

EU lacks vision of opportunities inherent in China relationship

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Opinion

But there are big challenges ahead for both partners, writes Victor Boştinaru.



This year marks the 40th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the EU and China. These 40 years have deeply benefitted both sides, but big are the challenges and opportunities for the years to come.

China is today Europe's second largest trading partner and Europe is China's largest trading partner, but what I believe is still missing is a truly strategic dimension to EU-China relations.

And in my view it is more the EU which lacks a real vision of the opportunities of bilateral relations, rather than the opposite. The visit of president Xi Jinping last year was a clear expression of the importance China attributes to the EU.

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On the other hand, the attitude of the EU has often been dominated by prejudices that impede a full understanding of the importance of relations with China and the potential benefits it can bring.

I hope that future relations can be characterised by an enhanced vision, more pragmatism, as well as a united voice for the EU, and I am confident that EU high representative Federica Mogherini will continue the work she has started on close cooperation with the Chinese authorities. I hope that EU member states will demonstrate unity and a similar rationality.

There are strong differences between the EU and China, and it is natural that they will persist. It is more so the common interests that must be developed.

We equally need to understand the importance of our relations with China from a geopolitical and geostrategic point of view, especially in the current historical context.

I am just back from a visit by the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats (S&D) leadership to China, where we had high-level meetings and tried to put the bases for stronger ties.

The Chinese authorities explained the heavy reforms they are undertaking, and expressed their readiness to further deepen institutional cooperation.

We confirmed that we will continue our work in this direction and although we know that there are many issues to be addressed, we think that the best way to deal with them is in the context of a frank and honest relationship.

One of the main topics we discussed was the bilateral investment agreement (BIA) between the EU and China. I previously mentioned the strong trade relations between the two sides. The situation is different with regard to investing in each other's territory.

I hope the BIA can become a reality in the near future, and that enhanced cooperation can bring positive results also in areas such as G20, security and defence, terrorism, nuclear non-proliferation, urbanisation, development and aid programmes, sustainable development and of course climate change, which according to a recent study by the London school of economics, China is showing strong commitment to and delivering much more than it promised.

My wish is that the upcoming EU-China summit at the end of this month in Brussels can see progress across all these areas, but beginning with the BIA.

I also hope that the two sides can prepare the best positive outcome for the July Addis Ababa conference on financing for development, and lay down through the necessary coordination the bases for a binding deal at the December UN conference on climate change in Paris.

About the author

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[Business and industry](#) [7]

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