RESPONSES TO THE CONCERNS OF THE EU ON THE 17+1 COOPERATION

# An assessment of the China – CEEC cooperation's effect on Southeast Europe countries' relations with the European Union.

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*Abstract*

*This paper explores an influence of China – CEEC cooperation (the 17 plus 1) on six Southeast Europe countries' (SEE6) relations with the European Union. It elaborates effects of the 17 plus 1 on Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia process of association with to the European Union. In the case of the two EU members states from Southeast Europe – Croatia and Slovenia it analyses whether the 17 plus 1 being inserted in their diplomacy within the EU and China relations.*

*Considering the SEE6 – China relations the paper concludes the 17 plus 1 and the BRI are developing in Southeast Europe also as a support to SEE6 and their relations with the European Union. China – CEEC's focus on regional cooperation and infrastructure connectivity projects indirectly boost implementation of the stabilisation and association agreement that Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia signed with the EU.*

*Within the context of claims the 17 plus 1 in Southeast Europe is China's tool for dividing the European Union the paper shows that kind of approaches do not provide a specific description of modern Southeast Europe geopolitical significance for China and other global powers' geostrategic interests. In most cases, geopolitical framing of the 17 plus 1 rest upon on mechanical repetition of qualifications derived from some other geographical area and events included in big geopolitical game.*

*However, international development underway, less multilateralism and the spread of security concerns into market competition, could strength influence of that geopolitical approach to the 17 plus 1 cooperation. The essential response to that tendency is permanent supporting of factual and empirical approach to the rise of the 17 plus 1 - Southeast Europe relationship.*

Key words*: "17 plus 1", Southeast Europe, the European Union, China, similarities, synergy, empirical understanding, SAAs, Dubrovnik guidelines*

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Southeast Europe countries Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, and Slovenia (SEE6) have been including within the 17 plus one cooperation since its launching in 2012. The relations have deepened through many agencies, associations centres, networks and mechansims established by the 17 plus 1 format.

The severe consequences of global financial crisis (2008) in Southeast Europe and weakening of its opportunities for fast economic development by integration into direction of the EU have assured relatively easy access of China's economic diplomacy, embodiment in 17 plus 1 and the Belt and Road Initiative, to Southeast Europe.

This part of Europe, known also as the Balkans, has had a strong interest to build big infrastructural projects how could create more robust economic development but had no money to finance it. China's sensitivity to the region's needs, its "shared development" concept with real money behind it, multilateral cooperation that has not been based on firm rules or treatises, and speed of action have created an intensive interest in the region for participating in it.[1]

The political dialogue at the high political levels between Southeast Europe countries and China has been rapidly improved. In the past years, PMs from SEE6 met many times with China's PM within framework the 17 plus 1 and the BRI.

Southeast Europe – China relations have been moved considerably forward, however, it is not possible to claim the countries cooperation with China reached its zenith, but it has prepared conditions for its further rising and upgrading.

The idea of the 17 plus 1 cooperation in European countries is broader than to specialise themselves as storehouse, roads, ports and gates for Chinese goods. Their interest is concentrated to accelerate, over time, their national economic development by new transport infrastructure, attracting China's direct investments and other 17 plus 1's partners into industry and tourism sectors.

[1] The format 17 plus 1 was launched in 2012, Warsaw, by than Prime Minister of China Wen Jiabao who proposed "12 measures"(establishing a US$10 billion special credit line, measure 2) to enhance cooperation between China and the 16 countries: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Macedonia, Montenegro, Poland, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia and Slovenia. For what this cooperation means in practice, see Liu Zuokui, China-CEEC Cooperation: China's Building of a New Type of International Relations, Croatian International Relations Review, Vol. 23 No. 78, 2017.

In 2019, Southeast Europe stays resolute to continue with opening up to the 17 plus 1 cooperation no matter of its still insufficient delivery of big projects in the region and low level of direct China's investments.[2]

The 17 plus 1 has worked on resolving its internal problematic aspects from requiring for a more multilateral system of governance to upgrading procedures for future enlargements. A new phase of the 17 plus 1's progress should be discussed in 2020. The key, 17 plus 1 will not change its whole concept of cooperation but will modernise, as concluded at China –CEEC 8th summit, held in Dubrovnik, a its Agenda, and make "a review of cooperation mechanisms and meetings developed within pre - Dubrovnik the 16+1 framework."[3]

Dubrovnik summit has brought to "16 plus 1" noteworthy change that has enabled the cooperation to go further in Europe, that is an "organic" tendency of the format, and to develop closer and clearer forms of cooperation with the Belt and Road Initiative.

The 17 plus 1 has expanded its geographic scope with its enlargement towards south Europe. Greece became a part of the cooperation and that turned the 16 plus 1 into the 17plus 1.

Southeast Europe countries expect the enlargement towards south of Europe might have a positive influence on faster bridging of a gap that exists between the 17 plus 1 and the Belt and Road in the region. These expectations are based on Greece's featured place inside the BRI's economic corridors. The Southeast Europe is interested to be more explicitly included in the BRI that has more power than the 17 plus 1 to connect it with Eurasia stronger.

No doubt, strengthening of interaction between "17 plus 1" and the Belt and Road Initiative will become a focus of Southeast Europe – China relations in the next years. In the longer term, the Initiatives could move more closely and merge. China's side might place 17 plus 1 as a form inside Belt and Road, and perhaps as sub regional, perhaps trans regional.[4] Both Initiatives are developing as a new kind of multilateralism in the international relations what this paper sees as process that might have power to move the world into a new phase of economic interdependence based on more just and win win approach.

And, to Southeast Europe appears Greece's entering and Austria and Switzerland's interests to become members of China – CEEC cooperation perhaps could be an opportunity for the cooperation to adjust its name to the new reality how it could reflect 17 plus 1 current spatial transformation and its future evolution. From the beginning, the name "China and Central and Eastern European Countries" caused an academic discussion in Southeast Europe and

[2] For a detailed analysis of Southeast Europe countries interest for cooperation inside China-CEEC framework and their expectations, see Jasna Plevnik, Stjepan Mesić, China in the Balkans, Zagreb, Plejada, 2013.

[3] See text of the Dubrovnik Guidelines for Cooperation between China and Central and Eastern European Countries, www.xinhuanet.com/english/2019-04-13/c_13797390.htm

[4] See Wang Yiwei's interview with Ljubica Gatarić for Croatian Daily Newspaper Večernji list. Ljubica Gatarić, „A great growth of the new middle class in the world to come ". Večernji list, 8.04. 2019, https://www.vecernji.hr/vijesti/slijedi-veliki-rast-nove-srednje-klase-u-svijetu-1311837

inside Chinese institutions. Some think the name includes a pre – 1990s China's view on Southeast Europe as a political part of East communist Europe.

China has had an elastic approach to European regions that is more in line with the economic and transport goals of Chinese capital. This could be one of reasons why, in principle, China does not use the term "Southeast Europe," and why the Baltic, Central, East, and Southeast European countries are clustered in that regional context, despite the fact that these countries themselves do not see each other in this way. There is also a problem that Southeast Europe's countries use different terms to define their own geographic location within Europe, with some defining themselves as "Central Europe," others as the "Western Balkans," or simply "the Balkans."

The issue of name of course is matter but it is not extremely significant for explaining the comprehensive experience of Southeast Europe within 17 plus 1 cooperation.

The paper endeavours to show the 17 plus 1 with its values: cooperation and connectivity and infrastructural projects in transport area has power to further strength the regional cooperation in Southeast Europe, that is one of key preconditions for Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia(SEE4) on their way to the European Union membership. The two EU member countries from Southeast Europe - Croatia and Slovenia are obliged to support SEE4 in these processes and even take a lead

The overall concept of 17 plus 1 and its implementation and operationalisation depend in many aspects on cooperation across Europe and with the EU.

When we look back over the last seven years of the 17 plus 1, we can see the cooperation has passed through process of respecting and accepting the European Union's rules and standards and that should be noted as one of its essential features. The 17 plus 1 has reached satisfying degree of complying with the European Union at levels of values (cooperation, peace, stability, transparency) standards and rules. The harmonisation with the EU had not been embedded from onset of the 17 plus 1 and was not directly mentioned in "12 measures.

The paper elaborates 17 plus 1 as an opportunity for Southeast Europe to broader parallel its relations with China and the European Union. In addition, here it is worth recalling all Southeast Europe countries have been in particular interested to position themselves inside the 17 plus 1 as a "gate" or "bridge" for China towards the European Union through railway and port infrastructure investments and logistics centres.

The words "geopolitics" and "division of the European Union" could not understand the goals, course and events of relations between China and 17 countries. Geopolitics not frames the essence of 17 plus 1 in Southeast Europe and what has going on around it.[5]

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[5] This theme is elaborated in detail in Jasna Plevnik, "Risks of a geopolitical nature", pp 44-51, in The Belt and Road initiative and its implications for Southeast Europe, Belgrade, Center for international relations and sustainable development (CIRSD), 2016.

Southeast Europe EU members or candidates' countries have never been involved in politics and events that offered cooperation with China as a replacement for their relations with the European Union. The have never worked on creating the EU in China's image. There is nothing distinctive geopolitical or military in that cooperation.

The 17 plus 1 diplomacy nor in one of its activities has involving a question of strategic rivalry between China and the EU.[6]

The 17 plus 1 cooperation, like every other diplomacy, remains sensible on events in the world. The post cold configuration of international relations instead to continue with further deepening of the economic interdependence processes among countries has come under pressure of anti-globalisation tendencies, anti-free trade politics and political populism mainly caused by the superpower goal to control and dominate new technologies of the fourth industrial revolution.

The new circumstances in the world order if continue could give new impetus to those interpretations that look at the 17 plus 1 as strategic not economic diplomacy of China. In the beginning of 2019, America's administration has openly started pushing Central, East and Southeast Europe countries in its 5G race with China claiming it is "more concerned about the Chinese presence, the Huawei presence, in Central and Eastern Europe than in western Europe

The EU reaction on "17 plus 1" and on the Belt and Road has appeared at the same time supportive and concerned. The European Union and China are not in tense situation, they are not geopolitical rivals though current America's administration is acting to change it. The Commission's discourse on China's growing economic power and political influence somehow have changed. For many years, the EU and China have been economic partners and competitors but in March 2019, China became "a systemic rival" that promotes an alternative model of governance.[7]

The EU, for now, stays decisive to deepen its engagement with China through promoting common interests at a global level based on full unity of all member states and common EU regulated approach to the security of 5G networks (Action 9) that is a meaningful road map to Southeast Europe.[8]

However, the EU also established a framework for the screening of foreign direct investments into the Union that will be applied since October 2020 and might check Chinese global companies and investments from security perspective that has been forced by the USA.

In the past years, the partners within 17 plus 1' have recognised and responded to those external and complex challenges. Dubrovnik guidelines (2019) put its first global focus on

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[6] See China's Policy Paper on the European Union, www.chinamission.be
[7] See Jasna Plevnik „BRI's natural environment is commercial, not strategic ". Opinion 16:02, 23 March 2019, https://news.cgtn.com/news/.../index.html?from=groupmessage...
[8] Ibid.

supporting of the economic globalisation and "a rules-based multilateral trading system with the World Trade at its core. The Participants supported "necessary reform of the WTO and China's accession to the WTO Government Procurement Agreement." [9] That approach connects Dubrovnik guidelines with the EU - China - A Strategic Outlooks' action five.

## 2. SOUTHEAST EUROPE BETWEEN 17 PLUS 1 AND THE EUROPEAN UNION

The analysis of The Belgrade Guidelines (2014), Suzhou Guidelines (2015) Riga Guidelines (2016), Budapest Guidelines (2017), Sofia Guidelines (2018), and Dubrovnik Guidelines (2019) shows the 17 plus 1 respect Southeast Europe's relations with the EU.

In some areas compliance between the 17 plus 1 and the EU norms is profound (principles, importance of transport infrastructure connectivity, trade, people-to-people cooperation) while in other domains should be more deeply formulated (ecology, energy sector, high-level policy cooperation). In the following pages an empirical assessment for this claim will be provide.

The Dubrovnik Guidelines (2019) has emboldened further development of the 17 plus 1 in synergy with the EU stressing harmonisation with the EU' standards depended on the EU contributions too!

The EU has been involved in the 17 plus one as its summits observer. The EU's diplomacy and institutions have not yet approached to the "17 plus 1" and the BRI as factors that might strength the EU- China relations.

In the past seven years of the 17 plus 1 and Southeast Europe relations the EU, from Karel de Gucht(European Commissioner for Trade) to Johannes Han (European Commissioner for European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations and European Commissioner for Regional Policy), has been concerned with China's exports and China's banks presence in the region and rise of investments, especially in energy sector.

In the case of trade, the 17 plus 1 has been aware the trade imbalances in China's relations with Southeast Europe, an issue that is a global phenomenon. China has been working on policies that encourages a more balanced trade into direction of reciprocity. [10] There is no

[9] Full text of the Dubrovnik Guidelines for Cooperation between China and Central and Eastern European Countries, www.xinhuanet.com/english/2019-04-13/c_13797390.htm

[10] In 2018, China organised a first fair dedicated to import The China International Import Expo (CIIE) in Shanghai.

regulation in trade that require of China or any other country to export the same value as it imports.

The data on China's exports in Southeast Europe since 2011 to 2018 did not show dramatic growth despite the region's entering in the 17 plus 1 and the Belt and Road Initiative. The trade cooperation could not be designated as a factor that threatened the region's economic relations with the European Union as some analysts expected. The trends show the EU' s countries are the most important foreign trade partners of the observed countries.

In all countries, except Montenegro, imports from the EU account for more than 50 % of their total imports. The percentage of absolute imports is generally rising, with a slight decrease in the share of EU imports in total imports recorded in 2018 in almost all countries in the region. It is hard to say why this is the case – the countries have opened up to other markets or may be the result of another slight recession in the EU.

The share of EU exports in total exports is higher than the share of the EU imports in total imports in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Northern Macedonia and Serbia. The other three countries Croatia, Montenegro and Slovenia, both in percentage and absolute terms, import more from the EU. [11]

China is significant for the region as an import destination. All countries import more from China than they export to China. This disparity can be quite large. For example, in 2012, the value of imported goods from China to Serbia was 220 times higher than the value of exports to China. The largest importer of goods from China is Serbia. The value of imports in 2018 was about $ 2.2 billion (about 1.9 billion euro). The share of imports from China in total imports in 2018 was between 3.3% in Slovenia, up to 10% in Montenegro.

In the observed period, the largest export of goods to China was recorded by Slovenia, EUR 303 million in 2018 (320 million in 2017). Slovenia's statistics office reported Slovenian exports in 2018, was 30.9 billion euros.[12] From regional perspective only Slovenia had a positive balance of trade in 2018.

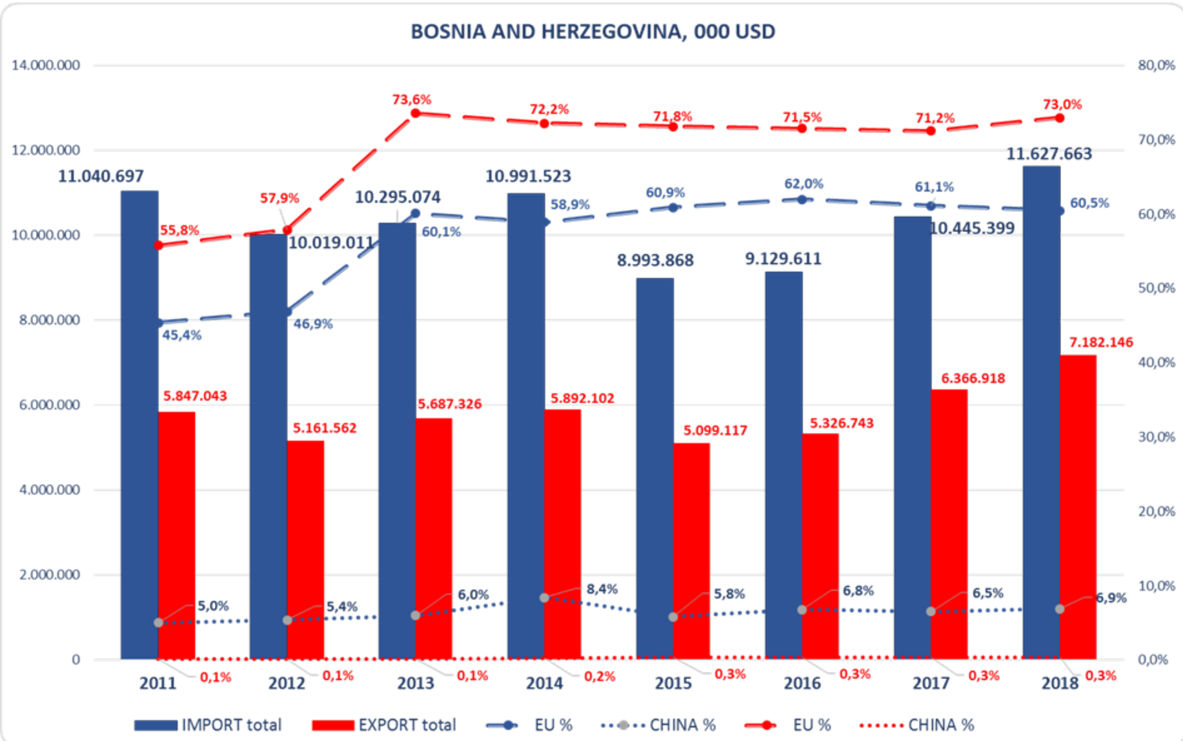
[11]We used data from the websites of SEE6 national statistical offices (The Agency of Statistics of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatian Bureau of Statistics, Statistical Office of the Republic of Montenegro, State Statistical Office of North Macedonia, Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia and Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia). For some reasons, the figures for Northern Macedonia's trade with the EU and China and Serbia's trade with the EU for 2011, were not published on their state websites. There were some problems in the compiling of the statistics because Bosnia and Herzegovina, Northern Macedonia and Serbia calculate their trade with China and the EU in dollars while Croatia, Montenegro and Slovenia use euros. The data will be more standardised when the whole region becomes part of the EU.

[12]See www.stat.si/statweb and „Slovenia's Top 10 Exports ", www.worldtopexports.com/slovenias-top-10exšprts/

"The largest share of exports to China in 2018 was recorded by Montenegro, 3.5%, but due to the modest total exports, the value of exports to China is not large either (EUR 14 million).

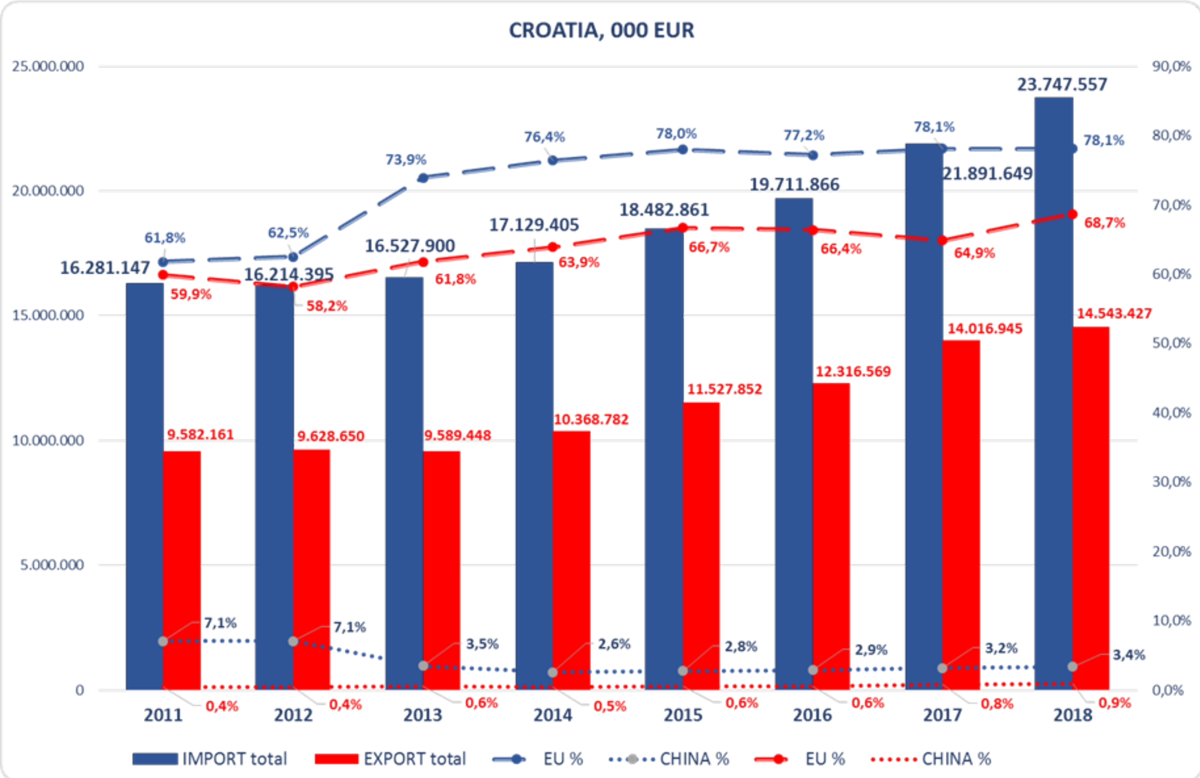
In general, there are no major fluctuations in either Chinese imports or exports. The absolute amounts are generally increasing, but as the totals grow at an equal or faster pace, the share of China's foreign trade does not change too much in any country. The share of Chinese imports ranges from 5 to 10 percent, and the share of exports to China is generally around 1% (0.3% in Bosnia and Herzegovina, 0.5% in Serbia).

Croatia has seen its share of Chinese imports halve after joining the EU (7 percent before, and about 3% after EU membership), as well as a decrease in the absolute amount of imports from China. This is because of the methodology used to monitor the EU's foreign trade with other countries. Specifically, if goods are taken by ship from China to Rotterdam, it is counted as imports from China to the Netherlands. If the goods continue to go to Croatia, they are recorded here as imports from the Netherlands and not from China. Therefore, it is quite difficult to estimate how much Croatia actually import Chinese goods, since only goods that came directly from China to China, for example, to the port of Rijeka, are counted as Chinese imports. It is the same with Slovenia. It is simply the way in which imports into the EU are recorded.[13]




Source: Geoeconmic Forum

[13] See the tables in Appendix.

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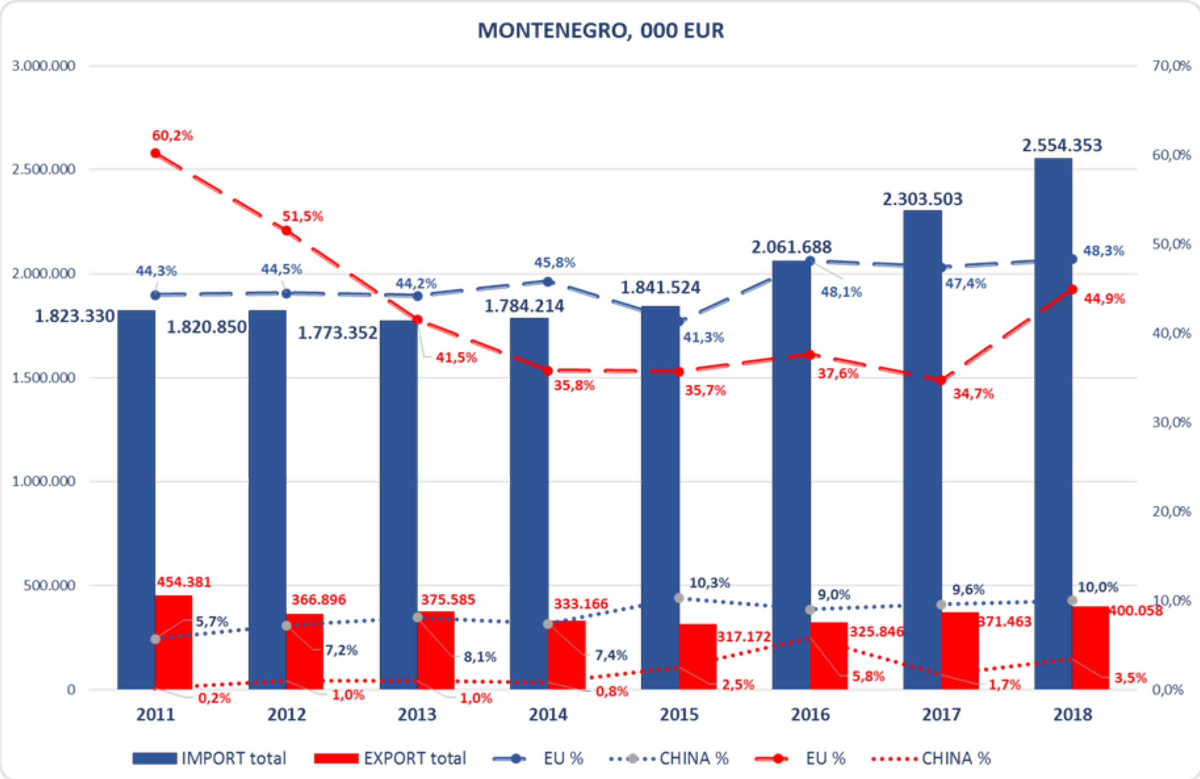


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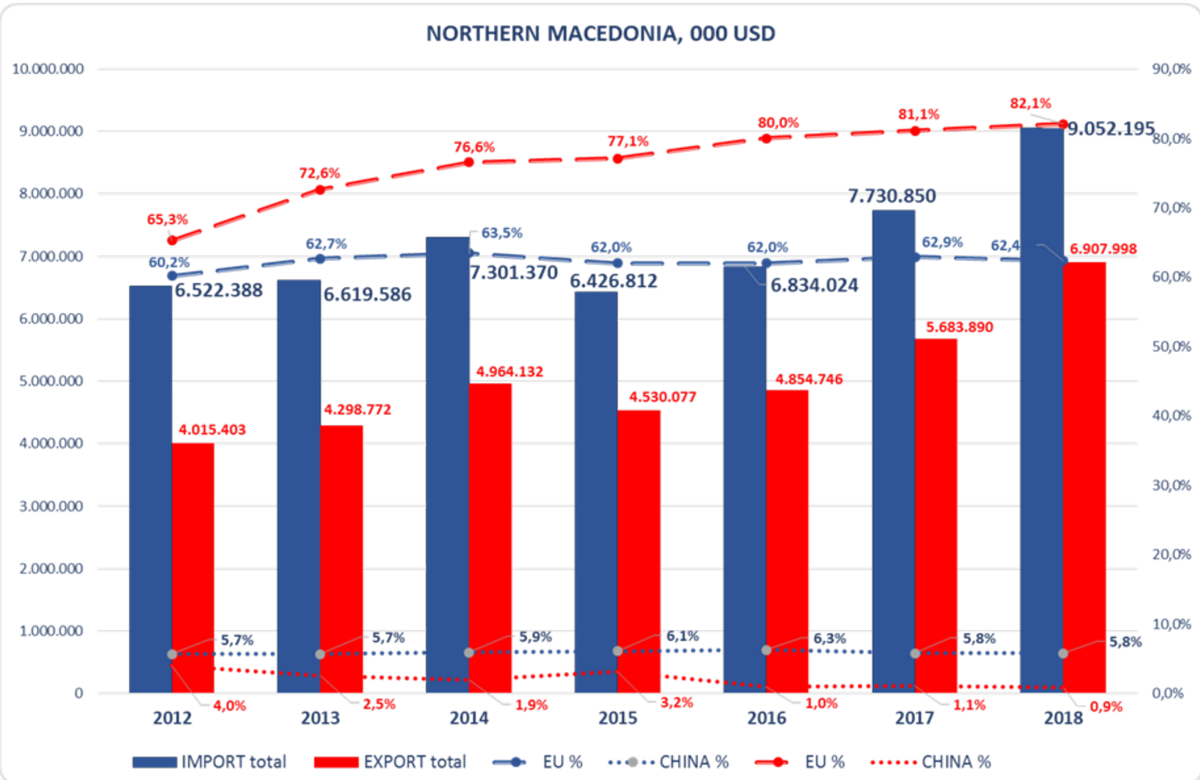


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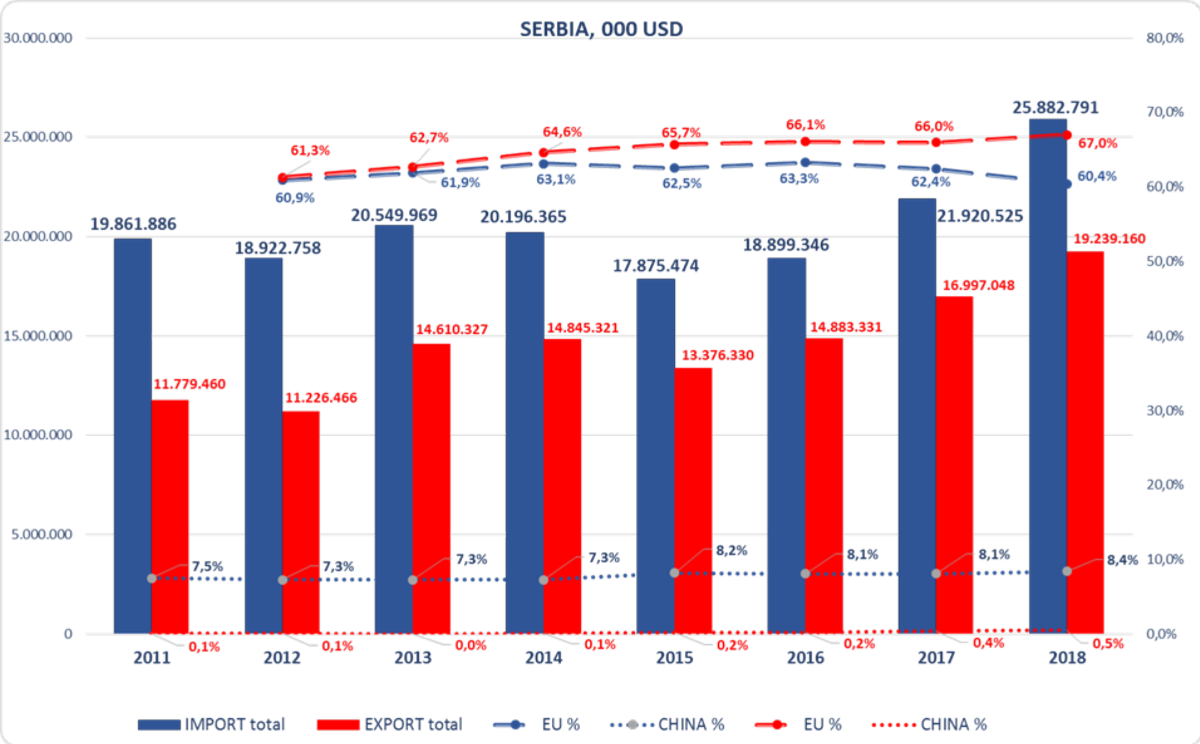


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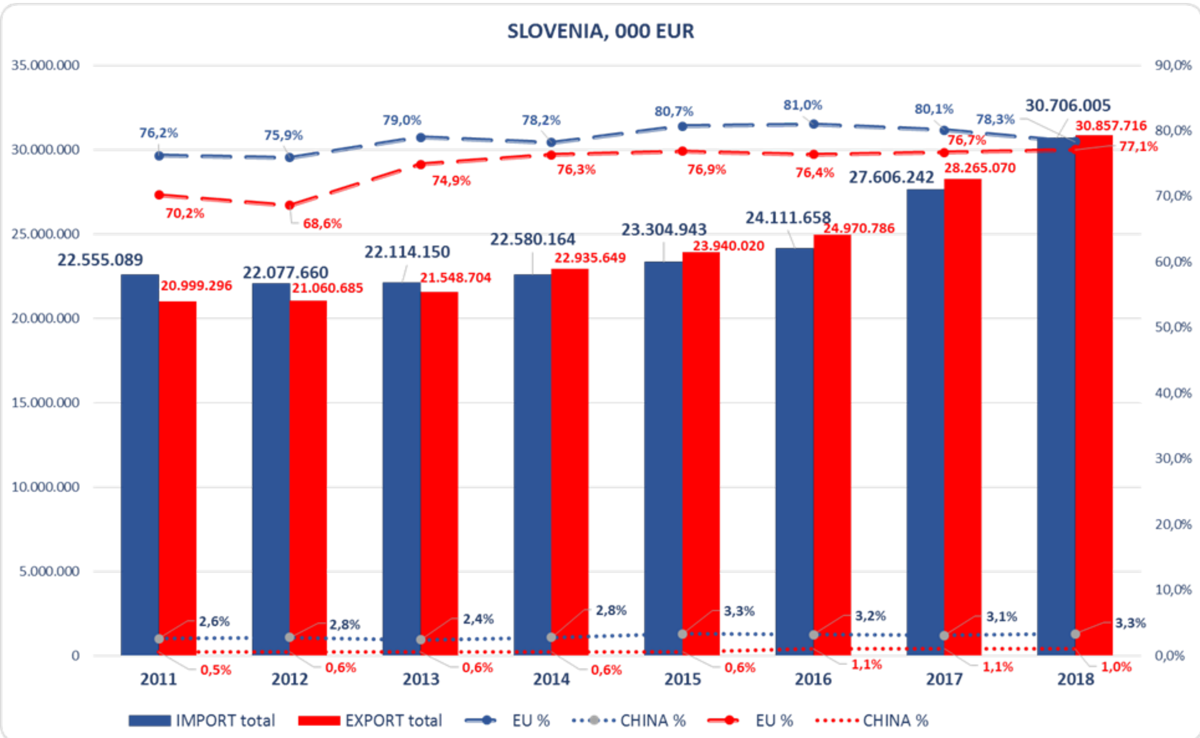


Source: Geoeconomic Forum

A further growth of export to China is an important goal for every country in Southeast Europe, but data from 2011 to 2018 show it is not realistic to expect some dramatic changes in that area in the short term. In the current period, the arrival of Chinese capital, especially direct investment, is more important for the region.

Southeast Europe countries will need to develop deeper knowledge on financial instruments, funds, challenges and benefits of financial cooperation with China within the 17 plus 1. The need is present at all the state levels.

The Chinese state–owned banks have been involved in co-finance energy and infrastructure projects in public transportation in Southeast Europe. In 2017, Bank of China opened a branch in Serbia, under control of Bank of China Hungary. The branch is designed to coordinate from Belgrade its activities in Croatia too.

In 2018, the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) has expressed its interest to invest in some non - Asian countries, in particular, in the EU and in transport connectivity between Eastern Europe and Asia that could provide benefits for Asia's growth.[14]

The EU's new strategy Connecting Europe and Asia – Building blocks lists, in the chapter five, as a key action for financing Europe - Asia connectivity that "the EU should also deepen its cooperation with the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB)."

The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development's (EBRD) partnership with the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank's (AIIB) that is "one of the strongest" partnerships that the EBRD has "with any multinationals", has potential to bring the AIBB closer to Southeast Europe.[15]

## 3. "17 PLUS 1" COOPERATION AND THE STABILISATION AND ASSOCIATION AGREEMENTS (SAAs)

The 17 plus 1's orientation towards the EU' values and standards has been well accepted in Croatia and Slovenia, which are members of the EU, and in the EU candidate countries North Macedonia, Montenegro, and Serbia, and in Bosnia and Herzegovina that has a status of potential candidate.

The paper here endeavours to show the 17 plus 1 has power to further strength the regional cooperation in Southeast Europe, that is an essential precondition for Bosnia and

[14]Jorge Valero, Asian investment bank: 'We could invest in the EU', EURACTIV.com, Jun 26 208, https://www.euractiv.com/section/eu-china/interview/asian-investment-bank-we-could-

[15] „The EBRD has helped the AIIB "from day one" because it was the last development bank created before the AIIB, and it wanted the AIIB to learn from its experience, Chakrabarti said. For getting deeper inside in the relation of the EBRD and the AIIB, see President of the EBRD Suma Chakrabarti interview for Nikkei Asian Review. Issaku Harada, „Europe's development bank digs in deeper with AIIB ", Nikkei Asian Review, November 20, 2018 at http://www.esilks.org/.

Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia (SEE4) on their way to the European Union membership.

The relations between China and Southeast Europe within 17 plus 1 framework and the Belt and Road Initiative, have been developed into direction of encouraging regional cooperation that is in line with the activities that the European Union has started in Southeast Europe in 1999 when launched the Stabilisation and Association Process (SAP). That process has aimed to improve political and economic stability in the region, but has not been completed yet especially not in terms of connecting Southeast Europe's countries transport infrastructure mutually and with the European Union. [16] Here is necessary to remind the 1990s in Southeast Europe were about dissolution of Yugoslavia and the war conflicts. The EU has emerged as a force "armed" with stabilisation and association process to renew cooperation among countries in the region and to open their process of approaching to Brussels.

All SEE countries, except Slovenia that signed European Agreement, signed with the EU Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA), a specific kind of multi-dimensional contract between the EU and signatory country that presents an essential part of the SAP and European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP). The SAAs provide framework for preparing a concerned country for membership in the EU.[17]

An unavoidable part of SAAs is regional cooperation that aims to strengthen stability in Southeast Europe, improve intra-regional cooperation and create conditions for spill over effects in economy that no country alone could achieve.[18]

Every agreement has a "Title III, regional cooperation that is focused on "active promotion of regional cooperation projects with a regional or cross-border dimension…"

North Macedonia was the first country that signed SAA with the EU in February 2001. Croatia signed SAA in April the same year. Montenegro in 2007 and Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia in 2008. Croatia's SAA is out of force because it entered to the EU in 2013 but it is obliged, as well as Slovenia, to support regional cooperation and even to be a role model.

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[16] On SAP, see https://ec.europa.eu › and www.mvep.hr/en/...(eu)/stabilisation-and-association-process/

[17] The relations between the EU and individual country during the pre-accession period aims to develop political dialogue, economic cooperation and establishing free trade area through harmonisation of legislation, environment and health protection. The effects of the SAA on Southeast Europe should be full harmonisation with the EU acquis.

[18]See Article 3 of Stabilisation and Association Agreement between the European Communities and their Member States, of the one part, and the Republic of Croatia, of the other part.
"International and regional peace and stability and the development of good neighbourly relations are central to the Stabilisation and Association Process referred to in the conclusions of the Council of the European Union on 21 June 1999. The conclusion and the implementation of this Agreement come within the framework of the conclusions of the Council of the European Union of 29 April 1997 and are based on the individual merits of Croatia."

The period from the agreements signing to the agreements entry into force has been protracted what supports claims about the SAP policy slowness in Southeast Europe.

South East Europe Relations with the European Union

| SEE6 | STATUS | SAA ENTERED INTO FORCE | THE EU ACCESSION NEGOTIATIONS | SCHENGEN | CURENCY | POPULATION (million) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA** | Potential candidate 2003 | 2015 | | | Convertibile mark | 3.057 |
| **CROATIA** | Membership 2013 | 2005 out of force 2013 | 2005 | | Croatian kuna | 4.154 |
| **MONTENGRO** | Candidate 2010 | 2010 | 2012 | | Euro | 622.471 |
| **NORTH MACEDONIA** | Candidate 2005 | 2004 | | | Macedonian denar | 2.074 |
| **SERBIA** | Candidate 2012 | 2013 | 2014 | | Serbian dinar | 7.022 |
| **SLOVENIA** | Membership 2004 | Europe agreement 1996 | 1997 | 2007 | Euro 2007 | 2.066 |

Source: Geoeconomic Forum

The relations between Southeast Europe and the 17 plus 1 have developed into direction of encouraging regional cooperation in transport infrastructure what brought the 17 plus 1 a reputation of a factor that might strength Southeast Europe transport position inside Europe and towards Asia.

The SAP and European Neighbourhood Policy have a persistent problem to produce faster results in the field of building hard infrastructure inside and outside of SEE6. Those difficulties have been well recognised in Southeast Europe. In October 2018, the Summit 100 in Belgrade, which is a meeting between business leaders from southeast Europe, concluded with a declaration that weak interconnectedness amongst countries fundamentally blocks Balkan’s development.

Part of the Trans-European Network for Transport (TEN-T) corridors for connecting Europe – Mediterranean, Rhine-Danube and Baltic-Adriatic – cut through Southeast Europe. Nevertheless, that does not guarantee southeast Europe will be connected with the core EU transport network and its most important parts. A greater part of southeast Europe is covered with a basic transport network that Brussels plans to finish upgrading by 2050.[19]

Besides it appears the concept of the EU strategy on connecting Europe and Asia (2018), that could be understood as a response to the BRI, does not reach Southeast Europe in a substantial way. In theorizing that strategy of the EU should give more significance to the geographical position of Southeast Europe that through history has been defined as an unavoidable link between East and West.[20]

It seems reasonable that Southeast European countries have right to attempt to faster lift themselves from the economic and transport periphery of Europe through the 17 plus 1's projects that stimulate regional cooperation through building transport infrastructures and connect the region with new different kinds of China - Europe networks. These processes are not in contradiction with the European Union relations with China.

In 2017 China signed The TIR Convention accepting integration into global transport and trade norms that is recognised as an important move forward in harmonising of its road transport with the EU Member States that are contracting parties of to the TIR Convention.

The 17 plus 1 cooperation has not been understood neither in Southeast Europe nor in China as an alternative for the European Union's policy of integration with Southeast Europe but more as an additional opportunity for integration into direction of Europe, Eurasia and China in terms of the economic globalisation.

The process of Southeast Europe's "going global" since 2000 to 20011 had been shaped by direction towards the West which prevented them to see roads to Asia and China that has become a successful actor of the economic globalisation.

## 4. THE 17 PLUS 1 CONNECTS SOUTHEAST EUROPE INTRAREGIONAL AND WITH THE EU

Thera many projects inside the 17 plus 1 that have potential to stimulate regional cooperation in Southeast Europe through building transport infrastructure and connecting the region with different kinds of China – Europe networs.

The 17 plus 1 quality to affect productively the Stabilisation and Association Process in Southeast Europe is possible to find in its HS Railways Belgrade – Budapest rail line project. It entails in itself many levels of cooperation and connections: inside Southeast Europe (Serbia, Macedonia) and connects Serbia with the EU member countries Hungary and in the future with Greece.

[19] See Jasna Plevnik, "BRI gives Southeastern Europe a feeling of better future. ", Opinion 23:15, 18 Jul 2019, China Global TV Network, https://news.cgtn.com/...Southeastern-Europe-a.../index.html
[20] See Connecting Europe and Asia - Building blocks for an EU Strategy, 2018

Montenegro highway should link the country's southern port of Bar with Serbia's capital Belgrade. The project is 85 per cent financed by a dollar denominated loan from China's Eximbank and built by the China Road and Bridge Corporation (CBRC).[21] The Montenegrin Government does not see that investment as excessive spending but expects the project will bring the country more tourists, and investments as well as higher level of all kinds of connectivity with Serbia, Romania and Italy. The highway should enhance long-term growth of Montenegro. Montenegro has debt-to GDP- ratio of almost 80 per cent and some international and European financial institutions have expressed their concerns that Montenegro's capital borrowing from China, estimated at €1.3bn, could put in risk the country's ability to repay the debt.

In the past, Montenegro tried and failed twice to secure European funding for the project with explanation the highway would not have enough traffic to justify the costs.[22]

In the long run a project "Adriatic-Baltic-Black Sea Seaport Cooperation", which was launched in 2015, during Suzhou summit, and was featured in Riga declaration (2016), has strong potential to connect Southeast Europe's sea ports and the inland waterways.

The 17 plus 1 cooperation in area of people – to – people bonds has powerful potential to improve regional cooperation. All Southeast Europe countries share same interest to attract China's tourists so they are interested to shape a new regional scale tourist product for China's market that will include the most attractive Southeast Europe destinations with interconnected direct flights to China.

The 17 plus 1 and the Belt and Road Initiative have been based on green development principles set down by the United Nation's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

In 2019, the Second Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation (BRF) stressed further expanding of the BRI into standardization and norms area and high quality development based on concept " open, green, clean, digital "[23]This has been direction of the UN's 2030 sustainable development concept that includes "inclusive development, sustainable development and green development".[24]

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[21] CRBC's subcontractor is Skladgradnja company from Croatia.

[22] The Chinese Road and Bridge Corporation (CRBC) builds the highway.

[23] See President Xi delivers keynote speech at 2nd Belt and Road Forum for… www.xinhuanet.com/english/2019-04/26/c_138008377.htm.

[24] The National Development and Reform Commission of China launched the Belt and Road Green Lighting Initiative with the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Industrial Development Organization and the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, and launched the Belt and Road Green Cooling Initiative with the United Nations Industrial Development Organization and the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific and the Energy Foundation. See, List of Deliverables of the Second Belt and Road Forum at https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx.../t1658767.shtml.

The 17 plus 1 has been developing in synchronisation with the BRI's principles and projects and that the BRI's orientation should indeed to spill over into modernisation of the cooperation's agenda that was announced at Dubrovnik summit.

A recent illustration of these green – project could be an investment of China's construction company NORINCO International Cooperation into construction of the 156 MW wind farm near city Senj on the Adriatic coast of Croatia that has started in 2018. Media and government officials labelled the project as a part of the Belt and Road Initiative though at the moment it is not a part of electricity grid connections or any kind of transboundary connectivity.

Every country has its national development priorities aside of regional, European and global inside the 17 plus 1. The government of Bosnia and Herzegovina decided the country 's energy sector, as one of the strongest economic sectors in Bosnia and Herzegovina, must play a key role in its cooperation with China how could improve the long-term weak economy situation.

A European Commissioner for European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations, and an Austrian politician, Johannes Hahn criticised the government for the decision to build the Tuzla Thermal Power Plant Unit 7 project that will use coal what is in contradiction with the EU energy policies and the UN goals. The EU is not a UN member but observer in the UN general Assembly.[25] The project is financed by China's Exim Bank and Bosnian government signed a loan guarantee covering a €614m loan. The Energy Community described it as illegal state aid that is opposed to EU law.

The European Commissioner Hahn also criticised the EU's decision to fund 85 per cent of the bridge Pelješac in Croatia that is building by Chinese Road and Bridge Company and worth about 526 million euros. [26]

When Croatia and China Road & Bridge Corp. signed the contract on the Pelješac Bridge construction (April 2018) Croatia' government found themselves under strong pressure of the companies that submitted their bids for constructing the Bridge, particularly of Austrian company Strabag. It lobbied inside the European Commission and Croatia against Croatia's decision to select as a principal contractor of the project China Road & Bridge Corp. and its partners CCCC Highway Consultants Co Ltd and CCCC Second Harbour Engineering Co Ltd. The Chinese Consortium was accused of dumping price and using the state subsidiaries not allowed in the European Union.

The claims on China's manipulation with price and covered subsidies were arbitrary and not driven by force of healthy competition but by extreme political claims that China uses its companies and the Initiatives to overmaster and divide Europe.

[25] See „EU official criticizes Bosnia's backing of Chinese power loan", Reuters, March 13, 2019,

[26]The bridge will connect Croatia's southernmost peninsula of Pelješac with the mainland by circumventing a territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina and has a strategic importance for Croatia's transport, tourism and its ambition to join Schengen zone.

Croatia rejected all complaints and fears of China's political influence as unfounded. The European Commission concluded all requirements and procedural steps under the Cohesion Policy regulation had been met.

## 5. SOUTHEAST EUROPE CAPACITY TO INFLUENCE EU POSITION ON CHINA

Southeast Europe countries have no capacity to influence EU's political and economic stand towards Beijing and divide the European Union. The region's relations with China are essentially less developed than bilateral trade and investment relations of the EU most developed countries and China. Germany, France, Great Britain, Luxembourg, Netherlands are countries that have significant mechanisms and strength to influence relations between Brussels and Beijing and do it.

China does not look at Southeast Europe as a space of strategic opportunity.  The claims on the 17 plus 1 and BRI's power politics goals in Southeast Europe appear like have been exaggerated and imported from another situation – the strategic competition of China and America in the Asia Pacific region– and should not be linked to the relations between China and the region.

Since 2012 to 2018, there have been no evidences that Southeast Europe countries were included in building some "China coalition" aimed to divide the European Union, weaken the European Commission's trade policy or influence the EU's cooperation with NATO.

The EU unity is endangered by rise of centrifugal forces inside the block. Brexit and strengthening of populism in Europe have become forces that divide the Union and slow its process of enlargement in Southeast Europe.

The research "EU Coalition Explorer", on coalition building in the European Union, published in October 2018, shows only a few European countries from "16 plus 1" (Poland and Hungary) have potential to influence the EU.[27]

Croatia and Slovenia are at the very bottom in terms of their impact on EU policies. Other four countries from Southeast Europe Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia, Montenegro, and Serbia are outside the EU, and their national interest is to follow processes of approaching to the Union.

Croatia and Slovenia, though small states, have some possibilities, but not of transformative nature, to influence the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) depending on their

[27] See the research "EU Coalition Explorer", presents the results of the EU28 survey conducted by the European Council on Foreign Relations in the 28 member states of the European Union. https://www.ecfr.eu/eucoalitionexplorer.

geographical position and capability to build political coalitions inside the EU or to use their EU Presidency to promote their foreign policy aims. The trouble is that idea of common foreign policy has not yet transformed into foundation of real European foreign policy ".[28]

In 2016, Croatia supported a neutral tone of the EU statement on China dispute in South China Sea following its arbitration case with Slovenia at the Court of Arbitration in Haag but some scholars have not theorized it as Croatia's national foreign policy interest but as pro-China grouping of countries dependent on China's capital. It is worth recalling since 2012 until Riga summit (2016) Croatia was not particularly interested in attracting China's capital within the 17 plus 1 cooperation and the BRI and it could hardly be viewed as the country which foreign policy behaviour is dependent on China's investment.[29]

Once again, the bridge Pelješac project. Croatia though under huge pressure, what was described above, signed the construction agreement with the Chinese Road Bridge Corporation that appears to the paper that Croatia extended its sway in the EU and slightly moved forward China- the European Union relations in the field of public procurement. [30] Croatia is interested that other big national projects be financed with EU money and involve Chinese companies especially in railway infrastructure investment.

For China Pelješac Bridge project epitomises in itself China's orientation to compete in the EU market of public procurement that is one of main interest of the Belt and Road Initiative and "17 plus one".

Croatia and Slovenia have developed their relations with China in consistency with principles of the EU-China 2020 Strategic Agenda for Cooperation (2013), The EU- China connectivity platform (2015), The Elements for a New Strategy on China (2016), Connecting Europe and Asia – Building blocks for an EU Strategy (2018) and EU – China – A Strategic Outlook (2019).[31]

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[28]Pierre Vimont French and EU diplomat, who helped launch of the EU's EAS and was its General Secretary, said " The EU does not have a real "European Foreign policy" because every country works on its own and member states do not want to give full responsibility to the EU's High Representative". See Pavol Szalai, there is no real „European foreign policy ", says former EU diplomat ", EURACTIV. sk Jun 15, 2019.

[29] See, for example, an explanation of Chinese investments in Central and East Europe in Philippe Le Corre, and Jonathan Pollack Paper 1, „ China's Global Rise: Can the EU and U.S: Pursue a Coordinated Strategy? "Brookings, October 2016, page 21.

[30]Croatian Prime Minister Andrej Plenković said at a news conference held in Sofia, after "16 plus 1" summit the project was a synthesis of the idea behind the 16+1 initiative. See, https://www.total-croatia-news.com/politics/29623-peljesac-bridge-a-milestone-in-cooperation-with-china

[31] See EU – China – A Strategic Outlook's ten actions:
Action 1: The EU will strengthen the EU's cooperation with China to meet common responsibilities across all three pillars of the United Nations, Human Rights, Peace and Security, and Development.
Action 2: In order to fight climate change more effectively, the EU calls on China to peak its emissions before 2030, in line with the goals of the Paris Agreement.
Action 3: The EU will deepen engagement with China on peace and security, building on

All these documents have as the goals creating of efficient infrastructure and connections from transport links to energy networks, people-to-people contacts to digital webs between the EU and China and Asia and as such are in a natural harmony with the 17 plus 1 and the BRI type of relations.

## 6. CONCLUDING REMARKS

The 17 plus 1's adherence to the EU' values and standards has been well accepted in Croatia and Slovenia, which are members of the EU, and in the EU candidate countries North Macedonia, Montenegro, and Serbia, and in Bosnia and Herzegovina that has a status of potential candidate.

China – CEEC's focus on regional cooperation and infrastructure connectivity projects indirectly increase implementation of the stabilisation and association agreements that Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia signed with the EU.

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the positive cooperation on the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action for Iran.
Action 4: To preserve its interest in stability, sustainable economic development and good governance in partner countries, the EU will apply more robustly the existing bilateral agreements and financial instruments, and work with China to follow the same principles through the implementation of the EU Strategy on Connecting Europe and Asia.
Action 5: In order to achieve a more balanced and reciprocal economic relationship, the EU calls on China to deliver on existing joint EU-China commitments. This includes reforming the World Trade Organisation, in particular on subsidies and forced technology transfers, and concluding bilateral agreements on investment by 2020, on geographical indications swiftly, and on aviation safety in the coming weeks.
Action 6: To promote reciprocity and open up procurement opportunities in China, the European Parliament and the Council should adopt the International Procurement Instrument before the end of 2019.
Action 7: To ensure that not only price but also high levels of labour and environmental standards are taken into account, the Commission will publish guidance by mid-2019 on the participation of foreign bidders and goods in the EU procurement market. The Commission, together with Member States, will conduct an overview of the implementation of the current framework to identify gaps before the end of 2019.
Action 8: To fully address the distortive effects of foreign state ownership and state financing in the internal market, the Commission will identify before the end of 2019 how to fill existing gaps in EU law.
Action 9: To safeguard against potential serious security implications for critical digital infrastructure, a common EU approach to the security of 5G networks is needed. To kickstart this, the European Commission will issue a Recommendation following the European Council.
Action 10: To detect and raise awareness of security risks posed by foreign investment in critical assets, technologies and infrastructure, Member States should ensure the swift, full and effective implementation of the Regulation on screening of foreign direct investment.

The relations between China and Southeast Europe within 17 plus 1 framework and the Belt and Road Initiative, have been dominated by the similar values (peace, cooperation, and connectivity) and activities that the European Union has started in Southeast Europe in 1999 when launched the Stabilisation and Association Process (SAP).

There is nothing geopolitical or imperial in Southeast Europe – China interconnectedness built through the 17 plus 1". China pursues its economic interest in the Region and its activities are not going into direction of its geostrategic aims or shaping defensive alliances.

Within the context of claims the 17 plus 1 in Southeast Europe is China's tool for dividing the European Union the paper shows that kind of approaches do not provide a specific description of modern Southeast Europe geopolitical significance for China and other global powers' geostrategic interests. In most cases, geopolitical framing of the 17 plus 1 rest upon on mechanical repetition of qualifications derived from some other geographical area and events included in big geopolitical game.

Southeast Europe countries have no capacity to influence EU's political and economic stand towards Beijing and divide the European Union. The region's relations with China are essentially less developed than bilateral trade and investment relations of the EU most developed countries and China.

The relations between Southeast Europe countries and the 17 plus 1 have taken more reciprocal shape. At the beginning of the Initiatives' launching China's companies have built infrastructure projects in Southeast Europe predominantly with the Chinese workers. Now they use more local workers not only because they are becoming cheaper for the Chinese companies than Chinese workers but also because Southeast Europe influenced China at many points to softer its approach towards local interests and accommodate to them.

## 7. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE 17 plus 1 – SEE6 COOPERATION ACCELERATION

- Further developing of the partnership into direction of transparent projects and transactions, playing by same set of rules and values not different from of the EU.
- Giving the 17 plus 1 clearer the BRI dimension.
- Establishing a regular forum focused exclusively on the 17 plus 1 and Southeast Europe relations

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## APPENDIX

# TRADE WITH THE EU AND CHINA 2011 - 2018

Bosnia and Herzegovina, 000 USD

| | Imports | | | | | Exports | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Year | Total | EU | | China | | Total | EU | | China | |
| | Amount | Amount | % | Amount | % | Amount | Amount | % | Amount | % |
| 2011 | 11.040.697 | 5.010.479 | 45,4 | 551.046 | 5,0 | 5.847.043 | 3.261.761 | 55,8 | 5.747 | 0,1 |
| 2012 | 10.019.011 | 4.701.880 | 46,9 | 536.243 | 5,4 | 5.161.562 | 2.990.384 | 57,9 | 5.592 | 0,1 |
| 2013 | 10.295.074 | 6.182.515 | 60,1 | 620.348 | 6,0 | 5.687.326 | 4.188.697 | 73,6 | 7.078 | 0,1 |
| 2014 | 10.991.523 | 6.475.794 | 58,9 | 922.478 | 8,4 | 5.892.102 | 4.253.352 | 72,2 | 9.195 | 0,2 |
| 2015 | 8.993.868 | 5.472.837 | 60,9 | 520.162 | 5,8 | 5.099.117 | 3.660.994 | 71,8 | 12.922 | 0,3 |
| 2016 | 9.129.611 | 5.660.744 | 62,0 | 617.698 | 6,8 | 5.326.743 | 3.809.516 | 71,5 | 14.715 | 0,3 |
| 2017 | 10.445.399 | 6.379.793 | 61,1 | 683.182 | 6,5 | 6.366.918 | 4.530.980 | 71,2 | 22.051 | 0,3 |
| 2018 | 11.627.663 | 7.033.957 | 60,5 | 808.109 | 6,9 | 7.182.146 | 5.241.518 | 73,0 | 22.356 | 0,3 |

Source: The Agency for Statistics of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Montenegro, 000 EUR

| | Imports | | | | | Exports | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Year | Total | EU | | China | | Total | EU | | China | |
| | Amount | Amount | % | Amount | % | Amount | Amount | % | Amount | % |
| 2011 | 1.823.330 | 807.146 | 44,3 | 103.080 | 5,7 | 454.381 | 273.351 | 60,2 | 748 | 0,2 |
| 2012 | 1.820.850 | 809.886 | 44,5 | 130.615 | 7,2 | 366.896 | 189.004 | 51,5 | 3.802 | 1,0 |
| 2013 | 1.773.352 | 784.201 | 44,2 | 142.895 | 8,1 | 375.585 | 155.791 | 41,5 | 3.907 | 1,0 |
| 2014 | 1.784.214 | 816.623 | 45,8 | 132.736 | 7,4 | 333.166 | 119.215 | 35,8 | 2.561 | 0,8 |
| 2015 | 1.841.524 | 759.771 | 41,3 | 189.591 | 10,3 | 317.172 | 113.177 | 35,7 | 7.904 | 2,5 |
| 2016 | 2.061.688 | 992.567 | 48,1 | 185.182 | 9,0 | 325.846 | 122.376 | 37,6 | 18.932 | 5,8 |
| 2017 | 2.303.503 | 1.091.585 | 47,4 | 221.419 | 9,6 | 371.463 | 129.031 | 34,7 | 6.450 | 1,7 |
| 2018 | 2.554.353 | 1.233.272 | 48,3 | 256.667 | 10,0 | 400.058 | 179.529 | 44,9 | 14.010 | 3,5 |

Sources: Statistical Office of Montenegro, Monstat.

Serbia, 000 USD

| | Imports | | | | | Exports | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Year | Total | EU | | China | | Total | EU | | China | |
| | Amount | Amount | % | Amount | % | Amount | Amount | % | Amount | % |
| 2011 | 19.861.886 | | | 1.488.492 | 7,5 | 11.779.460 | | | 15.236 | 0,1 |
| 2012 | 18.922.758 | 11.532.999 | 60,9 | 1.385.122 | 7,3 | 11.226.466 | 6.884.974 | 61,3 | 6.310 | 0,1 |
| 2013 | 20.549.969 | 12.726.983 | 61,9 | 1.509.458 | 7,3 | 14.610.327 | 9.165.352 | 62,7 | 8.996 | 0,1 |
| 2014 | 20.196.365 | 12.742.445 | 63,1 | 1.482.312 | 7,3 | 14.845.321 | 9.593.928 | 64,6 | 14.126 | 0,1 |
| 2015 | 17.875.474 | 11.176.386 | 62,5 | 1.465.497 | 8,2 | 13.376.330 | 8.789.625 | 65,7 | 20.245 | 0,2 |
| 2016 | 18.899.346 | 11.955.759 | 63,3 | 1.522.229 | 8,1 | 14.883.331 | 9.831.568 | 66,1 | 25.247 | 0,2 |
| 2017 | 21.920.525 | 13.673.746 | 62,4 | 1.767.681 | 8,1 | 16.997.048 | 11.217.236 | 66,0 | 62.140 | 0,4 |
| 2018 | 25.882.791 | 15.622.166 | 60,4 | 2.167.523 | 8,4 | 19.239.160 | 12.896.006 | 67,0 | 91.711 | 0,5 |

Source: Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia

North Macedonia, 000 USD

| | Imports | | | | | Exports | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Year | Total | EU | | China | | Total | EU | | China | |
| | Amount | Amount | % | Amount | % | Amount | Amount | % | Amount | % |
| 2012 | 6.522.388 | 3.927.983 | 60,2 | 374.926 | 5,7 | 4.015.403 | 2.621.116 | 65,3 | 158.846 | 4,0 |
| 2013 | 6.619.586 | 4.151.423 | 62,7 | 379.657 | 5,7 | 4.298.772 | 3.122.856 | 72,6 | 106.951 | 2,5 |
| 2014 | 7.301.370 | 4.633.071 | 63,5 | 433.028 | 5,9 | 4.964.132 | 3.801.460 | 76,6 | 92.631 | 1,9 |
| 2015 | 6.426.812 | 3.985.940 | 62,0 | 393.830 | 6,1 | 4.530.077 | 3.490.505 | 77,1 | 146.436 | 3,2 |
| 2016 | 6.834.024 | 4.234.473 | 62,0 | 433.307 | 6,3 | 4.854.746 | 3.885.983 | 80,0 | 47.810 | 1,0 |
| 2017 | 7.730.850 | 4.865.404 | 62,9 | 445.832 | 5,8 | 5.683.890 | 4.610.613 | 81,1 | 62.256 | 1,1 |
| 2018 | 9.052.195 | 5.649.550 | 62,4 | 523.224 | 5,8 | 6.907.998 | 5.670.167 | 82,1 | 65.259 | 0,9 |

Source: State Statistical Office of the Republic of North Macedonia.

Slovenia, 000 EUR

| | Imports | | | | | Exports | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Year | Total | EU | | China | | Total | EU | | China | |
| | Amount | Amount | % | Amount | % | Amount | Amount | % | Amount | % |
| 2011 | 22.555.089 | 17.186.125 | 76,2 | 575.830 | 2,6 | 20.999.296 | 14.743.943 | 70,2 | 99.051 | 0,5 |
| 2012 | 22.077.660 | 16.766.295 | 75,9 | 618.202 | 2,8 | 21.060.685 | 14.439.591 | 68,6 | 135.589 | 0,6 |
| 2013 | 22.114.150 | 17.471.332 | 79,0 | 538.678 | 2,4 | 21.548.704 | 16.148.877 | 74,9 | 126.850 | 0,6 |
| 2014 | 22.580.164 | 17.655.940 | 78,2 | 621.365 | 2,8 | 22.935.649 | 17.511.343 | 76,3 | 139.405 | 0,6 |
| 2015 | 23.304.943 | 18.811.764 | 80,7 | 758.526 | 3,3 | 23.940.020 | 18.398.785 | 76,9 | 147.715 | 0,6 |
| 2016 | 24.111.658 | 19.526.397 | 81,0 | 763.363 | 3,2 | 24.970.786 | 19.088.353 | 76,4 | 270.610 | 1,1 |
| 2017 | 27.606.242 | 22.115.508 | 80,1 | 854.880 | 3,1 | 28.265.070 | 21.687.876 | 76,7 | 320.281 | 1,1 |
| 2018 | 30.706.005 | 24.048.335 | 78,3 | 1.009.872 | 3,3 | 30.857.716 | 23.803.244 | 77,1 | 303.597 | 1,0 |

Source: Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia.

Croatia, 000 EUR

| | Imports | | | | | Exports | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Year | Total | EU | | China | | Total | EU | | China | |
| | Amount | Amount | % | Amount | % | Amount | Amount | % | Amount | % |
| 2011 | 16.281.147 | 10.065.202 | 61,8 | 1.152.507 | 7,1 | 9.582.161 | 5.735.364 | 59,9 | 39.179 | 0,4 |
| 2012 | 16.214.395 | 10.133.930 | 62,5 | 1.156.670 | 7,1 | 9.628.650 | 5.601.436 | 58,2 | 35.644 | 0,4 |
| 2013 | 16.527.900 | 12.220.028 | 73,9 | 581.578 | 3,5 | 9.589.448 | 5.926.536 | 61,8 | 57.244 | 0,6 |
| 2014 | 17.129.405 | 13.082.393 | 76,4 | 438.590 | 2,6 | 10.368.782 | 6.622.207 | 63,9 | 50.868 | 0,5 |
| 2015 | 18.482.861 | 14.420.100 | 78,0 | 517.232 | 2,8 | 11.527.852 | 7.683.383 | 66,7 | 69.218 | 0,6 |
| 2016 | 19.711.866 | 15.223.635 | 77,2 | 581.254 | 2,9 | 12.316.569 | 8.183.133 | 66,4 | 75.844 | 0,6 |
| 2017 | 21.891.649 | 17.087.954 | 78,1 | 694.532 | 3,2 | 14.016.945 | 9.093.104 | 64,9 | 112.050 | 0,8 |
| 2018 | 23.747.557 | 18.548.677 | 78,1 | 803.048 | 3,4 | 14.543.427 | 9.996.835 | 68,7 | 133.379 | 0,9 |

Source: Croatian Bureau of Statistics.