

Symposium Europe China

Summary note

May, 17th 2023 in Paris



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This report was written by Ines Haab, research assistant to the Director at IRIS (Institut de Relations Internationales et Stratégiques).



Concept Note

The world is in the midst of a global "polycrisis" or "permacrisis" from the Russian invasion of Ukraine to global warming, from the Covid pandemic to a looming debt crisis in developing countries, from the return of inflation to the tensions among civilizations and worldviews, with universal values and principles seriously challenged.

The world (dis)order is rapidly and profoundly reshaping, with traditional alliances falling apart and taking new forms. Global challenges and threats are piling up while Multilateralism and international cooperation are weakened and sometimes paralyzed, thus creating a vacuum for global problems solving.

- Are we heading towards a new divide of the world and the return of a bipolar world with the US on one side and China on the other side, and their respective allies leaning on one side or the other ?

- Is this situation inevitable ? What are the possible alternatives ?

- What role for Europe ? What perspectives for the emergence of a global South ?

- Is there any room left for cooperation and building trust? in what sectors ? Can we (re)imagine universalism in an inclusive and equal way ?

These are some of the questions that will be addressed in the first edition of the Europe-China symposium organized by the Aspen Institute France and the Center for China and Globalization in partnership with Foundation Prospective and Innovation. The symposium will bring together a group of influential policy makers, experts, influencers and business leaders from Europe and China.

Agenda

12:15 | Welcoming of the participants

12:30 (sharp) | Geopolitical Luncheon with EY

Opening Remarks:

Jean-Luc Allavena, Chairman of the Board, Institut Aspen France

Jean-Pierre Raffarin, Former Prime Minister of France, Chairman, FPI

Guest speaker:

Henry Huiyao Wang, Founder and President, CCG, Counselor to the China State Council (2015-2022), Vice-Chairman of China Association for International Economic Cooperation

Moderator:

Jean-Christophe Bas, Executive Director and Member of the Executive Board, Institut Aspen France

14:10 | Symposium program

14:15 | Welcoming Remarks

Jean-Luc Allavena, Chairman of the Board, Institut Aspen France

14:15 | Introductory Keynote

Jean-Pierre Raffarin, Former Prime Minister of France, Chairman, FPI

Co-moderators:

Jean-Christophe Bas, Executive Director and Member of the Executive Board, Institut Aspen France

Victor Gao, CCG Vice president, Former interpreter of Deng Xiaoping



Round Table 1

14:30 | Security and geopolitical perspectives

An inevitable bipolar world?

What role for Europe?

Multilateralism & International cooperation

Opening speaker:

Henry Huiyao Wang, Founder and President, CCG, Counselor to the China State Council (2015-2022), Vice-Chairman of China Association for International Economic Cooperation

Joachim Bitterlich, Ambassador (ret), Professor (affiliate) ESCP Paris, former European, International and Security Policy Advisor to Chancellor Helmut Kohl

Round Table 2

15:30 | Economic and commercial exchanges

Derisking vs Decoupling

Opening speakers:

Dr. Mabel Miao, Co-founder and Secretary General, CCG

Arnaud Favry, Director of Public and Government Affairs, bioMérieux, member of the Board, Institut Aspen France

Round Table 3

16:30 | Reimagining cooperation

Development in Africa

Financing international infrastructure projects

Climate and biodiversity?

Opening speakers:

Cécile Cabanis, Deputy Managing Director, Tikehau Capital

Prof. Yiwei Wang, Professor and Director of Center for European Studies

17:30 | Wrap up and the way forward

17:45 | Cocktail



Geopolitical luncheon

Mr. Jean-Pierre Raffarin, President of FPI (Fondation Prospective & Innovation), made opening remarks on the current geopolitical context, a difficult period which makes the symposium a good opportunity to exchange ideas. Europe is witnessing a war on its own continent: a tragedy, first to the people of Ukraine; and second, to the people of the EU, as new topics of division arise. NATO, which seemed dead before the war, regained its position as a major geopolitical actor. In many ways, Europe needs China. For all these reasons, we need to find a new strategy, in politics as well as in economic affairs, and to that end, engage in a discussion with all the stakeholders.

As the guest speaker, Mr. Henry Huiyao Wang contextualized the discussion before answering the participant's questions. As the pandemic war comes to an end and the war in Ukraine shakes the world, we are approaching a Second Cold War. In an increasingly multipolar world, globalization is being challenged, making Sino-European relations all the more important.

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The future of the world order was at the heart of the discussions. Many called for a transcending of the current bipolar view of the world as an opposition between democracies and autocracies, arguing that this value-based opposition focuses on differences rather than on what can bring us together. As we are moving towards a multipolar world, we need a more complex analysis of the international order. We also need to overcome the regionalization of the world, which has become increasingly divided into geopolitically oriented confrontational blocs (ASEAN, AUKUS, NATO, SCO, Quad, etc.).

To this end, Mr. Henry Huiyao Wang suggested the creation of a "G4", which would be more focused on economic issues and surpass the G20, that has become "too geopolitical". The G4 would include China, the European Union, the United States and the Global South. While in this organization, the representation of the Global South and the place of Russia still seem undefined, Wang implied that the EU could play a mediating role, mobilizing its soft power to ease relations between the US and China. The war in Ukraine was mentioned since it caused major turmoil, forcing China to adopt a position that cannot be "100% like other countries", as Mr. Wang pointed out.

Even though its trade with Russia has increased by 30%, China also faces border disputes with Moscow, and affirms its own geopolitical views. Beijing clearly defended sovereignty and territorial integrity, and warned against the use of nuclear weapons. Thanks to European leaders, China gained a better understanding of their concerns, and could help them mediate to end the war.

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Mr. Wang was asked about the issue of nuclear power – including Chinese – and its control. He argued that from a Chinese perspective, the US was fueling nuclear proliferation, as demonstrated by the creation of AUKUS and the sale of nuclear submarines to Australia. If not limited by dialogue and the return of Russia and the US to their agreements on the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons, this military buildup could be very dangerous.

Similarly, when asked about the use of force against Taiwan and its consequences on the deterioration of relations, including economic relations that China claims to want to strengthen, Mr. Wang replied that Beijing considers Taiwan to be part of China. Therefore, Beijing sees the visits of senior US officials to the island as a form of provocation, to which China merely replies. According to him, China wants a peaceful reunification that can only be achieved if foreign countries stop interfering and agitating.

The economic dimension of Sino-European relations was a major topic of discussion. China is the EU's largest import market and second-largest export partner. Rather than decoupling or rerisking, China is thus calling for stronger economic ties. Journalist Christine Ockrent mentioned the repressive economic measures taken by China in recent weeks against many foreign minimum viable products (MVPs), as well as the expansion of the security law, both of which seem to contradict the desire to strengthen economic relations. Once again, Wang suggested that these measures were in fact very limited and that China was only responding to US policies.

Cultural and historical differences create a gap that has been deepened by the pandemic, which built "a lot of miscommunication".



While the need to rebuild trust between Europe and China was acknowledged, some shared their concerns about what they considered to be a change of tone in the Chinese diplomacy. According to Wang, cultural and historical differences create a gap that has been deepened by the pandemic, which built "a lot of miscommunication". It is, however, improving.

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Jean-Pierre Raffarin concluded the session by emphasizing on the need to define a new relationship between Europe and China. He pleaded for an independent, strategic and political Europe, that should manage to be an ally of the USA without being an enemy of China, and work with both countries on strategic topics. We can also work as partners for the development of Africa, mixing French experience with Chinese strategy. All these issues were to be discussed in the following round tables.



Round Table 1: Security and geopolitical perspectives

In an increasingly uncertain and ambiguous world, Europe, China and the US must more than ever avoid unhelpful tensions. Mr. Victor Gao expressed his concerns that the bipolarity may eventually lead to escalation and war. However, instead of the “inevitable war” between China and the US prophesized by many, he believes in an “inevitable peace” between the two. “Whether China and the United States like each other or not, eventually they will need to get along with each other.” This is all the more important since, as underlined by Jean-François Copé, we are entering a new era in which all actors will be needed.

To that end, Europeans must have a discussion on the strategy they want as a collective, and create a real dialogue with China. It was suggested that they could play a key role in mediating US-China relations by using the EU’s soft power, possibly in a EU-US-China summit. The EU and China could also cooperate in specific issues like Ukraine or climate change, looking at their common strategic interests. It is important that they work together on a level playing field on several topics like investment, trade and security.

Even though they do not share the same domestic views, the participants agreed that a clash of values would be counterproductive: Jean-Christophe Bas stressed the importance to respect the diversity of cultures and to embrace a hybrid perspective. He called for “the creation of an independent and truly global initiative to (re)invent Universal, to define a new global contract for the 21st Century”.

Mr. Joachim Bitterlich insisted on the fact that while Europeans must stop sticking so much on their values, China could achieve greater international credibility by adopting a different policy towards Taiwan. There is a real need to think out of the box, something that can be done thanks to the participant’s respective organizations. As Mr. Bo Xu pointed out, the “people to people” scale must not be underestimated.

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Round table 2: Economic and commercial exchanges

A consensus emerged on the fact that Europe and China cannot decouple, nor even “derisk”. Business is, by nature, taking risk; and European firms cannot stop doing business with China. Mr. Arnaud Favry pointed that the economic ties between the EU and China have always been a sort of lifeline, even when the relationship was complicated by political and geopolitical matters. They also bring prosperity.

Derisking would mean distrust, when on the contrary, we should work together to change opinions. Mrs. Mabel Miao, for whom decoupling is the real risk, even advocates for “recoupling”: finding a common platform and move forward together on specific topics.

That idea was supported by Mr. Victor Gao, who considers that the prefix “de” sounds passive, whereas we must proactively build something in a changing world. It was suggested that we should work together, do business together, to become closer partners and therefore be able to solve our political differences.

Beijing is eager to discuss with European leaders, as was proven by their numerous state visits lately.

Yet, some acknowledged that each country has its own security issues and derisking strategy: Mr. Jean-Marie Le Guen underlined the fact that despite all the benefits of free trade, the financial crisis in 2008 and the pandemic showed countries and organizations like the EU that they needed to defend their sovereign interests. These are not anti-Chinese measures, but rather pragmatic responses to a crisis. In fact, China also tries to diversify its oil imports; similarly, Europe has to avoid total dependency on Chinese supply.

Many solutions emerged, since it was pointed out that both sides were willing to find compromise and understand the other side. Some underlined the fact that while US Secretaries struggle to talk to Beijing, Beijing is eager to discuss with European leaders, as was proven by their numerous state visits lately. Ursula von del Leyen’s speech on China in March clarified the position of the EU, and the Comprehensive Agreement on Investment could still be ratified. Businesswise, Mr. Jean Bizet expressed that Europeans “want free trade, but prefer fair trade”. Mr. Arnaud Favry suggested that nearshoring, which is less targeted against China, should be preferred over derisking, since it enables to reduce carbon footprint and dependence.



Round table 3: Reimagining cooperation

Ideas were shared on how France and China could cooperate on two issues on which they have common interests: climate change and the development in Africa. In an interdependent world, climate change must be fought together. As Mrs. Cécile Cabanis pointed out: "We are already racing against time; we shouldn't race against each other". It could be an opportunity for us to test real coordinate action based on what is happening on the field, thus showing "cooperation is not only a concept".



Africa could also be an interesting place for business cooperation, and a way to salvage us from distrust and geopolitical tensions. Mr. Étienne Giros underlined the fact that though most politicians do not feel concerned by the fate of this continent, it is a highly strategic region. We will indeed soon have to face the challenge of the inclusion of its large population, and its consequences on the climate. It cannot become the next field of competition between us, which is why we need to cooperate in the name of our shared goals instead of our values. In order to do so, he suggested that newcomers like China give signs of trust to French companies by adopting the same standards, so that the French become less reluctant to cooperate. Some went as far as saying we could recouple China and France in Africa.

Wrap up

Jean-Christophe Bas closed the symposium, which he described as a platform of discussion rather than a lobby or an interest group. To him, the idea of a G4 will need further discussion, while it is certain that we can cooperate on climate change and development projects in Africa. We are entering a new era which requires a new response, a mechanism of adaptation and a capacity to seize the opportunity. The symposium proved that we could have an interesting discussion on what we have in common, how we can agree and disagree; the question now is how we can build on this momentum, incubating innovative and creative ideas through a multiperspective exchange of ideas.



Participants list

European participants :



Jean-Luc Allavena

Born in Monaco in 1963, Jean-Luc Allavena is Chairman of *Atlantys Investors* (in partnership with Apollo Management) and of the Aspen Institute France.



Jean-Christophe Bas

Jean-Christophe Bas has been holding senior policy positions with the World Bank, the United Nations and the Council of Europe during the past twenty years. He is currently the Acting Executive Director of the Aspen Institute France.



Joachim Bitterlich

Joachim Bitterlich is a former German diplomat. He was Advisor in the private office of the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Hans-Dietrich Genscher. He is currently Vice-President of the think-tank Notre Europe Institut Jacques Delors. He is also a professor at ESCP-Europe Paris.



Jean Bizet

Jean Bizet is a senior advisor at APCO Worldwide Paris and is the former chairman of the Senate's European Affairs Committee.



Pascal Boniface

Pascal Boniface is Director of the Institute of International and Strategic Relations (IRIS). He is also the director of the *Revue internationale et stratégique* and *L'Année stratégique*.



Cécile Cabanis

Cécile Cabanis joined Tikehau Capital in 2021 as Deputy Managing Director, prior to which she was a member of the Executive Committee and Managing Director of the Danone Group.





Jean-François Copé

Jean-François Copé is a French politician serving as Mayor of Meaux since 1995. From 2004 to 2007, he served as the Minister of Budget.



Serge Dumont

Serge Dumont was elected as a member of the Board of Directors of the Asia Society. He is the co-founder and president of Asia Society France and vice-chairman of the board of Impactwayv. Inc.



Elvire Fabry

Elvire Fabry is a Colonel in the French Air Force Citizen's Reserve. She is a senior researcher at the Jacques Delors Institute, in charge of the Geopolitics of Trade of the working group on EU-China relations, Europe in globalisation and Brexit.



Arnaud Favry

Arnaud Favry is Director of Public & Governmental affairs and Patient value strategy of bioMérieux. His experience is focused on the healthcare sector and international trade.



Ulysse Gosset

Ulysse Gosset is a French journalist, currently an international columnist on BFM TV. Previously, he has worked for TF1, France Télévisions, France 3, LCI, France 24, Radio France, etc.



Etienne Giros

Étienne Giros has been CIAN's Deputy President since March 2014. In 2006, he was appointed vice-president of the Media department and then director of the CSA polling and research institute.



Pierre Haski

Pierre Haski is a renowned French journalist whose expertise spans from geopolitics to international affairs & trade. He was the President of Reporters Sans Frontières. He currently hosts the radio program "Géopolitique" on France Inter.



Christine Ockrent

After graduating from Sciences Po Paris and Cambridge University, Christine Ockrent became the second woman to present the 8pm news on *France 2* in 1981. She is now the producer of the radio program "Foreign Affairs" on France Culture and administrator of the Aspen Institute France.





Jean-Marie Le Guen

Jean-Marie Le Guen is a board member of Huawei France. Previously, he was a member of parliament, Secretary of State for Relations with Parliament in the Valls governments, and Secretary of State for Development and Francophonie (in 2017).



Jean-René Pavet

Jean-Pierre Pavet is a Senior Advisor at Jade Holding. He is also a former ministerial advisor and served as a cultural attaché at the Embassy of France in Holland and Germany.



Emmanuelle Peres

Emmanuelle Peres is a former interministerial delegate. She was appointed Director General of the *Fondation Prospective et Innovation* in March 2023.



Jean-Pierre Raffarin

Jean-Pierre Raffarin is the Former Prime Minister of France (2002-2005) and President of FPI (Fondation Prospective & Innovation). In 2019, he received the Friendship Medal from Chinese President Xi Jinping in Beijing.



Xavier Tessier

Xavier Tessier is Director of Strategy Sovereign Wealth Funds and Long-Term Investors at Bpifrance.



Dominique Trinquand

General Dominique Trinquand is an expert in international security and defense. He served as the Military Advisor to the Permanent Representation of France to NATO and the European Union. Since 2010, he is Director of External Relations at March & Balsan.



Qinghua Xu-Pionchon

Qinghua XU is a senior partner at EY based in Paris, where she built and leads EY's Chinese Overseas Investment Network (COIN) cross Europe advising Chinese companies investing and expanding into this region.



Chinese participants :



Henry Huiyao Wang

Henry Huiyao Wang is the Founder and President of *Center for China and Globalization* (CCG). He is the former Counselor to China State Council (China's cabinet)



Victor Gao

Victor Gao is Vice President of CCG, the Chairman-Elect of the National Organization Committee of the IGU (International Gas Union)/the WGC 2024 (World Gas Conference).



Dr. Mabel Lu Miao

Mabel Lu Miao is the Co-founder and Secretary-General of the Center for China and Globalization (CCG), a leading Chinese non-government think tank.



Dr. Kaisheng Liu

Kaisheng Liu is the rotating president of the FCPAE (Federation of Chinese Professional Associations in Europe) and president of the AFCDUD (Association Franco-Chinoise du Développement Urbain et Durable).



Dr. Dai Shen

Dai Shen has been managing director of BBS (Brest business school) since December 2017. He was CEO of the Demos group since January 2016.



Ann TANG

Ann Tang is Deputy Secretary-General and Director of Global Initiatives at Center for China and Globalization (CCG).



Yiwei Wang

Yiwei Wang is professor and Director of the Center for European Studies. He is also Director of the Institute of International Affairs and Director of the Center for EU Studies at Renmin University of China.



Xiandong Wang

Xiandong Wang is the Vice President of the Association des Ingénieurs Chinois en France.



Changzhi Dong



Changzhi Dong is Vice-President of the Association des Scientifiques et des Ingénieurs Chinois en France, He is also professor at the University Paris Cité.

Dr. Liya Ju



Liya Ju is a medical immunologist and a Senior Researcher at Jean Dausset Lab. She is the founder and CSO of PreciMed Europe Platform.

Hao Li



Hao Li is a Research director at the Centre National de la recherche Scientifique.

Shanjin WANG



Shanjin Wang is president of the Association des Ingénieurs Chinois de l'Automobile en France.

Bo XU



Bo Xu is a former MFA diplomat and is a research fellow of CCG.

Zhiqiang Zhou



Zhiqiang Zhou is a senior manager at BNP.

