

# XI'S VISIT

## Xi vows to enhance Serbia friendship

President pledges to make efforts to deliver more benefits to both nations

By **MO JINGXI**  
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Before the start of his state visit to Serbia, the second leg of his current three-nation European tour, President Xi Jinping said he looks forward to meeting Serbian leaders and friends to renew the friendship between the two countries and explore ways of cooperation.

"This will be my second visit to your country, a land of beauty and legends, as President of the People's Republic of China. The sweet scenes that prevailed during my last visit eight years ago remain very much alive in my mind," Xi wrote in a signed article published in the Serbian newspaper Politika on Tuesday.

Xi said he will work with his Serbian friends during his visit to

"bring out the best in our ironclad friendship and take real efforts to deliver more benefits to our two peoples, advance world peace and development, and promote the building of a community with a shared future for mankind".

He said the long-lasting friendship and win-win cooperation between China and Serbia make it clear that a stronger bilateral relationship conforms with the trend of history and serves the best interests of the two peoples.

Last year, China was Serbia's largest source of foreign investment and its second-largest trading partner, with bilateral trade volume registering at \$4.35 billion.

In 2016, a century-old Serbian steel mill that was about to slide into bankruptcy made a remarkable

comeback after receiving Chinese investment through the deepening high-quality Belt and Road cooperation between China and Serbia. The mill has now become one of the three biggest export companies in Serbia.

Xi said the thriving cooperation between the two countries in trade and economic relations, industrial chain and infrastructure development gives a great boost to their respective process of modernization.

"On the new journey of the new era, the China-Serbia comprehensive strategic partnership has more potential for further growth," he wrote, calling on the two countries to always be good friends and good partners.

The Chinese and Serbian peoples, though far apart geographically, have forged a strong friendship during the bitter Anti-Fascist War and their respective nation-building in the last century.

"Amid the ongoing transformations unseen in a century in the

world, our mutual support remains as strong as ever, our cooperation is closer, and our exchanges and mutual learning more substantive," Xi wrote.

Xi called on China and Serbia, which hold similar positions on many major international and regional issues, to play an exemplary role in promoting fairness and justice.

### Multilateralism stressed

"Facing a fluid and turbulent world, ... we should practice true multilateralism, and endeavor to maintain world peace and stability and safeguard international fairness and justice," he wrote.

The Chinese president also stressed the need to promote multi-dimensional people-to-people and cultural exchanges, and diversify subnational cooperation between the two countries for their friendship to shine even brighter.

"We should create more oppor-

tunities for our youth so that the China-Serbia friendship will be carried forward from generation to generation," he wrote.

As this year marks the 25th anniversary of the NATO bombing of the former Chinese embassy in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in 1999 which killed three Chinese journalists, Xi said Chinese people cherish peace, and will never allow such tragic history to repeat.

"The China-Serbia friendship, forged with the blood of our compatriots, will stay in the shared memory of the Chinese and Serbian peoples, and will inspire us to march forward with big strides," he wrote.

Just like flowers in spring will turn into fruit in autumn, Xi said the tree of the China-Serbia friendship will grow tall and sturdy and bear more fruit for the two peoples.

"This is what we expect and what we hope to witness together," he wrote.

## Agricultural collaboration yields rich dividends amid deepening ties

By **WANG ZHUOQIONG**  
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China has seen a robust trend in imports of high-quality agricultural products from France, driven by growing consumer demand and deepening bilateral ties.

France is China's largest agricultural product import market and the second-largest agricultural product trading partner in the European Union.

The import value of agricultural products from France last year was 46.95 billion yuan (\$6.5 billion), marking a 50.5 percent increase compared to five years ago, said Lyu Daliang, spokesperson for the General Administration of Customs. In the first quarter of this year, China imported agricultural products worth close to 10 billion yuan from France.

The growth is fueled in part by successful collaborations between Chinese and French companies.

Florian Delmas, president of Andros Group, a century-old food and agricultural enterprise based in France, lauded the fruitful collaboration with Beijing Capital Agribusiness & Foods Group since the signing ceremony at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing in 2019, witnessed by the heads of state of China and France.

Five years on, the joint venture has seen Andros China enjoy significant achievements, including the establishment of two processing factories in Linyi, Shandong province, and the expansion of its factory in Beijing, originally built in 1998.

It has produced a diverse range of high-quality fruit processing products in the fields of food service, industrial and retail sectors, cover-



A visitor selects a bottle of French wine at an import-export exhibition in Hohhot, Inner Mongolia autonomous region, on April 28. DING GENHOU / FOR CHINA DAILY

ing more than 170 cities and three factories across China.

"Andros has become (the) benchmark for fruit ingredients and products in China," said Maxence Zeng, general manager of Andros China.

The company has capitalized on the growing trend that European-flavored fruit products are gaining momentum in China. Zeng added:

"An increasing number of Chinese consumers are showing a preference for fruit flavors in baked desserts, tea drinks, coffee and dairy

products, especially those with European characteristics and charm, such as raspberries and other berries."

He also revealed that their newly launched fruit sorbet has also been widely welcomed by consumers this year in the Chinese market.

### Full-value chain strategy

The company emphasized its commitment to implementing a full-value chain strategy, spanning from orchard to spoon experience. It also aims to achieve rural revitali-

zation that benefits agriculture, rural areas, and farmers, said Zeng.

France's agricultural exports to China extend beyond fruit products. The country is a major supplier of aquatic products, dairy and meat to the Chinese market. This, combined with efficient logistics networks, benefits French restaurants in China.

Located in Beijing's Chaoyang district, La Maison Lyonnaise, a French restaurant, experiences a consistent influx of customers every day, necessitating reserva-

tions on weekends due to increased demand.

"Many of the key ingredients in our signature dishes are imported from France, such as oysters, snails, foie gras, and red wine," said Wei Shuxuan, a waiter who has been with the restaurant for two years.

This, combined with the French background of both the owner and head chef, plays a key role in the continual acclaim for the authenticity of the flavors and the exceptional quality of the dishes by customers from both China and France, Wei said.

He added that due to oysters being consumed raw, there is a high demand for their freshness, but thanks to the coordinated efforts of the entire "from French farms to Chinese tables" chain, endorsed by leaders from both nations, the oysters can be swiftly transported to the restaurant within a day.

Danone, a French food and beverage company, has also witnessed an increase in demand for high-end bottled water products in China.

According to Danone, the company is seeking to not only bring high-quality French products to China, but also closely cooperate with the Chinese government and business partners, and actively support regenerative agriculture projects and transformations in agricultural practices within the Danone supply chain.

"China is a market of opportunity. It's a huge market. It's a market that is extraordinarily sophisticated. It's a market where we innovate locally in China for China and the rest of the world," said Antoine de Saint-Affrique, CEO of Danone.

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## Visit marks 'pivotal moment' in relations

By **WANG MINGJIE** in Paris  
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Former French prime minister Jean-Pierre Raffarin has highlighted the profound significance of Chinese President Xi Jinping's visit to France, particularly amid the current turbulent geopolitical landscape and global uncertainties, saying it is not only timely but also essential for fostering deeper mutual understanding and strengthening collaborative efforts between the two nations.

"The visit of President Xi Jinping to France marks a pivotal moment, especially when the world faces such perilous challenges," Raffarin told China Daily in an interview. "We cannot envision the world's future without considering China, and, likewise, it is not in China's interest to disregard Europe."

He emphasized the necessity of continuous dialogue with China. "We need to have a very regular dialogue with China. I think that Emmanuel Macron is the leader of the West who best understands President Xi Jinping's thinking, having spent many hours discussing with the Chinese president," Raffarin said.

The discussions between Xi and Macron covered urgent global issues, including climate change and strategic geopolitical questions.

Raffarin expressed his satisfaction with the focus of the talks, recognizing their importance not just for France or China, but for the entire world. "These discussions are vital, as the world navigates through a dangerous period."

Raffarin, who served as prime minister from 2002 to 2005, asserted that France holds a unique position in Europe, having established a model for engaging in meaningful discussions with China, choosing cooperation over confrontation.

"France probably has the closest relationship with China within Europe, despite differing viewpoints. We share a vision of a multilateral world," he said.



Jean-Pierre Raffarin

Raffarin laid out what he sees as key areas for enhancing cooperation between France and China, emphasizing cultural exchange, environmental preservation and the establishment of new multilateral regulations as foundational elements of the partnership. "We need to focus on cultural questions to understand the societies between France and China better. Furthermore, protecting our planet for future generations is now a priority, necessitating a global consensus, particularly among the young people."

He also touched upon the need for common regulations in emerging technologies, including artificial intelligence, suggesting they could form the basis for the reform of global multilateralism.

Addressing strategic misalignments in global politics, particularly regarding the Russia-Ukraine conflict, the 75-year-old emphasized that a strong and balanced Europe is beneficial for China.

Looking ahead, Raffarin voiced his concern about the current direction of global politics, advocating for cooperation over confrontation.

"In a world leaning toward confrontation, we need to steer back toward cooperation," he said. "This is the only way forward for a stable and prosperous global community."

He added that he views Xi's visit as a cornerstone for not only reinforcing the China-France relationship, but also setting a precedent for how major global powers should interact in an increasingly multipolar world.

As tensions continue to rise on various fronts, the collaboration between China and France could play a crucial role in navigating the complex web of international relations, he said.

Raffarin welcomed Xi's commitment to expanding access and welcoming French companies and investment into China, underscoring the need for reciprocal relations between China and Europe.

"What we seek is reciprocity," he said. "The rules that apply to Chinese companies in Europe should similarly apply to European companies in China."

## Potential seen for China-France cooperation on green transition

By **HOU LIQIANG**  
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China and France, with long, pragmatic and fruitful climate cooperation, have great potential for jointly improving climate governance and promoting green transition in other countries, experts said.

Wang Binbin, associate research professor at the Institute of Carbon Neutrality, Peking University, noted a solid foundation for Sino-French climate cooperation.

As early as November 2007, the two countries had issued a joint statement on addressing climate change, said Wang, a Yale World Fellow. The joint statement is the first of its kind issued between China and another country.

To strengthen climate cooperation, they decided to establish a partnership under the framework of the China-France comprehensive strategic partnership, taking a series of initiatives thereafter, she said.

Sino-French climate cooperation involves areas related to climate change, such as biodiversity conservation and desertification control, and they also make efforts to jointly promote technological development and innovative collaboration, she said.

It is evident they have designed their cooperative efforts within the framework of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, Wang said, adding there is enor-

mous potential for expanding the scope of cooperation.

"China and France have always worked hand in hand, sending positive signals to the international community on climate governance, providing rare constants in a changing world, and encouraging the willingness and actions of other countries to actively respond," she stated.

Hu Bin, director of research on global climate governance at the Institute of Climate Change and Sustainable Development of Tsinghua University, said that as upholders of climate multilateralism and long-term partners in addressing climate change, China and France have played important roles in the establishment of the 2015 Paris Agreement on climate change.

During the crucial countdown period of the COP21 United Nations climate change conference in Paris, during which the treaty was adopted, China and France issued a joint presidential statement on climate change in November 2015.

In the statement, the two sides established a common ground on all major issues related to the negotiation of the treaty, including the principle of common responsibilities and the long-term goals, he said.

Hu highlighted the special contribution of the two countries in coming up with a mechanism for the long-term, sustainable implementation of the climate treaty,



A staff member works at an industrial park in the Sino-French Wuhan Ecological Demonstration City in Central China's Hubei province on March 19. WU ZHIZUN / XINHUA

which allows countries to set their contribution targets.

For over a year leading up to the Paris UN climate gathering, Xie Zhenhua, who then steered China's climate diplomacy, held more than 20 rounds of consultations with COP21 president Laurent Fabius, Hu said.

### Close communication

During the Paris conference, they maintained close communication, he said. The duo met almost every day to discuss the differences that emerged during negotiations and strive to maximize convergence among countries.

"They played crucial roles in

landing consensus on the final negotiation text," he said.

Li Zheng, president of the Institute of Climate Change and Sustainable Development at Tsinghua University, said that through positive dialogue and cooperation, China and France made great contributions to addressing difficulties emerging in implementing the Paris Agreement.

Since 2018, China and France have issued "three joint declarations and one initiative", all of which have emphasized cooperation in addressing climate change, he said. These documents have provided guidance for the continuous advancement of Sino-French and Sino-European cli-

mate cooperation, as well as global climate governance.

Noting significant complementarity in technology and markets between the two countries, Li said the two countries can further enhance policy dialogue and pragmatic cooperation in many sectors, including carbon markets and circular economy.

He said the two countries can also help accelerate the world's green, low-carbon transition and innovation by rolling out cooperation programs in other countries.

Fang Li, country director of the World Resources Institute China, said all the joint statements China and France have issued have consistently emphasized the importance of cooperation in addressing climate change.

"The proportion of environmental content, such as climate change and biodiversity conservation, in these documents has been steadily increasing," she said. "In the joint statement of 2018, environmental content accounted for 5 out of the 27 items, which is less than 20 percent in proportion, while in 2019 and 2023, the proportion exceeded 40 percent."

She said the two countries can potentially make even greater contributions to global sustainable development by joining hands to upgrade climate governance mechanisms in the post-Paris Agreement era and promote green financing.