

SCED's speech at evening reception at Regional Council of Burgundy (English only)

Following is the speech by the Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development, Mr Gregory So, at an evening reception at the Regional Council of Burgundy in Dijon, Burgundy, on June 5 (Dijon time):

President Patriat, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

Bonsoir. Good evening.

First of all, let me express my gratitude to the Regional Council for this warm welcome, and for your gracious words and tremendous hospitality. The presence of the guests here tonight is a testament to the high level of importance that Burgundy places on the relationship with Hong Kong. I wish to thank you once again for inviting me to visit your beautiful region. I have had a most enjoyable time visiting one of your very best wineries and a leading company here that provides CCTV solutions, the clients of which include the police force of Hong Kong. I am sure this is just the first of my many more visits to come.

Burgundy is home to some of the world's best wine and cuisines. There is an old saying that good wine and good food always bring together good friends. I am thankful for this opportunity to meet old friends and new tonight, to discuss how we can further enhance our partnership in business, and to tell you more about my city.

Hong Kong is a melting pot of different cultures, where the East blends with the West. Together with our excellent location in the heart of Asia, we managed to attract 60.8 million visitors last year, with about 78 per cent from Mainland China. In Hong Kong, tourists can enjoy city-wide duty-free shopping, extraordinary cuisines from around the world, lively nightlife and world-class theme parks, all in a very safe, multicultural and multilingual environment. Despite our reputation as an international financial centre and trading hub, we actually have sandy beaches and scenic hiking trails just half an hour away from our central business district. That is our best kept secret!

In terms of business, France is one of our most important trading partners in Europe, with some 8 billion Euros worth of bilateral trade last year. We also have a very strong presence of some 750 French companies in Hong Kong and over 16 000 French expatriates. Now you may ask, what makes Hong Kong so interesting to French

businesses?

For one thing, Hong Kong is an important base for French companies with operations and investments in Asia. For 21 consecutive years, we have been ranked the world's freest economy by the Heritage Foundation. We are also ranked the third in ease of doing business by the World Bank.

Our business-friendly environment is underpinned by the rule of law and an independent judiciary, our low and simple tax regime, free flow of information, capital and goods, as well as superb transport and communications infrastructure.

Over the past few decades, Hong Kong has been playing the role as the "super-connector" between Mainland China and the rest of the world. Our very versatile businessmen and professionals are accustomed to both international standards and how things work in Asia, especially Mainland China. For French businesses, that makes Hong Kong the fastest and most efficient route to the huge opportunities offered by the booming Asian markets.

Hong Kong's popularity with tourists and business travellers makes it an ideal showcase for high-quality French goods and services. Many of our shops are stocked with the latest French fashion, fragrances and houseware, including established and rising brands. Equally popular is the astounding variety of good food and wine from around the world. It is no secret that what sells well in Hong Kong will also sell well in the rest of China.

Speaking of wine, Hong Kong has long served close ties with Burgundy in wine trading and co-operation. We are a city with a population of just 7 million but, by value, Hong Kong ranked eighth worldwide and second in Asia in Burgundy's wine export markets in 2013-14, ahead of Mainland China, which ranked 12th worldwide. Since the removal of all our wine duties in 2008, Hong Kong's wine imports have thrived with a twofold increase to around 819 million Euros in 2014, and the number of companies doing wine business in Hong Kong has surged from less than 700 to over 2 000. Our booming wine business is complemented by the insatiable demand from just across the border, with re-exports into the Mainland surging over threefold to 143 million Euros from 2008 to 2014. Hong Kong also continues to be the global spotlight for fine wine, as we secured our position as the world's number one wine auction centre last year for the fifth consecutive year.

Before closing, I would like to thank you once again for giving me this opportunity to tell you about my city. Hong Kong has all the right qualities to be your trusted partner in business, but we are not all just about business. Hong Kong is also known for our efficient service and hospitality. I invite you all to come visit and see for yourself what Hong Kong has to offer.

Merci beaucoup. Thank you very much, and have a good evening.

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