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# The evolvement of China-EU cooperation on climate change and its new opportunities under the European Green Deal

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**Zhang Min**  
**Gong Jialuo**

Jean Monet Network EU-China:  
Comparative experiences and  
contributions to global governance  
in the fields of climate change, trade  
and competition

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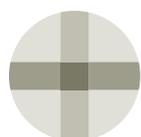
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# Introduction

Cooperation in tackling climate change has been one of the most prominent achievements in strengthening the China-EU relation, as highlighted by Mr. Wang Yi, the state councillor and the Foreign Minister of China, in the press conference held at European Policy Centre (EPC) referring climate change as one of the foremost global challenges of our times, and a big highlight of China-EU cooperation<sup>1</sup>. The EU have a shared understanding with China on the issue of global climate change. In the remarks made by Mr. Nicolas Chapuis, the Ambassador of the Delegation of the European Union to China, in an interview on January 7, 2020, Mr. Chapuis described the year of 2020 as a pivotal year in EU-China cooperation, because it is the time when the two parties could put joint efforts into tackling climate change. China and the EU is expected to hold Leaders' Summits at the end of March and mid-September this year respectively<sup>2</sup>.

The global outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic in January 2020 has severely distracted the living of people and unravelled the order of the world's economy and society tremendously, with China and European countries being epicentres of this crisis. Hence, the top priority for both sides is to actively prevent the spreading of the virus and speed up the R&D of testing a vaccine against COVID-19. In response, China and EU (hereinafter referred to as 'the two sides') have re-structured their priorities and adjusted their consultation agenda in a timely manner. For example, the China-EU Leaders' Summit, which was originally scheduled to be held at the end of March 2020, has been postponed, which is believed to leave a negative impact on the China-EU climate change cooperation only in the short run, as the long-term pattern of their cooperation on climate change, which is believed to be stable and consistent, will neither be interrupted nor thwarted by this pandemic. Since the establishment of the China-EU partnership on climate change in 2005, the two sides have carried out a series of fruitful cooperation in tackling climate change and both sides have been vital partners in the global governance of climate change. The joint efforts made by the two sides to fight against this public health crisis will build up mutual trust and help relieve other crisis in a more positive manner. As the regular epidemic prevention and control is getting normal in China, the China-EU cooperation agenda on climate change will get back on track and to be the heart concern in the development of China-EU relations. The latest strategy proposed by the new European Commission, i.e. the European Green Deal, brings up both opportunities and challenges to the future cooperation between the two sides on climate change.



H.E. Wang Yi, State Councillor and Minister of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China. Speech at the "Sixty-Minute Briefing", Event of The European Policy Centre, Brussels, December 16, 2019. Photo by Zheng Huansong, Xinhua News Agency.

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1 Minister of Foreign Affairs of China (2019).

2 Zhou (2020).

# I. Combating the climate change: China and the EU as two major international actors

## 1. China and the EU being advocators and key partners in response to climate change

The negative impact on global climate from human activities is not simply a lower rate of economic growth, the living condition of human are also in danger ecologically. This is the source from which stems the incentives for all countries to strengthen cooperation to mitigate climate change. It is essential to realise the limitation of approaches based on entirely pure research to deal with climate change, as its impact on politics, national security, economics and environment must also be addressed. China and the EU have long been considered as the two major actors in the governance of climate change: having different levels of economic growth and different political systems, both sides have been active players and action bodies in combating the global climate change. China and the European Union were founding members of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (hereinafter referred as 'IPCC') subject to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. IPCC was signed by more than 150 countries and regions around the world and came to effect on 21 March, 1994. Since then, China and the EU have successfully kept the atmospheric temperature at an appropriate level by the adoption of various mitigation and adaptation measures. In particular, the EU has kept its leadership role and taken actions to deal with climate change while going through a series of enlargement between 1995 and 2013, after which the union expanded to 28 member states in 2013 with the accession of Croatia. The historical moment when the United Kingdom formally left the union on 31 January, 2020 making the total number member states to 27, is considered to be a risk of the EU's disintegration, but the EU's dominating position and its leading role in the governance of climate change will not be fundamentally weakened and undermined by this movement.

As the largest developing country in the world, China has a high degree of concern over climate change and has been playing an important role in IPCC and other multilateral organisations. As pointed out in the IPCC AR5 Synthesis Report: Climate Change 2014, which was completed by 259 researchers worldwide including 18 Chinese scholars, "...the globally averaged combined land and ocean surface temperature data as calculated by a linear trend show a warming of 0.85°C over the period 1880 to 2012", "*Many of the observed changes since the 1950s are unprecedented over decades to millennia*" etc., the scientific evidence of global warming is strong and solid. The president of the IPCC AR5 report working group 1, Dr. Thomas F. Stocker, spoke highly of China's contribution to this assessment: "*Since the founding of IPCC in 1988, progress has been made in capacity building and the propagation of knowledge with the engagement of developing countries and transition economies. In the past 15 years, Chinese experts have indeed made great contributions...*"<sup>3</sup>

China has been a member of IPCC for over 30 years. On November 9, 2018, at the commemorative event marking the 30th Anniversary of China's membership in the IPCC, Xie Zhenhua, China's Special Representative for Climate Change, acclaimed the crucial role of IPCC in terms of establishing multilateralism<sup>4</sup>. In addressing the challenges of global climate change, China has been contributing China's wisdom and plan actively to implement the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. By speeding-up emission cut process, moderating its industrial structure and innovating clean energy techniques, China is also making every endeavour to control the global temperature at the level of 1.5.

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3 Qin (2013).

4 Ministry of Ecological Environment of China (2018).

## 2. China and the EU anchoring pledges of the Kyoto Protocol, carrying the post-Kyoto agenda to a new era

China and the EU are key members of the Kyoto Protocol, and both sides are also the main contributing parties to implement this treaty. The withdrawal of the United States and Canada gave rise to tremendous uncertainty to the future of Kyoto Protocol. At the time, the EU actively communicated and consulted with other countries to dismiss doubts and concerns to this treaty, persuading other countries to join. With the joint efforts of the EU and China, the Kyoto Protocol entered into force on February 16, 2005, effectively thwarted the unilateralism pursued by the United States. Kyoto Protocol marks the first move in human history to legalise the emission-reduction targets and global warming controlling standards.

EU has shown positive signs and taken concrete actions on climate change since the millennial, who claimed itself as the keen advocator as well as the rule-maker in the policy area of mitigating global climate change<sup>5</sup>. To fulfil the commitments laid out in Kyoto Protocol, EU has established the EU Emissions Trading System (EU ETS) in 2005. In 2007, the European Commission proposed an integrated energy and climate change package to achieve the ‘20-20-20’ key targets by 2020<sup>6</sup>. The 2030 Climate and Energy Framework was presented by the European Commission in 2014; following that, all member states have formulated their own emission-reduction action plan at national levels to target at greenhouse gas emission cut more precisely, develop clean energy and improve energy efficiency. According to the statistics of the EU in 2019, the 28 member states in 2017 have cut emissions by 22%, equivalent to 1.24 billion tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> emission, suggesting the EU has accomplished its 2020 reduction task ahead of time<sup>7</sup>.

The Chinese government has made early preparation to implement carbon emission-reduction targets. According to the Kyoto Protocol, developing countries should start the emission-reduction actions from 2012<sup>8</sup>, and China took actions at least 5 years earlier. Since 2006, the Chinese government has considered combating climate change as a major economic and social issue, and it has been embodied in the medium and long-term plan of economic growth and social development. China proposed obligatory targets in 2006 and energy consumption per unit of GDP in 2010 shall be shrank by approx. 20% compared with the level in 2005. China is also pioneering in adopting as well as enforcing state plans of tackling climate change. In 2007, China became the first developing country to formulate and implement a national program to address climate change. In 2009, China put forward the goal of action to reduce the per-unit GDP greenhouse gas emission in 2020 by 40% to 45% as compared to that of 2005. China earnestly performs its duties stipulated by the UNFCCC and Kyoto Protocol, released China Initial National Communications on Climate Change in 2004, and issued the National Plan for Coping with Climate Change and China’s Special Sci-Tech Campaign to Cope with Climate Change in June 2007<sup>9</sup>.

Responses to climate change of China have been synchronized at multiple levels including mechanisms, policies, and actions. In details, those emission-reduction tasks are achieved by various measures including industrial structure re-adjustment, increasing the proportion of renewable energy in the overall energy consumption, setting up the first Chinese carbon trading market, energy saving, and improving energy efficiency. To better serve the implementation of its climate policy, moderation and adjustment in mechanisms, relevant departments and institution of China have been put in place. In 2007, the National Leading Group to Address Climate Change was set up, and in 2008, the NDRC set up a department to coordinate and supervise the relevant work. Following that, Relevant departments under the State Council have founded supportive organs such as the National Centre for Climate Strategy and International

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5 Zhang (2014), pp. 453-459.

6 20% cut in greenhouse gas emissions (from 1990 levels), 20% of EU energy from renewables, and 20% improvement in energy efficiency. For more details, see: [https://ec.europa.eu/clima/policies/strategies/2020\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/clima/policies/strategies/2020_en)

7 European Commission (2020). See “Trends in greenhouse gas emissions”.

8 Kyoto Protocol Chinese Version (2003).

9 Information Office of the State Council of China (2008).

Cooperation of China, and the Research Centre for Climate Change, and some universities and scientific institutions have opened their own climate change research organizations<sup>10</sup>.

### 3. The entry into force of the Paris Agreement signifying that China and EU are leading the global governance of climate change

China and the EU are the main promoters of the Paris Agreement, and the Paris Climate Change Conference has created a number world records in global governance. The importance of Paris Agreement is intensively reflected in the content of negotiations including all major issues in global governance of climate change, e.g. the establishment of fundamental principles for mitigation, adaptation, losses and damages, funding, technology transfers, transparency and capacity building etc.<sup>11</sup>

The Paris Agreement succeeded by adopting a fresh bottom-up governance structure for emissions targets, placing the so-called nationally-determined contributions (NDCs) as its core<sup>12</sup>. In terms of governance, the agreement has also constructed a comprehensive system with three functions, including encouraging participation by making independent commitments, building mutual trust and encouraging mutual learning by a high level of transparency, and finally, strengthening cooperation by carrying out periodic checks and revisions. As the largest developing economy, China has committed high level of greenhouse gas emission reduction targets in a responsible way. In June 2015, China announced its nationally-determined emission cut targets by 2030 as follows: to achieve the peaking of carbon dioxide emissions around 2030 and pursuing best efforts to peak early; to lower carbon dioxide emissions per unit of GDP by 60% to 65% from the 2005 level; to increase the share of non-fossil fuels in primary energy consumption to around 20%; and to increase the forest stock volume by around 4.5 billion cubic meters on the 2005 level<sup>13</sup>. China has been partaking its major-nation responsibilities and is indeed a responsible country to urge developed countries to take greater responsibilities in emissions reductions with real actions. China has also been coordinating the progress of North-South relations in studies of the global climate, growing greater awareness of global climate change. It bears no doubt that both developed and developing countries have obligations and responsibilities to respond to this global challenge. The targets set up by China can be regarded as a new paradigm by which China can develop a new norm of North-South cooperation in tackling climate change and global greenhouse gas emission reduction tasks. These targets are both the key enabler to the negotiation of the 2015 Paris Agreement, and stronger mutual trust between parties can also be built<sup>14</sup>.

China has always persisted to negotiate the 2015 agreement under the framework of UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, and upheld the provisions of the convention as the core principle. The outcomes of negotiation shall be in accordance with the principles of equity and common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities, taking into account differentiated historical responsibilities and distinct national circumstances, development stages and the capabilities of developed and developing countries. It should reflect all elements in a comprehensive and balanced way, including mitigation, adaptation, finance, technology development and transfer, capacity building and transparency of action and support. The negotiation process should be open, transparent, inclusive, party-driven and consensus-based<sup>15</sup>. The above principles proposed by China not only reflects its respect and adherence the multilateralism as it takes appeals from both developed and developing countries in a balanced way, also earns the equity and fairness in emission cut targets of developing countries.

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10 Information Office of the State Council of China (2011).

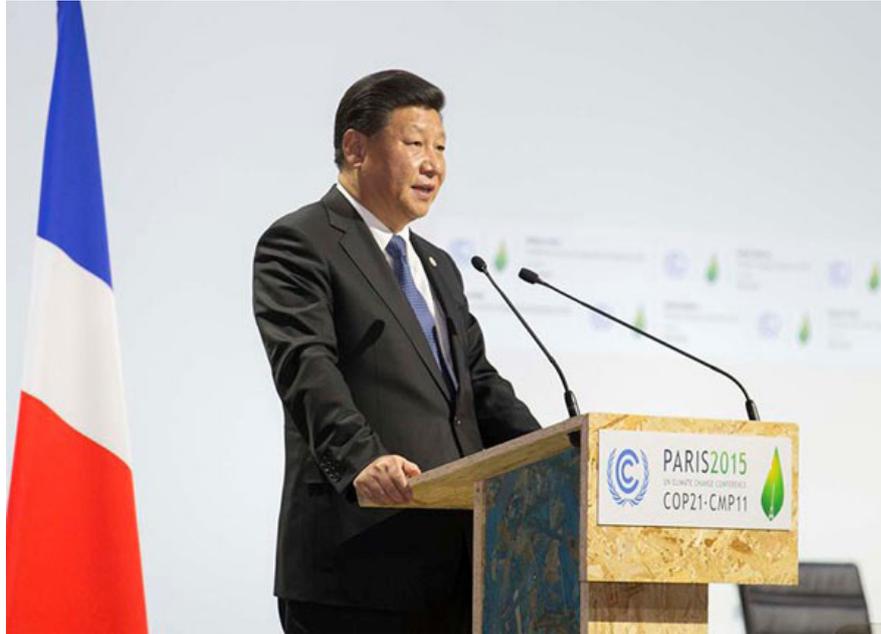
11 Dong (2017), pp. 74-92.

12 Teng (2018), p. 46.

13 Xinhua News Agency (2016).

14 Cao (2015), pp. 50-65.

15 Xinhua News Agency (2016).



Chinese President Xi Jinping delivers a speech at the opening ceremony of the United Nations (UN) climate change conference in Paris, France, 30 November, 2015. Photo by Huang Jingwen, Xinhua News Agency.

EU's stance in the negotiation, as stressed by then the EU Commissioner for Climate Action and Energy Miguel Arias Cañete, the agreement should contain a dynamic five-yearly review mechanism as EU stands to be the rule-maker rather than the rule-taker to the Paris agreement. Without falling behind previous levels of commitment, or resubmit the existing ones; in order to stay below 2, global greenhouse gas emissions need to peak by 2020 at the latest, be reduced by at least 50% by 2050 compared to 1990 and be near zero or below by 2100. EU has always been eager to compose an ambitious, durable and legally-binding international agreement on climate change. The EU is considered as a mediator and propeller of negotiations<sup>16</sup>, its role is just as crucial as a ratchet and has leaped the global governance of climate change to a new era<sup>17,18</sup>.

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16 Economic and Commercial Counsellor's Office of the Mission of the People's Republic of China to the European Union (2018).

17 Fu (2016), pp. 47-56.

18 Kang (2019), pp. 57-63.

## II. A review of China-EU cooperation on climate change between 2005 and 2020

The China-EU relations keep advancing, building the foundation for establishing a partnership in climate change. So far, China-EU relations have achieved remarkable milestones including the 1998 21st Century-Oriented Long-Term and Stable Constructive Partnership, and the first EU policy document issued by the Chinese government in 2003<sup>19</sup>, suggest a strategic upgrade of China-EU relations. The two sides agreed to build a comprehensive strategic partnership. In 2013, the EU-China 2020 Strategic Agenda for Cooperation<sup>20</sup> was released, a partnership featuring four key elements (i.e. peace & security, prosperity, sustainable development and people-to-people exchanges) was planned. At the same year, the second EU policy document<sup>21</sup> was issued by the Chinese government. In 2018, the third EU policy document<sup>22</sup> was published and more than 70 mechanisms for consultation and dialogue have been established so far, covering various fields such as politics, economy, trade, humanities, science, technology, energy and environment. On the other hand, China-EU cooperation on climate change continues to forge ahead, becoming one of the highlights of China-EU relations. In the period of 2005 to 2020, the cooperation on climate change had various features.

### 1. The establishment of China-EU partnership on climate change

The cooperation in climate issue between China and the EU links closely to their cooperation in other fields such as politics, trade, economy and technology but it is truly a late starter, a partnership on jointly tackling climate change between the two sides was reached as late as the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary since the establishment of diplomatic relations, that is, the 2005 EU and China Partnership on Climate Change<sup>23</sup>, officially marked the beginning of China-EU climate partnership<sup>24</sup>. This is a common achievement of both sides as the partnership is not only reality-based, it also reflects fundamental interests of both parties. On the other hand, the EU believes that China should implement the Kyoto Protocol following the EU's lead due to the fact of being a developing country. In contrast, as the world's largest energy consumer and producer as well as the biggest consumer in coal, China expected to meet its emissions reductions targets soon while optimising the structure of energy production and consumption at the same time by suggesting cooperation on climate change with the EU.

On the other hand, the partnership aims to introduce more communication and dialogues in the area of climate change between the two sides<sup>25</sup>, it helps them better commit to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Kyoto Protocol. Broadly speaking, two targets for cooperation have been put forward. First, both sides should collaborate in all aspects of developing the “zero emissions” coal technology; second, both parties should cut the innovation cost of such technologies, so that the utilisation of clean-tech can be popularised in the future.

### 2. Establishing the ministerial dialogue mechanism and deepening partnership in climate change

To further improve the China-EU partnership in climate change and create more opportunities for policy dialogues, the China-EU Ministerial Dialogue Mechanism on Climate Change comes in<sup>26</sup>. The Joint

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19 Xinhua News Agency (2003).

20 European Commission (2005).

21 Xinhua News Agency (2014).

22 Xinhua News Agency (2018).

23 European Commission (2005).

24 Ministry of Foreign Affairs of China (2020).

25 European Commission (2005).

26 European Commission (2016).

Statement on Dialogue and Cooperation on Climate Change between China and EU was made public after the ministerial dialogue between Xie Zhenhua, the Vice-Chairman of the National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC) of China, and Connie Hedegaard, the European Commissioner for Climate Action on 29 April, 2010, suggesting the official establishment of China-EU ministerial dialogue mechanism on climate change<sup>27</sup>. The dialogue will facilitate extensive view-exchanging key climate change issues in occasions of international gathering, negotiations, domestic policies and measures, specific cooperation projects the two sides engaged in. Moreover, the dialogue mechanism reflects the strong will to further strengthen communication between both sides. The dialogue did build consensus on most issues, significant differences persist, but both sides are confident that such differences can be coordinated and overcome through communication, more agreements may also be made in the future. China and the EU reaffirmed their faith in the principle of common and differentiated responsibilities in tackling the challenge, aimed for full, effective and efficient implementation of the UNFCCC and the Kyoto Protocol so that the next United Nations-host gathering about climate bears fruit.

## 2. China and the EU releasing joint statement on climate change

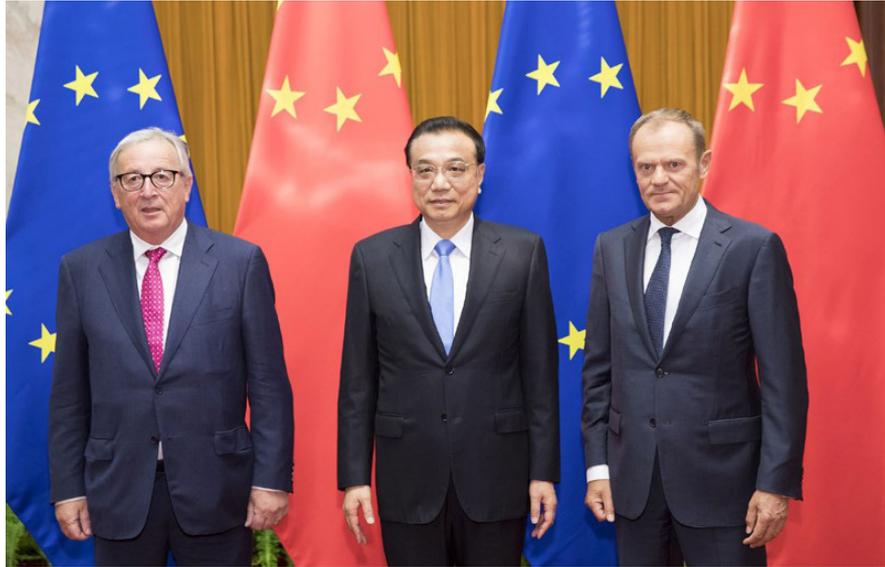
The ten-year bilateral relationship between China and the EU shapes a strategic and vibrant manner of cooperation in climate topics. The EU-China Joint Statement on Climate Change released in Brussels on 29 June, 2015, the moment when the EU and China Partnership on Climate Change celebrates its 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary, announcing further engagement into global climate change from the two sides. The statement has several implications:

- 1) The statement was soon after the release of the 2014 Sino-US Joint Declaration on Climate Change, expressing the strong intention to lead the global governance of climate change of both sides jointly. It also prevented the United States from being divisive and aggressive in negotiations of the Paris Agreement, seeking a common position for both China and the EU.
- 2) The statement has played a positive role in finalising the Paris Agreement. The national interests differed between both sides but an ambitious and legally-binding agreement was much-needed at that moment.
- 3) In terms of the climate finance, both sides have acknowledged the complementary support by other countries, which is regarded as a new norm in international occasions of climate change.
- 4) More investment into low-carbon industry will be channelled through cooperation upon this agreement.
- 5) China fully recognise the critical role of EU in characterising the carbon trading system of China. The joint research in climate-related topics, including Carbon Capture and Storage (CCS) technology, sustainable cities development as well as other environmental and energy issues will be strengthened.

China and the EU have faithfully implemented the joint declaration. In September 2017, the first ministerial meeting on climate action co-hosted by Canada, China and the EU was held in Montréal, Canada, the second ministerial meeting was held in Brussels, Belgium in June 2018, and the EU-China leaders' statement on climate change and clean energy was presented at the 20th China-EU Summit in Beijing later this year.

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27 European Commission and Government of China (2010).



The EU-china leaders' statement on climate change and clean energy was presented at the 20th China-EU Summit on July 16, 2018 in Beijing. Photo by Huang Jingwen, Xinhua News Agency.

The China-EU cooperation has encouraged the international governance of climate change to institutionalise and legalise. Emissions reduction is also the area where both sides may appear as a leading force. Consensus in fulfilling the commitments of Kyoto Protocol and the Paris Agreement via cooperation has also been reached, and two large projects were launched to tackle climate change in line with the ongoing China-EU climate cooperation. For instance, the EU-China joint project on emissions trading allowed the EU to share its schemes experiences in the setting of emission caps, allowances; the creation of market; supervision, reporting, verification and certification systems etc. with the seven pilot emissions trading locations of China, together with the 5 million euro fund injected by the EU, the establishment of a national-level carbon trading system in China is well supported. Another project named the Dialogue on China-EU Carbon Trading Market Cooperation was launched in June 28, 2018 with a total investment over 10 million euro (more than 70 million RMB) and runs over a period of three years. The project will promote China-EU dialogues on emissions trading and ensure the proper functioning of China's nationwide carbon trading market.

The 23<sup>rd</sup> round of the China-EU Carbon Trading Market cooperation project was launched in 2017 and will conclude by 2020. Designed to provide training sessions in different provinces and cities across China on a regular basis, the project is one of the first fruits of the ongoing China-EU cooperation<sup>28</sup>, and the latest session was held in Yunnan Province on the topic: "Capacity building for enterprises in environment and power industry" between 10 and 11 December 2019.

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28 European Commission (2016).

### III. The future of China-EU cooperation with the European Green deal

Unexpectedly, the China-EU cooperation on climate change has been disrupted by the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic in the world this year, the announcement of a series of policies after the election of the European Commission since the end of 2019 made matters even worse as uncertainties emerges. However, the impact of the pandemic is believed to be temporary and the predominance of the China-EU climate change cooperation, which is thought to be a crucial element in China-EU relations, will be restored quickly. The ‘Carbon Neutrality’ goal proposed by the European Green Deal will have an impact on China-EU climate change cooperation in the medium and long term and this both sides should be aware of it.

Ursula Von der Leyen, the new president of the European Commission, has launched a major development strategy named the European Green New Deal soon after she took office, proposing the EU to be the first carbon-neutral continent in the world no later than 2050. The core of the deal is to transform Europe towards an all-round greening, industrial recycling and carbon neutralization continent, the comprehensive sustainable development can then be achieved. To meet the carbon neutrality target, EU member states must put additional efforts into emission reduction, expand the scope of reduction and set the process forward. In the next three decades, that goal is expected to penetrate and be reflected in all EU policy areas, more and better advanced technological innovations should be presented as a result. The new deal specifically aims at heavy-emitters, namely the energy industry, manufacturing and construction. Other industries such as goods production & consumption, infrastructure, transportation, food and agricultural industry, taxation and social welfare will not be left aside. Furthermore, the European Green Deal will be the bellwether policy of the EU’s general development strategy, as it will not only facilitate the EU to achieve the UN Sustainable Development Goals<sup>29</sup>, also help Europe succeed to be the world’s first carbon-neutral continent.

#### 1. The core of the European Green Deal

The European Green Deal is a long-term development policy with absolute carbon neutrality as its core. The strong will expressed in the deal will translate into major changes in eight policy areas:

- 1) Speeding up the progress of moderating global climate change and increasing the EU’s climate ambition for 2030 and 2050. The EU’s greenhouse gas emission reductions target for 2030 is adjusted to at least 50% and towards 55% from 40%; that of 2050 will be lifted to 100% (carbon neutral) from at least 80% and towards 90% compared with 1990 levels in a responsible way<sup>30</sup>.
- 2) Supplying clean, affordable and secure energy. Improving energy efficiency will be put as the top priority by the EU, and characterising a power sector to be based largely on renewable sources, complemented by the rapid phasing out of coal and decarbonising gas.
- 3) Mobilising industry for a clean and circular economy to address the twin challenge of the green and the digital transformation. Europe must leverage the potential of the digital transformation, which is a key enabler for reaching the Green Deal objectives<sup>31</sup>.
- 4) Engaging in a ‘renovation wave’ of all buildings and renovating in a resource-efficient way. It is an effective way to boost the construction sector as well as an opportunity to support SMEs and local jobs;
- 5) Accelerating the shift to sustainable and smart mobility. The Commission will adopt a strategy for sustainable and smart mobility in 2020 that will address this challenge and tackle all emission sources<sup>32</sup>.

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29 SDG goals 2035.

30 European Commission (2020).

31 European Commission (2019), p. 7.

32 European Commission (2019), p. 10.

- 6) Adopting the From Farm to Fork strategy to design a fair, healthy and environmentally-friendly food system. The EU will transfer the existing production into a greener mode with lower emission, creating a food consumption system that is nutritious, healthy and eco-friendly to further protect human lives.
- 7) Preserving and restoring ecosystems and biodiversity. The EU is currently not meeting some of its environmental objectives for 2020, i.e. the Aichi targets under the Convention on Biological Diversity, therefore, the Commission presented a Biodiversity Strategy by March 2020 and specific action plans will follow up by 2021.
- 8) A zero pollution ambition for a toxic-free environment action plan. The EU must stop pollution from the very beginning and better monitor, report, prevent and remedy pollution from air, water, soil, and consumer products. To address these interlinked challenges, the Commission will adopt in 2021 a zero pollution action plan for air, water and soil<sup>33</sup>.

## 2. Background and motivation of the European Green Deal

The implementation of the EU's green and decarbonisation policies must be sustained by considerable funding and investment, which will subsequently increase the burden of the EU and its member states, while considering the cost of maintaining economic growth at the same time. According to the estimates, to meet the goals in the 2030 Climate & Energy Framework proposed in 2014, an additional 260 billion euro which is equivalent to 1.5% of the EU's 2018 overall GDP, must be invested every year. Therefore, the motive for the European Commission to launch such a deal at this moment is worthy of attention. Three significant aspects may be considered.

The EU has always been pursuing a model of development coordinating the society, economy and the environment. Regarded as 'the European model', it indicates a non-distortionary and non-sacrificing way to bolster economic growth and to support the fair and equitable development of the European society without harming the environment. The European Environment Agency (EEA) believes a green economy enhances the resource efficiency by introducing low-carbon policies and encouraging green innovations, complemented with focus on ecosystem resilience and people's well-being so that economic growth will be inclusive<sup>34</sup>. Being cornerstones of the European values and principles, Green GDP, together with a low-carbon and environmental-friendly society, has been thoroughly and comprehensively reflected in the European Green Deal context.

According to the deal, the EU will make more efforts in emission reduction to meet the goals laid out in the Paris Agreement compliance terms, and consolidate its leadership in global governance of climate change. Generally speaking, the EU is the prime mover of the landmark 2015 Paris Agreement, especially after the withdrawal of United States from the Kyoto Protocol, the EU had a louder voice on issues related to climate change in turn. However, the emission reduction target listed in the EU's 2030 Climate & Energy Framework, that is, the EU's greenhouse gas emission should be at most 60% compared with the 1990 level, is not consistent with the targets set by the Paris Agreement and the EU may fail to keep its Paris promises<sup>35</sup>. Thus, the European Green Deal empowers the EU to reaffirm its leading position in the global governance of climate change, particularly in the Paris Agreement, through additional efforts into the adjustment of emission cut targets given in the green deal.

The European Green Deal will be the general action plan applied by the EU to retain its global influence and to obtain better internal cohesion. On January 31, 2020, the UK officially "Brexit", and three short-term effects have been induced. First, Brexit harmed the overall power of EU as well as its global influence; second, it gave rise to power imbalances within the EU; third, the Brexit may hasten the disintegration of the EU. To allow the EU to be the genuine global leader in climate change, the Commission has been eager to give a long-term strategy which can be shared between all member states, and more consensus and mutual trust should be built, its internal cohesion and solidarity can then be improved and better upheld.

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33 European Commission (2019), p. 14.

34 Green economy (2015).

35 Yang (2020).

### 3. The implementation of the European Green Deal in response to new challenges in climate change

The European Green Deal imposes changes in food production, industry, transportation, construction and energy consumption, and the EU will undergo institutional changes in regulations, investment, high-emission industries will also be pressed ahead with reforms. Specific measures include:

- 1) The European Climate Law has been unveiled to legally monitor and control the progress of pursuing carbon neutrality of each member state.
- 2) A Just Transition Mechanism has been established to make sure the EU leaves no one behind during the process of transforming its high-emission industries. The Multiannual financial framework 2021-2027 lays out a 1.1 trillion euro plan to support Green Deal, to weather the financial and social costs of moving away from fossil fuels<sup>36</sup>.
- 3) Undergoing policy reform and encouraging technological innovation in high-emission industries including energy, construction, industry, and transportation. The production and use of energy across economic sectors account for more than 75% of the EU's total greenhouse gas emissions. Energy efficiency must be further prioritised<sup>37</sup>.
- 4) Building renovation. Currently, 40% of the total emission was produced by construction. Hence, a 'renovation wave' will be widely promoted around Europe as higher rate of building renovation and refurbishment will cut spending for families and also reduce energy consumption.
- 5) Only 12% of material resources used in the EU in 2016 came from recycled products and recovered materials. Thus, digitalisation and green technological innovations are necessary to maintain the EU's leading position in the world green economy.
- 6) The emission of the transportation industry accounts for 25% of the EU's total emission, the Commission will provide them with more affordable, healthier and cleaner alternatives to their current mobility habits, creating opportunities to undertake digitalisation and technological revolution in transportation.

Since the presentation of the European Green Deal in 2019, the EU has published several policy documents in line. In 2020, the European Green Deal Investment Plan and Just Transition Mechanism were released on January 14, the draft of European Climate Law was made public on March 4, and between March 10 and 11, the new EU Industrial Strategy<sup>38</sup> were presented together with the EU Circular Economy Action Plan<sup>39</sup>. All these policies and plans are designed to transfer the economy of EU to carbon-neutral with a strong digital component, improving its general global competitiveness in the long term.

It is for sure that more policies and plans will be introduced to better serve the implementation of the European Green Deal as time goes on. In the long run, achieving the carbon neutrality goal will greatly speed up the EU's transition to a low-carbon society; in the short run, it will force major energy-intensive and high-emission industries to undergo a series of adjustments. For members states who rely heavily on fossil fuels i.e. the Eastern European countries, these adjustments will raise costs and limits their growth potential. Therefore, only by reaching consensus between the EU and its member states on feasible ways and techniques to achieve carbon neutrality, can the green goals be firmly met. Moreover, countries must work together to agree on policies, for example, Poland and other eastern members that have overwhelming fossil fuels reliance, have reacted strongly against the deal by claiming those goals will severely restrict the their growth potential. In a word, barriers and challenges may persist and coexist.

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36 Petrequin (2020).

37 European Commission (2019), p. 6.

38 European Commission (2020), "A New Industrial Strategy for Europe".

39 European Commission (2020), "Circular Economy Action plan".

## 4. China-EU cooperation on climate change facing challenges and opportunities

The new deal is not only directly and legally-binding on all EU member states, it leaves a profound impact on other countries in the world, imposing new challenges to the China-EU cooperation on climate change. It is still in doubt whether the EU is going to apply EU standards to China, expecting China to reach carbon neutrality by 2050 as well. As such, China's energy production and consumption structure must undertake major adjustments. On the other hand, to what extent can the level of China's coal mining & utilisation get down? One possible way for China is to adopt advanced clean coal technology. All together, this deal creates opportunities for China and EU to deepen their cooperation in developing low-carbon technology.

The ongoing implementation of the Paris Agreement provisions in 2020 has been driven by the double-engines of China and the EU. As both sides hold a positive view on the future of cooperation, deepening cooperation in climate-change related topics is going to be on top of the China-EU summit agenda. Carbon neutrality, proposed as the major target in the European Green Deal, is the reflection of EU's ambition to fully anchor the pledges they made in Paris Agreement, and implicitly, the EU takes carbon neutrality as a tool to urge more nationally-determined contributions (NDCs) upon all other parties to effectively limit the atmospheric temperature increase below the 1.5 level. Furthermore, stabilisation of the atmospheric temperature will also be addressed in the China-EU summit.

China and EU should start to carry out systematic review of their progress in fulfilling the commitments made in the Paris Agreement and in the European Green Deal. So far, however, the nationally-determined contributions (NDCs) may not be quickly improved to another level even though countries fully commit to the Paris Agreement. As explained in the report of the Climate Action Tracker<sup>40</sup>, the world will warm by approximately 3°C by the end of the century under current pledges, almost twice as much as the level agreed in Paris and governments are therefore even further from the Paris temperature limit. Hence, more ambitious NDCs must be proposed by countries at the beginning. The carbon neutrality target will leave positive effect on speeding up emission reduction, channelling more investment into low-carbon technology R&D, ultimately establishing a framework of governance in climate change.

Given in the European Green Deal, the Just Transition Mechanism, completed with the Just Transition Fund, is worthy of reference to all participating countries of the Paris Agreement. China and the EU may also draw on this experience in their future cooperation. With the progress of China-EU cooperation, once the EU requires China to further shift coal away in its energy production or consumption, forcing heavy-emitters like coal-related industries to decarbonise, in which way the loss incurred due to temporary or permanent shutdown on enterprises can be compensated remains as a question mark. To find a way out, China and the EU could take a lesson from the model of the EU's Just Transition Mechanism & Fund and take similar actions i.e. setting up the China-EU Just Transition Mechanism and Funding Partnership for Climate Change in the future to tackle it. This proposed partnership may also promote the mutually beneficial and equitable development of the China-EU climate partnership.

The upcoming UN Climate Change Conference of the Parties (COP26) in Glasgow will bring at least two opportunities for both sides. First, as reforms to existing provisions must be made, further negotiate on issues of global climate change on this occasion; second, countries have reorganised themselves as a global community and realised it is the time for countries and companies to collaborate in fighting COVID-19, it is equally essential to put joint efforts in tackling climate change in a green and sustainable way<sup>41</sup>. This principle goes beyond any international climate negotiations. To sum up, the European Green Deal will upgrade the China-EU cooperation to a higher level with better fulfilment of pledges of the Paris Agreement: more investment into clean energy by both sides will be generated through cooperation and dialogues, better cooperation projects on the establishment of carbon trading market in China will be introduced, More dialogues on global governance of climate change between China and the EU will be strengthened.

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40 Governments still showing little sign of acting on climate crisis (2019).

41 Klein (2020).

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**Abstract:** As the two major international players in mitigating global climate change, China and the EU are at different stages of economic development, with different political systems and different social governance. However, both sides are active actors in the global response to climate change. China and the European Community (the predecessor of the European Union) are the founding members of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), the implementing countries of the Kyoto Protocol and the promoters of the Paris Agreement. Since the establishment of the EU and China Partnership on Climate Change Partnership in 2005, the two sides have carried out a series of fruitful cooperation in the field of climate change and played an active role in global climate governance. In 2020, China EU climate change cooperation will be affected by many factors, such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the European Green Deal. The impact of the Pandemic is temporary. After returning to normal situation, EU and China cooperation on climate change will remain a key area of China-EU relations. Currently, what deserves more attention is climate neutrality proposed by the European Green deal that will have an impact on EU-China cooperation on climate change for the medium and long run. Will the EU adopt EU standards to require China to reduce emissions for achieving climate neutrality by 2050? If so, China's energy production and consumption structure will have to be significantly adjusted. To what extent can China rapidly reduce coal mining or utilization? Or adopt more advanced clean coal technology, which brings new opportunities for China and the EU to deepen cooperation on low-carbon technologies?

**Keywords:** EU-China Partnership; Climate Change; Paris Agreement; global climate governance, European Green Deal, carbon emission reduction.

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