ASEM process (Asia-Europe Meeting): perspectives and priorities into the new decade

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PURPOSE : To present the priorities for the third Asia Europe Meeting (ASEM) in Seoul in October 2000. CONTENT : The ASEM process began with the Bangkok Summit in March 1996. Its objective is to build a comprehensive partnership based on the promotion of three pillars: political dialogue, the deepening of economic relations, and the reinforcement of cultural links between peoples. The second ASEM Summit in London in 1998 was overshadowed by the Asian financial crisis, but confirmed Europe's commitment to the Asian recovery. In particular, Europe pledged to keep markets open in the face of any protectionist pressures which may arise from the crisis and agreed to launch an ASEM Trust Fund to provide technical expertise to help address the financial and social issues arising from the crisis. The Seoul Summit offers an excellent opportunity to re-position the Asia-Europe relationship in the post-crisis situation and the age of globalisation of international relations. ASEM's strengths as a forum are informality, in the sense of dialogue rather than negotiation, multi-dimensionality of topics, and high level participation. In identifying future priorities, a distinction is made between general priorities and specific priorities for action in the short-term. General priorities are set out in each of the three pillars and are largely based on the on-going work in the ASEAN process. They seek to build on achievements to date and propose a deepening of relations between the two regions. These priorities should be incorporated into the updated Asia-Europe Cooperation Framework which will be adopted in Seoul, and which will set out the general parameters of the ASEM process in the next decade. Five specific priorities are also suggested: - an enhanced exchange of views on regional and global security issues. The Union and ASEM partners should share their respective regional experiences in fields such as analysis, planning and training in relation to conflict prevention and peace-keeping, reconciliation process, humanitarian assistance and other aspects of "soft" security cooperation. Exchanges on piracy and cyber warfare will be important. Fostering encouragement for universal compliance with the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, amongst others, could also be on the agenda. - an enhanced result-orientated cooperation on trade and economic issues, including dialogue on social policy issues. This includes particularly the launching of comprehensive WTO negotiations aiming at both further trade liberalisation and the strengthening of the WTO's rules-based system. - intensified educational exchanges between the two regions. This would include a target for additional scholarships of producing a five-fold increase in student exchanges between the two regions in ten years, and the launching of a high-level ASEM Scholarship programme. - networking and cooperation in the field of consumer protection. Food safety and eco-labelling are of interest to the peoples of both regions. - possible enlargement of participation in the ASEM process. This matter is under consideration by Foreign Ministers and certain basic parameters for enlargement are already under discussion. It is important for the process to reach practical conclusions at Seoul.