

Question from the European Parliament to the Commission on the City of Kashgar

Question from Nessa Childers (S&D) and Frieda Brepoels (Verts/ALE),

Members of the European Parliament, for written answer to the Commission

Rule 117

26 January 2011

During the EU-China Summit in October 2010, Commission President José Barroso announced that 2012 would be the EU-China Year of Intercultural Dialogue. On the same occasion Androulla Vassiliou, Commissioner responsible for education and culture, stated that 'Europe and China share common goals. ... Our cultural richness uplifts and unites us [the EU and China]. In a globalised world, our cultural diversity is an asset not an obstacle. It makes our lives richer and helps us grow and live in harmony with one another.'

In view of this expression of concern for cultural diversity and exchange between Europe and China, is the Commission aware of the cultural policies pursued by China in its ethnically diverse areas such as East Turkestan, or the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, with its largely Uyghur population of Turkic origin?

Is the Commission aware of the gradual and irreversible destruction of the historically significant and architecturally unique Silk Road city of Kashgar, in East Turkestan, as part of China's 'Kashgar Dangerous House Reform' programme? Furthermore, is the Commission aware of China's persistent refusal to include Kashgar in the planned transnational application for Unesco world heritage status for various ancient towns along the Silk Road?

If the Commission agrees that there is a pressing need for action to ensure both international and intranational cultural dialogue within current EU-China relations, how does it intend to ensure the survival of all the traditional cultures of China, Kashgar being a prime example of its enriching diversity?

Is the Commission prepared to take the necessary steps to raise international awareness of Kashgar and ensure that it is included in the planned Unesco application, as is necessary, to protect the priceless and internationally significant heritage of Kashgar and its ethnic Uyghur community?

**Answer given by High Representative / Vice President Ashton on behalf of the Commission
E-352/11EN (16.3.2011)**

The EU is extremely concerned at continuous reports that document the destruction of large parts of the old town in Kashgar, a cornerstone of Uyghur heritage. Reports also mention that local population has not been consulted that the demolition project has undermined their property rights. As access to Kashgar is denied to foreign diplomats, it is very difficult to assess the actual situation. The EU intends to raise the issue with the Chinese authorities at the next round of the EU-China human rights dialogue and request to visit Xinjiang and the city of Kashgar.

A policy dialogue exists between the European Commission and the Chinese Ministry of Culture. As a follow up to the conclusion in 2007 of the Joint Declaration on Culture by the Commissioner and the Chinese Minister of Culture, the European Commission (DG EAC) officially launched the policy dialogue with the Chinese Ministry of Culture in Shenzhen in May 2009.

In October 2009, a high level meeting with Chinese Ministry of Culture officials in Brussels identified three areas for future work in this framework: promotion of cultural industries, promotion of cultural diversity and preservation of cultural heritage. The senior officials also agreed to establish regular working mechanisms, to identify existing financial tools from both sides and to identify interested European and Chinese cultural operators.

In addition, the first EU- China high level forum on culture (HLFC) took place in Brussels on 6-7 October 2010, on the margins of the 13th EU-China Summit, marking a significant advancement in the area of policy dialogue on culture with China, as announced by European and Chinese leaders at the Nanjing Summit in November 2009. The forum is set to become the central element of the relations with China in the field of culture, taking place every year, alternatively in Europe and China, in 2011 in the context of the EU-China Year of Youth and in 2012 in the context of the EU-China Year of Intercultural Dialogue.

In this context it is the intention of the European Commission to pursue in the future a constructive exchange of views with Chinese authorities as regards the preservation of cultural heritage sites in China, notably in the framework of the meetings, events and joint initiatives which will be undertaken within the EU-China 2012 Year of Intercultural Dialogue.

To find the question and answer in full, please click on the links below:

Q: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getAllAnswers.do?reference=E-2011-000352&language=EN>

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