EU-China relations

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The Committee on Foreign Affairs adopted the own-initiative report by Bastiaan Belder (ECR, NL) on EU-China relations. It noted that 2015 marks the 40th anniversary of diplomatic relations between the EU and China. The EU-China Strategic Partnership is of key importance to relations between the EU and China and to finding mutual answers to a range of global concerns.

EU-China Strategic Partnership and Cooperation: the report welcomed the 40th anniversary of diplomatic relations between the EU and China as a source of inspiration to strengthen the Strategic Partnership, and to speed up the ongoing negotiations for a new Partnership and Cooperation Agreement based on trust, transparency and respect for human rights. It stressed the need for EU Member States to **speak with one voice to the Chinese Government**, particularly in view of Beijing's present reshaping of the global governance architecture. In this respect, Members:

- looked forward to a close cooperation of the EU with the **Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank** (AIIB) but regretted the lack of close coordination at EU level regarding several Member States' membership of the AIIB;
- stressed the importance of trade and investment policy, as the most obvious area to exert maximum leverage in the strategic relationship with China;
- took note of the recently developed cooperation between China and Central and Eastern European countries, also known as the **16+1 group**, which includes several EU Member States, but considered that this should not divide the EU or weaken its position vis-à-vis China and should also address human rights issues.

Members called on the European External Action Service and the Commission to submit an **annual report** to Parliament on the development of EU-China relations. The EEAS was asked to ensure that human rights are high on the agenda in relations and dialogues with China.

The report went on to underline the importance of the **Bilateral Investment Agreement** (BIT) between the EU and China currently under negotiation. It called, inter alia, for a fully-fledged **sustainable development** chapter to be included in the BIT, which provides for binding commitments with respect to ILO **core labour standards** and key **Multilateral Environmental Agreements**. Whilst welcoming the fact that over the last decades a considerable number of Chinese citizens have been lifted out of extreme poverty thanks to substantial economic growth, Members voiced, nonetheless, their concern that these economic improvements often cause environmental problems and great inequalities.

They also recalled that the EU Ombudsman in her draft recommendation adopted on 26 March 2015 criticised the absence of a human rights impact assessment in relation to the **Investor-State Dispute Settlement mechanism** in the negotiations for a trade and investment agreement with Vietnam. Members noted that this sets an important precedent for the negotiations for the EU-China Bilateral Investment Agreement.

Internal situation: the committee observed that China’s **human rights record remained a matter of serious concern.** It discussed the adoption of several pieces of repressive legislation, including the draft Foreign NGO Management Law, and the new draft law on cybersecurity. Members called on the European Council, the EEAS and the Commission to continue to complain forcefully to the Chinese authorities against these highly controversial measures.

They expressed concern at the recent political and civil unrest in Hong Kong, and called on China to abide by its obligations to the people of Hong Kong to preserve their rights and freedoms.

External situation: the committee noted that since its launch President Xi's 'Chinese Dream' of national rejuvenation foresees a more proactive role for China in the world. It encouraged the VP/HR to **explore the possibilities of developing a common approach to China with the US** wherever this would contribute to advancing EU interests. It noted the priority given by President Xi's presidency to the relationship with the US, given his proposal for a 'new type of major power relationship' between China, the US and other regional actors. Members favoured a **more constructive approach to a new world orde** r which China should help construe and integrate, one founded on the universal values of human rights, democracy and human security. Members called on the **EU to be more active in Asia**, and to cooperate with China, the US and other regional actors for more stability in the region.

Members went on to discuss the **expansion of the Chinese navy**, calling for a balanced attitude, to avoid worries on the part of China's neighbours and more tension in the Pacific and Indian Oceans and to guarantee Europe's crucial interest in freedom of navigation on the seas. They called on the VP/HR to identify the risks to peace and security in the region as well as globally should armed conflict arise in the **East and South China Seas**, in line with the priorities set forth in the European Maritime Security Strategy, what risks this would entail for the freedom and safety of navigation in the region, and what risks exist there to specific European interests.

The Chinese Government was urged to use all its levers of influence to ensure **stability in the Korean peninsula** and to induce North Korea to return to credible denuclearisation talks.

Human rights situation: Members noted the recent worsening of the situation of human rights in China started in 2013 and has intensified an already existing crackdown over the population. They were concerned that in the official Chinese view, the **universality of human rights is questioned on grounds of cultural differences,** and that this has led to lack of understanding and distrust in EU-China relations. They called, therefore, on the Chinese leadership to reconsider and to **respect the universality of human rights** and on the EU institutions to work together with the Chinese authorities in their dialogues in order to advance respect for universality.

Members want on to state their concern that **China is currently the world's largest executioner** and continues to impose the death penalty in secret on thousands of people annually. They were also deeply concerned that the Chinese government is continuing its **hardline policies against the Tibetan people**, especially by rejecting the Dalai Lama's 'Middle Way Approach' which seeks neither independence nor separation but a genuine autonomy within the framework of the Chinese Constitution. They called for the Chinese government to re-enter into a dialogue with Tibetan representatives.

Cross-strait relations: Members advocated negotiating a **bilateral investment agreement between the EU and Taiwan**, given that Taiwan was, at regional level, the best gateway to China for EU businesses and that numerous states – including China – have concluded such (de facto) agreements with Taiwan.

Whilst commending the acceptance by the Chinese government of Taiwan's participation in some UN organisations (WHO, ICAO), the committee expressed its concern at the Chinese government's reaffirmation of the **2005 Anti-Secession Law** that allows for the use of military means in the case of a declaration of independence by Taiwan. It felt that a gradual demilitarisation of the region would further facilitate the rapprochement of the parties, emphasising that **all cross-strait disputes should be settled by peaceful means** on the basis of international law.