

Chairman's Statement of the Asia-Europe Meeting Bangkok, 2 March 1996

I. Towards a Common Vision for Asia and Europe

1. The inaugural Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) was held in Bangkok on 1-2 March 1996 and attended by the Heads of State and Government from the Asian nations and fifteen European nations with the Head of Government of Italy acting also as President of the Council of the European Union, and the President of the European Commission. The Heads were accompanied by their Foreign Ministers, Members of the Commission and other Ministers. This historic Meeting was chaired by the Prime Minister of Thailand.
2. The Heads of State and Government and the President of the European Commission had an audience with Their Majesties King Bhumibol Adulyadej and Queen Sirikit at the Ananta Samakhom Throne Hall on 1 March 1996.
3. The Meeting discussed a wide range of issues and provided the opportunity for the Heads to share their concerns and aspirations, and develop a common vision of the future. The Meeting recognised the need to strive for a common goal of maintaining and enhancing peace and stability, as well as creating conditions conducive for economic and social development. To this end, the Meeting forged a new comprehensive Asia-Europe Partnership for Greater Growth. This partnership aims at strengthening links between Asia and Europe thereby contributing to peace, global stability and prosperity. In this connection, the Meeting underscored the importance of both Asia and Europe maintaining dialogue with other regions.
4. The Meeting recognised that an important goal of this partnership is for both Asia and Europe to share the responsibilities in building greater understanding between the peoples of both regions through closer people-to-people contacts. Strengthened dialogue on an equal basis between Asia and Europe in a spirit of cooperation and through the sharing of perceptions on a wide range of issues would enhance mutual understanding and benefit both regions. The dialogue will, in view of the global implications of the major regional integrations, also help ensure that such integrations benefit the international community as a whole.

II. Fostering Political Dialogue

5. The Meeting of the Heads from Asia and Europe reflects their common desire to strengthen political dialogue between Asia and Europe. Countries of Asia and Europe should highlight and expand common ground, enhance understanding and friendship, and promote and deepen cooperation. The dialogue among the participating countries should be conducted on the basis of mutual respect, equality, promotion of fundamental rights and, in accordance with the rules of international law and obligations, non-intervention, whether direct or indirect, in each other's internal affairs. The Heads reviewed political and security situations in both regions and underlined the importance of support for international initiatives to solve outstanding problems. The Meetings also agreed to promote intellectual exchanges between the two regions in the context of fostering political dialogue.
6. The Meeting agreed on the importance of enhancing the already existing dialogues between Asia and Europe on general security issues and in particular on confidence-building. Many Asian countries have established regular dialogue with the European Union. The European Union and the Asian nations have also engaged in discussions on political matters at such fora as the ASEAN-EU Dialogue, the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and the ASEAN Post Ministerial Conferences (PMC).
7. The Meeting reaffirmed its strong commitment to the United Nations Charter, the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, to the 1986 Declaration on the Right to Development, the 1992 Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, the 1993 Declaration of Vienna and Programme of Action of the World Conference on Human Rights, the 1994 Cairo Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development, the 1995 Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development and Programme of Action, and to the 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action for the Fourth World Conference on Women. The Meeting also agreed to cooperate in promoting the effective reform and greater democratisation of the UN system, including inter alia the issues concerning the Security Council, the General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council and UN finances, with a view to reinforcing its pre-eminent role in maintaining and promoting international peace and security and sustainable development. In this connection, the Meeting agreed to the

initiation of a dialogue between representatives of participating nations of the ASEM in New York to consider the vital question of the UN reform.

8. The Meeting agreed on the importance of strengthening global initiatives on arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and reaffirmed that Asian and European countries will enhance cooperation in these fields. The Meeting therefore attached particular importance to the early conclusion of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty in 1996. The Meeting noted that, in their efforts to contribute to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) regime, the ten Southeast Asian countries have concluded the Southeast Asia Nuclear Weapon-Free Zone (SEANWFZ) Treaty in Bangkok in December 1995. The Leaders reiterated their determination to pursue systematic and progressive efforts to reduce nuclear weapons globally with the ultimate goal of eliminating those weapons and of general and complete disarmament under strict and effective international controls. The Meeting emphasised its commitment to the non-proliferation and prohibition of biological and chemical weapons, in particular to the early entry into force of the Chemical Weapons Convention. The Meeting supported efforts in the Conference on Disarmament to start negotiations on a fissile material cut-off on the basis of the agreed mandate.

III. Reinforcing Economic Cooperation

9. The Meeting recognised the great potential for synergy between Asia and Europe on account of the economic dynamism and diversity of the two regions. Asia's emergence as an immense market has spawned great demand for consumer goods, capital equipment, financing and infrastructure. Europe, on the other hand, is a major market in the world for goods, investments and services, even more so since the completion of the Single Market. Opportunities thus exist for both regions to expand the market for goods, capital equipment and infrastructure development projects, and to increase the flows of capital, expertise and technology.
10. The Meeting recognised that the growing economic links between the two regions form the basis for a strong partnership between Asia and Europe. To further strengthen this partnership, the Meeting expressed its resolve to generate greater two-way trade and investment flows between Asia and Europe. Such a partnership should be based on the common commitment to market economy, open multilateral trading system, non-discriminatory liberalisation and open regionalism. The Meeting stressed that any regional integration and cooperation should be WTO consistent and outward looking.
11. The Meeting agreed that the ASEM process should complement and reinforce efforts to strengthen the open and rules-based trading system embodied in the WTO. Full participation in the WTO by ASEM countries will strengthen the organisation. Recognising the importance of the first WTO Ministerial Conference to be held in Singapore in December 1996, the Meeting agreed that the participants from Asia and Europe will work closely together towards the success of the WTO. The Meeting agreed that a priority facing the WTO was how to ensure full implementation of commitments made in the Uruguay Round. Participants also underlined the urgent need to bring unfinished Uruguay Round negotiations to successful conclusions and to pursue the so called built-in-agenda, agreed to at Marrakesh. Asian and European participants will consult closely on new issues for the WTO agenda.
12. To promote greater trade and investment between Asia and Europe, the Meeting agreed to undertake facilitation and liberalisation measures involving the simplification and improvement of customs procedures, and standards conformance. ASEM will also aim for the reduction of trade barriers to avoid trade distortion and create better market access thus encouraging greater trade flows between Asia and Europe. The Meeting underscored the urgent need to increase European investments in Asia from their present low levels, as well as to encourage Asian investments in Europe.
13. The Meeting decided to ask senior officials to convene an informal meeting at an early opportunity on ways to promote economic cooperation and in particular liberalisation and facilitation of trade and investment. Initial emphasis should be placed on the WTO issues indicated above, but officials should also try to identify other measures that could be taken by ASEM countries in order to facilitate trade and investment. Officials may also look into how training programmes, economic cooperation and technical assistance could be further intensified in order to facilitate trade and investment.
14. The Meeting agreed to encourage the business and private sectors, including small and medium sized enterprises of the two regions, to strengthen their cooperation with one another and contribute towards increasing trade and investment between Asia and Europe. For this purpose, the Meeting agreed to establish in due course an Asia-Europe Business Forum.

IV. Promoting Cooperation in Other Areas

15. The Meeting agreed that intensified science and technology cross-flows between Asia and Europe, especially in priority driving sectors such as agriculture, information and communication technology, energy and transport, are important for strengthening the economic links between the two regions. The

Meeting expressed the view that cooperation in the field of human resources development constitutes an important component of the economic cooperation between Asia and Europe. The Meeting also supported the strengthening of cooperation on all levels of education and vocational and management training. The Meeting also stressed the need to improve development cooperation between the two regions, giving priority to poverty alleviation, promoting the role of women and cooperating in the public health sector, including the strengthening of global efforts to combat AIDS and to promote AIDS prevention. The Meeting further agreed that the two regions should promote a dialogue within the ASEM on development cooperation with other regions, where feasible, sharing their respective experiences in this area.

16. The Meeting acknowledged the importance of addressing environmental issues such as global warming, protection of water resources, deforestation and desertification, bio-diversity of species, marine environment protection and agreed that mutually beneficial cooperation should be undertaken in this field including the transfer of environmentally sound technology to promote sustainable development. The Meeting agreed to strengthen cooperation between the two regions to deal with the illicit drug trade, money laundering, terrorism and other international crimes, including exploitation of illegal immigration, both bilaterally and through existing multilateral initiatives.
17. The Meeting called for the strengthening of cultural links between Asia and Europe, particularly the fostering of closer people-to-people contacts, which is indispensable to the promotion of greater awareness and understanding between the peoples of both regions. The Meeting emphasised that these new links between Asia and Europe should help overcome misperceptions that may exist between the two regions, and could be further reinforced through promoting cultural, artistic, educational activities and exchanges involving particularly youth and students, and tourism between the two sides. In this respect, the Meeting was informed about the results of the Europe-Asia Forum on culture, values and technology, recently held in Venice. The Meeting also encouraged cooperation in the preservation of cultural heritage.

V. Future Course of ASEM

18. The Meeting regarded the ASEM as a useful process for promoting further cooperation between Asia and Europe. The Meeting recognised that the ASEM process needed to be open and evolutionary. The Meeting agreed that inter-sessional activities are necessary although they need not be institutionalised. The Meeting further agreed that follow-up actions to be undertaken jointly by the participants to the ASEM will be based on consensus. The Meeting also agreed to facilitate cooperation between Asian and European business leaders.
19. The Meeting agreed to the following follow-up measures :
 - The Foreign Ministers and the Senior Officials' Meeting in charge of the First ASEM would coordinate and prepare for the Second ASEM on the basis of the result of the First ASEM. In this connection, a Foreign Ministers' Meeting would be held in 1997.
 - An Economic Ministers' Meeting would be held in Japan in 1997 to discuss relevant economic issues;
 - An Informal Senior Officials' meeting would be held in Brussels in July 1996 on ways to promote economic cooperation between the two regions, and in particular liberalisation and facilitation of trade and investments, with an initial emphasis on WTO issues;
 - A Meeting of Government and Private Sector Working Group would be convened in Thailand to draw up within six months an Asia-Europe Investment Promotion Action Plan to promote greater cross-flows of investment between Asia and Europe. Such a group could also study the current status of and potential for investment between Asia and Europe and recommend measures to be taken in this regard;
 - An Asia-Europe Business Forum would hold its inaugural meeting in France in 1996 and the next meeting in Thailand. At this Forum, Senior Officials would consider the appropriate modalities for fostering greater cooperation between the business and private sectors of the two regions. In this connection, a business conference would be held in 1997;
 - Malaysia would act as coordinator for the study of integrating a trans-Asian railway network (commencing initially with the railway project of the Mekong Basin Development) and also the study of the subsequent possible integration of this railway network with the trans-European railway network;
 - The establishment in Thailand of an Asia-Europe Environmental Technology Centre to undertake research and development activities as well as provide policy guidance to both regions' governments and peoples;
 - An Asia-Europe Foundation would be set up in Singapore with contribution from Asian and European countries, to promote exchanges between think-tanks, peoples and cultural groups. In this connection, Singapore has offered to contribute US\$ 1 million to seed this foundation;
 - An Asia-Europe University Programme would be started to foster exchanges of students and scholars with a view to developing better understanding of the cultures, histories and business practices of both regions;

- Intellectual exchanges between Asia and Europe through the holding of seminars and symposia on international and regional issues and the establishment of networks amongst the appropriate think-tanks from both regions;
- Objective studies on the economic synergy between Asia and Europe to provide future prospects and a solid basis for developing effective policy measures;
- Youth exchange programmes of mini "Davos-type" to strengthen cultural links and the mutual understanding between the two regions.

The Meeting also agreed to consider the following :

- A Meeting of Finance Ministers;
 - An Asia-Europe Cooperation Framework which will spell out the principles and mechanisms for long-term Asia-Europe cooperation in political, economic, social and other areas;
 - The establishment of a study group on enhancing technological exchanges and cooperation, particularly in the areas of agriculture, environmental protection, and technological upgrading and improvement of enterprises;
 - The development of closer cooperation among customs authorities in Asia and Europe in the areas of customs procedure and prevention of illicit drug trade;
 - Cooperation in the development of the Mekong River Basin.
20. The Meeting agreed to hold the Second ASEM in two years' time in the United Kingdom and the Third ASEM in the Republic of Korea in the year 2000.