

# EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

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**AD HOC DELEGATION FOR THE  
SEVENTH ASIA-EUROPE PARLIAMENTARY PARTNERSHIP  
(ASEP VII) MEETING**

**2 to 5 October 2012  
Vientiane (People's Democratic Republic of Laos)**

**Report by the Chairman  
Mr. George Sabin CUTAŞ**

## Background

**Asia Europe Meetings (ASEM)** were established in 1996, following an initiative launched in November 1994 by Singapore and France proposing an EU-Asia summit meeting to consider a new partnership between the two regions. On Singapore's proposal, the first ASEM Summit was held in Bangkok in March 1996. The summits associate, on the one hand, the 27 EU Member States and the European Commission and, on the other hand, 19 states from the Asia-Pacific region (Australia, Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, China, India, Indonesia, Japan, Laos, Malaysia, Mongolia, Myanmar, New Zealand, Pakistan, Republic of Korea, Russia, Singapore, Thailand, The Philippines, Vietnam + the ASEAN Secretariat). The summits take place every two years, alternatively in Europe and in Asia. The following summits have been held: (1) Thailand March 1996, (2) United Kingdom April 1998, (3) South Korea October 2000, (4) Denmark September 2002, (5) Vietnam October 2004, (6) Finland September 2006, (7) China October 2008, (8) Belgium October 2010. The 9th summit will be held in Laos (Vientiane) in November 2012.

Its parliamentary dimension, the **Asia-Europe Parliamentary Partnership Meeting (ASEP)** was launched in 1996 in Strasbourg and has alternated its meetings between Europe and Asia. It brings together parliamentarians from the ASEM Members States and the EP and takes place prior to each ASEM summit. It is intended to enable legislators to provide guidance to and oversight on their governments, particularly through the Declaration that is agreed at the closing of the meeting, and which is forwarded to the ASEM summit.

When the summit takes place in Europe, it is established practice that the EU Member State holding the rotating presidency of the Council hosts ASEM. ASEP rules of procedure (art. 5) state that "The parliament of the ASEM member state hosting the ASEM Summit shall have a priority to host the ASEP meeting the same year".

## Introduction

The 7th Asia-Europe Parliamentary Partnership (ASEP) meeting was held in Vientiane (Lao People's Democratic Republic) on 3rd and 4th October 2012, hosted by the Lao Parliament. Side events meant that the programme lasted from 2nd October (preparation contacts and meetings) to 5th October (mostly cultural activities). The meeting was chaired by Mrs Pany Yathotou, President of the National Assembly of the Lao People's Democratic Republic.

The Vientiane meeting of ASEP brought together delegations from the parliaments of:

- all the Asia-Pacific region States members of ASEM with the exception of Mongolia (18 out of 19). The most important delegations numerically were those of Laos neighbours -Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Malaysia, Thailand, Vietnam- but also China (8 members). This group also integrated the delegations of the parliaments of the States that joined ASEM in the last meeting (2010) and had not yet formally joined ASEP: Russia, Australia, New-Zealand and the reincorporated Myanmar;
- 9 out of 27 parliaments of the EU member States (Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Portugal, Spain), all with delegations of one or two members of parliament and the European Parliament delegation (7 members). The absence of delegations from Italy, France and the United Kingdom was noticed, even if the last one was expected.

The IMF resident representative, UNDP resident coordinator, UNISDR Special Representative of the UN SD and Head of UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction were present.

The European Parliament was represented by a delegation of seven MEPs, chaired by Mr George CUTAS (S&D, RO), who was elected unopposed as chair of the ad hoc delegation at the constitutive meeting held on 27 September 2012 in Brussels. The other members of the delegation were: Mr Francesco SPERONI (EFD, IT), Mrs Elisabeth JEGGLE (EPP, DE), Mr David MARTIN (S&D, UK), Mr Niccolo RINALDI (ALDE, IT), Mrs Anna ROSBACH (ECR, DK) and Mrs Katarina NEVEDALOVA (S&D, SK).

## Process

The overall procedure of the ASEP meetings is reminiscent of the procedure followed in multilateral conferences of the UN system - the type of international events most familiar to our Asian counterparts -, a procedure that has barely changed since the mid 70's. It is characterised by (1) a largely ceremonial plenary in which formal proceedings are registered (approval of documents) and formal speeches delivered; (2) panels, that is smaller groups of delegates that debate a specific theme and try to reach some consensus to report back to the plenary and (3) a drafting committee that considers a final political declaration whose approval by the plenary closes the meeting.

The main consequence of this procedure is that the meetings, notably the plenary sessions, follow a rather ritualistic pattern with a large number of prepared speeches and extremely limited debate, if any. This is to some extent a result of the clear desire of some delegations to ensure that their position is put on the record and that "the adoption of decisions shall be by consensus among official delegations" (rule 21 of ASEP rules of procedure).

The event opened on 2nd October in the afternoon with a **preparatory meeting** at which the procedures outlined above were agreed.

There was also a discussion in the **drafting committee** of the final declaration. The original text of the final declaration was produced by the Lao Parliament. This largely reflected the concerns of the host country. The Chair of the EP ad hoc delegation attended the meeting. A deadline for amendments was opened.

The **first plenary session** took place on 3 October. The full agenda is attached. The morning was devoted to formal speeches of welcome and procedural matters resolved informally the previous evening, followed by speeches of some of the Heads of delegations. The Chair of the EP ad hoc delegation delivered the attached speech in the plenary.

The afternoon was entirely devoted to a long accession ceremony for the four new members of ASEP: Australia, Myanmar, New Zealand, and Russia with all the conceivable solemnity (formal speeches, guard of honour for the flags, national anthems played, etc.).

As in previous ASEP meetings, the morning of the second day, 4 October, was entirely devoted to the two **panel discussions** held simultaneously.

The **first panel**, under the general title of "**Economic matters**" had two themes "Ensuring Food Security in the current situation of global climate change" and "Strengthening Asia-Europe Cooperation in the field of public debts for sustainable development". This panel was co-chaired by Dr S. Bouphannouvong, chair of the competent committee of the Lao National Assembly and by Dr. C. Ruck, Member of the German Bundestag (and deputy chair of the CDU-CSU group, CSU member). Three out of four main speakers concentrated on food security (Finland, China and Republic of Korea). The last, and only to deal with the debt crisis, was the IMF resident, with a statement more technical than political.

The high level of ambition of the organisers in addressing in a single panel four of the main global issues (food security, climate change, public debt crisis, sustainable development) resulted, predictably, in a rather confusing debate in which valuable arguments and presentations were somewhat lost, without a set of clear conclusions emerging, except the ones related to budgetary and financial stability as important public goods that should be pursued.

The **second panel**, under the general title of "**Social and environment matters**" was entitled "Asia-Europe partnership in increasing social participation for disaster management". The European Parliament ad hoc delegation provided the co-chair of the panel (Mrs ROSBACH).

The procedure described above repeated itself in this panel, as the conclusions reached by consensus were the product of a cumulative process of demands and statements. The panel report states that *"ASEP parliamentarians called upon ASEM member countries to make concerted efforts and utilize the international experience in disaster risk reduction, exchange of innovation and knowledge, dissemination of information and education mechanism, disaster preparedness for effective response and recovery, early warning mechanisms, technology transfer, risk assessment and management, search and rescue capabilities, infrastructure development associated with disaster prevention, natural and man made hazards, health threats pandemic diseases, industrial risks, agricultural risks, agricultural risks, rapid response and post-disaster management, mitigation."* To that end *"ASEP parliamentarians stressed the need to mobilize additional resources and contributions from social partners for disaster responsive capacity building, especially for high-risk countries in ASEM; and encouraged the public-private partnership (PPP) in national and international mitigation and adaptation strategies, including promotion of public awareness and education in disaster management"*.

In the early afternoon, the **drafting committee** was convened in order to consider the amendments tabled by some of the delegations to the original draft text.

At that stage (draft closed at 1.30 on 3 October), Belgium tabled three minor amendments (on ASEP 6 hosted by Belgium, on commitment by all countries to tackle climate change, on reducing malnutrition) and Finland two: one advocating for the inclusion of energy policy and transports and logistics as areas of Asia-Europe cooperation and the second to provide ASEP with "follow-up mechanisms of the meetings". On the Asian side, Japan tabled one amendment mentioning APEC activities in agriculture and Vietnam tabled one in support of "triangular cooperation in agriculture. The most active Asian country was China, tabling five amendments aiming at deleting references to the need of transparency and accountability at national level (three amendments), deleting a reference to the need for domestic fiscal consolidation and replacing a call for consolidation of public finances and the financial sector by a reference to debt management.

During the course of the day, the European Parliament ad hoc delegation had been under pressure from the Lao parliament which approached the secretariat of the meeting enquiring (with the Chair,

the two Italian MEPs, the secretariat) who would be the host of ASEP 8 in the second half of 2014. As a preventive measure, in order to avoid a damaging blank or, even worse, an imposition or an embarrassing situation in the plenary, the ad hoc delegation decided to table an amendment to state the obvious: ASEP 8 would take place in "Europe" in 2014.

At the opening of the meeting a new draft, with new amendments was circulated (draft closed at 10.15 on 4 October). Malaysia had tabled amendments notably to weaken language related to environmental commitments.

Germany had moved to block an Indonesian amendment on conditions imposed on indebted governments by tabling an amendment seeking deletion and reintroducing the notion of accountability and parliamentary oversight of governments, sensibly in other paragraphs in which these notions had been deleted by China's amendments. Australia had tabled a new amendment calling for proper prudential legislation in the financial sector.

The debate was lively, with some tension between the Chinese and German delegations that the Singapore delegation was able to smooth by suggesting compromise language and a balanced approach. A final draft was approved as attached.

The **second plenary session** began with a feedback from the two panel discussions - see above - presented in plenary by the *rapporteurs* that did not give rise to comments and by a short presentation of the draft final declaration which was adopted. A closing ceremony with formal speeches of appreciation concluded the meeting.

It is worth noting that, due to the fact that the European side could not indicate a host for the next ASEP meeting, the point on the draft agenda entitled "Acceptance speech by a representative of the next host parliament" was removed.

## Conclusions and follow-up

ASEP as the parliamentary arm of ASEM is the only multilateral *forum* in which the European Parliament (and the national parliaments of the EU Member States) is represented. The European Parliament is an observer in the ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Assembly (AIPA), but not a member. Major international powers are organising themselves in the Asia Pacific region, for example in the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation frame (APEC)<sup>1</sup> in which Europe has no part.

If the European Union was to engage the Asia-Pacific region in a multilateral context the options are limited to ASEM. The same applies for the European Parliament as the natural conduct of our multilateral action towards the region is ASEP.

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<sup>1</sup> APEC associates 21 States and was launched in 1989 in Canberra. The founding members were Australia, Brunei Darussalam, Canada, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, New Zealand, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and the United States. In 1991 China, Hong Kong, China and Chinese Taipei joined. There were followed by Mexico and Papua New Guinea in 1993, Chile in 1994 and Peru, Russia and Viet Nam in 1998. India, Mongolia, Pakistan, Laos, Bangladesh, Costa Rica, Colombia, Panama, Ecuador and Colombia have applied for membership. Until 1992, APEC met as an informal senior official and Ministerial level dialogue. In 1993, former U.S. President Clinton, established the practice of an annual APEC Economic Leaders' Meeting. The next APEC Summit will take place in Vladivostok in November 2012, the next one will take place in Jakarta in November 2013.

This would require a level of mobilization and interest from the European side that we could not observe in ASEP 7, despite exceptions, and a certain level of previous coordination on substance that does not exist for the time being.

The conclusions of the report on the ASEP 6, held in Belgium in 2010, are still valid: "the working methods and format need to be developed further" and "this issue could be addressed initially among the European delegations", "consideration could be given to more regular meetings - or at least greater liaison between meetings - and a more institutionalised structure. These and other developments could allow the significant potential of ASEP to be fulfilled."

### **State of play for 2014**

In the second half of 2014, the rotating presidency of the Council will be held by Italy. In accordance with established practice, it would have been the host of ASEM in autumn 2014 and, therefore, the Italian parliament would have to host ASEP a few weeks before. However, it appears that the Italian Government has announced that it is in no position to host ASEM. The Council is now exploring options, notably holding the summit in Brussels.

The Italian parliament has informed the host of ASEP 2012 (Laos) that it is in no position to make any commitment until the next elections due in spring 2013. This seems to state more a principle than a political decision. It does not clearly exclude that the new Italian parliament might decide to host ASEP in 2014. Furthermore, it appears that the Italian parliament has not notified other national parliaments of the EU that it does not wish to host the 2014 ASEP meeting.

Given the circumstances, it appears appropriate to ascertain if any national parliament of the EU would wish to host ASEP 2014, should the Italian parliament clearly state that it is in no position to do so.

*Enclosed:        Programme of the 7th ASEP Meeting  
                      Opening statement by Mr CUTAS, Chair of the EP ad hoc delegation  
                      Final Declaration of the 7th ASEP Meeting*