

Michel Rocard speech,

Hong Kong opening plenary of the China Europa Forum

July, 12, 2010



Dear Friends,

Standing before you here today, at the opening plenary session of our Forum's third meeting, I am filled with both emotion and pride.

Emotion when recalling its birth, in 2005, not far from here, in Nansha, thanks to the visionary quality of the late Henri Fok who had wished that the city he had newly created becomes, in accordance with the historical mission of the Delta of the Pearls River, a place of encounters between civilisations; thanks also to the profound intuition of my friend, Chen Yan, who envisioned the richness a common reflection on the European integration could bring, and thanks to the immediate support of the Charles Leopold Mayer foundation to the implementation of this initiative.

A sense of pride also, when realizing that in a very short period of time our Forum has become a space with no equivalent of dialogue between our two societies.

For our interdependencies are irreversible, and the financial crisis and climate changes are perfect illustrations, understanding each other is no longer a luxury, a desire for mutual discovery and enrichment, it is an absolute necessity.

Traditionnally, diplomacy, trade and academic exchanges represented the relations between societies. It is no longer sufficient. On this planet, so tiny, so crowded, and as we can see it more and more every day, so fragile, we, Chinese and Europeans, have become roommates of a collective apartment where we have to share the kitchen and the bathroom.

How to reach better mutual understanding? We can draw useful lessons from the very history of the European integration. The construction of Europe helped us overcome the resentment born from history, continued from century to century, from revenge to revenge and ending up in the endless cycle of wars. The European integration is the example, most likely the unique example of peoples who took the decision, voluntarily and peacefully, in the name of their interdependencies, to waive part of their sovereignty for the building of the common good. The European integration also shows, and this is a major historical lesson, that unity can emerge from diversity and that unity and diversity can be combined rather than opposed, that a choice has to be made between cohesion - thus denying differences, and celebration of diversity - thus accepting the risk of chaos.

Voluntary wave of a part of sovereignty in the name of common good and ability to combine unity and diversity are, in my view, two major contributions of the European integration to the world to come.

Our experience also teaches us that, with the rapid increasing number of European Member States, when the institutional structuring occurs before the peoples consciousness of sharing a common destiny, the system becomes more fragile, loses the support of the people, does no longer prevent demonstrations of populism and nationalism and eventually, as presently in Europe, renders its institutions powerless.

This is even more true at the world level. We can only regret the timidity and the repeated stalemates in the inter-governmental dialogue, whether be during the Copenhagen negotiations or in the recent G20 debates, in front of the seriousness of the challenges that climate change or economic and financial crisis represent for our world. Shortsighted negotiations, bargaining of national interests, or simply acknowledgment of powerlessness prevail where we would need a common vision and where the assertion of our interdependencies should lead us to live up to our responsibility to overcome our sovereignty.

But how would this be possible without the appropriation of this profound need by our societies, if they do not, as a preamble, develop relations of friendship, of experience sharing, of mutual respect, if they don't have a profound consciousness that their destinies are bound and that a common future is to be built together? This is why I see our Forum, initiative of the two societies, space for dialogue free of diplomacy constraints, not as a competition for inter-government relations but to the contrary as the necessary condition for these relations to regain sense and boldness. And our respective governments, which have not created our Forums, which observe us with care, may be even with some suspicion, but which have authorised them, which permit the machine to work, accompagnie us with a prudent and discrete presence, seem to begin and understand that we could even help them and they might need us.

As mentioned for the European Union, our Forum embodies the dual requirement of diversity and unity. During the second meetings, in 2007, from the work of the 46 workshops, we identified and demonstrated that the workshops were not just entities aside from one another, that their conclusions were not isolated but connected and that a strong idea emerged from all their findings: the decisive idea that beyond our multiple differences and because of these differences, we had four common challenges to face:

- to overcome the crisis of values which affects our two societies in a world where sweeping changes occurred over the past fifty years that we are losing our marks; in a world where people realize that economic and scientific advancements do not suffice to give a meaning to life and societies;
- to invent new modes of management of the society, from local to global, to invent more participatory modes of decision taking, to overcome the traditional « silo » mode of our administrative systems to turn towards more integrated approaches required by the complexity of the issues to address: urban, water, energy, health or economy management;
- to implement rapidly the transition from development models - in place since 150 years and drawn in the context of the industrial revolution - to sustainable societies, ensuring the wellbeing for all and the preservation of our fragile planet – what is called harmonious society in China and sustainable development in Europe, not ignoring that although the consciousness of its necessity is real, major transitions are still to be invented and lead;
- to assume our responsibilities, we, China and Europe, as global players in order to create new modes of regulations, a global governance at the scale of our interdependencies and challenges.

I still remember the workshop on global governance which took place during the second meetings of the Forum, in 2007, in Brussels. I was amazed by the modesty demonstrated by our Chinese colleagues. They mostly emphasized the long way they still had to go until China as a whole could be part of the developed world, and presenting their country only as a regional power.

What a distance covered during the past three years. With the global financial crisis, China, by the richness of its civilisation, the size of its population and its remarkable economic growth, had to hold the place it deserves. And now we have the responsibility to invent, together, new global regulations. And there, everything remains to be done.

If the principle of sovereignty (and its inviolability) has been the marker of international relations since the 17th century, today, in my view, it is the principle of interdependency that should play the central role of the global governance. And this principle should be acknowledged as a universal standard. It should be at the core of the reflections and development of any new institutional forms in the future. The ethical and political foundations of a future world governance should be sought among the notions of responsibility and solidarity.

This challenge illustrates what the profound ambition of our Forum needs to be. Not only to dialogue and to exchange experiences, not only to identify the common challenges but also to imagine together the world we seek. I am amazed by the lack of thinking, by the urgent necessity of an intellectual effort as a prerequisite for our future we seek for our children and grand children.

Since the end of the eighties, the world has been dominated by thinkers like Milton Friedman who, in the name of the efficiency of the market, made us believe that the market indeed was self regulated and that for its optimal functioning, there was no need for public action. We all know the results: incapacity of sharing fairly the profit of prosperity generated by the market, incapacity of thinking out the relations between societies and the biosphere, between economic efficiency and protection of environment, and finally incapacity to prevent and to address the global financial crisis. An alarming wake up call that eventually brought us out of the intellectual torpor these pernicious dogmas had plunged us.

I welcome the capacity of the Chinese authorities to avoid these errors, to resist to this turmoil. You move towards capitalism because it worked better than controlled economy. But you make your move at a time when capitalism enters in a serious and profound crisis. For your economic prominence, you cannot escape, you are co-responsible of the world. And therefore, it is essential, vital for the world and even more for you, Chinese people, that you immediately analyse and understand the global capitalism you are joining. To say it roughly, you will need to choose clearly and profoundly between Milton Friedman and Keynes, just as we, Europeans, will have to. Simply because one doesn't stir without a compass, one doesn't govern without clear and straight thinking or because the « world-computer » cannot run properly without software. And the present software just collapsed. Some of you, Chinese and Europeans do not know those two names, do not understand what I am talking about, for sure. Pity. This is what we have to learn, all of us. Finding the right thinking in terms of economy has become a survival condition for mankind.

The hardest times are still to come. It is necessary to rebuild an economic and political thinking adjusted to the requirements of the 21st century. I know its absolute necessity. I am convinced that our Forum, by the quality and experience of the persons it brings together, by the confidence raising between them, by the complementarity of the works in the various workshops, can and has to have this ambition.

When most large forums are limited to speeches, we made the choice of intellectual ambition for our third meetings. Therefore, all day tomorrow, you will pool the rich reflections of each workshop to draw the common perspectives, to enhance their contributions to the four challenges identified in 2007.

I easily imagine that asking 600 people from very diverse backgrounds to do the exercise is quite a challenge but I also do know that the Forum, by its efficiency and development has succeeded in addressing even greater challenges.

When we met for the first time in Nansha, in 2005, we had no idea we would set the conditions for a sustainable dialogue. There is still a long way to go to reach this goal but the distance already covered in a limited time gives me confidence in the future.

Finally, I would like to mention the world agenda. We can only regret that the general Assembly of the United Nations, for the large number of nations represented and their great disparity, has lost a large part of its influence and capacity for action in front of the major challenges we face. However the UN remains the unique space for enforcing legitimate international decisions. Because of its powerlessness, alternative bodies have emerged, the last being the G20. Nevertheless all this is insufficient.

We have to find a new structure capable of coordinating the relations and cooperations between the various types of actors and stakeholders. As we do in our Forum, our societies have to learn to dialogue and think together. And lastly we need to make of the irreducibility of our interdependencies an ethical principle of responsibility.

The international agenda gives us an opportunity to push this idea: the conference of Heads of State which will be organised in 2012 to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the Earth Summit, the so-called Rio + 20.

The present world order, to be honest, was designed by Western powers. There is no reason for us, Westerners, to be ashamed, to the contrary we can be proud: this was a contribution of our civilisation to universality.

But this again is no longer sufficient. World has dramatically changed. The raising power of China, India, Brazil, the awakening of Russia create a completely new context. We have to join together with these countries, in the perspective of Rio + 20, to define the ethical foundation necessary for the world community, to organise the dialogue between the societies of the world, to draw the bases of a new global structuring. If our Forum can bring its contribution, if we can join our efforts to draw the common ethical foundation, if the format of our dialogue can be a source of inspiration for a global dialogue, then it will have a true historical value.