Ladies and Gentlemen,

Dear friends,

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to discuss and exchange some views with you, at the China Institute for International Security Studies. You know, I suppose, that this is the last event of my visit here in China, a visit that I consider to be very productive.

This visit comes at a time when the world we live in is in turmoil. It is a time of predictable unpredictability. The best example, I believe, is the images we all witnessed just last Monday in Singapore. Something that was considered as impossible happened there, the President of the United States meeting, discussing and signing a Joint Statement with the President of North Korea. This groundbreaking meeting comes only a couple of days after a disastrous meeting of the G7, in Canada.

What does this tells us? It tells us that the world is moving towards a new period, a shift is taking place. New powers emerge, at a regional or global scale, seeking for a role and demanding a say. As it always happens with tectonic changes, there is friction. Probably, there will be more.

This is also a time that calls for wisdom. For global actors that are responsible and credible. That will provide security through the predictability of their actions, the clarity of their strategies and their adherence to universal values. Actors that work for the next day in partnership with like-minded actors.
The European Union is such a global actor. Our Global Strategy is about all these I have just described. A Strategy that describes a vision for the world that everyone could subscribe to. A Strategy that is open to and relies on partnerships.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Make no mistake. No contemporary global power can change the world alone. The world is far more complex, contested and connected for any nation to handle alone. Globalisation is everywhere, not just in economy or trade. It has gone further than that, unfortunately also in domains that affects us negatively. For example, the war in Afghanistan had consequences in Europe. Similarly, the war in Syria may have consequences in Xinjiang.

The European Union is a big and essential global actor. Its power mainly derives from its diplomatic, economic and cultural might. So the Union uses its Soft Power to influence, or to coerce if it comes to this, other nations. Examples are numerous: from the work we perform in Africa, to the support we gave to peace negotiations between the Colombian authorities and the FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) since the very beginning of those negotiations, to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) (Iran nuclear deal). The same can be said for your nation. Its Soft power cannot be underestimated. An economic giant, permanent member of the UN Security Council, the world’s most populous country. The role that China played behind the scenes in the realisation of the Trump-Kim Jong Un meeting, we can only suspect for now, but I believe that sooner or later it will be revealed!

Obviously and regretfully, not everything can be solved by applying just Soft Power. We came to realise this after the illegal annexation of Crimea and after ISIS. Soft Power must be complemented with some old-fashioned but effective Hard Power, to give our arguments some more substance. The events I just mentioned brought back dormant fears to European citizens, leading to a demand for more security.

Therefore, the strategic priority of protecting Europe is a very relevant one. I need though to underline that the term used is “protecting”, not to be confused with “defending”. There is a fundamental difference. This strategic
priority gave way to a number of defence-related initiatives in the European Union, such as the Permanent Structured Cooperation. This is a realisation that we are a Union of medium to small nations. Separated, they are weak. Together, they form a global power.

This notion of togetherness characterises all actions of the European Union. Together, we pool and share the best each of the member-states can offer. The result is much more than the mere sum of the elements. These elements of power, these instruments in our toolbox, we combine them and apply them in a well-orchestrated and coordinated way, applying what we call an Integrated Approach to external crises and conflicts. It is a “whole-of-Government” approach that puts everything that the European Union can muster into use, at just the right dosage and at the right sequence.

In this context, the European Union already uses its military tool. I refer to the six CSDP military missions and operations that are active today. Uniformed personnel from the Member-States are deployed under the EU flag in the Central African Republic, Mali, Somalia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Mediterranean Sea and the Indian Ocean. Our work there aims at setting the ground for sustainable, locally-owned security which is a prerequisite for development efforts to flourish. And I put emphasis on the sustainability and the local ownership elements of this security. The troops participating in these EU missions and operations do not provide security "per se" to the respective host nations but they are rather "founding" security. They are there to train and assist local Armed Forces build their own capacity to provide security in a responsible and professional way, adhering to the rule of law and to international conventions. By this they set the foundations for the gradual building of a development permitting environment.

We expand our Safe and Secure Environment some thousands of miles deeper in Africa and Asia providing "forward defence". We create proper living conditions for the local population to stay home and a security belt for the region and beyond.

This notion of togetherness is not limited only within the European Union. As I have already told, we are aware of the fact that no global actor is strong enough to do anything on its own. And even if it were, it would lead to
undesirable consequences. The world is multi-pillared and global affairs require cooperation at a larger scale. The European Union looks forward to such cooperation, based on mutual respect, and the results are overwhelming. Take Iran nuclear deal or the Paris climate agreement for instance.

There are great things that can be achieved through discussion and cooperation. I clearly see merit in expanding this cooperation to other domains, such as restoring security and stability in Africa. Both China and the European Union have troops deployed in this war-torn continent. In the Indian Ocean, our naval assets have already proved that cooperation is not just possible, it is essential. This model can be replicated elsewhere, in Mali for instance. But this is for our political leadership to decide. Then us, people in uniform, we can make it happen.

As I mentioned before, the European Union seeks and welcomes cooperation with like-minded nations. I will quote His Excellency President Xi, when he referred:

"[...] to the protection of maritime rights, countering terrorism, maintaining stability, disaster rescue and relief, international peacekeeping, escort services in the Gulf of Aden, and humanitarian assistance."

These are the same interests you will find in the European Union's Global Strategy.

This does not mean that we have to be the same or to have converging interests in every domain. China and Europe have different histories, created different civilisations and developed different cultures. We are very different. This is good! The world would be very boring if we were all alike. It would also be not as developed as it is today. Differences bring evolution and progress, as long as they lead to a frank dialogue, based on mutual respect. Through dialogue we will get to better learn each other, deeply understand each other. And then, hopefully, cooperate more with each other.

We can cooperate where our interests converge, like in restoring security and stability in Africa, or keeping the Sea Lines of Communication safe and unobstructed. We can disagree on other issues, such as adhering to the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) and resolving regional maritime
disputes (*Delimitation of Maritime Boundaries of the Exclusive Economic Zone*) through international arbitration.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

With that I will stop.

Thank you.

Edited by Captain (GRC/N) Vasileios Loukovitis