
China and Germany vow to take *"relationship to a higher level"*

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(AFP; Handelsblatt; Der Spiegel; Xinhua; ChinaView; huliq; Financial Times) Germany and China have announced that their bilateral relations have returned to normal after tensions following Chancellor Angela Merkel's meeting in September 2007 with the Dalai Lama. Frank-Walter Steinmeier, the German foreign minister and Vice-Chancellor, held talks in Berlin with Yang Jiechi, his Chinese counterpart, and said that the event marked *"a return to normality in our relations"*. Mr Yang said: *"China values its ties with Germany"*, adding that Beijing was ready to *"take our relationship to a higher level"*. Prior to the meeting, on 20 January, a Chinese government speaker expressed satisfaction over a German pledge to *"firmly adhere to one-China policy"* and *"recognise that Taiwan and Tibet are parts of Chinese territory"*. On 21 January, Chinese Science and Technology Minister Wang Gang clarified that Angela Merkel is welcome in the Chinese capital *"at any time, also for the Olympic Games"*. Merkel's meeting with the Dalai Lama sparked a dispute between Social Democrats (SPD) and Christian Democrats (CDU) who rule Germany in a coalition but remain bitter electoral rivals. Steinmeier, a deputy leader of the Social Democrats, criticised the Christian Democrat Chancellor's meeting with the Dalai Lama as *"shop-window politics"*. Sources close to the German Foreign Ministry, dominated by the Social Democrats, said that China and Germany are still *"a long way from a trusting, cooperative relationship"* and describe the meeting on 22 January as a success for Steinmeier's *"secret diplomacy"*, allegedly conducted with the Chancellor *"not clued in on the details"*. Also, the Asia-Pacific Committee of the main German industry federation welcomed the move as a *"very important step"*, mentioning *"strong fears that a longer period of tensions would have hit trade deals and investment contracts"*. However, Ms Merkel noted: *"We've all made clear that relations between Germany and China are important. The Chancellery has done that, I've done it and so has the foreign minister"*. In previous statements she also said, *"Friends must be able to bear a disagreement"*.

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