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CEEC's-China Mechanism of Cooperation and the Belt and Road Initiative: From Idea to Institutionalisation – Six Years Later

Duško Dimitrijević,¹ Nikola Jokanović²

Apstrakt: The paper analyzes the process of institutionalization of intergovernmental cooperation and coordination of state policies through the mechanism of cooperation between the countries of Central and Eastern Europe (CEEC) and China, known in the public as “16 + 1” (i.e., “17 + 1” starting in 2019). Through an eclectic picture of the development of contemporary international relations, the authors indicate in a methodologically accessible manner that this mechanism of cooperation is a significant impetus for the development of international relations. Since China has taken a dominant role in redefining the Global Management System, whose goals are balanced and sustainable international development, to achieve them, China has identified certain ideological frameworks that are present in its foreign policy through the *Belt and Road Initiative*. Through this Initiative, China seeks to achieve the broader goals of the New Silk Road development strategy, which not only determines the directions of China’s internal development, but provides guidance for its strategic cooperation with neighbouring countries as well as with countries on other continents. Consequently, the mechanism itself thus plays an important role in strengthening China’s foreign policy position, not only with respect to CEEC, but also with respect to other European countries, including the EU as a whole.

Key words: The “16+1” cooperation mechanism, the *Belt and Road Initiative*, the *New Silk Road*, development strategy, China, CEEC.

¹ Principal Research Fellow, Institute of International Politics and Economics, Belgrade.

E-mail: dimitrijevicd@diplomacy.bg.ac.rs

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Introduction

In the last three decades, China has been able to improve its industrial structure and increase the quality of economic growth since it promotes economic reforms through a series of policy decisions, reform measures and guidelines from five-year development plans, enabling it to assume one of the leading roles in the global economy. For the development of the modern world, the fact that China is the first trading power in the world with the highest purchasing power parity, the first country in foreign exchange reserves, and the second-largest country in terms of nominal GDP is insignificant.³ It owns 33 percent of shares in global military pillars of "China-Russia and the United States", and in economic pillars of the "China-Europe-United States".⁴ However, despite these positive indicators, China faces the consequences of the global financial crisis and industrial overcapacity that burden its economic model based on export-oriented economy and foreign direct investment. Hence, China needs to find new markets and preserve existing ones, and then provide participation in new forms of international economic cooperation, which would enable its balanced internal development. This new direction stems from the new international circumstances in which China is making great efforts to democratize international relations. This is best reflected precisely in its activities in the United Nations, where it stands for a multipolar international order and multilateralism in international relations in which the United Nations should play a primary role.⁵ As a global political actor and permanent member of the Security Council, China is becoming an increasingly binding factor in achieving global development goals.⁶ Respect for dignity and equality, solidarity and tolerance for China is an additional incentive to continue advocating for the realization of peaceful and harmonious global development which in particular means creating inclusive, harmonious, balanced and peaceful international society that is not only a "community of common interests", but also a "community of common destiny and responsibility", or to serve the well-known phrase of President Xi Jinping: a

² China Foreign Affairs University, Beijing.

³ "Report for Selected Countries and Subjects: China", *World Economic Outlook*, International Monetary Fund, April 2017.

⁴ Wang Yiwei, *The Belt and Road Initiative, What will China Offer the World in its Rise*, New World Press, Beijing, 2018, p. 5.

⁵ "Efforts Urged to Implement Belt and Road Initiative", *China Daily*, 17 March, 2017.

⁶ "Millennium Declaration", General Assembly of the United Nations, Resolution 55/2, 18 September 2000; "Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development", General Assembly of the United Nations, Resolution 70/1, 21 October 2015.

“Community of Shared Future for the Mankind”.⁷ Starting from this new visionary paradigm, China, in fact, encourages the international community to address more resolutely the issue of humanity’s progress related to the regulation of the crucial problems in the economic and social sphere such as poverty, pandemics, natural disasters, environmental pollution, migrations, proliferation of weapons, terrorism, international crime, international and internal conflicts. Due to this proactive approach, China is identified in some foreign policy estimates as a “potential” or “emerging” super power.⁸ However, for a long time, China has not perceived itself as such. Its political discourse has until recently explicitly emphasized that China is the largest developing country and a respectable regional power with increased global influence and soft power in international relations. This foreign policy direction is changing in the most recent period, and especially after the 19th National Congress of the CPC held in October 2017, when a new era of “rejuvenation of the Chinese nation in the moderately prosperous socialist society in all aspects” was proclaimed.⁹ Although China remained declaratively consistent in implementing the “Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence”, it made a certain manoeuvre after this Congress, as it came out with a much more confident position in international relations, demanding a more proactive role and place in the development and reform of the “Global Governance System”.¹⁰ That was a sufficient sign that the previous “Low Key Strategy” (*Tao Guang Yang Hui*) was abandoned.¹¹ This change from the self-contained, passive, defensive and non-assertive China to an open, proactive, offensive and assertive China, followed gradually with the implementation of radical social and economic reforms, as well as with fundamental changes in international relations in the post-Cold War period

⁷ “Work Together to Build a Community of Shared Future for Mankind”, Speech by H.E. Xi Jinping President of the People’s Republic of China at the United Nations Office at Geneva, Geneva, 18 January 2017. http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2017-01/19/c_135994707.htm, 20/03/2019.

⁸ Barry Buzan, *The United States and the Great Powers*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 2004, p. 70.

⁹ “The full text of the Resolution of the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China on the Report of the 18th Central Committee”, 24 October 2017, http://english.gov.cn/news/top_news/2017/10/24/content_281475919786014.htm, 31/03/2019.

¹⁰ Duško Dimitrijević, “China’s New Silk Road: the Opportunity for Peaceful World Development”, in: Sergei Chizhikov, Andrei Dmitirev, Kabyliniski Boris (eds), *Development of Trade in Modern World: Innovation and Challenges*, Russian Academy of National Economy and Public Administration, North West Institute of Management, Publishing House NWIM, Saint-Petersburg, 2018, pp. 68-82.

¹¹ Feng Yujun, Alexander Gabuev, Paul Haenle, Ma Bin, Dmitri Trenin, “The Belt and Road Initiative: Views from Washington, Moscow, and Beijing”, Carnegie-Tsinghua Center for Global Policy, Paper, 8 April 2019, <https://carnegietsinghua.org/2019/04/08/belt-and-road-initiative-views-from-washington-moscow-and-beijing-pub-78774>, 23/8/2019.

in which the idea that China should cooperate with all the countries of the world regardless of their size, ideological and political orientation and the level of economic growth had matured.¹² It is no wonder, therefore, that the long-standing foreign policy guidelines of Deng Xiaoping that China should “hide capabilities and bide time” was overcome in the meantime by a more rational approach to the reality in which China should take a very important place of “responsible power” (*Fu Zeren De Daguo*) in the “New World Order”.¹³

New Chinese positioning in international relations

According to the Chinese understanding transposed into important political documents, this new role of China would mean participation in the new international relations based on mutual respect, fairness, justice, and “win-win” cooperation. The ultimate goal of Chinese positioning as a “responsible power” would be to build “a community with a shared future for humanity characterized by an open, inclusive, clean, and beautiful world that enjoys lasting peace, universal security, and common prosperity”.¹⁴ It is, therefore, clear why China is today advocating for greater and more balanced cooperation between developed and developing countries, promoting cooperation in the South-South and South-North directions, and also working to fulfil its obligations on a global level. This positioning stems from a new foreign policy that presumes China’s active involvement in creating a good regional environment as a prerequisite for accepting the Chinese model of development on a global level.¹⁵ On the ideological plane, this position is

¹² Rush Doshi, “Hu’s to blame for China’s foreign assertiveness?” *Foreign Policy*, The Brookings Institution, <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/hu-to-blame-for-chinas-foreign-assertiveness/>, 31/06/2019

¹³ Yu Hongjun, “Sincere Dialogue for Conductive Cooperation”, In: *The Contemporary World Multilateral Dialogue*, China Centre for Contemporary World Studies, China Foundation for Peace and Development, Beijing, 2013, p. 9.

¹⁴ “The full text of the Resolution of the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China on the Report of the 18th Central Committee”, op.cit.

¹⁵ Such a foreign policy tactic, in practice, was accompanied by a gradual growth of Chinese “hard power” with an attractive narrative about the growth of “soft power”, which in the doctrine of international relations is explained by the premise that China, by “smart power”, seeks to convey the idea of its “peaceful rise” or of much more receptive “peaceful development”, in order to eliminate the possibility of a countervailing balance of power. See: Joseph S. Nye, *The Future of Power*, Public Affairs, New York, 2011, p. 11; Wen Jiabao, “Our Historical Tasks at the Primary Stage of Socialism and Several Issues Concerning China’s Foreign Policy”, *People’s Daily*, 27

covered by a doctrine of a peaceful and harmonious world, which is a basic course of Chinese foreign policy and its response to the challenges and risks of globalization. Following this course, China has adopted the development strategy of the *New Silk Road*, whose framework is defined with the program ideas of the *Silk Road Economic Belt* and the *21st Century Maritime Silk Road* colloquially named the *Belt and Road Initiative*.¹⁶ Even if abstractly determined, with quite widely defined geographical, temporal, functional and institutional determinants, the *Belt and Road Initiative* does not accept a geopolitical approach but affirms a geo-economics one based on ideas of common and peaceful coexistence, “win-win” cooperation and comprehensive, balanced and sustainable development.¹⁷ This approach steams from the priorities defined by the strategy of the *New Silk Road*, on establishing policy of co-ordination, connecting facilities, unimpeded trade, financial integration, and people-to-people bonds firstly with the countries of Asia, Africa and Europe, which in practice actually means the fulfilment of foreign policy guidelines for the all-round opening and enhancement of economic, financial, cultural, scientific and technological cooperation for the purpose of achieving global economic development, regional security and stability, and social prosperity and progress.¹⁸ This approach, which is generally in line with the purposes and principles of the UN

February 2007. A very interesting vision of China’s New World Order is given in the study: Randall L. Schweller, Xiaoyu Pu, “After Unipolarity: China’s Visions of International Order in an Era of U.S. Decline”, *International Security*, vol. 36, no. 1, 2011, pp. 41-72.

¹⁶ “Vision and Actions on Jointly Building Silk Road Economic Belt and 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road”, National Development and Reform Commission, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Commerce of the People’s Republic of China, 28 March 2015, Beijing, http://en.ndrc.gov.cn/newsrelease/201503/t20150330_669367.html, 31/03/2019; “Action Plan for Harmonisation of Standards along the Belt and Road (2015-2017)”, National Development and Reform Commission, 22 October 2015, Beijing, <http://china-trade-research.hktdc.com/business-ews/article/One-Belt-One-Road/Action-Plan-for-Harmonisation-of-Standards-Along-the-Belt-and-Road-2015-2017/obor/en/1/1X000000/1X0A443L.htm>, 31/03/2019; Duško Dimitrijević, Nikola Jokanović, “China’s New Silk Road Development Strategy”, *Review of International Affairs*, vol. LXVII, no. 1161, 2016, pp. 21-44.

¹⁷ “Promote Friendship between Our People and Jointly Build Silk Road Economic Belt”, *Peoples Daily*, 8 September 2013; “Join Hands to Write a New Chapter of China-Indonesia Relations, and Works together to create a Bright Future of China-ASEN Community of Common Destiny”, *Peoples Daily*, 3 October 2013. In essence, the New Silk Strategy seeks to overcome the weaknesses of the current global economic order and accelerate the revitalization of a large part of the world that covers a wider area with more than 4.6 billion people with a production capacity of 21 trillion US dollars (almost one-third of world GDP). See: Aleksandar Janković, ‘New Silk Road – New growth engine’, *Review of International Affairs*, vol. LXVII, no. 1161, 2016, p. 6.

¹⁸ Hu Yi, “China’s ‘One Belt/One Road’ Policy Is Open to All Nations”, *Executive Intelligence Review*, 20 March 2015, https://larouchepub.com/other/2015/4212hu_yi_spch.html, 31/03/2019.

Charter, does not deny the use of existing bilateral and multilateral forms of cooperation in favour of wider integration and connectivity with the existing development initiatives of regional organizations and political structures.¹⁹ Also, this approach does not exclude the engagement of the participating countries to the activities of international and regional financial institutions, primarily in the activities of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), the (BRICS) New Development Bank (NDB), the China, Central & Eastern Europe Investment Co-operation Fund (CEEFund) and the Silk Road Fund (SRF), which represent an equivalent to the transatlantic monetary system carried out by the World Bank (WB), the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the Asian Development Bank (ADB).²⁰ In this respect, it is important to mention such a position does not rule out the possibility of establishing innovative models of cooperation between states or between states and international organizations in order to participate in the *Belt and Road Initiative*, which represents dynamic framework of the *New Silk Road* development strategy. After all, this is illustrated by the example of the formation of the “16+1” mechanism between the countries of Central and Eastern Europe (CEEC) and China, which covers various areas of cooperation, starting with infrastructure, finance, trade, transport, agriculture, energy and telecommunications, to scientific, technological, cultural, educational and medical cooperation and people-to-people exchange.²¹ In the next part of the study, we will analyze the evolution of the “16+1” cooperation mechanism and the concrete effects of summits held at the highest state level between China and the CEEC.

¹⁹ In this regard, it does not exclude cooperation with existing organizations such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), ASEAN plus China, Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM), Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation (CAREC), the Asia-Pacific Dialogue (APD), the Asia Cooperation Dialogue (ACD), the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia (CICA), the China-Arab States Cooperation Forum, the Strategic Dialogue between China and the Gulf Cooperation Committee, the Economic Community of Brazil, Russia, India, China and the South African Union (BRICS).

²⁰ Helga Zepp-LaRouche, “The New Silk Road Leads to the Future of Mankind!” In: *The New Silk Road Becomes the World Land-Bridge*, E.I.R. News Service Inc., Washington, 2015, pp. 3, etc.

²¹ Duško Dimitrijević, “CEEC-China 16+1 Mechanism of Cooperation and Chinese Investments in Serbia”, in: *From 16+1 to One Belt One Road Initiative – Cooperation, Development and Win-Win*, Institute of Russian, East European & Central Asian Studies, Beijing, Shanghai University, CASS, Beijing, 2017, pp. 94-112.

Evolution of the CEEC-China mechanism for cooperation

Initial proposals for improving mutual cooperation

From the aspect of the official Chinese foreign policy discourse, cooperation between China and the CEEC within the “16+1” mechanism is an important factor for strengthening the Chinese partnership with the EU.²² This is first indicated after the opening of a transregional platform with an identical name officially announced by the then Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao at the China-CEEC Economic and Trade Forum held on 25 June 2011 in Budapest.²³ Promoting the so-called “five proposals” to enhance China’s cooperation with the CEEC, Chinese Premier provided an alternative to these countries to restart their economies after the 2008 crisis. Starting from the foreign policy position that all European countries should be treated equally regardless of their size and economic and political strength and that their legitimate national interests must be respected in relations with China, Premier Wen emphasized in the first of the five-point proposal the importance of further enhancing trade cooperation based on mutual interest and trust. At that moment, trade between China and the CEEC was less than 4 percent in their total foreign trade, which was less than 10 percent in trade between China and the EU. Given that China and the EU were strategic partners, while China was the EU’s second-largest trading partner and the EU was China’s biggest trading partner, it was clear that the former Chinese Premier will come up with constructive proposals, primarily with the ones related to greater market opening, reduction of customs and non-tariff barriers and the establishment of customs cooperation, better logistics and free movement of people, goods, services and capital. His second proposal is precisely the supposition of this suggestion, as it insists on improving two-way investments. Considering China and the CEEC have to work intensively on improving legal regulations on two-way investments and removing investment barriers of various types, he insisted on actively engaging in diversified forms of activities to promote different types of mutually profitable investment

²² Jasminka Simić, “The New Silk Road and the Role of 16+1 in Creating a New Economic Miracle for Europe”, in: Marcia Merry Baker, Michael Billington, Dennis Small, Ronald Kokinda and Megan Beets (eds), *The New Silk Road Becomes the World-Land Bridge: A Shared Future for Humanity*, Schiller Institute, vol. II, 2018, pp. 249-250.

²³ “China proposes more cooperation with Central, East European Countries”, *People’s Daily*, 26 June 2011, <http://en.people.cn/90001/90776/90883/7420628.html>, 01/02/2020; “Joint Statement Deepening the China-EU Comprehensive Strategic Partnership for Mutual Benefit”, http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjdt_665385/2649_665393/t1145387.shtml, 01/02/2020.

projects. In the third proposal, the Chinese Premier insisted on strengthening co-operation in the construction of infrastructure, which should establish a logistics network to facilitate the flow of goods and peoples. In the fourth proposal, he pledged to deepen fiscal and financial co-operation, which would provide a greater flow of capital and higher forms of business cooperation. Finally, in the fifth proposal, Premier Wen stressed the two sides should expand the people-to-people exchange in areas such as education, culture, health, sports, tourism, and science.

CEEC-China Summits

The first Warsaw Summit in 2012

During the first Summit of the leaders of China and the CEEC held in Warsaw (Poland) on 26 April 2012, Wen's "five proposals" were transformed into the so-called "12-point Initiative".²⁴ With this new Initiative, so-called *China's Twelve Measures for Promoting Friendly Cooperation with Central and Eastern European Countries*, the leaders of the participating countries agreed that the "16+1" platform has to grow into an official mechanism for multilateral and bilateral cooperation and policy coordination.²⁵ In this respect, the first of the 12 proposed points of the Initiative is indicative as it foresees the establishment of a Secretariat for Cooperation between China and the CEEC, which was officially inaugurated in September 2012 in Beijing. Its competence includes the coordination of activities between China and the CEEC, which, among other things, includes preparing the summit of leaders, preparing economic and trade forums and other gatherings, and the implementation of adopted decisions, directives, and guidelines. The Secretariat is managed and coordinated by the Secretary-General, the Executive Secretary-General and the Deputy Secretary-General. It consists of 24 member units, including the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The Secretariat office is located in the Department of European Affairs of China's Foreign Ministry.²⁶ The remaining

²⁴ "China's Twelve Measures for Promoting Friendly Cooperation with Central and Eastern European Countries", http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/topics_665678/wjbispg_665714/t928567.shtml, 01/02/2020.

²⁵ Anastas Vangeli, "China's Engagement with the Sixteen Countries of Central, East and Southeast Europe under the Belt and Road Initiative", *China & World Economy*, vol. 25, no. 5, 2017, pp. 101-124.

²⁶ "Introduction of the Secretariat for Cooperation between China and Central and Eastern European Countries", Secretariat for Cooperation between China and Central and Eastern European Countries, http://www.china-ceec.org/eng/msc_1/mscjj/t1411097.htm, 02/02/2020.

points of this Initiative regulate *inter alia* the issue of granting a special credit line of a 10 billion US\$ for the needs of the CEEC.²⁷ It is interesting that through this path, China has enabled the CEEC to directly address its financial organizations and banks such as Bank of China, the National Development Bank of China, the Export and Import Bank of China, the Industrial and Commercial Bank of China, Construction Bank of China, China CITIC Bank, etc. The Initiative also contain points about setting up an Investment Cooperation Fund between China and the CEEC with the goal of raising 500 million US\$ in the first stage; increase of the total trade volume between China and the CEEC to 100 billion US\$ by 2015; stimulation of Chinese enterprises to invest in special economic and technology zones in the CEEC; exploration of potential financial cooperation such as “currency swap, local currency settlement for cross-border trade and establishment of bank branches in each other’s countries”; establishment of an expert advisory committee on the construction of a transportation network between China and the CEEC; expansion of cultural cooperation; establishment of a Tourism Promotion Agency and the Research Fund and hosting of the first Young Political Leaders Forum of China and CESEE in 2013.²⁸

The second Bucharest Summit in 2013

The second Summit of Heads of Government of China and the CEEC was held in Bucharest (Romania) on 26 November 2013. The Summit participants formulated the “Bucharest Guidelines for Cooperation between China and the CEEC“. The Guidelines are focused on the theme of the “win-win“ cooperation, which implies increased investment and trade volumes, as well as increased cooperation in the fields of science, technology, innovation, environmental protection and energy (especially in the matter of nuclear power, wind power, hydropower, solar power and other sources of clean power). The document promotes people-to-people exchanges and cultural exchanges and cooperation. Special emphasis is given to infrastructure development. The Guidelines encourage China and the CEEC to build an international railway transportation corridor connecting China with the CEEC; along this railway corridor, distribution centres will be established to build a new logistics passage

²⁷ Justyna Szczudlik-Tatar, “China’s Charm Offensive in Central and Eastern Europe: The Implementation of Its ‘12 Measures Strategy’”, *Bulletin of the Polish Institute of International Affairs*, no. 106, 2013, pp. 1, etc.

²⁸ Anastas Vangeli, “Beijing via Warsaw: The growing importance of China – CESEE relations”, *Perspectives Internationales*, vol. 5, 2012, <http://perspectivesinternationales.com/?p=511,12/02/2020>.

between China and Europe. The document particularly supports the establishment of mutual cooperation in the area of free movement of capital and financial services. The document also welcomes the official launch of the Investment Cooperation Fund, as well as the establishment of contractual cooperation between the National Bank of China and CEEC central banks.²⁹ For the purpose of further coordination and institutionalization, the participants insisted on the more frequent maintenance of investment and scientific forums and the establishment of chambers of commerce of China and the CEEC, which can be joined by the Member States voluntarily. The summit announced the establishment of several new forums in the field of science and education, such as China-CEEC high-level symposium of think tanks, China-CEEC Young Political Leaders' Forum, the Education Policy Dialogue, etc. Finally, the Summit participants agreed on the need to establish coordination centres in different fields of cooperation.

Third Belgrade Summit in 2014

At the third Summit between China and the CEEC held in Belgrade (Serbia) on 16 December 2014, the Heads of Government announced the "Belgrade Guidelines for Cooperation".³⁰ According to the Guidelines, the parties will expand trade, investment and economic cooperation and deepen cooperation in science, technology, innovation, environmental protection, and cultural exchange.³¹ The Guidelines invites parties to fully utilize 10 billion US\$ in special loans and other financing tools provided by China for the promotion of trade and economic cooperation. At the same time, the formation of a new Chinese fund that would

²⁹ "The Bucharest Guidelines for Cooperation between China and Central and Eastern European Countries", Secretariat for Cooperation between China and Central and Eastern European Countries, 29 November 2013. http://www.china-ceec.org/eng/zdogjhz_1/t1410594.htm, 12/01/2020.

³⁰ "The Belgrade Guidelines for Cooperation between China and Central and Eastern European Countries", Secretariat for Cooperation between China and Central and Eastern European Countries, 26 January 2015, http://www.china-ceec.org/eng/zdogjhz_1/t1410596.htm, 12/02/2020.

³¹ "China Boosts Investment in Central and Eastern Europe", *EurActiv*, <http://www.euractiv.com/sections/europes-east/china-boosts-investment-central-and-eastern-europe-310997>, 02/02/2020; "China, CEE Countries Outline Blueprint for Further Economic Cooperation", *Xinhua*, 17 December 2014; Duško Dimitrijević, Nikola Jokanović, "Chinese Investment in Serbia-joint Pledge for the Future of the New Silk Road", in: Huang Ping, Liu Zuokui (eds), *China-CEEC Cooperation and the Belt and Road Initiative*, Institute of European Studies Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, Beijing, 2017, pp. 64-85; "The importance of Chinese investments in the One Belt, One Road Initiative", in: Duško Dimitrijević, Huang Ping (eds), *Initiatives of the New Silk Road - Achievements and Challenges*, Institute of International Politics and Economics, Belgrade 2017, pp. 360-390.

finance business projects with the CEEC was announced. In this regard, an emphasis was put on the project related to the modernization of the Belgrade-Budapest line, considered to be of key importance for further linking with the routes towards Macedonia and Greece and the inclusion in the *China-Europe Land-Sea Express Line*.³² The significant success of the Belgrade Summit is further institutionalization of the mechanism “16+1” that has been reflected in encouraging the establishment of the Executive Office of the Business Council in Warsaw, the Secretariat of the Contact Mechanism for Investment Promotion Agencies in Beijing and Warsaw, the Consortium for Promotion of Agricultural Cooperation in Sofia, the Tourism Promotion Agency in Budapest, the Association on Transport and Infrastructure Cooperation in Belgrade and Think Tanks Exchange and Cooperation Centre.

The fourth Suzhou Summit in 2015

At the fourth Summit held in Suzhou (China) on 24 November 2015, the CEEC and China expressed their readiness for “a new starting point, new fields and a new vision” in the development of their mutual cooperation.³³ They stated their readiness to formulate the Medium-Term Agenda for Cooperation with the aims to improve the “16+1” cooperation mechanism by setting out directions and priorities from 2015 to 2020. Calling for efforts to realize the shared goal of building a new type of open inclusive and “win-win” partnership, China gave a proposal for six priority areas of cooperation that should include the roadmap for fostering mutual cooperation. In this regard, the Summit participants supported the Chinese Initiative for the *Adriatic-Baltic-Black Sea Seaport Cooperation* and the implementation of the earlier planned project for the construction of the *China-Europe Land-Sea Express Line*. Also, the Summit participants supported the existing synergy in national development strategies and the establishment of new models of cooperation.³⁴ Chinese proposal resulted in the signing of a series of important

³² Duško Dimitrijević, “New Silk Road: Achievements & Prospects Of Serbia-China Economic Cooperation”, *Executive Intelligence Review*, vol. 45, no. 28, 2018, pp. 34-38; “Capacities for Development Serbia’s Cooperation with China”, *Working Paper*, China-CEE Institute, Chinese Academy of Social Science, Budapest, no. 4, 2017, pp. 1-14; Wendy Zeldin, “China: New Guidelines for Cooperation Signed with Central and Eastern European Countries”, *Global Legal Monitor*, 29 December 2014, http://www.loc.gov/lawweb/servlet/lloc_news?disp3_l205404250_text,03/02/2020.

³³ Zhang Lirong, “The “Sixteen plus One” Cooperation will take China-EU relations to a New level”, *EU Observer*, 25 October 2015, Brussels, <https://euobserver.com/stakeholders/131270>, 13/02/2020.

³⁴ Ivona Lađevac, Branislav Đorđević, “Possibilities for promoting interconnectivity between China and Central and Eastern European countries”, *Review of International Affairs*, vol. LXVII, no. 1161, 2016, p. 75.

agreements, including the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on the Improvement of the Initiatives of the “New Silk Road”. Also, the parties adopted the “Suzhou Guidelines” in which the CEEC and China gave attention to further deepening of cooperation within the “16+1” mechanism.³⁵ At the same time, they identified the importance of relations with the EU, since the EU-China Connectivity Platform also reaffirmed the importance of cooperation within the *Belt and Road Initiative*. Hence, it should not be surprising that the documents highlight the link between the *Belt and Road Initiative* and national development strategies. The Medium-term Agenda for Cooperation therefore anticipated, *inter alia*, the EU-China Comprehensive Strategic Partnership and EU-China Agenda 2020 as guidelines for the future development of their mutual relations.³⁶

Fifth Riga Summit in 2016

At the fifth Summit held in Riga (Latvia) on 5 November 2016, the Heads of Government of CEEC and China adopted the “Riga Guidelines”.³⁷ The focus of the Guidelines was on “connectivity, innovation, inclusiveness and common development”. In that way, the cooperation under the format “16+1” should foster closer cooperation in the new different fields. Cooperation should be developed in synergy between the “16+1” and the EU-China Comprehensive Strategic Partnership, including the EU-China Connectivity Platform. Recognizing the facilitating role of the Medium-Term Agenda, participants also supported the further coordination and institutionalization of the “16 + 1” mechanism by setting up a Secretariat on Logistics Cooperation with the Virtual Information Platform in Riga. At the Summit, it was decided that Latvia would be the coordinator for organizing the first meeting of China-CEEC Transport Ministers in 2017 in Riga.³⁸ Further institutionalization of mutual cooperation was expressed through the establishment

³⁵ “The Suzhou Guidelines for Cooperation between China and Central and Eastern European Countries”, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China, 24 November 2015, at: http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/t1318039.shtml, 21/04/2019.

³⁶ Dragan Pavličević, “China’s New Silk Road Takes Shape in Central and Eastern Europe”, *China Brief*, vol. XV, issue 1, 2015, p. 12.

³⁷ “The Riga Guidelines for Cooperation between China and Central and Eastern European Countries”, The State Council of the People’s Republic of China, 6 November 2016, http://english.gov.cn/news/international_exchanges/2016/11/06/content_281475484363051.htm, 09/09/2019.

³⁸ “Riga Declaration on Closer Cooperation in Logistics will foster integrated transport corridors development between Europe and China”, <http://www.ceec-china-logistics.org/en/events/riga-declaration-on-closer-cooperation-in-logistics-will-foster-integrated-transport-corridors-development-between-europe-and-china/01/02/2020>.

of the Centre for Dialogue and Cooperation on Energy Projects in Romania, the Technology Transfer Centre in Slovakia, the Coordination Mechanism on Forestry Cooperation in Slovenia and the Secretariat for Maritime Issues in Poland, which should be the main institutional support in the realization of the previously promoted Initiative of the *Adriatic-Baltic-Black Sea Seaport Cooperation*.³⁹ The Summit also gave a significant impetus to the various forms of cooperation that should take place under the auspices of institutional entities and forums such as the Inter-Bank Association, the Association of Provincial Governors, the Higher Education Institutes Consortium, the Culture Cooperation Forum, and the Association on the Promotion of Health Cooperation. In that sense, the participants of the Summit expressed their readiness to make concerted efforts to develop synergies between the *Belt and Road Initiative* and the relevant EU Initiatives such as the Trans-European Networks (TEN-T). Therefore, it is not surprising that the participants in the Summit provided adequate financial support for the realization of the planned goals by promoting a new China-CEEC Investment Cooperation Fund.

The sixth Summit in Budapest in 2017

The sixth Summit of the Heads of Government of CEEC and China was held in Budapest (Hungary) on 27th November 2017. The Summit adopted the “Budapest Co-operation Guidelines”, which insist on further deepening economic, trade and financial co-operation in order to achieve “win-win” development.⁴⁰ The document underlined the importance of the established cooperation mechanism of the “16+1” and increasing readiness of the CEEC to continue to cooperate within the *Belt and Road Initiative* through mutual consultations within the mechanism. In this regard, the Guidelines emphasized the future cooperation within the mechanism should not serve as a geopolitical instrument, but rather as an incubator for transregional cooperation, which would improve mutual relations and foster multilateralism and the openness of a global economy respecting international legal standards and the goals of the UN Charter.⁴¹ This has led to

³⁹ “Riga Declaration”, The meeting of Heads of Government of Central and Eastern European countries and China, Ministry of foreign affairs of the Republic of Latvia, http://www.china-ceec.org/eng/zyxw_4/t1414325.htm, 03/09/2019.

⁴⁰ “The Budapest Guidelines for Cooperation between China and Central and Eastern European Countries”, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China, 28 November 2017, at: https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjdt_665385/2649_665393/t1514534.shtml, 01/04/2019.

⁴¹ “Li Keqiang Attends Sixth Summit of Heads of Government of China and Central and Eastern European Countries”, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of China, http://www.china-ceec.org/eng/ldrhw_1/2016lj_1/tpxw/t1518685.htm, 11/12/2019.

demands for a faster interconnection of land, sea and air, and the application of new business potential to the “16 + 1” framework and the Initiative “Made in China 2025”. Support was also given to further institutionalize the activities of the “16 + 1” mechanism through the formation of new bodies, associations and forums in various fields (for example, in the area of finance, the establishment of the Silk Road Fund, the China-EU Co-Investment Fund, the Secretariat and the Coordination Centre of the Inter-Bank Association; in the field of trade, the establishment of the Economic and Trade Officials Exchange Mechanism, the Trade Facilitation National Inspection Examination Area and the “16+1” e-Commerce Logistics Hub; in the field of aviation, the CEEC-China Civil Aviation; in the field of higher education and science, the establishment of the Secretariat of the Higher Education Institutions Consortium, the Joint Laboratory between CEECs and China for research, innovation and technology; in the field of culture, health and people-to-people exchange the establishment of the Coordination Centre for Cultural Cooperation, the Human Resources for Health Cooperation Network, the Health Policy Research Network, the Association of Publishing Houses, the Youth Development Centre and the Sports Cooperation Mechanism, etc).

Seventh Sofia Summit in 2018

The seventh annual Summit of the Heads of Government of CEEC and China took place in Sofia (Bulgaria) on 6 and 7 July 2018. The Summit welcomed the participation of third country observers and institutions and their potential willingness to engage in the cooperation mechanism based on prior consultations and consensus.⁴² The Summit also reaffirmed its adherence to the UN Charter, as well as the principles of mutual respect, mutually beneficial cooperation and building an open world economy. Facing the challenges of the growing deficit in mutual trade relations, the participants stressed the need for a more balanced economic partnership and the fulfilment of previously undertaken commitments.⁴³ This approach was also confirmed by the “Sofia Guidelines on Cooperation”, which

⁴² Justyna Szczudlik-Tatar, “Prospects for CEE-China Relations after the Sofia Summit”, *Bulletin of the Polish Institute of International Affairs*, no. 91, 2019, p. 1162, <http://www.pism.pl/publications/bulletin/no-91-1162,01/02/2020>.

⁴³ The six-year history of relations between China and the CEEC consists of growing trade exchange in favor of China in combination with relatively small Chinese investments in the CEEC (approximately \$ 10 billion), and negligible investments of the CEEC in China (about \$ 1.4 billion). See: Bartosz Kowalski, “What’s Next for the China-CEE 16+1 Platform?”, *The Diplomat*, <https://thediplomat.com/2018/07/whats-next-for-the-china-cee-161-platform/>, 02/01/2020.

expressed the intention of the parties to fulfil the commitments from the Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development, within the applicable norms of international and internal law, and in line with EU standards and policies vis-à-vis the CEEC countries that are also members of this organisation. The Guidelines confirmed again the importance of the EU-China Comprehensive Strategic Partnership of peace, growth, reform and civilization and the EU-China Agenda 2020, including their active participation in the pilot projects in the framework of the EU-China Connectivity Platform, the Investment Plan for Europe, the extended Trans-European Network (TEN-T) and the Agreement on Investment between the EU and China. By supporting trade cooperation, investment and connectivity, the representatives of the participating countries supported the further development of balanced economic cooperation through the respect of the WTO rules, based on principles of the level-playing field and equal opportunities. They also supported progress in regional projects and initiatives (first of all, in building the Belgrade-Budapest railway and expanding cooperation within the *Three Seas Initiative*). Finally, they supported progress in the area of investment in infrastructure projects, transport and civil aviation, as well as progress in public procurement and enhanced cooperation and customs clearance facilitation.⁴⁴

Eighth Summit in Dubrovnik in 2019

The eighth Summit of the Heads of Government of CEEC and China was held in Dubrovnik (Croatia) on 12 April 2019. The Summit welcomed the accession of Greece as a full participant in the “16 + 1” cooperation mechanism (since then in the so-called “17 + 1” cooperation mechanism).⁴⁵ The Summit adopted the Dubrovnik guidelines for cooperation between China and the CEEC, reaffirming their commitment to nurturing sustainable global economic development and a multilateral trade system based on WTO rules.⁴⁶ The Guidelines express a firm commitment to the goals of economic globalization outlined in strategically important documents such as the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the

⁴⁴ “The Sofia Guidelines for Cooperation between China and Central and Eastern European Countries”, Xinhua, http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2018-07/16/c_137328408.htm, 22/02/2019.

⁴⁵ Emilian Kavalski, “China’s ‘16+1’ is dead? Long Live the ‘17+1’”, *The Diplomat*, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/201904/13/WS5cb15f54a3104842260b5ff3_1.html, 16/08/2019. <https://the-diplomat.com/2019/03/chinas-161-is-dead-long-live-the-171/>

⁴⁶ “The Dubrovnik Guidelines for Cooperation between China and Central and Eastern European Countries”, *China Daily*, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/201904/13/WS5cb15f54a3104842260b5ff3_1.html, 12/12/2019.

Paris Agreement, the EU-China Comprehensive Strategic Partnership of peace, growth, reform and civilization and EU-China Strategic Agenda 2020 for Cooperation. As in the previous Guidelines, the Dubrovnik Guidelines emphasize the need to establish effective cooperation mechanisms in the area of connectivity first (starting from the spirit of the *Belt and Road Initiative* and the EU Strategy on Connecting Europe and Asia, and in compliance with international and European standards). Cooperation in this regard should be developed through the promotion of the digital economy, efficient transport connectivity and smart, sustainable, secure and secure mobility. Achieving these goals will require that all stakeholders comply with the objectives announced in the Investment Plan for Europe, the Trans-European Transport Networks (TEN-T), and the EU-China Connectivity Platform. In this area, the Guidelines further emphasize that participants should promote railway and infrastructure investment projects, participate in fostering the development of joint administrative cooperation in customs matters, and in achieving the EU-China Strategic Framework for Customs Cooperation. They welcome important progress made by China, Serbia and Hungary on the Belgrade-Budapest railway project and its possible extensions to the Adriatic Sea, the Black Sea, and the Baltic Sea (*Three Seas Initiative*). They also support moving forward practical cooperation in the development of the *China–Europe Land-Sea Express Line*.⁴⁷ The Dubrovnik Guidelines also encourage the further work of existing institutional structures of “16+1” cooperation between China and the CEEC and recommend the establishment of brand-new ones (for example, the Customs Information Centre in Hungary, the Youth Development Centre in Albania, the Coordination Mechanism for Sports in CEECs, the Information and Communication Technology Coordination Mechanism in Croatia, the Energy Cooperation Dialogue, the Smart City Coordination Centre in Romania, the Block chain Centre of Excellence under the leadership of Slovakia, the Creative Hub in Montenegro, etc.).

General Conclusions

The idea of the “16+1” cooperation between the CEEC and China was initially at the level of the transregional platform on cooperation between equal participating States. This idea was subsequently, systematically and successively transformed into one, in the international relations a little-known institutional

⁴⁷ Senada Šelo Šabić, “China in Southeast Europe: Detecting the Trend”, in: Chen Xin, He Zhigao (eds), *16+1 Cooperation and China-EU Relationship*, China-CEE Institute, Budapest, 2018, p. 214.

mechanism for multilateral and bilateral cooperation and policy coordination. This mechanism was shaped by many structural dimensions and operational layers manifested through various institutional actions at the vertical and horizontal level. Thus, it is noticeable the mechanism serves to achieve connectivity and coordination between China and the CEEC through the engagement of heads of government through the holding of annual summits dedicated to enhancing mutual cooperation. These multi-level exchanges include also top-down political contacts and meetings among ministers and ministries officials and local government officials. When analyzing all effects of all these annual summits, it can be concluded that the “16+1” mechanism arises from common political will and mutual demand for closer cooperation in different social fields. The cooperation covers various areas ranging from finance, trade, transportation, agriculture, energy and telecommunication to scientific, technological and cultural cooperation. It covers different multi-track means of policy coordination and people-to-people exchanges. In this regard, state authorities have developed multi-fields activities which include, *inter alia*, different kinds of conferences, forums, symposiums, exhibitions and dialogues (for example, the high-level conference on transport, logistics and trade routes connecting Asia with Europe, the Customs Cooperation Forum, the Cultural Cooperation Forum, the high-level symposium of think tanks, the Young Political Leaders’ Forum, the Education Policy Dialogue, etc.).⁴⁸ Generally elaborating, China and the CEEC have simultaneously established connectivity using existing administrative capacity or by forming new administrative and coordinating bodies as was the case with the establishment of the Secretariat which was officially inaugurated in September 2012 in Beijing, in the presence of the National Coordinators of all 16 European countries and China.⁴⁹ The Secretariat operates under the auspices of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of China and its competence includes the coordination of activities between China and the CEEC, which, among other things include preparing the summit of leaders, preparing economic and trade forums and other gatherings, and the implementation of adopted decisions, directives and guidelines. The participants of the “16 + 1” mechanism encourage the Secretariat to conduct cooperation consultations in China and the CEECs through bilateral and multilateral activities. To further institutionalize the

⁴⁸ Long Jing, “Cooperation between China and CEE countries: features, significance and prospect”, *Diplomacy Journal*, January 2015, <http://diplomacy.bg/archives/1438?lang=en>, 25/04/2016.

⁴⁹ National coordinators are appointed by the CEEC to be responsible for coordination with the Secretariat and to jointly promote China and CEEC cooperation. Interconnection between the national coordinators takes place at the annual meetings organized by the participating states of the mechanism.

mechanism of cooperation between China and the CEEC, there has been some interregional and sectoral cooperation. In this respect, already existing institutional capacities have been used at various levels ranging from steering and management committees to professional associations such as chambers of commerce, inter-bank association, higher education institutes consortium, and association on the promotion of health cooperation. This approach has led to the establishment of numerous multilateral executive and coordinated bodies, such as the Executive Office of the Business Council in Warsaw, the Secretariat of the Contact Mechanism for China–CEEC Investment Promotion Agencies in Beijing and Warsaw, the Consortium for Promotion of Agricultural Cooperation in Sofia, the Tourism Promotion Agency in Budapest, the Association on Transport and Infrastructure Cooperation in Belgrade, the Secretariat on Logistics Cooperation with the Virtual Information Platform in Riga, the Centre for Dialogue and Cooperation on Energy Projects in Romania, the Technology Transfer Centre in Slovakia, the Coordination Mechanism on Forestry Cooperation in Slovenia, the Secretariat for Maritime Issues in Poland, the Think Tanks Exchange and Cooperation Centre, etc. In certain very important sectoral areas of cooperation such as financial cooperation, the “16+1” mechanism has established the Silk Road Fund, the China-EU Co-Investment Fund, the Secretariat, and the Coordination Centre of the Inter-Bank Association. In the field of trade, the establishment of the Economic and Trade Officials Exchange Mechanism, the Trade Facilitation National Inspection Examination Area and the 16+1 e-Commerce Logistics Hub has been also supported. In the area of higher education and science, a proposal was made to establish the Secretariat of the Higher Education Institutions Consortium, the Joint Laboratory between CEECs and China for research, innovation and technology and the Coordination Centre for Cultural Cooperation. Also, in the field of culture, health and people-to-people exchange, the “16+1” mechanism supported the establishment of the Coordination Centre for Cultural Cooperation, the Human Resources for Health Cooperation Network, the Health Policy Research Network, the Public Health Cooperation Network, the Association of Publishing Houses, the Youth Development Centre in the CEECs and the Sports Cooperation Mechanism, etc.

A new approach to the “16+1” cooperation marked the new direction of China’s foreign policy toward the CEEC and its geo-economic influence in this European region. At the same time, this was a stepping stone for the CEEC itself, as this mechanism could be linked not only to China but also to other important countries of the world, primarily those involved in the *Belt and Road Initiative*, which significantly influenced the optimization of their foreign policy position. Hence, the transformation of the idea of transregional cooperation into the institutional mechanism of cooperation “16+1”, intended primarily for the implementation of

the *Belt and Road Initiative* within the frameworks of the development strategy of the “New Silk Road”, represents one inventive endeavour of China and the CEEC in creating the multilateralism in international relations. In this regard, although the “16+1” mechanism of cooperation between the CEEC and China is in some way a reminiscence of international organizations, this is not because it represents a completely new form of international cooperation resulting from one, primarily a Chinese political vision formulated through the *Belt and Road Initiative* that gives significant emphasis to international connectivity, sustainable development, harmonization and coordination of public policies and global economic governance. In the future period, the “16+1” (today “17+1”) mechanism may serve as a catalyst which would bring some new approaches to development and strategic partnership in various productive spheres between China and the CEEC. The mechanism framework could help in mutual understanding and then to facilitate business contacts, build social networks, and make business decisions easier. Thus, the mechanism is in line with China’s goal of being a strategic partner with the EU, while its relationship with countries in Central and Eastern Europe can manifest itself as a positive driving force within the relationship between China and the EU. China believes that, by enhancing the overall level of its relations with the CEEC, it will be in a position to promote a more stable and healthy China-Europe relationship as well. Such an approach presupposes harmonization with the CEEC national development strategies, respecting their internal legal framework and then also respecting the competences, rules and standards of the EU as well as the obligations accepted in political and legal documents concluded with the EU such as the China-European Comprehensive Strategic Partnership, the China-EU 2020 Strategic Agenda for Cooperation, the EU-China Connectivity Platform, the Investment Plan for Europe and the Agreement on Investment between the EU and China.⁵⁰ The lack of any of these alignments can lead to justifiable international concerns, making it difficult to meet the set goals from the stated China-EU program documents and to the suspicion of the sustainability of the achieved results of cooperation within the mechanism. Also, it is possible that lack of mutual synchronization on one of the mentioned grounds can lead to a division between the EU member states that are also participants in the mechanism of cooperation with other EU member states. This possible divergence between the EU member states has become indicative with the introduction of the most recent EU legal framework establishing a screening mechanism for FDI in areas of vital interest for

⁵⁰ Dragan Pavličević, “China’s New Silk Road Takes Shape in Central and Eastern Europe”, *China Brief*, vol. XV, issue 1, 2015, p. 12; “The Sofia Guidelines for Cooperation between China and Central and Eastern European Countries”, op. cit.

the EU which in many cases covers individual economic and market interests of the member states.⁵¹ For coordinated relations between China and the EU, the problem may also be the change in the previous position of the candidate countries for EU accession in terms of full harmonization of domestic legislation with EU legislation, which has recently become very indicative, and which can additionally burden the harmonious and comprehensive development of Sino-European relations.⁵² On the other hand, the happy circumstance for development of mutual relations is the existence of institutional synergy that can lead to the enhancement of cooperation and strategic partnerships within the China-EU-CEEC triangle as was noted after the recent meetings of the Chinese President Xi Jinping with the leaders of Italy and France at the annual Summit in Dubrovnik.⁵³

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⁵¹ “Regulation (EU) 2019/452 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 19 March 2019 establishing a framework for the screening of foreign direct investments into the Union”, *Official Journal* L 79, 21 March 2019; Liu Zuokui, “Europe’s Protectionist Position on the Belt and Road Initiative and Its Influence”, *China International Studies*, September/October 2018, pp. 145-165.

⁵² Marcin Przychodniak, “The “EU effect”: How European Union influences state’s involvement in the “16+1” China-Central and Eastern European Countries (China-CEEC) Initiative”, *Working Paper*, China-CEE Institute, Budapest, no. 16, 2018, p. 4.

⁵³ Shannon Tiezzi, “Xi Jinping in Europe: A Tale of 2 Countries”, *The Diplomat*, <https://thediplomat.com/2019/03/xi-jinping-in-europe-a-tale-of-2-countries/>, 12/12/2019; Liu Zuokui, *Europe and the ‘Belt and Road’ Initiative: Responses and Risks*, Chinese Social Science Press, Beijing, 2016, pp. 88, etc; Gu, Hongfei, *Reconstructing China-EU Relations: Institutional Dilemma of “16+1” Cooperation Mechanism*, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, 2018, pp. 1-8; Dragan Pavličević, “A Power Shift Underway in Europe? China’s Relationship with Central and Eastern Europe Under the Belt and Road Initiative”, in: Li Xing (ed.), *Mapping China’s ‘One Belt One Road’ Initiative*, International Political Economy Series, Palgrave Macmillan, Cham, 2019, pp. 268, etc.

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Duško DIMITRIJEVIĆ, Nikola JOKANOVIĆ

**MEHANIZAM SARADNJE CIE-KINA I INICIJATIVA POJASA I PUTA:
OD IDEJE DO INSTITUCIONALIZACIJE – ŠEST GODINA KASNIJE**

Apstrakt: U radu se analizira proces institucionalizacije međuvladine saradnje i koordinacije državnih politika kroz mehanizam saradnje zemalja Centralne i Istočne Evrope (CIE) i Kine poznatiji u javnosti kao "16+1" (odnosno, kao "17+1" počev od 2019. godine). Kroz eklektičku sliku razvoja savremenih međunarodnih odnosa, autori na metodološki pristupačan način ukazuju da ovaj mehanizam saradnje predstavlja značajan podsticaj za razvoj međunarodnih odnosa. S obzirom da je Kina preuzela dominantnu ulogu u redefinisaju „Globalnog sistema upravljanja“ čiji su ciljevi uravnotežen i održiv međunarodni razvoj, za njihovo ostvarenje Kina je utvrdila određene ideološke okvire koji su prisutni u njenoj spoljnoj politici kroz *Inicijativu pojasa i puta*. Kroz ovu Inicijativu, Kina nastoji postići šire ciljeve strategije razvoja *Novog puta svile* koja ne samo da određuje pravce unutrašnjeg razvoja Kine, već daje smernice za njenu stratešku saradnju sa susjednim zemljama kao i sa zemljama na drugim kontinentima. Sledstveno, i sam mehanizam "16+1" (danas "17+1"), na taj način dobija važnu ulogu u ojačavanju kineske spoljnopolitičke pozicije i to, ne samo u odnosu na CIE, već i u odnosu na ostale evropske zemlje, uključujući i EU u celini.

Ključne reči: Mehanizam saradnje „16 + 1“, Inicijativa pojasa i puta, razvojna strategija Novog puta svile, Kina, CEEC.