



Asia-Europe Meeting

CONCEPT PAPER

“ASEM SYMPOSIUM ON THE FUTURE DIRECTION OF ASEM”

1. Background

There has been a number of studies on ways to further improve ASEM process. Notable among them is the “Helsinki Declaration on the Future of ASEM”, which was endorsed during ASEM 6 in 2006 on the occasion of the 10th anniversary of ASEM and has been instrumental in leading to improvements of the ASEM process. Since then, ASEM has grown while the global contexts have changed significantly. The 20th anniversary of ASEM in 2016 provides a great opportunity to seriously look back on the past 20 years and plan for the future of ASEM.

During ASEM 10 in Milan (16-17 October 2014), ASEM leaders welcomed the development of the ASEM process and recognised the need to build upon its strengths and accomplishments in order to move the ASEM process forward. Hence, they tasked the ASEM Foreign Ministers and the Senior Officials to submit concrete recommendations on the future direction of ASEM to the next summit to be held in 2016 in Mongolia, which will mark the 20th anniversary of ASEM. To start off this important endeavor, Thailand proposed to host the ASEM Symposium to discuss the future direction of ASEM and the initiative was welcomed by ASEM leaders. In this connection, Thailand will host **ASEM Symposium on the Future Direction of ASEM** on the **30 March 2015 in Bangkok.**

2. Objectives

The main objective of the Symposium is to take stock of ASEM’s achievements thus far and set out the framework for ASEM’s future direction towards its third decade, given new challenges and opportunities in Asia and Europe. One of the particular interests is how to increase ASEM’s relevance and visibility to the public in the long-term.

The summary outcome document of the Symposium will be circulated at the beginning of the ASEM Senior Official Meeting (ASEM SOM) which is expected to start in the afternoon of 31 March 2015 in Bangkok, during which ASEM SOM Leaders will discuss the future direction of ASEM and related issues.

Gist of the Symposium as well as points of discussions from the ASEM SOM Meeting will be reflected in the first draft of the “Bangkok Initiatives on the Future Direction of ASEM”, which will be submitted for further amendments

by the future ASEM SOM meetings. It will then be submitted for approval by the 12th ASEM Foreign Ministers in November 2015 in Luxembourg before the recommendations contained therein will be presented to ASEM leaders during the next summit to be held in 2016 in Mongolia.

3. Structure of the Symposium

The Symposium will be conducted in a panel discussion format and, tentatively, will comprise of 5 sessions namely:

- (1) Overview session,
- (2) Political Pillar session,
- (3) Economic Pillar session,
- (4) Social and Cultural Pillar session, and
- (5) Conclusion session.

The discussions during sessions (2), (3) and (4) will focus on 3 issues namely: (1) Stocktaking of ASEM's past challenges and opportunities; (2) How do we wish ASEM to be in its third decade? and (3) Ways and means to achieve such objectives.

4. Participants

Invitation will be extended to all ASEM SOM Leaders, interested think tanks/agencies, as well as other relevant stakeholders, especially from the following sectors: culture, business, NGOs, education, politics, media, youth and academia. Around 200-250 participants from ASEM members are expected to attend the Symposium.

5. Co-sponsors

ASEM members are invited to co-sponsor the Symposium by sending appropriate panelists for each session of the Symposium.
