

8th ASEM CULTURE MINISTERS MEETING (ASEM CMM8)

Sofia, Bulgaria
1-2 March 2018

CHAIR'S STATEMENT

The Eighth ASEM Culture Ministers Meeting hosted by the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Bulgaria was held in Sofia on 1-2 March 2018 under the theme "*The Role of Culture in International Relations: The Road Forward*".

The meeting was attended by delegations from 43 ASEM Partners, the European Commission, the Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF), and 123 delegates (list of participants appears as Annex 1).

The Ministers' proceedings came as a follow up to:

- The Seventh ASEM Culture Ministers' Meeting in Gwangju, Republic of Korea with the theme "*Culture and Creative Economy*" that stressed the importance of strengthening the institutional capacity and adopting flexible government policies for encouraging the development of creative industries, as well as the role of traditional cultural heritage in developing the creative economy. International cooperation in the field of culture is vital for promoting the creative industries.
- The Eleventh ASEM Summit in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia in July 2016 with the theme "*20 years of ASEM: Partnership for the future through connectivity*" that endorsed the results of the 7th ASEM CMM and encouraged the use of information and communication technologies in synergy with cultural heritage and international collaboration as means of promoting entrepreneurship skills, incentives, technology development, etc. The Heads of States and Government of ASEM Partners also encouraged the creation opportunities for broader people-to-people connections;
- The Thirteen Foreign Ministers Meeting in Nay Pyi Taw, Myanmar in November 2017 under the theme "*Strengthening Partnership for Peace and Sustainable Development*" which provided the opportunity for the Ministers to address relevant issues of common interest, such as promoting cultural diversity and cooperation in order to foster closer people-to-people contacts, and supporting the regular networking platforms among cultural professionals. They agreed that connectivity is a means to foster deeper people-to-people ties. They also acknowledged tourism as a catalyst for intensifying people-to-people connectivity, while calling for further promotion of sustainable and inclusive tourism across two continents, including conservation and management of the cultural and natural heritage.

The ASEM Culture Ministers underlined that the role of culture in international relations has been growing in recent years, both in Europe and in Asia, shifting more and more from a top-down showcasing approach (traditional cultural diplomacy) to a people-to-people approach,

based on processes of exchange, co-creation and co-production in cultural and creative sectors. The digital revolution has increased the need for more connectivity between people- especially young people- in culture, education, science and sport. At the same time, in a world faced with conflicts and challenges of various natures, from climate change to terrorism or migration, culture and creativity has a great potential to overcome divisions, build bridges and improve international relations.

Asia and Europe should work together to make sure that all citizens have access to culture and benefit from cultural diversity. The Ministers underlined that promoting culture in international relations is the only way forward in our epoch, contributing to a better understanding among peoples, but also to the economic and social fabric of our societies. Furthermore, they called for a special attention to be given to the protection, rehabilitation and promotion of cultural heritage, particularly building on the European Year of Cultural Heritage.

Concretely, ASEM Culture Ministers encouraged all partner countries to develop international cultural cooperation following the discussions in the three workshops, as follows:

1. Supporting culture as an engine for social and economic development

Workshop I was chaired by the Netherlands

Co-sponsors: Austria, Belgium, Brunei Darussalam, Bulgaria, Greece, Republic of Korea, Malaysia, Malta, Poland, delivered their presentations during the workshop.

Presentations and discussions covered the following topics:

- **Supporting the development of cultural policies**

The respect for cultural diversity and freedom of expression that is fostered by culture provides important support for democratisation processes and socio-economic development. Transcending cultural barriers and fostering harmonious growth of civilizations is crucial for an open and inclusive world. Furthermore, the need to incorporate culture as a strategic element in national and international development policies, as well as in international development cooperation has emerged as an important focus area in cultural policy dialogue.

- **Strengthening cultural and creative industries**

As a dynamic economic sector, cultural and creative industries are an important provider of quality jobs and often promote smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. Investments in cultural projects contribute to the competitiveness, attractiveness and social cohesion of cities and regions.

- **Supporting the role of local authorities in partner countries**

- The European Capitals of Culture, the ASEAN City of Culture, the Culture City of East Asia and the World Cities Culture Report 2015 demonstrate the significant return - in terms of growth and social cohesion - **for cities and other local authorities that invest in culture**. A recent external study which maps current and prospective cultural actions for development confirmed that cultural activities boost local development dynamics, not least in rural areas where traditional skills and arts can help alleviate poverty.

- **Innovative partnerships:** joint actions between the ASEM partners to better integrate cultural policies and initiatives in urban development strategies, building on successful projects supporting social cohesion.
- **Support cultural city twinning:** promoting the role of cities as hubs of innovation and best practice by twinning towns and cultural sites that share similar social, economic and environmental problems to explore potential opportunities for development.

The workshop further recommended the following **possible fields of cooperation**:

- Strengthen the **city-to-city cooperation** in the cultural field, notably through **sharing experiences among Capitals or Cities of Culture and city twinning**
- Support to **international networks of cultural policy professionals** for enhanced dialogue in the area of cultural policy support
- Develop **concrete programmes and policy measures** for creative industries, with a focus on entrepreneurship and cultural innovation, and enhance **international knowledge transfer** among ASEM partners, particularly for the development of tools for social impact measurement
- Use the **power of crafts and heritage** for redesigning cities and creating new bonds and social cohesion between countries and people

2. Promoting culture and inter-cultural dialogue for peaceful inter-community relations

Workshop II was chaired by Austria.

Co-sponsors: Belgium, Bulgaria, Estonia, Indonesia, ASEF delivered their presentations during the workshop.

Inter-cultural dialogue can promote the building of fair, peaceful and inclusive societies that value cultural diversity and respect for human rights. By establishing common ground and a favourable environment for further exchanges, intercultural dialogue can defuse tensions, prevent crises from escalating, promote national reconciliation, and encourage new narratives to counter radicalisation. Inter-cultural dialogue may be promoted through international cultural cooperation projects, co-creation, people-to-people exchanges, social debate and peace building, thus building a shared future ASEM partnership.

Presentations and discussions covered the following topics:

- **Supporting cooperation amongst cultural operators**

Cooperation, dialogue and mobility amongst cultural operators and artists are key aspects of inter-cultural dialogue. The circulation of works of art and cultural productions between countries spreads new ideas, establishes direct and indirect ties, and fosters innovation. Strengthened cultural cooperation between ASEM partners can help open the cultural space to new cultural players and audiences.

- **Fostering Peace-building through Inter-Cultural Dialogue**

Inter-cultural dialogue is an important tool in the prevention of conflicts and the promotion of reconciliation and mutual understanding in post-conflict societies, supporting processes of reconciliation between peoples and minorities.

The workshop further recommended the following **fields of cooperation**:

- Foster mobility of artists and culture professionals through programmes such as artists' residencies
- Involve youth in the next ASEM CMM meeting
- Develop evaluation indicators for intercultural dialogue projects

3. Reinforcing cooperation on cultural heritage

Workshop III was chaired by Germany.

Co-sponsors: Bulgaria, China, European Commission, Germany, Netherlands, Viet Nam, delivered their presentations during the workshop.

The workshop recalled that cultural heritage is an important manifestation of cultural diversity that needs to be protected. Rehabilitating and promoting cultural heritage attracts tourism and boosts economic growth. Cooperation on cultural heritage plays an important role in international relations and in development policies. Given the growing global demand for expertise, and the fact that many ASEM partners are willing to share their knowledge, there are opportunities for joint action between partner countries to develop sustainable strategies for heritage protection through training, skills development and knowledge transfer.

Cultural heritage is fragile and often threatened by natural disasters, man-made destruction such as wars, looting and pillaging, sometimes motivated by sectarian hatred. Looted artefacts are often sold and the revenues generated by these transactions can be used to support terrorist activities: this impoverishes the world's cultural heritage.

The workshop further recommended the following **fields of cooperation**:

- **Research on cultural heritage:** supporting research and innovation for cultural heritage activities through multinational, interdisciplinary projects that also engage local and regional authorities, businesses and civil society, aiming at new solutions for the preservation and management of cultural heritage.
- **Combat illicit trafficking of cultural heritage:** enhancing cooperation with partner countries to combat the illicit trafficking of cultural goods and exchange of best practices on national coordination and preventive measures in the fight against illicit trafficking
- **Protect heritage:** contribution of the ASEM partners to the international efforts, led by UNESCO, to set up a rapid reaction mechanism for the protection of cultural heritage sites
- **Share good practice** especially during and following the **European Year of Cultural Heritage 2018** in key areas such as innovation, participative governance, heritage in schools and heritage and young people, and use it as an engine for cooperation with Asian partners
- **Contribute towards developing cultural heritage-based sustainable tourism** through enhanced exchange of information and good practice about management of tourist flow and how to reconcile it with the protection of cultural heritage, in order to preserve and transmit its values

- **Training and capacity-building** activities in the field of cultural heritage, especially of young professionals on safeguarding of cultural heritage

The ASEM Culture Ministers acknowledge the Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF) as the only institution of ASEM and recognise its important role in facilitating multilateral cultural cooperation among artists, arts organisations and museums in Asia & Europe.

In particular, the Ministers positively acknowledge the added value of the ASEF Policy Panel at the CMM, which brought meaningful civil society inputs to this meeting. They also recognise the contribution of ASEF's arts portal, culture360.asef.org; the new travel fund *Mobility First! ASEF Cultural Mobility Initiative*; and, the Asia-Europe Museum Network (ASEMUS) to enhanced Asia-Europe connectivity.

The Ministers noted that the convening of the meeting coincided with the ASEM Day, 1 March, designated by the ASEM Leaders in 2016 with a view to underline ASEM's growing prominence. They agreed that having entered its third decade, ASEM should continue to bring Asia and Europe closer together across the three dimensions: political and security; economic; and socio-cultural, and that promoting cultural cooperation and exchange in all its dimensions is crucial in that direction.

The Ministers recommended that the conclusion of this meeting be taken into account at the 12th ASEM Summit to be held in Brussels, Belgium, on 18-19 October 2018. The Ninth ASEM Culture Minister's Meeting will be held in Asia in 2020.

Sofia, 2 March 2018