

Speech by CS at French National Day 2019 reception (English only) (with photos)

Following is the speech by the Chief Secretary for Administration, Mr Matthew Cheung Kin-chung, at the French National Day 2019 reception today (July 12).

Consul General (Consul General of France in Hong Kong and Macau, Mr Alexandre Giorgini), Commissioner Song (Deputy Commissioner of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, Mr Song Ru'an), ladies and gentlemen,

Good evening. I am most honoured to join you all this evening to celebrate the French National Day. This year also marks the 55th anniversary of diplomatic ties between France and China. With French President Macron visiting Mainland China last year and President Xi visiting France this March, the bilateral relations between the two nations will expand further and create boundless opportunities for business and people of both sides.

Hong Kong's strategic location at the centre of Asia, our status as an international financial centre, our deep pool of professional talents and our extensive international trade networks make Hong Kong an ideal partner of French businesses to jointly tap the vast market offered by our motherland. That is why more than 9 per cent of the total merchandise trade between France and Mainland China last year was routed through Hong Kong. Last year, that added up to US\$5.6 billion.

Indeed, Hong Kong and France have all along enjoyed a splendid bilateral relationship. France is Hong Kong's fourth largest trading partner in the European Union and 16th largest merchandise trading partner in the world. Last year, our bilateral trade reached US\$11.3 billion, representing an increase of 2.4 per cent over 2017.

French wine has certainly acted as an active catalyst for such a buoyant relationship. It accounted for 65 per cent of our total wine imports last year. In value, French wine imports realised more than US\$1 billion, representing nearly 10 per cent year-on-year growth.

Beyond food and beverage companies, luxury fashion and retailing, banking and finance, transport and logistics, pharmaceuticals, technology, insurance and many other French sectors and industries are thriving here. Indeed, more than 600 French companies call Hong Kong home. Among them, some 170 have chosen Hong Kong as the base of their regional headquarters or regional offices.

Our links are not confined to trade and business. Currently, the 20 000-

strong French community in Hong Kong is the largest in Asia. French culture has already become a part of Hong Kong's cosmopolitan culture. Just over two weeks ago, Le French May successfully completed another festive season in Hong Kong. Some 700 000 people attended more than 120 arts and cultural events brought to brilliant life by 350 performers from France, Hong Kong and Macao during this annual cultural highlight in Asia's world city.

The innovative spirit of France, as the Consul General highlighted, is alive and flourishing in Hong Kong. In March 2016, French Tech Hong Kong, the official online hub of the French tech ecosystem, was launched in Hong Kong to facilitate access by French entrepreneurs to the local ecosystem and make the French tech community more visible on the Hong Kong tech scene. The partnership in advancing science and technology collaboration is further boosted by the tripartite partnership among the University of Hong Kong, Institut Pasteur and Hong Kong Science and Technology Parks Corporation established in June 2018 for setting up a joint biomedical research centre for immunology, infection and personalised medicine.

French companies are also active in innovation, technology and start-up businesses in Hong Kong. The fourth edition of "So French So Innovative" was successfully held in April this year to present top French companies with international presence such as Schneider Electric, Suez and Renault, as well as young small- and medium-size enterprises and start-ups, showcasing expertise and dynamism in terms of "creative tech that works". In 2018, Hong Kong recorded over 2 600 innovation and technology start-ups, an 18 per cent increase over 2017. About 35 per cent of these start-ups are founded by overseas entrepreneurs or returnees to Hong Kong. I am most pleased to note that French entrepreneurs account for over 7 per cent of the total foreign start-up founders in Hong Kong. I look forward to seeing more French companies connect and excel in Hong Kong.

French excellence is also evidenced by its quality education. The French International School, which began in 1963, now counts four campuses with over 2 700 students in Hong Kong. Last November, the French Minister of State and our Chief Executive jointly opened the new French International School in Tseung Kwan O campus since they met at Airbus Helicopters in France in June 2018. The impressive new campus focuses on sustainable development in both design and philosophy.

Ladies and gentlemen, we just celebrated the 22nd anniversary of the establishment of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR). During the past 22 years since Hong Kong returned to our motherland, Hong Kong has experienced some changes, ups and downs, in the political, economic and social spheres. Yet, Hong Kong has remained steadfast, stable and prosperous. Backed by our country and open to the world, Hong Kong has continued to leverage its unique advantages under "one country, two systems". Under "one country", Hong Kong has benefited from the country's reform and opening up and has enjoyed greater room for growth and development in social, economic and livelihood areas. On "two systems", after our return to the motherland, Hong Kong is still internationally recognised as one of the freest economies in the world, with basic rights and freedoms of Hong Kong people fully

protected by the Basic Law.

As in the past, Hong Kong will weather any storm on the strength of our people's energy, endurance and resourcefulness. The HKSAR Government is determined to ensure that Government's future work will be closer and more responsive to the aspirations, sentiments and opinions of the community in order to reconnect with our people. Let us all work together to propel Hong Kong forward and jealously safeguard Hong Kong's reputation as an international metropolis of order, progress, stability and hope. I trust that with the joint efforts of all quarters of society, including our French community, Hong Kong will continue to thrive in the many years ahead.

Please join me now in a toast. To the Republic of France, and to the people of France, on your National Day. Thank you.

