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**Speech by President Barroso at the EU-China
Urbanisation Forum**

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Dear Prime Minister Li Keqiang,

Distinguished guests,

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a very great privilege to be here to address you today. I think that the impressive participation in this event is a testimony of the importance of this initiative for China and European Union alike. It is also testimony of the forward looking nature of our relations to have selected as a topic for cooperation, an issue which will be front and centre of China's development challenges and which is also at the heart of EU's policies.

Eighteen months ago, I had the privilege, together with Premier Li Keqiang, to launch this partnership in Brussels in an event which also brought together European and Chinese decision makers, local authorities, experts and civil society.

I firmly believe that the deepening of the relation between China and the European Union around the issue of urbanisation is a qualitative step forward in our relationship.

Our common interests in cooperating on this issue can be seen from many different perspectives.

First, urbanisation is a significant policy challenge for both of us, even if the starting points are rather different.

In many respects Europe is the 'urban continent'. Not only do three-quarters of Europeans live in cities; our history and our society models are built upon and around cities. To a large extent, cities have shaped European culture, European civilisation and we cannot think about European civilisation without having in mind the contributions that cities, sometimes city-states, gave to European history.

In the case of China the trend to urbanisation is a recent one but, as with many developments in this country, it is taking place at breakneck speed. 35 years ago only 17.9% of the population lived in cities. Last year this percentage reached, according to my statistics, 52.6%. It is really an impressive development.

In a few space of time China will have reached figures similar to the ones we have in Europe. This huge transformation raises formidable challenges that we in Europe have been facing for several decades such as urban planning, housing, intelligent use of resources, environment protection or the more challenging issues of social inclusion and equity.

We can offer our experience and our co-operation in dealing with these challenges. We can also learn with the experience of China. This is what the Urbanisation partnership is all about, seeking the best solutions in a cooperative manner for a common challenge.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Urbanisation is an extremely complex issue, involving dozens of different players in myriads of alternative situations. To be successful in economic and social terms Urbanisation has to be implemented through a, comprehensive, holistic approach across policy areas and with a long term vision in mind. There is not a one single urbanisation policy; it is a very complex set of policies that require horizontal cooperation.

And the vision is very important because it has to be based at the same time on a strategic goal; but at the same it has to rely on an intimate knowledge of the cities concerned. There is not a tailor-made solution for urbanisation, as we have learned in Europe.

It is therefore logical that for the first time in the history of our relations, we, European Union and China, count on our cities, provinces and regions to be the leading players in this partnership.

It was stated from the very beginning that the success of this partnership would to a great extent be function of the success of the city pairings, bilateral agreements and other relations between sub-national players in China and in Europe.

Through the urbanisation partnership we are supporting the development of a dense network of direct contacts between those in China and the European Union that have the most direct responsibility on the wellbeing of the citizens, and these are the local authorities. And I can recognise, among this very distinguished audience, many of my friends in Europe that I know from the Committee of the Regions, from many local leaders, mayors or regional leaders.

In a way this also translates one of the important principles of the EU decision making which is subsidiarity. 'Subsidiarity' probably sounds like a very intellectual concept, but at the end it is about taking decisions by the smallest, or least centralised authority closer to the citizens, because we believe that the better we are working with the citizens, the closer we are, the more efficient we can respond to those needs.

And the cities are becoming key players in the partnership between China and the EU adds a new dimension to our overall relations.

Because of that, we share the Chinese government's vision of conceiving the Urbanisation Partnership as an open platform with a mandate to deliver results. It is an open platform because all relevant stakeholders, public and private, national, regional or local, are invited to contribute.

But we are not starting from zero: since 2010 more than 150 Chinese decision makers from all 31 provincial-level regions have been able to share experiences and to visit good practices in more than 45 regions of 15 of our member states in the European Union.

There is a wide experience of more than 700 twinnings between Chinese and European cities, and now we received several dozen requests to conclude co-operation agreements between cities during today's events. This is a solid foundation on which to build a very interesting story.

Distinguished guests, dear friends,

My third consideration is economic. The urbanisation process in China is a milestone on the path from an industrial society, focused on producing for world markets, into what can be also a service society, focused on increasing its own welfare through the development of more complex systems and services.

The need for urban infrastructure and local public services is huge. And the need for long-term visions and stable co-operation schemes are essential.

The conclusions of the Third Plenum here in China, which has just finished, are very encouraging in this respect as the Chinese authorities have selected the urban-rural questions and the challenge of urbanisation as one of the main issues that the country will have to face in the years to come.

I am confident in the capacity of European companies and social stakeholders to cooperate with China in this endeavour. I am also confident as to an open minded approach from Chinese authorities to support the development of new businesses and undertakings with European participation.

Dear friends,

The world has become smaller and the resources scarcer. Productivity and efficiency gains will buy some time, but they will not be sufficient, it is not enough to increase our productivity. We also need a positive, intelligent shift in the pattern of life in cities, because that is the only way to ensure a sustainable future. We need to share our best experience on how to make cities liveable, friendly, resource conscious, socially fair. This is not only something to discuss and study; it is something to act upon. That's why I'm happy to see here not only experts - we very much value their contribution -, but those who have the responsibility to act at regional and local level.

And our dedication to this exercise is shown by the quality of the European delegation to the Urbanisation Partnership. By coming here, many European Mayors and other high-level authorities prove that they share our intelligent enthusiasm in supporting China to face the fascinating challenge of urbanisation.

I think I speak on their behalf, and on behalf of many other cities and regions of Europe, when I express our friendly commitment to deliver in this partnership. I really think that this partnership, which we have initiated, can become a leading light in the positive co-operation between our governments and our people.

Thank you for your attention!