Faculté des sciences économiques, sociales, politiques et de communication
École des sciences politiques et sociales (PSAD)

Chinese Belt and Road Initiative (一带一路) and the consequences for European unity – two case studies: Germany and Greece

Auteur : Pauline Bonnard
Promoteur(s) : Tanguy de Wilde d'Estmael
Lecteur(s) : Paul Servais
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INTRODUCTION

The European Union (EU) is an intergovernmental organization with a complex decision-making process that has gone through many crises since its creation. The EU faced and is still facing multiple external challenges such as the migrant crisis and unresolved conflicts on its periphery, as well as internal ones, like the Brexit. Europe is moving forward with these crises, but they must not be too rapid and deep, since they could even threaten the integrity of the institution. In general, opinions about the EU are positive but it sometimes dipped under 50 percent, for example during its expansion in 2004 which integrated 10 additional countries into the Union (48 percent in Autumn 2003 and Spring 2004) and during the economic and financial crisis (49 percent in Spring 2010 and a drop to 47 percent in Spring 2011) (Eurobarometer, 2013: 1). Overall, the majority of opinions about the EU still remained positive in the recent years with the exception of the states which were affected the most by the 2008 financial crisis. Indeed, only 47 percent of the Spanish thought that becoming a member of the EU was a good thing, showing a decline by 26 percentage points between 2007 and 2013; in Greece, they were 34 percent with a drop by 21 points; and 36 percent in Portugal with a decrease by 19 points (Eurobarometer, 2013: 1). European politicians all have very divergent opinions on the sustainability of the European mechanism. Jean-Claude Juncker, then president of the European Commission, asserted during his speech before the European Commission in Strasbourg in 2016 that the EU is facing "an existential crisis" (Juncker, 14.09.2016). The feeling of attachment to the Union is not equally distributed throughout the continent: it is generally stronger in Northern and Western Europe and there is a tendency to Eurocepticism in Southern and Eastern European countries. Greek citizens have the worst opinion regarding the European Union, as early as 2010. Indeed, 64 percent of them are "not satisfied" about the way democracy works in the EU, which is the highest percentage in the EU, because they are feeling their voices do not matter in the EU decision-making process (Parlemeter, 2018). Greece is an interesting case to study because this country was one of the most affected by the 2008 economic and financial crisis and its impact is visible on a political level, especially in view of the decisions taken by the government. In this context of crisis, Chinese leaders presented their Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) to the European countries in 2014, proposing to invest tremendously in large-scale projects intending to connect Europe to China.

This Belt and Road Initiative, whose name replaces the original version called "One Belt, One Road Initiative" (OBOR) "一带一路", was presented by Xi Jinping to the world in 2013 in a speech at Nazarbayev University in Kazakhstan. Through this Silk Road Economic

Belt, major projects were proposed to a wide range of countries. After some tangible realisations, in July 2015, the seventh BRICS[1] summit promoted an integrated market, connectivity, communication and cultural exchanges. This summit also allowed the creation of the New Development Bank, the Shanghai-based BRICS bank, which will "start funding joint large-scale projects in transport and energy infrastructure and in industrial development", as explained by Vladimir Putin following the BRICS summit (BRICS information centre, 9.07.2015). With the creation of this New Development Bank, the BRICS is contributing to the acceleration of the Silk Road Economic Road development. However, Chinese leaders remain the main funders of the BRI projects and the main figures of the ambitious projects.

Nowadays, with more hindsight, many projects are signed and become controversial with some countries falling in debt traps such as Sri Lanka. In Europe, the perceptions of this ambitious Chinese initiative are complex and diverse, not only between EU national governments but also between the two-level decision-making processes: both on the national and European Union scale. On the continent, projects are not developed enough to advance a clear and unequivocal position on it. The initiative is often seen as an ambitious economic project that could represent huge economic opportunities for European countries as it was first welcomed by Europe. However, increasingly, this Chinese initiative is considered, by some Western European countries, as a geostrategic project attempting to gain influence in the European decision-making process and even spread its norms and standards internationally.

A lot of research have been conducted on the ambitious Chinese project: especially regarding the real ambition of Chinese leaders and on the consequences for the different regions of the world. Some researchers made the analogy with the Marshall Plan, emphasising on the geostrategic, security and military considerations, portraying it as a threat for Western hegemony (Esteban & Li, 2017: 6). As for Fallon (2014), he depicted the Chinese initiative as a response to Obama's Pivot to Asia in the Washington-Beijing-Brussels triangle. With an American disengagement in Europe, China is making a "Pivot to Europe", filling that American gap and taking the opportunity to spread its influence and values. Many studies have focused on this realistic aspect of the BRI regarding the power relations between those two rivals. This analysis will put aside this rivalry and focus on Europe. However, it is too early to carry out a study on the BRI projects' consequences on the European countries since they are still at an

[1] BRICS is an acronym for Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa, which were gathered for their potential to become a powerful economic block. Those countries are regularly attending summits together and acted more or less according to each other's interest (Chen, 2020).

early stage, and for the time being, it is interesting to study the reactions of the European countries on the BRI and to analyse the danger for the EU in terms of cohesion. Indeed, member states have divergent visions on the Chinese initiative, which could pose a problem in the EU decision-making process, since a certain cohesion is necessary to write common statements. China, through its investment propositions, could exacerbate the lack of cohesion between European nations (Claverie, 2019: 25).

Europe was first enthusiastic about the BRI but this support got more moderate as governments discovered the economic, political and security significance on the European continent (Mohan, 2018: 1).The European Union decided to refuse the Belt and Road Initiative as a bloc but permitted the European states to accept Chinese projects separately, provided that each country complies with the European rules as part of their contracts with China. Then, it is up to each member state to consider the opportunities and challenges of the Chinese projects and to accept the proposal or not.

First of all, this study will focus on the national reactions regarding the Chinese projects. Since the European national governments have very different visions of the project, it is also more advantageous for China to deal with bilateral agreements with European Union countries. In general, Western European leaders are more cautious about security challenge while Eastern and Central European countries tend to see it as an opportunity, and it is even creating competition against them to get Chinese investment favours (Boniface, 2019). Then, these different visions increase divisions across the continent, widening the economic divide between North and South or the ideological divide between East and West. This study being very broad, specific case studies need to be implemented. Those member states' economic relations with China represent a concern for the integrity of each country but also for the EU cohesion and the decision-making process. It is then important, in the second place, to bring this study to the EU level. For that, I will analyse the impact of those EU members' reactions on the multi-decisional scale (Kavalski, 2019: 5).

In this work, I will wonder **how the European countries react to the Belt and Road Initiative and what the consequences are for the European cohesion. For that purpose, I will use two case studies: Germany and Greece.** Those two countries are presenting divergent perspectives and are relevant cases to analyse. Germany is the European country which is the most cautious about Chinese projects, paying a specific attention to the security challenges the latter represents. Because of this perceived security challenge on EU businesses and standards and the danger for internal cohesion, Germany is calling for stronger European mechanisms on trade, investments and market access in Europe and Asia (Mohan, 2018: 1). Greece, on its side, had its economy weakened by the 2008 economic and financial crisis and had to implement austerity policies with strong pressures coming from the EU and other member states. A big part of the Greek economy was privatized and dropped significantly, and then followed by a long and slow economic recovery. To some extent, Greece felt abandoned by the European Union and the Chinese proposition of loans and investments through its Belt and Road Initiative appeared as a good opportunity to revive the Greek economy. In fact, investments proposed by China drew the attention of many European countries and appeared as a project capable of boosting the European economies. Greece, particularly struck by the 2008 crisis, decided to enter the 17+1 platform in 2019 to ease the dialogue with China and increase investments.

Firstly using the case studies of Greece and Germany, I will examine the quantity of investments Greece and Germany are receiving, especially those related with the Belt and Road Initiative, and its evolution. Indeed, the European interest in the Belt and Road Initiative is first economical and it represents the divergence of opinion existing between European member states. Germany, which is China's main investment receiver, is currently concerned about the Chinese investments in critical fields of its economy and alerts other EU members to this danger. On the other hand, the leaders of many smaller states only sees the economic benefits in the Chinese projects. The economic sector is relevant to analyse, primarily to understand the scope of the Chinese investments in Europe, and discover why Germany and Greece disagree so much about it.

Elements of the economic sector lead to specific behaviour at political level, I will therefore consider the political level and explore the involvement of the government regarding China and the opinion of the population about it. Actually, those investments increase the involvement of China in the EU member states' decision-making process, and by extension, also on the Union scale through lobbying. Then, it is important to assess the impact of the involvement of China in the European countries on the political scale. Germany considers China as a reformer power capable of gaining significant political influence through its investments, and leaders are pushing for investment screening on the EU scale to fill the European policy gap on investments. As for other European states, their denial of that deeper involvement of China has a significant political impact, and several member states feel this way for different reasons. In the case of Greece, we should consider that the Greek public opinion was mainly Euro-critical after the 2008 crisis. Greece wants to attract Chinese investments and, at the same time, draw the EU's attention on the Greek economy, because it feels abandoned by the system.

This divergence on the national scale has an impact on the EU's decision-making process. I postulate that Germany is more concerned than Greece about Chinese investments in its country and tends to favour China rather than hinder its actions.

In a second place, I will analyse the impact on the EU scale and consider the impact of Chinese norms brought by the Belt and Road Initiative on the European Union. Germany sees it as a danger for the European norms, such as environmental and labour standards and competition rules, and wants to make sure they are respected by the BRI projects in Europe. However, this position is now easy to have for the country and for other member states considering the importance of the EU's trade relationship with China, with the trade in goods alone representing 362 billion euros in imports and 198.3 billion euros in exports in 2019 according to the Directorate-General for Trade in the European Commission's statistics, often called DG Trade (DG Trade, 08.05.2020: 5). Europe is attempting to find the balance between nominally resisting Chinese aggressive trade and investment practices, amplified by the implementation of the BRI in Europe, and no officially issuing explicit threats intended to China. Then, I will try to clarify to what extent the perceived security challenges encouraged the EU to protect itself from this Chinese initiative. In this part, I will assume that Chinese standards threaten the EU, which is taking action to protect the bloc's founding standards.

In the last section, I will use the results of the previous sections to answer the second part of the research question. I will therefore try to determine whether the dissenting opinions between member states and the attempt of the EU to preserve its founding norms regarding the BRI are undermining the European Union's unity or if it could divide Europe. Collective securitisation theory is a relevant tool to analyse the dynamics between members being part of the same organisation. Security governance can be applied to different types of actors and the EU represents a particular case with a specific decision-making process which takes the preferences of member states into account. Securitization is a term used to define an actor which identifies a "threat", chooses to give it the status of urgency or not, and takes "urgent and exceptional measures" in response (Buzan & Weaver, 2003: 491). Collective securitization implies a multiplicity of actors such as EU member states bargaining to find an agreement (Sperling & Webber, 2018: 5). Then, according to the theory, when a threat assails an organization as the EU, it can trigger a crisis that will need, in turn, consolidation, acceleration or initiation of the EU policies to mitigate the threats. In our case, this theory would be tested on the divergence of reactions of the European countries and would determine to what extend the so-called threat is perceived as such by member states and then enable them to find a common ground and to create joined policy on the issue. Thus, this theory will allow us to evaluate whether those diverse responses coming from Germany and Greece lead to a convergence at the EU level (unification) or an ongoing divergence (division) until the end of 2019. We suppose here that the perception of the threat on the national scale is alerting the EU's representatives who would call for action which would tend to reunify the EU's opinion about the Chinese issue.

The first two parts of this research work lay the foundations of the analysis by using neutral economic data such as those from the DG Trade platform, the European Commission's Eurobarometer and Parlemeter surveys. Specialists and think-tank papers would also be used to make the understanding of the relations between European countries and China easier. ECFR papers represent a useful tool for understanding the nuances of each state's relationship with China. Papers are full of information about political actions and leaders' intentions, however, they lack of subjectivity. Therefore, I chose a wide range of papers from different sources and used official websites to get a large overview and be able to measure my words. On the following part, in order to determine the actions taken by the European Union to defend the European standards, I will additionally use the European Union's reports as a primary source. In the final part, theoretical and analytical papers will be used to tackle and answer the research question.

This topic is broad and international, that is why it would have been difficult to conduct polls by myself on Germany and Greece. However, I used data from the Eurobarometer, Parlemeter and DG Trade to be as neutral as possible. I also included sources from Chinese authors and Chinese official websites to keep my mind open to different visions.

PART I: ECONOMIC ASPECT

Chinese trade and investments in Europe are not something new but they recently drew the attention of the European Union with the progress of the Belt and Road Initiative in Europe as early as 2015, which was presented as a solution to deepen the Sino-European economic relation.

In his speech given during the EU-China business summit in June 2015, Jean Claude-Juncker, then president of the European Commission, first showed interest in the BRI as a way to enhance EU-China relations after the 2008 crisis: "The European Union is a strong and reliable partner for China and our economies are ever more intertwined, to our mutual benefit. (…) Let me say we take note with interest of China's 'One Belt One Road' initiative. It is the kind of strategic thinking from which both Asia, China and Europe could benefit. We see the project as an open hand, an invitation to connect China and Europe better than ever before. (…) A first step is the connectivity platform we will launch today. It will allow us to combine forces – uniting the expertise and strength of our companies to develop high quality infrastructure, create new jobs in Europe, China and Asia, and build bridges between our two continents along the old Silk Road." (Juncker, 29.06.2015). Still, Jean-Claude Juncker reminded the Chinese representatives that their investments should also help stimulate the European economy. Accordingly, he went on: "Europe is back in business; China is welcome to invest. On the Chinese side, there must be a level playing field for European investors. (…) One very important vehicle to do so is to continue our negotiations for a Comprehensive Agreement on Investment." (Juncker, 29.06.2015)

Back in 2015, the position of the EU about the Belt and Road Initiative was already ambivalent. The project would lower transportation cost and increase trade volume between Europe and Asia, transforming their economic relations. Indeed, Europe is heavily relying on the Chinese trade: the EU is an important merchandise importer while China does not rely on imports from the EU that much. Moreover, Germany, which is known to be politically involved in the European decision-making process, is China's most important trading partner: it is the main recipient of Chinese goods and by far the leader in terms of exports. Actually, the reality of the Chinese "win-win" relation is questioned. From the European side, there is a kind of attractiveness with regard to projects likely to boost the European economy but, at the same time, there is a sort of concern about the fact that the initiative would mainly benefit China. The actual benefit of each EU member state and perceptions of the BRI differ significantly from one state to another, so it is relevant to study the economic implications on the national scale, in order to be able to compare it to political behaviours later.

Traditionally, the Chinese main share of the European investments goes to the Northern countries, mainly to the United Kingdom, Germany and France. With the creation of the 17+1 framework[2] which would be developed further in a subsequent section, particular attention was given to Southern Europe and Balkan countries as they received a bigger investment share than before. However, we should moderate this economic shift of the Chinese policy and take a closer look at the BRI economic implications on two contrasting member states: Germany, with its well-established Chinese investments which are becoming more restrictive; and Greece, which integrated the Chinese 17+1 platform and wishes to get more foreign investments.

A) GERMANY'S CAUTION ABOUT INVESTMENTS

Chinese investments in Germany

Chinese investments tend to follow the same pattern from 2010 to 2018. China is investing the biggest part of its capital in the "Big three" economies, referring to the United Kingdom, France and Germany, in comparison with other parts of Europe. Southern Europe is still capturing a meaningful share of the Chinese investments which varies from year to year, as figure 1 shows it, depending on the mergers and acquisitions.

Figure 1

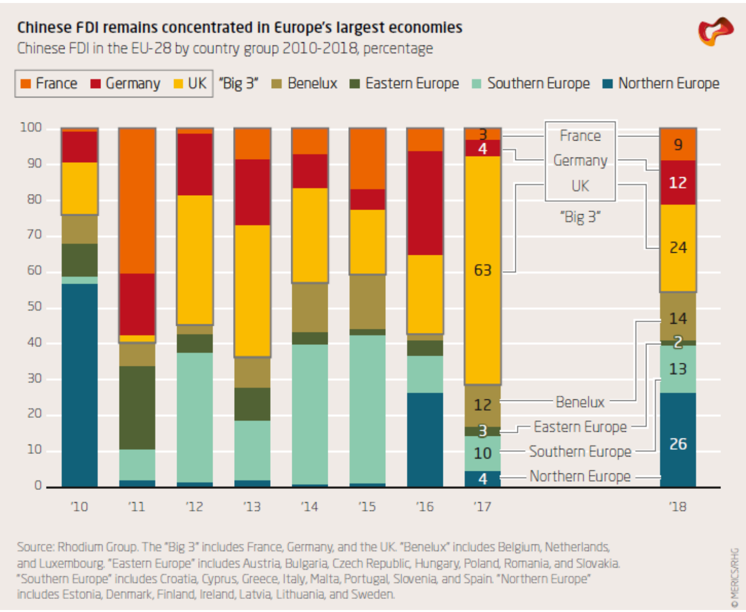
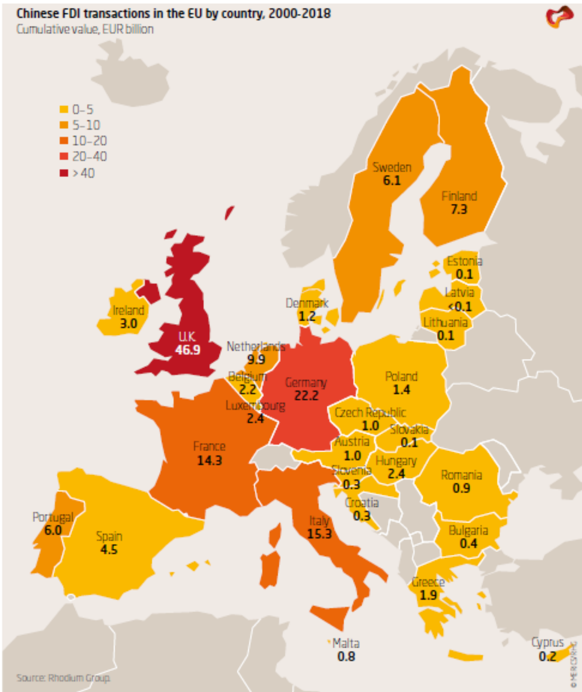


Figure 2



[2] China launched the 16+1 platform, which became in April 2019 the 17+1 with the accession of Greece, to connect Eastern and Central European countries to China and provide a unique regional arrangement to improve the relations with China.

China's interest in Southern Europe increased after 2008, however the rise in investments must be nuanced. Indeed, the 2017 MERICS report argues that Chinese investors have refocused on the "Big Three" in 2016 after their period of considerable investment in Southern Europe (Hanemann & Huotari, 2017: 6). As Figure 2 shows it, from 2000 to 2018, the cumulative amount of Chinese investments has been much higher in the United Kingdom and Germany than in Greece. Still in 2018, the "Big Three" received the best capital but the share in Chinese total investment decreased with China's growing interest in Southern Europe (Hanemann, Huotari and *alii*, 2019: 10).

In Germany, Chinese activities labelled as being part of the BRI are limited to five railway lines linking Germany and China, some lines had even been built before the announcement of the initiative. Chinese investors are traditionally interested in Germany and many connectivity projects between China and Germany were built before the announcement of the BRI, however they were designated later as being part of the Chinese initiative. In 2011, a connection between the cities of Leipzig and Shenyang was implemented and presented later to the media as an example of the BRI transport link. Few months later, a new railway line called the "Yuxinou Railway" was inaugurated between Chongqing and Duisburg, and was presented as a symbol of the "New Silk Road" by President Xi Jinping when he visited Duisburg in March 2014 to promote its "New Silk Road Economic Belt" in Europe (Esteban & Li, 2017: 11). The "Trans Eurasia Express" between Hamburg and Zhengzhou became operational in 2008 but was later actively promoted by a new operator DHL Freight as part of the Silk Road project. In 2015, two new railways were built under the "Chinese project" label, one from Hamburg to Harbin, and the other from Nurnberg to Chengdu (Van der Putten, Seaman and *alii*, 2016: 25).

Xi Jinping called this major project "the Belt and Road Initiative" in reference to the ancient Silk Road which was a European idea for facilitating freight transport towards Europe. The aim was to give a positive image of the initiative and German authorities were initially "open-minded" about it and had a keen interest in discovering the substantial propositions (Van der Putten, Seaman and *alii*, 2016: 24). Then, former railway operations were "BRI rebranding" in Germany and new projects were framed as part of the BRI activities. This was made because the BRI label had a good reputation among German transport companies and it made it easier for German cargo companies to find commercial contracts with partners established in China. In fact, the German freight sector has shown interest in the BRI as a way to attract bigger volumes of maritime trade coming from East Asia and all over the world (Van der Putten, Seaman and *alii*, 2016: 25).

Through this, China is attempting to position its main railway hubs in Germany to deliver Chinese goods directly to Northern Europe where Chinese investments are concentrated. The railways are giving a competitive advantage to the industries located nearby and Northern European countries would benefit from this construction. Conversely, other European regions would not benefit much from the BRI railway construction, creating unequal benefits in Europe. The global profit of the German railway construction could be more significant in Northern Europe, for instance in Germany, than in the South, in countries such as Greece. In 2016, the German national company Deutsche Bahn (DB) signed a memorandum of understanding with China Railways with the intention of developing the "Eurasian land bridge" (Van der Putten, Seaman and *alii*, 2016: 23). The same year, the German logistics giant DHL also signed a memorandum with the city of Chengdu to improve the railway connection between the city and Europe (Van der Putten, Seaman and *alii*, 2016: 23). However, even though German logistics companies showed their intention of increasing the contracts with Chinese companies, they hit several obstacles. Indeed, Germany was becoming more and more cautious about China's major project, afraid that Chinese investments in the critical fields of its economy could influence the decision-making process. Thus, despite the economic opportunities represented by Chinese investments through the BRI, the German government is getting more and more cautious about sectors China is investing in, which can explain the poor variety of the BRI projects in Germany.

Germany authorities' caution about investments

Since 2016, Chinese investments in Europe have been drawing attention. According to the Rhodium-MERICS report, that year, Chinese direct investments towards the European Union represented EUR 35 billion, a 77 percent rise compared to the previous year (Hanemann & Huotari, 2017: 4). This rapid rise is especially noticeable in Germany: investments were of EUR 11 billion, namely twenty-five time the amount of 2015 and 31 percent of the total investments in Europe (Hanemann & Huotari, 2017: 8). In 2016, Germany was alerted by the amount of Chinese purchases in the critical fields of its economy, especially new technologies, brands and others strategic fields, such as machinery with an interest in the company Kuka (Hanemann & Huotari, 2017: 4). Vice-chancellor Sigmar Gabriel disapproved the acquisition of the mechanics and robotics company Kuka by the Chinese giant Midea. However, no competing buyer came forward and Midea eventually took the German industrial robotics supplier over for EUR 4.4 billion. That year, Beijing Enterprises also spent EUR 1.4 billion to acquire the power generation and waste incineration German company EEW Energy and China National Chemical Corporation's took KraussMafei Group over, an industrial machinery maker, for EUR 925 million. Thus, the German government became more careful about the Chinese acquisitions and intervened in the economy to keep an eye on the Chinese foreign investments in the country, as we will see it in the following part. However, it is important to note that, still in 2018, Germany totalised EUR 2.1 billion of the Chinese investments, including the acquisitions of companies such as Biotest and Grammer (Hanemann, Huotari and *alii*, 2019: 10), showing that Germany remains flexible regarding Chinese investments.

B) CHINESE ECONOMIC ATTRACTIVENESS FOR GREECE

To understand China's economic implication in Greece, it is important to go back to the year 2008, which had a huge impact on the Greek economy and then on the Greek economic decisions, notably regarding Chinese investments.

Greek economic situation after the 2008 crisis

The 2008 crisis had a significant impact on the European economies. It urged major economic rethinking in Europe and created contradiction between Europe's social basis and aspiration mentioned in the Treaties and the common economic governance, involving profound pressures on labour and social rights. Those strict restrictions had long-term consequences on certain countries more than others, especially in Greece, Ireland, Spain and Portugal (Mexi, 2018: 104). Indeed, the Greek economy was one of the most impacted by the crisis and, in 2010, the newly elected socialist government discovered a deficit of 12.7 percent of the GDP, being twice the percentage announced by the former conservative government (Toute l'Europe.eu, 18.02.2015). In those conditions, the Greek authorities had to request a financial support to redress the economy and the "Troika", an alliance between the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the Central Bank and the Commission, and took in charge the supervision of the economic rescue plans. As part of the Troika, the two European bodies appeared as prominent actors, presenting the severe austerity plan as mainly "Made in Europe" (Verney, 2015: 283). They first proposed a rescue operation of EUR 110 billion in return for two Memorandums of Economic and Financial Policies, respectively in May 2010 and March 2012, to lower the Greek public debt to a sustainable path (Agitis, 2015: 31). Primarily, Greece had to focus on a drastic reduction of the government's expenditures, especially pensions and wages in the public sector, meaning reducing pensions and dismissal of public agents, while increasing tax rates, especially consumption tax (Agitis, 2015: 32). State companies were massively privatized and with the critical rise in unemployment, wages also decreased in the private sector. They also made the Greek labour market more flexible to be able to reduce wages by more than 20 percent and helped the Greek banks regain their financial liability (Delaume, 2014: 166). After applying those strict economic restructuration, Greece received a second EUR 130 billion aid in 2013. Despite a total aid package of about EUR 380 billion granted by the Troika, Greece was pressured to implement extreme austerity measures in return, which severely impacted the economy and the living and working conditions of the Greek citizens in the long run.

Some critics questioned the efficiency of those strict measures and the Troika was accused of "democratic deficit". This opinion is clearly expressed by the Greek Minister of finances Yanis Varoufakis in Tsipras's government and by the Greek economist Giorgos Argitis. They protested against the mechanism which dragged the Greek economy down instead of redressing it and are bitter at the Eurogroup which failed to help them. This point of view is interesting to discuss but is not unanimous because the Greek government and the citizens know their country need to stay in the European Union.

Those measures Greece had to implement were extreme and Yanis Varoufakis defends the fact that they had disastrous consequences on the economy. He blames the Troika for their ineffective measures and for ignoring the Greek government's alternative recovery plans. According to him, those austerity measures increased the Greek debt from 120 to 180 percent instead of reducing it (Varoufakis, 2015: 18). Indeed, still in 2015, the Greek economic indicators remained alarming: the size of the Greek GDP was still 25 percent below the level of 2008, one fourth of the jobs were lost and unemployment went from 7.2 in 2008 to an all-time record of almost 27 percent in 2015 (Agitis, 2015 : 32). Greek companies were also massively privatized by foreign investors, including the hold of the Chinese company COSCO on the Port of Piraeus. Those economic characteristics also had important consequences on the human scale: the suicide rate increased, ill people were discouraged from seeking treatments, diseases such as malaria or tuberculosis reappeared, child malnutrition became recurrent… This was a step backwards inside the European Union. Moreover, on the 27th of November 2013, Athens stock exchange officially lost its position of "developed market" and became an "emerging market" (Delaume, 2014: 167).

In its 2013 report, the International Monetary Fund also recognized that an earlier restructuring of the Greek debt would have "eased the burden of adjustment on Greece and contributed to a less dramatic contracting in output", Greece would have avoided some austerity measures (IMF report, 2013: 33). Indeed, at that time, Greek partner banks, which were mainly French and German, owned lots of Greek government bonds. Those countries would have suffered from big losses with an earlier restructuration, so they seized this opportunity to get rid of those bonds (IMF report, 2013: 33). According to this IMF report, "the delay provided a window for private creditors to reduce exposures and shift debt into official hands" (IMF report, 2013: 33). Some extreme points of view such as that of Minister of Finances Yanis Varoufakis who argued that "the objective (of the Troika) was to save Deutsche Bank, BNP Paribas, Finanz Bank, Société Générale, German and French banks […] by putting the burden on the weakest of Europeans, by provoking a humanitarian crisis in Greece" (Varoufakis, 2015: 18).

The Greek Minister also accused the Troika of knowing the ineffectiveness of its measures and having the objective of applying the economic management style of Northern European countries to Greece. In fact, there were no negotiation between the EU and Greece as a member of the Union (Varoufakis, 2015: 43). He questions the "political union" of the EU which does not respect the fundamental principles of liberal democracy and accused the Union of a democratic deficit because he could not participate to the Eurogroup meeting about Greek economy and present his alternative recovery plan (Varoufakis, 2015: 46). Additionally, Greek economist Giorgos Argitis, in its 2015 publication entitled "Greece in the Deadlock of the Troika's Austerity Trap", also argued that the Troika's plan caused "damaging effects on the stability of the Greek banking sector and the viability of the Greek public pension fund" (Giorgos, 2015: 33). He considers the Troika's plan as an "austerity-default trap" that "creates a vicious and self-defeating cycle that increases government's credit risk". He advises the Greek government to opt for new strategic policies and to move away from the "Troika-imposed neoliberalism" (Giorgos, 2015: 35).

However, those two actors do not represent neither the Greek government nor people's point of view. In 2015, Finance Minister Varoufakis left the government after strong disagreements with Prime Minister Tsipras, notably regarding austerity measures, and, according to the Greek Prime Minister, because "being a good economist does not make you a good politician", referring to the Finance Minister (L'express, 1.09.2015). Indeed, while Varoufakis did not want to accept any concession, Tsipras wished to find a compromise with its partners regarding austerity measures.

Eurobarometer surveys also give a good insight into the European citizens' opinions about the European measures and on the general attitude towards the European Union over the years. At first, the general opinion in Greece was that the international crisis would not affect the country and people felt that the Euro offered them protection. This feeling is visible in the statistics with a slight decline in the negative Greek feeling first, which then increased sharply between autumn 2009 and spring 2010. From then on, the Greek negative public opinion on the EU grew steadily in all domains (Clements, Nanou, and *alii*, 2014: 251). In winter 2014, the Greek public opinion was the most Eurosceptic in the EU, with a minority of Greek respondents thinking their EU membership was a good thing. It is the lowest score among the member states with 33 percent, Germany being at the other side of the spectrum with 72 percent (Eurobarometer, 2014: 48). The European Union, whose values are "people unity" and "the protection of universal values that are inviolable and inalienable rights of the people" was seen by the Greek population as pursuing punitive actions against their nation. However, it is also important to note that this distrust in the EU is also related to the voters' distrust in the traditional political class, with only 27 percent of the population feeling their voices matter in their country, compared with 75 percent of Germans (Eurobarometer, 2014: 58). Greek citizens blamed their government for their poor management of the crisis; traditional elected parties as the Panhellenic Socialist Movement (PASOK) and New Democracy (ND) lost most of their voters and were accused of crisis mismanagement. The Greek population largely elected the Coalition of the Radical Left (Syriza). That way, they rejected the Memorandums imposed by the Troika and Syriza's leader Tsipras appeared as a left-wing Prime Minister rejecting the EU's austerity measures (Dokos, Poli, and *alii*, 2013: 8). He was re-elected in 2015 and confirmed his position with a referendum rejecting the terms offered by Brussels. Still, Prime Minister Tsipras had to implement them but he could regularly blame the EU for its tough measures and the lack of social fund. Greek people seemed to have one of the lowest level of trust in the EU inside Europe. They felt abandoned by the organization and lost hope in the recovery of their economy (Linden, 2018: 11).

However, it appears to be more a protestation against the crisis mismanagement than a real dislike for the EU. Indeed, Greece cannot be considered as a hard Eurosceptic country because Greek Eurosceptics are outnumbered by those considering the EU as "a good thing" (Clements, Nanou, and *alii*, 2014: 252). The analysis made by scholars Clements, Nanou and Verney suggests that the Greek population had lost its enthusiasm for the EU but is more Euro-critical than Euro-rejectionist, in contrast with the UK. Indeed, in 2017, there was a widespread feeling that things were not going in the right direction neither on the national nor the EU scale with only 16 percent of the citizens thinking the EU was going in the right direction and 8 percent feeling the same about their country (Eurobarometer, 2017: 24). Still in 2019, Greek population remains the one which had the deepest doubts about the EU, with only a few respondents considering the multilateral institution with “hope” and “confidence” (Flash Eurobarometer, 2019: 6-8). Greek people had lost confidence in the EU and disapproved its direction, but they still want to remain in the Eurozone because they know their situation would be worst if they left the Union and abandoned the Euro. Even recently in 2019, the IMF executive board concluded that growth had returned in Greece but the improvement remains below the expectations: 2017 showed a moderate 1.5 percent growth, which rose to 1.9 percent in 2018 thanks to the recovery of the touristic sector and the return of consumption, despite a disappointing private investment and poor public investments; it still showed a moderate growth in the first half of 2019 (IMF report, 2019: 3).

The IMF also noted that unemployment stayed high compared to the expectations and that the economic activity remained below potential. According to their calculations, the Greek economy was expected to recover earlier and to grow at a stronger pace (IMF report, 2019: 10). The European Commission and the IMF staff predicted a quicker recovery for the Greek economy, as Figure 3’s blue curve shows it. The reality depicted by the red curve was different and Greek GDP per capita has dropped much lower than expected and during a longer period of time. The recovery beginning in 2013 remains slow and is expected to regain its previous-crisis GDP level in 2034. According to the IMF, this low performance is due to a largely unfinished reform agenda and Greece needs further financial, fiscal, labour and product market policies. They deplored a relaxation in the efforts ahead of the 2019 elections (IMF report, 2019: 11). However, the newly elected Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotaki, member of the conservative New Democracy Party, won a confidence vote on economic policy in July 2019, including tax cuts to stimulate growth and a simplification of administrative procedures to speed up the investments (Euronews, 23 July 2019).

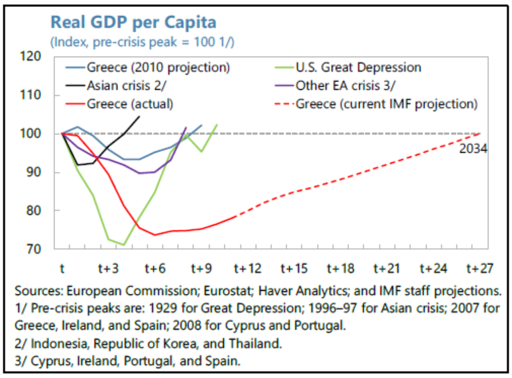


Figure 3

Greece was the European member state which was damaged the most by the 2008 crisis. Additionally, the tools used by the Troika and European measures showed disappointing results for Greek economic recovery. The population lost faith in the national government and in the EU institution and since 2012, has been voting for Syriza's party which proclaimed itself as being against the EU's austerity measures. The Greek population is contesting the EU's political direction but it would be worst for the economy to leave the Union. At that time of uncertainty, China proposed to help Greece with its debt and appeared as a saviour for the Greek economy. Indeed, the Chinese interest in Greece has grown since the financial crisis and Greece showed interest in fostering those relations and participating in the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative major project. The Greek authorities tend to be less suspicious about the Chinese proposal than Germany, and the Greek population has a general positive opinion about China, especially regarding economic benefits. Indeed, there is a belief that Chinese acquisitions would create more jobs and that Piraeus is also considered as a model of successful and profitable privatisation.

Chinese intervention

During the 2008 crisis situation, Chinese government officials proposed to buy the Greek's sovereignty bonds to help them redressing the economy. During China's official visit in Europe in Autumn 2010, president Hu Jintao and Prime Minister Wen Jiabao showed concerns regarding the Greek situation and promised to buy a part of the country's public debt, without indicating any specific sum (Chan & Guill, 2011: 86). As it was revealed by former Greek Prime Minister George Papandreou, Beijing bought EUR 6 billion of sovereignty bonds. In 2010, China also promised to double its bilateral trade to EUR 6.7 billion within 5 years and to increase Greek imports of products such as wine, olive oil and marble (Tzogopoulos, 2016: 37). Despite this commitment, Chinese investments in Greece did not increase significantly until 2010. Even then, the next three years, the total investment was under EUR 50 million. Still, Chinese investments remained stable while some major international institutions reduced their purchase of Greek stocks (Chan & Guill, 2011: 87).

Then, as Chinese foreign direct investments grew in Europe, Greece drew around EUR 200 million. In 2016, the acquisition of the Port of Piraeus increased the investments to EUR 343 million (Linden, 2018: 8). As for trade, the European trade balance shows a EUR 164 billion deficit with China according to the Eurostat 2019 data, this important dissymmetry also being observed in the Sino-Greek trade relationship at its level. Greece imported EUR 2.7 billion from China and only exported EUR 0.47 billion to China, the 2018 trade balance being of EUR 2.23 billion (Eurostat, 2018). Despite this dissymmetry, Greek Minister of Finances Yanis Varoufakis prepared the ground for boosting the relationship between China and Greece, with the intention of giving Greece a "Get out of Jail" card coming from the European creditors' hands. Indeed, European states saved their banks at the expense of the Greek economy and they strangled it with severe austerity measures, forcing Greece to find an alternative source of funding and in some way, pushing it to welcome Chinese investments (Mathews, 2017: 3). Therefore, following the 2008 financial crisis, China became more interested in investing in Greece, especially in port activities. China and Greece presented 2015 as the "Year for Maritime Cooperation between Greece and China", which enables to foster their cooperation in the shipping, trade and tourism sectors (Le Corre, 2018: 13).

Presentation of the BRI in Greece

Port of Piraeus

The Greek economy was still weak in 2015 and the announcement of the BRI reaching Europe seemed to represent a good opportunity from the Greek perspective and the population believed it would create more jobs. In those conditions, Greece could not refuse Chinese investments, especially the major project in the Port of Piraeus, which is seen by the country as the most successful and profitable privatisation. China started to get involved in the Port of Piraeus since 2009 through the company COSCO, which is China's largest state-owned shipping company investing in the Mediterranean area. The company obtained a concession from the Greek government for operating the container terminal for 35 years (Van der Putten & Meijnders, 2015: 10). In exchange of this lease, COSCO has to make substantial investments to improve the performance of the container terminal. Actually, Chinese investments enabled the Port of Piraeus to gain significant throughput rapidly. According to the magazine *Containerization International,* this Greek container terminal was the world's fastest growing in 2012 until it entered the top ten of the European largest container ports in 2013 (Van der Putten & Meijnders, 2015: 10). In September 2013, the Greek government pursued its agreement with COSCO, letting the company invest additional EUR 230 million to increase the terminal's capacity. COSCO also connected Piraeus to the national railway network through an extra investment in 2013 (Van der Putten & Meijnders, 2015: 10). In 2017, COSCO continued to upgrade its takeover, gaining a new concession for a period of 40 years and acquiring 67 percent of the port ownership, becoming the principal shareholder. It invested around EUR 1 billion and pursued its fast growth rate, positioning Piraeus as the second biggest key hub of the Mediterranean Sea (Claverie, 2019: 27).

The large hub is used by China as an entry point into Southern, Eastern and Central Europe to deliver its goods. COSCO's ambition is not only to transform the Greek port into a large container terminal but also to convert it as one of the most important European ports in terms of passengers' traffic, making it the departure point of cruises whose target are the Chinese tourists (Claverie, 2019: 29). This Chinese acquisition is also part of a bigger project whose aim is to link Greece to Hungary by constructing the Belgrade-Budapest highway. The Greek government also realized the economic opportunities of this large-scale project and even offered value-added tax exemptions to Chinese companies using the Port of Piraeus to import its goods to other European countries (Van der Putten & Meijnders, 2015: 12).

Other investments

Chinese companies and the government have also expressed their interest in investing in other ports than Piraeus and in other important areas of the Greek economy such as airports, electric grid and high speed railway departing from Greece (Van der Putten & Meijnders, 2015: 9). Indeed, China is also interested in developing tourism in the region. Companies are working on plans to build new hostels and other facilities intended for the Chinese tourists. To facilitate the arrival of these incoming tourists, direct flights were opened by Air China (Le Corre, 2018: 14-15). In 2016, the number of Chinese tourists was estimated at 35,000. According to former Greek Minister for Tourism Elena Kountura, there was a 35 percent rise of Chinese tourists in 2017 and this number increased over the following years (Le Corre, 2018: 15). Another example of major Chinese investments in Greece is the acquisition of a 24 percent stake in the company Independent Power Transmission Operator (IPTO), a Greek electric grid by China State Grid International Development, for EUR 320 million. China also focused on sectors dedicated to renewable energies and telecommunications. In 2017, Shenhua Renewables acquired four wind parks, which were previously owned by a local company and the Chinese group Fosun, which is already operating largely in other member states, purchased the Hellenikon airport located in the south of Athens (Le Corre, 2018: 16). Chinese interest in Greece is still present and Kastelli airport also caught the attention of the Chinese state-owned company China State Construction Group (Le Corre, 2018: 16).

Those Chinese investments are part of an intention of increasing its presence in the Mediterranean region and it is accelerating with the use of the Belt and Road Initiative. For instance, China owns one-tenth of the European port capacity in the south of Greece, Spain and Italy, also including its acquisitions in Belgium with the container terminal of Zeebrugge. This port is, as Piraeus, managed by the Chinese state-owned company COSCO (Mohan, 2018: 3).

However, the Greek population seems to accept the Chinese investments in their country and their opinion about China became relatively positive with the majority of Greeks thinking China will be an important actor in the next future. Newspapers, such as the Chinese Global times written in English, published articles emphasising on the cultural similarity between Greece and China being two of the most significant ancient civilizations to legitimise the rapprochement between the two countries (Tzogopoulos, 2014: 1).

The cooperation appears as a win-win economic cooperation between Greece which really needs investments and is ready to accept the Chinese ambitious project on the one hand, and China which is gaining a commercial entry point in Europe, on the other hand. This economic cooperation is leading to various political behaviours differing between Germany and Greece.

PART II: POLITICAL ASPECT

Europe attracts a lot of Chinese foreign investments, especially Northern European countries such as Germany. As part of the BRI, China gained interest in Mediterranean countries and a bigger share of its investments was directed towards those countries, such as Greece. The EU is not worried about increasing Chinese investments in this part of Europe, but rather about how this intervention is changing the framework of the European foreign relations. China is engaged in constituting "a qualitatively different regional relationality" in Europe, according to scholars Fierke and Antonio-Alfonso: China is intending to create special relations with countries interesting in the BRI without the intervention of the EU by asking for Memorandum of Understandings which could accompany the economic agreements, and by using the 17+1 alternative framework (Fierke & Antonio-Alfonso, 2018: 202). Germany is concerned about the Chinese strategy lying behind those investments and about the consequences for the integrity of the European Union. They see it as an intent to change the international order and they are politically active on the national and EU scale to contest it. During a summit in April 2019, the French and German representatives insisted on the need for European countries to adopt a common defensive strategy against China while 11 EU member states were in favour of an increase in the trade with China within the 17+1 platform and the support for the Chinese large-scale international infrastructure projects (Wiesenmayer, 2019: 181). Among them, Greece decided to integrate the BRI and the Chinese 17+1 exclusive platform to increase its involvement with the Chinese project. This part intents to determine the divergence of political behaviour between the case studies of Germany and Greece.

A) GERMANY MULTILATERALIZED APPROACH

Germany has considerable economic links with China; it is its largest European economic partner and a leading investor in the country. China then made an effort to promote the BRI with German industries by invited the high-level business community to the 2014 'Hamburg Summit: China Meets Europe'. In 2015, German businesses were again invited to the '"One Belt, One Road" Initiatives – Dialogue on the new German–Chinese Cooperation' to attend bilateral business dialogues in Taicang (Van der Putten, Seaman and *alii*, 2016: 26). Again in 2016, China organised cultural BRI-related events through Confucius institutes including academic conferences, concerts and dance festivals. Therefore, Germany traditionally follows a non-confrontational diplomacy towards China. However, from 2016 on, German leaders took a tougher stance, worried about the quick acquisitions of German technology companies.

German officials publicly reviewed Chinese acquisitions as potential security threats and they initiated the creation of stricter national regulations on investments. The federation of German industries also released a report summoning companies to reduce their dependence on the Chinese market (Wiesenmayer, 2019: 179). Chancellor Merkel called this Chinese gain of influence one of the “greatest challenges” facing Europe and she warned that political questions should be separated from Chinese economic investments (Mohan, 2018: 2).

Those Chinese investments mean more than economic opportunities for Germany and the political leaders do not hesitate to criticize the Chinese government openly, mainly regarding human rights. In 2016, Germany signed the joint statement condemning Chinese repression of human rights at the United Nations Human Rights Council, and in February, a letter condemning the torture of Chinese human rights lawyers (Godement & Vasselier, 2017: 108). German leaders perceive the Chinese newly enhanced investments in Europe as a quest for political influence which poses a security issue. To oppose it, German leaders want to first protect their economy, then act on the EU scale and call for a control mechanism on the organisational scale (Claverie, 2019: 29).

In light of these concerns, in 2017, an amendment was adopted to the Foreign Trade and Payment Ordinance to allow a broader control on company takeover in critical infrastructures by foreign investors. It went further in 2018 with the implementation of a tougher national legislation on foreign investments. This more stringent legislation allows the government to review a transaction made with a non-European company intending to buy more than 10 percent of the German firm in sectors such as the defence, critical infrastructures and the media (Hanemann, Huotari and *alii*, 2019: 16).

German politicians are then pushing for a European common approach toward Chinese investments, joined by French President Macron on that position, both insisting that the European interest should be prioritized regarding investments. Sigmar Gabriel, the Minister for German foreign affairs, expresses Germany’s concern also applied to other European member states: “If we do not succeed in developing a single strategy towards China, then China will succeed in dividing Europe” (Jakimów, 2019: 369). Indeed, German leaders are concerned about the BRI capacity to weaken the EU’s investment regulations and deteriorate the European political unity (Van der Putten, Seaman and *alii*, 2016: 26).

More broadly, the major Chinese project has already been implemented in many countries and some of them accused China to have set a debt trap for their economy (Boniface, 2019).

Mediterranean European countries are interested in the Chinese BRI and entered the 17+1 framework. The increasing amount of investments in the Central and Eastern European countries (CEE) and the growing number of meetings between the CEE leaders and Chinese policy makers through the platform is not alerting Germany. Indeed, the part of investments China poured in the CEE countries is still way lower than the part poured in the Western part of the continent and those leaders have more privileged bilateral relations with China (Kavalski, 2018: 14). Still, these Northern countries hardened their perception of the Chinese behaviour and are alarmed by the consequences that the platform could have on the efficiency of the European decision-making apparatus. They pay attention to the complex nature of the Chinese organisation depicted by Kavalski's analysis in Figure 4. This complex organisation is not only composed of annual meetings, but is it also has several bodies with representatives and a distinctive pattern in many countries. It is a form of regionalisation based on social practices of this interacting community (Kavalski, 2019: 5). Through the platform, China is promoting its practices and favouring the adoption of similar rules, norms and values among the participants. By maintaining those interactions in the long run, it favours mutual commitment and definition of interests (Kavalski, 2019: 5). Therefore, Merkel called for stronger EU mechanisms to watch the BRI-related activities in Europe.

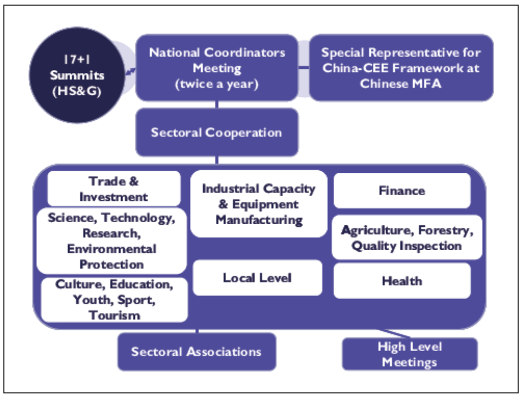


Figure 4: Institutional Framework of the '17+1 mechanism

"One-way relation"

The Belt and Road Initiative is emphasising the asymmetry between Europe and China regarding investment restrictions and trade. The European Union is relatively open to investments and have limited control mechanisms on foreign investment on the organisation scale. With the BRI, European leaders made Chinese understand they want more reciprocity in their economic relations. In fact, China is very restrictive when it comes to investments allowed in the country and it raises questions about this economic partnership with China which increasingly appears as a 'one-way relation'. French and German leaders are on the same line, cautious about this BRI project which seems to be more advantageous for China than for Europe in terms of investments. For instance, during his visit in China in January 2018, President Macron pointed out the "one way" dynamic and showed concern about the creation of "a new hegemony" of China in the global trade (Claverie, 2019: 10; Mohan, 2018: 3). He also drew attention on the difficulty for European companies to compete with Chinese ones regarding the contracts as part of the BRI projects, when Chinese national companies receive large state subsidies, creating market distortion (Mohan, 2018: 3; European Commission, 12.03.2019: 9).

Investment screening on the EU scale

Responding to the BRI geopolitical implication and to prevent a "one-way relation" with China, German leaders are asking for EU-scale measures to screen investments from countries outside Europe. In Brussels, German leaders advocated the use of the EU–China Connectivity Platform to check the conformity of the BRI-related Chinese investments in Europe, which must comply with the EU regulations and standards (Van der Putten, Seaman and *alii*, 2016: 26).

However, even though France stands on the same line as Germany, it is not the case of all the European leaders. The case of Greece gives another insight of the European political reaction regarding the Chinese BRI. The analysis on the European Union scale in the area of investment screening will be seen in a forthcoming section.

B) GREECE'S AMBIGIOUS POLITICAL RELATIONSHIPS

The actors helping Greece to redress its economy after the 2008 crisis had a political influence on the country. Greek leaders are keeping an ambivalent position towards China and Europe by welcoming Chinese investments without offending the EU. Indeed, despite the Greek public opinion being traditionally opposed to privatisation, Chinese investments have helped the Greek economy since the crisis at a time when the EU was pushing Greece to implement severe austerity measures. China increased its investments in Greece as part of the BRI strategy, which benefitted both countries economically. Greece does not have a foreign direct investment screening mechanism, which is worrying other EU member states on the political impact of Chinese economic implication in Greece.

On the other hand, we saw that, even during the crisis, Greece could not leave the EU and needed to stay in the Eurozone. The Greek situation was well-represented by Clements, Nanou and Verney in their 2014 article: “We No Longer Love You, But We Don’t Want To Leave You”. Tzogopoulos also showed Greece’s accommodating position in relation with the European Union.

The Greek government is then in an ambivalent position as it stands with China on some issues but at the same time needs the European Union. The BRI is also a way for Greek politicians to rearticulate the political national identity (Kavalski, 2019: 3). The part below intents to unveil the Greek behaviour.

Chinese objective of investing in Greece

Since its accession to the leadership position in 2013, Xi Jinping has become very active in the development of its large-scale Belt and Road Initiative.

Chinese interests in the project are questioned by many observers. From the Chinese perspective, the aim is a “win-win” cooperation between China and the receiving country on the economic scale. China is an important trading partner and investment receiver for Europe and, through the BRI, it is trying to improve the Chinese goods access to the European market. This was acknowledged by Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras who declared during a visit in China in 2016 that Greece intends to “serve as China’s gateway into Europe” (Le Corre, 2018: 14). Then, in May 2017, the Greek president attended the BRI meeting in Beijing.

It was also said that China chose the CEE countries not only for the implementation of high speed rails but also to gain the knowhow and the competences associated with nuclear energy production (Kavalski, 2019: 9). This way, China’s focus on the CEE countries seems to be part of a long-term ambition of the Chinese leaders.

This political rapprochement between China and Greece raised concerns because Chinese leaders appear, according to many European and American scholars, as attempting to change the international order. From their point of view, China is trying, through countries’ participation to the BRI, to spread its influence and show its preference for a pluralist global order. Thus, the BRI is seen as a “new mode of globalization (if not global governance) pivoted on China” (Kavalski, 2018: 17). For China, it is a way to spread the idea that each country should be able to choose their own path of development, as Greece did after the 2008 crisis (Kavalski, 2018: 17). Even now, China remained an important investor in Greece.

An important economic implication with the European counterparts leads to an enhanced political influence, letting China be more involved in the European political life and gain decisional power. Then, to spread its goods in the continent, China is benefiting from Greece's location in the European area. Therefore, China has no interest in warding Greece off the Union, it would rather keep it inside and use it as a gate to enter the European market. The Chinese authorities are concerned about the possibility of a Grexit, which would put COSCO's investments in Piraeus at risk. Greece showed its implication in the Chinese project by attending the Belt and Road Forum in May 2017. However, with the absence of most of the EU leaders, only general commitments were announced but no specific projects (Tzogopoulos, 2017: 26).

Political behaviour

Since taking office in March 2013, Chinese Premier Li Keqiang has visited Europe three times. On its third visit, after visiting the UK, he decided to go to Greece, showing the renew Chinese's interest in Greece and the wish to deepen their bilateral relations. He not only visited the Acropolis Museum of Athens but he also went to Crete Island, visited the Knossos Palace and archaeological site and finished his visit with the Heraklion Archaeological Museum. When Greek Prime Minister Antonis Samaras visited China in May 2013, he had a similar cultural program, showing Chinese political intention to bring the two countries closer together culturally. The number of Confucius institutes increased in Greece recently; they allow China to spread the part of Chinese culture approved by the government and represent the symbol of the Chinese soft power.

In response to the Chinese interest, the Greek authorities are also attracting Chinese investors by adopting very profitable policies. One example is the "Golden visas" that can be obtained by investing EUR 250.000 in real estate in Greece, giving those individual investors access to the Schengen area. Until June 2017, 701 visas were sold.

Memorandums of Understanding

China is also known for its taste for Memorandums of Understanding in its relation with foreign entities. Chinese leaders regularly ask governments, international institutions or companies to sign this kind of documents to prove their intention of cooperation. With the Memorandum of Understanding, the other party has to accept all the Chinese terms to obtain a contract with China. Those documents hold a symbolic value for China because they have the signatory country align its priorities with China. After the memorandum's signature, the Chinese counterpart often decides to turn it as a concrete commitment or to ignore it when it does not interest them, giving the Chinese part the advantage of choosing its contracts (Okano-Heijmans & Kamo, 2019: 2).

In 2016, Chinese and Greek prime ministers signed a memorandum to confirm their cooperation in the energy, environment, transport, information and communication technologies (Godement & Vasselier, 2017: 109). Additionally, Greece and the CEE countries participating in the Belt and Road Initiative and the 17+1 platform signed such documents with China to confirm their cooperation and to ease the dialogue with China. However, the promises made under the 17+1 platform remained unfulfilled by Chinese politicians for the most part (Okano-Heijmans & Kamo, 2019: 2).

On the political scale, it was observed that the signature of those memorandums had an influence on the political behaviour of governments, that they were later less keen to criticize China than before, for instance on human rights issues. This is deplored by the Western European leaders and EU representatives and some are concerned about the compatibility of the Chinese massive investments and political autonomy.

Implications of the 17+1 platform

The so-called "17+1 platform" was implemented by China to gather the countries interested in upgrading relations with China. The platform prevents the European countries to use the EU to communicate with China, and for others, it goes further and represents an attempt to federalise those countries within the Chinese framework. Gradually, since 2012, Balkan and European countries have joined this Chinese Initiative. Nowadays, 17 countries officially joined the initiative. Twelve are European member states: Poland, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia and Greece (since April 2019); and 5 Balkan countries: Albania, Serbia, Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro. The links of this group with the European Union as twelve are already members of the EU, four are EU's candidate states and one is a potential candidate (Kavalski, 2018: 17). The cooperation under this scheme focuses on infrastructures, such as railways and ports, and on new technologies, in particular 5G networks. In those fields, China is promising its partners a credit line of 11 billion dollars and the creation of a 3 billion dollars investment fund (Claverie, 2019: 27). According to estimates, China invested more than 8 billion dollars in CEE countries in 2016, which represents a significant increase in the region compared to the period before 2015 (Jakimów, 2019: 377). However, in 2016, investments also increased highly in Northern Europe and the investment rise did not match the volume promised by the Chinese rhetoric. Additionally, five years after the launch of the project, the platform still showed little tangible outcomes (Kavalski, 2019: 2).

The 17+1 platform has become the centre of attention since the 2015 Summit in Suzhou (China) regrouping all the CEE heads of states for the first time. The meeting was hosted by Chinese Premier Li Keqiang, demonstrating the new significance of these meetings in the European affairs. Observers saw in it the re-emergence of the “Eastern Bloc” from the Cold War division (Kavalski, 2019: 5). After this summit in Suzhou, annual meetings were held with the participation of the Chinese Premier and the CEE heads of states, the majority of the European representatives being from the CEE countries. The eighth summit for the initiative in July 2018 in Bulgaria marked a change in the EU’s attitude towards the 17+1 platform. That year, Bulgaria found itself hosting the Belt and Road Forum and, at the same time, held the rotating presidency of the Council of the EU. It was at the crossroad between a European integration turned to Brussels and a transcontinental one pivoted to Beijing (Kavalski, 2019: 5). The EU put tremendous pressure on Bulgaria to cancel the meeting, which nevertheless took place in Sofia in 2018.

On the contrary, China also introduces the 17+1 as a mechanism assisting the accession of the Balkan countries to the European Union and presents itself as involuntarily involved in the historical and political European identity cleavages. In spite of this commitment, China does not welcome everyone in its platform for political purposes: neither Kosovo, Ukraine nor Moldavia were invited to join the 17+1 mechanism (Kavalski, 2018: 21). For instance, China supports Serbia’s claim over Kosovo by refusing the territory’s entry within the 17+1 framework. This action is in accordance with the Chinese long-standing opposition to “splittism”, which refers to a violent cessation of a region from the original country (Kavalski, 2018: 26). The country’s main principle is also the one of sovereignty and non-interference in domestic affairs. This is an example of the way China conveys its ideas and norms thanks to the BRI and its 17+1 economic platform.

The Chinese framework has the capacity to divide Europe in that the countries engaged with China also use this platform to show their autonomy and their diversification of relations to Brussels. They try to alert the EU they have not been satisfied with their conditions since the 2008 global financial crisis, which saw decreasing levels of funding from traditional donors and investors (Kavalski, 2019: 9). Under these circumstances, the EU is increasingly perceived as an unfriendly force putting obstacles to the cooperation with China by controlling the public debt and financial deficit and preventing China to help them to boost their economy (Jakimów, 2019: 377). Accepting the Chinese controversial BRI can be seen as a way to draw the attention of the EU and legitimize their own governance model (Kavalski, 2018: 24). Indeed, during the first 17+1 summit in Croatia in April 2019, Alexis Tsipras announced: "I think this is a very crucial moment for global and regional development. We have to leave behind the crisis, and we have to find a new foundation for our cooperation on the regional and global scale", as it was recorded by the South China Morning Post (Kelmer, 2019: 1). By joining the 17+1 platform, Alexis Tsipras is also seeking the support of Central European and Balkan states to make Piraeus one of the main gateways of the Chinese trade in Europe. He would like to create an economic corridor between Piraeus and the heart of Europe through the building of new infrastructures with the support and investment of Chinese companies according to the BRI promotional website (OBOReurope, 18.04.2019). Greece, as other CEE countries, feels it lacks foreign policy independence, especially independence from the Brussels-based institutions.

Danger for political autonomy

On several occasions, Greece took a notable divergent position compared with other EU member states. In July 2016, Europe failed to issue a statement on time concerning the International Arbitration Court's ruling on the South China Sea because of the blocking of Athens and Budapest. When the EU could reach a compromise with those countries after three days of difficult negotiations, the common position appeared to be very vague and neutral and was not targeting Beijing especially (Zhou & Esteban, 2018: 495). Instead of their strong statement supporting the court ruling in disfavour of Beijing, the EU issued a general statement regarding the arbitration outcome (Le Corre, 2018: 17). Thus, it undermined the EU's foreign policy and represented a symbolic victory for China, thanks to its influence on Greece and Hungary.

Again in June 2017, the Greek government blocked another statement of the EU directed to China on the United Nation scale. The statement was criticising China for their human rights record which Greece called "unconstructive criticism of China" (Le Corre, 2018: 17). The Greek Ministry for Foreign Affairs insisted by saying that "Greece's position is that unproductive and in many cases, selective criticism against specific countries does not facilitate the promotion of human rights in these states, nor the development of their relationship with the EU" (Le Corre, 2018: 17). With those actions, the Syriza government is opportunistically favouring China, pushing to gain advantages in its cooperation with Beijing.

Greece is not the only EU member state showing more forgivingness regarding the Chinese human rights records than before. Some CEE governments were also in disfavour of statements during the EU's meetings criticising China for this issue (Jakimów, 2019: 379). In fact, those countries are part of the Chinese 17+1 organisation and this political reversal seems to be in order to keep good relations with China. The participation of the CEE countries in the 17+1 platform raises concerns on the EU scale regarding their political autonomy over China (Okano-Heijmans & Kamo, 2019: 2). In 2018, the European Commissioner for the European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations Johannes Hahn accused the CEE countries to be “Trojan horses” for China, meaning they split their loyalty between Europe and China (Kavalski, 2019: 2). Indeed, by blocking the EU’s statements, the credibility of the multi-decisional organisation is weakened because of the apparent lack of cohesion between the EU’s member states’ approach on the EU’s foreign policy. Thus, those European statements regarding the South China Sea and Chinese human rights represent the European principles and identity, and this is of significant importance for the integrity of the EU’s foreign policy.

PART III: CHINA AS A NORM REFORMER, A DANGER FOR EUROPE?

The previous parts highlighted the European countries' divergence of visions about the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative, and took Germany and Greece as case studies. We first identified divergent opinions between those two countries on the economic scale, which also had an influence on the political behaviour. Northern European countries, with Germany being the most striking example, traditionally receive most European's Chinese investments. However, with the increased investments in critical fields of their economy, they now realize they should keep control on the Chinese investments and acquisitions. They do not hesitate to criticize China openly for their human rights record and ask for more reciprocity regarding trade and investment in the People's Republic of China. On the other hand, China participates in the Greek economic recovery on several large scale projects including the Port of Piraeus upgrade and its connection to Hungary via railways. Therefore, Greek leaders accepted to sign several Memorandums of Understandings with Chinese counterparts and joined the BRI and the 17+1 framework. Later, Greece and other European countries in the same situation blocked statements on China on the EU and United Nation's scale, questioning the efficiency of those international organisations. So, those Member States' reactions regarding the BRI are contradictory, which could have consequences on the efficiency of the EU decision-making process.

Part one and two could highlight the way the BRI could impact the EU decision-making process. The BRI is not only accentuating the divergence of opinions between EU member states, it is also impacting the founding values of the Union. German leaders were alerted to the increased influence of China in Europe in terms of investment, but also regarding the issue of European-level norms. Indeed, international norms were traditionally created by the Western countries and then established as common norms applied to other countries. So, some Western observers identify China's active role internationally, most prominently through the large-scale and ambitious Belt and Road Initiative, as a way to spread its norms across countries as far as Europe. European norms represent the organisation's status in its foreign relations and the states entering the Union have to agree upon those shared values. However, different economic and political priorities on the national scale, as explained before, also has an influence on the way states consider common European norms. Consequently, the BRI as a norm reformer is leading to a normative competition with European norms, accentuating internal divergence on norms.

Therefore, in this section, it is important to study the tools China is using to diffuse its norms throughout Europe and the potential of the BRI to undermine European norms in its projects. We will examine how it affects the European Union and how the organisation defends its norms from those of the BRI.

A) THE CHINESE GLOBAL NORM REFORMER

First, let's precise "Norm" is a broad term that should be defined hierarchically. The highest and most important ones are those shaping the identity of an entity, determining the direction of its foreign policy. The European Union has its unique core norms and principles and so does China, with an evolution of the values over time, presented depending on the image they wanted to show internationally. The EU's and China's norms have chosen different directions in terms of foreign policy which could lead to different behaviours and misunderstandings between the two entities. To a lesser extent within the Belt and Road Initiative framework, China is promoting the use of its norms in related fields such as labour rights, trade and investment policies. The field of human rights also has to be analysed since it is another bone of contention between the Union and China. Those sectors are essential because they show the propagation of the Chinese norms as an instrument of China's foreign policy, putting forward its preferences to maximize the benefits of its national businesses and compete with European laws.

Through the BRI, China is progressively providing policy tools for reshaping global governance with its norms and standards (Bastian, 2018: 3). China is considered by some Western scholars and experts as a norm reformer attempting to shape the international order with its own values, interests and status. Indeed, China, which advocated bilateral relations between countries and multilateralism, has begun to support a regional "made-in-China" multilateralism (Zhou & Esteban, 2018: 487). China is subjected to a hail of criticism and needs to pay close attention to its international image. Therefore, the People's Republic of China (PRC) is using the Chinese experts who gives intellectual and theoretical support China's foreign policy to justify new initiatives or to respond to the Western countries' criticism. Their speeches have a certain authority and their expertise is useful to justify China's political actions (Bassan, 2019: 115). Experts also express new normative conceptions which are able to reconfigure the interests and preferences of other countries and promote their preferences in terms of global norms. Those Chinese experts are also called "norm entrepreneurs" because they are participating, in their speeches, in the reinterpretation of concepts to make them comply with the fundamental interest of the Chinese government (Bassan, 2019: 115). It is difficult to assess the influence of Chinese norms but some are more visible than others, such as "The Five

Principles of Peaceful Coexistence", which is a relevant example of the norms often stated in official speeches.

China's "Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence"

China is governing its international relations and foreign policy with a norm called "the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence" that was jointly initiated by India and Myanmar in 1954 (Zhou & Esteban, 2018: 497). This norm is largely promoted by Beijing and represents an important source of China's normative power. On the norm's 60th anniversary, Chinese President Xi Jinping praised its legitimacy and merit, and also explained that: "These five principles, as an integrated, interconnected, and indivisible concept, capture the essence of today's international relations, and can apply to relations among all countries regardless of their social system, stage of development or size. Principles have effectively upheld the rights and interests of the developing world and have played a positive role in building a more equitable and rational international political and economic order." (Zhou & Esteban, 2018: 497). So China is enhancing its normative power by proposing to the international community an alternative to the Western commonly admitted norm in international relations based on Westphalian sovereignty. This aim is related to China's promotion of regional multilateralism through the BRI. Indeed, during the opening ceremony of the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation in Beijing, Xi Jinping, in his speech given on 17 May 2017, emphasized the importance of integrating the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence into relationships across the Silk Road: "China will enhance friendship and cooperation with all countries involved in the Belt and Road Initiative on the basis of the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence. We are ready to share practices of development with other countries, but we have no intention to interfere in other countries' internal affairs, export our own social system and model of development, or impose our own will on others. In pursuing the Belt and Road Initiative, we will not resort to outdated geopolitical manoeuvring. What we hope to achieve is a new model of win–win cooperation. We have no intention to form a small group detrimental to stability, what we hope to create is a big family of harmonious coexistence" (Xinhuanet, 14.05.2017).

In the same vein, Chinese actors introduced various concepts over time to describe China's foreign policy dynamic. The concepts of Peaceful Rise and of Peaceful Development were first proposed by Chinese scholar Zhen Bijian and used again by former Chinese president Hu Jintao to introduce the idea of building a harmonious world, responding to the "Chinese Threat" narratives. Later, along with the Belt and Road Initiative, Xi Jinping came up with his new concept of Community of Common Destiny to emphasize that everyone's destiny is intertwined with that of another and that China is working on creating a community of shared interests, responsibility and destiny (Xinhua News Agency, 15.01.2017). Therefore, there is an evolution in the terms used by Chinese leaders over time. While former president Hu Jintao was promoting China's image as a pacific power, Xi Jinping did not hesitate to present its active foreign policy in the world and reshape the existing global governance system.

Through the BRI, Chinese leaders are attempting to gather countries participating in the project across the continents to create a coalition and shape a community with shared interests, destiny and responsibility to position China as a norm reformer in a peaceful way. This ambition was stated by President Xi Jinping during a work conference on foreign affairs in November 2014: "We should strengthen unity and cooperation with other developing countries and closely integrate our own development with the common development of other developing countries. We should advance multilateral diplomacy, work to reform the international system and global governance, and increase the representation and say of China and other developing countries." (Zhou & Esteban, 2018: 499). That way, the BRI's expansion to Europe provided China with great opportunities to spread its norms throughout the world. This was implemented through Memorandums of Understandings and the 17+1 framework, as explained in a previous section, and most prominently through new multilateral institutions financing the BRI projects. China is the main project funder thanks to its collaboration with the Silk Road Infrastructure Fund, mainly capitalized by China's foreign exchange reserves, the New Development Bank, which is a Shanghai-based BRICS Bank and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), which is a global financial organisation created by China (Thussu, 2018: 117). More significantly, the AIIB attracted a lot of foreign participants and some observers see it as an instrument to spread Chinese norms throughout the world.

AIIB reflecting Chinese preferences

China created the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank in 2016, whose main purpose is to provide financial support to the BRI projects and meet the massive demand for Chinese investments. Critics consider the creation of this institution as a way to put forward China's preferences and display the country's capacity to manage a multinational organisation. This initiative, as well as the BRI, raised concern worldwide and is considered by some Western observers as a rather revisionist initiative, whose intention is to promote China's interests by enhancing its control, using controversial loans policies and decision-making mechanisms (Ella, 2020: 3).

The link between the AIIB and the BRI was made clear by Chinese officials, and members of the Bank are expected to keep a positive attitude towards the grand Chinese Initiative (Ella, 2020: 21). The AIIB is, as the BRI, an innovative project and it makes China the first emerging country setting up a multilateral financial organisation. It attracted many members, including developed countries. European countries are largely participating in the Bank with 20 European members, including the UK, France and Germany and a total of 103 approved members worldwide (AIIB official website). With its expansion, the AIIB became the third largest financial institution after the IMF and the World Bank, the bank sector being traditionally dominated by Western powers' agenda setting and veto authority. Indeed, the AIIB is not only an investment tool, but also an instrument which allows China to play a more prominent role in the global financial system. China and other developing countries regularly criticise Western financial institutions for imposing additional conditions to obtain loans, such as business privatisation or liberalist reforms. The Chinese-led AIIB represents an alternative to those financial requirements and more broadly boosts China's role from rule-taker to rule-maker (Zhou & Esteban, 2018: 500).

In Western countries, sceptics are concerned about the capacity of the Bank to erode further international standards of transparency, environment sustainability, human rights and labour (Yang, 2018: 11). China responded to Western criticism by making concession in the AIIB's design in order to be seen as a responsible international institution. Consequently, the Bank adopted higher social and environmental standards which are recognized by international scholars and policy makers (Ella, 2020: 18). Indeed, through the institution, China is also promoting its non-intervention practice in domestic affairs and non-discrimination of different economic structures. Despite a similar structure with the World Bank and Asian Development Bank, China has kept certain elements which differ and represent the Chinese mark. The AIIB used a different classification mechanism from traditional financial institutions: the countries which joined the Bank during its establishment period obtained a founding-member status, granting them 600 additional votes. The aim was to attract major economic powers and it was a success for the United Kingdom which became part of the founding members. China being classified as an "upper middle-income developing country", it is understandable that it is reluctant to use usual classification, which could delegitimized its rank of largest shareholder (Ella, 2020: 22). This categorisation enhanced the influence of regional Asian members within the organisation.

Another particularity is the conditionality of the loans granted by the bank: the AIIB's policy is specific in that it is more flexible than other institutions as it does not ask for good governance, because the AIIB's policy does not intervene in a country's domestic affairs (Ella, 2020: 18). It is indeed part of the Chinese specific guide lines, with China usually offering assistance to countries without good and tough governance conditions. Accordingly, China's financial institution provides developing countries with an alternative method to avoid the assistance of the US-led institutions driven by the capitalist and liberal system (Ella, 2020, 19). The AIIB appears as a more flexible economic partner ready to do business with developing countries without as many guarantees and without asking for democratisation, market reforms, privatisation or deregulation.

Overall, with a more simple conditionality policy and regional categorisation, the AIIB became an attractive bank for Asian borrowers seeking a less interventionist institution in which they are better represented (Ella, 2020: 26). On the contrary, this alternative to Western financial requirements is questioning the legitimacy of their monopoly in the financial sector.

Still, many European member states decided to join the Bank. The UK was the first G7 country to join it, followed by European countries such as Germany and Greece. European countries' participation in the bank shows their ambivalent position with regard to the initiative. Some European countries joined their voting power, constituting the Euro Area Constituency (EAC) and reached a voting power of almost 15 percent, as illustrated in figure 5. Some members as Hungary and Poland joined another group along with the United Kingdom. The EAC group is the second largest group of the Board, which could give it a significant voice in

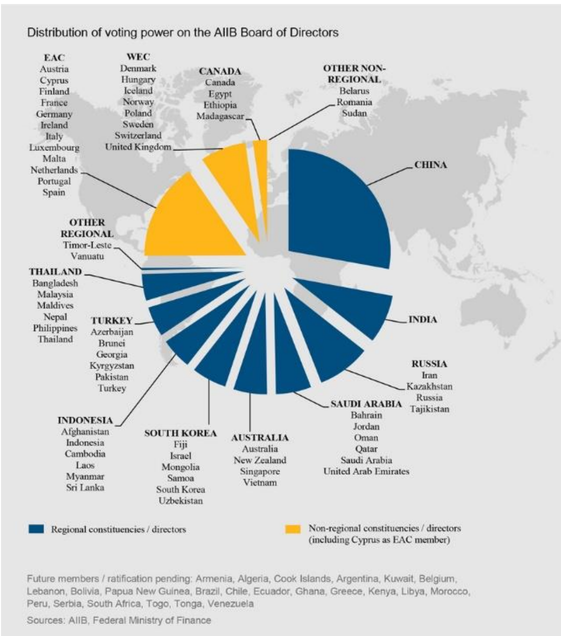


Figure 5: Distribution of voting power in the AIIB's Board of Directors

Source: German Federal Ministry of Finance, 3 April 2019 the decision-making process. However, this power in the decision-making process should remain moderate because 26 percent of the votes go to China and therefore, the latter can veto any decisions requiring the super majority, such as appointing the President of the Bank, increasing the bank capital, suspending a member and expanding the institution's operations (Ella, 2020: 23). Additionally, India has the second largest voting power with 7 percent, followed by Russia with 6 percent. On their own, European countries have only limited power within the financial organisation, but if they join forces, they could have a significant influence in the decision-making process.

Additionally, the presence European countries allows to check if the bank follows good practices regarding governance, debt sustainability and environmental and social standards (Ella, 2020: 20). The bank being related to the BRI, it is also a way to have a say in terms of respect of international standards in China's projects (Yilmaz & Changming, 2016: 408). To go further, the EU represented by Western European countries intents to promote European norms and standards within the organisation and advocate European rules regarding public markets and social and labour standards, which are not always respected in terms of equipment because China complained it could affect its domestic businesses (Claverie, 2019: 26). Indeed, regarding standards, the EU and China have different concepts: Europe's objective is to preserve the liberal rules-based international order whereas China is trying to share international rules in fields such as cyberspace, satellite and internet global networks (Bastian, 2018: 4).

China stated that the AIIB was not created to compete with other organisations but rather to complete the effectiveness other organisations are lacking, following the Chinese notion of "Harmonious World". In fact, the institution does not seem to challenge traditional financial institutions but reflects China's desire to be recognized internationally as a rule-maker by the establishment of its high-standard international institution following its core principal and standards (Ella, 2020: 27).

Finally, through the BRI, China has developed, going from a passive to a more active foreign policy, showing its confidence and increasing its international influence. As the second largest economy in the world, China has the potential to influence global governance with its preferences. The BRI was complemented by new approaches and the creation of innovative institutions that could have an impact on global governance considering the variety of countries deciding to join the BRI initiative (Ly, 2020: 2). As shown in the previous section, innovative new institutions such as the AIIB use new concepts which differ from Western loan policies and facilitate the procedures for developing countries. Therefore, China appears as an organised norm reformer, shaping its preferences and promoting values which differ from the Western countries' traditional ones. The Chinese-led BRI seems to be more than an economic project: it is part of China's long-term agenda-setting whose aim is to shape a more multilateral order in which developing countries have their say.

B) THE POTENTIAL DANGER FOR THE EUROPEAN UNION

China can be considered as an emerging market entering a mature market and bringing its own traditions and interpretation of sustainability with its labour and environmental standards. Meanwhile, BRI projects became attractive for many European countries and Chinese investments have increased in Europe. Indeed, the values conveyed by those Chinese projects are very different and could alter Europe's consensus on norms and standards (Breinbauer, Brennan, and *alii*, 2019: 11).

The EU as a supranational organisation conveys values and principles in its relations and signed agreements incorporating the fundamental European principles, such as the Cotonou agreement and the 2007 Lisbon treaty, stipulating that the EU's member states should promote principles of human rights, democracy and rule of laws in their external relations. Furthermore, the EU's 2016 global strategy reminds the Union's core values that members should respect because it goes hand in hand with their interests. It states that "Peace and security, prosperity, democracy and a rules-based global order are the vital interests underpinning our external action." (European Union Global strategy, 2016: 13). The statement insisted on the fact that the internal respect of those core values should be consistent to determine the EU's external credibility and influence and that there is no clash between national and European interests. It is a call for an active promotion of the EU's core norms outside the EU's borders, being united in action by the implementation of coherent common policies (European Union Global strategy, 2016: 17). The global strategy is asserting that the EU will pursue a consistent strategy with China based on the rule of law on both the national and international scale. Regarding trade and investments, the EU reiterates it is seeking a better level playing field, suitable intellectual property rights protection, enhanced cooperation on high-technologies and further dialogue on human rights, economic reforms and climate change (European Union Global strategy, 2016: 38). Besides, the countries belonging to the EU were reminded they had to comply with the EU's regulations to accept the BRI projects.

The aim of this section is to analyse whether the EU is using a "principle" or a "pragmatic" approach in its relation with China (Rühlig, Jerdén, and *alii*, 2018: 91). Moreover, the fields of foreign and security policy remain an intergovernmental competence. In order to materialize the "principle" approach, unity among member states is required, which seems difficult with some states giving priority to their national economic interests. Indeed, even though the European Union used to have a defined position on the Chinese compliance with human rights, the participation of certain countries in the BRI is hindering the EU's credibility with some European officials blocking strong statements on human rights or rule of law.

For a long time, Europe's approach was a constructive engagement with China and hoping the PRC would ultimately liberalize and adopt similar values. This strategy was ineffective, China having different interpretation in terms of democracy, human rights and rule of law (Rühlig, Jerdén, and *alii*, 2018: 91).

Therefore, we will try to determine whether the expansion of the BRI may impact the EU's core values by exploring the cases of human rights, labour standards and trade and investment policies.

Human rights

The EU considers as a priority and an existential interest of the organisation the promotion of a rule-based international order, focusing on International Law and including Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law, as reminded by the EU's 2019 global strategy. So, the Union attempts to pursue multilateral global governance as a strategic priority (EU global strategy, 2019: 15). Besides, the Cotonou agreement, which encompasses the framework of the EU's relation with African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries, was signed by 79 countries and seems to be the most comprehensive agreement between developing countries and the Union and is an essential tool to promote European values in those partnerships. This agreement implemented in 2000 contains consistent legal commitments on human rights and democracy, explicitly expressed in articles 9 and 96 (Cotonou Agreement, 2000: 21-22; 84-85). However, recurrent claims were made for inconsistent and selective implementation of the human rights clause.

The EU is a defender of liberal values in international affairs and its rhetoric is usually strong on this issue. The Union also takes action to keep its word and preserve the legitimacy of the Union's human rights policy (Saltnes, 2018: 174).

However, the implementation of human rights is not the first concern for rising emerging powers such as China. The PRC considers economic relationships as a priority and tends to be more concerned with legal issues in relation with economic implication than issues regarding human rights and democracy. Also, the EU would not build major economic relations with Europe and China at its peril because of non-compliance with the EU's human right policy. Additionally, even among the European Council, the most powerful states want to avoid taking responsibility for offending China if it were to become the world's leader. In the same vein, the member states do not publish the EU's press release on the Human Rights Dialogue (HRD) on the website of their foreign ministries (Rühlig, Jerdén, and *alii*, 2018: 94).

Still, the European Commission is engaging in dialogue with China on the human rights issue. Indeed, in the European Commission's publication of March 2019, it was pointed out that "the ability of the EU and China to engage effectively on human rights will be an important measure of the bilateral relationship quality" (European Commission, 12.03.2019: 2). Over time, the EU's narrative on the issue had a relative impact on Chinese actions, with the reduction of dead penalty sentences in China and the improvement of detention conditions, notably for human rights activists. Also, on the individual scale, Liu Xia, the wife of the Nobel Peace Prize and human rights activist Liu Xiaobo, who died in prison, was allowed to leave China thanks to joint German-EU efforts. At the same time, these Chinese measures will make it more difficult from now on for Western observers to raise concerns on detention in China and help human rights activists (Rühlig, Jerdén, and *alii*, 2018: 94).

Nevertheless, the EU's report from March 2019 is uncompromising regarding the Chinese leaders' management of the Hong Kong's issue: "The human rights situation in China is deteriorating, notably in Xinjiang and regarding civil and political rights, as witnessed by the continuing crackdown on human rights lawyers and defenders. The human rights of the EU and other foreign citizens in China must be protected. The high degree of autonomy enshrined in the Hong Kong Basic Law needs to be respected" (European Commission, 12.03.2019: 2).

Labour standards

The Chinese market has developed thanks to labour-intensive industries and strong exportation policies. China has long been criticized for its bad labour conditions in the manufacturing industry, including long working hours, underage workers and poor housing conditions, leading to riots and mass suicides among the employees of some factories (Breinbauer, Brennan, and *alii*, 2019: 13). Those working conditions only reflect partially the

Chinese workers' conditions but it is still important to investigate the impact on the Chinese FDI outflow. A research made by Nathalie Homlong and Elisabeth Springler investigated China's institutional settings of labour conditions and enforcement of those regulatory rules (Breinbauer, Brennan, and *alii*, 2019: 13). Their report demonstrates that even if China made major efforts to improve labour conditions, the enforcement of the regulations is still weak, although it depends on the target country. While labour conditions are weak on the African continent, the results are mixed in Europe. It was observed that labour conditions under the BRI are characterized by a high level of temporary workers and low wages in Hungary and Czech Republic. However, those conditions cannot be found in every member state. Labour conditions approved at European level are not specific and do not affect the Chinese BRI projects. Some European countries have stricter national labour conditions than others, so the BRI projects in Germany have stricter conditions than in Hungary and Czech Republic for instance.

China refuses to submit its equipment project to European juridical norms in terms of transparent allocation in public markets: China wants to come back to bilateral agreements and deal with each relation separately (Claverie, 2019). China invests in a country if its national companies are interested in the project. Those Chinese companies negotiated to recruit under China's terms of employment to maximise their profits (Pavlićević, 2018: 698). In prospective European member states such as Serbia, China demanded more investor-friendly rules, which would enable them to fire workers rather than hire, as it was the case with the acquisition of a steel mill in Serbia (Pavlićević, 2018: 698). In this country, Chinese investors lost their interest because the businesses did not identify enough opportunities to make profits. European standards being more rigid than in Serbia, Chinese companies want to be sure they are able to make profits before settling in a country. The Budapest-Belgrade railway project attempting to link the heart of Europe to the Port of Piraeus was subjected to the European Commission's investigation in 2017 because of a potential breach of the EU procurement law by Hungarian leaders. This investigation on the EU scale showed a concern on financial security for many European observers due to a normative gap between Europe and China (Pardo, 2018: 246). In the end, the project was declared as being in conformity with the EU procurement law and Hungarian government signed a loan agreement with the Export-Import Bank of China in April 2020, making the project enter the implementation phase (Nuomin, 27.04.2020: 1).

Experts criticise the lack of action of the EU in the European-Chinese trade agreement, negotiation mainly focusing on property rights although labour conditions are not addressed in details (Breinbauer, Brennan, and *alii*, 2019: 190). As a result, some of the EU's member states have strong national institution settings to guarantee the enforcement of labour regulations while others have a weaker institutional framework. The institution setting on labour conditions on the EU's scale is also weak and it could result in a weakening of the European standards (Breinbauer, Brennan, and *alii*, 2019: 13-14).

Trade and investment policies

The 2019 Strategic agenda is warding on China's development of domestic champions through its industrial state-driven economic policies such as "Made in China 2025". The EU accuses China to shield its domestic market for its national champions and to avoid competition thanks to a restrictive market opening. Indeed, China favours domestic companies for the protection and enforcement of certain laws such as intellectual property. The EU's operators have to comply with arduous requirements as a precondition to enter the Chinese market, such as the creation of a joint venture with Chinese companies or the transfer of its technologies to Chinese companies (European Commission, 12.03.2019: 6). That is why Germany and other member states insist on the European Union scale to build a more reciprocal economic relationship and warn member states that it is necessary to act at the Bloc's level as explained in the second section.

This issue has already been discussed in parts 1 and 2, yet, it had to be mentioned in this section because it is an important norm dispute between the BRI projects and the European Union.

To go further, the EU recently intended to take concrete steps to find a common strategy to enhance the dialogue with China on norms by addressing the EU's weaknesses: disunity and fragmentation (Rühlig, Jerdén, and *alii*, 2018: 94). In 2018, Germany and the Netherlands gave a comprehensive overview of the European Commission's Chinese policies, resulting in a more vocal 2019 EU-China strategic outlook. Additionally, a debate was brought up about the necessity of unanimous voting in some areas of security and foreign policy. This measure would appease the EU's foreign policy strategy and give it more power, so it would be difficult for the member states to accept it, since they would like to retain their veto power (Rühlig, Jerdén, and *alii*, 2018: 94). The EU's fragmentation issue is raised but the increase of populist parties in Europe is to be taken into consideration because it could influence the priorities of the EU, which could come back to a less principled approach.

C) THE EU'S REACTIONS TO THIS THREAT

The EU's counter-measures

In 2016, European officials alerted member states representatives to the critical state of the Union, calling it an "existential crisis": in his speech, the official said "never before have I seen such little common ground between our Member States" (EU Commission Speech, 14.09. 2016: 2). He noted divergent priorities among states, European citizens seemed very changeable in presidential elections recently. He insisted that "Europe can only work if we all work for unity and commonality" (EU Commission Speech, 14.09.2016: 2). He also recalled central European values gathering European countries together such as the right to have personal data protected by strong European laws, same labour standards and a fair level playing field (EU Commission Speech, 14.09.2016: 3). That speech did not target any specific country but year 2016 marked the growing awareness of China's rising power in Europe. Indeed, as early as 2016, the EU integrated more realpolitik in its foreign policy and hardened its position with regard to China. The EU drew up a document entitled "Elements for a new strategy of EU towards China" which insists on the importance of reciprocity in economic relations. For a fairer competition, this document provides that China removes barriers to investment and European exports and focuses its economy on liberal reforms (Claverie, 2019: 30).

Later in 2017, the EU adopted a new anti-dumping methodology to conduct investigations regarding competition distortions while remaining in compliance with the rules of the World Trade Organization (WTO), without discriminating a particular trading partner (Claverie, 2019: 30). It is an early stage of investment screening and the real efficiency of the tool can be questioned.

In 2019, the EU increasingly perceived China as a challenge rather than an opportunity. China seems to take advantage of developing countries and is accused to preserve its domestic market for its champions by keeping selective market opening for European companies. The EU reminded the member states that, even within frameworks such as the 17+1, they should comply with the EU's laws, rules and policies. Recently, in February 2019, the Union has established a renewed framework to filter foreign investment. This tool helps identify and prevent unfriendly investments that threaten European sovereignty over strategic infrastructures, new technologies or access to sensitive information (Claverie, 2019: 30). This regulation allows the Commission or a member state to issue opinions if they consider that a foreign direct investment, whether it is planned or completed, represents a threat to security or public order for a member state (EU Legislative Act, 20.02.2019: 18). Furthermore, each member state must submit an annual report to the Commission, including FDI information in their country, a document that needs to be handled by the 31st of March each year (EU Legislative Act, 20.02.2019: 23). Therefore, member states remain sovereign in their decision to accept or not a foreign investment but they need to inform the Commission that can issue advisory opinion if it considers the investment as a threat to the country or another member state (Gehrke, 2019: 2).

Moreover, in March 2019, the EU issued a communication release, calling Beijing a systematic rival in some areas and a potential partner and competitor in others (EU Commission, 12.03.2019: 9). It was followed in spring 2019 by a critical report by the EU's ambassadors in China who accused the BRI to be economically, socially, environmentally and financially unsustainable. The report criticized China for discriminating foreign businesses, for a lack of transparent procedures and for restricting its market to European businesses (Geeraerts, 2019: 2- 3).

On this topic, a real rivalry has set in between the member states wanting screening mechanism on the EU scale and the other members opposed to those measures. However, the EU's investment controls have been more and more assertive towards non-European investors. The EU has to find a balance between attracting investments from abroad and protecting the European critical sectors and defending its core values.

Europe's connectivity strategy: an alternative to the BRI?

In September 2018, the European Commission presented its own connectivity platform. This platform looks like that presented by China, connecting Europe to Asia, which is also focusing on key sectors such as road, sea and air transport, energy, digital connectivity and people-to-people relations. Through this platform, the EU's objective is to defend its values and norms which diverge from Chinese ones. The EU's initiative promotes equal treatment and equal access for the EU and local companies in order to give a better level playing field to European firms in Asia. It also ensures labour rights and both social and environmental standards, and insists on sustainability, transparency and adherence to market principles. The EU accuses the Chinese BRI to undermine those principles in most of its projects and promote its own principles through this platform.

The EU's strategy includes "a better availability and sustainability of finance" by the European Investment Bank (EIB) and European Fund for Strategic Investments (EFSI) because it is concerned about debt traps and also because the financial dimension is essential to create a relevant alternative to the BRI (Mohan, 2018: 5). Indeed, even though the EU does not want to consider it like a BRI's competitor and alternative, the selling point of the European initiative is the emphasize on the EU's norms and interests included in the projects. The alternative fulfils labour standards and avoids debt traps, going beyond the Chinese BRI (Bastian, 2018).

The joint communication emphasizes on the "European way", which implies it has "sustainable, comprehensive and rules-based connectivity" (EU Commission, 19.09.2018: 2). More precisely, the Union's core principles, such as security, environmental protection, social and individual rights, are expected to be a source of inspiration outside the EU (EU Commission, 19.09.2018: 2). The emphasis is put on the adherence to high standards of transparency and good governance, as well as on dialogue with the populations impacted by the projects, thanks to public consultations. That is why this initiative is not limited to China and is aimed at diversifying Asian relations to spread the EU's norms and values further (Claverie, 2019: 30).

The EU's Connectivity Strategy is based on equal partnerships. That is why the European Commission is working with international and European Standardization organisations to ensure technical harmonisation between Europe and Asia to obtain a consensus-based industry's standards (EU Commission, 19.09.2018: 9). The EU should connect the already developed Trans European Network for Transport (TEN-T)[3] with existing Asian networks, which also implies a deeper cooperation with the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), while ensuring the compliance with the EU's priorities in those relations (EU Commission, 19.09.2018: 3; 9). However, substantive results are still to be materialized. The EU should establish partnerships with other countries such as the EU-Japan connectivity partnership.

In fine, despite a real desire to preserve the European core norms and values on the EU scale, coming mainly from Germany, the Union is still struggling to find common ground between all the member states. The EU's normative framework is still weak in terms of investments and labour standards, and the human rights principle is not easy to enforce in concluding agreements with other countries. However, the increasing awareness of the security challenges caused by the Chinese political influence through the BRI is pushing for a

[3] The Trans European Network for Transport (TEN-T) is a policy that aims to develop infrastructures in all Europe and implement a network of railway lines, roads, maritime routes and airlines to close gaps between regions.

reinforcement of the measures at the European level. Further development could be expected, depending on the future policy and priorities of national governments.

PART IV: CONVERGENT AND DIVERGENT DYNAMICS

In the previous sections, I identified divergent European reactions through Germany and Greece, which seem opposed at first glance, regarding the Belt and Road Initiative. Germany, who is, with the United Kingdom, the European country which benefits from the majority of the Chinese investments, and its position about China on the EU's scale regarding the need of investment screening mechanism and the respect of human rights in the PRC is the most expressive. On the other hand, the Greek businesses welcome the Chinese investors and the government seems to favour China and even defends the Chinese positions by being reluctant on the publication of EU's critical statements about China. Without the member states' common position on China's investments, the Belt and Road Initiative progress in Europe is then posing problem for the EU's decision-making process. Later, I will analyse the impact of the Chinese standards related to the projects on the European Union. The Union seems to want to protect its core principles from the Chinese projects without confronting the country with the necessity of keeping good relations with it, considering the importance of the EU-China trade. In this regard, the Belt and Road initiative seems to endanger the European fundamental norms and principles, especially with European states playing with the limits of the European rules as part of their contracts with Chinese counterparts. The European Union took measures to protect the Union and those should be analysed to determine whether they are representing a renewed convergence of opinions at national level.

In order to do that, in this last section, I will try to analyse the recent developments of the EU's legislation in order to determine the progress of the member states' opinions about China's policy. I will then analyse the evolution of the tools to control foreign investments with European Commission's document and, additionally, to give a more updated dimension to this work, a survey conducted in 2020 by the European Council of Foreign Relations (ECFR) think-tank on the positions of the EU's national governments on China will be used. This last section will require the use of the collective securitisation theory regarding the European Union. This theory seems relevant to analyse the dynamics between actors joining the same international organisation. The issue affects all the actors but other factors compromise the consent to a common position on the issue. As the latter becomes more visible, the feeling of emergency might help the actors to find a common ground and therefore implement policy on the international organisation's scale to counter the threat. So, it is necessary to determine whether there is an increasingly converging dynamic between member states to find a solution as the theory stipulated it, or whether the divergence is still the main dynamic between domestic leaders.

COLLECTIVE SECURITISATION THEORY

Defining collective securitisation

With globalization, security governance is becoming more complex and a wider variety of actors could come into play to tackle those issues. The latter are also becoming more global and require an outsourcing of the security response to intergovernmental or non-governmental bodies. However, in security governance, it is rare that the identification of a threat translates into immediate security response. Its identification would usually either reinforce an already existing pathway of policies or, in times of crisis, shift security governance existing forms to a new directions (Sperling & Webber, 2018: 9). The concept of securitisation is the process by which an actor identifies a "threat", attributes it a specific status of emergency which allows the actor to take urgent and exceptional measures in response to that threat.

As for global issue, collective securitisation is a more relevant type of securitisation and can be applied to a "collective setting" such as multilateral institutions. Indeed, the term "collective" is well adapted when the security governance is shared between national actors and a multilateral organisation such as the EU, NATO or the UN. In collective securitisation, one actor is rising the alarm on behalf of empowered actors, with each of them already having individual security imperatives. Then, it entails the gathering of these different national securitisations and centres them on authoritative decisions in formal international organisations (Sperling & Webber, 2018: 9). Depending on the status and competences given to the international organisation, collective securitisation has both thin and thick variants. In the thin version, a state expresses its concern within the international organisation. If it obtains a favourable response from the other members, this actor empowers the organisation and adopts, at this level, policy measures in response. So, the international organisation receives artificial actorness, meaning the actions are done in its name but without any real autonomy or agency of the organisation; it is only a space dedicated to negotiations between members. On the other hand, in the thick version of collective securitisation, with more autonomous organisations such as the EU and the World Health Organization, the actor is composed of a state aggregation with its own opinions and policy preferences, but the organisation also has its own autonomy and standing in parallel with its members. The organisation can then be considered as a securitising actor with agency (Sperling & Webber, 2018: 10).

Six different stages can be identified in collective securitisation. In the first stage, there is a status quo on the security discourse and the premises of a policy response upon the received notion of threat. Then, in the second stage, there is a precipitating event or a sequence of cascading events whose gravity is important enough to disrupt the status quo in place and bring a feeling of emergency in the securitising actor and its audience on the degradation of the environment security. At that point, the issue is recognized as a security threat, the securitising actor may move to stage 3 and the audience responds to it, which is the fourth stage.

Then, the precipitating event is the key initiating the progress to the next stage, which is in the form of a speech act. The speech act implies the presence of a threat to the organisation in itself or its members or neighbours; or a threat to its systemic properties, such as the norms and rules governing the organisations. In the fourth stage, the audience is ratifying the securitising move after the redefinition of the threat, the target endangered and the policies necessary to reduce the threat. The securitising actor and the audience are interconnected and dependent, and in organisations such as the EU, the distinction between members and organisation is blurred in the statements. Stage 5 focuses on the formulation and implementation of the policies addressing the security threat. Then, a successful collective securitisation move is required to go beyond the statement and the agenda-setting, actually to take appropriate policy measures (Sperling & Webber, 2018: 20). In the case of the EU, those policies, primarily occurring on the European Union's scale, will have a more or less important impact on the national scale depending on the policy sector. However, for more efficiency, national policy responses should mirror and be shaped by those made by the EU. Finally, the last stage of collective securitisation is the routinisation of the new vocabulary usage, strategy and policies which are amended. The collective securitisation process is elaborated in six stages which are usually overlapping rather than separated.

In the case of the EU, it has to be noted that the autonomy of the Union depends on the organisation's competences in the specific domain of the issue. Therefore, to use this analytical tool to solve the EU's issue, it is important to establish European shared and exclusive competences and to evaluate whether the EU has skills in the sector of the case study. It is also essential to determine whether the crisis as defined in the theory can be associated with the threat, namely the danger perceived about the Chinese increased economic and political involvement in the Belt and Road Initiative. Then, before applying the theory to this case study, it is important to check the applicability of the actors and the threat to the theory. More precisely, it is important to identify the conditions in which this theory can be applied to the EU as an international organisation and to determine whether Germany's concerns about the Chinese increased FDI presence in Europe through the BRI can be considered as a threat. It is supposed that the use of the theory will help understand convergent and divergent dynamics in the EU's decision-making process regarding the BRI.

Applicability

In this section, I will attempt to determine the applicability of this collective securitisation theory to Europe as a securitising actor and to Chinese massive investments in Europe through the BRI as a threat.

It is commonplace to refer to the European Union as an international actor, although it is a particular one. The EU has its own policy autonomy and international standing in parallel with those of its member states. With its complex political, legal and institutional processes, I intend to assess the compliance of the EU as an agent of thick collective securitisation.

In this section, the argument is that a crisis allows the EU to act as an adequate agent of collective securitisation. To check the validity of this argument, it is important to determine the exact nature of the issue, first to verify the domain it belongs to. Then, it is essential to check if the EU is capable to act as an actor of collective securitisation, especially if it has the competences to do so in the sector studied. It is also important to take into consideration that the EU has to take into consideration member states' domestic political opinions, which also have an influence on the decision on the organisation's scale (Sperling & Webber, 2018: 2).

a) Chinese investments through the BRI as a threat?

When it comes to securitisation theory, it is important to understand what can be referred to as a security issue. Security does not emerge as a matter of consequence with the apparition of a tangible threat in the "real world", but because a key authoritative actor has identified the issue as such. Germany is a key European actor as explained earlier and, since 2016, the German leaders have become more expressive regarding China as they were concerned on how much those massive investments in critical fields would increase Chinese political influence in their country. The German leaders then identified those Chinese investments as a threat and even as a danger for domestic politics and therefore raised the alarm on the EU's scale. Belt and Road Initiative's projects are concluded through Memorandums of Understandings between the EU's member states and Chinese counterparts, which include political cooperation, agreements on trade and investments, and on transport and infrastructure. Even though those memorandums are not legally binding, they imply the member states' adoption of appropriate legislation or measures. However, each member state can only do so if it is under its domestic competences according to the EU's regulations. Whether the member states have the competences to accept the Chinese projects under the BRI depends on their obligations and competences allocated under the Treaty on European Union (TEU) and on the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) (Leandro & Duarte, 2020: 292).

b) National responsibility or EU competences

The EU is a relevant security actor as its members delegate some of the decision-making process in security areas and because the organisation provides non-violent conflict resolution and is organised in a non-hierarchical way (Sperling & Webber, 2018: 8). The EU is a unique organisation which enjoys a special relation with its member states, which are also independent security actors by themselves. States are also security actors tackling their own security threats but the development of complex and global threats is questioning the efficiency of individual responses. To give an appropriate answer to those threats, states are outsourcing their security competences to intergovernmental and independent actors. Thus, the EU and its member states are, in terms of security governance, sharing the same ground. However, the European Union only has the competences conferred by the treaties. The competences are divided into exclusive competences and shared ones: if the EU has exclusive competence in an area, it is the only one able to legislate and adopt binding acts; however, the EU and its member states have shared competences in some areas. As it is relevant to indicate in the case of the Belt and Road Initiative, the EU has exclusive competences on common commercial policy, which has included foreign investments since the Treaty of Lisbon of 2009 extended its competences (Leandro & Duarte, 2020: 292). Additionally, the EU's trade policy also includes larger perspectives, such as the reinforcement of foreign and security policy and consequently, it also promotes the defence of human rights, labour rights, the environment, and fair competition and procurement.

Additionally, the free trade agreements concluded after the Treaty of Lisbon are also promoting and exporting the EU's values and standards with and to its partners (Leandro & Duarte, 2020: 293). It is important to note that indirect investments and investor-State dispute are not included in the exclusive competence of the EU, the competence is shared with the member states. Also, the international trade in transport services is included in the common transport policy, which is a shared competence between the EU and its member states. However, while road and rail transport as well as sea and air transport fall under the common transport policy, neither the selling and marketing of transport facilities nor the repairs and maintenance of those services are included in the common transport policy (Leandro & Duarte, 2020: 296).

Overall, it seems that the EU has exclusive competences in many areas of the BRI activities considering that its main purpose is to ease trade with China by facilitating customs clearance and quarantine procedures, facilitating foreign investments procedures, removing trade barriers and developing market access, which are elements of the common commercial policy. Thus, Chinese imports of building materials for the construction of transport infrastructures such as railways and port terminals do not fall under the transport policy, but rather under the common commercial policy (Leandro & Duarte, 2020: 295-296).

c) Dependence on domestic political orientation

In collective securitisation, positioning an international organisation such as the EU as a securitising actor requires a good understanding of the audience, the latter referring both to domestic publics and to political elites for this study (Sperling & Webber, 2018: 15). In the case of the EU, the organisation has shared competences with the audience and some actors of the Union represents the member states' preferences, making the domestic political orientation more important.

During some periods, especially the post-Cold War and the post-Maastricht treaty eras, and after the 2008 economic crisis, Euroscepticism and hostility towards the EU and integration increased in the European domestic political opinion at different levels. Those times of crisis in some states limit the room for manoeuver of the EU's representatives within the organisation (Webber, 2013: 13). Recently, with the Brexit, there was a rise of political scepticism regarding the integration to the EU among the governments in place, with for instance Eurosceptic President Conte in Italy, Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban's strong criticism on the EU and *de facto* Polish leader Jaroslaw Kaczynski Eurosceptic and populist narratives (Meloni, 2019: 1; Zgut & Csehi, 2019: 1). However, this political distrust in the EU has not spread to all the member states. Indeed, actual French president Emmanuel Macron and German chancellor Angela Merkel are having pro-European narratives. More particularly, since the Eastern enlargement, Germany has been playing a unique pro-integrationist and rallying regional role in Europe, occupying a central position in the Union's bargaining process highlighting Germany's preferences. As section two dealing with Germany revealed earlier, not only the German leaders are protecting their country against the Chinese investments in critical fields of the economy on the national scale, but they are also alerted other member states of the necessity to act on the EU's scale, showing how the multilateral organisation is important to the German leaders. On the other hand, a decrease in Germany's long-standing support to the European strong position could destabilize the multilateral organisation (Webber, 2013: 15).

Overall, when talking about the EU as a securitising actor, it has to be remembered that, in the EU's complex political mechanism, the domestic opinion of the EU's member states still has to be taken into account. If member state's governments and citizens are against the binding of the EU's investment screening policy, it would be difficult to adopt it. Therefore, Chinese investments through the BRI have to be considered as a threat by all the members having converging opinions on the issue, and then a possibility of binding the EU's legislation emergence.

APPLICATION OF THE THEORY

The collective securitisation theory argues that after the recognition of the crisis as such by the members of the organisation, they will attempt to find a solution to the crisis together. Chinese massive investments through the Belt and Road Initiative are recognized as a crisis by the German leaders who intended to alert to their danger on political autonomy on the EU's scale. Within the EU, there is a necessity of consensus between member states in order to publish common statements and implement policies. So I would like to analyse the way the actors are considering the so-called threat and to determine whether the feeling of emergency helps the states to act together in order to find solutions to that threat (convergence) or whether the different opinions are too important to agree on a common position (divergence). Using the answers found in the previous sections, I will try to determine their consequences on the decision-making process on the EU's scale and on the Union's core norms and principles. To do so, I will take the evolution into account from the 2008 economic crisis until now, and I will classify the results into two categories: diverging and converging dynamics. Finally, through those two dynamics, I will determine whether or not the Chinese massive investments in Europe represent a threat for the European political unity.

a) Diverging dynamics

In this work, the Greek and German economic situations were examined to show the difference of perception between the two countries. Both are European member states for which China is an important economic partner. While German citizens generally think that EU membership is beneficial for them, it is not as clear in Greece while a smaller proportion of the population has the same opinion. Also, both countries are perceiving the economic opportunities in accepting Chinese contracts through the Belt and Road Initiative. However, German leaders tend to be more cautious on the projects' long-term political consequences, as developed in part one and two, even though leadership's behaviours of the two countries are showing more similarities recently. More broadly, the cases of Germany and Greece were chosen because they could show the variety of domestic opinions on China, but this analysis also applies to some extent to other member states. Greece and other Central and Eastern countries, who have been suffering from high unemployment rates and slow economic growth since the 2008 crisis, were more willing to welcome Chinese investments in the post-crisis years. Many of them also integrated the 17+1 platform created by China to favour Chinese loans and investments. Besides, Western leaders, especially German chancellor Angela Merkel and French president Emmanuel Macron, were and are still attaching more importance on the consequences of the massive Chinese investments for their national security and out of respect for the European common norms and values in the long run.

So, the domestic situations of the member states have to be taken into consideration first. Indeed, depending on the citizens' priorities and needs, governments with different programmes regarding Europe can be appointed. With the EU's elections coming in 2019, the Eurosceptic political rhetoric increased in some countries among governing parties, such as in Hungary and Poland, in addition to Greece. The domestic Euroscepticism rise is to be taken into account because this may imply a divergence of opinion on the European scale on Chinese policy and lead to a weak perception of the threat. Hungarian leader Viktor Orban is very expressive regarding his criticism on the EU and does not hesitate to dispute common policies. He accuses the EU to serve a corrupt elite, which is in conflict with the Hungarian people. He then tends to establish a nationalist policy which is opposed to Brussels. Jaroslaw Kaczyński, on his side, is considered as a Polish leader even though he does not have any function in the government, and has developed a Eurosceptic and populist discourse, similar to that of the Hungarian leader. Since 2015, he has been insisting on the fact that he would not let the EU indicate the political path Poland should take (Zgut & Csehi, 16.04.2019). Therefore, this kind of Eurosceptic talk is leading governments to diminish the perception of Chinese investments as a threat.

The EU is a unique organisation in which opinions are reflected by the EU's citizens and their domestic governments. Indeed, the EU's citizens, influenced by the conditions and priorities of their governments, are bringing various priorities on the EU's scale as the

Parlemeter 2019 graph shows it. Figure 6 shows that policy priorities differ between the EU's member states and the citizens by far, depending on the national economic and political contexts and on socio-demographic aspects (Parlemeter, 2019: 39). Indeed, while Germany as well as eleven member states are considering that climate change is the EU's priority, five countries including Greece believe that fighting young people's unemployment is the number-one priority, with also twelve member states which would rather tackle social exclusion and poverty first. Besides, it is important to note that the EU's investment policy was not part of the policies included in the survey.

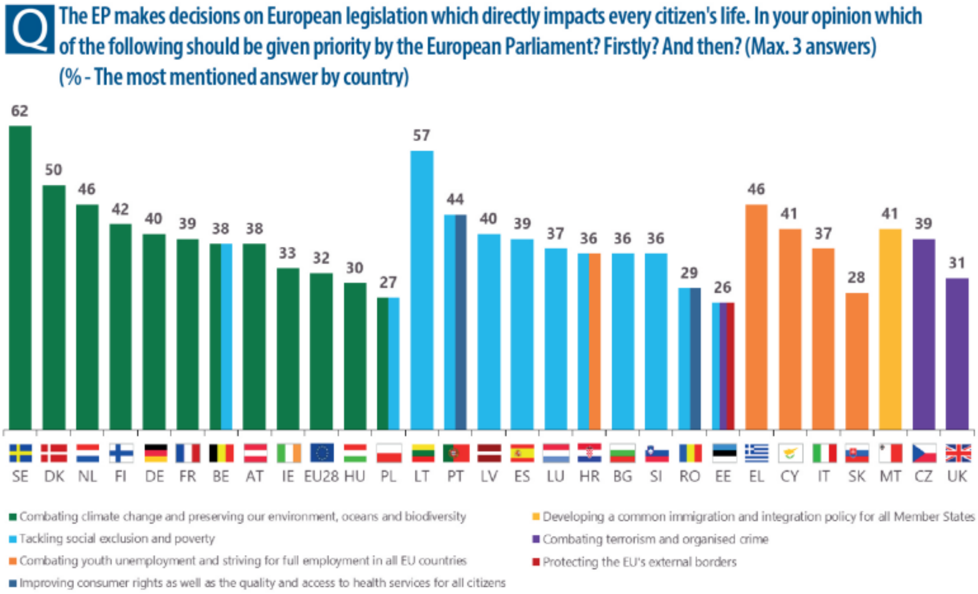


Figure 6

Source: Parlemeter 2019 (92.2), QB5T

With such disagreements on the domestic and the EU's scale, the member states have trouble agreeing upon common statements and common policies targeting Direct Foreign Investments from outside Europe. According to Jakimow, the EU's statements tend to remain vague in their language in order to please everyone: language usually emphasizes on economy rather than politics, on culture rather than norms, and on sovereignty rather than supranational commitments (Jakimów, 2019: 378). European decision-makers have trouble finding a strong common position regarding China. There is an asymmetry in the Sino-European relations between the Chinese activities which have started in Europe for a long time, but since they have become more visible and organized thanks to the BRI, the European common position on this issue regarding Beijing would be beneficial to the protection of the European states' security and the Union's core norms and principles. However, considering the divergence of opinions, it would not materialize as long as member states do not perceive the emergency of the threat represented by the Chinese political assertiveness through BRI massive investments (Bastian, 2018: 3). In order to maintain good economic relations with China and protect the European norms, the Union needs to find a balance between economic pragmatism and the protection of the EU's normative position.

b) Converging dynamics

As explained in details in part two, Germany especially received lots of Chinese investments in 2016 in some critical fields of its economy, which changed the German leaders' perception of those investments. So, the German government identified those Chinese massive investments as a threat for their political autonomy and for the national security of other member states. Therefore, they first decided to take action by implementing stricter policies on the domestic scale and they alerted other member states of this perceived threat of Chinese investments through the BRI, which became a danger. The German leaders attach a lot of importance to the EU's mechanism and called for measures on the EU's scale to protect all the member states in the same way. This way, Germany is acting as an integrative European actor trying to bring European states together to fight this common danger. For Germany, the rise of Chinese economic integration in Europe through its BRI investments is representing a threat and leaders are convincing other member states increasingly on the reality of the danger (Oertel, 2020: 8).

The German alert had a relative influence considering the role of European key actor the country has been playing for a long time. Indeed, the Franco-German "tandem" has been considered since the Post-Cold War enlargement as an unequal couple being Europe's driving force. Their roles are complementary, Germany being the economical driver of the Eurozone and France being the political and strategic driving force, and together they exercise a significant influence on the Eurozone. However, those two countries do not always share the same opinions, for instance regarding issues such as the military intervention in Libya. Since the 2008 economic crisis, Germany has increasingly been playing the part of "the Eurozone's and the EU's 'indispensable' member" (Webber, 2013: 5). More recently, in 2020, the European Council on Foreign Relations conducted a survey on the EU's scale among foreign policy professionals regarding the German position in the EU: 97 percent said Germany is the most influential country in the European Union and 82 percent said that it is the most "contacted" state, meaning a referent state in the EU (Ash, 2020: 1).

The EU's leaders are more and more concerned about the challenges caused by Chinese investments through the BRI, with governments simultaneously considering China as a partner and a rival, being therefore more pragmatic. A survey conducted in 2020 by the European Council of Foreign Relations (ECFR) think-tank (figure 7 below) showed that the majority of the European governments considers China both as a partner and a rival. Few countries including Greece are still considering China as a strategic partner only. The survey also found that in most member states, political parties generally agree on China's policy. It gives more capacity to the EU to publish common statements and engage in a long-term schedule regarding policies on China.

From 2016 on, a document, called "Elements for a new strategy of EU regarding China" was approved and calling the principle of reciprocity in European national economies. More recently, in March 2019, the Commission set a course for a new European approach on China with the publication of its Strategic Outlook document. The "EU-China: A strategic Outlook" described China as an "economic rival" and was an attempt to protect an international order based on rules, reciprocity, non-discrimination and openness. Indeed, the additional document's "proposition for a new industrial European policy" provided the framework of the implementation of European regulatory tools, such as investment screening, management of state subsidies and export control, going hand and hand with Europe and governments worried about Chinese economic assertiveness through the BRI.

The EU's strategy regarding China is not only about common statements, it also involves common mechanisms protecting both the member states' domestic economies and the EU's core norms and principles. To go further, it is interested to update the positions of the EU's governments' with the following question of the 2020 survey (figure 8 below) asking governments about their opinion on what would be the most suitable policy the EU should adopt regarding China. What is interesting is that Greece, who accepted Chinese investments, especially those related to the Port of Piraeus project, and other Eastern and Central European countries, are now in favour of investment screening in critical fields of their economy as well. Indeed, many of them, despite their participation in the 17+1 platform and the signing of cooperation agreements in the form of Memorandums of Understandings, were disappointed by the little amount of Chinese investments. More and more, those countries want to gain a level playing field with China and they are progressively determined to do so without being more dependent on China (Oertel, 2020: 7).

In 2017, a regulation on investments is establishing the framework for the screening of foreign direct investments by the member states and the Commission on the grounds of security or public order according to the Article 1 of EU official document (European Parliament, 13.09.2017: 19). The mechanism allows the European Commission to issue an opinion addressed to a member state if it considers the foreign direct investment is likely to affect the EU interest on grounds of security or public order. At the same time, member states shall inform the Commission if they are undergoing screening with their national screening mechanism. This screening mechanism allows the European Commission to request information on direct foreign investments in a member state to analyse its nature and determine if it can represent a danger for the Union interest. If it is the case, it may issue an opinion to the member state. Thus, this EU level tool is attempting to preserve member states from critical investments and it establishes the framework of European investment screening mechanism, giving still enough leeway to European states.

Increasingly, member states, with few exceptions, more and more agree on European China's policy and most of them agree that the EU should restrict Chinese investments in strategic sectors of their economy. They were then willing to upgrade the EU's investment policy to a more binding investment screening tool, transferring more power to the European Commission. In 2019, the EU's screening mechanism was implemented and went further than the previous one by giving more competences to the European Commission when the latter was considering that a foreign direct investment represents a danger for the security of a member state. Additionally, member states are required to submit an annual report of the foreign direct investments received. This tool is more effective in determining the intrusive nature of a foreign investment and is able to alert other member states this danger. Therefore, progressively, an evolution of the converging opinions regarding China and its BRI has been observed among the EU's governments, which could bring more consensus and allow to adopt a common strategy regarding the Chinese investments and the BRI in the long run.

In addition, to control mechanisms, the European Union wants to connect Europe to Asia while protecting its core norms and principles. Therefore, in September 2018, the European Commission published a paper on its own connectivity platform between China and Europe (European Commission press release, 19.09.2019). This document sets the EU's objectives and conditions in this initiative to connect Europe to Asia. They insist that this project will be done the European Union's way, emphasizing on a sustainable connectivity based on the respect of common rules. They also emphasized on the harmonization of regulatory standards and on the avoidance of debt traps (Bastian, 2018: 3). This EU-Asia connectivity strategy is an initial step emphasizing on a European normative approach of connectivity, making reference to the BRI without naming it. However, while this European initiative represents one example of converging dynamics between member states, it still needs broader regional scope and more coordination in funding to address the large-scale dimension of the BRI project (Oertel, 2020: 12). This EU-Asia strategy should be made global and be based on European norms and standards.

c) A threat to the European unity

There are converging and diverging dynamics between the member states' opinions. The application of the theory cannot be complete given that every member state does not consider the Chinese massive investments through the BRI as a danger for political autonomy to the same extent and that some Eurosceptic leaders, such as Polish and Greek ones, criticize the German position and actions within Europe and would tend to have a weak perception of the threat. Recently, in 2020, with the majority of the EU's members being for an EU's more ambitious and assertive policy towards China, more binding measures are expected on the EU's scale. However, each member state is wary of the other's reason to do so. Many member states are worrying that France uses the EU's measures to advance its own geopolitical ambitions and that Germany shapes China's policy according to its own economic interests (Oertel, 2020: 9). Those perceptions can be contested but can be an obstacle to provide a consensus on a binding policy towards China between European member states. Perfect unity between member states seems unrealistic regarding all the issues on China, however, the ECFR 2020 survey on domestic governments shows an increase in converging perceptions on China's policy and the emergency to adopt a common European strategy. Therefore, on the European Union's scale, more assertive statements on China were published and stronger control mechanisms on Chinese investments were implemented. Those elements provide the basis of a more coherent and effective European policy towards China and its large-scale BRI strategy.

Figure 7

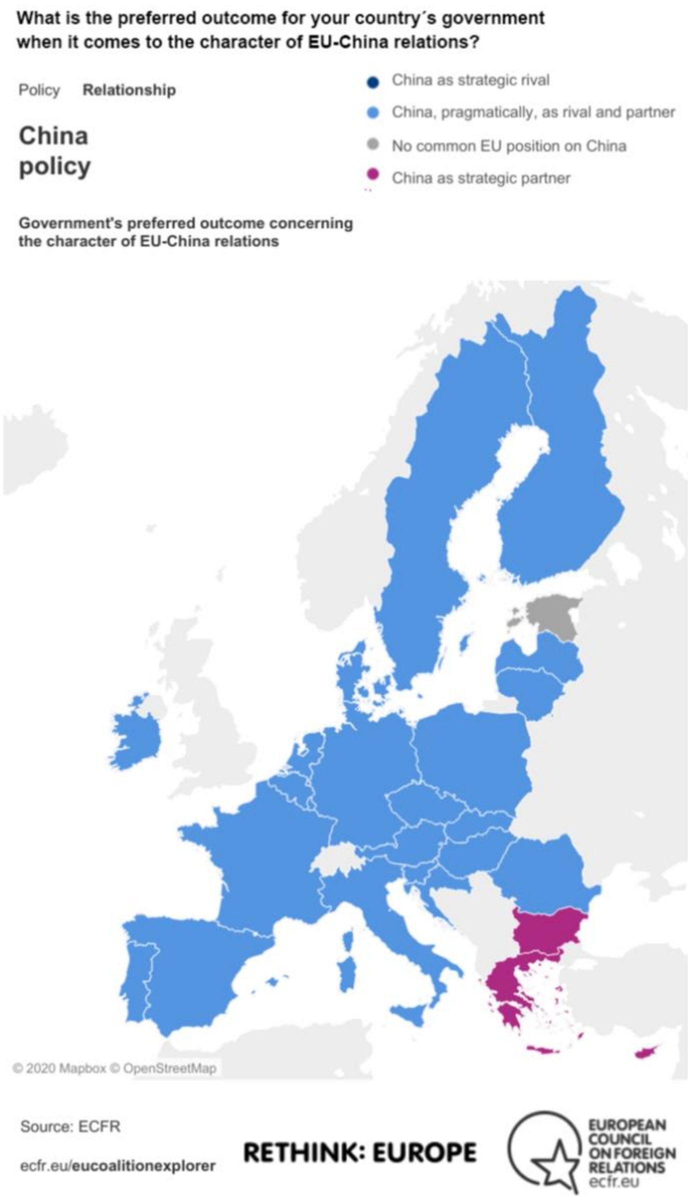
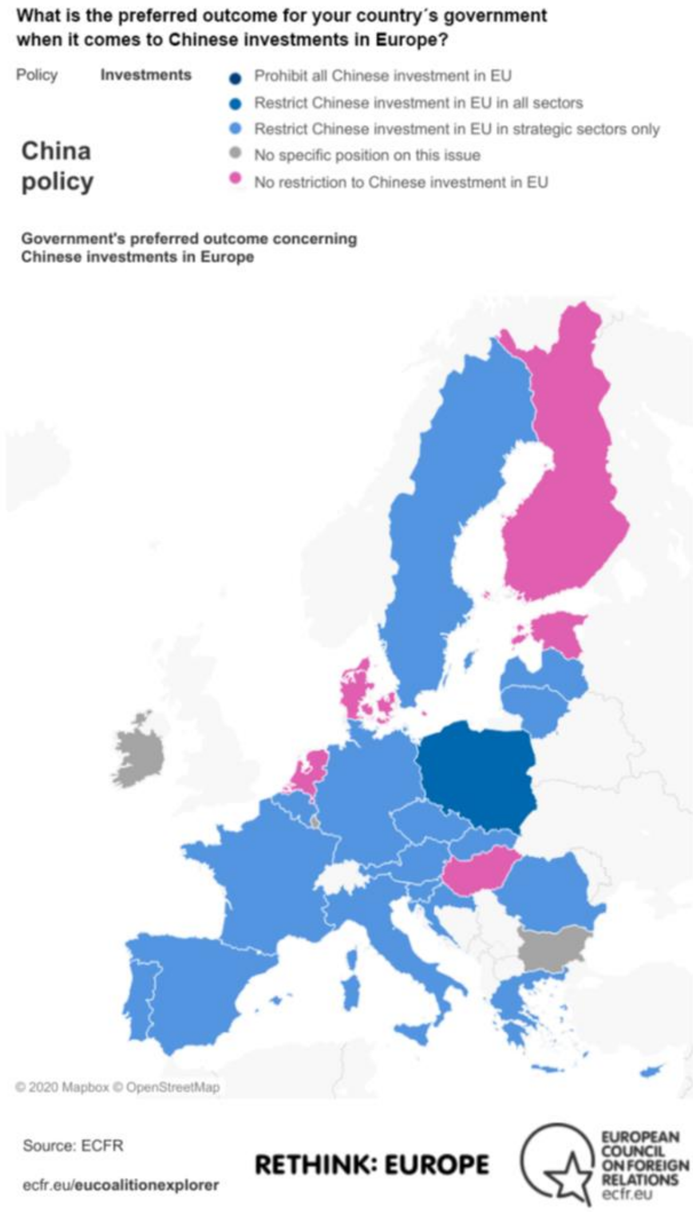


Figure 8



GENERAL CONCLUSION

The European Union has been through many crises since its creation, which have made the organisation progress and go beyond its original purpose. The complex decision-making process of the EU requires converging opinions between member states. The observation of the latter's domestic economy and politics helps understand the various dynamics. Germany and Greece have shown different perspectives regarding their relation with the Union and with China since the 2008 economic crisis. This analysis on the domestic scale revealed how different perceptions have the potential to undermine EU level decision-making process. The credibility and stance of the organisation is then questioned and also endangers the Union's core norms and principles. The advance of the BRI in Europe is threatening the European norms in that the Chinese projects are playing with the limits of the European laws. The EU has increasingly been protecting itself and its member states recently agreed upon the adoption of a more binding investment screening mechanism. Furthermore, the collective securitisation theory revealed the presence of intertwined diverging and converging dynamics between the member states' opinions, with converging dynamics being more visible in 2020 with the EU increasingly having more say in European FDI and according to ECFR recent survey. Therefore, with more member states being concerned by the rise of Chinese political presence in Europe through BRI investments, it could lead to a progress of converging dynamics in the future.

However, during the pandemic in April 2020, the export-import bank of China signed with the Hungarian Ministry of finances a loan agreement for the construction of the Hungarian section of the Hungarian-Serbian railway project. The project is then entering the implementation phase according to Xinhua Silk Road information and it represents an important part of the China-Europe continental express railway (Nuomin, 27.04.2020: 1). Hungary was under the European Commission investigation to check the government's commitment to the EU's procurement law as part of their contract with China. The project stopped for some time and started again in April 2020, picturing the Chinese economy's fast recovery and showing the country's intention to push their investments in Europe further.

China also used the pandemic to add the new "Health Silk Road" to its previous Silk Roads. It was promoted through its internet platform OBOReurope by the director of "Club des Amis de la Chine" in March 2020. The article states that the Belt and Road Initiative is a solution to fight future pandemics because it also boosts the cooperation with Chinese health sectors that are going to be enhanced as part of the "Healthy China 2030" programme (Goulard, 23.03.2020). China wants to set an example with its health sector to developing and developed countries. As part of this programme, the PRC also intends to give financial support to laboratories and high-tech companies operating in the healthcare sector worldwide and strengthening cooperation between China and foreign laboratories. China wants to be considered as an example for its management of the coronavirus crisis and this could have an impact on China's gain of influence in the world and the acceptance of the Chinese norms and standards.

Still, despite China's determination to reach Europe through different means, some European observers seem positive about the Union's future capacity to overcome the pandemic crisis and to gather the European countries' opinions. Indeed, during this period marked by the Covid-19 crisis, Germany is engaged on the EU's scale to propose a European recovery package with large grants and loans for southern European countries by relying on common European loans (Ash, 2020: 1). So, in June 2020, Angela Merkel along with French President Emmanuel Macron and the EU's institutional leaders announced the EU's 7-year EUR 1.8 trillion budget and recovery plan. Even though this plan was first rejected by Polish and Hungarian leaders, the recovery package was finally accepted by European leaders.

Furthermore, the relations between Europe and China are undergoing a transformation and this trend is accelerating with the pandemic. European countries are increasingly converging towards a common policy on China with the majority of governments being in favour of investment screening towards China, including Greece and other Eastern and Central European members. This tendency is increasing as leaders are observing the Chinese economy's fast recovery from the pandemic compared to Europe's (Oertel, 2020: 7). The EU not only needs to find a new strategy regarding EU-China relations, but also to implement the European policy. Europe should reassert its normative approach regarding China, especially in terms of human rights in Hong Kong and Xinjiang.

Overall, new developments are expected regarding Chinese investments and, even though a common policy towards China was not the priory of the European Union during the pandemic peak, the Chinese economy's fast recovery is calling on the emergency of the situation on the EU's scale and the European governments will increasingly find it essential to reach a consensus on China's policy and its BRI project.

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Abstract :

The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is an innovative large-scale BRICS project dominated by China's leadership and attempting to connect countries more prominently thanks to railways, roads and ports. Less tangibly, the BRI projects are also conveying in parallel the Chinese normative preferences, which is challenging the Western norms already in place. This thesis is focusing on the perception of the BRI in Europe, which is still at an early stage of implementation, as well as on the consequences for the European Union unity. Perceptions of the infrastructure projects and the danger for the EU's norms are diverging between member states. Therefore, those BRI projects in Europe could possibly endanger the decision-making process and the European Union's normative setting. The aim of this study is to evaluate the threat of Chinese investments through the BRI for the EU's decision-making process and unity and analyze the Union's response to this perceived threat.

Key words: EU; China; BRI; norms; investments

UNIVERSITÉ CATHOLIQUE DE LOUVAIN
Faculté des sciences économiques, sociales, politiques et de communication
École des sciences politiques et sociales (PSAD)
Place Montesquieu, 1 bte L2.08.05, 1348 Louvain-la-Neuve, Belgique | **www.uclouvain.be/psad**