Dear participants,

It is clear, from what we heard here today, that although our two countries have very different dimensions - China's population represents 19.5% of the world´s total population and the population of Belgium only 0.2%[[1]](#footnote-1) - we share some interests and face common challenges: the need for a cleaner energy, for healthier food systems, for a harmonious urban growth, etc. Many of these challenges are included in the 17 goals of the Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development, adopted in September 2015 within the framework of the United Nations. In order to achieve these goals we have to transform the way societies interact with our planet and with each other.

This change requires new knowledge, new technologies, and new economies. Our countries should grab this opportunity to further expand international co-ordination and cooperation between innovation players, including small and medium sized enterprises. I would like to mention here the example of SINNOLABS[[2]](#footnote-2), a public-private partnership launched last year to accelerate the establishment of Belgian innovative SMEs in China, and in particular companies working green technologies, recycling and new materials.

We recommend that our respective governments also remove barriers to international collaboration in national funding regimes and, based on respect and reciprocity, mutually open R&I national programmes.

The Belgian decentralised science and technology system - although probably not the most simple in the world - offers a wide range of opportunities for international cooperation, ranging from mobility of experts to science parks and joint laboratories. The signing of 3 MoUs today shows that these opportunities are not being neglected.

But not only our bilateral cooperation can de further developed; we should also take full advantage of international initiatives, such as the European framework for R&I, Joint Programming Initiatives and research infrastructures.

Science is an important factor for reaching sustainable development and peace. I am quite certain this first dialogue is an important contribution to science diplomacy between our countries and I hope the joint commission meeting we plan to have in 2018 will further deepen and consolidate some of the ideas discussed here today.

Before closing, I would like to acknowledge the efforts of those who helped to make this day possible: our partner, the Ministry of Science and Technology of China; the Embassy of People’s Republic of China in Belgium; the colleagues of the Belgian regions and communities; the Belgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs; the staff of the Belgian Federal Science Policy Office, the MCE Conference & Business Centre and, of course, all of you who decided to spend this marvellous spring day with us and contribute to our Dialogue.

I wish you very fruitful discussions in the afternoon and look forward to hearing your proposals for the future!

1. Gegevens <http://www.tradingeconomics.com/belgium/population> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. SINNOLABS ([www.sinnolabs.com](http://www.sinnolabs.com) ) is a PPP project (co-funded by FOD Financiën) acting as China Growth Accelerator for Innovative Belgian SMEs, enabling selected innovative European SMEs to successfully venture their business on the Chinese market by offering a 12-month acceleration programme specifically designed to allow them to find the solutions which will enable them to overcome the challenges and develop their businesses in China. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)