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VISIT TO CHINA
(SHANGHAI AND BEIJING)
4 – 8 JUNE 2013)

Note d'information de M. BORG

Destinataires : Membres de la Commission
Directeurs généraux et chefs de service

INFORMATION NOTE OF COMMISSIONER BORG TO THE COLLEGE

VISIT TO CHINA (SHANGHAI AND BEIJING, 4 – 8 JUNE 2013)

My visit to China took place from 4 to 8 June. Its main objective was to progress on market access for EU products into China, and also review our cooperation activities, and address respective concerns in the areas of food safety, sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) measures, consumer product safety and public health in the context of following dialogues:

- The High Level meeting established by the Memorandum of Understanding between DG SANCO and the General Administration of Quality Supervision, Inspection and Quarantine (AQSIQ) on consumer product safety and food safety and SPS;
- The High Level meeting established by the Memorandum of Understanding between DG SANCO and the Ministry of Agriculture (MoA) on Animal Health;
- The High Level meeting established by the Terms of Reference between DG SANCO and the National Health and Family Planning Commission (NHFPC) (ex-Ministry of Health) on Public Health and Food Safety;
- The EU-China Consultation and Cooperation Mechanism between DG SANCO and China Food and Drug Administration (CFDA) (ex-State Food and Drug Administration) on cosmetics, medical devices and pharmaceutical products.

During my visit I met with Minister of AQSIQ, Mr Zhi Shuping, the Minister of the NHFPC, Mrs Li Bin, the Vice-Minister of MoA in charge of the cooperation with the European Union, Mr Niu Dun, the Vice-Commissioner of CFDA, Mr Yin Li and the Shanghai Vice-Mayor, Mr Ai Baojun.

In addition, I visited the Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CCDC), an agency under the NHFPC, to reinforce the technical cooperation between the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control and the CCDC on communicable diseases. I also met representatives from the European Chamber of Commerce dealing with food and beverages, pharmaceuticals, cosmetics and medical devices and visited a toys inspection center (laboratory) to see first hand how standards and inspection processes are carried out on toys prior to export to the EU and also an alcohol (wines and spirits) and cosmetics inspection center (laboratory).

Meeting with AQSIQ Minister Mr Zhi Shuping

As major player regarding the safety of imports and exports, the meeting with AQSIQ Minister Mr Zhi Shuping was extremely important. We reviewed past and present cooperation in the area of food safety, sanitary and phytosanitary measures (SPS) and consumer products between our two services. Having the 10th anniversary of the EU-China Comprehensive Strategic Partnership as background reference, and the EU-China Summit in November 2013, we agreed to further strengthen the existing fruitful cooperation with the objective to achieve more social and economic development, by ensuring consumers' protection and facilitating market access.

We highlighted the technical work already carried out aiming at the simplification and increased EU access to the Chinese market, of food and SPS related commodities. As regards the longstanding issue of the recognition of the EU as a single entity, the EU has provided upon the request from China, a very comprehensive and detailed description of the EU system

for food safety and SPS issues. China is currently analysing the second set of information. Future technical steps have been identified including a physical meeting in Europe in the coming months including field visits in the EU MS to give China the opportunity to assess the efficiency of the EU system.

The Food and Veterinary Office (FVO) audit programme for 2013 to China was finally accepted by China. Thanks to the important efforts and understanding of both sides the right balance was found as regards the number of audits to China in 2013 and the coverage of all relevant sectors so that trade between China and the EU can continue on a sound basis.

I reiterated the EU strong concern that China does not allow the import of European beef for reasons of BSE. I repeated to Minister Zhi the need for China to process the applications from the EU MS swiftly. Minister Zhi pointed out that according to the Chinese law and regulations, China should lift the ban on BSE first before undertaking the inspection and quarantine access procedures for beef applications.

Minister Zhi reiterated its request for the EU to alleviate the current measure on dairy products from China due to the melamine scandal. I highlighted that after receiving the official information from China that all left-over stocks of contaminated milk powder have been destroyed and that all measures have been put in place to avoid the re-occurrence of such kind of incident, the EU will reconsider the measure with a positive spirit.

Together with Minister Zhi we reiterated our common objective to ensure a high level of product safety both in China and the European Union. Combined efforts and intensified cooperation are intended to protect and achieve a high level of health and safety of consumers in the mutual interest of citizens and economies. We also agreed to launch four product safety videos which are meant to inform designers, manufacturers, exporters, as well as importers, on EU market access and product safety requirements in selected areas. These videos in particular describe EU safety requirements for pushchairs, lighters, food imitating products, cords and drawstrings in children's clothes. Both organisations agreed to work on the broad dissemination of these messages to relevant stakeholders in order to ensure that safer products reach consumers.

We agreed to hold the 9th high level meeting in the EU, preferably in the spring of 2014.

Meeting with Minister of NHFPC Mrs Li Bin

During this meeting with Mrs Li Bin, we have reviewed our intensive cooperation on health, including at multilateral international organisations level, such as in the WHO and Codex Alimentarius, and we have restated our strong commitment for further strengthen this cooperation.

We had a review and an exchange of views on cooperation on tobacco control, antimicrobial resistance, cross-border health threats, the current H7N9 (bird flu) outbreak in China and novel coronavirus in the Middle East and tobacco control. I touched upon the implementation of technically strong e-health systems in the EU and how this technology can be used with huge benefits in particular for people located in remote areas. I suggested launching a pilot-project using the existing dialogue between DG SANCO and NHFPC to enhance exchange in this matter, knowing that China is also investing in e-health systems, with a view to open market opportunities. Minister Li also raised the issue of Chinese traditional medicines, highlighting their benefits to people's health and the unjustified obstacles to their access on the EU market. I clarified the EU approach regarding the marketing of traditional Chinese medicine products, in particular the existence of a simplified procedure for marketing authorisation without any requirement for clinical trials.

We both agreed that at the occasion of the next EU-China Summit, scheduled to take place in November 2013 in China, increased emphasis on cooperation on health policy would be much relevant, and a particular focus to be put on e-health systems.

Meeting with the Vice-Commissioner of CFDA Mr Yin Li

At the encounter with Vice-Commissioner Yin Li, I have highlighted the upcoming rules for the importation of active substances (also called active pharmaceutical ingredients - APIs) from China into the EU. China supplies approximately 30% of all active substances used in medicines in the EU. In order to reduce the risk of medicine shortages, it is essential that Chinese authorities issue the certificates required by the new EU rules ("written confirmations") to Chinese active substance manufacturers before 2 July 2013. Mr Yin confirmed that the request for the issuing the "written confirmations" was sent to the Provincial level.

We also discussed innovation in medical devices and how fast new medical devices are put in the market for the benefit of patients. I therefore underlined the importance for China to facilitate the registration of medical devices, to recognise the clinical trials made in the EU and the international guidelines in this matter. Vice-Commissioner Yin clarified that China is an immense market for medical devices and procedures in this field are being optimised. In particular he informed the medical devices would be classified to determine which would require, at different degrees, clinical trials.

On the safety of cosmetics side, I detailed the EU approach which focusses on ingredients which could present a risk (preservatives, conservatives), and avoiding the publication of a positive list of authorised ingredients. As regards Chinese requirements, imposing such a positive list, I underlined the importance of establishing this list swiftly. We also discussed the full ban on animal testing imposed by the EU and the need for future alternatives.

Meeting with MoA Vice-Minister Mr Niu Dun

Together with Vice-Minister Niu, we discussed mutual cooperation on animal health with a particular focus on avian influenza, in particular the H7N9 outbreak in China, foot and mouth disease and classical swine fever, and also touched upon Schmallenberg virus in the EU. Future aspects for reinforced cooperation in this area would be exchange of staff, research and information between reference laboratories and the cooperation with pharmaceutical companies to produce vaccines.

We also discussed the Chinese longstanding ban on EU beef due to mad-cow disease (BSE). I highlighted the absence of any reason to block such trade. The EU food safety rules and regulations are extremely stringent and therefore the EU beef offers the highest standards of safety and quality.

Meeting Shanghai Vice-Mayor Mr Ai Baojun

Together with Vice-Mayor Ai we have discussed the importance of mutual trade between the EU and China. Highlights focused on two issues, the first on animal health measures and directly related to the movement of EU horses into China, including their return to the EU in safe conditions in the context of a show jumping scheduled in Shanghai at the beginning of October. This event gathering the 100 best horses and 30 riders of the world will contribute to the promotion of equestrian sports in China and likely open new trade opportunities to the European horse industry. The second main issue was about food safety, in particular the

safety of EU spirits and wines for which Chinese import requirements have been suddenly tightened in January 2013, imposing in particular costly testing on phthalates, chemical compounds migrating from plastic in contact with the food products.

Conclusion

My visit to China took place just after the change of political leadership and in a tense trade context in relation to the antidumping duties imposed by the EU on Chinese solar panels. It clearly appeared that health and food safety are key priorities for the new government, fully conscious that these are major concerns for the Chinese population. There is therefore an increased interest from the Chinese administration to strengthen cooperation in these matters. The EU system is somehow seen as model of reference. This would lead to more activities for the Commission, in particular DG SANCO, but also more opportunities for the EU, getting better/faster market access for EU products.

Overall the results obtained were extremely positive.

