

China – EU: Taking the next step

President Xi's Brussels visit signals deeper relationship

By **Andy Carling**

"This is a significant milestone in EU China relations," said Madame Yang Yanyi, Ambassador of the People's Republic of China to the EU, at a discussion held by the EU-Asia Centre. Certainly the visiting head of state will have a full schedule, including giving three keynote speeches.

Yang added that the visit was a sign that both sides saw their relationship as great importance.

Relations have changed since the partnership was formalised ten years ago and Yang adds that the visit will also mark "the next step in relations."

Both sides have seen great changes in the last decade, when Europe was a trading giant and China still developing and beginning to awaken as a global player.

While many experts feel that the EU has also matured in their approach, once restricted to lecturing on human rights, now it involves the complexities of international trade, some €1.3 billion a day.

This has not gone smoothly, as the ambassador and experts agreed, but Yang says "wise heads" are prevailing and disputes, which arise in all trade relationships are solved by discus-

sion and diplomacy.

This has been the case in a recent trade dispute involving Chinese solar panels and French wine.

Yang said that China would like the next step in the widening and deepening relations between the two to be the "launch of a feasibility study into an EU China Free Trade Area." However, Brussels is looking at finishing a Bilateral Investment Treaty, whose talks began earlier this year.

This is hoped by Brussels to bring in protections and legal certainty for investors.

Yang also predicted that the major speech to be given by the Chinese President at the College of Europe in Bruges would be "forward looking, would project China's views on the strategic partnership and cast light on China's drive for reform."

Yang was positive on the future, saying that China fully supported Europe's integration process and, with the EU also looking to reform, partnership could help each side assist the other.

The third plenary of the Chinese Communist Party decided on a wide range of reforms which will fundamentally change the Chinese economy.

Gustaaf Geeraerts, head of the Brussels In-



Chinese President Xi Jinping (R) reviews an honour guard accompanied by Dutch King Willem-Alexander (C) in Amsterdam, the Netherlands, March 22, 2014. Xi Jinping arrived here Saturday for a state visit to the Netherlands and a global nuclear summit.

stitute of Contemporary China Studies said the visit was "timely, when the EU and China are going through fundamental changes and both are also taking stock of changes at a global level."

He added that it was clear that both parties were clearly entwined, but there had

been one important development, in the approach to discussions and relations. "Both sides start from realistic expectations" and that both were ready for the next stage in their long relationship, "all we have to do is make good on it."

NEWEUROPE

www.neweurope.eu

30 March - 5 April, 2014