

# WORKING PAPER

## **Green and Multipolar Logistics: The Impact of the Bri in the Balkans and the Future of Sino-European Cooperation**

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# **Green and Multipolar Logistics: The Impact of the Bri in the Balkans and the Future of Sino-European Cooperation**

Vincenzo Maria Di Mino, Marco Siragusa<sup>1</sup>

## **Abstract**

*Since its origin, the European project was based on the movement of goods, capital and people. In this sense, the Union has seen the proliferation of logistical corridors, high-speed transport projects, hubs and checkpoints to better control and regulate movement flows. Against a backdrop of continuing austerity, China's 'Silk and Belt Road Initiative', which crosses South-Eastern Europe, not only constitutes an enormous opportunity for investment and structural economic renovation but can also be interpreted as a project for rethinking a new Sino-European multipolarity under the banner of cooperation and a new ecological sustainability of economic and social development.*

*The project can be analyzed along two axes. The first analyses logistical and infrastructural operations from an ecological point of view, measuring their impact on the surrounding environment and trying to rethink them on the basis of broader participation in decision-making processes that can bring out collective needs.*

*The second rethinks the Silk Road project as part of a broader integration process, aimed at eliminating the geographical and social gap between the different European macro-areas. In this sense, as well, the Chinese project in the European space can act as a building block for a new multipolarity. The subject of the following proposal is the analysis of the possibilities opened up by Chinese infrastructure and urbanization projects from the points listed above.*

## **Introduction**

The acceleration of the processes of economic globalization over the last thirty years has profoundly changed the previous structures of the balance of power at the global level. In a first phase, Western countries (the United States in primis) have built their hegemony through the mantras of neoliberal economic philosophy, including the centrality of markets and financial

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exchanges regulated by international organizations. Following the war events that occurred between 2001 and 2003, the United States centralized in their hands the reins of global politics, with the allies reduced to pure satellites, in a symbiosis between the military machine and the economic-financial one. In this sense, we can use the Marxian metaphor of '18 Brumaire' in the case of G. Bush', as done by Negri and Hardt (2004), to highlight the seriousness of the choices made by the U.S. President George W. Bush aimed at extorting a global consensus through the war and maneuvers exchange rates. This apogee, however, brought out the first creaks and tares in global power systems and was a powerful driver for the development of alternative visions of the political and economic order.

Authors such as A. Gunder Frank and G. Arrighi thematized the shift to the East of the reins of governance and the overturning of the lasting relationships between center and periphery of the world-system. Frank, in 'ReOrient' (1998), has placed at the center of his analysis precisely the crisis of the Eurocentric vision of power relations and the gradual shift of economic flows to emerging countries, especially those in Southeast Asia. Building on these assumptions, Arrighi's important study 'Adam Smith in Beijing' (2007) focuses on the global dimensions of Chinese success and the genealogy of it. For the Italian sociologist, there are two peculiar characteristics that distinguish China's impetuous growth, both economically and in terms of global political prominence: the historical imperial heritage of continental and intercontinental exchanges and the planning based on 'harmonious development' borrowed from anthropological-cultural habitus and revolutionary thought, especially from the developments of Maoism and the socialist experience. China's assertion within the collapse of Atlantic unilateralism thus marks a paradigm shift in international relations, as it tries to replace inter-state competition with cooperation. In this sense, the founding pillar of the 'Beijing Consensus' is independence, namely the freedom of choice within a multipolar order, based on the 'localization' of economic needs and interests and the construction of global spaces of economic interdependence and mutual consensus between states. As can be clearly seen, the Chinese one is an attempt at 'razionalization of capitalism' or, to put it better, a project of social transformation that 'uses' the mechanisms of capitalism to correct its distortions, implement collective well-being and strengthen an alternative vision of global relations.

The most striking example of the Chinese project of 'market socialism' is the centrality it devotes to the issue of infrastructure, especially logistics. As critical analyses of capitalism have pointed out, logistics represent a vital and preferential part of the processes of value accumulation and distribution, both in terms of labour-power and the environment (Mezzadra,

Neilson, 2019), capable of remapping value chains and power relations between state entities and trans-national agents.

In this sense, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) represents the fundamental element of the global dimension of the Chinese project, because it combines economic processes and diplomatic relations within a new cartography of geopolitical relations. In Xi Jinping's September 2013 launch speech, this infrastructure project aims to implement a new page of economic development, based on the synergy between Chinese leadership and national interests, on intensifying the movement of people, goods and skills, and on facilitating economic and financial exchanges.

On the basis of these schematically illustrated points, other authors have stressed the central role of the BRI in a new global peace strategy, in providing a more solid foundation for multilateral cooperation and in pursuing sustainable development strategies, both in the mother country and in partner countries.

### **A new multipolarity: EU-China convergence on the environment**

A clearer and more programmatic articulation of this project can be seen by reading the 14th Five-Year Plan 2021-2025 approved by the Chinese National People's Congress in March 2021. The document highlights some of the key points of China's strategy: economic development with progressive centrality assigned to the area of the digital economy; new forms of urbanism focused on connectivity and the presence of integrative infrastructures, capable of creating networks between individual urban spaces; a renewed interest in the environment, concretely manifested in the extension of processes and technologies to make industrial production sustainable. Digitalization, covered in part 5 of the document, has a fundamental role in building forms of coordination and cooperation, both in the processing and circulation of data and in strengthening data-learning processes geared to the new technological structures of human dynamics. 'Smart' is a term that recurs several times in this section, especially in the guidelines for 'smart cities' and the production of 'smart energy'. The progressive shift in the direction of production dynamics towards the digital is evident. All these efforts, indeed, are aimed at the production and rationalization of urban space, in all its meanings, transforming it into a physical and virtual connective plane that tends to connect the different networks operating within it, as in the city's case of Xiong'an an example of the 'strategy for a new millennium'.

At the same time, one can perceive the importance given to ecological dynamics and therefore to the production of spaces and 'key ecological zones' capable of linking the search for collective well-being - the term used in the plan is 'prosperity' - sustainability and environmental protection. This proposal, in fact, is articulated through three guidelines: conservation, protection and 'nature restoration', an environmental risk prevention project that sees the active participation of enterprises, social capital and state governance. What emerges is a form of 'scale-management' distributed over all levels of the relationship between the production system and the environment, in which the achievement of 'carbon neutrality' by 2060 is modulated through the design of eco-sustainable infrastructures in order to prevent risks arising from environmental catastrophes. Active prevention and intensive implementation of the 'recycling system' highlight how ecological planning is a fundamental element of Chinese strategies on a systemic level, both internally, with the drastic reduction of polluting emissions, and internationally with the progressive abandonment of fossil fuel supply chains that have also structured the energy and political dependence of peripheral economies. Clearly, the strategic battleground is renewable energy, and geo-strategies to intercept and govern green value chains.

An 'operational synthesis' of the points of the programming document can be found in Article XLI of the Five Years Plan, dedicated to the BRI. The initiative, in fact, is defined as a 'linkage of development strategies', whose aim is to connect different dimensions - land, sea, sky and cyber - and is *de facto* the vector of an unprecedented transformation of space, both physical and virtual, logistics (human and commercial) and relations between actors in the global scenario. From a political point of view, the BRI project can be interpreted as a massive platform, as a vast set of infrastructural devices able to organize the territorialization processes of physical works and to affect extraterritorial political articulations: interconnectivity and interoperability, in fact, are the words that encapsulate the overall structure and the various functionalities and contribute to restoring its strategic horizon.

Fundamentally, this ten-year initiative has the ambitious goal of being a means of governing international spatial and political discontinuities, through the opening of new political and commercial channels and the dissemination of hubs, ports and pipelines. The diverse set of machines and devices, therefore, tends to connect in a molecular, capillary and diffuse sense a large part of the globe, trying to put technical innovation at the service of cooperation. In this sense, the initiative catalyzes and represents the socio-political priorities of the Chinese leadership and its global aspirations.

Should be not a surprise, then, the promotion of initiatives concerning the 'Health Silk Road', the construction of medical infrastructure to prevent infectious diseases which played a central role in the fight against the pandemic, and the 'Green Silk Road'. This latter initiative is placed in continuity with the logistics project, but within the framework of sustainability and active participation in climate change governance and, above all, highlights the importance of ecological and environmental issues in shaping Chinese policies and proposals in the international arena.

In the 12th Five-Year Plan of 2012, in fact, the environmental issue takes on a fundamental strategic role in defining the overall policy line; In the document, the term 'green development' is used for the first time and linked to an eco-friendly social vision, based on circular exchange processes, climate adaptation of society and prevention. The 18th CCP Congress in the same year set as a further target the reduction of carbon emissions and pursuing environmental protection policies within the broader framework of an 'ecological civilization', of the concentric link between economic development and improved quality of life. Along these lines, the 'National Green Development Fund' was launched in July 2020, with the precise aim of supporting the development of civilization and the green economy through the market economy. Linearly, the strategic horizon of 'green development' is also extended to international projects, BRI in primis.

Already at the 2017 BRI summit, the issue of 'green engagement', namely the active engagement to combat eco-climatic disasters, was on the agenda while the 2019 summit saw the creation of the BRICG (Belt Road Initiative Coalition Green). With this initiative, the Green BRI project becomes the flagship of the whole economic operation and assumes an increasingly important dimension in the mediation and interlocution between the different state, transnational and private actors. In 2019 was released the Green Investment Principle (GRI), a set of ethical principles for promoting sustainability-driven investments through understanding social and environmental risk, sharing information, and using 'green finance'. The culmination of this initiative was the founding in 2020 of the BRI Green Institute in Beijing, a research center that promotes and coordinates actions aimed at implementing environmental sustainability, which also draws on the presence of international experts.

The presence of the BRI on European territory poses different questions, starting from the strategic centrality that cooperation on ecological issues can have. In 2020, faced with growing environmental disasters and social movements calling for a policy shift in green

priorities, the EU gave the green light to launch the European Green Deal as a 'new growth strategy', a plan that aims to achieve climate neutrality by 2050 through the reduction of harmful gas emissions, the differentiation of forms of production and the transition to an environmentally sustainable social model. The convergence of both perspectives, the Chinese and the European, results from current contingencies and issues and it is also the result of a dialogue that began in 1998, with the formalization of the 'long-term' partnership, continued in 2004 with the partnership on 'Peace, Growth, Reform and Civilization' and arrived in September 2020 to the 'Green Partnership', established in the framework of multilateral cooperation on sustainability issues proposed by the 2030 Agenda.

The main result of this 20-year dialogue was reached in December 2020 with the 'Comprehensive Agreement on Investment', which complements the previous bilateral agreements and concerns the facilitation of economic exchanges and the promotion of investments in the field of ecological sustainability. The fourth section of the agreement, in fact, is dedicated to this issue, both to share responsibilities and to bring health, labor and rights measures into line with international standards. What emerges is the close link, which both partners in question highlight, between development and sustainability, placing the ecological issue as the political *prius* of cooperation and dialogue on these issues. In addition, on February 2, 2021, the 'High-Level Environment and Climate dialogue' between Chinese Vice Premier Han Zheng and European Commission Vice President Frantz Timmerman reinforced the common intentions of both partners, namely the pursuit of environmental balance and sustainability through collaboration and the international legal mechanism of Common But Differentiated Responsibilities (CBDR) established by the 2015 Paris Agreement, or the allocation of environmental responsibilities to individual states.

This device, indeed, can be mitigated by pursuing common goals, effective cooperation and socialization of the benefits gained. Both Article LXII of the current Five-Year Plan and the 2030 Agenda pursue the same goals, sustainability and multilateralism, which refer to the empowerment of actors in the international political arena. Despite the existing frictions, the physical presence of the BRI infrastructure within the European space and the presence of many important European financial actors in the GBRI project - such as Deutsche Bank and BNP Paribas - can and should strengthen collaboration between both poles, both in achieving established goals and in facilitating intra and extra-continental social and economic mobility.

Only win-win cooperation between these two actors can avert the return of aggressive unipolarism and extremist Atlantism, especially at a time when the wreckage of previous wars have rekindled the fire that had long been smouldering under the ashes.

### **Chinese investments in the balkans**

A geographical area that has assumed great importance in China's objectives is the Balkan region, especially the six countries that are not yet members of the European Union (Serbia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo, North Macedonia, Montenegro, Albania). Although the EU still remains the hegemonic actor in the region, both economically and politically with membership as a privileged prospect for all countries, in the last decade Beijing has carved out a significant space capable of highlighting the limits and weaknesses of the difficult relationship between the EU and the Western Balkans.

The attention of the Chinese government has focused on infrastructure and industrial investment projects, mainly related to the energy sector. To help create a direct channel of discussion with the countries of Southeast Europe and thus foster exchanges, not only commercial but also political-diplomatic, China launched in 2012 the so-called 16+1 Initiative, which became in 2019 "17+1" with including Greece. Created as a cooperation mechanism with the countries of Southeast Europe<sup>2</sup>, the initiative has played a key role in paving the way for Chinese investment in the region and significantly increasing trade, which has now reached a total of 100 billion dollars per year. This has allowed the region to increase, in an unexpected and sudden way, its geopolitical importance. As we shall see, infrastructural investments have made the Balkans one of the central nodes of the communication and movement networks of the whole of Europe and, therefore, also a meeting-ground with the Chinese giant.

One of the most important infrastructural projects concerns the modernization of the 350 km of the Budapest-Belgrade railway, with the doubling of the existing line and an increase in the speed of travel. A key route for Chinese programs, perhaps the most important of the entire BRI in Europe. Not only for the political repercussions with Serbia and Hungary, but above all for its commercial weight. Launched in November 2013 at the Bucharest summit of the 16+1 initiative, the line covers the last stretch of the long corridor from the port of Piraeus in Greece,

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<sup>2</sup> Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Greece, Hungary, Latvia, North Macedonia, Montenegro, Poland, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia and Slovenia.



already 67% owned by COSCO (China Ocean Shipping Company), to Central Europe. To finance the work, the Export-Import Bank of China provided a loan of \$1.3 billion to Hungary and \$1.3 billion to Serbia, representing 85% of the total costs. The remaining 15% is covered by the governments of the two countries. China Railway International (CRI) and the Russian company RDZ International are taking part in the project, demonstrating the enormous interest in the infrastructure.

Particularly interesting is the event linked to the construction of the Pelješac bridge in Croatia. The bridge connects the south of Dalmatia with the Pelješac peninsula, thus allowing the exclave of Dubrovnik to be connected to the national highway network and avoiding the need to cross the border (24 kilometers) in the Bosnian town of Neum. The project represents an important step forward in cooperation between the EU and China. The EU, through the European Commission, has financed a Chinese state-owned company, the China Road and Bridge Corporation, to build the bridge. Other investments included the construction of a motorway between Albania and Montenegro and the modernization of the railway line with the purchase of new trains in Northern Macedonia. Overall, more than 14.6 billion were invested by Beijing in the region between 2005 and 2019, with Serbia alone attracting more than \$10 billion, followed by Bosnia and Herzegovina with \$2.5 billion (American Enterprise Institute, 2021).

The Chinese projects have two extremely positive effects. The first is the modernization of infrastructure in countries that are still lagging behind. The second positive impact relates to the economic integration of the region into global trade chains, thereby significantly reducing isolation and economic marginalization.

However, these positive aspects are counterbalanced by several critical elements. The first is linked to the lack of transparency in the projects and agreements signed by investors and individual national governments. Access to information on aspects of projects, from responsibilities to forms of financing, remains rather complicated, sometimes even impossible. This contributes to a lack of confidence in the population, which has difficulty in understanding how these projects are approved and implemented and their actual benefits. The other problem concerns the so-called 'debt trap'. According to critics, the loans made available by the Chinese government expose the receiving countries to a substantial growth in public debt. This would increase the risk of insolvency, which would be mitigated by the concession offered to China of certain infrastructures of the insolvent country. However, it should not be forgotten that

projects are not imposed from outside by China, but are analyzed, approved and implemented with the active role of the governments of the countries involved. Responsibility must therefore be shared fairly, bearing in mind that the political apparatuses often exploit these projects to distribute patronage and bribes internally.

In the Balkans, for example, the only case in which the 'trap' materialized was the construction of the motorway between Boljare and Bar in Montenegro. In 2014, the Montenegrin government, then led by current president Milo Djukanović, agreed with the China Exim Bank on a loan of almost \$1 billion (85% of the total) to finance the first 41 km of the total 165, with an interest rate of 2% for a repayment period of 20 years. The project turned out to be one of the most expensive in the world, over 20 million dollars per km. The reason is mainly related to the need to build tunnels and viaducts, 130 in total, to cope with the morphological characteristics of the area. The work was entrusted to the China Road and Bridge Corporation (CRBC). Concerns about the excessive burden of the loan on public finances have proved to be well-founded over the years. In 2014, Montenegro's external debt stood at 59.6% of GDP while in 2020 it had risen to 104.8% (World Bank, 2021). According to data released by the Montenegrin government, in 2019 the Exim Bank held claims amounting to 640 million (about 16% of the country's total debt), second only to debts from Eurobonds amounting to 1.97 billion and 51% of the total (Government Of Montenegro, 2021).

Hard hit by the pandemic and the collapse in tourist arrivals, the Montenegrin economy has been in extreme difficulty. A crisis that has had serious repercussions on its ability to meet its commitments to Beijing. In March 2021, Deputy Prime Minister Dritan Abazović asked the EU to refinance the loan, so as to avoid increasing Montenegro's dependence on China. The European institutions, which have always opposed the motorway project, refused to grant the request. The EU does not provide for this type of mechanism in favor of non-member states. The case ended with an agreement between the Montenegrin government, the French bank Societe Generale, the German bank Deutsche Bank and the US banks Merrill Lynch and Goldman Sachs. With this agreement, the banks undertake to repay the debt by lowering the interest rate for Montenegro. An operation that makes debt repayment more sustainable and, above all, prevents China from controlling certain strategic areas of the country.

Beijing's interest in the Balkan region does not, however, focus exclusively on transport infrastructure. Many investments are being made in other strategic sectors, including energy. One of the most important projects concerns the construction of a new operating unit of the

coal-fired thermal power plant near Tuzla, a major city in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The work, according to an agreement reached in 2014, is the responsibility of Chinese companies China Gezhouba Group Company (CGGC) and China Energy Engineering Group (GEDI), while funding comes from Exim Bank, which has disbursed a loan of around €700m, making the project the largest investment in the country since the war. Equally significant is the commitment shown by the Chinese government in Serbia, Beijing's closest ally in the region also thanks to the friendship between Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić and Chinese President Xi Jinping. The latter, during an official visit to Serbia in 2016, had announced the purchase by the Hesteel company of the Smederevo steel plant, until then owned by US Steel.

In recent years, other projects have included the copper mine in the town of Bor, with Zijin Mining gaining 63% of the property, and the construction of a new unit of the Kostolac B coal-fired power plant, with the involvement of the China Machinery Engineering Corporation (CMEC), worth around EUR 700 million. As we shall see in the next section, the issues of environmental protection and ecological transition have become increasingly important in the Balkan region in recent years. Thanks also to civic activism and the many NGOs, these issues have been taken into consideration.

The new strategies for sustainable and green development drawn up by both the European Union and China fuel and support above all this attention. In fact, both parties have developed an unexpected and necessary convergence that will also have important repercussions for the Balkan countries.

### **EU-China convergence: possible consequences for the Balkans**

A lack of attention to environmental issues, partly because of lax national legislation, characterized the first phase of Chinese enterprise in the Balkan region. The development of a European green strategy, which has become central to the new mechanisms of the accession process and to govern the ecological transition also through decarbonization and the increasing use of clean energy sources, has prompted many governments in the region to harmonize their regulatory systems with the new European requirements. As we have seen, attention to environmental protection has also become a priority issue for China in recent years. The effects of this 'environmental convergence' between the two most important partners in the Western Balkans can undoubtedly favor the elaboration of new sustainable development strategies that are more attentive not only to economic growth but also to environmental protection.

EU-China convergence therefore opens the door to as yet unexplored avenues. Given that China's presence in the Balkans is established and difficult to undermine, the absence of open conflict with Beijing guarantees the EU the possibility of imposing its own rules, which are, about environmental protection, at least from a formal point of view, the most advanced in the world.

For China, it means continuing its economic penetration in the region without entering a collision course with the EU, a relationship that is also fundamental for rebalancing the difficult relations with the United States. More specifically, for the Western Balkans, ecological convergence can bring significant positive effects. First, to reduce air, water and land pollution. The progressive process of de-carbonization may encourage the renewal of obsolete industries and production systems. Economic transition requires substantial economic resources, resources that the individual Balkan states cannot make available. This is a unique opportunity to complete a reconstruction that has never really been completed, especially for the poorest countries in the region (Bosnia-Herzegovina in particular). Industry and transport infrastructure were the sectors hit hardest during the Yugoslav wars and those that are lagging behind. It is no coincidence that many cities in the region are consistently among the most polluted in the world, due to the technological obsolescence of the production processes of many industries, including coal-fired power plants.

Beyond the delays caused by the pandemic, some Chinese investments in the sector had to deal with an alternative approach to environmental issues stimulated in particular by the EU's development of a Green Agenda for the Balkans and the broader aim of fostering global ecological transition. One example of this was the Kolubara B coal-fired power plant project. In May 2021, the Serbian Ministry of Mines and Energy stopped the work, which was being carried out by CMEC. A few weeks earlier, Minister Zorana Mihajlović herself had publicly stated that the implementation of the project was 'unacceptable, especially regarding the speed of design and the quality of the equipment delivered'.

As we have seen, however, China's leading role concerns not only the energy and connection infrastructure sectors but also the digital and technological sectors, on which much of the future global balance will be played out. In this sense, the project for a Serbian-Chinese industrial park based in Belgrade is the most significant example of this 'race to the future'. In July 2021, the Serbian government approved the construction of the 'Mihajlo Pupin IT park' in Belgrade, a Serbian-Chinese high-tech park that will cover an area of 300 hectares at a total

cost of around 250 million euros. The park will rise just a few steps away from the Mihajlo Pupin bridge, built in 2014 by the China Road and Bridge Corporation, and will be divided into three areas: the International Commercial Center, a logistics center for the exchange of goods with a large shopping center; the Industrial Park, the largest area with industrial plants, commercial and residential buildings; and the High-Tech Park, intended for technological research and residential use with the use of the most innovative urban planning techniques that are attentive to environmental protection. Serbian Minister of Innovation and Technological Development Nenad Popović, at the presentation of the plan, presented the Mihajlo Pupin Industrial Park as "the most innovative and technologically advanced economic zone in Europe that will make Belgrade a European Shenzhen".

The IT Park project follows those already launched by Huawei in previous years. In 2020, the Chinese company completed work in the Serbian capital on a digital transformation hub. The company also revealed plans to launch a regional data center in the Serbian city of Kragujevac, already home to FCA's plants, as a reference center for the whole of southeastern Europe and the third largest in Europe after those in Germany and the Netherlands.

Looking at the political level, the Chinese commitment, accompanied by a non-confrontational approach of the European Union towards it, could achieve much better results than the decades-long inconclusive technical-political discussions on which the accession process has been based. Greater infrastructural (and therefore economic) interconnection between the countries of the region could help to create a new climate of mutual trust. This is a fundamental element for an effective reconciliation, which over the last 30 years has probably experienced more moments of difficulty and stalemate than concrete progress. A reduction in tensions between 'former comrades' would be a further stimulus for the region to recreate the basis for cooperation, including political cooperation. The "Open Balkan" initiative involving Serbia, North Macedonia and Albania provides a concrete example of these possibilities. In 2019, these three countries started discussions on the creation of a "mini Schengen area" for the Balkans. One objective of the initiative is to abolish border controls by 2023 and thus facilitate the movement of people and goods supported, of course, by the infrastructure projects already in place.

## **Conclusions**

The themes set out in these reflections, namely the BRI project as a concrete example of 'infrastructure diplomacy', and the search for consensual mechanisms for climate and environmental governance, are highly topical, given the unforeseen events that are and continue to occur on a daily basis. First, the explosion of the Afghan situation reopens a deep wound in the West, especially concerning 'military diplomacy' and state-building mechanisms. European diplomacy, caught between the anvil of US anger and the hammer of the space gained by Russia and China, has remained largely inert in the face of this enormous political and humanitarian tragedy, which risks becoming a farce.

The options on what to do, however, immediately point to the political status of the concept of 'humanistic cooperation'. Questioning the implications of this concept basically means questioning the implications of the new diplomatic phase between the EU and China, and the actual possibilities that both actors have to implement multipolar diplomatic dynamics. The search for a Mediterranean outlet for China's commercial logistics materializes the possibilities of economic development in the countries concerned by the BRI's own infrastructure, making it necessary for European governance to deepen dialogue and cooperation.

The multi-scalar governance of the networks of political and economic relations described above can open a new page in diplomacy between these two countries, through the prominence and importance to which the southern countries of Europe can aspire. China's 'diplomatic logistics', in this respect, can act as a vector for closing the intra-European economic fault line that the Covid-19 crisis has opened up even further, and feed the project of a Mediterranean counter-hegemony in response to the financial hegemony of the central-northern countries, a project based on sustainable development.

Second, the approach to Cop-26 on climate in Glasgow, which will take place in November this year, makes the new Sino-European course on climate governance even more important. The geo-strategic horizon of the environment, which is currently bound by the clauses of the trade agreements drawn up recently, can and must be the subject of further in-depth studies to bring the two great poles closer together on this issue. The 'green civilization' project, in fact, unites both visions, as an exit way from the knots of wild development and consequent pollution. Unravelling the full power of this concept, in this sense, may mean imagining a new multipolar arena that involves not only institutional actors (state and

international), but can finally open up to social movements and non-governmental organizations. Consequently, this wide-ranging multipolarism may provide a viable alternative to the risk of 'Climate Leviathan' (Mann, Wainwright, 2018), the construction of an emergency authority with absolute powers, and a new imperial coup in climate governance.

In conclusion, the increasingly active Chinese presence in Europe transforms the view of China's dynamics from an orientalist ambition into an analytical necessity: in the world's greatest technological power, in fact, the future of the West is also being written (Pieranni, 2020). The project of 'growth without accumulation' and the very high rate of technological innovation makes this country a vast laboratory with which to observe the present and guidelines for the coming times.

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