

China, Austria spark 'young energy' in mutual understanding

By Guo Yiming

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A total of 20 young leaders from China and Austria have engaged in close discussions and exchanges in a four-day agenda from Nov. 30 to Dec. 3, in Beijing, Guangzhou and Shenzhen to enhance mutual understanding and friendship between the two countries.



Chinese and Austrian young leaders hold formal talks on Dec. 1, 2016.

[Photo/China.org.cn]

The China-Austria Young Leaders Program, which is in its second year, has drawn a wide circle of elites from government agencies, non-governmental organizations (NGO), media, think tanks, universities and businesses in this annual event co-organized by the Chinese People's Institute of Foreign Affairs (CPIFA) and Foreign Policy and United Nations Association of Austria (UNA-Austria).

Revolving around topics including cultural inheritance and China-EU interconnectivity, delegates from the two sides have engaged in lively discussions on how the two countries will dissipate misunderstandings and foster closer cooperation.

According to President Xi Jinping's related remarks, policy coordination, infrastructure connectivity, unimpeded trade, financial integration and people-to-people bonds are the five aspects that constitute regional connectivity and are the major duties when pushing forward the Belt and Road Initiative, explained Chinese delegate Li Chao, assistant research fellow at the China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations.

"China and Europe are 'two powers, two markets and two civilizations' in the world; politics and global issues, economy

and trade, culture and civilization together form the triangle to make our bilateral relationship permanently stable." He believes that mistrust and misunderstanding can be solved with ever closely connected facilities and policies as well as people-to-people exchanges in an era of globalization.

"Public diplomacy is a possible and even a necessary approach to promote mutual understanding between Europe and China which may have a positive effect on co-evolution," said He Zhigao, assistant professor at the Institute of European Studies of Chinese Academy of Social Sciences and also a Chinese delegate. "Evidence shows that younger people develop a lot more understanding and respect for each other if they interact directly, if they grasp the background, the living conditions and the contexts of others."

"We are all human and the cultural barriers are not as huge as you might think because after you get to know about each other after a little while, you know that what you share in common is even greater than your differences," said the Austrian delegate Madeleine Salinger, international relations officer at the City of Vienna.

Impressed by the resources, knowledge and power, she recognized the dynamism of the country which is something that Europe needs to develop itself. "China may also need the 'slow path' of Europe to get back and think how things are going," she said.

During the four-day agenda, the Chinese and Austrian delegations have engaged in formal talks and also visited several companies, museums and cultural sites in Beijing, Guangzhou and Shenzhen.

"We have got to know a lot about China even though we only visited three cities," said Bernd Hermann, head of the Austrian delegation and vice-secretary of UNA-Austria. He encouraged more Austrian and Chinese to visit each other and foster mutual understanding.

"I was also impressed by the openness of the people that I met and it was very interesting to discuss with them and to exchange views on many things," said Roland Matous, research specialist at the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC).

The Young Leaders Program is a long-term program initiated in 2015 with the two countries taking turns to play the host each year.

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