



Australian Institute of International Affairs

Australia Joins the Asia-Europe Meeting:

9 August 2010, Melbourne
10 August 2010, Canberra

Outcomes Report

This report summarises two AIIA National events concerning Australia and the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM). The events were in conjunction with AIIA VIC and AIIA ACT Branch, with significant help from the Konrad Adenauer Foundation (KAS).

Highlights

- A total of nine speakers, including three members of diplomatic missions and the heads of four leading Australian centres for understanding Europe;
- Two international speakers, Dr Lay Hwee Yeo from the Singapore Institute of International Affairs and Dr Wilhelm Hofmeister from KAS;
- More than 60 influential audience members, including a substantial representation of the Canberra and Melbourne diplomatic communities;
- Spirited discussion following the presentations between panel and audience members.

Notable topics



Dr Lay Hwee Yeo

The event stimulated discussion on the meaning of Australia's participation in ASEM from October 2010. AIIA ACT Branch President Ian Dudgeon RFD noted that Australians have little knowledge of ASEM to date, despite it being one of the largest intergovernmental forums in the world. Dr Hofmeister gave a valuable background on the formation and aims of ASEM while Dr Yeo assessed ASEM's successes to date. The speakers also addressed current trends in ASEM's direction, including institutional structure, agenda and authority.

At both events there was considerable discussion about the internal dynamics of ASEM and on the process of potential enlargement. As Russia is joining this year, this led to questions on Russia's role in the organisation, and how it would fit into the Asia-Europe dynamic.



Dr Wilhelm Hofmeister

Other questions raised were how Australia might benefit from ASEM, and what opportunities participation would open for Australia. Australia's place in the region, the importance of ASEM to current member states and what impact membership in it will have on Australian bilateral relationships were also discussed.

Attendees

In Melbourne, Drs Hofmeister and Yeo were joined by a distinguished panel including the Belgian Ambassador, the Hon. Patrick Renault, and professors representing all the Melbourne universities with a strong focus on Europe:

- Dr Stefan Auer of LaTrobe University,
- Dr Philomena Murray of the University of Melbourne,
- Dr Bruce Wilson of RMIT
- Dr Pauline Winand of Monash University.



The Melbourne panel, from left: Ambassador Renault, Dr Auer, Dr Winand, Dr Yeo, Dr Hofmeister, Dr Wilson and Dr Murray.

In Canberra, Drs Hofmeister and Yeo were joined by the First Secretary of the Belgian Embassy Sophie Hottat and the Ambassador of the European Union Delegation David Daly.

The public forum was attended by more than 60 participants including representatives from:

- *Embassies, High Commissions, Consulates and Trade Offices* (Bulgaria, Denmark, Germany, Netherlands, Poland, Singapore, Taiwan and the EU High Commission)

- *Australian Government* (including Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Parliamentary Library);
- *Academics and Students* from Universities all over the country (e.g., Australian National University, Asia-Pacific College of Diplomacy, Australian Defence Force Academy, Melbourne University, Deakin University, La Trobe University, Monash University).



The Canberra panel, from left: Mr Dudgeon, Ms Hottat, Ms Conley Tyler, Ambassador Daly, Dr Hofmeister and Dr Yeo

Accomplishments

The Symposia generated several developments:

- **Increased publicity for ASEM:** many audience members mentioned during post-event discussion that they had not previously heard of ASEM, but now possessed some understanding of its relevance and impact.
- **Improved perspectives:** by utilising international speakers, audience members and participants could begin to understand ASEM from multiple viewpoints.
- **Improved dialogue:** by holding two events with a large number of speakers, the participants were able to discuss issues amongst themselves and make further contacts, assisting future scholarship. Social events were held for participating speakers in both cities to enable further conversation and network building.
- **Generating contacts:** the event allowed AIIA to improve its relationship with a number of individuals and institutions, most notably KAS.