



Asia-Europe Meeting

CONCEPT PAPER

5th ASEM Labour and Employment Ministers' Conference „Towards Sustainable Social Development in Asia and Europe: A Joint Vision for Decent Work and Social Protection”

3-4 December, 2015, Sofia, Bulgaria

Context

Within the framework of ASEM a fruitful and intensive dialogue on employment and social policies has been taking place during the last decade. Since 2006, four ASEM Conferences of the labour and employment ministers (LEMC) were held: 1st ASEM LEMC (2006, Potsdam, Germany); 2nd ASEM LEMC (2008, Bali, Indonesia); 3rd ASEM LEMC (2010, Leiden, the Netherlands); 4th ASEM LEMC (2012, Hanoi, Vietnam).

The Hanoi Ministerial Declaration of 2012 is focused on employment and social protection as a key to sustainable and inclusive growth, recommending policies in the sphere of employment, decent work, social protection, corporate social responsibility (CSR), health and safety at work.

To continue along this successful path, the Bulgarian Ministry of Labour and Social Policy will host the 5th ASEM LEMC in Sofia, on 3-4 December 2015. The Conference is jointly organised with the European Commission.

After the 4th LEMC in Hanoi, the ASEM dialogue in these areas has continued.

At expert level:

- Under the Hanoi Declaration, ASEM countries agreed to establish a forum which would develop practical recommendations to solve the increasing problem of low youth employment, both in Asia and Europe. As a follow-up, experts from ASEM countries met at the ASEM High-level Seminar on “Youth Employment Promotion” in Chongqing City, China, in 2013, to discuss the integration of young people into the labour market.
- An ASEM Seminar on Social Dialogue took place in March 2014, in Brussels, co-chaired by the Belgian Federal Public Service Employment, Labour and Social dialogue and the Indonesian Ministry of Manpower and Transmigration and with the support of the European Commission. Delegations, comprising of 75 officials, social partners' organizations and experts representing several countries of the EU and Asia, as well as ILO experts, exchanged visions, experiences and findings on important issues regarding the promotion of good industrial relations and effective social dialogue on both continents.

- Before the 5th LEMC in Sofia, the following ASEM activities will have taken place:
- ASEM Conference on Global Aging (October 2015, Korea);
- ASEM Cooperation on Disability (October 2015, China).
- In addition to meetings taking place in the ASEM context, ASEM members are proactively participating in the work of the ILO, as well as in other United Nations agencies/bodies, and some of them in the G20 processes. These engagements allow harnessing synergies in terms of developing the social and employment agenda at multilateral and international levels as well.

At the highest level:

During the last ASEM Summit in October 2014 in Milan, ASEM Leaders acknowledged decent and productive employment and social protection as central pillars of sustainable and inclusive development. 2015 is shaping up to be a crucial year for a new global development agenda post-2015, which will be truly universal and transformative, and which will ensure that no one is left behind.

Based on the above, the Sofia Conference would provide an excellent opportunity to exchange views on how dialogue and cooperation within ASEM could contribute to global efforts for sustainable development, focusing on decent work, full employment and poverty eradication. In addition, the Conference could contribute to multilateral and international efforts in ILO and the UN as a whole, OECD, G20 and G7 contexts in the sphere of employment and social policy, including youth employment, supply chains and investment in human capacity.

Also in the spirit of the Hanoi Declaration, the Sofia LEMC can send a strong political message as a follow-up to the Milan Statement of the Leaders, who reaffirmed their commitment to strengthening EU-Asia cooperation in a wide range of employment and social issues, and which will serve as a useful input to ASEM Leaders' discussion at the next ASEM Summit in 2016, in Mongolia.

Focus Items/Objectives

The 5th ASEM LEMC will further develop the achievements of the ASEM dialogue in the field of employment and social affairs. In practice that will be an example of the implementation of the "ASEM dialogue mechanism" with the purpose of better cooperation of ASEM partners, contributing to the development of the ASEM process in the sphere of employment and social policy.

As declarations are the most important outcomes of LEMCs and in order to draw-up the next Ministerial Declaration, the overall objective of the Sofia ASEM LEMC will be to follow up on the Hanoi Declaration, especially as relates to employment, in particular youth employment, as well as social protection in national contexts. In addition, the meeting will be a good opportunity to follow-up on the 2014 Leaders' Summit outcome and to discuss, in the ASEM framework, the future implementation of the new post-2015 development goals- "Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development", which is to be adopted in September this year. In this respect discussions on decent work and health and safety in global supply chains would have a great added value. With a view to ensuring greater synergies between parallel multilateral and international efforts, an exchange between Asian and European countries concerning activities of ILO, UN, OECD and G20 in the sphere of employment and social policy could also take place.

Main Topics

A preparatory meeting with ASEM countries to exchange views about the forthcoming LEMC was organized by the European Commission and the Bulgarian Ministry of Labour and Social Policy in Geneva in the margins of the International Labour Conference in June 2015. The attending representatives welcomed the Bulgarian initiative and the proposed main topics of the LEMC (as established in the invitation letter) and underlined the necessity of a focused agenda, so that enough time could be devoted to the most important topics, such as: youth employment/unemployment; decent work for sustainability in global supply chains; sustainable social protection and health and safety at work; new jobs in the fight against poverty within the context of the post 2015 sustainable development agenda.

Conference Format

Host: The Bulgarian Deputy Prime Minister for Demographic and Social Policy and Minister of Labour and Social Policy and the European Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs, Skills and Labour Mobility.

Invitees: ASEM Labour and Employment Ministers with accompanying delegations (1+2); Ambassadors; representatives of international organizations possibly invited as speakers; social partners.

Senior officials Meetings to finalize the draft joint declaration possibly on the day before the Ministerial Meeting (i.e. on 2 December 2015 /p.m./)

Meeting of the social partners will be held before the Ministerial meeting (on 3 December 2015 /a.m./), which Ministers will be able to attend.

Opening and closing sessions and three working sessions on the main topics for discussion and site visit/s

Output

- Review of the implementation of the declaration of the 4th ASEM LEMC- the Hanoi Declaration.
- Identification of the future themes for dialogue in the field of employment and social policy and possible concrete cooperation.
- Ministerial joint declaration to be adopted- Sofia Declaration.
- Contribution to the ASEM Summit in 2016 (in Mongolia)