"Competition – Engine for Prosperity“ , this was the title of this year’s Economic Freedom Network Asia (EFN) conference. The conference took place in Kuala Lumpur from 10th to 13th October 2011. The Economic Freedom Network Asia is a network of research institutes, practitioners, influential think-tanks, and individuals with an object of promoting the benefits of the market economy, civil society and individual liberty, which enhance human development and economic growth in Asia.

This year’s event was organised by the Friedrich Naumann Foundation’s Regional Office Southeast- and East Asia in cooperation with two Malaysian network members, the Institute for Democracy and Economic Affairs (IDEAS) and the Center for Public Policy Studies (CPPS).

More than 160 delegates from all over the world came to Malaysia, among them high-ranking representatives from international politics and economics. The panel discussions focused on three major issues which were the role of government, competition policy and enforcement as well as competition in public service delivery.

Hon. Florencio “Butch” Abad, Secretary of the Department of Budget and Management in the Philippines, welcomed the delegates with his introductory remarks on the overall conference theme. He summarized the advantages of economic competition as follows:

“Competition in the markets leads to reduced prices, increased and improved productivity and encourages innovation. In the end, consumers benefit due to lower prices, better quality of goods and wider choices.”

Also among the honourable guests was Prof Dr Jürgen Morlok, Head of the Board of Trustees of the Friedrich-Naumann-Foundation for Freedom. Prof Dr Morlok spoke on the topic of state intervention in market processes. He pointed out, that the state can and should play a role in regulating economic processes but only in terms of providing the frameworks to ensure free and fair economic competition.

Moreover, he shared his own experiences from his mome country, referring to the German division after World War II:

“I saw a market-economy with competition that lead to prosperity in West Germany. And I also saw a government-controlled economy without competition that resulted in disaster in East Germany. Today, unified Germany is doing well.”

The highlight of the conference was the launch of the Malaysian version of the „Economic Freedom of the World Report (EFW) by the Canadian Fraser Institute. Fred McMahon, Director of the Institute summarized the key findings of the Ranking of 141 countries according to their degree of economic freedom. The data, collected by the Fraser Institute in cooperation with more than 100 partners, clearly substantiate the correlation of a countries’ degree of economic freedom and its stage of development.

The less the state interferes in economic issues, the more competition can take place in the market which in turn leads to a higher development stage.

Malaysian guest of honour of the 2011 Economic Freedom Network Asia conference was Tan Sri Dr Koh Tsu Koon, Minister in the Department of the Prime Minister’s Office and President of the Gerakan Party, one of the foundation’s partners.

Dr Koh acknowledged the work of the Fraser Institute and partners and stressed the importance of the Index as a benchmark for the economic and social development of his

country. Following the conference, Minister Koh introduced the EFW report in Malaysia's cabinet where he broached the issue of the Malaysian ranking. Moreover, he suggested cooperation with the Fraser Institute, IDEAS and the Friedrich-Naumann-Foundation for Freedom. Within this year, the plan is to conduct a joint workshop on the topic of economic freedom.

Following to the conference, the network members drafted and adopted a resolution on the conference topic. The resolution acknowledges granting economic competition by the state as one of the crucial preconditions for a countries’ economic progress. Thus, competition should be one of the core elements of a truly free market economy.

A full version of the resolution can be downloaded here:

http://www.scribd.com/fullscreen/69245713?access_key=key-2jipa1fhcqwqkgv0n6p0

For more photos of the event go to:

http://www.flickr.com/photos/66676593@N06

For the presentation of the speakers, please visit:

www.scribd.com/fnfbangkok

The Regional Office Southeast and East Asia of the Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom would like to take this opportunity to thank all co-organisers, delegates, speaker and participants for their contribution to this successful event.

Juliane Schmucker, Regional Project Coordinator FNF Southeast and East Asia