

'Align development strategies'

President sees need for China and Spain to support core interests, jointly build Belt and Road

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China and Spain should enhance the connection of developmental strategies and jointly build the Belt and Road, President Xi Jinping said on Nov 28.

Xi made the remark while addressing the Senate and the Congress of Deputies of Spain during his ongoing state visit.

China would like to maintain high-level exchanges with Spain and for the two nations to continue to support each other's core interests and major concerns, Xi said, adding that they should uphold the right direction in bilateral relations.

Noting that this year marks the 40th anniversary of China's reform and opening-up, Xi said that China and Spain have upheld developmental paths that fit their own situations in the past four decades and have achieved national prosperity and social progress.

China will never close its door, but open it wider and wider, Xi said.

Spain is also taking measures to make progress and deepen reform, Xi said, adding that the development of China-Spain relations faces new opportunities.

The two countries should enhance people-to-people exchanges and strengthen communication on international affairs, Xi said.

The Spanish Senate and Congress of Deputies can play an important role in boosting China-Spain political mutual trust and deepening the friendship of the people, Xi said, adding that China attaches great importance to exchanges with the



President Xi Jinping and his wife, Peng Liyuan, pose for a photo with Spain's King Felipe VI and Queen Letizia in Madrid, Spain, on Nov 27 before a meeting between the two leaders. LI XUEREN / XINHUA

two houses of Spain's legislature.

On behalf of the two houses, Pio Garcia Escudero, president of the Senate, welcomed Xi's state visit. The Spain-China relationship is the best of all time now, he said.

He told Xi that Spain admires China's great achievements in reform

and opening-up, and China's important role in global affairs. Spain would like to enhance cooperation with China in bilateral issues and global affairs, boost exchanges of legislative authorities and deepen the friendship between the people of both sides, he said.

Xi earlier accepted the Gold Key of the City from Manuela Carmena, mayor of Madrid. Xi called the key not only an honor for himself, but also a symbol of China-Spain friendship and the hope for opening the door of China-Spain friendship wider.

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XI JINPING
President

Hailing Madrid as a famous historic city and global hub of culture and tourism, Xi said it is the window of China-Spain relations. In 1985, Madrid and Beijing became cities of friendship, which injected impetus into China-Spain cooperation in all areas, Xi said, adding that local-level cooperation is an important part of the friendship.

Carmena said the connection between Madrid and China has become closer, and China's Spring Festival has become a popular festival in Madrid. Xi's state visit will bring more opportunities for Madrid to enhance cooperation with China, the mayor said.

Xi on Nov 28 also held talks with Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez.

Spanish firms urged to step up BRI role

Connectivity and trade facilitation to improve from involvement in the initiative, experts say

By CECILY LIU in Madrid, Spain
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Experts in Spain are describing the Belt and Road Initiative as a crucial platform for upholding multilateralism and boosting global trade, and they are urging more Spanish companies to partner with Chinese ones on projects in the initiative.

"The BRI is a promising way of promoting physical and digital connectivity in Eurasia and beyond," said Andres Ortega, a senior researcher at the Elcano Royal Institute in Spain.

"Great opportunities exist for Spanish companies in the infrastruc-

ture, construction and power sectors. Spanish firms, with understanding and existing relationships in countries across Latin America and Africa, face a great opportunity to work with Chinese firms in these markets, and they have great expertise to offer in such partnerships," he said.

Angel Saz-Carranza, director of Spain's ESADE Center for Global Economy and Geopolitics, agreed and added that better BRI connectivity could also benefit Spanish companies wanting to export their renewable energy technology, and also boost Spain's tourism sector.

The BRI, proposed by President Xi

Jinping in 2013, advocates improved connectivity of infrastructure, trade, ideas and knowledge among countries and regions.

BRI collaboration was mentioned by Xi in a signed article he wrote for Spanish newspaper *ABC* ahead of his visit, which took place from Nov 27 to 29.

"We need to synergize the Belt and Road Initiative and Spain's 'Strategic Vision for Spain in Asia' and the 'Mediterranean Corridor', and actively explore cooperation in third markets for win-win cooperation in broader areas," Xi wrote.

Reyes Maroto, Spain's minister of

industry, trade and tourism, reaffirmed in Beijing in October Spain's eagerness to further participate in BRI-related development.

"Two axes of this initiative are very important for Spanish companies: connectivity and trade facilitation," Maroto said.

In recent years, Spain has benefited in various ways from the BRI. A new cargo train service connecting Yiwu, East China's Zhejiang province, with the Spanish capital Madrid has significantly reduced freight costs for Spanish exports, compared to airfreight costs.

Saz-Carranza said Spain should

now push for further engagement as BRI development momentum accelerates globally.

"Our geographic location, at the Western end of the European continent, gives us both an opportunity and a challenge," he said.

"If we do not engage proactively, we face the risk of being left out as other European countries engage with Asia for trade and connectivity. On the other hand, we have the opportunity to become a catalyst to accelerate Africa and Latin America's engagement. I feel the Spanish government could make its commitment to BRI engagement even more explicit.