

## ASIA-EUROPE CO-OPERATION IN LIFELONG LEARNING

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*A speech delivered at the Lifelong Learning Conference: eLearning and Workplace Learning, Bangkok, Thailand, 20<sup>th</sup> of July 2009.*

Your Excellencies,

Mr. Korbsak Sabhavasut , Deputy Prime Minister of Thailand,

Mr. Jurin Laksanawisit, Minister of Education,

Mr. Phaithoon Kaeothong, Minister of Labour ,

Our distinguished partners,

Mr. Zoltan Loboda, Chairman of ASEM LLL Hub Advisory Board,

Mr. Arne Carlsen, Chairman of the ASEM LLL Hub,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I deem it a great honour and privilege to be in a beautiful and hospitable city of Bangkok again on the occasion of the Lifelong Learning Conference on E-Learning and Workplace Learning, two of the most important dimensions of lifelong learning in a globalised and technologically-driven world. The fact that we are in the presence of Their Excellencies, the Deputy Prime Minister as well as the Ministers of Education and Labour of Thailand attests to the growing global significance of lifelong learning.

### **ASEF as a Catalyst for Enhanced Asia-Europe Co-operation on Lifelong Learning**

The Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF) was created one year after the first ASEM Leaders Summit held in Bangkok in 1996 to enhance mutual understanding between the people of Asia and Europe. Thailand has played an active role in our work over the past 12 years. From its early years, ASEF identified education co-operation as a key element to fulfil its mission, and has become a driving force and the Secretariat behind the “ASEM Education Hub or AEH” founded in 1998. The AEH is an umbrella framework that organises and co-ordinates various education co-operation initiatives on Higher Education, specifically (1) the ASEM Education Hub Advisory Committee; (2) the ASEM Rectors’ Conference; (3) Asia-

Europe Thematic Networks and (4) the new platform of Asia Europe Education Workshops. Complementing the AEH are initiatives such as the Asia-Europe Classroom Network, the ASEF University, and non-formal education activities.

Of these, the Asia-Europe Thematic Networks provide an avenue for exchanges on topical areas such as Lifelong Learning, peace and conflict studies, regionalism, human security and intellectual property. ASEF's support to the Lifelong Learning initiative is a major priority and has been ramped up since the ASEM Education and Research Hub for Lifelong Learning (or LLL Hub) was launched in May 2005.

### **Success of the LLL Hub**

The LLL Hub has undertaken important research in the field of lifelong learning, including:

- the role of continuing vocational and workplace learning;
- attractiveness of new learning approaches such as the use of Information and communication technologies (ICTs);
- competencies of teachers and trainers in lifelong learning; and
- support mechanisms and frameworks for lifelong learning systems in Asia and Europe.

These findings have fed concretely into the discussions of education planners and decision makers in Asia and Europe. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Conference of Ministers Responsible for Education held in Hanoi (14-15 May 2009) endorsed the LLL Hub's Detailed Proposal. ASEF has backed this initiative and has in fact, renewed its support to the Hub with a 2<sup>nd</sup> Memorandum of Understanding for 2011-2013 (the first was from 2008-2010).

### **Conclusion**

The LLL Hub initiative has managed to gather government representatives and researchers from universities of 24 ASEM countries through its activities. I believe that there are 2 key factors behind its success:

- First, the ASEM Lifelong Learning Hub has benefitted from a stable framework, including financial support that has allowed it to develop solid structures and governance, as well as a culture of co-operation among the

people and institutions involved. Here I should mention that the Hub enjoys political and financial support not only from ASEF but also the Danish government coupled with the full dedication of the Danish School of Education (of Aarhus University) as Co-ordinator;

- Second, the Lifelong Learning Hub links higher education professionals (researchers, scholars, university managers) and political decision-makers. This strategic alliance ensures that the activities of the Hub mirror current policy issues and priorities, and that their outcomes are put into action in improving lifelong learning systems and structures in ASEM countries.

In conclusion, allow me to stress that education shapes the future of our societies. Lifelong learning has become an integral part of the broader educational process, reflecting the dynamic work environment that we face. More broadly, the Hub, through its sound and experience-based inputs to ASEM policy discussions, has contributed to enhancing cooperation between Asia and Europe in a very practical and value-added way. ASEF will continue to support the work of the LLL Hub. I am confident that today's Conference will be an impressive demonstration of just how far the LLL Hub has progressed.

Your Excellencies,

Dear colleagues,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I thank you for giving me the opportunity of sharing with you ASEF's work in lifelong learning.

May I wish all participants productive meetings and enjoyable days in the Land of Smile !