



“The Hamburg Summit: China meets Europe”

Welcome remarks at the Conference Opening

by

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**First Mayor and President of the Senate
of the Free and Hanseatic City of Hamburg**

- Check Against Delivery -

Hamburg Chamber of Commerce

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Hamburg
Chamber of Commerce

Mr Melsheimer,

Mr. Li Yizhong,

Mr. Yao Shenhong

Prime Minister Xavier Bettel,

Excellencies,

distinguished Members of the European and Hamburg Parliament,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

283 years ago, on a September day in 1731, the first ship from China docked in Hamburg.

The “Apollon” had scarcely anchored in the port when fierce international disputes broke out. British and Dutch envoys tried to seize the cargo, arguing that – I quote – a ship of this kind “must not enter the Elbe and approach this city directly, nor bringeth goods to this here place”. End of quote.

Of course this demand was rejected successfully by the Hamburg authorities, and the cargo – porcelain and tea – was auctioned “for a very good price”, as it was expressly stated.

Hamburg has risen to considerable prosperity over this long period. We have a broad mix of enterprises. But one of the cores of our economy is still the port of Hamburg, the harbour, that we do hope to deepen as soon as possible to make it accessible to the new giant container vessels.

Last week we were anxiously awaiting a judgment of the Federal Administrative Court on the enlargement of the Elbe fairway, and it now seems we have to be patient for a while longer until the European Court of Justice has passed a decision on the deepening of the river Weser. But from what the court said, I’m very confident that even the biggest container vessels will be able to reach the port of Hamburg without difficulty in the foreseeable future. That is extremely important, not least for trade with the Far East.

- Goods and services to a value of about a billion euros are already being traded between China and Europe – every day!
- Hamburg has become a turntable of European trade with the People’s Republic of China.
- One container in three handled in the port of Hamburg now comes from China or has China as its destination.
- The People’s Republic of China is now Hamburg’s most important trading partner, and over half of Germany’s foreign trade is conducted through the port of Hamburg.

That goes to show one thing in particular: “We can’t do without China”. I fully agree with this conclusion drawn by the newspaper “Handelsblatt”.

It is a pleasure and a great honour to me today to welcome so many of you to the sixth “Hamburg Summit – China meets Europe” of the Hamburg Chamber of Commerce.

I especially wish to welcome our guests of honour Xavier Bettel, the Prime Minister of Luxembourg; Martin Schulz, the President of the European Parliament, and Karel De Gucht, the European Commissioner for Trade. Our Chinese guest of honour, Prime Minister Li Keqiang, will arrive here tomorrow. I’d also like to welcome numerous top-ranking economy representatives. I’m sure this meeting and the many personal discussions will make our already close relations closer still.

Hamburg and China are linked by nearly 300 years of history. The result is a close network of German-Chinese institutions, initiatives and associations. Over 500 firms with a Chinese background are established here.

Currently several large banks are planning to strengthen their Hamburg activities and are seeking a location in this city. Support is granted by HWF, the Hamburg Business Development Corporation. Additionally, large reputable companies within other branches are also planning to expand their business activities at their Hamburg site.

Moreover, one of Europe’s biggest Chinese communities lives here between the Elbe, Alster and Bille rivers. So I’m not boasting when I say that Hamburg might call itself China’s capital city in Germany. And that covers a lot more than just our traditionally good trade relations.

“We can’t do without China”: the parents who send their children to a German-Chinese nursery, the boys and girls who learn Chinese at our schools are well aware of that. And the doctors and their patients who put their faith in Chinese medicine know it too. That is why there is a centre for traditional Chinese medicine at the University Hospital in Hamburg-Eppendorf, for example. It unites research, teaching and treatment under one roof, and it is the first scientific institution in Germany to concentrate entirely on traditional Chinese healing methods that are more and more in demand.

For 28 years, Hamburg and Shanghai have been linked by a sister city arrangement called into being on 29th May 1986 by Hamburg’s First Mayor Klaus von Dohnanyi and the First Mayor of Shanghai, Jiang Zemin, who later became President of the People’s Republic of China. On that occasion the two ports agreed to maintain their traditional ties of friendship and intensify cooperation. Every two years the numerous instances of cooperation between the sister cities are recorded in a Memorandum of Understanding.

Naturally we hope to take these a step further, especially in sectors that hold special promise for the future. As I’ve already mentioned, Hamburg has a much wider mix of business activity today than just traditional industry and shipbuilding. Hamburg is the third most important location for the aviation industry worldwide; we have banks, insurance firms and leading manufacturers of consumer goods; we are one of Germany’s biggest media and information technology centres; we have excellent clusters in the fields of renewable energy and logistics, including wind power generation, and we are one of Germany’s major locations for innovation and the establishment of new enterprises.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

relationships have to be maintained and fostered. In spite of more and more intensive business, cultural and personal contacts between China and Europe, between the Dragon and the Bull, there are still some gaps in knowledge, occasional misunderstandings and sometimes even collisions of interests. These are things we have to talk about in order to overcome them. In doing so, Hamburg is a willing partner at any time.

I wish the “Hamburg Summit” the best of success, and you and all of us discussions in an atmosphere of harmony.