

Actor 1: IGO

The inconsistency of foreign policy between European Union member states toward China

### Introduction

The European Union (EU) is an inter-governmental organisation consisting of 27 European member states. With high levels of political and economic integration, the EU is described as a supranational union. The EU has a population of 446 million and a GDP of US \$15.6 trillion, which is the third-largest population and economy in the world (Gale, 2020). Hence, the EU plays an indispensable political and economic role on the global stage.

In the early 2010s, a comprehensive strategic partnership emerged between the EU and China. China supported EU integration, and the EU respected China's sovereignty and territorial integrity (EU-China 2020 Strategic Agenda for Cooperation, 2013). Nevertheless, the EU-China relationship deteriorated rapidly since the end of the 2010s. Under the leadership of President Xi, Western political values were frequently criticised by China (Rühlig, et al., 2018). More importantly, the suppression of the Hong Kong protest, the National Security Law, and the COVID-19 pandemic caused the EU-China relationship even worse.

Most EU member states openly criticised China on human rights issues. However, some EU member states doing the opposite. They refused to condemn China in the human rights issues, and even publicly appreciated the cooperation with China. This situation demonstrated that the EU splits on China issue, and ineffective to formulate a common foreign policy toward China. This essay will first investigate how EU member states differ in foreign policies, then find out the possible reasons why the EU failed to formulate a common foreign policy toward China, and why this issue will likely be persistent and cannot be solved.

### Focus question 1: How EU member states differ in foreign policies toward China

There are mainly three types of EU member states, the first type regards China as an enemy, and is extremely hostile toward China. Lithuania is the most prominent example. Lithuania withdrew from China-CEEC 17+1 bloc, and permitted Taiwan to establish the Taiwanese Representative Office in Lithuania in 2021. Since the name "Taiwan" was used instead of "Chinese Taipei", it triggered Beijing's nerves on the One-China Policy (DW News, 2021). Apart from Lithuania, the Czech-China relationship deteriorated after the President of the Czech Senate Miloš Vystrčil visited

Taiwan in August 2020. This event was crucial, since it was the highest-ranking European official visiting Taiwan in over 40 years (Šebeňa & Turcsányi, 2021). These countries challenged China's "red line" on sovereignty and territorial integrity, so they are antagonistic toward China.

The second type is the opposite of the first type, they are friendly with China, and emphasise partnership and cooperation. Hungary is a notable example, and Greece to a lesser extent. Hungary is the most China-friendly country in the EU, its Prime Minister Viktor Orbán publicly appreciated China and President Xi on vaccination, and urged to develop a strategic partnership with China (Hungary Today, 2021). Hungary attempted to build a close tie with China back in the early 2010s, and even build a closer relationship at the end of the 2010s. Hungary launched an "Eastern Opening" policy in 2010 to establish close ties with China and Russia. Furthermore, Orbán attempted to build Shanghai's Fudan University campus in Budapest with Chinese bank loans in 2021 (Standish & Szalai, 2021). Besides, Hungary and Huawei agreed to build a research and development centre in Budapest (Matura, 2021). Also, Hungary and Greece did not sign the joint declaration in the UN to call for immediate access to Xinjiang (US. Mission Geneva, 2021). Therefore, these countries take a position different from most EU countries, which is friendly to China.

The last type viewed China as a rivalry, or even enemy to a large extent, and partnership to a small extent. Most EU member states fall in this category. These countries cultivated economic ties with China in the past. For instance, most Central and Southern European countries joined China's Belt and Road Initiatives, aiming to improve infrastructure through Chinese investments (Garlick, 2019). However, these countries changed their attitude toward China dramatically at the end of the 2010s. They actively criticise China on Xinjiang and Hong Kong's human rights issues. For instance, 23 EU countries signed the joint declaration in the UN to call for immediate access to Xinjiang (US. Mission Geneva, 2021). Furthermore, Estonia, Latvia, Slovenia, Romania, and Bulgaria's national leaders did not attend the 2021 17+1 gathering, which was a snub to China (Bechev, 2021). Although these countries' relationship with China was not as tense as Lithuania, they are increasingly suspicious of China.

### Focus question 2: Why does the EU failed to formulate a common foreign policy toward China?

There are three possible reasons that lead to the failure of formulating a common foreign policy toward China, the systematic flaws of the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), lack of authority of the European Parliament, and the Eurosceptic views of the EU national leaders.

The Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) aims at facilitating member states to define, coordinate, and implement a common foreign policy, such as security and defence (Dijkstra & Vanhoonaeker, 2017). The Treaty of Lisbon indicated that there are four instruments of the CFSP, and one of them are the Common Positions. The Common Positions define EU's collectively agreed diplomatic strategy to a particular country. The EU adopted the Common Positions on countries that are disrespecting universal values, such as Cuba, North Korea, and Belarus. Besides, sanctions are also a part of broader Common Positions. As of 2013, governments, individuals, or organisations of 27 countries are sanctioned by the EU (Mix, 2013). Since all member states must comply and defend the Common Positions, they must ensure their national policies conform with it (Archick & Mix, 2010). Thus, the Common Positions of the CFSP is the EU's powerful tool to deal with countries violating human rights, so that the EU may use the CFSP against China.

Although the Common Positions of the CFSP is powerful, systematic flaw occurs in the decision-making process. The decision of the CFSP has required unanimity in the Council of the European Union. In other words, every member state has veto power. One member state can obstruct the making of an unanimity in the CFSP (Mix, 2013). For instance, the EU statement to criticise China's human rights record in the United Nations was blocked by Greece (Emmott & Koutantou, 2017). Hungary blocked the EU statement criticising China for imposing the new security law in Hong Kong (Baczynska & Escritt, 2021). When one dissident veto the statement, the CFSP would fail to formulate a common foreign policy toward a particular country. Therefore, the CFSP is ineffective toward China because dissidents veto decisions that are unfavourable to China.

The systematic flaw caused by the unanimity procedure of the CFSP will likely persist. The unanimity procedure was indicated in Article 31(1) of the Treaty on European Union. France and Germany initiated the Meseberg Declaration in 2018 to call for expanding the scope of qualified majority voting (QMV) in CFSP. However, no attempts have survived vetoes in the European Council. Moreover, Commission President Juncker failed to persuade the member states to expand the QMV to CFSP in the 2019 Sibiu summit (Lațici, 2021). These failed attempts demonstrated that it is difficult to revoke the unanimity system and expand the QMV in the CFSP. Hence, the unanimity procedure of the CFSP will tend to persist.

Apart from the systematic flaw of the CFSP, the lack of authority of the European Parliament also caused the EU fail to formulate a common foreign policy toward China. European Parliament made a consensus toward China, which was hostile toward China. For instance, the Parliament passed a

resolution to urge the EU institutions and member states to skip the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics unless China improves the human rights situation in Hong Kong, Xinjiang, and Tibet. The resolution was passed with a majority of 578 to 29. A resolution about building a stronger partnership with Taiwan was again passed by a landslide of 580 to 26 (European Parliament, 2021). Although the Parliament made a consensus toward China, it had limited authority to make actual decisions.

The above-mentioned European Parliament resolutions are both non-binding, which means only recommendations were proposed. The member states, the Commission and the Council could choose not to comply. Besides, the Parliament had to share legislative power with the Council of the European Union, and two of them formed the EU bicameral legislature. Most importantly, the Parliament has no authority to initiate legislations or enact laws, since this power belongs to the European Commission. Also, the Parliament rarely participates in the CFSP (Karns & Mingst, 2010). Therefore, although the Parliament reached a consensus toward China, its authority and influence are limited, which hindered the Parliament to initiate laws and regulations to compel all member states to be hostile to China.

The insufficient authority of the European Parliament will likely persist, since it is a structural problem. The authority of the Parliament was indicated in the Treaty of Lisbon. Amend the EU treaties have complicated procedures, such as go through the Council, European Council, and Parliament, and must ratify by all member states (Broin, 2010). Hence, expanding the authority of the Parliament, which means changing the fundamental structure of the EU, is challenging. Besides, if the authority of the Parliament is expanded, the power of the member states, Commission, and Council will be weakened corresponding in proportion. Therefore, other EU stakeholders may reject or veto the proposal about expanding the power of the Parliament.

The Eurosceptic views of the national leaders are another possible reason for causing the EU's failure on common foreign policy toward China. As mentioned above, member states remain the core of the EU, since the Parliament's authority is limited, and leaders possess veto power in the CFSP. Hence, national leaders' political positions vary, and greatly influence the decision making of the EU. Research indicated that political leaders who have favourable views of China's political system are correlated with the unfavourable views of the EU, and all China-friendly EU national leaders are Eurosceptic. The Eurosceptic leaders tend to use China as leverage in contrast with the EU institutions and other EU nations. For instance, Hungarian President Orbán used China's efficiency to compare EU's lengthy processes. The Greek government occasionally sided with

China to show it had an alternative other than the EU (Rühlig et al., 2018). Therefore, the rise of Eurosceptic national leaders causes the EU to fail to formulate common foreign policy toward China, since they use their veto power to block decisions that are harmful to China, even though most member states agree with it.

The EU is not merely an IGO, but also a supranational union, so populism and Euroscepticism will likely persist. European integration is increasingly deepening, thus the sovereignty of the member states is weakening, which triggered the right-wing populist. They advocated nationalist views and regarded their nation-states loss of control to legislate and border control, thus losing sovereignty. Therefore, the only way to retain their sovereignty is to diminish the authority of the EU, and even withdraw from the EU (Alonso-Muñoz & Casero-Ripollés, 2020). Thus, a supranational union, namely the EU, inherently conflicts with the right-wing populist by ideological differences. Euroscepticism will likely persist when the EU continue its supranational structure.

### Conclusion

The EU-China relationship had deteriorated rapidly at the end of the 2010s, and most member states were hostile to China. Nevertheless, some exceptions remain a friendly relationship with China. Hence, why the EU failed to formulate a common foreign policy toward China is a significant issue to discuss. This essay indicated three possible reasons, the systematic flaws of the CFSP, lack of authority of the European Parliament, and the Eurosceptic views of national leaders. Since member states and national leaders remain the core of the EU, the EU institutions are ineffective to formulate common foreign policy. These problems will likely persist, so the issues can hardly be solved. Moreover, other researchers may disagree with these three reasons mentioned in this essay, since there may be other possible reasons they regarded as crucial.

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