

10th anniversary of Sino-Italian partnership: a look back and beyond

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*Handshake cements Sino-Italian relations: Chinese Ambassador to Italy, Li Ruiyu (L) with Italian President Giorgio Napolitano (R).
(Photo: Cinitalia)*

We have been partners for ten years. But this is just the beginning. In China, the things that count in competitive sectors are communication and PR. We need to thoroughly understand market demand, connect with local businesses and grow through capital investments.

This is the way Italian and Chinese companies can create a win-win situation. This is the path ahead according to the Chinese Ambassador to Italy, Li Ruiyu.

On May 9, 2004, the Chinese and Italian governments released a joint statement announcing the establishment of a stable, friendly, long-term and sustainable comprehensive strategic partnership. This partnership is now celebrating its tenth anniversary, and in the meantime the political, economic, trade, cultural and academic relations between the two countries have experienced great improvement.

What does the future hold for relations between the two

countries? How are the Italian companies going to succeed in entering the Chinese market? What about the cooperation between Italy and China on international issues?

Li Ruiyu, Ambassador of the People's Republic of China in Italy, does not shy away from detailed explanations to *Cinitalia*, the national Italian magazine of gbtimes in collaboration with China Radio International.

Interviewer: China has fast become a rising power and its international standing has been in the ascendant. This provides compelling reasons for Italy to pay increasing attention to bilateral relationship. What is the Chinese government's approach to Italy?

Li Ruiyu: Italy is one of the founding States of the EU, a key country in southern Europe, an important member of the G20 and it has a great political and economic influence in Europe, in the Mediterranean and around the world. Our government has always paid great attention to developing relations with Italy, which boasts one of the warmest relations with China and is regarded as one of our most important partners within the EU.

Since I took office, I have come to appreciate that many different Italian business areas have a very strong desire and high expectations for cooperating with China. We are in constant communication now to realize our leaders' mutual exchange visits as well as the signing of the "three-year action plan of Sino-Italian economic cooperation" this year.

Taking advantage of the fact that in the second half of 2014, Italy will assume the rotating Presidency of the EU and will convene the Asia-Europe Summit, we will deepen our dialogue and lift the pragmatic and friendly cooperation between our countries to new heights.

Interviewer: 2014 marks the tenth anniversary of Sino-Italian comprehensive strategic partnership. How would you comment on the development of bilateral relations in the past ten years? Moving forward, which areas do you think we can look into to tighten our cooperation and cater to our common interests?

Li Ruiyu: Since 2004 our relations have been in constant growth, political consensus between both countries is robust and high-level exchanges are frequent.

We maintain close consultations on major international and regional issues and despite the global financial crisis, our economic and trade cooperation is still growing: last year bilateral trade reached US 43.3 billion dollars, an increase of 3.9% compared to the previous year, almost 3 times more than 10 years ago. In particular, Chinese imports from Italy rose 9.4%, registering also almost three-fold growth compared to a decade ago. Bilateral investment registered a growth in spite of the crisis, with Chinese investment in Italy exceeding US 600 million dollars in 2013.

Cultural and human-to-human exchange, as well as technical and scientific interaction between the two countries have also been very lively. In particular, the two sides have established the Sino-Italian Facility (SIF), a joint foundation aimed at implementation of joint projects on environment and energy between China and Italy, Centre of Innovative design, Centre of Technology Transfer, as well as the e-government Center, all of which have been conducive to advancing relevant projects in scientific, technical and environment areas.

Initiatives such as the Year of Chinese culture in Italy and permanent exchange of works between museums are aimed at constructing a bridge that affirms the friendly ties between our peoples.

Italy has traditionally been a European industrial power, demonstrating excellence in manufacturing and scientific innovation and boasting a vast number of small and medium sized businesses (SMEs) which are competitive on the international stage. This corresponds to what China needs.

With the enormous potential unleashed in the process of China's economic transformation and restructuring, I believe our countries share enormous opportunities for economic, commercial, scientific, technological, environmental, agricultural, culinary, cultural and academic cooperation.

The embassy will create a favourable environment, look for further ideas for collaboration and set up an information sharing platform to offer advice for reinforcing the framework of friendly cooperation and planning between the two countries at both top and grassroots levels. The ultimate goal is to promote all aspects of Sino-Italian relations.

Interviewer: 2014 is an important year for Italy - in the second half of the year it will hold the rotating Presidency of the EU and will organise the Asia-Europe summit; at the same time Milan Expo 2015 will be entering into its final preparatory phase. How will China make use of these further opportunities to work with Italy? And if we consider relations between China and Europe, what role does Italy play in these relations?

Li Ruiyu: Italy is a good friend and partner of China within the E, this bond helps stabilize Sino-European relations. In other words, the excellent relationship between China and Italy plays a fundamental role in promoting cooperation between China and the EU within the framework of strategic comprehensive partnership between China and the EU.

In the second half of 2014, Italy will take up the rotating presidency of the EU and will host the Asia-Europe summit. The bilateral visits we can expect to be conducted between the Chinese Premier and Italian Prime Minister this year shall present great opportunities for injecting fresh life into Sino-Italian relations and pumping new momentum into Sino-EU relations.

The Chinese government supports Italy's initiative in organizing the 2015 World Expo and endeavours to use the occasion to promote exchange between our partners and create a platform to help businessmen from our countries. We sincerely hope that the Milan Expo 2015 will be a great success. The Chinese pavilion will be amongst the largest and China will have two further pavilions devoted to its own industries. The theme of the Expo - "Feeding the Planet, Energy for Life" - is a wonderful opportunity for cooperation in each and every sector and will help specifically in encouraging trade, hi-tech agriculture and food safety.

Interviewer: China is living through a period of change and reform in many areas. It's a great opportunity for the Italian economy and many Italian entrepreneurs are hoping to benefit by entering the Chinese market. What advice would you give these entrepreneurs?

Li Ruiyu: There are more than 4,000 Italian companies investing and producing in China today. Their business is quite good in general. Before I took office as ambassador, I visited various Chinese cities and provinces, all of which were very welcoming of Italian investment in their districts.

After I took up my current role, many Italian businessmen expressed their wish to me to invest in China. Italy boasts numerous world famous businesses and brands and is famed for its high quality manufacturing, innovative

design, energy saving and environmental protection. At the same time, there are still a host of great things from Italy which are unknown to the Chinese and await further discovery.

In addition, there are many small and medium size Italian companies unable to go to China to invest due to financial and corporate size restraints. My advice to Italian firms is firstly to improve their communications and public relations efforts on their competitive sectors. Secondly, to carry out accurate Chinese market research and develop effective working relations with Chinese companies. Thirdly, I suggest that top quality small and medium Italian enterprises strengthen their cooperation with Chinese companies, in order to to increase their size through capital injections and expansion in the Chinese market, creating a framework that is mutually advantageous.

Interviewer: The Mediterranean Sea and Arab nations are geopolitically important areas for Italy. In recent years, China has stepped up cooperation with these regions. Can China and Italy work well together in this arena as well?

Li Ruiyu: Within the framework of their comprehensive strategic partnership, China and Italy have always maintained lines of communication and genuine cooperation about regional issues. This is illustrative from Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi's visit to Italy last year, who exchanged views with his Italian counterparts on a range of topics of common interest, such as national development policies in the Maghreb region and the situation in the Middle East.

In February 2014, a high-level panel on Syria's humanitarian crisis convened in Rome and China also took part in the meeting. The Italian Foreign Minister will

shortly also preside over the interministerial meeting on Libya, in which China's special envoy to the Middle East will participate as head of the Chinese delegation. We will discuss Libya in depth and the international assistance that must come from various parties, including Italy. China is willing to work with the international community to promote peace, stability, and development of West Asia and North Africa.

Interviewer: We know that many people of Chinese origin live in Italy and they make a lot of contribution to the development and economy of the country. What advice do you have for them?

Li Ruiyu: Currently there are over 300,000 [Chinese living in Italy](http://gbtimes.com/life/chinese-and-italians-prato-part-i) and they represent the fourth largest immigrant group in the country. For many years, many Chinese people in Italy have abided by the local laws and exhibit virtuous qualities such as diligence and perseverance. They have also made considerable contribution to the local community and economy.

In the meanwhile, we must recognise that the Chinese people in Italy have come to live and work in the country only recently and therefore their social integration and understanding of the country are far from deep.

In order to further improve their living conditions in Italy, I advise them to respect Italian rules and regulations and improve their methods of production and administration, creating the right conditions for their long-term development. At the same time, I hope that the Italian government and society at large can offer Chinese communities greater assistance and support.

