

Speech by SJ at Europe Day 2026 reception (English only)

Following is the speech by the Secretary for Justice, Mr Paul Lam, SC, at Europe Day 2026 reception today (May 8):

Ambassador Rouse (Ambassador and Head of Office of the European Union to Hong Kong and Macao, Mr Harvey Rouse), Consulates-General, Deputy Commissioner Li Yongsheng (Deputy Commissioner of the Office of the Commissioner of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region), distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

A very good evening. It is my great pleasure to join you today to celebrate together the Europe Day 2026.

Hong Kong and the European Union (EU) have long been maintaining a strong and close relationship. Let me use our deep economic ties as an example. At present, there are over 1 780 EU-based companies in Hong Kong. In 2025, the total merchandise trade between the two economies has reached HK\$491 billion. Also, as a key entrepot linking the EU with the Chinese Mainland, re-export trade between the two economies through Hong Kong amounted to HK\$293.1 billion.

Just last month, on April 16, our Chief Executive met Ambassador Rouse and other EU representatives, reaffirming a shared commitment to multilateralism, a rule-based international order as well as open co-operation between Hong Kong and the EU. I note that, during the meeting, Ambassador Rouse stressed the importance of embracing Hong Kong's uniqueness as an open and international city where there is full confidence in the rule of law, open debate and the exchange of ideas. I wish to say I concur in entirety. Respect for the rule of law, fundamental human rights and open dialogue are core values which are extremely dear to my heart. They are indeed the key to Hong Kong's success as a genuine international city. While it is perhaps very natural and not surprising that there may be different views between us on some related issues from time to time, there should not be any doubt that we share the same strong and unwavering commitment to uphold these core values. An important point is our willingness and readiness to engage in continuous and constructive dialogue with an open mind.

We always say that Hong Kong acts as a "super-connector" and "super value-adder" between the Chinese Mainland and other jurisdictions. Owing to the unique systematic strengths enjoyed by Hong Kong under the principle of "one country, two systems", I believe it also performs an important role in assisting our country to maintain and enhance a rule-based international order based on mutual respect, peaceful coexistence and win-win co-operation. This is of utmost importance at this challenging time in international relations.

In the recently announced 15th Five-Year Plan, China reiterates its ideal of building a community with a shared future for mankind, and the four vital initiatives to achieve this ideal, namely, the Global Development Initiative, the Global Security Initiative, the Global Civilization Initiative, and the Global Governance Initiative. These are not merely slogans, these are real objectives that our country strives to achieve together with other countries.

In this respect, Hong Kong may contribute in different ways, in particular, by strengthening Hong Kong's status as an international legal and dispute resolution services centre in order to promote the international rule of law. We are honoured to host the headquarters of the International Organization for Mediation (IOMed), the first intergovernmental international legal organisation dedicated to resolving international disputes through mediation, which has started operation since last October. There are now 41 signatory states to the IOMed Convention, out of which 13 have ratified the treaty and become formal contracting states. In fact, more than 1 000 people took part either physically or online at the Global Mediation Summit held today, which is in fact the last day of Mediation Week organised by the Department of Justice (DoJ).

I must also take this opportunity to express my gratitude to the General Assembly of the International Institute for the Unification of Private Law (UNIDROIT), based in Rome, which resolved in last December to establish its Asia-Pacific Liaison Office in Hong Kong by the end of this year. As UNIDROIT's first overseas office outside Rome, it will strengthen regional collaboration and enhance synergies among the leading international legal organisations in this part of the world: they include, inter alia, the Hague Conference on Private International Law - Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific, and the DoJ Project Office for Collaboration with the United Nations Commission on International Trade Law.

To further strengthen Hong Kong's relationship with EU members and international legal organisations, I am considering a trip to Rome and Vienna, where the headquarters of key international legal institutions are located, and perhaps other destinations in continental Europe around early December this year.

The relationship between Hong Kong and EU members of course goes far beyond economic and legal co-operation. I have bought tickets and will definitely attend various exciting cultural events of the French May Arts Festival. And, as a soccer fan, I wish and am confident that European teams will perform well in the World Cup Final in June and July, notwithstanding the fact that it will be played on the American continent!

May I conclude by wishing all of you a very joyful celebration for the Europe Day. Thank you.

Ends/Friday, May 8, 2026