

Esteemed Vice-Minister,

Mr Ambassador,

Dear Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is an honour and privilege for me to host here today the First China-Belgium Innovation Dialogue.

With this Innovation Dialogue we want not only to reinforce the links between our two countries in the area of science and technology but also to promote synergies across research performing and research funding organisations and the private sector.

The seed of this dialogue is the general framework agreement between the Belgian Luxemburg Union and the People's Republic of China for economic, scientific and technological cooperation, signed in October nineteen seventy nine. From that day on, the Ministry of Science and Technology (known as MOST) of China and the Federal Belgian Science Policy Office (known as BELSPO) met every two years to discuss and to develop concrete joint actions. Those meetings were and are a unique occasion to review significant structural changes in our science systems, to engage in new forms of collaboration and to increase visibility for the scientific communities from both countries. For example, the meeting organised in two thousand and ten was an excellent opportunity to gather all Belgian entities and the Chinese parties and to show some of the most important Belgian achievements in research and innovation at the occasion of the World Expo, in Shanghai.

These years of joint cooperation resulted in some interesting achievements and marked our bilateral relationship. I am sure some of them will be mentioned during this afternoon.

Belgium has much to offer to its partners and China is an important partner for Belgium. Belgium has a high quality public research and higher education system, with a strong international openness. The high share of our scientific

publications (Belgium is in the top 10% most cited scientific publications worldwide) and the success we achieved within the EU R&D Framework Programmes, are some of the indicators of the quality of the Belgian research system. If we look at patenting activities, Belgium is the most specialised EU Member State in materials and the second most specialised in biotechnology, two areas where Belgium has an important know-how.

According to the Regional Innovation Scoreboard – an instrument that compares the innovation performance of two hundred fourteen regions across twenty two EU Member States and Norway - the Belgian regions perform better in terms of innovation than the EU average, and are therefore considered as "strong innovators".

To invest together in innovation and creativity is an intelligent way of boosting our economies and of contributing to the improvement of the quality of life of our societies. And there are many opportunities waiting for our interest and action!

The digital age is accelerating and multiplying innovation through the exchange of knowledge. Big data and algorithms are generating huge amounts of data, changing scientific methods, instruments and skills' requirements and creating new fields of research. As indicated in the recent OECD Science and Technology Innovation Outlook, "open science is the next frontier" and encouraging the share and re-use of research data can generate more value for public money.

That is why I would like to encourage our speakers of today to not only focus on how we make the best use of what has been done, but also to consider these new opportunities and challenges while helping us to manage the risks and uncertainties around emerging science, technology and innovation developments. This can be achieved by adopting a more "responsible research and innovation" attitude.

In a world in which traditional borders of scientific disciplines are being questioned, in which science is engaging more and more with citizens and huge amounts of data are available, responsible research and innovation policies deserve a particular attention.

Belgium is paying great attention to responsible research and innovation by taking into account ethical and social considerations "upstream" in the

innovation process. Consultation of stakeholders in the preparation of our activities and the inclusion of the gender dimension in research and innovation are some concrete examples of what we are doing.

Before giving the floor to the next speaker I would like to say some words about the programme we prepared for today.

After setting the scene by presenting our respective landscapes and policies with regard to science and innovation, we will highlight some good practices of successful instruments.

According to recent projections, China will most probably be in the top sending countries for international students by two thousand twenty five. This trend is also reflected in the participation and success rates Chinese researchers had in the postdocs' fellowships of the Belgian Federal Science Policy Office: thirty three out of the one hundred forty funded grantees between two thousand and nine and two thousand sixteen were Chinese, which means at least 1 Chinese researcher per four researchers funded by BELSPO. These figures show how important it is to discuss research mobility with our partner and we will do it in our morning session. "Science parks "will be the other effective instrument we will present.

We will also provide some insights into on-going initiatives and into opportunities in three key sectors: factories of the future; life sciences and; space and aeronautics. I hope this will be sufficiently stimulating to convince you all to join one of our afternoon sessions.

The signature of three memorandums of understanding at the end of this morning shows the commitment of Belgian and Chinese institutions and the progress we intend to achieve in our cooperation. Signatories will have the opportunity to briefly highlight some key points of the agreements. Finally, some concluding remarks of the morning session will also be presented.

In the afternoon, three parallel sessions will join researchers and entrepreneurs around specific and promising subjects, trying to grasp possible new cooperation interests and forms.

I hope you will enjoy the day and I thank you very much for your attention!