



## **The Ninth Asia-Europe Business Forum (AEBF IX) Chairman's Statement**

7-8 October 2004

Hanoi, Vietnam

1. The Ninth Asia-Europe Business Forum was held on 7-8 October 2004 in Hanoi Vietnam. The Forum was chaired by Mr Ngo Van Thoan – General Director of the Vietnam Trade Promotion Agency and well attended by 320 representatives of the ASEM business communities under the theme “Towards a Closer and More Dynamic Asia-Europe Business Partnership” among ASEM member countries.
2. The Forum reviewed the business performance of ASEM countries over the last years and took note with satisfaction the more favorable global outlook. However, the world economy still is undergoing a number of uncertainties caused by terrorist attacks and regional conflicts, high volatility in currencies and commodity prices.
3. In order to make AEBF more effective, the Forum decided to set up a core group, reinforcing AEBF as Business Advisory Council to ASEM. The Steering Committee of the AEBF also considered the possibility of creation of a permanent Secretariat, to enhance coordination among business communities of ASEM countries and to improve the implementation of the recommendations of the Forum. In the future AEBF will meet every two years in connection with the ASEM Summit. The next AEBF will be hosted by Finland in September 2006.

### **4. Key recommendations of the Working Groups**

#### **4.1 Trade**

- The TWG appreciates the breakthrough WTO framework agreement on farm trade and encourages member countries to immediately begin negotiations on detailed issues, especially for securing better market access for developing member countries.
- To promote trade and the exchange of information, links among Trade Support Organizations (TSO) in the two regions and inter-regional commercial events such as an ASEM Trade Fair should be encouraged.
- ASEM members should continue to cut tariffs and avoid counter-veiling measures.
- ASEM governments should ensure accessibility to settlement mechanisms for all business people in case of disputes.
- ASEM governments should ease and simplify requirements for visa/travel permits for business people from member countries.



#### **4.2 Investment and infrastructure**

- Reinforce cooperation to increase the number of viable projects through promoting efficient investments by mobilizing private sector capability in the realization of projects, mixing adequately public and private, local and international financing, through strengthening of appropriate legal and practical framework and promoting risk mitigation instruments.
- Exchange “best practices” in order to improve the basic schemes in the various fields of infrastructure projects.
- Organize a conference on public-private partnership under the auspices of AEBF-ASEM.
- Set up training of public authorities and of experts in order to promote efficient preparation and management of key infrastructure projects.

#### **4.3 Financial Services**

- Governments support more actively the development of their respective capital markets, with emphasis on bond markets.
- Authorities focus on improving the regulatory framework, consumer education and tax simplification to encourage private pension funds to supplement the role of public schemes in supporting older-aged pensioners.
- Transparency is the key issue in building trust between financial service providers and the corporate sector.
- Governments need to take a more active role to ensure that remittances from overseas are channeled through the formal financial system.

#### **4.4 Information and Communication Technologies**

- Exchange of common application for utility, DB and e-government is encouraged.
- Experience sharing and consultation is strongly encouraged.
- It is necessary to promote e-government, e-based public services in ASEM member states;
- Pricing of e-services should be kept moderate to ensure that digital services are available to all

#### **4.5 Food**

- WG highly appreciates the results of Doha round, particularly the agreement in principle on elimination of export subsidies and substantial reductions in trade distorting domestic support in agriculture. Application of unilateral sanctions should be minimized.
- SPS measures should be reduced in accordance with international standards. Surveys and researches should be conducted in partnership with relevant national research institutions, to ensure the availability of scientific data when establishing appropriate standards.
- National websites should be utilized as a means of providing relevant food safety related information, e.g. crises management, alerts, listing of exporters, directory of experts in food safety, research data, training programmes and courses. An early warning system of the two continents should be established to notify member countries of possible outbreaks of infectious animal diseases or food safety incidents that threaten public health in one country.
- Sub-regional or regional MRAs (Mutual Recognition Agreements) on standards regarding food safety should be signed to recognize or accept some of all aspects of one another's conformity assessment results.
- Biotechnology is being increasingly applied in certain countries in Asia to improve productivity and the quality of agricultural products. EU countries, by their experience, should help Asian countries to control the development of this industry, so as not to go against human health, biodiversity and the environment.

#### **4.6. Tourism**

- ASEM countries should exchange views on health issues, security, safety and crisis management, and improve marketing and promotion campaigns in order to enhance sustainable tourism development for all members. ASEM members should make strong efforts to cut red tape (e.g. visas), reduce and speed up immigration procedures, improve external communications and internal transportation.
- In order to alleviate poverty, increase growth, create employment and generate foreign exchange, developed ASEM members should support other ASEM members in technical issues and training; share experiences, quality standards and certification, technology transfer; preserve historical, cultural and natural heritage.
- ASEM needs to establish and reinforce links with other international organisations. ASEM members' tourist associations should organise an annual 'tourism forum' for better cooperation.



#### **4.7. SMEs**

- Enhance the interconnection of existing SMEs' centres within ASEM in order to facilitate trade and investment.
- Develop and update existing tools (ASEM connect system) in order to interconnect existing websites for SMEs in Europe and Asia.
- Develop market awareness, information, local business practices.
- Promote the increase of globalization of SMEs through Asia – EU partenariat, Asia Invest and targeted business meetings.
- Enhance access to financing for SMEs.
- Governments should listen more carefully to the real problems of SMEs and create a strong support scheme to protect SMEs' existence and continuation.