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No feel-good summit

EU-China Summit

by Reinhard Bütikofer MEP

When Commission President von der Leyen and Council President Michel meet China's Prime Minister Li Keqiang today for an electronic version of the traditional EU-China Summit, there is only one question: feel-good summit, yes or no? Substantial results are not to be expected. It was not even possible to agree on a list of the long negotiated cooperation projects for the next few years, although it would have left out the most important topics of dispute. There is no joint final declaration from the summit.

There is nothing to be said against cooperation where it is good in the European interest; on the contrary. For example, intensified cooperation in the fight against climate change would be absolutely desirable. However, here the EU itself is falling short of what is necessary and China has reduced its climate policy ambitions in favour of even more coal energy production.

However, the growing number of conflict issues should not be missing from the agenda and public communication of our Presidents. Now that the European Parliament has taken a clear position in its resolution on Hong Kong, von der Leyen and Michel must make it clear to the Chinese side that the removal of Hong Kong's autonomy and the restriction of its freedoms will not be without consequences from the EU's side. The heightened Chinese aggression in the South China Sea, where the Beijing leadership is currently taking on Malaysia, Vietnam, Indonesia and the Philippines simultaneously, must be addressed. It is also time to make it clear once again that, from the EU's point of view, the unification with Taiwan sought by Beijing can only be brought about peacefully and not against the will of the Taiwanese. Von der Leyen and Michel are to address the brutal oppression and exploitation of the Uighur minority in China; the deterioration in the working conditions of European journalists in China; the ruthless persecution of human rights defenders; the crackdown on Chinese Christians; the fact that many of the commitments China made at the EU-China Summit a year ago have remained unfulfilled. And it should also be mentioned that the Chinese side will have to make substantial concessions to the EU if the investment agreement is to succeed by the end of the year.

Not everything that is to be discussed at this summit will be best spelled out publicly. If, though, criticism

is made only behind closed doors and then the impression is created in public that there is really only a minor clouding of a grandiose win-win partnership, then Chinese state party propaganda will have triumphed. And the EU lost.

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