

# Chair's Minutes

## of the Senior Officials Meeting (SOM) in Bonn, 10/11 March 2008 in preparation of the ASEM Conference of Ministers responsible for Education in Berlin, 5/6 May 2008

Upon invitation of the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research the Senior Officials of ASEM countries met in Bonn on 10/11 March in order to prepare the first ASEM Conference of Ministers responsible for Education in Berlin on 5/6 May 2008. At the meeting in Bonn some 50 representatives of 31 ASEM countries and the European Commission were present.

In his welcome address, Dr. Walter Mönig, Deputy General Director in the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research, stressed the importance of education for Asia and Europe and educational cooperation between both regions in an ever-globalizing world. He also pointed out that the first ASEM ministerial conference focused on aspects of higher education will be an excellent opportunity to establish a structured dialogue between Asia and Europe and to set new course for closer and sustainable cooperation between both regions in the future. As an important objective of the SOM, Dr. Mönig underlined the need to identify main topics to be discussed during the ministerial conference in Berlin.

The German SOM chair, Susanne Burger from the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research, welcomed the ASEM delegations and emphasized that the Berlin conference could convey a message to the next ASEM summit in Beijing in October 2008 and give valuable input to the second ministerial conference on education in 2009. The Berlin results also could be taken into consideration by the ASEM Rectors' Conferences during their meeting in Berlin in October 2008.

During the Senior Officials Meeting three topics have been discussed:

### 1. Organisational aspects of the Berlin conference

The SOM chair presented the draft conference programme (see attachement) and explained that

- delegations should be comprised of not more than 3 representatives (including the head of delegation)
- delegations are kindly asked to nominate their delegates as soon as possible
- the ministerial meeting will take place in the InterConti Hotel in Berlin
- according to the ASEM format, accommodation and travel costs have to be covered by the delegations
- embassies are asked to provide VIP services to their delegations in Berlin
- during the ministerial meeting only the head of delegation will have the right to speak
- there are opportunities for bilateral meetings between heads of delegations during the conference (see draft programme). Delegations

are asked to announce their wishes for such bilateral talks well before the conference to the conference organizers.

- Senior officials will have the opportunity to meet with the German chair on Sunday, 4 May (10.00 h) to discuss the draft chair's conclusions.
- delegations already present on Sunday, 4 May are invited to participate in a sightseeing boat tour of Berlin in the afternoon.
- in the morning of 5 May (10.00 h) two alternative visits to the Freie Universität Berlin (one of Germany's universities of excellence) or to Siemens (a well-known company with international focus and worldwide commitment) are offered. Delegations are asked to communicate their choices to the conference organizers before the conference.
- in the evening of 5 May the conference dinner for the delegations will take place at the TELEKOM Berlin. Ambassadors of the ASEM countries will be invited to participate by the German chair in early April.
- at the Press Conference on 6 May only the German chair and the cosponsors of the conference will speak.
- there will be no official post-conference programme for the delegations. However, the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) will invite the delegations to a reception in the afternoon of 6 May in Berlin.

## **2. Topics of the Berlin conference**

In January 2008, the German chair suggested two main topics (including a number of sub-topics) for the ministerial conference in Berlin and drafted two concept papers on "Aspects of EU-Asia higher education cooperation" and on "Education and the labour market" which were sent out to the ASEM countries for comments and providing a stocktaking report on the basis of the questions raised in the papers. The SOM chair thanked the delegations who had already reacted to the two papers in writing and invited the delegations to send their stocktaking reports until the end of March 2008. The reports, together with an executive summary, will be presented by the German chair to the Ministers in Berlin.

Dr. Siegbert Wuttig (DAAD) summarized the main ideas of the concept papers and asked the delegations for comments. The discussion of the papers made clear that all delegations in principle agreed on the two main topics proposed by the German chair. However, with regard to the various sub-topics of the two main topics there was consensus to concentrate on a few points only.

It was agreed to discuss the following sub-topics in the 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 between 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

The delegations' comments on these sub-topics are summarized below:

Sub-topics 1a and 1b:

- People-to-people-exchange and structural cooperation are highly relevant to strengthen the academic relations between Asia and Europe and should be high on the agenda of the Berlin conference. In both regions, there are already quite a number of national, bilateral, regional and international exchange programmes and cooperation activities (e.g. ASEM DUO, Asia Link, ERASMUS Mundus, Marie Curie, UMAP) in place, although not very well known in many cases. Given the size of the regions, however, much remains to be done in the fields of university mobility and academic cooperation. At political level, the European Bologna Process may be a helpful in that respect. In its global dimension the Bologna Process aims at strengthening cooperation based on partnership and intensifying political dialogue with countries in other parts of the world. In some contributions it was suggested that a structure similar to the European Higher Education Area under the Bologna Process could be established in Asia in order to promote further exchanges between the EU and Asia.
- Obstacles to mobility (e.g. funding, foreign language skills, visa, recognition of degrees and transfer of credits) and possible solutions should be considered.
- Imbalances of exchanges between both regions should be addressed.
- Examples of good practice for transnational structural cooperation (including joint programmes, joint research projects, “off-shore” activities and elearning ) could serve as models for further development of EU-Asia cooperation.
- Quality assurance for ensuring high-quality study and research opportunities has been considered important to improving the attractiveness of higher education institutions and to attracting the best “brains”. OECD’s *Guidelines for Quality provisions in cross-border education* mentioned also by the European Education Ministers in their London Communiqué of 2007 could be taken into consideration as reference document when it comes to quality assurance in transnational cooperation between Asia and Europe.
- More information on ASEM countries, their universities, study and research opportunities (including courses taught in English) as well as scholarship schemes is imperative for a better visibility of the higher education systems and institutions in both regions. The DEEP database of ASEF and the ERA-MORE Network (Marie Curie) were mentioned as valuable tools in this context. Joint education fairs and marketing activities also could be taken into consideration.
- Sub-topics 2a and 2b:
- Education-industry cooperation as well as lifelong learning and employability are seen as the most relevant sub-topics to be discussed in the second plenary session of the Berlin conference. Although the discussion will focus on higher education, reference to vocational education also should be made, especially with regard to lifelong learning and employability.

- 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 pivotal 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 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 university graduates. Internships and joint research projects are meant to be important elements for improving industry-academia cooperation. The implementation of technology parks and technology transfer centres to transfer R&D results to industry as well as the creation of career offices helping graduates to smoothly enter the labour market also could be taken into consideration.
- To further improve cooperation with industry, the dialogue between academia and the world of work has to be intensified. The University-Business Forum launched by the European Commission in 2008 was mentioned as a promising example. ASEM countries are asked to participate in collaborative education and research projects and to encourage their industries to offer practical training for qualified university students and staff.
- In view of demographic changes and new challenges arising from knowledge-based economies and globalization, lifelong learning and employability are high on the political agenda (e.g. OECD, Bologna Process) 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. The development of Qualifications Frameworks including the description of learning outcomes and competences was mentioned as an important field of future dialogue and cooperation. The ASEM Education and Research Hub for Lifelong Learning including 18 universities from Asia and Europe could be used to strengthen the exchange of knowledge and experience between both regions in the field of lifelong learning.

### **3. Possible key messages of the ASEM Education Ministers**

After a presentation on ASEM DUO given by the Korean delegate, the SOM chair invited the delegations to discuss possible key messages of the ministerial conference in Berlin. It was suggested that Ministers could:

- underline the importance of EU-Asia education cooperation for a more comprehensive and sustainable partnership of both regions and acknowledge the need for enhancing dialogue and deepening cooperation in fields of common interest (such as mobility, structural cooperation, attractiveness, lifelong learning and employability).
- initiate a structured dialogue (including stakeholders at all levels) and a regular exchange of experiences on issues related to the main topics of the conference.

- stress the need to increase university mobility, remove obstacles to mobility (e.g. visa, recognition) and promote structural academic cooperation between Asia and Europe; regarding obstacles to mobility Ministers could propose a ASEM working group to identify existing challenges and possible solutions.
- suggest to enhance the visibility and attractiveness of higher education systems and institutions of both regions by providing more and better information and offering high-quality education .
- acknowledge the importance of higher education and vocational training for the development of competitive knowledge-based societies and underline the pivotal role of education-industry cooperation and lifelong learning for employability.
- invite higher education institutions and industry to set up dialogue platforms, to establish partnerships and to intensify cooperation (e.g. developing of curricula, joint research projects, recognition of prior learning).

### **Road Map for preparing the Berlin Conference**

At the end of the Senior Officials Meeting the SOM chair summarized important dates and tasks relevant for the preparation of the ministerial conference in Berlin:

- (1) 20 March 2008: Sending out of SOM minutes to the ASEM delegations by SOM chair
- (2) 31 March 2008: ASEM delegations are asked to prepare their stock-taking reports on the basis of the questions raised in the two concept papers of the German chair and send their reports to the German conference organizers until 31 March 2008 at the latest. The reports should include examples of good practice related to the conference topics.
- (3) First week of April 2008: Sending out of invitation letters to ASEM ambassadors for the conference dinner on 5 May 2008 by the German chair.
- (4) 10 April 2008: Sending out of draft chair conclusions to the ASEM delegations by the German chair.
- (5) 21 April 2008: Sending out of the stock-taking reports received (including an executive summary) to ASEM delegations by the German chair.
- (6) 4 May 2008: SOM meeting at 10.00 h in the InterConti Hotel Berlin for discussion of the draft chair's conclusions.

The SOM chair thanked all delegates for their valuable contributions and the fruitful discussions during the meeting helping to prepare an interesting and forward-looking ministerial conference in Berlin.

Bonn, 31 March 2008 (final)