

Brussels, 30 June 2008

Social partners from 43 Asian and European countries meet to promote fair globalisation

Some 150 workers' and employers' representatives from 43 countries in Europe and Asia will today meet for the first time to discuss the social dimension of globalisation. The inaugural Asia-Europe (ASEM) Social Partners Forum in Brussels (30 June - 1 July) will contribute to broader cooperation between the two regions on improving living and working conditions in the world. The Forum will be opened by Commissioner Vladimír Špidla and Slovenian Labour Minister Marjeta Cotman. Belgian Foreign Minister Karel De Gucht will address the Forum on the second day.

"The EU and Asia acting together can help to make globalisation a success for all," said EU Social Affairs Commissioner Vladimír Špidla. "We need joint responses to address the new trends of growing inequalities both between and within countries and to mitigate the negative impact of financial market turbulence and rising food prices. Social partners have a key role in helping ensure a fair distribution of the gains of globalisation and in particular in promoting decent work for all – a shared objective for both Europe and Asia."

The Forum taking place today and tomorrow is the first event of its kind. The ASEM Heads of State called at their summit in 2006 to better involve social partners in the ASEM dialogue process. The Forum will contribute to the new ASEM dialogue on employment and social affairs launched at the first ASEM Labour Ministers Conference in Potsdam in 2006. This dialogue aims to reinforce regional cooperation between the EU and Asia, to strengthen the social dimension of globalisation and to promote decent work at global level.

The Forum will discuss issues including qualification; training and employability; poverty reduction; social protection and social cohesion; employment creation and flexicurity; and working conditions and quality of work. The main results of their discussions will be submitted to the next ASEM Labour Ministers' Meeting and Summit which will take place in October 2008 in Bali and Beijing, respectively.

Background

The Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) is a political dialogue process between the EU and Asia launched in 1996. ASEM today comprises 43 member countries which together represent more than 50% of world GDP and more than 60% of world trade and the world's labour force. Given this predominant role of ASEM in the world economy its dialogue and cooperation on employment and social affairs can have a direct impact on working conditions and social standards in the global economy. Based on the positive role that the social partners are playing in the EU, Commissioner Špidla encouraged the participants to develop concrete action proposals for further progress in these areas, while reiterating his support for regular social partner consultations under the ASEM process.

Further information:

http://ec.europa.eu/external_relations/asem/intro/index.htm