



## China Data Analysis & Research Hub (CDA)

**Alexander G. WELZL, President of CDA, in an interview with Shanghai Media Group (SMG) on February 22, 2021 in CDA headquarter in Vienna/Austria - <https://www.cda-hub.eu/>**

**SMG: How would you evaluate the efforts made by China to control the pandemic over the past year? Which experiences of China would be recommended for the other countries, as it's one of the first countries that controlled the pandemic?**

**WELZL:** First of all I am impressed by the endurance, discipline, learning curve and entrepreneurship power of the Chinese people. On the governance level the targeted and strategic approach of policy making and implementation to lead a country with 1,4 billion inhabitants has proven to be successful.

With regard to the way how China managed the impact of the pandemic in the last 12 months one could observe the following until today: the Chinese government and the Chinese people have reacted resolutely, quickly and in an exemplary manner to the existential challenge of COVID-19 in an international comparison. Effectiveness of measures and united action were, as we have now learned in Europe in the past months, the only correct answer to this crisis.

What we can see is the successful interaction of a set of measures and instruments. From the economic and social perspective, the interplay between the individual citizens in the community and the intelligent use of innovative technologies is crucial for success. As we have seen in China and continuously see the example of individual European countries, nationwide use of digital technologies is essential for coping with everyday life in this global crisis.

The Chinese government, ministries, universities and companies, have in the recent months promoted the scientifically supported learning process as well as the further development of the latest technologies for coping with the crisis through a multitude of initiatives.

In the high-tech sector, the **Ministry of Industry and Information Technology (MIIT)** has taken measures to implement nationwide projects for “new infrastructures” (5G network, industrial internet and artificial intelligence) faster in those regions of the country which are in a low level of risk.

**Ministry of Science and Technology (MOST)** has launched an innovation platform, with which national high-tech zones provided and disseminated innovative products and technology developments nationwide that accelerate the resumption of economic activity in China. These include innovations in the areas of diagnosis and treatment, hospital construction, temperature measurement and monitoring, epidemic prevention and surveillance, measures for disinfection and protection against infection as well as new services and management approaches at the regional level.

**On the medical level**, extensive research activities were started under the leadership of MOST to understand the spread of the virus and the course of the disease, to continuously improve the test methods and to develop optimal treatment methods for the patients. At the same time, several Chinese research teams and corporations like SINOVAC and SINOPHARM were working in parallel on the development of an effective novel vaccine.

The **large and state-owned enterprises (SOEs)**, with their resources and opportunities, have made it possible above all to build hospitals quickly, to produce medical materials, to support everyday life in China and to provide technical services for vital processes.

**From the point of view of SASAC (the state holding for SOEs)**, the COVID-19 crisis also represents a stress test for Chinese technology companies and for the resilience of the entire National Innovation System.

In order to cope with this pandemic, the **nationwide use of digital technologies** is particularly important in China: big data, artificial intelligence (AI), robot technologies, 5G and cloud computing. Innovative, digital technologies are essential in the diagnosis, the analysis of the spread and the treatment of COVID-19 (including track-and-trace systems via smart phones), as well as in the maintenance of daily life (online shopping, online learning, online meetings). WeChat and the other digital media play an important role for the individuals in China, especially during the week-long lock-down in times of COVID-19. There is no doubt that the epidemic in China has further accelerated the social acceptance of digital technologies in large parts of the population.

**SMG: This is a critical time for international cooperation. What role do you think China has played in addressing this global challenge, and in what other areas should it make efforts?**

**WELZL:** Let me repeat something I recently wrote when reflecting on Europe's and China's global footprint: **“while Europe and the European Union after 70 years of peace maybe seen as a global blue-print for peacefully build a supranational federation of states, China – after 60 years of successful development - turns out to be a global role-model for developing countries”**.

In the recent years China has started to develop, communicate and implement its **“global development narrative”** that consists of a combination of the BRI, the new structural economics approach for a macro-economic development model with Chinese characteristics and the **Dual Circulation approach**.

China **signed the Paris agreement to reduce greenhouse gases (CO2)** and jointly fights with the other nations against global warming. Just this February the country has launched a national carbon emissions trading scheme. In **multilateral organisations like the United Nations China has continuously gained weight**. Also with regard to taking leading positions. If we look for instance at the UN seat here in Vienna the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) is headed by a Chinese diplomat, Director General Mr. Li Yong.

Due to China's growing position as one of the leading nations the global responsibility of China vis a vis the other nations is also growing continuously. **Having said that UNIDO under Chinese lead could even more evolve in its role as a stimulating agent and meeting place for dialogue and joint problem solving that is publicly visible**. On the side of multilateral finance the **Asian Infrastructure Investment bank (AIIB)** could take a even more active role in the coming years to invest in successful recovery programs and sustainably stimulating transformation of infrastructure as well as metropolitan development worldwide.

**Beyond this China could intensify its efforts to establish itself actively as a global meeting place for peaceful, innovative and forward-looking multilateral dialogue**. By organising global round-tables, conferences and online-meetings to spur multilateralism and global collaboration China could contribute its share of global responsibility. The **annual Boao Forum in Hainan** taking place since 2002 is an important step in this direction.

**SMG: WHO warns that vaccine nationalism may prolong the global pandemic. On February 3, China announced to provide 10 million doses of vaccine to the implementation program at the request of WHO. How could China contribute to the most urgent task of promoting vaccines as a global public good?**

**WELZL: The ongoing pandemic is in my point of view a testbed and preparation for the fundamental changes that lie ahead of us in the coming decades caused by climate change and the related effects**. The pandemic urges mankind all over the globe for the first time since a century to change daily life based on a natural agent: in this case a tiny virus. And the most important lesson we probably have to learn is that **the only way to cope with the challenges of this pandemic is global cooperation!**

On international level this means **strengthening of the WHO as a multilateral platform of coordination** to fight Covid-19. This means both: cooperation with WHO officials as well as financing. **Openness, transparency, cooperation and providing reliable data** is a task to be delivered by all countries.

With regard to improvement and changes of individual lifestyle of people and their contribution to a healthier society the **concept of Health Promoting Hospitals** is a necessary building block on national level. In this context the **Chinese government promotes the Healthy China 2030 vision and action plan**.

**SMG: French President Macron has previously said that China's "clear diplomatic success" in vaccine distribution may have "embarrassed" Western leaders, while some Western media have argued that China's vaccine data is not transparent enough. What do you think of this tendency to politicize the issue of vaccines? How should Europe and China cooperate in the vaccine distribution?**

**WELZL: A major step in the right direction are trust-building measures based on facts and transparency.** An evidence-based approach and the dedication to cooperate on the European as well as the Chinese side can help reduce misleading developments.

**A helpful step could be a joint Sino-European evaluation programs of new vaccines in collaboration with the producing corporations in China (Sinovac, Sinopharm) and leading medical research institutions in Europe.** Potential collaboration partners in Europe could be for instance the Karolinska Institute in Stockholm/Sweden and the Robert Koch Institute in Berlin/Germany. **A joint Sino-European vaccine commission could care for standardised data exchange, evaluation of vaccines and could lend itself as a platform for dialogue and negotiation regarding the distribution of vaccines.**

Especially **Karolinska Institute – which is also the seat of the Nobel Assembly and Nobel Committee for the Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine – has very long experiences in scientific exchange with Chinese institutions and scholars in medical research.** Actually a Professor and medical scholar of Karolinska Institute is the European Chair of the CDA Scientific Advisory Board. Together with his Chinese counterpart, a Professor and economist from University of Chinese Academy of Sciences he contributes to the strategic orientation of our Sino-European think tank CDA.

**SMG: China's position in the global industrial chain has increased, while some Western countries and media have expressed concern and raised the idea of shifting the industrial chain away from China. How should China respond?**

**WELZL: Currently we are at a turning point due to several overlapping grand transformations and challenges.** This causes a lot of imbalances, considerations of approaches and models of societal as well as economic organisation. Digital transformation, climate change, demographic change, urbanisation as well as resource depletion lead to fundamental changes.

As a matter of fact **economic collaboration is one of the major success factors for building and maintaining peace.** On the other hand the pandemic as well as **the grand challenges we face call for rethinking of existing models and reform, a rebalancing of our global economic system. Innovation is at the core of this change.**

Against this backdrop Chinas approach to implement a **model of Dual Circulation is an understandable step.** Strengthening domestic consumption and indigenous innovation capacities in China will probably go hand in hand with **another focus on multilateral**

**engagement and treaties.** A current example of this approach obviously is the **Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership**, an agreement guaranteeing free trade between the 15 member countries. This is the biggest trade bloc in history accounting for about 30% of the world's population and 30% of global GDP as of 2020.

**In addition China's new position as one of the leading countries suggests to take an active and ambitious role in a global context.** Against the backdrop of the pandemic and global warming a **novel approach of a planetary patriotism is needed.** Balancing national needs with global challenges calls for China joining forces in the field of energy efficiency, artificial intelligence, novel mobility concepts and many other fields. **The Comprehensive Agreement on Investment, signed by China and the European Union in December 2020 is an important step underpinning the notion of a community of common destiny.** Former German Chancellor Willy Brandt once said "Peace is not everything but without peace everything is nothing".

**SMG: The Chinese government has repeatedly promised the world that it will implement a higher level of openness. In your opinion, in what areas should China make further breakthroughs?**

WELZL: At the beginning of the 21st century it becomes clear, that we share the fate of a „community of common destiny“. Let me also quote French President Emmanuel Macron who said that "there is no planet B" during his speech to US congress in Washington in 2018.

In the coming time breakthroughs and efforts of the Peoples Republic of China in the following fields and areas of initiatives would be helpful for the common good:

- 1. Strengthen joint programs on alternative energy sources and technologies**
- 2. Set up of a joint program on sustainable climate friendly logistics**
- 3. Set up and maintain several joint Sino-European eco-business parks and eco-city concepts in China and Europe like Nantong Eco-Business Park in Jiangsu Province (where China and the federal Republic of Austria join forces)**
- 4. An important step would be a stronger cooperation in the field of statistics to develop a common understanding and mutual trust in data provided on a national level**
- 5. Start a discourse on the approach of New Structural Economics of Prof. Lin Justin Yifu (Peking University, Institute of New Structural Economics)**
- 6. Joint development of new approaches in sustainable digitally enhanced tourism**
- 7. Encourage and enlarge scientific exchange programs as well as student exchange in both directions**