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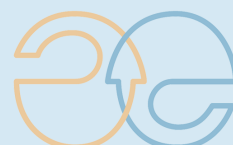
The Future of Asia-Europe Relations in the Post-COVID-19 World

STEAR ANNUAL CONFERENCE 2021

December 2021



STUDENT THINK TANK FOR
EUROPE-ASIA RELATIONS



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Edited by

Jedidja van Boven, Juliette Odolant, and Nawathas Thasanabanchong

Cover designed by

Jule Schretzmeir

Contact

Student Think Tank for Europe-Asia Relations (STEAR)

Email: steareditor@gmail.com

Website: www.stearthinktank.com



FOREWORD

It is remarkable to see what the Student Think Tank for Europe-Asia Relations (STEAR) has achieved in the first year after the founding of the organization. A very professionally organized first annual conference with a very impressive line-up of speakers will surely be seen as a very important milestone in the history of STEAR in the years to come. It was a privilege to attend this conference on the Future of Asia-Europe Relations in the Post Covid-19 World in November 2021. To me it was quite clear that this is a gathering of future leaders, policy makers and bridge builders between Asia and Europe. It was inspiring to see their passion for deeper ties between both regions. By investing in these leaders, we are investing in peaceful and constructive cooperation between both Asia and Europe in the decades to come, based on a joint understanding of common values and aims. The participants of the conference bring in new perspectives and problem-solving capacities for current and future challenges. Amidst a seemingly fracturing world and with the rising competition between the major powers US and China, this is more important than ever. The impact of the two nations' fight for hegemony is particularly felt in Asia. Connection rather than decoupling is key: mutual understanding and close ties between Asia and Europe bear the potential for partnership and multilateral cooperation. The Student Think Tank for Europe-Asia Relations (STEAR) lays the foundation for this to be a success.

Hence, the Regional Programme Political Dialogue Asia of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS) applauds STEAR's efforts to "strengthen relations and deepen cultural ties" between the two continents, and is committed to support this vital cause. KAS values the impact and essential role of the next generation on various platforms, such as the EU-ASEAN Next Gen Think Tank Dialogue (EANGAGE), in which young researchers and policy makers from both regions are working collaboratively on Connectivity, Sustainable Development and Security challenges and solutions on how to bring the two continents and its peoples closer together. The EANGAGE project is co-funded by the EU and implemented together with the Asian Vision Institute (AVI) in Cambodia and the Democratic Academy of Vietnam (DAV).

KAS congratulates STEAR for their inspiring and insightful first Annual Conference. It is a very worthy endeavor to collect the thought-provoking ideas and policy recommendations of the conference in this publication. We hope the readers will enjoy these insights, and we are looking forward to future cooperation projects with STEAR.



Christian Echle

Director, Regional Programme Political Dialogue Asia

Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung



CONFERENCE DIRECTORS' NOTE

What can WE do to be a bridge between Europe and Asia? This is the very question we had been asking ourselves during the preparation process. The Conference that we conceived of was the place where brilliant aspiring young future leaders from both continents get together to learn, engage, and collaborate with each other. .

When we first began discussing the idea of the Conference back in February this year, what we realized was there have not been lots of opportunities available for youths to voice their opinions on pressing diplomatic matters and receive valuable feedback from professionals in the field. By organizing the Policy Competition, we aimed not only to give the youth a chance to acquire first-hand policy-making experience with real-life problems, but also to directly engage with experienced policy makers. Thanks to all the hard work done by the Delegates, we pulled off the amazing Policy Competition and it was such a privilege to witness their enthusiasm and determination for tackling the global issue.

This special edition of the STEAR journal comprises the written recommendations of the three winning teams and we are very proud of presenting these outstanding works to you with tremendous help from our Editors-in-Chief. We hope that their voices show you the multifacetedness of the multilateral issues, challenge your existing ideas, and inspire you to take action.

We are sincerely grateful to KAS for offering the forward to this journal and very much look forward to our future collaborations to promote mutual understanding and cooperation between Europe and Asia. We would also like to take this opportunity to thank everyone who has supported our project over the past months and we are always reminded that our work has high stakes for the future of the young generation. Looking at the works of amazing future leaders, we are incredibly hopeful for what is to come even in this difficult time and we are certain that you will feel the same. Enjoy the journal and we are excited to hear what you think!

Aamna Khan and Emika Otsuka

Co-Directors of the Conference

Student Think Tank for Europe-Asia Relations



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PLANTING COOPERATION, HARVESTING EQUALITY: PROSPECTS OF CLIMATE SMART AGRICULTURE (CSA) TECHNOLOGY TRANSFER PROGRAM BETWEEN ASIA AND EUROPE

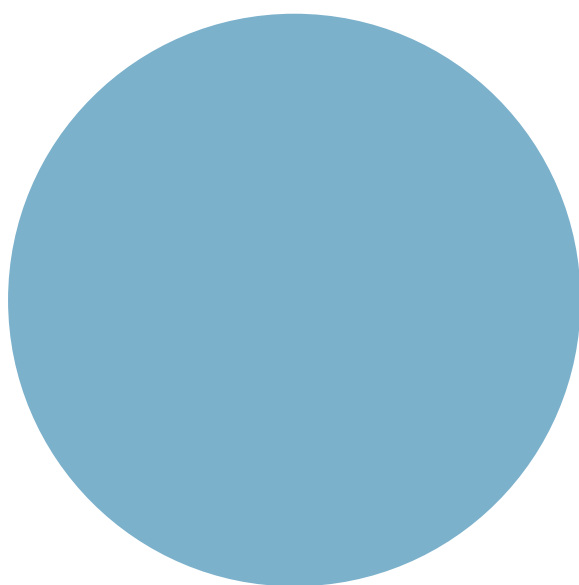
*Hsu Ting-Wei
Leonardo Jaminola III
Yannick Sommer
Juan García-Nieto*

Introduction

One of the major challenges of our times is the unequal development of technology and the self-reinforced widening of this gap between “haves” and the “have-nots” in a globalised world.

In the wake of the process of recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, policies to tackle the growing economic disparity between the two regions will only be effective if they rely on a multilateral approach and are aimed at the right target group. As the agricultural sector constitutes the main workforce segments in developing countries, policies focused on improving the agricultural sector play an integral part in reducing the overall economic disparity between Asian and European countries.

Tackling the agricultural sector lends itself to a few unique advantages. One is swift implementation, as the necessary climate-resilient technologies already exist and only need transferring. The other is targeted relevance. The agricultural sector includes the poorest part of the population, which is why policies in this area target the ones most in need.





Methodology

To explore the possible means of interregional cooperation on tackling agricultural and economic disparity, this paper will survey two existing case studies: the ACCESO project in Honduras and the ASEAN Farmers' Organisation Support Programme (AFOSP). The ACCESO program is a United States Agency for International Development (USAID) supported project that aims to transfer technology to Honduran farmers. The analysis of this case will support the feasibility of climate smart agriculture technology transfer programs. Meanwhile, the AFOSP is a program that aims to improve food security and livelihoods of smallholder farmers in Southeast Asia. This case study will detail the viability of implementing agriculture projects and programs in Asia. This paper made use of project documents and assessment studies to analyse the aforementioned projects.

Results and Discussion

Case Study 1: ACCESO Project

Kuhl (2019) describes that from 2010 till 2014, USAID ran the ACCESO project in Honduras, a state where 44% of the population lives below the extreme poverty line. This project transfers climate resilient technology and knowledge to Honduran farmers, with the aim of improving local crop yield and economic income, whilst minimising environmental impacts on climate change. The project covered both hardware and software transfer, providing farmers with upgraded technology along with individual and customised training for agricultural application. (Kuhl, 2019).

Moreover, the project also increased the income of farmer-beneficiaries through the introduction of market-driven projects for high-value cash crops and promotion of straightforward production practices. As of 2013, the project has aided more than 2,000 farmers in installing drip irrigation systems on their farms. Aside from this, nearly 30,000 households have invested USD 320,000 to improve

irrigation infrastructure. Funding was leveraged from ACCESO and other partner institutions and organisations. The installation of new irrigation systems allowed farmers to plant various high-value crops (such as onions and cabbage) and increased productivity of traditional crops (coffee, maize, and beans). The diversification resulted in higher household income for the beneficiaries (Project Spotlight - Honduras, 2013).

Similar to Honduras, the agricultural sector in Southeast Asia can also benefit from a similar technology transfer scheme, improving climate resilience, and reducing economic disparity. Though the project required additional long-term investment and climate information to fundamentally enhance resilience and income for all agricultural households, its transnational framework is a valuable reference for policy makers. The case study inspired further research on the benefits and limitations of technology transfer projects conducted on an intergovernmental scale.

Case Study 2: AFOSP

While much of the discourse and policies on the mitigation of global warming and the transition towards greener economies have primarily targeted state governments, the importance of localised efforts and cooperative initiatives by organised communities at the micro-level should not be understated. In the context of agriculture, this rings especially true in countries where these activities and the primary sector in general constitute a large part of their economy. In Southeast Asian countries like Laos and Cambodia, workers in agriculture constitute more than half of the workforce, while in other states like Vietnam and Myanmar agriculture the figure is above 40% (ASEAN Secretariat, 2019).

AFOSP allows for a comprehensive dialogue between the main stakeholders within ASEAN, providing a necessary link between farmers and ASEAN institutions. AFOSP was launched in 2015 and has

since then been a key instrument in intra-ASEAN cooperation in agriculture.

AFOSP's main goal is to "improve the livelihoods and food security situation of smallholder farmers and rural producers in ASEAN countries" (ASEAN Foundation). The programme is divided into two elements: Farmers Fighting Poverty (FFP/ASEAN) and the Medium-Term Cooperation Programme (MTCP2). The role of both elements of AFOSP is essentially similar, but FFP/ASEAN primarily focuses on the subnational level, leaving the international arena for MTCP2. Both pillars of AFOSP are geared towards the improvement of farmers' living standards and food security, as well as consolidating a network of farmers' organisations across countries by implementing a dialogue between local farmers and the regional policies enacted by ASEAN.

AFOSP is a prime example of EU-ASEAN collaboration in an economic area which is key for a large part of the population in Southeast Asian countries, as well as regional trade. The EU provides €15 million to AFOSP's funding (approximately 94% of its total budget) while the ASEAN Foundation develops the planning, such as the Roadmap for Agricultural Cooperative Development for 2025 (Agricord, 2018). Besides, national agriculture agencies or agri-agencies are pivotal in their support and advice provided to AFOSP in many countries. The inclusion of such a wide variety of stakeholders is crucial to fulfil the programme's objective of improving the living standards of people employed in agriculture regionally.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The issues of climate change and economic disparity are deeply interconnected. To illustrate, global warming has been found to have worsened global economic inequality due to the decline in economic output in hotter and poorer countries. From 1961 to 2010, the increase in Earth's temperature resulted in a 17 to 30% decrease in the

wealth per person in low-income countries (Diffenbaugh and Burke, 2019). Meanwhile, on an individual level, extreme weather disturbances and other climate-induced effects can lead to disruptions in production systems affecting livelihood and sources of income (Kabir & Serrao-Neumann, 2020). Overall, evidence suggests that climate change disproportionately impacts the poorest countries and people as they are more exposed and more vulnerable to its effects (Guivarach, Mejean, and Taconet, 2021).

Effects of climate change have been prominent in the agriculture sector. The increase in temperature and more extreme weather disturbances have greatly reduced agricultural productivity leading to a loss in income for farmers (Agriculture and Climate Change: Towards Sustainable, Productive and Climate-Friendly Agricultural Systems, 2016). It should be noted that the rural poor in many countries are highly reliant on agricultural income and farming-related livelihood (Kabir & Serrao-Neumann, 2020). Poverty has been identified as primarily a rural challenge by the UN, as estimates suggest that 80% of people in poverty reside in rural areas (Castañeda et al, 2018). In 2013, 18% of rural residents were classified as living in extreme poverty compared to only 5% of urban dwellers (World Social Report 2021 Reconsidering Rural Development, 2021). In terms of employment, the agriculture sector remains the biggest employer in the Asia-Pacific as of 2017 accounting for 28.5% of the workforce (Sectoral distribution of work in Asia-Pacific, n.d.). Meanwhile, in Europe, 9.7 million people worked in the agriculture sector in 2016 making it a significant employer in the region (Farmers and the agricultural labour force - statistics, n.d.). As such, climate change can have a significant impact in both regions' socio-economic development, especially in reducing inequality and alleviating poverty. While agriculture is affected by climate change, agriculture also contributes to climate change.

As a response to this, the concept of climate-smart agriculture has been



increasingly utilised in recent years. Combining the management of various landscapes and resources (e.g., croplands, forests, livestock, and fisheries), climate-smart agriculture (CSA) aims to attain the following: increased productivity, enhanced resilience, and reduced emissions (Climate-smart agriculture, n.d.).

This paper suggests an Asia-Europe green technology transfer collaboration program to mainstream the use of CSA in both regions. Stipulated in the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, green technology transfer refers to processes and mechanisms that result in the dissemination and transfer of knowledge, skills, and equipment for climate change mitigation and adaptation to different stakeholders (Technology Transfer, 2016). Under this proposal, the target recipients are smallholder farmers and farmers' cooperatives, and other rural producers. This program will help raise farmers' income, make production systems resilient, and contribute to climate change mitigation. Moreover, the technology transfer program will fill in a number of gaps, including in the areas of information and financing, especially in developing Asia. The paper uses the ACCESO project in Honduras and AFOSP as evidence of the need and viability of an agricultural transfer program focusing on CSA. Both programs can also serve as models to carry out a CSA technology transfer. Best practices documented in these multistakeholder programs may be replicated to serve as guide for the implementation of the CSA technology transfer program between Asia and Europe.

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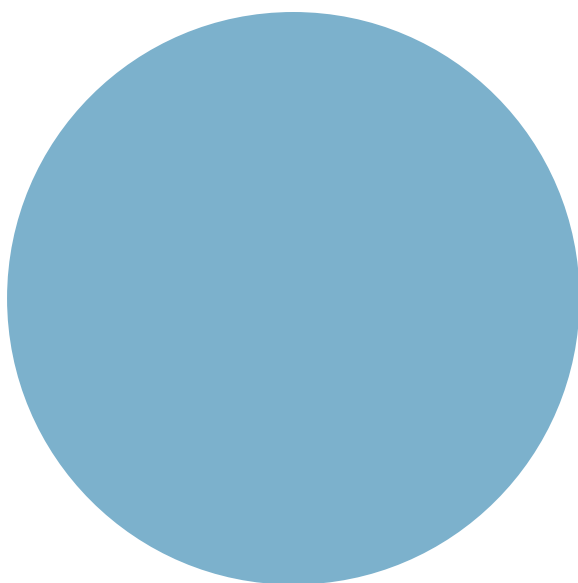


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A HOLISTIC APPROACH TOWARD ADVANCING DIGITAL ECONOMY THROUGH CONNECTIVITY IN EUROPE AND ASIA

*Konstantin Ehrhardt
Gregory Plummer
Kashaf Sohail
Thy Trinh*



Executive Summary

While the influence of digital technologies spans across and concerns all sectors and areas of life, inter-regional cooperation between Europe and Asia. Digital technologies still very much focus on the field of e-commerce and digital trade. This is also evidenced by the Asia-Europe Meeting's (ASEM) recent establishment of a Pathfinder Group for Connectivity (APGC) and their declaration of the Tangible Area of Cooperation in the field of Connectivity (TACC) to promote digital connectivity. This policy brief argues for taking a more comprehensive and inclusive approach to inter-regional digital connectivity - in line with ASEM's three pillars - and particularly provides recommendations on how to strengthen regional capacity and alleviate economic disparities in times of post-COVID-19 socio-economic recovery.

Introduction

Digital economies in Europe and Asia are developing at a rapid pace. By 2018, ASEM member countries already comprised more than 2.4 billion e-commerce users, accounting for more than 1.2 trillion USD in revenues. The Economic Research Institute for ASEAN and East Asia (ERIA) expects a continuation on the steep growth trajectory culminating in 3.4 billion users and 2.2 trillion USD in total



revenues by 2024 (Chen, 2021). Beyond e-commerce, cyber security and data regulation have become a flashpoint of geopolitical competition (European Commission, 2018; European Parliament, 2021; Amighini, 2021). Furthermore, various ASEM members have recently launched digital development assistance initiatives, including the EU's Digital for Development policy and China's Digital Silk Road (Okano-Heijmans, 2019). These developments generally speak for advancing holistic inter-regional dialogue on digital connectivity via ASEM.

What has been done?

In recent years, both scholars and practitioners have argued that ASEM must expand its scope to make digital connectivity a key priority and show more ambition by providing institutional venues for field-specific dialogue, also embracing the involvement and ideas of civil society, nonprofit and for-profit actors to facilitate cross-sectoral best practice exchanges and harness the exploitation of synergies (Lay Hwee & Tonchev, 2020; Okano-Heijmans, 2019; Ling, 2019; Friends of Europe, 2018).

In November 2018, ASEM started addressing this need by establishing a Pathfinder Group for Connectivity (APGC) dedicated to "Future Connectivity and Digital Economy" and naming digital connectivity a Tangible Area of Cooperation in the field of Connectivity (TACC) (Gaens, 2019). However, its coordination so far remains relatively limited to economic aspects. Since it focuses on "digital economy and digital infrastructure" and "cross-border e-commerce" as key issue areas. The APGC also lists only the Economic Ministers' Meeting (EMM), Customs Directors and the General and Commissioners' Meeting as respective competent parties (ASEM, 2018).

Analysis

ASEM should embrace the holistic character of digital connectivity by expanding its focus and composition beyond the economic dimension to

encompass all of its three main pillars and provide greater opportunities for external stakeholder engagement, including Asian and European youth.

Why is this important?

Pillar 1: Political dimension

Governments play a vital role in national digital infrastructure development and remain key actors of international cooperation. Through ASEM's agendas, they should join hands to prioritize setting up regulatory standards and norms for safe and fast digital connectivity. Also in the 13th ASEM Summit, leaders agreed to reaffirm their resolve to strengthen ASEM cooperation on digital connectivity in order to ensure a global, open, secure, stable, accessible and peaceful ICT environment. Hence, ASEM should initiate more regular inter-regional discussions between member states for best practice exchange and capacity-building.

Pillar 2: Economic dimension

Currently, there is still a lack of cooperation and alignment between different businesses and governments that have similar digital aspirations. Additionally, the lack of digital infrastructure across both regions highlights not only the lack of coordination but also the importance of an egalitarian digital world to provide everyone access to similar digital economic advantages (ITU, 2020).

Pillar 3: Sociocultural dimension

Inter-regional digital connectivity cannot disregard the various sociocultural structures, norms and values of European and Asian societies. One of the key factors hindering digital technology adoption by enterprises and consumers is a lack of trust in these technologies. Trust is often cited as a key barrier to adoption of e-commerce. (OECD, 2020). Particularly in less developed areas, there are multiple stratas and divisions amongst people and the ideas and principles of the digital

economy are alien to most of them, especially women. To address these concerns, it is paramount for the Pathfinder Group actors to lead the removal of barriers to emancipation and foster an inclusive, digital-driven era of globalisation alleviating urban-rural and inter-regional economic disparities (World Economic Forum, 2019).

Policy recommendations

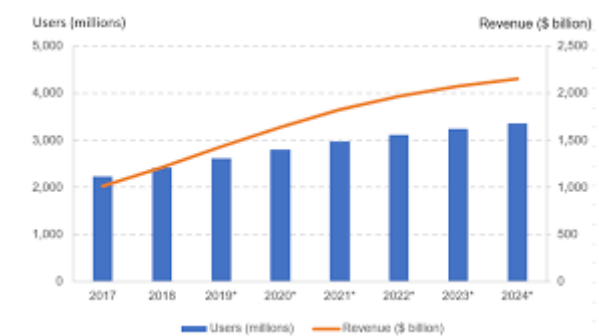
Pillar 1: Political dimension

First of all, the Pathfinder Group should advocate for more frequent talks concerning digital connectivity at different institutional levels, including the ASEM Summit, Ministerial Meetings and Senior Officials' Meetings (SOM). Thus, addressing the topic of digital connectivity via many channels will allow for a regular and thorough discussion. Secondly, a forum dedicated to e-Governance should be established. Member states that have implemented advanced e-Government systems, e.g. Estonia or Singapore, can provide valuable input on how to increase public sector efficiency and effectiveness, reduce governmental corruption and increase business transparency (UN Department of Social and Economic Affairs, 2020; Twizeyimana & Andersson, 2019). Thirdly, states, governments, and international organisations can use ASEM channels to discuss and establish common guidelines. Such guidelines will develop more structured policies for startups and SMEs operating in ICT-related segments (low-interest loans, simplified business registration procedure). Governments should further articulate a strategic framework for businesses in a nascent stage of digitalization outlining main priorities and objectives for digital transformation assistance while taking existing strategies and agendas into account.

Pillar 2: Economic dimension

Firstly, a digital inclusion financing framework as promoted by the World Economic Forum (2021) and the EDISON Alliance should be adopted by the APGC.

Such a framework will ensure that both governments and businesses that pursue digital inclusion financing arrangements solidify their commitment to promoting digital inclusion and raising funds through international capital markets. Secondly, a commitment to prioritising technology and internet access is key to reducing economic disparity. Facilitating cooperation with key players, such as The Alliance for Affordable Internet (A4AI) enables cheap and reliable network penetration in rural areas which allows farmers and microentrepreneurs to benefit from larger markets. (A4AI, 2020). Furthermore, the Pathfinder Group on Connectivity should increase its exposure to venture capital funds and startup incubators/accelerators to facilitate cross-regional financing and greater connectivity between startup ecosystems. Lastly, youth participation should become mandatory in order to capitalise on their adaptability and entrepreneurship. As outlined by UNDP (2020), better access to financial services should be encouraged to support youth entrepreneurship in low-income areas.



ASEM's e-commerce revenue and number of users (Chen, 2021)

Pillar 3: Sociocultural dimension

Firstly, the Pathfinder Group needs to stimulate its transport connectivity cluster to bind remote areas while recognising their respective socio-cultural spheres by employing local people and/or staffing personnel acquainted with their languages and traditions. Such efforts would not only help to connect and upgrade rural areas



but would also facilitate introducing and replicating a reformed version of the township and village enterprises. Under the programme, target populations shall be provided with training to use digital devices like sensors, GPS and aerial images. This also helps to establish digitally affine market-oriented enterprise systems in rural areas and thus contributes to the economic institutional reform of the APGC.

Secondly, an International Trade Center (2017) study found that 75% of online-only businesses are owned by women that ultimately generate higher revenue and are often more innovative and outperform the male counterparts. Thus, particularly women should be provided with extensive training opportunities and encouragement to pursue internet-based entrepreneurial ventures. Thirdly, 36% of the total population in Asia and Europe represents young people (ILO, 2020). However, meaningful youth engagement has rarely been given attention in any of APGC's agenda. The forum shall, thus, develop a map of formal and informal youth-participatory organisations and youth-centred civil society organisations to work with.

Moreover, ASEM shall develop a preliminary budget that covers identified youth needs, startups and assumes the (necessarily higher) cost of recalibrating engagement investments throughout the program life cycle to help vulnerable youth. Capacitating participants and providing them resources to support their own initiatives have helped them develop a mindset to drive change in the community.

Conclusion

The idea of the digital economy has had a substantial impact on the connectivity among people, businesses, devices, data and processes. ASEM as a leading intergovernmental process has the foundation needed for greater digital connectivity. ASEM's initiative of the Pathfinder group will pave a way for both the regions to bridge the economic gap and build digital relations in the era of globalisation 4.0.

Building on the existing pillars and the APGC, prioritising the digitalisation of its members can alleviate the growing economic disparity. In particular, we suggest enhancing digital government policies that are supportive of new models of social interaction, establishing concrete financial frameworks for businesses and governments, all the while fostering the participation of youth and women to support their digital entrepreneurship and successful startups.

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ENHANCING STUDENT MOBILITY AND HUMAN CAPITAL ACROSS EURASIA

*Anna Kolotova
Emma Sara D'Andrea
Shah Nizam Bin Mazlan
Thapanee Tubnonghee*

Executive Summary

Student mobility remains a quagmire of red tape and unrecognised certification in the 21st century.

The falling international student growth rates following COVID-19 restrictions worldwide has exacerbated this issue. Although joint programmes and corresponding certifications have seen breakthroughs in the European Union through ventures like the European Consortium for Accreditation (ECA), no such continent-spanning association yet exists for Asia, much less one that coordinates both. This policy paper proposes the recommendations in the following areas: (1) accreditation and certification, (2) educational programmes and initiatives, and (3) financing. It aims to suggest policies, offer review methods, and pinpoint possible obstacles, with the potential of breaking barriers and fostering a fluid labour force for fulfilling shortages and reducing economic disparity across Eurasia.

Introduction

Automation and technological advancement have steadily reduced the demand for unskilled labour, pushing the need for a larger highly skilled workforce. The COVID-19 pandemic and the



economic recessions in its wake only accelerated this shift, entrenching digitisation and virtualisation as the mainstay of the new post-pandemic era, heightening further demand for skilled labour.

From 2019-2020, China and India produced nearly as many graduates as the entire EU (Textor, 2021). The OECD estimates there will be 300 million graduates globally by 2030, with half that number attributed to China and India alone (ICEF Monitor, 2019). Despite this high figure, supply and demand is uneven, with the populous regions of the developing world unable to fill the labour shortages in markets of developed nations due to issues ranging from lack of accreditation to excessive bureaucracy, all of which hamper student mobility.

However, foreign students face more obstacles in the labour market due to difficulties related to credential recognition, lower reservation wages and language difficulties (OECD, 2021). This brief intends to outline the obstacles preventing the free flow of the human capital pool to where it is needed and provide recommendations involving governments, educational institutions, and private entities to facilitate greater student mobility and exposure at both secondary and tertiary levels. It aims at creating a more fluid labour market across Eurasia while also mitigating any adverse effects on local populations.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Accreditation and Certification

Organisations at the international level such as the EU, ASEAN, and other regional groupings to facilitate and endorse:

- a) The signing of MoUs (Memorandums of Understanding) between universities across Eurasia in fostering dialogue to achieve goals including, but not limited to:

- i) The adoption of internationally recognised academic qualifications and certification or mutual recognition of local certification where the former is unfeasible, in fields such as but not restricted to:
 - 1) Language requirements and proficiency tests,
 - 2) Bachelor's degrees and their certification,
 - 3) Technical studies and related fields,
 - 4) Humanitarian studies and related fields,
 - 5) Medical studies and related fields,
 - 6) Expansion into other courses subject to policy revision,
- ii) The integration, adoption, or replication of joint accreditation bodies, such as the European Consortium for Accreditation across Eurasia to
 - 1) Coordinate a single unified accreditation procedure,
- b) The partnering of universities in different regions across Eurasia, bolstered by measures like:
 - i) Institutionalising regular exchange programmes for students, offering one or multiple semesters abroad,
 - ii) Offering joint degrees,
 - iii) Offering undergraduate and postgraduate programmes that include studying at a partner university for a period of a year or more.

More cooperation between existing regional-level networking institutions; for example, among the European University Association (EUA), the Network of Universities from the Capitals of Europe (UNICA), and the ASEAN University Network (AUN). In the short term, a formal cooperation between these organisations regarding accreditation coherence (similar to the Bologna Process) is needed.

Recommendation 2: Educational Programmes and Initiatives

The implementation of expanded and unified exchange programmes through steps like:

- a) Expanding, adopting, or replicating initiatives from existing successful programmes from the EU and beyond, such as the Erasmus+ programmes.

Recommending tertiary educational institutions to adopt two extra languages as languages of instruction in addition to the national language:

- a) One European and one Asian language where:
 - i) Specific languages offered are subject to demand and feasibility,
 - ii) Languages introduced in the universities are to be determined by the education facility and/or government (depending on the political situation between the host country and students' countries of origin).

Recommendation 3: Financing

Adoption and integration of existing funding platforms, or creation of such platforms based on the European Hub for Civic Engagement model (Das Progressive Zentrum, 2019) with the aim to:

- a) Accommodate investments and financial support from both private investors and public organisations,
- b) Provide more financial support for students in all disciplines to fill in the labour gap whereby:
 - i) Individuals, groups, schools, institutions, or other entities seeking funding may put up their profiles, aims, and required funding amount,
 - ii) Individuals, groups, schools, institutions, or other entities seeking to fund may put up their profiles and desired applicants,

- iii) Both parties receiving and providing funding may actively seek each other out and communicate the terms of their agreement.

Methodology

The primary data sources informing this brief are reports and statistics from international bodies such as the EACEA, OECD, and ASEAN, as well as relevant case studies and news reports. Having identified potential challenges, the feasible ideas from specific case studies and other relevant material are synthesised into the recommendations of this paper. The mixed quantitative-qualitative approach in data collection and recommendation was chosen for its flexibility in allowing the incorporation of data from various sources, which is valuable considering the highly diverse educational and market conditions spanning Eurasia.

Policy Review Mechanism

The annual growth rate of international students would reach 6-9% (OECD, 2013; OECD, 2021), in which rates are to be considered in light of varying degrees of COVID-19 recovery within the first five years of implementation:

- a) High recovery: >70% of Eurasian nations reopen borders and allow incoming travel □ 8-9% annual growth,
- b) Moderate recovery: 50% of Eurasian nations □ 7-8% annual growth,
- c) Low recovery: <50% of Eurasian nations □ 6-7% annual growth,

To review the effective participation in the common financing platform every two years, with indicators including, but not limited to:



- a) Number of entities only expressing interest compared to those actively funding – to provide better figures for analysing the success of the initiative,
- b) Number of students interested in receiving financial support, receiving financial support and level of satisfaction with it – to analyse the popularity of the initiative among students,

All policies to be continued, revised, suspended, or cancelled pending local and international review after five years of implementation, in which time problems arising may:

- a) Be addressed jointly by relevant parties within a timeframe agreed based on the complexity of the issue.

Obstacles

Education-related projects/initiatives cannot provide any exact results in a short period of time:

- a) It takes time to reform the system and introduce changes, but they are more beneficial in the long run. Therefore, this policy should be mapped out as a long-term development strategy,

Local nationalism and prejudices toward certain ethnic groups/nations/etc:

- a) Solution depends on the political situation and government stance towards the issue,

Lack of support/mistrust of education facilities towards the initiative:

- a) Select a target group of education facilities to be a pilot group for the study and first implement the project among them (pilot group defined by specific criteria),
- b) Boost appeal to potential participating institutions by showing statistics of the participating graduates from similar initiatives and their achievements compare to non-participating ones,

Lack of common quality assurance agency and signed Decrees on mutual recognition of education certificate

documentation, decreasing willingness of prospective institution to join due to wariness towards extensive bureaucracy:

- a) Short-term strategy: establish MoUs between existing quality assurance agencies. Integrate pioneer Asian universities into the European Higher Education Area as “observers/partners”,
- b) Long-term strategy: establish a new international educational agency that must be institutionalised and recognised by European and Asian interregional organisations. Encourage countries to sign bilateral agreements on mutual recognition or to join the already signed Decrees, thus making them multilateral and expand opportunities for students to choose the country for their next degree,

Legislative differences across different nations:

- a) Advise target country to update legislation,
- b) Set initiatives to accommodate legislative differences where possible,

Lack of support/interest from investing institutions:

- a) Attract private sector and other interested parties to be private investors,
- b) Present statistics to showcase benefits of the initiative.

Conclusion

International student growth rates are steadily recovering in the post-pandemic period. However, the free flow of human capital across Eurasia is still restricted, namely through the lack of accreditation, integration, and access. By identifying the obstacles and establishing a review mechanism, the suggested policy recommendations could pave the way by overcoming these obstacles and helping leverage the largest pool of human capital in the world in filling labour shortages and buttressing against future crises.

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RECAP: STEAR ANNUAL CONFERENCE 2021

By James Farquharson, Juliette Odolant, and Nawathas Thasanabanchong



Day 1

Opening Ceremony

STEAR Vice President for External Affairs Daniel welcomed all delegates and the speakers to the conference before giving the floor to Luke, Co-President of STEAR, to make opening remarks. Luke welcomed Ambassador Morikawa, who is the Executive Director of the Asia-Europe Foundation and has supported STEAR since its launch event in April 2021.

Luke mentioned the famous *100 Whites* book written by Kenya Hara, describing the importance of hundred shades of white in design. This approach was then related to culture as a multi-faceted concept.

“Don’t be afraid to share with each other your own shades of white, explore your culture differences and find your commonalities.”

— Luke Cavanaugh,
Co-founder & Co-President, STEAR

Ambassador Morikawa commended all Asian and European young leaders for their leadership in participating and sharing views in this conference. His Excellency also said that it is very timely and pertinent to organise the conference because the 13th ASEM Summit will also be held later this month. Ambassador Morikawa addressed that the COVID-19 pandemic has changed the world in a variety of ways, as many global issues like climate change, may be unchanged or even worsened. Hence, it is crucial how we shape and operate in the post-COVID-19 world, where Ambassador Morikawa highlighted communication as key.

His Excellency also presented the outlook of future Asia and Europe relations in 3 aspects in light of climate change. Firstly, ***Asia and Europe can work together in an equal partnership***: Asia is one of the fastest-growing regions, while Europe has shown consistent efforts and innovative solutions on climate change. Secondly, ***a platform for communication and coordination with each other is important to learn different ideas***. We need to accelerate

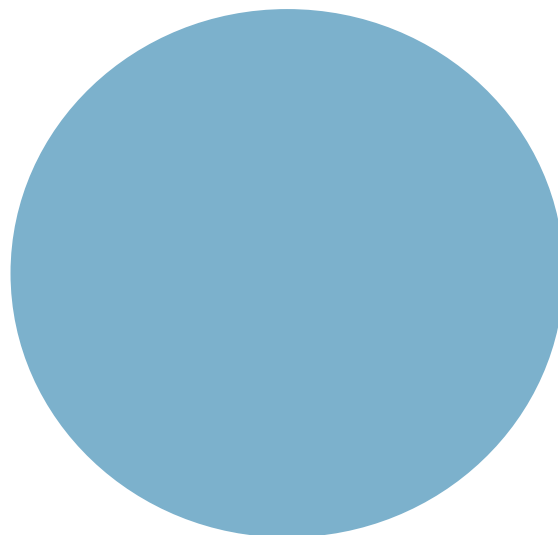
our efforts to bridge different ideas and simultaneously cooperate and evaluate the uncertainty in the post-Covid-19 world. Thirdly, **young leaders of future generations of both Asia and Europe are the keys to finding solutions** - which is why the STEAR conference is an important steppingstone for the future.

Last but not least, STEAR Conference Director Aamna expressed her warm welcome to the STEAR Annual Virtual Conference and gave thanks to the STEAR team members for their hard work in making this conference together in the past nine months. Aamna also addressed the gap and misconceptions between Asia and Europe and hoped that this conference will be the steppingstone in bridging the gap between the two regions.

First Keynote Speech: Global Economic Outlook

Recently, the pandemic has resulted in a severe economic contraction, leading to different challenges for countries all over the world. STEAR was honoured to welcome Chikahisa Sumi, Director of the IMF Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific, and Bert Hofman, Director of the East Asian Institute and Professor of Practice at the Lee Kuan Yew School, National University of Singapore, to share their global economic outlook in this session.

Mr. Sumi stated that the pandemic has led the world to face the largest economic contraction since the Great Depression. He also addressed that the pandemic seems to be the ultimate contrast because it hit the most vulnerable the hardest. Moreover, the pandemic pushed another 80 million people in emerging Asian economies into extreme poverty last year. As the pandemic has exacerbated poverty and inequality, it is very crucial to make sure that we can get the poverty reduction back on track. Mr. Sumi stated that it is important that we provide the vaccine supply everywhere, as the WHO set to equitably vaccinate 40% of the global population by this year. Advanced economies also need to share



more of their vaccine supply with developing economies - nobody is safe unless everybody is safe.

Mr. Sumi also suggested that it is vital to harness new growth opportunities, such as digital transformation and a green economy; however, existing policies that support human capital, such as the social safety net, should not be neglected either.

“Challenges are heading to your generations, but we can defeat it together, and the IMF is ready to support 190 countries in economic development and facilitate international cooperation.”

— Chikahisa Sumi,
Director of the IMF Regional Office
for Asia and the Pacific

Mr. Hofman highlighted several important transitions in the world economy, with particular attention for the rise of China. As China has become the world's second-largest economy, Mr Hofman also mentioned Thucydides's Trap, a deadly pattern of structural stress that results when a rising power challenges a ruling one. Managing this transition is the biggest issue in terms of diplomacy and deepening the understanding among the United States and Europe and Asia. Moreover, Mr Hofman stated that the economic gravity is shifting to Asia since it is one of the fastest-growing regions.



Poverty was once the biggest problem but this may not be the case anymore. The future challenge is climate change, in which everyone must cooperate together.

“We will not solve climate change or nuclear proliferation without cooperation.”

— Bert Hofman,
Director of the East Asian Institute
and Professor of Practice
at the Lee Kuan Yew School,
National University of Singapore

After the keynote speeches, the floor was opened to the Q&A session, where delegates asked questions to our keynote speakers concerning topics like the future direction of the IMF and the World Bank, the future collaboration with China in terms of innovation and technology, and climate finance.

Second Keynote Speech: ASEAN-EU Relations

In December 2020, the ASEAN-EU Strategic Partnership was announced, marking a turning point in the relationship between the two regional organisations. The strategic partnership contains cooperative arrangements on a wide range of issues including the economy, COVID-19 responses, sustainable development, maritime cooperation, and cyber security. It was STEAR's honour to have Ambassador Igor Driesmans, EU Ambassador to ASEAN, as our keynote speaker moderated by Ziarla, Vice President for Internal Affairs.

Ambassador Driesmans highlighted 2 key topics, including ASEAN-EU relations and youth partnership. His Excellency stated that the EU is one of the most prominent partners with ASEAN in the aspects of education, trade facilitation, environment, security, increasing on the military side. Ambassador Driesmans also mentioned 3 interesting points of ASEAN, consisting of economic, security interests, and environmental issues. Firstly, ASEAN has had solid economic growth in the past decades and is projected to become the 4th largest economy in the world by 2030. While the EU is the third-largest

investor and trade partner in the region, there are more potential collaborations to explore in the digital area.

Secondly, the tension has risen in the security stability in the Southeast Asia region, as the global military spending on the Asia-Pacific rose from 20% to 28%. His Excellency stated that 40% of the EU foreign trade is across the South China Sea.

“We see ASEAN as the big balancer in the region, and a strong ASEAN will help balance the dynamics of the region and maintain stability. Hence, it is a critical issue for the EU to facilitate trade and partnership.”

— Ambassador Igor Driesmans,
EU Ambassador to ASEAN

Thirdly, there is rapid economic growth in Southeast Asia, and so does the CO2 emission. Therefore, immediate action will lead to a larger economic gain in the long run and sustainability has become the EU's strong interest in Southeast Asia. For the youth engagement topic, Ambassador Driesmans emphasised the importance of youth engagement platforms and think tanks from both regions to share and exchange thoughts. The EU has supported the ASEAN through the [SHARE programme](#) to strengthen regional cooperation and enhance the quality, regional competitiveness and internationalisation of ASEAN higher education institutions and students, as well as supporting the establishment of the ASEAN Scholarship.

After the keynote speech, the floor was opened to the Q&A session, where delegates asked questions to our keynote speaker on issues like the EU's role and challenges in Myanmar and maritime security, ASEAN's centrality, the Free Trade Agreement, and the EU's 'lifeboat schemes.'

Panel 1: The Future of Youth Engagement and Exchange

STEAR's vision is to serve as the first leading policy institute for students and young professionals in

Asia and Europe, to provide a bridge between the two continents, and to strengthen multilateral cooperation and international prosperity. However, the COVID-19 pandemic has caused dramatic and unprecedented changes to young people's lives, such as the absence of in-person activities, physical and mental health issues.

STEAR was extremely honoured to organise a panel discussion with several distinguished guests: Dr Katharina Heil, President of Erasmus Mundus Association, Edward Lim, Policy Analyst, Singapore Ministry of Finance, Hayley Winchcombe, the Chair of the Board of the ASEAN-Australia Strategic Youth Partnership (ASSEYP), moderated by Michael Yip, Research Associate at the University of Oxford.

Hayley stated that the pandemic creates both burdens and opportunities. Many people could not take part in exchange programmes during the pandemic or had to shift to virtual or online programmes, which constitutes a significant loss of opportunities for our generation in developing cultural competences and networking skills. Nonetheless, youth organisations offer a beacon of hope amidst the pandemic. Since young people still interact and create initiatives virtually on various platforms, Hayley added it was very exciting to see a lot of programmes happening online - in the past, these programmes would not have been possible at all!

Dr. Heil also seconded that many courses have been pushed to online programmes, but the physical exchange can never truly be replaced. However, a hybrid programme between offline and online exchange seems to be a very interesting landscape to explore, and going online promotes inclusivity. She urged for more consultation of youth and open spaces in planning and designing the programmes.

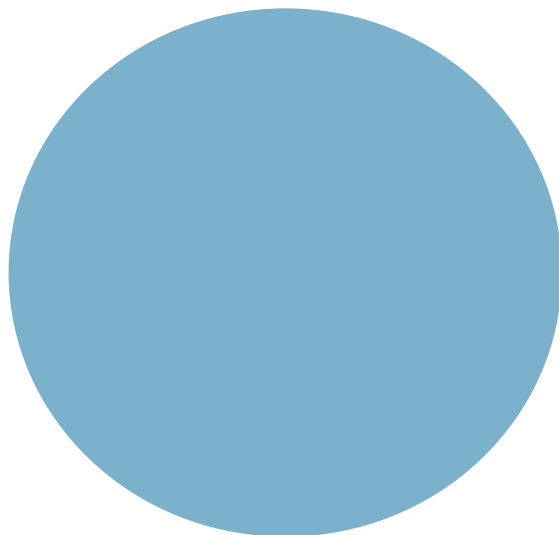
Similarly, Edward stated that the COVID-19 has shaped how we engage with each other. Looking ahead, he urged for the idea of co-creation to solve future challenges. In March, he co-created the "It'll Be Alright" Project with the [Youth Mental Well-being Network](#) to empower young Singaporeans to manage their mental struggles during the pandemic through the involvement of youth, parents, mental health professionals, and government representatives. Edward further suggested that he found it useful to have a mentor for guiding the initiative's direction and serving as an amplifier to share the message and publicise the campaign.

After the panel discussion, the floor was opened to the Q&A session, where delegates asked questions to our keynote speaker on topics like the challenges in returning to in-person communication, cross-cultural understanding and project collaboration in the different time zones, and techniques when discussing sensitive issues like geopolitics with other people.

Day 2

Reflection on Day One

The second day of the STEAR conference began with a moment of self-reflection. Conference Director Emika Otsuka asked participants to pause and reflect on their experiences from Day 1. Guiding the audience through this self-reflection with a list of guiding questions, Emika encouraged them to assess the valuable insights gained from the first day of the STEAR conference with prompts such as: What has been the most eye-opening moment of





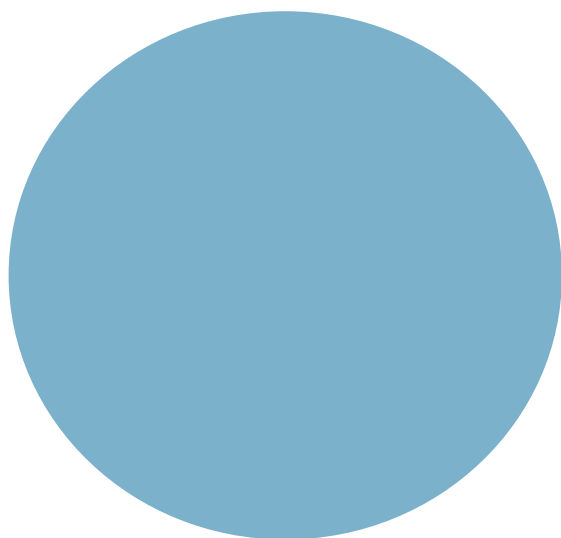
the overall experience so far? Did the sessions challenge your point of view? How would your learnings yesterday fit into your broader goals and self-development?

Third Keynote Speech: Multilateralism and Diplomacy

Following the reflection, STEAR Vice President for External Affairs Daniel Tafelski introduced our third Keynote Speaker. It was an honour for STEAR to welcome Mr Lirong Zhang, Secretary-General and Board Member of the China Forum, Secretary-General at the Center for International Security and Strategy at Tsinghua, to share his views on Asia-Europe relations and related issues of China, multilateralism, and youth engagement in diplomacy.

Mr. Zhang underlined that *Asia and Europe are two regions with important yet differing influence in the world today*, Europe having the largest concentration of developed countries, Asia having the fastest economic growth. Referring back to the centuries of tumultuous change undergone by Asia and more specifically China, Mr. Zhang asserted that now is the time to focus on development and cooperation under the banners of peace.

Mechanisms such as the European Union, European security organisations and Asia Europe Meetings play positive roles in avoiding war and responding to non-traditional security threats, while bolstering regional security.



The world is facing unprecedented pressure as it faces COVID-19, climate change, and major economic recessions. Mr. Zhang stated that a Cold War mentality and subsequent bloc formation are not aligned with today's priorities. While China advocates for peaceful cooperation and development for a community with a shared future, Asia and Europe also shoulder an important responsibility.

Mr. Zhang drew attention to the issue of unequal global development, and appealed to the principle of common but differentiated responsibility to mitigate this inequality. He also emphasized the significance of cross-cultural understanding - though development processes have disparate outcomes due to different local cultures, we should transcend ideological differences to embrace cultural diversity, instead of striving towards sameness.

Following the keynote speech, a discussion between Mr Zhang and the audience took place, where questions were asked regarding the potential for mutual Europe-Asia learning, and the promotion of cross-cultural respect amongst students educated overseas. In response to audience questions, Mr Zhang discussed China's role in international organisations, its aims in regional organisations, and guidance for those interested in a career in Chinese politics and diplomacy.

Panel 2: Cultural Understanding beyond the Differences in a Digitalised World

Following an introduction by STEAR Cultural Officer Stewart Knights, we dove into our second panel, which focused on the social, political and economic impacts of digitalization, and the prospects for digitalization-based facilitation of cross-cultural interaction. STEAR was honoured to organise a panel discussion with our distinguished guests: Dr. Asma Abdullah, an Intercultural Specialist, Yingying Li - Founder & CEO of Yingfluence, Inc, and Professor Mauro Barisione, Professor of Political Sociology at University of Milan.

Yingying pointed out that the conference itself is proof of the internet's positive potential, and that social media has become an important tool in the context of the pandemic. However, she added that the 'social dilemma' phenomenon also showed the dark side of social media. The abundance of different social media platforms arising from the competitiveness of the industry has forced digital professionals to be nomadic across platforms, in order to cater to different cultural preferences.

Dr. Asma underlined the need to be technologically savvy nowadays, and discussed how Zoom and social media in general have become a mental space and a crucial means of building relationships as a social space. It has emphasized the importance of bearing in mind the physical space inhabited by each person, whether sitting room, study or bedroom.

Professor Barisione explored the question of relationships between online discourse and political movements, asserting that the political economy of platforms must be understood in order to interpret the political results. Explaining the logic of epistemic ambivalence, he underlined the need to be neither overly optimistic nor pessimistic. This discussion was followed by a Q&A session, where questions were asked about the panellists' paths towards becoming intercultural specialists, and recommended ways to nurture intercultural skills.

STEAR Policy Competition

As part of the STEAR conference's aim to promote cross-cultural exchange, a policy case competition was organized. Delegates not only experienced policy development first-hand by tackling current issues, but also received feedback from specialized policy makers. STEAR was honoured to host three distinguished guest judges: Shada Islam, Senior Advisor at the European Policy Centre, Brussels-based EU commentator, Dr. Kirida Bhaopichitr, Research Director for International Economics and Development at Thailand Development Research Institute, and Trishia Octaviano,

Senior Project Executive in the Governance & Economy Department at the Asia-Europe Foundation.

After Emika Otsuka's introduction, the delegates began their policy presentations. Eight delegate groups presented their impressive research and policy recommendations in the hopes of winning one of the three Policy Prizes.

Group A's policy presentation, titled Education for All, aimed to target the issue of the digital divide in Asia and Europe in the post-pandemic world through three major policy recommendations and a comparative diagram showcasing a results assessment matrix.

Group B sought to enhance and promote student mobility and the free flow of human capital across Eurasia by resolving the issue of degree accreditation and certification on a regional and international scale with proposals of harmonisation of different national legislations and curricula.

Group C's policy presentation was centred on the creation of a fair vaccination alliance, which it identified as the basis for health policy at eye level between Asia and Europe. Advocating for a reform of patent law on vaccines, the group recommended the formation of a cross-Eurasian vaccine alliance which would capitalise on comparative advantages.

Group D adopted a holistic approach towards advancing digital connectivity between Europe and Asia through an expansion of ASEM's scope and using the Pathfinder group framework to expand communication channels, promote inclusion financing, and facilitate integration of women and youth.

Group E's presentation addressed challenges in the education sector due to the COVID-19 pandemic, such as the digital divide and low education budget baselines. Its recommendations included an increase in spending through cooperation with European consultancies and more effective data usage.



Group F focused on the issue of development for gender inclusivity, identifying the issues of gender inequality in the digitalizing world. It recommended tackling the systemic problem through gender sensitive data collection, the bolstering of digital infrastructure capacities and increasing women's access to digital tools and digital literacy.

Group G's 'Build Back Blue' policy project aimed to reassess the current use of maritime spaces as 'development spaces', taking into account the triangular framework of human capital, economy and sustainability and encouraging a harmonisation of conservation and sustainable maritime practices with spatial planning.

Group H considered the issue of planting cooperation and harvesting equality, proposing the development of a climate-smart agriculture (CSA) green technology transfer program between Europe and Asia in order to share and further innovate the use of climate resilient technology.

Each judge provided feedback and commented on the event, remarking what a privilege it was to witness such enthusiasm for tackling the issues that the world faces. Shada Islam underlined that rather than maintaining a Eurocentric us/them mindset, we should focus on what each culture can learn from the other. Dr Bhaopichitr highlighted that policy recommendations should not be a laundry list of desired changes, but should have a clear prioritisation and a means for persuading governments to accept the most important ones. Finally, Trishia Octaviano suggested that we should not be afraid of asking sensitive questions when delivering policy recommendations, as it enables you to see the policy as it relates to other political considerations, and may even enable you to find a solution to the more intractable issues.

The winners were then announced: Group H won first prize from the panel of three judges, while Group B won the presentation prize and Group D won the popular vote. Congratulations to all groups that participated!

Panel 3: Sustainable Development and Climate Action

For the Conference's third and final panel, Sustainable Development and Climate Action, STEAR was delighted to welcome two distinguished speakers: Sir Mark Moody Stuart, Former Chair of Shell, and Nadia Yang, President of European Young Engineers. The Panel was moderated by James Balzer, Editor at STEAR. The discussion for this panel was centred on analysing the role of multi-stakeholder and multi-sectoral engagement in working towards sustainable development.

Taking into account the engineering and corporate expertise of the speakers, the panellists, moderator and delegates focused on the current obstacles hindering Sustainable Development outcomes from a more technical perspective. The questions that were broached during the discussion ranged from the challenges the speakers had experienced in terms of coordinating multi-sectoral measures to the achievement of balance in the business sector between profitability and sustainability.

Closing Ceremony

Rounding off the event, STEAR Co-President Dao Nguyen highlighted four principles that were apparent throughout all the varied speeches, policy presentations and panels. Firstly, he noted the importance of equality in Asia-Europe partnerships, a key lesson in the context of a common tendency to juxtapose the two groupings or view them in terms of dominance.

Secondly, continued efforts must be made to bridge the different ideas inherent in Asian and European cultures, efforts which - as Dr Asma and Yingying mentioned - must begin with understanding one's own cultural assumptions. Thirdly, technical solutions need to be found to global issues such as the pandemic, by taking into account the needs and expertise of all countries. Finally, the conference made the power of youth abundantly clear, with the

The Future of Asia-Europe Relations in the Post COVID-19 World

enthusiasm and ability displayed by all the delegates and organisers deeply impressing the judges and speakers.

Dao took this opportunity to announce the three exciting flagship initiatives planned by STEAR for 2022. These include the Global Village programme, which aims to deepen cultural understanding; the launching of STEAR's Singapore chapter in December; and the capacity building summer school hosted at Cambridge University next summer.

He then gave the floor to Christian Echle, Director of Konrad Adenauer Stiftung's Regional Programme Political Dialogue in Asia. We are all very grateful for their sponsorship of the event, and look forward to further collaboration with KAS in the future. Christian expressed his appreciation for attending an event that showcased the resolve of young people to make a meaningful contribution to a variety of global issues.

The floor was then handed to Anna Kolotova, one of the outstanding delegates from the conference. Born in Russia but having lived in China for the past ten years, the idea of 'Eurasia' is particularly resonant for her, and she was heartened to see so many young people engaged in the world and working to deliver solutions to its problems throughout the conference.

Conference Director Emika Otsuka closed the ceremony by detailing the path of conference preparations that she, Aamna, and their team have walked in the weeks and months before the Conference. As she put it so beautifully, the meaning of the relationships created and ideas discussed may not be immediately clear, but the seeds that have been planted over the last two days will continue to grow and eventually bloom in the future.

