

Speech by DCS at Europe Day Reception (English only) (with photos)

Following is the speech by the Deputy Chief Secretary for Administration, Mr Cheuk Wing-hing, at the Europe Day Reception today (May 9):

Ambassador Gnocchi (Mr Thomas Gnocchi, Head, European Union Office to Hong Kong and Macao), Consuls General, ladies and gentlemen, friends of the European Union,

Good day on a grand day. Europe Day.

Europe Day stands as a resonating symbol of the EU's openness, its unity and commitment to peace, stability and prosperity.

Hong Kong shares those goals – for our economy, for our community and the world at large.

The EU is an important, highly valued trading partner of Hong Kong. As a bloc, the EU was Hong Kong's third largest trading partner last year.

And we hope now, as we move deeper into the post-pandemic economy, that we can further strengthen our longstanding, long-rewarding economic ties.

Hong Kong's advantages remain remarkably strong and inviting. Thanks to the "one country, two systems" grand design, Hong Kong continues to serve as the global gateway between the Mainland of China and the rest of the world.

At last count, Hong Kong was home to about 1 550 EU companies – a number that speaks of the enduring confidence EU nations have in Hong Kong, in our economy, our policies and plans and the boundless promise we offer companies and investors.

It helps that our tax system is as simple as it is low, that capital flows freely, that our business environment is open to all, and that our communications and logistics infrastructure is world-class.

We are also working, assiduously and creatively, to attract strategic companies, investment and talent.

Our Top Talent Pass Scheme, introduced to entice graduates of the world's top universities to pursue careers in Hong Kong, is doing just that.

In February, we approved more than 180 000 applications from our various talent-admission schemes. About 120 000 of them have already arrived in Hong Kong.

To help companies and professionals settle into Hong Kong faster and easier, we've put together a variety of initiatives. For example,

expatriates, including foreign staff of companies in Hong Kong, can now travel to the Mainland on multiple-entry visas, enjoying priority visa processing.

Hong Kong Talent Engage, established late last year to recruit international and mainland talent, also offers a wide range of support for incoming professionals. Earlier this week, it organised a Global Talent Summit, attracting some 1 000 participants and running alongside it an exhibition, featuring nearly 100 exhibitors, alongside it.

We welcome more EU companies and professionals, entrepreneurs and start-ups to join us, to help Hong Kong expand and diversify our world-class financial system.

Green finance is central to the future of our financial sector.

In February, we launched about 715 million euros worth of digital green bonds. They were denominated in Hong Kong dollars, renminbi, US dollars and euros, all under the Government Green Bond Programme.

That was our second digital bond issuance, following the Government's inaugural tokenised green bond, released 15 months ago.

Last month's GreenWay forum, the third edition, showed a promising way forward in responding, creatively and co-operatively, to green issues.

EU companies are working with Hong Kong companies and the Government to tackle waste management and the many other environmental concerns we all face. We look forward to continuing, and expanding, our collective co-operation in this critical, long-term challenge.

I invite you, too, to take advantage of the far-reaching opportunities presented by our fast-emerging innovation and technology sector.

There are about 20 EU I&T start-ups and incubatees in Hong Kong Science Park, and another 10 in Cyberport. Four InnoHK research and development centres have also been established in collaboration with EU institutions.

It's a good start, and I'm confident we'll see more EU I&T presence here in the coming years.

Hong Kong is also a pivotal player in the region's international I&T ambitions. To take one example, the Hong Kong-Shenzhen Innovation and Technology Park is fast emerging. Its first buildings, including laboratories, will progressively open from year's end. The years, and the decades to follow, look awfully promising.

So, too, does Hong Kong's cultural and creative sector, thanks to the West Kowloon Cultural District's emergence on the world stage. Thanks, too, to our continuing rise as an East-meets-West centre for international cultural exchange.

That very much includes pan-Europe's resplendent arts and cultural

offerings. The annual French May Arts Festival, to take just one shining example, would feature more than 100 arts and cultural programmes, from music and dance to film, theatre, wine and dine delights – and a great deal more.

East meeting West could not be more gratifying.

Listening to our national anthems being played earlier this evening, I was reminded that Beethoven's "Ode to Joy" theme – the fourth movement of his Ninth Symphony – is the EU's official anthem. This past Tuesday marked the first public performance of Beethoven's Ninth – 200 years ago in Vienna.

There's a line from the Ode's lyrics: "All men become brothers." That, ladies and gentlemen, is eminently worth striving for.

Happy Europe Day! Thank you.

