

Maas calls for 'open dialogue' with China

The German foreign minister's comments come ahead of a meeting with EU counterparts on the bloc's China strategy. Recent developments in Hong Kong present a "test of the EU's political ambitions."



German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas has touted an open dialogue with China, ahead of a conference between European Union foreign ministers on Friday.

Maas told reporters that the best way to influence China on the Hong Kong dispute was for the EU to stand united in its response and to maintain dialogue with Beijing.

"I think the past has shown that it is, above all, important to have a dialogue with China in which the EU very cohesively brings both its issues and principles to the fore, and then we will see where this dialogue leads," he said.

Maas also said that Hong Kong's high degree of autonomy "must not be undermined." Unlike the United States, however, the EU has not yet planned any sanctions on China.

The leaders are set to discuss a long-term strategy towards China in a video conference on Friday, against the backdrop of recent developments and flaring tensions in Hong Kong.

In his letter of invitation, EU Foreign Affairs Commissioner Josep Borrell described China's approach to Hong Kong as a "test of the EU's geopolitical ambitions."

China approved a controversial security law last Thursday, which critics say infringes on civil rights in the city-state.

The law, aimed at quelling protests that have rocked the city over the past year, bans "any acts or activities" that endanger China's national security, including subversion, separatism and terrorism.

What's on the agenda

The meeting had initially been scheduled to focus on China, regardless of the events in Hong Kong, in light of two upcoming meetings with Beijing this year. One of those meetings is set to take place in Leipzig in September and will see the agreement of an investment protection agreement.

Aside from Hong Kong, ministers are also expected to discuss China's commitments to agreements made in March 2019 and the country's approach towards international investors. The EU believes China "changes the rules in the middle of a match" and has not promoted a "level playing field" in terms of adherence to the rule of law.

The online press conference is expected to take place at 1 p.m. CET (11 a.m. UTC).

lc/rt (Reuters, AFP)

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