

China and Europe to celebrate 40 years of diplomatic relations

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Feature

Yang Yanyi says there is a strengthening of popular support for the China-EU partnership for peace, growth, reform and civilisation.



On 6 September in Beijing, China and the EU held their second high level people-to-people dialogue (HPPD). The meeting set priorities and outlined the future for cultural and people-to-people exchanges between China and the EU at a time when our bilateral relations are entering a new era. This upgrade in people-to-people relations between China and Europe will develop into a fundamental pillar of the long-term success of our partnership, ensuring that cultural exchanges will help boost mutual understanding and trust, catalyse our cooperation and promote joint efforts on global governance.

"There are over five million people traveling between China and Europe every year"

At the meeting, Chinese and EU representatives reviewed progress on the objectives previously set, and initiated a set of new projects to strengthen cooperation, notably in the fields of education, culture and youth exchange. China and the EU have agreed on a number of concrete measures: first, we will offer more scholarships. China will provide 30,000 scholarships for Chinese and European students who will study overseas in Europe and China, while the EU promised to offer financial help to 7000 students. Second, we will strengthen cooperation for innovation within the framework of the EU's Marie Skłodowska-Curie actions (MSCA), which supports the career development and training of researchers. We will also upgrade our dialogue on cultural policy and intensify cooperation on cultural and creative industries. Furthermore, new initiatives will support youth groups to network and partner through Erasmus+ and the China-EU youth partnership for friendship programme. Finally, we have agreed to carry out regular discussions and share best practices on the economic empowerment and political participation of women.

It is commonly said in China that the key to sound relations between states is the friendship between peoples. This understanding is embodied in the congratulatory letter of president Xi Jinping to the participants of the HPPD, which said the dialogue is crucial to China-EU efforts to build a partnership for peace, growth, reform and civilisation. It is an understanding also shared by our European partners: EU council president Herman Van Rompuy and commission president José Manuel Barroso said in their joint letter that people-to-people exchanges will play an increasingly central role in our strategic cooperation and they believe that ties between our people will continue to improve and expand.

"The vibrancy of our cultural and people-to-people exchanges not only drives but also epitomises the strength of China-EU relations"

The foundations are already there. There are over five million people traveling between China and Europe every year; there are currently more than 300,000 Chinese students in Europe and European students in China. Such exchanges build widespread support for bilateral cooperation. The vibrancy of our cultural and people-to-people exchanges not only drives but also epitomises the strength of China-EU relations.

When president Xi Jinping visited Brussels in the spring, leaders of the two sides agreed to upgrade bilateral relations, fully implement the China-EU 2020 strategic agenda for cooperation and build a partnership for peace, growth, reform and civilisation, thereby charting a new and accelerated course for bilateral cooperation.

We have been progressing well. Politically, both sides have pledged to respect each other's social systems and core interests, and support the pursuit of peaceful development. On the economic front, we have taken a more open and innovative approach, working to identify more common interests and fully tap the potential for cooperation. We have committed to stepping up negotiations on a bilateral investment agreement and launching a free trade agreement feasibility study as soon as possible. We have agreed to resolve trade disputes through dialogue and consultation and achieve the ambitious goal of booking €770bn in two-way trade by 2020. We will also nurture new areas of cooperation in scientific and technical innovation, urbanisation, as well as environmental protection, including climate change and maritime affairs.

As we celebrate the 40th anniversary of diplomatic relations next year, China and the EU can support each other and our common goals in important new ways. We are both navigating 'uncharted waters' in our development process, carrying out ambitious and visionary reforms, and we should support each other in this process. We are also committed to intensifying dialogue and coordination on

strategic and security issues to promote stability and peace. At the basis of this support is the mutual respect and harmony between our two civilizations, nurtured through the strengthened bonds, exchanges and learning between our people.

The relations between China and the EU are comprehensive and strategic. As such, the China-EU comprehensive strategic partnership is aptly named. This partnership between our societies – governments, peoples, civilizations – will take on even greater global, strategic and normative relevance in the years to come. The increased understanding, friendships and ties between our peoples will underpin our mutual development, as well as boost peace and prosperity which will benefit millions worldwide.

About the author

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