

Speech by DCS at Belgian King's Day Reception (English only) (with photos)

Following is the speech by the Deputy Chief Secretary for Administration, Mr Cheuk Wing-hing, at the Belgian King's Day Reception today (November 15):

Consul General (Mr David Lomastro), Deputy Commissioner Pan Yundong (Deputy Commissioner of the Office of the Commissioner of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region), ladies and gentlemen,

Good Evening. I am delighted to join you all to celebrate the Belgian King's Day here in Hong Kong. This special day, which has a long tradition going back to 1886, is also an occasion to celebrate Belgium's unity and rich cultural diversity.

What better time to celebrate your King's Day than during the second edition of the Belgian Days Cultural Festival, which brings to Hong Kong wonderful Belgian arts, music, film and comics, alongside business and cultural seminars. The Belgian Nights parties, with the cheer of foaming Belgian beer and scrumptious Belgian chocolate, will surely be great fun.

Strategically situated in Europe, Belgium is a founding member of the European Union (EU) in which your country plays a key role, and Belgium is a very important European partner of Hong Kong in its own right.

Like the Belgian Days, which showcases Belgian heritage and celebrates friendship between Eastern and Western cultures, Hong Kong plays to its unique advantages as a bridge between East and West, connecting Mainland China with Europe and the world, and fostering collaboration in trade and investment, arts and culture, technology and innovation.

I am glad to note the many cultural exchanges taking place between Belgium and Hong Kong. At the moment, an art installation by a Hong Kong artist is on display at the IMPACT Festival in Liege. Also earlier this year, the Hong Kong Philharmonic Orchestra held a concert at the Klara Music Festival in Brussels.

Meanwhile, Hong Kong hosted the Belgian music programme "Thelonious" by Zonzo Compagnie last August; and "Slow Dance: Something Borrowed" by Unlock Dancing Plaza this July. Belgian films are also regularly featured in various film festivals in Hong Kong.

As cultural exchanges between us grow, so does business. It is good to see that Belgian companies in Hong Kong are active in different sectors, from banking, asset management and logistics to environmental technology, high-end engineering and manufacturing. In fact, at last count, Hong Kong hosted 11

regional headquarters, 25 regional offices and 31 local offices with parent companies in Belgium.

To mention a couple of noteworthy collaborations, the Belgian environmental technology company Keppel Seghers has teamed up with a Hong Kong firm to design, build and operate an integrated waste management facility – the first project of its kind in Hong Kong. Also, Budweiser Brewing Company APAC Limited – the Asia-Pacific beer unit of Anheuser-Busch, which has Belgian interests – raised about US\$5 billion when listed in Hong Kong in 2019, making it the second-largest new listing globally that year. There are also two Belgian banks operating in Hong Kong, namely KBC Bank N. V. and the Euroclear Bank.

In 2023, bilateral merchandise trade between Hong Kong and Belgium reached HK\$35.6 billion, up 6.6 per cent from 2022, making Belgium our fifth-largest merchandise trading partner in the EU.

Given the ever-growing financial connection schemes between Hong Kong and the Mainland, companies from Belgium can readily tap into the Mainland's financial markets. I am sure that there are many opportunities for Belgium and Hong Kong to collaborate in various areas, such as fintech, green tech, advanced manufacturing and sustainability. I encourage friends in this room to give this some thought.

Hong Kong is a premier gateway between East and West. Our distinctive advantages are assured under the "one country, two systems" principle, including an independent judiciary, a free trade and investment regime, and an efficient and clean government. We offer a low and simple tax system, free flow of capital and information, an open and business-friendly environment, world-class infrastructure and a multicultural talent pool. Reputable surveys declare Hong Kong the world's freest economy. All these make Hong Kong an ideal place for Belgian enterprises and talent alike to explore and innovate in Asia and Mainland China.

On that note, ladies and gentlemen, let me propose a toast to His Majesty King Philippe and the people of Belgium. Cheers!

