

THE SECOND CHINA-EUROPE FORUM

Ending of the Plenary sessions
October, 7, 2007

Speech of Mr Jérôme Vignon
Director of the DG Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities
the European Commission

-- Integral version --

Six or seven words, but briefly, to respect the time.

The first word is transformation. I was lucky to attend the forum in Nansha exactly two years ago, and between the Nansha forum and this present one, there has been a real transformation. Particularly in terms of the passionate, fascinating and enthusiastic contribution of the youth who present us all with an enormous challenge, which I would like to discuss later on, but also in terms of the liveliness and richness of expression, especially of the Chinese but also of the Europeans present this morning, reflected in the workshops. China and Europe have also transformed: looking at the future changes it, looking at a person changes them. In four days, you have looked at China and Europe. As (21.51-Yu Shuo) said, they are changed, transformed.

The second word is truth. I was very moved by the words of the speaker during the previous question session. He said what I think is at the heart of what we have come to realise: “now we have to try to find the truth together”. Nobody owns the truth. And one of the problems with globalisation today, is that certain powers, with their good conscience, want to impose their truth unilaterally. We can only build an international community – and these words are so similar to European jargon – if the dialogue between societies is based on the search for the truth. What has taken place in the past four days is precisely an attempt to build a global community, with the focus more on culture and civilisation than on politics.

The third word is society. The former UK Prime Minister, Dame Margaret Thatcher, said, “There is no such thing as society”. Over the past four days, we have shown, you have shown, that not only are there societies in China and in Europe, but that they are an undeniable source of inspiration for political life, steering and guiding international relations. We understand that without the initiative of both the Chinese and European societies, socioeconomic development will remain superficial. To find the courage and inventiveness to go further, guidance must be developed for dialogue between societies, like the one that has taken place in the past four days. Great societies are great because they question themselves. All the workshops have revealed our uncertainty when faced with the big questions of the world. The environment, globalisation, the role of science, of women, of the youth in our societies are starting points. The future is not predetermined, anything is possible. Only societies can ask questions about the future in terms of what is to come, and thus help the international community.

Other important words that I think have been opposed are plan and speech. The youth want the forum to be more about making plans and allowing each person to participate, then to speak about it. Yu Shuo said, “What we have built in the last two years is a platform”. I think this is the right word. You, we, have been privy to numerous meetings, contacts, and experiences these past four days that help us to envisage both plans and speeches in the coming months, because the forum must make an impact and gain importance through the diversity of its plans. What was so special about it? Why should we be grateful to Pierre Calame, Yu Shuo and so many others? Because in two years, they were able to combine plans, workshops and speeches, which came alive these past four days.

This leads to my next word: continuity. How can this forum, an incredible achievement, continue? I think that we need more ideas. I think that we will need networks between China and Europe – this aerial bridge that was discussed – that will show us the way to the future. The rule of law is a new concept. The protection of workers must be studied in a different light. The role of women in society is also a new concept. We should be able to identify and develop these keys to the future together, with many voices, not only for us but for the world.

To ensure continuity, there must be individuals to oversee it. Pierre Calame said to us many times, “Who is this ‘we’ that drives the forum?” I think that now, having spoken of

transformation, we must, at least on the European side, ask ourselves serious questions about passing on the torch, recognising not only that the forum exists, but also that it cannot continue to be a constant miracle. The maturity of the exchanges and of the relationship between societies must be acknowledged. I think that on the European side, apart from the Foundation for Human Progress, organised civil society (this does exist in Europe) and an organised society of researchers must from now on serve as the counterbalance, the legitimate and reliable long term partner allowing not only a third but a fourth, fifth and sixth forum. And they will, with all of these proposals, analyses and visions, promote global dialogue and one day give rise to a community.

I will end with my last word: dialogue. Once again, why is this word so important? Why should we be so grateful to Pierre Calame? He says that he is a chef. Cuisine is not very different from art. I prefer to say that he and all of his collaborators and Chinese associates are giants: eyes on the horizon and feet firmly planted. We still need this mindset to achieve what Jacques Le Goff (a French historian) called self critical dialogue. It is what you have experienced. There is only real dialogue from associates who agree to question themselves, not before a judge, but before their free counterparts, and through this critical view, assume their own history, the best elements of their identity, to face today's human reality. This self critical dialogue must continue along these same lines. To do this, we must reach out and pass the torch to institutions that are still not visible enough, but that, I think given the dynamic nature and richness of the exchanges, will soon become noticeable.

I thank you.