

As tensions with US mount, Germany reaffirms “strategic partnership” with China

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Under conditions of mounting tensions with the United States, Germany is expanding its already close political and economic ties with China.

At a joint press conference in Berlin with Chinese Prime Minister Li Keqiang, German Chancellor Angela Merkel said on Thursday that in the period since China initiated diplomatic relations with Germany 45 years ago, the country has “become an increasingly important and now strategic partner.” This applies to “the entire spectrum” of relations, “of a political as well as economic nature ... but also with regard to the cooperation on cultural and social issues.”

“At times of global instability,” Merkel said, both countries feel they “have a responsibility to expand our partnership in these diverse areas and intervene in favour of a rules-based global order.” She was “happy” that there was “during this year a very intensive exchange.” Another visit is planned by Chinese President Xi Jinping ahead of the G20 summit in early July in Hamburg.

Trading relations had been “an important subject” in the talks, Merkel continued. It had been “agreed that trading nations like Germany and China should cooperate and issue a clear recognition of free trade,” declared Merkel, in what was a barely concealed swipe at US President Donald Trump. At the G7 summit last week, Trump repeated his criticism of Germany’s trade surplus and threatened to adopt counter-measures.

Germany’s political and economic relations with China are already more developed than with any other country outside of the European Union (EU). Regular government consultations have been taking place between the two countries since 2011. “China was our most important trading partner in 2016, with a bilateral trade volume of €170 billion. These are already very impressive figures,” Merkel said. Merkel and Li had “discussed that we want to expand these developments, which have been positive for both sides.”

The two countries signed 11 agreements and declarations of intent, according to the German government’s web site, including on cooperation in air travel technology, electronic mobility and recycling technology, and in the area of artificial intelligence. Partners on the German side included industrial giants like Airbus, Daimler, VW and Bosch, as well as mid-sized businesses and research institutes.

Deutsche Bank signed a five-year cooperation agreement with the China Development Bank (CDB) on Tuesday. Both banks committed in the agreement to finance projects on the “New Silk Road,” up to a cost of \$3 billion. With its “One Belt, One Road” initiative, the Chinese government hopes to revive the trade route of the Middle Ages with massive investments in infrastructure in order to connect China’s major economic centres with Europe and Africa.

Germany and China also intend to cooperate more closely in the future on climate protection measures. China will “continue to adhere to its promises within the framework of the Paris Agreement on climate change,” Li announced in Berlin, only a few hours before Donald Trump declared the US was exiting the deal in Washington. The picture of Merkel and Li jointly reaffirming their commitment to the Paris Agreement took on a symbolic character under such conditions and was circulated widely around the world.

It is expected that during his visit to Brussels today, Li will sign a joint agreement with EU Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker and Council President Donald Tusk on wide-ranging cooperation to combat climate change.

Cooperation between Germany and China on security policy matters is relatively new. With regard to North Korea, they “shared the conviction that North Korea could pose a danger to world peace,” Merkel said. At the same time, they were “committed to a negotiated solution

that is very, very urgent.” Germany declared its readiness “to be able to contribute to such a solution.”

Li also noted that they “want to cooperate more closely on other security policy matters.” Among other things, Germany and China want to “provide assistance to Afghanistan to rebuild its society and economy, and help them to increase their security capabilities so that the population can live there in peace.” The two countries would consult closely on “other international issues,” including “the Iranian nuclear dossier and the Istanbul process.”

Cooperation is also developing in the military sphere. German soldiers took part in joint exercises with troops from the Chinese People’s Liberation Army for the first time on Chinese territory during the 2016 “Combined Aid 2016” aid exercise. It was the first joint exercise between the PLA and any European army. Armed forces from both countries are already working side by side in Africa in UN missions, such as Minusma in Mali.

The deepening cooperation between Berlin and Beijing in a number of important policy areas is directly bound up with fraying Transatlantic relations, which have been a cornerstone of German foreign policy since the founding of the Federal Republic 70 years ago. Following last week’s NATO and G7 summits, Merkel called the alliance with the US into question during a speech in a Munich beer tent on Sunday, and declared that Germany would now take its “fate” into its own hands.

Although neither Merkel nor Li referred to the US or Trump by name during the press conference, German-Chinese cooperation is increasingly directed against the policies of the US, which is turning to economic protectionism and preparing for a military confrontation with Iran and North Korea. Such conflicts would not only be targeted at China, but also the geopolitical and economic interests being pursued by German imperialism in Asia.



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