

SINO-SERBIAN BRI COOPERATION

Liu Zuokui and Ivona Ladevac (eds.). *The Cooperation between China and Balkan Countries under the “Belt and Road” Initiative*, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, Beijing, China, 2019, p. 250

Academic papers dealing with the Sino-European cooperation at the very beginning of the XXI century have conceptualized the key issues and challenges for China-Europe’s relations. A vast number of studies have provided an overview of the then *state-of-the-art* relations between the two sides highlighting the greatest achievements, while some offered predictions of future developments. Scholarly interest has significantly risen in parallel to the announcement of reviving the medieval Silk Road under the new name “One Belt, One Road”, later recognized as the Belt and Road Initiative. The publication “The Cooperation between China and Balkan Countries under the ‘Belt and Road’ Initiative” is a thematic proceeding dedicated to a sub-initiative “16+1” and cooperation between the People’s Republic of China and sixteen Central and Eastern European countries participating within the Initiative.

The thematic proceeding is issued by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) from Beijing. Its publication is facilitated under the “China-CEEC Think Tank Book Series” and is edited by Liu Zuokui and Ivona Ladevac. In total, 13 articles have been arranged into the four thematic groups due to their narrow scopes. These four thematic units are divided according to the articles’ level of analysis depending on whether it is Europe, the CEE region, Serbia or some local context.

The first thematic part is devoted to China-Europe cooperation under the Belt and Road Initiative. It consists of three articles all dealing with the economic issues which lay between the PR China and Europe (primarily the EU). The articles are dealing with some key areas of economic cooperation, such as fundamental principles on which the cooperation is based. In this sense, protectionism as a meta-narrative of Chinese investments in Europe is presented. Growing Europe’s concerns regarding the risks of the “Belt and Road” Initiative are also among the goals of these articles. Some assumptions, such as the continuation of the trade dispute between China and the EU, the increase of obstacles for cooperation and acceleration in investment security building, are argued. The next article provided an overview of the BRI’s influence on Chinese investments in Europe, especially in the Balkans. The paper presented a tremendous increase in Chinese investments in Europe after the Belt and Road Initiative was introduced. The authors presented the types of economic presence pointing out that most of them were acquisitions and

foreign direct investments. By emphasizing the clear BRI engagement into the rise of Chinese investments in Europe, the authors concluded that their influence had steadily increased as highly competitive Chinese companies are now playing by the EU regulations. The last article in this Chapter deals with Serbian views on the '16+1' Initiative within Sino-EU relations. It points out a comprehensive strategic partnership between the PR China and the Republic of Serbia and the relevance of its impact on the relations between the two countries. The authors argue the strategic intersection position of Serbia within the BRI project and thus the importance of its attitude towards China-EU relations. They claim that traditional ties between Serbia and China, as well as sharing of same political goals, clearly contribute to the positive attitude of Serbia towards the Belt and Road Initiative.

Regarding the Sino-European bilateral conceptualization, the second part is dedicated to the China-CEEC cooperation under the Belt and Road Initiative, as a narrower segment of this relation. This Chapter consists of four articles of which the first two deal with in-depth analyses of trade status and tariff policy impact between China and the CEE countries and the Sino-European competition and cooperation regarding the investments in the Balkans. While the former one gives detailed analysis and usage of the quantitative model of trade between China and CEE to calculate the impact on the economy under the tariff policy and providing some policy recommendations, the later one sheds some light into the comparison of EU and Chinese investments in the Balkans. Besides, articles in this Chapter include analyses of Chinese economic presence in Serbia, viewed from the Serbian citizens' perspective as well as of the EU framework for FDI screening and its impact to '16+1' cooperation.

The next, third Chapter consists of three articles and is devoted to the China-Serbia cooperation under the Belt and Road Initiative. Within the first paper, the authors analyze the economic and legal aspects of Chinese investments in Serbia, both FDI and investments through the credits in infrastructure and energy. Global relations in the international community and its impact on Sino-Serbian implementation of the BRI are the subjects of the analysis in the second article where the authors have tackled Chinese questioning of the existing balance of (great) powers. The key research question of the third paper within this Chapter refers to China's potential to become the biggest Serbian exporter. It highlights Serbia's needs to reindustrialize its economy in order to boost export and overcome other issues among which trade deficit.

The three articles of the last Chapter of this proceeding deal with issues of cooperation on the local level and people-to-people cooperation between China and Serbia. The first article evaluates Hungarian perceptions of the Belt

& Road Initiative and its people-to-people capacities. Based on the previous achievements of the Initiative, the author concludes that three factors are affecting this exchange: the perception of the given country towards Chinese proclaimed goals, historical development experience of a specific country and the long-term national development strategic decisions and views regarding China and the BRI. The topic of the next article is the Chinese economic orientation in Europe and new international position of cities. As the major metropolitan areas are becoming more independent in all areas of daily politics, economics, tourism, and facilities needed, this provides a solid base for arguing that China observes cities as relevant partners within the BRI. The author describes abolishing full sovereignty of national states over its major cities, which leaves the space for more independent actions. This is the key argument of this article as the author implies a new position of cities within the globalization process. The last article of this Chapter emphasizes the significance and urgency of local cooperation between China and Central and Eastern European countries.

This publication offers a comprehensive and up-to-date view on diverse aspects of cooperation of the PR China and Balkan countries in both regional and local context. Therefore, it is very useful reading not only for those within the academic research field but for all parties interested in contemporary Chinese presence and its consequences in this part of Europe. Considering the increasing number of Belt and Road countries and its wider implications in political, economic, security and cultural sense, the topic of the present Chinese and Balkan countries cooperation and its future should not be neglected.

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