

Dear President, Dear friends,

Thank you for inviting me and for the kind introductory words.

Sir John Addis was a British Ambassador who after the Second World War served several terms in China. He states about China: "this is a country to which one should devote one's life.. or go away".

I have done neither. I have even never been in China. While preparing this posting I confess much of my career has been devoted to Africa so I have all to learn.

My involvement with China started pretty late when I received the task to organize the first state visit of our royals in 2015 to China. I then discovered while putting in place an ambitious program, how strong our relations are and how important China is for our economy.

The achievements are indeed very substantial. Today we are trading more than 20 billion Euros a year. With a growing middle class and an increasing domestic demand there is scope to do even more and better. Our economies are today complementary but tomorrow we will face stronger competition on both domestic and third markets.

Perhaps the greatest achievement in the last years has been the consolidation of a very intensive dialogue at the highest level. We exchanged recently two state visits and several meetings of our Prime Ministers took place in the last two years.

But also at the federal, regional, provincial and local level we are engaging strongly with China. It goes without saying that the overall improvements of our bilateral political relationship serves the further development of our economic relationship, putting Belgium at the 6st place as a EU trading partner for China.

So I look with optimism to this new posting.

In the last weeks I had the opportunity to talk and walk around and to meet during briefings several personalities of our business world. Let me share with you some of my findings.

In general I register much appreciation for the strong economic cooperation with China but there are challenges.

At this stage it is too early for me to make judgements but one of the first challenges and maybe the most important one is to avoid that economic problems that might occur, as imbalances in the trade relation, transparency problems in some areas, the lack of level playing field, the problems related to intellectual property, get politicized.

Belgium with its open economy, and strongly connected with China, favors a pragmatic, realistic approach based on dialogue and exchange of information by which we can find workable solutions and settlements.

Such approach will help to establish a sound basis for more win win cooperation. The potential and opportunities in the short and long term are high. To mention a few ones:

We will soon become member of the Asian Infrastructure and Investment Bank. Let us develop an ambitious agenda and mobilize our business community to sign in on projects.

Vice Prime Minister Kris Peeters participated recently in the high level Belt and Road Forum. He came back from Beijing with a wish to follow up more closely this ambitious agenda.

One Belt One Road Connectivity can indeed be crucial for the further development of the future relationship with Asia, Euro Asia, the Middle East and last but not least Africa.

But we believe that it will only be successful if the approach adopted is as inclusive and transparent as possible. With such approach OBOR will certainly contribute to the strengthening of the relations between China and Europe.

OBOR will be on the agenda when Minister Didier Reynders will visit China on the 24th of July. This visit will also give the opportunity to bring to the attention of the Chinese authorities some of your projects.

The preparation of the Joint Economic Commission between the Belgium-Luxemburg Economic Union and China that will take place in October 2017 in Luxemburg is an important occasion in the short term to review our bilateral

economic relationship and to put on the agenda ambitious objectives. We will for instance be able to look for ways to improved market access for food and agriculture products. Again a good opportunity to raise some of your concerns.

By then we will have to set our priorities. The action plans of the regions and the Chambers of Commerce will have to be defined and presented.

We will have to know what we want to get achieved in the frame of OBOR, what our priorities will be for the EU-China tourism year in 2018. We look forward to receive input from all the institutions involved and of course from the relevant Chambers.

The holding of the Joint Economic Commission gives us also a chance to put in place activities that can contribute to the strengthening of our image. The EU-China tourism year is a perfect occasion to develop a strong and positive image in China.

Let me conclude by reaffirming our strong commitment to develop together with our regional partners, and with all of you, an effective economic diplomacy. You can count on our Embassy team and I hope to be able to welcome you in Beijing

Thank you very much for your attention.