

## **Addressing the pandemic: China issues white paper on COVID-19, pledges 2 billions US dollars and suspends debt repayment to 77 BRI participating countries**

*In the light of the COVID-19 pandemics, China's relations with foreign countries has largely consolidated and improved. While the international community was quick to convey its condolences and support through letters and high-level phone calls, China reacted by exporting sanitary materials to over 200 countries and regions.*

*On a bilateral level, China granted a "fast track" access to logistics, technical services and production of medical materials to Germany, Singapore and South Korea, emphasizing the special importance China attached to its particular counterparts. Likewise, according to the Chinese Vice Foreign Minister Ma Zhaoxu, China and Russia "actively carried out anti-epidemic cooperation" as an extension of their privileged bilateral relations ("comprehensive strategic partnership").*

*As fears that some BRI-member countries might default their loans to China have arisen, on June 8, Foreign Minister Ma announced suspension of debt repayment schemes to "77 countries and regions", part of a G-20 strategy of easing the economic burden created by the pandemic for the most impoverished states. However, details on the terms of debt relief or the names of the particular countries aimed by the above measure have not been provided.*

*In addition, the cooperation mechanisms in setting counterpart hospitals in 30 African countries have been stepped up.*

*Multilaterally, China topped up its contributions to the World Health Organisation/ WHO, indirectly stressing the void left by other countries as well as the intention of stewarding the anti-pandemic fight and continuing its "charm offensive". In fact, after announcing it will contribute 30 million US dollars in April and donating 20 million US dollars in March, the Chinese president pledged a 2 billion US aid to be provided over a period of two years. The pledge, iterated by President Xi at the World Health Assembly further confirms the intensification of China's "charm offensive" actions.*

*Internally, the Information Office of the State Council released, on June 7, a 66-page white paper on fighting the pandemics. The paper highlights China's effective actions in combating the pandemics, focusing on how the spread of the disease was contained within a month and how the daily rate of infections dropped to single digit figures in two months time. China's liaison with the WHO, particularly the initial announcement on the epidemic China issued on January 3, received a particular attention in the document. While the actions have been described as a tremendous victory, some foreign analysts interpreted it as an implicit official response to*

detractors alleging the mismanagement of the COVID-19 crisis.

*While facing the pandemics, China demonstrated not only determination, but similarly coordination and the willingness to help its counterparts. The Covid-19 crisis has also witnessed a boost in China's efforts to project soft power at bilateral and multilateral level, a change in attitude if compared to Deng's "bide your time" strategy ("taoguang yanghui"). Though some measures are readily visible, the degree of extent and the full consequences of China's actions could only be fully scrutinized in the post-Covid era.*

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