

Switzerland and China hold first strategic dialogue

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Federal Councillor Ignazio Cassis met with China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi in Beijing on Tuesday 3 April 2018 for the first strategic dialogue in the history of Sino-Swiss diplomatic relations.

Speaking at a press conference after the meeting, the two foreign ministers applauded the strengthening of relations between their countries. "Relations between Switzerland and China are at an all-time high," said Mr Cassis, head of the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA).

Forging closer ties with China is one of the objectives Mr Cassis has set for his tenure. He therefore chose China for his first official visit outside Europe. The relationship will be further enhanced by the introduction of an innovative high-level strategic platform to foster Sino-Swiss dialogue. As a biennial event on the margins of the World Economic Forum in Davos, this platform will convene political and economic delegates from both countries. The two foreign ministers also noted their intention to expand the free trade agreement signed between Switzerland and China in 2014. Switzerland expressed its intention to support the Belt and Road Initiative, a development strategy proposed by the Chinese government to revive the ancient Silk Road. Mr Cassis stressed that this process must adhere to social and environmental quality standards and the principles of good governance.

The two foreign ministers continued with a broad exchange of views on the Korean Peninsula tensions. Mr Cassis pointed out that negotiations on the Korean situation had already been held in Geneva and that Switzerland was willing to host fresh talks or other meetings on the topic if requested by the parties concerned. "Switzerland has extensive experience in such meetings, particularly in regard to security," stressed Mr Cassis, noting the recent visits to Switzerland by the Chinese and US presidents.

Mr Cassis concluded by commending China for its engagement with the UN, as the second-largest financial contributor, and called for further cooperation between Switzerland and China within the multilateral system. The two ministers reaffirmed the importance of the role of the World Trade Organization (WTO) in the face of increased protectionism. Switzerland welcomed China's intention to further open its market, particularly in the financial sector. Mr Cassis said that Switzerland was pleased to see the Chinese government's support for International Geneva, noting that the rights of minorities were one of Switzerland's key values. "The friendly nature of our relationship means we can also discuss issues on which we hold different viewpoints, such as human rights," remarked the head of the FDFA during the press conference.

Before meeting with his Chinese counterpart, Mr Cassis spoke with former Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi, who occupies a key position in China's Communist Party. The topics on the agenda were the latest developments on the Korean Peninsula, the Belt and Road Initiative, and the functioning of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), of which Switzerland was one of the first founding members.

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