

White Paper Revolution: Solidarity with the Chinese Protesters

Over the weekend of 26th November 2022, mass civil unrest and protests erupted throughout the People's Republic of China (hereinafter China) across 15 cities, largely coordinated by students from more than 50 university campuses, and by workers in as many factories.

The protests began as demonstrations against China's 'zero-COVID' policy, but many have grown into overall dissent of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP)'s administration and particularly of CCP General Secretary Xi Jinping – with expressions of anger over oppression and repression by the state, and calls for democracy, freedom and human rights, or even the resignation of Xi Jinping or an end to CCP rule.

Blank sheets of paper have become a symbol of the protests, as students have used it to represent the CCP's restrictions on speech. Mass civil unrest and protests in China to this degree amounts to one of the most widespread expressions of dissent since the 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre.

The CCP's response since has, expectedly, been a crackdown of protests and suppression of (online) speech. Police units and metal barricades have been set up in various cities, and police have been recorded abusing and arresting protesters and journalists, on November 27th, in Shanghai, including two foreign reporters. Mentions of the protests and the word 'white paper' and videos of such abuses continue to be wiped from the Chinese internet.

At such a crucial and monumental juncture in time, where such dissent aimed at the CCP and its leader Xi Jinping is unprecedented, governments of the Western world cannot again choose to remain silent. The European Union and the governments of Europe must do more to rebuke China and hold Xi Jinping and his administration accountable for their actions. Despite escalation of protests and CCP retaliation, President of the European Council Charles Michel still flew to Beijing on December 1st to meet with Xi Jinping. The European Green Party therefore expresses its grave concern, as it has in the past, of China's suppression of fundamental rights, its continuous human rights abuses, its breaches of international law, and its crimes against humanity. We watch closely the developments of these protests and the response of the CCP, condemning the increasing escalation of force used by the Chinese police and of mass censorship and suppression of speech and freedom of press. We strongly reaffirm our demands made in the resolution adopted at the 33rd EGP Council – that the EU and national governments of Europe must actively pursue a common policy vis-à-vis China that is guided by upholding human rights and defending international rule of law.

With regards to all of the above, reaffirming the resolution on EU's China policy adopted at the 33rd EGP Council and in light of the further escalation of these protests, the European Green Party repeats all of the demands expressed in the previous resolution, and expresses our full solidarity with the protesters and unequivocal support for their fundamental rights and freedoms. We call upon the EU and national governments of the Europe to:

- Express their undivided support and solidarity for the protesters in China and those protesting abroad;

- Condemn in the strongest terms the crackdown of the CCP administration against the protesters and the suppression of their fundamental right to free speech and assembly;
- Exert pressure on the CCP administration to comply with the UN Charter and international human rights laws and standards as well as to condition future relations and agreements made with China on compliance with such norms, including for example the continued freezing of the EU-China investment deal;
- Strongly demand the CCP administration and companies with factories in China to guarantee decent work conditions and respect for the freedom, human dignity and equality of the workers in factories, in accordance with the conventions and other relevant standards of the International Labour Organisation;
- Consider, in light of further retaliation against and crackdown on these protesters by the CCP, the implementation of new sanctions, including targeted sanctions of Chinese officials and entities responsible for or directly associated with the crackdowns and other affiliated human rights violations;
- Offer asylum to Chinese activists, citizens, dissidents and individuals persecuted or targeted by the Chinese state living abroad, and issue humanitarian visas to facilitate the travel of said Chinese individuals in need of humanitarian protection to European borders;
- Guarantee the same degree of protection to Chinese activists, citizens, dissidents and individuals targeted by the Chinese state living in European territories as a European citizen would have, including the suspension of operations of Chinese police overseas service stations within territories of European states pending investigations into these stations of allegations of intimidation and persecution of Chinese individuals and end any extradition treaties between European states and China;
- Demand Chinese authorities to stop the intimidation, persecution and abuse of protesters and journalists, to respond to protests in line with international human rights laws and standards, and to release immediately and unconditionally all political prisoners, including human rights defenders, dissidents, activists, journalists, and academics;
- Support in all ways possible the limited democratic civil society operating in China, prioritising their own agency and wishes, including human rights organisations and groups, civil society organisations, civil defenders and advocates, and journalists. This includes resources and assistance in the monitoring of state censorship, repression and oppression in light of these crackdowns, and professional and legal support;
- Facilitate free access to the Internet and the flow of and access to information where possible, such as through the facilitation of Virtual Private Networks (VPNs) to bypass the Chinese 'firewall', as well as the facilitation of the production and dissemination of non-CCP-affiliated media via the support of independent Chinese and foreign journalists on the ground in China and pressure on the CCP against their further persecution;
- Push for the international condemnation of the human rights abuses and state suppression and oppression of the CCP via our democratic partners generally and specifically via the

General Assembly and/or Human Rights Council of the UN;

- In accordance with the above and anticipating further retaliation and crackdown by the CCP of these protesters, to call for the creation of an independent evidence gathering mechanism with functions similar to those of the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism (IIIM) for Syria via either the UN General Assembly or Human Rights Council in order to investigate human rights violations committed by the CCP against Chinese citizens, and to assist in any way feasible the coordination of such investigations.

Background

What began as a resistance to the government's 'zero-COVID' policy grew in strength and reached a tipping point after a fire broke out in a residential high-rise in Ürümqi of the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (hereinafter Xinjiang), leading to the death of ten people, as residents were not allowed to leave the building and firefighters were delayed from reaching the residents.

There is no doubt. Reiterating our previous resolution on China adopted at the 33rd EGP Council, the CCP is an authoritarian regime. Its 'zero-COVID' policy, the ruthlessness with which is its enforced and violent suppression of critical opinion is but the latest thread in a pattern over the past decades of sweeping crackdowns and censorship of dissent, free speech, and freedom of press, of erasure and destruction of civil society, and of the ethnic oppression of the Uyghurs, Tibetans, the Mongols, the Hui and others. Oppression, repression, and threats of military forces by the CCP has continually increased across the entirety of China, its disputed territories, and beyond. The CCP's brutalities against activists, dissidents and individuals targeted by the Chinese state include reports of the routine use of torture, forced disappearances, a lack of rule of law and separation of powers with politically controlled courts, and the excessive use of - often politically motivated - death sentences.

Therefore, it is especially notable that these protests have erupted out of Xinjiang, where the mass surveillance state is significantly more expansive than the rest of China. Furthermore, it is where the CCP is reportedly committing crimes against humanity in the region, as assessed in the report by the office of UN high commissioner for human rights Michelle Bachelet, published August 31st and likewise concluded by the European Parliament, which added that there is a high risk of genocide. This includes the ethnic cleansing, and forced internment, sterilisation, 're-education' (noting that 're-education' is the brainwashing through violence, dehumanisation and torture), and exploitation of up to 2 million Uyghurs and other ethnic minorities. However, the CCP has not been formally investigated on this, after such a measure was shot down by China and its allies in the UN Human Rights Council. The report from commissioner Bachelet was not a full investigation, as the UN was never allowed proper access.