**THE ROLE OF POLAND IN THE ONE BELT AND ONE ROAD INITIATIVE**

**(by Paweł Czerwiński, Ambassador of the Republic of Poland**

**to the Republic of Slovenia)**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Distinguished Guests,

Particular importance of the “One Belt and One Road” project (the OBOR for short) in Polish foreign policy has to be seen in the context of two of our priorities: strategic relations with the People’s Republic of China and strengthening ties and cooperation within Central Europe.

Poland and China have maintained diplomatic, cultural and economic relations for hundreds of years. After WWII, despite numerous fundamental political changes in both countries and in the whole world, Poland and China remained friends and partners. Our Embassy in Beijing belongs to the narrow group of top rank diplomatic representations and is supported by the Consulates General in Shanghai, Guangzhou (Canton) and Hongkong. Last year we have opened another Consulate General in Chengdu, which will focus on the development of bilateral economic and cultural cooperation.

China is a world superpower and its interest in Central Europe is of crucial significance for our country, especially given that strengthening the role and position of this part of Europe is one of the top priorities of Poland’s foreign policy.

Until now, Central European cooperation had mainly a local dimension, focusing first on joining the EU and then, mostly in the V4 format, on coordination of the policy of the so-called new Member States in the Community.

The “16+1” concept moves Central Europe to an absolutely new, global level and its particularly important feature is that it gathers both member states of the EU, as well as candidates to the membership. Together with the OBOR, it has universal dimensions and enables its participants to be present and recognizable in a much wider scale than before.

Poland, as the largest Central European country (in terms of territory, population, and economy) is keen to actively contribute a lot to the OBOR project and has an ambition to play a key role in the development of the relations between China and our region.

At the last 16+1 Summit in Suzhou, in November, 2015, the head of our delegation was President Andrzej Duda. The Polish delegation was the only one led by the head of state, clearly showing the importance of China in our foreign policy. The participation in the Summit was followed by a successful bilateral visit, including very substantial talks with the President of China Mr. Xi Jinping, and the opening of the Chinese-Polish Economic Forum.

Apart of the political context of the OBOR that I have already mentioned, this project, being focused on economic and infrastructural cooperation, has a huge potential from the business point of view, looking for new export, investment and joint-venture opportunities, as well as a reduction of the significant imbalance in the foreign trade turnover with China.

A key strategic element of Poland’s contribution to the OBOR lies in the domain of infrastructure and transportation; most importantly, in the railway sector.

Polish industrial city of Łódź has a railway connection with Chengdu, the capital of Sichuan province, while the capital of Poland Warsaw is connected with Suzhou – and these are two out of very few such connections between China and Europe.

Poland has also joined, as one of the prospective founding members, the China-sponsored initiative of the Asian Infrastructural Investments Bank (AIIB) and this decision was unanimously confirmed by our Parliament last week. The AIIB plays an important role in the OBOR, for instance in granting loans for the development of infrastructural projects that are to be realized in its framework.

Poland is the only Central-European country that has joined this Bank, and it will definitely be an important factor influencing both Polish-Chinese bilateral relations, as well as our position in the OBOR.

Overall, I can confidently say that Poland strongly supports the idea of the One Belt and One Road project and believes that it is a great opportunity for strengthening pragmatic, mutually beneficial relations between China and Europe. Moreover, the project also makes an important contribution to globalization, as it aims to bring states of different power, tradition and political systems closer to each other.

Thank you for your attention.