

Perspectives and priorities for the ASEM process, Asia-Europe

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Without debate, the European Parliament adopted the resolution by Salvatore Tatarella (NI,IT) on the Commission working document on Perspectives and Priorities for the ASEM Process. The report calls on the EU and its Member States and on the Asian partners to give high priority to taking the ASEM process forward and strengthening it, by taking the first steps towards the constitution of an organisation capable of acting collectively. It also calls on the ASEM Member States to extend membership at least to the South Asian countries. The Parliament supports the Council decision not to accept the participation of Burma at EU-ASEAN and ASEM meetings until there are significant improvements in human rights and democracy in Burma. It also stresses the need to limit obstacles to trade, but does not go as far as to recommend a free trade area, as proposed by the rapporteur. The report emphasises that the EU should put much more emphasis in its dialogue with Asian partners on the necessity to guarantee basic social rights for all workers, in particular with regard to the use of child labour. It calls for support for Asia-Europe cooperation at civil society level to be developed and NGOs to be associated to the ASEM process. The Parliament stresses that step by step institutionalisation of the relationship between the EU and the ASEM partners would pave the way for the achievement of more concrete results. The report notes the multi-faceted and in some cases deep-rooted character of the barriers that exporters to East Asia are still confronted with. In the Parliament's view, real progress may not be made until exporters experience clear improvements. It calls for a comprehensive and balanced WTO round of negotiations, resulting in further progressive liberalisation across all sectors. The report emphasises that the EU should continue to press for integration of environmental provisions in global trade rules and elaborate on its proposals on how this should be done. It invites the Commission and the Member States to exploit fully the possibilities to conduct a dialogue on this issue offered by the ASEM process. At the same time, the Parliament invites the Council and the Commission to study how the EU can support the development of viable political, economic and social structures in East Timor, and thereby facilitate a peaceful ending of the Indonesian occupation. It also wishes to see support for the ASEAN Regional Forum in order to contribute to reducing existing tensions and provide safeguards against the emergence and escalation of conflicts in the future. Finally, the Parliament urges the EU and its Member States to step up their efforts at achieving consensus on the inclusion of clear commitments to human rights to be included in key ASEM documents and to persist in raising concrete human rights issues in plenary ASEM meetings.