

Written Speech by Ambassador Zhao Bentang at the Seminar on Sino-European Relations

Dear experts and scholars,

Ladies and gentlemen, friends,

On behalf of the Chinese Embassy in Portugal, I would like to congratulate the opening of the Seminar on Sino-European Relations and wish this seminar a success!

Jean Monnet said, "To make Europe is to make peace". Similarly, China's peaceful development is a great contribution to world peace. It is precisely because of this reason that the people of China and Europe have found common ideals and common interests in the pursuit of peace. Both sides are committed to multilateralism, both are in favour of proper handling of international disputes through diplomatic and political means, and both are against the use of force or the threat of force. The world today is undergoing a major change

not seen in a hundred years, and the more the turbulence intensifies, the more we must work together to meet the challenges. China and the EU are two major forces, two major markets and two major civilizations. The more turbulent the international landscape and the more global challenges, the more important and indispensable China-EU cooperation becomes. Over the past period of time, President Xi Jinping has met with H. E. Charles Michel and H. E. Von der Leyen and other European leaders, as well as leaders of Germany, France, Spain and other European countries, to give strategic guidance on further deepening China-EU relations, and the two sides have sent out positive signals on joint efforts to push China-EU relations forward.

Against such a special background, I think it is of great significance to organise this seminar. I would also like to share a few points with you.

First, we should adhere to the correct mutual perception. China has always regarded the EU as a comprehensive strategic partner and has developed its relations with Europe with the utmost goodwill and sincerity. A few years ago, an EU policy paper labelled China as a partner, a competitor and a systemic rival at the same time. However, it has been proved that such a

triple positioning is not in line with the facts and is not feasible, and on the contrary, it has brought about unnecessary disturbances and obstacles to the development of China-EU relations. It is just like a car driving to an intersection with three signals - red, yellow and green - on at the same time, how can the car drive? We hope that China and Europe will establish a correct perception, enhance mutual understanding and trust, respect trust and righteousness, and single-mindedly develop their relations, so that they will not regard each other as rivals just because of the differences in their systems, reduce co-operation just because of competition, or engage in confrontation just because of the existence of differences. China's development is an opportunity, not a risk, for Europe.

"There are no two leaves in the world that are exactly the same." The more involved and the deeper the Sino-European relationship is, the more inevitably different views and even differences will arise. We should not avoid problems, but we also have to admit that due to significant differences in cultural traditions, social systems and levels of development, some problems may not subside in the short term. The key is to seek common ground while reserving differences, not to ignore broad consensus because of individual differences, and not to let

overall cooperation be constrained by local differences, otherwise it will be tantamount to "picking up sesame seeds and losing watermelons".

Secondly, we should keep the cooperation mutually beneficial and open. Deepening China-EU co-operation is not a stopgap measure, but a strategic choice for mutual benefit and win-win situation. Taking trade and economy as an example, from 2003-2022, China's trade with the EU increased from \$125.2 billion to \$847.3 billion, and the average daily trade volume increased from \$300 million to \$2.3 billion. A survey by the European Union Chamber of Commerce in China shows that most European companies in China still continue to make profits, and more than 90 per cent of the companies surveyed plan to continue to consider China as an investment destination, with 59 per cent of the companies surveyed considering China as one of the three main investment destinations.

More importantly, it is necessary to create an open, fair, just and non-discriminatory system and market environment for market players on both sides. China's efforts to expand opening up and improve the business environment are obvious to all, while on the contrary, the European side is not. The European side has recently taken a series of initiatives in 5G, foreign

investment review, government procurement, competition policy, etc., which are highly concerned by the Chinese government, enterprises and media. The European side has repeatedly said that it will not decouple from China, will not turn inward and will abide by WTO rules and the principle of fair competition. We hope that the European side will keep the trade and investment markets open and provide a fair and non-discriminatory business environment for Chinese enterprises.

Thirdly, we must maintain a broad international perspective. As the world's two major forces, two major markets and two major civilizations, what China and Europe advocate, what they oppose and what they cooperate on are of global significance. China and Europe should join hands in defending the principles cherished by the vast majority of the international community, upholding multilateralism and opposing unilateralism, safeguarding the international order and system with the United Nations at its core, and promoting the political settlement of hotspot issues at the international and regional levels. China and Europe should also join hands and sincerely provide more public goods to the international community, for example, by supporting countries with weak healthcare systems to strengthen

capacity-building so that they can better withstand the impact of infectious diseases in the future; and, on the basis of full respect for the wishes of African countries, we should actively carry out tripartite co-operation with Africa to help them break through the bottlenecks of development in infrastructure, human resources and capital. China has already put forward specific ideas to the European side on the development of tripartite cooperation, and we also expect that the relevant cooperation will be put into practice as soon as possible for the early benefit of the people of the countries concerned, and that in the course of the cooperation, the strategic and global significance of China-EU relations will be further enhanced.

In the post-pandemic era, a more robust and mature China-EU relationship, moving towards a higher level, will be of great significance to the prosperity and stability of both sides and the world as a whole. This year marks the 45th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and Portugal, and Portugal plays a model role in China-EU cooperation. Standing at a new historical starting point, China and Portugal should join hands, learn from and pass on the experience of the past 45 years of development, rule out the murmurings, show mutual respect and support, and work

together to promote even greater progress in the China-EU comprehensive strategic partnership. This is in line with the fundamental and long-term interests of China and Europe, as well as the common expectations of the international community.