

Speech by CS at Europe Day Reception (English only) (with video)

Following is the video speech by the Chief Secretary for Administration, Mr Matthew Cheung Kin-chung, at the Europe Day Reception this evening (May 10):

Mr Gnocchi (Head of the European Union (EU) Office to Hong Kong and Macao, Mr Thomas Gnocchi), distinguished guests, friends of the European Union and Hong Kong, ladies and gentlemen,

Good evening. I am most honoured to join you all to celebrate Europe Day.

Europe Day celebrates the remarkable success of the European Union, a singular economic and political institution uniting 27 nations with a shared goal: the promotion of peace, stability and prosperity.

Indeed, peace and the promise it engenders are aspirations shared by people around the world. When the European Union was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2012, it used the prize money – and then doubled it, to 2 million Euros – to help children in conflict zones.

A decade later, while it is debatable whether global conflict has lessened, it is clear that we live in a world beset with strife. Trade wars continue to create animosity and mistrust, and a virus has devastated the global economy and international community.

COVID-19 is clearly the biggest challenge that we have known since World War II – a global responsibility as much as a global scourge. As the World Health Organization has said, the pandemic is, and I quote, "a stark and painful reminder that nobody is safe until everyone is safe".

President Xi Jinping, speaking at the Boao Forum for Asia Annual Conference last month, is acutely mindful of that reality and the responsibility that comes with it. China, he said, "will continue to carry out anti-COVID co-operation with the World Health Organization and other countries, honour its commitment of making vaccines a global public good, and do more to help developing countries defeat the virus".

The European Council is no less aware of the critical need for a global response. Indeed, it has taken the lead in calling for an international pandemic treaty, one "guided by a spirit of collective solidarity, anchored in the principles of fairness, inclusiveness and transparency".

However nations and institutions respond, it is clear that we must come together if we are to ensure equitable and timely access to vaccines and related diagnostic tools, medicine and expertise.

That demands concerted co-operation on any number of levels. My heartfelt thanks to the consular officials in the EU office and member states, together with EU citizens here in Hong Kong, for getting vaccinated. The more people getting vaccinated, the greater the effectiveness of our anti-epidemic effort. That is a critical step in achieving herd immunity as soon as possible and enabling the community to gradually return to normality.

Despite COVID-19's adverse impact, Hong Kong and the EU have enjoyed a splendid bilateral relationship. Indeed, the EU was the third largest merchandise trading partner of Hong Kong in the world. I am pleased to note that our bilateral merchandise trade last year was over 46 billion Euros. Let me add that some 1 600 EU companies maintain an office here. More than half of them have chosen Hong Kong as the base of their regional headquarters or regional offices. I am confident that our business and investment ties will begin to pick up again in the second half of this year.

Beyond trade and business, our cultural exchanges with the EU are thriving in Hong Kong. I am heartened by the EU Office's continuing community engagement. The 12th edition of the European Union Film Festival, which ran through the last two weeks of April, featured 19 award-winning films – a treat for cinema lovers in Hong Kong.

I look forward to enhancing our future co-operation with the European Union, in arts, films, music, exhibitions and much else.

The EU, after all, has long been a welcome force for stability, in Europe and throughout the world. Please rest assured that Hong Kong will continue to connect the European Union with the Mainland and Asia in general – for business and investment, of course, but also, no less important, for communication, co-operation and mutual understanding.

Happy Europe Day!