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NOTE

from: General Secretariat of the Council
to: Delegations
Subject : European Parliament Plenary session in Strasbourg on 13 March 2013
EU-China relations (debate)

The rapporteur, Mr Belder (EFD, NL), stressed that a strong commitment to mutual responsibility was required for a successful EU-China strategic partnership. He considered that beyond economic interests, the EU should also address the issues of human rights, freedom of speech, religion and belief, the death penalty, forced abortions and the one-child policy, etc. These questions should be emphasised by the EU institutions when talking to their Chinese partners.

Mr Füle, on behalf of the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Ms Ashton, delivered the speech set out in the Annex.

For the political groups, the following speakers took the floor:

- Ms Oomen-Ruijten (EPP, NL) considered that the EU-China strategic partnership should be based on the common ground provided by the twelfth Chinese five-year plan and the Europe 2020 strategy. In the context of the political dialogue, the EU should continue to encourage China to make the transition to an open society with respect for the rule of law and human rights. She stressed that the Tibetan and Uighur people were concerned by the governance issues and said she was worried about the increase in the number of self-immolations in Tibet. She called on the Chinese authorities to lift restrictions on citizens' rights, freedom of religion, belief, expression, association and press. She also expressed support for the EU's 'one China' policy .

- Mr Menéndez del Valle (S&D, ES) stated that the EU-China relationship was beneficial to both parties and could be an important vector in shaping a new world order. He acknowledged the existence of various difficulties, but said that it was in the interest of both sides to cooperate and move on. Nevertheless, he pointed to an obvious imbalance in the commercial area, where EU companies had difficulty accessing the Chinese market. He also considered that pursuing bilateral relations between individual Member States and China would not help the EU to defend its strategic interests.
- Ms Ojuland (ALDE, EE) pointed to a range of topics where the EU had a constructive dialogue with China and recalled that the country had undergone immense changes in past decades, resulting in an improved quality of life for many people. Nevertheless, many issues remained unsolved, such as repressive policies that infringe on the fundamental freedoms of Tibetans, and the conflict in the East China Sea. Therefore she saw a need to strengthen the dialogue in the field of human rights.
- Mr Bütikofer (Greens/EFA, DE) felt that China prioritised bilateral negotiations with the Member States at the expense of cooperation with the EU as a whole. He saw a need to develop a strategic partnership of equals, based on common challenges. While warning against escalating the existing economic tensions, he stressed the need to represent European interests. He echoed Ms Ojuland's concerns regarding self-immolations and the East China Sea, but hoped for a solid EU-China partnership that would benefit both partners.
- Mr Morganti (EFD, IT) considered that the EU was already locked in economic war with China and called on the EU to tackle illegal Chinese business practices, e.g. by introducing quotas or trade tariffs, to protect EU workers and businesses.
- Mr Scholz (GUE/NGL, DE) considered that the report had failed to present prospects for a common strategy of cooperation in the face of growing mutual interdependence and common challenges.

Many Members took the floor in the subsequent discussion, largely echoing views already voiced by the group leaders. Given China's global importance and its importance as an EU strategic partner, Members stressed the need for viable EU-China cooperation and pointed to the positive outcomes yielded by successful dialogue in several areas. Nevertheless, they reiterated that the EU needed to defend its values and address the issues of human rights (Tibet, the one-child policy, death penalty, forced abortions, etc.), environmental protection and economic values (public procurement, respect for IPRs, free investment, dumping, obstacles for EU companies, etc.). Some called on the EU to discontinue the bilateral approach and act together, "en bloc", when entering negotiations. Others considered that China should take on a more responsible role in the world, that it needed to rise to global challenges and be more involved in global governance.

In his final remarks, Mr Füle reiterated his gratitude to the European Parliament for its support for High Representative Ashton's work and for the focus that Members had given to the EU-China strategic dialogue. He stressed that the EU would use the opportunity of engaging with the new Chinese leadership to map out the course of their relationship for the coming years. He informed Members that the High Representative expected to travel to China for her first encounter with the new Chinese leadership. He assured Members that the EEAS would continue to keep the European Parliament regularly informed about all developments in European Union-China relations.

Responding to remarks on commercial relations, the rapporteur reminded Members that, at the request of INTA committee, international trade had not been covered in the report. He concluded by saying that the EU should not see China as a threat, but should be challenged to innovate and make full use of EU's intellectual and economic capacity.

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Speech by Mr Füle on EU-China relations, Plenary session of the European Parliament, 13 March 2013

Mr President, honourable Members, on behalf of High Representative Ashton I welcome this balanced report by Mr Belder, setting out the European Parliament's views on the developing EU-China relationship. It comes at the right time, as the new leaders are about to take office in Beijing and determine the future of China over the next five years. China is a key strategic partner for the European Union and increasingly a significant player on the world stage.

High Representative Ashton is committed to enhancing the European Union's relationship with China in world affairs. We have ongoing close collaboration on Iran, where China is playing a constructive role in the 3+3 talks, and on fighting piracy off the coast of Somalia. China has actively contributed to the adoption of sanctions against North Korea, alongside the rest of the United Nations Security Council and the international community.

Mr Belder's report highlights the fact that China's political and economic involvement in Africa has contributed to economic development. There is also increasing political engagement in Africa. Like the European Union, China supports the African Union and other African regional organisations. The first ever Chinese naval mission outside China's neighbouring seas was to fight piracy off the coast of Somalia, in close collaboration with the Atalanta mission. China joined the European Union in escorting World Food Programme shipments to Somalia in a spirit of burden sharing.

We place particular importance on the security aspects of the European Union-China relationship. We will cooperate in this field on matters ranging from crisis management to counter-piracy and from non-proliferation to counter-terrorism.

In the last three decades China has achieved significant social progress, with hundreds of millions of people moving out of poverty. These improvements still need to be translated into better promotion and defence of human rights. We remain concerned by the reports on the human rights situation in China. The rules on detention of suspects could certainly be improved if China aligned itself with the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights that it has signed but not yet ratified.

During 2012, the European Union paid particular attention to the human rights situation in Tibet, as the High Representative pointed out in this House last June and in a statement on Tibetan self-immolations last December. Our line is well known and has not changed: we reiterate our call to the parties concerned to resume a meaningful dialogue. The European Union intends to continue closely monitoring the overall human rights situation in China, and we will not hesitate to speak our mind publicly.

Mr President, honourable Members, the EU-China relationship is one of the most intense on the economic front, one of the largest in terms of people to people exchanges, and our formal EU China dialogues cover almost all conceivable areas. We need to secure improved market access and a level playing field for European Union business, negotiating a substantial EU China Investment Agreement to contribute to the creation of growth and jobs on both sides. We must identify common ground between Europe 2020 and China's 12th Five Year Plan, for example on renewable energy, clean vehicles and information technology.

With our know how, we want to contribute to greener cities in China and share our experience on issues like emissions reduction, water security and rural development. And, of course, we will continue to encourage China to abide by international human rights standards and promote the rule of law, for the benefit of its economy, social stability and its respectability abroad. I look forward to listening to the views of the European Parliament in the debate to follow.