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Brussels, 1 June 2021

Ms. Ursula von der Leyen
President
European Commission
Brussels

Dear Commission President Ms. von der Leyen,

Re: **COVID-19 and EU's China Challenge**

Once dismissed as mere a conspiracy theory, the lab leak hypothesis of COVID-19 has picked up more adherents. Given the lack of Chinese transparency, the world cannot afford to eliminate the lab escape theory and its foot-dragging on an investigation, its secrecy and deception. There is a growing body of evidence that the (Wuhan) lab is likely the most credible source of the virus and now, scientific experts are joining the chorus, warning of more dire viruses if the alleged real origins are not revealed. As terrible as COVID-19 has been, this is almost certainly not the last pandemic we will face - and possibly not even the worst - and therefore understanding the origins of the pandemic is essential to addressing human vulnerabilities and preventing future crises.

If the US investigation comes out with definite conclusion that a single laboratory and a few scientists are responsible for one of the greatest human catastrophes in generations, it will certainly ignite a global diplomatic firestorm with unpredictable dimension. In this context it is important to state that this also raises the issue of ethical safeguards in scientific research. The EU is at its best when setting standards and it is high time that EU takes lead, together with international community, in developing mechanism for enforcing international scientific research safeguards and how to operate in countries like China which lacks a good regulatory and ethical review process, and where they cannot be enforced reasonably. On its own, the EU has economic and regulatory powers to enforce, but these are slow-moving and not effective.

The emergence of an unprecedented threat in the propaganda sphere by China evolving out of the turmoil related to the COVID-19 pandemic is worrying. It is no secret that the Chinese Communist Party's massive information control system and opportunism has contributed to the catastrophic spread of COVID-19 globally. This disinformation campaign poses new challenges to Europe's national security interests, and if EU is to turn back this tide of malign mistruths and conspiracy theories, it must greatly increase its preparedness and efforts to counter it.

In this background, the Comprehensive Agreement on Investment with China is widely seen as an attempt by China to draw attention away from issues such as secrecy about COVID, China's egregious human rights record, including the brute force Beijing has been using against the pro-democracy movement in Hong Kong. Sanctions by China on European lawmakers is laughable and, in this respect, European Parliament's decision to freeze the deal speaks the "mood of the Union" against a repressive and arrogant China. The country is aggressively pushing for strategic and economic advantage, and it will use the CAI as an economic tool to

enhance its influence in Europe. Also, EU cannot afford to ignore the history that China has broken trade and investment promises with many countries.

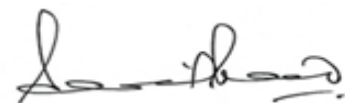
Over European Union's 70 years of exceptional history, Member States of the EU have risen to the challenge of protecting and furthering EU's founding principles and defeating existential threats to Europe's liberties. Today, this is challenged by a virulent and increasingly dangerous threat to human freedoms by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) through the nation it misrules; the People's Republic of China (PRC). The investment treaty with EU will give China and its party apparatus a "Free Pass" to weaken the role of European democratic norms and overturn vital economic and other components of order from which China itself has benefitted for decades. EU has for long recognized China as the authoritarian competitive threat and although it has long been a staple of politics in Europe, some EU countries have been soft on doing business with Beijing. What is disturbing is that some Member countries in a number of cases have been hedging, improving relations with China and pulling their punches inside the EU. For the sake European unity and integrity, this should not be allowed to continue.

Madam President, China has done more than any country to endanger world peace. All by itself it has destabilized the world order, has singularly poisoned alliances, and torn up treaties, and by its expansionist policy the country has displayed its scant respect for integrity of sovereign countries. The Chinese Communist Party aims not merely at preeminence within the established world order but to fundamentally revise it, placing the People's Republic of China (PRC) at the center and serving Beijing's authoritarian goals and hegemonic ambitions in the Indo-Pacific. To secure the type of international support that will be necessary to influence Chinese behavior, the EU will need to demonstrate a level of focus in strategic thinking, resources, and coordination with partners and allies. In this respect, the Joint Statement of the EU-India Leaders' Meeting held last month is a watershed moment in the EU-India relations as several important elements of global challenge and how to strengthen and deepen cooperation in every sector for the benefit of global stability, has been addressed.

It is important that EU strongly confronts China until Beijing changes its behavior on a wide range of well-known and longstanding concerns. These include discriminatory trade barriers, forced technology transfer, intellectual property theft, militarization of outposts in the South China Sea, reduces tension on LAC with India, pressure on Taiwan, human rights and religious freedom, government-sponsored cyber-enabled economic espionage, and Chinese interference in other countries' political systems. Let me also add that today it is not only the virus which is haunting the world order, it is the rise and arrogance of dictatorial China.

With kind regards,

Yours sincerely,



Secretary General

Cc. Mr. Josep Borrell, EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice-President

Mr. Valdis Dombrovskis, Executive Vice President and EU Commissioner for Trade