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**New Developments in China-EU Relations
Concurrently Analyzing the Trilateral Relations
between China, EU and US**

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I. The New Phase of the China-EU Comprehensive Strategic Partnership

On May 20th 2009 leaders from China and the European Union (EU) held the 11th summit in Prague. Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao was attending the summit along with EU leaders, including Czech President Vaclav Klaus, whose country held the rotating EU presidency, and EU Commission President Jose Barroso and EU foreign policy chief Javier Solana. The 11th summit was originally set for December 2008, but was postponed due to a meeting in Poland between the Dalai Lama and French President Nicolas Sarkozy, whose country was then holding the rotating EU presidency.

According to some European experts' analysis just before the Summit the Prague Summit had perhaps the lowest expectations of any on record. Because "No matter who you talk to in Europe or in China, the best anyone can say about the reinstated summit is that it will happen – hopefully." The results of the summit seem to prove this, for besides a routine joint press communiqué there were only three not very important agreements signed on cooperation in clean energy, science and technology and small- and medium-sized enterprises respectively.

However, if we treat this summit in a different perspective may be the conclusion will be quite a bit different from the previous one. And to some extent this summit can be seen as a new phase of the China-EU comprehensive strategic partnership.

First, this summit took place when the world economy plunged into its first-ever recession in 60 years due to the financial crisis. In this scenario, the summit pushed forward bilateral trade and economic cooperation, a greater necessity than ever for an early recovery of the two trading powers. In 2008, their bilateral trade volume exceeded 400 billion U.S. dollars for the first time. The EU remains China's biggest trade partner and largest export market. Recently, the EU became China's largest source of imports while China remains the EU's second largest trade partner. China's steadily growing market presents great opportunities for European enterprises. "China is one of our most important partners in meeting the challenges of today and tomorrow," Ferrero-Waldner, commissioner for External Relations and European Neighbourhood Policy, told policymakers and diplomats at a conference in Brussels on EU-China relations ahead of the summit.

Just because of this, the two sides agreed to oppose trade and investment protectionism in whatever forms, and the Chinese side said it will shortly send another buying mission to the EU in order to increase imports from Europe. The Chinese side expressed the hope that the EU would relax its export restrictions of high tech products to China so that bilateral trade and investment could continue to increase. The two sides pledged to make new efforts to increase mutual investment and enhance cooperation in small- and medium-sized enterprises, trade

facilitation, science, transportation and postal services. They also agreed to strengthen dialogue on macro-economic policy and finance, and make joint efforts to promote reform of the global financial system.

Second, this summit was held after a series of events between China and Europe from the chaotic situation of the Olympic torch relay in Paris and London (Chinese people watched the relay through TV and internet) to the meeting in Poland between the Dalai Lama and French President Nicolas Sarkozy; from the visits paid by Chinese Premier Wen early in 2009 to the European Commission and three other important EU member states including Germany, Spain, and UK besides Switzerland, but around France, to the Press Communiqué between China and France issued on April 1st, 2009. All these events have actually caused disillusionment of both sides in terms of a comprehensive strategic partnership and also have caused both parts to reconsider the comprehensive strategic partnership in a more realistic way.

The history of establishing the comprehensive strategic partnership between China and the EU shows the illusions among both sides for a certain period. On 2nd April 1998, Premier Zhu Rongji and Prime Minister Blair of UK, the EU rotating chairing country, and Mr. Santer, Chair of the EU Commission held the first leadership meeting between China and Europe in London and issued a Joint Communiqué expressing their willingness to establish an “endurable, stable and constructive partnership” oriented toward the 21st century between China and the EU. Through this meeting, China and Europe have set up a regular meeting mechanism for their leaders, which has played a positive role in promoting the development of the bilateral relations. At the first meeting, the leaders of both sides defined the China-Europe relationship as enduring and stable “constructive partnership” oriented toward the 21st century, later announced the establishment of “comprehensive partnership” in 2001 and decided to upgrade the relationship to a “comprehensive strategic partnership” in 2003. In May 2004 during Premier Wen Jiabao’s visit to Europe, many European countries advocated the strategic partnership between China and EU. Obviously the establishment of “comprehensive strategic partnership” between China and the EU and its important member states including France, Germany, and UK happened just during the second Iraq war, and both sides seemed begin to think that the relations between China and EU would be more important than the relations between EU and the US or between China and the US. Just because of this, China has also established a strategic consultation mechanism on security with some EU members, to ensure mutual understanding and support on major issues bilaterally. Both China and Europe uphold the role of UN and multilateralism to be strengthened and share identical or similar positions on many international issues. Both sides thought that strengthening consultations and cooperation between China and Europe without the US would play a fairly positive role in promoting

world peace, stability and development. Unfortunately, since 2006 the EU and its big member states reconsidered and re-adjusted their policy towards US, things have been changing and both sides have realized that they were living in a world where the bilateral relationship between China and EU is not the most important one, although we still need to maintain the “comprehensive strategic partnership”.

Third, this summit was held when lots of Western IR scholars and even some political elites suggested establishing a G2 model to monopolize world affairs. This view has already aroused the EU’s concern as well as China’s serious response. However, the Chinese premier’s rejection to this allegation has clarified China’s stance on this issue and helped to strengthen the bilateral relations between China and EU.

Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao dismissed as groundless the view that China and the United States — or the so-called Group of Two (G2) — will monopolize world affairs in the future. He told reporters at the end of a China-EU summit, "Some say that world affairs will be managed solely by China and the United States. I think that view is baseless and wrong." Wen also argued, "It is impossible for a couple of countries or a group of big powers to resolve all global issues. Multipolarization and multilateralism represent the larger trend and the will of people." China is committed to an independent foreign policy of peace and pursues a win-win strategy of opening up, said Wen. "It stands ready to develop friendly relations and cooperation with all countries and it will never seek hegemony."

Obviously, the Chinese premier’s rejection of the allegation that China and the US would monopolize world affairs in the future helped to let his European counterparts understand China’s official view of the current international system. Just like Barroso said, "We will continue our open and constructive dialogue, which is built on the successful visit of Premier Wen to Brussels at the end of January. Both the EU and China are committed to our comprehensive strategic partnership." Clearly, both Wen and Barroso agree that the so-called G2 won’t be the choice for managing the international affairs in the future which means that the Chinese premier's European tour really boosted mutual political trust and pragmatic co-operation between China and EU in a new perception for the comprehensive strategic partnership. (Up to now, the two sides have set up over 50 consultation and dialogue mechanisms covering political, trade, scientific, energy and environment areas.)

Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel once said, “The absolute idea may in this respect be compared to the old man who utters the same creed as the child, but for whom it is pregnant with the significance of a lifetime. Even if the child understands the truths of religion, he cannot but imagine them to be something outside of which lies the whole of life and the whole of the world.” [Shorter Logic (1830)] Although we can not say that the “comprehensive strategic partnership” between China and EU has been understood fully with the significance of a

lifetime of an old man, it is quite clear that it has been understood better than a child does. It seems to me that after this 11th China EU summit China EU comprehensive strategic partnership will be more and more mature.

(Actually Chinese well known poet Xin Qiji (Song dynasty) expressed the same meaning as Hegel's philosophical words in his famous poem *Chounüer*:

While young, I knew no grief I could not bear.
I'd like to go up-stair.
I'd like to go up-stair.
To write new verses, with a false despair.

I know what grief is now that I am old.
I would not have it told.
I would not have it told.
But only say How chilly in the autumn's cold)

II. A Brief Analysis of the Trilateral Relations between China, EU and the US

A. *China, EU and the US are playing more and more important roles in global affairs*

1) Up until now the GDP of the US, EU, and China together has exceeded more than half of the total global GDP. According to the World Bank estimation based on PPP, the US total GDP in 2007 accounted for 21.34% of the whole global GDP while the EU accounted for 22.3%, and China for 10.81%. Noticeably, the World Bank also forecasts that in the near future, say in 2010, the number will become around 20% for both US and EU and 14% for China, which means China will contribute more for the world economy in the near future although US and EU will keep their leading position in the global economy. Nevertheless China will be the third largest economic entity and the big three all together will play the decisive role in global economy.

2) In global political affairs China, EU and US all have their important influences and are playing great parts. Needless to say the US is still the first superpower in the world and its military stronger than that of the other big powers in the world. Needless to say, US hard power has a direct impact on world politics especially in traditional international security. Recently the European Union's normative power has increased compellingly and began to play a more and more important role in international politics. The EU has already taken the leadership in lots of non-traditional international security especially in climate change and other

environmental issues with its normative power. As a rising power, China's hard power and soft power have also increased continuously. However, China mainly focuses on promoting the harmonious world with its power in international politics.

3) With their respective hard, soft, normative, and smart powers China, US and EU are playing most important roles in nearly all the fields from economic to political affair, from traditional to non-traditional security in current international system.

B. The cooperation between China, EU and US has had and will have more and more important impact on current international relations

1) Without doubt, in today's world economy the cooperation among China, US and EU is so important that without it there will be more difficulties in tackling the global financial crisis. It is really hard to imagine what will happen if China, the United States and the European Union carried out "beg thy neighbour" policy in this global financial crisis just as the United States, Great Britain, France, and other big powers did in the 1929-1939 Great Economic Crisis and Great Depression which finally led to WWII. Although there are no economic trilateral cooperation mechanisms between China, US and EU for coordinating their economic policies in terms of solving the global economic problems, the three parties have cooperated extensively through bilateral mechanisms and other multilateral mechanisms like the G20 Financial Summit etc. in dealing with the global financial crisis and other important world economic issues.

2) In international politics, especially in the traditional and non-traditional security, the cooperation between China, US, and EU has become more and more important. For example in the anti-terrorist war China, US and EU have cooperated with each other to a certain degree, although if there had had more effective cooperation, collaboration or coordination among the three the task would have been fulfilled more favourably. It seems even more necessary for the three to collaborate in dealing with climate change for without the close cooperation among China, US and EU this serious issue cannot be handled effectively.

C. Although there is no high level trilateral cooperation mechanism among China, EU and US there are mature China-US, China-EU and US-EU Bilateral Cooperation Mechanisms

1) Up until now China and the United States have set up the bilateral constructive and cooperative relations and they handle their bilateral ties in a long-term and strategic perspective (although China has been defined by US as strategic partner,

strategic competitor, and stake holder at different time since the Clinton administration). In this relationship China and United States have set up two very important high level cooperative mechanisms: The China-US Strategic Economic Dialogue and China-US Strategic Dialogue. The 5th China-US Strategic Economic Dialogue was held from 4th -5th, Dec., 2008 in Beijing and the 6th China-US Strategic Economic Dialogue was held in Washington on Dec. 15th. Both dialogues focus on how to keep a healthy and stable momentum in the development of China-U.S. economic and political relations and how to enhance the two-way cooperation and coordination on regional and global issues. (Former US Deputy Secretary of State John Negroponte said, China and the United States are "increasingly interdependent" following three decades of building close economic and political ties. He also said, "That requires we conduct the relationship on a very mature basis and that's what we sought to do.") At the moment people may be a little bit concerned about whether the US new administration will avoid the temptation to copy the early Bush administration's "anything but Clinton" approach to China. However just as former American ambassador to China Lord said, "Overall, the American policy with China will remain essentially the same under the Obama administration, if you look at what Obama has been saying about U.S.-China relations, look at what type of people he has been appointing to key foreign policy positions, these suggest great continuity."

2) China and the EU founded the formal diplomatic relationship in 1975. Since the very beginning of 21st century, China and EU and most of its main member state have set up comprehensive strategic partnership relations. From 1999 China and EU had 10 Summits which have become the main China-EU cooperation mechanism. Because China and the EU both claim to strengthen the function of the United Nations and to promote multilateralism in current international affairs the two have the same and close positions on lots of international issues, although sometimes there are still some conflicts between them. Just because of this the cooperative mechanism between China and EU has played a very important role in promoting bilateral relations as well as stabilizing regional and world situations. Although the 11th China-EU summit has been postponed because of the meeting with the Dalai Lama by French President Nicolas Sarkozy, both sides still maintain the comprehensive strategic partnership and even continued their human rights dialogue in Nov. 2008. The reason for this is that EU is the largest trading partner for China and the first technology provider to China while China is EU's second largest trading partner and both of them need to cooperate in the global financial crisis.

3) This year NATO will celebrate its 60th birthday. Needless to say that NATO is still the most important cooperation mechanism between US and Europe.

Although during the run-up of the Iraq war and even in the early period of the war the transatlantic relationship deteriorated, the US-European Alliance was maintained and EU-US cooperative mechanisms such as the US-EU summit etc. have never been affected. Actually from the second Bush administration transatlantic relations have been better and better. Both German Chancellor Angela Merkel and French President Nicolas Sarkozy have shifted German and French policy towards the Bush administration. Merkel's pro-Americanism and Sarkozy's stated intention to improve France's difficult partnership with the United States stand in stark contrast to the policies of their predecessors, Gerhard Schroeder and Jacques Chirac. It is pretty reasonable to predict that the new Obama administration will strengthen transatlantic relations and build a new partnership across the Atlantic.

D. It is quite necessary to establish or to initiate the High Level China-EU-US Trilateral Cooperative Mechanism such as a trilateral strategic dialogue and strategic economic dialogue or even a Trilateral Summit

1) The current bilateral cooperative mechanisms between China-US, China-EU and US-EU are not sufficient for the three to collaborate effectively in the more and more globalized world which means that globalization and global governance need the China-US-EU trilateral cooperative mechanism. For example, if there had been China-US-EU trilateral financial cooperative mechanism it would have been more effective for the whole world to handle the financial crisis.

2) Not only can a trilateral cooperative mechanism make up the shortages of the bilateral mechanisms between China, US and EU, but it can also strengthen the existing bilateral mechanisms. On the other hand when the bilateral mechanisms meet some problems or face some new challenges like in the run-up to the Iraq War in 2003, the trilateral cooperative mechanism can provide opportunities for mending the rift in the bilateral mechanism.

3) With the help of a China-US-EU high level trilateral cooperative mechanism the three sides can learn from others' strong points to offset one's weaknesses. To some extent trilateral mechanisms are even able to let the strong points of each side be much stronger and the weakness much weaker, which means that the 1+1+1 in the trilateral mechanism will be bigger than 3 in terms of making and keeping world peace. It is quite clear that the China-US-EU trilateral cooperative mechanism will be helpful for maintaining world peace and promote world welfare.

4) Actually there are some tentative low level China-US-EU trilateral cooperative mechanisms such as the China-US-EU Commodity Security Cooperation Conference. The Conference was held in Brussels in November 2008 and the three

parts signed a communiqué to promote the collaboration between China, US and EU in keeping the commodity safety while the trade between the three parts has developed so fast. I do think that this was a first step for China, US and EU to cooperate with each other in a trilateral mechanism but it won't be the last one.

To live in a dream is dangerous, but to live without dreams is hopeless!