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EU-China Summit: Europe can, and should Hold China to Account

– In Dealing With China, The ‘European Way’ Should Be One Of Courage And Integrity

By Yang Jianli & Aaron Rhodes

FOREF (20.06.2020) – <https://bit.ly/2YhzyHq> – As human rights advocates, we are appealing to European Union member states to

condition trade relations with China on specific improvements in China's human rights practices, and on transparency as regards the origins of the Covid-19 pandemic. China's economy depends on European imports; trade between the two entities exceeds over one billion Euros per day. In this situation, Europe has a historic opportunity, and a responsibility to the moral principles upon which it was founded. The EU should use its immense soft power to help China stop persecuting religious, ethnic and political minorities, and start working with the international community to protect global public health.

China is the world's greatest threat to religious freedom and other basic human rights. Despite years of dialogue with the European Union, and increasing trade cooperation, human rights have deteriorated precipitously. China incarcerates and pressures its Muslim citizens, persecutes Christians, Falun Gong practitioners and other religious minorities, is ethnically cleansing Tibet, and persecutes human rights defenders; China has abrogated an international treaty guaranteeing freedoms to the people of Hong Kong. China has pushed an authoritarian approach to human rights in the UN system, one that degrades the sanctity of basic individual rights and freedoms. China is ranked 177 out of 180 countries in press freedom, and censorship allowed Covid-19 to get out of control. We can't even assess the loss of human life due to China's cynical malfeasance in suppressing, rather than dealing openly with the virus, and we need China's transparency to stop the crisis China created.

The episode has vividly confirmed that a state that mistreats its own citizens is not likely to respect the dignity and rights – and health – of others. But in the face of these threats, EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs Josep

Borrell's call for a "big, positive agenda for EU-China cooperation" without mention of human rights issues dividing Europe and China is discouraging.

Josep Borrell, EU High Representative to Foreign Affairs

Trade imbalances need to be addressed. But the main challenge for Europe should not be to cut a better deal and assume an equidistant posture between the United States and China, as Borrell emphasized. Instead, it is to use the EU's huge moral and economic leverage to put China on notice that the regime cannot violate human rights, and the very idea of human rights, without consequences; that the people of Europe cannot have normal relations with a dictatorial, human rights-abusing government. The EU's failed, German-inspired "Change through Trade" policy needs to be transformed into a policy of no trade development without change.

More mercantilism and naiveté on the part of the EU will make the Union into an enabler of human rights atrocities. The Chinese Communist Party's grand strategy seeks to avoid direct confrontation with the United States, and to use global "rural areas," including Europe, to encircle the US. It wants to join the EU in a united front against the US, a Maoist strategy. The EU is thus a main battle-ground in China's cold war for world dominance. China is pretending to be a peace loving, benevolent authoritarian ruler to get a foothold in relations with the EU and to expand its political and economic influence. Central Europe is a particular target because the CCP believes it to be a weak link in the chain, where democracy has not firmly rooted – a region where China can achieve a breakthrough.

Since its formation, European Union leaders have claimed it to be a “community of values,” that is, “European values,” diametrically opposed to the totalitarian ideologies the EU was founded to protect citizens against. In fact, the European Union’s basic political principles of individual human rights, democracy, and the Rule of Law are considered universally applicable in the international human rights framework. But the Chinese Communist Party subverts these principles at every opportunity, claiming that human rights are a gift from the state, and defending oppression as “human rights with Chinese characteristics.” China is a one-party, essentially fascist state, and increasingly aggressive in its efforts to stamp out any dissent at home, while confronting opposition to its land-grabs in the South China Sea with bullying and violence.

To make a significant, not merely symbolic stand against these fearful trends will require moral discipline and a willingness to sacrifice. Referencing the Frank Sinatra song, High Representative Borrell spoke of the virtue of a European Way. Let that be the way of integrity and courage. Europeans, and people around the world, need the EU to stand firm for human rights, and refuse to be China’s puppet against America.

Dr. Jianli Yang, a survivor of the Tiananmen Square Massacre, is President of Citizen Power Initiatives for China. Dr. Aaron Rhodes is President of the Forum for Religious Freedom-Europe and Human Rights Editor of Dissident Magazine.

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