

## **Presentation by Ronan Lenihan from ASEF**

### **Adding more seats at the table: Can an enlarged ASEM bring Europe and the Asia – Pacific closer?**

The Asia Europe Meeting (ASEM) process was established in 1996 as a platform to facilitate dialogue and co-operation between Asia and Europe. Initially set up as a dialogue between 26 members, ASEM has since expanded to a total of 48 members (including the ASEAN Secretariat & European Commission). The latest expansion at the 8th ASEM summit in Brussels brought Australia, New Zealand, and Russia into the ASEM family. Much debate has surrounded this latest expansion with questions over the geographic and strategic importance of enlarging to include this new “3rd category” of membership. It is evident that this expansion is an indication of the importance and openness of the dialogue, whose members are responsible for over half of the global GDP, 60% of global trade and 60% of the global population. Yet, doubts persist on the effectiveness of the dialogue and questions remain on what the third category members stand to gain from ASEM membership. This paper will examine the current challenges facing the ASEM process following its latest expansion. Specific focus will be paid to ASEM's visibility in national and international discourse and the current agenda of the process. In the words of Herman Van Rompuy, President of the European Council, in his speech to ASEM leaders at the 8th ASEM summit, "ASEM is our common strategic asset and it is in our mutual interest to develop it further". It remains to be seen whether enlargement will further improve upon ASEM as an asset for closer Asia-Europe co-operation.