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China Economics

Continuity With Rebalancing – Takeaways from the 20th Party National Congress Political Report

CITI'S TAKE

The 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China (CPC) opened on October 16. General-Secretary Xi Jinping delivered an opening speech, known as the *Political Report* (PR). We see the PR signals pragmatism, continuity, and rebalancing. It articulates the CPC's policy thinking and could help clarify some concerns on China's policy directions. Economic development remains the top priority. The CPC remains committed to market-based reform and opening-up. Technology and innovation are further underscored with national security elevated to the highest level ever. We discuss eight highlights and near-term implications.

The long-waited Party Congress — The 20th National Congress of the CPC opened in Beijing on October 16. General-Secretary Xi Jinping delivered the opening speech, known as the *Political Report* (PR). The Congress will continue until October 22 with a new Central Committee elected. The first Plenum will likely follow on October 23, electing the Political Bureau and its Standing Committee. The new economic team will be put in place at the National People's Congress (NPC) next March.

Takeaways from the Political Report — The PR signals pragmatism, continuity, and rebalancing in our view. To some extent, there is little surprise from the 20th PR, which doesn't put forward too many new concepts this time. Instead, it serves more like a summary of the CPC's current policies and could help dispel some concerns on China's directions due to certain recent policy actions. We see eight highlights from the PR: **[1]** Development remains the No.1 priority. **[2]** The CPC vows to uphold market-based reform and opening up. **[3]** Dual-Circulation Economics will be the organizing framework for economic policies. **[4]** Technology and innovation only become more important. **[5]** The emphasis on common prosperity remains, but doesn't imply an overhaul of the current income distribution system. **[6]** National security is elevated to the highest level ever. **[7]** Unsurprisingly there is no hint on the future of the Dynamic-Zero Covid (DZC) strategy. **[8]** The CPC has a cautious assessment on China's external environment, but is confident in China's engagement with the world at the same time.

Near-term implications: from risk management to real business — We believe the PR signals a pragmatic turn at the top level within the CPC. We reckon that a new political economy cycle will begin with politics settled. The accelerating policy momentum seems to suggest that the new cycle has already unfolded since the Beidaihe meeting in early August. As the first year for the new Political Bureau, 2023 could be a year of refocus on economic development. Guided by the pragmatism signaled by the PR, the new economic team could take a holistic approach to tackle challenges the Chinese economy is faced with today, especially Covid and property. Despite no rhetoric change this time, signals and actions post the Party Congress would be more important for our ongoing assessment for the reopening outlook in our view. We maintain our baseline that preparation to exit from the DCZ could take place in the coming months, and we could see a meaningful deviation from DCZ next year.

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Continuity With Rebalancing – Takeaways from the 20th Party National Congress Political Report

The most important political event of the decade for China. The 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China (CPC) opened on October 16, 2022. General-Secretary Xi Jinping delivered an opening speech, known as the *Political Report* (PR). The Congress will later elect the new Central Committee of the CPC and conclude on October 22. The 20th Central Committee will then hold its first Plenum on October 23 and decide on the composition of the Politburo and its Standing Committee, the CPC's top decision-making body. For background materials, please refer to our CPC leadership Primer and Party Congress Preview.

The Political Report shows pragmatism, continuity, and rebalancing. Having been the top leader for a decade, General-Secretary Xi has articulated his vision for China and put his ideas to work. His latest speech has only 14.4k words, 55% shorter than the PR presented to the 19th Party Congress. The speech should have covered most important points as a digest of the full report, which was reported to be 72 pages and is yet to be released (Zaobao, Oct 16). The 19th PR coined "Xi Jinping Thought", redefined the "Principal Contradiction" for the socialist China, and (re)introduced key ideas such as "high-quality development" and "common prosperity". The new PR doesn't seem to have launched many new ideological concepts or theories. It mainly reiterates and clarifies the goals, plans, principles, and ideas established earlier, with some pragmatic rebalancing. We flag the highlights below:

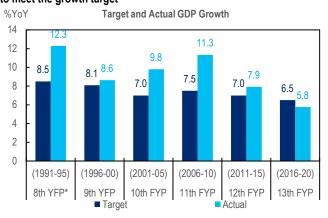
[1] Development as the No.1 priority

Chinese-style modernization. Unsurprisingly, the PR reiterates the second centenary goal of "building China into a prosperous modern socialist country" by 2049 and eventually achieving "the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation". For the first time, it specifies "Chinese-style modernization" as the road toward the goals.

The PR affirms economic development as the party's "first priority", stating that "high-quality development is the No.1 priority for the construction of a modern socialist country on all the fronts". It pledges to push forward both "the effective improvement of the quality and the reasonable growth of the quantity" of the economy.

The reiteration is similar in spirit to Deng Xiaoping's idea that "development is the absolute principle". After all, with GDP per capita ~US\$12,000, growth remains the ultimate solution to many challenges facing China, in our view. The PR should help dispel concerns that China might shift away from economic growth to ideological pursuits.

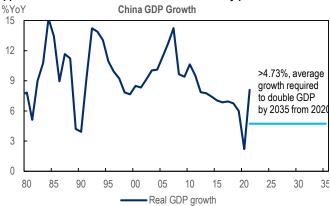
Figure 1. The previous 13th Five-Year Plan was the only FYP that failed to meet the growth target



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Source: NBS, Wind, Citi Research

Figure 2. With GDP per capita at ~US\$12,000 as of 2021, growth appears to remain as the ultimate solution to many problems



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Source: NBS, Wind, Citi Research

[2] Market-based reform and opening up

The PR highlights the importance of the socialist market economy, a framework outlined by Deng Xiaoping and Jiang Zemin. It vows to uphold China's basic economic structure, developing the state-owned sector, and supporting the private sector. Markets will continue to "play a decisive role in resources allocation", while government should play a better role.

Meanwhile, China will not cut itself off from the rest of the world. The PR underscores opening-up as the "basic state policy", pledging to push forward high-level opening up. For the first time, the CPC pledges to step up "institutional opening-up" on rules, regulations, management, standards, and others. To put into context, China's opening-up in the past few decades has been mainly on goods and capital flows. Institutional opening-up seems to be emerging as the next venue for opening-up.

Reform and opening-up are not new ideas, but given certain policy actions in the past few years, the PR's reassurance clarifies the direction for China's road ahead. It may help ease the fear about the reverse of market-based reform and opening-up, although the implementation remains to be seen.

[3] Dual-Circulation Economics (DCE)

DCE remains as the organizing framework for economic policies. Regarding the external circulation, the PR calls for efforts to enhance its quality, also signalling a continuity from previous years. On the other hand, the PR mentions to "combine the demand-expansion strategy with structural supply-side reforms" to energize the domestic circulation and to increase its sustainability. Consumption will be promoted together with a <u>renewed push on infrastructure investment (II)</u>, in our view. The PR continues to emphasize food and energy security and promote self-dependent innovation via an enhanced "new whole-nation system" on the supply side.

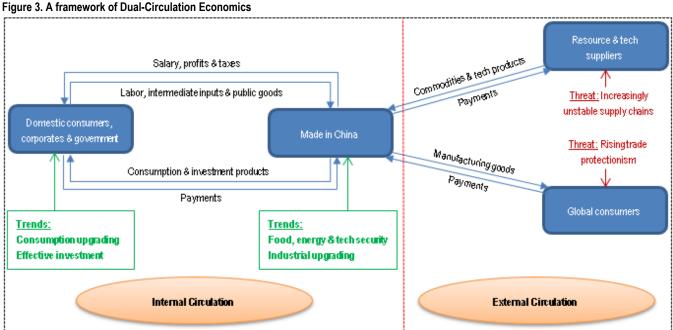
The focus will be on the real economy, according to the PR. It implies that the financial sector and the real estate could play at best a supplementary role, in our opinion. Key areas to be supported include new industrialization, rural revitalization, and new urbanization, among others. As a reflection of pragmatism, General-Secretary Xi's speech doesn't mention the mantra that "housing is for living, not for

speculation", although it could remain in the full text of the PR as in the last Party Congress (<u>Zaobao</u>, Oct 16). Its absence from the speech could already suggest a twist on the policy stance amid the prolonged property downturn.

[4] Technology and innovation

The PR underlines the strategy of "rejuvenating the country through science and education", crafted by Jiang Zemin. The push on technology and innovation is at least as forceful as the 19th PR. It calls for joint efforts to achieve breakthroughs in core technologies and realize "high-level technology self-dependence and self-strengthening". The "new whole-nation system" will focus on key areas that are original and leading, including, as discussed in the 14th FYP, AI, quantum information, integrated circuit, life & health, brain science, biological breeding, and aerospace, among others. Linked with supply-chain security, technology and innovation are also a matter of national security, according to the PR.

The PR also highlights the role of education in innovation, as "talent is the first resources". In the 19th PR, education was mostly mentioned in the discussion of social welfare, yet in the new PR, education and talent strategy are mostly discussed in the section on technology and innovation.



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Source: Citi Research

[5] Common prosperity

The emphasis on common prosperity remains, as we expected. The PR sees common prosperity as a defining feature of Chinese-style modernization, but it also seems to see it as a result of development and focuses more on how to promote it through social welfare and public service.

The PR implies no fundamental change to the current allocation mechanism. Allocation by labor remains the majority with multiple other methods. The PR encourages "hard work to get rich", promotes "equality of opportunities" and

implement the "employment-first strategy" – none is inconsistent with the market economy. The leadership is also determined to promote the social security system, expanding its coverage. All signals a continuity from the past.

The only new signal is the mention to "regulate the wealth accumulation mechanism" for the first time. We think it could indicate an intention to crack down illegal and unethical behaviors in the markets. However, the speech doesn't single out "the disorderly expansion of capital" this time.

[6] National security

Security is elevated to the highest level ever. The following three points may be relevant for the economy: **[1] Supply chains.** The PR vows to ensure the security of key supply chains, supported by self-independent innovation. **[2] Food security.** It reiterates that China will solidify the foundation of food security and safeguard the red line of 1.8bn *mu* arable land. **[3] Energy security.** The PR pushes for the efforts to achieve carbon neutrality in a "proactive and steady" manner. China's energy policy has taken a pragmatic turn, acknowledging that coal remains a key part in China's energy structure, and the PR calls for clean usage of it.

[7] Dynamic-Zero Covid (DZC)

The PR offers no hint on the exit from DZC, unsurprisingly. As a strategic report, it doesn't discuss specific pandemic measures. The PR notes that DZC has protected people's lives and health to the greatest extent and that China has achieved encouraging outcomes from balancing Covid prevention and economic development. For the future, it only pledges to improve the public health system, the epidemic control system, and the emergency response capacity.

[8] Foreign policy: cautious assessment, but with rising confidence

The PR has a very cautious assessment about China's current standing. The CPC leadership is acting on bottom-line thinking, preparing for "roaring waves" or even "violent storms". To be sure, it is not the first time that General-Secretary Xi uses such words. At the 40th Anniversary of reform and opening-up in 2018, he also mentioned that during the process of reform, China could encounter "unprecedented violent storms" (Xinhua, Dec 18, 2018). It could be a metaphor for China's external environment, which has been constantly deteriorating since the US-China trade conflicts. Such an assessment could underpin the overarching importance of national security in the PR.

The PR also signals rising confidence in foreign affairs. General-Secretary Xi continues to stress China's independent foreign policy of peace, but also adds to "fight against all forms of hegemonism and double standards". The PR reiterates the existing rhetoric of the Taiwan issue, which could remain a flashpoint for US-China tensions. It urges the "democratization of international relations" and calls for "genuine multilateralism". China will continue to promote the high-quality development of the *Belt and Road Initiative*. The PR is explicit that China will stand with developing countries.

Near-term implications: from risk management to real business

The Political Report in our view signals policy continuity with pragmatic rebalancing at the top level. General-Secretary Xi's speech is much shorter compared with previous congresses, but he has addressed mounting concerns on the Chinese economy due to certain policy actions in recent years. It would be a fair

assessment that there is little surprise from the 20th PR. Economic development remains the top priority. The leadership remains committed to market-based reform and opening-up. Technology and innovation are further underscored with national security elevated to the highest level ever. Instead of putting forward new concepts or theories, the 20th PR seems to serve as a summary of recent polices and attempt to clarify the mounting concerns in one go.

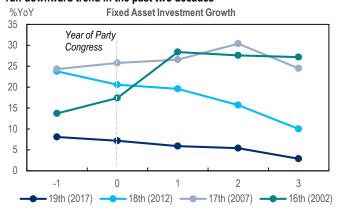
We see the PR as the latest signal and also the most important signal that a new political economy cycle may be under way. Economic development could return as the main focus with politics settled. Looking at past congresses, the economic policy uncertainty index typically moderated post the event barring external shocks such as the Global Financial Crisis and the US-China trade conflicts. It could strike an uptick prior to the congress, likely a result of political uncertainty. The growth of FAI, a major tool for the government to drive growth in China, also stabilized post the congress year amid its long-run downward trend in the past two decades. A similar pattern could have started to unfold this time.

Figure 4. Barring external shocks, economic policy uncertainty could dip post the Party Congress



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Figure 5. FAI growth stabilized post the Congress year amid its longrun downward trend in the past two decades



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We reckon the policy mode would shift from "risk management" to "real business" with a refocus on the economy in 2023, the first year for the new Political Bureau. Besides the latest pragmatic twist from the PR, policy execution has been improving since the Beidaihe meeting in early August. New policy measures announced since August have accumulated to ~RMB2trn, or ~1.8% of GDP, in addition to rate cuts and property support. We believe policymakers will not shy away from incremental measures to bring the economy back on track. With the low base set this year, we expect the government to still express the growth target as "around 5.5%" for 2023E.

We tend to think Beijing will likely take pragmatic measures to tackle property and Covid challenges, but would also monitor actions down the road. Following the Party's 20th National Congress, a new economic team will be in place at the NPC in March 2023. The new team could be better equipped to work out a holistic approach to tackle the Covid situation and the housing sector. The central government recently added support for the property sector, aiming to stabilize sales. More support could come in the coming months. Right before the Congress, China's top official newspaper *People's Daily* published multiple articles in a row to urge the public to enhance their patience with DZC. China CDC's expert panel head Dr.

Liang Wannian also said "no timeline" for exit from zero-Covid controls (<u>Gov</u>, Oct 13). These undermine the chance for an imminent reopening, but have no material impact on our base case for a meaningful deviation from DZC after the NPC. Signals and actions post the Party Congress would be more important for our ongoing assessment for the reopening outlook.

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Date	Summary	RMB bn	% of 2022 GDP
Monetary			
Aug-15	10bp cut of 1Y MLF		
Sep-14	Relending for capex on equipment upgrade for manufacturers	200	0.17
Sep	The PBoC resumed PSL in Sep, extending RMB108bn to policy banks		
Property			
Aug-19	Special loans to ensure delivery, reportedly amounted to RMB200bn	200	0.17
Aug-22	15bp cut of 5y LPR		
Aug-24	Government guarantee for bond issuance of developers as reported by WSJ		
Sep-29	Lifted the constraints on mortgage rate floors for first-time home buyers in selected cities		
Sep-30	Refund of personal income tax for home sellers who buy a new one within a year		
Sep-30	15bp cut of lending rate of housing provident fund		
Sep-30	Big banks to ramp up lendings to developers as reported by Bloomberg		
Fiscal			
Aug-24	Clarified local governments have >RMB500bn special bonds quota for issuance by end-Oct	500	0.43
	Fiscal subsidy for interest payment on loans for equipment purchase and upgrade		
Sep-08	R&D and capex: increase the pre-tax deduction ratio for R&D expense; 100% pre-tax deduction for equipment purchase in Q4 for high-tech companies; 100% pre-tax deduction for basic research expenditure		
Sep-14	Extended tax deferral and accelerate tax credit rebate for manufacturing and selected SMEs	472	0.41
Sep-27	Further fee deferral including sewage disposal fee and others	116	0.10
Quasi-fiscal			
Aug-24	Added RMB300bn to policy banks for infrastructure investment	300	0.26
Aug-31	Expand the scope of infrastructure investment supported by policy banks, included old town renovation, provincial level highway and others		
Sep-22	Further support for logistics: 10% cut for toll fees for highways, targeted financing support for highway companies, 20% cut for government set cargo charges		
Sep-27	Accelerate infrastructure construction in rural areas, aiming to complete RMB300bn investment within the year	300	0.26
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