

An exclusive interview of Davide Cucino, Chairman of China-Italy Chamber of Commerce

Italy joins “the Belt and Road Initiative”, which sets an example for the rest of the European Union

© Trainee journalist Zhang Zhe’ang from *International Finance* (No. 04 version of April 1, 2019)



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Thirty years ago, Davide Cucino, a young Italian man in his early 20s, went to Peking University on his own to study Chinese history. Since then, he has forged an indissoluble bond with China.

Ten years later, Davide became Chairman of the Italian Chamber of Commerce in China, who worked very hard to promote the practical cooperation between Chinese and Italian enterprises.

Now Davide is still doing business with China. He is Chairman of the Italian Chamber of Commerce in China and Chairman of Fincantieri (Shanghai) Trading Co. Ltd, which recently signed a joint venture agreement with China State Shipbuilding Corporation to build luxury cruises in Waigaoqiao, Shanghai. The group also signed an agreement with Shanghai Baoshan District to establish a cruise support center in China.

His long life and work in China made Davide have a deep affection for China. At the same time, he has witnessed the gradual changes of China's opening up.

Chinese President Xi Jinping paid a state visit to Italy from March 21 to 24 at the invitation of Italian President Antonio Mattarella. During the state visit, the two sides issued a joint communique on strengthening China-Italy comprehensive strategic partnership and welcomed the signing of the memorandum of understanding between the two governments on jointly promoting "the Belt and Road Initiative".

Davide told the reporter from *International Financial* in an interview that, "President Xi Jinping's visit helps balance the trade deficit between China and Italy, and this time Italy becomes the first G7 country to join "the Belt and Road Initiative", which is a model for other EU countries".

A memorandum of understanding

"It is not easy for China and Italy to reach "the Belt and Road Initiative" memorandum of understanding this time." Davide told the reporter from *International Financial*.

The signing of a memorandum of understanding is a sign of mutual trust, understanding and proper handling of disputes between the two countries. This means that signed by both sides need to stand on the other side's position to think about problems. "In September last year, the European Union Chamber of Commerce also suggested that the member states should consider a series of common prerequisites when signing a memorandum of understanding. In terms of joining "the Belt and Road Initiative", we are not thinking about whether we should join, but what we should do after joining." Davide added.

Romano Prodi, the former President of the European commission and former prime minister of Italy, also said at the sub-forum in Boao Forum for Asia on March 27, that "the Belt and Road Initiative" is bound to be affected by a worse world situation than before. Italy now can not only play an important role in "the Belt and Road Initiative", but also shall play an important role.

This year marks the 15th anniversary of the establishment of China-Italy comprehensive strategic partnership, and the two countries will jointly celebrate the 50th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic ties next year, presenting important opportunities for the development of bilateral relations. As a founding member of the European Union, Italy sets an example for other European countries that have not yet decided whether to join "the Belt and Road Initiative"" Davide said.

A case of successful cooperation

When asked by a reporter from *International Finance* what are the highlight cases in the

economic and trade cooperation between China and Italy this time, Davide replied, "the shipbuilding industry is a good example of the successful cooperation between China and Italy.

"Italy has a long history of port management. Italy is strategically positioned to become a gateway for Chinese exports and a transit point to the next destination.

Italy has two good ports in the north, Genoa and Trieste, linking Asia to the Mediterranean and the heart of the continent, which are closest to China. On the other hand, in the third-party market cooperation represented by Africa, Italy has the geographical advantage of being close to Africa, which provides convenient conditions for the market development and investment activities of China and Italy in Africa.

"At the same time, Italian technology helps China achieve better results in cruise lines and high-tech ship production. And Italy also look forward to working with China's large infrastructure companies involved in more projects together." Davide said.

Take Fincantieri (Shanghai) Trading Co. Ltd as an example. The group signed a memorandum of comprehensive strategic cooperation with China State Shipbuilding Industry Corporation Limited (CSCC) on August 28, 2018 in Beijing, aiming to build the first luxury cruise ship for China's domestic market and hold other related activities. After that, the two sides will also establish cooperation possibilities in areas including oil and gas industry ships, cruise ferries, giant yachts, special ships, steel structure infrastructure, procurement of Marine engineering equipment and cruise cabins and interior decoration.

"In addition to shipbuilding, Italian companies are particularly good at building roads, railways and communications." Davide added.

As the Chairman of China-Italy Chamber of Commerce, Davide said: "the China-Italy Chamber of Commerce will also provide more successful cooperation cases for Italian small and medium-sized enterprises who want to develop in China, and provide help for their later practices."

Giovanni Tria, the economy and finance minister of Italy, said at the Boao Forum for Asia on March 27 that there are a lot of small enterprises with a strong scientific and technological innovation ability which can carry out cooperation with China. The cooperation between China and Italy will enhance the competitiveness of their respective enterprises in the international market and further promote the economic development of the two countries in the wave of globalization.

A foreseeable future

"China-Italy cooperation is expected in the future."

"President Xi Jinping's visit helps balance the trade deficit between China and Italy", Davide told the reporter from *International Financial* in an interview, "As a matter of fact, there is a large trade deficit between China and Italy in 2018, and the deficit amount reaches up to 17 billion Euros. The deficit may be improved after Xi's visit to Italy, bringing more business opportunities to Italian companies."

The two governments signed cooperation documents in the fields of "the Belt and Road Initiative", e-commerce, scientific and technological innovation and agriculture during the visit. The companies of the two sides signed 10 commercial agreements with a total amount of 3.3 billion US dollars, covering finance, equipment manufacturing, infrastructure construction and third-party market cooperation, etc.

In the course of President Xi Jinping's visit to Italy, there is also good news that Italy will participate in the second China International Import Expo as the guest of honor this year.

When asked by the newspaper what he thought, He said: "I think both countries must have high expectations for this Expo, and Italy will spare no effort to display its high-tech technology, innovative ideas and products in this Expo."