ASEM13 - PHNOM PENH - CAMBODIA

The Way Forward on ASEM Connectivity

Pursuant to the Leaders' decision at the 12th ASEM Summit, that further work on connectivity should be pursued in the framework of the future Senior Officials Meetings based on the *ASEM Pathfinder Group on Connectivity*'s **(APGC)** final report, it is proposed that ASEM's Regional Coordinators, working with ASEM's SOM leaders, could facilitate the exchange of information and improve forward planning of ASEM-wide Connectivity activities.

Background

1 ASEM has taken pride in involving its various stakeholders in activities that promote dialogue and cooperation to build on its political, economic and socio-cultural pillars. ASEM's unique and informal process has allowed it to achieve considerable progress in the field of connectivity in past years, namely – a definition of ASEM connectivity, and *ASEM Tangible Areas of Cooperation in the Field of Connectivity (TACCs)* – without creating any new formal structures or decision-making procedures.

2 ASEM connectivity activities rely on existing national sectoral structures such as foreign affairs, economic, transport, digital, culture, finance, environment, energy, labour and employment, and education, and the use of thematic ASEM ministerial meetings, preparatory SOMs, Directors General (DG) meetings. Connectivity activities also include those undertaken under the umbrella of Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF) whose projects should be closely linked with ASEM activities.

3 Specifically, on the sectoral processes, it is important to acknowledge that the relevant expertise and competence lie with the line Ministries. Accordingly, SOM discussions on sectoral activities have added value to the ASEM process**.**

4 Due to the crosscutting nature of ASEM Connectivity, communication and timely information sharing are critical to effective implementation. It is important to refer to key guidance given by ASEM Leaders and relevant Ministers, as set out in the

outcome documents coming from ASEM Summits and Ministerial Meetings. This would help to ensure relevance and encourage broad participation of Partners from both Asia and Europe. It could also help prevent the duplication of efforts, which in turn would support better prioritisation of ASEM partners' resources. It would also improve ASEM's visibility in the long run, including the link between ASEM connectivity and sustainable development for achieving the 2030 Agenda.

Recommendations

5 To this end, and in line with relevant ASEM documents, it is recommended that ASEM partners could do the following, bearing in mind that this would be on a voluntary basis, and taking into consideration partners' unique circumstances:

Updating of contact lists for sectoral events/activities

a) ASEM partners, in particular those planning to convene sectoral meetings, are encouraged to update proactively their Regional Coordinators and the SOM network on the contact details of their respective Asian and European co-organisers' contact points for a particular event/activity. This information would then be shared with ASEF for compilation and for regular circulation to all ASEM Partners.

Information sharing on connectivity activities

b) To ensure better planning of ASEM connectivity activities, ASEM partners are invited to use the relevant standard ASEM template or concept note to share information in advance of their connectivity activity.

c) The template could include the objective of the proposed activity; the rationale/justification relating to key guidance given by ASEM Leaders and relevant Ministers as per the definition of ASEM Connectivity and the Areas of Focus outlined in the APGC Final Report; the co-organisers from Asia and Europe; a rough outline of the content; location; timing and the expected outcomes.

d) The completed template should be circulated again to all ASEM partners for information through the Contact Points and SOM network**.** ASEM partners interested in collaborating on activities may wish to get in touch with the co-organisers. The co-organisers could likewise update all ASEM partners, either directly through the Contact Point and SOM network or through the Regional

Coordinators, the outcome of the ASEM connectivity activities that they organized.

e) The proposed activity shall follow the procedures and guidelines as outlined in Paragraph 25 of the Asia-Europe Cooperation Framework (AECF)[1] in order to be included in the ASEM work programme.

ASEM Senior Official Meetings

f) Connectivity should be mainstreamed into all relevant ASEM activities, and be inserted as an agenda item in the SOM agenda. The scope of discussions will revolve around the elements agreed as per the definition of ASEM Connectivity.

g) Regional Coordinators should engage the ASEM Senior Officials in their respective regions to obtain a list of envisaged ASEM connectivity events/activities already shared by the co-organisers through the relevant sectoral processes, and submit the list to the Senior Officials for review in preparation for the first SOM of a given year. This will allow ASEM SOM Leaders to have a better overview of the status of ASEM connectivity activities across the board.

h) The focus of ASEM SOM Leaders will be on addressing policy questions and guiding implementation in a balanced manner.

ASEM Infoboard

i) Publicity for ASEM connectivity initiatives can be strengthened through ASEM Infoboard as outlined under Item 5 of "Recommendations for ASEM Working

[1] To be included in the ASEM work programme, any proposed ASEM initiative should have the support of all ASEM partners, and should be in line with the principles, objectives and priorities set out in this AECF. In addition, any proposed ASEM initiative should meet the following guidelines :
• the proposed initiative should be of mutual benefit, and must receive the full consensus of all ASEM partners;
• it should contribute to advance the overall objectives and perspectives of the ASEM process;
• the participation of a large number of ASEM partners must be ensured;
• the proposal should clearly state goals, prime actors (government, business, civil society), target audience, likely cost, and possible means of finance;
• duplication with existing ASEM initiatives should be avoided;
• initiatives should, where suitable, have a counterpart Asian and European partner;
• participation will be open to ASEM partners only, though SOM may, on a case-by case basis and with the consensus of all ASEM partners, agree to extend an invitation to a non-ASEM country as well as appropriate international organizations and institutions to take part in a specific event;
• the activity must receive SOM's blessing and its results reported to the ASEM SOM.

Methods" document[2]. The relevant co-organisers can proactively inform ASEF to update the ASEM Infoboard accordingly.

In conclusion, putting in place this practice of enhanced engagement between ASEM SOM Leaders and existing sectoral mechanisms will promote inclusiveness, sufficient preparation time and awareness of existing and planned projects amongst ASEM stakeholders and create more visibility of ASEM. There will be no need for any new institutionalized mechanisms to coordinate ASEM Connectivity.

[2] Publicity for endorsed initiatives should be strengthened through ASEM Infoboard, i.e. publicizing the initiative on the ASEM website before its implementation. Information of initiatives held in the past should be gathered, organized and compiled so that it can be widely shared. This process should be carried out by the ASEM Infoboard.