**Honourable Secretary of State,**

**Distinguished Delegates from ASEM Partner countries and Stakeholders,**

**Dear guests,**

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

**We would like to express our warm welcome to all of you** who attended the Second Senior Officials’ Meeting of ASEM ME7. International gatherings in places like this emphasises the solemnly character of multilateral dialogue and international collaboration in education. Therefore, we would like to thank the **Romanian Ministry of National Education** for hosting and organising SOM2 and ASEM ME7.

The **team of the ASEM ME7 Secretariat** started working closely with the **ASEM Education Secretariat (AES)** more than one year ago, and it has been a particular pleasure to share tasks with our colleagues**.** It should also be stressed that **ARC7** takes place back-to-back with the SOM2 and ASEM ME7. Thus, the ASEM ME7 Secretariat has successfully arranged venue with ARC7 Secretariat.

We’d also like to express our gratitude to all **Senior Officials from ASEM partner countries and ASEM Education stakeholders**, who contributed to the meetings during this the ASEM education process cycle from Seoul to Bucharest.

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

1. The ASEM Education Process (AEP) comes to the end of a cycle, and it’s worth the effort to remind what has been achieved since ASEMME6.

In the beginning of June 2018, the **ISOM** was held in Jakarta, where the AES and the Indonesian Ministry of Research, Technology and Higher Education had to implement an original meeting arrangement by introducing the new workshop format.

Four months later, the **first SOM** was organised in Krems in October 2019 by the Austrian Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research. Again, this SOM was a unique experience as it was a carefully orchestrated leitmotif: “*Pathways to recognition: A contribution to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG’s) from a Lifelong Learning perspective*”.

The **success of coordination** between different hosts, diverse meetings and manifold partner countries and stakeholders in Asia and Europe shows us that the AEP cycle **relies on the collaboration of the whole ASEM Community:** Your commitment to ASEM Education initiatives and projects, your contributions to discussions and presentations as well as your participation in formulating official documents and working papers are the essential basis of the AEP.

1. Today, **two main official documents of the AEP** will be presented and discussed, the **Stocktaking Report (SR) and the final draft of the Chairs’ Conclusions.**

The AES presents you today the **SR “From Seoul to Bucharest”** which lays out the achievements of the AEP since ASEM ME6. We’d like to **express our thanks** to all partners and stakeholders who have contributed to this report by completing the questionnaires and by providing feedback. Special thanks go to the task force for their contributions and to Dr. Wuttig for his dedication and expertise in drafting this report as well as for his constructive feedback. The result of the current SR will be presented later in detail.

The second document to be discussed today is the **final draft of the Chairs’ Conclusions (CC’s),** which is the result of two previous draft versions that circulated before this meeting. Many ASEM partners and stakeholders contributed to the final draft version within their remarks, suggestions, and proposals. **The CC’s are consensual.** Thus, the most significant outcome of the CC’s is to **keep the right balance** between high pragmatic ambitions and very general political statements. We are confident that the presentations and the discussions on the CC’s will lead to their adoption and to the entire satisfaction of all participants.

1. We’d also like to draw your attention to the **presentations of ASEM Members and Stakeholders this afternoon**.

Again, the agenda would not have been finalized without their active participation, giving us the opportunity to discover current initiatives and reflections about the AEP. We’d also like to remind that **today’s evening** provide a great platform for all attendees Senior Officials, Rectors and Students to enrich network to internationalise higher education between both regions.

**Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,**

1. This SOM2 and ASEM ME 7 is also the **midterm of the AES Belgium.**

We’ve had the pleasure to assist and to contribute to the development of the AEP and we found out that challenges seem not to be obstacles in the ASEM Community. To this regard, we’d like to remind that the **Secretariat needs a new host** to ensure a well-managed transition to the next AEP cycle. We hope that one of the Asian ASEM partners will grab this opportunity.

Let’s come to an end with the well-known saying: “If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together”. In this respect, we wish you all a pleasant and productive meeting.