
MEPS TELL CHINESE AMBASSADOR OF CONCERNS ON TRADE

24.04.2018

EU Observer (24 April 2018)

EU and China cannot do without each other but still cannot trust each other. The paradox of their relationship was clear on Monday (23 April), when the European Parliament international trade committee exchanged views with Beijing's new EU ambassador.

"We should really look to stabilise our relations," said the committee's chair, German social democrat MEP Bernd Lange, referring to the global context where protectionism seems to be on the rise and the rules-based trading system under threat.

But in a draft opinion that is part of a wider upcoming parliament report on EU-China relations, the trade committee has already pointed out issues that hamper smooth economic relations between the pair.

MEPs have called on China to "further open up the Chinese market to foreign investors, strengthen the protection of intellectual property rights and level the playing field by making China's market more transparent and better regulated."

They also expressed "concern about industrial overcapacity in China's steel sector" and called for "further reciprocity in market access."

"We have to be sincere enough to debate frankly," the opinion's rapporteur, Romanian centre-right MEP Iuliu Winkler told the China's envoy on Monday.

"We are very open to discussing the issues" mentioned in the opinion, ambassador Zhang Ming told the MEPs, in his first public appearance in an EU institution.

He insisted that with \$600bn of trade in goods, over \$100bn in trade of services and a stock of investment of nearly \$200bn, EU-China economic and trade relations are "by nature mutually beneficial."

The ambassador argued that issues raised by the MEPs "take up a very small part of our overall cooperation" and that "to solve problems we must look ahead, not look back."

In the wake of US president Donald Trump's imposition of tariffs on steel and aluminium, MEPs insisted on EU demands that China reduces its overcapacity in the sector.

Ming said the issue was "global challenge" that was "not specific to China alone" and pointed out that the country would have to find another job to hundred of thousands sector's workers if it had to lower its production.

He also assured MEPs that negotiations for a bilateral investment agreement with the EU were a "priority" for China and that the government was "already taking actions".

"Direction is more important than speed," he told MEPs.

"We welcome engagements," Winkler answered the ambassador, adding that they were "very important" and "sounding very promising".

Kaynak/Source: