

“中国与世界”系列报告之八



# 中欧抗疫 命运与共

China-Europe Solidarity in Fighting COVID-19 with a Shared  
Commitment to Safeguard Human Health

Together We Fight  
against the Virus

中国国际问题研究院 CIIIS  
二〇二〇年四月 April 2020

Chairman: Qi Zhenhong

Members: Ruan Zongze

Chen Xulong

Jiang Yuechun

Song Junying

Wang Youming

Rong Ying

Cui Hongjian

Liu Qing

Teng Jianqun

Zhao Qinghai

Yang Yi

Hu Dawei

Li Ziguo

Wang Jia

China Institute of International Studies (CIIS) was founded in 1956 under the name of Institute of International Relations. It is the think tank of China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs. It conducts research and analysis on a wide range of foreign policy issues.

The Institute consists of the Departments of Global Strategy, American Studies, Asia-Pacific Security and Cooperation, EU Studies, Developing Countries Studies, World Economy and Development Studies, Latin America Studies. Besides, there are Research Centers focused respectively on the study of European Union, the Middle East, the South Pacific, China's Energy Strategy, Maritime Security and Cooperation, Periphery Security and World Economy and Security.

# Contents

|   |           |
|---|-----------|
| <b>Abstract</b> .....   | <b>2</b>  |
| <b>Introduction</b> .....   | <b>3</b>  |
| <b>I. Facing COVID-19 – the Common Enemy</b> .....                  | <b>4</b>  |
| <b>II. Taking Measures Suitable to National Circumstances</b> ..... | <b>6</b>  |
| 2.1 China’s Intensive Combat against COVID-19.....                  | 6         |
| 2.2 The “Protracted War” in Europe .....                            | 8         |
| <b>III. Working Together to Fight the Common Enemy</b> .....        | <b>14</b> |
| 3.1 Building Confidence through Mutual Support .....                | 14        |
| 3.2 Sharing Experience to Improve Patient Treatment .....           | 19        |
| 3.3 Providing Supplies in the Spirit of Reciprocity .....           | 23        |
| <b>IV. Building a Community of Shared Future</b> .....              | <b>27</b> |
| 4.1 Overcoming Prejudices.....                                      | 27        |
| 4.2 Protecting the Economy and People’s Livelihood.....             | 34        |
| 4.3 Working Together to Advance Post-Pandemic Development.....      | 37        |
| <b>Conclusion</b> .....   | <b>40</b> |

## **Abstract**

COVID-19 is a common enemy for China and Europe. The virus respects no borders. China and Europe are both victims of the pandemic although different epidemic prevention measures are being taken due to differences in national conditions, systems and capabilities.

Solidarity between China and Europe has played a positive role in addressing the common threat. When COVID-19 broke out in China, European countries and the European Union (EU) did not only express their sympathy to China, but also provide China with strong material support out of friendship. In return, when Europe was later affected by the pandemic, China tried its best to meet the needs across Europe for medical supplies in the spirit of international humanitarianism and reciprocity. The solidarity reflects the good will on both sides and the vision of a community with a shared future for mankind, and enriches the connotations of the China-Europe relations.

At present, the spread of the pandemic has apparently slowed down in China but it is still surging in Europe. It is imperative for both sides to accumulate further knowledge of COVID-19 and the course of the pandemic, so we must learn from each other and share information, experience and expertise. More concerted efforts are needed to safeguard people’s health, ensure people’s livelihood, strengthen economic resilience and guarantee the integrity of supply chains. To address the pressing challenges, we must promote consensus and enhance mutual trust to purify the environment of international public opinion, prevent the dissemination of false information, stop politicizing the epidemic and stigmatizing certain countries. Last but not least, we must remain committed to multilateralism, maintain the international order, and bring innovation to global public health governance to improve the well-being of mankind.

## **Introduction**

2020 marks the 45th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and the EU. Both sides are ready to promote wide-ranging, all-dimensional and high-level cooperation and a milestone is expected in the development of bilateral relations.<sup>1</sup> However, the outbreak of COVID-19 comes as a shock for both China and Europe. The pandemic has not only challenged our public health preparedness, but also the governance capacities of all countries and regions. It threatens global economic and social stability, and tests the political mutual trust between China and Europe.

January 23, 2020, two days before China's 2020 Spring Festival, was a day that would be remembered by all Chinese people. In the early morning, the municipal government of Wuhan of Hubei Province announced to "suspend the operation of buses, subways, ferries and intercity buses in Wuhan, advise citizens against leaving the city if not necessary, and temporarily close exit channels in airports and train stations." A national traffic hub in central China, and a huge city with an area of more than 8,000 square kilometers and a total population of more than 11 million, the city of Wuhan was locked down under the threat of COVID-19. Five days later, the entire province of Hubei, with a total area of nearly 190,000 square kilometers and a total population of 60 million, was also shut down, with transportation and passenger links with other parts of China cut off.

February 22, 2020 was to be remembered by all Italians and Europeans. In order to contain COVID-19 in their country, the Italian government shut down 12 towns in Lombardy and Veneto in northern Italy. More than 50,000 people were urged to stay indoors. On March 10, Italy extended the shutdown measures nationwide, affecting a total population of 60 million in a territory of 300,000 square kilometers. The lockdown of Wuhan and the shutdown of Italy have brought China and Europe to the critical moment in the face of COVID-19.

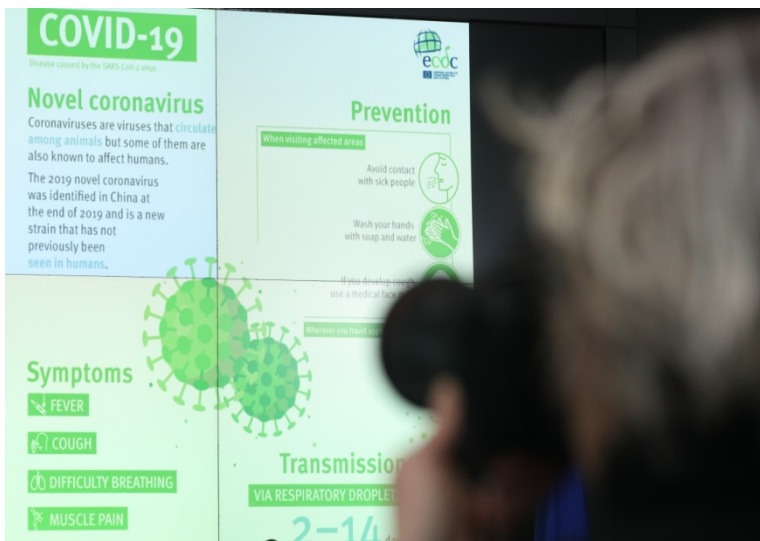
---

<sup>1</sup> "Wang Yi: China-Europe Relations at New Historical Beginning," Central People's Government of China, December 16, 2019, [http://www.gov.cn/guowuyuan/2019-12/16/content\\_5461485.htm](http://www.gov.cn/guowuyuan/2019-12/16/content_5461485.htm).

## **I. Facing COVID-19 – the Common Enemy**

The first month of Wuhan’s lockdown was the darkest time in China, as reported COVID-19 cases soared, and all Chinese faced the severe challenge of the coronavirus. Hospitals at different levels in Wuhan and other cities in Hubei Province were overwhelmed, due to inadequate understanding of the new coronavirus, the surge of cross infections and the shortage of medical resources. Confirmed and death cases climbed higher and higher. Meanwhile COVID-19 was spreading fast in other provinces of China. Shortly after Wuhan went into lockdown, 27 provincial regions of China were affected by the novel coronavirus. Just outside Beijing, Hebei Province reported the first death outside Hubei Province.

The first COVID-19 case was reported in Europe on January 24, 2020. France officially notified the WHO Regional Office for Europe of 3 confirmed



cases of COVID-19 (still called 2019-nCoV at that time). Yet the outbreak hit Italy first. On February 22, one month after Wuhan was locked down, Lombardy hospitalized its first local confirmed patient after nucleic acid testing was implemented. Results from massive testing have shown that, before this first confirmed case

The European Union’s disease prevention agency raised its risk assessment of the ongoing coronavirus outbreak on March 2.

in Italy, community transmission had taken place in northern Italy. Therefore, Italy was the first European country to face the COVID-19 outbreak. Italy soon became the center of Europe’s COVID-19 crisis, since it tested lots of

suspected cases and its death rate was high.

The European countries, due to the inadequate understanding of the novel coronavirus, initially treated COVID-19 as the common seasonal flu. Therefore, the routes of transmission were not cut off in time. Meanwhile, the free flow of people between the Schengen countries made it harder to control the spread of the virus. Sport events and festival activities also accelerated the speed. On March 9, Cyprus reported its first confirmed case of COVID-19 infection, meaning that all 27 European Union member states have reported infections. Two days later, on March 11, the WHO declared the COVID-19 epidemic to be a pandemic, considering its spread in Europe. It means COVID-19 had escalated from a local epidemic to a global pandemic.

At the same time, however, the spread of COVID-19 has slowed down in China. Since March 10, Wuhan has reported a steady decline in daily new confirmed cases and the discharged patients outnumbered the new confirmed ones. The suspension of all temporary hospitals in Wuhan further suggests that Wuhan, once the epicenter, has successfully stopped the spread of COVID-19. Considering that “Europe is now reporting more cases and deaths than the rest of the world combined, except for China,” and that “more cases are now being reported every day than were reported in China at the height of its epidemic,” the WHO announced Europe to be the world’s COVID-19 pandemic epicenter on March 13.<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> “WHO Declares Europe as Epicenter of Coronavirus Pandemic,” *Xinhua*, March 13, 2020, [http://www.xinhuanet.com/world/2020-03/14/c\\_1125710116.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/world/2020-03/14/c_1125710116.htm).

## II. Taking Measures Suitable to National Circumstances

China and the European countries have adopted different measures to fight COVID-19, due to the differences in governance models, health systems and the availability of supplies. While China has put the coronavirus under control rather fast and has shared its experience with the international community on how to control the virus, there is no standard solution at all. The European countries are making and implementing their own solutions to fight COVID-19, based on the specific problem they face.

### 2.1 China’s Intensive Combat against COVID-19

China’s efforts against COVID-19 can be outlined as follows:

First, a strict lockdown was enforced in Wuhan, the center of China’s COVID-19 outbreak to cut off transmission routes of the new coronavirus in communities in Hubei and beyond.

Second, Chinese governments at all levels, along with communities across

the country, took quick and coordinated actions in response to the outbreak. Following the lockdown in Wuhan and Hubei province, strict control measures were enforced in the rest of China. At the national level, the Central Leading Group on Responding to the Novel Coronavirus Pneumonia



On January 23, Wuhan was locked down to contain the outbreak of COVID-19.

Outbreak, headed by Chinese Premier Li Keqiang, began to function from January 25, 2020. Public health emergency response mechanisms were implemented and leading groups at local levels were established across China



very soon.

Third, negligent officials of local authorities were held accountable, punished, and replaced. Besides many health officials, the top political leaders of Wuhan and Hubei Province were replaced on February 13, with the hope of making the response efforts more efficient and concerted, and building a united front between governmental and non-governmental forces.

Fourth, considering the experience of the SARS outbreak in 2013, China was alert enough to secure medical resources and make them available in the epicenter and other severely affected areas. Efforts were made to improve medical infrastructure and facilities at the frontline against COVID-19. Two emergency hospitals dedicated to severe COVID-19 cases were built very fast. One is Huoshenshan Hospital which covers a total floor area of 33,900 square meters and has 1,000 beds. The construction began on January 23, the day when Wuhan went into lockdown, and it was completed within 10 days and put into operation in Wuhan on February 2. The other emergency hospital is Leishenshan Hospital with 1,600 beds, which broke ground on January 25 and was put into use in Wuhan on February 8. In addition, 16 temporary hospitals based on existing buildings were activated in Wuhan, which relieved the strained medical system.

Fifth, human and material resources were mobilized nationwide to support Wuhan and other affected cities in Hubei, which was a critical support for the combat against the coronavirus. Starting from January 28, over 40,000 medical workers, including PLA medics, were sent to Hubei from various other parts of China. They joined the fight against COVID-19 in Hubei and played a significant role there. Meanwhile, China ordered that provision of supplies and logistics in hard-hit areas be prioritized and that medical equipment producers resume operation to guarantee the supplies.

Sixth, when personnel and equipment permitted, the Chinese government ordered health facilities to isolate, hospitalize and treat any

affected person in need, including COVID-19 patients and close contacts, to contain the outbreak. Thanks to the intense efforts of medical and public health workers the COVID-19 outbreak in Wuhan peaked in late February, with more patients cured and discharged from hospitals than new confirmed cases reported for consecutive days. As a result, the medical facilities including designated hospitals, temporary hospitals and quarantine facilities were no longer overloaded and all had empty beds. Around March 10, Hubei recorded a single-digit daily tally for the first time and all temporary hospitals in Wuhan were shut down. On March 12, the National Health Commission (NHC) announced that China’s COVID-19 outbreak had passed its peak. On March 18, for the first time, Wuhan reported zero new confirmed and suspected COVID-19 cases, which brought the daily tally of local infected cases in the Chinese mainland to zero and activated the withdrawal of external medical workers from Hubei. In view of this, the Central Leading Group on Responding to the Novel Coronavirus Pneumonia Outbreak concluded and declared in a statement on March 23 that the spread of domestically transmitted epidemic with Wuhan as the epicenter had been basically blocked, and the focus of China’s combat against COVID-19 thereafter shifted to “the prevention of imported cases and a rebound in indigenous cases.”<sup>1</sup>

## **2.2 The “Protracted War” in Europe**

The epidemic response of European countries is based on their understanding of the coronavirus and their governance models. Believing that the coronavirus may coexist with humans for a long time, most European countries were prepared for a “protracted war.” Nevertheless, the response measures in Europe varied from country to country. Italy and Spain were forced to take strict measures; France and Germany stepped up their measures gradually as the outbreak escalated; the UK and Sweden were once

---

<sup>1</sup> “Li Keqiang Presides over Meeting of Central Leading Group on Novel Coronavirus Prevention and Control,” *Xinhua*, March 23, 2020, [http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2020-03/23/c\\_1125756523.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2020-03/23/c_1125756523.htm).

inactive when it came to the danger of COVID-19 spread and thus drew misunderstandings and criticism.

### **Italy and Spain waking up to the danger of COVID-19**

Italy was the first European country to be hard hit by the outbreak, and the first one to implement harsh response measures. From February 7 when the first local confirmed case was reported, to February 22 when a sudden surge in confirmed cases occurred, Italy's response was based on the perception that COVID-19 was more or less a severe flu. Although it took action, Italy's signals were not clear and its epidemic control measures were relatively lax. People lacked



On March 10, Italy awoke to a national lockdown intended to contain the spreading COVID-19.

awareness of the coronavirus, and massive gatherings and events went on as scheduled. The inadequacy of public awareness and government response in the early days led to a strain on medical resources after a surge in COVID-19 cases after February 22. Mild cases could not be isolated or treated in time, while severe cases could not get prompt and proper treatment. Thus, COVID-19 broke out, deaths soared, and the entire society panicked. The Italian government was forced to take more decisive measures. On the night of February 22, Italy announced toughened emergency measures to contain the epidemic, shutting down the worst-hit northern regions. Schools in Lombardy, Veneto, Emilia-Romagna and Piedmont were closed. On March 5, the Italian government went further to impose the shutdown of all schools nationwide. On March 8, Lombardy together with 14 additional neighboring provinces was put under lockdown, which restricted the movement of about a quarter of the

country’s population. Two days later, the government extended the lockdown to the whole country, as part of its toughening response measures. Following the outbreak in Italy, Spain, which is close to Italy geographically and has close contacts with Italy in many other ways, was severely affected by the coronavirus and overtook Italy as Europe’s worst-hit country by confirmed cases on April 5. Facing the outbreak starting from March 11, the Spanish government revised its response strategy and imposed intensive measures. On March 13, the government ordered the closure of all schools. On March 14, it declared a 15-day state of emergency, ordering people to stay at home. All shops were closed, except for food shops, pharmacies, and barber shops that provide essential goods and services. The Spanish government also enhanced its role in the allocation of supplies. In short, due to the lack of awareness of the crisis surrounding COVID-19 in the early stage, the epidemic had come as a sudden attack on Italy and Spain, but they had waken up and taken brave actions to fight the enemy.

### **Escalating defense against COVID-19 in France and Germany**

France was the first European country that had reported a confirmed case of COVID-19. Due to limited testing and the slow climbing of new cases, the French government did not respond toughly to the virus early on. However, in



March, as COVID-19 infections soared in its neighboring countries and access to testing expanded, France found itself facing a serious threat. Based on its robust health system and epidemic preparedness tested by

Macron declared France “at war” with Virus and mobilized the whole nation to fight against the pandemic.

historical public health crises, the French government had launched a three-stage strategy before the outbreak to contain COVID-19. The first stage began in late January when the first confirmed case was reported and lasted until February 28. The priority of “Stage 1” was to stop the spread of coronavirus from overseas. On February 29, France reported 16 new confirmed cases, bringing its total to 73. In response, the French Ministry for Solidarity and Health announced that their country had moved to “Stage 2” of the coronavirus epidemic, and deployed a range of measures like activating the Operational Centre for the Reception and Regulation of Health and Social Emergencies (CORRUSS) and coordinating national medical services with the help of Regional Health Agencies (ARS). However, the virus was spreading so fast that the outbreak in France deteriorated in mid-March, the number of new confirmed cases reached new highs, and the public health system was nearly overwhelmed. In a televised address on March 12, French President Emmanuel Macron described the COVID-19 epidemic as “the biggest health crisis” that the world had faced in a century since the 1918 flu pandemic, and he imposed a shutdown of all schools. Two days later, the Ministry for Solidarity and Health declared Stage 3 of the national health emergency plan, the final stage in the epidemic, and ordered the closure of “non-essential” public spaces. On March 16, President Macron warned that France was “at war” against the COVID-19 outbreak, thus instituting restrictions on people’s movements and the “closure of the external borders of the European space.” Similar to France, Germany also implemented a “three-stage strategy” in response to the COVID-19 outbreak. Stage 1 began on January 27 when Bavaria reported the first confirmed case. In the first half of February, by testing, tracking and quarantining people coming from Asia, Germany managed to have a clear view of possible infection chains and then cut them off, but it is impossible for Germany to remove all risks. Since the outbreak in Italy in late February, the virus had spread stealthily through mass gatherings

like carnivals, resulting in large-scale community transmissions in Germany although the country was just partially hit by imported cases at first. Within three days from March 16 to 19, Germany’s cumulative confirmed cases doubled, with over 2,000 new cases confirmed on March 19, bringing the total to over 10,000. Confronted with the escalation of COVID-19, Germany moved into Stage 2. Thanks to its advanced system of emergency medical services and its strong medical capacity, Germany managed to keep the death rate low, which was a great performance compared with other European countries. In general, in the fight against COVID-19, France and Germany have adapted their response measures to their national realities and their political mobilization power. The three-stage strategy was like what we see in a defensive warfare, where measures are adjusted to new conditions on the frontline to secure a good result without wasting any efforts.

### **Attrition war in the UK and Sweden**

The UK’s three-stage strategy, namely containment, delay to mitigation, is developed from its previous influenza strategy. However, in the first stage the UK was not successful in cutting off the transmission and was forced to move into Stage 2 earlier than expected in mid-March. Only a suite of soft measures was adopted, with no restrictions imposed on mass gatherings, no closure of schools, and no mandatory quarantines. It was speculated in the British media that the decisions were made based on an epidemiological concept called “herd immunity,” which means allowing a high percentage of the population to be infected with COVID-19 in order to develop immunity against it. After a storm of criticism at home and abroad, the British government soon denied this was the case, and toughened its measures against COVID-19. Considering the possible degree of public compliance with its measures, the capacity of the National Health Service (NHS), and the stockpile of medical supplies, the British government tried to flatten the curve, prevent the NHS from being overwhelmed by an early peak, and give the

vulnerable (including the elderly and the sick) sufficient access to health services. Unlike the quick reaction of Italy and Spain, or the gradually intensifying defense of France and Germany, the British response to COVID-19 was similar to policy implemented in countries such as Sweden. Well-known as welfare states and famous for their advanced health systems, the Nordic country did not pay much attention to the COVID-19 spread in the early days. Sweden believed that their country was at a low-risk level even after the pandemic hit many European countries and Finland also failed to act immediately. Sweden stopped testing the people with mild symptoms or collecting their epidemiological information soon after community spread occurred, in an attempt to save medical resources. It was not until the outbreak worsened that Sweden began to impose emergency measures, such as social distancing and border closure. Countries like the UK and Sweden have adopted policies centered around the idea that dealing with COVID-19 would be “a marathon, not a sprint.” They don’t want to fight the pandemic at the expense of normal life and economy.

European countries and China have responded to the COVID-19 challenge in their own ways, with due considerations of their own conditions and priorities. Therefore, it is hard to judge which one is better. Only the people of the country are entitled to score their government’s performance. After all, it is the government that are primarily responsible for their people and it is the people who are taking risks of the action or inaction of their government. However, the pandemic has posed a common challenge to all. Therefore, it is a natural choice for China and Europe to strengthen cooperation and mutual support through sharing experience and medical supplies.

### **III. Working Together to Fight the Common Enemy**

Europe and China have close political and economic ties with each other. China-Europe cooperation against COVID-19 is a natural extension of their partnership, and a spontaneous desire of the governments and peoples of both sides. Europe offered great assistance to China in our darkest days of the outbreak in Wuhan, and when the stress eased in China, China began to provide assistance to Europe in return. This shows the value of solidary and mutual assistance against the pandemic. The solidarity between China and Europe is mainly manifested in their mutual political support, experience sharing and provision of medical supplies.

#### **3.1 Building Confidence through Mutual Support**

As Francis Bacon wrote in his *Essays*, Compassion is the highest virtue in all morality. While fighting the COVID-19 outbreak, Europe and China have shown good will to each other and given each other support to build confidence, which is a perfect act of virtue. When China faced its most difficult and critical moment against the epidemic, leaders of many European countries voiced their sympathies and support to the Chinese people. On January 22, Chinese President Xi Jinping had separate phone conversations with French President Emmanuel Macron and German Chancellor Angela Merkel. As their leaders stressed, France and Germany appreciated China's efforts to respond promptly, stay open and transparent, and carry out international cooperation, adding that they are willing to provide China with support and assistance. Xi expressed his gratitude to his counterparts, and stressed that China is willing to strengthen cooperation with the international community, including France, Germany and WHO.<sup>1</sup> In the phone

---

<sup>1</sup> Xi Jinping holds a telephone call with German Chancellor Merkel, the website of Foreign Ministry, January 22, 2020, <https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/web/zyxw/t1735134.shtml>; Xi Jinping holds a telephone call with French President Macron, the website of Foreign Ministry, January 22, 2020,



conversation with British Prime Minister Boris Johnson on February 18, President Xi expressed his gratitude to Queen Elizabeth II and Prime Minister Johnson for their sympathies with China's fight against the epidemic, noting that Britain had offered China supplies in support of the fight, demonstrating the friendship between the two countries and the two peoples.<sup>1</sup> For his part, Prime Minister Johnson, on behalf of the British government and people, expressed sympathies to the Chinese people over the COVID-19 outbreak, and highly appreciated China's comprehensive and effective measures to control the epidemic, timely sharing of information with the international community, and efforts to stop the virus from spreading on a worldwide scale. The British side admired China's swiftness and efficiency in its epidemic response as well as the UK's readiness to provide continued support and assistance. Prime Minister Johnson also expressed his confidence that the Chinese people would win the battle against the outbreak and minimize its impact on China's economic and social development. In another phone conversation with French President Emmanuel Macron on the same day, President Xi thanked President Macron for calling again to express solidarity and support to China, which spoke volumes about the profound friendship between the two countries and the strength of China-France comprehensive strategic partnership. President Xi also said that China has been working with France and other countries in an open and transparent manner to deal with the outbreak, and hoped to strengthen cooperation with France in the field of health and work together to ensure public health security at regional and international levels.<sup>2</sup> President Macron once again expressed his solidarity for the Chinese government and people as they were united in this fight against

---

<https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/web/zyxw/t1735124.shtml>.

<sup>1</sup> Xi Jinping holds a telephone with British PM Johnson, the website of Foreign Ministry, February 18, 2020, <https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/web/zyxw/t1746415.shtml>.

<sup>2</sup> Xi Jinping holds a telephone call with French President Macron, the website of Foreign Ministry, February 18, 2020, <https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/web/zyxw/t1746418.shtml>.

the outbreak, as well as his admiration for China's timely, vigorous measures and high degree of openness and transparency. He offered that France was ready to provide further assistance on top of the medical supplies already delivered. France would continue to work with China to fight the epidemic and, in this process, enhance bilateral cooperation in the health sector.

Premier Li Keqiang had phone talks with President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen and German Chancellor Angela Merkel separately on February 1 and February 9. During the talk with the former, he expressed “the hope that the EU could provide necessary convenience for China in purchasing medical supplies in emergency from EU member states through commercial channels.” In reply, von der Leyen said “the EU highly respects and recognizes the epidemic prevention and control measures China has taken, and admires China’s quick response to the epidemic.” She added, “the EU will try its best to utilize every single available resource so as to lend a helping hand to China, and will coordinate with relevant member states to provide convenience to the Chinese side in purchasing medical supplies.”<sup>1</sup> Similarly, speaking of the outbreak in China, Merkel noted that Germany was paying close attention to the epidemic situation. She expressed thanks to China for its support and help of the German citizens in China, adding that Germany was willing to strengthen cooperation with China in containing the epidemic, continue to provide China with medical aid, and do all it can to help China win the fight against the epidemic. She also extended her respect and blessing to Chinese medics. From January 27 to early March, many phone talks took place between the Chinese side and their European partners. For example, Yang Jiechi, member of the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee and Chief of the General Office of the Central Foreign Affairs

---

<sup>1</sup> Li Keqiang Holds Telephone Talks with President of European Commission Ursula von der Leyen, the website of Foreign Ministry, February 1, 2020, <https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/web/zyxw/t1738618.shtml>.

Commission, discussed the epidemic on the phone with Sir Mark Sedwill, British Cabinet Secretary and National Security Advisor (NSA). China's State Councilor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi talked separately with French Foreign Minister, French Diplomatic Adviser to the President, British Foreign Secretary, Germany Foreign Minister, and so on. They both delivered thanks to their foreign counterparts for their sympathies over the epidemic in China, their strong political support for China, and their agreement to cooperate against the epidemic.

After COVID-19 swept across Europe around mid-March, China expressed sympathies and support to European countries in reciprocity. President Xi made phone calls on March 13 with President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen and President of the European Council Charles Michel to extend China's sincere sympathies to the EU and the people in all its member states over the outbreak. Recalling that not long ago the EU and its members had conveyed their sympathies and support in various forms to Beijing over China's epidemic response efforts, President Xi stressed that unity meant strength and that China was ready to support their fight against the epidemic and help the EU overcome the outbreak as soon as possible.<sup>1</sup> From March 14 to April 2, President Xi sent his sympathies over the outbreak on the phone to multiple European leaders, including German Chancellor Angela Merkel, French President Emmanuel Macron, Italian President Sergio Mattarella, Spanish King Felipe VI and Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic. At the same time, he had talked on the phone with President Macron, Chancellor Merkel, Italian Prime Minister Conte, Spanish Prime Minister Sánchez, British Prime Minister Johnson, Polish President Duda, King Philippe of Belgium and other European leaders to express further sympathies

---

<sup>1</sup> President Xi Jinping Sends Message of Sympathy to President Charles Michel of the European Council and President Ursula von der Leyen of the European Commission, the website of Foreign Ministry, March 14, 2020, <https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/web/zyxw/t1755919.shtml>.

and support, and expressed his wish to promote China-Europe cooperation in fighting the epidemic. Premier Li Keqiang also expressed China’s condolences and support on the phone with President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen, Bulgarian Prime Minister Borisov, Croatian Prime Minister Plenković, Austrian Chancellor Kurz, Irish Prime Minister Varadkar and Dutch Prime Minister Rutte. On March 18, President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen posted a video speech in English, French and German to thank China for its support in EU’s fight against the epidemic. She reiterated the agreement she reached with Premier Li in the previous phone talk, that “the fight against COVID-19 is a global one and that we need to support each other in times of need.” Noting that China provided assistance when the Europe was in urgent need of medical supplies, she said, “this support is highly valued and we are grateful for it.”<sup>1</sup> Meanwhile, in response to China’s actions, many embassies of European countries in China have extended their sympathies and support to the Chinese government and people on social media such as WeChat and Weibo. In China’s national mourning on April 4 for martyrs who sacrificed their lives in the fight against the COVID-19 outbreak and people died of the disease, the Delegation of European Union to China and several European embassies and consulates expressed sympathies with their flags flying at half-mast.

There are also many touching stories of solidarity and mutual support between China and Europe at the local and community levels. Lots of European friends working and living in China chose to stay in Wuhan and other parts of China after the epidemic broke out, showing their confidence in China's war against the epidemic through concrete actions. Sister provinces and cities expressed solidarity with China in many ways. The governor of the

---

<sup>1</sup> President Ursula von der Leyen of the European Commission express gratefulness for China’s support in Europe’s efforts in combating the pandemic,” Xinhua News Agency, March 19, 2020, [http://www.xinhuanet.com/2020-03/19/c\\_1125735352.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/2020-03/19/c_1125735352.htm).

## China-Europe Solidarity in Fighting COVID-19 with a Shared Commitment to Safeguard Human Health

---

Saxony State of Germany, a "sister province" of Hubei province, wrote to Hubei Governor Wang Xiaodong to express firm support for Hubei to fight the epidemic. On February 24, at Germany's annual Munster Carnival, the leading parade floats were posted with prominent "Wuhan Wins" signs in both Chinese and German on both sides, demonstrating the German people's support for China's efforts against the epidemic. Meanwhile, sister cities of Wuhan in the UK, Iceland and Finland



“Together We Fight against the Virus- UK and China, United We Stand” event jointly hosted by the City of London and Chinese and British Business Communities.

also showed their understanding and sympathies with the people of Wuhan. A student network of the University of Cambridge launched a "Cambridge Stands with Wuhan" fund-raising campaign. The fund would be used to purchase protective suits and masks for Wuhan and other quarantined cities of China and support families of the medical and nursing personnel who lost their lives in fighting the epidemic. Cork City Council of Ireland held a special event to voice support for China's efforts. Danish artists and sports stars recorded videos to cheer China on. These stories are the expression of the solidarity between Chinese and European people in a difficult time. In short, while fighting the common enemy, China and Europe have given each other sympathy, comfort, understanding and support, which is the political foundation and defining feature of the China-Europe cooperation.

### **3.2 Sharing Experience to Improve Patient Treatment**

The primary goal of China-Europe cooperation against the pandemic is to contain the virus and save lives. By now, China has cured more than 80,000

patients. Through the fight against COVID-19, China has generated rich experience in clinical diagnosis and treatment and has been sharing valuable data and experience with countries around the world to improve their response to the pandemic. Information sharing between China and Europe has produced positive results. Even before the outbreak in Europe, China and Europe had already exchanged information about the disease in various ways. In early February, Germany and other European countries sent experts to WHO to work with their Chinese colleagues. At the same time, high-level medical experts from China and Germany held a video conference for the first time. As COVID-19 broke out in Europe and the rate of infection slows in China, China responded quickly and expressed its willingness to cooperate with European countries, share its experience of medical treatment and transmission control, and provide medical supplies.

On March 13, China and 17 Central and Eastern European countries (CEECs) brought together their medical experts to hold a video conference on COVID-19 control. The Chinese participants included officials from the Foreign Ministry and National Health Commission (NHC), and experts in disease control, clinical diagnosis, community service, customs and civil aviation, and the European participants were government officials from 17 CEECs and more than 150 experts in hygiene and epidemic response. The Chinese participants introduced their experience in epidemiological survey, clinical diagnosis and treatment of COVID-19 patients, community-level quarantine, and the quarantine measures for the ports of entry, and gave professional and detailed answers to questions raised by their European counterparts about diagnostic criteria, treatment protocols for patients, protection over the vulnerable population, the origin of the coronavirus, protective measures for medics, and quarantine measures for the ports of entry. All the European participants thanked China for the experience sharing

## China-Europe Solidarity in Fighting COVID-19 with a Shared Commitment to Safeguard Human Health

session, saying that it is of great significance for CEECs to improve their response to the rapidly spreading coronavirus.<sup>1</sup> On March 19, the Chinese Foreign Ministry and NHC held a China-Europe video meeting with 18 European countries including the UK, France, Germany, Italy, Spain and Switzerland. At the meeting, the Chinese side shared its experience of COVID-19 prevention and control with European officials and medical experts. They discussed the epidemiological characteristics of the outbreak, epidemic response strategies, and diagnosis and treatment of patients, and the Chinese participants gave professional and detailed answers to more than 80 questions from their European colleagues. The European participants highly appreciated China's robust response to the outbreak, and thanked China for holding the meeting at such a critical moment. They concluded that the meeting offered a large amount of professional information and many other operable measures, which is helpful for European countries troubled by the surge in coronavirus cases.

Chinese and Irish medical experts held a special video conference on COVID-19, during which Chinese experts answered questions from their Irish counterparts on epidemic control and treatment of patients, and shared experience in preventing community transmission, home quarantine policies, control and interruption of transmission routes, early detection and



The base of China's anti-epidemic expert team to Serbia.

---

<sup>1</sup> Successful Video Conference was held between China and CEE countries on the prevention and control of COVID-19, Website of People.cn, March 19, 2020, <http://world.people.com.cn/n1/2020/0314/c1002-31631938.html>.

intervention, medical resources management, and big data assistance. The Chinese government provided free online access to “The Knowledge Center for China’s Experiences in Response to COVID-19” for the rest of the world including European countries who can look up any information they need. Aside from sharing experience online, since mid-March, China has sent medical teams to Italy, Spain, the UK, and Serbia upon request to work on the frontline with their local European colleagues.

Science and technology are the most powerful weapon for humans to combat diseases, so scientific development and technological innovation are integral to China and Europe’s joint battle against the epidemic. Scientific research has become the major task for both sides. Since the outbreak began, both China and Europe have worked on vaccines and effective drugs. Research groups from many universities including University of Oxford, Imperial College London, University of Nottingham and University of Liverpool have actively conducted COVID-19 researches from very early on, hoping to accelerate vaccine development and clinical trials on humans. In addition to clinical treatment, China and Europe are striving for further cooperation on epidemiological research and the development of vaccines and effective drugs to end the outbreak that has been raging around the world. The National Natural Science Foundation of China and the UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) issued a joint statement on “Encouraging and Supporting the Scientific Community to Jointly Respond to the Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19).” GlaxoSmithKline (GSK), one of the world’s largest vaccine manufacturers, and the Norway-based Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI) announced a collaboration by which GSK will provide its AS03 adjuvant technology to facilitate four programs funded by CEPI to develop vaccines against the new coronavirus. One of them aims to develop a DNA vaccine and will be implemented by an international pharmaceutical



company in collaboration with Beijing Advaccine Biotechnology's Suzhou Biobay R&D Center. GSK is also working with Clover Biopharmaceuticals, a Chinese biotech, to further evaluate its vaccine candidates in pre-clinical studies. Many Chinese companies such as BGI Group and Guangzhou Wondfo Biotech are stepping up their efforts to produce COVID-19 testing products. China and Germany have come a long way in their joint efforts toward vaccine research and development. BioNTech and Fosun Pharma will collaborate to conduct clinical trials in China. Fosun Pharma will commercialize the vaccine in China subject to regulatory approval, with BioNTech retaining full rights to develop and commercialize the vaccine in the rest of the world. Fosun Pharma will pay BioNTech up to EUR 120 million in upfront and potential future investment and milestone payments. The two companies will share future gross profits from the sales of the vaccine in China.

### **3.3 Providing Supplies in the Spirit of Reciprocity**

Stefan Zweig once said, "Was it not the most wonderful thing on earth to be able to help one's fellow-creatures? I now knew that it was the only thing that was worthwhile." In the joint efforts to combat COVID-19, China and Europe have transformed mutual sympathy into concrete actions, and provided each other with large quantities of badly needed supplies.

After the outbreak in China, European countries have provided various material assistance to China in addition to political support and heart-warming sympathies. The EU expressed its willingness to mobilize all available resources to help China, and coordinated its members to facilitate China's purchase of medical supplies from Europe. Putting their words into action, the EU provided China with 15 tons of medical supplies. On February 1 and February 18, the German government sent a total of 15 tons of medical supplies to China and shipped them directly to Wuhan. By late February, the French government had sent three shipments of medical supplies to China

and delivered them to Wuhan. The British government donated gloves, protective suits, goggles and other materials, and delivered them to China on the chartered plane to evacuate British citizens in China. Denmark gave China medical supplies worth DKK three million. Norway allocated special funds to buy medical supplies to support China’s fight against the epidemic. Other European countries, such as Italy and Hungary, also provided material assistance to China. The assistance came from national governments, local governments and businesses in different ways. As a sister city of Wuhan, Duisburg of Germany was one of the first to donate medical supplies to Wuhan. More than 60 German companies that have offices in China provided financial and material support to China, totaling RMB 274 million. British companies including HSBC Group, Jaguar Land Rover, GlaxoSmithKline and Standard Chartered Bank announced cash donations. UK-based GV Health Ltd and Dyson Ltd donated disinfection and sterilization products to hospitals in China. Logistics companies such as Royal Mail offered logistics services for medical supplies from European contributors. Danish companies including Novo Nordisk, Maersk, Grundfos, Danfoss, Coloplast, Vestas, LEGO, and Abena donated cash and supplies worth a total of RMB 22 million, which were intended to support China's COVID-19 response efforts. Irish companies Novaerus and Allergan also donated money and supplies to Wuhan. Companies from Sweden such as Ingka Group, Volvo Cars, Blueair, NOME, Molnlycke, and Ericsson provided financial and/or material assistance to China. All this showed the friendship between peoples in Europe and China.

As COVID-19 spread globally and was declared a pandemic, China has done its best to help countries around the world including European countries in their battle against the epidemic in the spirit of reciprocity. According to China’s statistics, the Chinese government has provided supplies to 127 countries and four international organizations, including surgical masks,

## China-Europe Solidarity in Fighting COVID-19 with a Shared Commitment to Safeguard Human Health

protective gears and testing reagents by mid-April.<sup>1</sup> Meanwhile, local governments, businesses and non-governmental organizations in China have donated medical supplies to more than 100 countries and regions and international organizations. Since the outbreak in Europe, China has provided government assistance to the EU member countries including Italy, Spain, France, Germany, the UK and Serbia as soon as possible and overcome multiple challenges such as the heavy burden to fight the virus, the need to resume production, and inconvenient transportation of supplies. In addition to government assistance, China provided market-based supplies to meet the specific needs of European countries. China opened a special production line for Spain's medical supplies. France signed an agreement for buying one billion face masks from

China and opening an "air corridor" for the transport of these urgently needed supplies. At the local level, Shanghai alone provided material assistance to European cities such as Vila do Porto in Portugal, Hamburg in Germany, Milan and Lombardy in Italy, Ljubljana in the



300000 masks provided by China's Alibaba Public Welfare Foundation and Ma Yun Public Welfare Foundation arrived at Liege Airport in Belgium on March 16.

Republic of Slovenia, Marseille, Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes and Île-de-France in France. Shenzhen and other local governments in China also donated medical supplies to cities including Milan and Turin in Italy. Chinese companies and

---

<sup>1</sup> Chinese Foreign Ministry announces China's efforts in providing material assistance to 127 countries and 4 international organizations to combat the coronavirus pandemic, CCTV news, April 12, 2020, <http://news.cctv.com/2020/04/10/ARTIX93tEWQj4gDinYWnRaK0200410.shtml>.

people have also taken active steps to donate cash and emergency supplies to Europe. Jack Ma Foundation and Alibaba Foundation pledged 1.8 million face masks and 100,000 COVID-19 test kits to Belgium, Italy, Spain and other heavily hit European nations. Many other Chinese companies such as Xiaomi and Huawei shipped urgently needed face masks and test kits to European nations that have been hit by the disease the hardest. Fosun Foundation initiated a PPE donation joined by several Chinese private companies. Many Chinese-funded companies and Chinese overseas also donated a huge quantity of urgently needed PPE supplies to the Greek government, such as medical masks, protective suits and non-contact digital infrared thermometers.

The facts and statistics above may not provide a complete picture of the mutual aid between China and Europe, but they reflect the solid political foundation and strong public support for China-Europe cooperation against COVID-19. Governments and peoples on both sides have felt the good will of each other. The Chinese government and people have expressed their sincere gratitude to Europe for their assistance. On the other hand, Italian Foreign Minister Luigi Di Maio posted a video on the social media showing the arrival of Chinese medics and medical supplies. He stressed: “I am confident more aid will come... Tonight, I just wanted to tell you all that we are not alone.” Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić showed up at the Belgrade airport to welcome the supplies from China and expressed his gratitude. Many European people also took it to the social media to thank China.

## **IV. Building a Community of Shared Future**

Although China and Europe are far apart geographically, they are a community of shared future as they have extensive shared interests. China-Europe cooperation against COVID-19 has not only enhanced mutual understanding between governments and deepened the friendship between the peoples of the two sides, but also demonstrated the significance of the China-Europe partnership, strengthened and expanded China-Europe cooperation, and improved China-Europe relations. China-Europe cooperation against COVID-19 will help to remove prejudices and misunderstandings old and new, and to promote rational and objective perception of each other. China and Europe should extend the scope of cooperation to reduce the economic damage of the pandemic, increase economic resilience and secure supply chains. After the shock of the pandemic, China and Europe should resume their cooperation programs to promote health, prosperity and stability in regional and international community.

### **4.1 Overcoming Prejudices**

The sudden outbreak of COVID-19 has a huge impact on people's physical and psychological well-being, the social environment and public opinions. The lack of knowledge about the virus can easily cause public panic and fear, and unfounded speculations about the origin and nature of the virus can transform into prejudices or stigmatization against certain ethnic groups or countries. Face-to-face communication is now replaced by online communication during the outbreak, which facilitates the spread of false information and biased opinions. Emotional changes and the change in the method of communication have caused confusion and paranoia, which would not only amplify existing differences between China and Europe, but also create new conflicts. This may affect mutual understanding and damage

political mutual trust between China and Europe. Therefore, China-Europe cooperation against COVID-19 should not only focus on practical assistance, but also try to reduce prejudices through communication. Only in this way can we maintain a favorable public opinion environment for the cooperation against COVID-19, promote mutual understanding and enhance political mutual trust between China and Europe.

### **COVID-19 is a common enemy of humankind**

In the early days of the COVID-19 outbreak and the most challenging stage of China’s fight against the virus, most European governments and people gave their support to China, but still a handful of European media created some unpopular expressions out of their long-held prejudices. The 6/2020 issue of the German magazine *Der Spiegel* ran a sensational cover picture which deliberately linked China to the virus. Some German media and individuals, which proclaimed themselves as rational and objective, issued racist statements, allowing and inciting xenophobia and especially discrimination against China. The French press spread fallacies, referring to COVID-19 as a “yellow alert” and “yellow peril.” They were not only “taking pleasure in China’s deficiencies and mistakes of responding to the outbreak in the initial stage,” but also accused the Chinese government of the “strengthened review and control” of the public opinion, claiming that the pandemic was resulted from China’s “authoritarian system.” Some British media also spread false information and improper opinions. *The Financial Times* published an article entitled “Coronavirus Poses Challenges for China’s Centralized System,” which was filled with groundless accusations. *The Economist* published similar false reports full of prejudices against China’s political system. *The Times* ran an editorial that defended the racist articles published by *The Wall Street Journal*, while distorting China’s epidemic response efforts. Moreover, a handful of European populist politicians and congressmen also poured oil on the flame to

seek their own political gains. Nigel Farage, a British far-right politician and an initiator of Brexit, claimed, “The virus is yet another reason to rethink the West’s relationship with China.” The Commons Foreign Affairs Committee of the British parliament published a report which slandered China of concealing the epidemic and spreading false information, and groundlessly called China the origin of the coronavirus break.

Although these remarks do not represent the mainstream public opinions in Europe, peddling prejudices at the critical moment of the global campaign against COVID-19 will only cause more panic, create international opposition and conflicts and facilitate racial discrimination and stigmatization. Therefore, these remarks have attracted extensive criticism in China and among European people as well. Many rejected such unprofessional and racist remarks. China has refuted such false statements through various channels, emphasizing that the coronavirus cannot be used as an excuse for discrimination and xenophobia, and the European society should not allow racist remarks to permeate in the name of press freedom. It will not only affect Chinese people’s perception of Europe, but also damage the mutual trust between Europe and China, which will harm the European society ultimately. China advised relevant media, individuals and institutions to show a well-considered attitude in this dangerous situation and become aware of their responsibilities instead of continuing to stir up and spread panic. Only when all parties work together to contain COVID-19 and the dangerous “political viruses” can we benefit from mutual support and cooperation in the fight against the pandemic.

**We must respect differences and avoid politicizing the pandemic**

Soon after the COVID-19 outbreak began, China took a series of control measures adapted to its own political and socioeconomic circumstances and

based on its previous anti-epidemic experience and international practices. China has managed to curb the domestic spread of the coronavirus within a relatively short period of time. European countries have also developed measures suited to their political and socioeconomic circumstances and with full considerations of their public health emergency preparedness and response capabilities. Therefore, responses on both sides are reasonable in their own sense. They can learn from each other, but not copy each other’s approach. Some European experts and scholars acknowledged China’s

## **Opinion: How media bias shapes the sinophobic narrative of coronavirus Covid-19**

*Western media outlets have called China’s quarantine measures ‘authoritarian’, while describing similar policies in Italy and South Korea as ‘empowered’ by their governments*



**Henry Lui**

Published: 11:48am, 5 Mar, 2020

Updated: 6:25pm, 16 Mar, 2020

A review article on *South China Morning Post*.

achievements in addressing the pandemic and noted that Europe may learn some of China’s response measures. Lucien Abenheim, former French Director General of Health, stressed that the Chinese example had shown that the pandemic could be stopped by two means: strict containment and a “local micromanagement” to identify each infected case and isolate it.<sup>1</sup> Dominique Bertrand, President of French National Commission of Public Health, said that China’s quarantine measures yielded

favorable results and set an important reference for France. <sup>2</sup> *Le Monde*, the leading French daily, published on March 18 an article titled “*Coronavirus: à Wuhan, confinement et isolement des malades ont permis de vaincre l’épidémie*,” detailing China’s experience in fighting the coronavirus.

Meanwhile, there are always people seeking to politicize China’s combat

---

<sup>1</sup> “The Observation of a Chinese diplomat in France,” the website of Chinese embassy in France, March 28, 2020, <http://www.amb-chine.fr/chn/ttxw/t1762846.htm>.

<sup>2</sup> “France ‘at war’ with Virus, and learns from Wuhan experience,” Guancha Website, March 18, 2020, [https://www.guancha.cn/international/2020\\_03\\_18\\_542274.shtml](https://www.guancha.cn/international/2020_03_18_542274.shtml).



against the pandemic, claiming that “the fact that China has done well in containing the virus doesn’t necessarily prove the superiority of its political system.” Referring to China’s blanket lockdown and the closure of normal economic activities, they blamed China for placing 150 million residents under house arrest on the excuse of epidemic prevention, and they called China’s use of drones to fight coronavirus as “a spy on its citizens,” concluding that “such authoritarian methods are not worth learning.” However, when some European countries like Italy started to impose similar lockdown measures on their citizens, the same people came up with a different narrative, expressing concerns about the potential economic risks instead of “house arrest” and “crackdown on freedom.” This is certainly double standard. While some Chinese social media accounts claimed with pride that European countries should “copy China's homework” after COVID-19 broke out in Europe, the Chinese government and major state media agencies opposed such voices and expressed respect and understanding for what European countries were doing under their national circumstances. Beyond political prejudices, China’s successful experience which mainly includes “early prevention and treatment, early isolation and wearing masks” was promoted by WHO and widely applied in Europe. It proves that any measure or practice capable of containing the virus, curbing the spread and reducing the death toll can be applied in different political systems. Tagging experience sharing as “an export of ideology” will not only delay the opportunity to contain the virus, but pose a new political threat to cooperation between China and Europe.

**China's assistance is out of its moral sense**

China is a major producer of medical supplies, but a severe shortage of masks, ventilators and other medical supplies was experienced in the hard-hit regions such as Wuhan when a large number of infected patients needed treatment. While China was trying to increase its own production capacity,

many European countries donated medical supplies to China to help fight the epidemic. The Chinese government and people are thankful to them and hope to reciprocate the good will. After Europe was struck by COVID-19, the Chinese government and people acted quickly and donated medical supplies to Europe, even though China's outbreak was not over yet. This should have been communicated as a moving story of mutual support between China and Europe and this story should be passed on to future generations. However, this reciprocity of good will was distorted by American media, which was followed by European media. They claimed that China's anti-epidemic assistance was “a cover-up of its missteps in handling the domestic outbreak” and that China was conducting “political propaganda” in the name of “generosity”, aiming to expand its influence and power of narrative, change the world order, improve the image of the Communist Party of China, and divide Europe. The supplies shipped to Europe by Chinese private enterprises were said to serve “ulterior motives.” In order to support this conspiracy theory, some people dubbed masks, the important medical supplies delivered by China to other countries, as an evidence that China was “harboring evil intentions.” The term “mask diplomacy” was coined to describe China's “conspiracy.” The absurdity of these fallacies, however, was heightened in titles on some European media: “How China Is Using Mask Diplomacy to Shape Its Political Narrative,” “Mask diplomacy: China tries to rewrite virus narrative,” “China's ‘mask diplomacy’: Communist PR campaign,” and “EU split over China's ‘face mask’ diplomacy.”

As Chinese writer Fu Lei put it, “Those who have never experienced sharp pains will not feel deep compassion for others.” Likewise, Romain Rolland believed that as long as you had the ability to help others, you had no right to stand by. China has felt the truth in what both writers have said. Having experienced the outbreak, the Chinese government and people were sincerely

## China-Europe Solidarity in Fighting COVID-19 with a Shared Commitment to Safeguard Human Health

and profoundly sympathetic to the European countries and people who are still suffering from the pandemic. Empathy is woven into the DNA of the Chinese nation. Moreover, China has received help from Europe, and the Chinese people believe that “the grace of dripping water should be reciprocated by a gushing spring.” Meanwhile, China and Europe have great common interests in many fields such as economy, trade and social development, and have been trying to expand the common ground through people-to-people exchanges. Moreover, virus knows no borders or races. Even if China recovers from the epidemic outbreak, the common interests of China and Europe would suffer if Europe remains in trouble. It is therefore clear to China that it helps itself when it helps Europe. The good news is that the governments and people of most European countries have not been swayed by prejudices, and they are grateful and outspoken for having received help from China. Spain's Minister of Foreign Affairs Arancha González Laya said in an interview that China's assistance “was not only a good thing to do but the right

thing to do,” and that “in exercising generosity, a country, in a way, projects soft power. This is true for China. This is true for the US. This is true for



Spanish Foreign Minister González Laya in an exclusive interview with a CGTN reporter said that we should work together to fight against the virus and do not misunderstand China's goodwill as “mask diplomacy.”

Europe.” EU Commissioner Thierry Breton insisted that he “did not see any ulterior motive behind Huawei and other Chinese companies' donations of

face masks to the bloc and that solidarity is the best way to tackle the global coronavirus outbreak.”<sup>1</sup> During this extraordinary period of COVID-19 outbreak, China and Europe must enhance mutual trust and rely on it to avoid interference in anti-epidemic cooperation by unreasonable speculations and arbitrary smearing. Only mutual trust can free both sides from unnecessary concerns and make international solidarity and the final victory against COVID-19 possible.

#### **4.2 Protecting the Economy and People’s Livelihood**

As each other’s major trade and investment partners, the cooperation between Europe and China should not be limited to mutual support, share experience and exchange supplies in overcoming the pandemic. As the world economy is likely to suffer a negative growth and the economic situation would be even worse than the financial crisis in 2008, Europe and China should work more closely to alleviate the economic impact of the pandemic, protect the people’s livelihood, and ensure the stability of the global industry and supply chains.

The pandemic threatens to disrupt China and Europe’s economy. First, covid-19 has greatly affected economic activities and growth forecasts in China and Europe. The pandemic could throw Europe’s economy into recession. The European Central Bank (ECB) has revised down the economic growth of the Eurozone in 2020 and 2021 to 0.8% and 1.3%.<sup>2</sup> China will also bear great pressure to keep its growth above 3%. Services in Europe and China are the first and the hardest hit, and logistics, wholesale and retail, tourism, hotel, catering, offline entertainment, farming, forestry, fishery and animal husbandry are very vulnerable. Second, manufacturing and industry and

---

<sup>1</sup> “EU high-ranking official refutes ‘mask diplomacy’ and highlights the importance of cooperation in tackling the pandemic,” Sina News, April 2, 2020, <https://news.sina.cn/gn/2020-04-02/detail-iimxxsth3289059.d.html?cre=wappage&mod=r&loc=5&r=9&rfunc=78&tj=none>.

<sup>2</sup> “ECB lowered 2020 Eurozone economic growth expectation to 0.8%,” the official website of MOFCOM, April 7, 2020, <http://www.mofcom.gov.cn/article/i/jyj/m/202004/20200402953024.shtml>.

supply chains will bear the grunt. China and Europe have taken measures to suspend economic activities, reduce the flow of people and focus their attention on the pandemic. This has disrupted supplies and market demand across industries. As China and Europe have extensive economic relations, many common interests and highly interdependent industry chains, a slight change can result in large differences. China, as the factory of the world, is a source of raw materials, semi-finished products, and parts and components for many European countries. Meanwhile, China is a major market for many important industries in Europe, such as luxury goods. However, the pandemic has hurt China's consumption and export and then, as it intensified, it would undermine Europe's import and production. Take automobile and aviation manufacturing as an example. Due to the disruption to the supply chains, European auto makers such as Daimler, Citroen, Groupe Renault, Fiat and Ferrari have closed down most of their factories in China and Europe, and Airbus's subsidiary companies and tire manufacturer Michelin have suspended production. All this will ultimately damage the cooperation between China and Europe along industry and supply chains. The current downturn in China's consumer market will put a brake on the processing and manufacturing industries in Europe. Among other things, French luxury brands Chanel and Hermès have decided to suspend their production in the short term and to close their factories in France, Switzerland and Italy in the next two weeks. The last area that might be affected is the agreed economic cooperation agendas between China and Europe. Negotiations on EU-China bilateral investment agreements and cooperation under the framework of Belt and Road Initiative and the EU Strategy on Connecting Europe and Asia that are expected to be completed in 2020 might be put on hold.

To avoid shocks caused by the pandemic on economic development and partnership, both China and Europe have adopted economic relief measures.

As the outbreak eased in China, the Chinese government has tried to reopen its economy and bring it back to normal, issuing a series of emergency and hedging measures such as corporate tax cuts and fiscal policy easing. China aims to stabilize its foreign trade while boosting domestic demand, and further stimulate corporate activity and market potential. Europe has adopted a large package of fiscal and financial relief measures as well. For example, the



European Central Bank (ECB) announced a 750 billion euros Pandemic Emergency Purchase Program (PEPP) for both private and public sectors to counter the serious risk to the monetary policy transmission mechanism and the Eurozone posed by

The EU proposed a road map for lifting restrictive measures step by step.

the escalating diffusion of COVID-19. It has also eased the conditions for purchasing government bonds of the eurozone countries, adopting a more flexible approach which still aligns with the national central banks' capital contributions to the ECB, and removed the restrictions on the Greek government for issuing government bonds. European countries have rolled out specialized funds and supportive policies to help SMEs survive the catastrophe. While introducing relief measures, China and Europe must strengthen coordination and communication. Since the outbreak started, China's Minister of Commerce Zhong Shan has kept in touch with EU Trade Commissioner Phil Hogan and Internal Market and Services Commissioner Thierry Breton, exchanging opinions on strengthening international cooperation on epidemic control and deepening bilateral economic and trade

relations. They believed that Chinese enterprises should expand production and provide more anti-epidemic supplies for Europe, and promised to make joint efforts to advance various economic and trade agendas. While safeguarding the multilateral trading system with the WTO as the core, China and Europe must try to promote the healthy and stable development of bilateral economic and trade relations. Before and after the G20 special summit, China and Europe intensified communication and collaboration on issues such as coordination of macro-economic policies and relief measures, and the stability of industry and supply chains.

### **4.3 Working Together to Advance Post-Pandemic Development**

COVID-19 is a common threat to human society. It tests the emergency preparedness and governance systems of all countries and regions, and tests the foundation of China-Europe partnership. Although many cooperation projects of China and Europe in political, economic and cultural spheres have been temporarily postponed due to the epidemic outbreak, the basic framework and direction of China-Europe cooperation should not suffer. Instead, they must be more stable and clearer after the threat of pandemic is relieved.

First, China and Europe must maintain the mainstream awareness that consensus outweighs differences and cooperation exceeds competition between the two sides. We must also ensure that China-Europe relations are always at the forefront of China-West relations. As State Councilor Wang Yi said, “Although our social systems and values are different, they are all reasonable, for each of these social systems and values are rooted in our own profound history and culture. The right approach to deal with these differences is to admire and learn from each other, so as to achieve common development and prosperity.” Although the pandemic has brought panic and suspicion, and challenged China and Europe's perception of each other, the

mutual trust and solidarity reflected in China-Europe cooperation against the pandemic show both sides' wisdom and courage in facing the common threat and demonstrate the resilience of China-Europe relations.

Second, China and Europe must advance the agenda for cooperation more actively and open up a new prospect for collaboration in the area of public health. On the basis of cooperation in politics, economics, trade, science and technology, and culture, China and Europe must further strengthen bilateral cooperation in public health, through sharing experience on medical science research and public health management and dialogue and cooperation on public health policies and emergency response. China-Europe cooperation should be elevated to the level of global governance and involve third parties. Both sides are supposed to enhance cooperation within multilateral mechanisms such as the WHO, G20 and UN, and expand bilateral cooperation to Africa, Latin America and other regions, drawing on the previous success against Ebola virus disease (EVD). China and Europe, as major forces in the reform and improvement of the global governance system, should work together and play greater roles.

Third, China and Europe should play active parts in safeguarding economic globalization, and keep the global industry and supply chains stable to defend their common interests. Concerns about the free movement of people, the emergency closure of borders, the suspension of economic activities, and the damage to industry and supply chains during the pandemic outbreak may provide ammunition for anti-globalization forces to market the ideas of “minding your own business,” industry decoupling and exchanges downgrading. The community with shared interests for mankind and the global industry and value chains that have been taking shape and maturing in the past few years will be under challenge. As highly interdependent partners with a solid foundation for cooperation, China and Europe should face up to



the challenges. We must not only play active roles in keeping industry and supply chains stable on both sides, but also plan future industry cooperation to safeguard the world economic order and the progress of globalization.

Last but not least, China and Europe should incorporate the basic political consensus and valuable experience gained through the cooperation against COVID-19 into post-pandemic economic and social development. We must work together to advocate multilateralism versus unilateralism and promote international fairness and justice, which is a fundamental guarantee for global anti-COVID-19 cooperation. The global response to the outbreak reflects the global significance of China-Europe relations. Both supporting and upholding multilateralism, China and Europe share the belief that, in face of global challenges at a trying time, it is important to rise to the occasion together rather than blame others, pass the buck or adopt beggar-thy-neighbor policies. China and Europe must work together to champion and facilitate international solidarity and cooperation in strengthening the weak links and seeking a long-term solution to defending global health security and advance global governance.

## **Conclusion**

COVID-19 is a common enemy for China and Europe and has caused similar pains and suffering to the both sides. Mutual help and cooperation during the pandemic has given expression of the China-Europe friendship and partnership and enriched the connotations of the China-Europe relations. Even though China and Europe are currently in different stages of combating the virus, they should conduct cooperation in multiple fields. The two sides should learn from each other and share experiences so as to gain a better understanding of the virus and the course of the pandemic. More concerted efforts are needed to safeguard people's health, ensure people's livelihood, strengthen economic resilience and guarantee the integrity of supply chains. Both sides must promote consensus and enhance mutual trust to purify the environment of international public opinion, prevent the dissemination of false information, stop politicizing the epidemic and stigmatizing certain countries. Last but not least, China and Europe must remain committed to multilateralism, maintain the international order, and bring innovations to the global public health governance to improve the well-being of human beings.

*(Written by Cui Hongjian, Shi Yan, Zhang Bei, Yang Zili, Hu Hong,  
and Fan Zhengjie)*

*For more information, please visit our website at [www.ciis.org.cn](http://www.ciis.org.cn).*



北京市东城区台基厂头条3号, 100005  
3 Toutiao, Taijichang, Beijing, 100005, CHINA  
<http://www.ciis.org.cn/>

