



CONCEPT PAPER

8th ASEM Culture Ministers' Meeting (ASEM CMM8)

“The Role of Culture in International Relations: The Road Forward”

March 1-2, 2018, Sofia, Bulgaria

Context:

As the world is growing ever more interconnected and interactive, and as an increasing number of people has affordable access to information at an unprecedented scale in human history, it is now crucial for decision-makers to utilize a resource that every single country possesses – culture – in promoting cooperation, mutual respect, and better understanding between states and societies. This is a necessary prerequisite for ensuring peaceful development and common ground in facing global challenges.

The important role of culture and cultural diplomacy in fostering understanding and closer ties between the Asian and the European partners of ASEM were first underlined as a new dimension of the ASEM dialogue during the 4th ASEM Summit in 2002 and since then seven ASEM ministers of culture meetings have occurred broadening cultural interaction on political and people-to-people level.

Within the ASEM framework the Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF) has a pivotal contribution in developing dialogue between European and Asian civil societies and public authorities, as well as in advancing sustainable partnerships in the field of culture including through ASEF's arts portal, culture360.ASEF.org and [Mobility First!](#) travel fund for artists.

Culture has become an essential element of the strategic and comprehensive approach to international relations of the European Union. In 2016 the Council of the European Union has adopted the EU global strategy on foreign and security policy, emphasizing on culture as one of the priority areas for the work on implementation of the EU global strategy in general, and specifically on the role culture can play in combating terrorism, nurturing societal resilience, and conflict resolution. In southeast Asia, one of the key strategies of ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations)'s Strategic Plan for Culture 2016-2025 includes focus on culture and intercultural understanding as a counter against violent extremism. Further, there is a strong thrust on promoting the role of culture for ASEAN to become a proactive member of the global community.

Focus Items/Objectives

The Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Bulgaria will host the 8th ASEM Culture Ministers' Meeting (ASEM CMM 8). The meeting is jointly organized in cooperation with ASEF and the European Commission. ASEM CMM 8 will provide an excellent opportunity for exchange of ideas on how the dialogue and cooperation within the framework of ASEM could contribute to recognizing culture as an integral element of peace and stability, especially in the current global political environment, in which human rights, cooperation and solidarity are under threat. On the other hand, the meeting will delineate the crucial role civil society plays in fostering resilient and sustainable communities as well as its role as a partner in the development of initiatives in the cultural domain, thus highlighting the current investment gap.

The forum will emphasize the importance of the cultural and creative industries not only as a key social factor, but also as a resource for economic growth, employment and sustainable development.

The positive dynamics of the European year of cultural heritage 2018 shall be a prerequisite for exchange of ideas and practices directed towards intensifying cooperation in the area of cultural heritage. Cultural heritage signifies cultural diversity that has to be preserved. Safeguarding and promoting cultural heritage are key to encouraging sustainable tourism and economic growth. Cooperation in the area of cultural heritage plays a very important role in international relations and in development policies, as well as in combating illegal traffic and crime related to cultural goods

In this regard, the ministers will be invited to share their views on the following two questions:

- How does culture contribute to strengthening and consolidating foreign relations between countries? What are your views on developing a more open approach to international cultural relations, based on mutual understanding and reciprocity?
- What measures could be taken on a national level to promote the cooperation between all stakeholders in order to ensure synergies and added value to international initiatives in the cultural domain?

Main Topics

As the ACEM CMM 8 meeting is focused on the role of culture in international relations, the host is proposing the following discussion topics within three workshops that will be organized outside of the plenary sessions:

- Supporting culture as an engine for sustainable social and economic development;
- Promoting culture and intercultural dialogue for peaceful intercommunity relations;
- Strengthening cooperation on cultural heritage.

The conclusions and recommendations from the workshops will serve as the basis of the discussions and drafting of a Final Declaration from the meeting.

The Senior Official Meeting shall be held the day preceding the meeting of ministers – February 28th, at 15.30 o'clock.

On February 28th, 17:45, ASEF organizes a Policy Panel for ASEM delegations at the end of the Senior Officials Meeting. The topic of the panel will be *From Cultural Diplomacy towards Cultural Co-operation: What Future Directions for Asia-Europe Relations?*