

Dear excellencies, representatives of the People's Republic of China, the European Commission, and the EU Member States,

Dear friends and colleagues,

I am very honored, as President of the Federal Public Service Social Security, to be here today in order to celebrate the many achievements of the EU-China Social Protection Reform project.

The Federal Public Service Social Security carries out international projects aimed at improving cooperation between the European member states or helping to reform social security systems in European and non-European countries.

These projects are largely funded by the European Commission and in most cases are implemented in collaboration with Belgium's Public Social Security Institutions responsible for the management of the various branches of the Belgian Social Security, as well as other federal and regional public services.

To facilitate this collaboration, the BELINCOSOC shared service center was established within the FPS Social Security. BELINCOSOC focuses specifically on international projects in the field of social protection. BELINCOSOC is therefore part of an international network of partner organizations that are active in international cooperation in the field of social protection. To this end, the various Memoranda of Understanding (MoU) have been concluded with various partner organizations.

In 2014, BELINCOSOC became, together with other European States organizations, a partner within the EU-China Social Protection Reform Project. For the implementation of the various project activities, BELINCOSOC worked closely with various public social security institutions and other federal government departments. To this end, an "EU-CHINA SPRP Belgian Task Force" was established within which all relevant information is shared among the various Belgian partners.

Since the start of the EU China Social Protection Reform project, the FPS Social Security and its partner institutions, have provided a lot of input for the EU-China Social Protection Reform project.

In February 2015, the FPS Social Security already organized, in close cooperation with the National Office for Pensions, a very successful seminar for a number of senior Chinese officials on government pensions and on reforms in this area. This two-day workshop highlighted various aspects and was able to boast the contributions of both European and Chinese top experts. This seminar was also initiated and attended by Minister of Pensions, Daniel Bacquelaine.

The FPS Social Security also received three study visits from our Chinese partner agencies. Experts from the Planning Bureau of the Chinese People's Republic (NDRC), as well as the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Social Assistance, were received by us and actively exchanged knowledge with our experts and those from other Belgian government services, not only at federal, but also at a regional level. Belgian experts also contributed to three study visits in our other EU partner countries.

The FPS Social Security and its partner institutions, also sent experts to work with Chinese experts on concrete reforms and to participate in three panel discussions, four expert workshops, four training missions, as well as a High-Level Forum and a Conference. Our experts were active in the three components of the project. For example, various Belgian experts provided input for the Chinese pension reforms, the reform of labor market regulation and employment services, the improvement of the legal framework and policy for social assistance, etc. ... .

Today, we have many reasons to celebrate the many achievements of the EU-China Social Protection Reform project. Unfortunately, this fruitful project has come to an end. But I am quite sure we will continue to collaborate in the future. It would be a pity to lose the knowledge and experience that we jointly accumulated during the project's five year duration. Foremost, very good multilateral and bilateral contacts have been established between our experts and those of the Chinese government agencies. Therefore, I sincerely believe that this project has paved the way for a more solid partnership between Belgium, the other European Member States, and the People's Republic of China. So, the end of this project brings the hope of other forms of co-operation in the future.