

EU parliament 'freezes' China trade deal over sanctions

Vincent Ni China affairs correspondent, Thu 20 May 2021



Tit-for-tat sanctions over Beijing's treatment of Uyghurs puts halt on investment agreement

The European parliament has voted overwhelmingly to “freeze” any consideration of a massive investment deal with China, following recent tit-for-tat sanctions over Beijing’s treatment of its Uyghur population in East Turkistan.

According to the resolution, the parliament, which must ratify the deal, “demands that China lift the sanctions before parliament can deal with the Comprehensive Agreement on Investment (CAI)”. Some MEPs warned that the lifting of the sanctions would not in itself ensure the deal’s ratification.

The vote on the motion was passed by a landslide, with 599 votes for, 30 votes against and with 58 abstentions.

Thursday’s outcome is yet another sign of the deterioration of the China-EU relations, and is not surprising to observers of the diplomatic ties.

“The European parliament has always been a more critical voice on China in the past. It is now able to wield more power to vote against any trade and investment agreements on the grounds of political conditionality,” said Yu Jie, a senior research fellow on China at London-based thinktank Chatham House.

The massive trade deal was a result of seven years of marathon negotiations. The final talks were wrapped up late last year by the Chinese president Xi Jinping, along with European leaders such as Germany’s Angela Merkel, France’s Emmanuel Macron as well as the European Commission president, Ursula von der Leyen.

If ratified, it could lead to Beijing loosening some of its notoriously stringent rules on foreign companies such as the need to operate through joint ventures with local partners.

Analysts said that economic planners in Beijing had hoped to use this agreement as an opportunity to push for domestic reform, even though the implications of the CAI for

the Chinese economy remain unclear.

The deal was controversial from the beginning in Europe. Even before the negotiations were concluded, China sceptics as well as human rights advocates had long urged Brussels to prioritise the issue of human rights in its dealing with Beijing.

Then, in a dramatic turn of events in March, the European Union imposed sanctions on four Chinese officials involved in Beijing’s policy on East Turkistan. In response, China swiftly imposed counter-sanctions that targeted several high-profile members of the European parliament, three members of national parliaments, two EU committees, and a number of China-focused European researchers.

On Wednesday, Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson Zhao Lijian urged the EU to “make in-depth reflections and immediately stop interfering in China’s internal affairs”.

He added: “The CAI is a balanced and win-win deal that benefits both sides, rather than a ‘gift’ or favour bestowed by one side to the other. An early ratification of the agreement is in the interests of both China and the EU.”

Thursday’s move comes after European Commission’s executive vice-president Valdis Dombrovskis, earlier this month, said that political outreach to promote the controversial trade agreement had been ‘suspended’ after recent sanctions.



The conclusion of the initial CAI negotiations last December was said to be helped by German chancellor Angela Merkel. The Chinese market is especially important to German carmakers and manufacturers who have a large presence in the country.

German economy minister Peter Altmaier maintained his defence of the investment deal. He said that China is the EU's largest trading partner and plays an important role in the global economy. "We want to reach results with China that are in the interest of both sides," he added.

But Yu Jie of London's Chatham House said that it will now become "increasingly difficult" to push the deal through after Merkel's departure in September. In the meantime, the mood in Brussels is changing, too, with the talk of "strategic autonomy" becoming a main part of Brussels's foreign policy discourse.

"Any chance of salvaging the CAI will now take a major political willingness on both sides, but neither seems to be willing to speak soft at this stage."

Lithuanian parliament latest to term China's treatment of Uyghurs 'genocide'

ANI, May 21, 2021

“Lithuania's parliament on Thursday became the latest to describe China's treatment of its Uyghur minority as "genocide", voting to call for a U.N. investigation of internment camps and to ask the European Commission to review relations with Beijing.



A perimeter fence is constructed around what is officially known as a vocational skill-education centre in Dabancheng in East Turkistan, September 4, 2018. REUTERS/Thomas Peter

The Biden administration in the United States has used the term genocide to describe China's actions towards the Uyghurs, as have countries including Britain and Canada. Beijing denies abusing minorities and has condemned countries for using the term.

The non-binding resolution, supported by three-fifths of Lithuanian parliament members, also called on China to abolish a national security law in Hong Kong, and to let observers into Tibet and begin talks with its spiritual leader, the Dalai Lama.

Neither Prime Minister Ingrida Simonyte nor Foreign Minister Gabrielius Landsbergis participated in the vote, despite being present in the parliament.

"We support democracy, as we will never forget the cruel lesson of living under occupation by a Communist regime for 50 years", said Dovile Sakaliene, a lawmaker blacklisted by China and who sponsored the resolution.

China's foreign ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian told a briefing on Friday that Beijing firmly opposed the move and urged Lithuania to correct its mistakes to avoid harming relations.

Lithuania, which suffered repression under Soviet rule from 1940-1991, is now a member of the EU and NATO, and has often taken a prominent role in pushing for tougher Western diplomatic lines towards Russia and Communist countries such as China.

Rights groups, researchers, former residents and some Western lawmakers say authorities in East Turkistan province have arbitrarily detained around a million Uyghurs and members of other primarily Muslim minorities in camps since 2016.

Beijing initially denied the camps existed but has since said they are training centres designed to combat religious extremism.

Man Jailed Over Photo of Chinese Leader's Daughter

'Soon to be Transferred'

RFA, 2021-05-20

Authorities in the southern Chinese province of Guangdong are preparing to transfer website administrator Niu Tengyu to a different jail at the start of his 14-year jail term for allegedly posting a photo of the daughter of ruling Chinese Communist Party (CCP) general secretary Xi Jinping online.

Niu, 22, was jailed in the southern province of Guangdong after someone posted a photo of Xi Mingze to meme site Zhina Wiki, an act that was later blamed by police on Niu's Vulgar Wiki.



Niu Tengyu will soon be moved to Yangjiang Prison after a Guangdong court rejected his appeal.

Niu Tengyu, jailed for 14 years for discussing personal details of Chinese President Xi Jinping's family online, is shown in an undated photo.

Niu will soon be transferred from the Maoming No. 1 Detention Center to Yangjiang Prison to serve his sentence, his mother, who gave only a nickname Coco, told RFA.

"I heard recently that they will be transferring Tengyu to prison, and I am very heavy-hearted," she said. "I worry about his health and his recovery following his torture."

"If that finger isn't treated in time, he will be left with a lifelong disability," she said. "Given the current state of my own health, I don't know if I will ever see my son again."

An employee who answered the phone at the Maoming No. 1 Detention Center where Niu Tengyu is currently being detained said it was normal for detainees to be sent to regular prisons after they had had a second instance appeal rejected.

"The decision of the second instance court has been finalized, so transfer at this point is

normal," the employee said.

Complaint over torture

Niu's rights attorneys, Bao Longjun and Wang Yu, have filed an official complaint over torture Niu suffered while in police detention in October 2019, resulting in injury to his right hand.

Bao told RFA's Cantonese Service on March 5 that Niu had also been stripped, suspended from the ceiling, and his genitals burned with a lighter.

After months in detention, Niu Tengyu was handed a 14-year jail term on Dec. 30, 2020 by the Maonan District People's Court in Guangdong's Maoming city, which found him guilty of "picking quarrels and stirring up trouble," "violating others' privacy" and "running an illegal business."

Reports at the time indicated that 23 young people detained around the same time in connection with the Vulgar Wiki case had also been tortured and mistreated in detention.

Sources told RFA that the parents of the other young detainees were told there was no record of them at the detention center when they went to put money into their prison spending accounts.

The records were restored following a protest by parents outside the Guangdong Detention Center.

Trumped-up charges

Bao said the entire case against Niu rests on trumped-up charges.

"It should have been impossible to find Niu guilty based on the available evidence," Bao told RFA. "This is a fundamentally political case."

Coco told RFA that the behavior of the Maoming authorities was "a discredit to the country."

"This case will become a huge blot on the history of the Chinese legal system," Coco said. "This miscarriage of justice must be overturned."

The Maoming People's Court rejected Niu's appeal behind closed doors on April 23, 2021.

Reported by Yitong Wu and Chingman for RFA's Cantonese Service. Translated and edited by Luisetta Mudie.

Whitewashing China: The Rise of "Belt and Road Journalism"

05/22/2021 MASSIMO INTROVIGNE

A report by the International Federation of Journalists reveals how China manipulates the media about COVID-19 (and East Turkistan). Italy is the worst case.



After more than one year, while all our countries have suffered thousands of deaths and damages to the economy it will take decades to overcome, we have almost forgotten that the virus came from Wuhan. China has been successful in selling to the world preposterous alternative theories placing the origins of the virus in the United States, Norway, or Italy. As for the laboratory hypothesis, although regarded as a serious possibility by authoritative research centers such as the French National Center for Scientific Research, if you try to mention it you will be excluded from polite company as “conspiracy,” and your posts may even be cancelled by Facebook or Twitter.

Of course, this happened because there is a pro-China lobby that represents prominent business interests. The same businesses that have their main markets in China own newspapers, magazines, and TV networks. However, a report published this month by the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ), tells us that there is more.

Belt and Road agreements are often confidential, but we live in a world where keeping secrets is difficult. For instance, the Belt and Road memorandum between China and Italy was leaked to the Financial Times and, as of this day, is still available online. It is not easy

to find, but we commented it in Bitter Winter. Other Belt and Road agreements remain confidential, but we have all reasons to believe that the one signed with Italy is a variation on a common template. 140 countries are now part of Belt and Road, including 18 countries of the European Union.

The IFJ report mentions that the Italian Belt and Road agreements “included memoranda of understanding between China Media Group and a number of Italian outlets, including RAI and [the privately-owned] Mediaset broadcasters. The state-run news agency ANSA signed an accord with China’s state media agency Xinhua to launch the Xinhua Italian Service. This has translated into Ansa running fifty Xinhua stories a day on its news wire, with Xinhua taking editorial responsibility for the content while ANSA serves as a tool of distribution.” Perhaps a few words deserve a second reading: ANSA, the main Italian wire agency on which many Italian media depend, runs fifty stories a day prepared by the Chinese regime’s news agency Xinhua. ANSA does not take any “editorial responsibility” for them, which means that it simply distributes what the Chinese feed to it.

“The agreements have also led to Italian television stations airing Chinese documentaries.” “Chinese media outlets, the IFJ report continues, [are] offering content tailored for the Italian market for free. One example, mentioned by a journalist, hints at the success of this strategy, ‘They asked us to give more space to the New Year’s speech of President Xi Jinping. They gave it to us for free, translated directly into Italian. And we broadcast it, of course, not at the best time.’”

The predictable result was an Italian “info-demic,” with fake news and rumors circulating faster than actual information about the virus.” Incredibly, some Italian media even circulated Chinese stories claiming that the virus had originated in Italy.



Italy still maintains independent media that reject Chinese propaganda, no matter whether it comes from ANSA or is nicely packaged. The two other case studies of Belt and Road countries in the IFJ report, Serbia and Tunisia, reveal much weaker defenses.

IFJ notes that the system was mobilized to whitewash China of any responsibility about the COVID, making it on the contrary into a virtuous example of good practices for con-

taining the epidemic. But, once in place, the system is also used to publish China-friendly news on East Turkistan and other issues.

Those in Italy and elsewhere who believed that Belt and Road memorandums were only about selling more tomatoes to the Chinese were, in the best-case scenario, badly misinformed, in the worst, accomplices of a devious Chinese strategy.

‘The Man in Shackles is my Father’: Daughter of Jailed ‘Two-Faced’ Uyghur Official

RFA, 2021-05-17

The daughter of a jailed high-ranking Uyghur official discusses why she chose to end her silence.

Memet Abdulla, the former chief of the forestry bureau of East Turkistan, was detained by national security officers on April 29, 2017, shortly after the launch of a campaign of mass extralegal incarceration that has since seen up to 1.8 million Uyghurs and other Muslim minorities held in a vast network of internment camps in the region. Abdulla is one of the highest-ranking officials whose detention and subsequent arrest in the campaign have been confirmed. Last year, RFA’s Uyghur Service confirmed details of his disappearance and sentencing to life in prison last

year for being “two-faced”—a term regularly used by authorities to refer to Uyghur cadres who they say pay lip service to Communist Party rule in East Turkistan, but secretly chafe against state repression of members of their ethnic group.

Abdulla’s U.S.-based daughter Subhi Memet recently told RFA that her father was detained the very day he was set to visit her and her brother, along with their families. Since then, she has been unable to obtain information about her father’s situation and only recently



A screen shot of a video showing Memet Abdulla on trial in Urumqi in 2019.

and my mother [who remain in East Turkistan] weren't able to ask about how he was doing on the phone. My mother told me she had heard my father's voice, that he was alive, but I found I couldn't believe her. I couldn't believe what my own mother was saying. She said that they were going to let her see him six months later. On April 29, 2021—in other words, four years after they detained my father—they allowed my parents to see one another via video chat.

In April 2020, Voice of America did a video interview with me. After the video came out, in June of 2020, the Global Times said that I was spread-

ing fake news, that I fabricated falsehoods when I said my father's "crime" was being "two-faced" and a "splittist," and that they had arrested him for the crime of bribery. They took my father away via the public security bureau. They never took him for investigation. There was never any talk of an investigation, and I heard nothing about "bribery."

... They have claimed that we, their children, are lying in order to discredit the work that we are doing internationally, in order to claim that we're fooling people and to [try to] put an end to the cause that we're working for. Governments around the world already know that the Chinese government is a straight-up liar, so we will not turn back, and we will continue moving forward.

'My heart was shattered'
My heart was shattered when I saw the pillar of our family wearing the clothing of a prisoner, when I saw him older in age, close to 80 a nearly 80 years old, his feet chained up. No child wants to see such a sight of their own father in such a state of abuse. I will never be able to get this sight out of my mind. My father

was allowed to speak to her mother and sister, who both remain in East Turkistan. In an interview, she said she found herself unable to believe her mother's claims that her father was still alive when they first spoke on the phone after many months of silence. After Memet began testifying about her father in the international press last year, Chinese officials and state media accused her of lying and denied her claim that her father had been detained and arrested for being "two-faced." An official statement says Abdulla was sentenced for "bribery and embezzlement." Recently, Memet saw a video of her father shackled and chained to a chair in what appears to be a courtroom. It was her first sight of him in years. In her interview with RFA, she called on anyone with disappeared family members to break their silence and speak out about their loved ones.

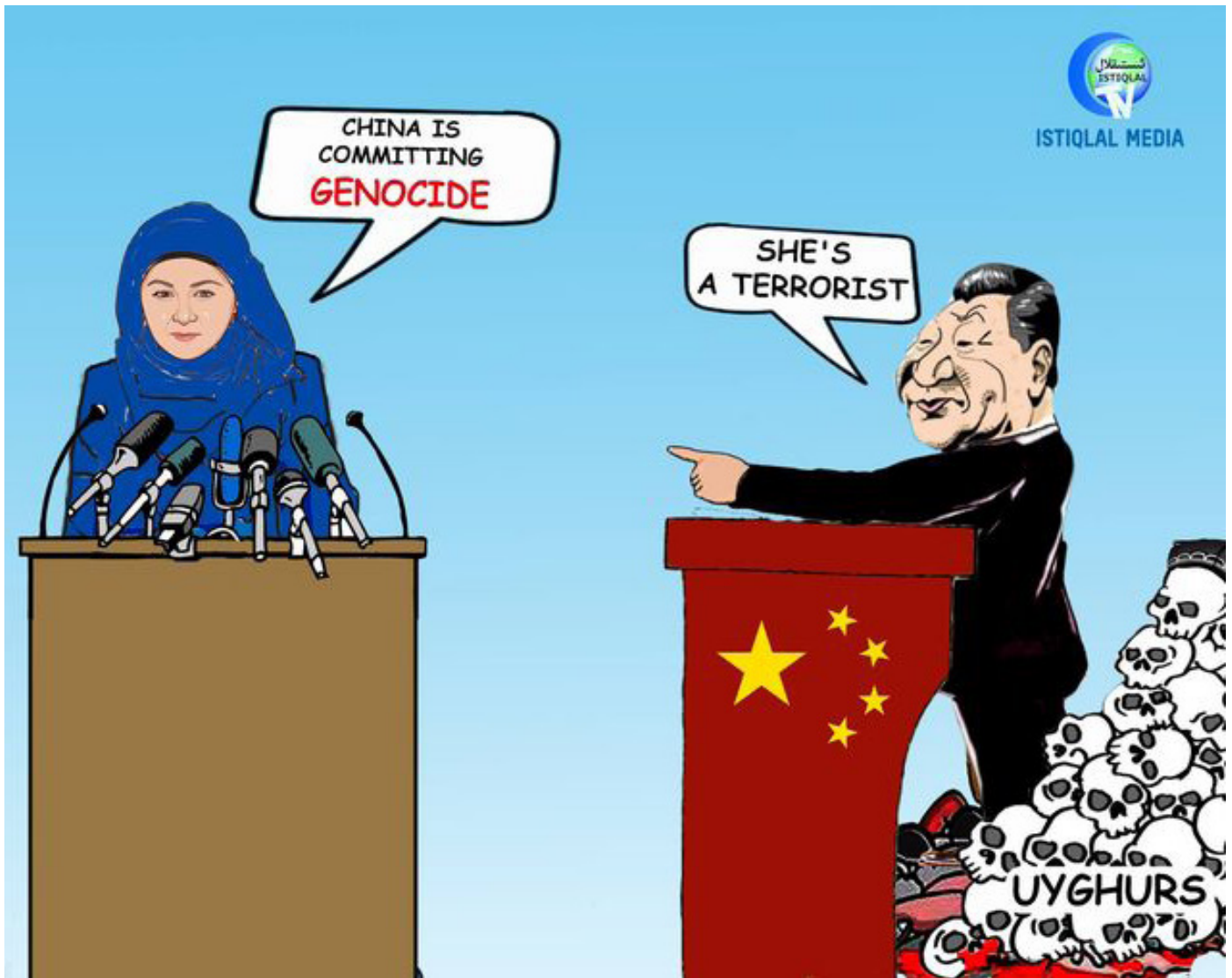
'My heart was shattered'

Memet: In October 2020, out of the blue my sister got a phone call from a number she didn't recognize. She took the call, and it was my father's voice. My father said they were holding him in Cell 11 of the No. 3 prison. She

her has liver problems and high blood pressure. He also has diabetes. How can the Chinese government be so thirsty for justice? What I've felt, based on my own experience, is that we can never be silent. The longer we stay silent, they will continue to oppress us

such that, ultimately, it is still us who will be hurt. The longer we stay silent, the more they oppress us ... Our staying silent is the greatest harm we could do to our parents and our relatives.

The Chinese regime, which was ranked fourth to last out of 180 countries on the 2021 World Press Freedom Index, has labeled the journalist, activist Gulchehra Hoja as a "terrorist" because of her Uyghur identity and her activities in exposing the crimes of the Chinese regime.



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