EU-China relations

2015/2003(INI) - 16/12/2015 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted by 554 votes to 50, with 99 abstentions, a resolution on EU-China relations.

Parliament 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: Parliament 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, Parliament:

- 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.

Parliament 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 resolution 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, Parliament voiced, nonetheless, its concern that these economic improvements often cause environmental problems and great inequalities.

It 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. Parliament noted that this sets an important precedent for the negotiations for the EU-China Bilateral Investment Agreement.

Internal situation: Parliament 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. It called on the European Council, the EEAS and the Commission to continue to complain forcefully to the Chinese authorities against these highly controversial measures.

Members 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. They strongly supported '**One country, two systems**' as a basis for good relations between the Special Administrative Regions of Hong Kong and Macao and mainland China.

External situation: Parliament noted that since its launch President Xi's 'Chinese Dream' of national rejuvenation foresees a stronger and 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 stressed:

- that China's persistent rise as a global power requires a continuous and rapid reconsideration of Europe's strategic priorities in its relations with China, as a matter of urgency;
- the need for a world power like China to contribute, in a globalised and interdependent context and in a more active and constructive manner, to confronting global challenges and regional conflicts and to attaining a multilateral world order that respects international law, universal values and peace.

It considered that China should increasingly take its place among the world's leading countries, acting according to the rules set for all.

Parliament also 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. It favoured a more constructive approach to a new world order which China should help construe and integrate, one founded on the universal values of human rights, democracy and human security. **It 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.

China Sea: Parliament stated that it remains alarmed at the escalating tension between parties in the South China Sea and **called, therefore, on all parties involved to avoid unilateral provocative actions in the South China Sea**. It stressed the importance of peaceful settlement of disputes, based on international law and with the help of impartial international mediation such as the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS).

It considered it regrettable that China refuses to acknowledge the jurisdiction of both UNCLOS and the Court of Arbitration. It considered that a way forward for a possible peaceful resolution of the tension in the areas of the South and East China Seas is the **negotiation and joint implementation of codes of conduct for the peaceful exploitation of the maritime areas in question**, including the establishment of safe trade routes and quotas for fishing or attribution of areas for resource exploration.

Parliament also welcomed the agreement reached recently between China and ASEAN to speed up consultations on a Code of Conduct for the disputes in the South China Sea and it took note of Taiwan's 'South China Sea Peace Initiative' aimed at reaching a consensus on a code of conduct and the establishment of a mechanism allowing all sides to cooperate in the joint exploitation of natural and marine resources in the region; supports all actions enabling the South China Sea to become a 'Sea of Peace and Cooperation'.

Members invited 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, 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 is 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** and take concrete steps to **denuclearise**.

The resolution recalled that China remains North Korea's most important ally, and therefore Parliament encouraged the Chinese government, together with the international community, to play a constructive role in urgently addressing the dire human rights situation in North Korea, including dealing with the thousands of **North Korea refugees** who cross the border into China fleeing appalling conditions at home.

Further salient international issues: Parliament urged the Chinese government to exert influence on Pakistan to persuade that country to refrain from fuelling instability in the region. It regretted the fact that China, in partnership with Russia, has continuously blocked UN action on Syria, where a deadly war is being waged by Bashar al Assad on the Syrian people, for over four years now. It underlined the importance of mutual trust and cooperation between China and the EU and the other key international actors to **tackle global security issues**. Members hope that China will offer its support to the EU- and US-led initiatives aiming at ending the breaches of international law causing the **conflict in Eastern Ukraine** and at restoring the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Ukraine after Russia's aggression.

Human rights situation: Parliament 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. It noted its concern 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. It 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.

Parliament went on to state its concern that **China is currently the world's largest executioner** and continues to impose the death penalty in secret on thousands of people annually. It emphasised once again that abolition of the death penalty contributes to the enhancement of human dignity and the progressive development of human rights.

On the issue of corruption, Parliament noted that certain commitments have been put forward by President Xi to 'comprehensively advance ruling the country according to the law', along with combating corruption.

It is 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. Members called for the Chinese government to re-enter into a dialogue with Tibetan representatives.

Parliament urged European companies investing in China to respect international labour standards and to make commitments to go beyond Chinese labour rights, if these do not meet internationally agreed standards.

Cross-strait relations: Parliament 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), Parliament 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 deplored the fact that there are still 1 500 long-range missiles aimed at Taiwan from southern China and took the view that a gradual demilitarisation of the region would further facilitate the rapprochement of the parties.

Parliament emphasised that all cross-Strait disputes should be settled by peaceful means on the basis of international law and stressed that the meeting on 23 May 2015 on Kinmen Island between top officials from the two sides of the Taiwan Strait was an encouraging step.