CONNECTIVITY IN ASEM: RISE...FALL...AND UP AGAIN?

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Advancing connectivity in ASEM
The Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) is an intergovernmental process to foster dialogue and cooperation between Asia and Europe. Presently it brings together 51 countries from Europe and Asia, plus the EU and the ASEAN Secretariat.
Since the 10th ASEM Summit in October 2014, ASEM set out to enhance Europe-Asia connectivity to further economic prosperity and sustainable development. ASEM connectivity is about physical infrastructure, institutional linkages and people-to-people ties. It covers all the three pillars of ASEM: economic, political and sociocultural.

Source: ASEM Connectivity Inventory, June 2018.
Simmering connectivity conflict...can ASEM prove its worth?

Competing propositions:
- 2010: ASEAN Master Plan on Connectivity
- 2013: Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) – China
- 2015: (Expanded) Partnerships for Quality Infrastructure – Japan
- 2016: Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) – Japan, India US, Australia
- 2018: Sustainable Connectivity – EU

Connectivity in ASEM:
- 2014: start of discussions on connectivity
- 2016: ASEM Pathfinder Group on Connectivity (APGC) established
- 2018: ASEM Sustainable Connectivity

Tangible Areas of Cooperation (TACC, 2018):
1. Sustainable connectivity
2. Future connectivity → digital connectivity
3. Trade and investment connectivity
4. People-to-people connectivity
5. Security challenges linked to connectivity
Focus digital connectivity: the next great game
4th industrial revolution + shifting power balances = hardening US-China *trade-tech-data* conflict

...stalling of progress in ASEM context...

Source: Okano-Heijmans, July 2019.
Many ASEM members ‘crunched’?
Key issues and challenges for ASEM members in post-pandemic socio-economic recovery

**Key issues/objectives:**
- vibrant and resilient digital economies
- an open, transparent and inclusive digital domain
- digitally skilled citizens, digital rights and principles
- standardization of new technology applications, data privacy and cross-border data flows
- cyber security

**Challenge = diverging approaches**
US’ surveillance capitalism vs. Chinese state surveillance vs. EU & Japan: ‘human-centered’ approach

Source: [Clingendael Report 2020](http://example.com).
ASEM’s role in digital connectivity (1) facilitate dialogue... between governments, and govts with Big/small Tech

(Big) Tech companies: = online platforms / e-commerce companies
→ aim for market presence and market share in the digital economy

- ‘platform fairness’: a level-playing field, inclusiveness (rather than lock-in, dependency)
- personal and non-personal data regulation: open markets, transparency
- R&D and ‘ethical AI’: human-centered approach (rather than state interests or business interests first)
- standard-setting

→ ref. ASEM’s successful DG Customs dialogue!
ASEM’s role in digital connectivity (2)
manage and steer ‘digital ODA’

Digital Official Development Assistance
= support to third countries on digital infrastructure; digital competence and the e-economy; regulatory frameworks; and cyber security & resilience
→ establish as a cornerstone in ASEM’s digital connectivity agenda
→ help deliver inclusive and sustainable growth in ASEM countries and beyond

Existing (competitive?) initiatives include:
✓ China’s Digital Silk Road (DSR)
✓ ROK’s Cybersecurity Alliance for Mutual Progress
✓ Japan’s Strategy for Cyber Security (SCS)
✓ EU’s Digital for Development (D4D)
✓ ASEAN–Singapore Cybersecurity Centre of Excellence (ASCCE)
✓ India’s Centre for Digital Financial Inclusion (CDFI)

ASEM’s role in digital connectivity (3) 
other actionable steps

✓ **Digital economy (and interoperability) issues** fall under the purview of the economic and financial pillar, specifically the ASEM’s Economic Ministers Meeting (EMM). Digital connectivity issues were discussed during the last meeting of the EMM in 2017 under South Korea’s chairmanship.

- **Actionable step**: ASEM members should invest in reviving the EMM, considering the importance of digital issues to a sustainable socio-economic recovery.

✓ **Data policies** can be discussed within ASEM’s [Asia-Europe Business Forum](#) where government officials and private sector actors meet to increase trade and investment flows.

- **Actionable step**: the Asia-Europe Business Forum could focus on digital economy issues.

✓ **Broadband expansion** requires focused cooperation through partnerships, exchange and discussion of best practices and standards.

- **Actionable step**: Under ASEM, broadband discussions can be fostered through the Trans-Eurasia Information Network (TEIN) that aims to connect infrastructures between Asia and Europe.
Thank you for your attention!

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