D4.7 THIRD PROGRESS REPORT ON RESEARCH CLUSTERS WP4 AND RESEARCH WORKSHOP

Project Information	
Acronym	ReConnect China
Title	ReConnect China: generating independent knowledge for a resilient future with China for Europe and its citizens.
Project no.	101061483
Type of Action	RIA
Deliverable Information	
Title	**D4.7 Third Progress Report on Research Clusters WP4 and Research Workshop**
WP number and title	WP4
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Description	Annual summary of the progress made in the research clusters of WP4 and the thematic Research workshop on Chinese diplomacy with EU policymakers, stakeholders
Lead Beneficiary	Egmont
Type	R: Document, report
Dissemination Level	PU: Public
Status	Draft
History of Changes	
Version 1.0	Version submitted as deliverable (15.10.2025)

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1   EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The present document constitutes the **D4.7 Third Progress Report on Research Clusters WP4 and Research Workshop** ReConnect China, a project funded by the European Commission under its Horizon EUROPE Framework Programme for Research and Innovation under the grant agreement no. 101061483. The main objective of this deliverable is to provide an annual summary of the progress made in the research clusters of WP4 and the thematic Research workshop on Chinese diplomacy with EU policymakers, stakeholders.

The ReConnect China team regards dissemination and exploitation as key "deliverables" linked to the realisation of project objectives in the short term, and various forms of project impact in the long term. In this understanding, achieving any sustainability for the project's activities beyond the project duration (= the funding period) is largely depending on how successful dissemination and exploitation was conducted during the project as well. In addition to many other examples of EU funded projects labelled as specific success stories in their respective disciplines[1], the already concluded S4D4C project on science diplomacy could be mentioned in this regard. As a research project (S4D4C was a RIA project: Research and Innovation Action) in the Social Sciences and Humanities (SSH), the project's widely acknowledged impact was no implicitness. RIA projects, contrary to IA (Innovation Actions) projects and in particular those in the SSH, often struggle with channelling their work towards one "most important" output – whatever this is, a new policy recommendation, a new service, a new product or process, a new use model etc. Thanks to S4D4C's strategic choice to develop a Science Diplomacy Training Course, many stakeholders

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[1] The European Commission website on success stories of R&I projects collects such examples:
 https://ec.europa.eu/research-and-innovation/en/projects/success-stories

could be reached. This (but not only) led to the formation of a European Union Science Diplomacy Alliance[1] after the project's end. This alliance continues its work until today.

2   INTRODUCTION (THE PROJECT)

ReConnect China aims to answer the question in which domains collaboration of the EU with China is desirable, possible, or impossible. The question in which domains EU collaboration with China is desirable, possible, or impossible starts from the acknowledgment that in the modern geopolitical and geo-economic world, the EU and China stand in a perpetual dynamic relationship with each other. This project therefore identifies the following key fields on which the EU should upgrade its independent knowledge: Science & Technology, Economy & Trade, Domestic Governance, and Foreign Policy. To carry out this project, a database which will provide access to new sources of information will be developed. The independent knowledge that will be generated in this project will bring together stakeholders and experts in a Europe-China Knowledge Forum. The project also envisages to enhance awareness on China among the general public and youth.

3   DELIVERABLE SCOPE

The main objective of this deliverable is to provide an annual summary of the progress made in the research clusters of WP4 and the thematic Research workshop on Chinese diplomacy with EU policymakers, stakeholders.

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[1] https://www.science-diplomacy.eu/

4   REFERENCE DOCUMENTS

- ReConnect China Grant Agreement no. 101061483

- ReConnect China Consortium Agreement

- ReConnect China Project Management Handbook (D7.1)

- Horizon EUROPE Online Manual https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/funding-tenders-opportunities/display/OM/Grant+management

- European Research Executive Agency – Communicating about your EU funded project https://rea.ec.europa.eu/communicating-about-your-eu-funded-project_en

- European Research Executive Agency – Horizon Europe Dissemination and Exploitation https://rea.ec.europa.eu/horizon-europe-dissemination-and-exploitation_en

Explanation of the work carried out in the WP and summary of progress towards objectives

During the reporting timeframe, WP4 delivered a comprehensive set of policy-oriented outputs and outreach activities. Under T4.1, a policy brief was produced on responding with data to China's supposed divide-and-rule diplomacy in the EU (UGent), alongside a research paper on Taiwan examining the positions of Lithuania and the Czech Republic and the costs of diverging from the "One China" consensus (UTARTU). Under T4.2, two policy briefs were completed: one on China and great-power rivalries, with a focus on the China-Russia partnership and the Ukraine war (IFRI), and another on China's growing presence in Africa (UGent), emphasising that Europe's response to the PLA in West Africa should go beyond military considerations. WP4 also organised a targeted policy workshop, which successfully took place in Prague, bringing together researchers, policymakers, and practitioners (UPOL). Under T4.3, a policy brief was finalised on technical standards, soft connectivity, and China's Belt and Road Initiative, analysing whether emerging dynamics are leading towards convergence or fragmentation (IFRI).

WP4 has made strong progress towards its objectives of providing timely and policy-relevant analysis, strengthening engagement with EU stakeholders, and enhancing the visibility of project findings. The set of five policy briefs and one research paper completed within this reporting period covers a wide thematic spectrum—from intra-EU dynamics and great-power rivalries to Africa, technical standards, and Taiwan—ensuring the consortium's outputs are both comprehensive and strategically relevant. The Prague workshop further reinforced the project's impact by creating a direct channel for discussion with policymakers. Overall, WP4 has met its objectives, translating research into actionable recommendations and ensuring effective dissemination in line with the Grant Agreement

T4.1: DIPLOMACY (DURATION M28-M38) – UPOL

Scope:

T4.1 identifies China's diplomatic instruments of power and influence and what implications its practices, policies, narratives (linking up with T3.2; T4.4), and ambitions have for global regions.

Deliverables related to task 4.1:

• Report on the results of Research cluster Chinese Diplomacy

This report presents the results of research cluster on Chinese diplomacy along the identified axes:

• Chinese diplomacy in Europe and its neighbourhood

• China and great power diplomacy

• Chinese climate diplomacy

• Chinese science diplomacy

It collates key results and conclusions reached in 4 policy papers and 1 research paper and published the findings publicly.

Deliverables and milestones related to task 4.1:

Under T4.1, a policy brief was produced on responding with data to China's supposed divide-and-rule diplomacy in the EU (Sense Hofstede, UGent), alongside a research paper on Taiwan examining the positions of Lithuania and the Czech Republic and the costs of diverging from the "One China" consensus (Eiki Berg, UTARTU).

Deviations, corrective actions performed, and any consequence or impact to achieve critical objectives:

The policy workshop was held in Prague instead of Brussels.

T4.2: SECURITY AND DEFENCE (DURATION M28-M38) – UI

Scope:

T4.2 seeks to explain the phenomenon that China's security and defence posture in recent years has become more belligerent. Crucially, it aims to understand and discuss the effects of China's power projection in various regions of vital geostrategic importance to China and Europe. Understanding China's geostrategic actions and ambitions in the wider Indo-Pacific (as well as in the Middle East) is thus of critical importance to European actors. T4.2 will also closely scrutinize changing EU-China relations in face of growing Chinese security and defence challenges for Europe. The looming Sino-US great power rivalry, and rectangular or even multipolar great power relations which include Russia, the EU and other actors, and which revolve around issues of overlapping or colliding interests is an important frame for this task.

Deliverables related to task 4.2:

•　　　　Report on the results of research cluster Security & Defence

This report presents the results of the research cluster on China's security and defence policy along the identified axes:

-　　　　(1) China's security relations with the wider Indo-Pacific (Taiwan, Japan, two Koreas, SE Asia and US)

-　　　　(2) China's security and defence challenges for Europe; China and great power rivalries (US, Russia, EU)

-　　　　(3) China's security footprint in the wider Middle East.

It collates key results and conclusions reached in 4 policy papers and 2 research papers and published the findings publicly.

Major achievements:

Under T4.2, two policy briefs were completed: one on China and great-power rivalries, with a focus on the China-Russia partnership and the Ukraine war (Marc Julienne, IFRI), and another on China's growing presence in Africa (Sense Hofstede, UGent), emphasising that Europe's response to the PLA in West Africa should go beyond military considerations.

T4.3: CONNECTIVITY (DURATION M28-M38) – ELCANO

Scope:

T4.3 aims to explore Chinese connectivity instruments, which play a central role in China's external action. The 'Belt and Road Initiative' is Xi Jinping´s signature foreign policy program and has seen a gradual shift in its ambitions and operations, e.g., from heavy, physical infrastructure to digital (Digital Silk Road, linking up with T1.4), health (Health Silk Road) and human linkages. That the EU understands the trajectory of the BRI and how it advances China's economic, diplomatic and security interests abroad is of critical importance (linking up with T2.1 & T2.2). Simultaneously, the far reach of the BRI into the EU neighbourhood with financial and digital instruments requires careful assessment and understanding to be able to address appropriately.

Deliverables related to task 4.3:

This report presents the results of the research cluster on China's connectivity along the identified axes:

- The BRI in Europe and its neighbourhood and its implications

- Competing connectivity approaches (Japan, US, AUS, RUS, EU)

- The role of finance/AIIB in the BRI --> Amended: Soft Connectivity: Technological Standards

- The BRI in Africa and Chinese influence

It collates key results and conclusions reached in 4 policy briefs and 1 research paper and published the findings publicly.

Major achievements:

Under T4.3, a policy brief was finalised on technical standards, soft connectivity, and China's Belt and Road Initiative, analysing whether emerging dynamics are leading towards convergence or fragmentation (John Seaman, IFRI). Furthermore, a PB is ready for publication on the BRI in Africa & Chinese Influence (Richard Turcsanyi, UPOL).

T4.4: NARRATIVES (DURATION M28-M38) – CLINGENDAEL

Scope:

T4.4 aims to analyse China's growing ambition and skill in utilising narratives (linking up with T3.2-4) as a power instrument in its global affairs. China has become a narrative entrepreneur and is rapidly expanding its role in shaping global discourse on norms and values. New operations through social media and other (new and old) channels are often combined in complex strategies to target specific audiences in Europe and elsewhere. Simultaneously, Chinese narratives encounter competition and reinforcement by other global and regional narratives. Identifying and understanding the different strategies which China employs and their effect on norms of societies and institutions remains an understudied phenomenon and requires new datasets, methods and attention.

Deliverables related to task 4.4:

Report on the results of Research cluster Narratives

This report presents the results of the research cluster on Chinese narratives in foreign policy along the identified axes:

(1) Chinese narrative strategies and competition with US/Russia

(2) Measuring effects of Chinese narrative strategies

(3) Sino-European narratives competition: implications

(4) and Chinese discourse patterns in international organizations

It collates key results and conclusions reached in 3 policy papers and 1 research paper and published the findings publicly.

Major achievements:

No major achievements within reporting period.

CRITICAL RISKS WP4

Risk 1: Delays in Meeting Internal Deadlines

- Description: Internal deadlines for meetings and coordination have not always been met, leading to delays in the publication process. This affects workflow efficiency and could impact timely dissemination of results.

- Risk Mitigation Measures: Strengthened internal project management, improved communication between partners, and stricter adherence to timeline monitoring. Additional coordination meetings have been scheduled to ensure alignment.

- Did you apply risk mitigation measures? Yes, measures have been implemented to improve coordination and enforce stricter internal deadlines.

- Did your risk materialise? Partially. While delays have occurred, their impact has been contained, and we remain on track for final deliverables.

- Comments: Continued monitoring is necessary to prevent further delays, and additional adjustments may be made if needed.

Risk 2: Personnel Turnover and Replacement Delays

- Description: Personnel changes, including key team members leaving, have led to disruptions and delays in project execution. Finding suitable replacements takes time, affecting continuity.

- Risk Mitigation Measures: Proactive recruitment efforts, knowledge transfer processes, and internal reallocation of tasks to ensure continuity.

- Did you apply risk mitigation measures? Yes, efforts have been made to speed up recruitment and ensure knowledge transfer.

- Did your risk materialise? Yes, staff turnover has caused delays, but mitigation measures have helped minimize impact.

- Comments: While personnel changes remain a challenge, the project is still on track. Additional flexibility and resource allocation may be required to prevent further disruptions.

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