

Figures on the Billiard Table: EU-China Dynamics in the Wake of the 2024 European Elections

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“Red over green, white over green, new figures emerged like signs; quickly they blew away, nothing remained; music without melody, painting without representation; just squares, rectangles, diamonds, in large numbers; balls sloshing against the black edge.”¹

While still a powerhouse in its own right, Europe’s relative influence on the world stage has been diminishing over the last few decades. Data, for example, highlight a significant shift in global trade patterns away from the old continent. According to a recent Brookings’ calculation, South-South trade had by 2009, i.e., around the time of the global financial crisis, increased from 10.9 per cent to 25.0 per cent worldwide. South-South trade thus surpassed North-North trade for the first time in world history. Today, 35.0 per cent of global trade is accounted for by South-South merchandise trade, and just 25.0 per cent of global trade is North-North trade. One important factor in this is a surging China-Africa trade. With China’s bilateral trade with Africa rising from 2.7 billion dollars in 1990 to 209 billion dollars in 2022, China has now become Africa’s single largest trading partner.²

Not only have the dynamics of global trade clearly changed, but also in the geopolitical domain, new alignments and alliances are being made. Pertinent examples in case are such Chinese initiatives as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (*Shanghai hezuo zuzhi*; SCO).³ Established in 1996 as the ‘Shanghai Five’ comprising China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan, this organization expanded to include Uzbekistan in 2001. Pakistan joined in 2017, followed by Iran in 2023. Initially focused on demilitarizing frontier areas as well as combating

extremism and drug trafficking following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the organization evolved into a vehicle for economic development and, increasingly, political cooperation.⁴ In the same vein, one has to mention the BRICS+ platform, an expansion of the BRICS group of countries (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa) joined by Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates in 2023. And then there is, of course, the Belt and Road Initiative (*yi dai yi lu changyì*; BRI)⁵ launched in 2013.⁶

Thus far, cooperation within these initiatives has not yet established an alternative regional or international system comparable to, for example, the European integration process, but the increasing instrumentality of these new frameworks is undeniable.⁷ That China, instead of joining a Western-led peace conference in the Swiss Alps, appealed on Brazil to formulate an (alternative) plan to end the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine is only one recent example.⁸

BRUSSELS IN THE EYES OF BEIJING

These and other developments are part and parcel of the globally growing phenomenon of sovereign internationalism, a view on international relations that can be interpreted as a reaction to the concept of contingent sovereignty (associated with the United States (US) during the Bush Jr. presidency) and the development of transactional and mercantile internationalism (associated with the US during the Trump era), and that is increasingly popular in the countries of the ‘global south.’⁹ In the eyes of Beijing, the European Union (EU) remains more associated with the soft power approach of Wilsonian

internationalism. This perspective drives Beijing's desire for Brussels to distance itself further from Washington. It also explains the chilly Chinese reception of Ursula von der Leyen, the outgoing President of the European Commission (EC). Beijing views the 'decoupling,' later softened to 'de-risking' (essentially 'partial decoupling'), policies of von der Leyen – introduced in a speech at the MERICS think tank in March 2023 – as indicative of Brussels' perceived slavish compliance with Washington's demands.¹⁰

This coldness came painfully to the foreground when von der Leyen joined French President Emmanuel Macron on a visit to China in the first week of April 2023. In the Chinese media coverage of this visit, the EC President received only minor attention, with a small article placed at the bottom of the right column on the front page of the People's Daily (*Renmin ribao*) of 7 April 2023. In contrast, the rest of the front page was dedicated to Macron, featuring images of him and President Xi inspecting troops of the People's Liberation Army (PLA), with state media reports adopting a near-romantic tone when describing the cordial interaction between the two leaders.¹¹ A similar scenario unfolded during the visit of Belgian Prime Minister Alexander De Croo and Minister of Foreign Affairs Hadja Lahbib to China in January 2024. Despite Belgium holding the rotating presidency of the EU for the first half of 2024, media attention largely centered on bilateral relations.¹²

From the coverage of these visits, it is also important to retain that Xi Jinping is reported to have expressed to von der Leyen that China "is willing to continue its good traditions with the EU,"¹³ and to have stated that China is "welcoming specific proposals for a political solution to the crisis [in Ukraine] by the French side."¹⁴ Or how, for China, adherence to sovereign internationalism is concomitant with a preference for bilateral relations over the workings of institutes of global governance in some cases (the war against Ukraine in which it is clearly unwilling to jeopardize its leverage over Russia by participating in the Swiss peace talks), while in other cases (global health, food security, climate change, etc.), the country prefers to function within the existing framework of international

institutions. During Xi's visit to Europe in May 2024, his first post-Covid trip to the continent, a bilateral approach was prominently featured. Xi visited France, Hungary (which will hold the rotating presidency of the EU for the second half of 2024), and Serbia. Hungary, led by Viktor Orbán, maintains strong ties with China and has been a recipient of significant Chinese investments. Serbia, not an EU member state, has enthusiastically embraced multiple infrastructure projects under BRI. In line with these dynamics, it was not surprising that it was Macron who ensured that Xi's meetings in Paris included von der Leyen – not the other way around.¹⁵

EXPECTATIONS AND POSSIBILITIES FOR THE FUTURE

The Chinese leadership will likely have mixed feelings about the election results for the European Parliament (EP). Now that the ballots have been counted, it is clear that the European People's Party (EPP) has once again emerged as the largest European group in the EP with 189 seats, triumphing over their traditional challenger, the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats (S&D), who took 136 seats.¹⁶ Some notable anti-China hawks bid the parliament farewell before the elections (e.g., Reinhard Bütikofer), while others returned with reinforced factions (e.g., Raphaël Glucksmann). Additionally, some of China's 'friends,' traditionally found on the (far-)left of the political spectrum, failed to be re-elected (e.g., Clare Daly and Mike Wallace). Although Beijing also retains support on the far-right, these allies are unlikely to bring it much positive publicity. For instance, Maximilian Krah, whose Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) was expelled from the Identity and Democracy (ID) grouping, has faced scrutiny over his ties with Moscow and Beijing.¹⁷ One day after his re-election, Krah himself got expelled from the AfD as some in the party sought to rejoin ID or establish a new group, essentially putting him on the fringe of a fringe – and thus unlikely to be of much use to China.

In this regard, it is noteworthy that Chinese state media largely avoided discussing the European elections beyond brief summaries of the results and occasional mentions of concerns in European media about the rise of the (far-)right.¹⁸ This is not alien to the fact that China

has come to organize its foreign policy in a three-tier structure. On the highest level are such global projects as the BRI. This level is followed by such regional platforms as the SCO. On the lowest – but therefore not functionally less important – level are the bilateral relations. China appears to employ one of these three levels, depending on the specific policy domain that is targeted.¹⁹ The fact that, within China, there is no direct homologous institution for the EU and its leaders further complicates interactions.

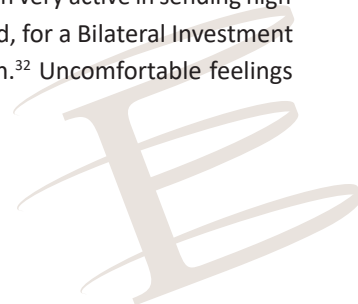
Notwithstanding the fact that, after the 2019 election cycle, von der Leyen may have been a compromise candidate after cross-party support for the original *Spitzenkandidaten* of the EPP (Manfred Weber) and S&D (Frans Timmermans) failed to materialize, extending her mandate could be considerably easier this time around, as a credible alternative has failed to emerge.²⁰ Provided von der Leyen can secure enough votes in the European Council (a supermajority) and EP (a majority),²¹ and survive some apparent political maneuvering by the Council's outgoing president Charles Michel,²² a second term is highly likely. It is not yet decided who will be President of the European Council and High Representative as of the moment of writing, but Portugal's Antonio Costa and Estonia's Kaja Kallas, respectively, seem most likely to succeed Michel and Borrell.

The general balance of power is, however, clear. Some reflections on what this suggests for the EU's future China policies are therefore in place. While gaining enough allies in the EP to alter Brussels' China policy was never realistic, Beijing might have hoped for changes in the EC, or at least a blank slate under a new president. Von der Leyen's term saw EU-China relations nosedive, after a hopeful start that was marked by the signing of an agreement in principle on the hard-fought EU-China Comprehensive Agreement on Investment (CAI) in December 2020.²³ The retaliatory sanctions of the Chinese authorities against European individuals and entities that had been involved in accusations of human rights violations in Xinjiang in March 2021,²⁴ ended any chance that the EP would ratify the agreement.²⁵ While Chinese calls to simultaneously end the sanctions and unfreeze CAI have been present

since 2022,²⁶ the 'simultaneous' aspect of their offer is likely to remain a bridge too far for the Europeans. Since, as described above, the new EP still contains many who were sanctioned in 2021, anything short of a unilateral 'icebreaker' on China's behalf is unlikely going to make any progress in this regard.

Albeit of a very different nature and *envergnung*, that former Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte – who is known to maintain cordial relations with von der Leyen – will succeed Jens Stoltenberg as next Secretary-General of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) may further complicate the matter. Just like von der Leyen, Rutte is perceived as adhering to a transatlantic approach to foreign affairs. Rutte followed Washington in imposing microchip export controls toward China in 2023,²⁷ and oversaw increased Dutch activity in the South China Sea and Taiwan Strait.²⁸ Under Rutte, a further increase in (military) cooperation with allies in the Indo-Pacific can thus be expected. Such a development is likely to convince Beijing that it is the ultimate purpose of the West to contain China. Squaring the circle with the EU's expanding (economic and political) role in the region²⁹ (and avoiding that China draws even closer to Russia in response) will therefore be a daunting task for both Rutte and von der Leyen.

With regard to the EU, tensions over Taiwan are not unrelated to nuances between what Brussels calls 'its "One China" policy,' and what China hails as 'the One China Principle' (*yi ge Zhongguo yuanze*).³⁰ The EU statements that "Taiwan is a reliable and valued like-minded partner in Asia," that "the EU and Taiwan share common values, such as democracy, the rule of law and human rights," and that both are "committed to upholding multilateralism and the rules-based international order,"³¹ have more recently been coupled with the Commission agreeing to increase trade and investment with Taiwan (whereas, compared to the EP at least, the Commission traditionally had been more reluctant to support Taiwan, by putting trade interests in China first). This echoes calls by many in the EP, which has recently been very active in sending high-level delegations to the island, for a Bilateral Investment Agreement (BIA) with Taiwan.³² Uncomfortable feelings



with the EU's position on Taiwan were clearly visible from the media coverage in China on Lai Ching-te's inaugural speech as President of the Republic of China (Taiwan) in May 2024. The Overseas Edition of the People's Daily (*Renmin ribao haiwai ban*) devoted its full third page to reactions to Lai's speech. Prominently featuring were Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi who, during the opening session of the meeting of the SCO in Astana on 21 May referred to all SCO member states as adhering to the 'One China Principle'; Foreign Ministry spokesperson Wang Wenfu mentioning Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Kiribati, the United Arab Emirates, Guyana, Tonga, Russia, Serbia, Palestine, and Iran as upholding the 'One China Principle'; and further some shorter articles mentioning support from Venezuela, Zambia, Kenya, Nauru, Vietnam, Myanmar, Japan, and – strikingly – Bulgaria.³³ However, it is clear that within the EU, countries like Bulgaria (as well as Hungary, Cyprus, and Romania) are increasingly becoming outliers, while the powerbrokers are – in one way or another – shifting toward a more proactive (often meaning 'supportive') approach to Taiwan.³⁴

Be that as it may, with the EPP coming in first in the European elections, and von der Leyen having built a 'Chinese Wall' against the extremes to the right and the left, a more profound EPP stamp on the EU's China policy is realistic. Referring to the 2019 document *EU-China – A Strategic outlook*, the document *EU-China Relations – Towards a Fair and Reciprocal Partnership* that the EPP coincidentally released just days before the aforementioned sanctions in March 2021, says in no uncertain terms that the EPP believes that the fourfold approach of China as “simultaneously, in different policy areas, a cooperation partner with whom the EU has closely aligned objectives, a negotiating partner with whom the EU needs to find a balance of interests, an economic competitor in the pursuit of technological leadership, and a systemic rival promoting alternative models of governance”³⁵ is outdated. This because “systemic rivalry can increasingly be seen as the overriding paradigm in our relationship; [...] the global struggle between democracy and authoritarianism is a major determinant of our relationship with China. As a result, the space

for cooperation and economic exchange has shrunk.”³⁶ That 'business as usual' with its 'economic competitor' is indeed a thing of the past is already visible through the instatement of sanctions on Electric Vehicles of up to 38 per cent from early July 2024 onwards.³⁷ The new EP, which (inversely to its stance on Taiwan) has historically been tougher on China than the EC, is unlikely to oppose such moves.

A harder line toward China was intensified in the EPP's *Manifesto* for the 2024 elections with the notable addition of the notion that “The EU also needs a long-term strategy towards other key, strategic areas including China *and Taiwan*” (italics added).³⁸ The China strategy and 2024 manifesto of ALDE – which seems poised to deliver the next High Representative – also explicitly mentioned the desire to achieve a BIA,³⁹ and even the conservative ECR stressed the need to elevate relations with Taiwan (while it can be expected to fight the next Commission on many themes, Taiwan will likely not be one of them).⁴⁰ Most other parties (only the Left did not mention China, while ID did not release a manifesto at all) at least touch upon the need to rebalance relations with China in light of the European strategic interests. It is therefore highly likely that the successor document to *A Strategic Outlook*, which only mentioned Taiwan in a footnote, will dedicate more space to the contested island. This expected increased focus on Taiwan could provoke Chinese ire and lead to a more adversarial economic relationship between the EU and China – whether Beijing likes to hear it or not, politics and economics can no longer be separated for the EU in the same manner as in the early 2000s.

MOVING FORWARD

So, how should the EU engage with China? With the BRI increasingly focusing on the non-West – Italy, the only Western European country that signed an MoU with China on the BRI withdrew from the scheme on 6 December 2023⁴¹ – and with talks on the ratification of the CAI stalled, the option might be considered to finally build the 'Global Gateway' into a focused and effective policy tool. Negotiations with Taiwan on establishing a BIA may come as a corollary to this and would preferably

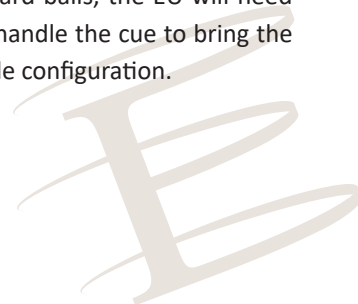
even come hand in hand with unfreezing the CAI. More generally, the rise of South-South trade and China's increasing influence in Africa highlight the importance for the EU to engage more proactively with emerging economies. An enhanced economic clout of the EU in the Global South through its 'Global Gateway' may rebalance the impact that China's parallel international structures have on the global scene. The EU should leverage its experience in multilateralism to rebalance existing and to innovate and lead new global governance structures when and where needed. By actively participating and shaping initiatives like the BRI, the EU can ensure its interests are represented and can influence global standards. This rebalancing can go hand in hand with the EU engaging with China on issues such as climate change or global food security through the existing institutes of global governance.

The knowledge, further, that the 'Third Plenum,' a session by the Central Committee of the CCP (essentially the party's 'top-200') which traditionally outlines the economic and political reforms for the coming years, is strikingly overdue (this session is normally scheduled in the year after the party congress, but will now, finally, be held in July 2024) may give the EU extra leeway. While the delay has both been interpreted as a position of strength (Xi Jinping not needing to call a meeting)⁴² and weakness (too much instability within the CCP to convene a meeting),⁴³ it is clear that 'reform and opening up' (*gaige kaifang*)⁴⁴ is back on the agenda. The term is intrinsically related to Deng Xiaoping, the father of China's economic liberalization which commenced after his victorious political struggle against Mao Zedong's conservative successor Hua Guofeng at the Third Plenum of the 11th Central Committee of the CCP in December 1978. 'Reform,' however, had been notably absent from many official documents of the early 2020s, but appeared as many as 11 times in the official communique of the Politburo meeting of 30 April 2024, which decided to finally convene a 'Third Plenum' and, among other things, stated that: "Reform and opening up is an effective instrument for the cause of the Party and the people to make great strides in keeping up with the times."⁴⁵

The knowledge that Beijing still tends to see Brussels firstly through an economic lens, and that, for China, Ukraine remains a port of entry into Europe also in the post-war against Ukraine period,⁴⁶ explains why the Ukrainian accession to the EU is and should not be a red line for China – which notably committed itself to European integration ten years ago.⁴⁷ That, on 14 June 2024, the EU ambassadors agreed to start accession negotiations with Ukraine (and Moldova) – with talks starting at intergovernmental conferences on 25 June 2024⁴⁸ – may in this respect indeed signal to China the need to put "reform and opening up," and "keeping up with the times" on the agenda. To this can be added that, although Sino-Russian relations may be perceived as a form of (far-reaching) 'benign neutrality,'⁴⁹ there are still points where the Chinese positions on Ukraine do align with the EU – for example, that nuclear escalation should be avoided at all costs.⁵⁰

The shift in global trade patterns and the rise of new geopolitical alignments underscore the urgent need for the EU to rethink its strategic autonomy. Whether it is the incoming EC or EP, all in Brussels will be faced with the need to develop more robust, independent policies to navigate a multipolar world where the influence of traditional Western powers – proportionally, at least – is waning. In (re)positioning itself as a self-confident great power, the EU might thus be faced with the necessity to rethink the balance of norms versus interests. Acknowledging the importance of the concept of sovereign nationalism for many countries of the Global South, Brussels can redefine its role in a world in which nations prioritize sovereignty and individual interests for some issues, but remain open for international collaboration in other issues.

This redefined international role also applies to the EU's relations with China. Did not some famous Chinese paramount leader who was, in the past, praised for his pragmatism and who was well aware of the necessity to maintain 'one world' say that "it doesn't matter if the cat is white or black; if it catches mice, it's a good cat"?⁵¹ Whether cats or billiard balls, the EU will need a leadership that can deftly handle the cue to bring the billiard balls into the desirable configuration.



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Endnotes

- 1 Translated from: Heinrich Böll, *Billard um halb zehn*. Köln: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1959.
- 2 Note that while the relative increase of ‘South-South’ trade over the past decades is undisputed, the specific numbers can vary based on the definitions of ‘Developed/North’ and ‘Developing/South.’ For instance, a 2022 UNCTAD report, which expanded the list of ‘North’ countries, observed a smaller decline in the North’s share of global trade (from 52 per cent in 1990 to 37.1 per cent in 2020) compared to the South’s share (from 10.8 per cent in 1990 to 25 per cent in 2020) than the previously cited figures. See <https://unctad.org/publication/trade-and-development-report-2022> (last accessed on June 13, 2024); and, Andrew Mold, “Why South-South trade is already greater than North-North trade – and what this means for Africa.” *Brookings Commentary*, December 11, 2023. <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/why-south-south-trade-is-already-greater-than-north-north-trade-and-what-it-means-for-africa/> (Last accessed on June 12, 2024).
- 3 上海合作组织.
- 4 See Mirzokhid Rakhimov, “Contemporary Central Asia: Balancing Between Chinese and Trans-Asian ‘Silk Road’ Diplomacy.” In *China’s Global Rebalancing and the New Silk Road*, ed. B. R. Deepak, 119-128. Singapore: Springer, 2018, p.121; Fabienne Bossuyt, “Engaging with Central Asia: China compared to the European Union.” In *China, the European Union, and the developing world: a triangular relationship*, ed. Jan Wouters, Jean-Christophe Defraigne and Matthieu Burnay, 210-235. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 2015, p.230.
- 5 一带一路倡议.
- 6 On this see, Jasper Roctus, “Remolding China’s ‘Empty’ Belt and Road Initiative: An Opportunity for the EU.” *Egmont Security Policy Brief* 128, June 2020.
- 7 On these initiatives and their importance for global order: see Bart Dessein, “China and Geopolitics as Ontology.” *Egmont Policy Brief* 328, January 2024, p.4; Jasper Roctus and Bart Dessein, “China, the West, and the Rest: Who is Enjoying the Shadow of Whom?” *Egmont Policy Brief* 333, February 2024, pp.4-5.
- 8 “Brazil, China call for Russia-Ukraine peace talks with both countries”, Reuters, May 23, 2024. [https://www.reuters.com/world/brazil-china-call-russia-ukraine-peace-talks-with-both-countries-2024-05-23/#:~:text=Brazil%2C%20China%20call%20for%20Russia%2DUkraine%20peace%20talks%20with%20both%20countries,-By%20Reuters&text=May%2023%20\(Reuters\)%20%2D%20Brazil,by%20Reuters%20showed%20on%20Thursday](https://www.reuters.com/world/brazil-china-call-russia-ukraine-peace-talks-with-both-countries-2024-05-23/#:~:text=Brazil%2C%20China%20call%20for%20Russia%2DUkraine%20peace%20talks%20with%20both%20countries,-By%20Reuters&text=May%2023%20(Reuters)%20%2D%20Brazil,by%20Reuters%20showed%20on%20Thursday). (last accessed on June 12, 2024). On May 31, 2024, China decided to not participate in the Swiss peace conference on Ukraine. See, Laurie Chen and Liz Lee, ‘China says it will not join Swiss peace conference on Ukraine,’ Reuters, [https://www.reuters.com/world/china-will-not-join-swiss-peace-conference-ukraine-sources-say-2024-05-31/#:~:text=BEIJING%2C%20May%2031%20\(Reuters\),confirming%20an%20exclusive%20Reuters%20report](https://www.reuters.com/world/china-will-not-join-swiss-peace-conference-ukraine-sources-say-2024-05-31/#:~:text=BEIJING%2C%20May%2031%20(Reuters),confirming%20an%20exclusive%20Reuters%20report). (last accessed on June 12, 2024).
- 9 See Richard Sakwa, ‘BRICS and Sovereign Internationalism,’ *Strategic Analysis* 43/6: 456-468.
- 10 See https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/speech_23_2063 (last accessed on June 11, 2024).
- 11 See Bart Dessein and Jasper Roctus, “‘Remonstrating,’ or the Art of Forging Relations,” *ReConnect China Policy Brief* 1, May 2024, pp.1-2.
- 12 Press coverage in all major state newspapers was universally focusing on the Sino-Belgian relations first, and only on Sino-European relations in secondary order. See, e.g., “习近平會見比利時首相德克羅” (Xi Jinping Meets Belgian Premier De Croo), 人民網, January 13, 2024. <http://politics.people.com.cn/n1/2024/0113/c1024-40158060.html> (last accessed on June 12, 2024).
- 13 “习近平指出，中方始终[...]愿同欧方延续良好传统”，“习近平会见欧盟委员会主席冯德莱恩” (Xi Jinping Meets with European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen), (*Renmin ribao*, April 7, 2023; http://paper.people.com.cn/rmrb/html/2023-04/07/nw.D110000renrmb_20230407_4-01.htm (last accessed on June 12, 2024).
- 14 “习近平指出，[...]欢迎法方就政治解决危机提出具体方案。”“习近平同法国总统马克龙举行会谈” (Xi Jinping Holds an Informal Meeting with French President Emmanuel Macron in Guangzhou), (*Renmin ribao*, April 8, 2023; http://paper.people.com.cn/rmrb/html/2023-04/08/nw.D110000renrmb_20230408_1-01.htm (last accessed on June 12, 2024).
- 15 Andrew Scobell, Mirna Galic, Mary Glanz, and Katie Ruppert, ‘In Europe, Xi Looks to Boost Ties – And Sow Division,’ United States Institute of Peace, May 16, 2024. <https://www.usip.org/publications/2024/05/europe-xi-looks-boost-ties-and-sow-divisions> (last accessed on June 12, 2024).
- 16 After the EPP surged in the 1999 European elections and surpassed the S&D, it has remained the largest party ever since. The S&D subsequently has always taken second place.
- 17 Krah’s former aide was arrested for working for the Chinese intelligence service. See <https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/news/afd-mep-krah-cleared-from-espionage-case-but-other-preliminary-investigations-ongoing/> (last accessed on June 10, 2024).
- 18 See, respectively, “综合消息 | 欧洲议会选举投票结束 政治光谱向右倾斜” (Comprehensive news. Polling in the European Parliament elections is over, and the political spectrum is tilting to the right), 新华网, 10 June 2024. <http://www.news.cn/20240610/f30315a278344df4961e4f98e9d09cfa/c.html> and “欧洲议会右翼和极右翼势力崛起 多家国际媒体表示担忧”(The rise of right-wing and far-right forces in the European Parliament has prompted many international media to express concern), 央视网, 11 June 2024. <https://news.cctv.com/2024/06/11/ARTIZd8CCZFKtmexfla4ZO8n24O611.shtml> (both last accessed on June 21, 2024).

- 19 On this three-tier structure: see Jeremy Garlick, 'China's alternative global order: a primer.' <https://eh4s.eu/publication/Chinas-alternative-global-order-a-primer> (last accessed on June 12, 2024).
- 20 Notably, the S&D failed to present a strong alternative in 2024. See, for example, Barbara Moens, Eddy Wax and Jacopo Barigazzi, "Nicolas who? Socialists close in on challenger to take on Ursula von der Leyen", *Politico*, 15 January 2024. <https://www.politico.eu/article/nicolas-schmit-socialists-ursula-von-der-leyen-european-commission-spitzenkandidat/> (last accessed on June 10, 2024).
- 21 The European Council could still prove tough to convince as currently only 12 out of 27 national leaders are represented by the EPP – and none of those are powerbrokers. In addition to approval from the European Council, a majority in the EP is required for election. Since abstentions effectively count as no-votes, securing such a majority is challenging. In 2019, Ursula von der Leyen narrowly surpassed the threshold thanks to support from several right-wing parties, despite defections from dozens of S&D members. See Maïa de La Baume and David M. Herszenhorn, "Ursula von der Leyen elected European Commission president", *Politico*, 16 July 2019. <https://www.politico.eu/article/ursula-von-der-leyen-elected-european-commission-president/> (last accessed on June 10, 2024).
- 22 Ever since 'Sofagate,' a spat over seating arrangements during a meeting with the Turkish leadership, relations between Michel and von der Leyen have been notably strained. According to sources cited by *POLITICO*, Michel has attempted to influence his own succession and also suggesting alternatives to von der Leyen. See Barbara Moens and Jacopo Barigazzi, "Charles Michel's new plan to destroy von der Leyen: Give the Greek PM her job", *Politico*, 13 June 2024. <https://www.politico.eu/article/charles-michel-new-plan-destroy-ursula-von-der-leyen-commission-president-kyriakos-mitsotakis/> (last accessed on June 17, 2024).
- 23 See "EU-China agreement in principle", *European Commission*. https://policy.trade.ec.europa.eu/eu-trade-relationships-country-and-region/countries-and-regions/china/eu-china-agreement/eu-china-agreement-principle_en (last accessed on June 11, 2024)
- 24 See "外交部发言人宣布中方对欧盟有关机构和人员实施制裁" (The spokesperson of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs announced that China has imposed sanctions on relevant EU institutions and personnel) https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/fyrbt_673021/dhdw_673027/202103/t20210322_9171336.shtml (last accessed on June 11, 2024).
- 25 See "MEPs refuse any agreement with China whilst sanctions are in place," *European Parliament*. <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/press-room/20210517IPR04123/meps-refuse-any-agreement-with-china-while-sanctions-are-in-place> (last accessed on June 11, 2024).
- 26 Fu Cong, the previous Chinese ambassador to the EU, among others, repeatedly called for this. See, for example, "Transcript of Ambassador Fu Cong's Interview with the South China Morning Post", *Mission of the People's Republic of China to the European Union*, 23 December 2022. http://eu.china-mission.gov.cn/eng/mh/202212/t20221224_10994641.htm (Last accessed on February 7, 2024).
- 27 See "Dutch cozy up to US with controls on exporting microchip kit to China", *Politico*, 1 September 2023. <https://www.politico.eu/article/the-netherlands-limits-chinese-access-to-chips-tools-asml/> (last accessed on June 14, 2024).
- 28 The Netherlands has participated in several joint exercises in the South China Sea since the late 2010s, especially in collaboration with the US. See, for a recent example, Rebecca Moore, "Netherlands, U.S. naval forces conduct South China Sea operation", May 22, 2024. <https://www.navy.mil/Press-Office/News-Stories/Article/3784149/netherlands-us-naval-forces-conduct-south-china-sea-operations/> (last accessed on June 17, 2024). In early June, the Dutch frigate HNLMS Tromp, which was taking part in a multinational operation together with the United States, the UK, and South Korea to monitor compliance with UN sanctions imposed on North Korea over its nuclear weapons program, passed through Taiwan Strait for the first time in many years en route to the region. An incident involving Chinese fighter jets subsequently took place. See "China's defence ministry says Dutch ship incident 'heinous'" (Reuters, June 11, 2024) <https://www.reuters.com/world/chinas-defence-ministry-says-dutch-ship-incident-heinous-2024-06-11/> (last accessed on June 17, 2024).
- 29 See, for example, Gloria Sicilia and Emily Benson, "Navigating Tides: The European Union's Expanding Role in the Indo-Pacific", *CSIS*, 5 March 2024. <https://www.csis.org/analysis/navigating-tides-european-unions-expanding-role-indo-pacific> (last accessed on June 21, 2024).
- 30 一个中国原则.
- 31 "Relations with the EU – The European Union and Taiwan" https://www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/taiwan/european-union-and-taiwan_en?s=242 (last accessed on June 12, 2024).
- 32 See Jasper Roctus and Bart Dessen, "China, the West, and the Rest: Who is Enjoying the Shadow of Whom?" *Egmont Policy Brief* 333, February 2024, p.4; Jasper Roctus, "Lai Ching-te Inaugurated in Taiwan: Managing Legislative Turmoil and Cross-Strait Status Quo." *Egmont Commentaries*, May 30, 2024.
- 33 Apart from these countries, also the secretary of the United Nations in Vienna, the secretary of trade of the United Nations, the International Atomic Energy Agency, the International Red Cross, and the International New Red Moon are mentioned as adhering to the 'One China Principle.' The addition of Japan is in particular curious, considering it has never fully embraced the Chinese position on Taiwan – choosing to merely 'respect' (尊重) Beijing's position when it established relations in 1972 – and been stretching the boundaries of 'one China' recently by, among others, sending high level delegations of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) to Taiwan. In this regard it is not surprising that the quotations in the Chinese press were not made by an incumbent government official, but by former prime minister Yukio Hatoyama (r. 2009–2010), who is not affiliated to the LDP and is known for his pro-Chinese stance. For the different articles on said page, see http://paper.people.com.cn/rmrbhwb/html/2024-05/22/node_867.htm (last accessed on June 13, 2024).

- 34 For an overview of the respective China (and also Taiwan) policies of EU member states, see Bernhard Bartsch and Claudia Wessling (2023), “From a China strategy to no strategy at all: Exploring the diversity of European approaches,” *European Think-tank Network on China (ETNC)*.
- 35 See *European Commission and HR/VP contribution to the European Council EU-China – A strategic outlook*, Strasbourg, March 12, 2019. <https://commission.europa.eu/system/files/2019-03/communication-eu-china-a-strategic-outlook.pdf> (last accessed on June 12, 2024).
- 36 See “EU-China Relations – Towards a Fair and Reciprocal Partnership” (March 10, 2021). <https://www.eppgroup.eu/newsroom/eu-china-relations-towards-a-fair-and-reciprocal-partnership> (last accessed on June 12, 2024).
- 37 See, “Commission investigation provisionally concludes that electric vehicle value chains in China benefit from unfair subsidies”, *European Commission*. https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_24_3231 (last accessed on June 20, 2024).
- 38 See “EPP Manifesto 2024” <https://www.epp.eu/papers/epp-manifesto-2024> (last accessed on June 12, 2024).
- 39 See, respectively, “A Liberal Strategy for Europe’s Relationship with China” (ALDE) https://assets.nationbuilder.com/aldeparty/pages/6626/attachments/original/1685448655/A_Liberal_Strategy_for_Europe%E2%80%99s_Relationship_with_China.pdf?1685448655 and “Your Europe, your Freedom. Delivering Change for You” (ALDE) https://assets.nationbuilder.com/aldeparty/pages/6401/attachments/original/1712824919/ALDE_Party_2024_Manifesto.pdf?1712824919 (both last accessed on June 13, 2024).
- 40 See “ECR Party 240424 Manifesto” <https://www.europaportalen.se/sites/default/files/dokument/ECR%20valmanifest%202024.pdf> (last accessed on June 13, 2024).
- 41 See “Italy Withdraws from China’s Belt and Road Initiative”, *Center for Strategic and International Studies*, 14 December 2023. <https://www.csis.org/analysis/italy-withdraws-chinas-belt-and-road-initiative> (last accessed on June 12, 2024).
- 42 See, for example, “The “Missing” Third Plenum suggests Xi is sticking to his plan”, *MERICs*, 5 March 2024. <https://merics.org/en/comment/missing-third-plenum-suggests-xi-sticking-his-plan> (last accessed on June 13, 2024).
- 43 See, for example, “China’s Third Plenum Is Long Overdue. That’s a Red Flag”, *The Diplomat*. <https://thediplomat.com/2024/03/chinas-third-plenum-is-long-overdue-thats-a-red-flag/> (last accessed on June 13, 2024).
- 44 改革开放.
- 45 Original text: “改革开放是党和人民事业大踏步赶上时代的重要法宝.” See <http://politics.people.com.cn/n1/2024/0430/c1024-40227489.html> (last accessed on June 14, 2024)
- 46 Note that the 12th point of the document “China’s Position on the Political Settlement of the Ukraine crisis” of 24 February 2023 reads ‘Promoting post-conflict reconstruction. The international community needs to take measures to support post-conflict reconstruction in conflict zones. China stands ready to provide assistance and play a constructive role in this endeavor’. https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjdt_665385/2649_665393/202302/t20230224_11030713.html (last accessed on June 20, 2024).
- 47 “Joint Statement: Deepening the EU-China Comprehensive Strategic Partnership for mutual benefit”, 31 March 2014, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/STATEMENT_14_89 (last accessed on June 21, 2024)
- 48 “EU agrees on start of accession talks with Ukraine, Moldova” (Reuters, 14 June 2024). [https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/eu-agrees-start-accession-talks-with-ukraine-moldova-2024-06-14/#:~:text=BRUSSELS%2C%20June%2014%20\(Reuters\),intergovernmental%20conferences%20on%20June%2025](https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/eu-agrees-start-accession-talks-with-ukraine-moldova-2024-06-14/#:~:text=BRUSSELS%2C%20June%2014%20(Reuters),intergovernmental%20conferences%20on%20June%2025) (last accessed on June 15, 2024).
- 49 For reflections of the ‘cost’ of China’s neutrality, see Sven Biscop, “Ukraine: The Price of China’s Neutrality,” *Egmont Commentary* (March 2023). See <https://www.egmontinstitute.be/ukraine-the-price-of-chinas-neutrality/> (last accessed on June 19, 2024).
- 50 Chinese officials have notably taken credit for preventing nuclear escalation, see, for example: “Xi Jinping warned Vladimir Putin against nuclear attack in Ukraine”, *The Financial Times*. <https://www.ft.com/content/c5ce76df-9b1b-4dfc-a619-07da1d40cbd3> (last accessed on June 18, 2024)
- 51 不管黑猫白猫，能捉到老鼠就是好猫。





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