



1st ASEM Labour Ministers Conference in Berlin 2006

“More and Better Jobs – Working Jointly to Strengthen the Social Dimension of Globalisation”

The first meeting of ASEM labour and employment ministers scheduled to take place in Berlin in September 2006 will add an important element to the European-Asian dialogue on the occasion of its 10th anniversary: work in the context of the social dimension of globalisation. Work and social security have been topics on the ASEM agenda since the Copenhagen Summit. Seminars in Peking (November 2003), Hanoi (April 2004) and a specialised congress in Berlin (June 2004) have dealt with these issues. At their meeting in Hanoi in October 2004, ASEM heads of government emphasised the significance of enhanced co-operation in this field of political action. The foreign ministers also recently welcomed the labour minister conference at their Kyoto meeting in May last year.

Background to the stronger focus on labour and employment policy is the insight that globalisation in itself does not guarantee development, jobs and prosperity for all. Making the benefits of globalisation available to as many people as possible will require pro-active measures. The global socio-economic restructuring processes must be embedded in a strategy of social balance and individuals' ability to stand their own ground amidst permanent change and to take an active part in the process. Problems of acceptance or open resistance would otherwise be inevitable. Jointly providing social backing for globalisation means strengthening the global economy's forces for growth in all regions with the goal of arriving at or maintaining a high employment level and providing employment in line with internationally approved social standards. In the long run, this is the only effective way to combat poverty and the prerequisite for fair trade, social balance and political stability.

With this objective in mind, regional groups, having established a common platform to exchange their views and learn from one another, can develop strong effects; the more so if they maintain very close economic relations, as is the case for ASEM. In adapting their socio-economic structures to the ever changing framework conditions, Europe and Asia can mutually profit from their experience and “best practices”.

The ASEM countries are not alone in their striving for a stronger focus on employment and social issues. The final document of the UN Millennium Summit 2005 states:

„47. We strongly support fair globalisation and resolve to make the goals of full and productive employment and decent work for all, including for women and young people, a central objective of our relevant national and international policies as well as our national development strategies, including poverty reduction strategies, as part of our efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals. These measures should also encompass the elimination of the worst forms of child labour, as defined in International Labour Organisation Convention No. 182, and forced labour. We also resolve to ensure full respect for the fundamental principles and rights at work.”
(Document A/60/L.1)

In its February 2004 report, the World Commission on the Social Dimension of Globalisation, set up by the ILO, also calls for the global economy to be underpinned by social policies to balance the disparity of its benefits in and between countries.

The German government is pleased and honoured to host the first exchange of views and experience of ASEM labour and employment ministers. The Conference is an important element in the architecture of the ASEM summit meeting organised by Finland which features a wide range of subjects and areas. The scheduling of the event 3 to 5 September 2006 will give the ASEM Labour Minister Conference the opportunity of providing impulses and results for the meeting of the heads of state and government which will follow in Helsinki (10 to 12 September 2006). The ministers could agree on an ongoing exchange and cooperation on employment policy issues.

The two-day Conference in Berlin will be held under the heading of “More and Better Jobs – Working Jointly to Strengthen the Social Dimension of Globalisation”. It offers a forum for plenary policy discussion and intensive work in thematically structured workshops. Since it is the first time for the ministers to come together, priority will be given to the mutual information and exchange of ideas.

Preparatory discussions and coordination processes have just begun. Contact points need to be established. Interested countries who would like to support Germany in preparing the conference are welcome to do so. We would appreciate the ASEM partners' comments to the agenda. (Please contact Dr. Christian Schleithoff, tel.: ++49 1888 615 6550 / email: christian.schleithoff@bmas.bund.de, or Svenja Deters, tel. ++49 1888 615 6985 / email: svenja.deters@bmas.bund.de)

Draft Programme

Sunday, 3 September 2006

Afternoon: Arrival of delegates

Evening: Dinner hosted by Federal Minister of Labour and Social Affairs and Vice Chancellor, Franz Müntefering

Monday, 4 September 2006

Morning: 1. Political opening statement / Keynote speech by the Federal Minister and Vice Chancellor
2. Plenary session/ Political discussion (Heads of delegation)

Noon: Light meal

Afternoon: 3 workshops to be chosen from the following list of 5 suggested workshops:

1. Growth and employment – How can positive interaction be enhanced?
2. Globalisation, international division of labour and restructuring – quo vadis Asia, quo vadis Europe?
3. Investment in human resources – key factor for economic progress and social inclusion
4. CSR – Social dialogue and corporate social responsibility
5. Regional cooperation – the best way to strengthen the social dimension of globalisation?

Evening: Dinner hosted by the Berlin Senate (planned)

Tuesday, 5 September 2006

Morning: 1. Presentation of workshop results by the rapporteurs and plenary discussion
2. Chairman's Statement
3. Press conference

Noon: Departure of delegates