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Promoting dialogue between the Council of Europe and its neighbour, China, on social values and working conditions

Motion for a resolution¹

tabled by Mr Mike HANCOCK and other members of the Assembly

This motion has not been discussed in the Assembly and commits only those who have signed it

The picture we have of China is often incomplete because the media focus solely on the negative aspects of the country and the adverse consequences of its economic development. It is necessary to rectify this perception: China is the most populated country in the world, a great civilisation and an incredibly dynamic economy; it is a neighbour and not just a trading partner. Conditions relating to social progress and the way in which it is taking place are currently of concern in China and should not leave Europe indifferent.

China ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1993 and the two 1966 International Covenants on Civil and Political Rights, and Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in 1998. China has also ratified some 20 International Labour Organization conventions and took part in the ILO's 14th Asian regional meeting on the launch of a Decent Work Decade (in the period up to 2015).

Labour legislation is beginning to be introduced in China, examples being the 2002 regulations banning child labour, the 2003 accident insurance regulations and the 2001 Trade Unions Act.

In the social field, China must – just like Europe, but on a different scale – address such major challenges as the rapid growth in the number of elderly people and their growing poverty, particularly in rural areas. Internal migration, poverty and HIV/Aids are leaving hundreds of thousands of children without support, abandoned or in the care of their grandparents. Pollution and the deterioration of the environment are jeopardising public health.

Chinese immigration in our member states is an underestimated phenomenon. In certain recent member states, Chinese workers, who are ill-acquainted with their rights and sometimes badly accepted, are replacing national workers who emigrate. As a result of the Chinese one-child policy, numerous western couples are adopting Chinese children, mainly girls, and because of the surplus of single men in China there is the risk that its society will be unstable in the future.

China is seeking to devise a strategy to reduce poverty among elderly people. The introduction of a system of minimum welfare standards and health cover for the entire population is under discussion.

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Globalisation is making health and social challenges more similar and interdependent. The Council of Europe has a wealth of solutions and examples to offer, and lessons can be learned from a comparison of experiences. As a precursor to further developments, there is a need for a proactive dialogue with China on social values and working conditions.

Signed (see overleaf)

Signed²:

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2. ALDE: Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe
EDG: European Democrat Group
EPP/CD: Group of the European People's Party
SOC: Socialist Group