

## **1<sup>st</sup> Senior Officials' Meeting (SOM1) of the 5<sup>th</sup> ASEM Education Ministers' Meeting (ASEMME5)**

### **SUMMARY REPORT**

Last updated: 26.11.2014

1. The Senior Officials on education issues of Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) countries met in Riga on 10 and 11 November 2014 in order to prepare for the fifth ASEM Education Ministers' Meeting (ASEMME5) to be held in Riga on 27 and 28 April 2015. The meeting was organized by the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Latvia under the Latvian Presidency of the Council of the European Union (EU). At the meeting 89 participants from 33 countries in Europe and Asia, the ASEM Education Secretariat, the European Commission and the European External Action Service (EEAS) as an overall coordinator of the ASEM process were present. In total, 44 delegations participated, including 8 stakeholders: the European University Association, the ASEM Education and Research Hub for Lifelong Learning (ASEM LLL Hub), the European Association of Higher Education Institutions (EURASHE), ASEM-DUO Fellowship Programme, the Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF), the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the South-East Asian Ministers of Education Organization, the Regional Centre for Higher Education and Development (SEAMEO RIHED) and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) University Network Secretariat.
2. SOM1 was held in a plenary format with participants expressing their opinions and broader discussions taking place within two parallel sessions to prepare proposals for the ASEM Education Process policy agenda and to provide substance for the ASEMME5 Conclusions by the Chair.
3. In her welcome speech, Ms Sanda Liepina, the State Secretary of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Latvia, who was also the Chair of the SOM1, stressed that “with SOM1, we have chosen to stick to a format which promotes contribution by all ASEM members. Each session will be followed by discussions; all opinions will be heard and taken into account [...]. Our joint task for the coming days is to develop a road map and arrive at proposals for ASEMME5 policy agenda and ASEMME5 Conclusions by the Chair that will form the work that needs to be taken up by all of us in our respective countries after 2015 and leading up to 2017”.
4. Ms Inga Skujina, Under-Secretary of State for European Affairs of European Union Directorate of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia, in her welcome address mentioned that during the Latvian Presidency of the Council of the EU the focus will be laid on three priorities: Competitive Europe, Digital Europe and Engaged Europe. The aims of these priorities are closely linked to the cooperation between Europe and Asia in the framework of ASEM. During the Latvian Presidency of the Council of the EU, the strengthening of the role of education and training in promoting economic growth and

well-being will be high on the agenda. The Latvian Presidency of the Council of the EU will also focus on grassroots sport and physical activities for children and young people as an essential element for quality education.

5. In his speech Prof. Dr. Aris Junaidi, the director of the ASEM Education Secretariat (Indonesia) welcomed the new ASEM members that have joined recently - Kazakhstan and Croatia. Prof. Dr. Junaidi expressed the hope that with increasing numbers of committed countries, the Education partnership in Asia and Europe will be strengthened and broadened more.
6. In his presentation Mr Einars Semanis, Ambassador–Director General of Bilateral Relations Directorate of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia elaborated the role of ASEM Education in the overall ASEM process. Cooperation in the field of education is essential part of ASEM. Mr Semanis stressed the role of leaders’ summits and various ASEM Ministerial Meetings where the strategic documents of ASEM are approved. Referring to the 11<sup>th</sup> ASEM Foreign Ministers’ Meeting, Mr Semanis emphasized ministers welcoming the initiative to encourage ASEM members to achieve the result, oriented towards tangible outcomes. Ministers supported the tendency to incorporate a wider stakeholding amongst business, civil society, media and academia. Mr Semanis also underlined the importance of the remarks by the President of the European Council Herman Van Rompuy at the 10<sup>th</sup> ASEM Summit: “Future development is also dependent on quality education, which fosters innovation and employment and thereby contributes to economic growth. Cooperation in this key area is also an investment in our joint development through cross-fertilisation of ideas and better mutual understanding. These issues will be further developed [...] by the Education Ministerial in April in Riga, Latvia.”
7. The Chair Ms Liepina stressed the necessity to share a common understanding of the ASEM Education Process when reflecting on the developments and looking to it’s future. The Chair invited Prof. Dr. Junaidi to highlight the results and benefits of the ASEM Education Process since 2008. The presentation showed the ASEM Education Process as being about making education systems in Asia and Europe more compatible, with exchange and mobility. Over the years, the discussions have mainly focused on the way and extent higher education, as well as technical and vocational education and training (TVET) and lifelong learning could contribute to developing high quality human resources and increasing the mobility of students and staff within and between the ASEM regions.
8. The SOM1 Deputy Chair Liga Lejina, Deputy State Secretary, Director of the Department of Policy Initiatives and Development of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Latvia noted that one of the key documents to summarize the various activities and results since ASEMME4, serving as a crucial basis for drafting the Chairs’ conclusions for ASEMME5, is the Stocktaking Report. The Deputy Chair Ms Lejina invited Prof. Dr. Junaidi to present the draft Stocktaking Report. In order to obtain more information on the progress of programmes and also further initiatives, the Stocktaking Report was circulated to all the members. The upcoming programmes and initiatives proposed by the members were also listed in the Report. Through the following discussion Denmark suggested the necessity to create a working group between ASEMME5 and ASEMME6, reviewing the ASEM Education Process in order to create a robust conceptual framework. Indonesia stressed that AES should have a more detailed overview of the projects both in Asia and Europe.
9. The Deputy Chair invited Ms Anita Vahere-Abrazune, Deputy Director of the Department of Policy Initiatives and Development of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Latvia to present the results of the Early Consultation carried out from June to October 2014 to identify possible priorities and activities for the post-ASEMME5 period

and the ASEMME5 agenda. All parties involved in the ASEM Education Process were invited to participate in the consultation process. The results show that the four main priority areas should be maintained and evaluated at the ASEMME5. According to the views expressed, it is important to see the progress and outcomes of the current activities. It could be useful to focus on one core aspect per priority and to review the topics covered by the current priority areas. The focus points during ASEMME5 should be: “quality assurance and recognition” and “the obstacles to balanced mobility”. It is important to continue and to strengthen the activities already underway. After the ASEMME5 more attention should be paid to promoting the development of basic, transferable, professional skills of individuals, but without a too excessive focus on the employability issue. A number of joint activities were proposed to encourage cooperation among ASEM countries to promote development of basic, transferable and professional skills of individuals.

The participants of the Early Consultation recommended various complementary measures that might be necessary to promote closer cooperation among education policy makers, higher education institutions, student organizations, employers and other stakeholders within the ASEM Education Process. ASEM members and stakeholders also explained the obstacles to balanced mobility and offered solutions.

10. As the Chair Ms Liepina underlined in her welcome speech, it is important for the participants to have an opportunity to have an outside look at the ASEM issues discussed in other formats in other fora, thus contributing to the decisions on the policy agenda. The results of the Early Consultation also indicate proposals to consider when making the decisions on the policy agenda.
11. The Deputy Chair Ms Lejina remarked that at the ASEMME4 education ministers emphasized the need to engage in dialogue with all the stakeholders and invited ASEM members and stakeholders to widen the scope for the discussion with presentations about: Education for Sustainable Development (ESD), “Education for All” (EFA), Contributions by ASEF to the ASEM Education Process, ASEM and OECD cooperation and EU-ASEM cooperation in the area of higher education.
12. Two important points for the further promotion of ESD at the global scale were emphasized: Global Action Programme on ESD and the UNESCO’s continuous initiative for promoting ESD. With regard to the EFA programme, there was put forward the proposal that ASEMME should cooperate to address EFA through a joint task force. ASEF drew attention to an upcoming research project under the ASEF Education Policy Programme intended to be conducted over the next two years by ASEF together with the British Council. The research is focused on the role of higher education institutions in promoting social entrepreneurship. The OECD underlined the importance of not only higher education, but also of secondary and early childhood education, and proposed that OECD Skills Strategy could become one of areas to work with ASEM. The EU programmes have promoted Europe-Asia cooperation, education and mobility. The new programme “Erasmus+” offers funding opportunities for higher education cooperation between Asia and Europe.
13. During the ASEM SOM1 Ms Vahere-Abrazune presented the draft of ASEMME5 agenda to streamline the discussions and to come back to agenda on the next day. Ms Vahere-Abrazune also put for discussion the theme of the 5<sup>th</sup> ASEM Education Ministers’ Meeting - “Harmonising ASEM Collaboration for Results”.
14. Ms Vahere-Abrazune invited Mr Jordi Curell Gotor, the Director in Directorate-General Education and Culture of the European Commission to elaborate on the Information day on “Erasmus+” for ASEM, scheduled for 29 April 2015 as a side event for ASEMME5. Mr Curell Gotor underlined that the new programme “Erasmus+” can be used in a very strategic manner, both by countries and higher educational institutions themselves as it

offers a pack of actions which can be a very useful complement to the international strategies of different universities worldwide – to combine credit mobility with the joint degrees and capacity building. Mr Curell Gotor believes it is essential to bring ministers' attention to the importance of that as they will have responsibility implementing processes on the national level and in terms of disseminating information about the new possibilities offered by "Erasmus+". In addition, this programme can make a major contribution to the four priorities of the ASEM Education Process. Mr Curell Gotor informed that the audience to be brought together on the Information day is those who participate in the Ministerial Meeting, university associations and representatives of the ASEM Rector's Conference, student organizations, universities and "Erasmus Mundus" alumni. During the Information day the new possibilities offered by the "Erasmus+" programme will be presented in a very hands-on approach in relation to the themes, such as credit mobility and capacity building.

15. As stated by the Chair Ms Liepina, it is important to link the ASEM Education Process to the on-going broader ASEM dialogue and process, ensuring that the work of Senior Officials for education can be seen in a broader context of Asia-Europe education. ASEM Cooperation in education is a part of the overall ASEM Cooperation, contributing to the strengthening of cooperation and development between both regions.
16. The Chair Ms Liepina invited Mr Michael Matthiessen, Principal Advisor of EEAS to give an insight into the Asia-Europe cooperation. Mr Matthiessen drew attention to the importance of paragraph 31 in the Final Chair Statement of the 10<sup>th</sup> ASEM Summit "Responsible Partnership for Sustainable Growth and Security" and annexes, highlighting the Annex 3 – "List of Interested ASEM Members for Tangible Cooperation Areas". Mr Matthiessen explained: "Paragraph 31 is extremely important because it is about education. Even if this text is not legally binding, all 53 leaders, representing 60% of the world's population, 60% of world trade and 60% of global GDP have agreed to this text. Paragraph 31 is some kind of guidance for you in the work that you will be doing in the future as you prepare the Ministerial in Riga."
17. After the presentation, discussion started on the matter of the Annex 3 of Paragraph 31 of the Final Chair Statement of the 10<sup>th</sup> ASEM Summit, raising concerns that some countries are not on the list of interested ASEM members for cooperation. Mr Matthiessen commented that as ASEM is often criticized for being a "talk show", it is recommended for ASEM to implement more tangible and operational activities. The countries interested in some specific areas are encouraged to cooperate in a joint work. Mr Matthiessen also emphasized the importance of coordination between line ministries and Ministries of Foreign Affairs.
18. The Chair came back to the proposals for ASEMME5 policy agenda (including side events) and the ASEMME5 Conclusions by the Chair. The Chair drew attention to the proposed theme of the 5<sup>th</sup> ASEM Education Ministers' Meeting "Harmonising ASEM Collaboration for Results" and the title "5<sup>th</sup> ASEM Education Ministers' Meeting". The Chair explained the reason behind the necessity to change the title of the meeting, asking delegations for their comments. There has been no unity in the way the Education Ministers' Meetings have been named since 2008. Therefore, the proposal is to start using the same titling as for other Ministerial Meeting's formats such as the Foreign Ministers' Meeting.
19. Various consultations and discussions have confirmed that there is an eagerness for fewer speeches and more of real conversations and exchange between ministers at ASEMME to allow for the pressing issues of the day to emerge and to allow for the real policy setting to be done by the ministers. ASEMME5 policy agenda will be built on four blocks: Dialogue and Continuity; Commitment and Collaboration for results - specific themes identified and discussed in detail; 10<sup>th</sup> ASEM Summit, Chair's Statement – response of

education ministers; Post-ASEMME5 conceptual framework and new priorities. These areas to be covered during ASEMME5 meeting should also be taken into account in the process of forming the Chairs' Conclusions.

Policy agenda and priorities for the post-ASEMME5 are mainly based on three inputs: Early Consultation process; input from discussion groups SOM1 and the Stocktaking Report. Conclusions by the Chair will include assessment of the progress made, priorities for the post-ASEMME5 and activities and measures for the next years.

20. The SOM1 Chair summarized dates and tasks relevant for the preparation of the Ministerial Meeting in Riga:

**-26 November 2014:** sending out the SOM1 minutes/summary "1<sup>st</sup> Senior Officials' Meeting (SOM1) of the 5<sup>th</sup> ASEM Education Ministers' Meeting (ASEMME5) Riga, 10-11 November 2014"

**-22 December 2014:** receiving the proposals/inputs/comments of the ASEM members and stakeholders, based on the discussions that have been taking place at SOM1 in Riga (on 10 and 11 November 2014)

**-22 January 2015:** sharing the first draft of the Chairs' Conclusions and final ASEMME5 agenda

**-12 February 2015:** receiving comments on the Chairs' Conclusions of the ASEM members and stakeholders in order to proceed with the second draft

**-27 February 2015:** sharing the second draft of the Chairs' Conclusions and final ASEMME5 agenda

**-20 March 2015:** receiving comments on the second draft of the Chairs' Conclusions and final ASEMME5 agenda

**-10 April 2015:** sharing the final (third) draft of the Chairs' Conclusions and final ASEMME5 agenda

**-26 April 2015:** ASEMME5 SOM2 meeting in Riga for discussion of the draft Chair's Conclusions

21. The meeting was followed by the reports from the discussions in two parallel sessions among the ASEM members and stakeholders, held on the first day of the SOM1 meeting. The aim of the discussion was to summarize the views on expected outcomes of the collaboration taking place within the ASEM Education Process, to prepare proposals for both the future policy agenda and substance to the Chair's Conclusions of the ASEMME5. Discussion was based on the results of the Early Consultation with the ASEM members and stakeholders and participants' experience and/or expectations, as well as on the results of the previous discussions and presentations of SOM1. A concise summary below represents the conclusions and constructive recommendations made during the discussions.

**The main outputs and benefits resulting from ASEM Education collaboration are as follows:**

-ASEM as a platform for dialogue and exchange of perspectives for mutual understanding and learning (based on this dialogue, ASEM members defined a number of priority issues and developed joint initiatives; some of them led to concrete activities (e.g. pilot projects));

-working group "Quality Assurance and Recognition" and Working Group on Innovative Competences and Entrepreneurial Mindsets;

-wide array of proposals for cooperation; best practices and exchange of information (models to pick and choose; stimulus and inspiration for local and national education strategies);

- multi-stakeholder approach (direct link between policy makers and the education community);
- mobility exchanges;
- opportunity for multi- and bi-lateral exchanges.

ASEM Education collaboration benefits ministries, the higher education community, Quality Assurance agencies and other bodies and stakeholder groups.

**With regard to the expectations of the ASEM members** from the ASEM Education Process and mutual collaboration the participants of the discussion mentioned:

- acknowledgement of different needs and priorities by ASEM members on a local, national and regional level (better assessment of areas which could/should be jointly tackled and areas which could/should be solved on a national or bilateral level);
- strengthening of the multi-stakeholder approach (education community - rectors, teachers, students and their relevant associations, as well as business sector); involvement of the stakeholders also within the national context;
- close cooperation within the official ASEM Process for better synergies (exchanges between the relevant Ministries of Foreign Affairs, Education, Culture, Labour, etc.);
- keeping the identified topics - continue to follow them up;
- keeping it a multifaceted, multipurpose process (principally open to all topics, but setting clear priorities; several countries would like to focus more on quality assurance and recognition and student mobility);
- ensuring an informal process and information exchange, but at the same time identifying the issues which require clear policy commitment by the participating countries;
- consistency of the processes where all the parties involved in the ASEM Education Process are engaged in, for example, Bologna process (in order to avoid the overlapping of the efforts in the different processes for the same objectives);
- common understanding of concepts and objectives (e.g. the kind of mobility discussed).

**Regarding the concrete measures to be taken when developing the ASEM Education Process**, the participants of the discussions mentioned:

- vision document: including 1) shared understanding of education, and explaining the importance of education exchanges for the Asia-Europe process; 2) road map – framework to be agreed;
- Two Pillars system within the ASEM Education Process (Pillar 1: dialogue-oriented to provide a platform for mutual learning; Pillar 2: result-oriented; pilot projects with commitments);
- clear, realistic objectives and result-oriented activities (e.g. ASEM DUO Fellowship Programme, joint curriculum development);
- refocusing the objectives within the existing priorities (e.g. mutual engagement of the sectors – higher education and business and industry instead of engaging business and industry in education);
- strategic reflection on the ASEM Education Process (e.g. an external assessment in order to put up pressure and get a clear self-evaluation of the process; focus on uniqueness of the ASEM Education Process in order to set priorities);
- planning ahead, for example, 2018 - ten year anniversary;
- more coordination, making the process of common work more robust (perhaps the need for another institution helping to manage the complex process, where so many countries, problems and wishes exist); coordination between organizations (linking the work); appointing coordinators for the working groups;

-the need for communication strategy; the importance of exchange of information about the activities and projects;

-promoting the visibility of the ASEM Education Process through better online communication (e.g. ASEM Education Secretariat website; ASEM Infoboard ([www.aseminfoboard.org](http://www.aseminfoboard.org)); members of the ASEM Education Process could also contribute to the relevant ASEM task force on visibility).

**Considering the priority areas for post-ASEMME5**, the participants suggested the continuation of the four existing priorities of the ASEM Education Process for continuity and stability. The participants of the discussion proposed the integration of additional topics within the framework of the existing priorities: TVET; Teacher education; EFA; ESD; Community engagement as responsibility of higher education institutions; (Social) entrepreneurship in higher education. At the same time it was also suggested to establish the Two Pillars system instead of asking whether four priority areas should be maintained or strictly concentrating on two thereof.

**Sharing opinions on developing and establishing monitoring system or guidelines** for implementing the ASEM Education priorities and reflecting their progress in the countries, participants agreed that firstly, there is a need to define a joint vision. From there, goals and specific objectives can be determined, milestones set and a road map developed. The proposal of Two Pillars approach was also pointed out as the system where the monitoring could take place (in the framework of the Pillar 2).

As assessment of intangible results, or impact, poses challenges when it comes to the evaluation, the members of the working groups emphasized the need for a better visibility and communication. It was pointed out to reinforce the role of AES (for instance, the role of website) for improving visibility.

The members of the discussion suggested that the existing monitoring/reporting tool the AES Stocktaking Report, could be further enhanced and promoted, for example by including statistics or by formulating indicators of progress for the various activities. It was recommended to reinforce AES to strict stocktaking and following up all the initiatives.

Some participants considered that at the moment there is no need for monitoring at all. During the SOM1 it was repeatedly recommended to use the initiatives and tools which already exist, integrate and improve them, as well as to make them more visible. Meanwhile there was expressed an opinion that the ASEM Education Process does not need monitoring since one of its primary functions is facilitating dialogue.

**Furthermore, some other recommendations were expressed regarding the ASEMME5 agenda.** The point was made that it is important to demonstrate the benefit of the ASEM process to the ministers, for instance, in the form of Working group “Quality Assurance and Recognition” presenting their work at ASEMME5. The participants of the discussion also agreed that the meeting aspect is important for the ministers and that interesting and impressive topics should be chosen (for example, balanced outputs, such as education, mobility, curricula; outcomes of the 10<sup>th</sup> ASEM Summit in Milan; open access – virtual mobility (MOOCs)). Some countries believe that the Ministerial Meeting should focus on one theme or challenge. In addition, it was proposed for the ministers to decide on the broad goals or even the vision. Furthermore, it was also suggested to invite inspirational speakers, as well as other stakeholders (for example, real students, teachers, representatives of non-governmental organizations and ASEM Rectors’ Conference) who have benefited from the ASEM Education Process to the ASEMME5.

To recap, during the group discussions there was expressed a broad support to the Two Pillars system within the ASEM Education Process, the proposal for developing the vision document and involvement of stakeholders, especially students, rectors and teachers in the ASEM Education Process. Throughout the discussion there was also stressed the

importance of the visibility and coordination of the ASEM Education Process. The delegations recommended focusing on clear, realistic objectives and result-oriented activities, at the same time keeping it a multifaceted, multipurpose process.

22. The Chair concluded that according to the views expressed during the discussion held after presentations of the group discussions the ASEM process should include various educational levels, not only higher education. The delegations suggested not putting out the topics by the level of education, but looking at cross-cutting themes, for example, technological developments, balanced mobility, employability and skills.
23. The participants representing European countries proposed to change the theme of the ASEMME5 from “Harmonising ASEM Education Collaboration for Results” to “ASEM Education Collaboration for Results” or “ASEM Education Convergence for Results” as the word “harmonisation” in Europe has a very clear meaning and is frequently linked to the EU processes (for example, harmonising regulations, approaches and implementation). The word “harmonising” has a different meaning in Asia. Prof. Dr. Junaidi explained that the title “Harmonising ASEM Education Collaboration for Results” has been proposed because it continues the titling of the ASEMME4 “Strategizing ASEM Education Collaboration” and harmonising in this context means implementing the strategies together.
24. The Chair came back to the draft of ASEMME5 agenda and asked the delegations for comments. The Chair concluded that during the discussions about the proposals for ASEMME5 policy agenda (including side events) and the ASEMME5 Conclusions by the Chair the majority of delegations supported the proposal to have a one full day meeting for the ministers. Regarding the content to be discussed during the Ministerial Meeting it was proposed to present several extensive reports, for instance covering the open access issues or qualification frameworks. Apart from that, it was suggested to discuss the educational levels to be included in the ASEM Education Process.
25. It was recommended to focus more on choosing the theme of the discussion of working lunch of Ministers. There were proposed some potential topics of the discussion: request by the leaders and statements made at the 10<sup>th</sup> ASEM Summit and the cross-cutting themes, for example, technological developments, quality and recognition, European area of skills and qualifications.

The presentations of the SOM1 are available at the following link:  
<http://files.fm/u/byhckdx>