

THE SECOND CHINA-EUROPE FORUM

Opening of the Plenary Sessions
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Speech of Mr Michel Rocard
Former Prime Minister of France

-- Integral version --

President, ladies and gentlemen, and friends: China is surprising. It boasts 6000 years of uninterrupted civilisation, dawning around the same time as that of the Egyptians. Before we did, China discovered paper, the compass, rudders, and gunpowder, among other things. By the time of the Portuguese king Henry the Navigator, Europeans rounding the tip of Africa often came across Chinese junks. China was heading for world dominance, absolutely, and beating us to it. Then in the fifteenth century, a mysterious Chinese emperor decided that contact with us Barbarians risked polluting the mindset and culture of the Chinese people. He decreed an absolute ban and condemnation, accompanied by the death sentence, for any person who should construct ships with the intention of sailing abroad. China slumbered five centuries. Five centuries of human history without China, that accounts for a quarter of the world population, yet less than 1% of global production and less than 0.5% of trade: China had been forgotten. Well, not entirely forgotten. China received a glance now and again; it caused apprehension. The term “yellow peril” still popped up in history books and conversations, but in the end, it was mainly applied to the Japanese.

It is my belief, ladies, gentlemen and friends, that in the world today, there is no event more important than the formidable awakening of China. In approximately fifteen years, since the major reforms introduced by president Deng Xiaoping, China has already secured 8 to 9% of gross global product, and approximately the same percentage of international commerce. Its growth is three times faster than that of Europe or the United States. In less than 20 years, it will acquire a 20 to 25% cut of global production and trade. We will witness this. It is an event of major importance.

China strongly underlines its desire that both its awakening and its assuming this new role in world trade be carried out in a peaceful manner, and it is right to do so. In fact, over the course of its long history, it has never invaded any country with the exception of Tibet and Vietnam - regions with a standing similar to that of Alsace-Lorraine in France – whereas it itself has been invaded many times. This historical vision is part of our shared history. However, China raises fears. It raises fears for several reasons. It raises fears, because it is immense. It raises fears because it is capable of very quickly reaching the absolute summits of technology (its most recent experiments were in space, as you know). And it raises fears because its return to growth unfurls in conditions which could be, and already partially have been, detrimental to European jobs.

Like all of you here, I sincerely wish that this return to normality of China, one of the greatest countries of the world, the largest in terms of size, and one of the greatest in terms of culture, should happen in peace. As a former prime minister I must tell you that everywhere in the world, involving any subject, engaging in peace and negotiation is always more difficult than engaging in conflict and war. Conflict and war are intellectually easy, whereas constructing peace is complicated and difficult; we do not always know how to go about it. As a former prime minister I have a second secret to tell you: distrust between peoples is not solely the responsibility of ministers and head of State. Often, it is the peoples themselves that engender it. The tragedy of the Middle East is that nowhere, either in Israel or Palestine, is there a majority ready to accept the symbolic sacrifices necessary for peace. In other words, to carry out this Chinese adventure in a spirit of mutual understanding; to prepare this place for China; and for China to itself accept sectoral conditions or time limits that would allow all of this to be done: none of this can be brought about single-handedly. That explains the reasoning of this forum's founders.

The initial idea for these forums came, I believe, from the association of Chinese professors in Europe. They quickly established contact with the *Foundation for Human Progress* and additionally set up a huge system, a network of volunteer activists in the public authorities, who managed the incredible. The first China-Europe Forum held in Nansha two years ago, where I had the honour of being invited and being a participant, was a unique experience since it was the first sizeable meeting of representatives of the peoples of Europe and of the Chinese people, outside of a diplomatic or legal context. Through universities and research centres, these were basically non-political groups searching for an identity. This is by no means a manifestation of distrust vis-à-vis the public authorities. In fact, both sides reassured you of that fact earlier on. Both Chinese and European public authorities came to tell you that they approved of this process. On both sides, there is therefore the feeling that the governments are somewhat alone, especially when matters are difficult. When matters are difficult, others' views are quickly rejected. It can even be a political platform, as currently in Belgium. This is frightening. The governments of both sides detect that the effort to have intellectuals, specialists, teachers, professors, researchers, and political analysts from China and Europe express themselves, meets an absolute need: the need to enlarge mutual knowledge, mutual understanding, and mutual discovery of each other's problems. Along these lines, there is a surprise: I was supposed to co-direct, with ambassador Wu - and I want to express here my friendship for the ambassador and my regrets that he is not here, so I therefore directed it alone - the opening text of the workshop on world governance. One of our surprises was the extreme modesty of our Chinese partners, telling us "Do not overestimate China's weight. We are not really a world power. We are a regional power". We Europeans told them, "perhaps you understand it that way, but global warming can not wait, nor can the insoluble nature of American financial problems, and even less the fight for civil peace and against terrorism". You are involved, Chinese friends. Moreover, time constraints prevent us from writing the summaries of these workshops immediately. I believe that will be for the future. I want to express one more thought concerning the workshop I had the joy of participating in: we dialogued, better and more openly than in Nansha. You may say that it was high time to start. We know each other very little. Moreover, we have historical reasons to distrust each other. This mutual discovery has an emotional aspect to it. Yet we find many common parameters, many common desires, for example, in the difficult reconciliation necessary world regulations with sovereignty and national independence. Europeans are tired of warring between themselves to an even greater extent than you have warred. This is not minor statement. You have been violent in recent times, but we have been even more so. Europeans are tired and proclaim that the world needs one manner of regulation, one manner of governing that is more coherent and more pertinent. I did not say we need a world government. Governance can be accomplished by treaties, by procedures, by courts of justice, and by codes that are respected. In this area there is still a real need. China affirms that for all peoples everything begins

by the discovery of their own strengths and their own dignity. It is true that this should not be forgotten too soon. Nevertheless it is unheard of to discuss it together, first because - another message - this meeting between Europe and China is not at all meant to take place to the detriment of others. This is part of the working-out of world governance that should continue with the Americans, Russians, Indians, Brazilians, and doubtless many others. Secondly, in the same way, the discovery that there are problems for which even very large nations – not even China or Europe with its nation-like powers in the economic and financial fields - are not up to solving the world's problems. The constant change of world problems leaves all of us simultaneously with questions relating to governance, and leaves us exploring and hesitating. We begin a process of discovery, and we begin it together. This is, I believe, absolutely essential. It is the reason why I am happy to have reported that my workshop 1/46 was going very smoothly, and that it met a need. I believe that we will likely hear that it in the other 45 workshops, the situation was the same. Consequently, if we decide, if you decide by tomorrow that the process will continue, and that after the second China-Europe forum, there will be a third, a fourth, and a fifth, progressively larger, we will work hard so that mutual understanding between great nations of the world may pave the way for a future of harmony and peace between all of us. It is not as easy as we think, so it is even more necessary than we think. Thank you.