Commissioner Tian Lipu,

Deputy Head of the Delegation of the EU, dear Mr Pulch,

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is both an honour and a pleasure for me to be here today in this wonderful city of Shanghai, and to share with you some information about co-operation between the European Patent Office and China in the field of patents.

I am delighted that my first official mission as President of the EPO has brought me to China. In my new capacity I can continue an important task which I started in my former position as head of the French National Institute for Industrial Property, and whose development at European level I oversaw as head of the French delegation and, later, as Chairman of the Administrative Council of the European Patent Organisation.

I regard it as a high priority to maintain and enhance that co-operation in order to be able to efficiently and effectively address new challenges arising in the field of intellectual property for the benefit of the Chinese and European economies.

The EPO and China can look back on a long-standing and fruitful tradition of co-operation on patents. This tradition started almost exactly 25 years ago, with the signing of the first agreement between the EPO and the then Chinese Patent Office.
It was a significant step, as it paved the way for further agreements which enabled China and Europe to develop closer ties in the field of patents.

This co-operation was, and still is, exemplary and instrumental in enabling China to set up and manage a modern and effective system for the legal protection of technical inventions. Such a system is of course not only limited to the authorities responsible for the grant of patents, but also concerns the areas of trademarks, appellations of origin and copyrights.

I am pleased to say that both offices today count among the five largest patent offices in the world in terms of staffing and workload handling. The EPO and the SIPO have become decisive players in the global patent system, and strongholds for the overall creation of economic value, as intellectual property rights are playing an ever more important role in global trade. It is with no small degree of satisfaction that I can say that as a consequence of our successful partnership, the patent systems of China and Europe have become very similar in essential aspects.

Initially, the focus of the co-operation between the EPO and China was on setting up technical and administrative infrastructures in China with a view to enabling China's transition from a manufacturing to a technology-creation country, as laid down in the Chinese National Intellectual Property Strategy.
The impact of this transition is very visible in the patent statistics: Chinese companies have become regular users of the European patent system. European patent applications filed by Chinese companies almost tripled between 2005 and 2009 alone, rising from 538 to 1,630. Similarly, the number of European patents granted to Chinese companies by the EPO is also on the rise, from 82 in 2005 to 351 last year.

Over the years, the close bilateral cooperation has paved to a wider cooperation scheme and a continuous dialogue on IP between the EU and China in the framework of their EU-China Programme.

The present co-operation project, of which the EPO is the implementing European partner, is dedicated to improving enforcement structures and awareness in China for the benefit of Chinese and European businesses. The project reflects the understanding of both partners of the growing importance of IP rights in business and trade and the need to secure valuable intellectual investments with enforceable rights.

With a budget of well over EUR 16m and scheduled to run for four years, the IPR2 project is particularly ambitious in terms of both its scope and aims. It relies on a strong network of partners in the EU and China, in particular the Chinese Ministry of Commerce.

The dossier in your press files gives you an overview of the project activities in China and the EU.
One recurring theme in this co-operation work has been the protection of intellectual property at trade fairs, the subject of the simulated court proceedings which are taking place in the EU pavilion today. In this simulation, Chinese and European experts will implement enforcement proceedings under their respective legislations, allowing comparing each other’s practices and procedures in a very practical way.

The relations between the EPO and the SIPO will continue to be a decisive factor at a multilateral level too. Our two offices are working together with their partner institutions in Japan, Korea and the US to safeguard the sustainability of the global patent system and to ensure the good quality of patents filed.

Here too, the long-standing and productive co-operation of two partners sharing a joint vision on IP will be of crucial importance.

Thank you for your attention.