



Ignazio Cassis meets China's Minister of Foreign Affairs Wang Yi in Bern to discuss bilateral cooperation, human rights and multilateralism

Bern, 22.10.2019 - Federal Councillor and head of the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs Ignazio Cassis met China's Minister of Foreign Affairs Wang Yi on 22 October 2019, as the two countries gear up to celebrate 70 years of diplomatic relations. The meeting provided an opportunity to explore issues of current interest to both countries. The meeting builds on the strategic dialogue established between Switzerland and China in 2017 and follows on from Mr Cassis visit to Beijing in April 2018.

At their meeting, Mr Cassis and Mr Wang discussed bilateral political and economic relations, China's Belt and Road Initiative, human rights and multilateral cooperation.

Human rights issues and, in particular, freedom of expression are currently of concern to Switzerland, with Mr Cassis addressing the situation in Hong Kong. He also expressed Switzerland's concerns about conditions for minorities, particularly in Tibet and Xinjiang Province. "Bilateral talks on human rights and multilateral initiatives are mutually complementary instruments", said Mr Cassis.

The two ministers also noted that a well-functioning economic and financial marketplace is in the interests of both countries. China is currently Switzerland's third-largest trading partner after the EU and the United States, with the annual trade volume reaching CHF 44 billion in 2018. Mr Cassis welcomed the news that China is opening up to Swiss businesses holding majority stakes in most China-based companies. Within that context, updating the free trade agreement and financial market access are of utmost importance to Swiss businesses.

Mr Cassis and Mr Wang also discussed China's Belt and Road Initiative, a development project aimed at bringing the old Silk Road back to life. A memorandum of understanding on cooperation in third country markets was signed in April of this year. Mr Cassis emphasised that while the Federal Council was interested in the Belt and Road Initiative, it was essential that such projects respect social and environmental quality standards.

At multilateral level, Mr Cassis acknowledged China's intention to step up its contribution to achieving the goals of the Paris Agreement. The FDFA cooperates with China on a number of climate-related projects including, in particular, initiatives to tackle air pollution in major cities. Mr Cassis also underlined the importance of a rules-based international order, for example with regard to e-governance implementation. In this context, he also spoke about International Geneva and Switzerland's role as host state and its involvement in humanitarian action.

Before his meeting with Mr Cassis, Mr Wang paid a courtesy call on President of the Swiss Confederation Ueli Maurer.

In 2020, Switzerland and China will celebrate 70 years of diplomatic relations. Switzerland recognised the People's Republic of China on 17 January 1950, one of the first Western countries to do so. The two countries maintain close and diverse political relations, as evidenced by President Xi Jinping's 2017 state visit to Switzerland and visits to China by Ignazio Cassis in 2018 and President Ueli Maurer in the spring of this year. Switzerland and China also cooperate closely on research and development and at economic level. Today's bilateral meeting was the second strategic dialogue between Mr Cassis and his Chinese counterpart. The strategic dialogue was established in 2017 with a view to strengthening relations between Switzerland and China.

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