

# WORKING PAPER

## **Environmental Governance as opportunity for China and EU cooperation**

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# **Environmental Governance as opportunity for China and EU cooperation**

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## **Abstract**

Climate changes, i.e. air pollution, water scarcity and soil contamination remain threats and represent great challenge to Chinese efforts in making its development sustainable. Since the very first developmental goals during the first decades of its policy of reforms and opening did not follow high ecological standards, China became the world's top emitter producing more than a quarter of the world's annual greenhouse emission. However, climate changes are not only Chinese issues, their consequences are global in character. Thus, fighting climate changes requires intercontinental and international cooperation. China pledged to cut emissions under the Paris Agreement and is making great efforts by making environmental issue the priority in the further developmental goals.

This paper analyses the Sino-EU relations and cooperation in creating “Green civilization” and environmental global governance.

The first part of the paper tackles the development of the ecological state of mind in China, particularly because China announced that it would become a climate neutral country. In the same part of the paper, we are examining the development of the EU approach in becoming the climate neutral space. The second part of the paper is focused on China's international cooperation in fighting climate changes, particularly the Sino-EU cooperation on this particular issue, that is, making “Green civilization”.

We will examine whether this cooperation is opening new space for improving their mutual cooperation and creating the harmonious atmosphere for a win-win cooperation of further antagonizing currently disturbed relations. ?

**Key words:** *climate changes, green civilization, global governance, win-win cooperation*

## **Introduction**

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, tackling climate changes is a high level global (geo)political, (geo)economic, scientific, security, ethical and diplomatic issue, which directly affects global development, global migrations, global supply chains and the structure of global balance of power. Thus, as an issue, which exerts global pressure, it requires cooperation on the same level backed by interstate, inter-institutional and people-to-people relations. By creating such an inclusive global partnership human civilization is in a much better position to search and find the long-term and sustainable solutions for overcoming the consequences triggered not just by misbalance between economy and ecology, but by imposing fierce and sometimes selfish economic, political and security conditions/obligations for access to green technology. Climate changes are producing both visible-material and non-visible-psychological consequences such as water pollutions and scarcity, air pollution, soil contamination, feeling of insecurity to name few. The mentioned consequences already endanger the quality and health of the people's lives what can be counted by number of climate refugees. Only in 2019, a total of 24.9 million people were internally displaced as a result of weather-related disasters (Ischinger, 2020). We are witnessing that migrations are causing security and economic challenges, but those challenges are additionally reinforced by behavior of some countries, which can be described as a heritage of traditional power politics. Power politics combined with geopolitical and geo-economic rivalry is imposing additional pressure on the fragile states' poor institutional performances of political and economic development.<sup>1</sup> Politicizing and militarizing the climate changes urges leaders to incorporate this pressing issue in strategies of securing individual, national, regional and global security. On the other hand, climate changes are creating the context, which is making countries understand that feasible and long-term solutions for their overcoming could not be grounded on wars and weaponry race, but on constant investments in research & development and diplomacy. Climate changes are demonstrating that diplomacy in the contemporary world is not an obsolete activity; on the contrary, it is a much-needed activity and a model of behavior recommendable for making global development sustainable and enhancing the quality of people's lives. Accordingly, climate changes combating should not be based on traditional power politics, geopolitics and nationalism, but on solidarity, predictability, transparency, trust and harmonization of relations and interests. Furthermore, climate changes combating shows that unilateralism in securing global security is not a feasible strategy, because

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<sup>1</sup> The fragility can be measured by using the following indicators: Fragile States Index, Human Development Index, Worldwide Governance Indicators and index of Climate Change Vulnerability (Climate Diplomacy Report, 2020).

climate changes are “free passport problems”, that is, problems which are showing that emerging the world of interconnectedness is irreversible processes (Stambuk, 2010). In line with that, tackling climate changes requires multilateral and bilateral cooperation. Mobilizing partnerships at all levels – individual, national, regional and global, and forms – bilateral, “mini-lateral” and multilateral, to address climate changes has to become the core tenet of states’ foreign and domestic policy (Schmid, 2020). For some authors, “mini-lateralism” and bilateralism are required, because multilateral approach might impede action - by slowing things down, by making it more difficult (or even impossible) to reach agreement, or by empowering reluctant participants and free riders (Biniaz, 2020). Thus, all of these different dimensions have to be viewed as complementary, interconnected, and of equal importance (Greminger 2020).

For the purpose of this article, we are researching the Sino-EU climate cooperation on making *green civilization*. We selected to conduct the proposed research for various reasons, starting from the fact that both the EU and China declared to become climate neutral in 2050 and 2060 respectively. Secondly, the Chinese leadership is striving to ground the Chinese sustainability on scientific development. In that sense, the EU as one of the leaders of green managerial skills and innovators of “green know-how” technology appears to be a logical partner in further Chinese pursuing of “policy of reforms and opening-up”. This cooperation brings many opportunities for both sides. As for the EU, the first opportunity is seen in absorption capabilities of the Chinese vibrant and dynamic market. Secondly, being more involved in the Chinese development, the EU is creating the context in which China will be pushed to transform, make more familiar and harmonize its understanding of a win-win cooperation with the EU value-based standards. Thirdly, the EU can make the Chinese development more transparent, which is very important from the EU ambitions to participate in the Belt and Road Initiative point of view. For the Chinese side, the first opportunity is seen as an impetus in the Chinese efforts to make its development as an organic part of the “ecosystem of innovations” and global development. For this kind of Chinese ambitions, Powell Lydia claims that China is developing deep climate diplomacy relations with the EU, because Beijing is afraid of “green marginalization” (Powell, 2020). Commitment to global change combating and making green civilization through material and non-material investments is serving as a platform to China for deepening the cooperation in other strategically important spheres, but which cooperation was burdened by different interpretation of the same concepts such as democracy, human rights, sovereignty, multilateralism,

infrastructural connectivity amongst others. After that, the reason we are conducting the analysis on China-EU climate cooperation is stemming from the fact that China became highly involved in energy sector of EU and *vice versa*.

**“Establishing [new rules] before breaking [old ones] (先立后破)”**

The two basic objectives of one country are to make its development sustainable and secure national security. In the contemporary world order characterized by interdependence and interconnectedness one country cannot achieve the mentioned goals by acting from the position of isolated or unilateral state, China being no exception. In the same context, China understood that it has not just to abandon the non-feasible *middle kingdom* power position and understanding the international order, but to adapt to changes in doing business and making partnerships in globalized world. By doing so, China is becoming more integrated in the world order, and is thus in a much better position to create the rules of global development. The more the state is influential in creating international norms, the more it is influential in global balance of power. The more the state is influential in the global balance of power, the less it is vulnerable to global changes and challenges in regard to its sustainable development. Fighting climate changes is one of the platforms through which China can enhance its partnership diplomacy and create the context within which China will be perceived and accepted as a benevolent superpower, that is, the superpower which is not challenging the international security. Following this logic, China will be in a much better position to represent its philosophy and values as sources for mutual learning. In that sense, we can understand Chinese commitment to climate changes combating as its ambitions to fully develop and implement the principles defined as the New Security Concept (NSC) and Four Confidences. The main features of the NSC are mutual trust, mutual benefit, partners' equality and coordination of interests (Xuetong, 2009). Xi Jinping introduced the *Four Confidences* concept on the 95<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Communist Party of China, which aim is to promote the development path confidence, theory confidence, institution confidence and culture confidence (Sun, 2018). Accordingly, the Chinese commitment to the global climate changes combating became one of the main strategic, instrumental and foreign policy goals and tools of raising the level of its strategic credibility on the path of becoming and recognizing the responsible partner to the global leadership. Besides that, the Chinese commitment to the global climate changes combating is also required from domestic policy goals and preserving the legitimacy of the Communist Party of China.

Therefore, an obvious interconnectedness between domestic and foreign policy concerns in climate changes combating is in accordance with the theoretical framework offered by Putnam's two-level games theory (Putnam 1988). Namely, China, as a rising power, perceives the climate change cooperation as an issue of global strategic importance. Consequently, it has adopted a double-pronged approach to maximize its national interests by balancing domestic needs and international aspirations. Domestically, China is striving to transform its development into green development. Internationally, China wants to actively participate in making global environmental regime and exerts influence over the rules of the international affairs (Fuzuo, 2013). Thus, some authors advocate that Chinese commitment to climate changes combating is no longer about "well-intentioned" environmentalism, but it is about creation of a new geopolitical international economic order (Powell, 2020). Development of the Chinese ecological and climate state of mind is in accordance with Confucius' cosmology and yin-yang, that is, approach of creating the organic wholeness between humans and nature. This was demonstrated when China announced to create a harmonious society - domestically, and a harmonious environment - globally.

Respecting the Nationally Determined Contribution, China pledged to cut emissions under the 2015 Paris Agreement and is making great efforts by making environmental issue the priority in the further developmental goals. In 2009, China for the very first time, declared the targets for carbon emissions that were incorporated in the twelfth Five Year Plan. After that, as can be seen, putting this kind of targets became part of the Chinese behavior. Consequently, in the 14<sup>th</sup> Five Year Plan China set the goal that "dual-high" will "resolutely contain the blind development of 'dual-high' projects (坚决遏制“两高”项目盲目发展)" — whilst ensuring a stable electricity supply during the peak demand in summer.<sup>2</sup> In regard to the stable electricity supply, it is also very important from the point of view of another meeting goal. The meeting directed the nation to "support the 'new energy' vehicles for their accelerating development (支持新能源汽车加快发展)".<sup>3</sup> In the sector of dealing with climate changes, we are noticing the critics on the manner of the CCP behavior. The Chinese environment official warned of "very serious" consequences if "dual-high" projects were allowed to "develop blindly". China's

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<sup>2</sup> DUAL-HIGH' PROJECTS: "Dual-high" projects is a term used by Chinese authorities to refer to projects with "high" energy consumption and "high" emissions. The two "highs" used to stand for "high" energy consumption and "high" polluting.

<sup>3</sup> In China, "new energy" vehicles mainly include pure electric vehicles, plug-in hybrid vehicles and fuel-cell vehicles. It would be very interesting to analyse the nexus between Chinese ambitions to develop new energy vehicles and its goals set by Vehicle Emissions Standards.

Central Environmental Inspection Team - CEIT<sup>4</sup> openly criticized the central government's National Energy Administration (NEA) for failing to limit the country's expansion of coal power plants (Hongqiao Liu, 2021). Besides that, Xie Zhenhua, China's special envoy for climate change, said that China would "gradually release" a "top-level design plan" – described as the "1+N framework" – for its climate goals. It also came after the central government formed a high-level climate "leaders group" in late May to direct the country's emission-reducing efforts (Bloomberg Green, 2020). This leaders group coordinates its actions with Ministry of Ecology and Environment of the PR China. Furthermore, on the 30<sup>th</sup> of July at the meeting, held in Beijing, the Chinese government urged officials to pursue the nation's twin goals of reaching the carbon emission peak before 2030 and achieving "carbon neutrality" before 2060 in a "coordinated and orderly manner". (新华网, 2021). The instructions called for the unique approach in dealing with climate changes and carbon reduction i.e. "stick to a single game nationwide (坚持全国一盘棋)", "rectify campaign-style 'carbon reduction' (纠正运动式“减碳”)" and "establish [new rules] before breaking [old ones] (先立后破)". Development of its ecological state of mind, China is supporting by technological development. By 2015 China surpassed Germany as the largest market for solar energy in the world. Besides that, according to the World Intellectual Property Organisation (WIPO) data obtained in the period from 2015 to 2019, China brought 1,552 applications, that is, patents for clean energy technologies, pushing China to the third place, following Japan (3,114 applications) and the United States (2,247 applications) (Powel, 2020). Simultaneously, here the question arises of morality and who is making the profit and wealth whilst the countries, which possess the green technology, are demonstrating the technological aspect of their structural power.<sup>5</sup> The question is whether "green developed" countries will control the other states' development by providing them with "green technology"? Will these states condition the climate resilience and adaption capacities of the fragile states? Will the project implementation be based on the needs of the receiving states or on the geopolitical, security and geo-economics interests of states which can transfer technology? In that sense, we can presuppose that global climate change combating is

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<sup>4</sup> The CEIT is a new institution formed by China's top leaders to ensure the implementation of such protections. It is co-led by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (CCCPC) and the State Council, which are, respectively, the highest authorities of the Communist Party of China (CPC) and the central government.

<sup>5</sup> Structural power is the power to shape and determine the structures of the global political economy within which other states, their political institutions, their economic enterprises and (not least) their scientists and other professional people have to operate. Structural power confers the power to decide how things shall be done, the power to shape frameworks within which states relate to each other, relate to people, or relate to corporate enterprises. It contains of the following structures: production, economy, finance and security (Strange, 1988: 24-26; Mitrovic, 2012).

conditioned by the knowledge-sharing behavior of states that can develop “green technology” (Sovacool and Björn-Ola, 2016). In the same context, Simon Schunz questions whether the science is the bargaining tool in providing green development or acquiring more power (Schunz, 2015)? Hence, do international institutions represent global, i.e. common interest? For some scholars, tackling climate changes is bringing completely new understanding on global balance of power, geo-economics distribution of wealth, and science and geopolitics.

Since global warming has security implications for countries and concerns relative gains, it is difficult to reach a high-level international cooperation on reducing greenhouse gases (Fuzuo, 2013). From that point of view, China does not pursue any (neo)realist approach in mitigating the consequences of climate changes, because it is constantly demanding that developed nations provide financial support and technological transfer to the developing nations based on the principle of justice (Fuzuo, 2013). However, this kind of Chinese behavior is, also, mirroring the Chinese national interests, if we remember that China advocates that it is a part and protector of the developing world, that is, the South. We can also say that the EU is not pursuing any (neo)realist approach in dealing with climate changes, because taken together, the EU and its member states are by far the biggest provider of development assistance worldwide (Climate Diplomacy Report, 2020). On 20 September 2012, the EU and China even signed a financing agreement to assist China in the design and implementation of its own Emissions Trading Scheme (ETS) (Carrapatoso & Well, 2014).

Having in mind that tackling climate changes is a “two-levels game” which can jeopardize the legitimacy of the CCP, by incorporating the climate issues in the Five Year Plans, leaders of the CCP are creating the atmosphere that the nation “carry out the carbon-peaking and carbon neutrality work in a coordinated and orderly manner (要统筹有序做好碳达峰、碳中和工作)”, as well as introduce an action plan “as soon as possible” to lead the nation’s emission-peaking endeavor. By pursuing this kind of pragmatic and inclusive approach, the leaders of the CCP are striving to achieve several goals. Firstly, the CCP is demonstrating to the international audience that in China citizens and the civil society are participating in the process of making national policy. This can be understood as one of the strategic steps in the Chinese approach to the Western understanding of democracy. The second objective could be presented as the domestic (Chinese) awareness rising and capacity-building in problem solving on climate changes. The third objective could be seen as providing international and domestic legitimacy to the CCP and its decision on ruling the country. Namely, broadening the climate change combating to the structural level of masses, the citizens of China will have an impression that



they have an important participating part in making national policy of securing security and development. By doing so, China is creating the space for international cooperation, informing international audience on Chinese plans. Furthermore, the leaders of the CCP through international cooperation not just rise-up its transparency, but are demonstrating its ambitions to be an agenda and standard setter in climate changes combating.

As it was previously said, China is using the climate changes combating to make new partnerships or to reshape and reinforce the existing. In line with that, the Sino-EU cooperation on this particular issue possesses tremendous importance for their comprehensive relations. However, before examining the Sino-EU cooperation in climate changes combating, we make brief foray into the development of the EU “green state of mind”.

### **EU Climate Policy**

The climate policy issues within the EU have been on the table since signing the Maastricht Treaty. It presupposes the EU institutional development and EU proactive and global diplomatic approach for resolving this very particular issue (Schunz, 2015). This kind of approach resulted in the announcement of the EU Green Deal. According to this Deal, Europe is aiming to become the first climate neutral continent and climate resilient society by 2050. This was followed by the introduction of EU 2030 Climate Target Plan, EU Adaptation Strategy, European Climate Law and European Climate Pact. European Green Deal was presented on 11 December 2019, containing the ambitious package of intended measures designed to enable the EU to become carbon neutral by 2050. By doing so, the EU is pursuing both the institutional (domestic) and diplomatic (international) approach in dealing with climate changes issues. For that purpose, the EU prioritized the following areas: energy, environment, transport, low carbon economy, sustainable finance, to name a few (EU).

The most important action is the he European Green Deal is the European Climate Law to ensure a climate-neutral EU by 2050. It is planned to cut GHG emissions to at least 55% by 2030.

EU administration, also, adopted many directives that tackles the question of climate change combating. Here we can emphasize Renewable Energy Directive, Energy Efficiency Directive and Energy Performance in Buildings Directive. The first Directive seeks to ensure

that renewable energy up to 2030 accounts no less of 32% of total EU energy consumption particularly in electricity generation, transport, heating and cooling. As the main sources for renewable energy are regarded solar and hydroelectric power, wind and biomass. The directive which tackles the issue of energy efficiency gives clear regulations and obligations that has to be followed in energy saving. The Directive on Energy Performance in Buildings was adopted in May 2018. Through this Directive the EU is striving to create new intelligent management system, which will improve energy performance of both new and old buildings. (EU Parliament, 2021)

The 26<sup>th</sup> UN Climate Change Conference (COP26) saw EU as taking leading role with the European Green Deal as setting a positive example in the international community. The latest Eurobarometer survey showed that European citizens believed climate change was the most serious problem facing the world. More than nine out of ten people surveyed consider climate change to be a serious problem (93%). (EU Commission, 2021)

However, the EU's effectiveness is limited due to incoherence between member states (Schunz, 2019). On the other hand, if there is no 'one voice' speaking in sending message to the global audience, we cannot say that many voices are implying cacophony, as they can send similar or same message (Schunz, 2015). But, for some authors the bigger problem for the EU lays in relations between its institutional, and norm development and its applicability in relations with international partners in dealing with climate changes. Simon Schunz emphasizes that the EU's external actions can be characterized as an un-reflexive attempt to promote its own model because institutions tend to export institutional isomorphism as a default option' (Schunz, 2019: 352). Thus, the EU climate changes combating strategies are not based on flexible approach and detailed analyses of geopolitical and geoeconomics environment, and needs, interests and values of other parties (global level) that operate in the context of complex balance of power. Having this in mind, Simon Schunz advocates that addressing climate changes requires a geopolitically and geoeconomics informed, flexible and long-term environmental foreign policy strategy (Schunz, 2019).

## **“Green Civilization” – new path to international and global cooperation**

Announcing the quest to achieve carbon neutrality by 2060, China sees as another positive impetus on the global fight against climate change and strives to put itself as the leader for the developing world and a partner to developed world. China stands ready to work with all parties to build a closer Belt and Road partnership, President Xi Jinping said on June 23, 2021 in a written message to the Asia and Pacific High-level Conference on Belt and Road Cooperation. Xi said the joint building of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) that he proposed is aimed at carrying forward the spirit of the Silk Road, working together to build an open platform of cooperation, and providing new impetus for cooperation and development among countries. Thus, BRI International Green Development Coalition is jointly launched by Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Brunei, Cambodia, Chile, China, Colombia, Fiji, Indonesia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Laos, Malaysia, Maldives, Mongolia, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, the Philippines, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, Solomon Islands, Sri Lanka, Tajikistan, Thailand, Turkmenistan, United Arab Emirates, Uzbekistan, and Vietnam at the Asia and Pacific High-level Conference on Belt and Road Cooperation on June 23, 2021 (Secretariat of BRI International Green Development Coalition, 2021). This coalition is in line with China relational theory and partnership diplomacy upgraded on the climate changes actions and coordinated with the UN 2030 Sustainable Development Goals. It also shows China, besides Japan, as one of the leaders of the region and promoter of the new, green technologies. The “Green development guidelines for overseas investment and cooperation” issued jointly by the Ministry of Commerce (MOFCOM) and the Ministry of Ecology and Environment (MEE), encourages Chinese businesses to integrate green development throughout the overseas investment process. Where local standards are insufficient, they also suggest that companies should “follow international green rules and standards” (Secretariat of BRI International Green Development Coalition, 2021). As such, they represent, when it is necessary, a step away from China’s traditional reliance on host country rules and could pave the way for the implementation of much higher standards in infrastructure projects under the BRI. The guidelines call for strengthening engagement with host country environmental protection organizations. They also name non-fossil energy technologies as key areas for domestic and foreign direct investment. The document is a significant upgrade on MOFCOM’s 2013 “Guidelines for environmental protection in foreign investment and cooperation”. The emphases have shifted from a bare minimum of pollution control that meets host countries’ standards towards the promotion of a “green development concept” and encouragement of higher standards used in host countries

where appropriate. However, Chinese green development towards Europe should also meet the EU requirement for investments, specifically concerning the CEE countries where the EU voiced concern on Chinese investments not meeting ecological criteria amongst other mainly non-transparency related issues. Since China's "going out" strategy began in 1999, Chinese enterprises have been encouraged to comply with host country laws and regulations to obtain relevant local and Chinese permits and licenses. However, regulatory environment of host countries can vary and Chinese enterprises have often been criticized by NGOs and media i.e. in Serbia (EU candidate) for their environmental and social impacts on local ecosystems and communities. On the other hand, there is a question why did not China pursue whilst implementing projects, for example in Serbia, the green standards defined by EU and in that manner facilitated Serbian EU integration process? Even though new guidelines are soft law, they send a clear signal, especially to the state-owned enterprises (SOEs) that MOFCOM's policies have steer over, including key BRI actors such as China Development Bank, China Export-Import Bank, and Sinosure, China's export credit insurance agency. (Cristoph Nedopil, 2021) This policy gives a boost to their efforts to go green and helps better cooperation and future projects in the EU.

### **China-EU Cooperation**

China was the EU's second-largest trade partner in terms of the total value of trade in 2020, with the EU running a trade deficit of USD186 billion. However, foreign direct investment (FDI) flows have been substantially lower than the sheer size of the two sides' populations, and potential markets would imply. Despite the EU companies historically being more active in China than vice versa, the EU's FDI outflows to China represented less than 2.5% of extra-EU FDI in 2017. EU FDI into China has been limited by factors such as a lack of market access, complex and costly regulations, and weak intellectual property protection. The largest share of EU direct investment into China has been in the manufacturing sector, particularly in the production of transport equipment and machinery. Both sides have great interest in the EU-China Comprehensive Agreement on Investment (CAI), but EU was close to resolve the issue of better access to the vast Chinese market and China was hoping for the European companies to increase investments in China in emerging sectors such as renewable energy, cloud computing, and financial services.

Renewable energy cooperation would additionally set China along with the EU as the leader in the climate changes combating on the global scale thus improving its overall image in the international arena. Bearing in mind that China through its initiatives aims to raise the level of the confidence of international community on Chinese intentions to be perceived as a reliable partner in global security and development, the "green BRI" has an increasingly important role especially in Europe and the EU which China sees as the important region in its foreign policy? As of January 2021, the number of countries that have joined the Belt and Road Initiative by signing the Memorandum of Understanding is 140. Out of that number, 34 BRI countries are in Europe and Central Asia and 18 countries of the European Union are alongside of the BRI. BRI thus makes it a good vehicle to promote the green global development either through the new BRI International Green Development Coalition under the leadership of the Ministry of Ecology and Environment of China thus putting China as the leader in the UN 2030 SDGs implementation and world leader of the green technologies. All these initiatives are being initiated without the USA, absence of which was more apparent during the Trump presidency. However, with the Biden administration, the absence is more structured as opposition to all China-lead initiatives and the EU is not immune to this. So far, the security cooperation and NATO alliance is seen as the priority over economic benefits of the Comprehensive Agreement on Investment with China. Human rights and Western values seen as the universal are opposing Chinese hybrid values, making this current dispute even bigger. Common interests such as climate changes and global health issues will not disappear and will not be resolved without China and the Chinese participation. The model of cooperation is yet to be seen. The Chinese leadership is apparent and moving forward and bringing new green technologies and smart and green cities as examples i.e. Hangzhou and Suzhou. As the BRI can help the world learn from China, - China needs Europe and the EU and other nations that will join for the common cause of saving the planet and making this world a better place for future generations.

Since 2005, the EU-China Partnership on Climate Change has provided a high level political framework for cooperation and dialogue.<sup>6</sup> This was confirmed in the 2010 Joint Statement and enhanced in the 2015 Joint Statement and 2018 Leaders' statement. (The official

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<sup>6</sup> The work of this Partnership is regulated by the China-EU Action Plan on Clean Coal and China-EU Action Plan on Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energies. Besides these two Action Plans, China and the EU organize many dialogues with the aim to tackle the climate changes such as Bilateral Cooperation Mechanism on Forests and EU-China Environment Dialogue. Besides that, the two sides established the Europe-China Clean Energy Centre in Beijing and China-EU Institute for Clean and Renewable Energy (Carrapatoso & Well, 2014).

EU website, 2018). While the US administration strives for climate leadership, relations between the EU and China remain key in global efforts to cut emissions. Their commitment to tackling climate changes was confirmed even on the summits organized by ASEM (Asia-Europe Meeting). Namely, two sides coordinated their actions, values and ideas in creating a non-binding declaration such as ASEM6 Declaration on Climate Change and ASEM7 Beijing Declaration on Sustainable Development (Carrapatoso and Well, 2014). Furthermore, China's heavy involvement in many European countries' energy sectors has become an important driver of national energy transitions, despite fears of overreliance.<sup>7</sup> The key path to this is emission – free hydrogen technologies that could become key to the global effort to stop climate change. The EU previously developed solar PV manufacturing, at high cost only to later move to China, hence Europe is not taking any chances with hydrogen. In a bid to outcompete China and fulfill its ambition to become climate-neutral, Europe has launched a massive green hydrogen push to decarbonize industry and aviation and secure promising export opportunities (Amelang, 2021). Green hydrogen is viewed by many as key to reaching "net-zero" emission targets, but a global rollout of the technology will not be possible without steep price decreases. This could make competition between the EU and China crucial to global de-carbonization efforts. Cooperation remains as a vague hope in the past as the China faces fierce opposition from the West in many fields, this being only one. The US-led West has intensified its China-containment strategy mirrored in its Indo-Pacific policies and NATO framework. When the G7 met in June this year, the focus turned to China again, proving that the Sino-Western relations are not getting any better. The G7 leaders announced various initiatives to counter China, including “Build Back Better World”. And the NATO meeting on June 14 warned that China poses a military threat to the West. The two announcements reflect the importance the Western world’s attaches to China’s rise. However, the G7 Summit in Cornwall showed that US President Joe Biden was going to struggle to organize a unified, anti-China front. And European Union diplomats said the United Kingdom, Canada and Italy want a more nuanced China policy compared with Biden’s hard line. There is a hope in the EU’s approach, which should be one of “cooperate”, “compete”, and “contest” and make space for cooperation in one of the most pressing areas i.e. climate change and global health.

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<sup>7</sup> In 2012, the two sides established the EU-China High Level Energy Meeting.

## Conclusion

China is an unavoidable partner in many global and pressing issues and climate changes combating and global health being the most important one. Climate cooperation should lead the path towards better overall international cooperation. Whether we call it green belt and road or green better world, it should be the common interest in the face of global fears of pandemic and natural disasters. Chinese pledge to reach carbon neutrality by 2060 and the reaffirmation of its commitment to the Paris Agreement targets confirms Chinese global role repositioning and taking leadership in many international organizations and pressing issues. Currently a joint push by the EU and China remains the best hope to drive global climate action, because the international community is currently not doing enough to address climate change, whether by reducing greenhouse gas emissions, adapting to impacts, or otherwise (Biniaz, 2020: 90).

The coronavirus pandemic has also shifted national priorities, raised geopolitical tensions and postponed the long awaited EU-China Comprehensive Agreement on Investment (CAI).<sup>8</sup>

This and other endeavors indicate the prioritization of this issue in the Chinese government too, making it one of the key matters in the globalization and Chinese international and global role. Fighting climate changes requires international cooperation and this, along with global health issues became the core or the only two issues China marked as the common ground with the EU.

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<sup>8</sup> The European Parliament on 20 May adopted a resolution stating that the ratification process of the EU-China Comprehensive Agreement on Investment (CAI), agreed in principle in December 2020, would be "frozen" by the Parliament while Chinese sanctions remain in place. China imposed sanctions against five members of the European Parliament (MEPs) and four entities and members of the Dutch, German, and Lithuanian parliaments measures in response to a 22 March Council of the European Union decision to impose restrictive measures, including travel bans and asset freezes, on four Chinese officials.

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