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Sino-Swiss Dialogue eyes closer environment, business cooperation

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There is a lot of potential for Switzerland and Guizhou Province to work together in the area of environment protection, sustainable development and foster trade and investment in clean technologies, said a Swiss delegation at the press conference Thursday, prior to the 2015 Sino-Swiss Dialogue in Guiyang, Guizhou Province on Friday. Swiss experience in terms of environmental policies, technical support and Cleantech paired with Guizhou's desire to be a leader in sustainable development is creating more opportunities for the public sector and business alike, according to the delegation, which consists of high-level politicians, diplomats, CEOs and experts in environment, sustainability and green economy.

Headed by Bruno Oberle, director of the Swiss Federal Office for the Environment (FOEN), the delegation will attend the Sino-Swiss Dialogue, a major sub-forum at the Eco-Forum Global (EFG) Annual Conference to be held in Guiyang from June 26 to 28, and share with Chinese officials and experts their insights into issues related to environmental protection and business cooperation.

Guizhou Province in southwest China resembles Switzerland for being landlocked and boasting rich mountain resources. They also share common goals in promoting green and sustainable development and eco-tourism.

“The exchange of ideas is conducive in generating concrete ideas for future cooperation between the two sides and exploring new opportunities for trade and investment, especially given Switzerland's competitive strengths in environment protection, cleantech and eco-tourism,” said Swiss Ambassador Jean-Jacques de Dardel before the opening of the dialogue. This year marks the 65th Anniversary of diplomatic relations between Switzerland and China, and the countries are working to deepen cooperation in these fields, the Ambassador added.

The Sino-Swiss Dialogue was initiated by the Chinese government in 2013 following its efforts to strengthen exchanges and cooperation with Switzerland in building an ecological civilization. Thanks to the leading role Switzerland plays in the field, and the intensive collaboration that exists between Switzerland and Guizhou, Switzerland has been one of the main guest countries at the EFG Annual Conference for three years.

“A particular strength of Switzerland lies in our capacity to balance economic growth and preservation of the environment. Since 1990, we have increased our GDP by 36%, our population by 19%, while reducing our CO2 emissions per capita by 20%,” said Philippe Zahner, counsellor for Climate Change and head of the Environment, Development and Humanitarian Aid Division at the Swiss Embassy. “In other words, we have been able to decouple our economic growth rate from our emissions of greenhouse gases.”

As an example, Switzerland cooperates with the Provincial Development and Reform Commission Office in Guiyang in karstic mountainous areas suffering consequences of climate change. The two sides explore together adaptation measures to these extreme events, which shall improve the livelihoods of the farmers. Lately they have been working on the alternate use of bamboo plantations for better income generation and improved ecosystem.

In addition to the dialogue, a two-day seminar on the Ecological Footprint Study of Guizhou will be co-organized by the Department of Environmental Protection of Guizhou, the FOEN and Global Footprint Network, a non-profit organization engaged in sustainability. A business matchmaking meeting and a Swiss Pavilion will present a number of Swiss companies and provide business development opportunities for Swiss and Chinese companies.

At last year's forum, the Guizhou-Switzerland agreement was signed between the two sides with the aim to facilitate trade and business opportunities between companies from Switzerland and China. In April, 2015, a Swiss business delegation of companies active in the cleantech field visited Guizhou. Following the visit, it is expected that there will be more opportunities in terms of trade and investment.

A think tank which helps the Chinese government with policies on green economic transformation, ecological security and design models for sustainable development, this year's Eco-Forum Global Annual Conference focuses on a new era of eco-civilization and the economic development in China.

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