

2020-05-06 Bunker

신종석

유럽 – IFRI(Institut français des relations internationales)/ETNC(European Think-tank Network on China)

IFRI

China's Mix of Aggressive and Charming Coronavirus Diplomacy could Worsen Europe's Fractures, Report warns

<https://www.ifri.org/fr/espace-media/lifri-medias/chinas-mix-aggressive-and-charming-coronavirus-diplomacy-could-worsen>

Multiple lawmakers in Europe and the U.S. have called for an international investigation into the origins of COVID-19, a proposal dismissed by Beijing. On Friday, EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen agreed that such a probe would be helpful.

The IFRI said that existing tensions in the EU-China relationship—for example over trade, investment and human rights—will likely "become more prevalent as time wears on."

But the China question is also creating fractures within the EU, the report warned. Some EU nations in central, southern and eastern Europe—plus some nations in the Balkans—have been more open to Chinese investment than their western counterparts. Leaders in Hungary and Serbia, for example, have lauded Chinese support during the coronavirus crisis and downplayed EU assistance.

The IFRI report said Beijing is tailoring its approach to different countries based on these divisions. "There is a diversity in methods that ranges from "low key" in countries like Latvia or Romania; "charm offensive" in Poland, Portugal, Italy or Spain; or even "provocative or aggressive" towards Sweden, Germany or France, the document explained.

"China is becoming an increasingly divisive topic of internal political debate in many European countries," the report added. "At the same time, China's actions toward Europe in this time of crisis seem to amplify the fractures across the continent."

China was quick to assist European nations when the coronavirus took hold on the continent. Beijing organized large transfers of medical equipment—an opening move in expanding its own influence via assistance, in what has come to be known as "mask diplomacy."

29 April 2020

IFRI - European Think-tank Network on China (ETNC)

Special Report

<https://www.ifri.org/en/publications/publications-ifri/ouvrages-ifri/covid-19-europe-china-relations>

China has organized a number of video conferences with governments and health experts across Europe to share information about its experiences in fighting Covid-19, particularly related to medical and scientific aspects of combating the virus. It is worth noting that the first video conference was set up with Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries – including non-EU member states – that make up the so-called “17+1”, with the interesting addition of Malta, on 13 March.

While aid and “mask diplomacy” has been a key feature of the discussion, it is important to note that commercial deliveries of medical supplies from China have far exceeded aid volumes.

Drawing from the chapters below, key messages tend to fall into four categories:

- 1) highlighting solidarity and aid
- 2) calling for international unity
- 3) promoting China’s fight against Covid-19 as a success story, and in some cases (for instance in France) blaming Western democracies for their poor management or even responsibility in the spread of the pandemic
- 4) countering narratives critical of China, including through sowing doubt about the origins of Covid-19. While China’s increasingly proactive public diplomacy is widespread, and there appears to be a relative degree of consistency in messaging, there is a diversity in method that ranges from low key (see Latvia or Romania) to charm offensive (see Poland, Portugal, Italy or Spain) to provocative or aggressive (see Sweden, Germany or France).

Relations with China amid Covid-19 have fuelled internal political discord in some countries, while

also highlighting divisions within Europe.

Even countries that have seen their relations with China sour in recent years have found a reason to strengthen those relations in a time of crisis. For many governments in Europe, the mid-term solution to the Covid-19 crisis (and the longer-term prevention of similar outbreaks) must pass through multilateral action, which highlights China's role as a partner and further necessitates a degree of cooperation, despite the concerns that have been raised over China's growing influence in international institutions such as the World Health Organization (WHO).

Indeed, the chapters in this report also indicate that more contentious, structural issues, including some that have been exacerbated by Covid-19, loom around the corner. Already, some, for example Germany and Sweden, have moved to strengthen investment screening measures out of concerns that foreign, particularly Chinese firms may seek to take advantage of Europe's economic distress to acquire strategic assets. This demonstrates a persistent level of wariness and distrust of China in many corners of Europe. Dependence on China for medical supplies, now clearly demonstrated as being a strategic sector, has also become a topic of debate in much of Europe. In the wake of this crisis, Europe will have to engage in further conceptual discussions on the nature and terms of dependence in strategic industries, and this will also necessitate a debate on the nature of Europe's relationship with China.