

VATICAN-CHINA UPDATE

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By: Shan Jie and Zhao Yusha

Negotiations between China and the Vatican on the renewal of the agreement on bishop appointments is proof that the framework has worked well for the past two years, which will help elevate the bilateral relations to the next level, observers said.

China and the Vatican are negotiating the renewal of the provisional agreement on bishop appointments, which is due to expire in September, Bishop Marcelo Sanchez Sorondo, also chancellor of the Vatican's Pontifical Academy of Sciences, confirmed with the Global Times, saying that "they are going to renew it, which means that the initial experience went well."

China and the Vatican signed a two-year provisional agreement on the appointment of bishops in September 2018.

The agreement is due to expire on September 22. Now both sides might be optimistic about renewing the agreement, upgrading it from a temporary agreement to a formal one, Zhan Silu, vice chairman of the Bishops' Conference of the Catholic Church in China and bishop of the diocese of Mindong in East China's Fujian Province, told the Global Times on Wednesday.

It shows both China and the Vatican are satisfied with the framework in the past two years,

when at least two Chinese bishops were ordained by the Pope thanks to the agreement, Zhan said, adding that if it were not for the COVID-19 pandemic, more would have been processed.

Zhan himself was one of seven state-appointed bishops ordained without papal approval, but his appointment was recognized by the Pope in September 2018 as part of the provisional agreement, according to the Vatican's press office.

Meanwhile, Zhan said there would be an opportunity for relations between China and the Vatican to go further with the agreement, which solves the issue of bishop appointment. "The agreement is a key link that secures China-Vatican ties and could help push ties to the next step."

Despite growing controversies between China and the US, the Vatican carried on its important dialogue with China. This is evidence that the Holy See could be a reliable partner and of importance for China, Francesco Sisci, a senior researcher at the Center of European Studies at the Renmin University of China and Vatican affairs expert, told the Global Times on Wednesday.

In February, Chinese State Councilor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi and Archbishop Paul Gallagher, secretary for the Holy See's Relations with States, held a meeting on the sidelines of the Munich Security Conference, the first meeting in half a century between the two countries' foreign ministers.

Wang noted that the China-Vatican deal on appointing bishops was a groundbreaking practice that has brought positive achievements.

Gallagher mentioned the two countries' deal in 2018 concerning the bishop appointments in China and said it was important and beneficial for promoting the welfare of Catholics and the Chinese people.

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