

Beat: Politics

European Commission - Asia-Europe Meeting

Opening remarks by President Barroso

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USPA NEWS - José Manuel Durãõ Barroso
President of the European Commission
Opening remarks by President Barroso at the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM)
10th Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) - Milan, 16 October 2014
European Commission

Ladies and gentlemen,

Europe and Asia were closely linked in the past and I'm sure they will remain so in the future. Much in our respective civilisations can be attributed to ancient economic, political and cultural interactions. So, our inter-dependence is not new. Now, however, the speed of inter-action is different. We have moved from slow-motion to top gear. We are living through a period of accelerated transformation. And, one of the most impressive transformations of this period is the remarkable economic and political rise of Asia. To this Europe has responded by intensifying our relations with the whole continent.

The ASEM process embodies this commitment and is the proof that we matter to each other.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Together, ASEM countries "" and I would like to warmly welcome our two new partners, Croatia and Kazakhstan - represent half of the world's GDP, more than 60% of the world's population and around 60% of global trade. This entails great opportunities for the ASEM process but also great responsibilities for Europe and Asia. For each of us, wealth, competitiveness and creativity all depend on our openness to each other. All of us must be willing to adapt, connect and open up to global opportunities. But, this is also a world of global challenges. Climate change, terrorism and pandemics know no borders. That is the reason why we all must be willing to contribute to cooperative solutions.

Regional integration and cooperation can be key drivers for shared stability and prosperity. And, that is also why we, Europeans and Asians have to connect better our two continents in order to reflect better this growing interdependence. We have to do it economically, by strengthening trade and investment, making it easier to move goods, services and people and making progress on our bilateral and multilateral trade agenda. I believe this is very important, because as we know, at the moment we are meeting, there are some doubts about the prospects for global growth. I believe we all need to give our contribution to global sustainable growth.

Some have to take measures in terms of supply side initiatives, others in terms of demand-driven policies. All, I believe, need to commit to reforms and to openness.

The EU's engagement with the Asian region has never been stronger. In 2011 we concluded the first ground-breaking free trade agreement with South Korea. We have also finished negotiations with Singapore, the first of several such negotiations with ASEAN countries. Talks are well advanced with Vietnam and underway with Malaysia and Thailand. Our aim is that these agreements serve as building blocks for a broader deal with ASEAN as a whole.

And let me say that we very much support ASEAN integration and are looking forward to an upgraded strategic partnership between the European Union and ASEAN.

We are also in negotiations with India where we look forward to further progress. Furthermore, we are negotiating a free trade agreement with Japan, one of the EU's most important trading partners.

China is our main trading partner in the region and we are now well into a negotiation to improve both access and protection for investments in both directions. Once concluded, all these agreements will contribute to further shared prosperity in both Europe and Asia.

But, in the end any open economy depends not only on an open market but also on adequate global governance.

This is also part of how we can connect with each other. We all have an interest in playing by the rules of a multilateral global order, within a fair and rules-based international framework.

For all our objectives to be attained, I believe it is essential to reinvent our economies in a cleaner, greener, and more efficient manner. We need to reach a global agreement to fight climate change in the Paris Conference next year. This will be a test case for international leadership. We need to deliver.

It is also essential to create a stable environment by peacefully settling disputes in accordance with international norms and principles.

We want to be your partners in this process because history has taught us that security is indivisible. From Aceh to Mindanao and Myanmar we have proven we are a committed and reliable partner in supporting our Asian partners in consolidating peace and promoting reforms.

And it is also essential to empower our people by respecting everyone's dignity and giving everyone a chance to realise his or her potential.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Ultimately, all this cuts across the issues that are at the heart of our cooperation.

The European Union is ready to support EU-Asia cooperation through concrete financial support. We have allocated for the next financial period (2014-2020) 6.683 billion euros for cooperation with Asia. This represents an increase of more than 1 billion euros compared with the previous period. And we will concentrate this support in the countries more in need.

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Moreover let's not forget that enhanced connectivity will happen not only through economic and political bonds but also through people-to-people connections, building on the many ties and multiple exchanges that already link Asians and Europeans.

Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

These last 10 years I could witness directly how important our cooperation and the ASEM process have become. If you compare how was the relationship between Asia and Europe in economic, trade and investment terms and how it is now, what a formidable progress. But not only in economic terms, also in political exchanges "" the quality, the density, the openness of our political dialogue has greatly improved. So, I really believe that building on the progress of these years we can build an even better future.

I thank you for your attention.

José Manuel Durão Barroso
President of the European Commission

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