetings in order to encourage mobility and institutional cooperation. The Ministers invited the European Commission to explore financial support for such fairs.
27. Recognised that lacking financial support is an important obstacle to mobility but noted with appreciation various national and regional grant schemes to financially support interregional learning experiences. The Ministers suggested to exchange examples of good practice and to take the necessary measures to provide more scholarships for periods of study or work placements abroad.
28. Reaffirmed that equal access to interregional learning experiences should be ensured through sufficient public student support and the development of mobility opportunities.
29. Invited the European Commission to organise a seminar for ASEM members on the international dimension of the new EU education programme (2014-2020) with a focus on funding opportunities for Asia-Europe mobility and cooperation.
30. Noted with satisfaction the positive evaluation report of the ASEM-DUO Fellowship Programme. They expressed their appreciation for the programme's contribution to balanced mobility between the two regions and encouraged more ASEM member countries to join the programme. Belgium (French Community) expressed its willingness to join the ASEM-DUO Fellowship Programme.
31. Shared the view that attractive education offerings would positively influence interregional mobility and therefore supported the proposal to set up an ASEM Joint Curriculum Development Pilot Scheme. They welcomed the intention of Belgium (Flemish Community and French Community), Brunei Darussalam, Germany, Indonesia, Lithuania and Malaysia to facilitate the implementation of the pilot scheme with financial support.



32. Repeated the need for comparable and reliable mobility data to enable evidence-based policy-making and encouraged the collection of data on inbound and outbound mobility in cooperation with experienced data collectors in both regions.

#### **D. Lifelong Learning (LLL) including Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET)**

Lifelong learning including TVET has been an important topic in the ASEM Education Process from the very beginning and will be given special attention in the years to come. In a rapidly changing world, the workforce in Asia and Europe, as in other parts of the world, faces the challenge of meeting the needs of a changing labour market and of updating their skills and competences throughout their lives. Open personal growth, continuing professional development and lifelong learning for all are key elements for enhancing the employability and ensuring employment of citizens in both regions, especially in times of economic crisis. National and regional qualifications frameworks supporting the permeability of the different education and training sectors have gained increasing significance in this area. These are equally key aspects of fostering social inclusion in complex societies, whereby lifelong learning is fundamental for creating sustainable communities and active citizens able and willing to participate in shaping the world in which they live.

In this context, the Ministers thanked Denmark, the Republic of Korea and the ASEM LLL Hub, supported by the Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF), for having organised the ASEM 'Forum on Lifelong Learning', which took place in May 2012. The Ministers also thanked Germany for having hosted a symposium on TVET with special regard to qualifications frameworks in February 2012, and Austria for having carried out a workshop on TVET in the Tourism and Catering Sector in November 2012.

The Ministers:

33. Reaffirmed the importance of a documentation of good practice in TVET and welcomed Germany's offer to organise an expert seminar in order to exchange experiences and lessons learnt in the field of dual education and training and Portugal for participating in this expert seminar. The Ministers welcomed Malaysia's initiative to organise an international ASEM seminar on Lifelong Learning in 2014.
34. Expressed their conviction that innovative and entrepreneurial skills and competences should be fostered from an early age and endorsed Denmark's proposal to develop a programme for improving innovative and entrepreneurial skills and competences in school education, in cooperation with Brunei Darussalam, the Czech Republic, Latvia, Malaysia, Norway, Republic of Korea, Singapore and Viet Nam.
35. Emphasised that National Qualifications Frameworks (NQFs) play an important role in making lifelong learning a reality, as tools to understand levels and qualifications between systems and subsystems, to enhance transparency and to support comparability and mobility and to recognise prior learning (non-formal and informal learning). The Ministers considered it therefore useful to discuss and explore the possibilities to develop cross-referencing mechanisms between regional qualifications frameworks in Asia and Europe and noted with satisfaction the *Global NQF Inventory*, compiled by the European Training Foundation (ETF), Cedefop and UNESCO, including the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL).
36. Underlined that meaningful descriptions and consistent use of learning outcomes are needed to make regional and national qualifications frameworks a reality. The Ministers invited thus the expert group



on interregional credit transfer mechanisms (see paragraph 18) to discuss and exchange good practices on the development, understanding, implementation and practical use of learning outcomes, in close cooperation with stakeholders mainly higher education institutions and students' representatives.

37. Acknowledged the consistent contributions of the ASEM LLL Hub within the ASEM Education Process and recalled the continued need for objective information and analysis to facilitate evidence-based policy discussions. The Ministers appreciated the joint and comparative studies carried out by researchers from Asia and Europe and encouraged efforts to partnering with the ASEM LLL Hub, including for sponsoring specific studies within its research networks.

**The Ministers mandated:**

The ASEM Education Secretariat to observe and assist the member countries in implementing the proposed initiatives and to inform the Ministers on the progress achieved with the stocktaking report for ASEMME5 in 2015.

**The Ministers thanked:**

- Indonesia for its commitment to host the ASEM Education Secretariat as of October 2013. In this context, Indonesia invited countries to contribute to the operation of the ASEM Education Secretariat by sending staff to work at the Secretariat.
- China for its commitment to host the intermediate SOM in 2014 in preparation of the 5th Asia-Europe Meeting of Ministers for Education (ASEMME5).
- Latvia for its commitment to host the 5th Asia-Europe Meeting of Ministers for Education (ASEMME5) in 2015.
- The Republic of Korea for their commitment to host the 6th Asia-Europe Meeting of Ministers for Education (ASEMME6) in 2017.
- Belgium's (Flemish Community) offer to host the ASEM Education Secretariat as of October 2017.