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Answer given by High Representative/Vice-President Borrell
on behalf of the European Commission
(15.7.2020)

The European External Action Service (EEAS) is a diplomatic service and therefore interacts daily with representatives of third countries, listening to their views and assessments of EU's policies. However, the EEAS has never bowed to any outside pressure – including from China – in preparing its reports, including on such crucial issues as disinformation at the time of pandemic, where transparency is key. The content and timing of EEAS's public assessments on disinformation trends around COVID-19 (called “EEAS Special reports”) is determined by the EEAS alone.

The specific case in the question involved two different documents for different audiences. One was internal (for EU institutions and Member States) and the other one for public consumption - the EEAS Special report. There are naturally similarities between them, as the public reports often are based on the insights and the information presented in the internal documents.

As of today, the EEAS has issued four public reports – the latest one on 20 May – and each of these very clearly points out state-sponsored disinformation campaigns and names the actors behind them – including China. The space dedicated to Chinese activities has increased with each report. This shows that there has been no intention of “watering down” any findings, however uncomfortable they are to China.