State of EU-China relations

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The Committee on Foreign Affairs adopted the own-initiative report by Bas BELDER (ECR, NL) on the state of EU-China relations.

It noted that the High Representative's and the Commission's Joint Communication ‘Elements for a new EU Strategy on China’, together with the Council conclusions of 18 July 2016, provide the policy framework for EU engagement with China over the coming years.

Members asserted that the EU-China Comprehensive Strategic Partnership is one of the most important for the EU, and is founded on a shared commitment to openness and working together as part of a rules-based international system. However, they were concerned that the increase in China’s global economic and political weight over the past decade has put these shared commitments to the test. Members referred to Europe’s much **greater collective bargaining power** with China, and urged that Europe **defend its democracies** so as to better face up to China’s systematic efforts to influence its politicians and civil society. The larger Member States were called upon to use their political and economic weight towards China to promote the EU’s interest.

Economic perspective: the report noted that the Chinese leadership has gradually and systematically stepped up its efforts to translate its economic weight into political influence, notably through **strategic infrastructure investments** and new transport links. It also noted that the 16+1 format between China on one hand, and 11 Central and Eastern European Countries (CEEs) and five Balkan countries on the other, was established in 2012 in the aftermath of the financial crisis and as part of Chinese sub-regional diplomacy to develop large-scale infrastructure projects and strengthen economic cooperation. The findings of recent investigations show that since 2008, China has acquired assets in Europe worth USD 318 billion.

Members called on those Member States participating in the 16+1 format to ensure that their participation in this format **enables the EU to have one voice** in its relationship with China, and to carry out **sound analysis** of suggested infrastructure projects to ensure no compromising of national and European interests for financial support. Chinese involvement in strategic infrastructure projects and potentially greater political influence would, according to the committee, **undermine the EU’s common positions** on China. At the same time, Members called for the strengthening of EU public diplomacy.

The committee discussed the challenges of China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), and suggested that **data** on all Chinese infrastructure investments in EU Member States and accession countries be shared with the EU institutions and other Member States. It insisted that the BRI must include human rights safeguards. It welcomed the setting-up of the EU-China Connectivity Platform, which promotes cooperation in transport infrastructure across the Eurasian continent.

Human rights: the report underlined the fact that the promotion of human rights and the rule of law must be at the core of the EU's engagement with China. It firmly condemned the ongoing harassment, arbitrary arrest and prosecution of human rights defenders, lawyers, journalists, bloggers, academics and labour rights defender.

Members called on the Council, the European External Action Service (EEAS) and the Commission to ensure that EU-China cooperation is grounded in the **rule of law**, and the universality of human rights. It drew attention to the EU’s failure, for the first time ever, to make a joint statement on China’s human rights records at the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva in June 2017.

The committee called on the EU and its Member States to pursue a more ambitious, united and transparent policy with regard to human rights in China and to substantially consult and engage with civil society. It called on China to act upon the issues raised at the Human Rights Dialogue, In addition, the EU should set clear **benchmarks for progress**, ensure more transparency and involve independent Chinese voices in the discussion. Members also drew attention to the need to address all forms of **visa harassment**.

Chinese students: Members drew attention to the need for **greater support to students** and scholars from China who are in Europe, so that they are less vulnerable to being pressured by Chinese authorities to surveil one another and to become tools of the Chinese state, as well as the importance of looking very carefully at substantial mainland funding to academic institutions across Europe.

Lastly, Members called on the Commission to actively monitor the Chinese **trade distortion measures,** which are affecting EU companies' positions in global markets, and to take appropriate action in the WTO and other fora, including through dispute settlement.