

# CULTURAL DIMENSIONS OF “SUMMIT 16+1” COUNTRIES: HOFSTEDE MODEL

Katarina ZAKIĆ, PhD  
Faculty of Business Studies, John Naisbitt University,  
Belgrade, Serbia<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract:** The “Summit 16+1” was established in 2011 under the initiative of the Chinese Government. The initiative is dedicated to the promotion and improvement of the Chinese relations with countries coming from Central and Eastern Europe (CEE). The main goal is to build stronger connections with the CEE countries in the field of economy, politics and culture. Infrastructure is the focal point of the Chinese interest in this region, and infrastructural projects are the most important part of this initiative. As a region with more than 128 million citizens, the CEE countries are not so big in size, but their geographical position is very important because they can be regarded as a bridge between the Eastern and the Western World. Unfortunately, most of the countries from this region belong to middle-level developed countries that need to develop more. Also, some of the countries involved in this project, such as countries that belonged to former Yugoslavia, the SSSR and Czechoslovakia are still having difficulties in mutual cooperation, due to unsatisfactory political relations. So, it will be interesting to find out, if there are some other factors besides political and economic, which can influence cooperation between those countries and also their cooperation with China. In order to do that, the Model of cultural dimensions that was developed by Geert Hofstede will be used to conclude if cultural differences can be the obstacle for mutual cooperation.

**Key words:** “Summit 16+1”, cooperation, cultural dimensions, Hofstede Model.

## INTRODUCTION

In the last five years, China experienced a lot of changes, both on the internal and the external level. Those changes are a part of reforms conducted under the guidance of President Xi Jinping and his Government. On the internal

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<sup>1</sup> E-mail: katazakic@gmail.com

level, China is conducting the New Normal Policy. That policy is concentrated on the restructuring Chinese economy.<sup>2</sup> The main idea is to change things that are urgent at the moment in China – finances, infrastructure, regional development, in an effort to give the new boost for China's future development. Also, on the external level, China is momentarily conducting many projects aimed at stabilizing China's global economic power. At the same time, China is trying to make new connections with the countries that were not significantly included in its former foreign policy. It can be said that that economic internationalization process started with establishing BRICS association in 2009<sup>3</sup>. Then, in 2011 China created the Summit 16+1, and finally in 2013 President Xi introduced to the world so far the most ambitious Chinese project and one of the biggest world development projects (in scale) in modern economic history: The One Belt - One Road initiative. Having in mind that China is paying undivided attention to both internal and external activities, it is necessary to state that it is very courageous and difficult to have such a scale of reforms and projects at the same time and to be able to have so many partners involved in this process of changing. However, China's strategic planning has been famous for centuries – who can forget Sun Tzu and his teaching? So, although there are many things that can go wrong, at the moment, these projects are progressing in a good way. In addition to that, there are some facts that need to be emphasized. Whenever there are projects or initiatives that are gathering so many countries, there are always some problems and misunderstandings. Many of those problems are connected with historical circumstances or with national culture. It does not matter that every day there are so many articles about respecting different cultures or public pleas about respecting other nationalities...There are still so many problems worldwide. In order to at least try to prevent this type of problems, we need to learn more and understand more. So, the main aim of this paper is to use Hofstede Model of cultural dimensions in order to explain similarities and differences between countries that belong to the Summit 16+1. There are two reasons to choose this initiative and not One Belt - One Road. The first reason is methodological. Hofstede model is mostly used to compare two or

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<sup>2</sup> More about that in Stakić Nikola, Zakić Katarina, "Challenges of Business and Financial Transformation of China in New Normal Economy" *Review of International Affairs*, Institute for International Politics and Economy, Belgrade, 2016, Vol. LXVII, No. 1161, p. 80–100.

<sup>3</sup> Originally South Africa was not part of this association, and it joined them in 2010.

three countries. There are also papers that explain one region using this model, but usually they do not compare one country with one region, as will be done here. Since the OBOR initiative has 67 countries, it is very complicated methodologically to compare all those countries, so the Summit was more convenient. The second reason is the involvement of Serbia in the Summit 16+1. Actually, Serbia was from day one the supporter of this Summit, and there was and still is a great public support for this initiative. On the other hand, Serbia signed a memorandum about joining the OBOR initiative in 2015. So, technically speaking, Serbia is longer and more involved in the Summit. From the Serbian point of view, the Summit 16+1 represents better our national interest and we have more connections with countries in Central and Eastern Europe than with countries coming from Central and East Asia, the Middle East or Africa. Those are the reasons for choosing this model and these countries. Through the next phase, it will be determined if there are regional differences in the CEE region, and we will see if those differences can influence and jeopardize connections between China and the CEE countries. Furthermore, it will be pointed out that besides cultural and historical, some political factors are playing very important role in setting up and promoting this initiative.

## **ECONOMIC COOPERATION BETWEEN CHINA AND CEE COUNTRIES**

Economic internationalization process that China started some 15 years ago (“Go Global” strategy), was not at the first moment concentrated on the EU, and more precisely not on the CEE region. That process started later, but it progressed very fast. According to the reports from 2015 that were made by the European Commission, China is the EU’s biggest trade partner, and the EU is China’s second biggest trade partner after the USA (European Commission, Trade, 2015). Why is China so interested in the EU, why does it invest so much in Europe and what are the reasons for Chinese companies to buy so many European companies?<sup>4</sup> The answer to these questions is very simple – the

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<sup>4</sup> More about that in Zakić Katarina, Radišić Bojan, “Strategies of Chinese Companies when entering Global Market”, Economic and Social Development, 21st International Scientific Conference on Economic and Social Development, Varaždin Development and Entrepreneurship Agency in cooperation with John Naisbitt University, University North, Faculty of Management – University of Warsaw, Belgrade, 18-19th May 2017, p. 169-180.

profit. However, that answer is in a way too obvious and too simplified. The profit is always important, but besides that China can achieve so many things through spreading its business abroad. Goals that are achieved so far through the process of internationalization are in some part economic, but also political and they are connected with the world security issues. These are the reasons why China chooses the EU as one of its strongest partners. In recent years, with the Summit 16+1, China unexpectedly gave much attention to one specific part of Europe - meaning its Central and Eastern part, and not to the EU per se. It is also more surprising when we look at the history of diplomatic, politic and economic relations between China and the CEE countries in the last 30 years. According to Kong Tianping, the genesis of the development of relations between China and CEEC can be divided into three stages: 1. 1989–1998 period of mutual disengagement, 2. 1999-2008 period of internationalization on both sides (not among them) and 3. From 2009 until now – period of improvement and mutual cooperation (Kong, 2015). When we look deeper into the reasons that separated China and this part of the World (e.g. failing of communist system), we can say that all those circumstances were a part of the reason that China and CEEC did not have such strong connections as they have today. How did that change? Cooperation initiative 16+1 actually was first promoted in Budapest in 2011, at the first China - Central and Eastern Europe Business Forum held by the Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao (Kong, 2015). Next year in Warsaw, China held a first Forum that gave the guidelines for the further development of the cooperation framework 16+1. In upcoming years many Forums and meetings on the ministry level were held in China and CEEC. Through those meetings all the parties involved<sup>5</sup> discussed how to develop and implement this cooperation framework, in hope that different projects and initiatives can improve not so good economic situation in this region of the Europe. The main fields of cooperation between China and the CEE countries will be infrastructural projects, high technology, green technology, agriculture, finance, education, science and culture. As previously stated, the CEE region has approximately 128.3 million people. Most of the countries in it are in economic sense middle level developed, with many problems that are not only inherited from the communist period, but are also part of the transition process into liberal capitalism. Many of those countries resolved some of their problems after joining the EU and that helped them in establishing better economic

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<sup>5</sup> In the table 1 is the list of all countries that are part of this initiative.

results. On the other hand, within this region we also have countries that are at some stage of joining the EU and they still have to change many things in economic development in order to reach this final goal.<sup>6</sup> One of the major concerns for any kind of integration process here is the political stability of this region and the Balkan countries are particularly problematic. With so many disputes and conflicts that are present for more than one century, and the most intense in the last 30 years, it is a region that could be potentially very challenging in terms of mutual cooperation. Regarding the CEEC trade with China, in 2014 it surpassed 60 billion US\$ (Kong, 2015), which is a great improvement from the beginning of the century. But, considering that at the same time China has with the EU the trade of about 600 billion US\$ (Xinhuanet, 25.11.2015), we can say that there is a lot of space for improvement of the cooperation between China and the CEE countries and for the further development of mutual benefits.

*Table 1. Countries that are part of the project of cooperation between China and Central and East European countries (so called Summit 16+1)*

Countries that participate in Summit 16+1	
1. The People's Republic of China	2. The Republic of Serbia (former SFRY)
3. The Republic of Albania	4. Bosnia and Herzegovina (former SFRY)
5. The Republic of Bulgaria	6. The Republic of Croatia (former SFRY)
7. The Czech Republic (former Czechoslovakia)	8. The Republic of Estonia (former SSSR)
9. Hungary	10. The Republic of Latvia (former SSSR)
11. The Republic of Lithuania (former SSSR)	12. The Republic of Macedonia (former SFRY)
13. Montenegro (former SFRY)	14. The Republic of Poland
15. Romania	16. The Slovak Republic (former Czechoslovakia)
17. The Republic of Slovenia (former SFRY)	

Source: Stakić Nikola, Zakić Katarina, "Challenges of Business and Financial Transformation of China in "New Normal Economy", *Review of International Affairs*, Institute for International Politics and Economy, Belgrade, 2016, Vol. LXVII, No. 1161, p. 80–100.

<sup>6</sup> Note: we have here eleven EU countries (Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia) and five are EU candidate countries (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, FYROM (Macedonia), Montenegro and Serbia)

## HOFSTEDE DIMENSIONS OF CULTURE

In order to understand how the culture is affecting the way of doing business, Hofstede Model of Cultural Dimensions will be used. Besides this model, there are many contemporary models that scientists and business people use when they want to compare different cultures and to discover how they are affecting the way of doing business, such as: Fons Trompenaars model, Schwartz model or GLOBE model. Of course, each model has its advantages and disadvantages, but Hofstede model was chosen because of two reasons. First, it is the most widely known model and the most popular one and second, its methodology and results can be used in a very simple and understandable way, so many people who do not know a lot about the culture can use it and understand it. In his latest version of Cultural Dimensions Model (2010), Hofstede stated that there are six dimensions within each culture and a dimension: "is an aspect of a culture that can be measured relative to other cultures" (Hofstede, 2011, p. 3):

1. *Power distance index (PDI)*: "is related to the different solutions to the basic problem of human inequality" (Hofstede, 2011, p. 8) or we can say "that this index defines the extent to which the less powerful members of organizations and institutions (like the family) accept and expect that power is distributed unequally." (Hofstede, 2011, p. 9). Societies that have a high level of PDI have the tendency to be more autocratic, leaders do have a power that is not changeable, a family is very important (more important than individuals), and people follow norms that are given and accepted by society. Societies that have a low level of PDI are those who are more democratic, political power is easily changeable, leaders are those who are in most ways equal to ordinary people and social norms are more flexible than in those that have a high level of PDI.

2. *Individualism versus Collectivism (IDV)* - "related to the integration of individuals into primary groups". (Hofstede, 2011, p. 8). In societies that are individual, more important is individualism than society or group. Personal beliefs and values are a priority and everybody is expected to look after themselves. Collectivistic societies are those in which immediate and extended family members are very important and one person always needs to take into account what the group wants and thinks. Also, personal wishes come on a second place, after family wishes. One's most important task is not to disgrace their group members.

3. *Masculinity (MAS)* - “related to the division of emotional roles between women and men.” (Hofstede, 2011, p. 8) Masculine societies are those who are oriented toward material things, success and ambition. There is a strict division of roles in society, with emphasis on what men and what women are doing. Feminine societies are those in which love and empathy are prevailing all material stuff and those societies do not have a strict differentiation between gender roles.

4. *Uncertainty avoidance index (UAI)* - “related to the level of stress in a society in the face of an unknown future.” (Hofstede, 2011, p. 8). A high level of UAI means that in this kind of society people are afraid of changes, they do not perceive them as good. There are strict rules to be followed in politics, religion and everyday life. A low level of UAI means that people do accept changes and they do not consider them as something negative. Rules are there to be changed and people do not follow them strictly.

5. *Long term orientation (LTO)* - “related to the choice of focus for people’s efforts: the future or the present and past.” (Hofstede, 2011, p. 8). LTO is describing the way that people perceive their future. According to this dimension, the most important events in life will happen in the future, people should save and not spend money immediately, traditions can change. On the other hand, in a short term oriented society everything is oriented towards past and on-going events, traditions are sacred and there are guidelines in everyday life that need to be followed.

6. *Indulgence versus restraint* - “Indulgence stands for a society that allows relatively free gratification of basic and natural human desires related to enjoying life and having fun. Restraint stands for a society that controls gratification of needs and regulates it by means of strict social norms.” (Hofstede, 2011, p. 15).

## **HOFSTEDE MODEL – SUMMIT 16+1**

In table 1 there are results of Hofstede indexes for countries that are a part of cooperation framework 16+1. Countries that are coming from the CEE region are put in a geographical order coming from the north and ending with the south. Also, as it was previously mentioned, countries in this region have the so-called “communist background”, and unfortunately many of them

were part of bigger countries, but eventually they disintegrated. After that process, all of them went through the path of privatization and changing from a centralized economy to a capitalist economy (which is one thing that they have in common with China). Besides that, in most of these countries the main religion is Christianity (Catholic or Orthodox) and in some of them Islam is the main or very important religion with a lot of followers (Albania, B&H, Macedonia). So, those are the similarities within the CEE countries. Since they share a similar historical background in modern history (devastation in World War II, the influence of communism after war ending, the transformation process in 1990-ties), many people perceive this region as very similar. Is that the case after all? In order to explore that question, it is a very good thing to look upon results that we can find in table 2. For start, just by looking at these results, we can see that there is a large discrepancy in the values of indexes presented. For example, the most obvious thing is Masculinity/Femininity index, which goes from 100 in Slovakia (very high level of this index - masculinity) until 9 in Latvia (very low level - femininity). So, these results are actually showing us that there are significant differences between countries and that we need to regard them carefully so that we can learn something from them. If we can learn about them, then we can understand them, in order to accept them. The next step in this process will be to compare these cultural indexes in the CEE countries with China and try to look upon potential problems that can have a background in different cultures.

Table 2 – Hofstede cultural dimensions results for countries that are involved in Summit 16+1

Country	PDI	IDV	MAS	UAI	LTO	IND
China	80	20	66	30	87	24
Estonia	40	60	30	60	82	16
Lithuania	42	60	19	65	82	16
Latvia	44	70	9	63	69	13
Poland	68	60	64	93	38	29
Czech	57	58	57	74	70	29
Slovakia	100	52	100	51	77	28



Country	PDI	IDV	MAS	UAI	LTO	IND
Hungary	46	80	88	82	58	31
Romania	90	30	42	90	52	20
Bulgaria	70	30	40	85	69	16
Serbia	86	25	43	92	52	28
Croatia	73	33	40	80	58	33
Slovenia	71	27	19	88	49	48
* Bosnia and Herzegovina	/	/	/	/	/	/
* Macedonia	/	/	/	/	/	/
* Montenegro	/	/	/	/	/	/
Albania	90	20	80	70	61	15

Source: <https://geert-hofstede.com>

*\*Note: there are no official data about HCDM in these three countries. Usually, scientists use Hofstede dimensions from SFRY – that are (scores) somewhere in the middle of Serbia, Slovenia and Croatia. There were some efforts to try to conduct a survey in order to attain this data, and they showed more or less the same results. For this research only data from Hofstede official web site will be used, omitting the results for these three countries in the charts. Also, in explanation of the results for these three countries the indexes from former Yugoslavia will be used.*

Since there are 16 countries from CEE and since it is already presented that those countries are very different, it is easier to group these countries into clusters that are more similar, in order to have better structure and understanding of the problem itself. This kind of “mapping clusters” is more similar to GLOBE model and Schwartz model than to Hofstede model<sup>7</sup> but for this paper, the experience with mapping clusters from previously mentioned models will be used. Comparing all the results that are available

<sup>7</sup> More about comparing these three models in: Zakić Katarina, Milutinović Olivera, “Doprinos interkulturnog menadžmenta razvijanju tolerantnosti u međunarodnom poslovanju”, Anali poslovne ekonomije, Novembar 2013, Godina V sveska 2, Univerzitet PIM, Banja Luka, p. 162-177.

on the official web site of Geert Hofstede, countries can be grouped into three different clusters that have most similarities, as presented in table 3. Estonia, Lithuania and Latvia are the countries that can be put into the Baltic cluster; Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary are making the Central East European cluster and all other countries are put into the Balkan cluster. Of course, the titles of the groups (clusters) do correspond to their geographical position, and this is done intentionally.<sup>8</sup>

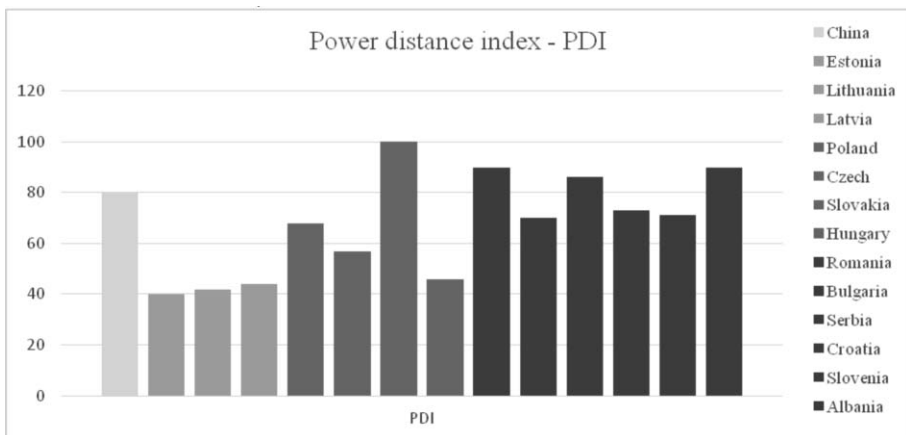
*Table 3 – Clusters of CEEC done by using Hofstede Model of cultural dimensions*

China	
Estonia	BALTIC CLUSTER
Lithuania	
Latvia	
Poland	CENTRAL EAST EUROPEAN CLUSTER
Czech	
Slovakia	
Hungary	
Romania	BALKAN CLUSTER
Bulgaria	
Serbia	
Croatia	
Slovenia	
Bosnia and Herzegovina	
Macedonia	
Montenegro	
Albania	

<sup>8</sup> The colors of these clusters presented in table 3 are used in the same way on all other graphics in this paper.

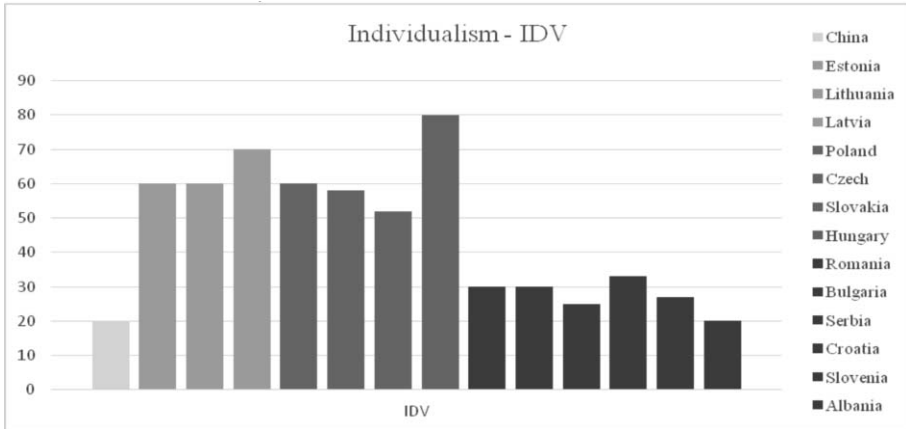
By doing this kind of differentiation, we can more precisely interpret the results and make the conclusions. In this one, as well as in all other graphs that will be used in the paper, the same order will be applied: first goes China, then we have results for Baltic, then CEE and in the end Balkan countries. First of all, on the graph 1, there are results for first Hofstede index and that is power distance index (PDI). In this graph, we can see that China is the country with a high level of PDI, and it means that hierarchy, authority and centralization are some of the main characteristics of this culture. In that sense, the most similar with China is the Balkan cluster, and after that the CEE cluster. The Baltic cluster is completely different because it consists of countries that have a low level of PDI, meaning that they are more decentralized, have less authority and hierarchy.

*Graph 1 – PDI index for Summit 16+1 countries*



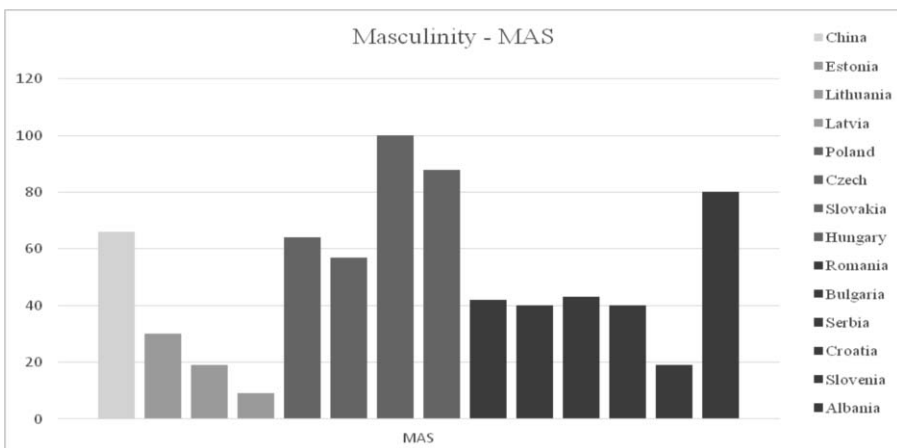
The second graph shows the results for Individualism (IDV) index. China is, according to these results, a collectivistic society, like the Balkan countries. This means that in this type of countries values, beliefs and norms of the society are more important than the individual norms. Also, the interests of the group are more important than individual ones. In such kind of culture, family and friends are valued as integral and influential part of individual life. On the other hand, the Baltic and CEE countries are individualistic societies, where individual values, beliefs and norms are perceived as more important than collective ones.

Graph 2 – IDV index for Summit 16+1 countries



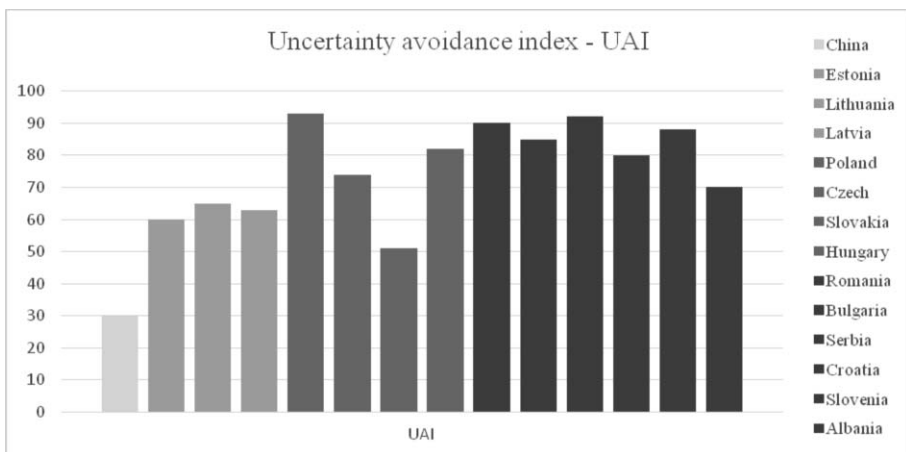
Masculinity is the main characteristic of the Chinese society, as well as in the CEEC cluster. In those cultures, the main values are material wealth, success and ambition. In both, the Baltic and Balkan clusters (except Albania), we have femininity society. In these countries, values such as love, empathy and helping those that are not in a position to help themselves (children, older people, people with special needs, etc.) have a stronger impact on society.

Graph 3 – MAS index for Summit 16+1 countries



China has a low level of uncertainty avoidance index (UAI), and this indicates that China is a society that is not afraid of the unknown future and what it will bring. On the other hand, we have societies that have a high level of UAI, and in that type of culture there is a strong need to escape all things in life that are new and unknown. According to Hofstede, the results for all countries in the CEEC region as a whole (not cluster) are like that. So, in that sense, they are more similar to each other than to China.

*Graph 4 – UAI index for Summit 16+1 countries*

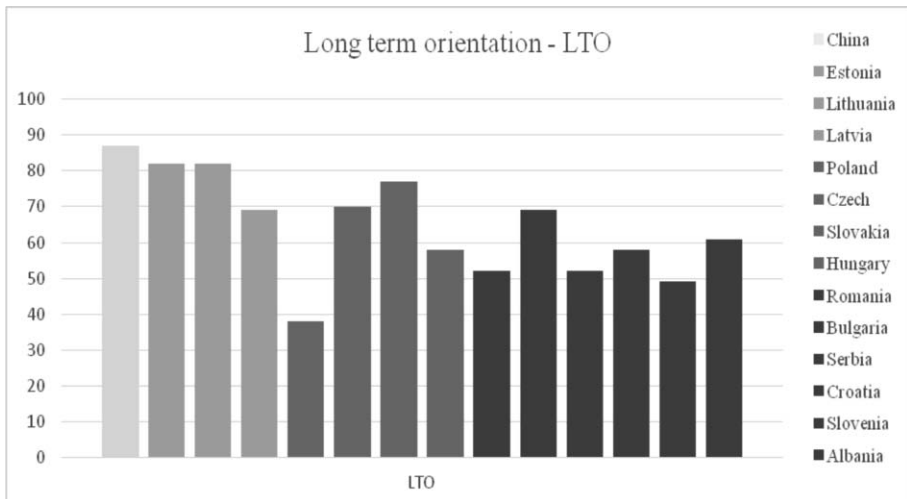


Long term orientation is an index that Hofstede did not put into his research immediately, but only after he conducted his research in China. During that time, his Chinese researchers helped him to understand that China<sup>9</sup> has some other cultural characteristics that are not included in his first four indexes. LTO is related to the choice of focus for people’s efforts: the future or the present and past. Long term orientation means that there are societies that are oriented towards the future, and short term societies are more oriented towards the present and the past. In the end, Hofstede named that index Long term/short term orientation, instead Confucianism/

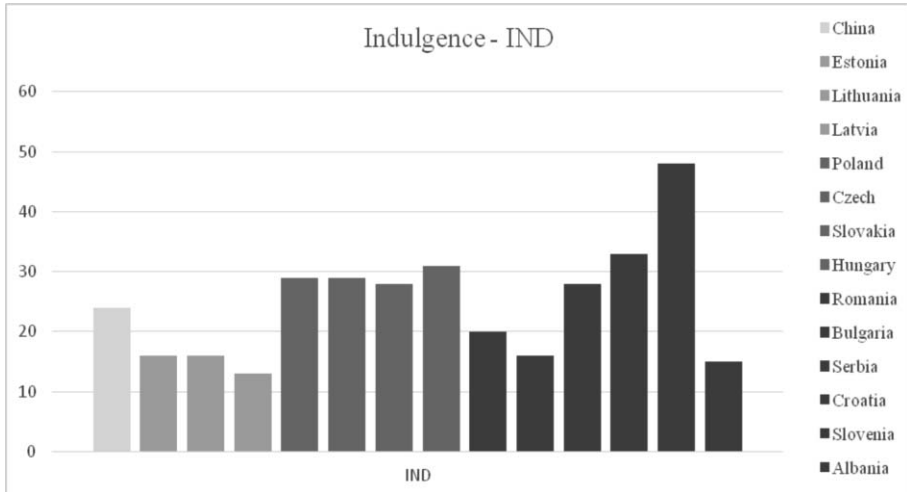
<sup>9</sup> Note: And all other countries in Asia that have a strong tradition of philosophical teaching Confucianism.

Non Confucianism index. Knowing that, we can see why China has a high level of LTO. Besides China, the Baltic countries also have a high level of LTO and after that, we have the CEEC cluster in which most of the countries have a medium or high level of LTO. Most of the countries coming from the Balkan cluster have a low level of LTO. Indulgence versus restraint is the last index in Hofstede model. According to this model, all countries that are a part of this Summit, except Slovenia, are the countries in which restraint prevails. Slovenia is the only country in which indulgence is more important. In restrained societies, strict social norms and hard work are viewed as very important, while in indulgent societies we have less strict social and working norms.

*Graph 5 – LTO index for Summit 16+1 countries*



Graph 6 – IND index for Summit 16+1 countries



## CONCLUSION

The Summit 16+1 is obviously a very ambitious and important cooperation framework, which can potentially bring many benefits both to China and to the CEE countries. Some of the planned projects are well on the way, but some of them are still waiting to begin. Although there are many advantages that can be achieved with the implementation of this summit, there are also many problems that need to be solved in order to have a successful project. Some of the obstacles for mutual cooperation within the CEE countries are coming from political backgrounds of the countries involved that have unresolved issues from a previous time. Also, from the economic point of view, some of the CEE countries are part of the EU, and some of them are not, which makes further problems especially regarding economic cooperation, but also from the legislative point of view. Besides that, in this paper, it is demonstrated that the cultural background in the CEE countries is not as similar as one may think, and that can also be a problem in the way of the fulfilling expectations of the countries involved. Regarding the presented results of the Hofstede model, the country that is the most similar to China from the cultural point of view is Albania (5 dimensions out of the 6), then we have Bulgaria and Slovakia (4/6), and after that Poland,

the Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania, Serbia, Croatia, B&H, Macedonia and Montenegro (3/6). The countries that have the least similarities with China are the Baltic countries and Slovenia. All three clusters have two dimensions that are the same as in China: the Balkan cluster has PDI and IDV the same, the Central East European cluster has MAS and IND, and the Baltic cluster has UAI (not a match, but close enough) and LTO. According to the previous researches that the author of this paper conducted over time, it can be concluded that the three dimensions in Hofstede model which mainly influence everyday business life are: PDI, IDV and LTO. Having that in mind, the Balkan countries are in a way the most similar to China and its way of doing business. Since one of the most prominent sayings in the Chinese promotion of OBOR and the Summit 16+1 framework is a *win-win situation for all the parties that are involved*, it is very important to further expand the research about all the potential problems that can arise in the way of implementing these two initiatives. Because the cultural background and differences are among the potential problems, this kind of analysis should be conducted more extensive in order to better understand and accept different cultures. This can be considered as a way for prevention of potential misunderstandings. In Serbian language, there is an old saying that can be used as a conclusion (or highlight) of this paper, and it says: *“It is better to prevent something than to fix (heal) something”*, meaning that if we can be careful and proactive - then everything will be much easier.

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