

The Working Breakfast – An Informal Political Discussion on “Goals, Objectives and the Future Vision of the ASEM Educational Process”

SUMMARY

The Working Breakfast is an informal political discussion and was based on the theme of “Goals, Objectives and the Future Vision of the ASEM Educational Process”. It was held on 28 April 2015 in Riga and representatives from 31 countries attended. These included ministers and other senior heads of delegations, the participation of the European External Action Service – EEAS - , the ASEM Education Secretariat – AES - and the Asia-Europe Foundation - ASEF.

The event was chaired by Ms Mārīte Seile, Minister of Education and Science of Latvia. The participants of the Working Breakfast were invited to give their vision on the future of the ASEM Education Process based on the achievements of the ASEM Education Process to date, and the main areas of interest and challenges faced in the collaboration between Asia and Europe. Ms Seile expressed the hope in her introductory speech for an open, critical and visionary debate during the Working Breakfast. 21 interventions were made by participants during the discussion.

Some countries acknowledged the value of the ideas of informality, friendship, peace, prosperity, cooperation and inclusiveness which had been promoted by the ASEM Education Process. During the discussions, a number of countries expressed the view that collaboration needed to be broadened between ASEM countries regarding primary and secondary education while others said that the focus needed to be on higher education. Consequently, it was suggested that a more intensive discussion at the next SOM1 of the ASEMME6 could be held on the topic, including which education levels needed to be included in the ASEM Education Process. Additionally, it was suggested that the format of the ASEMME meetings could be changed.

Some countries highlighted the importance of focusing on the topic of teacher training – the need for teachers to be able to provide high quality basic level education. Different opinions were expressed regarding whether or not both regions needed to collaborate in areas of research and technologies within the ASEM Education Process.

Several countries mentioned the importance of education within the post 2015 sustainable development agenda and the Global Action Programme on Education for Sustainable Development for the ASEM Education Process. They also commented on the continued promotion of this initiative. There was felt to be a need for the ASEM Education Process to align to their goals. It was emphasised again that it was important that the ASEM Education Process remained a multifaceted and multi-purposed process, open to all topics and which inter-acted with other education organisations.

Participants also underlined in informal discussions the need for tangible results and result-oriented action. Some of the initiatives that have led to tangible results included the ASEM-DUO Fellowship Programme and the results that the Working Group on the ASEM Recognition Bridging Declaration had achieved. It was acknowledged that a great deal had been achieved since 2008, and the results should now be made more

visible. It was stated that it was time to deal with the challenges faced. It was acknowledged that there was a need for specific visible signs to demonstrate that something tangible had been achieved from the ASEM Education Process.

It was also mentioned that synergy needed to be demonstrated in all four priority areas of the ASEM Education Process as well as an exchange of practice. A number of countries believed that increasing mobility was vital for mutual understanding and learning. Obstacles to mobility needed to be reduced, and according to the views expressed, it needed to be one of the ASEM educational priorities. Virtual mobility was also mentioned as a development area.

During the discussion it was noted that the added value of the ASEM educational cooperation were the results of the ASEM Rectors' Conference and the Students' Forum because the students knew their needs better than others while rectors knew the obstacles to balanced mobility. Strengthening institutional cooperation, developing joint education programmes for increased employability and more scholarships were stated to be also significant for countries. Further strands to the ideas included the notions of bilateral agreements, quality assurance and mutual recognition issues. Quality assurance was still a priority for countries and the quality assurance area was supported by the EU SHARE programme and the UNESCO-led process which could contribute to progress in the area within two years.

A number of countries drew attention to skill development, including VET, and explained that values and attitudes were also important, particularly diversity and inclusion. There were suggestions of moving outside the frameworks as it was necessary to analyse those skills that countries really needed. Other members highlighted ICT skills, entrepreneurship and language proficiency. Work-based learning and technical fields of study were also mentioned as areas where further effort was needed.

It was also stressed that terms and definitions needed to be clear in the field of ASEM education collaboration. A common understanding was needed regarding specific meanings within the issues under discussions; for example, a "qualifications system", because, even in Europe, different understandings on one specific matter can exist. When the meaning is clear, it will be easier to solve problems and move forward on agreed understandings.

Regarding process-related improvements, the need for evaluation was highlighted; for example, indicators needed to be clear for results of projects. It was suggested that ASEM education needed monitoring and that a Working Group could be created to monitor this processes and to assess results in different sectors.

EEAS mentioned the 20th anniversary of ASEM will be in Mongolia in 2016 and that the participants of the Working Breakfast are also a part of ASEM. Consequently, they would have the opportunity to influence the outcome document of the meeting in Mongolia.

It was stressed that it was important for ASEF to participate in this kind of discussion because ASEF needs to know the challenges and priorities of the ASEM Education Process when it plans education and youth programmes. ASEF has invited the Education Ministers to give direction and guidance regarding the possible ASEF programmes.

In conclusion, Ms Seile, the Minister of Education and Science of Latvia, stressed the importance not only of the vision of the ASEM Education Process but also the need for clarity in creation and implementation of the initiatives. Ms Seile reminded the audience that it was also necessary to work together with ASEM stakeholders. Ms Seile expressed the hope that the Republic of Korea would incorporate the thoughts expressed at the Working Breakfast discussion in the further work of developing ASEM education collaboration.