

ASEA - UNINET
(Austria - South-East Asia University Network)

1st PLENARY MEETING
Ho Chi Minh City / Vietnam Dec. 27-30, 1994

Introductory Remarks

Presently, ASEA-UNINET includes 6 Austrian, 3 Indonesian, 10 Thai and 6 Vietnamese universities. Top representatives of almost all of these universities followed the invitation to the first plenary meeting and discussed numerous topics related to administration and infrastructure of the Network, information exchange, joint project performance and financing as well as priorities of cooperation fields. The conclusions achieved within the agenda have all been reached unanimously by all delegates and are summarized in the following.

Observer from the Ministry of University Affairs of Thailand and the Ministry of Education and Training of Vietnam were also present at the meeting.

AGENDA and CONCLUSIONS

1. Organisation and Administration

Every University is represented by one coordinator for all ASEA-UNINET activities. For each country a national coordinator has been nominated, namely Prof. Rode (U Innsbruck) for Austria, Prof. Sukanto (UGM/Yogyakarta) for Indonesia, Prof. Supachai (Chulalongkorn/Bangkok) for Thailand and Prof. Dang Ugh Van (U Hanoi) for Vietnam. The national coordinator of the country where the next plenary meeting is to be held, acts as chairman for the intersessional period.

The next plenary meeting will take place in Chiang Mai / Thailand in February 1996; after that, plenary meetings will be held every 2 years.

According to this schedule Prof. Supachai (Thailand) acts as ASEA-UNINET chairman for the present interessional period.

During the interessional periods, working groups can be established and meet for the preparation of agenda or for taking care of special tasks within the Network's scope. Besides nominated delegates (coordinators), other experts may be invited as members of such working groups.

2. Information Exchange

Printed brochures and specific information on study programmes, research programmes and facilities and other offers of any of the partner institutions will be supplied on specific request to the partner universities or their subunits (departments, institutes). In addition to that, all institutions will try to increase their presence in databases like WWW (World Wide Web) and Gopher in order to make such information available via electronic networks (Internet).

ASEA-UNINET related information will be distributed by the national coordinators, who supply it to all university coordinators in their respective countries. The university coordinators will distribute incoming information to faculties, departments and institutes in their universities and forward information supplied by any of these institutions to them to the national coordinator, who will forward them to the national coordinators of the other countries. This information exchange will be performed preferentially via Internet and ASEA-UNINET electronic mailing lists; institutions not yet having access to Internet will be informed via facsimile and/or ordinary air mail services.

In addition to these channels, a "user group" will be established on Internet by Prof. Tjoa at the Technical University of Vienna, where all staff and students interested in ASEA-UNINET activities may subscribe, submit letters for requests and contribute to discussions.

3. Project Proposals and Performance

Whenever a project is planned or carried out between institutions of network universities belonging to 2 or more different countries, university and national coordinators will be informed at an early stage of the project planning. On the basis of this information provided for all partner institutions, requests for joining in this project by other universities can be submitted in due course. Besides the planning of joint research projects, this also applies to teaching activities, workshops and special courses within the network, enabling thus to make more efficient use of visits of staff members to Austria or a country in South-East Asia by inviting them to further institutions in the respective region.

For the initiation of larger joint research projects, after exchange of related information and requests, a detailed discussion among all interested partner institutions may become necessary concerning the detailed planning of performance, time schedules and financing possibilities. For this purpose the organisation of small workshops is considered most useful. Such workshops shall be carried out in a similar way as meetings of working groups on specific tasks as mentioned under (1).

4. Financing

Delegates of the 4 countries involved in ASEA-UNINET have outlined briefly the existing and intended sources of financing for network activities. It is understood that some of these budgets are and should be accessible regularly for ad-hoc activities with small-scale budget requirements, whereas for projects with larger budget requirements financing has to be planned specifically, taking into consideration all accessible national and international funding possibilities. This is especially important, if besides personnel and travel costs also costs for equipment and scientific materials arise.

The following national funding sources have been identified :

Austria: *University Budgets for Partnerships

* University Budgets for International Cooperation

* North-South Dialogue Scholarships

- * Scholarships of Ministry for Science and Research
- * Visiting Professorships
- * Scholarships of the Austrian Science Foundation
- * Development Cooperation Funds of the Federal Government^{a)}
- * Dedicated Budget of Ministry for Science and Research^{a)}
- * project Funding by Austrian Science Foundation
(at present, agreements with sister institutions in Thailand and Indonesia have already been signed)

Thailand:

- * Autonomous Budgets of the Universities
- * Dedicated Budget of Ministry for University Affairs^{a)}
- * Government Budget for Cooperation with Indochina/ASEAN
- * Project Funding by National Research Council

Indonesia:

- * Autonomous Budget of the Universities
- * Dedicated Budget of the Ministry for Education^{a)}
- * Project Funding by National Research Foundation

Vietnam:

- * Budgets of Universities
- * Dedicated Budget of the Ministry for Education and Training^{a)}

^{a)} to be negotiated

Reflecting the general budgetary situation and the state of economic development, funding capacities of university budgets differ strongly. Austrian and Thai universities can usually cover the full costs for short-term guests, and may in special cases also give some travel assistance; Indonesian universities can on the whole provide accommodation only and some Vietnamese universities have difficulties to provide any substantial support at present.

The Austrian universities will try to achieve an improvement of existing government scholarship programmes in quantity and quality and ask for government help in the establishment of on-place and South-South Scholarship programmes within ASEA-UNINET.

5. Relation to European Union Programmes

The specific guidelines for research-cooperation with third-world countries as provided in the framework of the EU research cooperation programmes have been outlined by the Austrian delegates. Whenever a project of partners in 2 or more South-East Asian countries in ASEA-UNINET and an Austrian partner meets the requirements for project submission to the EU authorities, one or more further EU partners will be approached to join. Austrian universities usually have well-established connections to partner institutions within the EU and can be instrumental, therefore, to identify suitable institutions in other EU countries for such projects, whenever the Asian partner institutions have not yet established such connections.

EU funding is considered of special importance for large-scale multilateral projects in areas where high-level research can be carried out by several institutions of the network. ASEA-UNINET is considered as a most suitable structure for that purpose, now already providing many of the desired networking capabilities mentioned in the relevant EU documents.

6. Focus Areas of Cooperation

All university delegates have identified the main interests of their institutions in staff development, teaching and research programmes. From these statements, a list of the areas of common interest has been compiled and adopted unequivocally as the priority cooperation fields within ASEA-UNINET. At the same time it has been stated that this list does not exclude any other field of cooperation from being realized within ASEA-UNINET.

The focus areas of cooperation will be:

1. Computer Science including Software Engineering and Computer Assisted Chemistry
2. Agricultural and Food Technology
3. Environmental Science and Technology
4. Medicine and Health
5. Biotechnology
6. International Economics

7. Tourism Economics and Management
8. Language, Linguistics and Translation
9. Telecommunication

The coordinators will invite institutes and departments of their universities to submit cooperation proposals in these fields so that working groups can be formed to define in more detail target areas and specific projects within the given fields.

It is noted that the majority of the fields mentioned above coincide or overlap with priority fields listed in the EU programmes.

7. Relation to UNESCO

ASEA-UNINET is a large-scale structure fulfilling all criteria for the UNESCO-initiated UNITWIN programme. For this reason it may be of interest for UNESCO to adopt ASEA-UNINET as one of their UNITWIN structures and to act as "umbrella" institution.

The delegates would agree to such a UNESCO "umbrella" in case UNESCO is willing to sponsor the network with an annual budget contribution. This possibility will be explored during the current intersessional period.

8. Measures for Infrastructural Improvement

Two measures have been identified as most urgent for the improvement of ASEA-UNINET's infrastructure:

1. Providing full access to Internet for all partner universities in Indonesia and Vietnam.

Delegates of these universities should approach their governments authorities and urge them to give highest priority to the rapid establishment of this indispensable means of scientific communication and information. Establishment of this electronic networking infrastructure should be listed among the top projects in national development plans, and foreign aid should be sought as well as

7

sponsorship by commercial enterprises, e.g. of the computer and telecommunication sector.

2. Visa regulations

The process of obtaining visas for Vietnam for travelling scientists has been identified as a main difficulty for an active and unbureaucratic cooperation. The delegates therefore appeal to the Vietnamese authorities to facilitate the issuing of visas for visiting scientists, and express their hope that agreements can be found between the governments of member countries of ASEA-UNINET to remove all bureaucratic obstacles of this kind, especially for holders of official or service passports, who should be generally exempted from visa requirements for visits up to 3 months. The expected association of Vietnam with ASEAN and possible general agreements between ASEAN and EU countries could be seen as a favourable framework for suitable solutions in this matter.