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Review paper

EVERLASTING UNSETTLED SINO-EUROPEAN RELATIONS: IS THE '16+1' INITIATIVE MUTUAL BENEFIT OR POINT OF DIVERGENCE?

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Abstract: The paper investigates to what extent the Chinese geopolitical position is prone to change in the 21st century, in the context of its policy towards the EU and especially sub-initiatives such as the “16+1”. To address this issue, the Hegemonic Stability Theory (HST) postulates developed by Charles P. Kindleberger will be employed. Besides its wide application within IR research, this theory is fruitful as it presents a solid basis for exact indicators which can be established and compared. While the first two premises according to which China is the world’s benevolent leader are not questioned (large and growing economy as well as being political and military power), there is the third one according to which a hegemon must commit to the system, which needs to be perceived as mutually beneficial for other great powers and important state-actors. The “16+1” initiative will serve as a case study and will demonstrate that China’s foreign policy is far from being only a middle range power. The author starts with testing the first two postulates of the theory on Chinese economic presence in the Central and Eastern Europe space, followed by China’s commitment to the international system in which the “16+1” initiative will be analyzed as a challenging factor for its relations with the EU. This paper points out the Sino-European cooperation model which presents the basis for creating the EU’s attitude towards this and recent similar Chinese initiatives.

Key words: China, the European Union, economic relations, hegemonic stability theory, 16+1 initiative, investments.

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INTRODUCTION

Establishing the European Communities along with their rudimental foreign policy components in the early 1950s did not directly lead to the development of modern Sino-European relations. It took more than twenty years for them to be officially introduced in 1975.² The European pillar of relations with China has been transmitted, due to internal supranational political reforms in the EU, from the European Economic Communities to a specialized body under the European Commission, the European External Action Service (EEAS). Following a very shifting global political outlook, they have been highly variable throughout different periods. There were several waves of academic considerations about maintaining the Sino-European relations, while an effective debate over their changing nature has been exposed in three most dominant discourses. The first one in the early stages of cooperation was about noticing coincidences in behaviour between the two sides (Lin et al., 2003). However, not so many mutual coincidences (except common willingness for economic growth) between the two sides were noticed.

The interests of one party in another were stemming from current political turmoil and short-to-middle term goals in foreign policies of both sides.

Chan sums up that “absence of fundamental geopolitical conflicts between the EU and China in the post-Cold War era has facilitated the process of engagement” (2010, p. 2). The argument according to which the Sino-European relations have had significant ups and downs was exposed by Algieri. He claimed that “growing importance” of relations had been seen in early 1980, while in the next decade no significant steps were taken to improve them further (Algieri, 2002). Also, Brown points out that the prioritisation of dimensions and fields in which two partners are about to cooperate (both in political and economic issues), was one of the characteristics of early debates (Brown, 2014). The third group of considerations was conceptualized to focus on China’s rise. While some recognized the importance of democratization in that process (Legro, 2007), the general conclusion of early academic debates could be summed up as the perception of “threat” of China’s rise (Möller, 2002; Brown, 2014). Relatively new academic corpus debate tends to focus right on the relations based on perceptions of the potential rise of both sides.

Thus, there are claims such as that “varied perceptions of the implications of China’s rise have shaped policy preferences in ways that are inconsistent with concerns over the threat of an impending power transition” (Brown, 2014, p. 4). Jing Men argues that Sino-European era has started very late since the Western

² Even though there are many views on what exactly forms the “European” fragment of the Sino-European relations, for the purposes of this article, the “European” will refer to both EU Member States` space, along with its near neighbourhood involving the Western Balkan countries, regarding their inclusion within “16+1” initiative.

European countries were “encouraged by the US-China rapprochement,” which followed mutual recognition of China by most of them (Men, 2007, p. 2). Perception as an important element of analysis has not been denounced not even in the work of some realists such as Stephen Walt and Randall Schweller (Brown, 2014). After several challenges in the Sino-European relations have been overcome, the two sides started with a modern phase of relations, based on peace and security, prosperity, and most importantly – economic cooperation. Liu Zuokui argues that the perception of China is influenced by vast factors including globalization and the European sovereign debt crisis, the poor image of the Chinese people abroad, but also by the public surveys conducted in the USA (Zuokui, 2017). The most populous country in the world and the European supranational entity create a unique intertwined foreign policy within the international system. An instrument which enables twenty-eight countries to speak with a “single voice” in relations to the third parties, the Common Foreign and Security Policy of the EU on the one hand, and Chinese foreign policy which has been steadily developing followed by heavy economic presence all across the globe, form this *sui generis* relations. Though some claim that relations between the EU and China are relations between France/Germany and China (Weske, 2007), this paper will shed light to the EU CFSP as a referring object from the European side.³

The key issue of this analysis is focused on determining whether the level of Chinese “hegemony” in the economic sphere through sub-initiatives could present a new model for involvement in global affairs. This inconsistency is rather the reason for lack of robustness in explaining the causal effects of the supranational foreign policy of the EU.

In this regard, many authors recognize a deficiency in the scientific explanation of such nature (Algieri, 2002; Jing, 2007; Brown, 2014; Arežina, 2015). Preliminary literature review on this topic has shown the existence of a significant level of consensus in the academic debate over the theoretical application to a *sui generis* supranational – specific national foreign policy relation.

³ In this regard, it is of utmost importance to define what is under the umbrella of “European” side of foreign relations. Beside China, initiative “16+1” gathers sixteen more countries of Central and East Europe, out of which five are outside the EU full membership. The common foreign and security policy (CFSP) and the European security and defence policy (ESDP) are based on legal acts, including legally binding international agreements, and on political documents. The EU Member States must be able to conduct political dialogue in the framework of CFSP, to align with EU statements, to take part in EU actions and to apply agreed restrictive measures. Applicant countries are also required to progressively align with EU statements, and to apply restrictive measures when and where required. Having in mind candidate status of all Balkan countries willing to enter the EU (out of which Montenegro and Serbia have already started negotiations for full membership), Sino-European relations could cover both EU and non-EU countries within “16+1” initiative.

The author starts with a presumption that there have always existed factors and inputs which caused varying important stages within the interrelated connections and which have been determining the Sino-European relations in the widest sense (such as Tiananmen occurrences, China's membership within the WTO, the World Economic Crisis, etc.). Unlike classical bilateral relations, Sino-European ones have more or less developed *ad hoc* than on a permanent and structured basis. Based on the presented literature review, it can be concluded that the Sino-European relations in early stages were rather Eurocentric and introspected through the lens of European side as a small "leader" in this bilateral regime. In this sense, a very dynamic academic debate on the nature of the Sino-European relations was inspired by adding not so structural factors into the analysis – the perception of Chinese rise. Robert Jervis developed a thesis on a personal misperception of "otherness" in creating foreign state policy. Even though he was developing his thesis quite early (1968), this author laid the foundation of individual decision-making factors within international politics and thus, contributed to the potential understanding of the creation of bilateral relations (Jervis, 1968). He further concluded that even in the most complex political systems, foreign policy was being significantly influenced by and was made on an individual level (1968, p. 192).

In line with the initial argumentation of the article, among diverse factors that have been determining the EU and China links, the best known modern one which determines the Sino-European relations, is the Belt and Road Initiative, more specifically the "16+1" sub-initiative. This article starts by presenting the most notable academic debates over nature and scientific feasibility of the HST, as well as on its early conceptualizations. As it has experienced its renaissance within modern IR research, all the three presumptions of the theory shall be presented. The one according to which the hegemon must commit to the system, which needs to be perceived as mutually beneficial for other great powers and important state-actors, will be dismantled to several kinds of argumentations and will present a basis for presenting the conclusions and findings of this paper. The key research question on which this paper will seek to provide an answer is whether the varying nature of the Sino-European relations in terms of the hegemonic rise of China is dependable on sub-initiatives such as the "16+1". It will also be pointed out the eventual approximation of the two partners into a "G2" club, as a model for a new economic axis of the 21st century.

In this context, the "16+1" initiative shall serve as a case study. The data presented in this article are based on the available World Bank Data indicators. Descriptive statistics will be one of the deployed methods, along with the content analysis of key bilateral agreements and documents from China's and the EU's administration.

Theorizing the Hegemonic Stability Theory: China as an upgrading praxis

The debates over what forms a real global hegemon⁴ within the theories of international relations have been emerging since the beginning of modern IR theory. After the World War II, even though there were some attempts (Krasner 1976, Webb & Krassner, 1989, Spiezio, 1990), efforts to empirically determine a leader in a bipolar world were unsuccessful.

The interest of academics nowadays has dramatically decreased, with only several empirical analyses of the HST postulates (Hubbard, 2010). The strategic moment is a crucial characteristic of the “hegemon”. At the very end of the 20th century, and during the last decade, both the EU and China were advocating a comprehensive and strategic component of cooperation in all fields. As the outcome of most of the diplomatic initiatives, two sides have signed “EU-China 2020 Strategic Agenda for Cooperation”,⁵ a document which revived and brought up to the strategic level modern links between the two partners (EEAS, 2013).

As claimed by many academic authors, economic dimension is inevitable in the Sino-European analysis (Algieri 2002; Weske, 2007; Geeraerts, 2013), as China pledges to become a new world’s hegemon or at least its economic superpower (Brown, 2014). Whether deploying theories on different levels such as middle range theories and micro theories as a subsequent part of never found “meta-theory” of international relations, empirical research in this field could not advance due to non-aligned methodological decisions and vast complicity of the theoretical framework, while some positive findings slightly improve the theory (Hubbard, 2010). The HST provides only normative robust arguments on what forms a status of global hegemon (Kindleberger, 1973), but it does not take into account the changeable structure of international system along with the possibility to create qualitatively new international structure type. Relatively vivid conceptual discussions within IR, take into account which type of “hegemonic” behaviour China takes in the modern international system. For instance, there are claims according to which Chinese role within modern globalized society could be analyzed through three lenses: the changes of structure in international politics, respective identity differences among

⁴ The term “hegemon” should be understood as a concept derived from theoretical debates among the HST authors, and thus, does not indicate any negative mark of certain country, but refer to the role that leading superpower (could) have in international system.

⁵ The document regulates and addresses strategic axis of activities between the two partners such as infrastructure development, transport, science, peace & security, prosperity, energy, urbanisation, social progress, etc. The document sets three pillars on which the EU and China will base their annual summits: (the annual High Level Strategic Dialogue, the annual High Level Economic and Trade Dialogue, and the bi-annual People-to-People Dialogue. More available at: http://eeas.europa.eu/archives/docs/china/docs/eu-china_2020_strategic_agenda_en.pdf

the EU and China, and emerging multilayered and culturally diversified polarity between the two actors (Geeraerts, 2013, p. 54).

An observed gap in scientific literature relates to the sphere in which the hegemon must accomplish itself. In this article, the author argues that the “commitment” (expressed by the *will* to participate in global affairs), besides the traditionally accepted political presence, could be also demonstrated in active economic presence within specific regions. Instead of testing the first two arguments of the HST, their multilevel collision will be deployed in regards to the current analysis.

The HST casts an argument according to which the international regime will operate smoothly and experience periods of stability only if dominated by one powerful national economy. Consequently, the “absence of a hegemon is associated with a disorder in the world system and undesirable outcomes for individual states” (Snidal, 1985, p. 1). This general premise has been elaborated through three normative arguments that could be summed as:

- a) The hegemon must have a large and growing economy and developed technology;
- b) The hegemon must possess politico-military soft and hard power;
- c) The hegemon must have the will and readiness to take the leading role within the international system (Kindleberger, 1973).

Most of the available economic indicators reveal that Chinese constant growth is indisputable.

Taking into account an extremely high ratio of Chinese export-oriented economy, it is important to expand an argument according to which China is a producing and not a consuming nation (see Chart 1). Unlike many socialist countries, it had a very successful economic transition in terms of adapting to the global economy outreach. Similarly, excluding other countries with strict government-protected industrial sectors, China’s success lays in its so-called “dual-track” approach, which Lin describes as “gradual and pragmatic” (Lin, 2013).

Table 1. The Trend towards multi-polarity: Share of World GDP (in %)

	1995	2007	2020	2030	Trends 2007-2030
USA	21.7	19.4	18.3	16.6	2.8 ↓
EU28*	24.5	20.8	18.6	15.6	5.2 ↓
China	5.5	10.1	17.7	22.7 ↑	12.6
Russia	2.8	2.9	3.1	2.7	0.2 ↓
Japan	8.3	6.0	4.6	3.6	2.4 ↓

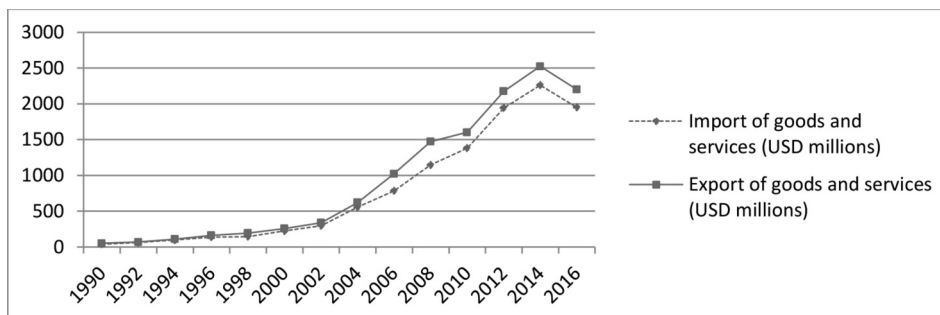
*Without Croatia which joined the EU in 2013.

Source: Adapted information by Economic Intelligence Unit; Taken from: Geeraerts, 2013, p. 57.

With the protection of unviable firms in the primary sector, it “simultaneously liberalised the entry of private enterprises, joint ventures and foreign direct investment in labour-intensive sectors in which China had a comparative advantage but that were repressed before the transition” (2013, p. 263). Although the high and growing level of exportation, China’s ratio of import of goods and services does not create a big share in its total GDP (World Bank Data, 2017). When in 1986 China resolutely decided to resume its membership within the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, it meant its joining back to the world’s economic system (Marković, 2014).

The expressive progress of China’s economic rise has occurred at the very beginning of this century and has been multiplied several times nowadays. According to the World Bank Global Prospects programme, China will continue measuring its economic growth, maintaining 6.4% of growth per annum until 2019 (World Bank Global Prospects, 2017).

Chart 1: Import and Export ratio of China between 1990-2016 (USD millions)



Source: World Bank Data, 2017⁶ (Compiled data)

With a permanent seat within the United Nations Security Council, China also plays a key role in preserving global peace and stability. It is ranked as the third country with most powerful military capacities, taking the first place in the Asian area (Global Fire Power, 2017).

⁶ According to the World Bank Data explanation, imports and exports of goods and services represent the value of all goods and other market services received and sent to / from the rest of the world. They include the value of merchandise, freight, insurance, transport, travel, royalties, license fees, and other services, such as communication, construction, financial, information, business, personal, and government services. They exclude compensation of employees and investment income (formerly called factor services) and transfer payments.

More available at: http://databank.worldbank.org/data/reports.aspx?Code=NE.EXP.GNFS.ZS&id=1ff4a498&report_name=Popular-Indicators&populartype=series&ispopular=y (Accessed on: 17.10.2017.)

Its increase of defence budget has even described as the “brave move” towards the real multilateralism, which none of the other potential superpowers were ready for (Kagan, 1998). William Cohen (2007, p. 683) claimed that China was “destined to behave as other emerging powers had in the past”; specifically, China will “resume its place as East Asia’s hegemonic power and extend its influence wherever it can in the rest of the world”. Hard power alone is insufficient to confer ‘great power’ status (Kim, 1998, p. 6). But some assume that China is boosting its military capability in order to emerge as a great power regionally and eventually globally, thus to be capable of confronting the US.⁷ Measuring the Chinese military capabilities and strengths is more adequate by observing how China acts “*in-theatre*”, or in any potential military scenario, such as the tensions in the South China Sea.⁸ Notwithstanding this argument on politico-military hegemony and predominance in global affairs, in terms of the HST, China measures rise in something that its scholars call “comprehensive national power – CNP”, a syntagm which relates to precise calculation of the national both soft and hard powers (Zhang, 2010), and according to which China ranks as one of the world’s top nations. All of the above-mentioned normative arguments give China the attributes of a theory-significant case which can be observed, and the status of “upgrading praxis” of the theory. Data from Table 1 and Chart 1 show the long-term tendencies of stability of the Chinese economy. Next chapters will discuss the Chinese willingness to involve in global affairs through economic initiatives.

GENERATING MODERN SINO-EUROPEAN RELATIONS THROUGH THE “16+1” SUB-INITIATIVE

The first two adapted assumptions of the HST provide an assessment of the third and most significant argument of the theory. Duncan Snidal was among the ones who provided comprehensive argumentation on the limits of the HST and the range of its (empirical) application to specific situations (Snidal, 1985). These theory principles were primarily based on the economic nature of political relations among countries. Thus, the author believes the third argument according to which the hegemon must commit to the international system, could be modified from having purely political to economic nature. This was initially introduced by Michael Webb & Stephen Krassner, who differentiated the HST into two sub-theoretical discourses: the collective goods and the security version of this theory (Webb &

⁷ China is among the top of military global superpowers in accordance with the annual Military Balance reports. See more at: <https://www.iiss.org/en/publications/military%20balance> (29.10.2017)

⁸ For detailed China’s military capabilities, see more at: <https://amti.csis.org/chinese-power-projection> (Accessed on: 13.10.2017)

Krasner, 1989). According to them, the security version of the HST, “does not assume that states have a common interest in international economic liberalization and stability. If the pattern of relative gains threatens the security of powerful states, international economic liberalization will be restricted even though those states could have increased their absolute welfare by participating in a more open system” (1989, p. 185). Following that line of argumentation, that would mean the hegemon’s commitment to the international system should not necessarily be exposed in political affairs only but could be accepted for economic areas as well.

For the purposes of this article, a matrix of indicators developed by Webb and Krasner will be used to re-assess the Chinese presence within the 16+1 geographic area. Further conceptualizations of the theory along with its methodological issues for research design have been vivid since the theory has been established.

There was a vast number of empirical studies that used precise indicators for measuring economic “hegemony” and predominance within the international system (Kindleberger, 1973; Gilpin, 1975; Krasner, 1976). Those indicators would involve the main macroeconomic measures such as goods and services import and export, general GDP trends, FDIs (net inflows), from data series taken from the World Bank Data values. For the purpose of this article, the sub-initiative “16+1” is subject to empirical examination.⁹ Re-assessment of the Chinese economic presence must take into account the new circumstances that involve politico-economic strategic competition between the two sides or their similarities.

Chart 2: Export and import of goods and services 2008, 2012 and 2016 (\$ millions)¹⁰



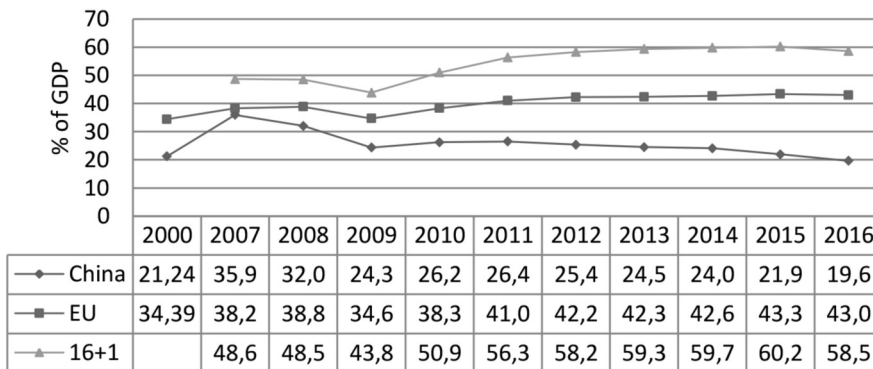
Source: World Bank Data, 2017; (aggregated data for sixteen countries of CEE region)

⁹ A several-years old, structured annual forum, which gathers countries of the Central and Eastern Europe and China, to develop comprehensive (predominantly) economic policies and ways of cooperation.

¹⁰ The “16+1” designation in terms of these charts involves sixteen Central and Eastern European countries, and therefore, excludes China for which separate values have been shown.

Sixteen countries of Central and Eastern Europe are not that much prone to import goods and services, nor to do their export, in comparison to single China’s values or the EU28 ones (see Chart 2). Two more observations from this Chart should be noticed. First, the EU28 import ratio is constantly decreasing, along with its export trends that are also declining. This could be caused by its general slow-down in the economic ratio and not by a higher EU dependency on import/export. Aggregated data for sixteen CEE countries show the minimal share of export/import when compared to the EU28 one. This presents an opportunity for China to further invest and export its goods. The charts above have shown general trends of imports of goods and services of the European side of “16+1” region, as well as the very high ratio of the import-based need for all EU member states. To achieve deeper insight than the nominal numbers, the export-import interrelation could be more adequately analyzed if observed through the percentage of GDP per annum respectively.

Chart 3. Exports of goods and services (% of GDP)



Source: World Bank Data, 2017 (Aggregated data)

Chart 3 shows that if observed through this indicator, the CEE countries are *de facto* increasing the export ratio in the last several years. On the other side, China’s decline in percentage is a consequence of its permanent GDP growth. Therefore, the share of export cannot be conceived as a smaller ratio. Unlike the CEE countries, the EU as a whole is stagnating in the export ratio which can be the first signal for its non-adequate growth policy.

Regarding China, investments beyond its borders in 2010 were almost 10% of its GDP, while in 2011 it was 11.1% (Xin, 2010). On the other side, the CEE countries receive not only the Chinese investments but also others, such as from other EU member states and the third parties.

According to the World Bank Data, aggregated foreign direct investments (FDIs) in the CEE countries do not overcome 35 billion US dollars *per annum*. Some assessments predict that China is spending several billion Euros a year in the CEE region (Reuters, 2016; Spiegel, 2017).¹¹ No more concrete and robust data on this issue were found. In China's strategies of development, investments are recognized as impetus which could demonstrate Chinese openness towards the world. The Thirteen Plan for a five-year period announces two significant measures: deeper participation in supranational power structures, more international co-operation, and encouraging people of China to share the fruits of economic growth to bridge the existing welfare gaps. The willingness to involve deeper in global affairs was explicitly demonstrated. For "measuring" Chinese benevolence, data from an annual series of public opinion surveys in key European countries presented by the Center for Strategic and International Studies, will be used.

Table 2. International views on China:
Favourability of China within the public opinion

	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Germany	34	26	29	30	34	29	28	28	34	28	34
France	47	28	41	41	51	40	42	47	50	33	44
Russia	60	60	58	60	63	62	62	64	79	n/a	70
USA	42	39	50	49	51	40	37	35	38	37	44
Japan	29	14	26	26	34	15	5	7	9	11	13
Turkey	25	24	16	20	18	22	27	21	18	n/a	33
Average	39,50	31,83	36,67	37,67	41,83	34,67	33,50	33,67	38,00	27,25	39,67

Source: Center for Strategic and International Studies;
<https://chinapower.csis.org/global-views> (29.10.2017)

¹¹ German daily newspapers Spiegel announced that China would get closer to the Eastern EU Member States through huge package of 10 billion dollars investments, especially to Poland, indicating that Western Europe investors were not able to increase "intra-EU" investment circle. More at: <http://www.spiegel.de/international/europe/with-10-billion-dollar-credit-line-china-deepens-presence-in-central-europe-a-833811.html> (31.10.2017)

DISCUSSING THE CHINA'S BENEVOLENT COMMITMENT TO THE INTERNATIONAL SYSTEM

Even the most HST- sceptic oriented authors admit that a vast number of critics did not destroy its analytic foundations (Gowa, 1989). The research question from the beginning of this paper was set to provide an answer if China's case presents the possibility for hegemonic stability theory-upgrade through its benevolent behaviour? Although the "benevolent hegemon" was conceptualized at the very beginning of theorizing (Kindleberger, 1973), this benevolence has hardly been exposed by any of major superpowers. Chinese significant economic investments all across the globe are *sui generis* example of such behaviour within international relations. Another issue which is significant is the defining the "long-term" period of theoretical arguments. It is quite unclear what constitutes the sufficient period of time in which all those arguments should be observed. In another scenario, the G2 as a new model for establishing the global hegemon in economic and financial affairs could occur.

It is for all the reasons the EU attitudes towards the initiative (Franco-German axis; Visegrad Group countries attitudes; other related attitudes), were quite positive towards China (Möller, 2002). The hegemon and its behaviour must be perceived and accepted positively by a wider consensus of the international community. It must be formed as mutually beneficial for other great powers and important state-actors. Perceptions of Europeans towards China, in general, are not investigated that much in academic practice.

Some empirical views, however, stand on distinction of the European Union member states attitudes towards China, spreading them into four fluctuating groups: assertive industrialists, ideological free-traders, accommodating mercantilists and European followers (Fox & Godement, 2009). Not only the EU member states, but even the CEE countries were dispersed into all of the groups (2009: 5). On the other side, there were some empirical studies that shed light on how the Chinese people percept the EU in general (Chan, 2010). All the perception studies are one-way oriented (i.e. Chinese people towards the EU in general and *vice versa*, or group of the EU Member States' public opinions towards the specific policy of China) and thus not adequate for generalization and deeper analysis (see Table 2).

All of these factors imply that classical interpretations of the HST as a "meta-theory" of IR should be denounced in terms of its corrections and further upgrades. It would be impossible to deploy only one out of three arguments of the HST in analysing the multilateral and bilateral relations among the major world powers (notwithstanding China, the EU or any other party). The HST has experienced some serious objections in academic considerations. The focus and interest on rebutting the first argument are most common within academics since it gets most space for empirical investigations. Despite that the economic indicators

are easily measurable and thus, subject to different methodologies, they offer a solid basis for their direct comparison.

Eichengreen argues that there are problems with three concepts of this theory: hegemony, the power the hegemon is assumed to possess, and the regime whose stability is ostensibly enhanced by the exercise of hegemonic power (1987, p. 3). He continues with an explanation of the last concept and points out the nature of a regime which should recognize its leader, concluding that this process is very slow (Eichengreen, 1987).

On the other side, if the normative *de lege ferenda* argument according to which the world *needs to have* its predominant leader is taken into account, the HST is quite successful in explaining the Sino-European relations on a middle-range term. Furthermore, it is of utmost importance to determine whether a theory with economic postulates could be applied to describe and even predict solely political relations between China and the EU. Some describe future China's relations with Central and Eastern Europe as "dependent on the overall EU posture towards China's interests in the region" (Dimitrijević & Jokanović, 2016). In the end, this paper has shown that there is an inconvenient convergence from the Europeanization of the Sino-European relations towards the Chinese angle of their perception.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

This article pointed out to most significant academic debates over the Sino-European relations and their changing nature. The author intended to demonstrate Chinese commitment to the international (economic) system through its wide and comprehensive BRI policy, by using the "16+1" example. The discussion and results have shown that China's foreign policy is far from being a middle-range power. Its economic presence through giant sub-initiatives is a key factor in shaping the Chinese foreign policy towards the third parties. Its willingness to invest heavily in the CEE region's infrastructure is recognized as a tendency of nearing the general European market for Chinese goods. Thus, establishing stable economic relations is for sure an opportunity for so-called "*spill-over*" effect, in which cooperation in all other major areas could be achieved.

The notion of "hegemon's commitment to the system" inevitably involves an economic dimension. If the postulate that "for the world economy to be stabilized, there has to be a stabilizer, one stabilizer" (Kindleberger, 1973) is accepted, then in Chinese case the normative moment of the HST should be avoided. Having a "hegemonic" role does not indicate it is necessarily a coercive player within the international arena; moreover, as Kindleberger claimed, it could be a benevolent actor. Thus, the benevolence in China's case is explicitly expressed in vast

investments all across the globe. Generating more than 11% of total world's GDP, China along with the EU, which forms some of 20% of total world's GDP, could become a real new economic leader in the near future (World Bank Data, 2017). Debates among scholars concerning the potential "G2" scenario, in which China and the EU could take global economic leadership, are more often being actualized in global discourse. Some scholars predict that world economic hegemony will be soon established through "G2" scenario, in which the EU will be joined by China (Geeraerts, 2013).

Geeraerts argues that the G2 will present the first economic tier of multilayered polarity (2013, p. 58), while Scott recognized this dyad as the "strategic axis for the 21st century" (Scott, 2007). If international economic institutions are widely understood to be "in need of reformation and repair" and for a new or reworked system to have credibility, China would need to have input into the process (Desai, 2006, p. 2). This became visible in 2017 roundtable "Promoting an Open, Invigorated and Inclusive World Growth", where the WTO director general announced: "China's commitment to increased openness will help to drive the economy forward. There is an opportunity now to accelerate reform and focus more on the sustainability and quality of growth" (WTO, 2017). So far, it seems that China did not play assertive economic policy towards the global institution creation.

But through various initiatives, it has demonstrated that international institutionalism should not necessarily be used as a means to the global presence. The future of the Sino-European relations highly depends on the mutual agreement of Europe and China about particular strategic areas in which further cooperation should be built. An attempt to provide an overview of the Sino-European relations with their everlasting variable nature will be put highly on the academic agenda in future (Shirk, 2007). Whether the "16+1" initiative foster the cooperation and China's rise followed by balanced Sino-European relations, will notably depend on the Chinese will to assume a global leadership and to achieve its growth policy.

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Nenad **STEKIĆ**

**TRAJNO NEDEFINISANI KINESKO-EVROPSKI ODNOSI:
DA LI JE INICIJATIVA „16+1“ ZAJEDNIČKI BENEFIT
ILI TAČKA RAZILAŽENJA?**

Apstrakt: Ovaj članak istražuje do koje mere je kineska geopolitička pozicija spremna na promene u 21. veku, u kontekstu njene politike prema Evropskoj uniji, i naročito, subinicijativama poput „16+1“. Kako bi adekvatno bilo odgovoreno na ovo pitanje, biće korišćeni postulati teorije hegemonске stabilnosti Čarlsa Kindlbergera. Osim rasprostranjene upotrebe u istraživanjima međunarodnih odnosa, ova teorija predstavlja plodotvornu bazu jer pruža indikatore koji mogu da budu upoređivani. Dok prve dve premise, shodno kojima je Kina benevolentni lider, nisu upitne (velika i rastuća privreda, kao i vojna i politička moć), postoji treća, prema kojoj hegemon mora da bude posvećen sistemu, koji treba da ga percipira kao uzajamno korisnog člana međunarodne zajednice od strane velikih sila i ostalih važnih državnih aktera. Inicijativa „16+1“ će služiti kao studija slučaja i pokazati da je spoljna politika Kine daleko od statusa sile srednjeg dometa. Autor počinje testiranjem prva dva postulata teorije, na primeru ekonomskog prisustva Kine u prostoru Centralne i Istočne Evrope, praćen kineskom posvećenošću međunarodnom sistemu u kom će inicijativa „16+1“ biti analizirana kao izazov odnosima sa Evropskom unijom. Ovaj papir ukazuje na model saradnje koji predstavlja osnovu za stvaranje stavova Evropske unije prema ovoj, i sličnim kineskim inicijativama.

Ključne reči: Kina, Evropska unija, ekonomski odnosi, teorija hegemonске stabilnosti, inicijativa “16+1”, investicije.

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