

Ningbo Companies on the Global Stage

China-CEEC Expo: A Decade of Growth and Cooperation in Ningbo

By Jin Yuhan

The 4th China - Central and Eastern European Countries Expo & International Consumer Goods Fair is set to take place in Ningbo from May 22 to 25.

Since hosting the first Central and Eastern European Countries' Products Fair 11 years ago, Ningbo has steadily promoted the growth of the China-CEEC Expo and established the China-CEEC Business Cooperation Demonstration Zone.

Over the years, CEE specialty products have gained traction among Chinese consumers, cross-border business cooperation has extended into new sectors, and professionals from various industries have expanded their international networks. Together, these developments highlight the success of the "Ningbo approach" to China-CEEC cooperation.

A Decade of Growth

The year 2014 marked a turning point for Ningbo's role in China- CEEC cooperation. That June, the city hosted the Central and Eastern European Countries' Products Fair as part of the 13th China International Consumer Goods Fair. Later that year, the Belgrade Guidelines—adopted following the third Meeting of Heads of Government of China and Central and Eastern European Countries—formally named Ningbo as the host of the 2015 China- CEEC Investment and Trade Expo. Five years later, the event was elevated to national-level status, becoming China's only recurring state-level event dedicated to cooperation with Central and Eastern Europe.

The expo's first three editions featured more than 80 high- level activities across trade, investment, customs co-ordination, regional connectivity, and over 10 other sectors. These efforts led to the establishment of more than 50 co-operation platforms supporting China's broader diplomatic initiatives.

Over 3,000 CEE enterprises have since participated, collectively exhibiting more



CEE specialty products. [Photo provided to Ningbo Times]

than 10,000 products. Notable first-time appearances included Hungary's "Magic Wall" and the Czech Republic's Shark Aircraft. The expo has generated over 20 billion yuan in orders, underscoring its role as a key platform for international business cooperation.

As the 4th China-CEEC Expo draws near, Xing Kunlun, head of procurement at Ningbo Detianhou Supply Chain Services Co., Ltd., is busy with preparations. In addition to popular products like Polish detergents and Czech fabric softeners, the company plans to introduce a new item to the Chinese market—Polish canned salmon salad. A full container carrying 100,000 cans is expected to arrive as early as July. According to conservative estimates, Detianhou's imports from CEE countries are projected to exceed 70 million yuan this year. The company has already established links with over ten major CEE suppliers through past expos.

By combining in-person exhibitions with digital showcases, and pairing temporary events with a year-round CEEC Products Permanent Exhibition Pavilion, the expo has become a year-round hub for showcasing and sourcing CEE products.

In operation for a decade, the CEEC Products Permanent Exhibition Pavilion spans 32,000 square meters and houses more than 70 specialized traders and 37 national pavilions. Nearly 5,000 products from across CEE are now available to Chinese buyers year-round.

The Demonstration Zone in Action

Guo Xiao, a veteran trader from Qingtian, Zhejiang with 24 years of experience in Serbia, now calls Ningbo home. Today, he plays a new role—as a "story-teller" at Ningbo's CEEC-CODE, often referred to as the "home base of CEEC cooperation".

"Originally, I just wanted to import products," Guo recalled. "Importing is easy. The real challenge is finding buyers. That's when I realized: people are more likely to buy when they're drawn in by a story." Building on that insight, Guo launched the "Serbia National Pavilion" account on a popular video platform to promote CEE goods. He later founded a travel agency offering one- stop services for business exchange and tourism between China and CEE countries. His latest venture—the Serbia Technology and Tourism Business Center—is slated to open by the

end of May.

Guo's relocation to Ningbo was inspired by the 2017 announcement that the China-CEEC Business Cooperation Demonstration Zone would be established in the city. Today, the zone has become a flagship example of China-CEEC cooperation. Since its establishment, Ningbo's trade with CEE countries has grown at an average annual rate of 18.3%, reaching 56.13 billion yuan in 2024—triple the figure in 2017.

Ningbo also has 19 sister cities in CEE countries; these ties have led to expanding partnerships in education, science and technology, culture, tourism, and more. Ningbo Zhoushan Port has launched shipping routes with five CEE ports. In 2023, container throughput was 2.3 times higher than a decade earlier.

Broadening the Horizon

The 4th China-CEEC Expo is set to spotlight the distinctive charm of Central and Eastern Europe while expanding its global reach. This year's edition will welcome over 400 exhibitors from CEE countries and feature a 15% increase in temporary exhibition space compared to the previous event. For the first time, dedicated exhibition zones will

highlight artificial intelligence and smart equipment, while new CEE brands and digital CEE products are slated to make their China debut.

Lan Yue, General Manager of Ningbo Lantu Trading Company, is already preparing inventory. "I've stocked hundreds of best-selling chocolates and Greek dessert wines," she said. "With products like these, tapping into new markets won't be a problem."

As e-commerce becomes a new driver of growth, Serbia's leading logistics provider, Milsped Group, has been quick to establish a local branch in Ningbo. "The surge in cross-border e-commerce parcels from Ningbo to Serbia has created strong logistics demand," noted the company's sales director.

"We're based in Ningbo, but we're thinking beyond it," said an official from the Ningbo Municipal Bureau of Commerce. "Our goal is to leverage more resources to build a premier platform for showcasing CEE products and expanding imports."

With efforts to build long-term mechanisms that support national-level cooperation, Ningbo is charting a replicable and sustainable course for deepening pragmatic ties between China and CEE countries—from ex-



Ningbo Launches Fast-Track Air Cargo Route for CEE Imports

By Zhao Yu

At 4:50 p.m. on May 15, a shipment of down quilts from Budapest, Hungary, weighing 50 kilograms, arrived at the warehouse of Ningbo Yongze International Trading Co., Ltd. after a four- day journey, transiting through Ezhou, Hubei.

"This is just the beginning. 800 kilograms of Hungarian Tokaji wine are on the way next!" said Wang Shiyu, a representative from the company, as he signed for the delivery.

For Han Jun, Deputy Director of the Ningbo Municipal Bureau of Commerce, this marked a milestone: the first successful shipment under the new "1 Euro Express to China" logistics program. The initiative, spearheaded by the Central and Eastern European (CEE) Commodities Procurement Alliance, aims to dramatically streamline intercontinental trade.

Until now, most imports from CEE countries relied on sea freight, with transit times ranging from 40 days to two months, reducing shelf life and limiting flexibility. Many CEE products also face challenges such as niche market demand and slow turnover, increasing the risk of overstock and tying up capital for importers.

To address these issues, the CEE Commodities Procurement Alliance, headquartered in Ningbo, has partnered with SF Express to develop an innovative logistics solution.

The Alliance, whose 120 + member companies maintain warehousing hubs in Poland, Romania, and Hungary, connects CEE suppliers directly with the Chinese market. By leveraging SF Express's dedicated cargo flights and extensive domestic delivery network, goods can now reach major Chinese cities in a matter of days.

"Dedicated cargo flights offer a major advantage over passenger flights, slashing logistics costs from €1.5 - 2 per kilogram to just €1," said Chen Weijun, Executive President of the Alliance. "This addresses a long-standing pain point in China- CEE trade and allows businesses to confidently source high- value goods like specialty foods."

The express service complements a growing ecosystem of platforms in Ningbo. The CEE Youth Innovation and Entrepreneurship Center and the CEEC Products Permanent Exhibition Pavilion have played key roles in sourcing and trade facilitation.

Now in its tenth year, the Permanent Exhibition hosts more than 70 specialized trading companies and 37 national pavilions, showcasing nearly 5,000 CEE products.

In 2024, Ningbo's agricultural imports from CEE countries reached 230 million yuan, a 13-fold increase from a decade ago. Imports of dairy products and wine surged by 71-fold and 3-fold, respectively, over the same period—figures that underscore the growing appetite in China for premium goods from the region.

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SPOTLIGHT

Svetlana Kuznetsova: Sharing China's Story with the World

By Jin Lu

At the 2025 "Hi China" event, Svetlana Kuznetsova, an international student from Uzbekistan, recited lines from the *Ballad of Mulan* while dressed in a Mulan- inspired outfit. Standing proudly on stage, she shared her journey of studying at Ningbo University.

A lifelong martial arts enthusiast, Svetlana was drawn to Chinese culture through kung fu movies. She is currently completing her degree in International Economics and Trade and is set to graduate this June. During her

studies, she was deeply impressed by the scale and growth of Ningbo's import and export sector. "I've finished all my courses a year early and hope to start a global trade company back home in Uzbekistan," she said.

Svetlana has embraced not only her academic pursuits in China, but also the country's cultural traditions. In 2022, she appeared on CGTN during the Mid- Autumn Festival as a representative of international students, where she shared her experience in China and handed out homemade mooncakes to classmates.

Outside the classroom, Svetlana is an active volunteer. She has participated in a variety of cultural and community events—like the Fenghua Peach Blossom Marathon and local folk heritage workshops—often bringing along classmates and sharing the experiences on social media. "Many of my friends back home are curious about China. I want to help them see the real China," she said.

Svetlana admires the confidence and openness of Chinese youth, especially their enthusiasm for sharing culture through online media. "China



Svetlana Kuznetsova. [Photo by Ying Zhanglei]

is growing stronger, and its young people are proud and expressive," she noted. "To me, it feels like living in 2050."

As she looks ahead,

Svetlana hopes to serve as a bridge between China and Uzbekistan. "I want to tell China's story to the world—together with my Chinese friends."

