

Dear friends,

I wish all the participants to the Shanghai Silk Road Health Forum a fruitful and successful outcome. Unfortunately, the pandemic forces me to stay away from China and from the friends I used to work with. This is a painful distance that the digital connection cannot bridge. But it is a price to pay to ensure safety and to overcome the challenge with a disease that has affected the whole world, that has caused so much suffering and victims and that has changed the life of billions of women and men. The coronavirus storm is destined to leave a deep wound in the lives of us all and on the structure of international relations. Nothing will be like before. This crisis has an unprecedented anthropological dimension. It threatens health and life, disrupts habits, radically changes interpersonal and work relationships. It therefore affects people's lives and not just the economy. However, this phenomenon affecting both the poorest and the richest countries could really turn to be an opportunity for major changes. A new hierarchy of values, protection of health, environment, culture and interpersonal relationships, is needed. The crisis increases the danger of a fragmentation of the network of international relations and cooperation. Mobility is reduced and relations between different countries in general become more complicated, fear is growing, nationalism and isolationism can also grow. We may find ourselves living in a less globalised and less interdependent world: this would not only be detrimental to our restricted economies within the limits of new autarchies, but also damaging to the growth of our civilisation, which is enriched through comparison and dialogue.

Never before has it become clear that only by working together we can face the great challenges that stand in front of us. At the same time, we also see the real risk that mutual hostility and mistrust will increase and even the risk of a return to a new Cold War between West and East.

This is why I believe that the initiative GHL(Global Health Link) you are promoting today is so important. In other words, it is a matter of promoting a courageous programme of cooperation in the fundamental field of the protection of people's health. It is a matter of exchanging experiences and knowledge accumulated during the pandemic; it is a matter of ensuring the circulation of new technologies, new products and new treatments.

I believe that in this direction it is essential to strengthen the role of the World Health Organization, but also to promote exchange and direct cooperation between single countries, in particular, within the framework of the Belt and Road Initiative, that is, the new Silk Road. About it, we are unfortunately already lagging behind: the lack of cooperation for a vaccine and its availability to everyone, including the poorest countries.

I therefore believe it is essential that, first and foremost, new cooperation should be developed between Europe and China. During the first wave of the pandemic, many complained about the

delay in the alarm coming from China, but later recognized the importance of the aid and support coming from your country. What is fundamental to our future now is that we can never again be caught unprepared for a challenge of this scale. That is why we must work together and create the platforms that allow us to positively cross-reference supply and do everything necessary to overcome the disease and protect people's health. Let the Forum therefore make an urgent appeal to governments. But at the same time we are mobilising civil society, associations and businesses to do everything in our possibilities. I wish the Shanghai Silk Road Health Forum every success and hope to be able to return to work side by side for cooperation and progress soon.