

Important developments in Asia-Europe higher education and research

While EAHEP Round Table aims at looking into reform processes and how they impact higher education institutions at the ground, there is a strong policy component to it. The following document summarises developments under the Asia-Europe Meeting process (ASEM), which has recently developed a new focus on (higher) education, and how this could link to universities and university organisations in both regions.

What is ASEM?

The Asia-Europe Ministerial Meetings Process has been established in 1996, as an informal dialogue for enhancing cooperation and exchange at interregional and bilateral level (27 EU member states, 10 ASEAN countries, China, S-Korea, Japan, European Commission, the ASEAN Secretariat and recently India, Mongolia and Pakistan - in total 45 members).

The process is multidimensional, as it is generally open to all issues of mutual interest and concern. It is a high level process through biennial Heads of State and Government summits, Ministerial Meetings (MM) and Senior Officials Meetings (SOM). There is a strong focus on foreign politics, trade and economics and also on cultural and social issues, *“with an increasing focus on fostering **people-to-people** contacts in all sectors of society”*.

http://ec.europa.eu/external_relations/asem/index_en.htm

<http://www.aseminfoboard.org/>

<http://www.asem7.cn/>

What does ASEM mean for higher education and research?

1997: the Asia Europe Foundation (ASEF)

In order to ensure that cultural and educational issues are included in the Asia-Europe cooperation process, in February 1997, the **Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF)** has been established by ASEM. It is the only permanent physical institution of ASEM. It is a not-for-profit foundation based in Singapore, and seeks to promote better mutual understanding between the peoples of Asia and Europe through greater intellectual, cultural, and people-to-people exchanges.



Under its **Peoples-to-Peoples strand**, it established the **ASEM Education Hub (AEH)**, consisting of Asia-Europe HE Networks with their annual colloquia, and a database on study opportunities in Europe and Asia (**DEEP**); established with support of ACA and IAU. ASEF organises conferences together with the various partners in Asia and Europe. It also runs the **ASEF HE Hub Advisory Committee**, which meets once a year in December, and facilitates dialogue among associations from Asia and Europe cooperation.

<http://www.asef.org/>

<http://aeh.asef.org/>

<http://www.deep.asef.org/>

2008: The ASEM Education (Ministerial) Process

In 4-6 May 2008, the **first ever ASEM Education Ministers Meeting** took place in Berlin, hosted by the German Government. This meeting aimed to underline the pivotal role of education and training for qualified human resources as a key factor for economic and social development in a globalised world. The ministerial recommendations cover the two major areas

- university cooperation with business/industry
- higher education cooperation/obstacles to mobility

The ministers agreed to:

- set up 'a strategic Asia-Europe education partnership for the 21st century', to strengthen the ASEM dialogue and cooperation in the field of education to include stakeholders at all levels;
- and convene a second Ministerial Meeting on Education in Vietnam in 2009.

This has been followed up through senior officials meetings and workshops over the course of 2008-09. The **Ministers had a second meeting** on 14-15 May 2009, in Hanoi Vietnam, in which they

- announced pilot groups in areas such as credits + learning outcomes, qualification frameworks and quality assurance;
- proposed initiatives and events for 2009/2010, including areas such as lifelong learning, industry cooperation, joint degrees;
- agreed to establish a rotating ASEM Education secretariat. It will be hosted for the next 4 years by Germany and has been allocated at the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD);
- accepted Denmark's offer to host the next Ministerial meeting;



- acknowledged the importance of the ASEM Rectors Conference Process (see below) as supportive of the Ministerial process and welcomed the organisation of biennial conferences.

How can universities and university organisations get involved in this process?

2008: First ASEM Rectors Conference

In response to the ASEM Education Ministers Meeting, a consortium of the German Rectors' Conference (HRK), the European University Association (EUA), the ASEAN University Network (AUN) and the Asia Europe Foundation (ASEF), organised in 2008 the first ASEM Rectors Conference. Besides the conference recommendations, which have been submitted to the Ministers, it has been decided to:

- establish an ASEM University platform, also referred to as ASEM Rectors Process – which is driven by AUN, EUA and ASEF, and which would organise conferences and workshops on higher education and research issues, in order to support universities in their institutional development and cooperation;
- ensure that the outcomes of the events feed in form of policy recommendations into the ASEM Education process.

So the purpose of the initiative is to ensure that universities and university organisations can embark on a more scheduled and visible policy process for higher education cooperation, and that their voice would be heard by the ASEM Education Ministers. It was inspired in particular by the experience of the European universities in the Bologna Process, where the EUA together with the representatives of the European students (ESU) and colleges (EURASHE) is a consultative member, and has had a considerable influence on the reform agenda. A 2nd ASEM Rectors Conference will take place in Asia in the last quarter of 2010.

http://www.hrk.de/de/hrk_international/hrk_international_4568.php

http://www.asef.org/index.php?option=com_project&task=view&id=479



How does the EAHEP project link to the ASEM Education Process?

The EAHEP is a European Commission project awarded to a consortium of EUA, the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) and the Netherlands Organization for International Cooperation in Higher Education (Nuffic) in December 2007. Its duration is 2 years. No prolongation is foreseen.

The project aims at enhancing Asia-Europe higher education relations, and also to contribute to mobility and the development of higher education in emerging and least developed countries in Asia.

The main deliverables of the project are the implementation of 2 round tables, 4 workshops, 2 European higher education fairs and symposia (EHEF), and the establishment of a website portal (www.eahep.org). Given the interest of the implementing organisations, there has been a strong thematic focus on institutional development and cooperation:

- Round Table on Autonomy Governance and Management, Hanoi 25-26 Nov. 2008
- Workshop: Doctoral/Graduate Education, Beijing 8-9 Dec. 2008
- Workshop: Student Mobility in the framework of institutional development, Kuala Lumpur, February 2009
- Workshop: Lessons learned in Partnerships, Jakarta, June 2009
- Workshop: Regional Quality Assurance, Bangkok, November 2009

The EAHEP web portal, www.eahep.org, supplements these events by giving an overview on policy developments in Asia and Europe, and to provide links to and information on relevant organisations and important initiatives in both regions.

There is no official link between the EU-Asia Higher Education Platform (EAHEP), which is a project of the European Commission funded under the 'Asia-Link' programme, and the ASEM Rectors' Process / University Platform, which is run by ASEF, AUN and EUA. However, the two initiatives have a lot in common: they aim at enhancing the Asia-Europe cooperation in higher education and research, addressing similar content and themes, targeting the same audience, and involving to some extent the same organizations and people. Thus the ASEM process will be an important point of discussion at the EAHEP Round table: 'Regional Higher Education Cooperation in the Next Decade: The Bologna process and Europe-Asia Dialogue'.

Though the EAHEP project will conclude at the end of 2009, the consortium members, the European Commission and other partner organisations are exploring ways to continue future events and initiatives that would support the ASEM process and contribute to a focused interregional dialogue.



2010: the new landscape for Europe-Asia higher education cooperation

The prospects for EU-Asia cooperation beyond 2010 are promising:

The ASEM Education Process has a secretariat, and the next Ministerial meeting has been announced. Rectors of Asia and Europe will meet in 2010 for a policy level Rectors' conference, similar to the one held in Berlin in October 2008. ASEF and its partners have announced to organize workshops to feed into the process, and several ASEM governments have committed to concrete initiatives, which should lead to tangible enhancement of cooperation between the two regions. While it is still uncertain how the ASEM Education Process will further develop, and whether and how the EAHEP activities can be sustained beyond December 2009, evidently governments, organisations and institutions involved have a strong interest in continuing the policy dialogue so as to enhance cooperation and regional development between Asia and Europe.

A purpose of this Round table is certainly to further explore and concretize these prospects:

- How to build the interregional policy dialogue in the future?
- What are the core issues that ministers and stakeholder organisations should address?
- How to best synergise efforts, and ensure visibility and transparency of the policy processes?

The EAHEP Team is looking forward to an interactive discussion on these issues.

