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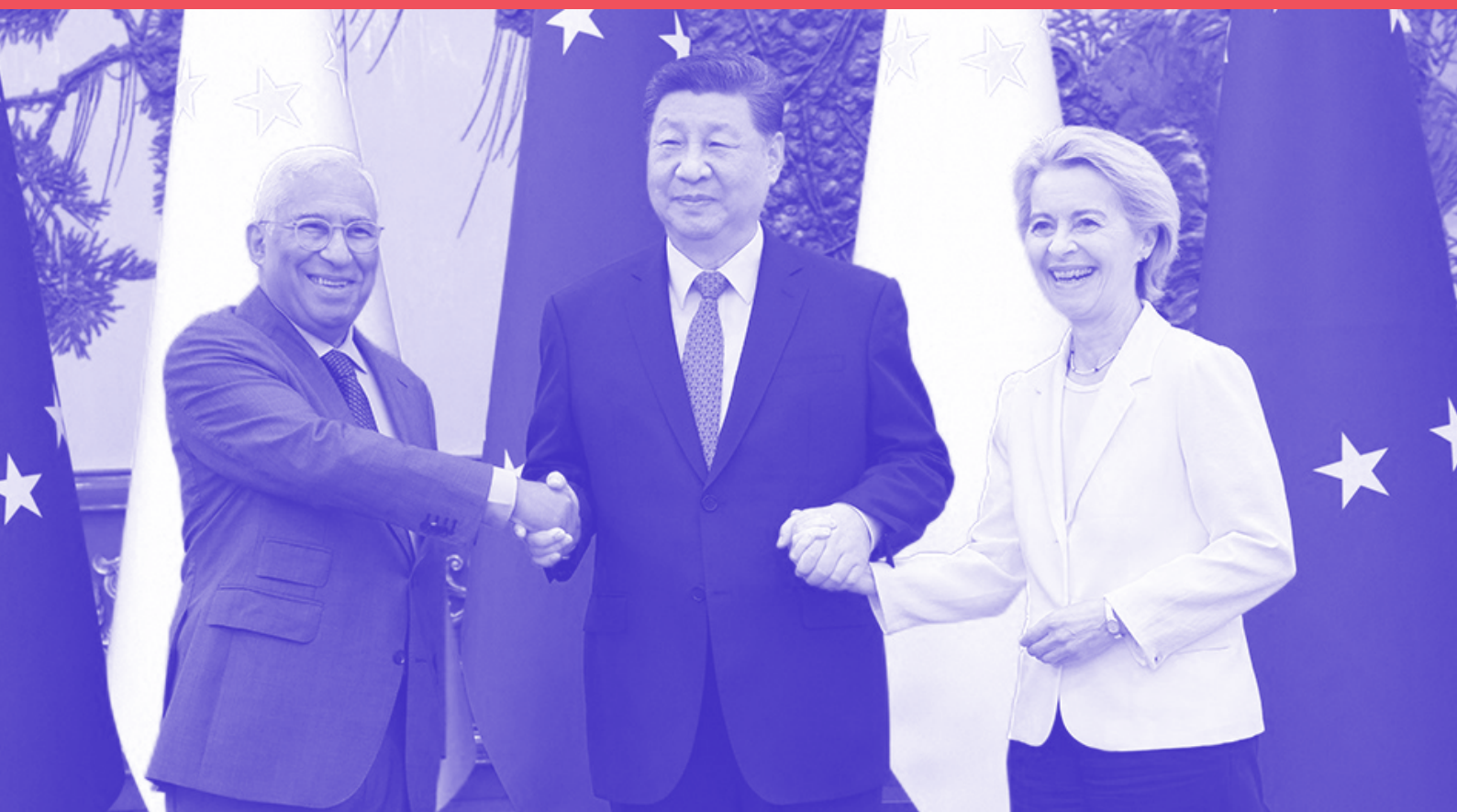
PUBLICATION

The EU-China relationship: 10 guiding principles to move forward in the 21st century



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This publication is an independent output Friends of Europe. Written by Jamie Shea, it outlines a view on what is needed to move forward in the next 50 years of EU-China diplomatic relations. The publication builds up on the messages from Friends of Europe's 2025 Europe China Forum, where European and Chinese officials gathered to discuss how to cooperate better amid geopolitical challenges.

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Introduction: finding the right balance and plotting a steady course

The most important bilateral relationships are always the most difficult to maintain, let alone move forward. This is especially true given the paradox of international relations in the 21st century.

On the one hand, the America First policies of the Trump Administration, which have engendered constant instability in the global trading system and in traditional security arrangements, have made both the EU and China more interested in diversification. Reaching out to each other has been a central plank in their respective diversification efforts given their weight in the global economy and the depth and breadth of their commercial interactions. To reduce dependency on the US market, they need more bilateral trade and greater access to each other's economies. As the US not only pulls up the drawbridge at home but also withdraws from UN agencies and international treaties, the EU and China have to somehow try to fill the gap and work more closely together to build new international coalitions and to seek solutions.

The area of climate change is of primary importance here as the planet heats up at a faster rate, threatening biodiversity, causing more extreme weather events and endangering food, clean water, air quality and the protection of the world's oceans. China has stepped up by offering to host the UN body tasked with implementing the High Seas Treaty (which aims to protect 30% of oceans by 2030) in its port city of Xiamen. Given the EU's commitment to the UN COP process and global carbon emissions reductions (as well as to the decarbonisation of its own economy), Brussels and Beijing should naturally lead global action on climate change moving forward.

Yet on the other hand, a diversification away from dependency on the US can also lead to greater frictions in the EU-China relationship. They are both now competing more actively to gain advantage in third markets. Products that can no longer be sold in the US can be exported to Europe or China instead, at discounted prices, distorting traditional markets and making home products less competitive. There are fears in Europe regarding de-industrialisation as companies relocate to China or can no longer sell their products into the Chinese market, shedding jobs in companies that were once emblematic national champions.

Germany alone lost 124,000 manufacturing jobs in 2025. Yet just as Volkswagen is moving production to China, so the Chinese company, Nexperia, is building chip manufacturing plants in Germany. Both wish to benefit from local technology and to get around divergent standards and regulations. At home, protectionist barriers are going up as both the EU and China seek to shield key industries and public procurement markets in both manufacturing and digital services, and to impose minimum standards for Buy European or Buy Chinese components in industries receiving state subsidies.

The Commission's proposal for an EU Industrial Accelerator Act is a case in point.

Along with subsidies, there are concerns regarding regulatory barriers going up (and whether these are motivated primarily to suppress fair competition) or currencies being manipulated for unfair advantage. These domestic pressures are making balanced trade and market access more difficult for both sides and tariffs are not just a monopoly of the Trump administration.

Critical supply chains also remain a key concern, as both the EU and China depend on each other for vital materials: rare earths from China in the case of Europe and advanced computer chips or telecoms components from the EU in the case of China. These supply chains can be subject to political pressure, including sanctions, and to sudden disruptions, leading to debates as to whether to continue with those traditional supply chains or build entirely new ones with more domestic capability and different foreign suppliers. Both Brussels and Beijing have gone through these debates in recent times.

Some will want to double down on the relationship, with more long-term investment, others will argue for de-risking and less engagement. Some will advocate linkage, arguing that the EU should, for instance, use its economic leverage to push Beijing on human rights while some in China will link trade access to alignment with Beijing's stance on Taiwan and limiting diplomatic and commercial ties with the island, especially arms supplies. But other officials and experts will say that the EU-China relationship should be compartmentalised so that the inevitable complexities and difficult negotiations in the commercial area do not derail essential cooperation on global issues such as regional conflicts, climate change, space exploration, maritime safety and non-proliferation. One issue must not be allowed to override all the others, but this is more easily achieved if Brussels-Beijing contacts take place regularly and across a broad front and multiple channels.

Annual summits are good but not sufficient in themselves.

In sum, the imperative towards diversification does not mean that EU-China relations are destined to improve automatically. Both sides have other options. For instance, the latest EU trade pact is with India and that is the country that Chancellor Merz of Germany visited first (before going to Beijing) on his recent trip to Asia. Previously the EU was engaging Mercosur. Meanwhile, China has been exporting more to partners in Asia, Africa and Latin America as well as agreeing a trade deal with Canada. So, the importance of the Chinese market for the EU and vice versa can go down as well as up. Moreover, as both sides try to engage more with each other, reality is not always in line with expectations. European leaders visit Beijing or Chinese leaders come to Europe with considerable political and media interest but often return home with only modest results. Increased engagement inevitably means that different groups in both Europe and China have different priorities and will lobby governments for different interests, not always compatible. In such a complex environment with so many difficult issues on the table to be managed at the same time, it is all too easy for everything to be a priority or for Beijing and Brussels to have conflicting agendas. The EU-China relationship will then underperform as it falls into a syndrome of two steps forward and one step back or hits a plateau requiring constant resets, relaunches or fresh charm offensives from both Beijing and Brussels. The challenge is to break out of this well-known syndrome, or circular pattern in the relationship and take it durably and decisively to a new qualitative level of productive dialogue, impactful cooperation and mutual benefit.

First and foremost, this will require firm and consistent leadership and the time and effort to engage on both the EU and China sides. But it might be useful too if Brussels and Beijing could agree on a baseline set of principles to guide their relationship moving forward and to serve as guardrails against the disruptive forces that come from both inside and outside Europe, as well as inside China that will try to put the occasional obstacle in its path. Yet the principles will only prove useful if, once agreed, the EU and China give them similar importance and stick resolutely to them.

Herewith 10 such principles to set the relationship on a steadier and more consistent course:

1. The starting point: keep talking because no issue can be resolved without diplomacy and dialogue.

A stable and predictable relationship between the EU and China is the goal which serves the interests of both sides. It promotes mutual investments, increases market access for goods and services and helps to foster a level playing field for trade. It is therefore the best basis for the EU and China to contribute optimally to each other's economic growth and prosperity. Regular political dialogue based on EU-China summits, frequent Ministerials and mutual visits help the EU and China to understand each other better, avoid crises and surprises, and to cooperate more effectively on global challenges where their interests and strategic concerns coincide. The EU and China agree that they are not seeking to diminish each other's role and influence on the world stage through a classic strategy of containment nor to change each other's political system. They will ground their relations in mutual respect and, in their official interactions, engage each other professionally without recourse to inflated rhetoric or "Wolf Warrior" style public communications.

2. Competition, constraint and cooperation: striking a difficult balance.

Given China's increasing power and role on the global stage, and the multifaceted ways in which the country is impacting the EU's economy, politics, security and external affairs as it becomes stronger and more influential, the EU-China relationship will never be a simple or easy one to manage. A complex basket of issues will require different policy responses at the same time. Inevitably the relationship will be comprised of competition, and occasionally pushback and constraint, as both

Brussels and Beijing find themselves on opposite sides of the argument or feel the need to counter specific actions or policies, which undermine their economic or military security. China's support for Russia in its war against Ukraine or European freedom of navigation operations alongside the US in the South China Sea or the Taiwan Strait are examples. But neither side has an interest in allowing unfettered competition or pushback to dominate the relationship and to prevent cooperation going forward in areas where the EU and China can identify a common agenda. Balance across the many and various policy baskets needs to be maintained to prevent zero-sum , winner-takes-all outcomes. Over time, the objective of the relationship is to move as many issues into the basket of cooperation as possible and to minimise the points of friction. Strategic level statesmanship from the top as well as the ability of senior officials to communicate with each other openly and regularly will be needed to break deadlocks, find compromises and push the relationship forward.

3. Human rights and democratic norms cannot be sidelined.

The EU is an institution which asserts the rule of law, democratic values and respect for human rights. It practices freedom of speech and religion and the protection of minorities. China has a different conception of these basic principles and how they should be applied. It often rejects criticism of its treatment of the Uighurs, Tibetans, Hong Kong democracy activists or the arbitrary detention of foreign nationals as illegitimate and unwarranted interference in its internal affairs. Yet in its relationship with China, the EU will steadfastly defend its values and standards, including those set out in the Universal Declaration on Human Rights and other core UN documents, and not refrain from raising its concerns in its dialogue with Beijing. The European Parliament, representing electorates in all 27 EU member states, has a particular role to play here. The EU recognises that its attachment to democratic norms and human rights will be an ongoing constraint in its relationship with China even if European diplomats must be realistic about how much leverage the EU has here. The EU will not conduct a relationship based on pure transnationalism but the absence of dialogue will not change the human rights situation in China either. Clearly, to the extent that China is prepared to hear the EU's concerns and act upon them, the scope for a productive and trusting EU-China relationship will increase significantly. Yet even where progress is limited the dialogue must continue.

4. Upholding the rules-based international order. Moving from rhetoric to action.

The EU is also committed to a rules-based international order that upholds the sovereignty and independence of all states (large, medium and small). As an open trading area with a global diplomatic presence and economic relations on all five continents, the EU relies especially on a rules-based international order and has worked for decades to consolidate and strengthen that order. China also professes its commitment to the rules-based order. Its membership of the WTO in 2001 was a key factor in the country's economic lift-off and rapidly growing trade outflows.

China has repeatedly reaffirmed its support of the principles of the UN Charter, international law and the territorial sovereignty of UN member states as well as the inviolability of state borders. Like the EU, it has condemned unprovoked acts of aggression and the illegal seizure of national territories. Moreover, Beijing did not use its veto in the UN Security Council to try to block international interventions to uphold human rights in Kosovo, Libya or Afghanistan after the 9/11 terrorist attacks nor to prevent the deployment of NATO stabilisation forces in Afghanistan, Kosovo or Bosnia.

Despite periodic tensions in the EU-China relationship, Brussels and Beijing have long identified their special responsibility to work together to uphold the rules-based order at a time when it has been under threat from the America First and power politics approach of the current US administration. The US has slashed its funding for international relief and humanitarian assistance, shuttered USAID and its overseas broadcasting stations, cut its financial contribution to international organisations and withdrawn from over 60 UN agencies and programmes, including the WHO, Human Rights Council and the UN Framework on Climate Change, not to mention the 2015 Paris Agreement on global warming. Also, there is of course the current international concerns expressed at the highest level of the UN of the flaunting of the international rules-based order in the context of the Israel – Palestine conflict in which the US is directly implicated. Russia too has become a revisionist power which has openly repudiated resolutions by the UN General Assembly, launched a war of aggression, violated over 100 international treaties and conventions and embraced a policy of spheres of influence in which might is right. So, the EU and China are today the principal poles of economic power and global outreach on which a renewed rules-based order can rest. Think tanks, including Friends of Europe, have laboured long and hard to develop proposals for joint EU-China action on the global stage, and there has been no shortage of ideas. For instance:

- how to involve China more in the resolution of regional conflicts where Beijing has interests and could play a useful role (for instance Ukraine, where China appointed a Special Envoy, or Sudan or Yemen or the Cambodia-Thailand border clashes). China usefully mediated the normalisation of diplomatic relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia;

- further targets for the reduction of global CO2 emissions within the UN COP process;

- an international convention to stop over-fishing;

- rules to prevent the militarisation of space like an anti-satellite treaty or a satellite collision early warning system;

- an initiative to strengthen UN peacekeeping by funding, training and equipping peacekeeping missions and providing logistical and transportation support. China has increased its participation in UN peacekeeping, sending units to Africa;

- further work on AI safety and norms (China participated in the first AI Safety Summit held in the UK in 2023 and in follow-up meetings);

- a UN Convention on Cybersecurity to mandate the protection of critical civilian infrastructure and promote responsible state behaviour and the authority of international law in cyberspace;

- cooperation in preparing the Review Conferences of the UN Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty (NPT) to strengthen international safeguards against clandestine nuclear weapons activities;

- international maritime security against piracy focusing on major sea lanes such as the Gulf of Aden or the Malacca Straits, including the establishment of an international tribunal to prosecute those involved in piracy;

- reinforcing the WHO's global infectious disease monitoring system and rapid joint assistance to countries experiencing outbreaks to contain the spread of diseases (for example, Ebola in Africa);

- more cooperation on organised crime (narcotics, counterfeits, contraband, art trafficking, money laundering, prostitution and migrant smuggling and front organisations hiding criminal activities);

- protection and preservation of historic monuments and cultural heritage sites.

China and the EU are both in the G20 and this could be a good forum to bring in other key players to contribute to (and co-fund) EU-China global initiatives. India, South Africa, Brazil and Canada could be valuable partners extending the global impact of any such initiatives. But the key thing is for both China and the EU to move beyond the exchange of ideas and declarations of intent in speeches towards real joint action backed by political will and resources. On the Chinese side, there is a tendency for political leaders and diplomats to describe the rules-based order in very general terms and to repeat over again Beijing's commitment to concepts such as sovereignty, non-interference, international law and the peaceful resolution of disputes. Yet these principles are more credible if they are applied concretely to specific situations. Policy initiatives also need to be followed up with specific programmes and clear, measurable commitments as well as staff and budgets. The EU needs to pin Beijing down to specific commitments on safeguarding the rules-based order and to taking concrete, deliverable initiatives to demonstrate its good faith. There needs to be less talk and more action on both sides.

5. Competing harder and innovating better.

The EU must not see economic and technological competition with China as a zero-sum game of winners and losers. Nor should it use excessive protectionism to shut Chinese goods and services out of its markets. Its aim should be to open up the Chinese market rather than deny Beijing access to its own. To do this, it needs to examine the factors that account for China's rapid growth and economic successes and learn from them. The value of competition is to motivate the EU to look at its own declining competitiveness and to identify weaknesses in education, science, technology and engineering that need to be remedied. Chinese competition is one forceful reason (among others) for the EU to get its own house in order. China's massive investment in infrastructure such as its long-distance high-speed train network and roll-out of green technology and energy renewables is not necessarily a strict model for the EU to imitate as the EU will choose different financing methods (based more on private sector investment and public-private partnerships). But in its pursuit of higher economic growth rates, and how to modernise its economy and infrastructure, the EU can learn from China's experience in innovation and

industrial policy in both its positive and less successful aspects (for instance, excessive subsidies to industries, inadequate consumer protection and building safety standards, industrial over-capacity as in steel production or inflated property markets).

6. Setting and benchmarking key economic, trade and technology objectives to assess progress in the relationship.

In taking their relationship forward, the EU and China should set a number of objectives that can serve as yardsticks of tangible progress and achieve greater parity and mutual benefits from the relationship. There are of course many such objectives that the EU could propose. For instance:

- Better protection of patents and intellectual property rights;
- better data protection and more transparent and enforceable mechanisms for the handling and storage of industrial and personal data;
- refraining from cyber-attacks against critical infrastructure, governments and companies and the use of cyber tools for industrial espionage and intellectual property theft;
- improving legal protections for EU companies and citizens operating in China
- fostering more China-EU joint ventures;
- setting clear EU-wide and China foreign direct investment rules;
- locating more manufacturing and industrial production in each other's territory;
- prevention of dumping of industrial goods or consumer products at below cost and market prices to obtain monopoly advantages;
- tighter rules to govern technology transfer and rules on transfer or diversion of technology to unauthorised third parties;
- guaranteeing key supply chains, for instance in the supply of rare earths and critical minerals and metals;
- clamping down on organised crime and criminal networks as well as the narcotics trade and the illicit trade in counterfeit goods and unregulated cryptocurrencies and money laundering;
- easing rules that restrict access to public procurement balancing open competition with security or anti-monopoly requirements;
- rebalancing EU-China trade. In 2025 China had a US$1.19tn trade surplus with the rest of the world despite US tariffs. This represented one-fifth less trade with the US but was offset by a marked increase with the rest of the world. It is the

largest trade surplus in the country's history. The EU trading deficit with China was US$300bn in 2024;

- establishing a level playing field in trade relations through better market surveillance rules. Chinese goods entering the EU market need to comply with EU quality and safety standards;

- reducing state subsidies and other trade distortions.

The next EU-China Summit could select some of these proposals as part of a future joint programme (along the lines of the Trade and Technology Council that the EU operated with the US during the Biden Administration). It is important that the objectives be realistic, achievable within a 12-month timeframe and be areas where both China and the EU are prepared to engage seriously and demonstrate reciprocity.

7. China and the EU must not directly undermine each other's security

China and the EU must recognise their shared responsibility, accountability and mutuality for each other's security. The war in Iran is a case in point of how both the EU and China can and should cooperate and collaborate in finding solutions. However, both need to understand and respect certain red lines which are underpinned by values, international law and a commitment to a rules-based world.

There has to be a recognition that the war in Ukraine is one of the most significant active aggressions on Europe's doorstep, and this has a deep impact on its own security and also on its role as an arbiter of international rules, freedoms and human rights. It is critical that there is an understanding of this and that effective diplomatic dialogue is used to address this red line for Europe.

There will always be perspectives on what each party should or could do, but the importance of a future-facing principle is that dialogue, both frank and free, is enabled with a view to creating a shared understanding of these red lines, motivated by a desire to explore and identify solutions.

The current global political and geopolitical security environment is the most insecure, vulnerable and unpredictable since the end of the Second World War. Both parties need to remember the opportunity, stability, and economic and social viability that peace reflects. Dialogue of retribution and public political rhetoric can lead to unfortunate and unforeseen repercussions which may ultimately lead to aggression and dismantle a peaceful world order in the future. Both parties therefore have to recognise, given their scale, size, reach and global importance, that they have the responsibility to be arbiters of peace and work as hard as they can not to undermine each other's security.

Ukraine and the current war in Iran will continue to strain relationships. In the absence of open and free dialogue on the future security of Europe and the importance of a rights-based approach to safety, both sides will have to find pathways through diplomacy to understand each other's positions.

A key example of a future security issue is space exploration.

China and the EU have recently launched a joint space mission to study how the Earth's magnetic field shields the planet from harmful solar radiation. This is a project of the European Space Agency (ESA) and the Chinese Academy of Sciences known as Smile, which was first agreed in 2016. ESA and the China National Space Administration have not yet agreed on a follow-up to this rare instance of international space collaboration. Perhaps the usual obstacles over export controls on sensitive technology, safety regulations and technical problems have deterred them. At the strategic level, Beijing and Brussels could provide the impetus here.

Also, freedom of navigation in the principal sea lanes of communication is important to global trading entities like the EU and China, reliant – although at different extents – on global supply chains for their business and industrial models. This is the case for key transit routes such as the South and East China Seas and the Taiwan Strait. On the other hand, the US war against Iran and the closure of the Strait of Hormuz has presented an opportunity for China and the EU to cooperate in upholding freedom of passage in this waterway, which is key to the oil and gas imports of both and where clearly a broad international coalition of nations will be needed to protect commercial shipping.

There is thus a need for more communication between Brussels and Beijing on the threats (current and potential) that each perceives as coming from the other and for an agreement on the prevention of dangerous incidents at sea and in the air.

8. Diplomatic relations should be open and transparent

Trusted diplomacy has to be at the core of EU-China relations. Finger-pointing about the abuses and excesses of covert operations will not enable and foster trustworthy diplomacy. At the end of the day, it is a two-way street. In the world we are living in, covert operations have become a global phenomenon. However, in a spirit of a future-focused diplomatic framework based on trust, agreeing to rules and continuous dialogue, increasing transparency and therefore building greater trust.

To avoid regular frictions and mutual accusations of underhand and even hostile activity in the relationship it would be useful for the EU and China to agree to rules and a code of conduct for political lobbying activities on each other's territories to ensure transparency and the proper identity of the people engaged in these activities. Diplomats posted by China in EU member states and by the latter in China should conform to standard and accepted diplomatic practice.

In this regard, in recent years China has sought to increase the number of diplomats that it posts to the EU member states and other Western countries. It would be helpful to the relationship if China would agree on the basis of reciprocity to more diplomats from the EU (EEAS and national) being posted to Beijing and to the creation and strengthening of consulates in the major Chinese cities (including Hong Kong).

9. No surprises: the EU and China need a high-level consultation mechanism to manage crises where both have a stake.

In a globalised international community events in one country can have a big impact on others, if not globally. We have seen this in recent times with extreme weather events such as storms or flooding impacting global supply chains for spare parts or consumer electronics, or the adoption of sanctions or export restrictions on energy, food, raw materials or vaccines with little or no warning. Sometimes too, with government announcements following in quick succession, there can be confusion about what exactly has been decided or what the timelines or conditions for the implementation of these measures will be.

China can also react suddenly (and in the eyes of EU officials disproportionately) when it is displeased at certain actions by EU member states or EU politicians. The trade embargo imposed on Lithuania after it allowed a trade office from Taiwan to open in Vilnius or sanctions imposed on MEPs after visiting Taiwan or discussing human and minority rights in China are a case in point. There will inevitably be points of friction from time to time but the objective is to manage them diplomatically without unnecessary escalation and derailing the broader EU-China relationship.

With this aim in mind, the EU and China need a better early warning mechanism or No Surprises policy to enable them to consult earlier and better on emerging developments (like viruses or changes to tax rules or import and export or investment regulations). This early warning mechanism or the equivalent of a Brussels-Beijing hot line could apply to political issues as well. Of course, both sides are sovereign and will take the decisions or adopt the measures that they see fit but a crisis consultative mechanism led by the Commission and the EEAS in Brussels linked directly to the Central National Security Commission under President Xi in Beijing could be helpful to clarify situations early and seek avenues of de-escalation.

10. Increasing society-to-society contacts: more needs to be done here.

Up to now, communication between the EU and China has largely been at the government level involving ministers, officials and diplomats conveying official positions. Yet if the EU-China relationship is to develop over the long term, civil society has to be included too in order to build greater understanding between peoples and societies. Therefore, contacts have to be extended to levels below government, such as cities, universities, research institutes, arts companies and philanthropic foundations. Town twinning is a concept that has worked well in binding the EU member states closer together from the 1960s onwards. Student exchanges and scholarships (as exemplified in the EU's Erasmus programme) can help to form future leaders who better understand each other's countries and cultures. Artistic groups and performers can tour more widely and Ministers of Culture and Education from both the EU member states and China meet more frequently to discuss cooperation. Historical anniversaries of significant events in China in which Europeans had a role can be used to give European audiences a better sense of China's long and complex history and the role European countries played for good and frequently for bad. Museum exchanges are also a tried and tested method of raising public interest in national cultures and artistic achievements. Here a certain degree of imagination and creativity as well as the engagement of financial resources to subsidise these exchanges and support academic and research

fellowships is required of both sides. Something along the lines of the Fulbright Programme for short-term academic exchanges.

China has of course been investing heavily in this area with its Confucius Institutes overseas, which have spearheaded the teaching of the Chinese language. Leading European universities also have no shortage of Chinese students. What is needed is more efforts on the EU side to increase the European civilian presence in China by establishing more educational and cultural programmes. But China can play an important role here too by providing a truly welcoming environment for EU citizens who travel to China to learn about the country and in many cases to contribute their experience and expertise to Chinese society. Reassuring government messaging backed up by credible legal protections for EU citizens to encourage them to take up opportunities in China will help as well. Tourism too is the way that most EU and Chinese citizens discover foreign countries. Whether tourism really enhances international understanding and deep knowledge of foreign countries and cultures is a long running debate. Nonetheless, increased tourism in both directions is a necessary but insufficient condition for creating better mutual awareness of societies and cultures.

Certain EU member states have networks of public diplomacy and track two political dialogue vis-à-vis China. For instance, the German political party foundations or cultural and language institutes such as the Alliance Francaise and the Goethe Institute. The EU could carry out a study of the impact of these different organisations in terms of building bridges between the EU and China and provide recommendations for discussion with member states and the European Parliament on how they can be reinforced and complemented by other initiatives.

Finally, a word on public broadcasting. China has considerably stepped up its global broadcasting outreach. CGTN reaches an audience of 200 million according to the network and 62 million via Facebook, although these figures are hard to verify. It broadcasts in three European languages (English, French and Spanish) and is easily accessible on cable and online. The EU should discuss with Chinese ministers and officials ways to facilitate the operations of European media organisations in China. Again, reciprocity in access, ability to operate and treatment by the authorities must be the objective. China is rightly proud of its 5000-year civilisation and its rich culture and should not be wary of opening its doors further to share that immense legacy with others, including enterprising and curious Europeans. Beijing recently granting visa-free travel to EU citizens for 30 days is a good step forward in this regard.

Conclusion: broadening the circle of experience for better policymaking

The EU is not the only democratic entity striving to improve its relationship with China in a climate of uncertainty. The EU's partners across the globe, such as Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Korea, Japan and the United Kingdom have been in the same situation with many leaders making high-visibility trips to Beijing to try to reboot their bilateral relations with China after highly publicised incidents and disputes, which froze those relations

for long periods. They have sought new trade agreements, lower tariffs, more business opportunities and cooperation in other areas.

Given that the EU has concluded security agreements with these democratic partners over the past two years, it makes sense for the EU to make the exchange of experience and lessons learned from China engagement a central element of future consultations under the new security agreements. For instance, cybersecurity, Chinese direct investment flows, political influence and interference, market access or confidence building through more military-to-military contacts. Such consultations and information sharing can undoubtedly help both the EU and China to finetune and adjust the ways they implement the guiding principles for conducting their relationship going forward. A common, synchronised approach would also provide both parties greater leverage in working with powerful global actors either emerging, longstanding, in the changing circumstances of global powers including the US

Yet the US and Israeli war against Iran with its financial, economic and energy repercussions across Asia and Europe also makes direct engagement with China even more important and urgent. Both Europe and China will need to stabilise a Middle East that Washington and Jerusalem have signally failed to do while handling the shockwaves in terms of trade routes and supply chains, secure energy and raw material flows and predictable trade relations free of excessive tariffs and political weaponisation. The current situation and circumstances in the Middle East and how this crisis was precipitated further reinforce the need for a strong concordat between the EU and China based on the guiding principles set out herein, to maintain and enhance future diplomatic relations fit for a future world that will be increasingly unpredictable, unstable and multi-polar.

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