

1st meeting of the EU-China HEPCE in the framework of the EU-China HPPD

“Closing remarks” of the “Presidents’ Dialogue” and the report to the “China-EU Higher Education Policy Dialogue” on the preceding “Presidents Dialogue”

Bernd Wächter

Ladies and gentlemen,

This has been a day brimful of useful facts and intelligent analysis about the state of EU-China cooperation in higher education. I have learned a lot today, and much of it I still need to further ‘digest’. This notwithstanding, I will dare to share with you some preliminary observations and – perhaps – conclusions. They are - by necessity - my own observations, which is why they are subjective, to a degree.

This Presidents Dialogue was devoted to three themes, or topics, viz.

- Joint EU-China structures (schools, institutes, etc.)
- Joint curricular offers (degrees) and joint supervision of students
- The state of the art in European studies in China and China studies in the countries of the EU (Jean Monnet).

As it turned out, many presentations concerned two or sometimes even three of these topics. This is not a sign that we have been lacking in analytical prowess. It rather shows that **the themes are related and naturally overlap** in the “real world” of EU-China higher education collaboration.

The presentations we had the privilege to listen to today were wonderfully unpretentious. They were, in most cases, **very practical and concrete**. They displayed **examples of practice**. We thus received a good insight into China-EU higher education cooperation **on the ground**. I think this hands-on approach was exactly the right one.

Taken together, the examples showed **wide diversity** – regarding disciplines, cooperating universities, structures (joint ‘schools’, joint curricula, joint research projects and institutes, consortia, etc.) as well as academic mobility between China and Europe, mostly in the form of joint and double degrees, and other mobility windows. This shows that EU-China cooperation rests on a **rich and broad foundation**. This does not mean that no further efforts are needed, of course. Quite the reverse. With the **joint Tuning study**, we have already entered new territory, and I could imagine that work in this area will continue. A broadening of the number of disciplines involved in TUNIG CHINA could be one way to extend the TUNING engagement. Likewise, I see scope in the area of quality assurance. But I am racing ahead.

What else have I learned today? I have to be selective, since I have little time. Here are a few observations.

- Not only is the landscape of EU-China cooperation diverse and lush, **so is the support it receives from governments on both sides**. This applies to China’s rich funding for the mobility of students and staff in both directions and it applies to the EU Commission’s programmes, but also to the member states and their **funding agencies**, such as the DAAD in Germany, to name just one prominent example. And, of course, at the Chinese end, to the China Scholarship Council.
- EU-China higher education cooperation is **older than I had been aware**. Some of the links and projects we learned about today date back to the

1980s, and more to the 1990s. We can look back onto quite a common history already.

- And this is not only important for history-minded observers. We have very different cultures and ways to do things. For cooperation to work and be mutually beneficial, trust and mutual understanding must be built up – **and this takes time**. Also, lasting partnerships cannot be created through a ‘big bang’, a one-time investment, however big. They need **constant effort and a long-term commitment**.
- **Internationalisation** is a big and increasingly **mainstream issue** in both Chinese and European higher education. This is good for higher education in both China and Europe, and it provides a sound basis for cooperation. But the presentations of today also show that China is by no means looking towards Europe only. Universities in the USA, but also elsewhere in Asia and beyond, are also on the radar of our Chinese friends. Therefore, we **Europeans must make an extra effort to remain one of China’s privileged partners**.
- What I also noticed is the **highly innovative potential** in many China-Europe partnerships and joint projects. I was particularly impressed by those projects which **pooled the resources of various disciplines** – and used this approach to address the **big global challenges of today**.
- What remains to be done? Very much, of course. I want to single out one area, Chinese studies in Europe. Apparently, we in Europe lag far behind our Chinese counterparts when it comes to produce knowledge on China in our population at large and also and particularly in higher education. This challenge cannot be met by more young Europeans becoming sinologists (although this is desirable as well). As our colleague from Göttingen rightly pleaded, **we have to integrate the study of the Chinese languages, and of the Chinese society and economy into the curricula of other disciplines**.

- I feel we must also address the (quantitatively) **relatively underdeveloped student mobility from Europe to China**. European students study abroad ever more often, but almost exclusively in other European countries. We simply cannot afford that our next generation of leaders grows up ignorant about what will be in ten years, if not earlier, the largest economy in the world.
- Let me come back to more practical issues: partnerships are essential. What does that entail, apart from building mutual trust and understanding, which I already mentioned? First of all, it necessitates a **cooperative attitude (as opposed to one based solely on competition)**. It requires **mutuality**, in other words. It also requires the **choice of the right partner**, one whose academic orientations and offers are **complementary** to one's own. It requires, as already said, a **sound and lasting commitment**. And it will not be successful without **regular coordination** and some form of – friendly – **quality control**.

Thank you very much for your kind attention.