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Answer given by High Representative/Vice-President Borrell
on behalf of the European Commission
(7.7.2020)

In the face of a global pandemic, international solidarity and cooperation are essential.

The Commission has been in contact with the Chinese authorities, since the beginning of February 2020 to discuss the COVID 19. Also, the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) is in frequent contact with the Chinese Centre for Disease Control to exchange information, including revisions of the case definition and epidemiological updates. These contacts are an opportunity to gather a better understanding of the situation in China.

A thorough understanding of the epidemiology of the coronavirus pandemic is essential as the basis for public authorities to take informed decisions safeguarding public health, the global economy and freedom of movement. Early identification of any weaknesses in local, national and global health policies allows for corrective action to be taken.

There may well be lessons to be learned about the response to the coronavirus pandemic, both at the level of individual countries and internationally. In this regard, the EU stands ready to support thorough scientific enquiry into the origins of the coronavirus. Transparency, and scientific research free of constraint are vital for improving the quality of decision-making by the public authorities in dealing with global challenges such as the coronavirus and ensure prevention of such a disastrous health crisis in the future. However, for now the priority has to be on saving lives and containing this pandemic. We will only defeat this pandemic through global efforts and cooperation that include all partners.

The EU will continue to apply a more realist, robust and multi-faceted approach towards China as outlined in the Joint Communication on EU-China relations (March 2019). The EU interests will continue to focus on obtaining a more reciprocal and balanced trade relationship, and constant strengthening of the EU's position. At the same time, the EU remains committed to improving its own capacity in general, including through the establishment of the framework for screening foreign direct investment, the modernising of the export control of dual use goods, and the strengthening of the security of critical infrastructure and the technological base. As the Honourable Members may be aware, at the end of January 2020, the Commission endorsed the joint toolbox of mitigating measures, agreed by EU Member States, to address security risks related to the rollout of 5G. These measures are all aimed not only at strengthening EU own credibility, but more importantly, at protecting the rights of its citizens.

Personal data exchanges with entities in China may only take place in full compliance with the requirements of the international data transfer rules in the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), designed by the EU legislator to ensure that the level of data protection guaranteed in the EU is not undermined when data are transferred to a foreign country.