



“The Hamburg Summit: China meets Europe”

Keynote speech

by

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- Check Against Delivery -

Hamburg Chamber of Commerce

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Hamburg
Chamber of Commerce

Your Excellency Prime Minister Li Keqiang,

Prime Minister Bettel,

Minister Steinmeier,

First Mayor Scholz,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is an honour for me to be here addressing what has become one of the most relevant Sino-European economic forums.

This year this Summit celebrates its first decade. Since then China's weight in the world has grown enormously, the then fledgling EU-China Partnership has developed impressively, a whirlwind financial crisis has shown how interdependent we are, and global problems requiring global responses have multiplied.

The EU and China need each other today in a more holistic way than was the case ten years ago.

We must now make sure that we maintain the commitment - a commitment to work constructively together on an ever wider number of areas.

The EU and China will also be facing more global challenges together - be it terrorism, nuclear proliferation, global economic governance, pandemics, and of course climate change.

For these reasons China will be at the top of my foreign policy agenda throughout my mandate as President of the European Parliament. I intend to build upon the momentum President Xi Jinping's historic visit to the European Parliament in March this year gave to the EU-China parliamentary relations.

The European Union, and with it also the European Parliament, are about to engage on a new adventure.

With the soon to be elected European Commission and the new European Parliament, Europeans have an excellent occasion to breathe fresh air into the EU project and deliver what citizens are asking for.

Some say it is our last chance to deliver in Europe - what I know is that these are critical times. We European politicians must seize this opportunity because if we are unable to fulfil people's basic aspirations and deliver the conditions they need to thrive then we are not fulfilling our fundamental duty.

As politicians we are also called upon to deliver a Europe which is competitive and has an industrial base which is at the cutting edge. We must ensure that entrepreneurs are provided with the ideal context with which to develop or launch their business.

In a sense, the important challenge facing Europe today is a microcosm of the wider world. We live in a complex world which science fiction would have scarcely conceived some decades ago. And it is important for politicians to deliver.

The very much shared global challenges are a wake-up call to both the EU and China to engage more actively and responsibly in the international arena.

We have both invested a lot in our trade relations over these last years and these efforts are bearing fruit. And we must not slow down.

But we need to engage more widely.

On climate change for example, I welcome Prime Minister Li's proclaimed 'war on pollution' in China.

The work taking place through our bilateral cooperation on climate change is also of note.

But, more than anything else, it is crucial to have strong cooperation in view of the Climate Summit in Paris late next year. China's positive engagement is decisive for the Summit's success.

China's active and constructive role will also be necessary for the more ambitious global economic governance that we need to develop.

The multitude of regional conflicts and the surge in international terrorism are also areas which should see us cooperate more together.

Dear friends from Europe and Asia,

Irrespective of the developments around us, the economic side of our relationship remains fundamental.

China is the EU's second trading partner and the EU is China's biggest one. Moreover the good track record we have of dispute resolution, as testified by the agreements on solar panels or wine, sets us in good stead for building confidence and enhancing our commercial relations.

Reaching a deal on the Bilateral Investment Agreement is the most concrete measure currently on the table for maximising potentials. We should focus considerable energies on this.

China and EU trade is worth more than 1 billion euro daily, but this is overwhelmingly concentrated in goods. Our trade in services and investments are still depressingly low. The Bilateral Investment Agreement can remedy this.

The support of the European Parliament for the conclusion of the investment agreement will be necessary. My fellow MEPs and I will be looking to ensure that issues such as social responsibility, environmental and social standards, intellectual property, and data protection are addressed appropriately.

The investment agreement is all the more important because it can be a precursor for talks on other agreements.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Both the EU and China share the common fundamental goal of developing a functioning system that makes life better for their people. The basic goal is the same but the angle from which we approach it often differs.

In many instances this is normal. There is no one size which fits all.

There are however basic rights and conditions which, at one point or another, all people will aspire to and consider fundamental.

These include all sorts of social and political rights and of course human rights.

It's well known that the European Union and China disagree in some of these areas. This is not new.

But just because it is nothing new does not mean that I and others should stop raising our concerns.

I raise these concerns not only because I believe firmly in the individual person and their rights, but also because for a governance system to be sustainable in the long run, people need to know that they can aspire and that there is a body of rights which brings important protection and fairness.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

For over thirty years we have been building a relationship. We have come a long way and we should be proud of this.

Just like two people in a relationship, we have our differences and we openly recognise and raise them.

The years ahead will require us to call on our strong history of cooperation. We will need to continue building our economic cooperation chapters, but we will also need to work together on issues where we do not immediately see eye to eye.

The complex global system will require us to work together, and our successful futures will depend on us working together.

I am sure events such as the Hamburg Summit have an important contribution to make towards delivering this impetus and understanding.

I wish the European Union and China sustainable success, because the world needs it.

Thank you very much for your attention.