

## EU and China strengthen efforts to boost 'people-to-people' exchanges

Written by Androulla Vassiliou on 17 March 2014 in Feature  
Feature

Expanding contacts in China and pursuing long-term culture and education sharing programmes can deepen EU-China relations, writes Androulla Vassiliou.



Over the past few years, the European Union and China have put a lot into developing people-to-people exchanges, particularly in education and culture, as part of a long-term effort to deepen our mutual understanding and friendship.

The recent acceleration of initiatives in this area highlights their growing importance for EU-China relations and a willingness from both sides to build closer ties between our peoples.

I will visit China at the end of May to participate in the second round of the EU-China high-level people-to-people dialogue, which was launched in 2012 in Brussels. My direct counterpart in this dialogue is China's vice-premier Liu Yandong; we both strongly believe in the value of such contacts as a means of bringing our peoples closer.

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The high-level people-to-people dialogue complements our other two dialogues, in economy and trade and on strategic matters. The objectives of our meeting in May are to take stock of our achievements so far and give a clear direction for the dialogue in the years to come.

The dialogue has already produced real results. In education, the number of student, researcher and professorial exchanges between the EU and China has increased considerably thanks to scholarship schemes offered by both sides.

A new higher education platform for cooperation and exchange tackles issues of mutual interest and shares ideas. The 'China tuning' initiative aims to identify and jointly define learning outcomes so that we can better compare our education systems.

In multilingualism, 18 Chinese professors have received training in lesser-spoken EU languages, EU support was given to the Chinese interpreter training programme, and a language training scheme was offered by the Chinese government to EU officials. In 2013 30 officials took part, and a further 25 are expected to participate in 2014 and 2015.

In culture, we supported a number of projects under the 2012 EU-China year of intercultural dialogue and signed a joint declaration on cultural cooperation. We have organised an online EU film festival in China, and strengthened the policy dialogue on cultural and creative sectors.

In the youth sector, we sought to build on the 2011 EU-China year of youth, which already featured many joint projects. Joint seminars on youth work and entrepreneurship have also been organised and close to €5m has been allocated to youth projects with Chinese partners from 2011 to 2013.

The high-level people-to-people dialogue will now promote Erasmus+, the EU's new programme for education, training, youth and sport, as well as Horizon 2020, in particular the Marie Skłodowska Curie actions, which promote researcher mobility.

I hope many Chinese institutions, professors and students will benefit. Support for Jean Monnet chairs and centres of excellence in China will ensure that EU studies form part of Chinese universities' programmes.

The second higher education platform for cooperation and exchange - scheduled to coincide with my visit to China - will also focus on Erasmus+ and Horizon 2020. Our internationalisation strategy for 'EU higher education in the world', which identifies future cooperation between the EU and China, will also be a focus of my trip.

I hope that the growing participation of Chinese universities in our 'U-multirank' initiative will help increase their visibility and popularity as study and exchange destinations among European students and academics.

In culture, a project initiated by the European parliament will help to fine-tune our approach to cultural diplomacy. Cultural heritage and the contribution of culture to local development will be discussed as part of the EU-China urbanisation partnership. The future policy dialogue on creative and cultural sectors will focus on the audiovisual sector.

For youth we will expand web-based cooperation, while there is funding available through Erasmus+

for joint youth projects. We will also encourage cooperation between organisations in the youth sector, like the All-China youth federation and the European youth forum, as well as their member organisations.

In order to implement these ambitious plans, we need the support and advice of the EU's member states. Many are already extremely active in their cooperation with China in education and culture. Regular exchanges of information and joint initiatives among member states will help us form a coherent approach.

I am convinced that we must continue to expand our people-to-people contacts with China. Over time, our high-level dialogue will benefit millions of people, help to build trust and deepen our mutual understanding.

### **About the author**

Androulla Vassiliou is European education, culture, multilingualism and youth commissioner

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