

Interest for Belt and Road initiative grows in Italy

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MILAN, Italy, May 3 (Xinhua) -- Awareness about the China-proposed Belt and Road initiative and interest in its long-term benefits on an international level are increasing among Italians, according to local experts.

The initiative, which comprises the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road, was brought up by Chinese President [Xi Jinping](#) in 2013, with the aim of building a trade and infrastructure network connecting Asia with Europe and Africa along the ancient Silk Road routes.

"Since I started my mandate in Beijing around eight months ago, the Belt and Road initiative has been growing in importance," Italian Ambassador to China Ettore [Francesco Sequi](#) told Xinhua earlier this week on the sidelines of a gala dinner organized by the Italy China Foundation in Milan.

Sequi highlighted that various events were being organized in Italy to present the many opportunities offered by the initiative, most notably port infrastructures in the Mediterranean peninsula.

On Tuesday, a conference held at the University of Milan gathered experts from different backgrounds who shared views and experiences about the initiative, which would effect about 4.4 billion people in more than 60 countries.

Alessandra Lavagnino, professor of Chinese language and culture at the University of Milan and co-director of its Confucius Institute, stressed the "economic, geopolitical and cultural" opportunities offered by the Belt and Road initiative that could be capitalized upon by Italy.

"The ancient Silk Road was an important point of reference in our country...and the new Silk Road will become a new driving force especially for young generations, who are studying Mandarin and are closer and closer to China," she told Xinhua.

Among her students is Alberto Gatti, 23, who is writing his degree thesis about the Road and Belt initiative.

Gatti said he hopes the Belt and Road initiative will be closely linked to his professional future. "Young Italians are very curious about China and its development, thus it is very important to make them aware of the opportunities offered by the Belt and Road initiative," he said.

Gianluca Mirante, Italian director at the Hong Kong Trade Development Council (HKTDC), works closely with the Italian entrepreneurial world. "Italian entrepreneurs are looking forward to knowing how they can concretely be involved in the Belt and Road initiative," Mirante told Xinhua on the sidelines of the conference.

"Today we are telling students that the China-proposed initiative gives consideration also to the interests of other countries, and even of my home region, Sardinia," said Francesca Congiu, research fellow of the department of social sciences and institutions at the University of Cagliari.

Sardinia, an island region in southeastern Italy, lacks investments, Congiu said, thus can be helped by the Belt and Road initiative especially as regards young generations.