EU-China relations

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The Committee on Foreign Affairs adopted the own-initiative report by Hilde VAUTMANS (Renew, BE) on a European Parliament recommendation to the Council and the Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy concerning EU-China relations.

This recommendation assesses the state of play of the EU-China relations given that China is moving into a new era of security and control characterised by an increasingly assertive economic and foreign policy, employing grey-zone activities, including military exercises, economic coercion, cyber warfare and information manipulation and seeks to change the international rules-based order.

The EU can only credibly defend its interests and values against an increasingly assertive China if it acts with a single, united and determined approach and remains consistent with its message. Europe needs a new approach towards China based on European open strategic autonomy, reciprocity and cooperation with like-minded partners, backed up by the necessary legislative and non-legislative instruments to defend itself against coercion. The EU must not accept critical political or military support by China for Russia's illegal war of aggression against Ukraine. The report pointed out that China has still not recognised the Russian invasion into Ukraine as a full-scale war of aggression and plays a vital role in the circumvention and mitigation of EU sanctions imposed against Russia.

The current strategy for relations between the EU and China dates back to 2016, and was last updated in 2019, so it would be advisable to carry out a review and update of it in light of the new geopolitical context.

Recommendations

Members made the following recommendations to the Council and the Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy:

Engaging China to tackle global challenges

- continue engaging pragmatically with China to tackle global challenges such as climate change, the protection of biodiversity, challenges to human health and pandemic preparedness, food security, the reduction of the risk of disasters, debt relief for the Global South, financial stability and humanitarian assistance, and increase effective dialogue with China and like-minded partners on security issues in view of China's increasingly critical role in global peace and stability, particularly in the light of Russia's unprovoked war of aggression against Ukraine, but also in other conflict regions such as the Korean Peninsula or the Middle East;

- demand that China uphold the rules-based international order, especially the universal principles of human rights;

- China, as the world's largest carbon emitter, must adhere to its own promises and act in line with the Paris Agreement by peaking its CO2 emissions before 2030 and by participating, proportionally to its economic power, in efforts to financially support poorer countries affected by the negative consequences of climate change in the context of the Loss and Damage Fund.

Opposing China's human rights violations

- insist that China will be held accountable for its increasing human rights violations;

- condemn the use of death penalty: the total estimated number of executions in China exceeds all other countries that apply capital punishment in 2022;

- address the systematic use of forced labour by China in Xinjiang and Tibet by working with the private sector to diversify supply chains;

- put an immediate end to any measures aimed at preventing births in the Uyghur population;

- closely monitor the trials of political prisoners in Hong Kong and call for their release;

- assess the autonomous status of Hong Kong and Macao in the light of the National Security Law, which should be repealed;

De-risking from China to ensure Europe's open strategic autonomy

- work closely towards fostering unity among the Member States' approaches towards China and strengthen the EU's strategic autonomy to ensure that Europe is able to defend its values and economic interests, as well as the global rules-based order;

- advance the EU's stated goal of de-risking trade flows with the PRC to reinforce the EU's open strategic autonomy without aiming to decouple or turning inwards;

- work towards a more coordinated approach towards the protection of critical infrastructure at EU level to limit control by China, countering acts of hybrid tactics such as cyberattacks, disinformation campaigns, surveillance of the Chinese diaspora and espionage originating from China and taking place within the European Union;

- uphold the EU's engagement policy with Taiwan in order to intensify cooperation and continue supporting democracy there;

- fully leverage the Global Gateway strategy as a tool to intensify the EU's engagement in global development efforts and business relations with partners from developing countries to provide an alternative to Chinese-driven foreign investment strategies;

- intensify cooperation with international financial institutions and the private sector to mobilise the necessary funding;

- fully implement the EU's '5G security toolbox' guidelines to mitigate security risks in networks, and propose additional security standards for Chinese suppliers of 5G. Members welcomed the decision of the EU institutions and institutions in several EU Member States to suspend the TikTok application on corporate devices, as well as personal devices enrolled in the institutions' mobile device services.