



COVID-19 Pandemic and EU-China Relations in an Unstable World

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Abstract: *The COVID-19 crisis is not a war but it is ‘war like’ or more serious, for it poses considerable challenges and almost changes everything permanently across the world. As an unprecedented public health crisis, the pandemic hits EU-China relations which is one of the most important strategic relationships in geopolitical landscape. China had been inappropriately depicted as a human rights violator and systemic rival to Europe before and during the pandemic by some voices. However, systemic rival doesn’t necessarily lead to systematic rivalry. In response to a series of risks brought by the COVID-19 pandemic, EU and China should stand together and cooperate with each other as comprehensive strategic partners, to protect human life and health, recover global economy, maintain multilateralism, and finally bring the world to normal.*

Keywords: *EU-China Relations; COVID-19 pandemic; Systemic Rival; Comprehensive Strategic Partnership*

1. INTRODUCTION

2020 is the year of disaster. Many human beings are facing an unprecedented international public health crisis—the COVID-19 pandemic. Coronavirus severely threatens people’s right to life and the right to health while the globalization is also suffering great hardship.¹ Till now, 213 countries and territories around the world have reported a total of 27,492,982 confirmed cases of the coronavirus and a death toll of 896,869. Confirmed cases are still drastically surging in many countries.² Like the fall of the Berlin Wall or the collapse of Lehman Brothers, the coronavirus pandemic is a world-shocking event whose far-ranging consequences we can only begin to imagine today. Just as the COVID-19 pandemic has shattered lives, disrupted markets and exposed the competence of governments, it will lead to permanent shifts in political and economic power in ways that will become apparent only later.³ As Henry A. Kissinger said, the Coronavirus Pandemic “has struck with unprecedented scale and ferocity... will forever alter the world order”.⁴

¹ The author and his family live in Wuhan which was the epicenter and ground zero of COVID-19 in the world. After outbreak of the pandemic and announcement of whole city lockdown on 23 January, 2020, with other 9 million residents in Wuhan, the author’s family strictly followed self-quarantine requirement for nearly 3 months without even stepping outside their apartment. People in Wuhan got through community closing, public transportation stopping, lack of food and PPE supplying. Besides, psychological pressure and mental torment in some kinds of claustrophobia were also overwhelmingly unbearable especially in the earlier stage of the pandemic.

² About the newest exact number of infected and death cases of coronavirus worldwide, pls see <https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/>

³ “How the world will look after the coronavirus pandemic”, *Foreign Policy*, 20th March, 2020.

⁴ Henry A. Kissinger, “The Coronavirus Pandemic Will Forever Alter the World Order”, *Wall*

This year marks the 45th anniversary of diplomatic relations between the European Union and China, established on 6th May 1975.⁵ EU-China relations is one of the most important strategic bilateral relationship in the world. China is now the EU's second biggest trading partner behind the United States and the EU is China's biggest trading partner. Both sides are also committed to a comprehensive strategic partnership, as expressed in the *EU-China 2020 Strategic Agenda for Cooperation*.⁶ Nevertheless, there were still skeptical and critical voices against EU-China cooperation from the European sides, describing China as a “systemic rival”⁷. COVID-19 pandemic worsens this situation, some high-level officials of EU publicly accused China of launching “global battle of narratives” or “disinformation campaign”, makes things more complicated.

The pandemic has been controlled in China and many European countries while the situation is still terrible in some other countries. In an unstable even chaotic world after the coronavirus pandemic, as world's strategic powers, EU and China need to stand together and cooperate with each other, for their own interests, to sustain rule-based international order, protect human rights especially the right to life and right to health in developing countries and vulnerable regions, safeguard social stability and promote prosperity of world's economy.

2. THE PANDEMIC CHILLED EU-CHINA RELATIONS

If we conducted a counterfactual hypothesis before 2020, we would see both China and Europe had high expectations for 2020. The EU and China are two of the three largest economies and traders in the world, each of them plays an important role in international arena as well. China was keen to celebrate the forty-fifth anniversary of its bilateral relationship with the EU and cooperate with EU in multilateralism framework coping with lots of thorny issues around the world; Meanwhile, EU leaders were hoping to conclude a long-awaited bilateral investment agreement with Beijing that would address structural trade and other economic issues. However, no one expected the unprecedented global coronavirus pandemic would prevail and changed almost everything, comparatively chilled EU-China relations.⁸

2.1. A Multidimensional and Complex Partnership Before the Pandemic

The European Union and China are linked by enduring relations and both sides are committed to a comprehensive strategic partnership. However, there is a growing appreciation in Europe that the

Street Journal, 3 April, 2020.

⁵ “Marking 45 years of EU-China diplomatic relations in a time of global crisis”, *Swedish Embassy in China*, <https://www.swedenabroad.se/fr/ambassade/china-beijing/current/news/marking-45-years-of-eu-china-diplomatic-relations-in-a-time-of-global-crisis/#>

⁶ “EU-China: A Strategic Outlook”, *Joint Communication to the European Parliament, the European Council and the Council*, 12 March, 2019.

⁷ Andrew Small, “The meaning of systemic rivalry : Europe and China beyond the pandemic”, *European Council on Foreign Relations*, 13 May, 2020.

⁸ According to a recent poll conducted by Körber-Stiftung, 36 percent of Germans now view China less favorably than before the outbreak of the virus. Another recent study by the European Council on Foreign Relations confirms that, across Europe, post-pandemic perceptions of China are increasingly negative. Pls see “Adapting to a New Normal German foreign policy and public opinion in times of COVID-19”, https://www.koerber-stiftung.de/fileadmin/user_upload/koerber-stiftung/redaktion/the-berlin-pulse/pdf/2020/contributions/Koerber_TheBerlinPulse_Sonderausgabe_Editorial_20200515.pdf

balance of challenges and opportunities presented by China has shifted. In the last decade, China's economic power and political influence have grown with unprecedented scale and speed, reflecting its ambitions to become a leading global power.

Consequently, European views on China have hardened over the past several years. Since 2016, the EU has taken several concerted steps to push back against perceived unfair Chinese trade and economic practices to promote greater reciprocity and a more level playing field for European companies in China. These steps include the completion of a landmark piece of investment screening legislation, the release of common guidelines for addressing the security risks that Chinese companies like Huawei pose to 5G networks, and a new connectivity strategy to help Europe better compete with China's "Belt and Road Initiative."⁹ Many observers considered 2019 a turning point in the EU's bilateral relations with China. In March 2019, the previous European Commission under then-president Jean-Claude Juncker promulgated a more bold view of China in a ground-breaking EU strategy document named *EU-China: A Strategic Outlook*. It called China for the first time a "systemic rival promoting alternative models of governance" and outlined several concrete measures for the EU to improve the situation. According to this guideline, China can no longer be regarded as a developing country. China is now a key global actor and leading technological power. Its increasing presence in the world including in Europe, should be accompanied by greater responsibilities for upholding the rules-based international order, as well as greater reciprocity, non-discrimination, and openness of its system.¹⁰

The EU-China relationship is a highly institutionalized, multidimensional and complex relations. To some extent, it's also controversial and sensitive.¹¹ In the EU's eyes, China is simultaneously a multi-faceted actor and plays different roles in different policy areas. In the area of international arena, to maintain multilateralism, cope with climate change, promote sustainable development and maintain JCPOA (Iranian nuclear deal), China is a cooperation or negotiating partner with whom the EU has closely aligned objectives; In the area of economy and hi-tech, China is a competitor in the pursuit of technological leadership or adversary with whom the EU strive to attain more level economic playing field; In the area of political systems, China is a systemic rival promoting alternative models of governance, competing with liberal democracies and seek to replace western models.¹² Charles Michel is the incumbent president of European Council. After taking part in the virtual EU-China summit on 22 June, he said "Engaging and cooperating with China is both an opportunity and necessity. But, at the same time, we have to recognize that we do not share the same values, political systems, or approach to multilateralism. We will engage in a clear-eyed and confident way, robustly defending EU interests and standing firm on our values".¹³

⁹Philippe Le Corre and Erik Brattberg, "How the Coronavirus Pandemic Shattered Europe's Illusions of China", *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, 9 July, 2020.

<https://carnegieendowment.org/2020/07/09/how-coronavirus-pandemic-shattered-europe-s-illusions-of-china-pub-82265>

¹⁰ "EU-China: A Strategic Outlook", *Joint Communication to the European Parliament, the European Council and the Council*, 12 March, 2019.

¹¹ Mario Telo, Ding chun and Zhang Xiaotong (eds.), *Deepening the EU-China Partnership: Bridging Institutional and Ideational Differences in an Unstable World*, Routledge Publisher, 2018.

¹² Hans Von Der Burchard, "EU Slams China as systemic rival' as trade tension rises", *Politico*, 19 April, 2019.

¹³ "EU-China Summit: Defending EU interests and values in a complex and vital partnership",

In particular, for the EU recognizes itself as a normative power and continues to “insist on the internalization of its norms by various countries around the world...”¹⁴, The EU attaches much importance to human rights issues with China. In other words, the ability of EU and China to engage effectively on human rights will be an important measure of the quality of the bilateral relationship.¹⁵ The EU acknowledges China's progress in economic and social rights. However, in other respects, Hong Kong, Xinjiang and other rights-based issues frequently attract EU's attention. Before outbreak of the pandemic, some EU organs especially European Parliament has piled up pressure on Chinese side via political statement.¹⁶

2.2. Tension Escalates During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Last year, the European Union published the strategic outlook document in which it labeled China as a “systemic rival”, reflecting a sharp change in its balance of assumptions about the EU-China relationship. The pandemic is just tilting that balance further.¹⁷

The bilateral relationship between the EU and China actually has hardened over the past several years before the pandemic, but cracks in the relations run deep during the pandemic.¹⁸ The EU think this requires a flexible and pragmatic whole-of-EU approach towards a more realistic, assertive, and multi-faceted policy to China. It will ensure that relations with this strategic partner are set on a fair, balanced and mutually beneficial course. Josep Borrell, Vice president of European Commission and High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, indicated that “The EU's relations with China are diverse and our approach must not be reduced to one perspective”, and the focus of the EU-China relationship should be on “trust, transparency, and reciprocity”¹⁹. Josep Borrell also openly accused China of launching so-called “global battle of narratives” and “disinformation campaign” during the pandemic, though his predecessors including Ms. Federica Mogherini all avoided criticizing China publicly and his Chinese counterparts denied these stigmatizations several times.

According to his argument, Josep Borrell has referred to the highly critical messages posted on Chinese embassy websites and social media accounts as a “battle of narratives”. He thought it was a global battle of narratives going on in which timing is a crucial factor. Europe was sending a lot of medical equipment to help Chinese authorities that were overwhelmed at the time. Since then, China has brought down local new infections to single figures – and it is now sending equipment and doctors to Europe, as others do as well. China is aggressively pushing the message that, unlike the US, it is a responsible and reliable partner. In the battle of narratives, Europe has also seen attempts to discredit the EU as such and some instances where Europeans have been stigmatized as if all were carriers of the virus. EU must be

European Council, 22 June, 2020.

¹⁴ Emilian Kavalski, “The struggle for recognition of normative powers: Normative power Europe and normative power China in context”, *Cooperation and Conflict* 48 (2), pp.247-267.

¹⁵ Zsuzsa Anna Ferenczy, “Human Rights in Europe-China Relations: Assessing European Normative Power Effectiveness”, *Taiwan Human Rights Journal*, June 2017, pp.17-71

¹⁶ Elena Cavallone, “EU-China relations amid Uighur row”, *Euronews*, 9th January, 2020.
<https://www.euronews.com/2019/12/19/the-brief-eu-china-relations-amid-uighur-row>

¹⁷ Andrew Small, “The meaning of systemic rivalry: Europe and China beyond the pandemic”, *European Council on Foreign Relations*, 13 May, 2020.

¹⁸ Laurens Hemminga, “cracks in China-Europe Relations Run Deep”, *The Diplomat*, 1 September, 2020.

¹⁹ Joseph Borrell, “Trust and reciprocity: the necessary ingredients for EU-China cooperation”, *EEAS*, 15 March, 2020.

aware there is a geo-political component including a struggle for influence through spinning and the “politics of generosity”. Armed with facts, EU needs to defend Europe against its detractors.²⁰

Currently Trending False Narratives on China in Europe²¹

1	The coronavirus is a biological weapon deployed alternatively by China, the US, the UK or even Russia (with the aim of destroying the EU and NATO)
2	The coronavirus did not break out in Wuhan, China – the US is concealing its true origin, which is in fact the US or US-owned laboratories across the world
3	The EU is not ready to provide urgent support to its Member States (e.g. Italy) — instead, they have to rely on external support, with China mentioned most often as the source of such assistance
4	China is coming to rescue the EU as Brussels abandons EU Member States
5	The coronavirus is linked to 5G (e.g., Wuhan as a 5G testing ground in China)
6	Miscellaneous conspiracy theories: historical predictions about the pandemic, plagues hitting the planet, secret “Deep State” attempts to control population growth, the pandemic being caused by chemtrails or leading to World War III

With the outbreak of COVID-19, European have seen the proliferation of significant quantities of news, myths and disinformation about it – coming from various sources both within and outside of the European Union. Disinformation is a cross-cutting issue and countering COVID-19 related disinformation is also very high on the EU agenda. Today, the information environment around the coronavirus is characterized by an immense amount of content from different sources and on different media. Governments and health authorities are trying to provide authoritative information about COVID-19 and social media platforms are looking for effective ways to promote this content, while simultaneously demoting or removing unreliable content. A special report on “disinformation campaign” during the pandemic produced by the European External Action Service (EEAS) — The EU’s “Foreign Ministry ” clearly details some disinformation no matter in Europe or from China. Concerns about Chinese politicization of aid and faulty supplies have also surfaced in many EU member states and led to renewed calls for diversifying Europe’s supply chains for pharmaceuticals and critical medical supplies away from China. Belows are some currently trending false narratives on China originated in Europe and disinformation coverage from China :

Disinformation Coverage from China (Official/Social Media)²²

1	China and especially the top Chinese leader have done an admirable job of containing the coronavirus
2	A centralized state such as China’s is actually an asset in such a crisis because the processes (and citizens) can be more thoroughly controlled.
3	The West, and especially the United States, should be grateful to China for their quick reaction and containment of the virus – the West and especially the US worked too slowly and are now in total disarray over the virus.
4	The virus did not originate in China, it stems from somewhere else (most likely the US).
5	The West instrumentalized the virus in order to harm China and spread anti-Chinese sentiment, for which it owes China and the Chinese people an apology.

²⁰Joseph Borrell, “The Coronavirus pandemic and the world it is creating”, *EEAS*, 23 March, 2020.

²¹ “EEAS special report: Disinformation on the coronavirus—short assessment of the information environment” , *European External Action Service*, 19 March, 2020.

²²Ibid. This content only represents EEAS’s opinion, but not the author’s .

2.3. EU's Human Rights Concerns against China

The EU has defined human rights as a critically important aspect of its foreign policy. Respect for human rights, in conjunction with the principles of fundamental freedoms, democracy, and rule of law, is a cornerstone of the European Union, and a fundamental part of all EU relations with non-EU countries and international institutions.²³ Besides the pandemic related disputes mentioned above, The EU expressed its grave concern on Hong Kong, Xinjiang, especially under the pressure from MEPs and human rights advocacy organizations.²⁴

Since taking charge of its external relations on December 1 last year, Josep Borrell has raised Xinjiang and Hong Kong issues with Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi, and overseen a reorientation of human rights in the EU's focus on China. The EU "foreign minister" has vowed to fight for the adoption of laws to punish human rights violations in the troubled region and paved the way for European version of Magnitsky-style sanctions on human rights offenders (named after Sergei Magnitsky, a tax adviser whose death in a Russian prison after investigating a case of government tax fraud became a symbol of human rights abuses), makes EU's human rights sanction more convincing and reliable than before, though till now there is no clear timeline of the legislation.²⁵

Concerning the disputes of Hong Kong national security law, many across Europe including the European parliament has made several statements for some aggressive responses, eg., to sue China before the International Court of Justice (ICJ) or ban on dual-use exports to Hong Kong. Apparently to be more moderate, the EU establishment reiterates the position that it has a significant stake in the stability and prosperity of Hong Kong. Accordingly, it attaches great importance to the preservation of Hong Kong's high degree of autonomy, in line with the Hong Kong Basic Law and with international commitments, as well as to the respect for the 'One Country, Two Systems' principle. On 29th May 2020, the press office of the council of the EU released a declaration stating "The EU expresses its grave concern at the steps taken by China which are not in conformity with its international commitments (Sino-British Joint Declaration of 1984) and the Hong Kong Basic Law. This risks to seriously undermine the 'One Country Two System' principle and the high degree of autonomy of the Special Administrative Region of Hong Kong";²⁶ On 30th June 2020, after the standing committee of national people's congress (SCNPC) of China passed a sweeping security law on Hongkong, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said she was "in touch" with international partners to weigh up a potential riposte to China's new national security law in Hong Kong. European Council President Charles Michel also said Brussels "will need also a strong

²³ "Protectio and promotion of human rights", *Council of the European Union*, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/human-rights/>

²⁴ Before the 22nd EU-China summit (virtually held on June 22, 2020), Human Rights Watch (HRW) publicly urged European Union leaders should use the forthcoming EU-China summit to press for an end to Beijing's grave and systemic human rights violations. The responses to Hong Kong and Xinjiang should be the EU's top agenda. See "EU: Make China Rights Crisis a Summit Priority", *Human rights Watch*, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/06/19/eu-make-china-rights-crisis-summit-priority>

²⁵ Stuart Lau, "EU ramps up human rights pressure over Xinjiang with legislative threat to China", *South China Morning Post*, 20 December, 2019.

²⁶ "Declaration of the High Representative on behalf of the European Union on Hong Kong", *Council of the EU*, 29th May, 2020.

coordination with all the member states in order to see what we will do in the near future";²⁷ Following an initial discussion in the foreign affairs council on 13 July 2020, the Council adopted conclusions expression grave concern over the national security legislation for Hong Kong. The conclusions restate the EU's support for Hong Kong's high degree of autonomy under the 'One Country, Two Systems' principle, and its solidarity with the people of Hong Kong, whilst setting out a coordinated response package of measures in various fields. The conclusions call for a review of the implementation of the national security law and of the impact of the EU response package before the end of the year.²⁸

Main fields of the EU coordinated package responding HK legislation

1	Asylum, migration, visa and residence policy
2	Exports of specific sensitive equipment and technologies for end use in Hong Kong
3	Scholarships and academic exchanges involving Hong Kong students and universities
4	Support to civil society
5	The operation of member states' extradition arrangements and other relevant agreements with Hong Kong

Surrounding Xinjiang and the Uyghurs issue, the EU raised its concern about the treatment of minorities in Xinjiang during the virtual EU-China summit on 2nd June, 2020; On 30th June 2020, UK's ambassador to the WTO and UN in Geneva with other 26 countries (most of them are members of the EU) delivered a cross-regional joint statement on Hong Kong and Xinjiang at the 44th session of the UN human rights council. A number of the signatories to this statement submitted a letter last year to express concern to rights of minorities in Xinjiang. The statement urges China to allow the UN high commissioner for human rights meaningful access to Xinjiang at the earliest opportunity. On the contrary, On behalf of 53 countries, Cuba made an opposing joint statement at the 44th session of UNHRC, expressing their support for China to pass the national security law for the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region;²⁹ On 24th July 2020, a group of 23 Renew Europe MEPs coordinated by Hilde Vautmans and Katalin Cseh, wrote a letter to Josep Borrell who is the Vice-President of European Commission and High Representative of EU's external affairs. The letter requires "The EU should adopt the framework swiftly to make sure we can ban human rights violators from traveling to Europe and freeze their assets"³⁰, and calls for the EU to demand a detailed UN led investigation into the alleged human rights abuses and conducts against Uighur Muslims in China's Xinjiang autonomous region.³¹

²⁷ Jakob Hanke Vela and Laurenz Gehrke, "EU says it is mulling a coordinated response over Hong Kong", *Politico*, 30 June, 2020.

<https://www.politico.eu/article/eu-says-it-is-mulling-a-coordinated-response-over-hong-kong/>

²⁸ "Hong Kong: Council expresses grave concern over national security law", *Council of the EU*, 28 July, 2020.

<https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2020/07/28/hong-kong-council-expresses-grave-concern-over-national-security-law/>

²⁹ "Over 50 countries support China's national security law for HK at human rights council", *Global Times*, 1st July, 2020.

³⁰ Florian Eder, "EU must sanction Chinese leaders involved in Uighur oppression, legislators say", *Politico*, <https://www.politico.com/news/2020/07/24/china-uighurs-europe-sanctions-381080>.

³¹ Pragadish Kirubakaran, "EU asks UN to probe China's Xinjiang Atrocities", *Republic world.com*, <https://www.republicworld.com/world-news/europe/eu-asks-un-to-probe-chinas-atrocities-in-xinjiang.html>

3. DEEPENING EU- CHINA COOPERATION IN AN UNSTABLE WORLD

Time past can't be called back again, the pandemic has forever changed the world and our lives. As an unprecedented historic event, the coronavirus pandemic could be the straw that breaks the camel's back of economic globalization, it symbolizes the end of globalization as we know it. The pandemic also triggers a series of consequences of international politics, the world is now more unstable. As Josep Borrell pointed out, "COVID-19 will reshape our world. We don't yet know when the crisis will end. But we can be sure that by the time it does, our world will look very different. How different will depend on the choices we make today".³²

3.1. What the World Look Like After the Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic is a once-in-a-century global public health disaster. It threatens to destroy countless lives, ruin economies, and stress national and international institutions to their breaking point. And, even after the virus recedes, the geopolitical wreckage it leaves in its wake could be profound. Three things seem apparent. Politically, the coronavirus pandemic will change our politics, both within states and between them. Government is back. The major dividing line in effective crisis response will not place autocracies on one side and democracies on the other.³³ Most governments are to turn inward, focusing on what takes place within their borders rather than on what happens beyond them. The pandemic will strengthen the state and reinforce nationalism, more failed states emerge as well; Economically, The pandemic will not only have long-lasting economic effects, but also lead to a more fundamental change. The critical shock to the world's financial and economic system is the recognition that global supply chains and distribution networks are deeply vulnerable to disruption. The basic tenets of global manufacturing are undermined and companies will now rethink and shrink the multistep, multicountry supply chains that dominate production today. Lower profit but more supply stability could be expected in the future;³⁴ Internationally, this is not yet the end of an interconnected world, though the pandemic may end the economic globalization as we know it. The pandemic itself is a proof of our interdependence. But in all polities, there is already a turning inward, a search for autonomy and control of one's own fate. We are headed for a poorer, meaner, and smaller world. International order based on the results of WWII is now undermined seriously, competition even confrontation grows drastically, unilateralism and hegemonism are obviously rising as well.

To some extent, the United States has failed the leadership test during the COVID-19 pandemic, and will no longer be seen as an international leader because of its government's narrow self-interest and bungling incompetence. Till now, The infected cases in US are 6,514,433, death numbers are 194,037, both rank the first in the world and are still surging everyday. The US government emphasizes domestic economic interest more than international cooperation against the pandemic, President Donald Trump put his own election calculation first rather than protection of people's life and health. In the past years, the US government unilaterally withdrew from UNESCO, UNHRC, Paris Agreement, JCPOA, even threatened to sanction the judges of International Criminal Court taking charge of the war crime investigation to American soldiers in Afghanistan. Recently, Trump and his high-level officials labeled COVID-19 as "Wuhan virus" and "China Virus" to pass the buck, and recklessly announced to withdraw from WHO during the pandemic.

³² Joseph Borrell, "The Coronavirus pandemic and the world it is creating", *EEAS*, 23 March, 2020.

³³ Francis Fukuyama, "The thing that determines a country's resistance to the coronavirus", *The Atlantic*, 30 March, 2020.

³⁴ "How the world will look after the coronavirus pandemic", *Foreign Policy*, 20th March, 2020.

In 2017, the Trump administration announced a new national security strategy that focuses on great-power competition. COVID-19 shows this strategy to be inadequate. Even if the United States prevails as a great power, it cannot protect its safety by acting alone. On transnational threats like COVID-19 pandemic, it is not enough to think of American power over other nations. The key to success is also learning the importance of power with others. Every country puts its national interest first, the important question is how broadly or narrowly this interest is defined. COVID-19 pandemic shows the US is failing to adjust its strategy to this new world.³⁵ Joseph Nye, the leading scholar of international relations, reminds that Donald Trump's presidency possibly marks a major turning point in world history and the end of American unipolar world. He says, "Trump's electoral appeal may turn on domestic politics, but his effect on world politics could be transformational, particularly if he gains a second term".³⁶

3.2. Why do the EU and China Need Each Other?

The year 2020 was regarded as a critical year for China-EU relations. Some people have badmouthed China-EU relations after the pandemic hit. They believe that the EU will agree with US' conspiracy theories about China³⁷. In fact, EU members' opinions are divided. Some European populist political leaders, non-mainstream media and anti-China parliamentarians have advocated these conspiracy theories due to their publicity needs and political interests. Disinformation from the US also has increased in the EU, with requests even made for Europe to discredit and slander China. These theories may affect some European people. However, the EU's main position is to maintain multilateralism and keep international order based on rules, it is the real interest and top priority to Europe. Very clear, without China's understanding and cooperation, the EU can't attain such goals in an unstable even chaotic world. Similarly, The EU is also very important to China, not only in cooperation to fight against the COVID-19 pandemic, but also in building a more balanced world, and realization of the community of shared future for mankind. Besides, China is now the EU's second biggest trading partner and the EU is China's biggest trading partner. One-sixth of Chinese exports of goods go to Europe, and China sells goods worth 320 billion euros (\$359 billion) to Europe alone every year. Hence, amicable bilateral relations between the EU and China benefit both sides.

Over the past few months, to fight against Covid-19 pandemic, China launched a global campaign of emergency humanitarian assistance at a scale unseen in the history of the People's Republic. China has provided timely medical supplies assistance to over 150 countries and international organizations in response to their needs. China has organized thematic video conferences between Chinese health experts and their counterparts in more than 180 countries. 33 medical teams also have been sent to 31 countries badly in need.³⁸ The EU and China cooperated with each other closely during the pandemic. Just after the outbreak of coronavirus in Wuhan, The EU immediately provided China with medical supplies especially the emergency PPEs. China also sent experts team with necessary medical supplies to Italy and other European countries when the virus spreaded speedily in early March. Besides, China actively took part in the *The Coronavirus Global Response* launched by President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen which is a joint global action for universal access to

³⁵ Joseph S. Nye, "American Power will need a New Strategy", *Foreign Policy*, 20th March, 2020.

³⁶ Joseph S. Nye, "Is Trump a turning point in World Politics? ", *Project Syndicate*, 1st September, 2020.

³⁷ "2020 a critical year for China-EU relations after pandemic", *Global Times*, 8th May, 2020.

³⁸ Wang Yi, "Upholding the Trend of Peace and Development of Our World with Unity, Cooperation, Openness and Inclusiveness", *Xinhuanet.com*,
http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2020-09/01/c_139332396.htm

affordable coronavirus vaccination, treatment and testing. However, because of President Trump's America-first policies, contempt for multilateral organization and testy relationships with other world leaders, the US government rejected to join this initiative, and frustrated the EU lots.³⁹

The China-U.S. relationship is in its most testing time since the establishment of diplomatic relations. It has come to this stage because some hardliners in the U.S. have gone to great lengths to portray China as a major rival. Almost every day we see deepening tensions between the US and China with clashes over a variety of issues. Positions are hardening with advocates of decoupling in the ascendancy in both Washington and Beijing. The troubled U.S.-China relationship now raises profound questions about other region's future and the shape of the emerging international order.⁴⁰ This US-China strategic rivalry will probably be the dominant organizing principle for global politics, regardless of who wins the next presidential US elections. In that context, Europe needs to hold nerve and frame its own EU approach. Europe needs to be clear where it stands. The EU must follow its own path and act in accordance with its own values and interests.⁴¹ China is considered as "systemic rival", but it is also EU's "competitor", "partner", even "ally" at the same time in different areas.⁴² More importantly, "systemic rival" doesn't necessarily lead to "systematic rivalry", "...It doesn't mean that we are embarking on a systematic rivalry" with China.⁴³ The diplomatic goals of EU are to promote multilateralism and global cooperation. The EU doesn't want to take side between the US and China, and it would like to be the master of itself. Although human rights related issues (Hong Kong, Xinjiang, etc.) still constitute impediments in EU-China relations, the most powerful person in Europe Chancellor Merkel says they "will continue to seek dialogue and conversation with China".⁴⁴

3.3. EU-China Cooperation After the Pandemic

The world is undergoing changes unseen in a century, accelerated by the sudden onslaught of COVID-19. Faced with all these changes and challenges, the EU and China should stand together and work hand in hand. Three major summits were planned to be held this year, including the China-Central and Eastern European Countries Summit, the 22nd China-EU Summit, and a special summit of EU leaders and China in Leipzig, Germany. Because of the pandemic, EU-China Summits all have to be organized virtually via video conference. On the occasion of the 22nd EU-China Summit dated on 22nd June 2020, the President of the European Council, Charles Michel, and the President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, accompanied by High Representative Josep Borrell, met with Chinese Prime Minister Li Keqiang followed by exchanges with Chinese President Xi Jinping. The

³⁹Tracy Wilkinson, "Global response to coronavirus stymied by lack of leadership from the U.S. and Trump", *Los Angeles Times*, 15 April, 2020.

⁴⁰ Lee Hsien Loong, "The endangered Asian century – America, China, and the perils of confrontation", *Foreign Affairs*, 4th June, 2020.

⁴¹ Josep Borrell, "China, the United States and us", *EEAS*, 31st July, 2020.

https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/83644/china-united-states-and-us_en

⁴² Joseph Borrell, "Video conference of Foreign Affairs Ministers: Remarks by HR/VP Joseph Borrell at the press conference", *EEAS*, 29 May, 2020.

⁴³ "EU won't ally with US against China, foreign policy chief says before Pompeo meeting", *South China Morning Post*, 16 June, 2020.

⁴⁴ "EU leaders seek 'dialogue' with China over Hong Kong law", *Washington Post*,

https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/eu-leaders-seek-dialogue-with-china-over-hong-kong-law/2020/07/02/600164a4-bc92-11ea-97c1-6cf116ffe26c_story.html

summit focuses on bilateral relations, global challenges especially the COVID-19 pandemic, and regional and international issues.

Shared Responsibility of EU-China Cooperation On COVID-19⁴⁵

1	participate in global efforts to stop the spread of the virus
2	boost research on treatments and vaccines
3	support a green and inclusive global recovery
4	show solidarity in addressing the consequences in developing countries
5	participate in the independent review of lessons learned from the international health response to COVID-19
6	to facilitate the return of EU residents in China.

Be aimed at the EU-China cooperation after the pandemic, 1) China and the EU need to build an anti-COVID pandemic mechanism, and promote cooperation on post-pandemic recovery. Both sides should strengthen cooperation on the development and production of vaccines, medicines and testing kits and support the WHO, Gavi and other international institutions in playing their roles; 2) Take a cooperative approach in the negotiations on the bilateral investment agreement, conclude a comprehensive, balanced and high-standard agreement within this year. On that basis, kick-start the FTA process and conclude the *China-EU 2025 Strategic Agenda for Cooperation*, to provide an institutional framework for all-round dialogue and cooperation; 3) Foster a green and digital partnership, and create new growth areas of China-EU cooperation. Both sides should deepen cooperation in such areas as artificial intelligence, information and communications technology, e-commerce, big data, cloud computing, environmental technology, circular economy, clean energy, and sustainable finance, make joint contributions to global standards and rules in the digital domain; 4) Deepen international cooperation, and work closer in multilateral affairs. Both sides should further strengthen dialogue and cooperation on climate change, biodiversity and sustainable development, and work together to tackle global challenges.⁴⁶

4. CONCLUSION

The world we knew before COVID-19 pandemic is gone, the one that comes after is still at least partly up to us. The pandemic has put entire countries across the world under lockdown, devastated countless businesses, killed hundreds of thousands of people and upended hundreds of millions of lives. On a long view, this crisis will reshuffle the international power structure in ways we can only begin to imagine. The international system will, in turn, come under great pressure, resulting in instability and widespread conflict within and across countries.

Since the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic, governments and people of China and Europe have worked together to overcome a variety of obstacles and respond to the challenges of coronavirus. At this crossroads in human history, China and Europe should continue to keep in mind the responsibilities for mankind's future and the fundamental interests of both people. China and Europe are two major forces, two big markets and two great civilizations. The development of bilateral relations over the past 45 years indicates that there is no fundamental conflict of interests between China and the EU.

⁴⁵ "EU-China Summit via video conference", *The Council of the EU*, 22 June 2020.

<https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/meetings/international-summit/2020/06/22/>

⁴⁶ "EU leaders seek 'dialogue' with China over Hong Kong law", *Washington Post*,

https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/eu-leaders-seek-dialogue-with-china-over-hong-kong-law/2020/07/02/600164a4-bc92-11ea-97c1-6cf116ffe26c_story.html

Despite the difference in political systems and social values, cooperation still far outweighs competition, and there are far more areas of common understanding than disagreements.

Chancellor Merkel once said, China has already been a “global player”, there are broad common interests shared by EU and China, mutual cooperation between the two sides has “strategic interests” .⁴⁷ During the period of normalization of epidemic prevention and control or even after the pandemic someday, China and the EU are entirely able to enhance trust through equal dialogues, achieve win-win outcomes through mutually beneficial cooperation, properly address differences through constructive communications, and jointly tackle global challenges through stronger coordination.

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Citation: Zhang Xian. "COVID-19 Pandemic and EU-China Relations in an Unstable World" *International Journal of Humanities Social Sciences and Education (IJHSSE)*, vol 9, no. 1, 2022, pp. 120-131. doi: <https://doi.org/10.20431/2349-0381.0901010>.

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⁴⁷ Angela Merkel, “For Europe to survive, its economy needs to survive”, *Guardian*, 26 June, 2020.