

ASEM Conference of Ministers Responsible for Education

Education and Training for Tomorrow: Common perspectives in Asia and Europe

Berlin, 5/6 May 2008

Executive Summary of National Reports

I. Introduction

In their Helsinki declaration of September 2006, the Heads of State and Government from 13 Asian and 25 European nations emphasised ASEM's continuing vital role as a framework for dialogue and cooperation, serving as a prime point of convergence between Europe and Asia. For the second decade of ASEM, some key policy areas including education, science and technology have been defined. In this context, the German Government has offered to organise the first ASEM Education Ministerial conference in Berlin on 5/6 May 2008.

In preparation of this ministerial conference, the German chair sent two draft discussion papers on "EU-Asia higher education cooperation" and "Education and the labour market" to the ASEM Ministers responsible for education and the European Commission. The papers touched upon important aspects of education cooperation between Europe and Asia and raised a number of issues and questions which could be of relevance for the Berlin conference. During the SOM in Bonn on 10/11 March 2008, the ASEM delegations accepted the main topics as proposed by the German chair and agreed to concentrate on the following aspects to be discussed in the two plenary sessions of the Berlin conference:

(1) Plenary session I on "Aspects of EU-Asia higher education cooperation"

- (a) Mobility of students, staff and researchers as well as structural cooperation between higher education institutions of both regions;
- (b) Visibility and attractiveness of higher education systems and institutions in Asia and Europe.

(2) Plenary session II on "Education and the labour market"

- (a) Education and industry cooperation;
- (b) Lifelong learning and employability with special regard to higher education.

In order to have a sound basis for the discussion of these topics in Berlin, the delegations have been invited to prepare national stocktaking reports based on the questions raised by the German chair in its two concept papers. Some ASEM countries and the European Commission made use of this opportunity to present their rich experience and examples of good practice in the field of EU-Asia higher education cooperation. The most important aspects of these reports are summarized

in this paper. Due to the fact that several countries did not send a report, some results might be biased or over-interpreted.

II. General Aspects

The discussions in the SOM and the national reports emphasise the importance of EU-Asia relations in the field of education and underline the key role of higher education for the development of societies and economic growth in Asia and Europe. Given this pivotal role of higher education, it is suggested to strengthen EU-Asia higher education relations and to forge stronger links between both regions through enhanced cooperation between higher education institutions, the intensification of academic, research and student exchanges, and the promotion of structural networks enabling mutually beneficial cooperation.

Although there are important bi-regional activities of the Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF) and its ASEM Education Hub in the field of education cooperation, there is no formalised dialogue on education and training between the ASEM partners so far. The Berlin Education Ministerial conference, therefore, is considered a milestone in future Asia-Europe education relations and in establishing a permanent platform for dialogue on educational matters between both regions in the framework of ASEM.

The national reports clearly show that there are already intensive higher education relationships and numerous cooperations between ASEM countries at bilateral and interinstitutional level, mainly focussing on people-to-people-exchange and structural cooperation such as joint programmes and research projects. The intensity of cooperation differs from country to country and, not surprisingly, depends in most of the cases on the size of the countries involved. At multilateral level, the EU initiatives and programmes (such as ERASMUS Mundus or in the past 6 years Asia-Link) are gaining increasingly importance for the bi-regional university cooperation including the development of joint curricula and the mobility of students, graduates and researchers. The ASEM-DUO fellowship programmes for the exchange of university students and professors between Asia and Europe are another pertinent example in this field. However, the overall number of multilateral and bilateral cooperations between European and Asian countries seems to be way too low compared to the size of both regions and, therefore, needs to be increased.

The aim of intensifying higher education cooperation between Asia and Europe relates to the broader issue of globalisation and the internationalisation of higher education institutions. The reports make clear that in both regions the internationalisation of higher education is very high on the political agenda.

At European level, the Bologna Process is considered an important instrument for internationalisation and a powerful framework to create a high-quality and worldwide attractive European Higher Education Area. The EU with its policies and the new Lifelong Learning Programme (and in particular with ERASMUS for higher education) supports the Bologna Process in its inner-European dimension. In Asia, with its numerous regions and very diverse national systems, a single regional “umbrella” for higher education comparable to the Bologna Process does not exist. However, in the framework of ASEAN some initiatives have been launched to strengthen educational cooperation and mobility among leading universities in ASEAN (e.g. through the ASEAN University Network). The University Mobility in Asia and Pacific (UMAP)

programme is a regional exchange scheme very similar to the European ERASMUS programme. Some Asian countries are interested in learning more about the Bologna model. One country even is of the view “that a structure similar to the European Higher Education Area ought to be established in Asia.”

At national level, governments in many ASEM countries (in some cases in cooperation with non-governmental organisations) developed strategies and programmes to support and enhance the internationalisation and international attractiveness of their higher education system and universities as well as to strengthen exchange and cooperation between Asia and Europe. Intergovernmental and interinstitutional agreements, mobility schemes for domestic and foreign students, graduates and researchers, international study and research programmes (some taught in English), off-shore activities, marketing and information initiatives, measures to improve the quality and capacity of higher education institutions, etc. were mentioned in this context. The national reports include very interesting examples of internationalisation strategies and cross-border cooperation between Asia and Europe. The reports also make clear that the main focus of internationalisation and the intensity of bi-regional cooperation differ very much from country to country (and certainly from institution to institution).

Almost all national reports stressed the importance of intensifying the dialogue and cooperation between education and industry at national and international level. Education-industry cooperation is a core element for increasing the prosperity of societies through the development of qualified human resources and skilled work forces. There is a clear understanding that universities play a key role in providing high-quality and market-relevant education and in delivering employable graduates. However, the competences gained by the graduates during their university studies do not necessarily meet the needs of industries. Universities, therefore, should be invited to better react to these needs by preparing graduates with required soft competences and by delivering educational programmes which improve the employability of their graduates.

In view of demographic changes and new challenges arising from knowledge-based economies and globalisation, lifelong learning and employability are high on the political agenda (e.g. OECD, Bologna Process, ASEAN) and increasingly becoming key concepts of education in Asia and Europe. The need for closer interaction and better permeability of higher education and vocational education systems has been stressed. Continuing training, flexible learning paths, the recognition of prior learning (including credit transfer) were considered important elements in this context.

III. EU-Asia Higher Education Cooperation

1. Mobility and structural cooperation

There is a broad consensus in the reports that people-to-people-exchange and structural cooperation are highly relevant to strengthen the academic relations between Asia and Europe. The exchange of talented students, graduates and researchers enriches academic environments with new cultural, social and academic values and contributes to a cross-fertilisation of ideas and scientific progress. Experience of cultural and academic diversity creates opportunities for personal

growth, promotes tolerance and reduces discrimination assisting, thus, in developing and maintaining a global democratic culture.

Structural cooperation (e.g. intergovernmental agreements, institutional partnerships, joint programmes and projects) at national or institutional level is seen as the ideal way to develop common strategies for collaborative academic activities (including cross-border mobility), to deepen mutual understanding and trust, to identify and solve existing challenges and to establish sustainable links and relations between ASEM countries and their universities.

More than 2.5 million students worldwide are studying at higher education institutions outside their home countries. The five top sending countries are China, India, the Republic of Korea, Germany and Japan, all being ASEM members. Following the United States, the ASEM partners United Kingdom, Germany and France are in a leading position among the most important receiving countries.

An impressive number of ASEM countries describe in their reports national initiatives and programmes to foster international mobility of domestic and foreign students, graduates and researchers. Some of them (but very few) even developed a national strategy to increase international mobility of locals and especially to attract more students from abroad. In many cases, bilateral agreements between governments provide the legal framework for cooperation and exchange activities (sometimes including mutual recognition of academic qualifications). Except a very few examples, however, the number of agreements and exchanges between Asian and European countries seems to be low as compared to the size of both regions. Some ASEM partners implemented national scholarship schemes to enhance international mobility including (and very often focused on) incoming mobility. Even so, the number of students paying for their studies abroad normally exceeds by far the number of students receiving a scholarship. Most of the scholarships are provided to students for full-term or partial studies at Master's or doctoral level. Some countries also award grants to students to attend summer schools and language courses abroad. In a number of countries scholarships are made available to support lecturers, university teachers and researchers in carrying out study visits as well as teaching and research activities. At European level, the EU promotes mobility between Asia and Europe with its Erasmus Mundus programme by providing scholarships to European and non-European graduate students and academics. In addition, the Erasmus Mundus External Cooperation Window (as of 2008 open to 10 Asian ASEM countries) supports the exchange of undergraduate, master, doctoral and post-doc students as well as academics between both regions. The EU also supports the ASEM Education Hub which has been developed as a platform to facilitate and support multilateral exchanges between Asia and Europe.

The imbalance of exchanges between Asia and Europe has been addressed as an important challenge by some reports. As a rule, many more Asian students want to study in Europe than Europeans in Asia. Mobility in bilateral or multilateral schemes such as international study and training partnership programmes, ASEM DUO or inside university networks seem to be a favourable framework for more balanced exchanges. However, even "organized mobility" from Europe to Asia has to be improved. Maybe the offering of summer courses and research projects could be a measure to attract more European students, as suggested by one Asian country. Special programmes enabling European students and graduates to combine

intercultural and language learning in Asia with practical experience in industry are supposed to be another successful instrument (already implemented by one European country).

In addition, the removal of existing obstacles to mobility could help to increase the exchange of university students and staff between both regions. Irrespective of a long tradition of people-to-people-exchanges and quite a number of intergovernmental and interinstitutional agreements between Asia and Europe, some challenges still remain to be met. The reports addressed the following challenges: comparability of education systems, lack of foreign language skills and intercultural competences, problems with visa and work permits, portability of pension rights, recognition of academic qualifications and degrees, lack of information and adequate funding (e.g. scholarships) and problems with social integration in host countries. To take a closer look at these challenges and to discuss possible solutions, a joint working group could be set up by the ASEM Education ministers, as suggested by the SOM in Bonn.

Many reports emphasise the key role of structural cooperation for strong and sustainable links between higher education institutions of Asia and Europe. Most of the ASEM countries have a substantial number of university partnerships and networks, pursuing multiple objectives such as student and staff exchange, development of joint study programmes (sometimes with double or joint degrees), carrying out of joint research projects, organisation of conferences, etc. In some countries, these interinstitutional activities between Asia and Europe (sometimes limited to selected countries) are supported by bi-lateral and/or national programmes, funded by governments and, in some cases, implemented by non-governmental organisations. Very few European countries addressed so-called off-shore activities of their universities in the Asian region. These activities supported by national funds include the organisation of summer schools, the collaborative establishment of study programmes and the foundation of faculties and higher education institutions in cooperation with Asian partners.

The EU provides support for multilateral Asia-EU university cooperation through programmes such as Asia-Link, ERASMUS Mundus and the ASEAN/EU University Network Programme. Two new EU programmes with Japan and the Republic of Korea will fund joint project activities focused on joint curriculum development and structured exchange of students and staff.

2. Visibility and attractiveness of higher education systems and institutions in Asia and Europe

Making European education systems and their institutions more visible and attractive to international students and academics is one of the primary objectives of the Lisbon Strategy and the Bologna Process. In its Action IV the current ERASMUS Mundus programme of the EU supports multilateral projects aiming at improving the visibility and attractiveness of the European Higher Education Area. In the framework of EU's Asia-Link programme a consortium of experienced national organisations (DAAD, British Council, CampusFrance, Nuffic) organised European Higher Education Fairs in seven Asian countries (China, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam) offering European higher education institutions a platform to promote

their study programmes and to network with Asian institutions. The new EU-Asia Higher Education Platform funded by the EU and developed by the European University Association, DAAD and Nuffic will serve for improving networking activities, exchange of best practices and information between Asia-Link project coordinators and other stakeholders active in academic cooperation between Asia and Europe. ASEF's DEEP Database on Educational Exchange Programmes helps to create better awareness among university students in Asia and Europe of study opportunities available in the other region. However, more activities and joint efforts are needed in this field.

The lack of information on higher education systems and institutions in Asia and Europe as well as on cooperation opportunities and funding schemes has been stressed by several national reports. It is suggested to make higher education systems and institutions more visible by providing better and more detailed information via joint marketing activities (e.g. education fairs in both regions) and information campaigns (publications on "Study and Research in Asia and Europe", web-forums, etc.). Transnational platforms for dialogue and information (as implemented by Asia-Link or ASEF) as well as tools already existing at national level could be used and further developed. Alumni are valuable resources for information and their networks could contribute to disseminate information. Systemic effects and sustainable success in this field need an overarching marketing and information strategy or a "concerted action" as already implemented by some ASEM countries at national level or basically by the EU with its ERASMUS Mundus Global Promotion project at European level.

High-quality study and research opportunities, efficient framework conditions (e.g. visa regulations, student services) and interesting scholarship schemes are important prerequisites to make regions, countries and their universities attractive to talented students, graduates and researchers from abroad. The Bologna Process aims at creating a European Higher Education Area (with 46 signatory countries so far) that will facilitate mobility, increase employability and strengthen Europe's attractiveness and competitiveness in the world. A three-cycle higher education system with internationally comparable degrees (BA, MA, doctoral degree), qualification frameworks, common standards and guidelines for quality assurance and fair recognition of higher education qualifications, periods of study and prior learning, including the recognition of non-formal and informal learning, are essential components of the EHEA. In this context, many European higher education systems and institutions are undergoing sometimes radical changes and reforms. Some reports of the European ASEM countries show that the Bologna Process gives new impetus to further internationalisation of national higher education systems and to make them more attractive by implementing quality assurance and recognition mechanisms, developing joint study programmes (increasingly taught in English), promoting foreign language training, and encouraging student and teacher mobility (in many cases by offering scholarships).

Internationalisation of higher education systems as well as raising the appeal and improving the quality of higher education is also very high on the agenda of some Asian ASEM countries. Initiatives to improve the institutional management of internationalisation (e.g. establishment of International Offices), to internationalise academic programmes (e.g. international curricula, research activities) as well as to encourage student and scholars to study abroad and to return to their home country,

and to increase the number of incoming students have been noted in the national reports. One Asian country also explained its efforts to improve educational quality, to offer a better studying and living environment and to provide timely guidance and services for in-bound international students.

Quality assurance and recognition of credits and qualifications are considered very important for ensuring high-quality study and research opportunities and for improving the attractiveness of higher education institutions. Evaluation and accreditation procedures for study programmes and/or institutions have been implemented by many countries to improve the educational quality of higher education institutions. However, further progress has to be made in this field. There are still many cases (especially when it comes to international exchanges) leading to non-recognition of credits or degrees due to the lack of good educational quality. For the cooperation between Asia and Europe, one Asian ASEM country, therefore, suggested to set up an ASEM Quality Assurance Network comparable to the International Network of Quality Assurance in Higher Education or the Asia Pacific Quality Network. Regarding recognition it has been proposed to establish an ASEM Information Center similar to ENIC (European National Information Centers) and NARIC (National Academic Recognition Information Centers). Bilateral agreements on recognition of study periods and degrees at governmental and non-governmental level have been mentioned by some countries.

Too strict visa regulations are an obstacle to mobility (see previous chapter) and could reduce the attractiveness of receiving countries. Some national reports and even more so the ASEM representatives in the SOM stressed the need for improvement in issuing visa. It is hoped that the European Council's "Students Directive" will facilitate access of third-country nationals to EU countries. Valuable practical information on how to get a visa is provided by the "Guidelines to assist third-country students in getting visas to Europe" developed by the European Commission.

IV. Education and the labour market

1. Education and industry cooperation

Most of the national reports underlined the importance of education-industry cooperation in a globalising world with increasing demographic challenges (which differ in Asia and Europe). Partnerships between higher education institutions and companies are crucial to develop market-relevant knowledge, skills and competences and to improve employability of citizens. The importance of such partnerships at national, regional and local level has been underlined by the EU "Lisbon strategy" aiming at making the EU "the most dynamic and competitive knowledge-based economy in the world." In order to improve employability of university graduates, the Bologna Process emphasised the need to further develop partnerships and cooperation with employers in the process of curriculum innovation based on learning outcomes. University-industry cooperation is certainly also critical for the ASEAN Economic Community to be achieved by 2015 and for societies in other ASEM countries.

In many countries, promising examples of university-industry cooperation are already in place. Employers are involved in accreditation councils, the development of curricula (at all levels), as teachers in higher education institutions, in providing student placements in companies, in collaborative research projects, in sponsoring chairs and scholarship programmes, etc. In some countries, specific types of higher education institutions (e.g. Universities of Applied Sciences, Hogeschoolen) deliver a more practice-oriented education combining theoretic knowledge with practical work experience. Sometimes dual study programmes, leading to both a vocational and an academic degree, are jointly offered by higher education institutions and companies enabling students to combine academic studies and vocational training. A similar model of dual education combining school education with practical training in a company is offered by a few countries in the field of vocational education.

Regular meetings of business and higher education representatives (including social partners and Rectors' Conferences) take place in some countries to facilitate the exchange of information and to foster cooperation on a policy level. Some countries even developed national strategies and instruments to enhance collaboration between academia and the world of work. However, this interaction, as a whole, has to be widened and improved. Especially Asian countries mentioned a profound gap between the knowledge and skills gained by graduates during their university studies and the needs of industries. This gap has to be filled and universities "are expected to produce graduates and research findings to help solve industry-existing problems, so that they can create values for the society, meaning that universities are highly expected to deliver educational programs with high relevance to the societies' needs". Dialogue and ties between universities and companies have to be strengthened. This is also true for university-industry cooperation between ASEM countries. The establishment of a bi-regional forum for dialogue and exchange of experience involving stakeholders from the academic and economic sector in Asia and Europe would contribute to deepen the cooperation between higher education and business and to learn from each other. The European Commission's University-Business Forum could serve as a model. Quite a number of ASEM members could give valuable input and share their experience with countries less developed in this field. The national reports already include initiatives and measures to intensify university-industry cooperation which could be presented and discussed in this forum. The implementation of university science parks, technology transfer centers, platforms for innovation, product innovation centers, incubators of entrepreneurship, career offices, etc. are worth mentioning here. The forum may also identify the competences and skills needed on the labour markets in ASEM countries which should be taken into consideration by Asian and European universities when developing joint curricula. The provision of work placements for students in Asia and in Europe would be another interesting point of the agenda.

2. Lifelong learning and employability with special regard to higher education

In globalising knowledge-based economies and societies with new demographic challenges, initial training and education is not sufficient any more. Individuals need to update or acquire new competences, skills and knowledge as well as to improve their employability and to enhance their adaptability to the changing labour markets. In this perspective, regions and countries worldwide develop lifelong learning policies and strategies in order to provide people of all ages with equal and open access to high-quality learning opportunities and to a variety of learning experiences in and

outside the formal education and training systems. In Asia, ASEAN has undertaken various efforts in implementing lifelong learning activities at regional level. In Europe, the Copenhagen Process and the Bologna Process aim at improving employability of citizens and at making lifelong learning an important concept for education at all stages in the life cycle. The national reports show in a very impressive way that many ASEM countries have already implemented lifelong learning strategies and policies (some of them many years ago) foreseeing the development of a flexible and open structure of education. Some countries promote a concept of building a lifelong learning society for all. One Asian country supports the building of learning cities. Universities are expected to play an important role as “knowledge centers” in the countries’ strategies, especially (but not only) in the field of continuing education and further training for post-graduates and non-academics. Some universities offer very successfully distant education in the lifelong learning context, including degree and non-degree education, full-time and part-time learning, classroom teaching and distance learning.

As regards EU-Asia cooperation in lifelong learning, the ASEM Heads of State agreed on the establishment of an ASEM Lifelong Learning HUB in 2004. The objectives of the HUB are to set up a network of universities that can strengthen the exchange of knowledge and experience in the field of lifelong learning in both regions. The University Network includes 18 Asian and European universities so far and is aimed at initiating bilateral and multilateral research projects, at increasing the exchange of students and academic staff involved in lifelong learning, and at providing information to policy makers and practitioners. It could be considered to encourage the ASEM Lifelong Learning HUB to extend its existing cooperation with 18 countries to all ASEM members and to increase its research activities in the field of lifelong learning, as suggested by the HUB itself.

Lifelong learning encompasses better permeability between different types of education, for example between vocational and higher education. Some ASEM countries have already implemented policies and programmes to alleviate access to universities for people with vocational education. The recognition of prior learning and the development of flexible learning paths are important elements in this context. This approach, however, has not been followed by other countries. One Asian ASEM partner explicitly “does not encourage shifting of workforce with vocational skills to have bachelor or honors degrees” due to high needs of skillful workforce in the country. An important instrument for promoting lifelong learning in Europe and improving permeability between different education sectors is the European Qualifications Framework (EQF). The EQF is a common European reference framework which links countries’ qualifications systems, acting as a translation device to make qualifications more readable. It has two principal aims: to promote citizens’ mobility between countries and to facilitate their lifelong learning. At the national level, the EQF promotes the development of national qualifications frameworks. It is an interesting point for the cooperation of ASEM countries that these qualification frameworks facilitate the transfer and use of qualifications across different countries and education and training systems. Therefore, it seems reasonable that in its national report one Asian country is proposing the establishment of an ASEM Qualifications Framework that follows the EQF.

Another powerful tool for the promotion of transnational mobility of learners and workers and access to lifelong and borderless learning are credit transfer and

accumulation systems based on learning outcomes achieved by individuals. The EU has developed the European Credit Transfer System for VET (ECVET) in this context. ECVET is compatible with the ECTS credit system for the higher education sector (and probably compatible with the credit system used in the UMAP programme in Asia which is very similar to ECTS). EUROPASS (including the Diploma Supplement) is also an instrument to encourage mobility and lifelong learning in Europe. It consists of several documents and aims to help citizens make their qualifications and skills easily understood. One European country suggested the creation of a similar tool for Asian countries. The same country proposed to install a committee which will discuss ways of implementing a common credit system (like ECTS).

V. Concluding remarks

The German chair would like to express its sincere gratitude to all ASEM partners who prepared a national report or shared with us their rich experience in the field of education and their views on future EU-Asia higher education cooperation during the Senior Officials Meeting in Bonn. As the executive summary highlights only some important aspects of the national reports, it is highly recommended to take a closer look at the full version of the reports which will be sent to the delegations one week before the conference. Special attention should be given to the examples of good practice mentioned by several countries.

Bonn, 15 April 2008