

„THE BELT & ROAD INITIATIVE IN THE GLOBAL ARENA-CHINESE AND EUROPEAN PERSPECTIVES“

Cheng Yu, Song Lilei, Huang Lihe (eds.), *The Belt & Road Initiative in the Global Arena-Chinese and European Perspectives*, Palgrave Macmillan, Singapore, 2018, pp. 266.

We have in front of us one of the first books to offer meaningful analysis and discussion about the Belt and Road Initiative - one of the most significant economic projects of today, implemented by the People's Republic of China. This book is the result of an international forum entitled "The Belt and Road to a Better Future: China-Europe Youth Dialogue", which aimed to bring together young researchers from Europe and Asia to contribute to understanding strategies and goals of this significant project. This international forum was initiated by Dr. Yu Cheng, Dr. Lilei Song, and Dr. Lihe Huang from Tongji University.

The book is divided into four parts, and they are: 1. Comprehension and Communication on the Belt and Road Initiative, 2. Regional Cooperation in the Belt and Road Initiative, 3. Economic Cooperation in the Belt and Road Initiative and 4. Geopolitical Challenge in the Belt and Road Initiative. These four parts consist of fourteen scientific papers. The authors of these papers are: Yu Cheng, Dragana Mitrovic, Lihe Huang, Lilci Song and Zhao Qiqi, Agnes Szunomár, Piotr Bajor, Ikboljon Qoraboyev, Balázs Sarvaari and Anna Szeidovitz, Ida Musialkowska, Dimitry Doronin, Mireia Paulo, Filippan, Filippan and Junbo Jian.

In order to become more familiar with the purpose of the book, we will first introduce what the Belt and Road Initiative project stands for. The Belt and Road Initiative project was first introduced in September 2013 in Astana, Kazakhstan, when the President of the People's Republic of China, Xi Jinping, visited this country. On that occasion, he proposed the project The Silk Road Economic Belt that would connect Asia and Europe. Subsequently, a month later, in Indonesia, President Xi Jinping also proposed a New Maritime Silk Road of the twenty-first century. President Xi Jinping also announced the establishment of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, whose primary purpose was to support financing and cooperation within this project. The Belt and Road Initiative aims to restore the historic Silk Road and create Eurasian economic and cultural cooperation. This project covers 65 countries, more than a third of the world economy, and half of the world's population. The project aims to create economic corridors as well as political, economic, and cultural cooperation between Europe and Asia. The goal is to create a win-win situation in which all countries will benefit from significant economic opportunities and free trade agreements. The greatest benefit for the countries involved in this economic and

cultural project is the development of new, modern infrastructure such as roads, ports, railways and pipelines. In addition, the Initiative will have the effect of reducing travel costs and increasing the visibility of rare products. Economic cooperation will, according to the authors, also provide a more stable environment, which will primarily contribute to cooperation and understanding so that the economies of the countries involved can function smoothly.

The book *The Belt & Road Initiative in the Global Arena - Chinese and European Perspectives*, pays the most attention to the countries of Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) as well as their cooperation with the People's Republic of China within the Belt and Road Initiative. Special emphasis was given to Poland. Specifically, the book analyzes the activities and soft power of the People's Republic of China directed at the countries of CEE through 16 + 1 cooperation. The 16 + 1 cooperation began in 2012, and it aims to present the cultural diplomacy and a good image of the People's Republic of China vis-à-vis the CEE countries so that CEE citizens could accept the cooperation between the People's Republic of China and Europe under this project more easily. It is the CEE countries that represent the "bridge" between the European Union and China, and with their cooperation send a positive signal to other European countries that it is useful to participate in this significant project.

In addition to the CEE countries, the cooperation between the countries of Central Asia and the People's Republic of China as well as the cooperation between the Balkans and the People's Republic of China within the Belt and Road Initiative project was analyzed. The authors state that the People's Republic of China is one of the largest economic partners of all Central Asian countries and that economic cooperation in this region has increased in recent years. The authors also state that the bilateral relations of the countries of Central Asia and the People's Republic of China are warm, and above all, they refer to the bilateral relations of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan with the People's Republic of China. The Belt and Road Initiative project is welcomed in that region, but the authors also point to the fact that the Central Asian region is an area of interest for other major powers, such as the EU, Russia, Turkey and the United States. According to this fact, the People's Republic of China may also face economic competition in the Central Asian region. Regarding the presence of the People's Republic of China within the Belt and Road Initiative in the Balkans, we must say that China's presence is also important in this region. Beijing considers the Republic of Serbia a key country in the Balkans and seeks to strengthen ties with the Republic of Serbia to strengthen ties with the entire Balkan region, according to Jian. However, as in the case of Central Asian countries, the countries of the Balkans also represent an area of interest of the great powers, and in this sense, the presence of the People's Republic of China in the Balkans can be treated as a challenge for the EU, Russia and Turkey.

The book also contains scientific papers that offer opportunities to look at the cooperation between the People's Republic of China and the Russian Federation in the field of the creative economy, as well as the possibilities and proposals for creating the so-called e-Silk Road through the fifth-generation digital industry (5G). The book also offers a significant view on Afghanistan, i.e., the challenges that the People's Republic of China may have in implementing the Belt and Road Initiative project in that country.

Significant work is the work of Yu Chang, who discusses the need for more detailed and comprehensive information and research about the Belt and Road Initiative project to familiarize the countries that are in the Initiative with the aspirations of the People's Republic of China. This is also evidenced by a recent study by the PEW Research Center, which discusses the divided opinion of the international public on the goals and nature of the Belt and Road Initiative.¹

The book *The Belt & Road Initiative at the Global Arena - Chinese and European Perspectives* is a significant study of one of the most important economic projects of today - the Belt and Road Initiative. This book describes in a meaningful and comprehensive way the aspirations of the People's Republic of China within the Belt and Road Initiative, especially in CEE, Central Asia, and in the Balkans. We must emphasize that the book also presents the challenges that the People's Republic of China may face in implementing this major project, as well as recommendations for removing possible obstacles. These recommendations mainly consist of a more intensive presence of the Belt and Road Initiative in the media, academia and the public so that people can become more familiar with the benefits of this project. This study will benefit many researchers in the fields of economics, international relations and political science, but it will also enable governments and decision-makers to take a closer look at the perspectives this project offers.

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¹ <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2018/10/01/international-publics-divided-on-china/>, Accessed: 05.10.2019.