



Remarks by President von der Leyen at the press conference at the end of her visit to China

Beijing, 6 April 2023

I want to debrief you on a comprehensive day of high-level discussions we had today here in Beijing. I met with President Xi, both in a joint meeting with President Emmanuel Macron and then in a bilateral meeting. I also had a meeting with Prime Minister Li.

Let me start with EU-China relations. It is an extensive and complex relationship that we have. For both of us, this relationship has a significant impact on our prosperity and our security. For China, because the European Union is the first export destination, while China is in the European Union the third export destination. If I give you one concrete figure, this means trade of more than EUR 2.3 billion per day in 2022. At the same time, our trade relationship is increasingly imbalanced. Over the last ten years, the European Union's trade deficit has more than tripled. It reached almost EUR 400 billion last year. And we discussed that, because this trajectory is not sustainable and the underlying structural issues need to be addressed. I conveyed that European Union businesses in China are concerned by unfair practices in some sectors – unfair practices that impede their access to the Chinese market. For example, if you take the EU agri-food products, they face significant hurdles. Or if you take medical devices as an example, they are being excluded from the market by discriminatory 'Buy China' policies. All of these sectors I am speaking about are recognised areas of European excellence. So these sectoral issues are exacerbated by ever-growing requirements imposed by China that apply across the board: be it, for example, increasing pressures to submit to technology transfer; or be it excessive data requirements; or be it insufficient enforcement of intellectual property rights. All this puts European Union companies exporting to China, and also those producing in China, at a significant disadvantage, we discussed that. And we also discussed the fact that this contrasts with the level playing field that all companies operating in the European Single Market benefit from. So against this backdrop, the European Union is becoming more and more vigilant about protecting our interests and ensuring a level playing field.

In addition to these imbalances in our relationship, as you know, the European Union is growing more vigilant about dependencies. Some of these dependencies raise significant risks for us, as does the export of sensitive emerging technologies. Within this context, we all know that this leads to calls by some to decouple from China. I doubt that this is a viable or desirable strategy. I believe that we have to engage in de-risking. This means focusing on specific risks, while appreciating that there is of course a large majority of goods and services, so trade that is un-risky. Of course, different risks require different means to address them: We address the risk of dependencies through the diversification of our trade and investment relations. The risk of leakage of sensitive technologies that could be used for military purposes needs to be addressed through export controls or investment screening. But whatever the instrument we choose is, we wish to resolve the current issues through dialogue. So it is basically de-risking through diplomacy. This is why I called for – and we agreed in – the resumption of the High-Level Economic and Trade Dialogue. I am very glad that we agreed on this. Not only the High-Level Economic and Trade Dialogue, but along with this one also the High-Level Digital Dialogue. These two Dialogues should convene as soon as possible to make progress on all the different files and produce tangible results.

Let me now turn to the geopolitical environment. This visit is taking place in a challenging and increasing volatile context, in particular because of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine. China's position on this is crucial for the Europe Union. As a member of the UN Security Council, there is a big responsibility, and we expect that China will play its role and promote a just peace, one that respects Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity, one of the cornerstones of the UN Charter. I did emphasise in our talks today that I stand firmly behind President Zelenskyy's peace plan. I also welcomed some of the principles that have been put forward by China. This is notably the case on the issue of nuclear safety and risk reduction, and China's statement on the unacceptability of nuclear threats or the use of nuclear weapons. We also count on China not to provide any military equipment, directly or indirectly, to Russia. Because we all know, arming the aggressor would be against international law. And it would significantly harm our relationship.

We also addressed human rights. I expressed our deep concerns about the deterioration of the human rights situation in China. The situation in Xinjiang is particularly concerning. It is important that we continue to discuss these issues. And I therefore welcome that we have already resumed the EU-China Human Rights Dialogue.

Besides Russia's invasion of Ukraine, there are some areas of convergence and cooperation on specific global issues. In view of the size of our economies, we have a shared responsibility in resolving global issues, for example, first and foremost, to protect the climate and to protect our environment. I particularly welcome the positive role that China has played in delivering the Montreal-Kunming agreement on biodiversity. China has also been a driving force to reach a deal on the High Seas Treaty – this is particularly positive. On the fight against climate change, we want to see China make concrete and ambitious commitments in the run-up to COP28 in Dubai. We discussed this topic too. And I invited China to jointly prepare this COP28, in the context of our joint initiative with Canada. And of course, I would very much welcome if China would be choosing to join the Global Methane Pledge. We need China as an important player. These were the different topics in general that we have discussed and I am now looking forward to answer your questions.

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