



## **Report from ASEF meeting on Alumni networking, in Madrid 31 August – 1 September 2007**

Hosted by the UNISCI – Research Unit on International Security and Cooperation,  
Universidad Complutense de Madrid

By Staffan Lindberg

The Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF) had invited representatives of some important institutions and networks for a dialogue on how to improve student exchange and alumni networking. (For a short presentation of participants and their background, see under **Participants** below.)

ASEF is funded by the European Commission and various partners in Asia and Europe to ‘strengthen networks among the next generation of leaders from Asia and Europe.’ The most important programme is promoting student exchange between the two continents, by organising summer courses (2 weeks in duration) at various universities and by the organisation of summer universities and conferences on particular themes. The students involved mainly come from the social sciences.

The participating countries have been formed around the regular meeting between ASEAN and the European Union countries, with China and Japan also participating. This means that when ASEF uses the term Asia, it practically means East- and Southeast Asia. This year, however, India and Pakistan have been included in the network, making a total of 43 countries

in the network (called ASEM). The latter was the reason for the invitation to SASNET to take part of the meeting.

### **Alumni network**

By funding or part-funding of students in the courses and conferences, ASEF has now involved about 1700 students from Asia and Europe in its activities. To follow up on this it has now formed the **Asia-Europe Foundation University Alumni Network (ASEFUAN)** with currently 450 members in 38 countries. ASEFUAN organises an annual conference around a particular theme and gathers about 50-60 students. It has a chapter in Beijing based on Chinese and European students who reside there.

Besides the annual meeting, ASEFUAN has organised individual contacts between the students in dialogue around the exchange of cultural artefacts of various kinds. It organises weekend meetings locally and publishes an ENZINE – an electronic magazine.

The two-day meeting was structured around four basic issues:

### **Context Mapping**

After a round of presentations by the participants, we brainstormed around various organisations, networks and associations involved in exchange programmes primarily between Asia and Europe, and how these functioned.

ASEF and ASEFUAN are unique in working exclusively with Asia and Europe. All other exchange programmes target more generally. The Erasmus Mundus funds masters students from the non-European countries globally, although 70 % of them actually come from Asia. It is now in the process of forming an Erasmus Mundus Alumni Association (EMA). The Sciences Po in France draws French speaking social sciences students from all over the world and has an alumni association since 1875! Sciences Po now expands into giving courses in English and focuses a recruitment drive in Asia.

Universitas 21, which organises full range and research oriented universities in UK, America, Asia and Europe, network globally and, for example, organises summer schools, but has no alumni association.

SASNET promotes research and higher education exchange between Sweden and the South Asian countries.

We discussed various possible partners in furthering the goal of student exchange. Besides a Chinese network in Beijing, there seems to be very few networks or organisations in Asia of this kind.

In Europe, the British Council, Alliance Francaise, DAAD in Germany, the Swedish Institute, etc. fund students with scholarships to study in their respective countries. There are no alumni associations around these students.

The various European associations of modern South Asian studies, East Asian studies, etc. promote the participation of PhD students in its bi-annual conferences as do the British Association for South Asian Studies (BASA), the Nordic Association of South Asian Studies (now defunct it seems).

The European Research institutes, like IIAS in Leiden and Amsterdam, South Asia Institute in Heidelberg, etc. also involve students to varying degrees in its activities and sometimes provide funding for Asian students in PhD programmes.

In the Nordic countries there are three organisations furthering student exchange:

- \* Nordic Centre in Shanghai is organising courses for students in China (Fudan University) and in the Nordic countries. It has quite large programmes by now.

- \* Nordic Centre in India, with an office/guesthouse in New Delhi, is organising summer and other courses for Nordic students in India (Hyderabad, Mumbai, etc.) but is not yet involving Asian students to come to the Nordic universities to study.

- \* The Nordic Institute of Asian Studies in Copenhagen is running a support for Nordic PhD students specialising in Asian studies.

### **The Case for Linking Asia and Europe**

The driving force of the student exchange and the networking round it is of course the increasing interest among Asian and European students to get involved in these exchanges and studies.

For the Asians, Europe offers an alternative to the United States and Australia in higher education. One important factor is the absence of teaching fees in continental European universities. The European welfare state and environmental concerns may also be attractive to Asian students compared to a more liberal and free market perspective dominating in the US.

For the Europeans, Asia offers both opportunities and challenges.

The fast growing industrial and tertiary economies in Asia offers business partnership. The fast growth of highly educated Asian scientists offer prospects of world leading research cooperation in the future, without which European universities may stagnate. Add to this, European fascination for the cultural treasures of Asia.

On the other hand, environmental threats in Asia have global implications (climate change, water scarcity, etc.) and the security situation in many parts of Asia pose serious threats to global security.

## **Adding Value – How ASEF can support alumni networks?**

It is quite clear that the activities of ASEF to organise and fund summer schools and conferences make up the core and infrastructure for building and maintaining an alumni network. So these activities should be pursued with vigour.

When it comes to linking and cooperating with other alumni networks and academic exchange programmes, it has to be recognised the different coverage that the various associations and programmes have. The Nordic centres have a close similarity with ASEF so their cooperation should be easy to achieve.

However, since Asian students play such a prominent role in, say, the Erasmus Mundus Alumni and in the Sciences Po, it should also be possible to develop links and cooperation in focussed activities of common interest.

Similarly, to the extent that U21 organises student exchange involving Asian and European students, there could also be scope for cooperation. U21 now also plans to include the University of Delhi as a partner.

## **Practical and modest objectives to initiate cooperation**

The final session aimed at developing ideas about how we could start cooperating to build enduring relationships.

Ramon Molina, director of ASEF, initiated the discussion by suggesting that we all form an inclusive ***Umbrella of Asia Europe Alumni Networks***. One participant suggested ‘Student Exchange’ instead of Alumni. Perhaps the best name for the time being would be **Umbrella of Asia Europe Student Networks?**

Ideas for cooperation that came up:

- \* ASEF should contact possible partners and inform them of its will to network around student exchanges, etc. and invite the sharing of relevant information, including websites of participants and relevant publications.
- \* Focussed Gateway for the activities – DEEP could perhaps serve as the entry.
- \* Cooperate around the EMA conference on climate change in Budapest next year. Ramon said that there could be the possibility that ASEF could support the conference if there was a session on climate change in Asia and its implication, in which ASEF was a partner. At the conference there could also be a workshop on bi-regional cooperation.
- \* In the Gateway there could also be an open chat forum inviting students who went for studies in Europe and Asia respectively to comment on their experiences. There are already advices developed by the University of British Columbia for students going to study abroad which could be made known, see [www.students.ubc.ca/global/outgoing](http://www.students.ubc.ca/global/outgoing).
- \* ASEF would like to develop an environmental science network in which all are welcome.

Other rallying points organised by ASEF:

- \* There will be a Rectors’ conference next year in connection with a meeting of Education ministers of ASEM in February or March.

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## Participants

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**Asia-Europe Society, to be formally launched in October-November 2007**

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**UNISCI – Research Unit on International Security and Cooperation, Universidad**

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David Garcia, Professor of International Relations

**Universitas 21 – An association of 21 universities worldwide, [www.universitas21.com](http://www.universitas21.com)**

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