



## Building UK-EU bridges: Convergent China policies?

by Ian Bond, 10 July 2023

No country poses bigger policy challenges to both the EU and the UK than China. Both are struggling to exploit the economic opportunities that China offers while managing the security risks that it creates. In dealing with China, the EU and the UK have many interests in common. But can they co-operate more closely in formulating and implementing policy towards China? And can they make common cause in responding to US pressure to focus on containing Beijing's rise?

In a new CER policy brief, '[Building UK-EU bridges: Convergent China policies?](#)', generously supported by the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, CER foreign policy director Ian Bond looks at the evolution of China's relations with the UK and the EU, from the 'golden era' of UK-China relations in 2015 to current efforts by both the UK and the EU to reduce their economic dependencies on China. He considers the similarities and differences in what London and Brussels say about their approach to China, as well as the tougher lines that often emanate from Washington and the effect that those have on European policy-making.

In the post-Brexit world, the UK no longer has the influence it used to have on EU foreign policy. The policy brief argues, however, that there are many policy areas where the UK and EU have identical or very similar objectives.

These include:

- ★ Dissuading China from supplying Russia with weapons or other supplies to help its war effort.
- ★ Providing alternatives to Chinese loans for developing countries that need help in building infrastructure.
- ★ Lobbying and where necessary imposing sanctions in response to Chinese human rights violations.
- ★ Running common candidates for key positions in international organisations to prevent China gaining excessive influence.
- ★ Controlling the export of military or dual-use technology to China.

- ★ Restricting inward and outward investments that might damage European or Western security, to the benefit of China.
- ★ Avoiding over-dependency on Chinese supplies of critical raw materials and technology.
- ★ Countering Chinese influence operations.
- ★ Countering CCP efforts to intimidate or suborn Chinese citizens or ethnic Chinese citizens of other countries.

The policy brief considers current informal contacts between the EU and UK, comparing them with the more formal structures that the EU and US have for discussing economic and political questions relating to China. It concludes that over time it would make sense for the UK and EU to establish a more structured approach to forming and implementing convergent policies towards China. Both sides stand to gain from an effort to align their separate efforts to pursue their very similar goals. They will be able to respond more effectively to unacceptable Chinese behaviour; but they will also be better positioned to stand up to the US when they have to.

The paper's author, Ian Bond, said *"The UK used to be one of the most active members of the EU in shaping the Union's policy towards China. Despite Brexit, UK and EU objectives in China policy – to have a productive economic relationship; to work with Beijing on shared challenges such as climate change; and to defend our shared democratic values against China's techno-authoritarianism – are almost identical. It is only common sense that we should be combining our efforts if we want to maximise our joint influence in Beijing"*.

**This policy brief is the last of a three paper CER/ Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung series, "Shared Values, Common Challenges - UK-European Security Cooperation after the War in Ukraine."**

#### Notes for editors:

For further information on the new research and to request an interview with Ian Bond [@CER\\_IanBond](https://twitter.com/CER_IanBond) please contact Octavia Hughes in the CER press office on [pressoffice@cer.eu](mailto:pressoffice@cer.eu) or +44 (0) 20 7233 1199.

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