

STRENGTHENING THE ASIA-EUROPE PARTNERSHIP

Relevant for: International Relations | Topic: ASEM

On December 15 and December 16, I am chairing ASEM, the “Asia-Europe Meeting”. What might seem to be a rather bureaucratic acronym, actually is a highly relevant event for our continents. I had offered to host this meeting in Madrid when I was still Foreign Minister of Spain and now I will be chairing it as European Union (EU) High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy. It underlines my personal interest in the fast-moving continent that is Asia today.

ASEM brings together 53 partners made up of the 28 EU member states, Norway, Switzerland and the EU, and on the Asia side, 21 countries and the ASEAN secretariat. Together we represent 55% of global trade, 60% of global GDP, 60% of the global population and 75% of global tourism.

Simply bringing countries together does not, of course, guarantee any results. But it creates opportunities. In recent years, ASEM has become increasingly relevant and strategic. This ASEM meeting will be an important opportunity to further strengthen cooperation between Europe and Asia.

There is a clear willingness from ASEM countries to engage on global issues and to take on more responsibility — from supporting sustainable development, to rules-based global trade, to information sharing on cross-border threats, to the prevention or peaceful resolution of conflicts. ASEM has acquired a new rationale and momentum as a key platform to uphold and promote rules-based, multilateral approaches. In the challenging world of today, this kind of cooperation and leadership is imperative.

In recent years, sustainable connectivity has been a key theme of our discussions – and will continue to be so. The same goes for combating climate change. We adopted last week the EU Green Deal and made the ground-breaking commitment to make Europe the first climate-neutral continent by 2050. But our ambition must be global and we need collective action. To safeguard our planet and to promote sustainable development, cooperation with our Asian partners is key.

In addition, we cooperate on the most pressing issues on the international agenda: the situation on the Korean peninsula and in Rakhine State, the West Asia peace process, Iran and the wider region, and efforts to bring peace to Afghanistan — to name just a few. We also work on the need to uphold multilateralism, address security challenges, as well as promote gender equality and women’s empowerment.

During my mandate as High Representative, I will conduct EU foreign policy with realism and a strong sense of partnership. And I want to work closer with our Asian partners on key priorities such as our partnership with Africa, the Western Balkans, finding a solution to the situation in Libya, or a peaceful resolution of the conflict in eastern Ukraine, on Iran and many more.

All of these issues will be discussed at our political meeting. But the real Asia-Europe meeting happens every day: when students from our respective continents swap Europe for Asia, or vice-versa, to study at university; when business transactions take place between European and Asian companies — big or small; when we visit each others’ continents, either as tourists or as friends, to take in the best that Asia and Europe have to offer; and when researchers from our two continents put their minds together to work towards ground-breaking innovation.

At meetings like ASEM we create the environment and the conditions to enhance the

connections we have between our societies and our citizens. This is the real goal of frameworks such as ASEM. I look forward to doing this with Europe's Asian partners and friends, during ASEM in Madrid, and in the years to come. It's time to translate Europe and Asia's power into a real partnership.

Josep Borrell is the present High Representative of the European Union

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