

## NEWS & EVENTS > Interview: Fionnuala Croke on the Symposium on the Future Direction of ASEM

BY JORDI BALTÀ PORTOLÉS  
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# Interview: Fionnuala Croke on the Symposium on the Future Direction of ASEM



On 31 March and 1 April

2015, Bangkok hosted a Senior Officials' Meeting of the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM), entitled **Symposium on the Future Direction of ASEM**. Among the participants of the Symposium was ASEMUS Chair **Fionnuala Croke**, who took part in a session where the social and cultural pillar of relations between Asia and Europe was discussed. Following the event, we interviewed her to hear more about her message and the conclusions of the event. *Pictured right: Fionnuala Croke addresses the ASEM Symposium in Bangkok, 31 March 2015.* Q: You were recently invited to take part in a discussion on the social and cultural pillar of the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM). What were the main points raised in your contribution? My message was simple: **The soft power of culture can often be underestimated as a diplomatic or business tool**; I believe that museums

such as the **Chester Beatty** have a unique role to play in fostering intercultural understanding and mutual respect, thereby advancing the ideas and recommendations of ASEM in ways that are achievable and tangible. Through collaborations, and the sharing of expertise and collections, **museums can start conversations at a cultural level allowing our governments to follow through** on those conversations at political and economic level. **Museum displays have the added benefit of being able to reach large, multicultural audiences** – facilitated by online resources and social media – and we are therefore able to promulgate cross-cultural themes. We can challenge existing narratives and prepare new narratives that explore our cultural heritage. While based on scholarly research, we can interpret these stories at multiple levels, using them to communicate our shared common values and needs to a broad and diverse public. *Q: What do you think is the value added of networks like ASEMUS in the broader context of relations between Asia and Europe?* ASEMUS' objectives are two-fold: to promote mutual understanding between Asia and Europe through collaborative museum-based cultural activity; and to stimulate and facilitate the sharing and use of museum collections. **Culture is *the* great bridge builder and exchanges and interactions at this level can allow individuals and groups of people across these continents to find points of commonality** that transcend other barriers. *Q: How can multi-thematic forums like ASEM enrich the work of those with a focus on culture and the arts? What were your views after the meeting in Bangkok?* In preparing for the meeting in Bangkok, I noted with interest the use of language describing the future of ASEM. Phrases like '*energised and vibrant*', '*digital connectivity*', and '*creating a new ASEM narrative*' jumped out at me. **I particularly related to the claim that ASEM's '*socio-cultural or people-to-people pillar is picking up momentum*'. Conscious that ASEMUS has no budget to develop a sustainable programme of activity, I spoke about the work of ASEMUS and the excellent relationship we enjoy with our colleagues in **ASEF's Cultural Department**. Bearing in mind that ASEF is the only permanent institution of the Asia Europe Meeting and ASEMUS is the *museum arm or network* of the ASEM countries, I made a plea for those present to **advocate for ASEF and ASEMUS in their respective countries to ensure that the relevant parties understand the potential and the power of culture.****

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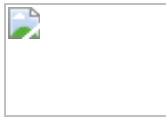
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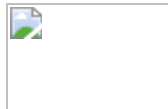
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