

In about a hundred words on Chancellor Scholz's visit to Beijing

This week, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz will be travelling to China. His visit as the first G7 and EU leader since the start of the pandemic to meet with Xi Jinping come against the backdrop of the controversial decision to allow a Chinese shipping group, COSCO, to buy a stake in a Hamburg Port terminal.

Given the significance of this trip, GLOBSEC asks four experts; what would categorize the trip as a success for Chancellor Scholz?



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Chancellor Scholz, as the first G-7 leader to visit China after the 20th Party Congress and the consolidation of Xi Jinping's control over all levels of the Chinese political system, is seen by experts and bureaucrats in Germany and other likeminded countries as naïve, deeply problematic, and a reflection that Scholz has not learned from the failed engagement with Russia who now continues to attack the sovereign state of Ukraine. As unlikely as it is, unless he secures guarantees of a reciprocal, rule-of-law-based approach by China towards Germany and other countries when it comes to protecting economic investments in China, Mr Scholz risks massively damaging his and Germany's credibility when it comes to pushing back against authoritarian states and their efforts to erode the rules-based order.



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Olaf Scholz's trip to China is a delicate diplomatic venture and an exploratory mission that should be viewed in the context of Germany's comprehensive strategic partnership with Beijing but also within the responsibilities of the G7 chairmanship. Scholz has already indicated that his trip to Japan in April was a clear political signal that both Germany and the EU would prioritize those Asian allies with democratic values and would intensify engagements with the Indo-Pacific. If he can deliver this message to Xi Jinping and also stress that more support of Russia in Ukraine would be viewed as crossing a red line, then he is setting up the relationship with China on the right trajectory.



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This visit should not take place at all, not at this time – right after the triumphant Party Congress - not without other EU leaders, like Macron, and not with the sale of a part of the port of Hamburg to boot. So it cannot become a success in absolute terms. It would still have a positive effect, at least, if Scholz made it abundantly clear to his hosts that from now on, Germany will not bend to Chinese pressure over human rights, over a free Taiwan and sales of strategic infrastructure in Europe. That's unlikely to happen, however, under Scholz. When will they ever learn?



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With its *Zeitenwende*, Germany is reluctantly moving away from the long-held guiding light of "change through trade." Yet, the new foreign policy of Chancellor Scholz is still not well defined, slow in commitment, and shy in leadership. The trip might be seen internally as one successful example of finally leading in talks with China, but the feeling elsewhere is that Chancellor Scholz is not travelling under the mandate of the EU. Rather, with Xi Jinping, he will be walking a tightrope between assuring some form of strategic economic partnership with China, being wary of calls for 'isolation', and staying on course with Europe's definition of China as a systemic rival.