

Europe and China. Uncertainty, challenge and perspectives.

European-Chinese relations and their ambivalent political-cultural potential

Impulse paper of the board of the
German Commission for Justice and Peace

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Editor: Dr Jörg Lüer

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I. China as a challenge to European political thinking

I.1 Hardly ever in its long history has China attracted more attention in the world than today. This has several reasons, but most of all amazement and admiration on the one hand and concern and misgivings on the other hand. Amazement and admiration are caused by the Chinese economic upturn and its scientific and technological success, while concern and misgivings are caused by its domestic hardening and foreign-policy actions. Within a breathtakingly short time China has achieved the rise from a developing nation marked by its rural character to an important high-tech country, from an at best third-rate stakeholder of international policy to an economic and political world power, whose influence can no longer be ignored without consequences.

I.2 Just by the sheer size of the country, its population and its economic and political influence China has already changed the constellation of the world of states drastically. Such tectonic shifts tend to trigger uncertainty and fears and mobilise counterforces. This is especially true when they are accompanied by highly ambitious goals that are programmatically geared towards fundamentally and permanently changing the structures of international politics. Quite a few states, above all the USA, perceive this as a fundamental threat to world peace. They consider it urgently necessary to counter this danger through the broadest possible alliance of states that are willing and able to defend the current world order, if necessary by military means. For its part, the Chinese government is seeking international support, especially in the Global South.

I.3 In principle, this change in world society and world politics makes it necessary for all states to review their previous relations with the People's Republic of China and, if necessary, to readjust them. This is currently also happening at the European level, but so far without an adequate response by the public. The German government's recently published China strategy has not yet changed this. However, such a public discourse is indispensable for the formation of political objectives and decision-making in a democracy, especially when it is a matter of considerable significance for the entire world.

II. Our starting point

II.1 With the following reflections we want to contribute to the debate on the future orientation of the EU's China policy.¹ As part of the Catholic Church, we do not regard China and China policy from the perspective of neutral observers who limit themselves to merely stating facts and describing circumstances without evaluating them. We follow the social doctrine of the Catholic Church the core of which is the firm belief in the equal dignity of all human beings, in which human rights have their foundation and the basic principles (principles of personhood, common good, solidarity and subsidiarity) as well as fundamental values (truth, freedom, justice) of human coexistence are embodied. Catholic social teaching thinks and argues in the spirit of contemporaneity in solidarity. It does not adopt a position of equidistance in contemporary and future conflicts, especially in the conflict between the USA and China or the West and China, but avoids identifying itself unreservedly with one of the parties to the conflict. With regard to the EU's China policy, *Justitia et Pax* also advocates developing an independent perspective based on European interests without losing sight of the common good of the world and building on its own expertise and analysis without ignoring the knowledge and judgements of others.

III. The EU and China. Two fundamentally different entities

III.1 We consider one of the most important prerequisites for a realistic understanding of the relationship between the EU and China to be the recognition of the completely different nature of both powers. This insight is not sufficiently perceived by the public. Unlike China, the EU is not a stakeholder in the sense of a state, but a historically unique entity that has been described by the Federal Constitutional Court as a "union" of member states. This union is based on contractual agreements between these states and their multiple interdependencies at different levels and in different policy areas. European politics is therefore characterised by enormous complexity. This situation not only creates a high need for coordination and agreement in order to enable joint action, it also justifies the necessity of providing the population with sufficient information in order to make European policy as transparent as possible. In this respect, we note a serious deficit in the EU's independent public relations work, as a result of which the respective image of the EU in the member states is largely determined by the national media and governments.

¹ Therefore, we do not intend to comment on the Vatican China policy which is as contentious in the Catholic Church as the Pope's attitude towards the war in Ukraine.

III.2 The need for more information and communication particularly concerns those policy areas that are not (yet) communitarised. These include the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), the name of which easily fosters the misleading impression of a greater common ground than corresponds to reality. The CFSP is not a clear-cut common programme; it is primarily an instrument created by the Maastricht Treaty in 1993 to improve cooperation in the field of foreign and security policy and to achieve greater commonality over time. From the outset, the CFSP as an intergovernmental institution has mainly encompassed trade policy and development cooperation, much less security policy. It is in the hands of national governments and is represented by the High Representative of the EU, supported by the European External Action Service.

III.3 For years, and even more emphatically at present, there have been calls for the EU to pursue a common line vis-à-vis China (and other states) and to speak with one voice. This demand is justified in our view, because we can detect little of a unified EU China policy line. However, the member states and their governments bear the main responsibility for this, as the degree of commonality that the CFSP can achieve and realise depends largely on them. The sobering result of this dependence became particularly clear in the past in the example of the European sanctions policy after the events in Tiananmen Square in Beijing in 1989, which was gradually but rapidly undermined due to the priority of national (economic) interests over a unified EU policy. Unfortunately, we recognise a pattern in this: when values and interests have to be weighed up, the decision is usually in favour of national economic interests. We do not advocate simply reversing this rule, because even with interests, values are often at stake. But the credibility of a rule- and value-based foreign policy is jeopardised when the values supposedly represented are regularly sacrificed to economic or political interests.

IV. Developments in China and European China Policy

IV.1 Official relations between the European Community, founded in 1957, and the People's Republic of China, founded in 1949, began in 1975. From the beginning, the focus was on economic concerns. This was understandable and wise, because it was easier to reach agreement on economic interests than on ideological differences. We still consider this to be the right approach in principle, but we also emphasise its limitations. The motto "change through trade" has not completely lost its meaning through the events and experiences after 1989, but it was a mistake to think that we were in a post-ideological age in which politics would only be determined by interest calculations or "deals". China in particular offers an instructive and disturbing example of the revival of an ideology that

was almost presumed to be dead. After taking office in 2013, President Xi Jinping single-mindedly committed the communist party to a Marxist-Leninist line and consistently expanded its political, social and not least economic influence. Today, China presents itself as a one-party state under the almost complete control of the Communist Party, which leaves no doubt that it wants to hold on to its sole rule forever.

The CCP's claim to a political monopoly has two consequences, among others: On the one hand, it is able to set long-term binding goals for the development of the state and society; on the other hand, it can advance development in the various sectors of domestic and foreign policy according to a unified, coherent strategy. Although this is an ideal-typical idea that can never be fully realised, it is in line with the party's aspirations and self-image. State and Party leader Xi Jinping has condensed it into the idea of the "Chinese dream", while Party congresses set precise milestones through several five-year plans to realise it by 2049. By 2025, China is to occupy a leading position in all major areas of world politics: economic, military and political. At first glance and in the eyes of many governments, China's political structure seems to have considerable advantages in competition with Western states and especially the EU with its structural complexity. In our view, this is by no means necessarily the case, but it will become true to the extent that the EU fails to achieve joint decision-making and action through voluntary agreements and mutual coordination.

IV.2 The EU's China policy must be attuned to China's specific nature and attentively and critically explore what constructive possibilities can be identified. In the course of the last decades, several concepts for relations with the People's Republic of China have been developed, most recently in 2019. The basic idea of this most recent framing of the various policy fields, as also found in the German government's China strategy, is to divide the overall complex of relations into three types: partnership, competition and rivalry.

This conceptual orientation is to be welcomed because it makes it possible to distinguish between different levels of analysis and action and to disentangle problem areas to a certain extent. This contrasts to a certain extent with the CCP's efforts to shape Chinese policy from a "single mould", as it were, but we consider it necessary in terms of peace policy. It leads to a theoretical and political dead end to draw the indisputable ideological and political opposition between China and the West into all policy areas and in this way only to repeat the CCP's conceptual way of thinking in a mirror image. For it is the party that constructs an opposition between China and the West, for example between "Asian" and "Western" values, because it derives a good part of its political legitimacy from this. To understand the relationship with China as a consistently antagonistic relationship is

basically to unintentionally leave the power of definition to the CCP and thus narrow the scope for political action. This would be unwise and questionable in terms of peace policy.

IV.3 Dealing with China in a constructive way requires taking note of and understanding China's self-image, in which the reference to history plays a key role, and on the other hand, and most importantly, measuring China's policies against its own standards. This means that it is crucial to take the Chinese government seriously and at its word in order to test its policies compared to reality. When criticising China from outside, it is crucial to avoid double standards and to examine Chinese criticism of the West for its truthfulness and not to dismiss it wholesale as propaganda. Credibility should be a feature of EU foreign policy.

V. Critical agreement on European identity as the basis for reliable and successful external relations

V.1 The path to a future European China policy must begin with a self-reflection of the EU, in which the community ascertains who or what it wants to be in the future. This has nothing to do with Eurocentric self-reflection, but much more with critical self-awareness. For in the light of its overall concept, it must give an honest account of what it really is at present. It is not enough to proclaim values if they do not also serve as a reliable measure of self-criticism. This also includes a sense of truth and justice with regard to its own history, which requires that the important role of violence in Europe itself and in the course of European expansion be perceived and included as a fixed element in Europe's self-image. This is all the more important and urgent because in the non-European world, the course and consequences of colonial conquests, with their mostly racist justifications, are often deeply engraved into the cultural memory. This is especially true for China and it corresponds to the emphatically proclaimed goal of the CCP to irrevocably end and make up for the deep humiliation of China by the Western colonial powers in the 19th and 20th centuries and to regain and expand China's role as a great power.

V.2 The question of its identity has accompanied the EC/EU since its beginnings. As early as 1973, the Copenhagen "Document on The European Identity" was published, which even then placed European unification in direct relation to the power shifts in the international system. (...) The "Nine" defined "the principles of representative democracy, of the rule of law, of social justice (...) as well as the respect for human rights" to be the "fundamental elements of the European identity", which had to be "preserved" in the changing power constellation of world policy (Cf. No. 1). This could not and should not be a final answer to the question of identity, because both the changes in the world situation

and the development of the European "unification project" demanded a dynamic and open conception of the "unmistakable character" of the growing community of European countries. European identity must therefore combine continuity and change and manifest itself in different dimensions: institutionally and structurally, culturally and politically.

V.3 The normative core of European identity which is, according to Article 2 of the Treaty on European Union, to be represented and preserved on an international level by "a common foreign and security policy", finds its concise expression in the Preamble of the Treaty on European Union in the "attachment to the principles of liberty, democracy and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms and of the rule of law". In Art 2 of the Treaty of Lisbon this group of "principles" has been enlarged to a list of "fundamental values": respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities. These values are common to the Member States in a society in which pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity and equality between women and men prevail."

V.4 Of course, this list does not simply represent the reality of the EU and its member states; it neither corresponds to what the EU was, nor to what it is, but rather signals first and foremost what the EU wants to realise in it and through it according to its will and self-image. In the sense of a commitment, however, it shows a remarkable continuity in the course of the various phases in the development of the EU. For this reason, these principles and fundamental values may indeed be described as an identifying feature of the EU. It is against them that the EU itself must first be measured before they are applied to the EU's external relations. In this respect, practical politics, both internally and externally, is the decisive field in which European identity crystallises and becomes visible or remains a mere postulate, a self-generated illusion without effective power. It is not only China, but above all China, that is currently putting the EU to the test, a test that goes far beyond the framework of economic competition.

V.5 In our view, the EU should remember the State of the Union address of the then President Franklin D. Roosevelt held to the US Congress in early January 1941. It contained a simple and clear message that influenced both the anti-Hitler coalition and the later Atlantic Charter. It might be called the concept of the "Four Great Freedoms", echoing the language of the CCP:

The first is freedom of speech and expression--everywhere in the world.

The second is freedom of every person to worship God in his own way--everywhere in the world.

The third is freedom from want--which, translated into world terms, means economic understandings which will secure to every nation a healthy peacetime life for its inhabitants--everywhere in the world.

The fourth is freedom from fear--which, translated into world terms, means a world-wide reduction of armaments to such a point and in such a thorough fashion that no nation will be in a position to commit an act of physical aggression against any neighbor--anywhere in the world.

V.6 This programme combines the idea of individual freedoms with the realisation of social and political duties in a global horizon. It manifests the substance of Western thought, which is also capable of inspiring a substantial criticism of Western politics that includes any imperial or hegemonic aspirations of states. Basically, it contains basic elements of a world order that enables and demands peaceful and social development. Therefore, the Chinese objections to the so-called "Western values" do not apply. In our view, there is no real contradiction between "Asian" and "Western" values. If the EU is credibly trying to realise a world order based on values and rules, then this is by no means in opposition to, but in harmony with those elements of Chinese tradition and culture that emphasise the well-being of the Chinese people. The EU itself is trying to be a role model for a successful balance between the different traditions and cultures of the states and peoples of Europe and the common life in freedom, peace and prosperity. But neither Catholic social teaching nor the principles of European politics allow the welfare of any people to be regarded as a supreme value to which everything may be subordinated.

V.7 Social and political thinking in Europe has been shaped to a large extent by the experiences of massive violence within and between European nations that have characterised it until the recent past. Not least among these is the experience of forms of violence emanating from the state and governments. In a protracted process, it has led to the realisation that a people must also have the possibility of getting rid of its government if it does not (any longer) serve the common good and is no longer supported by the will of the overwhelming majority of the population as expressed in free elections. This is the most fundamental principle of democracy, compatible with different political systems, as the EU itself makes clear. At the same time, however, it marks a fundamental regulatory contrast to a constitutionally established one-party rule of unlimited duration. At this point, the EU's foreign policy must firmly contradict the Chinese government and the CCP and must not allow itself to be led by any economic or other interests to accept or even adopt interpretations of the rule of law and democracy that in reality justify dictatorial and totalitarian features of the state.

V.8 A guiding principle of European foreign and security policy can be derived from this: It cannot want to see its independence and its peculiar role in assuming a midway position in the systemic conflict between the USA and China and therefore offering itself as a mediating authority. For with regard to the fundamental principles of order in national and international life, the EU is far closer to the USA than China. In view of the normative core of European identity, to approach China with regard to these principles would mean for the EU to betray and abandon itself. Of course, this cannot and must not be the goal or outcome of European foreign and security policy, but this almost banal insight does not force the regulatory antagonism between the West and China to escalate into a new Cold War that could once again divide the world into blocs. Such a division would be fatal for the whole of humanity in view of the world's problems, which can only be solved together. European policy should therefore concentrate primarily on finding cooperative solutions to these problems. China declares that it is prepared to cooperate at the international level and is demonstrating this in individual UN organisations. The EU should expand traditional cooperation in the field of development policy and take initiatives to involve China even more in projects that serve the common good. A cooperative attitude is needed which, nevertheless, at the same time does not lose sight of systematic precautions for the possible failure of this cooperation and the potential threats arising from it. This dual orientation of policy, which not least also takes the experience with Germany's policy towards Russia seriously, is a question of political wisdom. Ideally, it increases the incentives for cooperative action on the Chinese side.

VI. Human rights as a strained foundation of relations between Europe and China

VI.1 The CCP boasts in a variety of statements of the widespread elimination of hunger in China, but likes to hide the fact that the same party was responsible for one of the greatest famines in history. Nevertheless, the successful fight against hunger in the post-Mao era must be recognised as a historical achievement that was more successful than Western efforts in this area. From the perspective of Catholic social teaching, which places a high value on justice, China has every right to be proud of this success. It also entitles the Chinese government to regard it as an important contribution to the implementation of human rights. However, we do not share their view that social human rights should take precedence over individual human rights. If individual human rights are subordinated to social rights, the state is granted the right to decide whether and to what extent people may defend themselves against the state. This paves the way for a social dictatorship. If the Chinese government wants to preserve and expand the social progress it has achieved,

it should recognise the equal importance of human rights. The rule of law of a state does not coincide with its legality; it is fulfilled in a legal system to which the state itself, which is otherwise above the law, also submits. Consequently, the principle of the rule of law is not identical with the right of the state to regulate state and social life through laws, but is superior to it. The sovereignty of a state, to which China attaches great importance, is not only reflected in its relationship to other states and in the principle of non-interference, but also in its relationship to itself in the form of the state's capacity for self-limitation. It is not a sign of weakness, but a proof of strength.

VI.2 Another difference between the EU and China as regards the understanding of human rights has an even more serious effect. The current human rights declarations, which the EU undertakes to observe and most of which China has also signed, attribute them without exception to human beings as such. This is expressed in the statement that they are innate to the human being. All characteristics that mark people beyond their birth are irrelevant from this point of view. Human rights are not conferred or acquired; they are granted to everyone solely because they are human beings. This understanding contradicts a "people-centred approach to human rights", as advocated by China, for example, in the UN Human Rights Council since 2019. For it means a serious restriction of human rights, because it makes their validity dependent on belonging to a certain group of people, the "people", i.e. the state people of China. Europe, and especially Germany, has had bad, even terrible, experiences with such concepts, and China has also suffered from them. The EU must strictly adhere to the universality of human rights, not at all because it suffers from a Eurocentric perspective or wants to advocate a kind of human rights imperialism. It is the other way round: the universal claim of human rights erects a normative wall against racism, nationalism, imperialism and ethnic arrogance, which also protects China.

VI.3 In line with an old and broad tradition of Chinese thought, which is strongly embedded in the consciousness of the Chinese population, the Chinese government emphasises the social duties of the individual. It therefore often criticises the pronounced individualism of Western culture. We too condemn an exaggerated, egoistically distorted individualism, but we clearly disagree with the view that Western images of man misjudge the social nature of man. While they focus on the original and inalienable dignity of each individual, this in no way contradicts the fundamental sociality of the human being. In addition to concern for the well-being of the individual, humane politics always include an orientation towards the common good, which encompasses more than the sum of individual and private interests. In the history of the EU, this finds an early positive expression in the "Social Charter" of 1961, which lists a series of rights, the other side of which are social responsibilities. Not without reason Western thinking has the idea of

juxtaposing human rights with human duties. We also refer to the fundamental importance of the principles of solidarity and the common good in Catholic social teaching. The decisive factor, however, is always respect for the dignity of all people and every human being, which is expressed first and foremost in respect for their freedom. Human rights and human responsibilities are formally of equal rank, but in material terms human rights take precedence, because otherwise individual human rights might be suspended as protective rights in the name of social responsibilities. This is exactly what we observe and criticise in the People's Republic of China.

VI.4 Our objections and concerns about the Chinese government's understanding of human rights do not mean that a dialogue on human rights issues is pointless and futile. It could be linked to the high esteem in which important representatives of European Enlightenment philosophy held Chinese culture and Chinese thought. We need only recall the universal scholar G.W. Leibniz, who regarded the ethics and practical philosophy of Confucianism as exemplary and strongly recommended to study them. Thinking back would be important not least to jointly resist the danger of focusing too much on the present conflict situation and working too little on the foundations of a common future.

VII. China's role in the international system and the EU's response

VII.1 The Chinese leadership has long emphasised that it strictly follows the principle of peaceful development in its foreign policy and always wants to shape economic and political cooperation with other states in the sense of mutual benefit. China, it is repeatedly said, does not aspire to a hegemonic position, neither in Asia nor worldwide. However, European policy should not completely forget the decades in which the People's Republic, in competition with the USSR, pursued the intention of leading the communist world revolution and passionately rejected the principle of peaceful coexistence advocated there after the death of Stalin as a revisionist aberration. In view of this historical experience, it would do well to expect China to show a fundamental departure from this attitude by refraining from using coercion or pressure to assert its legitimate concern to gain international influence or from using illegal practices to gain advantage. This includes the theft of information as well as the use or threat of military force, which is contrary to the letter and spirit of the UN Charter. In normal, so to speak, inter-state dealings, however, the expectation of trust-promoting behaviour refers not least to the Chinese government's tendency to respond to any behaviour it dislikes in an irritated, insulted manner and often

with sanctions. To deal with each other as equals includes composure and openness to criticism.

The EU should not let itself be intimidated or provoked by this "wolf warrior diplomacy", but should react self-confidently and with staying power. The EU is not a superpower, but it has great power if it is able to jointly use its strengths.

VII.2 China is pursuing the "Chinese dream", hundreds of thousands of people in Africa and other regions of the world dream of living in an EU country, only the Europeans seem strangely despondent, lacking confidence in the common future. Indeed, the EU needs an inspiring vision if it is not to fall prey to the forces working from within and without to destroy it. For quite a while, it seemed that the EU was endangered mainly by the indifference of its citizenship. Now, however, it is threatened even more by the revitalisation of nationalist governments and movements, which in turn are forming an anti-EU international movement. Russia actively supports this countervailing power formation, while China weakens the EU by preferring - as usual - bilateral relations with its member states, in which it can always appear as the stronger partner. Resisting the temptation to damage the EU for the sake of economic gain will only be successful if a stronger motive outweighs the orientation towards national interests. The EU therefore needs a "European dream" that can inspire governments and populations alike. This does not mean that the wheel has to be reinvented. It is rather a question of reviving the ideas that set the process of European integration in motion and transforming them into a model of sustainable community policy. Their attraction draws people in large numbers to Europe, not to Russia or even to China. In the competition between systems, the EU can very well survive, especially if it remains true to its values and principles.

VII.3 The EU can assert its uniqueness by reflecting on its strengths and developing them. It is right to identify and protect strategically important areas of politics and society. But it is probably even more important to strengthen the EU's innovative power. This should apply not only to the economy, science and technology, but also to culture. China rightly boasts that it is the heir to an ancient culture. But Europe's cultural roots also go back a long way. There is little point in trying to fight a battle of rank here. The era of colonialism, in which the representatives of European civilisation acted as teachers of the civilisation process worldwide, belongs irrevocably to the past. The enormous challenges facing humanity can only be mastered through vast intellectual efforts and peaceful exchange between cultures and religions. The EU as well as China must henceforth see themselves as members of a global learning community into which all peoples can feed their cultural heritage and in which the best is combined on the path of free recognition to a world

culture. This, however, presupposes a genuine interest in other cultures and the history of other peoples and countries, which, in our impression, is still far too little developed in Europe at present with regard to China. The EU should promote corresponding efforts in science and education and make intensive efforts to establish and expand scientific and cultural exchange with Chinese institutions. In these areas, too, however, reciprocal relations must be shaped on an equal footing and remain free of unilateral state control and influence.

The aforementioned G.W. Leibniz had suggested founding a world academy of sciences in order to overcome the Eurocentrism prevalent at the time through an all-round transfer of knowledge. In calling for the need for a global learning community, we are promoting an idea that is neither revolutionary nor remote from reality, but a vision similar to the one that inspired the process of European unification. The EU came into being thanks to the initiative of far-sighted men and women who wanted to build a "Common House" on the battlefields of Europe, with rules that would benefit all its inhabitants. European foreign and security policy can therefore pursue no nobler goal than that of building a community of nations that wants to transform the only house it can inhabit, which is planet Earth, into its home, where it lives in peace with itself and with nature. It should draw its driving force from this human longing, which in history has again and again released undreamt-of creative energies to bring forth something new.

VII.4 A decisive prerequisite for Europe's innovative contribution to a sustainable world culture lies in its inner diversity, which, however, needs a counterweight in the constant struggle for commonality. The European leitmotif "unity in diversity" succinctly expresses the necessary balance between the two aspects of "diversity" and "unity", but in view of the numerous forces that are deliberately fighting the unity of the EU, European politics must in turn organise consensus-building with even greater determination. In our view, this does not require common action in all matters, but it does require constant exchange and mutual agreement to ensure that no state decides and acts against the interests and principles of the community. Within the EU, in addition to the alignment of different interests, their balancing must take place in the form of solidarity, so that there is no conflict between national self-interest and community interest. In a community of economically unequal states, solidarity is the irreplaceable cement that holds them together. It is a dangerous misconception to think that everyone is best served if everyone looks after themselves first.

In the Global South the government of the People's Republic often successfully creates the impression of giving altruistic economic, financial and technical aid by refraining from attaching conditions of a particularly political nature. This has been a tradition since Mao's

time and helps to secure international support for China. However, China has succeeded and continues to succeed only to a limited extent in anchoring the Chinese model of order permanently in other countries. Recently, there has been growing mistrust and unease in a number of countries that have taken Beijing up on its offers. The EU should not allow itself to be led into panic or hysteria by China's growing influence, but should be prompted to establish fair conditions in its economic and political external relations and to always orient solidarity-based aid on the principle of not allowing any long-term dependencies to arise. Aid must always be given in the form of help for self-help. The EU does not need protected zones of influence made up of satellite states; its best protection is provided by free partners and allies. For this reason, the EU's foreign policy must not take the path of unconditional development aid and development cooperation in order to withstand Chinese competition. For in the long run, as many examples prove, the renunciation of minimum human rights and political standards harms the countries concerned and, in the end, the EU itself. All too often, the West has tolerated or even courted authoritarian and reactionary governments in order to benefit economically or politically, most often with disastrous results. The EU should learn from these mistakes instead of trying to compete with Chinese policies.

VII.5 The EU's greatest enemy is not China, but the self-doubt triggered by China's success. European thinking never gained its persuasive power from the prohibition of criticism and self-criticism; on the contrary, it was its ability to question itself and, as it were, to constantly reinvent itself. The principle of the rule of law is not identical with the right of the state to regulate state and social life through laws, but is superior to it. Many people today feel that this is a hostile destruction of traditional ways of life with their values and norms. They fail to recognise how strongly this ongoing self-reflection as a medium of reason is nourished by trust in a truth that asserts itself. This trust, for its part, establishes a way of life that links truth and freedom in a reciprocal conditional relationship. Today, autocrats and populists do everything they can to denounce freedom as an element that corrodes every order and every community. They promote themselves and their regimes as the true guardians of the most sacred values of humanity, for whose protection any means is justified. The EU must preserve or regain confidence in these values itself. For they are its foundation, the basis of its unique political form and of the appeal it still exerts, to the annoyance of despots and autocrats, despite all its flaws, mistakes, errors and crimes.