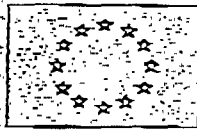


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Technical Unit for Asia

Brussels, October 31, 1995.
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"EUROPE-ASIA FORUM"
VENICE
FOUNDATION CINI JANUARY 18 - 19, 1996

BACKGROUND PAPER

EUROPE-ASIA FORUM: THE CONTEXT

While the share of Asian world trade in the global market is expanding tremendously, the intensity of the mutual understanding and, more generally, of the relations between Europe and Asia is, so far, weak.

From a cultural perspective, for example, for each Asian student educated in Europe, four are educated in the USA while a rather limited number of European professors spend a part of their academic career in Asian universities.

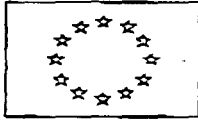
Asia still remains a marginal destination for European investors: it represents a mere 2,6% of their investments in stocks.

As far as trade is concerned, Europe accounted for nearly 25% in value of imports into Asia in 1970 but only 15% in 1992. In addition to that, the present level of the political dialogue has not yet translated the economic growth of the most dynamic Asian countries into political influence on the world scene.

Moreover, the findings of a survey (1) on "The image of Europe and the European Union in South and East Asia" indicate that the European Union suffers from a poor image in Asia:

"Europe is considered by many (Asian) to be a rather distant continent, both geographically and influentially, particularly in comparison to the USA and Japan which have a much higher profile".

(1) The survey, financed by the European Commission, was carried out among Asian elites in July 1994 by BBC Int.



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PAGES	5 (this cover sheet included)		

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MESSAGE
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Against this background, a reshaping and strengthening of the Europe-Asia relationship is today an urgent priority. It can be initiated by the public system, the European Union, but it needs to be implemented by the dynamic and committed European and Asian civil society.

"Towards a new Asia strategy" approved by the European Council at Essen in December 1994 and by the European Parliament in summer 1995 has been the first important step towards this direction. The strategy has two main orientations:

- raise the EU's profile in Asia and enhance mutual understanding;
- strengthen the EU's economic presence in the region.

Similar considerations have led the ASEAN leaders to propose the first Asia - Europe Meeting between the EU and Asian Heads of State and Government which will take place in March 1996 in Bangkok. It is important to underline that the meeting itself will be a major step since the presence of the European and Asian leaders is an indication of their respective interest in strengthening Europe-Asia relations. A new impetus to the relations between the two regions in the direction of a true partnership is expected as a follow-up.

In order to prepare this major event and to increase mutual understanding, the European Commission is organising the "EUROPE - ASIA FORUM" which will hopefully be the first of a series of highlevel consultative meetings focused on European and Asian civil society.

The Forum aims to:

- demystify certain perceptions prevailing in relation to Europe and Asia;
- avoid clichés;
- attempt to bring the two continents closer;
- and identify conditions on the basis of which future commitments between the two regions can flourish.

ORGANISATION

The Forum will be organised at the prestigious Cini Foundation in Venice with the support of the Italian Presidency and the City of Venice. The Forum will see the participation of the Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs - Mrs. Sussana Agnelli, a senior representative of the European Parliament, the Vice Presidents of the European Commission - Mr. Manuel Marin and Sir Leon Brittan, and the Mayor of Venice - Mr. Massimo Cacciari.

The debates will start in a plenary session the 18 January, and will divide into 5 working groups on 19 January. The following moderators have been identified to chair the working groups (comprising 15 to 20 persons each).

Working groups

Moderator

- | | |
|---|--|
| - 1/ Past, present and future of Europe-Asia technology exchange | To be confirmed |
| - 2/ Conflict resolution in Asia: exception or example? | Ms Shobana Bhartia, Executive Director of the Hindustan Times |
| - 3/ Unity and diversity of Asia: a comparative geopolitical approach | Mr Gianfranco Zoppas, President of IRCA Cie |
| - 4/ Understanding Asian values | Giles Merritt, Director Forum Europe |
| - 5/ Religions in relation to progress | Edgar Morin, Directeur of CETSAM (Centre d'Etudes Interdisciplinaire, Sociologie, Anthropologie, Histoire) |

In each case, the theme will be introduced by an "ad hoc" reference paper which will be presented by leading European research institutes (see page 4).

THE PARTICIPANTS

Eighty highly esteemed experts from Europe and Asia will take part in the Forum. They have been invited on account of their expertise, professional background and personal interest in relation to the 5 themes which will be debated during the working groups. A careful selection has been made in order to have a balanced participation of representatives from the business community, from academic circles and from civil society. Moreover, a specific attention has been paid to ensure a balanced participation from the different Asian and European countries.

Major European and Asian media will cover the Forum in order to ensure that the content of the discussions will benefit European and Asian decision-makers and also have an impact on a larger public.

THE FIVE THEMES

The five themes debated by the working groups have been selected on the basis of their importance in the relations between Europe and Asia. They represent some of the most common clichés and areas of possible misunderstanding between the two regions.

1. *Past, present and future of Europe / Asia technology exchange:* the theme will identify long term trends of technology exchange, first from Asia to Europe, then from Europe to Asia, and the actual flows of exchanges between the two regions with the perspective of mutual benefit.
2. *Conflict resolution in Asia: exception or example?:* the aim is to analyse how specific Asian and European ways of problem-solving and decision-making persist in a context of rapid globalisation and to compare Asian and European modes of governance for a mutual benefit.
3. *Unity and diversity of Asia : a geopolitical approach:* even if the name "Asia" may be an external label, a certain unity of Asia nevertheless exists; the objective is to identify and specify common cultural denominators, using a geopolitical approach.
4. *Understanding Asian values:* the objective is to encourage debate about differences and complementarities which may exist between Asian and European systems of value, identify their similarities and assess their sustainability within the context of an emerging global cultural framework.
5. *Religions in relation to progress:* the objective is to present the role of religions in the context of EU-Asia dialogue in relation to progress, morality as well as an economic and social dynamic factor.

The debates on these five themes will take place on the basis of reference papers which are being prepared by teams composed of Asian and European experts mobilised by five European Centres:

<i>Themes</i>	<i>Research Directors</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>European Centres</i>
1	Claudio Leone	Director	Mondimpresa
2	François Godement	Senior Research Fellow	IFRI (Institut Français de relations Internationales)
3	Michel Foucher	Director	Observatoire Européen de Géopolitique
4	Jacques Pelkmans	Research Director	European Institute for South and South-East Asian Studies
5	Kristofer Schipper	Head Professor	International Institute for Asian Studies

The conclusions of the workshops will be presented by the moderators in the plenary session on the third day and will be the basis for the preparation of the proceedings of the Forum.

