

Introduction

The Asia–Europe Meeting (ASEM) is a unique cooperation initiative, bringing in scope for transnational cooperation between countries, through regional and sub-regional activities. Since its inception in 1996, ASEM has played a key role as a forum for dialogue and cooperation in connecting Asia and Europe. ASEM is a collective effort towards addressing the demands of greater connectivity amongst the geographies, economies, and peoples of Asia and Europe. ASEM is wide enough to accommodate global and inter-continental development priorities. And yet, it localises connectivity amongst Partner countries for partnerships for economic growth, trade and investment, quality infrastructure, skills development, education, sustainable development, and climate change. As the shadow of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic holds sway in both Europe and Asia, Cambodia’s hosting of ASEM13 assumes greater significance as it envisages an inclusive and prosperous growth pathway for the Asia–Europe region, through multilateral cooperation and sustainable development. The 13th ASEM Summit (ASEM13) has a mission to set out the future pathway for ASEM – built on the principles of mutual growth, sustainable development, and rules-based multilateralism.

ASEM has promoted Asia’s integration with Europe through physical, institutional, and social connectivity in which multilateralism and support for global governance play an important role. The different sections of this book offer pathways for ASEM’s vision of inclusive and prosperous Asia–Europe relations. Regional and sub-regional plans for physical connectivity, trade and investment, institutional and regulatory connectivity, enhanced capacities and skills, a common approach towards Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and participation in the digital economy are important pillars in this pathway. The theoretical basis for all the chapters is grounded strongly in actual country and/or regional experiences in the respective fields. Since 2016, the Economic Research Institute for ASEAN and East Asia (ERIA) has strived to bring a holistic and synergistic approach to Asia–Europe cooperation and connectivity through its successive studies on ASEM connectivity. The study captures the rich experiences amongst Partner countries that are productive and replicable, and presents it to the ASEM13 chair to build on and expand the Chair’s directions for ASEM. This book fulfills this purpose, and establishes pathways for making ASEM an active, efficient, and influential multilateral platform for cooperation and connectivity between Asia and Europe.

Section 1 describes the concept, features, and plans with respect to Asia–Europe connectivity. Besides covering the essence of ASEM as a multilateral cooperation partnership, both chapters present the physical, institutional, and human development aspects of Asia–Europe connectivity. While Chapter 1 covers the multidimensional nature of ASEM, and the renewed scope for cooperation in a post-COVID-19 phase of growth, Chapter 2 underlines the connectivity policies and infrastructure plans that represent Asia–Europe connectivity in the making. The two chapters are an operational framework for implementation of Asia–Europe connectivity.

Section 2 describes the most important and obvious link between Asia and Europe, namely trade, investment, and economy. Trade facilitation and the free trade agreements are the pillars on which Asia and Europe have witnessed strong growth in merchandise trade, and in foreign direct investment (FDI). Since both pillars of growth require domestic reforms to border and behind-the-border procedures, and improvements in infrastructure and regulatory environment, the first two chapters in this section underline country experiences to show how trade facilitation and free trade agreements can help minimise trade costs and encourage greater trade flows, and can also be a source of competitive advantage amidst changing environments.

Section 2 especially brings out the Asia–Europe region’s preparedness for the digital economy from institutional, infrastructure, and regulatory policy perspective. The digital economy is here to stay. ASEM countries have an opportunity in ASEM, which can become a cooperation platform for greater participation in the global value chains of the digital economy and to foster inclusive digital societies.

Section 3 is devoted to human development issues of gender, youth, and labour mobility. The Cambodia chair is especially tuned towards inclusive development in the ASEM region. Greater participation of women and youth in ASEM economies, and mainstreaming of labour mobility issues are captured in this section.

Section 4 covers the sustainable development experiences in Asia and Europe, with particular attention to energy, water management, and sustainability in connectivity plans.

Section 5 concludes the study and underlines the role of ASEM in supporting a multilateral order, and moving towards for a sustainable, inclusive, and prosperous Asia–Europe region. It captures the unique role and vision of Cambodia as the host of ASEM13, and the need to carry these into the 14th ASEM Summit in Europe.

The study brings together scholars and practitioners from Asia and Europe who have put forth their academic and practical wisdom in their respective chapters and ERIA is proud to assemble their writings under the aegis of this study. The study especially acknowledges the influence of pioneering research of Prof. Fukunari Kimura, Chief Economist of ERIA, in the fields of connectivity and economic integration in ASEAN and East Asia. This study reflects the trust placed in the research capacities of ERIA, which has pioneered several pieces of research on the ASEAN Community, the East Asia region, and connectivity as a development paradigm in Asia, and between Asia–Europe, and Asia–Africa.

ERIA presents its commendations to His Excellency Prime Minister Samdech Akka Moha Sena Padei Techo Hun Sen for chairing the ASEM13. ERIA extends its gratitude to His Excellency Prak Sokhonn, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, The Royal Government of Cambodia, for giving the message

for the ASEM13 through this book. ERIA is very grateful for the opportunity given by the The Royal Government of Cambodia to prepare and present this plenary study to the Leaders and Heads of Governments of the Partner countries of 13th Asia–Europe Meeting (ASEM) Summit. ERIA gratefully acknowledges the immense contribution and support of His Excellency Dr. Sok Siphana, Senior Advisor to the Royal Government of Cambodia and ASEM SOM Leader for Cambodia, in steering the book through its conception, development, and finalisation.

This study continues with the unique role of ERIA in providing academic and capacity support to the ASEM process and the ASEM chair. It is our sincere hope that this book will provide substantial ideas and policy directions to the 13th ASEM Summit (ASEM13) and its associated meetings in Cambodia.

ERIA takes this opportunity to wish The Royal Government of Cambodia a successful hosting of the 13th ASEM Summit (ASEM13).

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