

THE SECOND CHINA-EUROPE FORUM

**First Part of the Plenary sessions
October, 6, 2007**

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-- Integral version --

Madam Ambassador, I would give my speech in Chinese, but my accent is not very good, so I am going to speak in French, my native language. Since you told a story, I am going to tell another one. During my time as the ambassador of the European Community in London, I decided to visit the chargé d'affaires of the People's Republic of China. It was autumn of 1971, and as there was no official relationship between the European Community and China, I asked Ralf Dahrendorf, the Commissioner in charge of Foreign Affairs, to authorise the visit. He was very reluctant, and finally he gave me written instructions: "you can make the visit, but at your own personal risk." As you can see, we have come a long way since then. So I went to the Chancellery of the Chinese chargé d'affaires. I was welcomed by a long series of people, each with a little red book in their hands. I remember that on each step of the staircase, two people were holding up the red book. I finally arrived at the Chargé d'affaires' office. Our conversation was in English, and I thought it would be short. It lasted five and a half hours. For the first time, a real exchange took place, and all the elements of our conversation that seemed impossible at the time are now a reality. I am proud of having established that first contact between the European Commission in Brussels and the government of the People's Republic of China. The conclusion that I have drawn from the experience is that sometimes it is a good idea to take personal risks.

The second thing I wanted to start off by telling you is that the opening of this meeting takes me back to 1952 when we started building the European Community. It was complete chaos. So do not worry if we are unable to stick to a strict schedule, because chaos can bring about creation. I am sure that if we have the impression that things are a little disorderly now, it is a sign that things will be orderly in the future.

(...)

I think you all realise the fundamental point that we have in common. We are living in the most significant period of transformation in human history. This transformation has been happening peacefully, but is more far-reaching than all the wars and revolutions in our national histories. I am now going to move on to the questions that the Europeans have for the Chinese by making two comments that were inspired by some of the questions our Chinese colleagues suggested. Is globalisation the affirmation of a sort of American cultural hegemony? We have been discussing this issue since 1950 in Europe, and we have made some observations that historians may disagree with. Nevertheless, as politicians, we have drawn a certain number of conclusions from our observations. They concern China directly. The 19th century has been marked by the brutal transformation of our European societies. When conditions become unbearable, people react in one of three possible ways. First: they try to overthrow the oppressive regime. Second: they emigrate. Third: they resign themselves to the situation. If you look at how the United States of America was formed, America was originally composed of Europeans who fled Europe because their living conditions had become unbearable. So the immigration of Europeans to America was a revolutionary act. America was built on the dreams of downtrodden Europeans. Then things began to evolve and change. Things were imported into the United States in a brutal manner: the Chinese, for one, the construction of the transcontinental railroad and the oppression and slavery of Africans brought by force to America. But European dreams for a better future still made up the foundations upon which America was built. Meanwhile, in Europe, those who stayed behind resisted and organised revolutions: socialist revolutions, communist revolutions, democratic revolutions. This had a direct influence on the evolution of China, which was sometimes influenced by democratic revolutions, 1911, or communist revolutions. In other words, we have all been shaken by the changes that would lead us on towards modernity.

American hegemony is not American. American hegemony is the hegemony of an attempt to modernise our societies. After the Second World War, when we started, there were not many of us. There was a European revolution. We wanted to re-import the European dream from America back to Europe and try to create a United States of Europe. Consequently, even though there are substantial differences between American and European politics, they both belong to the same family, whose goal is the progress of mankind. After all, if the foundation of this meeting is the progress of mankind, it makes sense that you understand each other so well. What have we done? We have reintroduced the notion in Europe that we are no longer enemies, and that being enemies is pointless. And so, patiently, since the majority of the things we hope to accomplish in life require patience, we have succeeded in getting countries that hated each other and killed each other's citizens to work together – and Brussels is proof of this. The success of the European Union reintroduced the possibility of diversity. Diversity disappears when there is war. Diversity is only possible in times of peace. Therefore, many of us in Europe do not consider globalisation as a way to get rid of diversity. On the contrary, globalisation allows us to manage diversity. And we are ready to build and organise relationships in different areas of the world that will nurture our diversity, and not the contrary. If we are interested in China, if we think that we can find elements of inspiration and development in China, it's because we know perfectly well that China is a united entity where almost a quarter of the world's population is able to live together with a shared patriotism that comes with being a part of the Chinese entity as a whole. We understand the importance of this, and in Europe, we are beginning to adapt to this mass Chinese phenomenon, because for the first time, you can hear Europeans say: "There are 500 million of us." Before, we said: "there are ten million of us, 50 million of us, 60 million of us," and our psychology corresponded to those small figures. We are discovering that 500 million

puts us in the category of large cultural blocks that are shaping the future humanity in the 21st century. So we are very curious to see how this system functions with one billion three hundred million people. We are curious to understand the content of the patriotism of such a large group of people. We are curious to know which values have survived over thousands of years and still inspire today's China. We are very curious to know how, with such a long history, you have been subject to so many influences, conflicts, crises and hopes, and how, today, you have succeeded in taking your place on the world stage with force and dignity in the space of a few years, hence the questions that some Europeans are asking themselves. I am one of them. What we would like to know first, is whether the consequences of Chinese economic development are in line with Chinese culture. When people with a minimum level of education think of China, they think of wonderful Chinese paintings, the quality of the porcelain, the works of art and the music. Is this kind of modern economic aggression in line with Chinese culture? Could it destroy Chinese culture? It's a question that needs to be asked. Another question that needs to be asked is whether you, the Chinese, understand and are ready to accept the rules of the international community you have joined. I have had many conversations along these lines in China and the answer I was sometimes given was: we did not establish the rules you are referring to. They are rules that you established for yourselves. To which I respond: are you, the Chinese, willing to participate in the creation of new rules to govern the world? In other words, do you, the Chinese, wish to participate in the creation of this world governance?

I will make one observation. Never in its history has China been a world superpower. In the past, we went to Beijing. We bowed respectfully before the emperor. We went to Beijing. Today, this is no longer the case. We go to Beijing, Washington, Brussels and Moscow. In other words, the world no longer has a centre. If China has, in the past, considered itself the centre of the world, it is no longer the centre of the world today. We are all the centre of the world. I remember a conversation in Beijing while contemplating the first photograph of the Earth taken from the moon. My Chinese friend, a great intellectual, said to me: "you see, because of this photograph, Chinese culture and Chinese sensibilities will have to change." Another question having to do with international rules is, in fact, the underlying question of this meeting: what influence does Chinese civil society have on Chinese political authorities? This is a delicate question, a question that foreigners should not attempt to answer. It is a question that the Chinese can ask themselves. Only the Chinese can find an answer amongst themselves. But it is clear that what you hear, the way we organise ourselves, the way we are sometimes chaotic and unpredictable are all things to think about, and these elements could be assimilated in a Chinese manner. I am struck by the fact that the remarkable Chinese speeches we heard were improvised, since most of the speakers only found out ten minutes beforehand that they were going to speak. This spontaneity that comes from the heart, as we have heard, is an element of change that should allow Chinese diversity to affirm itself in all its richness and power. The question that is being asked, and I repeat, the Europeans are not meant to answer, concerns the relationship between civil society and the political authorities. Having had the honour, in 1981, of being received along with some of my friends by Mr. Deng Xiaoping, I believe that the Chinese authorities would like things to change in a Chinese manner, with caution and humility, with patience, little by little in a Chinese way, which is what we are seeing so clearly in the economic domain. Finally, a question for the Chinese, the Europeans, the Americans and all the inhabitants of this Earth: are we ready to adhere to principles that are considered universal? Having been educated in a classic French manner, I am very distrustful of the concept of a universal value. When I was in primary school, I was taught that France had a universal mission. When one of my Chinese friends, who went to a French school in Beijing long ago, told me that at the French school he was told to repeat "our ancestors, the Gauls," he told me that "he had some doubts". The notion of a universal value is one that will need to be more clearly defined so that everyone can feel more comfortable with it. As for me, and this is where I would permit myself to judge

whether or not China is truly ready to adhere to principles that are considered universal, the first question is whether or not each of us is able to respect our fellow man, not in a courteous or superficial way, but to deeply respect others as they are. This requires that we consider all human beings as equals and that their dignity and life must be respected, either on a collective or individual level.

Another element: I really like meeting Chinese friends because in China, the elderly are still respected. I feel much more comfortable in those situations. I realized, having travelled throughout the world and having spoken to the poor, to revolutionaries, to heads of government, to intellectuals, to artists and to actors, that we share a universal instinct, but that our different stories and sorrows lead us to believe that we are fundamentally different from others. We are rediscovering, through fundamental challenges, that we are not so different from each other. Having been called to order by our chairman, I will now conclude, but this development was meant to bring up some of the European questions that appear in this little document I was given and to encourage my European colleagues to react and ask our Chinese colleagues the questions they see fit. So as not to worry Pierre Calame, I will not be taking the half-hour that was accorded to me later in the programme, so that our European colleagues might have the opportunity to ask their questions.