

## **THE EU-JAPAN-ASIA JOURNALISTS CONFERENCE (FUKUOKA, JAPAN 6-9 APRIL)**

For its traditional yearly Journalists Conference - now in its 17<sup>th</sup> edition - the Delegation of the European Commission in Japan adopted a new formula. In partnership with the ASEF Foundation in Singapore we organised the conference in Fukuoka, Japan, on the theme "New Asia and New Europe", meaning to discuss how changes like the EU enlargement or the revival of Japan's economy and the rise of China affected the partnerships between the EU and the countries in Asia. For the first time we invited journalists from the other Asian countries participating in ASEM to join our traditional groups from the EU countries, old and new Member States, and Japan.

36 journalists participated. The opening session was addressed by Mr Bernhard ZEPTER, Head of Delegation, Mr Wataru ASO, Governor of Fukuoka Prefecture, Mr Hatsuhsa TAKASHIMA, Press Secretary, Director-General for Press & Public Relations of Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (who also had an informal session with all the journalists in the afternoon) and Dr Albrecht ROTHACHER, Director for Public Affairs of ASEF Foundation. Mr Rodolfo C. SEVERINO, Former ASEAN Secretary-General, gave a keynote speech on new ASEAN in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Other speakers taking part in the working sessions of the conference were Dr Hazel SMITH, Professor of United Nations University in Tokyo, Mr Yoichi MASUZOE, Member of the House of Councillors of Japan, Mr Katsufusa FUJITA, Corporate Vice President of Mitsui High-tech, Inc., Mr Pierre DEFRAIGNE, Deputy Director-General of DG Trade, Mr Chris HUHNE, Member of the European Parliament, and Professor Hirotaka WATANABE, Tokyo University of Foreign Studies.

The credibility of Japan's foreign policy vis-à-vis Asia was very much the dominant theme of the discussions which had been structured around security, development and governance issues as they affect the partnerships between the EU and countries in Asia. Interest in the EU and its affairs was not as great as the preoccupation that both Japanese and other Asian journalists expressed regarding the suspicion with which Japan is viewed in Asia (amendment of Article 9 of its Constitution, re-militarisation, inability to apologise for the actions of the Imperial Army in WWII, visits of the Prime Minister to the Yasukuni Shrine).

The shadow of the US was perceptible throughout the discussions, terrorism, energy and poverty (root cause of terrorism) being seen as the meaningful security issues much more than the potential military rise of China or even the threats from North Korea.

Europe was not deemed as being capable of or entitled to contribute to security in Asia. Some journalists felt that Europe was not sympathetic to Asia and only interested in commerce. Europe's agenda of human rights and democracy although fundamentally right was suffering from the insensitive way in which it was thrust on Asia. Democracy could not be imported, it had to be home grown.

Corruption, described as endemic and a factor in allocating scarce resources and opportunities, was a cause of poverty in depriving large groups of citizens in all countries of the benefits of development as well as of the fruits of international cooperation. An active press, publicity and direct accountability were the indispensable remedies as well as systemic conditionality clauses by donors.

Regional cooperation, successful in Europe, had not yet convincingly taken root in Asia as was shown by the experimentalism of ASEAN or the protracted and rather sterile discussions about FTAs. But European integration was an inspiration and its recipes for reconciliation, common norms or monetary union were highlighted.

(Etienne REUTER, Head of Press, Public and Cultural Affairs, Tokyo Delegation)