

**ASIA-EUROPE FOUNDATION**  
**– 5<sup>th</sup> Editor’s Roundtable–**  
**Recollection of the introduction by Vice-Prime Minister & Minister of Foreign Affairs**  
**Steven VANACKERE**  
**Brussels – 3 October 2010**

Vice-Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Steven VANACKERE opened the 5<sup>th</sup> Editor’s Roundtable as follows : “Words can change the future, but only if the narrative sticks to the readers”. The Minister chose to depart from his prepared speech and preferred to engage on a more personal base with the editors, journalists, and other participants from the media. Underneath are a few of the lines he used:

- True to this mandate, ASEM 8 is proving to be much more than the Summit of the leaders alone. The 6<sup>th</sup> Asia-Europe Parliamentary Partnership Meeting took place earlier in the week on Monday and Tuesday September 27-28. From 2 to 5 October, the 8<sup>th</sup> People’s Forum is bringing together non-governmental organizations, including trade unions, from both regions, 300 people in all. The 12<sup>th</sup> Business Forum will meet on the side on October 4, with a focus on the integration of the respective financial sectors.
- One should not forget that over the last twenty years enormous progress has been achieved in raising the quality of life of Europeans and Asians alike, most notably by lifting millions of people out of poverty. This is often passed under silence – you know – bad news sells better than good news.
- Still, this is not the time for complacency. We face important challenges and they top the agenda of the ASEM 8 Summit. The first priority for ASEM 8 is to join forces in favour of strong, sustainable and balanced growth, with safeguards that prevent the kind of excesses that were seen on the financial markets in the recent past and with the clear objective of producing more inclusive economies. The economic and financial crisis, which is not over yet, may still be the narrative of the day. The important, fundamental question is about our capacity to work together. Zero-sum games approaches are not useful when considering exchange rates and debt deficits.
- Considering that 12 ASEM members are simultaneously members of the G-20, ASEM 8 seems a good opportunity for Asia and Europe, in view of the Seoul G-20 Summit in

November, to show leadership and promote the kind of measured and balanced responses to which both are historically inclined. Instead of focussing on the ‘‘Fall of Yesterday’s Powers’’, one should pay attention to ‘The Rise of the Rest’.

- The impact of declarations and decisions depend on their implementation. There is a clear role for the press, as a guardian for such implementation and for day-to-day accountability. Media people are from within society : they contribute to shape perceptions, they enjoy natural attention and visibility.
- Sustainable development concerns the livelihood of millions of Europeans and Asians. Indeed, present patterns of production and consumption appear not sustainable in the long run. In addition, under the present difficult economic conditions, the sheer preservation of social safety nets and of mechanisms for social solidarity has become an uphill battle of its own. Besides, the recent floods in Pakistan highlight how people can be affected by natural disasters, amplified as a consequence of deforestation and ill guided habitat.
- Europe is fascinated by Asia and vice-versa. Europe envies the growth rates achieved by the Asian economies. It understands that the future of its own economic and social model depends on major structural reforms, unleashing entrepreneurship and competitiveness. Conversely, Asia understands that economic growth alone does not produce stable and harmonious societies. It is interested in the European practice of shared prosperity through the combination of income redistribution and public services. Also, the management of conflicting economic, social and environmental demands in Europe’s pluralistic societies through webs of consultation and participatory mechanisms catches attention in Asia.
- Ageing societies in Europe and Asia are often presented solely as a problem. Yet, longevity, the fact that average life now typically extends far beyond productive life, should also be considered a cherished gift.
- ‘Constructive ambiguity’ is often found in official documents. Let us not fool ourselves. At times, lucid or rational ambiguity can be beneficial but at times it may also have the effect of postponing the solution to the issues at stake. This would appear to be the case

for the respect for human rights and the rule of law. These are not impediments to economic development. These are beneficial to it. Hopefully, one day, an ASEM Summit will clearly state that human rights do matter, also on economic grounds.

- Media are invited to play their role fully. They should not only act as an ASEM observer. They should also behave as ASEM actors.

The intervention of the Vice-Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Steven VANACKERE at the 5<sup>th</sup> Editor's Roundtable was followed by a lively questions and answers session.