

Belgium'a bridge' to EU

AIB should make priority of securing Brussels' participation, Xi tells visiting King Philippe
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China hopes the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank will make a priority of encouraging Belgium's participation, President Xi Jinping told King Philippe on Tuesday in Beijing.

The Belgian king is making his ninth visit to China within the past three decades.

China appreciates Belgium's willingness to participate in infrastructure construction in Asia and welcomes the country to join the unfolding Belt and Road Initiative, Xi said.

The China-led AIB finalized its list of 57 founding member states in April, including many western European countries but not Belgium. Other countries that are interested can still join as ordinary members.

Xi made the remarks shortly before he and the king witnessed the signing of 12 cooperation agreements covering areas such as space, customs, science and technology, nuclear fuel and education.

He called for both countries to push forward with development of the logistics industry, along with cross-border e-commerce between Europe, China and broader Asia.

China supports connectivity between its western region and Antwerp, Xi said, inviting Belgium to back Chinese enterprises join the investment plan for Europe and participate in the construction of a railway network across the continent.

He also highlighted areas for cooperation, including high-end manufacturing, environmental technologies and sustainable development, as China is carrying out its innovation-driven development strategy.

Calling Belgium a reliable partner for China in Europe, King Philippe said his country-home to the headquarters of the European Union – would use its advantages and act as a bridge by which China can enter Europe.

Belgium appreciates China's Belt and Road Initiative and would like to make an effort to link those plans with the investment plan for Europe, he said.

He also underscored the importance that Belgium places on its 44-year-old relationship with China, recalling that it was his first destination for a state visit as king.

The king and his wife, Queen Mathilde, began their week-long visit on Saturday in Wuhan, Hubei province. After Beijing, they will visit Shanghai, Suzhou and Shenzhen.

A large delegation led by the king includes high-level governmental representatives, around 100 CEOs, presidents of its main universities and heads of three regions.

The visit comes at a time when more Chinese companies are discovering Belgium as an investment opportunity, according to a news release from the Belgian embassy in China.

Zhang Yuanyuan, a former Chinese ambassador to Belgium, said the royal family, along with key players in Belgium's economy, have maintained close ties with China and expect to export more of Belgium's products to China.

Belgium is China's sixth-largest trading partner within the EU, with trade volume of \$27.3 billion last year, an increase of 7.3 percent from 2013.



WU ZHIYI/CHINA DAILY

President Xi Jinping and his wife, Peng Liyuan, welcome Belgium's King Philippe and Queen Mathilde during an official ceremony in Beijing on Tuesday.

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