

Welcome and Opening Address

by

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Your Excellencies, Members of the European Parliament, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is with great pleasure that I welcome you all to this meeting on 'Europe and Asia, One Year after the 11th of September', here at the Eastmann building of the European Parliament. Today calls for a commemoration of those three thousand and fourty three persons hailing from some 88 different countries, going about their daily business in the early New York morning of September 11. They became victims of a vicious, wicked, brutal and unprecedented act of terrorism. Here, the European Parliament's Committee on Foreign Affairs responded immediately and unconditionally condemned this act of terrorism. To quote:

' This terrorist act is directed against the entire international community of democracies and their citizens. We stand together with the USA in the fight against international terrorism'

It was inevitable that this event would have far-reaching implications for the global relationships between the United States of America and its associates and adversaries. And indeed it has -- we all witnessed the military operations in Afghanistan, and seen increased US military presence in Southern Philippines, in Indonesia, across several Central Asian States and elsewhere. Many governments around the globe, including from within the EU, are now actively sharing intelligence with the US as well as amongst themselves aiming to apprehend and bring to justice all those that have provided support to the attack.

Today, here in Brussels the home of the European Union, we will focus on the implications of September 11 on the international relations between the EU and Asia. The relationship between Europe and Asia has been re-defined in the post-colonial context in three successive stages. First, starting from the mid-seventies, through new commitments in the field of development cooperation and trade cooperation, second, from the early 1990s onwards through economic cooperation focusing on business-to-business collaboration and in recent years through a hesitant and sometimes delicate cooperation in the fields of regional and global 'human' security.

The Europe-Asia Strategic Framework -- adopted by the Commission just a few days earlier on the 5th of September 2001 -- refers to a pro-active role in regional fora such as the ASEAN Regional Forum, it refers to support for conflict prevention and addressing global challenges such as combating trans-national crime and -- indeed -- terrorism (see page 19 of the communication COM(2001) 469 final).

What truly will those implications for EU-Asia be? Is there perhaps a need to rethink the geographical focus and coverage of the Asia Strategy -- towards a greater attention on Central Asia? Is there perhaps a need for new 'instruments' or 'modalities' in order to address issues of 'hard' as well as 'soft' security collaboration to complement or even substitute the approach of 'technical assistance' such as TACIS?

Is there not a danger of political incoherence -- offering trade and economic rewards to governments who comply in the field of geo-strategy, while downscaling equally or more pertinent concerns about governance, democratisation, human rights, development and social equity?

There too may be a number of broader implications. First, are we not in danger of losing our focus on the multi-polar world, in view of the resurgence of unilateral actions by the US co-ordinating with only a few of the main players? Second, are we not in danger of falling prey to stereo-type and prejudice, partly due to media imaging which portrays a woman wearing the *hijab* as backward and not integrated, or portraying the young Muslim man as a fighter wearing a turban while toting his Kalashnikov?

In our programme today we will seek to assess the implications at the level of the EU strategy vis-à-vis Asia in the first session. In the second session we will assess the implications for political relations and human rights issues. The third session will focus in particular on Central Asia, while the fourth session will look into Europe's dialogues with Islam.

The interest in today's meeting is enormous -- we have received close to 200 registrations. It is not merely numbers -- particular impressive is the calibre of the participants -- I am very pleased to welcome Ambassadors and Counsellors from

- Nearly all the ASEAN Member States, in particular Ambassador Mashor Ahmad from Brunei Darussalam who will also address us in the second session;
- West and Central Asia, including Iran, Kazakhstan, Kuwait, Lebanon; Mongolia, Uzbekistan;
- South Asia with the Ambassador from Sri Lanka and Nepal and Counsellors from India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, as well as
- senior representatives from East Asia (Hong Kong, Taiwan, China and Japan).

Evidently Asia whole-heartedly accepts the invitation to examine the implications of September 11 for its relations with the EU and we very much welcome you to share with us your views and concerns.

From the European side three Members of the European Parliament will speak today -- Jules Maaten, a Dutch Member of the ELDR group, Nirj Deva, a British Member of the EPP group and Senora Maria Carrilho, a Portuguese Member of the PSE Group. We are in particular grateful to Jules Maaten who immediately supported our request to hold the meeting at the European

Parliament. Furthermore, quite a few EU member states have sent members of their permanent representations to this meeting and we are very pleased with the presence of numerous EU officials, leading academics, prominent NGO' s and members of the Press corps.

As you know, the meeting has been organised by the Strategic Alliance for Asian Studies, which is a collaboration between five institutes in Europe specialising in the interdisciplinary study of Asia. Our Alliance seeks to pool our intellectual resources to inform public policy debate about Asia in Europe and it consists of

- the International Institute of Asian Studies, an inter-university post-doctoral research centre based in Leiden and Amsterdam, established in 1993;
- the Nordic Institute for Asian Studies, which promotes research into Asia in the Scandinavian countries, founded in 1967;
- the Institut für Asienkunde in Hamburg, which functions as a think tank for the German Parliament and the Foreign Ministry, founded in 1956;
- the European Institute for Asian Studies, a think tank supported by the European Commission and the European Parliament, founded in 1989;
- the Asia-Europe Centre, a resource centre of the Fondation Nationale des Sciences Politique in Paris, set up in 2001.

The disciplines covered by the Alliance members include political science, economics, international relations, anthropology, humanities and linguistics and the topics researched include, amongst others, issues of ethnicity, social development, political and diplomatic cooperation. Today here in Brussels our focus is naturally on international relations and political science.

May I once again welcome you all and declare today' s meeting opened.

First, I would like to request Jules Maaten, the European Parliament' s rapporteur to review with us the Parliamentary discussions about the EU' s Asia strategy paper, followed by a statement from the Commission' s Asia directorate, represented today by Pierre Amilhat, the Director of the Coordination Unit. Dr David Camroux will offer a critical assessment of the strategy, after which I will invite questions and comments from the floor. Speakers are requested to be brief -- say around 10 minutes -- to enable maximum participation.