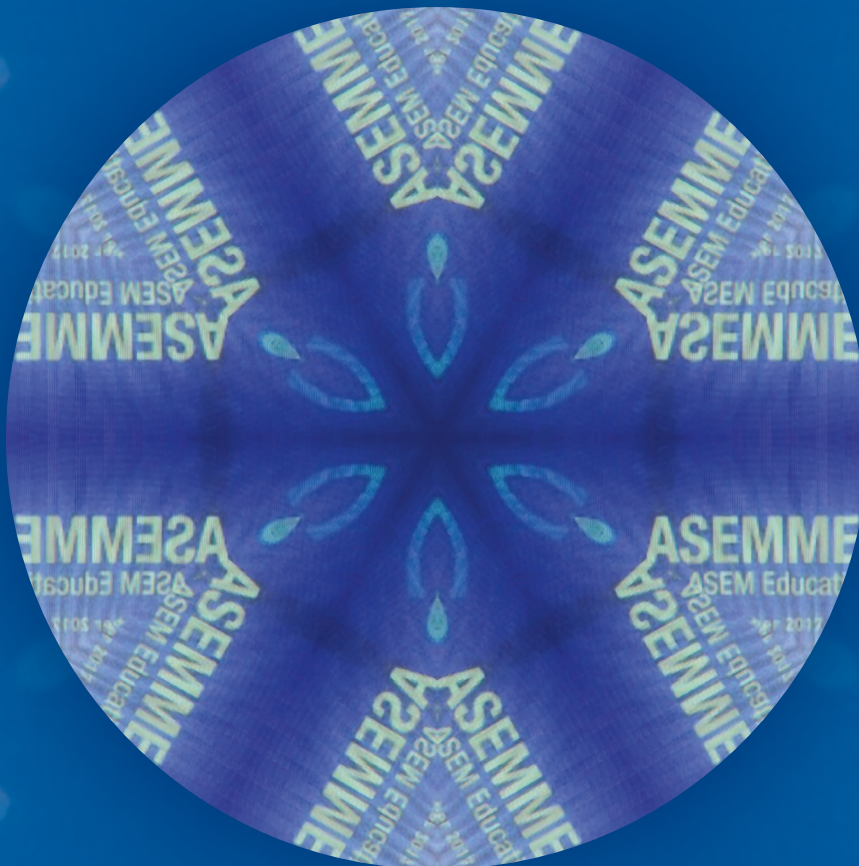


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LOOKING BACK AND LOOKING AHEAD:

# The ASEM Education Process – History and Vision

2008 – 2018



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**Paper entitled: An Outsider Perspective: Reflecting on the evolution of Asia Europe Meeting (ASEM), the Asia Europe Education Process (AEP) and the recent shift towards a dialogue on Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET)**

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**Asia Europe Meeting Overview:**

**As a forum for political dialogue** Asia Europe Meeting (ASEM)<sup>1</sup> provides a platform for member countries to meet, and is considered by the countries involved as a space to foster cooperation and **deepen relations** between Asia and Europe. Member Countries hold the view that the forum provides a platform for discourse and the exchange of views which is fundamental **to achieving a more balanced** political, economic and social **world order**. Heads of State and Government officials from each member country meet biannually, alternating summit level meetings between Europe and Asia, while meetings between ministers and senior official in specific government domains (foreign affairs, finance, economics, environment, culture, labour and employment, education, transport, energy and security) progress along a more frequent continuum.

Currently ASEM is made up of 53 partners comprising 51 member countries (Australia, Austria, Bangladesh, Belgium, Brunei Darussalam, Bulgaria, Cambodia, China, Croatia, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, India, Indonesia, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Kazakhstan, Korea, Loa PR, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malaysia, Malta, Mongolia, Myanmar, The Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Pakistan, the Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Romania, the Russian Federation, Singapore, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Thailand, the United Kingdom and Viet Nam) plus 2 regional organisations (The European Union and the ASEAN<sup>2</sup> Secretariat).

**As a political process** ASEM encapsulates a wide array of initiatives supported by government with the primary ambition to **foster cooperation** through **enhanced dialogue** and **connectivity** and ultimately to **bring people closer together** in areas that identify as the three major pillars of ASEM: politics, economics and the combined pillar of social, culture & education.

**Contextually** a number of factors converged to provide the impetus for ASEM to be established: a growth in confidence on the part of Asian countries; a mounting concern for a fortress Europe; an intention on the part of Asia to respond to the United States of America (USA), Canada and Mexico creating the North America Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA)<sup>3</sup>; and an intention on the part of Europe to counterbalance Asia Pacific countries establishing Asia Pacific Economic Co-operation (APEC)<sup>4</sup> as a regional economic forum.

Consequently, during a meeting of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), China, Japan, Korea, EU Member States and the European Commission which was held on the 1<sup>st</sup> of March 1996, political leaders ratified Asia Europe Meeting (ASEM) as the official platform for Asia Europe summit level dialogue. The first ASEM Summit level meeting was convened and as such ASEM leaders quickly moved to underpin political dialogue with the inauguration of ministerial level meetings in identified priority areas of foreign affairs, finance and economics.

**A decade later** ASEM not only proved to **sustained momentum** for the forum by achieving five ministerial level summit meetings and realising seven foreign minister meetings, six finance ministers meetings, five economic ministers meetings but also **achieved traction** and **expanded dialogue** to include the government domains of environment and culture:

- **ASEM Summit Level Meeting** inaugurated in 1996 and attended by heads of state and government: ASEM1 Bangkok (1996)<sup>5</sup>, ASEM2 London (1998)<sup>6</sup>, ASEM3 Seoul (2000)<sup>7</sup>, ASEM4 Copenhagen (2002)<sup>8</sup> and ASEM5 Hanoi (2004)<sup>9</sup>.
- **ASEM Foreign Ministers Meeting (FMM)** inaugurated in 1997<sup>10</sup> and attended by ministers: ASEM FMM1 Singapore (1997), ASEM FMM2 Berlin (1999), ASEM FMM3 Beijing (2001), ASEM FMM4 Madrid (2002), ASEM FMM5 Bali (2003), ASEM FMM6 Kildare (2004) and ASEM FMM7 Kyoto (2005).
- **ASEM Finance Ministers Meeting (fin MM)** inaugurated in 1997<sup>11</sup> and attended by ministers: finMM1 Bangkok (1997); ASEM finMM2 Frankfurt (1999); ASEM finMM3 Kobe (2001); ASEM finMM4 Copenhagen (2002); ASEM finMM5 Bali (2003); ASEM finMM6 Tianjin (2005); and ASEM finMM7 Vienna (2006).
- **ASEM Economic Ministers Meeting (EMM)** inaugurated in 1997<sup>12</sup> and attended by ministers: ASEM EMM1 Makuhari (1997); ASEM EMM2 Berlin (1999); ASEM EMM3 Hanoi (2001); ASEM EMM4 Copenhagen (2002); and ASEM EMM5 Dalian (2003).
- **ASEM Environment Ministers Meeting (EnvMM)** inaugurated in 2002<sup>13</sup> and attended by ministers: ASEM EnvMM1 Beijing (2002) and ASEM EnvMM2 Lecce (2003).
- **ASEM Culture Ministers Meeting (CMM)** inaugurated in 2003<sup>14</sup> and attended by ministers: ASEM CMM1 Beijing (2003), ASEM CMM2 Paris (2005).

ASEM leaders were however becoming increasingly aware that increased cooperation also brought **fresh challenges** and even **greater expectations** and as such the forum found itself at a **crossroads: internally** ASEM felt it had been **successful** in its ambition to **encourage cooperation, foster dialogue** and **increase connectivity**, bringing member countries and citizens closer together and also **extending opportunities** for cooperation to new members however **externally** the context of both the global and regional **environments** within which ASEM operated **had changed**. The euphoria and optimism that had followed the end of the Cold War which was typified by a rise in globalisation that pervaded the 90's was no longer prevalent. The world had transitioned to a place of **uncertainty** characterised by **challenge** and **unrest** which was compounded by the collapse of the Twin Towers and expressed by an increasingly vocal anti-globalisation movement. Politically the world stage had begun to view the emergence of India and the rise of China with varying degrees of apprehension and appreciation while broad commentary speculated on the worlds ability to adjust and adapt to this new dynamic, **new players** and a **new world order**.

**The Summit Level Meeting of 2006 (ASEM6)**<sup>15</sup> provided member countries with an opportunity to take stock of the first 10 years of ASEM. ASEM6 was to be the largest ever meeting of ASEM Heads of State, and with a view to solidifying ASEM as a political process going forward, political leaders not only formally adopted the *Helsinki Declaration on the Future of ASEM*<sup>16</sup> but also agreed a policy for enlargement. Members believed that continuity, partnership and increased cooperation would significantly strengthen the global weight and visibility of the forum and as such ASEM6 emerged as an **important milestone** in the history of ASEM in terms of **consolidating Asia-Europe relations** and **bringing cohesion** to ASEM political **process**. The remit of ASEM also widened to support ministerial meetings in the government domains of labour and employment, education, transport and energy security.

The evolutionary nature of ASEM coupled with a desire to strengthen multilateral cooperation and encourage international standards gave rise to ASEM leaders emphasising **human resources as a constituent and key component of economic and social development** and to also recognise that globalisation had presented challenges to human resource development which in turn affected the entire field of education and training. Dialogue evidenced Asia and Europe as facing common issues principally in the areas of financing education provision and ensuring quality education and training for all citizens. ASEM leaders emphasised the important and underpinning role of both basic education, vocational training and life-long learning in the development of human resources and as such highlighted the significance of government investment in human capital. Stressing the value of continued dialogue and the exchange of best practice **ASEM6 leaders** not only began to **encourage** the establishment of **a dedicated ASEM ministerial meeting specific to education** but also created an impetus to ASEM policy direction by **ratifying the ASEM Education Process (AEP)<sup>17</sup> as a horizontal measure** with the ambition to **harness the key role education and training** plays in terms of developing human capital. Positioning AEP as a horizontal measure also have the effect of providing a platform to harness the potential of multilateral cross dimensional links which had been developed between member countries, throughout the political spectrum of governance (foreign affairs, finance, economics, environment, culture, labour and employment, education, transport, energy and security) and across the overarching pillars of ASEM (political, economic and social, culture & education).

Following ASEM6 **the next decade** witnessed ASEM advance towards **a more integrated political dialogue and enhanced cooperation** with leaders achieving a further six summit level meetings while the establishment of a dedicated ASEM Ministerial Meeting on Education (ASEMME) and the ratification of AEP both as a policy direction and as a horizontal measure, with the ambition to harness the key role education and training plays in economic and social development, advanced at pace with ministers achieving six ASEMME meetings over a 12-year period. The **vision for ASEM began to consolidate and achieve traction** across a wide spectrum of government domains with member country initiatives, guided by the **agreed priorities** of the *Helsinki Declaration* identifying **core principles** underpinned by **operating mechanisms**, collectively and significantly **contributing to the ambition** of ASEM both as a **political process and as a political forum** functioning on a global playing field:

- **Summit Level Meetings:** ASEM6 Helsinki (2006)<sup>18</sup>, ASEM7 Beijing (2008)<sup>19</sup>, ASEM8 Brussels (2010)<sup>20</sup>, ASEM9 Vientiane (2012)<sup>21</sup>, ASEM10 Milan (2014)<sup>22</sup> and ASEM11 Ulaanbaatar (2016)<sup>23</sup>.
- **ASEM Labour and Employment Ministers Conference (LEMC)** inaugurated in 2006<sup>24</sup> and attended by ministers: ASEM LEMC1 Potsdam (2006), ASEM LEMC2 Bali (2008), ASEM LEMC3 Leiden (2010), ASEM LEMC4 Viet Nam (2012) and ASEM LEMC5 Sofia (2015)
- **ASEM Education Ministers Meeting (ME)** inaugurated in 2008<sup>25</sup> and attended by ministers: ASEMME1 Berlin (2008), ASEMME2 Hanoi (2009), ASEMME3 Copenhagen (2011), ASEMME4 Kuala Lumpur (2013), ASEMME5 Riga (2015) and ASEMME6 Seoul (2017)
- **ASEM Transport Ministers Meeting (TMM)<sup>26</sup>** inaugurated in 2009 and attended by ministers: ASEM TMM1 Vilnius (2009), ASEM TMM2 Chengdu (2011), ASEM TMM3 Riga (2015) and ASEM TMM4 Bali (2017).
- **ASEM Energy Security Ministerial Conference (ESMC)<sup>27</sup>** inaugurated in 2009 and attended by ministers: ASEM ESMC1 Brussels (2009).

Moving towards the third phase of ASEM and **following this initial period of establishing AEP as a collective policy direction** it is perhaps timely to reflect on progress to date with a view to both advancing the vision and ambition of AEP and also to developing the scaffolding and supports required to carry the process through to the next phase: **internally** in terms of AEP being both a collective political decision-making forum and a policy process (with the ambition to agree, develop, support and implement educational advancements in parallel with member countries) and a horizontal measure (with the ambition to provide for cross dimensional links across the political domains and throughout the overarching pillars of ASEM) and also **externally** in terms of **AEP emerging as an economic and social driver** in the development the human resources, human capital, **education and training**. More specifically the ambition for the next phase of the ASEM Education Process, as identified and agreed during ASEMME6 (2017)<sup>28</sup> and requires for AEP to “*unleash the potential of AEP by **shifting the focus** to one that **produces outcomes** and induces **tangible cooperation** and, given that economic growth and social reform arise from greater integration with the rest of the world, to also encourage Asia-Europe partners to **concentrate on global issues together** while **enabling societal changes** to address prevalent challenges such as **employability** and the **development of ICT** in education; specifically relating to the identified priority areas of **improving youth employability** through policies relating to **Lifelong Learning (including Technical Vocational Education and Training TVET)** and the **engagement of business and industry with education** in addition to **promoting mobility and people to people connectivity** through the development of initiatives that support the advancement of frameworks for **quality assurance and recognition** and also encourages a **balanced approach to mobility**”.*

With this in mind the aim of this paper is not only to **review the progress of AEP to date** but also to critically reflect on AEP as a process: **internally** in terms of **the structure and the evolution of AEP** placed within the context of ASEM, looking to **history, culture and objectives as contextual drivers to shaping policy direction and advancement**; and **externally** as a **collective policy direction** with the ambition to **underpin economic and social development** as situated in a the **context** of a **globalised fast-moving environment** and in doing so to take consideration of how ASEM operates both as a forum and as an overarching **summit level political process**. This paper will also discuss the role of **Vocational Education and Training (VET)** as an identified priority area within ASEM AEP, and taking account of **progress to date**, will reflect on the **recent** and emerging **shift towards a dialogue on TVET**.

**Critical Reflection - looking back provides us with the momentum to propel ourselves forward:** When we undertake a critical review of any system, let alone ASEM AEP, we become mindful that our ambition and our responsibility is not simply to diagnose right from wrong but to **critically reflect** on key issues and to do so not in an anti-intellectual way but in such a way that the system begins to ask questions of itself with the result that the process becomes better equip at keeping both the system, its structures and policies healthy and free from ideas that are harmful to member countries, stakeholders, individuals and more specifically learners. Critical reflection requires that we ask ourselves **who** actually benefits from this, **what** is the alternative, is there another perspective, **where** will this idea take us, can we improve, **when** do we know we have succeeded, can we expect change, will this play a part in our history, **why** is this relevant, is there a need for it, **how** does this benefit others, how do we see this in the future, does this disrupt things and are we really changing things for the good of society and mankind.

### **Looking Back - The Evolution of Asia Europe Meeting (ASEM):**

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), China, Japan, Korea, EU Member States and the European Commission officially established Asia Europe Meeting (ASEM) on the 1<sup>st</sup> of March 1996 as a platform for summit level dialogue with the ambition deepen cooperation and to achieve a more balanced political, economic and social world order.

As a **forum for political dialogue** the impetus for bringing Asia and Europe closer together through the creation of ASEM may have appeared somewhat **reactionary**, however the intention to strategically and politically align Asia with Europe was more **considered**. At the time strong Atlantic ties existed between Europe and the USA while the establishment of APEC had served to strengthened cooperation between the Asia Pacific countries. The USA also had a number of bilateral agreements with Asia and as such a weakness in cooperation between Asia and Europe was revealed with the result that ASEM was openly presented as a concept to both close the triangle and to balance the power dynamic of a global economy buttressed by the USA, Europe and East Asia. While everyone was in agreement with regards to the establishment and ambition of ASEM, the inaugural speeches delivered on the day rather curiously expose significantly different perceptions and interests with the result that the vision advanced by the leadership not only created an environment conducive to enhancing economic and social development but one that predominately focused ASEM ambition on maintaining peace and stability. With the result that the alchemy required to achieve the balance between economic and social development on one hand and peace and stability on the other is fundamentally at the heart of ASEM and as such has ultimately influenced both the culture and structure of the forum. ASEM dialogue is characterised by informality with an intentional absence of legal instrument which in turn serves to create a political framework that is uniquely diverse in terms of cooperation initiatives and activities as opposed to one that takes the shape of a unitary structure with clearly defined parameters. In a decision-making arena the use of informal protocols when coupled with a flexible dynamic may exhibit as reactive, uncontrolled, chaotic or even ambivalent particularly when the task is to achieve both political cohesion, tangible results and measurable outcomes however the motivation/culture instilled in ASEM at the outset (to balance economic and social development with peace and stability) has proved to be both the underlying genius and compelling strength of the forum. Over time, and through a process of informal dialogue coupled with a willingness for cooperation which is underpinned by mutual respect, the core values of ASEM evolved and emerged to be adopted **internally** as the *Asia Europe Cooperation Framework* (2000)<sup>29</sup> agreeing a Political Charter and providing foundational principals to guide member cooperation, initiatives and activities:

- on a basis of **equal partnership, mutual respect and mutual benefit**;
- **in an open and evolutionary process** with enlargement conducted on the basis of consensus by the heads of state/government;
- **to enhance mutual understanding and awareness through** a process of **dialogue** and lead to **cooperation** on the **identification of priorities** for concerted and supportive action;
- to carry forward three key dimensions of ASEM with the same impetus: to **foster political dialogue, reinforce economic cooperation** and **promote cooperation** in other areas;
- **to not be institutionalised** and as an informal process ASEM should stimulate and facilitate progress in other fora;
- **to go beyond governments** in order to **promote dialogue and cooperation between the business/private sectors** of the two regions and, no less importantly, between the **peoples** of the two regions; ASEM should **also encourage** the cooperative activities of **think-tanks and research** groups of both regions.



**As an overarching political process** ASEM operates **externally** in a global fast-moving environment which brings with it some unique challenges. When ASEM was established the benefits of globalisation were viewed with a sense of expectation and optimism: the possibilities for international cooperation elicited visions of a new world order that was multi-polar (in that it would be driven by more than two centers of power), multidimensional, dynamic and exciting. What emerged however was an increased unilateralism as well as an increased interdependence. **The global playing field transpired to be a more contentious and fractious space with successive financial crisis, increased terror attacks and an anti-globalisation movement** that was gathering momentum. Issues of trust, balance of power and questionable motivating factors were very much at the heart of globalised activity which was characterised by an amount of vulnerability and a level of **insecurity** and inevitably **resulted in more demands, more rules and more procedures**. At the time ASEM as a political forum was evolving through the initial stages of establishment and as such was primarily focused on activities that would broaden dialogue in the key areas of political positioning, human rights, security and environment with Ministers for Foreign Affairs establishing **The Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF)**<sup>30</sup> as a non-profit intergovernmental body to **promote cultural, intellectual and people to people exchange**. However, as an overarching political process ASEM leaders also had a responsibility to actively **respond** to the challenges being presented by globalisation. Consequently, ASEM leaders agreed, in both a **considered and effective** manner, to set up the ASEM Trust Fund<sup>31</sup> with the remit to respond to the financial crisis and to develop a number of counterterrorism initiatives with a primary focus on increasing dialogue and fostering understanding between countries, different cultures and religious doctrine. The agreed policy direction resulted in the ASEM leadership (particularly in East Asia) emerging as **a strong and more unified voice with a shared belief and collective responsibility** for the creation of a more **stable and constructive regional positioning**, which in turn had a **profound effect on both the internal and external functioning of ASEM**.

The next ten years bore witness to a number of cooperation initiatives in the area of customs and trade which resulted in a substantial increase in activity between Asia and the EU. The economic pillar of ASEM in particular made significant progress establishing the Trade Facilitation Action Plan (TFAP)<sup>32</sup> and the Investment Promotion Action Plan (IPAP)<sup>33</sup> while the social, culture and education pillar encouraged exchange initiatives and created a number of networks to encourage intellectual and cultural exchange: the Council for Asia-Europe Cooperation (CAEC)<sup>34</sup>, the **ASEM DUO Fellowship Programme**<sup>35</sup> and the Asia Europe People Forum (ASEF)<sup>36</sup> establishing intellectual think tanks and engaging civil society in meaningful dialogue relating to issues of democracy, social equality and security. All of which played a crucial role in developing ASEM as a “soft-power”. However, a leitmotif or **reoccurring theme** was beginning to **emerge from the ASEM membership**. Dialogue between Asia and Europe had undoubtedly improved and while discourse was wide-ranging many of the issues discussed had **yet to transition from surface level information sharing to deep and concentrated dialogue** (the latter of which **requires not only a greater level of cooperation but also a substantive level of commitment**). The breath of topic and a lack of focused agenda which when coupled with a diffidence towards tackling political issues in a more substantive manner did not result in inertia but instead surfaced as a palpable determination with members lobbying for operational programme structures that were **more concrete and more tangible**.

Understandably key issues such as leadership came into focus. As a forum made up of equal partners with consensus building at the heart of all decision-making the notion of **leadership** within ASEM defines as *issue based* as opposed to *power-based* and is reflected by a tendency (on the part of member countries) to cluster together to discuss issues of particular interest or specific expertise with the result that the resources and supports necessary to develop and implement initiatives are implied. Consequently, the fundamental questions being asked of leadership were not so much about how to organise the internal structures of ASEM (e.g. project-based teams/departments) to achieve outcomes but were more about how to leverage synergies and multiplier effects of projects and initiatives

(which are predominately clustered into bilateral and multilateral cooperation activities) to achieve the level of *upscale* and *market traction* required for a forum with a membership the size and scale of ASEM.

In order to respond effectively the leadership and the forum recommended for a review of ASEM principles and objectives to focus on mechanisms and processes that would provide for **benchmarking** and more **concrete deliverables**. Both the Foreign Ministries of Finland and Japan viewed the recommendation as **opportunity** to ascertain whether ASEM, as a global player, had advanced its political agenda and as such sponsored a research project **to evaluate** the first ten years of ASEM. The aim of the evaluation was **to assess** whether ASEM had achieved **the objective of enhancing political dialogue and cooperation** and also to create a “*think tank*” **to explore the future** of ASEM. The study entitled *ASEM in its Tenth Year, Looking Back, Looking Forward: An evaluation of ASEM in its first decade and an exploration of its future possibilities (2006)*<sup>37</sup>, conducted by the Japan Centre for International Exchange (JCIE)<sup>38</sup> and the University of Helsinki Network for European Studies<sup>39</sup>, was presented to the ASEM Senior Officials Meeting (SOM)<sup>40</sup> in March 2006. Given the symbiotic nature of ASEM both as a political forum and as an overarching political process the **research findings** were synthesised to reflect the **internal workings** of ASEM (mechanisms, processes and objectives) and also to contextualise the **external pressures** of the global environment within which ASEM was functioning and as such the key findings served to advance the ASEM political agenda towards substantive dialogue in a number of key areas. Economic and social development was reiterated as a priority area for policy advancement, which encompassing issues of human capital and human resource had led to Asia Europe Education Process (AEP) being established as vehicle to drive ASEM policy agenda on education and training, and as such the evaluation proposed to solidify the work of AEP with the establishment of a dedicated secretariat. The remit of the Asia Europe Secretariat (AES)<sup>41</sup> proposed to co-ordinate and support member country cooperation activities, increase the visibility of initiatives, capture horizontal measure activity from across and between the overarching pillars of ASEM (**politics, economics and social, culture & education**) and ultimately to achieve legitimacy for ASEM policy developments in the field of education and training.

As ASEM the forum and overarching political process began to find composition and parity understandably the operational **structures, mechanisms** and protocols through which members navigate cooperation activities began to take shape. Ministerial meetings assigned a broad spectrum of governance, ratifying policy advancement through collective decision-making processes and agreeing a policy on enlargement to continue to foster participation while member country cluster groups initiated projects focused on popular issues which resulted in an amount of growth and traction. The biennial summit of **heads of state and government** agreed to **steer the working agenda** and to drive momentum with ministerial and senior official **meetings** to be **held regularly** in a more operationalised manner and on a continuum. **Ministers for foreign affairs supported by senior officials** and **regional co-ordinators** took responsibility for the overall **coordination of ASEM** with regional coordinators for Europe comprising the **European Commission** and the **Council of the Presidency** and regional coordinators for **Asia** comprising one **member state** formally representing the **ASEAN** countries and one member state representing the **three Northeast Asian partner countries**. Dialogue, structural processes and operating mechanisms between member countries retained their informal collegial nature and purposefully avoided bureaucratic diplomacies and cumbersome protocols. The *Chairs Conclusions* and summary reports of biannual summit level meetings were structured to include an outline of the agreed working agenda, the issues discussed, the positions taken and the decisions made and also presented as the foundational document for subsequent and follow-up meetings while the *Stocktaking Report* compiled member country cooperation initiatives and projects with the ultimate ambition to collate empirical results, findings and observations that are grounded in practice and provide a knowledge base to inform strategic level decision-making and policy development.



**Critically reflecting** on the history of ASEM this period of evaluation and recalibration clearly demonstrates as a shift in thinking, with members progressively asking questions of the process (**how** can we improve, **who** benefits, how does this benefit **others**, **where** do we see this in the future) and ultimately resulted in ASEM moving **away from** a position of **short-termism** (which is often characterised by reactionary responses to crises and decision-making processes that are rooted in metrics, which if handled badly can tip economic balance towards value-destructive behaviours) and **towards** a position of **long term strategic thinking** (which is often characterised by decision-making that is grounded in research and entails the communication of a vision and a strategy to get you there and includes long term investment in people and initiatives to support growth and development with ideals of consistency and balance as core components to achieving self-efficacy).

### **Looking Back - The Evolution of ASEM Education Process (AEP):**

The ratification of Asia Europe Education Process (AEP) as a political agenda for ASEM is significant in that it signalled the **ambition and vision** of ASEM going forward: **highlighting the pivotal role education and training plays** in terms of developing human capital and human resources to enhance **economic and social development; and legitimising AEP** both as a political process for the **development of member country education and training policy** and as a **horizontal measure connecting the three pillars of ASEM** (politics, economics and social, culture and education) which collectively **contributes to the political ambition of ASEM** both as a **forum** and **as an overarching political process** functioning on a global playing field.

The first official meeting of **ASEM Education Ministers** was held in 2008<sup>42</sup>, **hosted** by Germany and **co-sponsored** by China, Denmark and Japan, taking the shape of a troika partnership representing **Asia/EU member countries**. Inaugural speeches underlined the **importance of stable and productive dialogue** in the development of education and training policy and officially launched the Education Ministers Meeting as a platform to foster cooperation, enhance dialogue and agree an agenda for AEP in collaboration with members and stakeholders. Operationally this first meeting also set the **template** for subsequent ASEM Education Ministers Meetings (ASEMME) to **run in tandem** with the **ASEM Heads of State and Government Summit Meetings** and likewise to take place **biennially** with both the **location and event management** hosted in **rotation and alternating** between Asia and EU member countries. To date there have been **six ASEM Education Ministers Meetings**. Each meeting has advanced the AEP agenda, progressing from initial stages of consensus building and the identification of mutual areas of interest, to the more advanced stages of collaboration, reaching consensus on policy direction and agreeing priority areas for education and training policy development and therein providing member countries with opportunities to advance dialogue and strengthen cooperation:

### **ASEMME1 Berlin, Germany (5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> May 2008)<sup>43</sup>:**

The first ASEMME meeting entitled “*Education and Training for Tomorrow: Common Perspectives in Asia and Europe*” was organised and hosted by Germany in collaboration with troika partners China, Denmark and Japan. The meeting was chaired by the German Federal Ministry for Education and Research and supported by the President of the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the Länder (16 national/regional Ministries of Education and Cultural Affairs). The **Working Agenda**<sup>44</sup> for the meeting focused on strengthening cooperation in higher education through strategic partnerships and enhancing both employability and Lifelong Learning by bringing education and the labour market closer together. Key issues discussed include the fundamental role cooperation plays in deepening relations between Asia and Europe; the value of strengthening dialogue and fostering cooperation in the field of education and training (particularly bilateral and multilateral activities in the field of education and science, culture and academia as well as fostering diversity, tolerance, personal growth, reducing discrimination and increasing democracy); the internationalisation of higher education systems and ensuring quality (enhancing

education systems, making them more attractive and better positioned to compete on a world stage); improving access to information and increasing the visibility of member country education systems with a view to creating sustainable links; and the development of education systems that provide a general education forged by strong links to industry, are adaptive to the labour market and work to ensure employability.

**9 Key decisions were agreed:** the establishment of strategic partnerships comprising stakeholders from all levels with the ambition to strengthen dialogue and cooperation (target deadline ASEMME2); communication mechanisms to ensure *Chairs Conclusions* feed into overarching ASEM processes both horizontally (to leadership Summit Meetings) and vertically (to relevant policy clusters such as Asia Europe Higher Education Leadership Dialogue Meetings); expanded invitation to members, senior officials and stakeholders to participate in working groups to strengthening mobility and to improve support mechanisms for exchanges (especially in the area of recognition of qualifications and degrees); the establishment of a bioregional forum involving stakeholders from education and industry with the aim to strengthen dialogue and cooperation at local, regional, national and international level on the development of a relevant education curriculum (knowledge, skills, and personal competences); continued internationalisation of education systems especially in higher education; educational mobility both students, staff and researchers and to strengthen mobility schemes such as ASEM DUO and Erasmus Mundus and to support the key role played by the European Commission and the Asia Europe Foundation (ASEF) in enhancing people to people exchange; education cooperation (with a focus on structures: organisations, institutions, universities and networks) to encourage sustainable partnerships, common research areas and joint study programmes; cooperation in the field of Lifelong Learning and to extend the ASEM Lifelong Learning Hub network to encourage research and post graduate further education and training; increase visibility of member education systems and stakeholder marketing platforms such as Asia-Link, ASEF, European Higher Education Fairs in Asia and Alumni Networks.

**ASEMME2 Hanoi, Viet Nam (14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> May 2009)<sup>45</sup>:**

The second ASEM Education Ministers meeting was held in Asia during May 2009 entitled “*Sharing Experiences and Best Practices on Higher Education*”. The meeting was hosted by Viet Nam in collaboration with troika partners China, Denmark, Germany and Korea. The meeting was chaired by the Vietnamese Deputy Prime Minister who was also the Minister for Education and Training and was supported by the Chinese Ministry of Education, the Danish Ministry of Education, the German Ministry of Education and Research, the Korean Ministry of Education, Science and Technology and the Thai Ministry of Education. The **Working Agenda**<sup>46</sup> for the meeting recounted key areas agreed during ASEMME1 and progressed AEP forward looking towards strengthening cooperation across higher education through strategic partnerships in the areas of quality assurance, credit recognition and transfer; Lifelong Learning and Vocational Education and Training specifically future skills needs, sustainable human resource development and employability; enhanced mobility strengthening industry partnerships; and developing quality. Given the depth and complexity of discussions the meeting was then structured into two focus area/plenary session entitled “*Quality Assurance, Credit Recognition and Transfer in ASEM*” and “*Sustainable Human Resource Development for ASEM Future Needs*”. The first plenary session provided a starting point for Asia-Europe dialogue in the field of higher education and, presenting the EU Agenda on Education in the context of the Bologna Process, provided a space for members to discuss a similar/parallel process for ASEM member countries. A number of pilot projects were launched to gather expert opinion on: Credits and Learning Outcomes, Quality Assurance and Qualification Frameworks. The session also looked to increase joint study programmes through bilateral and multilateral funding schemes and to share information, experience and best practice in the standards and guidelines. The second plenary session focused on employability in relation to industrial need and international skill demand; sharing information and data on skills forecasts with a view to linking national advisory groups; and promoting and improving the attractiveness of VET through training of trainers and curriculum innovations.

**11 Key items** were identified for special mention: ASEF and the ASEM Education Hub (AEH) stakeholder dialogue and cooperation; Erasmus Mundus and ASEM DUO facilitating mobility; the ratification of ASEM Rectors Conference<sup>47</sup> as a dialogue partner representing higher education; Lifelong Learning as a solid framework for sustainable human resource development, economic growth, social welfare and learning; the role of ICT in capacity building, teaching and learning; UNESCO quality mobility portal; UNESCO guidelines on quality assurance, credit recognition and transfer; a reminder that Lifelong Learning Education and Training is not a short term recovery instrument but a long term economic and social response to crisis; European Higher Education Ministers Communique to enhance ASEM policy dialogue on the Bologna Process; a reminder to ensure that cooperation is based on collective consultation and should reflect member interests; feedback from the ASEM Labour and Employment Ministers Meeting (2008) discussion on VET and Labour migration.

During the meeting **Ministers ratified** three priority areas and reached agreement on a number of underpinning initiatives. The first was quality assurance, credit recognition and transfer with Ministers adopting the formation of expert working groups/pilot projects to focus on credits and learning outcomes, quality assurance and qualification frameworks; and support for ASEM initiatives and projects in the area of higher education focused on promoting the development of joint degree programmes and mobility. The second priority area focused on sustainable human resource development with Ministers adopting a number of objectives to strengthen the role of the ASEM Lifelong Learning Hub and endorsing a budget to deepen understanding and provide for research based policy decision making and to support two future workshops (Lifelong Learning and Sustainable HR scheduled for Vietnam 2009 and Lifelong Learning, Workplace Learning and e-Learning scheduled for Bangkok 2009); the establishment of a University/Business Forum<sup>48</sup> to exchange views and best practice; increase and improve systems for national skills forecast group exchange of information; link the European Network for Quality Assurance in VET (ENQA-VET) with Asia; increase visibility of education systems and institutions; and endorse the ASEM Rectors Conference as a biannual event. The third priority area focused on mechanisms to underpin and support the work of AEP and therein ratified the establishment of an ASEM Education Secretariat (AES) to coordinate activities, prepare for Ministerial Meetings and facilitate the implementation of output orientated initiatives that contribute to education policy development and practice. The Secretariat would rotate between Europe and Asia every four years and while being staffed by the responsible host Government, Member Countries would also be encouraged to seconded staff. Germany offered to host the first AES with contributions from China, Indonesia and Viet Nam.

#### **ASEMME3 Copenhagen, Denmark (9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> May 2011)<sup>49</sup>:**

The third ASEM Education Ministers meeting was held in Europe during May 2011 entitled “*Shaping an ASEM Education Area*”. The meeting was hosted by Denmark with the support of AES. The meeting was chaired by the Danish Minister for Education and welcomed new ASEM members countries (Australia, New Zealand and the Russian Federation). The **Working Agenda**<sup>50</sup> focused on four priority areas: quality assurance and recognition (presented by the European Commission and the Republic of Korea), engaging business and industry in education (presented by Malaysia), balanced mobility (presented by China) and Lifelong Learning including VET (presented by Viet Nam). AES presented their first *Status Report*<sup>51</sup> detailing progress to date and providing a systematic overview and analysis of activities. 160 delegates represented 40 ASEM Member Countries.

**8 Key items** were identified for special mention: intensive and sustainable Asia Europe education partnership; the need for high quality research and education and training systems that encourage and foster lifelong learning; the key role AEP plays in fostering dialogue and cooperation across Asia and Europe in the field of education and training; progress to date including initiatives undertaken by ASEM members, ASEF, the ASEM Education Hub, the ASEM Education and Research Hub for Lifelong Learning who were responsible for bringing transparency to member country education

systems; keeping the momentum for AEP going, the continuation of joint activities and concrete measures to build on existing structures and conventions such as those developed by UNESCO<sup>52</sup>; a request for AES to develop their progress report into a *Stocktaking Report* for submission to Ministers Meetings; and thanked Belgium, China, Indonesia, Luxemburg and the Netherlands for seconding staff to AES while recognising stakeholder involvement (ASEM Rectors Conference, higher education and students) in achieving broad consensus for AEP and joint mobility initiatives undertaken by University networks ASEA – UNINET and EURASIA-PACIFIC.

In order to advance cooperation under the four identified priority areas **Ministers agreed** a number of underpinning measures and initiatives for implementation. **Priority Area Quality Assurance and Recognition:** emphasised interregional cooperation between ASEM and other external agencies with a view to developing common principles for quality assurance, Germany offered to host the first experts meeting in 2011, France scheduled a subsequent meeting for 2012 with a progress report tabled for submission to ASEMME4 and scheduled for Malaysia 2013; encouraged the mutual recognition of qualifications through the development of a common understanding of credits and learning outcomes; sought to explore the feasibility of setting up a convention for the mutual recognition of degrees and study and to establish National Information and Recognition Centres (Austria offered to establish an expert group with a progress report also tabled for submission to ASEMME4); considered the implementation of UNESCO/OECD Guidelines for Quality Provision in Cross Border Higher Education<sup>53</sup>. **Priority Area Engaging Business and Industry in Education:** agreed to timetable the ASEM University Business Forum as an annual event with the ambition to identify best practice, develop ideas and make recommendations (Germany offered to host the Forum during 2011 while Malaysia offered to host a stakeholder meeting during 2012); invited the European Commission to link ASEM University Business Forum with EU University Business Forum to deepen dialogue and increase employer participation in curriculum development and to ensure relevancy to the labour market; invited ASEM Rectors Conference through ASEF to the ASEM University Business Forum so as to enhance dialogue; considered the establishment of an ASEM mobility/placement programme to industry for qualified students; and explored the possibility of opening the next phase of Erasmus Mundus to ASEM students. **Priority Area Balanced Mobility** recommended for a strategy to ensure balanced mobility with a progress report tabled for submission to ASEMME4; looked for more and better data on student and staff mobility to provide for political decision making; resolved to improve information dissemination in relation to educational opportunities, encouraged members to support ASEF and maintain the DEEP database<sup>54</sup>; encouraged members to increase the number of joint study programmes and summer schools and to access funding schemes such as the ASEM pilot scheme for joint curriculum development; agreed to promote student, teacher, research and administrative staff mobility with ASEM DUO to undertake an evaluation tabled for submission to ASEMME4; proposed to intensify promotional activities across ASEM with AES and establish an expert group to explore the development of promotional strategies; and encouraged members to organise thematic training seminars to remove obstacles to mobility (Thailand offered to host an International Conference on Mobility during 2011). **Priority Area Lifelong Learning including Vocational Education and Training** underlined a commitment to enhanced adult and community education; encouraged research to contribute to evidence based reform and innovation; recommended dissemination of best practice, the professionalisation of practitioners and the sharing of findings through the ASEM Lifelong Learning Hub, UNESCO<sup>55</sup> and other international bodies; encouraged workplace learning and discussed employer responsibilities for provision as well as employee participation (Denmark offered to host an ASEM Forum on Lifelong Learning in collaboration with the ASEM Lifelong Learning Hub during 2012); encouraged dialogue and improved transparency of qualification frameworks and approaches to Lifelong Learning; encouraged the exchange of best practice including validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes, flexible pathways to further education and career guidance (Viet Nam offered to host a Qualifications Framework Conference during 2012 and Germany offered to host a VET Symposium focusing on qualification frameworks during 2012); requested AES in

collaboration with Senior Officials to provide a systematic overview of qualification frameworks to be tabled for submission to ASEMME4; requested a study of VET best practice specifically relating to partnerships with industry (Austria offered to host a workshop to disseminate findings); suggested the establishment of an expert group to develop joint VET initiatives (Malaysia offered to host an expert group on eLearning in Lifelong Learning); supported and encouraged the research work of ASEM Lifelong Learning Hub and encouraged staff secondment while also encouraging cooperation between ASEM Lifelong Learning Hub, SEAMEO Regional Centre for Lifelong Learning and to maximise potential for exchange and cooperation.

**Ministers mandated** AES to support member countries to implement initiatives and for Malaysia to host ASEMME4 in 2013, Indonesia to host the next rotation of AES for 4 years from October 2013, Latvia to host ASEMME5 in 2015 and for the Republic of Korea to host ASEMME6 in 2017.

#### **ASEMME4 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia (13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> May 2013)<sup>56</sup>:**

The fourth ASEM Education Ministers meeting was held in Asia during May 2013 entitled “*Strategising ASEM Education Collaboration*”. The meeting was hosted by Malaysia with the support of AES. The meeting was chaired by H.E. The Secretary General, Ministry of Higher Education and welcomed the new members countries (Bangladesh, Norway and Switzerland). The **Working Agenda**<sup>57</sup> focused on four priority areas: quality assurance and recognition (introduced by China and Estonia), engaging business and industry in education (introduced by the Republic of Korea and Germany), balanced mobility (introduced by Malaysia and Austria) and Lifelong Learning including VET (introduced by Indonesia and Denmark. AEP presented a *Status Report* detailing progress to date. 152 delegates represented 34 ASEM Member Countries and 7 international organisations.

**6 Key items** were identified for special mention: a renewed commitment to strengthen AEP and the ASEM education area, dialogue and cooperation in the political, economic and socio-cultural fields; the import role education and training plays in terms of a balanced, sustainable and inclusive growth as well as for democracy and social cohesion highlighting a necessity to invest in the quality and attractiveness of education and training systems to provide for lifelong learning and the development of highly qualified open minded citizen with a strong sense of social responsibility and respect for cultural diversity; increased dialogue between leaders and stakeholders (Ministers, the Bologna Forum, the Rectors Conference and ASEF); recognition for the number of initiatives progress by members, ASEF, ASEM Education Hub (AEH), ASEM Education and Research Hub for Lifelong Learning and AES in terms of achieving transparency, improving exchange of information, making systems more comparable, facilitating mobility and enhancing cooperation; encouraged policy to practice, joint initiatives, concrete measures and for Senior Officials to continue to identify priority areas for action; and recognised the work of stakeholders (Rectors Conference, ASEF and students) in reaching broad consensus on AEP aims and measures while also encouraging the active involvement of stakeholders going forward.

The meeting reviewed cooperation activities and policy advancement in the four identified priority areas. **Priority Area Quality Assurance and Recognition:** noted quality assurance, qualifications frameworks and recognition as essential for building trust and facilitating the recognition of degrees and diplomas, the need for a regular dialogue between government, quality assurance agencies, recognition organisations, higher education institutions, students and ASEM experts (supported Malaysian initiatives to facilitate dialogue, Japan’s initiative to establish a higher education quality assurance centre for Asia and a working group for ASEAN+3 Education Ministers Meeting to promote mobility of higher education and China’s initiative to establish a Cross-border Quality Assurance Network in Higher Education (CBQAN)); invited quality assurance agencies to consider their inclusion in the European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR) open to both European and non-European countries; encouraged quality assurance agencies to invite members to take part in external

quality assurance procedures; welcomed the Belgian initiative to organise peer learning activities related to governance (autonomy, responsibility and accountability) and quality assurance; endorsed the *ASEM Recognition Bridging Declaration*<sup>58</sup> drafted by Belgium in collaboration with China and aligned to both the *Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region* (Lisbon Recognition Convention)<sup>59</sup> and the *Asia-Pacific Regional Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications in Higher Education* (Tokyo Recognition Convention)<sup>60</sup> which serves to improve recognition of higher education qualifications between Europe and Asia; identified a need to improve information on education systems and recognition procedures for students going abroad, proposed to build a network of National Information Centres (NICs) across Asia to collaborate and share information with European ENIC-NARICs, facilitate joint research and enhance collaboration on qualification recognition, welcomed China's offer to set up a centralised website; recognised the need to make member country credit systems more transparent to facilitate recognition of study achievements abroad and to stimulate cross-border mobility and welcomed the establishment of an expert group (comprising Australia, Belgium, Brunei Darussalam, China, Estonia, Lithuania, Malaysia, Portugal and Thailand) to discuss interregional credit transfer mechanisms, asked the AES to update the "*Compendium on Credits and Learning Outcomes in ASEM Countries*"<sup>61</sup> and underlined the need to discuss education systems, recognition procedures and interregional transfer mechanisms with stakeholder groups (Rectors Conference and ASEF). **Priority Area Engaging Business and Industry in Education:** acknowledged that effective cooperation and the transfer of knowledge between education and the world of work are influential factors for the employability of graduates, economic growth and the development of societies; agreed to intensity dialogue and collaboration between education, business and industry and to propose concrete measures for discussion and implementation; agreed to reinforce cooperation between the fields of economy and education; encouraged stakeholders to engage in dialogue to enhance the employability and entrepreneurial skills, to develop strategies for cooperation and collaboration between business and education, identify future skills needs; requested ASEF, AEH and the ASEM Rectors' Conference (ARC) to continue stakeholder dialogue and acknowledged the role of universities play in the economic growth through the development of skills, knowledge and competences and to further enhance entrepreneurial skills by offering courses reflective of the labour market; acknowledged that Germany and Malaysia held the 2nd and 3rd ASEM University Business Forum (UBF) to share best practice and strengthen dialogue and that Belgium and Malaysia would host the 4th and 5th UBF with a focus on study and work based learning; emphasised the role work placement plays in enhancing graduate employability and endorsed the launch of an interregional ASEM Work Placement Pilot Programme between Belgium Germany and Thailand to promote practical experience, cross-cultural skills and competences. **Priority Area Balanced Mobility:** noted an imbalance in mobility with more Asian students participating in study in Europe and called for initiatives to recalibrate flows, encouraged mobility friendly frameworks, information, funding and study; encouraged ASEM DUO reciprocal exchanges and acknowledged the recent "*International Asia Europe Conference on Enhancing Balanced Mobility*" organised by Thailand; welcomed the development of a strategy for balanced mobility (advanced by Malaysia in cooperation with member countries and tabled for submission to ASEMME5<sup>62</sup> scheduled for Latvia 2015); acknowledged initiatives in information/data collection (ASEF Database on Education Exchange Programmes (DEEP) and the potential to integrate DEEP with the REDBROOK database which facilitates research collaboration between higher education and business) and encouraged further development and dissemination; encouraged initiatives to promote mobility; recognised funding as an obstacle to mobility and encouraged national authorities to fund grant schemes and scholarships; reaffirmed equal access to mobility opportunities; invited the European Commission to organise an information session for ASEM members with a focus on mobility and cooperation activity funding opportunities; noted the evaluation of the ASEM DUO Fellowship Programme with Belgium (French Community) expressing a willingness to join ASEM DUO; supported the proposal for a Joint Curriculum Development Pilot Scheme (Belgium (French and German Communities), Brunei Darussalam, Germany, Indonesia, Lithuania and Malaysia); and underlined the need for reliable mobility data to provide for evidence based policy

making. **Priority Area Lifelong Learning including Vocational Education and Training:** noted the increasing importance of Lifelong Learning and TVET going forward; thanked members (Denmark, the Republic of Korea, ASEM Lifelong Learning Hub and ASEF) for organising the ASEM Forum on Lifelong Learning (2012) and Germany for hosting a symposium on TVET qualification frameworks (2012) and Austria for organising a workshop on TVET Tourism and Catering (2012); reaffirmed the importance of documenting best practice models in TVET (welcomed Germany and Portugal's expert seminar on best practice/lessons learned in dual education and training, welcomed Malaysia's seminar on Lifelong Learning); endorsed innovation and entrepreneurial skills/competences fostered from an early age (welcomed members proposal to develop a programme for improving innovative and entrepreneurial skills and competences in schools education (Denmark, Brunei Darussalam, Czech Republic, Latvia, Malaysia, Norway, Republic of Korea, Singapore and Viet Nam); emphasised the role NQF plays in making lifelong learning a reality and discussed the development of an Asia/Europe cross referencing tool noting the Global NQF Inventory compiled by the European Training Foundation<sup>63</sup>, CEDEFOP<sup>64</sup>, UNESCO<sup>65</sup> and the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL)<sup>66</sup>; underlined that meaningful descriptions and consistent use of learning outcomes in the development of regional and nation qualification frameworks and welcomed the establishment of an expert group to discuss best practice and the development of credit transfer mechanisms (Australia, Belgium, Brunei Darussalam, China, Estonia, Lithuania, Malaysia, Portugal and Thailand, higher education stakeholders and student representative); acknowledged the contributions of ASEM Lifelong Learning Hub and called for research to facilitate evidenced based policy discussion noting the joint and comparative studies carried out to date and encouraged collaboration with the ASEM Lifelong Learning Hub as well as sponsored studies within research networks.

**Ministers mandated** AES to assist member countries implement the initiatives proposed and to track progress through the *Stocktaking Report* tabled for submission to ASEMME5, noted China's commitment to host the intermediate SOM in preparation for ASEMME5, encouraged staff secondment to AES and thanked Belgium Flanders for offering to host the next 4-year rotation of AES from October 2017.

**ASEMME5 Riga, Latvia (27<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup> April 2015)<sup>67</sup>:**

The fifth ASEM Education Ministers meeting was held in Europe during April 2015 entitled "*ASEM Education Collaboration for Results*". The meeting was hosted by Latvia with the support of AES. The meeting was chaired by the Minister for Education and Science who welcomed the new ASEM members countries of Croatia and Kazakhstan. While the **Working Agenda**<sup>68</sup> focused on the four priority areas of: quality assurance and recognition, engaging business and industry in education, balanced mobility and lifelong learning including technical vocational education and training with the aim of the meeting to ensure forward-looking dialogue, exchange of good practice and to encourage tangible and more result-oriented activities that would serve the interests of both regions. The role AEP plays in ASEM dialogue and cooperation was reiterated and provided for discussion on future prospects, main challenges, opportunities and expected outcomes from a political perspective while also considering current global developments and subsequent impact on education policies across ASEM countries. The plenary sessions explored education cooperation initiatives, their contribution to the development of skills for better employability, rapid changes in technology, new learning technologies. AES presented a *Status Report* detailing progress to date. 196 delegates represented 46 ASEM Member Countries and 11 stakeholders.

**12 Key items** were identified for special mention: the strategic role of education in promoting sustainable and inclusive development and innovation as well as the reduction of poverty and unemployment, contributing to connectivity, dialogue and cooperation; noted the importance of tangible activities and cooperation and encouraged members and stakeholders to contribute to a "*tangible cooperation areas*" to demonstrate achievement of common goals for ASEM AEP;



reaffirmed the relevancy of transparency to make education systems more comparable, facilitate mobility and enhance collaboration with the ambition to equip people to operate in an international global environment; reiterated the importance of AEP as a multifaceted, multipurpose process, open to various topics and interacting with other education institutions to avoid unnecessary duplication (UNESCO World Education Forum (Korea 2015)<sup>69</sup>, the Global Action Programme on Education for Sustainable Development (ESD)<sup>70</sup> launched in 2014); stressed the importance of continuity and progress under the four AEP key policy areas; advanced the notion of delineating AEP dialogue into two augmentations (dialogue orientated cooperation and results orientated cooperation) to provide for mutual learning and exchange of practice relating to policy/strategy development on one hand and to present tangible activities and measures on the other; acknowledged the different needs and priorities of members and commented on the increase in bilateral and multilateral cooperation; noted the contribution and momentum created by intermediate SOM; noted the work of Indonesia in hosting AES and for initiating a vision document and launching the ASEM Education Gazette<sup>71</sup> as both an official document and channel for communication; underlined the importance of increased visibility improved by AES website<sup>72</sup> and ASEF ASEM InfoBoard<sup>73</sup>; and noted ASEF's outreach to youth networks and other education institutions while also thanking member country secondment to AES.

The meeting reviewed cooperation activities and policy advancement in the four identified priority areas. **Priority Area Quality Assurance and Recognition:** noted quality assurance as essential to facilitating mobility and crucial to enhancing the attractiveness, transparency, comparability and permeability of higher education and raised awareness for a number of initiatives including the working group to implement ASEM Recognition Bridging Declaration known as the Beijing Declaration (established by China and supported by Austria, Belgium (French Community), Brunei Darussalam, Estonia, Germany, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, the Republic of Korea, Latvia, Lithuania and the United Kingdom) and launching Asian National Information Centers Coordinating Website (ANICCW)<sup>74</sup>, establishing the Cross-border Quality Assurance Network (CBQAN)<sup>75</sup> and drafting the Handbook of Guidelines, Principles and Good Practices on Recognition in the ASEM Region; the quality assurance and recognition seminar organised by Malaysia (2014), the establishment of a higher education quality assurance centre for Asia and a working group on Mobility of Higher Education Ensuring Quality Assurance of Higher Education among ASEAN Plus Three Countries coordinated by Japan and drafting quality assurance guidelines for student exchange; the Peer Learning Activity (PLA) organised by Belgium to common understanding of quality assurance and qualifications frameworks; noted the European Union initiative Higher Education in ASEAN Region (in collaboration with ASEAN Secretariat, the British Council, DAAD, Nuffic, Campus France, ENQA and EUA) to support the development of regional higher education frameworks for quality assurance, recognition of credit and qualifications, and mobility among Asian and European countries and to the further development and implementation of the ASEAN Credit Transfer System<sup>76</sup> and the ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework (AQRF)<sup>77</sup>, and also provide grants for supporting student mobility among Asian countries and with Europe; and encouraged member countries to participate in new initiatives such as the establishment of an expert group to discuss interregional credit transfer mechanisms and learning outcome systems, peer learning in the area of qualification frameworks for higher education and the joint ASEM EHEA conference to discuss the impact of policy reform on higher education. **Priority Area Engaging Business and Industry in Education:** highlighted the need to improve the employability of graduates, encourage entrepreneurship and the use of ICT in the learning environment and that collaboration between higher education and business is vital for socio-economic development as well as raising awareness for a number of initiatives such as the 4<sup>th</sup> Rectors Conference (ARC4) to discuss university business partnership, the 4<sup>th</sup> ASEM Business Forum focusing on education in business/university cooperation, the ASEM Work Placement Pilot Programme (coordinated by Brunei Darussalam, Belgium (Flemish Community), Germany, Indonesia and Thailand, the workshop to foster entrepreneurship in higher education (organised by Brunei Darussalam), the peer learning activity on employability and the contribution of higher education to innovation (organised by Belgium (Flemish and French Community), the

student teambuilding initiative aimed at engaging business in education (coordinated by the Russian Federation) and the Global Industry University Cooperation Forum (organised by the Republic of Korea). **Priority Area Balanced Mobility** commented on the need for an internationally trained workforce and the need for a more balanced mobility and raised awareness for a number of initiatives including current mobility schemes, scholarships and bilateral educational agreements, the conference on balanced mobility (organised by Malaysia) and a proposal by Malaysia and AEI to organise summer camps and a pilot project, the development of the DEEP database to include links to mobility schemes and opportunities, the European Commission initiative to organise an Erasmus+<sup>78</sup> information day to develop inter regional cooperation and capacity building particularly in the area of quality assurance, recognition, attractiveness, transparency and comparability of education systems, the ASEM DUO Fellowship Programme to enhance mutual understanding by promoting education cooperation and the balanced exchange of university students, the ASEM Joint Curriculum Development Project as an instrument to enhance international collaboration (supported by Belgium (Flemish Community), Brunei Darussalam, Germany, Lithuania and Indonesia), the ASEM Studies Curriculum Module to make Master level students, studying in the field of Asian or European studies, familiar with the goals and instruments of the ASEM process as well as its political, social and economic framework (supported by Germany), the youth projects organised by ASEF including ASEF Summer University, Model ASEM, ASEF Youth Leaders Summit<sup>79</sup> and ASEF Classroom Network<sup>80</sup> aimed at secondary education, and the ASEM Research Collaboration Scheme<sup>81</sup> to encourage higher education and industries cooperation in research with a working group established to discuss research areas, outputs and methods. **Priority Area Lifelong Learning including Technical Vocational Education and Training:** noted lifelong learning as essential to coping with the side effects of globalisation, demographic transformation and rapid technological advancement focusing on creating learning opportunities for all, CPD and the enhancement of skills development for working life, personal fulfilment, active citizenship and social inclusion and also raised awareness for a number of initiatives such as the expert seminar on dual study programmes entitled “*A Strategy to Expand Opportunities for ASEM Youth*” (organised by Germany) to discuss the integration of study programme with work placement, the international seminar on Lifelong Learning (organised by Malaysia entitled “*Strategising Collaboration, Leveraging Resources: Charting The Way Forward for Lifelong Learning*” with the objective to share experiences and to look to future strategies and trends, the working group on “*Innovative Competences and Entrepreneurship Education*”, the ASEM Forum on Lifelong Learning entitled “*Renewing the Agenda for Lifelong Learning*” (coordinated by ASEM LLL Hub<sup>82</sup>, Denmark and Indonesia) publishing two issues of ASEM Magazine for lifelong learning, the ASEM LLL Hub joint and comparative study entitled “*ASEM Review of National Policies for Lifelong Learning*, and the “*2015 Global Inventory of National and Regional Qualification Frameworks*”<sup>83</sup> compiled by the European Training Foundation (ETF), CEDEFOP and UNESCO and UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL) and a future initiative focusing on TVET systems and mobility creating new partnerships and developing skills for employability (organised by Latvia).

**Ministers** invited senior officials with the support of AES to prioritise: the exchange of information on the results of ASEM education activities with a view to advising policy direction, to guide coherence and to underpin development and implementation as well as improve visibility and dissemination of information; and also for AES to assist members in the implementation of initiatives in cooperation with stakeholders and to collect and analyse results in preparation for a more descriptive and analytic *Stocktaking Report* as well as to agree a strategy for enhanced communication and the exchange of information through available channels, websites and email circulars. Ministers thanked Austria for offering to host ASEMME7 in 2019, Russia for offering to host the first Intermediate Senior Officials meeting (ISOM) scheduled for 2016, Austria and Romania for offering to host SOM 2018 and SOM 2019 in preparation for ASEMME7 scheduled for Romania 2019. The **Chairs Conclusion** attached annex listing initiatives coordinated by member countries and copies of policy recommendations agreed during the ASEM Rectors and Students Forum (ARC4).

### **ASEMME6 Seoul, Korea (21<sup>st</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> May 2017) <sup>84</sup>:**

The sixth ASEM Education Ministers meeting was held in Asia during April 2017 entitled “*Collaboration for the Next Decade: From Common Perspectives to Effective Fulfilment*”. The meeting was hosted by the Republic of Korea with the support of AES. The meeting was chaired by Deputy Prime Minister as the Minister for Education. The Prime Minister opened the conference with a welcome address. The **Working Agenda**<sup>85</sup> focused on the four priority areas: quality assurance and recognition, engaging business and industry in education, balanced mobility and lifelong learning including technical vocational education and training with the ambition to seek more effective ways to enhance cooperation between Asia and Europe. The meeting focused on opportunities to utilise cooperation in a way that would unleash the potential of the ASEM education collaboration. The theme was crafted following the results of a survey conducted by the Republic of Korea (2016)<sup>86</sup> aimed at capturing the ASEM partners’ aspirations for the future development of AEP and concluded that the ASEM Education Process should focus on producing outcomes and tangible cooperation by encouraging Asia-Europe partners to concentrate on global issues that provide for societal changes and to address challenges such as employability and development of information, communication and technology (ICT) in education. AES presented a *Status Report* detailing progress to date and on this occasion 216 delegates represented 44 ASEM Member Countries and 10 Stakeholders.

**10 Key items** were identified for special mention: agreement of the *Seoul Declaration* as the first AEP ministerial declaration affirming member countries commitment to the future direction of ASEM education policy recognising the growing importance of cooperation, connectivity as well as the promotion and visibility of tangible project initiatives; underlined the importance of connectivity across the spectrums of governance (politics, economics, socio-cultural) as well as through channels of communication (digital, institutional and people to people); the role of VET, higher education and lifelong learning in human resource development; continued support for the identified priority areas of quality assurance and recognition, engaging business and industry in education, balanced mobility and lifelong learning including technical vocational education and training with dialogue focussed into two augmentations (dialogue orientated cooperation aimed at enhancing learning and results orientated cooperation aimed at producing tangible activities); the ISOM meeting aimed at exchange of information including analysis of results with a view to the coherent development of policy (hosted by the Russian Federation); and the establishment of the ASEM Education Task Force to foster transparency between actions and to strengthen visibility (supported by Germany). Ministers also noted appreciation to Indonesia, as the outgoing secretariat) for hosting AES and welcomed Belgium (Flemish Community and French Community) as incoming secretariat, encouraging member countries to second staff. ASEF celebrated their 20 year anniversary as the only permanent institute of the ASEM Process having encouraged member country cooperation activities, dialogue and over 25,000 collaborations and exchange. Ministers also encouraged ASEM member countries in the implementation of AEP and to continue raising the profile of ASEM AEP by leveraging communication channels, websites and publication platforms.

The meeting reviewed cooperation activities and policy advancement in the four identified priority areas. **Priority Area Quality Assurance and Recognition:** noted the three actions plans advanced by the working group on implementing the ASEM Recognition Bridging Declaration (CBQAN, ANICCW and the Handbook of Guidelines, Principles and Good Practices on Recognition); the working group on Mobility in Higher Education and Ensuring Quality Assurance in Higher Education amongst ASEM +3 APT countries, the formal approval of the Guidelines on Student Exchange and the development of Guidelines on Transcription for Exchange Students; the Expert Group on Interregional Credit Transfer Mechanisms and Learning Outcome Systems, a review of the Terms of Reference and the revision of the Compendium on Credits and Learning Outcomes to facilitate interregional mobility and cooperation; the European Union project Support to Higher Education in the ASEAN Region aimed at improving regional cooperation, quality, competitiveness and

internationalisation; Peer Learning Activities (PLA) on qualification frameworks for higher education in relation to quality assurance and recognition and the relationship between qualification frameworks, quality assurance and recognition strategy and implementation; the joint ASEM European Higher Education AREA (EHEA) conference on the impact of reforms and challenges that higher education has to face in academic work. **Priority Area Engaging Business and Industry in Education:** noted cooperation between higher education and the business sector and the advancement of innovative strategies to address employability and raised awareness for a number of initiatives including the ASEF Rectors Conference and Students Forum (ARC) conferences entitled “*Employability Asia and Europe Prepare for the New Generation*”<sup>87</sup> and “*Future Ready Universities and Graduates Quality Education beyond the Horizon*”<sup>88</sup>; the ASEM Work Placement Pilot Programme (ASEM WPP)<sup>89</sup> initiative and the proposal to upscale the initiative and create a permanent support structure (coordinated by Belgium (Flemish Community) and Thailand); the ASEM University Business Forum paying attention to the education side of cooperation and to enhancing synergies; the Workshop on “*Entrepreneurship in Education*” to equip students with skills and knowledge on sustainable practices for economic diversification in Asia and Europe (organised by Brunei Darussalam); Peer Learning Activities (PLA) on Employability and the Contribution of Higher Education to Innovation exploring employability policy contexts and cultural differences ideas and best practices (organised by Belgium (Flanders)); the “*Students Teambuilding as an instrument of engaging business in education*” workshop (organised by the Russian Federation) to build collaboration and foster employability; the Global Industry University Cooperation Forum (hosted by the Republic of Korea) to discuss best practice and policy direction in the field of university/business cooperation. **Priority Area Balanced Mobility:** noted the imbalance of mobility and current estimates that Asian students incoming to Europe for full time degrees is 15 times higher than European students outgoing to Asia and a focus on programme initiatives to bring parity including joint curriculum development and interregional exchange programmes/camps for students and staff and raised awareness for a number of initiatives including the AEI ASEM Summer School (organised by Malaysia, AEI the University of Malays and Maastricht University Belgium) aimed at fostering knowledge and experiences of multiculturalism and multi-ethnicity and providing students with the opportunity to attend the Asia Europe Conference (AEC) entitled “*Is it time for Europe to play a broader role in Asia*” to foster a better balance of student academia and researcher mobility; European Union collaboration initiatives promoting opportunities through Erasmus + and the organisation of contact seminars and higher education fairs to increase visibility and dissemination of Asia EU cooperation; continuity for ASEM DUO Fellowship Programme now enlarged to include cooperation between the Republic of Korea, Singapore, Thailand, Sweden and Belgium (Flemish and French Communities) which had supported 3,400 exchanges to date; the Joint Curriculum Development Project (supported by Germany, Indonesia and Romania); the ASEM Studies Curriculum Module (supported by Germany) to strengthen scientific relations between Asia and Europe with a summer school entitled “*Europe Asia Dynamic*” and initiatives organised by ASEF Young Leaders Summit adding value to student, academic and university staff mobility targeting policy development and youth including summer schools entitled “*Sustainable Urbanisation in Heritage Cities*” and “*Gateways to Asia and Europe Connectivity by Land Sea and Air*” and “*Entrepreneurship and Youth Employment*” and the 12<sup>th</sup> ASEF Classroom Network Conference entitled “*Coding 4 Education*”. **Priority Area Lifelong Learning including Technical Vocational Education and Training:** recognised the role of Lifelong Learning and TVET in education and as a key component of employability in a globalised world within the ASEM framework and spirit of inclusivity, emancipation, humanism and democracy and raised awareness for a number of initiatives including the working group on Innovative Competences and Entrepreneurship Education focus on diagnosing the status of entrepreneurship education in member countries undertaking a survey of policy makers, teachers and employers perceptions of innovative competence and entrepreneurship education; collaboration between stakeholders and partners to promote dialogue and the sharing of best practice and future perspectives in the area of TVET; the ASEM Forum on Lifelong Learning entitled “*21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills*” (organised by the ASEM Lifelong Learning Hub) to discuss the

development of skills and policy supports for lifelong learning aimed at promoting resilience in disaster management, strengthening networks throughout countries facing disasters and involving institutions dealing with disasters; the ASEM Lifelong Learning Hub Desktop Studies on National Policies for Lifelong Learning and the joint ASEF ASEM Lifelong Learning Hub conference entitled “*Theory Meets Practice Teacher Training in a Digital Era*” focusing on teacher professionalisation and training in the face of ever advancing educational technology and underpinning research commission by ASEF and the University of Teacher Education Zug; underlined the value of qualifications frameworks as established instruments significant in the recognition of learning both formal and informal and in facilitating lifelong learning across education linking education to the labour market and enabling qualification comparisons, noting the updated Global Inventory on regional and national qualification frameworks (published by CEDEFOP, ETF, UNESCO and UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning) and encouraged the development of a the World Reference Levels (advanced by UNESCO); the creation of the ASEM Network of Massive Open Online Course (MOOC’s) to provide peer learning opportunities for partners and stakeholders through the organisation of forums and case study research into learning outcomes ensuring the transformation of education to flexible, open, accessible and accountable provision; cooperation activities between national governments and cities and the strengthening of cooperation in three identified areas namely cultivating decent work and entrepreneurship through lifelong learning, embedding education in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and enhancing intersectoral links between academia, government and the private sector to implement lifelong learning.

**Ministers** encouraged senior officials to foster tangible and effective collaborations targeting the four identified priority areas; to expedite the implementation of activities, programmes and initiatives into measurable actions, to review the implementation of ASEM education activities and to look to on-going and future initiatives; and to take consideration of the *ASEM Rector Conference and Student Forum Policy Recommendations (2015)*<sup>90</sup>, Ministers invited member country proposals to host AES for the period 2021 to 2025 and mandated for AES to continue to support ASEM partners and stakeholders in the implementation of AEP and to reorganise the *Stocktaking Report* according to proposals agreed by the ASEM Education Task Force. Ministers thanked Indonesia for offering to host the ISOM during 2018 and Austria and Romania for hosting the SOM in preparation for ASEMME7 scheduled for Romania 2019. **The Chairs Conclusion** attached annex listing initiatives coordinated by member countries and also a copies of policy recommendations agreed during the ASEM Rectors Conference (ARC5) and the ASEM Rectors and Students Forum (ARC6).

**Critically reflecting on AEP** as policy direction evolved and the agenda progressed through each ministerial meeting evidences that ASEMME1 and ASEMME2 were understandably held in quick succession (2008 and 2009) and predominately concerned with laying the foundations of AEP. Discussing the role of education and training aligned to economic and social development ministers situated AEP within the context of the overarching objectives of ASEM agreeing that ASEM cultural and academic initiatives created many opportunities for personal growth while also encouraging a culture of democracy, tolerance and reduced discrimination with member countries acknowledging the long-standing history and success of bilateral partnerships in the area of education and science.

**ASEMME1** entitled “*Education and Training for Tomorrow: Common Perspectives in Asia and Europe*” **encouraged cooperation and fostered the notion of strategic partnerships** however notably the discussion was **very much concentrated in the area of higher education**. Training as distinct from education was predominately spoken about in terms of creating links with industry for the purpose of creating labour market cooperation aligned to employability with the result that the designated sectors of education and training (VET and TVET) emerged into the process as a separate category grouped together as one item on the agenda alongside Lifelong Learning.

From the outset **ASEMME2** entitled “*Sharing Experiences and Best Practices on Higher Education*” targeted only the ministers responsible for higher education with ministerial dialogue and the summary report (*Conclusion by the Chair*) not only strengthening cooperation and encouraging strategic partnerships but also **progressing the agenda towards targeted areas for collaboration** such as **quality assurance, recognition and transparency of qualifications** including credit transfer, sustainable human resources, enhanced mobility and employability. **Members demonstrated a willingness to ask critical questions of the process**, reflecting outwards to take account of other perspectives such as UNESCO developments in the area of mobility, quality assurance, credit recognition and transfer, EU policy developments in the area of Lifelong Learning and the Bologna Process and ASEM Labour and Employment Minister Meetings agreeing policy in the area of VET and labour migration, and also to take countenance of stakeholder opinion recognising the ASEM Rectors Conference as an official dialogue partner representing higher education.

By the time Ministers arrived at **ASEMME3** (2011) **AEP was beginning to take shape with consensus and agreement reached on guiding principles, mechanisms for enlargement, the establishment of Asia Europe Secretariat (AES) as the official body to coordinate AEP activities** and initiatives, and the identification of four priority areas for policy advancement dialogue and cooperation: quality assurance and recognition, engaging business and industry in education, balanced mobility and Lifelong Learning including VET. Operationally ASEMME3 was the first meeting to present a *Status Report* detailing the history of AEP, key objectives, tasks completed, and conclusions reached and was also the first ministers meeting to officially mandate agenda items designated for action. **Critically the meeting represents a shift towards consolidation of activity with the ambition to clearly identify and agree priorities, an operational work programme and target deadlines while also providing for a systematic review and analysis of progress**, which not only reflects a desire to create momentum and keep it going but also reveals an awareness to plan for and keep track of progress with the expectation to demonstrate change. AES was designated as the body to take responsibility for maintaining records and administrative support duties. Again the focus of dialogue and activity is very much centred on higher education with higher education stakeholders reaching a broad consensus on the objectives for AEP going forward.

**ASEMME4** saw AEP **transition to a period of strategic implementation** with discussion shifting to that of member country collaborations to development and implement cooperation initiatives. The tone of dialogue was now characterised by an energy for improvement, concrete measures for action and a desire for results. Membership of ASEM expanded to include new partner countries of Norway, Switzerland and Bangladesh and the work of stakeholder groups was recognised to encourage active involvement and to reach a broad consensus on the aims of AEP through the Rectors Conference, ASEF and student forums while the building of networks to share and exchange information was facilitated. **Members demonstrated a willingness to ask critical questions** of the process in terms of **identifying relevance**, whether the process would change things for the good of society and mankind, if change would be positive, would developments influence others and should people know about this, which is reflective of a desire to underpin decision making with processes of research and evaluation. Notably discussion was still very much concentrated in the area of higher education while the agenda item of Lifelong Learning and VET was redefined as Lifelong Learning and Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET). Initially TVET and Lifelong Learning showed promise with the scheduling of kick off meetings to initiate cooperation activities between ASEM member countries, however the proposed initiatives were on the whole, driven by European Member States known for advancing the field of education and training and recognised as centers of excellence in the area of VET policy development.

**ASEMME5** was very much **focused on consolidation, achievement and the demonstration of tangible results**, evidenced by a decision to **delineate dialogue into two augmentations: dialogue orientated cooperation to enhance learning, and results orientated cooperation to produce tangible activities**. **Members reflected on the future both in terms of challenges, opportunities and expected outcomes while also considering the wider picture of global developments** including rapid advances in technology and subsequent shifts in the labour market and employability. The structure of reporting (*Chairs Conclusion and Stocktaking Report*) became more cohesive and streamlined with opening statements advancing the agenda for each priority area followed by a list of cooperation activities and initiatives evidencing outcomes that are both descriptive, analytic and open to interrogation. Ministers and leadership transitioned from the role of mandating activity to that of advising senior officials and AES, and encouraged decision-making processes to prioritise the advancement of policy agenda underpinned by project results and analysis, to develop a communication strategy and to disseminate outcomes and leverage resources to increase the visibility of AEP. Discussion was again predominately concentrated in the area of higher education while the agenda item of Lifelong Learning and TVET focused on renewing motivation for lifelong learning initiatives and expanding dialogue to include youth forums.

**ASEMME6 focused on continuity** with ministers, members and stakeholders looking to the future both in terms of **global advancements, economic and social change** and the role AEP plays in supporting member countries to work together to **develop effective responses** to human resource capacity building underpinned by quality education and training provision. The ratification of the *Seoul Declaration* saw member countries reaffirm their commitment to both AEP and the agreed priority areas and also reach a consensus on the future direction of AEP policy agenda: transforming member and stakeholder aspirations and ambitions into a coherent vision underpinned by structural supports and operational mechanisms: providing for **greater levels of cooperation and substantive commitment** which is reflective of dialogue that goes beyond surface level **information sharing to achieve the levels of deep and concentrated dialogue required to advance** political issues in a more meaningful manner that is both considered, cohesive and grounded in the reality of practice. Members recognised the role of Lifelong Learning and TVET in education and as a key component of both employability in a globalised world and the ASEM framework aligned to the ASEM spirit of inclusivity, emancipation, humanism and democracy. The tone was one of sustainable development with ministers calling for member country nominations to host AES for the period 2021 to 2025.

### **Critically reflecting on AEP priority area Vocational Education and Training and the recent shift towards a dialogue on Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET):**

Given the cohesive nature of university and academic collaboration, and a motivation for partnership coupled with a tradition for research and development underpinned by identifiable structures and mechanisms it was somewhat predictable that AEP (as a cooperation initiative to foster dialogue and the exchange of knowledge) immediately focused on and achieved traction across the higher education sector. Conversely, the same cannot be said for ASEM AEP activity in the education sectors of VET and TVET and as such **a leitmotif has begun to emerge from within the membership** which is perhaps reflective of anticipated global challenges and the level of unprecedented change unfolding across economic and social environments, identifying as a **shift towards the 4<sup>th</sup> Industrial Revolution and evidencing as rapid technological advances** in artificial intelligence (AI), digitalisation, automatisisation and robotisation **which directly impacts policy development in the ASEM AEP priority area of TVET and Lifelong Learning**.

ASEM dialogue at the level of ministerial meetings continues to encourage TVET and LLL cooperation and activity, and while progress to date specifically in the area of TVET evidences member countries as informed and aware, the emergence of cooperation initiatives has been **slow to gather momentum and somewhat passively engaged in activity** with just four cooperation



activities identified to date: the ASEM TVET symposium (China 2011), the ASEM Symposium on TVET entitled “*Putting Frameworks into Practice Demand, Development and Decision*” (Berlin 2012), the ASEM Expert Seminar to exchange experience and lessons learned in the field of dual education engaging industry, academia and society in the dialogue (Nuremberg in 2014), the ASEM workshop on TVET in the Tourism and Catering Sector (Austria 2012) and more recently the ASEM TVET Seminar (Latvia 2018).

Specifically, **ASEMME3** notes the TVET symposium held in Qingdao, China in 2011 with follow-up recommendations demonstrating as an enthusiasm to collate and share information in a bid to develop understanding and bring cohesion to key issues and future dialogue by: linking existing European Network for Quality Assurance in VET (ENQA-VET) with initiatives Asia to encourage exchange of experience and practices on the implementation of QA in VET; making ASEM TVET Symposium a regular event to establish and enhance an international TVET policy dialogue mechanism; establishing an expert group to elaborate the development of joint TVET initiatives; sharing models of best practice in the area of developing cooperation between multinational enterprises and local vocational schools; encouraging member countries to conduct bilateral and multilateral TVET technical assistant programmes; supporting member countries to cooperate in area of curriculum and teacher professional development, quality assurance, recognition of prior learning and learning methods; documenting best practices, particularly industry-school partnerships; and also welcomed a commitment from Germany to host the 2nd ASEM TVET Symposium. The summary report of the meeting (*Chairs Conclusion*) requested for member countries to document best practices in VET, particularly those reflecting industry- school partnerships to be shared during a future workshop hosted by Austria and suggested the establishing an expert group in order to elaborate the development of joint VET initiatives. **On reflection** and perhaps of significance in terms of assessing the progression of AEP policy in the field of VET is that the *AES Status Report* presented during ASEMME3 updating progress on activities proposed during ASEMME1 and ASEMME2 evidences that **only two** of the seven **activities** agreed **had progressed towards completion**: to make the ASEM TVET Symposium a regular event and for Germany to host the 2nd ASEM TVET Symposium.

Moving forward **ASEMME4** saw VET as a priority area and agenda item replaced by Technical VET (TVET) albeit dialogue was focused on encouraging initiatives to enhance the employability of students in higher education through the provision of entrepreneurial skills and competences, entrepreneurial curriculum in schools education, the development of monitoring strategies for education-business cooperation and collaboration and awareness raising for the Global Inventory of National and Regional Qualification Frameworks compiled by the European Training Foundation (ETF), CEDEFOP and UNESCO and UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL). **On reflection the only VET or TVET specific dialogue evidenced** as Germany offering to host an **expert seminar on best practices in dual education**. Notably a subsequent review of AEP reports and documentation evidences a **gap in reporting** regarding either the **recategorisation of VET as TVET** or clarification regarding the **shift in lexicon**.

During **ASEMME5** Ministers advanced a policy direction to **encourage** the creation of **TVET partnerships and initiatives** to foster dialogue in the areas of teaching and learning, quality assurance mechanisms and mobility with ministers recommending for the creation of new education partnerships between ASEM countries. Ministers welcomed further discussions in the area of new learning approaches and work-based learning, TVET institution and industry partnerships, and activities to cultivate transparency and comparison of education systems in both regions. Latvia proposed an initiative to share best practice and future perspectives on TVET while ministers affirmed the role of AES to support member country implementation and to provide a platform for dissemination/visibility. **Notably** and perhaps of significance to ascertaining progress in relation to (T)VET and Lifelong Learning as a priority area within AEP the *Chairs Conclusion* record a

**ministerial request for senior officials to identify barriers to implementation** and to ensure the **identification of clear goals and objectives** as well as a plan **for the advancement of policy agenda** including a definition of tasks and expected outcomes taking account of stakeholder feedback. Albeit the priority area appears to **vacillate between** the sectors of **VET and TVET** with TVET recently replacing VET on the agenda, it is of **greater concern that** AEP membership is officially represented by higher education authorities (ministers for higher education and government department senior officials responsible for higher education) with stakeholder dialogue **predominantly represented by the opinions of higher education** institutions (ASEM Rectors Conference and Student Forums) and as such structurally AEP not only **creates a bias towards higher education interests** but also **actualises a vacuum in VET/TVET representation and participation all levels of engagement** both ministerial, senior official and stakeholder.

ASEMME6 saw a shift in dialogue with ministers and senior officials **looking to the future** of AEP, expressing the view that **the profile of TVET and LLL needs to be raised** if member countries are to meet future needs created by economic demand and subsequent changes in society. Members lobbied for **more concrete initiatives** (dialogue orientated cooperation to enhance learning and results orientated cooperation to produce tangible activities) and for **pilot project activity** to be led by member countries with both a reputation and strong tradition in the area of VET (e.g. Germany, Austria, the Netherlands and Denmark) and a vested interest in progressing future policy development in the area. The *Chairs Conclusion* **acknowledged Lifelong Learning and TVET as priority areas however the narrative concentrates predominately on Lifelong Learning** articulating that “*the ASEM Education Process recognises lifelong learning opportunities as the key element to ensure employability of people in both regions, equipping them with skills needed to thrive in a globalised world. With the spirit of inclusive, emancipatory, humanistic and democratic values, lifelong learning within the framework of the ASEM Education Process*”. Additionally a review of initiatives listed in the *Stocktaking Report* evidences member country activity principally in the area of entrepreneurship education, lifelong learning and ICT with a specific focus on Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) which is perhaps reflective of current trends and also evidenced in the results of the Korean Survey of ASEM Partners and Stakeholders (2016) gathering opinion on the future direction of ASEM AEP which evidenced 63% of respondents in agreement that advances in ICT would have the biggest impact on TVET and Lifelong Learning. **On reflection the only TVET focused activity listed** in the *Stocktaking Report* evidenced as a proposal to organise a **seminar to promote TVET dialogue and the sharing of best practice and future perspectives** (led by Latvia in collaboration with Austria, Brunei Darussalam, Belgium (Flemish Community), France, Germany, Indonesia, the Philippines and the Russian Federation).

**The TVET seminar**<sup>91</sup> proposed during ASEMME6 was held in Latvia in 2018 with the ambition to exchange best practice and methodologies from across member countries in the area of TVET policy development specifically focusing on the involvement of industry in TVET planning, education and training processes, skills development and international cooperation. Given **this seminar is the most recent TVET cooperation initiative** undertaken by ASEM member countries it **serves to provide valuable insight into AEP VET and TVET policy progression**. The topics discussed, and the recommendations made present as studied and valid and perhaps more tellingly, reflect the status of TVET within AEP in terms of topics for cooperation and dialogue, the initiation of initiatives, the creation of momentum and potential to achieve traction: European Commission TVET policy development overview (VET, Apprenticeships and Adult Learning); recent reforms and the development of national VET policy; national TVET systems; TVET legislation, administration, institutional arrangements, industry and employers; validation of learning outcomes (informal and formal learning) principles, procedures, conditions and stakeholders; channels for communication and information sharing and platforms to provide visibility (skills competitions, centers of excellence, fairs and exhibitions). **Five themes emerged: vision and strategy** (advancement and legislation); **economic and labour market demand** (factors shaping demand for skills, identification of demand,

matching skill demand with supply, access and transition to employment, self-employment and business creation); **social inclusion** (factors shaping the demand for VET, access, participation and progression, delivering on demand); **internal efficiency of VET systems** (teaching and learning, learning conditions, quality assurance, learning outcomes); and **governance and policy practices** (update on governance, management and assessment of policy implementation). Looking to the future member country delegates spoke of raising the profile and reputation of both VET and TVET, advancements in the area of joint qualifications, capacity building and teacher training, systematic policy reform, and the internationalisation of TVET.

Rather interestingly **the seminar emerged with a consensus for TVET policy development** to adopt a **systematic approach to TVET policy reform**, in that TVET becomes a **cradle to grave concept of learning** integrated into education provision from entry level compulsory education (initial VET and TVET) through to higher education (advanced VET and TVET) and on to adult and continuing education (continuous professional development, reskilling and upskilling) and as such reframes VET policy reform to advance **concepts of continuity** and the development of vocational pathways that place the learner at the centre of the dialogue and brings **coherence to policy development**. The realisation of a flexible and adaptable VET/TVET system that **places provision along a continuum, underpinned by quality assurance mechanisms and transparent frameworks for validation and recognition** coupled with flexible modes of delivery through blended, distance and online learning in the classroom or in the workplace requires for a paradigm shift both by government, education and training authorities and institutes, stakeholders, employers and learners. Additionally a **central tenet to successful implementation** requires for **effective employer collaboration**, which demands institutions to develop strong collaborative links with local, regional, national and international employers and business fora while also staying open to global events, external forces and changes in the wider economy; and also for effective employer engagement that is cohesive and sustainable and provides for long term strategic cooperation which demands institutions to develop mutually beneficial memorandum of understanding/partnership agreements with business and industry. **Building** the level of **trust** required for effective and sustainable employer engagement is not simply a matter of inviting business fora to assist with curriculum develop or asking employers to provide work placement opportunities for learners but additionally and conversely provides for employer and employee **access to high quality education and training** that is adaptable to blue sky thinking and innovative solutions; communication that is collaborative and effective ensuring **capacity building** and the sharing of best practice that is both aligned to and **responsive to economic demand and technological advancements**; and the development of **occupational standards** and quality assurance mechanisms to ensure **provision meets both employer need and labour market demand** which is often set against the backdrop of a rapidly changing and dynamic environment.

**Critically reflecting on AEP progress** in the priority area of (T)VET it is obvious that cooperation **activities have not yet gathered momentum or achieved traction** and as such the next steps require for careful consideration and the identification of foundational building blocks to support collaboration if VET is to avoid being lost to the Process. **A clear role for AEP emerged** during the most recent TVET seminar in terms of **advancing dialogue and cooperation activities in the area of policy development** to: **strengthen collaboration and the exchange of best practice innovations in the area of policy reform and practice implementation**; **share best practice education and training models that involve business and industry**; **advance the development of curriculum to blend both the academic and the practical aspects of education and training** and to take consideration for **access to and flexibility delivery**; **encourage international benchmarking** as a key component **to improving quality assurance, validation and transferability**; recommend for **government investment** particularly in the area of creating **TVET institutional networks** and also **to developing effective employer engagement**; and to **advance collaboration and information sharing across future skills needs expert groups**. Given (T)VET plays an important role in the

development, reskilling and upskilling of society, providing individuals with the core skills and personal competences required to access decent work and to adapt for better employability, it is perhaps **interesting to note that both Asia and Europe are experiencing challenges to improving the reputation of (T)VET** which is often linked with social class and learning ability and framed as an alternative education route as opposed to legitimate choice and as such raising the profile of (T)VET **emerges as a priority area for AEP policy development**. Additionally, there is overarching role for AEP to play in terms of **fostering dialogue** between the ASEM pillars of education and labour: given the **new rhetoric of employability as aligned to the insecure workforce** (often characterised by zero contract hour employment underpinned by unethical and opportunistic behaviours) and increasing concerns for social imbalance and inequality<sup>92</sup>.

**Critically reflecting on the role of ASEM** as an overarching process advancing AEP and (T)VET as a priority area it becomes apparent that fostering a culture of lifelong learning that engages business (as learning organisations) **in the process of education and training is greatly enhanced when members learn from the experiences of their counterparts in Europe and Asian and from experts who are ahead of the curve**. Undoubtedly **the transfer of knowledge** from one member country to another is the **first step in a much lengthier process that requires contextualisation and adaptation of practice at a national level** however the importance of internationalisation when it comes to developing our capabilities cannot be understated: we learn from the experiences of members who have tackled similar challenges and while strong bilateral partnerships and sustainable cooperation advance policy development in the field of education and training, there is also **significant value to be found in upscaling programmes and projects to achieving traction across member countries**. Cooperation that combines top-down approaches with the bottom-up initiatives is essential and necessary both in terms of engage citizens and **developing systems that are both fit for purpose and of benefit to both the learner and society** as well as **employers and the economy**: creating opportunities for learners to enhance their knowledge, skills and personal competences throughout life both in terms of personal fulfilment, **active citizenship and social inclusion**. Without doubt **tangible results** provide evidence of progress and also indicate a move away from surface level dialogue to **achieve the levels of deep and concentrated dialogue required to advance** political issues in a more meaningful manner. **However there is a hidden assumption at play** here, in that while member countries are moving at various speeds there is a general **tendency to believe that everyone is heading to the same destination** which effectively **advances a policy environment that is “multi-speed” with “experts” leading the way as opposed** to a policy environment that is **“multi-track”** providing member countries **with choice and variety** (as well as pace), which ultimately is far more beneficial in terms of scope and benefit.

**Critical reflection of the past provides us with the momentum to propelling ourselves forward:** Standing in a **time** and space **characterised by “unknowing”** and the **misconceptions of “other”**, when old answers are quickly becoming obsolete and economic systems need a rethink, as well as an overhaul, collectively the attitude is one whereby new medicines, better laws, faster computers, solar power and nanotechnology should be making us more efficient, more intelligent, more capable and more able to solve the problems of the world. Yet for a growing number of people there is a feeling of disquiet (set against a backdrop of crisis after crisis) bubbling under the surface, as the expectations associated with “high tech” and “modern” (evidence as unethical behaviours with AI systems that have substantial ownership of control processes, taking action or make decisions that drastically alter the course of a person’s life or heavily influence human life, political leadership, health, fortune and human rights) begin to ring hollow. Politically we tend to distinguish between two kinds of regime: the first reflects of an **open society** whereby people elect leaders to serve the interests of the people (as opposed to the leaders own interests); while the second is best typified as a **closed society** with leaders manipulating the electorate in such a way as to serve the personal interests of the leader. George Orwell described this closed society as a totalitarian state while today’s rhetoric speaks of a

“*mafia state*” to denote the façade of democracy whereby leaders control media, the judiciary, and other levers of influence to enrich (and maintain) themselves in power. In political terms these classifications are of course overly simplistic however the distinction between the two types of regime is somewhat illuminating given that right now **attitudes towards cooperation are demonstrating as negative** with many countries witnessing a **shift in narrative towards** the reassertion of **sovereignty** (as opposed to surrendering more of it). **However, uniquely the underlying genius and compelling strength of ASEM (to balance peace and stability with economic and social development) has the ability to disrupt this narrative in a positive way** and for the good of society and mankind **which is more reflective of an appetite for a new metanarrative and new interpretative constructs**, through which culture can evolve and on which civilisation can build, that are both stable and sustainable as well as peaceful and prosperous<sup>93</sup>.

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