

Remarks by President Charles Michel after the EU-China leaders' meeting via video conference

I'm pleased that we could speak by video conference with President Xi, together with Ursula (von der Leyen) and Angela (Merkel). Unfortunately, our physical meeting in Leipzig wasn't possible.

Europe needs to be a player, not a playing field. Today's meeting represents another step forward in forging a more balanced relationship with China.

We strive for a relationship that delivers on our mutual commitments. That generates concrete results for both sides. Results that are also good for the world. In some areas, we are on the right track. In others, more work needs to be done.

We made it clear where we stand. Where we agree, and where we disagree. Real differences exist and we won't paper over them. But we are ready to engage. Ready to cooperate where we can, and ready to roll up our sleeves to find concrete solutions. And on those difficult issues, we conveyed a clear and united European message: we want a relationship with China that is based on reciprocity, responsibility, and basic fairness.

Today we addressed 4 key topics:

1. Climate change
2. Economic and trade issues
3. International Affairs and Human Rights
4. COVID-19 and economic recovery

China is a key global partner in reducing global greenhouse gas and tackling climate change. And we encourage China to be even more ambitious.

The EU is setting the bar high — carbon neutrality by 2050. And we count on China to show similar leadership by implementing the Paris Agreement.

We have a robust trading relationship with China. The EU is China's first trading partner. On average we trade over 1 billion euros a day.

Trade can energise our economic recovery. But we want more fairness. We want a more balanced relationship. That also means reciprocity and a level playing field. That's why we welcome today's signature of the Agreement on Geographical Indications. It's a big step in the right direction. We are working on a comprehensive investment agreement and concrete results in other important areas.

And in the digital domain, we defend our vision of a free, open and secure cyberspace. For the good of our people and our societies. As global players, the EU and China have global responsibilities. This means upholding the rules-based international order.

The national security law for Hong Kong continues to raise grave concerns. The EU and our Member States have responded with one clear voice. Democratic voices in Hong Kong should be heard, rights protected, and autonomy preserved. We called on China to keep their promises to the people of Hong Kong and the international community.

We reiterated our concerns over China's treatment of minorities in Xinjiang and Tibet, and the treatment of human rights defenders and journalists. We asked for access for independent observers to Xinjiang and we called for the release of the arbitrarily detained Swedish citizen Gui Minhai and two Canadian citizens.

We agreed to discuss these issues in detail at the Human Rights Dialogue in Beijing later this year which will also include, we hope, a field visit to Tibet.

We called on China to refrain from unilateral actions in the South China Sea, to respect international law, and avoid escalations.

Covid-19 remains a deep and urgent threat. Only collective and transparent action will send this virus to the history books. There is only one way to find a vaccine and deploy it in all countries ... that's global cooperation.

We expect all countries, to cooperate with the impartial, independent and comprehensive evaluation of the international health response to COVID-19, and support the WHO to identify the source of the virus.

We encourage China to pursue an economic recovery that leads to structural reforms and that shapes a greener, more sustainable economy. This includes implementing the G20 Action Plan to drive sustainable global growth and reduce global tensions. And in Africa, China should be engaged in multilateral efforts on debt relief that will spur economic recovery.

In conclusion, our discussions today were of great importance. We are well aware that talks and dialogue are important, but they are not enough. We must turn our messages into actions.

We are determined to continue to engage with China to promote our values and defend our interests. We want a balanced relationship, based on respect for mutual interests.

We believe that reciprocity and transparency must be at the heart of the commitment made by the European Union.

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