

**THE DISCURSIVE RIFTS WITHIN EU REGARDING  
CHINA'S ANTI COVID-19 DIPLOMACY - THE  
AMBIVALENCE OF THE EU'S STRATEGIC POSITION  
UNDER THE PRESSURE OF US-CHINA'S GLOBAL  
CONFRONTATION**

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**INTRODUCTION**

With the eruption of the global Covid-19 pandemic, the US-China long-standing tension also reach the unprecedented level than ever before. Under such circumstances, EU -as the semi-global and full regional power- suffered the serious pressure to deal with the situation. Based on this reason, it would not be surprise to see the discursive rift within EU regarding the situation aforementioned. The focuses of the relevant discourse are on the 'China's anti pandemic diplomacy'. Based on the specific characteristics like the stance and phrasing preferences of such discourse, it would be reasonable to distinguish one main fault lines (discursive rifts) combined with two sub fault lines within them. The main one stands between different member states

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based on the situation of their internal divisions centering around 'China's anti pandemic diplomacy'. According to the indicator above, the paper would distinguish the member states into four groups which is said to be the countries with serious internal discords (group A), the countries with minor internal discords in favor of China's anti pandemic diplomacy (group B), the countries with minor internal discords being critical of China's anti pandemic diplomacy (group C) and the countries keeping the theme in minor key (group D). Within the country of each group, the two sub fault lines exist: The first one stands between the governing political elites and the mainstream medias, while the former has been always trying its best to keep the neutrality to appease the controversial of pandemic origin and emphasized the importance of global collaboration to fight against the pandemic at this moment, the latter preferred more to follow the Washington DC's harsh tone accusing China's covering up the truth of the pandemic such as the hiding the real timeline of the first case and the possible leaking of the virus from Wuhan P4 laboratory. The second one stands between the governing political elites and the oppositional politicians — especially the one from the populist camp. The distribution of this rift is quite similar to the first one. In order to do this, the essay would introduce the DA (Discourse Analysis) approach. For the conclusion of the analysis, the paper would try to point out that such discursive rift would be one of the important mirrors reflecting the ambivalence EU's self-strategic position under the pressure of US-China's full-scale confrontation.

**MACRO - CONTEXTUALIZATION: US - CHINA  
ESCALATING TENSION AND EU'S AMBIVALENT  
STRATEGIC POSITION WITHIN IT**

Though US-China tension or confrontation is not a new issue at all, the severity of it reach the unprecedented level since Donald Trump took the office in 2017. If the situation of this could be described as 'conflictual cooperation' during the pre-Trump era which means the two sides could keep the efficient cooperation in a certain level regardless of the essentially conflictual national interests within the bilateral relationship, it rapidly turned to the full-scale open conflict or confrontation under Trump's rule. With the guidance of protectionist and isolationist thoughts which is specifically represented as 'America first', Trump administration has been always trying to defend America's national interests based on the specific perceptions<sup>2</sup> and maintain the country's long-standing superiority over any other nations at any cost of outsiders regardless of whether the outsider belong to the US's allies camp or not. Under such circumstances, China-as the second largest economy and the most likely potential challenger to US global hegemony, was well-reasoned defined as the most important target by the WDC-specifically the Trump administration. Therefore, it would not be surprised to see the both sides stuck into the prolonged open conflicts ranging from the endless bilateral trade wars to the

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<sup>2</sup>Such specific version of America's national interests was mainly defined by the demands from middle and lower class of whites in US especially the one labeled as 'red neck' and was sophisticatedly synthesized by Trump administration (most specifically articulated by the former chief strategic advisor Steve Bannon). The most important policy approach reflecting the national interests aforementioned was 'anti-globalization' which explicitly clashed with the interests of transnational conglomerate especially the giant capitalists of Wall Street.

up to date anti Covid-19 pandemic campaign especially the part of the blaming game.

One should never overlook the deep suggestion of the current US-China tension which would be essentially distinguished it from the previous ones. Generally speaking, the situation of the tension above-mentioned could be described as the dilemmas of 'no off ramp' which means the bottom of the bilateral relationship is rapidly falling out of the regular track and there is little possibility to reverse the trend in the near future. There are several cases demonstrating such claim: U.S. lawmakers are pushing the president Trump to hit China with sanctions or other measures for its increasing grip on Hong Kong and human-rights abuses toward minority Muslims in Xinjiang. China, meanwhile, has vowed to punch back at the U.S. while moving ahead with national security legislation over Hong Kong, which prompted Secretary of State Michael Pompeo to declare the city was no longer sufficiently autonomous. Then on the last week of May, the top leaders from both sides sparred on everything from the coronavirus and 5G networks to Taiwan and academic research. Their warships are tailing each other in the South China Sea, their companies are facing obstacles to invest and their journalists have been targeted with tit-for-tat visa curbs. A trade deal signed in January is looking increasingly at risk.

According to the cases abovementioned, it would be reasonable enough to argue that the debate over whether the U.S. and China are in a Cold War will only intensify in the coming months as both leaders focus primarily on appealing to their own virus-weary citizens in a bid to retain power: Trump in the November election, and Xi during a Communist Party conclave in 2022 that effectively serves as a leadership

contest. “There is no off ramp for the moment for the U.S. and China, for the pretty obvious reason that neither is looking for one,” said Richard McGregor, a senior fellow at the Lowy Institute in Sydney and author of “The Party: The Secret World of China’s Communist Rulers.” “The U.S. feels it is playing catch up in muscling up to Beijing, a debate that will only be sharpened in a presidential election year. And China under Xi is programmed not to take a backward step.”

Under the pressure of US-China global confrontation abovementioned, the EU’s strategic position within it is becoming increasingly ambivalent or hesitated. Such ambivalence or hesitation could be demonstrated through two lines below: 1 the attitudes towards Trump’s US-Though the US overall commitments towards the transatlantic partnership has been experiencing the significant declining since the end of Cold War, such declining reach the unprecedented risky level since Donald Trump took the power. Regarding the security policy area, Trump administration does not hesitate to apply force in pursuit of US interests while trying best to avoid any long-term military commitments on European continent. Regarding the trade policy area, as the WDC introduced the protectionist approach, it has been always trying every available means to maximize its own economic interests at any cost of the trading partners<sup>3</sup>. Under such circumstances, the EU’s criticisms and skepticisms towards Trump’s US has been increasing rapidly and significantly. In 2019, the EU officials even characterized the track record of Trump’s foreign policy as a series of “reckless choices, bad deals and dangerous provocations”. Such divergence

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<sup>3</sup>This most important case to demonstrate such trading policy approach is the Trump’s immediate decision to retreat from TPP (established by Obama administration) after he took the presidency.

between both sides is continually extending since the eruption of Covid-19 pandemic-most of Europeans are not looking to the US to lead during the emergency as they might have done in the past; 2 the attitudes towards Xi's China: In March 2019, the European Commission and the External Service characterized China as a partner, a competitor and a systemic rival. Such complicated or even contradictory statement reflects the deep ambivalence towards newly emerging superpower- China: on the one hand, EU needs China's support for its multilateralism and related agendas in the global arena. On the other hand, the long-term trend of the difference in systems and ideology between both sides still cause EU's anxiety about the future directions of the global order with the emerging China. Certainly, the Covid-19 pandemic has further reflected the ambivalences abovementioned.

Based on the two lines of ambivalences previously elaborated, EU's responses to China's anti Covid-19 diplomacy in Europe and the broader picture of US-China global confrontation behind it is becoming quite subtle and divisive within the union itself. The most visible and important case to reflect the responses abovementioned would be the discursive rifts centering around the theme (China's anti pandemic diplomacy). Through the examination of such rifts, the paper would try provide the specific perspective to elaborate or explain the EU's the ambivalent strategic position under up to date pressure of US-China global confrontation.

## **DISCURSIVE RIFTS REGARDING CHINA'S ANTI PAN-DEMIC DIPLOMACY-DIVIDED THE UNION STANDS?**

“China took the very authoritarian measures, while in the US, the virus was played down for a long time. These are two extremes, neither of which could be a model for Europe”-In an interview with the German news magazine *Der Spiegel*, Mass said Germany and the EU could not look to Washington or Beijing as models in their handling of the crisis. Such statement is a typical neutral discourse reflecting the EU governing politicians' attempt to appease the existing divisions within the union regarding China's anti-pandemic diplomacy and the following US-China diplomatic conflicts. Even so, the divisions-specifically the discursive rifts-within EU is still highly visible and impactful. Due to the nature of long-standing loosing foreign policy coordination between each member state within the union, the paper would try to analyze and elaborate the divisions on national level rather the European ones<sup>4</sup>. The following part would pick up the typical member states to examine the divisions. Based on the seriousness of the internal divisions (discursive rifts) and the overall attitudes towards China's anti pandemic diplomacy, these member states could be categorized as four groups.

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<sup>4</sup>This does not mean there are not such divisions in EU level. For example, there are similar controversies arose in the hearings between MEP and EU bosses within EP (European Parliament). However, such divisions impact little on the relevant responses from EU level.

### **Group A: The Countries with Serious Internal Discords (Discursive Rifts)**

**Italy:** Italy was the first to receive conspicuous exports and donations of medical equipment from Beijing. Because of the controversial nature of various means of support from China, the bilateral relationship is now back in the spotlight, one year after the signing of Memorandum of Understanding. There exist explicit discursive rifts between the left and right within the political spectrum. For the former, the Five Star Movement, the party most positive about China has retained its position. Luigi Di Maio, the former leader of the movement, current foreign minister and staunch supporter of the BRI MoU, has actively promoted engagement with China for the acceptance of the aid. Moreover, recent declarations from other prominent party members seems to suggest that the Five Star Movement is increasingly consolidating its utilitarian position in favor of China, to be used also as leverage against the EU. Similarly, the center-left Democratic Party (PD) has also welcomed Chinese support, while a little different from the far left Five Star Movement, it made a strong point of Italy's allegiance to the EU and NATO.

In the contrast, the right and center-right have remained China-sceptic and have at times used the Five Star Movement's proximity to China to pressure the government. Matteo Salvini-the chief leader of Lega shared a 2015 video by Italy's state television which documented China's work at Wuhan P4 lab, claiming that this was somehow evidence of the artificial origin of the coronavirus. He stated that: "If China knew of the virus, it should then be prosecuted for crimes against humanity". Similarly, Antonio Tajani, vice-president of the European Parliament and a leading figure within Silvio Berlusconi's Forza



Italia Party, has declared that solidarity cannot be used to promote BRI and sneak in deals concerning Italy's strategic infrastructure.

**Spain:** Chinese assistance, cooperation and experience have been positively regarded by Spain's Head of Government and Head of State (the King) but never rated above those of other countries. Nor have they been used to criticize third-countries management of the crisis no matter whether it's at abroad or not. As for the controversies over the quality of some medical supplies purchased in China, mainly rapid diagnostic tests and the motivations of Chinese assistance to Spain, the Spanish government has adopted a conciliatory attitude. In an interview for the CGTN program *The Point*, for instance, Spain's foreign minister Arancha Gonzalez Laya explained that both sides help each other in times of need and that "in exercising generosity [China] projects soft power". She also acknowledged that the malfunctioning coronavirus testing kits were bought through a Spanish contractor not through direct agreements with Chinese authorities.

In the contrast, the strongest criticism of the Chinese government's management of the pandemic arises from two sectors. On the one hand, NGO that consider Covid-19 within the context of their causes, be they press freedom, wildlife preservation or human rights protection. On the other hand, conservative and liberal politicians and media groups critical of the Spanish government have not only condemned domestic measures in China, but also China's cooperation with Spain. Among the most critical political leaders, several high-level members of Vox and, to a lesser extent of the Popular Party have referred to the pandemic as the "damned Chinese virus", "the 21<sup>st</sup> century plague" or "the Chinese plague".

**Czechia:** Though President Zeman officially gave thanks to the Peoples Republic of China (short for PRC) during his public speech to the Czech nation on the pandemic crisis and the Chinese media circulated this praise of foreign aid, the internal influential media or opinion makers still hold the harsh stance being critical of China's anti pandemic diplomacy. For example, media reports pointed to mass purchases of face masks and respirators conducted by the Chinese embassy and Chinese community members in Czechia in the first months of the crisis in China. The think tank Sinopsis highlighted the issue of the demand for Chinese commercial supplies as an easy source of "propaganda" in which China is portrayed as a savior. The same source focused on Minister Hamacek's personal political and economic involvement in China as the relevant point in his crisis management of health supplies. Following the latter's insulting reply, soon after Czech posting the Chinese buying masks and respirators and alleging a securitization of "Chinese overseas epidemic war operation".

In sum, the pro-Chinese narratives pointed to the urgency of the first Chinese supplies in March, while critical voices argued by warning about Chinese propaganda, accepting humiliating conditions and pointing to insufficient and even discriminatory policies towards domestic producers. Over the past two decades, polarized views on China in Czechia have caused very few major disputes on really relevant issues, but the current pandemic crisis has put China front and center.

## **Group B: The Countries with Minor Internal Discursive Rifts (Discords) in Favor of China's Anti Pandemic Diplomacy**

**Poland:** It seems there is a rather positive perceptions of Chinese efforts in Poland. The best example is the Polish official's statements and remarks regarding the relevant theme. Such statements and remarks always emphasized the necessity of broad international cooperation to combat the pandemic and restrained in criticism of China's initial reaction to the first cases of the new coronavirus. Similar views have been presented by Polish medical specialists, mainly epidemiologists and virologists. Medical experts who appear in Polish media to comment on the pandemic often use Chinese examples such as the Hubei lockdown or experimental methods of curing the infected people as an appropriate response to the spread of the virus. What's more, there is a lot of information in traditional and social media about China's donation of medical supplies. In that sense, Polish public opinion has adopted the Chinese narrative about the prevalence of humanitarian aid.

Even so, there is still a negative perception from media, commentators and experts on China, as well as other people active in social media regarding the same theme (China's anti pandemic diplomacy). They focus mostly on a delayed Chinese reaction to the initial outbreak and China's ongoing disinformation campaign about covid-19. However, such minor discords have very limited impact on the Poland's overall positive perceptions of China's anti pandemic diplomacy.

**Hungary:** The global pandemic has not changed the amicable relationship between Hungarian government and China. Official comments have not blamed Beijing for the outbreak of Covid-19, instead they have emphasized the massive amounts of medical equipment

sent from China to Hungary. Meanwhile, the government has used the crisis as pretext to strengthen its control over domestic political and business affairs. Budapest has been following a pro-China policy over the past decade. The Covid-19 crisis has not led to a change in Hungary's position on China, as the Hungarian government has expressed its gratitude for the Chinese help and support on various occasions.

In contrast to the official narrative, non-governmental media sources are more critical about China and its role it played in the current pandemic and the general public as well has been expressing very negative opinions on social media, however, criticism mostly focused on Chinese government's domestic pandemic crisis management not on the Hungarian government's China policy and China's anti pandemic public diplomacy in Hungary. In sum, the pro-China attitude of Budapest is here to stay for the foreseeable future.

**Portugal:** Chinese donations of medical and personal protection equipment (PPE) have earned particular attention in Portugal. China's assistance, despite the 'China virus' labeling and criticism over how the initial outbreak was concealed, is being judged against a perceived lack of solidarity from EU.

China's public diplomacy seems functioning very well in Portugal. As former expected, the role China is playing in supplying Portugal with important resources to fight Covid-19 has been widely disseminated by the Portuguese media. The "quantitative" dimension is the dominant perspective in the news-the impressive imagery of planes landing on Portuguese runways to unload tones of crucial equipment arriving from China. In this context, the idea that China is replacing the EU as a source of solidarity, namely with southern EU countries, has clearly

gained ground in Portuguese public opinion. China's ability to effectively convey solidarity is also being voiced by influential political analysts in the national media. The indecisive stance and scant action by the EU have left many in Portugal with a sense of *déjà vu* regarding the union's long-standing North-South divides which open the room for China to fill. Nevertheless, it would be hard to identify any sign of instrumentalization of the 'China factor' in domestic politics. In sum, the long-term strong bilateral relations between China and Portugal are unlikely to change due to the eventual impact of the pandemic surge.

### **Group C: The Countries with Minor Internal Discords (Discursive Rifts) Being Critical of China's Anti Pandemic Diplomacy**

**Germany:** Germany-China relations were already complicated before the global Covid-19 crisis. Political relations were deteriorating not least because of growing German skepticism about Chinese policies concerning the pro-democracy movement in Hong Kong and large-scale human rights violations in Xinjiang. There, it would not be surprised to see the rapid diffusion of China-skepticism wave in Germany since the pandemic erupted. Such wave impacted almost every influencing domestic actor of Germany which led to the following situation: the critical stance towards China's anti pandemic diplomacy nearly became the strong consensus among the actors aforementioned, the only difference is the phrasing or rhetoric they used to express the relevant concerns.

The governing politicians phrased the expressions cautiously when they criticized China's handling of the crisis and the so called "China's

international propaganda efforts". For example, a representative from center-left SPD expressed concerns about the dependence of Germany's supply chain on China. A Green Party member pointed out China should not turn the crisis into a competition of systems. However, they never try to insult the specific ideology or the person of China directly. In the contrast, some German mainstream media outlets blamed and insult China and its anti-pandemic diplomacy much more directly and aggressively. For instance, the chief editor of the large German tabloid "Bild" openly attacked the Chinese president. After publishing a calculation of what China owes Germany as financial compensation, he harshly accused Xi in an online video of having informed the international community too late about the danger and urged Xi make an open apology to the world immediately. In sum, the negative perceptions regarding China's anti pandemic diplomacy got the solid ground in Germany.

**France:** A little different from Germany, the perceptions of France towards China's handling of pandemic crisis experienced the significant change through time frame. Generally speaking, the press coverage and government reactions in France toward China were quite positive during the first two months the crisis. This seemed to have changed since late March when the crisis erupted in Europe. Debate on China's influence over WHO, new information questioning the number of casualties in China, suspicion of geopolitical motives behind what has been called China's "mask diplomacy" as well as the aggressive stance taken by the PRC embassy<sup>5</sup>, all contributed to a cooler and

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<sup>5</sup>The PRC embassy in France has played an unprecedented role in the media: First, the embassy spread the suspected facts or conspiracy theories implying that the coronavirus originated in the US and introduced to China by the US military actively since the late March; Second, the embassy published several anonymous articles on its website which is aimed at "restoring distorted

sometimes hostile attitude toward China in France. French foreign minister Le Drian summoned Ambassador Lu Shaye on April 14 to express clearly the disapproval of the statements made previously. The next day, during a hearing with Mr. Le Drian, French senators shared their discontent and concerns regarding the embassy's comments. Additionally, President Macron, while avoiding a direct challenge to China's political system, suggested the transparency issue indirectly in an interview with the Financial Times on April 16: "Obviously, things that we don't know have happened [in China]". In sum, China and France have been cooperating since the start of the epidemic in China, as well as when France was under great pressure notably due to its severe face mask shortage. However, since the unprecedented proactive public diplomacy taken by PRC embassy of France arose, the overall perceptions of France towards China and its relevant anti pandemic diplomacy turned down rapidly including within the government which would probably undermine the bilateral relationship in the near future.

**Sweden:** When Covid-19 epidemic struck Wuhan in early 2020, it came after four years of a steadily worsening diplomatic relationship between Sweden and China. So far, the coronavirus emergency seems to create no impetus for mending ties. The widespread suspicions of the country regarding the suspected 'China's cover-up and international publicity efforts' have further gained more solid ground than ever before. Unlike Germany or France where there still exist cautious but limited appreciation on China's pandemic management

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facts" presented by Western media, experts and politicians who intended to slander China. Third, the embassy often commented on specific reports in the French media that it said were untrue and detrimental to China's image.

achievements, China's response to the crisis has received little praise both from media and politicians in Sweden. Repeated themes in the public discussion instead include the initial cover-up of the spread in Wuhan, Chinese disinformation about the pandemic, Taiwan's exclusion from the WHO, and worries that China and other non-democracies are taking advantage of the crisis to pursue their agendas. Moreover, such suspicions not only remain on discursive dimension, but also translate into the relevant policy decisions. For example, in late April, the Swedish parliament agreed to introduce a temporary legislation to stop foreign investments that harm the country's security interests which is mostly aimed at preventing Chinese actors from buying up Swedish companies in critical sectors during the looming economic crisis.

#### **Group D: The Countries Keeping the Theme (China's Anti Pandemic Diplomacy) in Minor Key**

**Austria:** The Covid-19 crisis seems not induced a restructuring of Sino-Austrian relationship. The rather non-confrontational position held by the Chinese embassy in Austria has been matched by Austria's perpetuation of its longstanding policy of neutrality. Contrary to the proactive China's proactive anti pandemic diplomacy actions in Austria<sup>6</sup>, the Austrian government has distinguished itself through its noticeable silence towards China. It's noteworthy that the call between Chancellor Sebastian Kurz and Premier Li Keqiang on March 27 was widely publicized by China through an official statement and several

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<sup>6</sup>For example, the Chinese ambassador Li Xiaosi notably promoted during 'donation ceremonies' the contributions made by the Chinese community as well as Chinese companies to Austria.



social media posts, while the Austrian government did not mention it. In addition to this, the Austrian economy minister Magarete Scharamböck abstained from openly singling out China when confronted with reports of deficiencies in the quality of mask imports from China. Such cases explicitly reflect Austria's continuation of a policy neutrality regarding US-China tensions. This is further exemplified by the announcement that telecom providers in Austria would be free to choose whether to employ Huawei or not in the country's 5G roll out.

**Bulgaria:** Though China has offered assistance to Bulgaria amid Covid-19 pandemic and used this aid to serve its public diplomacy, the latter seems to keep such theme within a strictly limited scale and level of public debate. Instead, the government focused on either diversifying its sources of medical supplies or boosting the local production of relevant items. Generally speaking, the level of awareness about China's role in the world is relatively low in Bulgaria as there are no historical links between two nations. Business and political elites in Bulgaria acknowledge China's economic potential and international standing. However, at the same time, the volume of China's investment in the country is extremely limited compared with its investment in other EU member states or the 17+1 area. Moreover, the foreign policy and security priorities of the current Bulgarian government are determined predominantly by its European and transatlantic commitments. So far, the pandemic crisis has not led to a noticeable shift of Bulgaria's stance in favor of China.

**Latvia:** At this point of Covid-19 crisis, relations between Latvia and China have remained limited, constructive and market-based. The exchanges have not been visible in the public and media space. As the Covid-19 outbreak first developed in China, the domestic reports of

Latvia mainly relied on information from international news agencies and the phrasing on China was mostly neutral with no emphasis on the virus being “Chinese” but rather “from China”. Moreover, Latvia even organized several activities to help the victims in China. Therefore, China also made a generous reciprocation to Latvia since the pandemic erupted there. However, the local media keeps the very low coverage of such theme (China’s anti pandemic diplomacy). For example, a flight in late March by the national airline AirBaltic to Urumqi and back carried 900000 face masks and 80000 respirators from China. The Latvian reports are worded as a praise of AirBaltic and do not focus on the context of the exchange and China’s role.

In sum, certain exchanges have taken place between Latvia and China during Covid-19, including charity events, donations, experience exchanges and equipment purchase, but the activities that could serve China’s image have gone largely absent in the local media and public debate.

Through the examination and analysis above, the one main divide combined with two sub divides is on full display: as most of cases above demonstrated, necessity proven to be a powerful driver in promoting cooperation with China in the fight against Covid-19. Even countries that have souring relations with China in recent years have found a reason to strengthen those ties in a time of crisis. For many governments of Europe, the mid-term solution to the pandemic crisis must require the multilateral action which would highlights China’s role as a partner and further necessitates a degree of cooperation, despite the controversies regarding China’s growing influence in international organizations such as WHO.

As the pandemic has severely shocked European integration process which would lead to the decline of the continent's strength and international influence, the emergence of such divides would be inevitable but still be the risky signal for the integration cause. Fortunately, though some details of the divide suggesting the complaints or dissatisfactions with EU's inertia compared with China's immediate assistance action and the following solidarity<sup>7</sup>, little of them opposed to the EU integration project directly. Therefore, it would be reasonable to define the current situation of EU's responses to China's anti pandemic diplomacy and the following effects as 'divided the union stand', which means the EU would still function as a political polity effectively but the integration cause would meet newly emerged obstacles or pressures brought by the ongoing pandemic crisis.

### **CONCLUSION: THE POSSIBLE SCENARIO OF FUTURE EU-CHINA RELATIONSHIP AND EU'S INTERNATIONAL STRATEGIC POSITION**

The Covid-19 pandemic crisis would be the first time that China has figured so prominently on an issue of such immediately critical importance to European citizens, governments and the European project more broadly. Thus, China has become an indispensable part of public and policy debates across much of the continent during the pandemic era. The way of EU-China relationship evolving as the current crisis unfold and the debates around them would cause a lasting effect

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<sup>7</sup>It is not the first time that China's factor became the leverage for some member states-specifically the ones in south Europe-going against EU. During the financial crisis between 2008-2012, some south European countries already tried this once. However, the scale and the level of it reach the new peak record compared with the previous one.

even after the crisis has passed. Frankly speaking, the EU-China relations had already grown more complex before the crisis hit. What were mostly commercially driven relationship a decade ago have now contained more diversified, more geopolitical and more contested suggestions, as China's interests in Europe have grown considerably and China itself has become more competitive and more globally ambitious. Under such circumstances including the previously emerged complexities and the up to date pandemic crisis, the year 2020 would probably be a defining year for EU-China relationship. Critical decisions are to be made on questions such as 5G licensing rules in Europe and a bilateral investment agreement between both sides. In September, 27 European heads of state and government would like to sit down, for the first time collectively with their Chinese counterpart in Leipzig, Germany. From whichever perspective, this summit would most likely reshape the new track or framework for the future of EU-China relationship.

The demonstration of EU-China relationship above offers a very apt example to analyze the EU's international strategic position. Facing the increasingly self-interests focusing US and the rising, ambitious but ideologically heterogeneous China combined with the unprecedented global confrontation between both, EU has been always trying its best to keep the sophisticated neutrality or balance under the shadow of such global superpowers' conflict. However, considering the deep-rooted security guarantee reliance on US, it would not be reasonable to expect EU could develop the newly demanded global strategy framework independent of the long-standing transatlantic partnership completely. Therefore, the most likely scenario of EU's international strategic position in the near future would be that EU still keep

the transatlantic partnership functioning but gradually reduce the strategic reliance on it especially the ones referring to the security commitment on the one hand, while try to build and develop more organic and effective coordination with the previously defined geopolitical rival like China or Russia on the other hand.

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