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Switzerland and China renew high-level contacts and deepen relations in the run-up to 75th anniversary

Bern, 15.01.2024 - On Monday, 15 January, a Federal Council delegation led by President Viola Amherd received a Chinese delegation led by Premier Li Qiang at the Lohn Estate for an official visit to Switzerland. This was the first such high-level meeting since the pandemic. The delegations discussed the deep and wide-ranging bilateral relations characterised by dialogue on around 30 issues, as well as a range of current international affairs.

Federal Councillor Guy Parmelin, head of the Federal Department of Economic Affairs, Education and Research (EAER), also attended the talks on behalf of the Swiss government. The Chinese delegation included MofCom Vice Minister Wang Shouwen, the governor of the People's Bank of China Pan Gongsheng and high-ranking representatives from several other ministries, including Deputy Foreign Minister Ma Zhaoxu. Both sides welcomed the fact that contacts are once again taking place at the highest level in the year leading up to the 75th anniversary of diplomatic relations between Switzerland and China. They agreed that a common goal for 2024 is to continue bilateral dialogue and further deepen the 'innovative strategic partnership' agreed in 2016.

One of the topics discussed on Monday was the dialogue between the foreign ministries, which is to be resumed this year. Among other things the dialogue will cover development cooperation, mediation and human rights. Bilateral dialogues are expected to take place on a range of further topics such as science, migration, labour and employment, intellectual property, health and the environment. Dialogue will also be resumed in the area of economic and financial matters following the pandemic-related interruption. A further topic of discussion was whether Switzerland would be included on the list of countries whose residents benefit from visa-free entry to China for stays of up to 15 days.

Following the discussions at the Lohn Estate, a joint declaration was signed with reference in particular to the finalisation of a joint study launched in 2017 on the further development of the free trade agreement between Switzerland and China. This marks an important step towards the start of possible negotiations.

Broad range of topics

The Sino-European Cyber Dialogue, in which Switzerland is involved, was also a topic of discussion. The Swiss delegation emphasised the importance of multilateral cooperation with China and other international partners in order to promote stability and security in cyberspace. Switzerland also attaches great importance to respect for fundamental freedoms in the digital age.

Among the global issues on the agenda were the fight against climate change and the results of the UN Climate Change Conference in Dubai, Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, the war in the Middle East and the situation in East Asia and, more generally, the development of global security architecture and multilateralism. The Swiss delegation emphasised the need for an international order based on the rule of law and the principles of the United Nations Charter.

Close contacts over several decades

Switzerland and China have maintained close contacts for many decades. Switzerland was one of the first Western countries to recognise the People's Republic of China, doing so on 17 January 1950. Since 2010, China has been Switzerland's most important trading partner in Asia and its third most important trading partner overall behind the USA and the EU. Switzerland is also one of around 60 countries that maintain a 'strategic partnership' with China. In 2017, President Xi Jinping paid a state visit to Switzerland. In 2019, President Ueli Maurer was received in China on a state visit.

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Documents

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