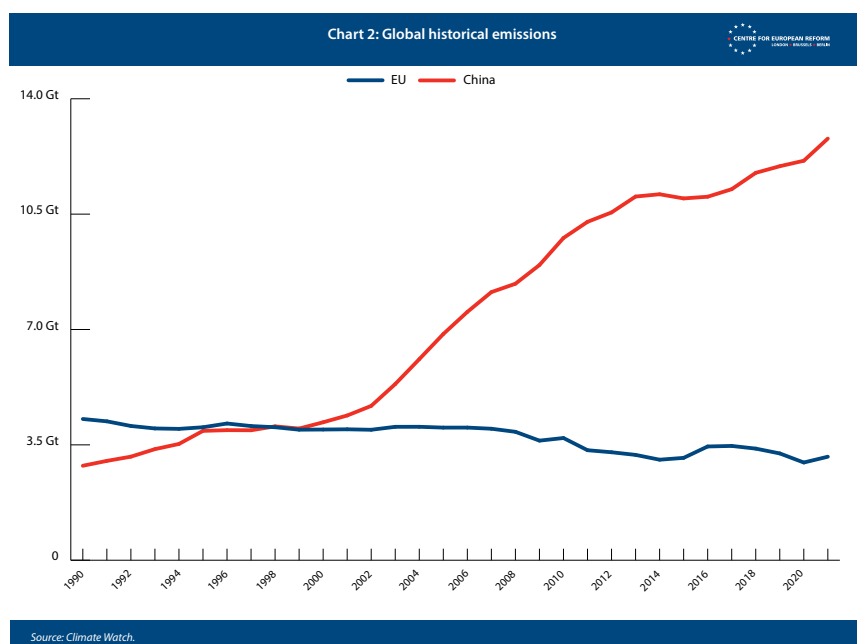




European policy-makers must rethink climate engagement with China

In 2019, the EU coined a new way of talking about its increasingly complex relationship with China. According to this threefold approach China is a partner, a competitor and a systemic rival. When asked about the partnership dimension of the relationship, many European officials point to climate, but China does not see things this way. A new policy brief [‘Between competition and co-operation: How to engage with China’](#) from the Centre for European Reform challenges the notion that climate co-operation can be isolated from other contentious aspects of China’s relationship with the EU and US. Christina Keßler, author of the policy brief, urges European policy-makers to reassess their climate engagement with China.

The urgency of tackling climate change means waiting for a more favourable geopolitical moment is not an option. European policy-makers must identify areas where climate co-operation with China is both possible and effective, while also leveraging competitive dynamics, particularly in green technology, to benefit climate action. China’s relationship with climate action is seemingly marked by contradictions. The country is the world’s largest carbon emitter and hosts approximately half of the world’s coal power plants. At the same time, it is investing in green technology on a massive scale. To advance climate action, policy-makers must recognise that China’s energy policy is driven by economics and energy security concerns.



International climate diplomacy may be reaching its limits, but opportunities for depoliticised co-operation remain. The EU and China can still exchange technical knowledge and establish shared standards to yield significant benefits despite broader strategic competition. Additionally, aligning co-operative efforts with Chinese interests and providing incentives will be crucial. A balanced approach, incorporating both co-operation and competition, is essential. China's dual role as the world's largest greenhouse gas emitter and the biggest investor in renewables means the EU cannot afford to ignore the country. To advance climate action, policy-makers must navigate the complexities of the EU-China relationship, utilising both collaborative and competitive strategies.

Climate co-operation with China will become only more important for Europe if Donald Trump is elected President again in November. Europe should seize this opportunity. Where the space for climate co-operation is closing, there is space to advance through climate competition.

Christina Keßler, author of the policy brief, said: "China has strategically positioned itself to be at the centre of the world's new energy system. From solar panels to batteries for electric vehicles (EVs), from wind turbines to critical minerals, China leads the global renewables market. Some analysts warn that Europe could slip from dependency on Russian gas straight into the next one, this time on Chinese clean energy technology. But the truth is, Europe is already dependent on China. In order to advance of climate issues, European policy-makers need to do both: climate co-operation and climate competition."

Notes for editors:

For further information on the new research and to request an interview with Christina Keßler [@christina_ksslr](https://twitter.com/christina_ksslr) please contact Octavia Hughes in the CER press office on pressoffice@cer.eu or +44 (0) 20 7233 1199.

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