

Wuhan 15 November 2018, Markku Markkula, Chair of the Board City of Espoo and First Vice-President of the European Committee of the Regions

Cities as forerunners in implementing UN SDGs in China-EU cooperation

Honourable President Li Xiaolin, distinguished representatives of cities, ladies and gentlemen

Let me first bring you the greetings of all European cities and regions in my capacity as the First Vice-President and former President of the EU Committee of the Regions. During recent years we have increased not only China-EU cooperation but more and more our collaboration on practical city and region levels. We will continue this development and I want to do my best to deepen and strengthen that.

As a representative of my home city of Espoo, Finland, it is my honour to accept Shanghai's Sister City Award 2018. We thank you for this acknowledgement which is highly important to the development of our cities and citizens.

I have been very happy to witness the birth of joint projects between our cities, universities, companies and people. The future of Shanghai-Espoo cooperation seems very bright and promising – 20 years as official and practical sister city collaboration is a good base for understanding each other's culture and ways of developing the sustainable and smart city practices.

Our sister city cooperation builds bridges not only between city authorities, but between professionals and communities at all levels. This enables us to exchange new concepts and ideas as well as to improve the ways of building our cities, city services and societies in a sustainable, innovative, and human-centric way.

Even though Shanghai is much bigger than Espoo, we are both facing the same challenges related to urbanisation, the aging of society and climate change.

And I want to stress that we also share a great passion for entrepreneurship, sustainable growth and education. These mean new extensive progress in urban smart city development – China & EU collaboration at the city level can and should bring a lot for the benefit of citizens and on a broader scale new solutions to societal challenges especially in tackling climate change.

In international assessments, Finland has earned a reputation as an innovation leader. Innovation is in our Finnish DNA and problem-solving in our second nature. Having produced the world's most highly educated workforce, the Finnish school system continues to be the main engine of our success. Finland combines extensive digital expertise, the best availability of scientists and engineers globally, a super-qualified workforce, a unique start-up scene and an open public-private collaboration ecosystem. This makes Finland the perfect accelerator of next-generation innovations.

Espoo and the Helsinki Region are drivers of this development in Finland. Internationally, they provide an excellent reference environment for experimenting, piloting and testing scalable solutions to many of the challenging problems that our world is facing.

According to an international survey, Espoo is the most sustainable city in Europe. The survey revealed that we have successfully developed our city in all four dimensions of sustainability: not only economically and ecologically, but also socially and culturally.

Espoo – in partnership with other cities – is also taking a stronger European and global responsibility as a pioneer. In 2018, Espoo was named ‘the Most Intelligent Community in the World’ by the Intelligent Communities Forum. Espoo Innovation Garden is the largest innovation community in the Nordic countries. It is a highly competitive platform, where the city, universities, research centres, companies and people come together to solve the challenges of a sustainable future and to create new smart services and jobs. The outcomes of this can be seen and are influencing to all activities not only on long term, but also in everyday life, as an example in the entrepreneurial mentality and mindset within the Aalto University campus. These developments have been recognised and used as forerunner examples by the European Commission, especially on place-based innovation ecosystems.

Shanghai and Espoo have many things in common, and we share many opportunities: both cities are world-class innovation centres, benefiting greatly of this cooperation, especially in the fields of education, urban planning and sustainable development. Although in Espoo the scale of everything is much smaller than in Shanghai, of course.

Cities are the key actors to solving the challenges of climate change and resource scarcity. Urbanisation and demographic change demand smart and sustainable solutions to maintain and improve the living standards of growing city populations. Cities are the ones who can implement significant changes in turning climate and resource scarcity crises into possibilities.

Around 70% of the world’s CO₂ emissions come from cities, and cities use up to 80% of the energy produced in the world.

A few weeks ago, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, IPCC, published a special report on Global Warming, highlighting the urgency of climate change mitigation.

There are many ways to reach this goal. I stress that all solutions must be implemented on a local scale. Cities are the ones who create preconditions for a smooth everyday life and enable their residents to make climate-friendly choices, for example in terms of circular economy, transport renewal and smart housing.

Cities play a key role in the Global Covenant of Mayors. Key success factors in reaching climate goals are bottom-up governance, a multi-level cooperation model and its context-driven framework for action. This year we celebrate 10 years since the EU’s Covenant of Mayors was launched – an initiative whereby local and regional authorities voluntarily agree

to surpass the EU's climate and energy targets. Today, over 7,500 towns and cities have joined this bottom-up movement which has now gone global.

Just a few weeks before the Katowice COP 24, we – the Presidents of the European Committee of the Regions – are calling for new ambitious actions. Despite the role of local and regional governments being recognised in Paris COP 21, we have not made nearly enough headway in creating a truly inclusive global climate governance system.

Positively, there are more and more European cities which have agreed on highly ambitious climate goals. Espoo among these: our climate policy aims at carbon neutrality by 2030 and the whole Helsinki Region by 2035. To reach these targets we have defined extensive action plans.

The United Nations Agenda 2030 aims at reaching the 17 sustainable development goals on a global scale. The agenda was signed by all UN member states in 2015. It is not an agenda for the south, or for the north, not for the east or the west. It is an agenda for the entire humankind.

Achieving these goals is not an easy task. We all have our duties and roles. The UN has invited Espoo in the category of university cities to become one of the pioneers in creating and implementing new solutions to achieving the UN Sustainable Development Goals SDGs, already by 2025. This SDGs leadership programme involves 25 pioneering cities in different categories from around the world. Pioneers commit on co-creating high quality solution for real life practices, and especially on supporting and mentoring other cities in all continents.

The cities in the leadership programme commit to engaging their industry, educational institutions and other actor groups including citizens in these efforts. The cities will co-create concepts, tools and indicators that other cities of the world can use to achieve all the 17 sustainable development goals.

The leadership programme also demonstrates how communities at all levels and especially partnerships of cities can co-create concrete instruments that enable us to reach the sustainable development goals. These activities are the potential breakthroughs; the importance of which also the European Union is in many ways supporting.

Madam President, let me conclude. Let us cooperate in increasing and deepening the collaboration on city and region levels on these urban development opportunities. In this we can use as the starting point the outcomes of this conference and what already has been achieved and proposed between the Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries, CPAFFC, and the European Committee of the Regions, CoR.

I also want to highlight that Shanghai is a very important partner for the City of Espoo. We have a lot to learn together and a lot to share. The sister city cooperation works as a platform and an umbrella that encourages cooperation and deepens our ties on all levels.

Thank you very much! Kiitos! Xie xie!