

Event Report

The Belt and Road China-EU Forum on Regional Promotion

7 July 2017

The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is an expansive set of infrastructure, trade, and development programs that will connect China with the rest of the world. Many of its components will retrace ancient lines of trade between East and West, creating a new "Silk Road" that will offer new opportunities for EU-China cooperation.

Of particular interest is the impact that the BRI on growing tourism between China and the EU, which is a relatively underdeveloped market. This event explored the possible areas for promotion in both locations for the advancement of tourism and other forms of exchange. A delegation representing Guangdong Province in southern China presented the region's many technological and cultural offerings, while government representatives and business leaders from regions within the EU spoke on strategies for adapting EU market offerings for Chinese consumers.

This conference was hosted by the Mission of the People's Republic of China to the European Union, the Committee of the China Arts Festival in the EU, the Information Office of the People's Government of Guangdong Province, and the Europe-China One Belt One Road Culture & Tourism Development Committee, with support from the European Institute for Asian Studies, at the Tangla Hotel in Brussels. This Belt and Road China-EU Regional Promotion was a preparatory event for the 2018 EU-China Tourism Year and a flagship activity of the 3rd Edition of the China Arts Festival in the EU.

Opening Remarks by Ambassador YANG Yanyi, Head of the Mission of the People's Republic of China to the European Union.

Ambassador YANG Yanyi opened the event and spoke of the strong people-to-people cooperation that binds together communities from the EU and China. Her Excellency noted the importance of connecting Brussels, as the heart of Europe, with Guangdong Province, which is a center of socioeconomic progress and innovation in China. She compared the role of the Belt and Road Initiative in China's global "opening up" with the role that Guangdong plays in spreading Chinese culture, technology, and innovation abroad. Ambassador YANG emphasized the role of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in further developing EU-China cooperation, particularly between Brussels and Guangdong, and its ability to promote sustainable growth and shared prosperity. She concluded by calling upon all attendees to celebrate the interactions between the cultures and societies of the EU and China, and to allow these interactions to spawn many diverse opportunities.

Keynote Addresses:

Mr Shen HAIXIONG, Chairman of Guangdong International Culture Association and Director-General of the Publicity Department of the CPC Guangdong Committee

Mr SHEN presented the successes of Guangdong Province, and supported the province's economic cooperation with the EU and its member states. He highlighted the extraordinary growth seen in the province since China's liberalization in the 1980s, and said that it was his impression that many EU member states, regions, and cities have intense interest in working with Guangdong and its native corporations. In addition to business and trade relations, he also spoke of common cultural heritage shared by Guangdong and Brussels through the historical Maritime Silk Road, a heritage that will be revived through BRI. He related a particular anecdote; in the mid-13th century, a huge commercial ship sunk in the South China Sea en route to Europe while carrying between 40,000 and 60,000 porcelain artifacts as well as large shipments of silk and fine jewelry. In the 1980s, a Chinese/British archeological team discovered the wreckage on the ocean floor, and salvaged its remains to be displayed in the first Maritime Silk Road Museum. Mr SHEN visited the museum just before traveling to Brussels, and said that the recovered artifacts made a strong impression on him. The collection included many gold rings with empty settings, which scholars speculate were destined for Antwerp where they would be fitted with precious stones. He concluded that the two regions in partnership at the event have been linked by the exchange of goods, people, and ideas for centuries, and the BRI is a natural extension of this age-old relationship.

He stated that the role of media in connecting the EU and China is irreplaceable, and while the government of China is leading this initiative, a decisive role has been given to the

market to drive media connections. Mr SHEN concluded with the words of Chinese President Xi Jinping, "If you want to walk fast, you walk alone. If you want to walk far, you go with someone else," alluding to the benefits that are sure to come from closer EU-China cooperation.

Member of European Parliament (MEP) Istvan UJHELYI, President of the Europe China “One Belt One Road” Culture and Tourism Development Committee and Vice President of the Committee on Transport and Tourism Committee of the European Parliament

MEP UJHELYI welcomed the diverse audience and EU and Chinese delegations at the conference. He recalled that Ambassador YANG has been one of the most active diplomats in Brussels over the past year, and has thus done a great deal to advance EU-China cooperation. MEP UJHELYI spoke of his passion for Chinese economics, politics, and culture, as well as his involvement in building up EU-China relations that dates back to his work before joining the European Parliament, when he established the Confucius Institute in his home district in Hungary. He categorized the BRI as "a global tool for development and peace," and called on EU member states and China to capitalize upon the potential of tourism to enhance opportunities provided by BRI to drive socioeconomic success. He called tourism between the EU and China "a peace project" that has more nuanced value for development behind its image of national monuments and beach visits. He also emphasized the importance of this initiative in light of recent global developments that have violated security in the EU and around the world.

Dr Eric PHILIPPART, Special Counselor, Responsible for the 2018 EU-China Tourism Year – Tourism, Emerging and Creative Industries – European Commission

Dr PHILIPPART began his remarks by describing the history of tourism, which he asserted began in Europe in the form of the archaic "grand tour" from London to Paris, and then through Rome and Greece to the historical end-point of the Silk Road. When the Silk Road was most active, it facilitated the exchange of not only spices and jewels, but also scientists and diplomats, and even the world's first "tourists" as those who accompanied the trade missions out of curiosity. The Silk Road was a technological and economic exchange between the two most advanced civilizations of the time, and that legacy bodes well for the developments planned under the BRI.

Dr PHILIPPART described the cooperation between the EU Travel Commission and the China National Tourism Administration (CNTA), including the opening of the 2018 EU-China Tourism Year to be held in Venice on January 19th 2018. The event will be held at the Doge's Palace, a historically significant venue as the former seat of government for one of the main trading hubs on the old Silk Road. He also introduced tourism initiatives including the proposed "Light Bridge" that will illuminate landmarks in the EU and China with the colors of both parties' flags as an emblem of cooperation. In celebration of China's annual Lantern Festival in March, landmarks across the EU will be lit in red and gold, while Chinese landmarks will be lit with blue and gold or with colors of national events like green in honor of St. Patrick's Day. In connecting these tourism initiatives to fostering international cooperation, he concluded: "In today's world it is more important than ever to build bridges, when so many are collapsing."

Cooperation Agreements

Following the addresses, delegates from the Europe China One Belt One Road Culture and Tourism Development Committee, Information Office of the People's Government of Guangdong Province, Kam Yuan Group, and Southern Publishing and Media Corporation signed two agreements promoting EU-China cooperation in tourism, media, and cultural exchange.

Panel Discussion

Mr Eduardo SANTANDER, Executive Director/CEO of the European Travel Commission (ETC)

Mr SANTANDER opened the discussion by addressing the recent success of the ETC in promoting Europe in China and improving EU-China relations in tourism. Originally founded in 1948 and commissioned by the European Commission, the ETC has been promoting Europe internationally for over 60 years, encouraging the exchange of knowledge and work between national tourism organizations, businesses and industries. Mr SANTANDER stated that for the past 12 years China has become one of the most important markets for the EU, however not much is known about China in Europe, making it more difficult to work together. He insisted on the idea of cooperation and mutual trust, stating that every single success is a collective one, collaboration being the only way forward for both China and the EU. In that respect ECT has proven itself to be a forward thinking organization by its successful attempts to build a strong connection between the two entities. He stated that ECT's main goal is to bring more Chinese people to Europe, and to do so, Europe needs to prepare itself accordingly in order to welcome more Chinese tourists by learning more about Chines culture and mores.

Mr SANTANDER then went on to identify two main aspects to modern tourism: first, European tourism is based on small and medium enterprises that make it difficult to promote remote regions and third tier destinations; Europe should therefore increase its capacity and connectivity with such areas and improve the visa policy, allowing for Chinese tourists to easily visit such places. Second, Chinese tourists today are seeking new areas to explore and avoiding big popular cities that are usually flooded with visitors in order to have an authentic European experience.

He concluded his speech by reminding to the audience that European and Chinese peoples are not so different after all but should also embrace their differences while working towards more cooperation. Finally, he added that Europe needs to make an effort to adapt itself in order to work with China as well as to attract more Chinese tourists to Europe.

Mr WANG Guike, Chairman of Guangdong Publishing Group, Southern Publishing and Media Co., Ltd

Mr WANG introduced Guangdong Publishing Group as one of the most influential media actors in China. He presented the importance of media as an intermediate to reach

European populations and disseminate Chinese culture internationally, especially as non-Chinese media provides most information on China in Europe. He also expressed his wish to strengthen EU-China relations and promote China around Europe.

Mr WANG then gave the floor to a representative of Paths International, a unique English company that only co-publishes books about China. Southern Publishing Media Group was one of the first publishing groups that Part International worked with and for the past seven years Southern Publishing Media Group has been providing Parts International with strong support and great books. Today most information on China outside of Europe is provided by non-Chinese media, which creates misunderstanding about China and often offers a simplistic view of the country. Parts International prides itself in only introducing Chinese academic and educational work to the world, raising the profile of Chinese authors internationally and helping Chinese publishers develop a market.

They went on to introduce to the audience their latest China Insight: Youth Learner Series, which explores many aspects of China and gives the unique opportunity for young learners to learn about the country's culture and history.

Mr Jacopo SERTOLI, President of the Welcome Chinese project and CEO and Founder of Select Holding Ltd

Mr SERTOLI has worked in China for the past ten years and has observed a big change in the Chinese tourism market. He explained that the travel industry in China is following the exact same pattern as the western industry did when at the end of WWII. People used to travel in big groups, but have slowly trended towards more individual travel experiences. The main difference however between travel in China as opposed to Western countries is that this change is happening in an extremely rapid time frame, and it is therefore crucial for tourism organizations to keep up with China's rapidly growing market of individual travel.

Welcome Chinese was created 5 years ago with the support of the China Tourism Academy in order to understand what Chinese tourists need and to make their European experience a more practical one. Indeed, Mr SERTOLI justly pointed out that coming all the way to Europe is very much an effort for Chinese people who could more conveniently travel around Asia. However they choose to travel to Europe as they are genuinely interested in experiencing European culture. It is therefore the role of European tourism companies to make sure Chinese tourists receive the appropriate service they deserve throughout their stay in Europe. Mr SERTOLI emphasized the importance of providing practical services such as efficient translation, adapted payment options, and the appropriate infrastructures to welcome Chinese tourists in the most pleasant and hospitable manner possible.

Mr Mikko TURTIAINEN, Vice-President (Global Sales) at Finnair Group

Mr TURTIAINEN identified the Finnair airline as a success story for bringing Europe and China together through cooperation between airlines, travel agencies and enterprises. Mr TURTIAINEN expressed the great pride Finnair group takes in being a pioneer for physically connecting China and Europe. It was the first European airline to fly non-stop between Helsinki and Beijing in 1988. It was also the first airline to fly non-stop from Helsinki to

Xi'an. Finnair was the first in the world to introduce the Airbus 350, the newest technology, enabling travelers to fly to and from China in the most comfortable way possible. Every week, Finnair flies 35 times between Helsinki and China, being the enabler of stronger EU-China relations in regards to tourism.

Mr TURTAINEN agreed with the other panelists that Chinese tourists visit Europe seeking an authentic experience and Europe should therefore provide them with all the services they expect and adapt to Chinese culture. He identified several challenges for Chinese tourists coming to Europe such as visas, payment services, and the language barrier. In order to develop EU-China Tourism in the years to come, Mr TURTAINEN believes it is important to build the service infrastructure towards making Chinese tourists' experience easier in Europe, with the same hospitality experienced by Europeans in China. He offered the example of Finnair's pioneering adoption of Alipay for on-board purchases, an online payment platform widely used across China, which makes travel to Europe much more convenient and accessible for Chinese tourists. He argued that Europe should provide services to the level that the Chinese customers expect, for example taking into consideration Chinese behavior and culture in order to create adapted services in hotels. Mr TURTAINEN concluded that only through strong cooperation would it be possible to grow and improve the EU-China tourism market.

Mr XIONG Yifang, Co-Founder of the Guangdong-based drone manufacturer EHang,

Mr XIONG provided an insight in the new trend of small start-ups and entrepreneurship that has emerged in the past few years in China. He introduced EHang as a top innovative drone company, which, by positioning itself as a global company, has achieved a rapid and worldwide success. He explained that EHang is the very first drone company to have introduced the use of smartphones as means to control drones. Mr XIONG went on to display the different international connections his company has developed such as with the city of Dubai with whom EHang is working to develop a flying car, or in the American healthcare sector where the effective use of drone for transporting organs and patients to hospitals more quickly would most certainly save many lives. Two years ago, EHang established its European operations in order to work closer with the EU market. In that sense, Mr XIONG expressed his wish to further build cooperation between Europe and China in the fields of innovation and modern technology. Moreover, he added that it is extremely important for businesses and enterprises to follow EHang's example by positioning themselves as global, rather than regional, companies in order to achieve better cooperation between China and the rest of the world.

Ms Dominique ANDRE, Manager of New Markets at Wallonie Bruxelles Tourisme

The panel was closed by Ms ANDRE who highlighted the importance of creativity in the tourism market, specifically for a small region like Wallonia that is still unknown to the Chinese population. She expressed her wish to open up a dialogue between Wallonia and China in order to learn about Chinese reactions and expectations towards this region. She explained that Chinese people understand the concept of quality in tourism differently than European people do, which is why it is important to know first hand what is expected from the consumers. She asserted that companies must be able to predict the needs of

tomorrow. Ms ANDRE expressed her interest in building quality products that are Chinese consumer-friendly, and to adapt tourism initiatives to Chinese customers as much as possible. She affirmed that Wallonia will be the first destination in Europe to be Chinese-friendly, greeting Chinese tourists in their own language and providing all manner of services adapted especially for them. She spoke of the importance of being aware of the diversity of the Chinese population depending on which city or region, social class, and work background they come from. She also spoke of the importance of having a contact person based in China in order to be aware of the current trends and interests of Chinese consumers and adapt the tourism market of Wallonia accordingly.

Exhibition

After the conclusion of the panel discussion, attendees were invited to a networking lunch and to view art exhibitions and technology displays representing Guangdong Province and the Belt and Road Initiative.

Report prepared by Kathleen Brown and Louise Drogoul

European Institute for Asian Studies – EIAS a.s.b.l.
26 Rue de la Loi, 10th Floor, 1040 Brussels/Belgium
Tel.: +32 2 230 81 22 E-mail: eias@eias.org Website: www.eias.org