

# BRI CONFERENCE

## BOOK OF ABSTRACTS

OLOMOUC 2019



# **ECONOMIC AND STRATEGIC IMPACTS OF THE BELT AND ROAD INITIATIVE ON CENTRAL EASTERN EUROPE, CENTRAL AND SOUTHEAST ASIA: SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES**

## **BOOK OF ABSTRACTS**

**March 20-21, 2019  
Palacký University in Olomouc**

**Sinophone Borderlands – Interaction at the Edges**

reg. no. CZ.02.1.01/0.0/0.0/16\_019/0000791  
Excellent research

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## China's Belt and Road Initiative

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In autumn 2013, Chinese President Xi Jinping introduced the ambitious Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). During a speech in Astana (Kazakhstan) in September 2013 he presented his plans for the land-based Silk Road, the so-called Silk Road Economic Belt (SREB). One month later in a speech in Jakarta (Indonesia) he laid out the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road (MSR). Together they form the New Silk Roads or, as they were previously known, One Belt, One Road (OBOR).

The New Silk Roads are a fundamental revival of the ancient Silk Road. They became part of the Chinese Dream, proclaimed by Xi, and are since 2017 enshrined in the Constitution of the Communist Party. Basically, the main objective of the BRI is to modernize the broadly defined infrastructure, including roads, railways, airports, ports, pipelines and telecommunication networks, in China and the neighbor regions. Thus the People's Republic of China (PRC) shall become better connected by land and sea with its close and geographically more distanced neighbors in Northeast, Southeast, South and Central Asia, the Middle East, East Africa and Europe. A recent addition to the BRI framework is the Arctic route in form of the "Polar Silk Road". Furthermore, it seems likely that Latin America will be formally included in the trans-continental initiative as well. So far, more than 60 countries joined the initiative. Almost 90 became member of the Asia Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), the key multilateral financial instrument for implementing the BRI with an initial capital of 100 bio. USD.

Even though many facets of the BRI still remain vague, the initiative is already a fact: a global, multi-billion dollar project that is likely to impact economically and, even more important, strategically on many regions and countries, be they participants or by-standers of the initiative. The most prominent non-participants are the United States, Japan and Australia. Tokyo, though, negotiated an agreement with China to cooperate in infrastructure development in Asia in October 2018. On the other hand, Japan promotes together with the United States, Australia and India (the so-called Quadrilateral Alliance) plans to create an own infrastructure development mechanism for Asia.

This initiative illustrates what the geopolitical key question in regard to the BRI is: Is Beijing willing to stick to the existing international and regional orders or does it aim to use BRI to promote its own values, norms and collaboration mechanisms?

In fact, a broad bundle of strategic, foreign policy, foreign economic and domestic motives drives the BRI. The Western inland provinces, notably the autonomous region Xinjiang, shall narrow the socioeconomic divide in comparison to the higher developed coastal provinces. Another motive are the avenues offered by the BRI for Chinese companies to export their excess production (e.g. steel, aluminum and cement). Moreover, most infrastructure projects along the New Silk Roads are built by Chinese compa-

nies and with Chinese workers, and most loans are provided by the Chinese government or banks. The BRI will also help to further open up the consumer markets in Asia, Europe and the Middle East for Chinese products (“going out” strategy). Overall, the BRI shall create trust among the participant countries, enabling to subsequently deepen cooperation in trade, economics, people-to-people contacts and in additional realms.

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## Analysis of the impacts of BRI in three regions

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The New Silk Roads will likely remain in the foreseeable future a core frame for China to promote its economic and strategic interests in its greater neighborhood that will shape the relations with its partners. How the BRI impacts on three selected regions along the New Silk Roads – Central Eastern Europe, Central and Southeast Asia – will be the topic of this two-day conference organized by the EU-funded project Sinophone Borderlands–Interaction at the Edges in Olomouc on 20/21 March 2019. The main aim of this international and interdisciplinary conference is to compare the economic and strategic impacts of the BRI on these three regions and the countries therein. By comparing the Chinese strategies to promote and implement the BRI in these regions, similarities and distinctions of the Chinese approach can be better highlighted. Also the economic and strategic ramifications of the BRI can be better understood in a comprehensive comparative regional context. Consequently, further comparative workshops, e.g. on Northeast and Southeast Asia, are planned in the context of the Sinophone Borderlands project.

In all three regions multilateral organizations have been established. In Southeast Asia the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), created in 1967, is a comparatively strong regional organization. Its ten members collaborate in a broad range of policy areas. The relations with Beijing are since the mid-1990s very close, it is ASEAN's main economic partner. However, due to China's assertive behavior in the South China Sea, tensions between the PRC and certain ASEAN members, in particular Vietnam, increased. Criticism has also been raised on China's attempts to instrumentalize the economically dependent smaller ASEAN members Laos and Cambodia to undermine ASEAN's unity.

Regional collaboration in Central Asia is a more recent phenomenon. The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) was created in 2001, developing out of the Shanghai Five, founded in 1996. China and Russia are the main driving forces behind this collaboration mechanism that is still mostly concerned with fighting terrorism, (ethnic) separatism and (religious) extremism. Beijing, though, aims to extend the collaboration to the economic realm, including deepening the relations between the Russia-led Eurasian Economic Union and the BRI. Yet, there are limits to the degree of cooperation, as China and Russia are strategic rivals in Central Asia, regarded by Moscow as its "near abroad".

In Central Eastern Europe (CEE) there exists since 2012 a regional cooperation mechanism as well, the 16+1 format. The qualitative difference to ASEAN and the SCO, though, is that Beijing established this platform and chose the 16 European members. Since the launch of the BRI, 16+1 increasingly developed in a comprehensive and institutionalized mechanism to promote the New Silk Roads. Regular meetings of

politicians and business people are held in Europe and China. Beijing became an important economic partner, though the investments from European countries in CEE are still much higher. Key projects for Beijing are the planned high-speed rail connection between Belgrade and Budapest (currently suspended by the European Union) and the further upgrade of the port of Piraeus. Greece is, similar to Austria, an observer in 16+1. Many 16+1 members as well as Austria are interested in becoming the key bridge for China's connections to Europe, possibly leading to competition among the CEE countries. In the Czech Republic, Beijing's growing economic and political influence has recently been discussed controversially in public.

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## Aims of the conference

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A major outcome of this conference will be assessments whether China pursues a similar or a different strategy for the three regions to implement the BRI. Special emphasis will be given to the question whether China supports the existing regional orders or aims to change them to its own advantage.

Apart from comparing the impacts of BRI on the three regions, another aim of the conference is to examine the official position of the regional organizations, the national governments as well as the population in Central Eastern Europe, Central and Southeast Asia on the BRI. It will be discussed whether the perceptions changed in the last year. Evidence from Southeast Asia and Europe suggest that both certain governments as well as the citizens became more skeptical about the impacts of the New Silk Roads. The European Parliament and the Commission are seemingly also more critical about Chinese influence on its member states. Yet, they also highlight positive effects of infrastructure cooperation, notably in the railway sector. Based on the assessment of Chinese investments and loans, the objective is to examine the economic and social impacts of the BRI and to identify areas in which cooperation is likely to offer mutual benefits.

In the evening of the second conference day, experts will publicly discuss the main findings of the three regional panels from an academic and political point of view. The discussants will compare and contrast China's BRI approach in Europe and Asia. With this public discussion, the new Central European Institute of Asian Studies (CEIAS), a regional Think Tank at Palacký University, will be formally launched.

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## Program

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March 20, 2019

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**8:30 REGISTRATION**

Václav Havel Room, Křížkovského 12

**9:00–10:30 OPENING CEREMONY**

**Welcome Speech**

*Jaroslav Miller (Rector, Palacký University Olomouc, Czech Republic)*

**Introduction of the Project “Sinophone Borderlands – Interaction at the Edges”**

*Ondřej Kučera (Department of Asian Studies and Sinophone Borderlands Project, Palacký University Olomouc, Czech Republic)*

**Keynote Speech: The Fragility of the Belt and Road Initiative**

*Yuan Horng Chu (National Chiao Tung University, Taiwan)*

Moderators: *Alfred Gerstl and Mária Strašáková (both Palacký University Olomouc, Czech Republic)*

**10:30–11:00 COFFEE BREAK**

**11:00–13:00 PANEL 1: BRI AND ITS IMPACT IN SOUTHEAST ASIA**

**The Belt and Road Initiative: At the Service of the Chinese Grand Strategy?**

*Tanguy Struye de Swielande (Université Catholique de Louvain, Belgium)*

**Logistics, Infrastructure, and Local Impacts: Chinaled BRI in Southeast Asia**

*Joyce C.H. Liu (National Chiao Tung University, Taiwan)*

- 11:00–13:00**      **PANEL 2: BRI AND ITS IMPACT IN CENTRAL ASIA**
- Comparing “Silk Road” Rhetoric and Policy Implementation in the Chinese, Japanese and Korean Engagement Strategies in Central Asia**  
*Timur Dadabaev (University of Tsukuba, Japan)*
- The European Union, USA and Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) in Central Asia: Competing Actors with Different Goals?**  
*Alica Kizeková (Institute of International Relations Prague, Czech Republic)*
- 13:00–14:00**      **LUNCH**
- 14:00–16:00**      **PANEL 1: BRI AND ITS IMPACT IN SOUTHEAST ASIA**
- At the Margin of the Belt and Road Initiative? A Multidisciplinary Approach of the Case of Brunei**  
*Jérémy Jammes (Universiti Brunei Darussalam, Brunei)*
- Red Dot and the Belt and Road Initiative**  
*Irene Chan (Nanyang Technological University, Singapore)*
- 14:00–16:00**      **PANEL 2: BRI AND ITS IMPACT IN CENTRAL ASIA**
- China’s Belt and Road Initiative in Central Asia – Development and Securitization in the Silk Road Economic Belt (SREB)**  
*Yuka Kobayashi (School of Oriental and African Studies, Great Britain)*
- Chinese BRI Policy – a View from Ashgabat**  
*Slavomír Horák (Tbilisi State University, Georgia)*

**Olomouc Guided Tour, starting at 17:00**

*(meeting point at main square, town hall, in front of astronomical clock; c. 45-60 minutes)*

**March 21, 2019**

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**9:00–11:00**

**PANEL 3: BRI AND ITS IMPACT ON CENTRAL EASTERN EUROPE**

**Bilateral and Subregional Cooperation in the Framework of “16+1”**

*Jing Long (Shanghai Institutes for International Studies, PRC)*

**Economic Policy Implications of the Belt and Road Initiative for CESEE and Austria**

*Robert Stehrer (Vienna Institute for International Economic Studies, Austria)*

**Localizing China’s Global Silk Roads through the “16+1”**

*Emilian Kavalski (University of Nottingham Ningbo, PRC)*

**11:00–11:15**

**COFFEE BREAK**

**11:15–12:45**

**PANEL 3: BRI AND ITS IMPACT ON CENTRAL EASTERN EUROPE**

**Deciphering China’s Strategic Partnerships in Central and Eastern Europe**

*Bartosz Kowalski (University of Łódź, Poland)*

**The Worsening Perception of China in the Czech Republic: Between Criticism and rising Sinophobia**

*Rudolf Fürst (Institute of International Relations)*

**12:45–13:30**

**LUNCH**

**13:30–15:00**

**PANEL 4: SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES IN THE THREE REGIONS**

**The Chinese Belt and Road Initiative and its Impact on Democratization and De-Democratization Processes**

*Wolfram Schaffar (University of Passau, Germany)*

**15:00–15:30**      **COFFEE BREAK**

**15:30–17:00**      **PANEL 5 (public): Along the Silk Roads: Realities and Prospects of Connections**

**Silk Ropes and Hopes on the Road**

*Petra Andělová (Metropolitan University Prague, Czech Republic)*

**Rail Projects and the Belt and Road Initiative**

*Frédéric Lasserre (Laval University, Canada)*

**Europe Goes Silk Road – A Young European Initiative**

*Sebastian Holler and Sebastian Maier (Europe Goes Silk Road, Vienna, Austria)*

**17:00–17:30**      **COFFEE BREAK**

**17:30–19:00**      **PANEL 6 (public): China's Belt and Road Initiative – Impacts on Europe and Asia**

*Jaroslav Miller, Rector, Palacký University Olomouc, Czech Republic*

*Ondřej Kučera, Head of the Project Sinophone Borderland–Interaction at the Edges, Department of Asian Studies, Palacký University Olomouc, Czech Republic*

*Werner Fasslabend, Former Minister of Defence Austrian Institute for European and Security Policy (AIES), Austria*

*Štefan Füle, former European Commissioner for Enlargement and Neighbourhood Policy, Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Joint Czech-China Chamber of Mutual Cooperation, Prague, Czech Republic*

*Martin Klepetko, Director of the Asia-Pacific Department, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Czech Republic*

*Jing Long, Shanghai Institute for International Studies, PRC*

*Tanguy Struye de Swielande, Université Catholique de Louvain, Belgium*

**19:00–21:00**      **CONFERENCE RECEPTION**

*Refreshments and lunches will be provided at the conference venue.  
Kindly note that the programme may be subject to change.*

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**March 20, 2019**

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Keynote Speech:

**The Fragility of the Belt and Road Initiative**

*Yuan Horng Chu (National Chiao Tung University, Taiwan)*

This talk attempts to explain why I predict that the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) as we know it today will undergo retreat and very likely to cease to exist within a quarter century. I will examine the declared purposes and the practical motivations of China, the ambivalent perceptions of the BRI client countries, and the most grandiose narrative of strategies imagined by China's rivals, for example, Steve Bannon's warning against the BRI as one of China's global strategies for hegemony. The Belt and Road Initiative will be compared with the 1405–1433 Zheng He expeditions that prefigured part of today's BRI map, and compared with its abrupt stop. The political conditions for the Chinese proverb remain generally unchanged: 人亡政息, when a man in power dies (or falls from power), all the political measures he made will cease. Zheng He's expeditions was launched by royal court; in spite of its formidable size, unlike the Portuguese explorations 65 years later, the Ming voyages had never brought about a sea trade feast broadly participated by its people across all strata as in the Portuguese trade empire in Asia.

With the BRI, whereas several infrastructure-focused state-controlled firms are provided with profitable business opportunities, provincial-level companies have to apply for loans provided by the Party-state to participate in regional projects. There are doubts and resentments, not only from the client countries, about China's political intentions, debt trap diplomacy, and hotbed of corruption, but also from Chinese nationals, about Chinese bank's ability to control risk, and the wasteful spending spree (大撒幣). Although China and some commentaries are claiming that the BRI is gaining momentum, signs of growing resistance and a losing momentum show otherwise, that it no longer seems unstoppable. If the Party-state "in-forms" the BRI, with its dictatorial policy forming and mode of power-succession, it will also "in-form" its possible abrupt stop. When it gets muddy or turns sour, no successor will devote to endure it, especially when it is domestically unpopular or resented.

## **PANEL 1: BELT AND ROAD INITIATIVE AND ITS IMPACTS IN SOUTHEAST ASIA**

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*CHAIRS: ALFRED GERSTL AND MÁRIA STRAŠÁKOVÁ*

### **The BRI: At the Service of the Chinese Grand Strategy?**

*Tanguy Struye de Swielande*

*(Université Catholique de Louvain, Belgium)*

Drawing from social theory and geopolitics, the presentation analyses China's Belt and Road Initiative as Beijing's grand strategy to assert and legitimate its national role conception of world leader by 2049. Despite Chinese rhetoric about the BRI being a project that will benefit the international community and that is in line with the current international order, realpolitik factors inform and drive the project, as China reinforces its exports, increases its sphere of influence, and increasingly sets tomorrow's norms. In doing so, China projects an image of a country with the objective and power resources of a great power that is ready and willing to take the lead in international affairs. This presentation argues that China mobilises and operationalizes all the dimensions of power to achieve its aim and have its role validated by others. Thus, coercion, threats, predatory economics, salami tactics, patron-client relations are concealed by social power and discursive power of cooperation and connectedness. The presentation reconnects thus the current literature on China's power expansion with social theories of power and international order to highlight the process of China's role definition and its localization within the international system.

## **Logistics, Infrastructure, and Local Impacts: China-led BRI in Southeast Asia**

*Joyce C.H. Liu (National Chiao Tung University, Taiwan)*

The 29 trade and investment deals signed in the form of a Memorandum of Understanding on November 20, 2018, between Rodrigo Duterte and Xi Jinping, including plans for “joint oil and gas exploration”, seems to indicate a more relaxed picture for the tension in the South China Sea. Both China and the Philippines declared that there would be no debt trap and no threat for sovereignty on the side of the Philippines. However, the huge benefit of these projects for Duterte as well as his influential friends and business associates have already created distrust among the general public. Moreover, people are also concerned with the real debt the Philippines is stepping in. Half of the funding of the 75 flagship projects under Duterte’s “build, build and build” plan have already relied on the loan from China. Manila intend to ask for additional 800 mio. Peso (c. 15.3 mio. USD) from China for the up-coming BRI projects in the Philippines.

The recent move in the Philippines is not the only case in Southeast Asia. The renewed interest in the Kra Canal in Thailand, a master plan in China’s BRI to link Pacific with the Andaman Sea, Bay of Bengal, Indian Ocean, and the Arabian Sea, is another example. This infrastructure initiative not only has alarmed other ASEAN countries, especially Singapore, since the Kra Canal will replace the Malacca Strait but also created local concerns due to the fact this project might trigger stronger reactions from the Muslim communities in the southern part of Thailand. The anti-Chinese riot in June 2018 concerning the 99 years lease for the Special Economic Zones in Vietnam, the corruption involved in the Indonesian BRI infrastructure, and the reservation of Mahathir have reflected the impacts the China-led BRI on Southeast Asian countries in various forms. Instead of predicting the success or failure of the BRI, my talk will address how the logistics of the China-led BRI projects are physically sutured by local politico-economic infrastructure, trigger more transnational migrant labors, and hence intensify various forms of frictions in local societies. Our project involves colleagues and students from Vietnam, Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, the Philippines, and Australia. We will analyze the BRI operation through the following axis: first, the roles of geo-economic and geopolitical zoning politics played by the BRI; second, how does BRI further trigger the flow of transnational labor migration and intensify the frictions among the local societies; third, how do such infrastructure initiatives expose the local corruptions and political tensions?

**At the Margin of the Belt and Road Initiative?**  
**A Multidisciplinary Approach of the Case of Brunei**  
*Jérémy Jammes (Universiti Brunei Darussalam, Brunei)*

Although a “small” ASEAN member state, Brunei is an integral part of the massive Chinese “new maritime silk route” game. Does Beijing find an additional “relay” with overseas Chinese communities that have been residing in Brunei for several generations? Can China be interested in Brunei for geostrategic reasons? Who are the Chinese interlocutors in Brunei and, in general, in ASEAN? To answer these questions and fully take into account Chinese interests, seduction and ASEAN’s reactions, this presentation will describe the implementation of the Belt and Road Initiative in Brunei through various actors, institutions and mechanisms, paving the way for a multidisciplinary approach of the Chinese strategy in the South China Sea.

## **The Little Red Dot and the Belt and Road Initiative**

*Irene Chan (Nanyang Technological University, Singapore)*

Singapore is among the most avid of supporters for China's economic initiatives, not just the Belt-and-Road Initiative (BRI). The city-state is among the first group of countries that joined the Chinese-proposed Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank in October 2014. However, in May 2017, Singapore's supposed exclusion from China's Belt-and Road Forum for International Cooperation made headlines. It resulted speculations of Singapore's expulsion from the Belt and Road Initiative by China due to disagreements over the South China Sea. Unlike many other ASEAN countries, Singapore does not require or receive Chinese infrastructure development assistance. However, Singapore's leaders have repeatedly endorsed the BRI. Singapore is also proactively engaging with China on the BRI. So, why is the city-state interested in the BRI? What is Singapore's role in the BRI? What are the challenges and opportunities for Singapore's engagement? Bearing in mind China's growing economic presence in this region, how does Singapore's support of the BRI square with its close strategic partnership with the US?

### **DISCUSSANTS:**

Wolfram Schaffar (*University of Passau, Germany*)

Klaus Scholik (*Austrian Institute for European and Security Policy, Austria*)

Padraig Lysaght (*University of Vienna, Austria*)

Tomáš Petrů (*Oriental Institute of the Czech Academy of Sciences, Czech Republic*)

Petra Andělová (*Metropolitan University Prague, Czech Republic*)

Filip Kraus (*Academia Sinica, Taiwan*)

Anna Holzmann (*Mercator Institute, Germany*)

František Kratochvíl (*Palacký University Olomouc, Czech Republic*)

## **PANEL 2: THE BELT AND ROAD INITIATIVE AND ITS IMPACTS ON CENTRAL ASIA**

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*CHAIRS: SAYANA NAMSARAEVA, PAVEL PTÁČEK AND  
UTE WALLENBOECK*

### **Comparing “Silk Road” Rhetoric and Policy Implementation in the Chinese, Japanese and Korean Engagement Strategies in Central Asia**

*Timur Dadabaev (University of Tsukuba, Japan)*

This presentation compares the Silk Road rhetoric of the Chinese, Japanese and South Korean engagements in Central Asia with the implementation plans rooted in such rhetoric. This contribution builds on the recognition that discourses on the intentions of various powers in engaging Central Asia do not always match their practical implementation. Thus, this presentation considers the particular projects these states plan and analyze their reasoning and implementation. In line with such an approach, this presentation recognizes that while speeches and statements of presidents, foreign ministers and policy officials inform our understanding of the relations between Central Asian and East Asian states, there is a need to look into the practical steps taken by these states. To operationalize this goal, this contribution uses the comparative analysis of engagement of China, Japan and South Korea with Uzbekistan through analysis of the economic road maps and statistics of their engagement from 2016 onward. This time-frame is a particular focus of this article as it symbolizes the new opening of Uzbekistan towards these three states after the death of its dictatorial president Islam Karimov.

# **The European Union, USA and Shanghai Cooperation Organization in Central Asia: Competing Actors with Different Goals?**

*Alica Kizeková*

*(Institute of International Relations Prague, Czech Republic)*

This presentation examines the engagement of the European Union (EU), the United States of America (USA) and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) in Central Asia in the era of the evolving Chinese Belt and Road Initiative. While the EU and USA have had their strategies on Central Asia in place, they have shown significant shortcomings which require reviews to consider the changed political environment and competing regional powers. Here, Russia and China have played the upper hand in dealings with Central Asian states bilaterally and within the SCO, as well as other regional platforms. China's emerging BRI, as well as the enlargement of the SCO by including India and Pakistan, have challenged the status quo and created a new dynamics in relations when various priorities compete at both bilateral and regional levels. This presentation argues that Central Asia should be at the forefront of strategic significance for all players through different dialogues. The region remains insecure and prone to traditional and non-traditional security threats. There, however, should be more recognition of local actors and key agents and tailoring approaches to the needs of local stakeholders. Above all, involving the EU and USA in an SCO+ format is vital since this platform is most likely going to become the primary regional organization for checks and balances of China's activities under the BRI in Central Asia.

# **China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in Central Asia – Development and Securitization in the Silk Road Economic Belt (SREB)**

*Yuka Kobayashi*

*(School of Oriental and African Studies, Great Britain)*

The Silk Road Economic Belt (SREB) initiative, launched by Xi Jinping in 2013 as the Central Asian component of China's Eurasian Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), is presented as a trade and infrastructural developmental initiative that benefits all to deliver stability. It consolidates Beijing's existing economic investments and security-building measures, while launching new projects to link the regions of Central Asia and South Asia more closely with China and extend the arc of security westward and develop these as a transport corridor linking China to Europe. This presentation examines the interaction between China's infrastructural investments and security dynamics in the Central Asian region, exploring why the BRI/SREB, presented by China as primarily as a developmental vision, is fraught with wide-ranging security implications.

## **Chinese BRI policy – a View from Ashgabat** *Slavomír Horák (Tbilisi State University, Georgia)*

Turkmenistan's foreign policy towards the Chinese BRI project remains ambiguous. From one point of view, the country is trapped in Chinese economical policy as China is a key purchaser of gas with an almost monopolistic position in Turkmen gas export. Turkmenistan also repays the loans provided by China for the development of gas fields in eastern Turkmenistan. In addition, Turkmenistan proclaimed its interest in the development of transport infrastructure for transit of goods through the country. However, the real implementation of infrastructural projects does often not fit with the main transport flows in Eurasia. Even those projects accomplished as eventual part of the BRI are used far below expectations due to poor transit conditions, the political situation, and high and ineffective tariffs in the country. As a consequence, Turkmenistan, despite its eventual excellent position between Central Asia, the Caucasus and the Middle East, stands mostly out of the main BRI projects.

### **DISCUSSANTS:**

Norbert Lacher (*Theresian Military Academy, Austria*)

Gaziza Shakhonova (*University of Economics Prague, Jan Masaryk Centre of International Studies, Czech Republic*)

Svetlana Jacquesson (*Palacký University Olomouc, Czech Republic*)

Allen Chun (*Academia Sinica, Taipei, Taiwan, and Palacký University Olomouc, Czech Republic*)

Azim Malikov (*Palacký University Olomouc, Czech Republic*)

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**March 21, 2019**

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**PANEL 3: THE BELT AND ROAD INITIATIVE AND ITS IMPACT  
IN CENTRAL EASTERN EUROPE**

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*CHAIRS: ALFRED GERSTL AND ALICA KIZEKOVÁ*

**Bilateral and Subregional Cooperation in the Framework  
of “16+1”**

*Jing Long (Center for European Studies of Shanghai Institutes  
for International Studies, PRC)*

When the “16+1 Cooperation” was designed and launched in 2012, the main purpose was to promote the bilateral economic cooperation through this multilateral platform. This positioning can be found in series of official documents and high ranking leaders’ remarks and also can be confirmed by the results mainly achieved in the last seven years. Some initiatives of cross-border cooperation have also been put forward by Central Eeastern European countries and provide a new development direction for the cooperation platform to be a new space for the cooperation between China and European subregions. This new dimension of cooperation is not with the purpose of weakening or replacing the bilateral cooperation between China and the EU or individual European countries. Instead, it plays a complementary role in developing China-Europe relationship by providing more space and areas of cooperation. China’s participation in subregional cooperation in Europe is till in its start-up stage with several new features. It also faces challenges when exploring new areas for pragmatic cooperation. The benefits are also obvious because, to strengthen the subregional cooperation will not only attract more Chinese investors with a larger and emerging market, but also help smooth the relationship between China and the EU by stimulating the common development and reducing the gap in Central and Eastern Europe.

## **Economic Policy Implications of the Belt and Road Initiative for CESEE and Austria**

*Robert Stehrer (Vienna Institute for International Economic Studies, Austria)*

The Belt and Road Initiative, a vision to revive the ancient “Silk Road” by means of massive infrastructure investments throughout Eurasia and Africa, was first presented by China’s President Xi Jinping in 2013. China has identified the region of Central East and Southeast Europe (CESEE) as the gateway to Western European markets. This was manifested by the investment in the Port of Piraeus (Greece) and the diplomatic initiative “16+1”, comprising eleven EU member states and five Western Balkan countries, which is interesting for Austria due to its strong economic relations with this region. The presentation analyses the most recent developments in trade and investment activities of China, Austria and the EU in CESEE, which are compared to the state of infrastructure in the region in the areas of transport, energy, information and communication technology as well as finance. Overall, CESEE has a high need for infrastructure investments, particularly in the transport sector. Chinese loans and investments in the region are becoming more important, especially for the Western Balkan countries, which have limited access to EU grants.

## **Localizing China's Global Silk Roads through the "16+1"** *Emilian Kavalski (University of Nottingham Ningbo, PRC)*

The Central and East European (CEE) part of the Eurasian landmass is often overlooked in the conversations on contemporary geopolitics. Yet, owing to China's investment in the CEE countries, the region has been subject to growing strategic attention. This article offers a brief overview of the history of this relationship by focusing on the "16+1" mechanism. Nestled within the broader Belt and Road Initiative, the "16+1" has provided a unique regional arrangement for extending Chinese influence in the sixteen CEE countries. The presentation inquires whether there is something else than the instrumental economic reasoning for the willingness of CEE countries to partner with China. The analysis detects four distinct (and mutually exclusive) strategic narratives motivating the participation of CEE states in the "16+1" mechanism. The study concludes with an enquiry on China's preparedness to respond to such identity geopolitics not only in the CEE region, but throughout the vast expanse covered by the BRI initiative.

## **Deciphering China's Strategic Partnerships in Central and Eastern Europe**

*Bartosz Kowalski (University of Łódź, Poland)*

The seven-year history of the Chinese-led multilateral initiative in Central and Eastern Europe consists of growing trade exchange (in favor of Beijing) and consolidation of political ties with Serbia, the Czech Republic, Poland and Hungary, combined with relatively small volume of Chinese investments. Thus, one might conclude that the general task of the "16+1" format is to create leaders of cooperation with China in CEE and to define models of cooperation at the bilateral level. By 2018 China signed agreements on comprehensive strategic partnerships with four countries of Central and Eastern Europe: the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Serbia. The presentation aims to analyze both the content of documents and the practice of bilateral relations. Chinese activities in these countries might be considered as the process of testing various models of economic and political cooperation. In case of Hungary and Serbia, they correspond to the aspirations of these countries to be a leader in CEE in a wider, not only Chinese context; in Czech Republic the Chinese activities have proven to be inconsistent with European reality, whereas in Poland they are mostly influenced by the state of relations between China and the United States.

# **The Worsening Perception of China in the Czech Republic: Between Criticism and rising Sinophobia**

*Rudolf Fürst (Institute of International Relations)*

This contribution reviews and summarizes the Czech media and public perception of China in the period of 2012–2017, i.e. since establishing the 16+1 regional format and the Czech “restart” of bilateral political dialogue with Beijing. It traces a contradiction between the Czech Republic's pragmatic agenda towards the PRC and Czech public opinion. The perception of the PRC in the Czech public and media debate is the worst in Europe (Eurobarometer poll), public discourse is showing signs of a negative bias, which will be in the presentation compared with available facts. The Czech public debate points to the issue of China challenging the Western liberal order and put the role of the PRC as an acceptable partner in question. The paper conceptualises criteria of Czech national interest, such as: relevance, consensus and acceptability. The negative public discourses in Czechia include allegations of betrayal of policy of values and legacy of Václav Havel, the “Chinese influence” phenomenon, emotional public pressure on providing asylum to members of the “Church of Almighty God” in the Czech Republic, and the uncritical acceptance of the Falun Dafa and its media platform “Epoch Times” in the Czech Republic. It also points to the Dalai Lama visit controversy in Prague in 2016 and a demonstration of liberal-conservatives against president Zeman before the presidential election; negative acceptance of traditional Chinese medicine (TCM), the Huawei securitization panic, and finally reconsidering the Prague-Beijing City Partnership Treaty by a new Prague City Hall led by the Pirates party. The presentation concludes with discussing the insufficient Czech knowledge of the Europe-China policy context and lack of interest in it; and rising polarization and ideologization of the Czech public discourse.

## **DISCUSSANTS:**

Werner Fasslabend (*Former Minister of Defence Austrian Institute for European and Security Policy (AIES), Austria*)

Velina Tchakarova (*Austrian Institute for European and Security Policy, Austria*)

Jeremy Garlick (*University of Economics Prague, Jan Masaryk Centre of International Studies, Czech Republic*)

Rudolf Fürst (*Institute of International Relations Prague, Czech Republic*)

Runya Qiaoan (*Palacký University Olomouc, Czech Republic*)

Štefan Füle (*Joint Czech-China Chamber of Mutual Cooperation, Czech Republic*)

## PANEL 4: SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES IN THE THREE REGIONS

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*CHAIRS: ALFRED GERSTL AND MÁRIA STRAŠÁKOVÁ*

### **The Chinese Belt and Road Initiative and its Impact on Democratization and De-Democratization Processes**

*Wolfram Schaffar (University of Passau, Germany)*

Since the launch of the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative, academics and analysts debate about the character and impact of Chinese economic activities on the political situation of the recipient countries. The debate centers around the question in how far China – apart from an economic agenda – exports its authoritarian development model as an alternative, non-liberal, state-centered development paradigm and thus contributes to processes of de-democratization.

As a fact, the implementation of the BRI coincides with a global wave of authoritarianism and the majority of most countries which are committed to the project, are authoritarian regimes. But even worse: in some countries, the shift from a liberal democratic towards an authoritarian regime seems to be directly connected with the reorientation towards China and its BRI activities.

In my presentation I will discuss countries of three regions – Southeast Asia, South Asia and Europe – where recent political developments have been linked to Chinese influence. I will argue that the variety of political conflicts and processes can not be fully explained by the external impact of Chinese foreign policy. Rather, the data supports analyses which highlight the interplay between external and internal factors, arguably with a primacy of internal factors. In a more global perspective, however, regional patterns of democratization and de-democratization can be carved out and demand further research.

#### **DISCUSSANTS:**

All Participants

## **PANEL 5 (OPEN TO THE PUBLIC): ALONG THE SILK ROADS: REALITIES AND PROSPECTS OF CONNECTIONS**

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*CHAIR: MARTIN LAVIČKA*

### **Silk Ropes and Hopes on the Road**

*Petra Andělová (Metropolitan University Prague, Czech Republic)*

“New Silk Road/Roads”; “One Belt, One Road”; and “Belt and Road Initiative” are only few of the names given to the new form of Chinese foreign politics. In fact, they are in general not as new and yet-to-be precisely defined. However Chinese engagement and mainly its strong economic push seems to take many by surprise and as such has been generating fears. In the global political landscape, where integration, dialogue platforms of all sorts, cooperation, communication etc. became magic formulas and remedies for almost all maladies of states and societies, the Chinese initiative somehow sticks out. The reason is obvious: China is different and not willing to be “socialized” into the existing international order. The Chinese initiative once again opened discussion about new forms of (neo)colonialism, mainly because the Chinese economy (and the economic diplomacy the BRI is most visible form of), even as a member of the WTO, is based on state-owned enterprises. The Southeast Asian states differ in their approaches to this Chinese plan for the interlinked “New Silk Road Southeast Asia”. This presentation attempts to interpret where there are the main pitfalls on the Road and why it generates so many hopes in mentioned region.

## **Rail Projects and the Belt and Road Initiative** *Frédéric Lasserre (Laval University, Canada)*

The BRI is a multifaceted project; it notably aims at developing connectivity between China, Asia, and Africa, notably through the development of transport infrastructure, seaports and railways. The Chinese authorities have set up six main corridors in which infrastructure and economic projects are supported to various degrees, but they all include railway projects. These however display diverse forms and degrees of progress. Some corridors are already active, like the container service between China and Europe through Russia or Kazakhstan. Other corridors remain purely paper projects like the rail link between Yunnan, Bangladesh and India through Myanmar. Some corridors include high-speed train projects but not others. What picture can be drawn of these multiple railway projects? To what extent are they advanced or do they remain paper projects? What are the economic and political stakes that support or, to the contrary, inhibit them?

## **Europe Goes Silk Road – A Young European Initiative** *Sebastian Holler and Sebastian Maier (Europe Goes Silk Road)*

China's Belt & Road Initiative aims to strengthen the economic integration of Europe, Asia, Africa and the world through the accelerated development of intercontinental infrastructure and trade networks on land, at sea and in cyberspace. Russia, India, Iran and the European Union follow similar approaches. All these endeavors reflect partly complementary, partly competing visions of a multi-dimensionally interconnected Eurasia which are not solely about infrastructure construction and transport time reduction but are in fact underway of heralding a new era of globalization in an increasingly multipolar world. Thus, reconnecting the Eurasian supercontinent has multiple implications in terms of economy, politics, security and culture.

EUROPE GOES SILK ROAD is an initiative of young European academics undertaking a 33.000 km research expedition along the New Silk Road to document the different Eurasian connectivity initiatives and their main projects on site as well as assessing them from an interdisciplinary point of view. The expedition will lead the researchers through the Balkans, across the Caucasus and the Caspian Sea, via the steppes and deserts of Central Asia to Khorgas, then up to the roof of the world, the Hindu Kush in Afghanistan and again down to the Pakistani port of Gwadar at the Indian Ocean, before they are again traversing the world's highest mountain range on the Karakoram Highway and entering China until they reach their destination Shanghai.

**PANEL 6 (PUBLIC):  
CHINA'S BELT AND ROAD INITIATIVE – IMPACTS ON  
EUROPE AND ASIA**

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*CHAIR: ALFRED GERSTL*

**Jaroslav Miller**

Rector, Palacký University Olomouc, Czech Republic – to be confirmed

**Ondřej Kučera**

Head of the Project Sinophone Borderlands – Interaction at the Edges, Department of Asian Studies, Palacký University Olomouc, Czech Republic

**Werner Fasslabend**

Former Minister of Defence Austrian Institute for European and Security Policy (AIES), Austria

**Štefan Füle**

former European Commissioner for Enlargement and Neighbourhood Policy, Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Joint Czech-China Chamber of Mutual Cooperation, Prague, Czech Republic

**Martin Klepetko**

Director of the Asia-Pacific Department, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Czech Republic

**Jing Long**

Shanghai Institute for International Studies, PRC

**Tanguy Struye de Swielande**

Université Catholique de Louvain, Belgium

**19:00 – 21:00 Conference Reception**

*Kindly note that the programme may be subject to change.*

## **CONFERENCE VENUE**

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# Sinophone Borderlands – Interaction at the Edges

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