

## **Yearender: China's railway diplomacy unlocks enormous cooperation potential**

by Xinhua writers Wang Haiqing, Shang Jun

BEIJING, Dec. 30 (Xinhua) -- Thanks to tireless promotion by top Chinese leaders, the country's railway industry has seen another year of good harvest in overseas markets in 2015, culminating in the launch of a railway project in Asia and the start of another in Europe at the year end.

Thailand and China launched on Dec. 19 the project of building the railway line linking the Thai capital city of Bangkok with the northeastern city of Nong Khai near Laos, marking the beginning of bilateral cooperation to develop Thailand's first standard-gauge double-track railway line.

The 845-km railway line will be part of the backbone of a trans-Asia rail transportation system.

In Europe on Dec. 23, construction work started for building the Serbian section of the Serbia-Hungary railway line, in the execution of a flagship project between China and the two European countries.

When completed by mid-2017, the 350-km high-speed railway line, undertaken by a Chinese-led consortium, will reduce travel time between Belgrade and Budapest to less than three hours from the current average of eight hours.

The two projects, both promising enormous potential in transforming the landscape of regional cooperation, are only the latest yields from China's railway diplomacy, a strategy aimed at better inter-connectivity and closer cooperation with partner countries.

### **PREMIER AS SUPER SALESMAN**

Since 2013, Chinese leaders have been making unremitting efforts to promote the country's railway technologies and equipment during foreign visits or at multilateral gatherings.

In November this year, Chinese Premier Li Keqiang, regarded as a "super salesman" for the country's railway industry, took leaders from 16 Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries for a bullet-train trip from Suzhou to Shanghai in east China to showcase Chinese technology.

The 20-minute trip, which came at the end of a China-CEE forum, was dubbed as an unprecedented marketing endeavor for China's high-speed railway sector, as it involves so many top foreign leaders.

In May, during an official visit to Brazil, the Chinese premier took a ride on a newly-opened subway line in Rio De Janeiro using China-built trains.

He said during the train ride that China has quality technology and powerful equipment manufacturing capacity in railroad transport, and that China-built products are cost-effective and adaptable to various markets.

### **CHINA RAIL CONNECTS WORLD**

After years of technological upgrade and innovation, China has lifted its high-speed railway technologies to the most advanced level of the world.

It is estimated that by the end of 2015, China's railway mileage will have reached 120,000 km, only second to the United States.

China also boasts the world's biggest high-speed railway network, with its current 16,000 km of high-speed rail lines accounting for more than half of that across the world.

Rails built with Chinese investment have been generating huge economic efficiency in many parts of the world.

In Asia, an artery rail link connecting China, Laos and Thailand is taking shape. The line will significantly reduce logistics expenses for ASEAN nations and facilitate trade and travels in the region.

In Africa, China-built rails have been or will be the backbone of the local public transport system and a key component of growth in a number of countries, including Nigeria and Ethiopia.

In South America, trains made in China are running on the Mitre commuter route in the Argentine capital of Buenos Aires, and also on a subway line in the Brazilian city of Rio De Janeiro.

In Europe, besides the ongoing Serbia-Hungary railway project, Chinese trains will operate soon in Macedonia.

#### COMMON DEVELOPMENT

Railway has become an important component of China's diplomacy after President Xi Jinping brought up in 2013 the initiatives on international cooperation in the construction of the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road (popularly known as the "Belt and Road" initiative) aimed at reviving the ancient Silk Road trade routes spanning Asia, Africa and Europe.

Infrastructure cooperation and enhancement of regional inter-connectivity have been among the priorities in China's implementation of the "Belt and Road" initiative.

China's railway diplomacy also has its root in the fact that China's railway technologies are not only as reliable as those of developed countries, but also more cost-effective.

Building railways abroad and exporting related equipment and technologies lead to all-win situations for both China and its foreign partners, as such cooperation will facilitate China's endeavor to upgrade its national economy and allow partner countries to enjoy all the interests of these projects at lower costs.

Addressing a forum in mid-December, Malaysian Transport Minister Liow Tiong Lai said China's "Belt and Road" initiative and railway cooperation in particular present new opportunities to many countries especially ASEAN.

"The importance of connectivity as a growth driver cannot be underestimated. That is why transport is one of the key sectors for Malaysia-China cooperation, with railway a core focus," he said.

As the Chinese railway industry goes global, there is also room for cooperation between China and developed countries: They may work together to produce high-quality, inexpensive equipment and develop huge markets in third-party countries.

Observers say China's initiatives on international cooperation in building the "Belt and Road" infrastructure networks would facilitate common development, as both initiatives allow participating nations to better tap into their comparative strength.

Huang Bin, a China expert with the Thai think tank Kasikorn Research Center, noted that the railway project between Thailand and China, once completed, could serve as a model for China's "Belt and Road" initiative and demonstrate to the world how such projects can bolster regional economic integration.