

# EU-CHINA OBSERVER

DEPARTMENT OF EU INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS AND DIPLOMACY STUDIES



"EXCHANGING IDEAS  
ON EU-CHINA RELATIONS:  
AN INTERDISCIPLINARY  
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Baillet Latour Chair of  
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# INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION AND KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER: COMPARING CHINA AND EUROPE IN AFRICA

DR ABDOULKADRE ADO

## Introduction

EU member states used to be the top economic partners of many African economies, until China surpassed them. According to 2018 data from UNCTAD, China now is the leading economic partner of several countries like South Africa, Ethiopia, Angola, Sierra Leone or Zambia.<sup>1</sup> In addition, data from the IMF indicate that from 2010 to 2016 African countries' exports to China were worth more than €340 billion,<sup>2</sup> thus overtaking African exports to France and Spain combined. Meanwhile, African imports from China reached over €401 billion during the same period - more than what the continent imported from the US and France combined.

Building on this dynamic reality, this paper investigates Chinese presence in Africa and compares China's way and Europe's approach to boosting development on the continent. The paper focuses on how China's presence differs from Western European countries' engagement in Africa and argues that knowledge transfer (KT) may be the key to successful cooperation with Africa. The analysis mobilizes findings from 29 case studies of China-Africa joint ventures (JV) in 12 countries and interviews with 75 Africans to explain why China and its multinationals succeed where EU countries and companies still struggle. Accordingly, elements of the Chinese approach to Africa are highlighted and some comparisons are made vis-à-vis the European approach, particularly from KT, cross-cultural and neo-colonial perspectives. Europe, China and their companies can mutually learn from each other's approaches to Africa.

The paper contributes to a better understanding of the China-Africa relationship while presenting potentials for bettering EU-Africa and China-EU-Africa dynamics toward winning, renewed, responsible and sustainable collaborations among these three major partners.

Africans' perceptions of Chinese and European approaches. Scholars in international relations, international development, political economy and global business often compare the European approach to Africa versus the South-to-South approach.<sup>3</sup> More specifically, comparisons are made between how former colonial powers like the UK, France or Belgium approach their former African colonies and how new emerging countries like China deal with those very same countries.<sup>4</sup> There are indeed major differences. For instance, some studies described Western nations as condescending toward African nations, while using classical models of foreign aid with strict conditionalities that are often inadequate for African economies.<sup>5</sup>

China, on the other hand, is approaching Africa with a different philosophy, putting forward principles like non-interference, flexibility and equal dialogue.<sup>6</sup> These differences translate into unique advantages when it comes to KT through international partnerships.

To illustrate them, in 2015 I conducted a study on 29 China-Africa JVs in 12 countries: Benin, Burundi, Cameroon, Chad, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ghana, Ivory Coast, Niger, Nigeria, Republic of Congo, Rwanda and Togo. The JVs were at least three y.o., had sizes ranging from five to

more than 1000 employees and operated in eight sectors. Selection criteria required participants to have worked for at least three years for a JV with Chinese people who acted as their colleagues or collaborators. Based on a consolidation of transcribed data extracted from the 75 interviews conducted, below I present an overview of how the interviewees described their perception of their relationship with the Chinese in the context of KT. For instance, as recognised by a director in Congo's ministry of foreign affairs, China may have arrived in Africa at the right time. During the interview, he told me:

*"With the Chinese, in fact, there is no problem of balance of power. The Chinese regard us as friends, it is up to us to appropriate the opportunities they offer us. If there is Chinese opportunism, it is simply in relation to their European, American and other competitors, but not against the Africans. Because the West, despite the efforts, today no longer has the means and the will to support Africa's ambitions. The opportunism of the Chinese is that they take advantage of the present economic precariousness of the West which is no longer able*

*to support Africa on its development priorities while we are thirsty for partners. As the West no longer has the means for our ambition, our continent is forced to turn to the current highest bidding partner which is China."*

Table 1 compares the perceptions of African interviewees of China vis-à-vis Europe. Interviewees described the context of their partnerships with the Chinese. From those descriptions I captured the number of times African interviewees mentioned specific perceptions regarding their relationships with foreign partners. Then, I compared China's and Europe's approach, using analysis based on the literature on Africans' perception of the relations between Africa, Europe and China (e.g. OLIVIER, 2011 – From Colonialism to Partnership in Africa–Europe Relations?; SCHEIPERS and SICURELLI, 2008 – Empowering Africa: normative power in EU–Africa relations; BODOMO, 2019 – Africa-China-Europe relations: Conditions and condition- alities).

"Mechanism for KT" was the most mentioned topic

**Table 1: KT in Europe's and China's Approach**

Context/approach	Mentions by interviewees	China toward Africa	Europe toward Africa
Relationship status	12	Equal	Condescending
Level of colonial burden	7	Low, advantageous	High, disadvantageous
Like-minded allies' mentality	23	Promoted	Not promoted
Soft power, cultural diplomacy	11	Strong	Weak
Foreign aid model	9	Customised	Classic
KT potential	5	Significant	Very significant
Policy for KT	32	Strong	Weak
Mechanism for KT	48	Joint ventures	Development assistance

throughout the interview transcripts, describing how Africans (want to) gain knowledge from foreign partners. “KT potential” was the least mentioned, but still, the description highlighted how, in African perception, European multinational constitute a significant potential source for gaining knowledge. Topics like “Policy for KT” and “Like-minded allies’ mentality” were also often mentioned and Africans considered them as stronger and promoted more in China’s approach than in Europe’s. Finally, “Relationship status”, “Level of colonial burden”, “Soft power, cultural diplomacy” and “Foreign aid model” were mentioned several times, indicating their importance.

African countries like the Republic of Congo, Angola, Zimbabwe, Kenya or Niger, are increasingly putting China in a more advantageous position than European countries, especially those with colonial legacies, when addressing the challenges and opportunities of KT, and particularly in the context of the Belt and Road Initiative.<sup>7</sup> The reason is that African leaders and businesspeople are feeling increasingly comfortable in partnering with Chinese government and organisations. During our interview, one director at the Beninese ministry of foreign affairs made the parallel between Chinese and French approaches and told us that:

*“When France offers you aid, it often goes to justice, decentralisation, governance, human rights, things that do not necessarily have real impacts on the population. However, in this area, we have many problems because our mayors, our elected local officials are not prepared. There is money, but they waste it, because they are not trained to manage such programmes. It is a process that should take some time, but France puts the cart before the horse. On the other hand, the Chinese do not meddle in these matters, and you have a complete realisation. You want a road, schools, administrative buildings, infrastructure, they say ok.”*

For the interviewees, China’s approach to Africa from a KT perspective seems to stand out from the European approach. This suggests that Europe has a catch-up work to do vis-à-vis China if it wants to use its KT potential to successfully do business with Africa. The EU should then listen to African priorities and improve dialogue and

specific KT policy and mechanisms, while also working to better the overall relationship through more cross-cultural and mindset renewal vis-à-vis Africa. Such a redirected approach could improve the EU’s cooperation with Africa while coping with potentially negative colonial burden.

### Importance of KT for Africans

Among African governments, organisations and peoples, from ministers to CEOs, from traditional farmers to high-tech entrepreneurs, from bureaucrats to informal businesses, it is increasingly clear that KT is important in every international partnership African countries establish.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, Africans are increasingly looking for foreign partners from which they can learn new ways of doing things, access new technologies and co-create knowledge to materialize the economic potential of continent’s abundant resources.

In our study, KT and financial performance emerged as top priorities for all interviewees<sup>9</sup>, unequivocally highlighting the importance of KT in partnering with the Chinese. This means that in all the JVs with Chinese partners, Africans

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had a clear expectation of gaining knowledge. To support and corroborate the claims made by the respondents, I gathered additional data from documents like the terms of the agreement and the medium-term objectives of the JVs. All of them included components of KT from the Chinese partners to the African partners. Some JVs established a clear time-frame during which all the initial Chinese trainers were

expected to train local people so that Africans become the main trainers and workforce within those organisations. In fact, at least six of the China-Africa JVs started with more than 50 percent of the workforce Chinese, then gradually transitioned into a majority of African workforce. Successful examples (ongoing) include the Djarmaya Refinery in Chad and the Benin Textile Company in Lokossa. One participant from a Beninese company clearly recognised the significant KT that occurred in their organisation thanks to their partnership with Chinese:

*“I must admit that Chinese were able to transfer knowledge because all the positions where there were Chinese expatriates, the latter trained Beninese who have now taken over.”*

*It is only in electrical engineering that there is still a Chinese assistant. Otherwise, the Chinese currently present are more at the management level than at the factory level, whereas during the first years it was very important that the Chinese also remain in the factory."*

This shows how Chinese partners are becoming a conduit for knowledge gain for Africans. It is a pattern observed across many of the 29 JVs studied, although in at least twelve interviews and across seven cases Africans complained about not gaining all the knowledge they wanted. It is also increasingly clear that China does show awareness of Africans' needs and expectations, more than Europe does, regarding KT, capacity building and industrialisation both at the government and corporate levels. One government official ironically stated that "Europeans are not happy that we are going to Asia, to China particularly, but, at the same time, they are not ready to give us what we need."

### **Potential of KT toward Africa: comparing China and Europe**

At a time when EU is still unclear about the place of KT in its policy toward Africa, themes like 'knowledge transfer', 'learning', 'technology transfer' appear more common than ever before in Chinese government's discourse, as highlighted at recent FOCAC meetings and through Chinese initiatives like the creation of new Confucius institutes and Lu Ban workshops across Africa.<sup>10</sup> This is also the dynamic in the discourse of African presidents whereby partnerships that align with priorities of gaining knowledge to accelerate African development are promoted.<sup>11</sup> While Europe has yet to refine its strategy in this regard, China seriously takes note of the continent's priorities by customising its foreign policy and strategy vis-a-vis Africa, while encouraging its companies to invest through partnerships, especially JVs, that enable KT.

Accordingly, economies like Kenya, Zimbabwe, Ethiopia and Djibouti are looking beyond traditional western partners and increasingly rely on Chinese expertise to boost development. China meanwhile continues working to meet those expectations by directly sending experts and equipment to train Africans in medicine, agriculture,<sup>12</sup> policy development and implementation to alleviate poverty, an area where China possesses a stronger comparative advantage.<sup>13</sup>

However, despite having a lot to offer to Africans, China does not yet have the weight of the EU when it comes to transferable knowledge like technologies and expertise, nevertheless many African countries consider that the

Asian power gives more knowledge to Africa through partnerships. Thus, Africans seem to praise the Chinese approach, understanding and friendship that enable them to learn new skills and establish more China-Africa JVs on the continent. Africans also seem to praise China for what they perceive as Chinese knowledge generosity at a time when Europe is underutilising its potential in transferable knowledge. Indeed, although Europe has had a significant presence in Africa long before China, the number of EU-Africa JVs is much lower than China-Africa JVs despite China arriving much later on the continent.<sup>14</sup> One can also add that China's speed of internationalization toward the continent might have been higher than Europe's and that the economic power of China coupled with the opportunity related to Africa's natural resources to fuel Chinese economic growth worked in the advantage of China in recent years compared to Europe.

Meanwhile, Europe and its companies possess significant knowledge, advanced technologies and expertise that is of high importance for Africa, as Africans seem more aware than Europeans. Africans increasingly expect that European companies entering the African market bring soft assets – i.e. the significant transferable knowledge – into the continent, and that, through partnerships, Africans may be able to learn from their European counterparts. Furthermore, European companies that can transfer knowledge may be more welcome in Africa and eventually more likely to succeed.

There is therefore an opportunity for the EU to encourage renewed partnerships with Africa by fostering more KT opportunities. If European companies aim to succeed in Africa, with Africans welcoming them just like the Chinese or even more, they will need to mobilise their knowledge assets in negotiating win-win partnerships. Recent instances of European corporations like Germany's Volkswagen establishing new partnerships to assemble cars in Africa's Special Economic Zones in Rwanda, Ghana and Nigeria are exemplary moves that can increase EU's competitiveness in Africa. These are the kinds of collaboration Africans are excited about. Other examples include French companies like Groupe PSA Peugeot & Citroën which recently extended partnerships to assemble cars in Kenya<sup>15</sup>. Indeed, such partnerships with significant potential for financial returns on investment for shareholders and meaningful KT for Africans can motivate more local actors to collaborate with European counterparts.

## Conclusion

This paper highlights the importance of KT in China-Africa relations and its significance for Europe-Africa cooperation. China and its companies are significant providers of new knowledge to Africans<sup>16</sup> through government-led initiatives and company-led JVs. This makes China an increasingly interesting partner for Africa. Across the continent, industries like agriculture and manufacturing are improving thanks to China's presence<sup>17</sup> especially by establishing JVs with local partners, leading to more KT. Having replaced European countries as Africa's leading trading partner, it is safe to state that China currently seems more successful in comparison to Europe in Africa. The fact that more and more African leaders think of China first as a foreign ally and development partner indicates how important its presence and relationships are with several African nations. This reality also indicates the necessity for the EU to make KT a priority in its policy toward Africa. Consequently, this means that the EU should encourage its companies to consider KT as an important factor when entering African

markets. The EU should offer incentives to support European companies to transfer more knowledge to Africa if they are looking for successful and win-win partnerships with Africans. Further studies can be conducted to understand areas with high potential impact regarding the type of knowledge that is transferable and relevant on the EU-Africa cooperation agenda.

Finally, another research avenue could explore the potential for a triangular cooperation framework that aligns Africa's, China's and the EU's interests around KT. This can take the form of three-party JVs, meaning partners from each region joining forces to collaborate on projects that enable significant KT toward Africa. As also emphasized in a recent briefing paper from the European Institute for Asian Studies<sup>18</sup>, this will require Europeans, the Chinese and Africans to work together toward a trilateral enhanced and sustainable dialogue and cooperation. ☺

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# CITY DIPLOMACY AS TOOL FOR IMPROVING THE EU-CHINA COOPERATION: THE CHINESE AND EU UNESCO CREATIVE CITIES

NIEDJA DE ANDRADE E SILVA FORTE DOS SANTOS

## Introduction

Cities are called the “powerhouse of nations”.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, about 72% of them are wealthier than nations,<sup>2</sup> and the United Nations (UN) predicts that two-thirds of the world’s population will live in cities by 2050.<sup>3</sup> More than 120 global institutions are comprised of cities,<sup>4</sup> such as the Organization of World Heritage Cities, Eurocities and the UNESCO Creative Cities Network (UCCN). In such networks, cities act internationally, a practice known as ‘city diplomacy’ (CD).

City diplomacy has received attention in EU-China cooperation at least since the EU-China Mayors’ Forum in 2012, when the role of CD in strengthening citizens’ participation was discussed as a means to foster the pillars of the Sino-European 2020 cooperation agenda.<sup>5</sup> However, the EU-China partnership continues to be predominantly driven by commercial and geopolitical goals.<sup>6</sup>

This paper argues that CD is a potential tool to enhance EU-China collaboration through multilayered diplomacy by promoting the involvement of civil society at the grass-roots level. The EU-China interaction at the UCCN is analyzed to illustrate this argument and to make recommendations on how the EU could support cities in this framework.

## Public Diplomacy and City Diplomacy

Public diplomacy (PD) is the way countries organize assets like culture and values to communicate with foreign publics and present themselves in an attractive way, and increase their soft power.<sup>7</sup> Most importantly, PD can lead international stakeholders to support a country when a

crisis arrives, being a source of ‘reputational security’.<sup>8</sup>

In a globalised world, cities are pivotal to PD, because they are better in “building common understanding and relationships”.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, cities can mitigate difficulties in interstate relations by building a “high level of trust in interpersonal civil society trust networks”.<sup>10</sup> This is due to the fact that “face-to-face relations have more cross-cultural credibility than do government broadcasts”.<sup>11</sup> PLUIJM and MELISSEN define CD as “institutions and processes by which cities, or local governments in general, engage in relations with actors on an international political stage with the aim of representing themselves and their interests to one another”.<sup>12</sup>

The integration of CD in the higher level foreign policy is an idea developed under the theoretical perspective of ‘multilayered diplomacy’. This considers local, national and supranational government and structures as actors of a complex diplomatic model in which international and domestic dimensions mix at different levels for governing global issues.<sup>13</sup> This means that cities perform internationally in line with top level foreign policy, which is a suitable model to support the mission and goals of the external action of the EU.<sup>14</sup>

PD measures fall into five categories of actions: ‘listening’, that is understanding foreign expectations for defining foreign policies accordingly; ‘advocacy’, the international defence of arguments; ‘cultural diplomacy’, the approach through a country’s cultural aspects such as art, beliefs and other; ‘exchange diplomacy’, that is hosting or sending

citizens abroad for studies or acculturation; and 'international broadcasting', the use of radio, TV and social media to transmit news abroad at large scale.<sup>15</sup> Cities operate mainly in the fields of cultural and exchange diplomacy.

### **City Diplomacy between the EU and China**

Since the 1990s, European and Chinese cities have joined international organizations gathering cities. However, the pioneer initiative involving cities directly concerted by EU-China cooperation was the 2012 EU-China Mayors Forum' sponsored by the President of the European Commission, Mr. José Barroso, and the Premier of China, Mr. Wen Jiabao. Its goal was to discuss governance of sustainable urban development.<sup>16</sup>

Since then, rapprochement of cities under the EU-China cooperation has intensified. In 2013, Sino-European cities signed agreements like the Shenzhen-Amsterdam agreement on low-carbon or the Xi'an-Chartres cultural partnership.<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, the EU-China Urbanisation Flagship got support from Horizon 2020, which provided funding in 2018 for the diagnosis of challenges and obstacles in designing EU-China policy and cooperation. This research pointed to cultural differences, language barriers and cities' lack of human and economic resources as the main issues to be overcome in international cooperation.<sup>18</sup> In 2019, the 14<sup>th</sup> High Level Forum on urban policy cooperation discussed several themes related to cities, such as the circular economy, urban mobility, and culture.

Despite being a channel of dialogue that was already open, hence a potential advantage, the UNESCO Creative Cities Network (UCCN) was not part of the EU-China urbanization agenda until this point.

China has integrated CD as a tool of national foreign policy. In this regard, the Shanghai Institute for International Studies identified the pattern of Chinese CD: identity definition, coordination with central government, focus on policies and strengthening of diplomatic channels. Chinese cities usually have foreign affairs offices at the city level.<sup>19</sup> At national level, the Chinese People's Association for the Friendship with Foreign Countries coordinates the cities' international activities. On the other hand, due to the emphasis on national sovereignty, Chinese cities do not install representations abroad.<sup>20</sup>

On the European side, despite being able to install offices in other countries, such as Bradford's office in Qingdao<sup>21</sup>, the international performance of cities is not strongly coordinated by the EU. In fact, the Committee of Regions (CoR), which is supposed to oversee cities and regions,

merely adopts recommendations within a highly decentralized approach.<sup>22</sup> For instance, the 78th plenary session in 2008 discussed how CD could be relevant for addressing transnational issues, while advancing EU interests at the local level.<sup>23</sup> In that occasion, the CoR suggested EU members set up a funding instrument to support CD,<sup>24</sup> but there were no follow-up actions.

Hence, there is a path opened for Sino-European CD and its full potential remains to be explored. In this regard, international activities involving cities could be carried out under the EU-China cooperation umbrella. Coordination through those activities will bring benefits to the cooperation, for instance through the UCCN, which has the potential to advance the future cooperation agenda.

### **Culture and creative economy in EU-China relations**

The EU-China relationship has been studied with a focus on the economy, trade, investment and traditional diplomacy. In this regard, Fulda states that "Europe and China need to go beyond commercial and geopolitical interests of their respective governments and require the strengthening of civil society exchanges and collaborative people-to-people relations".<sup>25</sup> Indeed, citizens complement the Sino-European relationship at its grassroots. In this context, culture is a promising tool to engage people in diplomacy.<sup>26</sup>

A joint report on culture and creative industries recently commissioned by the European Commission and the Ministry of Culture of China has shed light on aspects of CD which also concerns UCCN goals. The main findings were: [1] cultural relations are shifting to people-to-people diplomacy, [2] cultural entrepreneurship is rising in China, [3] co-creating is a trend in cultural exchange [4] artists are engaging in social purposes, [5] Chinese cities seek knowledge and creativity for sustainable development, [6] creative industries are people-driven [7] the education sector needs creativity and culture and [8] Chinese creative and cultural industries offer market opportunities to the EU.<sup>27</sup> China also seeks European collaboration to drive the change from 'made in' to 'created in China', placing the creative economy at the center of cities' improvement.<sup>28</sup> The conclusion indicates that transforming policies into action requires mediation,<sup>29</sup> which could be supplied by the UCCN. Additionally, culture and the creative economy, which are at the core of the UCCN, were emphasized as relevant means to develop EU-China cooperation focused on peace and security, prosperity, sustainable development, and people-to-people exchanges.

### City Diplomacy in the UNESCO Creative Cities Network (UCCN)

The UCCN was created in 2004 to promote international cooperation on sustainable development. Currently, it comprises 246 cities, including 14 from China and 89 from the EU.<sup>30</sup>

Acting as a mediator in CD, UNESCO keeps updated information on cities' features, representatives, contact details, and showcases cities' events and activities through its digital platform, which is a kind of permanent informal monitoring.<sup>31</sup>

Beyond merely committing to the UCCN objectives, cities must participate in annual conferences and submit four-year reports according to UNESCO guidelines.<sup>32</sup> The mission statement of the UCCN recommends that cities interact, for instance through research on creative cities, which corresponds to advocacy in PD, or by sharing knowledge, which invokes cultural and exchange diplomacy in PD.<sup>33</sup>

A focal point in charge of negotiating, developing and coordinating international cooperation represents each city in the UCCN. The four-year reports submitted by cities pass through a formal qualitative evaluation by a peer-review system. The assessment focuses on contributions to the UCCN management, achievements in sustainable development, inter-city cooperation and the action plan for the next period. To date, UNESCO has recognized the efforts of all cities that have submitted reports. Annually, UNESCO chooses the best initiatives which are presented in the UCCN conference. This is a token of success.

### China and the EU in the UCCN

There are 11 EU and Chinese cities which have been members of the UCCN for at least five-years that had submitted monitoring reports by 2017 which are analyzed in this paper. That is the case for four Chinese cities: Shanghai, Chengdu, Hangzhou, Beijing, and seven EU cities: Dublin (Ireland), Enghien-les-Bains (France), Fabriano (Italy), Graz, (Austria) Krakow (Poland), Östersund (Sweden) and Saint-Étienne (France).<sup>34</sup>

The actions taken by those cities were separated into national level or city diplomacy. Then, city diplomacy actions were categorized according to the PD framework: [1] listening, [2] advocacy, [3] cultural diplomacy, [4] exchange

diplomacy and [5] international broadcasting. Then they were classified into areas of the EU-China strategic agenda: [1] peace and security, [2] prosperity, [3] sustainable development, and [4] people-to-people exchanges.

The analysis identified 87 actions from Chinese cities. Among them, 42 were city diplomacy measures, 31 of them (74 percent) advanced with EU partners. The actions were categorized as follows: 17 for exchange diplomacy, 13 for cultural diplomacy and one for advocacy. From the point of view of areas of EU-China agenda, they were: [1] 10 for people-to-people exchanges, like the 'UNESCO Creative Cities Beijing Summit' promoted by Beijing, involving 19 Europeans and about 100 Chinese citizens and the professional exchange promoted by Hangzhou for a Chinese citizen in Fabriano, [2] 15 for

prosperity, such as the Fashion Week in Shanghai, involving at least 100 designers from the EU, and [3] six for sustainable development, for instance, the food show promoted by Chengdu in Helsinki,

Rovaniemi and Copenhagen, involving around 100 people.

On the other hand, EU cities promoted 195 actions, of which 77 were in the field of city diplomacy. Among them, 21 actions (27 percent) were partnered with Chinese cities. They were classified as: 17 for exchange diplomacy and four for cultural diplomacy. In the perspective of areas of the EU-China agenda, there were: [1] 14 for people-to-people exchange, such as the publication of the Crafts and Folk Art book by Fabriano, involving around 20 people from China, [2] three actions for prosperity, like the 'COD100 Program' of Graz, and [3] four actions for sustainable development, such as the Biennale Internationale Design promoted by Saint Étienne, involving around 20 people from China.

Among the main findings, both EU and Chinese cities adopted actions mainly related to cultural and people-to-people diplomacy.

The single action on advocacy was the branding project of 'Beijing Design 2017'. Additionally, Chinese cities were more active in partnering with EU cities. All Chinese cities carried out at least one project with EU counterparts. In fact, 74 percent of all Chinese actions were partnered with EU cities. On the other hand, two of the European cities did not share any projects with Chinese cities. Indeed, only

## BOTH EU AND CHINESE CITIES ADOPTED ACTIONS MAINLY RELATED TO CULTURAL AND PEOPLE- TO-PEOPLE DIPLOMACY.

27 percent of the total actions developed by EU cities had Chinese cities as counterparts.

The Chinese government appears to focus on creative cities. As an illustration, national political authorities participated in the Creativity 2030 Summit (Beijing), in the 2014 Annual Conference (Chengdu) and supported funding for creative industries (Shanghai). In regard to EU cities, involvement of national governments or EU authorities was not reported.

Remarkably enough, exchange diplomacy was widely performed by both China and the EU, bringing practical benefits for the economies by opening doors for entrepreneurial cooperation, mainly among SMEs. Concretely, UNESCO mediates the cities' approach while cities' focal points mediate actions. This minimizes the dispersion of power inherent in people-to-people direct interaction, which usually makes central governments fearful.<sup>35</sup> Examples of exchange diplomacy are the cooperation between Beijing and Enghien-les-Bains for promoting enterprises and the participation of young designers from Graz in the Shenzhen Design Week, as well as the exchange between Saint-Etienne and Shanghai on design.

Local level actions may involve real needs of citizens and concrete implementation of sustainable development. Indeed, cities offer a wide scenery of possibilities meeting the EU-China cooperation goals. Effective and accountable actions at city level can thus foster long-term relationships, back dropping Sino-European cooperation at international level.

## Conclusion

Cities are relevant actors in the globalized world. In this context, the UCCN has created opportunities for international cooperation among cities, ultimately giving the floor to citizens. The EU-China cooperation has recognized the role of CD and citizens, but has remained focused on commercial and geopolitical goals.

Cities are a powerful tool to involve people in an organized way, as well as to build long-term relationships due to the laypeople's high cross-cultural credibility. In this regard, the UCCN is a channel for overcoming barriers by approaching cities with very well established mechanisms. Moreover, relevant aspects of the Sino-European cooperation are at the core of the UCCN, such as cultural entrepreneurship and sustainable development guided by creativity.

Therefore, China and the EU must pay strategic attention to the UCCN by monitoring the international performance of cities, besides associating those efforts to national foreign policies. Integration of local, national and supranational governments in a multilayered diplomacy approach may strengthen foreign policy. China has already moved into this direction, but the EU still has room to leverage it, for instance, by including a focus on the UCCN at the CoR, during high level forums on urban policy and in its external action. ©



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# EU POLITICAL DISCUSSION OF CHINA'S “SECURITY THREATS”: INSIGHTS FROM EP RESOLUTION 2019/2575

MICHELE CASADEI

## Introduction

In light of the institutional reforms introduced by the Treaty of Lisbon, the role of the European Parliament (EP) in EU external relations has expanded to the point where it exerts a “diplomatic action”<sup>1</sup> of its own. The EP’s bilateral involvement with the People’s Republic of China (PRC) has witnessed a similar trend, as relations have grown in depth and extended to a larger number of sectors than previously. In this way, the Parliament is now an integral part of the Union’s China policy and a player in the sort of multi-level game that Brussels runs with Beijing<sup>2</sup>. However, just as the EU mostly struggles to speak with one voice, it is hard to understand how political discussion at the EP, with its variety of opinions and interests, can possibly flow into a single position on China. It is particularly challenging to assess whether this discussion responds to party politics among parliamentary groups, or rather to dynamics related to national politics of the Member States.

After describing in greater detail the evolution of EP diplomacy towards China, this paper takes the case of the *‘European Parliament resolution of 12 March 2019 on security threats connected with the rising Chinese technological presence in the EU and possible action on the EU level to reduce them’*<sup>3</sup> (“the Resolution”), analysing the events, debates and negotiations that led to its adoption. In doing so, it presents two main arguments with the overall aim of furthering our understanding of EP diplomacy. First, it shows why the EP’s traditional function as co-legislator is a crucial means of diplomatic action, thus assigning a privileged position to standing committees over other

bodies in defining the overall stance of Parliament. In parallel, it gives an initial assessment of how national politics influence EP diplomacy, to the point that the latter may be seen as an extension of discussions of China taking place in EU capitals.

## General and specific trends in EP diplomacy towards China

The Treaty of Lisbon strengthened the role of the Parliament in EU decision-making in general, and in external relations specifically. In this domain, the EP gained formal prerogatives of co-decision in international treaty-making, budgetary oversight, and political accountability of the Union’s diplomatic arm<sup>4</sup>. Through these prerogatives, as well as through its cooperation with national parliaments of the Member States<sup>5</sup>, the Parliament can play a limited, yet fully-institutionalised role in the decision-making on EU external relations. In addition, it has developed its own network of inter-parliamentary ties – a fact that is mostly referred as ‘EP diplomacy’<sup>6</sup> or “diplomatic action”<sup>7</sup>. Nonetheless, it has to be acknowledged that the ‘internal’ dimension of the Parliament’s role in EU decision-making is an essential asset to its ‘external’ action.

Among the numerous parliamentary bodies that are concerned with EP diplomacy, delegations and committees get involved the most<sup>8</sup>. The former are geographically-based and oversee the EP’s external relations with third countries and international organisations; the latter are issue-based and manage internal proceedings in policy areas that either are part of the EU’s external action or have significant external repercussions. Even if the two formally

have different scopes but equal standing, it is undeniable that “committees tend to act as a *trait d’union* between the European Parliament’s internal proceedings and the work of delegations outside the parliament”<sup>9</sup>, considering that the Committee on Foreign Affairs (AFET) has political oversight over and coordinates their activities, and so can the Committee on International Trade (INTA) and on Development (DEVE) within their policy areas<sup>10</sup>. In addition, out of the two, only committees are tasked with drafting resolutions and recommendations, i.e. the two typical instruments for the EP to express its position on any “matter falling within the spheres of activity of the European Union” (Rule 143<sup>11</sup>) and on the Union’s external action (Rule 118<sup>12</sup>), respectively.

These two general trends – the progressive extension of EP diplomacy and the tendency of committees to be in the lead – are present in the evolution of EP relations with China. Proceedings that directly involve China are discussed on an ordinary basis by AFET and INTA, but they are also more and more frequently dealt with by committees in charge of other policy areas, such as the Committees on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs (LIBE) and Industry, Research and Energy (ITRE). On the other hand, the Delegation for Relations with the People’s Republic of China (D-CN) has been standing since the very first directly-elected Parliament (1979), and has counted at least 37 full members in the last four terms<sup>13</sup>, being today the second largest among those delegations dealing with bilateral inter-parliamentary ties<sup>14</sup>.

Based on the analysis conducted by JANCIC on “executive visions of parliamentary involvement in EU-China relations”<sup>15</sup>, three additional trends can be outlined in this specific area of EP diplomacy. First, the Parliament’s involvement in the Union’s China policy-making has progressively enlarged in scope. From an initial focus on civil society and the promotion of human rights, it has shifted to people-to-people diplomacy as a whole, and then to the full range of parliamentary activities, e.g. in policy areas like trade and digitalisation. Secondly, in the vision of the European Commission, the EP has evolved from being a more “passive” actor into a “precious tool” that could complement inter-governmental relations, and eventually into an “integral part of the EU decision-making apparatus”<sup>16</sup>.

Accordingly, power relations within this apparatus have progressively changed, as the traditional inter-institutional rivalry has left room for cross-fertilisation, cooperation and a sort of ‘division of labour’ within a “multi-level game” that Brussels now plays with Beijing<sup>17</sup>. To this extent,

GIANNIOU’s argument that the EP’s active involvement is in the overall interest of the Union, based on the fact that the Parliament is able to “present more resolute positions transcending EU official red lines”<sup>18</sup>, seems to fully apply to EU relations with China.

Taking these trends into consideration, it can be argued that the EP is now fully involved in the Union’s China-policy making, and plays its own part in every phase of the cycle. The position of the Parliament is informed by a number of internal bodies, but mostly by the D-CN and standing committees. Whereas it can be expressed through parliamentary recommendations and resolutions, as it is typical, the EP’s stance can equally take many other forms, ranging from the statements of the President, the Chair of the D-CN or other MEPs, to legislative proceedings that directly or indirectly touch relations with China. To this extent, in order to assess the weight of parliamentary diplomacy in EU external relations, it is crucial to understand how the EP position is formed and identify its driving factors, as in the case study presented in the following section.

### **Forming the EP position: where do concerns with China’s “security threats” come from?**

Between the end of 2018 and early 2019, a number of events sparked extensive debate about the growing presence of Chinese companies in the European ICT sector. These events fall into three main categories. Some of them – per se much anterior to this timeframe – relate to China and its domestic policies, namely the entry into force of the Cybersecurity Law<sup>19</sup> and the approval of the Intelligence Law<sup>20</sup> in 2017. Back then, many feared that these two legal acts would create a new Chinese ‘digital sovereignty’, as the former was expected to make it harder for foreign companies to collect data in China, while the latter would oblige national companies operating abroad to share foreign data at the request of the Chinese intelligence. As a second category of events, global discussion ensued on whether it was necessary to take measures against, and possibly ban, Chinese companies in order to protect critical infrastructures. This discussion reached its peak on the occasion of the notorious arrest in Canada of the Chief of Financial Operations of Huawei, Meng Wanzhou, for her extradition to the US<sup>21</sup>. In this same timeframe, a third set of events took place directly within the EU, with the release of a warning against Huawei and ZTE by NUKIB, the Czech national authority on cybersecurity,<sup>22</sup> and the arrest of a Huawei employee in Poland on accusations of espionage<sup>23</sup>.

Against this backdrop, concerns about “security threats” connected with Chinese technologies did not take long to

enter the EU political discussion. A debate on this issue took place on 13 February 2019, as MEPs exchanged views with Minister George Ciamba, representing the Romanian presidency of the Council, and then Commissioner for the Security Union, Sir Julian King. It is important to notice that this was a last minute addition to the agenda of the Plenary, as requested by Czech MEP Luděk Niedermayer on behalf of the group of the European People's Party (EPP). This request had been approved by the Plenary two days prior, with the sole opposition of French MEP Bruno Gollnisch (Front National, group Non Inscrits – NI)<sup>24</sup>. Aside from the statements of the the Council and the Commission, ten MEPs intervened in this exchange of views, including four Czechs and two Germans<sup>25</sup>. Overall, there was general agreement on the fact that EU action on cybersecurity was necessary to ensure coordination among Member States and deal with these security concerns. However, representatives from both extremes of the political spectrum also stressed that China did not have to be a specific target, insofar as other countries, including the US, could pose an equal threat to the Union's cybersecurity<sup>26</sup>.

At this earlier stage, the political discussion was arguably driven by two factors. On the one hand, positions in Strasbourg were mirroring domestic dynamics and debates on the subject. This explains the overrepresentation of Czech MEPs in the exchange of views, considering that the NUKIB warning against Huawei and ZTE had revamped a harsh confrontation between president Miloš Zeman and the national "security community"<sup>27</sup>, possibly becoming the symbol of a negative turn in Czech political discourse about China<sup>28</sup>. On the other, stances on this issue intertwined with longer-lasting tendencies in European politics, namely how criticism of the US is something that recurs across the whole political spectrum<sup>29</sup>. For instance, Bulgarian MEP Peter Kouroumbashev, speaking on behalf of the group of the Socialists and Democrats (S&D), pointed out that US companies had also faced allegations of cybersecurity breaches<sup>30</sup> – the same remark that MEP Gollnisch (Front National/NI) had made to justify his vote against adding to the agenda a discussion of this sort<sup>31</sup>.

This debate was meant to lead to a resolution, to be voted in the part-session of March 2019. According to Rule 123<sup>32</sup>, the Plenary would vote on individual motions for resolution tabled by a committee, a political group or a certain number of MEPs, as well as on any joint motions for resolution (JMR); a JMR could replace the individual motions previously tabled by its signatories, and be voted first if supported by a clear majority. As is common practice, political groups then started negotiating a JMR that could

receive the broadest support<sup>33</sup>. In the first week of March, four meetings took place under the leadership of the EPP, who had proposed the debate in the first place. Despite the time constraints, in their first meeting political groups decided to both present individual motions (GMR<sup>34</sup>) and collaborate on a JMR, for which the draft GMR of the EPP was chosen as working text.

The GMRs presented a number of commonalities and differences. Common elements included: a clear focus on 5G (with the exception of the GMR of the Greens/European Freedom Alliance - EFA); the call for closer EU coordination on cybersecurity; the reference to some EU instruments that were already or soon to be in place, i.e. the NIS Directive<sup>35</sup>, the Cybersecurity Act<sup>36</sup> and FDI screening<sup>37</sup>; and a general emphasis on risk-assessment measures. Nevertheless, key differences concerned whether or not to specifically mention foreign actors. First, a majority of the GMRs mentioned China's Cybersecurity and Intelligence Laws and the concerns they had raised, whereas some of the groups were open to limit the number of direct references to Beijing - possibly not even citing China in the title of the Resolution. Similarly, three GMRs addressed allegations against Huawei, so it was also discussed whether it was suitable for the JMR to name foreign companies. Thirdly, many GMRs referred to the US alongside other countries that had taken or discussed measures for limiting Chinese technological presence, while the GMR of the Gauche Unie Européenne/ Nordic Green Left (GUE/NGL) made explicit reference to the Snowden revelations and US accusations against Huawei<sup>38</sup>.

Most of these differences turned out to be decisive for groups in deciding whether to support the JMR or not. Eventually, a common text was co-signed by EPP, S&D, Greens/ EFA and the Alliance of the Liberal and Democrats in Europe (ALDE)<sup>39</sup>, whereas GUE/NGL, the European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) and Europe of Freedom and Direct Democracy (EFDD) kept their own GMRs on the table. While including all the main elements that were common to the GMRs of its signatories, the JMR took a stance on the issues that had been at the core of political confrontation. It eventually included references to: "*Chinese* technological presence" in the title of the Resolution, as it was against the rules for it to differ from the designation of the related Plenary debate (interestingly enough, this rule has been overturned in the Rules of Procedure of the 9<sup>th</sup> legislative term<sup>40</sup>); China's Intelligence Law (sixth citation) and State Security Laws (recital E); and Huawei (recital F), but only as far as measures taken against it specifically in the Czech Republic were concerned; on the other hand, it did not include any mention of the US<sup>41</sup>.



Two additional elements have to be taken into consideration for this analysis of the Resolution to be comprehensive. First, even if the possibility to table motions for resolution had been left to political groups instead of specific committees, the resolution inevitably required that negotiators be familiar with cybersecurity, 5G and the many dossiers on digital policy that the EP had been discussing until that point. Accordingly, the negotiating team included experts from both AFET and ITRE. However, the level of technical expertise that was necessary for debating this issue prevented those working on EU-China relations from taking the lead, which was left instead to advisors in digital policy. Moreover, it should be noted that each political group was not only represented by its policy advisors, but some accredited assistants were also present to ensure that the 'red lines' of their MEPs would not be crossed. This arguably is the reason why allegations against Huawei in the Czech Republic were kept in the JMR, while similar references concerning other Member States were taken out. Finally, it should be mentioned that the negotiations took place at the very end of the 8<sup>th</sup> legislative term, i.e. not only when the European elections were only three months away, but under extraordinary pressure to conclude legislative procedures for as many files as possible. Understandably enough, a certain 'fatigue' may have eased what could otherwise have been a very harsh political confrontation. The vote on the Resolution took place on 12 March 2019, with the JMR being voted first and approved by a large majority. The position of the EP then flowed into a debate that has kept growing since then, with further discussions on 'Huawei bans' in several Member States<sup>42</sup> and the publication of a EU Toolbox for 5G Security<sup>43</sup>. In parallel, on the very same day of the vote a new EU China paper was released, signalling a step change in the Union's approach in relations with Beijing<sup>44</sup>. This '*strategic outlook*' not only identified the "security of critical infrastructure and the technological base" as one of the areas where the EU needed to grow stronger vis-a-vis China<sup>45</sup>, but it also foresees for the Parliament to be a crucial actor through its prerogatives as co-legislator. In a longer-term perspective, the Resolution then was a very first occasion for the Parliament to discuss and adopt a preliminary position on China's "security threats", being called to implement it within the legislative process of any related files from then on.

## Conclusion

This case study has attempted a contribution to understanding the genesis of EP diplomacy, i.e. how the Parliament forms its positions and what factors drive this process. The analysis of the background events, political debate and negotiations that led to the adoption of the Resolution points towards two elements that recurred throughout the process.

First, whereas the role of the Parliament in EU external relations has expanded through both its function in 'internal' decision-making and its ability to conduct 'external' relations of its own, legislative prerogatives remain at the core of the EP's action. Parliamentary recommendations and resolutions are indeed crucial to the formulation of the Union's policy towards China and other foreign actors, but the Parliament also needs to implement them in its 'ordinary' activities, as domestic EU policies have growing external repercussions. Accordingly, many parliamentary bodies contribute to EP diplomacy, but the weight of standing committees is expected to increase as long as they hold wider prerogatives in internal proceedings, including the possibility to table motions for resolutions. In addition, the technical expertise that advisors working at committee level possess is crucial for leading also those negotiations that have political saliency in foreign affairs.

Secondly, dynamics pertaining to national politics of the Member States can heavily influence the EU political discussion. In this case study, a confrontation between different visions of relations with China in the Czech Republic ultimately was what brought the debate to the EP and got the largest representation, thus giving a spin to the course of the negotiations and the final position of the Parliament on this matter. For this reason, further research is needed not only on how differences among national delegations interplay within each EP political group, but also on how they are formed in the first place within the Member States. For this purpose, focus should be put on domestic cleavages, discussions of China in national politics, as well as of Chinese diplomatic action and influence in EU capitals. ☺

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## BIO

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# THE RETURN OF GEOPOLITICS: EASTERN PARTNERSHIP COUNTRIES BETWEEN THE EUROPEAN UNION AND CHINA

DR RUBEN ELAMIRYAN

## Introduction

Rising major power competition increases the potential for clash of interests in the EU's Eastern Partnership (EaP) region between global, regional, and local actors. The region encompassing Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine has for centuries been of strategic interest for Eurasian and non-Eurasian powers alike. As such, these countries have traditionally been centers of great power competition due to their geographic location, as well as natural resources.

Hence, this paper analyzes the main declared and latent political, economic, and geopolitical goals of the EU and China in the EaP region. The paper compares the EaP Program and the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) based on the strategic approaches from both centers of power towards the EaP region, economic cooperation (trade and foreign direct investments), current and potential infrastructure development, discovering opportunities for cooperation, as well as risks and challenges which might lead to confrontation. The demonstration of the main land and maritime routes of the BRI brings more clarity to China's strategic interest in the EaP countries. At the same time, the paper analyzes the impact of the USA and Russia on the development of relations among the triangle of EU, China, and EaP countries. Furthermore, it discusses the opportunity to develop cooperative coexistence in the region among the centres of power. Finally, the findings are summarized in the conclusion.

## Eastern Partnership Program of the European Union

The EaP is a relatively new regional cooperation project

officially presented to six countries in Eastern Europe and the South Caucasus by the EU. With Sweden's active participation, Poland introduced the initiative during the EU Foreign Affairs Council meeting on May 26, 2008. It is designed to promote regional stability and sustainable development through economic cooperation, democratic institution-building, energy security, as well as stabilization of the EU eastern neighborhood.

The official objectives of the EaP include developing the political and economic integration of the EU with Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine. It is geared towards advancing human rights and good-governance norms through creation of a free-trade zone that would give partner countries access to the EU's five hundred million consumers.<sup>1</sup>

However, the initiative did not go so far as to offer EU membership to partner countries. On the one hand, this was a reasonable decision given the limited possibilities of the further EU enlargement. On the other hand, this move was widely seen as an impediment and disincentive for partner countries to undertake serious economic and political reforms.<sup>2</sup> There is also the third opinion, which claims that the EaP was intentionally designed to stop EU enlargement to the East.<sup>1</sup> Finally, the EaP provides strategic security dimension for the EU through promotion of the comprehensive stability in its neighborhood.<sup>2</sup>

After the partially failed EaP Vilnius Summit in November 2013, when Armenia and Ukraine did not sign the Association Agreement, it seemed that Brussels lost to some

extent its enthusiasm towards the Programme. Additionally, the ongoing migration crisis in Europe, Brexit and the changing global security architecture strengthened the voices of those who claimed it was essential to focus on the EU's domestic issues, instead of putting energy into the EaP Programme.<sup>3</sup>

However, during the EaP Summit in Brussels in November 2017, the EU infrastructure investment plan was publicly introduced, which is designed to boost connectivity and economic growth in the EaP countries. The European Commission and the World Bank have co-authored an 'Indicative trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T) Investment Action Plan' that identifies priority projects in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine. According to the Plan, the projects will require an estimated cumulative investment of almost €13 billion and foresee a total of 4,800 kilometers of road and rail, six ports and 11 logistics centers.

The plan clarifies that the priority investments include both short-term projects to be completed by 2020 and long-term projects aiming to improve transport links on the TEN-T by 2030 (Eastern Partnership 2019).<sup>4</sup> As a consequence, TEN-T might be described as a stimulus to accelerate the project and enhance further cooperation with the region.

At the same time, TEN-T might be argued to be a supporting mechanism to the EU's newly developed strategy – Connecting Europe and Asia – Building blocks for an EU strategy of October 2018, which is intended to provide tighter connection between the EU and Asia, including China. The former EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice-President of the European Commission, Federica Mogherini stated: "The approach to connecting Europe and Asia is something big, and is consistent with our overall global approach. And I know that our friends not only in Europe but also in Asia are very much looking forward to start working on this."<sup>5</sup>

As a consequence, the EaP region finds itself in the middle of that route. This in turn, will have big political, economic, security, and geopolitical implications for the six EaP countries, establishing both opportunities and challenges, which will be discussed below in the paper.

Successful EaP implementation will contribute to the EU's external and internal security, economic cooperation, and political stability through establishing a peaceful, sustainable, stable, and cooperative region in its neighborhood and

strategic communication routes. Given the potential for the Ukrainian and Nagorno-Karabakh conflicts to escalate and threaten strategic stability in the EU neighborhood, the successful implementation of the EaP gains additional value in contributing to a peaceful and cooperative environment for all sides.

### **China, Belt and Road Initiative, and the EaP Countries**

The BRI is a comprehensive project aiming at closer integration in Eurasia. The project encompasses the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road and was initially proposed by Chinese President Xi Jinping in 2013. On May 10, 2017 (shortly before the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation, which took place on May 14 and 15), China issued a detailed explanatory document on the BRI. Firstly, the document outlined the economic nature and motives of the BRI.<sup>6</sup> Secondly, it officially announced that the BRI consists of the land-based Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road.

The Silk Road Economic Belt has three routes:

- from Northwest China and Northeast China to Europe and the Baltic Sea via Central Asia and Russia;
- from North-West China to the Persian Gulf and the Mediterranean Sea, passing through Central Asia and West Asia;
- from Southwest China through the Indochina Peninsula to the Indian Ocean.

The 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road has two major routes:

- one starts from coastal ports of China, crosses the South China Sea, passes through the Malacca Strait, and reaches the Indian Ocean, extending to Europe;
- the other starts from coastal ports of China, crosses the South China Sea, and extends to the South Pacific.<sup>7</sup>

Based on the above five routes, China has proposed the following six corridors for the BRI:

- New Eurasian Land Bridge Economic Corridor,
- China-Mongolia-Russia Economic Corridor,
- China-Central Asia-West Asia Economic Corridor,
- China-Indochina Peninsula Economic Corridor,
- China-Pakistan Economic Corridor,
- Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar Economic Corridor.<sup>8</sup>

Neither the BRI document, nor the corridors, have strategic focus on the EaP region. In particular, none of the five main routes and six corridors pass through the EaP countries. However, two regional projects in the EaP, initiated by



Armenia and Azerbaijan respectively, aspire to connect the region with the BRI and become hubs between Europe and China. The first one is the 'North-South Corridor'. Currently, this highway is under construction and aims to connect the Persian Gulf with Black Sea through Iran, Armenia, and Georgia, integrating it into the BRI<sup>9</sup>

The second project is the recently launched Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railroad. The main idea is to connect China and Europe through Central Asia, the Caspian Sea, South Caucasus (Azerbaijan and Georgia), and Turkey.<sup>10</sup>

At the same time, the following projects are being currently implemented within the BRI:

- Batumi Bypass Road Project
- Trans Anatolian Natural Gas Pipeline Project
- Nenskra Hydropower Plant.<sup>11</sup>

Moreover, China is constructing the second largest Chinese embassy in Armenia.<sup>12</sup> However, the current state of the not very intensive Armenia-China relations leaves an open question as to why China needs this Embassy in the suburbs of the Armenian capital-city. At the same time, in 2018 China replaced Russia as Ukraine's biggest trading partner.<sup>13</sup>

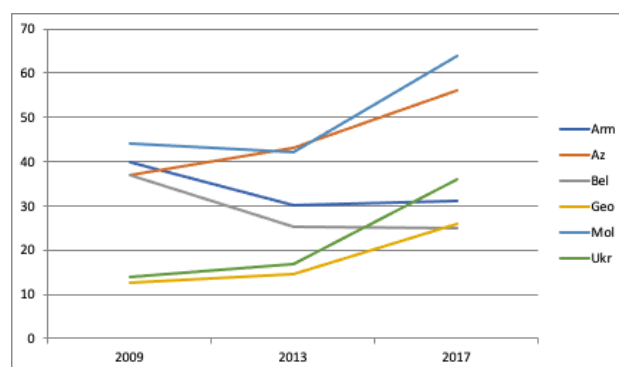
Thus, it could be concluded that even though currently China does not show any strategic interest in the EaP region, but, there is a steady rise in, particularly, economic, political, and energy-sector collaboration. On the other hand, based on the current dynamic this cooperation has the potential to evolve into more strategic relations in the future.

### EU, China, and economic cooperation with the EaP

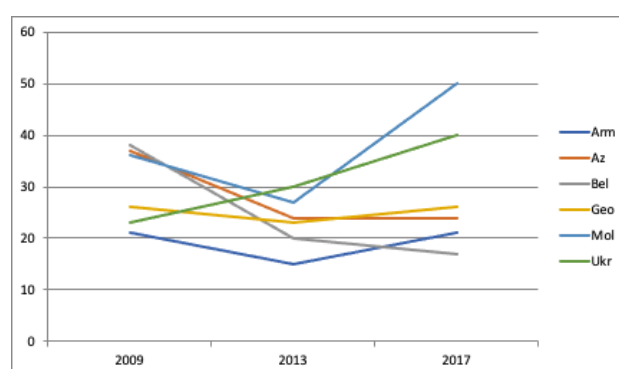
The analysis of EU – EaP and EaP – China relations will be incomplete without a demonstration of the economic cooperation dynamic. Both the EU and China emphasize economic collaboration as one of the main pillars in the Eastern Partnership Program and BRI respectively.<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, both particularly outline the economic cooperation-oriented nature of those platforms, especially in the case of the BRI.<sup>15</sup>

In order to illustrate the level of economic cooperation, the paper presents graphics of trade (export-import) and foreign direct investments between the sides. The comparison starts from 2009, when the EaP was officially introduced, stops on 2013, when the BRI was launched, and shows the most recent data for 2017.

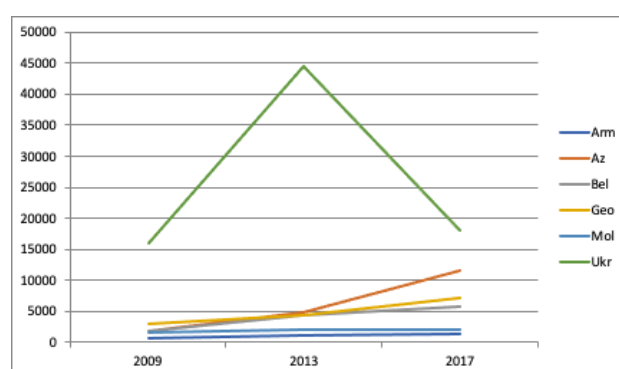
**Figure 1: Export Dynamics: EaP to EU (% of total exports of each country)**



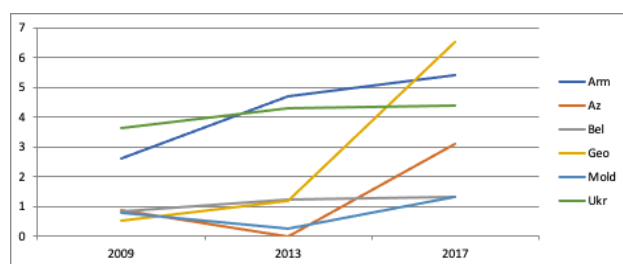
**Figure 2: Import dynamics: EU to EaP (% of total exports of each country)**



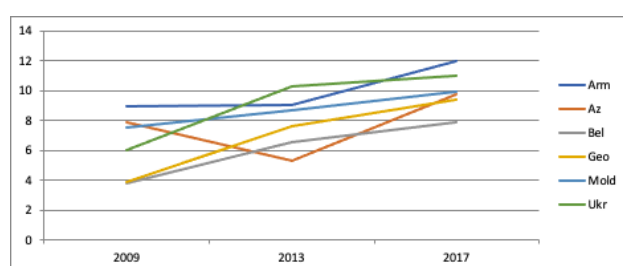
**Figure 3: FDI dynamics: EU to EaP (in mln USD)**



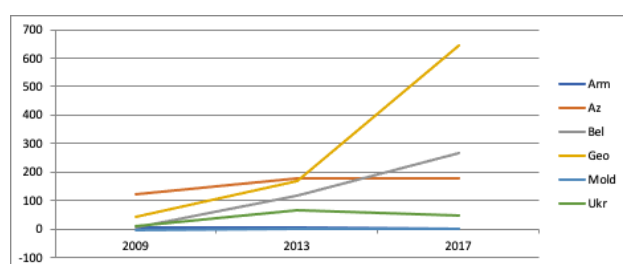
**Figure 4: Export dynamics: EaP to China (% of total exports of each country)**



**Figure 5: Import dynamics: China to EaP (% of total imports of each country)**



**Figure 6: FDI dynamics: China to EaP (in mln USD)**



Sources for Figures 1 – 6.<sup>16</sup>

Figures 1–3 demonstrate that the EU enjoys strategic economic presence in the EaP region. It is one of the most important economic partners for all EaP countries with major share in their exports, imports, and FDI. For instance, Figure 1 shows that in 2017 the EU's share in EaP countries' exports varied from 25 per cent in case of Belarus to 64 per cent in case of Moldova. The same strategic economic partnership between the EU and EaP countries is applicable in the case of imports to the EaP countries and the EU investments in the EaP region (Figures 2 and 3). At the same time, Figures 4 – 6 show that though currently the Chinese economic presence in the region is not significant, it is undergoing steady growth. For instance, in 2017 Georgia, which had the largest export to China out of all EaP countries, exported only 6.5 per cent to China out of

all its export. However, this figure increased from 0.53 per cent in 2009. Additionally, from 2009 to 2017 Chinese FDI in Georgia grew more than 15 times (from 42 to 644 mln USD). At the same time, during 2009-2017 Chinese FDI in Belarus increased more than fifty times – from 5 to 268 mln USD (Figure 6). The same tendency is mostly applicable to all EaP countries with regard to exports, imports, and FDI (See Figures 1-4). In contrast, the presence of the EaP countries in the EU's and China's trade and FDI is very low. For instance, for 2017 all six countries together had less than two per cent share in the EU trading balance and even less in the case of China.<sup>17</sup>

The above demonstrates a major imbalance in the EU-EaP and EaP-China economic relations, where the EU is a strategic economic partner for the EaP countries and China is becoming a more important one. On the other hand, the EaP market is rather insignificant for both the EU and China. Hence, the low share of the EaP countries in EU and China trade, and, as a consequence, rather limited significance of the EaP market for the both, may not trigger clash of economic interests between the EU and China. But at the same time, given the potential for economic power to transform into political power,<sup>18</sup> for the EU and China the level of economic presence in the region has the potential to generate political influence and promote the interests mentioned in sections above.

### The United States and Russia in the EaP region

The paper demonstrates the multilayered EU and China involvement in the EaP region. However, none of them can develop its relations with the EaP countries without calculation of the strategic environment and particularly other actors that have a strategic presence in that part of the world. In this regard the paper discusses the role of the USA and Russia in the EU's and China's foreign policy making in the EaP region.

Both the USA and Russia are two major actors that have a large political, economic, geopolitical, and hard security presence in the EaP region. Additionally, the EU and US have been strategic allies for at least seventy years, while China and Russia are developing a strategic partnership, especially in the light of the rising West-China confrontation.

Russia is the largest trading partner for Armenia and Belarus. Both are members of the Russia-led Collective Security Treaty Organization and Eurasian Economic Union. All the EaP countries, except Georgia, are members of the Commonwealth of Independent States – an international

organization, which was established after the disintegration of the Soviet Union and mainly on its basis. Bilateral ties between EaP countries and Russia are also based on the access to Russia's labour market, as well as cultural, educational, and other platforms.

When it comes to the US, Georgia and Ukraine have NATO membership aspirations, while the remaining four EaP countries are developing military cooperation with the US and NATO, for instance, in the form of Individual Partnership Action Plans (except Belarus, which has special cooperation framework called 'Individual Partnership and Cooperation Programme'). Trade cooperation is also strong between the US and EaP countries. Additionally, the US and Russia are two out of the three mediators in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict (where, particularly, Armenia and Azerbaijan are involved) as the OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chairs.

The above demonstrates the comprehensive presence and potential for the US and Russia to impact political, economic, and geopolitical processes in the EaP region, including the relations between the EaP countries and with the EU and China. An example of that impact might be when in September 2013, after visiting Moscow, the former President Serzh Sargsyan of Armenia decided in one night to join the Russia-led Customs Union, instead of signing the already negotiated Association Agreement with the EU.<sup>19</sup>

On the other hand, given strategic EU-USA and Russia-China relations, the following developments may impact the region. Firstly, China might restrict its further engagement with

the EaP countries or limit its scale, given that Russia might consider the region as a sphere of its preferential interests, while China, not having strategic aspirations there, focuses on the development of strategic cooperation with Russia in other parts of the world, which are more important for China.

Secondly, the rising turbulence and uncertainty in the world might limit the EU engagement with the region, especially in geopolitical sense. Due to the fact that Russia might consider the region as a sphere of its preferential interests,

the EU might not be willing to have further deterioration of the EU-Russia relations, especially in the light of the Ukrainian conflict.

Additionally, the hypothetical further worsening of EU-Russia relations will have limited impact on EU-China relations, including in the EaP region. Despite the rising Russia-China strategic cooperation, China implements an independent foreign policy based on its own national interests. Chinese neutrality in the Ukrainian conflict of 2014 justifies this assumption.

Finally, given the US-EU strategic alliance and NATO membership for most of the EU member-states, the rising great power competition between the US and China might push the EU to take harder stance on China, including in the EaP region. The recent NATO summit in London, where for the first time in history China was recognized as a challenge for the Alliance,<sup>20</sup> might be an indirect clue for this assumption.

### Conclusions

With the rising great power competition around the world, various regions in and outside of Eurasia might be affected and become a battlefield of competitive interests for global and regional powers. From this perspective, the paper has demonstrated that there is strategic mutual interest between the EU and EaP countries, while China-EaP collaboration, and the BRI

involvement in the region is experiencing a steady rise. Both for the EU and China these interests include, but are not limited to, trade, access to communication routes, including transport and movement of

goods, energy resources, as well as strategic stability in the neighborhood.

Hence, those interests have full potential to become either a 'bone of contention' or a platform for positive collaboration. However, given the understanding of the necessity in strategic stability in their neighborhood and along strategic land routes, the EU and China should strive for cooperative co-existence in the region. On the other hand, competition is an inalienable part of human and state nature. Hence, the importance of positive, not conflictual, competition

## **GIVEN THE UNDERSTANDING OF THE NECESSITY IN STRATEGIC STABILITY IN THEIR NEIGHBORHOOD AND ALONG STRATEGIC LAND ROUTES, THE EU AND CHINA SHOULD STRIVE FOR COOPERATIVE CO-EXISTENCE IN THE REGION.**

should be emphasized, which aims not at destruction and establishment of 'spheres of influence', but fair competition, mutual respect, and accountability for the future of the regional and, as a consequence, global security environment.

From this perspective, the development of the cooperative collaboration agenda might bring together, for instance, the EU's 'Connecting Europe and Asia – Building blocks for an EU strategy' and BRI via modernized 'Indicative trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T) Investment

Action Plan', and allowing the EaP countries to serve as a hub for positive cooperation.

Finally, the small and medium size countries in the EaP region should also accept their responsibility in the development of cooperative collaboration by developing an accountable, clear, peaceful and cooperation-oriented agenda, avoiding the 'temptation' to become a source of threat for any of the actors involved. ☉

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## BIO

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