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Elements of Global Superiority of the People's Republic of China in the 21st Century

Summary: The Chinese state has existed for more than five thousand years and in the history of human society it has always presented its own specific civilizational attainment, which exerted a considerable influence on the Asian region. In the years since its creation on October 1, 1949, and especially in the last decade, New China has stepped out beyond the region of Asia onto the global scene. With its economic power and international development projects (amongst which the Belt and Road projects stands out), China has become a leader of development and the promoter of the idea of international cooperation in the interests of peace and security in the world and the protection of the future of mankind. This paper will attempt to delineate the elements of the development of the People's Republic of China in the 21st century, placing a special focus on the realization of the Belt and Road initiative and the results of the struggle against the Covid-19 pandemic, all of which have made China an essential factor in the power relations between great global forces and the resultant change of attitude of the United States of America and the European Union towards China. Namely, China has always been a large country in terms of the size of its territory and population, but it is in the 21st century that the PR of China has become a strong state with the status of a global power. Such results in the organization of society and the state, the promotion of new development ideas and the achievement of set goals, would not have been possible without the Communist Party of China, as the main ideological, integrative and organizational factor within Chinese society. In its activities, the Chinese state sublimates the experiences of China's past with an understanding of the present moment in the international community and the need of Chinese citizens to improve the quality of life and to ensure stable development of the country. The United States and the European Union are taking various measures to oppose the strengthening of the People's Republic of China. These include looking after their interests and preserving their position in the international community, while simultaneously trying, if possible, to avoid jeopardizing their economic cooperation with China.

Keywords: China, global power, Belt and Road, United States of America, European Union, international relations

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Introduction

In modern history of the development of human society there has never been a country which has made such a giant leap in its social and economic development in such a short period as China has done. From 1949, when it was founded, to this day, China has in multiple ways improved the lives of its citizens and their standard of living, it has developed the infrastructure of the country (a network of highways, railways, and air routes) and technology and has become one of the leading powerhouses of the world, a country with a strong economy, powerful military and great political influence. Almost all innovation in the past decade has come from China. Besides all the new things that have become part of modern China's identity, the country has not forgotten its past, its traditions, and its history. China has succeeded in binding its history with the present, its ancient customs and its new aspirations, the philosophy of Confucius and modern life. In other words, modern China has succeeded to change many things in its society, to become one of the most powerful countries in the world and yet remain part of the centuries-old Chinese state, whose values and traditions have survived for five thousand years. At the international level, the People's Republic of China has emerged as the leader of regional and global development through numerous multilateral development projects, amongst which the Belt and Road project stands out. As the originator of these projects, China advocates the cooperation of states, primarily in the United Nations, but also in other international organizations, while preserving peace and security and promoting

mutual agreements between countries facing global challenges and problems, all in the interest of the future of mankind.

The Strengths of the People's Republic of China

The People's Republic of China is the first country in the world in terms of population. According to the United Nations, in 2020 the People's Republic of China had a population of 1.443 billion, or 18.34% of the world's total population of 7.868 billion. After China, India has the largest population with 1.392 billion inhabitants, followed by the United States with 327 million people, Indonesia, Pakistan, Nigeria, Brazil, Bangladesh, Russia and Mexico, all countries with a far smaller population compared to China (United Nations, 2019). In terms of area, with 9,569,901 km², China is the third country in the world (after the Russian Federation and Canada, and ahead of the United States of America), and it is the largest country in Asia. China is politically one of the most influential countries in the world. The People's Republic of China has been a permanent member of the Security Council of the United Nations (one of five) since the inception of this most important of international multilateral organization (1945). With the strengthening of the economic power of the People's Republic of China, its political importance and influence has also increased. The views of the People's Republic of China on various global issues are carefully monitored, analyzed and respected by other countries. For its part, the People's Republic of China supports the work of the United Nations as "the most universal, most representative and

most important international organization, the multilateral arena for the promotion of peace and the solving of regional and global problems” (“Multilateralism is important”, 2020). For this reason, the People’s Republic of China insists that all important questions regarding for peace and security in the world, as well as other issues that impact the future of mankind (environmental protection, climate change, modern security challenges, etc.) need to be considered by and agreed about within the United Nations.

In the sphere of economy, the People’s Republic of China is among the leading countries in the world, with good prospects of becoming the first economy in the world very soon. China’s gross domestic product in 2020 was \$14.720 billion. Two decades earlier, China’s GDP was 1.210 billion dollars, which means that the country’s GDP rose more than 12 times in two decades.^[2] Ahead of China are the United States, whose GDP in 2020 amounted to 20.930 billion dollars. The growth of the US’s GDP in the past two decades did not experience such marked step changes as in the case of China, as in 2000 it amounted to 10.250 billion dollars, presenting a mere twofold increase. According to experts, the differences in the strength of the

economy between the United States and China will shrink rapidly and this process has been accelerated during the Covid-19 pandemic. Amongst the 10 leading economies in the world, besides the US, China and Japan are Germany, Great Britain, India, France, Italy, Canada and South Korea.

The accelerated rise of China’s economic power in the 21st century and its ability to actively participate in the process of linking the world economically are confirmed by the figures regarding the representation of Chinese companies in the list of the largest (most successful) companies in the world compiled by to *Fortune* magazine. In 2000, among the top 200 largest multinationals in the world, only two companies were from the People’s Republic of China: China Petrochemical Corp. in 58th position and the State Power Corporation of China in 83rd position (Fortune, 2000), while, as expected, the greatest number of companies were from the United States, Japan and Germany.^[3] Ten years later, among the 200 largest companies there were 14 from the PRC, 60 from the United States, 26 from Japan and 16 from Germany, while the remaining 84 companies were based in other countries (Fortune, 2010). A year ago, in 2020, out of the total of 200 largest companies in the

[2] Cited from <https://www.inf.org/en/Countries/USA#Countrydata> (taken from the International Monetary Fund website, accessed May 26, 2021. According to the National Bureau of Statistics of China, the country’s real annual economic growth (in %) averaged 9.57% per year from 1993 to 2003. Economic growth averaged 10.15% per year from 2003 to 2010. The growth of China’s GDP in the following years was somewhat lower (in 2011 - 9.2%, in 2012 and 2013 - 7.7%, in 2014 - 7.4%, 2015 - 6.9%, in 2016 the target growth rate was between 6.5% and 7%, while in 2017 it was 7.1%). Cited according to Janković 2017, pp. 48–54; Manchang, 2018, pp. 10.

[3] For more information see: *Ibid.* Proof of the global dominance of the economies of the US, Japan and Germany (i.e., the strength of multinational companies from these countries) at the end of the 20th century is found in the fact that in 1999 142 of the largest multinationals had their headquarters in these three countries. Cited after Steger, 2005, p. 45; Kilibarda, 2008, p. 208.

world, a quarter (50 companies) were from the People's Republic of China, while the United States maintained the same level of representation (60 companies), 22 companies were from Japan, 10 were from Germany, while the remainder (58) were from other countries (Fortune, 2020). The increase in the number of companies from the PRC in the first decade of the 21st century (from only 2 companies to 50), most clearly demonstrates the strength, variety, technological, organizational and developmental potentials of the companies coming from China and thus the Chinese economy as a whole.

70 | China's economic development and political influence are accompanied by the strengthening of its military power. According to the Global Firepower website, which has been publishing annual reports and ranking lists of national armed forces since 2006, at the beginning of 2021, the People's Republic of China was the third strongest military power in the world among 139 countries on the ranking list. The military strength of each country is calculated on the basis of an index that includes more than 50 factors (not only the number of soldiers and the type and number of different types of weapons, but also financing, logistical capabilities, geographical surroundings, etc.) (New world military rankings, 2021). The United States

is still in the leading position, with a Power Index of 0.0718 (the closer the index is to zero, the higher the military strength of the state). In second place is the Russian Federation (Power Index of 0.0791), and in third place is the People's Republic of China with a Power Index of 0.0854.^[4] The military power of the People's Republic of China is undoubtedly many times greater than two decades ago or earlier, which is a consequence of the overall development of China and investments in the development of its military power. That all other countries lag behind the world's leading military forces is demonstrated by the Power Index of India, which is in fourth position (Index 0.1207), then Japan, which is in fifth (Power Index 0.1599) and others.

The Belt and Road Initiative

China's global Belt and Road development initiative, which aims to connect Asia with Africa and Europe by different territorial and maritime routes (as epitomized by the former Silk Road), was promoted by Xi Jinping, President of the People's Republic of China, during visits to Kazakhstan^[5] in September and Indonesia^[6] in October 2013. years. The Belt and Road represents China's new development strategy on a global scale, with far-reaching positive

[4] The military budget of the People's Republic of China (178 billion dollars) is smaller than the budget of the United States, but larger than the budget of Russia. China has the largest number of active members in the armed forces (with 2.185 million members), as well as 3,260 military aircraft, 35,000 armored vehicles (including 3,205 tanks) and 770 warships, including two aircraft carriers (New world military rankings, 2021).

[5] In his address at the University of Azerbaijan in Astana (Kazakhstan) on September 7, 2013, President Xi pointed to the fact that 2100 years ago, during the Han Dynasty, peace and friendship missions established contact between China and Central Asian countries and started the Silk Road that connects East and West, Asia and Europe. For more see: Jinping, 2014, p. 315–319.

[6] One month later, during a visit to Indonesia on October 3, 2013, President Xi emphasized China's intention to develop a maritime partnership with other countries in a joint effort to build the 21st Century Silk Road. For more see: *Ibid*, p. 320–324.

economic and political implications, both for the participating countries and for the growth of the international community, peace and security in the world. The call for cooperation in the implementation of the Belt and Road strategy has been sent to all countries that are on the territorial and maritime routes of this large project.^[7] The range of cooperation and connection between states, both at the unilateral and at the regional level, is broad. In addition to the joint construction of various infrastructure projects (construction of railways and highways), the Belt and Road initiative also includes the construction of ports, projects in the field of energy (gas, oil and energy infrastructure), the construction of information and telecommunications facilities, a network of free trade zones, the facilitation of mutual trade, investments, financial cooperation, cooperation in the fields of environmental protection, education, science, information, culture, health, tourism,

human exchange, etc. (Office of the Heading Group for the Belt and Road Initiative, 2017, pp. 18–48). The outstanding feature of the Belt and Road initiative is among other things its inclusiveness – it is open to any country with the desire to participate in the process of cooperation and implementation of projects (no one, that is, no country, is obliged to join the Initiative). Cooperation in the realization of this initiative provides various benefits for all those involved, participating states and their citizens.

The huge importance of the Belt and Road initiative is confirmed by the number of countries participating in this project. At the time of its promotion, it included 64 countries, in addition to China, situated on the routes (terrestrial and maritime) that connect the three continents: Asia, Africa and Europe.^[8] The Belt and Road participating countries (65 member states at the Initiative's start) covered an area of 51,491,201 km², inhabited by more than 4,400,000,000 people (World Bank,

[7] Taking into account the old routes of the terrestrial and maritime Silk Road, China has established five directions within the Belt and Road - three „terrestrial” and two „maritime”. One route starts from northwestern and northeastern China, goes through Central Asia and Russia, to Europe and the Baltic Sea. The second, from northwestern China to the Persian Gulf and the Mediterranean Sea, passing through Central and Western Asia, and the third route connects southwestern China with the region of Indochina, ending on the coast of the Indian Ocean. The Maritime Silk Road has two routes: one route, which starts from China's coastal ports, passes through the South China Sea to the Indian Ocean and extends to Europe, and the other, which also starts from China's coastal ports, passes through the South China Sea and extends to the South Pacific. Cited from: Office of the Heading Group for the Belt and Road Initiative, 2017, p. 18–19.

[8] At the time the Belt and Road initiative was promoted, in addition to China, it included another 64 countries in the area between Asia (China) and Europe, including parts of Africa. From Central Asia, in addition to Russia and Mongolia, the member states of the Belt and Road were Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan. Southeast Asian countries involved in the project are Indonesia, Cambodia, East Timor, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Brunei, Vietnam, Laos and Myanmar. From South Asia, the members are Nepal, Bhutan, Maldives, Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka. In Europe, the Belt and Road included 16 countries (members of the process of China's cooperation with Central and Eastern European countries): Poland, Montenegro, Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Albania, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, the Czech Republic, the Slovak Republic, Hungary, Slovenia, Croatia, Romania, Bulgaria and Serbia. From West Asia and North Africa, the members of the Belt and Road are Iran, Syria, Jordan, Israel, Iraq, Lebanon, Palestine, Egypt, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Oman, Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain and Yemen. Georgia, Belarus, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, Moldova and Armenia were also included from Central and Eastern Europe (Wang, 2018, p. 76).

2021),^[9] that is, more than half of the total world population. The number of countries interested in participating in the Belt and Road initiative has increased in the meantime. The (first) Belt and Road Forum, held in May 2017 in Beijing, was attended, as participants or observers, by representatives of about 100 countries, as well as representatives of 70 international organizations (Obradović, 2018, p. 159). The second forum, held in April 2019, also in Beijing, was attended by about 140 heads of state and participating governments (Brkić, 2019). The breadth and importance of the Belt and Road initiative, both on the bilateral and global level, is confirmed by the data published by the National Development and Reform Commission in November 2020, according to which China signed 201 documents on cooperation within the Belt and Road initiative with 138 countries and 31 international organizations, despite the negative impact of the Covid-19 pandemic (Beta, 2020).

Many countries and regional organizations which have embraced cooperation in the realization of goals (projects) that are part of the Belt and Road initiative, have accepted the harmonization of

infrastructure development plans of the signatory states with the content of this project (Obradović, 2016, p. 84). The importance of the Belt and Road initiative on a global level was also recognized by the United Nations, which endorsed this project.

By promoting the great global development project „One Belt, One Road”, in 2013, Chinese President Xi Jinping essentially announced new steps which the People’s Republic of China would take with the goal of strengthening Chinese society and state, but this time with a marked international dimension. Namely, the Belt and Road initiative could not be realized without the ability of the People’s Republic of China to join international economic flows, that is, economic globalization. This position of China was clearly presented by Xi Jinping at the World Economic Forum held in Davos, in January 2017.^[10] At the end of the year, in his speech at the 19th Congress of the Communist Party of China in October, President Xi Jinping took a “step forward” in affirming the development plans and goals of the Chinese state in the period preceding the celebration of the 100th anniversary of the proclamation of the

[9] For more see Obradović, 2018.

[10] In his address, President Xi Jinping emphasized that “China has taken a bold step and accepted the global market” and that this „has proven to be a good strategic choice.” In order for China’s economy to develop, according to the President, the country “must have the strength to swim in the vast ocean of the global market” and therefore needs to adapt to economic globalization and direct it, soften its negative impact and make sure that “its benefits reach all countries and peoples”. By explaining the way in which the People’s Republic of China acts in the process of economic globalization, President Xi actually promoted China’s economic strength and its position as a country with great global influence and its intention to strengthen that position even more. Xi believes that China should act “proactively” and manage the process of economic globalization in an “appropriate way in order to achieve its positive development [since economic globalization also has negative consequences – author’s remark] and balance its course.” China’s intention is to follow the “general trend, taking into consideration specific national conditions” of the country and to go down the route of integration in the process of economic globalization at an “appropriate pace”. The ultimate goal that China wants to achieve in this way is to strike a balance “between efficiency and justice” to ensure that “different countries, different social strata and different groups of people benefit from economic globalization.” Cited from: Jinping, Belgrade, 2019, p. 71.

People's Republic of China. He outlined the elements of the country's "two-step development plan" from 2020 to the middle of the 21st century, and at the end of this phase of development, in addition to many other goals to be achieved, China is projected to become a global leader in terms of national strength and international influence (Jinping, 2017, p. 25).

China's struggle against Covid-19

In the fight against Covid-19, which has become a global health phenomenon and threat, China has proven itself to be a responsible, well-organized, and efficient country. It was the first country to bring the new virus under control and the first to restart economic development and establish cooperation with other states. In that way, on a global level, the unstoppable process of the "transition of economic power" from the USA to China has essentially begun.

The secret of China's success in the fight against Covid-19 can be seen in the approach of the Chinese state, which included a wide range of measures aimed at stopping the spread of infection, protecting the health of citizens, but also creating opportunities for people to move and work. The People's Republic of China introduced a sophisticated system of health codes which

help track the movement of people. The system enabled the country to introduce lockdowns in the regions and cities where the coronavirus was found, regardless of their size or population.^[11] The spread of the virus also was also curbed by the high degree of discipline of China's citizens, who diligently wore masks and respected epidemiological measures, as well as the authorities' strict supervision of the population's adherence to compulsory measures.

Along with stopping the spread of the new virus, that is, putting Covid-19 under control, the People's Republic of China adopted economic measures aimed at resuming production and encouraging exports,^[12] which yielded results. The resumption of domestic production was also a sign for foreign companies that produce or do business in China to continue working and investing in the Chinese economy (for more see Obradović, 2020a). Thanks to this, China has renewed production and restarted development. This was confirmed by the International Monetary Fund, which singled out China as the only country among the world's leading economies whose economic growth in 2020 would be positive at 1% (Vujic, 2020). China's economic growth in 2020 was higher than the IMF forecast and amounted to 2.3%. For 2021, China's GDP growth has been forecast to be even higher, at 6%, while the World Bank believes that

[11] China's ability to react quickly in preventing the spread of Covid-19 and lock down certain areas is confirmed by the case in the city of Qingdao city in east China, where 12 cases of virus transmission among the local population were recorded, resulting in more than 10 million tests administered in about seven days. (M. A., 2020).

[12] The measures of the Government of the People's Republic of China were focused on foreign trade policy and were aimed at "deepening the opening and international cooperation". The advantage in resuming production was given to companies "that have an important influence in the global supply chain" and help maintain its stability. To that end, the government has supported key export companies by securing "export credits". Cited from: China is trying its best to achieve a double victory - both in the prevention and control of the epidemic and in the resumption of work and production, 2020, p. 8.

74 | China's economic growth will reach 8.1%.^[13] Such developments, the growth of the Chinese economy in the conditions of the Covid-19 pandemic, when placed in relation to the decline of the economies of other countries, especially the United States, have provoked numerous predictions of changes in the economic relations between the US and China on a global level and the limitations of the liberal model of society and economy. Numerous experts have concluded that "the idea of a world economy presided over by America ... is falling apart, and the factors are China's rise and the United States' turn to nationalism" (This is the end of the economy as we know it, 2020, p. 9). The French newspaper *Le Monde* assessed that "the international order built under the leadership of the USA after the Second World War is no longer attuned to the reality of the balance of power in the 21st century" and that "China's power shook the whole system" (China's power shook the whole system, 2020). The respected scholar F. Fukuyama (otherwise a supporter of the concept of liberal democracy) believes that "the period in which we find ourselves represents the death knell of the era of neoliberalism that began with Reagan and Thatcher in the 1980s" (Lalić, 2020, p. 8). The High Commissioner for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy of the European Union, J. Borell, also gave his assessment of the changes in power relations at the global level under the influence of the pandemic. Borell pointed out that "there are indications that Asia is taking over the role of the center of

global power from the United States" and that the pandemic "can be seen as a point where the transfer of power from East to West took place" (World rulers changing before our eyes, 2020; Power shifts happening before our eyes, 2020). The changes on the global economic scene were also acknowledged by A. Merkel, Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany, who stated that "China has become the chief economic power" (Mitrinović, 2020). At the same time, Merkel expressed reservations about the future of the liberal model of economic relations and thus indirectly pointed to the advantages of the Chinese model of economic organization of society, calling on European countries to assume a "common position in relation to China" and to develop policies that reflect "our interests and values" (Mitrinović, 2020).

By resuming production and increasing exports, in addition to stabilizing the supply chain of various companies (and countries), and thus a significant part of the world economy by providing the required raw goods and materials, China managed to deliver large quantities of medical equipment to other countries to help combat Covid-19. Chinese doctors, via video conferencing and direct visits to other countries, shared their experiences in the fight against Covid-19, helping other countries to take the necessary measures to combat the pandemic and treat the infected. For many countries, this significantly aided their fight against the pandemic. Serbia was among the countries that received medical assistance and was visited by Chinese doctors.

[13] Cited from: Speech by HE Ambassador of the PRC Mrs Chen Bo given at the meeting of the Friendship Group of the National Parliament of the Republic of Serbia with the National People's Congress of the People's Republic of China, Belgrade April, 27, 2021.

The results achieved in the economic development and reconstruction of Chinese society and the new role of China in the international community would not have been objectively possible without the active role of the leading and ruling party - the Communist Party of China. In the 100 years of its existence, the Communist Party has travelled down a long and thorny road, from being the opposition party to the ruling party, yet it has managed to resist the numerous temptations presented before the Chinese people and state, and thus the party. Today, the CPC of China has become the largest, strongest and foremost party of the left not only in China but also in the world. With its ideas and projects for the development of Chinese society, constant commitment to making China whole and strong, to improving the quality of life of China's citizens, the search for new, better solutions compared to existing solutions, through the innovation, pragmatism and determination that accompany its work, through good organization, a constant referring back to set goals and with quality personnel solutions in the party and state bodies and institutions, the Communist Party of China has completely transformed the People's Republic of China, and has made it a developed, strong and powerful state.

Among the numerous personalities and events that are part of the identity of the Party, but also of the People's Republic of China, Mao Zedong stands out as the person who led the party in difficult times of opposition, the Chinese people's struggle for liberation from the occupiers in World War II and who was the first creator and developer of the new China - the People's Republic of China. The second was Deng Xiaoping, who in the 1980s

was the ideological creator of economic reforms and the opening of China to foreign investments. This move changed China for the better, and socially and economically helped it develop and become a powerful state. With the arrival of Xi Jinping at the head of the Chinese party and state, the country's further strengthening continued, but measures were also taken to include China, more than ever before, in the world's global economic and social flows. President Xi promoted the Belt and Road initiative, a major development, economic, infrastructural and civilizational project, thanks to which the People's Republic of China has become not only the locomotive of global growth but also a country that impacts numerous global events and processes. Led by Xi Jinping, the People's Republic of China has become a country with global reach – a truly powerful state.

USA/EU – China relations

The growth of the power of the People's Republic of China at the international level could not remain without the reaction of the United States of America and the European Union. During the proclamation of the National Security Strategy of the USA, in December 2017 (several months after the First Belt and Road Forum was held in Beijing), the then President of the USA, D. Trump assessed that “China (besides Russia) is a revisionist force and a competitor that seeks to challenge the power of America and undermine its security and prosperity” (Obradović, Stanojević, Jeftić, 2019, p. 84). That the United States considers China a strategic rival was confirmed by the US Department of Defense in January 2018, which in its new military strategy identified China

76 | (alongside Russia) as America's main adversary (Obradović et al., 2019, p. 84). The Belt and Road initiative is also negatively perceived because in the opinion of leading representatives of the US administration that it "represents the breakdown of the international liberal establishment which the USA created following WWII" (Obradović et al., 2019, p. 84). By various measures, the United States very quickly moved from words to deeds and showed its attitude towards China. America imposed tariffs on a number of Chinese products, starting a trade war with China. At the same time, there was an intensification in accusations directed at China concerning the militarization of the islands in the South China Sea, which are part of China's territory, for its role in the situation in Hong Kong and Taiwan, human rights violations in Xinjiang. All of these allegations are used as a basis for imposing sanctions on Chinese institutions and individuals. A technological war is also being waged against Chinese telecommunications companies. In 2019, a law was passed to "protect American communications networks", under which the Federal Communications Commission banned US companies from purchasing equipment from Chinese telecommunications companies Huawei and ZTE because they "pose an unacceptable risk to US national security" (Americans have decided, 2021). The Federal Commission later expanded the list of Chinese companies that are seen as a threat to "national security, communication networks". In addition to Huawei and ZTE, the expanded list includes Hytera Communicative Corp., Haugzhou Hikvision Digital Technology and Dachau Technology (Americans have decided, 2021). During the Covid-19 pandemic, the United States (US President D. Trump and Secretary of State M.

Pompeo) repeatedly publicly accused China of the creation and spread of the new disease, claiming that the Sars-CoV-2 virus originated from a laboratory in Wuhan without offering any evidence to support this claim (Kavaja, 2020, pp. 1–3). The United States did not stop there, nor did the accusations against China cease with the new administration, led by President J. Biden. At the beginning of this year, President Biden held a video summit with the leaders of the Quad (Quadrilaterals Security Dialogue) - a loose alliance of the United States, Japan, India and Australia. Although the summit participants did not mention China in name, the intention of the four countries led by the US to establish an alliance that would oppose the interests of the People's Republic of China in the Indo-Pacific was made clear (Biden creates alliance, 2021; Slap to Beijing, Chinese angry, 2021). The inter-parliamentary alliance of representatives of eight countries (United States, Great Britain, Japan, Canada, Norway, Sweden, Germany and Australia) is also part of the front against China. The goal of this alliance is to "create appropriate and coordinated responses and to offer help by providing a proactive and strategic response to issues concerning the People's Republic of China" (Inter-Parliamentary Alliance, 2020), that is, to counter China's growing influence. Unlike the United States of America, which during the administration of D. Trump assumed a sharp stance towards China (the introduction of customs duties on goods from China, bans on certain Chinese companies, various types of accusations of Chinese official policy, etc.), the European Union's approach to the People's Republic of China is more sophisticated and softer, but indisputably negative, with increasingly critical tones and practical measures being taken against

China. Such an attitude of the EU towards the People's Republic of China is understandable because the EU "follows" the policy of its most important strategic, security, political and economic partner - the United States, while at the same time seeking to minimize the negative impact such a position might have on the achieved level of economic cooperation with the People's Republic of China, characterized as a "comprehensive strategic partnership" since 2007 (Babić, 2010). Economic cooperation between the EU and China has been constantly improving for decades, and in 2020, China became the most important trade partner of the EU (surpassing the United States). Part of the EU's cooperation with the People's Republic of China is the Cooperation Process with 17 Central and Eastern European countries (the 17 + 1 Cooperation Process), which has existed since 2012 and in which 12 European Union members participate.^[14] In recent years, these countries, led by Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary, have started (and realized) a large number of projects in various fields in cooperation with China (Zuokui, 2016). Several summits of the Cooperation Process (17 + 1) were held in the EU member states, such as in Bucharest, Dubrovnik, Riga, Sofia and others. This cooperation is not only part of China's relations with the European Union, but also part of the implementation of the Belt and Road initiative, as that the 17 + 1 Cooperation

Process (the territory of EU member states) lies on the western route of the Chinese initiative.^[15] The EU and China have signed several documents which have created the possibility for the infrastructure projects relating to the European section of the Belt and Road initiative to be integrated into the infrastructure development plans of EU member states. It should be noted that the leading EU countries (Germany, France, Italy, and Great Britain, while still a member) are trying to extend the scope and content of economic cooperation with China, which includes mutual visits at the highest level (Xi Jinping UK 2015, E. Macron China 2018, etc.) and the signing a large number of economically significant contracts. Along with the development of economic relations, there were periods of cooling of political relations between the EU and China, primarily due to the assessments of the European Union regarding certain internal issues in China, such as "human rights". In recent years, criticism of Chinese state policy by the EU (regarding Hong Kong, Taiwan, Xinjiang, etc.) has become more frequent. On the other hand, through various administrative measures, the EU seeks to control and slow down the activities of Chinese companies throughout Europe, including the Balkans (Brussels is troubled by China and Russia in the Western Balkans, 2021, p. 2), as well as the implementation of certain infrastructure projects.^[16] In addition, at the EU level, an initiative was launched

[14] The members of the European Union participating in the 17 + 1 Cooperation Process are: Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Slovenia, Croatia, Bulgaria, Romania and Greece (Lithuania has meanwhile expressed its intention to leave the 17 + 1 Process).

[15] For more on the cooperation between China and the countries of Central and Eastern Europe within the Cooperation Process see Obradović, 2018.

[16] The realization Hungarian section of the Budapest-Belgrade Railway Reconstruction and Construction Project is late

78 | to pass a law that would enable a ban on “the takeover of companies from the European Union by state-subsidized companies from third countries” (Avakumović, 2021; Is a law being prepared against Chinese companies?, 2021). Although Chinese companies are not explicitly mentioned, it is very clear that this ban applies to them, especially since some EU member states have criticized the takeover of domestic companies by Chinese companies (e.g. Germany) (Obradović, 2018, p. 165). Some EU members, e.g., Poland and Romania (under the influence of the USA or independently) have decided to halt Huawei’s business in those countries by introducing “new 5G security rules” (I. Š. M., 2020). In addition, the governments of France, Denmark, the Netherlands and Belgium have taken measures to reduce Huawei’s presence in 5G networks, and Sweden has introduced a ban on Chinese equipment for parts of its networks (I. Š. M., 2020). That the pressure to end cooperation with Chinese companies has a broader dimension is confirmed by the case of the Romanian company Nuclear Electric, which the Romanian government, following pressure from the US and EU, sent a request to suspend negotiations with a Chinese partner on the construction of two new nuclear reactors (America halts the Chinese Belt and Road through Romania, 2020; Obradović, 2020b). During the Covid-19 pandemic, European leaders did not hesitate to accuse China of concealing information about the new virus. In fact, E. Macron, the President of France, said that “Beijing was not completely open about the scale of the epidemic” (Kavaja, 2020).

It is clear that the European Union is abiding by the policy of the United States regarding China, while also taking care (up until this point) that the level of criticism and measures taken against the Chinese state and Chinese companies do not “cross the line” that would jeopardize economic cooperation with China, from which the EU undoubtedly benefits.

Conclusion

Thanks to comprehensive economic and social growth it has experienced in the last two decades, the People’s Republic of China has become a global power with a great impact on all developments in the international community. Infrastructure projects, the effort to bring together states in different areas of human enterprise, economic cooperation, advocating for peace and security in the world and the sponsoring of shared care of the future of humanity, etc. are the principles that China applies and promotes in international relations. The Belt and Road initiative embodies all these values in the best possible way. Therefore, China appears in many third countries not only as an alternative partner for cooperation but also as a country that in relation to Western countries offers a new concept of relations between states and peoples in the international community, a new system of development values of human society. In the last decade, the United States has identified China as its global adversary and is taking various measures to diminish the reputation and influence of the People’s Republic of

because the EU asked Hungary to respect EU regulations when announcing a public tender for the selection of companies which will implement the railway construction project.

China in the world. The American trade war against China, the ban on the use of telecommunication equipment by the Chinese company Huawei in the USA, as well as the campaign among other countries to stop cooperation with said company, are just some examples of how the USA views its relations with China. The European Union, i.e., its member states, are increasingly criticizing China (e.g., the human rights situation in Xinjiang, the situation around Hong Kong, Taiwan, etc.) and implementing administrative and other obstacles to cooperation with China, while at the same time taking care not to jeopardize the achieved level of mutual economic cooperation. The European Union has also criticized EU accession candidate countries which cooperate with China within the 17 + 1 Cooperation Process. These criticisms, of course, aim to reduce the level of cooperation and

friendly relations between those countries and China. Essentially, American-led Western countries want to eliminate China as a global rival and its presence in parts of the world they consider zones of their influence. However, this is not possible. China's demographic potentials, the achieved level of technical and technological development, its strong economy, mighty army and influential diplomacy, make China not only a powerful state but also a global power, whose influence on events in the international community cannot be ignored. The future of the world depends on the extent to which other global powers, primarily the United States, will find the will to agree with China on reforming the global system of governance and participate in joint cooperation, with the aim of resolving all open issues in the interest of peace and security in the world and the future of humanity.

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A number of technologically advanced automated float glass production lines built by an enterprise in Hebei province