Is the Chinese Leadership Ready for Dialogue? Perspectives on the Uyghur Issue
European Parliament, Brussels
Altiero Spinelli Building, Room 5G1
Tuesday, 17 December 2013
3.00 – 6.30pm

First of all, I would like to thank Niccolò Rinaldi and the ALDE Group for sponsoring today’s conference. Niccolò Rinaldi has been very committed in raising the Uyghur issue at the European Parliament and I salute his efforts and convictions in creating a platform to discuss minority rights, but also his boldness in addressing an issue that is repeatedly side-lined. My thanks also go to the World Uyghur Congress, and I warmly welcome all of their members, not least Ms Rebiya Kadeer, for the occasion. Today, we are here to talk about whether Chinese leadership is ready for dialogue.

Despite major hope, China’s new leadership is confirming the status quo: intolerance and suppression of any call for respect of human rights, cultural assimilation and racial discrimination.

Uyghurs have not benefitted from the growing gas and oil industry but rather face a growing job discrimination. Uyghur language has been taken out of school instruction. The Uyghurs’ history books and culture have been banned. The Uyghurs’ religious freedom is constrained and they are threatened by population transfers.

The new leadership of President Xi Jinping raised question about possible domestic reform and changes in policy that could potentially transform and heal political divisions and societal fragmentation caused by Chinese branches of power. The 1984 Law of Autonomies, that was never implemented, is still just a piece of paper and it seems that will remain a paper with no intention at all to make it real.

Uyghurs firmly maintain their request for dialogue with the Chinese leadership but non-violent demonstrations have been met with the most horrific repression and human rights violations and have increasingly led to fatal incidents. Enforced disappearances, the most heinous crime, continue to be an issue for the Uyghur community. UNPO prepared a publication addressing the issue seriously. I invite you to pick up a copy of this report today.

While Uyghurs and Uyghur human rights activists demonstrate bravery on a daily basis, I would like to bring attention to the lack of bravery of the international community. Global actors, such as key political figures, international organizations, and states have generally ignored the plight of the Uyghurs, because it is easier to do so. Those reliant on China for trade and aid remain quiet. Human rights come secondary to the reign of trade and security interests, particularly when dealing with China...

Recently, Barbara Lochbihler, Chair of European Parliament’s human rights Subcommittee, quoted “There should be no double standards, which is why we need to level our criticism at where European exports contribute to the violent persecution of opposition activists or the torture of dissidents. Trade, economic, labour or refugee policymakers who seriously believe in fundamental rights for all must take responsibility, particularly here in Europe, because human rights are indivisible.”

I fully agree as many of you do, I’m sure.

Today’s conference seeks to address these issues just before China’s new leadership completes its first year in power. The panellists will address the power struggles in Asia, the escalating tensions in East Turkestan, the international community’s responsibility, and opportunities for stability, peace and development in the region. Let us call for dialogue in China with Rebiya Kadeer. Let us remember that by remaining quiet we are complicit in the oppression.