Growing Together

The Academic Invigoration of the Asia Europe Business Forum

Whereas political and business circles recognize the importance of the biannual Asia Europe Business Forum (ASEM), the significance of these deliberations and the possibility to influence them seems to escape many in academia. Alongside the ASEM political summits in the media spotlight, the Asia Europe Business Forum (AEBF) provides researchers the opportunity to constructively influence the process of business cooperation, facilitating and invigorating the AEBF deliberations and ultimately the ASEM agenda as such.

By Jan Ammerstad

Coinciding with the September 2002 ASEM Economic Ministers’ Meeting in Copenhagen, the seventh annual Asia-Europe Business Forum (AEBF) VII conference was held just ahead of the ASEM VII summit. Well in advance, academic researchers and other specialists from East Asia and Western Europe met to discuss strategic issues identified at the previous meeting in Singapore.

In Singapore in 2001, it was decided that three strategic issues cutting across the AEBF working groups would be brought to the fore to bring momentum to the deliberations: (1) dynamic regions, metropolitan hubs, and modern city structures in the globalizing economy; (2) strengthening the economic fabric through the growth of small and medium-sized business enterprises; and (3) the global challenge to corporate governance and business participation in socio-economic development.

These themes were discussed in multiple areas within the European and Asian specialists, and evaluated in a workshop that brought together academics and other specialists from Asia, Europe, and North America three months ahead of the Copenhagen AEBF. The resulting 30-page Briefing Paper presented a comprehensive set of suggestions for the eight working groups and for deliberations in the plenary sessions.

The working groups then used this content to develop their platforms for advice to the ministers and other top policy-makers involved in the ASEM process. To deliver tangibles, much of the work in the AEBF conferences provides research and urgent policy issues.

For many AEBF VII participants, the discussions in Copenhagen were useful and intellectually inspiring. For the 300 researchers involved in preparing the AEBF Briefing Paper, AEBF VII was a challenging set of encounters, where research results were confronted with urgent policy issues as expressed by top business representatives and public officials.

Areas for improvement were also identified. The lack of a permanent ASEM secretariat and the annual shift of AEBF conference responsibilities render continuity in deliberations and the implementation of follow-up recommendations more difficult. As a result of the transfer of responsibilities between Europe and Asia, specialized knowledge is unfortunately lost. Therefore, the implementation of a ‘long-term internally driven strategic vision, which can be translated into clear and concrete objectives’ would add to the controversial nature of this topic, for which reason we open the floor for your reactions to this article in particular.

Concluding remarks. For many, the AEBF conferences are a wonderful opportunity to foster professional relationships at all levels, to contribute to the institution’s scientific agenda, and to promote the European Research Area. Areas for improvement were also identified. The lack of a permanent ASEM secretariat and the annual shift of AEBF conference responsibilities render continuity in deliberations and the implementation of follow-up recommendations more difficult. As a result of the transfer of responsibilities between Europe and Asia, specialized knowledge is unfortunately lost. Therefore, the implementation of a ‘long-term internally driven strategic vision, which can be translated into clear and concrete objectives’ would add to the controversial nature of this topic, for which reason we open the floor for your reactions to this article in particular.

Deliberations among business representatives, academics, and other specialists need to continue to invigorate the next AEBF planned in Seoul for October 2003.