



**Commissioner Janez POTOČNIK**

Speech

*'EU-China cooperation in science and technology: scientific responses to global challenges'*

*Brussels, 11 October 2006*

**Minister Wu,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Welcome honourable guests – or rather 'Huan ying guan ling'.

It gives me great pleasure to launch the China-EU Science and Technology year today with my Chinese counterparts. This is the fruit of a good idea and commitment from both sides. It is also a recognition that, in seeking answers to today and tomorrow's world, more unites us than divides us.

In our globalised world, alliances can produce more than rivalries. The EU and China have recognised this in a series of agreements, covering many areas, signed to date. I am pleased that now we have the China EU Science and Technology Year to showcase our cooperation in the area of science and technology.

The year's aim is to strengthen our links, both scientifically and politically, to better face common challenges.

### **What are these challenges?**

We are all confronted with areas requiring action. Urgent action. For example:

- Climate change may be taking place faster than we thought
- Avian flu may be mutating to spread to humans more easily
- And oil reserves may be lower than estimated and being consumed more rapidly

These are all only possibilities. But waiting to find out if they are true is not an option. So we need to help our researchers to look for answers.

I welcome the declarations of the Chinese Government at last month's Asia EU Summit in Helsinki. There, the Chinese Premier, Wen Jiabao, highlighted the need for us to work together on these, and other, common challenges.

## **How can we help our research efforts?**

Most importantly by working together. This brings me back to our alliance.

There is already good research cooperation between the EU and China. Let me give you a few examples:

- In our current EU R&D Framework programme, FP6, China is one the largest third country partners. There are now over 130 joint research projects on going or under preparation with Chinese and European teams. Together, these are worth nearly €900 million.
- A Science and Technology agreement between China and the EU was signed in December 1998 and renewed in 2004. This provides the framework for discussing how to tackle many common challenges.
- China has joined the EU in major projects which require massive funding, such as ITER, the Experimental Thermonuclear Reactor and the Galileo satellite project. Allow me to thank China for their support in establishing this major experiment to develop nuclear fusion in Europe with our partners. We are very honoured by this.

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Both the EU and China know that innovation starts with knowledge. China's strong emphasis on education will see it produce more graduates than either the EU or the US this year, especially in the exact sciences. And a large proportion are in areas where we, in the EU, need more graduates, such as science and engineering.

This is just one of the many reasons why it would benefit both sides if more European researchers participated in Chinese research programmes. It would give European researchers more access to China's expertise, while spreading knowledge in both directions.

My services are looking at how this could be made easier from our side and look forward to collaborating with the Chinese Ministry of Science and Technology on this.

**Knowledge is not just about tackling problems. It is about also creating opportunities.**

In the EU, we have recently drawn up an innovation strategy, which aims to take advantage of these opportunities.

We want to see more of our research result in commercial successes. To make this happen, we know we need to:

- improve conditions for researchers
- increase partnerships, especially with industry
- seek more R&D funding, both public and private
- and change European mentalities in this respect

Innovation breeds investment. China is reaping the rewards of this already. In just the first half of this year, EU companies invested almost €3 billion there, up 20% on last year's figure.

To encourage further innovation, we need to look together at issues such as intellectual property rights. In FP7, we are changing some of the IPR provisions to make issues clearer, especially for our small and medium sized enterprises.

We know that lack of protection for ideas and products is a big disincentive to innovate. I look forward to working with China to improve knowledge protection, to enhance our collaboration in certain thematic areas.

## **So what is the China EU Science and Technology Year designed to achieve?**

As well as recognising the importance of science and technology is in our relationship, I hope this year will make real differences. Let me name just a few: It will:

- strengthen research links and cooperation between research institutions on both sides
- increase mobility of people and knowledge
- open up further collaboration possibilities in Government research programmes
- promote fair technology exchange, particularly between SMEs from the two regions
- and play a role in developing research projects of interest to both sides

Concretely, we can look forward to a number of events over the next 12 months which will highlight China-EU cooperation. This kicks off next month with the IST 2006 event in Finland.

The EU and its individual Member States will sponsor events throughout the Union. I sincerely hope both sides take full advantage of them to bring us closer together.

### **Ladies and Gentlemen,**

It was 18 years ago last week that the European Commission first opened its Delegation in Beijing. That was a symbol of increased communication and cooperation between our two regions. Together, we have come a long way since then.

I hope today's launch of the China EU Science and Technology Year today builds on the successes we have already achieved in that time. I have no doubt it will help create new links, opportunities and cooperation, further opening our programmes to more researchers.