

# **China's Belt And Road Initiative: How Is This Framing The European Union's International Trade Defense Strategy?**

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**CHINA'S BELT AND ROAD INITIATIVE: HOW IS THIS  
FRAMING THE EUROPEAN UNION'S INTERNATIONAL  
TRADE DEFENSE STRATEGY?**

*LA INICIATIVA CHINA DE LA FRANJA Y LA RUTA:  
¿CÓMO ENMARCA LA ESTRATEGIA DE DEFENSA COMERCIAL  
INTERNACIONAL DE LA UNIÓN EUROPEA?*

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## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

|              |  |
|--------------|--|
| <b>16+1</b>  | Cooperation between China and Central and Eastern European Countries |
| <b>ADB</b>   | Asian Development Bank   |
| <b>AI</b>    | Artificial Intelligence  |
| <b>AIIB</b>  | Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank                                 |
| <b>ASEAN</b> | Association of Southeast Asian Nations                               |
| <b>AU</b>    | African Union  |
| <b>BRF</b>   | Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation                    |
| <b>BRI</b>   | Belt and Road Initiative   |
| <b>BRICS</b> | Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa                       |
| <b>BRRC</b>  | Belt and Road Research Center  |
| <b>CAI</b>   | Comprehensive Agreement on Investment                                |
| <b>CCP</b>   | Chinese Communist Party  |
| <b>CDB</b>   | China Development Bank   |
| <b>CEESE</b> | Central, Eastern and Southeastern Europe (CESEE)                     |
| <b>CEEC</b>  | Central and Eastern European Countries                               |
| <b>CRCT</b>  | China Railway Container Transport                                    |
| <b>DSB</b>   | Dispute Settlement Body  |
| <b>DSR</b>   | Digital Silk Road  |
| <b>EaP</b>   | Eastern Partnership  |
| <b>EBRD</b>  | European Bank for Reconstruction and Development                     |
| <b>EAEU</b>  | Eurasian Economic Union  |
| <b>EC</b>    | European Commission  |
| <b>ECJ</b>   | European Court of Justice  |
| <b>ECCS</b>  | Electrolytic chrome-coated steel                                     |
| <b>EIB</b>   | European Investment Bank   |
| <b>EIF</b>   | European Investment Fund   |
| <b>ETWG</b>  | Economic and Trade Working Group                                     |
| <b>EU</b>    | European Union   |
| <b>FDI</b>   | Foreign Direct Investment  |
| <b>GATT</b>  | General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade                               |
| <b>GDP</b>   | Gross Domestic Product   |
| <b>GFF</b>   | Glass Fiber Fabrics  |
| <b>GIPS</b>  | Greece, Italy, Portugal, and Spain                                   |

|                |  |
|----------------|--|
| <b>GSR</b>     | Green Silk Road  |
| <b>HED</b>     | EU-China High-Level Economic and Trade Dialogue          |
| <b>HFP</b>     | High fatigue performance                                 |
| <b>HSR</b>     | Health Silk Road   |
| <b>ICT</b>     | Information and communication technology                 |
| <b>IMO</b>     | International Maritime Organization                      |
| <b>IO</b>      | International organization                               |
| <b>IRU</b>     | International Road Transport Union                       |
| <b>ITU</b>     | International Telecommunication Union                    |
| <b>ITS</b>     | Intelligent Transportation System                        |
| <b>MES</b>     | Market economy status                                    |
| <b>MoU</b>     | Memorandum of Understanding                              |
| <b>MPRCEU</b>  | People's Republic of China Mission to the European Union |
| <b>NDRC</b>    | National Development and Reform Commission of China      |
| <b>LDC</b>     | Least Developed Country                                  |
| <b>OBOR</b>    | One Belt One Road  |
| <b>ODI</b>     | Outward Direct Investment                                |
| <b>PBOC</b>    | People's Bank of China                                   |
| <b>PET</b>     | Polyethylene terephthalate                               |
| <b>PPP</b>     | Public-private partnership                               |
| <b>PRC</b>     | People's Republic of China                               |
| <b>PSR</b>     | Polar Silk Road  |
| <b>PTA</b>     | Preferential Trade Agreement                             |
| <b>R&amp;D</b> | Research and development                                 |
| <b>RMB</b>     | Renminbi   |
| <b>SDG</b>     | Sustainable Development Goal                             |
| <b>SIP</b>     | Standard Information Platform                            |
| <b>SME</b>     | Small and medium-sized enterprise                        |
| <b>SOE</b>     | State-owned enterprise                                   |
| <b>SSHR</b>    | Hot-rolled stainless steel coils and sheets              |
| <b>SSTPF</b>   | Stainless steel tube fittings                            |
| <b>TDI</b>     | Trade Defense Instrument                                 |
| <b>TEN-T</b>   | Trans-European Networks                                  |
| <b>TNC</b>     | Transnational Corporation                                |
| <b>TEU</b>     | Twenty-foot equivalent unit                              |

|                  |  |
|------------------|--|
| <b>UN</b>        | United Nations   |
| <b>UNCLOS</b>    | United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea  |
| <b>UNCTAD</b>    | United Nations Conference on Trade and Development   |
| <b>UN DESA</b>   | United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs   |
| <b>UNECE</b>     | United Nations Economic Commission for Europe  |
| <b>UNODC</b>     | United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime   |
| <b>UN-OHRLLS</b> | United Nations Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States |
| <b>USSR</b>      | Union of Soviet Socialist Republics  |
| <b>USA</b>       | United States of America   |
| <b>WBG</b>       | World Bank Group   |
| <b>WEF</b>       | World Economic Forum   |
| <b>WHO</b>       | World Health Organization  |
| <b>WTO</b>       | World Trade Organization   |

## **ABSTRACT**

This research seeks to answer what are the main international trade defense measures adopted by the European Union in response to China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in the period 2013-2023. China is the country with the most active anti-dumping and anti-subsidy cases in the EU, accounting for 58% and 47% respectively. This reflects the importance of this research as it seeks to identify the main international trade actions taken by the European Union in response to China's strategy to distinguish the degree of trade interdependence between the two.

This research will be based on an analytical-descriptive approach to the issue under discussion, opting for a qualitative analysis of a range of sources. The main research tool will be the analysis of primary sources such as the findings of bilateral agreements and trade defense reports that show the interaction between both actors.

The study will begin with a first chapter covering the general aspects of the BRI, its strategic objectives, geographic focus, and spheres of influence. A second chapter will analyze the EU's responses to the BRI, its engagement, concerns, and alternatives. The third chapter of this research will analyze the degree of reciprocity and interdependence that could characterize the relationship between the two actors. The main reason for exploring this topic lies in the prospective hypothesis of the interrelationship that economic, political, and social issues have in today's context.

**Keywords:** European Union, People's Republic of China, Belt and Road Initiative, trade defense

## **RESUMEN**

Esta investigación pretende responder a cuáles son las principales medidas de defensa comercial internacional adoptadas por la Unión Europea en respuesta a la Iniciativa de la Franja y la Ruta de China en el periodo 2013-2023. China es el país con los casos antidumping y antisubvenciones más activos en la UE, con un 58% y un 47% respectivamente. Esto refleja la importancia de esta investigación, ya que pretende identificar las principales acciones comerciales internacionales emprendidas por la Unión Europea en respuesta a la estrategia de China, con el fin de distinguir el grado de interdependencia comercial entre ambos actores.

Esta investigación se basará en un enfoque analítico-descriptivo del tema tratado, optando por un análisis cualitativo de diversas fuentes. La principal herramienta de investigación será el análisis de fuentes primarias como las conclusiones de los acuerdos bilaterales y los informes de defensa comercial que muestran la interacción entre ambos actores.

El estudio comenzará con un primer capítulo que cubrirá los aspectos generales de la Iniciativa de la Franja y la Ruta, sus objetivos estratégicos, enfoque geográfico y esferas de influencia. Un segundo capítulo analizará las respuestas de la UE a la iniciativa, su compromiso, preocupaciones y alternativas. El tercer capítulo de esta investigación analizará el grado de reciprocidad e interdependencia que podría caracterizar la relación entre ambos actores. La razón principal para explorar este tema radica en la hipótesis prospectiva de la interrelación que las cuestiones económicas, políticas y sociales tienen en el contexto actual.

**Palabras clave:** Unión Europea, República Popular China, Iniciativa de la Franja y la Ruta, defensa comercial



## INTRODUCTION

### The development of China's trade

China has become a major player on the international stage, not only because of its economic power but also because of its political positioning in the global conversation. Since 2013, China has been implementing an initiative called Belt and Road in which it seeks to position itself as an important ally for several countries through infrastructure financing and development programs. Its dominant character as a world power has drawn attention to its actions, and other international players are basing their trade initiatives on the decisions made by the Asian country.

China has risen to the top of the world's economies in less than fifty years. Its qualification as a global trading powerhouse is due to a series of circumstances that began in 1979 with the gradual opening of its economy. Understanding this rise requires a brief historical review of the economic and political reforms carried out in the Asian country, as well as a series of events and actions that made possible its transformation from a low-income economy to the second country with the second largest GDP in the world.

The People's Republic of China (PRC) was founded in 1949<sup>2</sup> under a self-reliant economic model in which its leader, Mao Zedong, refused to open up to the international economy and viewed economic exchange as a betrayal of the nation and the structure forged by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). With Zedong's death in 1976, a series of economic reforms and ideas began to be implemented that gradually allowed China to enter the global economic spectrum. The model that operated between 1949 and 1976 was based on a centralized economy in which the state controlled a large portion of China's economic output. The central government set production targets, controlled market prices, and allocated resources throughout most of the economy<sup>3</sup>.

Between 1979 and 1985, the first stage of reform was characterized by moderate and cautious internationalization. In this stage, state-owned enterprises (SOEs) operating under the auspices of the Ministry of Commerce and the State Economic and Trade Commission were allowed to invest outside China<sup>4</sup>. Deng Xiaoping, Mao Zedong's successor in the leadership of the PRC, created a two-way economic opening policy, called the *Open Door Policy*, which not only allowed SOEs to open but also allowed foreign firms to enter the Chinese market, to build domestic production capacity and increase national export capacity<sup>5</sup>. To better understand what these trade opening reforms entailed, it is worth noting that before 1979, foreign trade conducted by the Chinese government was limited to the procurement of goods that could not be produced domestically<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup>YAN, Xuetong. From Keeping a Low Profile to Striving for Achievement. In: *The Chinese Journal of International Politics* [online]. 2014, vol. 7, no. 2, pp. 153-184 [accessed: 22 January 2024]. Available at: <<https://doi.org/10.1093/cjip/pou027>>, p. 153

<sup>3</sup>MORRISON, Wayne. China's Economic Rise: History, Trends, Challenges, Implications for the United States. In: *Congressional Research Service* [online]. 2019 [accessed: 23 February 2024]. Available at: <<https://sgp.fas.org/crs/row/RL33534.pdf>>, p. 1

<sup>4</sup>BUCKLEY, Peter, CLEGG, Jeremy, CROSS, Adam, LIU, Xin, VOSS, Hinrich, and ZHENG, Ping. The Determinants of Chinese Outward Foreign Direct Investment. In: *Journal of International Business Studies* [online]. 2007, vol. 38, no. 4, pp. 499-518 [accessed: 22 January 2024]. Available at: <<https://doi.org/10.1057/palgrave.jibs.8400277>>, p. 500

<sup>5</sup>AMIGHINI, Alessia. 2018. China: Champion of (Which) Globalisation? First edition. Milano: Ledizioni [accessed: 23 February 2024]. ISBN 9788867057900, p. 13

<sup>6</sup>MORRISON, W., *op. cit.*, p. 7

Hand in hand with the above, the financial system underwent a series of changes, starting with the end of the monopoly of the People's Bank of China (PBOC). In its place, four state-owned commercial banks, better known as the Big Four, were established to take over the role of the PBOC and to play a crucial role in the Chinese government's proposed method of strengthening its economy through state credit and financial support<sup>7</sup>. Also, beginning in 1979, as part of China's economic reforms, the government established four special economic zones along the country's coastal areas to attract foreign investment, increase exports, and import high-tech products<sup>8</sup>.

A key event in this transformation process was China's reintegration into the World Bank in 1980, which would set an important precedent for the future development of reformist ideas from the West<sup>9</sup>. The World Bank acted not only as an important lender for the resurgence of the PRC but also as a catalyst for China's critical and prospective thinking about the world economy and the strategic role it would play in this scenario<sup>10</sup>. It is important to note that China did not limit its knowledge acquisition to the economies of the Western powers of the time; on the contrary, it sought advice from emerging economies in Latin America, such as Argentina and Brazil. This was based on the mentality that "China will never seek hegemony or bully others, but will always be on the side of the Third World"<sup>11</sup>. While it is impossible to know in depth the true motives behind this particular approach on the part of the PRC, it is relevant to note its character of seeking pluralistic and diverse advice and analysis.

Another fundamental pillar of the PRC's economic growth has been the State's tendency to maintain high levels of savings. When economic reforms began in 1979, domestic savings accounted for 32% of the country's gross domestic product (GDP). The country's high savings enabled it to become a major lender to other economies, a "large net global lender"<sup>12</sup>. This period, which began in 1979, could be said to be the beginning of the end of the communist system with its Soviet-style economic policies in China and the beginning of the transition to a market economy; a crucial moment not only for the economy of this Asian country but also for the world economy<sup>13</sup>.

From 1986 to 1998, China's economic transformation was directly driven by government encouragement. First, several restrictive policies were liberalized and Chinese firms were allowed to form alliances with other foreign economic actors. Second, internationalization policies were introduced into national economic development policies, which generated direct support not only from national entities but also from subnational institutions<sup>14</sup>. In general, the PRC's development model was based on "reducing the size of the centralized planned economy and increasing the size of market-based private sector

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<sup>7</sup>BARTH, James, CAPRIO, Gerard, and PHUMIWASANA, Triphon. The Transformation of China from an Emerging Economy to a Global Powerhouse. China's Emerging Financial Markets. In: *Boston, MA: Springer US* [online]. 2009, vol. 8, pp. 73-110 [accessed: 23 February 2024]. Available at: <[https://link-springer-com.sire.ub.edu/chapter/10.1007/978-0-387-93769-4\\_2](https://link-springer-com.sire.ub.edu/chapter/10.1007/978-0-387-93769-4_2)>, p.74

<sup>8</sup>MORRISON, W., *op. cit.*, p. 4

<sup>9</sup>GEWIRTZ, Julian, 2017. Unlikely partners : Chinese reformers, Western economists, and the making of global China. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press [accessed: 23 February 2024]. Available at: <<https://doi-org.sire.ub.edu/10.4159/9780674973459>>, p. 12

<sup>10</sup>WEI, Shang-Jin, FAN, Shenggen, KANBUR, Ravi, and ZHANG, Xiaobo, 2014. The Oxford companion to the economics of China. Oxford: Oxford University Press [accessed: 23 February 2024]. Available at: <<https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199678204.001.0001>>, p. 40

<sup>11</sup>GEWIRTZ, J., *op. cit.*, p. 199

<sup>12</sup>MORRISON, W., *op. cit.*, p. 7

<sup>13</sup>WEI, S., *op. cit.*, p. 52

<sup>14</sup>BUCKLEY, S., *op. cit.*, p. 500

activity"<sup>15</sup>. During the period of the *Open Door Policy* from 1979 to 1998, foreign firms were granted access to the Chinese market, although it should be noted that the characterization of this opening continued to be cautious and did not consider the Chinese consumer market<sup>16</sup>.

It should not be forgotten that this stage of reform and trade opening was based on Deng Xiaoping's approach of seeking advice from other States. The creation of a socialist market economy in China resulted from Xiaoping's promises to modernize and enrich the Chinese state, which, according to his projections, would lead to an acquisition of global power. This rise was achieved through extensive and careful analysis of Western economic policies and how they could be applied in the PRC<sup>17</sup>. Some of the reforms were also driven by China's desire to join the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) and the World Trade Organization (WTO), which meant that the PRC cut tariffs on 5,000 items, reducing the average tariff rate to 23 percent<sup>18</sup>.

A pivotal moment in China's economic and political growth dates back to 1999, when it implemented a new policy called the *Go Global Policy*, which implied a greater international opening of trade relations with other actors and the regulation of outward direct investment (ODI)<sup>19</sup>. In November 2001, China became a full member of the WTO, which meant, on the one hand, an increase in trade and investment and a restructuring of the Chinese economy through global flows of goods and services, and, on the other hand, the responsibility of the state to comply with a set of standards and requirements of an international institution<sup>20</sup>. This integration of China into the global trading system brought about several changes and affected the conditions of some global trading actors. For example, European producers had to face competition from Chinese exporters within the euro area<sup>21</sup>.

Since the 2000s, the export sector has been an important driver of China's growth<sup>22</sup>, and it was during this period that China embarked on a strategy of establishing preferential trade agreements (PTAs) to strengthen its trade alliances. It began with a special focus on neighboring countries in the Asian region and then entered into such agreements with countries in Europe and South America<sup>23</sup>. In line with the PRC's export orientation, China's exports began to grow faster than its imports in the 21st century, generating growing trade surpluses that continued unabated until the financial crisis of 2008<sup>24</sup>.

It is from the 2000s that China's economic performance can be said to have begun to show high projections of becoming a global powerhouse. By 2003, China was the world's

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<sup>15</sup>PALLEY, Thomas. External Contradictions of the Chinese Development Model: export-led growth and the dangers of global economic contraction. In: *The Journal of Contemporary China* [online]. 2006, vol. 15, no. 46, pp. 69-88 [accessed: 23 February 2024]. Available at: <<https://doi.org/10.1080/10670560500331732>>, p. 71

<sup>16</sup>AMIGHINI, A., *op. cit.*, p. 13

<sup>17</sup>GEWIRTZ, J., *op. cit.*, p. 133

<sup>18</sup>GALKIN, Philipp, BOLLINO, Carlo Andrea, and ATALLA, Tarek. Effect of preferential trade agreements on China's energy trade from Chinese and exporters' perspectives. In: *International Journal of Emerging Markets* [online]. 2018, vol. 13, no. 6, pp. 1776-1797 [accessed: 23 February 2024]. Available at: <<https://doi.org/10.1108/IJoEM-06-2017-0212>>, p. 1778

<sup>19</sup>BUCKLEY, S., *op. cit.*, p. 504

<sup>20</sup>GEWIRTZ, J., *op. cit.*, p. 266

<sup>21</sup>DE VILLE, Ferdi, and VERMEIREN, Mattias. The Eurozone crisis and the rise of China in the global monetary and trading system: The political economy of an asymmetric shock. In: *Comparative European Politics (Houndmills, Basingstoke, England)* [online]. 2016, vol. 14, no. 5, pp. 572-603 [accessed: 23 February 2024]. Available at: <<https://doi.org/10.1057/cep.2014.35>>, p. 573

<sup>22</sup>BARTH, J., *op. cit.*, p. 80

<sup>23</sup>GALKIN, P., *op. cit.*, p. 1778-1779

<sup>24</sup>AMIGHINI, A., *op. cit.*, p. 18

largest recipient of foreign direct investment (FDI)<sup>25</sup>. By 2005, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), based on research using information from national investment promotion agencies, projected that China would become one of the four countries with the highest FDI inflows between 2005 and 2008. In addition, the UNCTAD survey results showed that China was considered an attractive location by 87% of transnational corporations (TNCs) and by 85% of the experts surveyed<sup>26</sup>.

In the first decade of the 21st century, China decided to reform its banking system more deeply than in the early years of Deng Xiaoping's transformation. It opted to open up the possible acquisition of shares in state-owned banks to the foreign market<sup>27</sup>, allowing foreign companies to inject capital into the country through the acquisition of ownership shares "limited to less than 20% for a single investor and less than 25% for all foreign investors"<sup>28</sup>. There is a direct link between the globalization of the 1990s and the rise of China as the dominant global economy. The opening of the *Second World*, Central and Eastern Europe, and the former Soviet Union facilitated the rise of new industrial powers such as the PRC<sup>29</sup>.

In addition, the consumer market of the PRC should be emphasized. In 1995, the populations of the United States of America (USA), Japan, and Germany accounted for half of global consumption. Just over 10 years later, China's growing share of global consumption allowed it to overtake Germany in 2007 and Japan in 2010 to become the world's second-largest consumer<sup>30</sup>. In addition to this progress, its economic development model has evolved exponentially since the implementation of the *Go Global Policy*. After two decades of basing its economic development on FDI and being the largest recipient of this type of investment, by the end of the second decade of the 21st century, China had become a major outbound investor<sup>31</sup>. Indeed, in line with its evolution toward a strategic approach to investment and financial assistance, "China's economic aid is designed for strategic relations rather than economic benefits"<sup>32</sup>. By 2009, China was already considered a "global manufacturing powerhouse" because of its positioning in world industrialization and globalization<sup>33</sup>.

By 2010, China surpassed Japan in terms of GDP, becoming the country with the second-highest GDP after the United States<sup>34</sup>. With an average annual growth rate of 10%, China's GDP "has grown at almost three times the world average"<sup>35</sup>. It is worth noting that

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<sup>25</sup>DAUDERSTÄDT, Michael, and STETTEN, Jürgen. China and globalisation. In: *Inter Economics* [online]. 2005, vol. 40, no. 4, pp. 226-234 [accessed: 23 February 2024]. Available at: <<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10272-005-0153-4>>, p. 226

<sup>26</sup>UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON TRADE AND DEVELOPMENT. Prospects for Foreign Direct Investment and the Strategies of Transnational Corporations [online]. 2005-2008 [accessed: 3 April 2024]. Available at: <[https://unctad.org/system/files/official-document/iteiit20057\\_en.pdf](https://unctad.org/system/files/official-document/iteiit20057_en.pdf)>, p. 4

<sup>27</sup>DAUDERSTÄDT, M, and STETTEN, J., *op. cit.*, p. 226

<sup>28</sup>BARTH, J., *op. cit.*, p. 97

<sup>29</sup>DAUDERSTÄDT, M, and STETTEN, J., *op. cit.*, p. 226

<sup>30</sup>JU, Jiandong, and YU, Xinding. China's Opening up after 40 Years: Standing at a Historic Turning Point. In: *China & World Economy* [online]. 2018, vol. 26, no. 2, pp. 23-49 [accessed: 23 February 2024]. Available at: <<https://doi.org/10.1111/cwe.12235>>, p. 40

<sup>31</sup>AMIGHINI, A., *op. cit.*, p. 32

<sup>32</sup>YAN, X., *op. cit.*, p. 182

<sup>33</sup>GARNAUT, Ross, SONG, Ligang, and WOO, Wing Thye, 2009. *China's New Place in a World in Crisis: Economic, Geopolitical and Environmental Dimensions*. 1. Canberra: ANU Press [accessed: 23 February 2024]. Available at: <[https://doi.org/10.26530/OAPEN\\_458873](https://doi.org/10.26530/OAPEN_458873)>, p. 292

<sup>34</sup>YAN, X., *op. cit.*, p. 153

<sup>35</sup>BARTH, J., *op. cit.*, p. 73

until 1995, Japan was considered the core country of the East and Southeast Asian region. By 2015, however, China had replaced Japan as the core economy of this part of the world<sup>36</sup>. The Chinese economy has undergone a series of important transformations in the last decade, from a "major trading country" to a "major producer, capital investor, consumer, and innovator"<sup>37</sup>.

Along with the above, China has transformed not only in its trade relations with the outside world but also in its internal productive approach. The basis of China's economic model has been, and continues to be, its large supply of young workers as part of the manufacturing industry<sup>38</sup>. However, this is gradually changing, and its foreign trade has moved from a broad focus on a labor-intensive model to a capital- and technology-intensive approach and high-end manufacturing<sup>39</sup>.

In addition, the PRC's exports have diversified rapidly, reflecting precisely this transformation. In 2000, China's largest export category was textiles and clothing. By 2018, however, it had shifted 8% of its total textile production to electrical machinery<sup>40</sup>. As evidence of this reorientation, it is claimed that it has lost its advantage in labor-intensive activities such as garments, footwear, and electronics assembly<sup>41</sup>. China has grown from an emerging consumer market to a core economy based on high-tech industries, and its positioning has given it global political power and influence<sup>42</sup>. The PRC is the country with the highest number of banking assets, which, in addition to its sheer size and growth rate, makes it an economy of high relevance to Western companies<sup>43</sup>.

In 2015, the Chinese government launched a plan called *Made in China 2025*, which aims to upgrade and modernize 10 key sectors of China's manufacturing industry. They intend to do this through a comprehensive approach to obtaining assistance from other governments<sup>44</sup>. To sustain the economic growth that has characterized its reform to a market economy since the late 1980s, China has established some 156 high-tech development zones (HTDZs) to further strengthen its global position in advanced manufacturing and technology<sup>45</sup>. The actions, characteristics, and policies pursued in China will shape not only the future of the Chinese economy but also the future of the global economy.

This is evidenced by the fact that China is not only a global trade powerhouse in the broadest sense but also a technology superpower. China has the world's largest population of Internet users, with more than 900 million Chinese users virtually connected, a number

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<sup>36</sup>JU, J., and YU, X., *op. cit.*, p. 40

<sup>37</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 24

<sup>38</sup>China's economic power on uncertain speed. In: *Knowledge For Policy* [online]. 05 October 2022 [accessed: 17 March 2024]. Available at: <[https://knowledge4policy.ec.europa.eu/foresight/chinas-economic-power-uncertain-speed\\_en](https://knowledge4policy.ec.europa.eu/foresight/chinas-economic-power-uncertain-speed_en)>, par. 10

<sup>39</sup>JU, J., and YU, X., *op. cit.*, p. 31

<sup>40</sup>AMIGHINI, A., *op. cit.*, p. 22

<sup>41</sup>DOLLAR, David. China's Rise as a Regional and Global Power: The AIIB and the 'One Belt, One Road'. In: *Horizons: Journal of International Relations and Sustainable Development* [online]. 2015, no. 4, pp. 162-173 [accessed: 1 March 2024]. Available at: <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/48573566>>, p. 170

<sup>42</sup>Knowledge For Policy, *op. cit.*, par. 1

<sup>43</sup>*Ibid.*, par. 4

<sup>44</sup>MORRISON, W., *op. cit.*, p. 1

<sup>45</sup>UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON TRADE AND DEVELOPMENT. World Investment Report 2019. Special Economic Zones [online]. 2019 [accessed: 5 April 2024]. Available at: <[https://unctad.org/system/files/official-document/wir2019\\_en.pdf](https://unctad.org/system/files/official-document/wir2019_en.pdf)>, p. 134

almost equal to that of the United States and the European Union (EU) combined<sup>46</sup>. Of these 900 million users in China, one-third are considered "strong digital" users who are driving the global consumer industry<sup>47</sup>. China will not only base its future economic strategies on traditional business models, but will also take into account other aspects such as the rise of artificial intelligence (AI) and digital technologies, which will influence and help strengthen the industry not only as a purely economic and commercial actor, but also as an important political actor in the international spectrum, contributing to the debate on "global governance issues such as digital sovereignty, cross-border data flows and cybersecurity"<sup>48</sup>.

At present, China is facing a major restructuring of its economic model, not only in terms of the above, but also in terms of the social, environmental, and political issues that have arisen as a consequence of its earlier initial policy of achieving growth at any cost. Pollution, inequality, overcapacity in many industries, and growing corporate debt, to name a few of these consequences, have led the PRC to mobilize in search of an economic model based on smart economic growth methods that promote sustainable development<sup>49</sup>. China is the "third largest sustainable fund market in the world", financing more than 270 sustainability funds, with funds exceeding USD 50 billion by the end of 2022<sup>50</sup>. China is also in the process of transforming its energy sector, which is the world's second-largest contributor to air pollution and climate change<sup>51</sup>. On the one hand, it is worth noting that by 2019 it already had the world's largest renewable energy capacity, although on the other hand, 60% of primary energy consumption in the PRC came from coal<sup>52</sup>.

### **Purpose of this research**

As shown above, China is considered a major actor in the international arena, both politically and economically. Consequently, it is placed alongside other major world powers such as the United States, Japan, India, the United Kingdom (UK), Canada, and the bloc of 27 European States that make up the EU. For this study, the relationship between China and the EU is characterized as vital to the global economy. According to data updated at the beginning of 2024, China is the world's largest exporter with a share of 17.6%, followed by the EU with 13.2% of total world exports<sup>53</sup>. These two international players are in a strategic position of importance for world trade. Based on 2023 data, China was the leading importer of goods to the Union (20.5%), while the EU was the third largest exporter of goods to China (8.8%)<sup>54</sup>.

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<sup>46</sup>WINSTON MA, Ma, 2020. *China's Data Economy: How Its Innovation Power Is Shaping the Future of AI, Media, and the Global Order*. 1st edition. S.I.: Wiley-Blackwell [accessed: 23 February 2024]. Available at: <<https://onlinelibrary-wiley-com.sire.ub.edu/doi/book/10.1002/9781119749073>>, p. 302

<sup>47</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 302

<sup>48</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 328

<sup>49</sup>MORRISON, W., *op. cit.*, p. 9

<sup>50</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 101

<sup>51</sup>The World Bank In China. In: *The World Bank* [online]. February 2024 [accessed: 23 February 2024]. Available at: <<https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/china/overview>>, p. 101

<sup>52</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 27

<sup>53</sup>China-EU - international trade in goods statistics. In: *Eurostat* [online]. February 2024 [accessed: 3 April 2024]. Available at:

<[https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=China-EU\\_-\\_international\\_trade\\_in\\_goods\\_statistics](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=China-EU_-_international_trade_in_goods_statistics)>, par. 5

<sup>54</sup>*Ibid.*, par. 6

The emergence of China as a giant in the economic world and the global trading system has had an asymmetrical impact on the different Member States of the European Union. In other words, the situation has been uneven in terms of trade relations with the Asian country. On the one hand, in the case of northern European States, such as Germany, it has managed to strengthen its external competitiveness in the face of the region's deepening monetary and trade relations with China. On the other hand, in the case of the EU's southern countries, they have struggled to cope with the economic and trade competition that comes with the European bloc's direct relations with China. In particular, the GIPS countries (Greece, Italy, Portugal, and Spain) have been exposed to vulnerabilities as a result of their lack of institutional adaptation to the emergence of this commercial giant<sup>55</sup>. As a complementary element, the rise of China as a global powerhouse has exacerbated pressures in the European region in the face of the devaluation of the euro against the renminbi (RMB)<sup>56</sup>.

Diplomatic relations between the EU and China date back to 1975. Both have "one of the largest and most dynamic trading relationships in the world", as their policies, links, and trade and investment exchanges have become key drivers of development and innovation for each of the parties<sup>57</sup>; one could speak of a bilateral trade relationship that brings about joint development. In the twelfth EU-China Strategic Dialogue, held in October 2010, representatives from both sides stressed the importance of maintaining high-level contacts and remaining strategic allies. However, they also acknowledged the growing complexity of the relationship. In the context of the increased volatility that has become the new normal in the international economy and trade, it is important to analyze one of the pillars of the PRC's foreign policy strategy: the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

This research seeks to answer the following question: What are the main international trade measures adopted by the European Union in response to China's Belt and Road Initiative in the period 2013-2023? The main objective of this thesis is to identify the main international trade measures adopted by the European Union in response to China's Belt and Road Initiative, to distinguish their degree of trade interdependence. Likewise, as complementary or specific objectives, we seek, on the one hand, to identify the international trade agreements, measures, and sanctions that each actor has taken towards the other in the period 2013-2023 and, on the other hand, to compare and contrast the strategies of China and the European Union concerning reciprocal international trade.

The European Union was chosen as the international actor of analysis within the framework of the BRI because of the geographical presence of the university institution in which this research is framed. Since this is a research carried out within the studies of the Master's Degree in Diplomacy and International Organizations of the University of Barcelona, located in Spain, a member state of the EU, it was decided to choose this regional bloc because of the direct support of faculty and resources close to the source of study. In addition, as mentioned in the previous paragraphs, the Union has been paying attention to China's actions for decades. According to a report by the European Commission (EC)<sup>58</sup> China is the country with the most active anti-dumping and anti-subsidy cases in the EU, with 58%

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<sup>55</sup>DE VILLE, F., and VERMEIREN, M., W., *op. cit.*, p. 573

<sup>56</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 575

<sup>57</sup>EU-China 2020 Strategic Agenda for Cooperation. In: *European Union External Action Service* [online]. [accessed: 3 April 2024]. Available at: <<https://www.eas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/20131123.pdf>>, p. 5

<sup>58</sup>EUROPEAN COMMISSION. 41th Annual Report from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council on the EU's Anti-Dumping, Anti-Subsidy and Safeguard activities and the Use of Trade Defence Instruments by Third Countries targeting the EU in 2022 [online]. 6 September 2023 [accessed: 9 April 2024]. Available at: <<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=SWD:2023:287:FIN#page=6>>

and 47% respectively. This reflects the importance of this research as it seeks to identify the main international trade actions taken by the European Union in response to China's strategy to distinguish the degree of trade interdependence between the two.

This Master's thesis is intended to serve as a starting point for future research on the economic relations between these two international players, as well as to guide the economic and commercial initiatives of various public and private organizations whose main focus is on relations between the Asian and European markets. This research work is framed in a descriptive nature, where a tour of the characteristics of both international trade regimes will be carried out. It will be limited to a period of 10 years, starting from the beginning of the Belt and Road Initiative and ending in 2023.

This research will be based on an analytical-descriptive approach to the issue under discussion, opting for a qualitative analysis of a range of sources. The main research tool will be the analysis of primary sources such as the outcomes of summits and bilateral and multilateral agreements between both actors. Particular attention will be paid to the communications and trade defense reports published by the EC. The research will focus on the period from the year in which the Belt and Road Initiative was announced, 2013, to the previous year in which this research was published, 2023. In addition, the research will be based on a review of secondary academic sources directly related to the topic under discussion.

The study will begin with a first chapter covering the general aspects of the BRI, its strategic objectives, geographic focus, and spheres of influence. A second chapter will address the EU's response to this initiative, its engagement, concerns, and strategy. The third chapter of this research work will compare and contrast the different strategies of both actors from a commercial point of view. The main policies, measures, partnerships, and agreements implemented between the two actors will be reviewed. Finally, it will review the main findings and implications of the Asian powerhouse BRI for the EU's trade strategy. It will also explore the limitations of the present work as well as opportunities for future research.

The economic actions of this major Asian actor are expected to shape the future of the globalized trade regime. Consequently, impacting on the decisions, policies, and actions of other states around the world. This, in turn, has a direct implication on societal issues necessary for the sustainability of the world. The main reason for exploring this topic lies in the prospective hypothesis of the interrelationship that economic, political, and social issues have in today's context.



## CHAPTER 1. THE BRI: IMPLICATIONS FOR THE EU

The BRI as a global connectivity strategy is introduced in this first chapter. In particular, its objectives, approaches, and sources of investment will be discussed. In addition, there will be an overview of some of the major projects in the decade under review and their impact in the international context.

### 1.1 Geographic Focus and Key Projects

The foreign policy of the PRC, on which this research will focus, will be, as mentioned above, the BRI. This is the result of a vision communicated by Chinese leader Xi Jinping in 2013, for the first time on September 7 at Nazarbayev University in Kazakhstan<sup>59</sup> and then reiterated on October 3 of the same year in Indonesia<sup>60</sup>. Both communications were initially intended to specifically target and attract the attention of audiences close to China<sup>61</sup>. On the one hand, in the first of these conferences, Jinping alludes to the geographical and commercial proximity that unites the States of China and Kazakhstan, insofar as they share a large common border and more than 2,000 years of exchange of interests<sup>62</sup>. He also focuses his speech on the creation of a *Silk Road Economic Belt* in which the countries of the region can synchronously achieve five general objectives: (1) enhance joint regional policies to achieve economic development, (2) improve connectivity through an efficient transportation network, (3) promote and facilitate mutual trade, (4) allow the circulation of local currency to make the region an economically competitive space in the world, and (5) strengthen people-to-people exchanges<sup>63</sup>.

In the second conference, on the other hand, Jinping refers to the blood ties between China and the countries of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). In contrast to China's approach at the first BRI conference, in this one, he focuses on the importance of maritime cooperation and calls for the joint creation of a *Maritime Silk Road* in the 21st-century<sup>64</sup>. Having given a general introduction to the BRI in Kazakhstan, he then devoted part of his speech to emphasizing the importance of China's role in the development of the world. The CCP leader openly declared that the Chinese state has decided to embark on a "successful development path" that will not only bring development at the national level but will have an impact on the whole world<sup>65</sup>. He concludes by pointing out that by uniting the populations of Indonesia and China, a great power could be brought together that would represent a quarter of the world's population (1.6 billion people)<sup>66</sup>. As a result of these initial explanatory approaches to the BRI, it can be pointed out that the BRI has two main lines of work: one focused on the development of territorial transportation infrastructure (railways,

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<sup>59</sup>President Xi Jinping Delivers Important Speech and Proposes to Build a Silk Road Economic Belt with Central Asian Countries. In: *Consulate General of the People's Republic of China in Toronto* [online]. 7 September 2013 [accessed: 17 March 2024]. Available at: <[http://toronto.china-consulate.gov.cn/eng/zgxw/201309/t20130913\\_7095490.htm](http://toronto.china-consulate.gov.cn/eng/zgxw/201309/t20130913_7095490.htm)>, par. 1

<sup>60</sup>Working Together to Build a China-ASEAN Community of Destiny. In: *Belt and Road Initiative Hong Kong* [online]. 2017 [accessed: 17 March 2024]. Available at: <[https://www.beltandroad.gov.hk/important-speeches\\_20131003\\_tc.html](https://www.beltandroad.gov.hk/important-speeches_20131003_tc.html)>, par. 20

<sup>61</sup>DOLLAR, D., *op. cit.*

<sup>62</sup>Consulate General of the People's Republic of China in Toronto, *op. cit.*, par. 9

<sup>63</sup>*Ibid.*, par. 8

<sup>64</sup>Belt and Road Initiative Hong Kong, *op. cit.*, par. 29

<sup>65</sup>*Ibid.*, par. 40

<sup>66</sup>*Ibid.*, par. 50

highways, and airports) and the other on the strengthening of efficient maritime routes (ports and sea lanes)<sup>67</sup>.

This initiative represents China's vision of forging a global community based on a shared future<sup>68</sup>. This new perspective on openness began with the death of Mao Zedong and China's refusal to perpetuate an ideology of isolation from the rest of the world<sup>69</sup>. It has its antecedents in the ancient silk routes that connected Chinese territory with other places<sup>70</sup>. It also stems from the PRC's criticism of so-called "economic globalization," which is dominated by a few countries and, in the PRC's view, has not contributed to the common development that would allow global benefits to be achieved<sup>71</sup>. According to the Chinese government, the basic principles of the BRI are: "peace, broad consultation, openness, innovation, and social progress"<sup>72</sup>. China's foreign policy is also based on the goal of reorganizing the international order dominated by Western countries, which is why it seeks to implement an interconnected economic, political, and cultural system<sup>73</sup>. However, it is also relevant to add that China has a surplus of products and goods in several sectors, such as steel and cement, which is why the BRI has an additional interest in the PRC to commercialize its trade surpluses in the market of this so-called *New Silk Road*<sup>74</sup>.

It should be noted that the BRI has evolved from being initially conceived for the States on China's periphery in the first phase, to continuing to seek connectivity with the rest of the Asian countries, Africa, and Europe in the second phase, to ending up in a third phase covering all the countries of the world<sup>75</sup>. One of the main aspects that characterize the BRI is its connectivity priority, which has been emphasized since its first communication in 2013. This initiative consists of six main corridors: the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, the China-Indochina Peninsula Economic Corridor, the China-Mongolia-Russia Economic Corridor, the China-Central Asia-West Asia Economic Corridor, the Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar Economic Corridor, and the New Eurasian Land Bridge<sup>76</sup>. China's three-pronged goals in implementing transportation systems are to (1) reduce its current maritime dependence for trade, (2) increase the infrastructure capacity of cities to develop and integrate domestic markets, and (3) make more sustainable and strategic use of energy and natural resources<sup>77</sup>. Therefore, the BRI is projected as a high-impact initiative and opportunity for China due to the new markets that the BRI area encompasses<sup>78</sup>.

Related to the above, in addition to a clear international focus, Beijing also seeks to

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<sup>67</sup>AKDEMIR, Erhan. Chinese Strategy Towards Europe. In: *Studia Europejskie* [online]. 2020, vol. 24, no. 2, pp. 121-145 [accessed: 22 January 2024]. Available at: <<https://doi.org/10.33067/SE.2.2020/7>>, p. 128

<sup>68</sup>The Belt and Road Initiative: A Key Pillar of the Global Community of Shared Future. In: *The Third Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation* [online]. October 2023 [accessed: 17 March 2024]. Available at: <<http://www.beltandroadforum.org/english/n101/2023/1010/c124-895.html#:~:text=By%20the%20end%20of%20August,with%2028%20countries%20and%20regions>>, par. 3

<sup>69</sup>*Ibid.*, par. 33

<sup>70</sup>*Ibid.*, par. 33

<sup>71</sup>*Ibid.*, par. 56

<sup>72</sup>*Ibid.*, par. 54

<sup>73</sup>AKDEMIR, E., *op. cit.*, p. 124

<sup>74</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 135

<sup>75</sup>ZENG, Jinghan. Does Europe Matter? The Role of Europe in Chinese Narratives of 'One Belt One Road' and 'New Type of Great Power Relations'. In: *Journal of Common Market Studies* [online]. 2017, vol. 5, no. 55, pp. 1162-1176 [accessed: 22 January 2024]. Available at: <<https://doi.org/10.1111/jcms.12535>>, p. 1163

<sup>76</sup>*op. cit.* n. 68, par. 12

<sup>77</sup>*op. cit.* n. 67, p. 128

<sup>78</sup>GARCÍA HERRERO, Ana and XU, Jianwei. Can Europe Expect Trade Gains? In: *China & World Economy* [online]. 2017, vol. 25, no. 6, pp. 84-99 [accessed: 22 January 2024]. Available at: <<https://doi.org/10.1111/cwe.12222>>, p. 11

positively influence those underperforming provinces that should seek to reinvent their economic and trade strategy<sup>79</sup>. In terms of land strategy, the Silk Road Economic Belt aims to connect "the country's underdeveloped hinterland to Europe through Central Asia" and in terms of maritime strategy, the Maritime Silk Road aims to connect the "fast-growing Southeast Asian region to China's southern provinces"<sup>80</sup>. The above is evidence that, in addition to being an initiative based on cooperation to achieve a prosperous future of the world order, it can be affirmed that there are clear and specific strategic objectives for the benefit of China. An example of this is the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, which is considered one of the flagship projects of the initiative under study. This corridor will connect the city of Kashi in the far west of China with the province of Balochistan in Pakistan. Because of the latter's proximity to the Persian Gulf, this route will allow China to transport its energy supplies to the Middle East without having to use the maritime route through the South East Asian Sea<sup>81</sup> and reduce its dependence on oil shipments through the vulnerable Strait of Malacca<sup>82</sup>.

The BRI is not a single mega project but is characterized as an ever-growing initiative with a broad portfolio of subprojects ranging from "(1) rail, road, sea, and airport infrastructure, (2) power and water infrastructure, (3) real estate contracts, to (4) digital infrastructure"<sup>83</sup>. In this regard, since 2013, this initiative has also begun with the proposed creation of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB)<sup>84</sup>. This banking institution acts as one of the main sources of financing for the One Belt One Road (OBOR) Initiative<sup>85</sup>. The AIIB officially began operations in 2016 with 54 founding members, including Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa (BRICS), the UK, France, Italy, and Germany (four G7 countries), and other countries such as Egypt, Australia, and New Zealand<sup>86</sup>. The BRI is said to consist of a catalog of strategies that are independent of each other but linked by a broader purpose<sup>87</sup>. This initiative involves a variety of actors, both state and non-state, a myriad of capital, and numerous geographical areas<sup>88</sup>. There is also talk of active participation at the domestic level, i.e., Chinese local governments, from planning agencies to universities, are actively and vigorously seeking to be part of the BRI<sup>89</sup>.

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<sup>79</sup>LOWY INSTITUTE FOR INTERNATIONAL POLICY. Understanding China's Belt and Road Initiative [online]. March 2017 [accessed: 11 April 2024]. Available at: <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep10136>>, p. 2

<sup>80</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 2

<sup>81</sup>Lowy Institute for International Policy, *op. cit.*, p. 4

<sup>82</sup>ASIA SOCIETY POLICY INSTITUTE. Navigating the Belt and Road Initiative [online]. June 2019 [accessed: 17 February 2023]. Available at: <[https://asiasociety.org/sites/default/files/2019-06/Navigating%20the%20Belt%20and%20Road%20Initiative\\_2.pdf](https://asiasociety.org/sites/default/files/2019-06/Navigating%20the%20Belt%20and%20Road%20Initiative_2.pdf)>, p. 4

<sup>83</sup>SIELKER, Franziska. The influence of the Belt and Road Initiative in Europe. In: *Regional Studies, Regional Science* [online]. 2020, vol. 7, no. 1, pp. 288-291 [accessed: 22 January 2024]. Available at: <<https://doi.org/10.1080/21681376.2020.1790411>>, p. 289

<sup>84</sup>SILVIUS, Ray. China's Belt and Road Initiative as Nascent World Order Structure and Concept? Between Sino-Centering and Sino-Deflecting. In: *Journal of Contemporary China* [online]. 2021, vol. 30, no. 128, pp. 314-329 [accessed: 11 April 2024]. Available at: <<https://doi.org/10.1080/10670564.2020.1790905>>, p. 322

<sup>85</sup>AKDEMIR, E., *op. cit.*, p. 130

<sup>86</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 131

<sup>87</sup>SILVIUS, R., *op. cit.*, p. 316

<sup>88</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 325

<sup>89</sup>Lowy Institute for International Policy, *op. cit.*, p. 3

## 1.2 Evolution and Achievements of the BRI

To understand the BRI in a broad sense, it is necessary to delve into the development of the initiative during its first decade of implementation. One of the milestones in the characterization of this initiative corresponds to its incorporation into the constitution of the CCP during the 19th Party Congress in 2017, four years after the launch of the OBOR<sup>90</sup>. As a result, President Xi Jinping entered his second term in 2018 with a strategy of international engagement and integration built into the core of the Chinese system<sup>91</sup>. This integration reaffirmed the PRC's commitment to the initiative by reaffirming its goal to continue with the initiative's purposes, projects, and goals at all costs, as well as sending a message of not giving up despite the circumstances that may arise along the way<sup>92</sup>. The above represents a fundamental pillar in the evolution of the BRI from an idea or Chinese projection of the international order to a driving force of the Asian giant's foreign policy.

The evolution of the initiative will continue to be addressed from the perspective of policy development and scaling up the impact of the initiative based on the three Belt and Road Forums for International Cooperation (BRFs) promoted by the Chinese government and held in 2017, 2019, and 2023. These reflect China's diplomatic work to position the BRI as a hub of international development. According to data published in primary sources by the PRC government (see Table 1), the BRF has seen an evolution in terms of the total number of participants, as well as the number of resources or outcome documents generated from the discussions and dialogues held at the forum. However, it is worth highlighting two of the categories of participation that have seen a decrease: the number of countries represented by their heads of state and the number of representatives of international organizations (IOs). It is important to note that in 2023, these categories of participation were lower than those of the first forum held in 2017.

Table 1. BRF

| Year | Number of participating countries | Number of unique countries represented by heads of state or government | Number of unique international organizations represented | Total number of participating representatives | Number of deliverables |
|------|-----------------------------------|--|--|---|------------------------|
| 2017 | 140                               | 29   | 80+  | 1,600   | 279                    |
| 2019 | 150                               | 38   | 92   | 6,000   | 283                    |

<sup>90</sup>YING. "Belt and Road" incorporated into CPC Constitution. In: *Xinhuanet* [online]. 24 October 2017 [accessed: 17 March 2024]. Available at: <[http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2017-10/24/c\\_136702025.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2017-10/24/c_136702025.htm)>, par. 11

<sup>91</sup>CENTER FOR GLOBAL DEVELOPMENT. Examining the Debt Implications of the Belt and Road Initiative from a Policy Perspective [online]. March 2018 [accessed: 17 February 2023]. Available at: <<https://www.cgdev.org/sites/default/files/examining-debt-implications-belt-and-road-initiative-policy-perspective.pdf>>, p. 1

<sup>92</sup>Asia Society Policy Institute, *op. cit.*, p. 10

|      |                   |                  |                  |                      |                   |
|------|-------------------|------------------|------------------|----------------------|-------------------|
| 2023 | 150 <sup>93</sup> | 23 <sup>94</sup> | 41 <sup>95</sup> | 10,000 <sup>96</sup> | 369 <sup>97</sup> |
|------|-------------------|------------------|------------------|----------------------|-------------------|

*Note:* It would be useful to note that this information was obtained through 4 separate notices issued by the PRC. Although these are primary sources of information issued by the Chinese government, it is worth noting that they are not contained in a single unified document or report. The compilation of this information was done by the researcher as a synthesis.

The purpose of this research is far from finding the reason why these two representations had lower numbers on the tenth anniversary of the BRI. It should be noted that despite the lower representation in terms of the diversity of actors, the number of outcomes increased significantly, which could indicate greater cohesion and integration when it comes to establishing concrete proposals and projects. To better understand the outcomes of each of these central forums for the BRI, each of their outcomes will be described in chronological order. It will begin with the first BRF, held in Beijing on May 14-15, 2017, which marks an initial milestone in the development of the initiative as it enters its fourth year of active implementation. According to Xi Jinping's opening speech at the inaugural forum, the achievements of the BRI can be summarized in four major axes.

The first of these is the presence of greater political connectivity. The Asian giant signed cooperation agreements with more than 40 countries and IOs of various kinds<sup>98</sup>. As a result of this first international meeting, the PRC government took some actions to synergistically develop common policies and strategies. China signed BRI cooperation documents with the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), the World Economic Forum (WEF), the International Road Transport Union (IRU), the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), and the International Maritime Organization (IMO), to name a few of the major IOs with which formal partnerships have been established<sup>99</sup>.

The second of the axes mentioned by Jinping was that of infrastructure connectivity, and the construction of four major railways was accelerated: Jakarta-Bandung, China-Laos railway, Addis Ababa-Djibouti, and Hungary-Serbia<sup>100</sup>. A cooperation agreement was also signed with the main railway companies on the Eurasian route, along the railways from China, Belarus, Germany, Kazakhstan, Mongolia, Poland, and Russia. This is just one

<sup>93</sup>Chair's Statement of the Third Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation. In: *The Third Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation* [online]. 18 October 2023 [accessed: 13 April 2024]. Available at: <<http://www.beltandroadforum.org/english/n101/2023/1020/c127-1271.html>>, par. 1

<sup>94</sup>*Ibid.*, par. 1

<sup>95</sup>Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Mao Ning's Regular Press Conference on October 19, 2023. In: *Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the Republic of Moldova* [online]. 19 October 2023 [accessed: 13 April 2024]. Available at: <[http://md.china-embassy.gov.cn/eng/fyrth/202310/t20231019\\_11164132.htm#:~:text=Mao%20Ning%3A%20T hank%20you%20for,countries%20and%2041%20international%20organizations](http://md.china-embassy.gov.cn/eng/fyrth/202310/t20231019_11164132.htm#:~:text=Mao%20Ning%3A%20T hank%20you%20for,countries%20and%2041%20international%20organizations)>, par. 2

<sup>96</sup>*Ibid.*, par. 2

<sup>97</sup>List of Practical Cooperation Deliverables of the Third Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation. In: *The Third Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation* [online]. 18 October 2023 [accessed: 13 April 2024]. Available at: <<http://www.beltandroadforum.org/english/n101/2023/1020/c127-1273.html>>.

<sup>98</sup>YAMEI. Full text of President Xi's speech at opening of Belt and Road forum. In: *Xinhuanet* [online]. 14 May 2017 [accessed: 17 March 2024]. Available at: <[http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2017-05/14/c\\_136282982.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2017-05/14/c_136282982.htm)>, par. 12

<sup>99</sup>Full text: List of deliverables of Belt and Road forum. In: *Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia* [online]. 28 May 2017 [accessed: 17 March 2024]. Available at: <[http://sa.china-embassy.gov.cn/eng/zt/yidaiyilu1/201705/t20170528\\_2040683.htm](http://sa.china-embassy.gov.cn/eng/zt/yidaiyilu1/201705/t20170528_2040683.htm)>, par. 12

<sup>100</sup>YAMEI, *op. cit.*, par. 13

indication of the hard work of cooperation and synergy that will be required to achieve the connectivity envisioned by the BRI<sup>101</sup>.

Under the third axis of financial cooperation and connectivity, progress has been made with relevant financial institutions, which are crucial for the future development of BRI projects. The Chinese Ministry of Finance signed a series of Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Asian Development Bank (ADB), the AIIB, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), the European Investment Bank (EIB) and the World Bank Group (WBG). The aim is to forge commitments to common interests under the OBOR initiative. In addition, as of 2017, the AIIB had provided loans to nine different BRI projects for a total of US\$1.7 billion<sup>102</sup>. The "16+1 financial holding company between China and Central and Eastern Europe" was also inaugurated<sup>103</sup>.

About the fourth axis highlighted by the Chinese leader, strengthening people-to-people connectivity, the Chinese government has provided some 10,000 scholarships to students from BRI countries<sup>104</sup>. In parallel to the main BRF session, an initiative was launched under the Thematic Session on Trade Connectivity to promote open and transparent trade cooperation along the Belt and Road<sup>105</sup>. Under this initiative, participants expressed their support for upholding the standards promoted by the WTO and its multilateral trading system. China pledged to continue to open its market to the outside world and allow foreign products to enter its domestic market<sup>106</sup>.

Although not part of the negotiations or outcomes communicated in the first BRF, it is worth noting one of the fundamental facts that was implemented four years after the official launch of the BRI in 2013. This refers to the United Nations (UN) Security Council Resolution 2344 (2017), which calls for the continued implementation and strengthening of regional cooperation efforts to facilitate trade connectivity, exchange, and transit, directly alluding to the BRI initiative as an example of regional development. In addition, the Security Council links the trade objectives of the BRI with the promotion of sustainable economic growth in terms of infrastructure development, energy supply, and border management integration<sup>107</sup>.

The second BRF, held in Beijing on April 25-27, 2019, marked a new milestone in the development of the BRI, six years after its launch. This second forum was characterized by a call to action and efficient development of projects that were in the early stages at the previous forum. Xi Jinping began his opening speech at this international meeting by alluding to the complementary and mutual relationship between the goals of the BRI and those of other regional and international development plans and initiatives, such as those of the UN, ASEAN, the African Union (AU), the EU, and the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU). It calls on BRI member States to be guided by three principles under the umbrella of

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<sup>101</sup>Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, *op. cit.*, par. 23

<sup>102</sup>YAMEI, *op. cit.*, par. 14

<sup>103</sup>*Ibid.*, par. 14

<sup>104</sup>*Ibid.*, par. 15

<sup>105</sup>Initiative on Promoting Unimpeded Trade Cooperation along the Belt and Road Released in Beijing. In: *Ministry of Commerce People's Republic of China* [online]. 16 May 2017 [accessed: 17 March 2024]. Available at: <<http://english.mofcom.gov.cn/article/newsrelease/significantnews/201705/20170502578235.shtml>>, par. 1

<sup>106</sup>*Ibid.*, par. 6

<sup>107</sup>UNITED NATIONS. Resolution 2344 (2017) Adopted by the Security Council at its 7902nd meeting [online]. 17 March 2017 [accessed: 17 March 2024]. Available at: <<https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/862351?v=pdf#files>>, par. 34

multilateralism: "broad consultation, joint contribution and shared benefits"<sup>108</sup>. An interesting aspect mentioned by the PRC leader in this speech is the BRI's intention to act as a promoter of green development and sustainable development, announcing that it will participate in financing green projects<sup>109</sup>.

It is worth highlighting the PRC's effort to justify and share the reasons for its motivations regarding the establishment of infrastructure and an efficient intercontinental transportation system. Instead of highlighting objective progress through facts and hard data, as it did in the first forum, in this second meeting it makes a cause-and-effect relationship between the lack of infrastructure and the poor development suffered by some countries. Consequently, it directly links access to infrastructure projects, which it describes as "high-quality, sustainable, affordable, ...", and will enable countries to effectively integrate into the global supply chain<sup>110</sup>. In this regard, China openly communicates that it will focus from 2019 on developing the New Eurasian Land Bridge economic corridor<sup>111</sup>. Two reports have been published with guidelines for cooperation between EU countries and China for the development of this project<sup>112</sup>.

By 2019, the construction of the Belgrade-Stara Pazova section had already begun, and the construction of the Western-China-Western Europe International Expressway connecting China, Kazakhstan, Russia, and Western Europe would soon be completed<sup>113</sup>. According to the data at the end of 2018, the train service between China and Europe had already connected 108 cities in 16 countries, where a total of 13,000 trains had crossed so far. It is worth noting that on the China-Europe route, the load factor of these trains was 94%, while on the opposite Europe-China route, the load factor was 71%<sup>114</sup>, indicating a difference of more than 20% in terms of exports from each of these regions.

In the second BRF, Jinping focuses his communication through five statements that represent assertions about the PRC's stance and plans within the framework of the BRI. Through these statements, it is clear that he is attempting not only to communicate the goals of the initiative but also to defend some of the major criticisms leveled at China. In its first statement, it claims that it will expand access to its domestic market for foreign investment. While in the previous forum, China had committed to allowing foreign companies access to its domestic market, in this forum it is moving forward in terms of trade openness, announcing that it will expand the number of sectors in which foreign-controlled or wholly foreign-owned enterprises will be allowed<sup>115</sup>. His second statement clarifies that they will intensify efforts to protect intellectual property. He emphasizes the importance for China of promoting cooperation in this area and strengthening the legal framework, as it is a fundamental axis to enable the development of an economy based on innovation and

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<sup>108</sup>Working Together to Deliver a Brighter Future For Belt and Road Cooperation Keynote Speech by H.E. Xi Jinping President of the People's Republic of China At the Opening Ceremony of the Second Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation. In: *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China* [online]. 26 April 2019 [accessed: 17 March 2024]. Available at: <[https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/wjdt\\_665385/zyjh\\_665391/201904/t20190426\\_678729.html](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjdt_665385/zyjh_665391/201904/t20190426_678729.html)>, par. 25

<sup>109</sup>*Ibid.*, par. 58

<sup>110</sup>*Ibid.*, par. 87

<sup>111</sup>*Ibid.*, par. 65

<sup>112</sup>The Belt and Road Initiative Progress, Contributions and Prospects. In: *Belt and Road Portal* [online]. 22 April 2019 [accessed: 17 March 2024]. Available at: <<https://eng.yidaiyilu.gov.cn/p/86739.html>>, par. 12

<sup>113</sup>*Ibid.*, par. 12

<sup>114</sup>Belt and Road Portal, *op. cit.*, par. 21

<sup>115</sup>*op. cit.* n. 107, par. 22

quality<sup>116</sup>. It also announced that it would promote technological exchanges and cooperation with other countries, always under the principles of the market and the rule of law<sup>117</sup>.

China's third goal will be to increase imports of goods and services to expand China's qualification as a global factory for a global market. This information is used to defend the PRC's position that it does not seek to impose a trade surplus, but rather plans to import more competitive products in the agricultural, manufactured goods, and services sectors<sup>118</sup>. The fourth of its plans is to become more involved in the coordination of international macroeconomic policies. The aim is to create a positive spillover effect to achieve sustainable and balanced global growth. He also stated that "China will not resort to the beggar-thy-neighbor practice of devaluing the RMB"<sup>119</sup>. The fifth and last of his communications focuses on assuring that China will actively work to generate an opening-up policy. The Chinese president affirms that China will establish a binding enforcement mechanism for international agreements and will create laws and regulations in line with its opening-up policy<sup>120</sup>.

By 2019, the Chinese government had invested an estimated US\$1 trillion in projects in 125 countries<sup>121</sup> through direct investment under the BRI. Similarly, between 2013 and 2018, during the first five years of BRI implementation, Chinese companies outside the BRI framework made an estimated US\$15.6 billion in non-financial direct investment, accounting for 13% of China's total non-financial FDI during the same period<sup>122</sup>. Hand in hand with Beijing's aforementioned goal of focusing its infrastructure development efforts on the New Eurasian Land Bridge connecting China to Europe, the China-EU Joint Investment Fund began operations in July 2018, with capital of approximately 500 million euros from both the Chinese government through the Silk Road Fund and the European Investment Fund (EIF)<sup>123</sup>.

Many overall BRI results achieved before the third BRF will be presented. As of June 2023, China had signed more than 200 cooperation agreements under the BRI with more than 150 countries and 30 IOs<sup>124</sup>. Under the auspices of the BRI, more than 20 multilateral dialogue and cooperation mechanisms have been established between China and other foreign partners in areas such as "railways, ports, energy, finance, taxation, environmental protection, disaster prevention, and relief, think tanks, and media"<sup>125</sup>. In addition, by mid-2023, China had signed 107 documents with standards and guidelines in 65 countries, covering diverse areas such as civil aviation, agriculture and food, and oceanography<sup>126</sup>.

Under the three pillars of connectivity: land, sea, and air, the first decade of BRI implementation has also seen some achievements. In the first category, under the New Eurasian Land Bridge, construction of the Budapest-Kelebia section of the Hungary-Serbia Railway began in 2021, and both the Peljesac Bridge in Croatia and the Western Europe-West China Highway were built and completed by 2022. In addition, the Smokovac-Matesevo section of the Bar-Boljare highway in Montenegro was completed and opened to the

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<sup>116</sup>*Ibid.*, par. 19

<sup>117</sup>*Ibid.*, par. 20

<sup>118</sup>*op. cit.* n. 107, par. 21

<sup>119</sup>*Ibid.*, par. 22

<sup>120</sup>*Ibid.*, par. 22

<sup>121</sup>Asia Society Policy Institute, *op. cit.*, p. 9

<sup>122</sup>Belt and Road Portal, *op. cit.*, par. 48

<sup>123</sup>*Ibid.*, par. 36

<sup>124</sup>*op. cit.* n. 68, par. 54

<sup>125</sup>*Ibid.*, par. 57

<sup>126</sup>*Ibid.*, par. 58



public<sup>127</sup>. In the second of these connectivity categories, the BRI had succeeded in getting 117 ports in 143 different countries and more than 300 Chinese and international trading companies to join the Silk Road Maritime Association<sup>128</sup>. In the third category, the BRI has enabled the signing of air transport agreements with 104 partner countries of the initiative and the opening of direct flights with 57 cooperating countries<sup>129</sup>.

It is particularly noteworthy that by June 2023, the China-Europe Railway Express had reached 200 cities in 25 European countries, reaching a total of 86 routes that pass through or circle the major regions of the Eurasian hinterland. Data collected by mid-2023 show that since its construction and implementation, this route has seen a total of 74,000 trips, representing 7 million twenty-foot equivalent units (TEUs) worth US\$300 billion<sup>130</sup>. Another fact that underscores the importance of connecting the two ends of the BRI, Europe, and China, is the China-Europe Land-Sea Express Line, which was the third most important trade channel between these two places by 2023<sup>131</sup>. According to the PRC government's projection in an official communique, the BRI is far from becoming a fixed plan but rather seeks to continue to encompass more areas and economic sectors, as well as to deepen and broaden the scale of impact of its projects<sup>132</sup>.

The third BRF, which will be held in Beijing from October 17-19, marks a third important milestone in the development of the BRI, as it marks the tenth anniversary of its launch. President Xi Jinping decided to use his opening speech at the forum to announce a series of steps to be taken by the Chinese government, summarized in eight points. First, China aims to build the BRI into a multidimensional connectivity network by further integrating transportation routes and enhancing their efficiency. The PRC will strive to increase the speed of the China-Europe Railway Express, which, as mentioned above, has played a crucial role in trade between the two parties. In addition, it will continue to host the China-Europe Railway Express Cooperation Forum and make efforts to build a new logistics corridor along the Eurasian space<sup>133</sup>. Second, China has communicated its interest in incorporating e-commerce into its BRI cooperation strategies, as well as its eagerness to conclude more free trade agreements and investment protection treaties with other countries<sup>134</sup>.

Third, the PRC announces its interest in promoting a strategy of livelihood programs to support BRI partner countries. It announces that it will implement 1,000 small-scale livelihood support projects, with an extraordinary fund of USD 97.2 billion to finance these projects through cooperation agreements<sup>135</sup>. Fourth, as in the second BRF, China reaffirms its interest in promoting green development. It states that it will strengthen cooperation in areas such as sustainable infrastructure, energy, and transportation. It will also continue to integrate sustainable investment principles into BRI projects and provide 100,000 training opportunities for cooperating countries by 2023<sup>136</sup>. Fifth, the BRI will integrate artificial

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<sup>127</sup>*Ibid.*, par. 65

<sup>128</sup>*Ibid.*, par. 78

<sup>129</sup>*Ibid.*, par. 81

<sup>130</sup>*op. cit.* n. 68, par. 86

<sup>131</sup>*Ibid.*, par. 87

<sup>132</sup>*Ibid.*, par. 87

<sup>133</sup>Building an Open, Inclusive and Interconnected World For Common Development. In: *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China* [online]. 18 October 2023 [accessed: 17 March 2024]. Available at: <[https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/wjdt\\_665385/zyjh\\_665391/202310/t20231018\\_11162854.html](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/wjdt_665385/zyjh_665391/202310/t20231018_11162854.html)>, par. 3

<sup>134</sup>*Ibid.*, par. 13

<sup>135</sup>*Ibid.*, par. 23

<sup>136</sup>*Ibid.*, par. 24

intelligence governance into its cooperation and dialogue spaces. This initiative will seek to promote the "orderly and safe" development of artificial intelligence in the world<sup>137</sup>.

Sixth, China will continue to forge and strengthen people-to-people ties among BRI countries. The Asian country has launched a series of programs to strengthen cultural, educational, and social integration in various fields. For example, there are spaces for integrating and strengthening theater, art, museums, libraries, and tourism. It should also be noted that there is a Chinese government scholarship program derived from the BRI<sup>138</sup>. The penultimate point emphasized by the PRC leader was the promotion of full cooperation based on international trade principles and standards. It was reported that China will launch three diagnostic, evaluation, and accountability mechanisms for companies involved in the BRI to ensure the integrity of their actions under the initiative<sup>139</sup>. Finally, an important milestone in the regulatory development of the BRF was the establishment of an executive body of the Forum to act under the functions of a secretariat. The purpose of this is to strengthen institutional construction with BRI partner countries for multilateral cooperation on various issues such as disaster mitigation and/or prevention, taxation, and anti-corruption<sup>140</sup>.

The BRI has not only evolved in the scope and depth of its original objectives but also internationally, gaining global recognition and relevance. The initiative has the potential to impact multiple stakeholders in different parts of the world. This argument is shared by UN Secretary-General António Guterres, who in 2019, six years after the initiative's launch, will make a statement at the second BRF, sharing his vision of the BRI's role in international cooperation. According to Guterres, it will accelerate the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), close the financial gap between developing and developed countries, and strengthen the principles of a green economy that can connect territories through sustainable transport routes based on a green, clean and low-carbon future<sup>141</sup>. These statements, in 2017, the then Director of the Development Policy and Analysis Division of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA) stated that the BRI is guided by the principles and purposes of the UN Charter, as The five pillars of the BRI are directly aligned with the economic, social and environmental advancement of sustainable development<sup>142</sup>.

In its 2030 Agenda, the UN proposes a total of 17 SDGs and 169 action-oriented targets that it believes will put the world on a resilient and sustainable path. These goals not only call for sustainable consumption and production but also for responsible management of natural resources and a series of urgent actions to address climate change. Although the BRI was proposed two years before the adoption of the 2030 Agenda in 2015, according to the UN, this initiative is consistent with a vision of sustainability and to achieve shared development for the globe<sup>143</sup>. The main lines of work of the BRI are directly aligned with several SDGs (see Table 2), both of which aim to influence the socio-economic development of a wide range of people in different regions of the world.

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<sup>137</sup>*Ibid.*, par. 25

<sup>138</sup>*Ibid.*, par. 26

<sup>139</sup>*op. cit.* n. 133, par. 27

<sup>140</sup>*Ibid.*, par. 28

<sup>141</sup>*Ibid.*, par. 24

<sup>142</sup>*Ibid.*, par. 24

<sup>143</sup>UNITED NATIONS DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS. Partnering for a Brighter Shared Future. Progress Report on the Belt and Road Initiative in Support of The United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development [online]. March 2022 [accessed: 17 March 2024]. Available at: <[https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/progress\\_report\\_bri-sdgs\\_english-final.pdf](https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/progress_report_bri-sdgs_english-final.pdf)>, p. 7

Table 2. The BRI and its link with the SDGs.

| Purpose of the BRI   | Affected SDGs                                  |
|--|--|
| Helps close the income gap by creating jobs and generating income for local communities.                                   | SDG 1 No Poverty                               |
|  | SDG 2 Zero hunger                              |
|  | SDG 5 Gender equality                          |
|  | SDG 8 Decent work and economic growth          |
| Helps reduce the investment and financing gap by offering financial assistance for sustainable infrastructure development. | SDG 9 Industry, innovation, and infrastructure |
|  | SDG 11 Sustainable cities and communities      |
|  | SDG 13 Climate action                          |
| Expands trade and improves access to regional and global markets   | SDG 8 Decent work and economic growth          |
|  | SDG 10 Reduced inequalities                    |
|  | SDG 17 Partnership for the Goals               |

*Note:* It should be noted that the information in this table is taken directly from the Progress Report on the Belt and Road Initiative in Support of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, published by the Ministry of Economic and Social Affairs in 2022.

Based on information from the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, a BRI implemented with high-quality standards may have the potential to enhance connectivity, innovation, and industrialization of the countries participating in this initiative, thus achieving remarkable regional integration and economic development<sup>144</sup>. Some of the main areas of work of the BRI that are directly related to the SDGs, in addition to the objectives listed in Table 2, are the creation and signing of cooperation agreements, synergistic coordination between national, regional, and international initiatives, cooperation in terms of infrastructure connectivity, the creation of economic and trade cooperation zones, the realization of free trade agreements, and in general, the facilitation of regional and international trade<sup>145</sup>. The BRI is consistent with 13 of the 17 SDGs<sup>146</sup>, except for SDG 12 (responsible consumption and production), SDG 14 (life below water), SDG 15 (life on land), and SDG 16 (peace, justice, and strong institutions).

Together with the Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries, and Small Island Developing States (UN-OHRLS), the BRI has launched a project to strengthen the presence of Least Developed Countries (LDCs) in regional and international connectivity and transport policy-making<sup>147</sup>. This will allow them to use the BRI as an opportunity for dialogue, learning, and building the robust regulatory frameworks needed to improve connectivity in

<sup>144</sup>United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, *op. cit.*, p. 9

<sup>145</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 19

<sup>146</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 9

<sup>147</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 24

their territories<sup>148</sup>. Leaders of LDCs have been prepared and advised by the UN-OHRLLS to tackle the implementation of infrastructure development projects in their States under a sustainable and beneficial model in line with their national objectives<sup>149</sup>.

Just as UN agencies such as UN-OHRLLS have established direct partnerships with the Chinese government and the BRI, the initiative has established some multi-sectoral working mechanisms to more effectively achieve its sectoral goals. China has partnered with the World Health Organization (WHO) under the OBOR initiative to align core economic and trade objectives with a set of social development objectives. That is, the WHO and the PRC have actively worked to ensure the proper integration of public toilets, medical centers, and sanitation facilities into their connectivity development projects<sup>150</sup>. In my view, WHO is one of the IOs working directly with the Asian government to achieve common goals. In line with this collaborative work, the BRI has also joined forces with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) to protect the initiative from corruption and to promote not only the integrity of conduct within collaborative projects through audits<sup>151</sup>, but also to maintain a trustworthy reputation with the countries and actors involved in the initiative.

Other forms of multisectoral work implemented by the BRI correspond to sub-organizations derived from the initiative and focused on working in specific contexts. One example is the *Clean Silk Road*, whose main purpose is to seek to uphold international standards while "respecting state sovereignty, cultural differences and national realities" in the projects implemented under the initiative<sup>152</sup>. Another example of these organizations, derived from the central organization of the BRI, is the *Digital Silk Road (DSR)*, which stands out for integrating digitization objectives into the connectivity projects of the Chinese initiative. Its main goal is to promote digital connectivity among BRI member countries, for example, by helping them advance the installation of cross-border optical cables and other telecommunications links<sup>153</sup>.

The role of the DSR organization focuses on five pillars through which the Chinese government seeks to implement digital connectivity in its major intercontinental and interregional infrastructure projects. First, this sub-organization seeks to develop a long service life for BRI infrastructure by implementing new technologies in the planning and execution of these projects to ensure the effectiveness and competitiveness of the buildings in the medium term. Second, in addition to ensuring high standards in the integration of digitalization in the BRI, it also seeks to position projects on land or at sea in the international logistics system through a technological network adapted to global needs, such as satellites that provide real-time information on the supply chain. Third, the DSR aims to improve the quality of life of people living in the cities of the least developed countries within the framework of the BRI through the integration of sustainable projects<sup>154</sup>.

Fourth, in line with the third pillar, the DSR intends to use new technologies as a tool

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<sup>148</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 56

<sup>149</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 58

<sup>150</sup>China's Belt and Road to Redefine Global Health Role. In: *World Health Organization* [online]. 16 July 2018 [accessed: 17 March 2024]. Available at: <<https://www.who.int/hongkongchina/news/detail/16-07-2018-china-s-belt-and-road-to-redefine-global-health-role>>, p. 10

<sup>151</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 11

<sup>152</sup>Full text: Beijing Initiative for the Clean Silk Road. In: *China Daily* [online]. 26 April 2019 [accessed: 17 March 2024]. Available at: <<https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/201904/26/WS5cc301a6a3104842260b8a24.html>>, par. 4

<sup>153</sup>WINSTON MA, M., *op. cit.*, p. 307

<sup>154</sup>WINSTON MA, M., *op. cit.*, p. 308

to ensure compliance with global environmental commitments. Through the use of big data and the ability to analyze a large amount of data in real-time, this sub-organization aims to position BRI countries as pioneers in the integration of connectivity, digitization, and environmental and natural resource protection. Fifth, in addition to providing technological tools at the regional, national, and international levels through its land-based and maritime projects, the DSR aims to provide Internet access to more than 3 billion people who are not yet connected to the World Wide Web<sup>155</sup>. It is worth noting that the DSR was integrated into the BRI in 2015 as part of its efforts to expand its ambition and priority vision for connectivity in all its aspects<sup>156</sup>.

Hand in hand with this grand goal, China launched the *Green Silk Road (GSR)* in 2018, which aims to strengthen BRI projects by establishing environmental protection standards and guidelines. These aim to align economic development goals with some of the most important environmental goals, such as reducing carbon emissions, reducing pollution, and protecting biodiversity and natural resources<sup>157</sup>. The GSR aims to benefit the Chinese government from multiple angles, ranging from a diplomatic vision of the importance that sustainability issues have gained in the global order through the 2030 Agenda and in response to questions that have arisen about the potential negative impacts that extensive infrastructure development can have, to a more pragmatic vision of achieving its goals of reducing carbon emissions by 2030 and achieving carbon neutrality by 2060<sup>158</sup>.

In addition, the BRI has an initiative launched in 2015, just two years after the official launch of China's grand project, called the *Health Silk Road (HSR)*<sup>159</sup>. This is another of Beijing's projects to expand the reach and impact of connectivity by bringing it to the health sector. The HSR received a major boost with the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 when it evolved from an initiative initially focused on a global commitment to a comprehensive health system to include concrete initiatives such as cooperation between health professionals in different regions, the promotion of vaccine diplomacy, and the construction of medical facilities<sup>160</sup>. The health initiatives that emerged and grew out of HSR enabled China to build stronger cooperative ties and enhance its reputation as a responsible member committed to global well-being<sup>161</sup>.

In 2018, Xi Jinping's government launched the *Polar Silk Road (PSR)* to expand maritime transportation and connectivity routes from the BRI to the North Pole<sup>162</sup>. Its main

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<sup>155</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 309

<sup>156</sup>XIAO, Anthony, and DING, Yifei. Evolution of China's Belt and Road Initiative: Digital Silk Road. In: *Invesco* [online]. 1 March 2023 [accessed: 19 April 2024]. Available at: <<https://www.invesco.com/apac/en/institutional/insights/fixed-income/evolution-of-chinas-belt-and-road-initiative-digital-silk-road.html>>, par. 2

<sup>157</sup>XIAO, Anthony, and DING, Yifei. Evolution of China's Belt and Road Initiative: Green Silk Road. In: *Invesco* [online]. 4 April 2023 [accessed: 19 April 2024]. Available at: <<https://www.invesco.com/apac/en/institutional/insights/fixed-income/evolution-of-chinas-belt-and-road-initiative-green-silk-road.html>>, par. 2

<sup>158</sup>*Ibid.*, par. 6

<sup>159</sup>XIAO, Anthony, and DING, Yifei. Evolution of China's Belt and Road Initiative: Health Silk Road. In: *Invesco* [online]. 8 May 2023 [accessed: 19 April 2024]. Available at: <<https://www.invesco.com/apac/en/institutional/insights/fixed-income/evolution-of-chinas-belt-and-road-initiative-health-silk-road.html>>, par. 2

<sup>160</sup>*Ibid.*, par. 5

<sup>161</sup>XIAO, A., and DING, Y., *op. cit.*, par. 3

<sup>162</sup>XIAO, Anthony, and DING, Yifei. Evolution of China's Belt and Road Initiative: Polar Silk Road. In: *Invesco* [online]. 6 June 2023 [accessed: 19 April 2024]. Available at: <<https://www.invesco.com/apac/en/institutional/insights/fixed-income/evolution-chinas-belt-and-road-initiative.html>>, par. 2

objective is to seek alternatives to connect the major economic centers: North America, East Asia, and Western Europe. The recent melting of the poles has opened up the possibility of opening a more accessible maritime access route than a few decades ago, making it possible to reduce the distance between China and Northern Europe by 40%. The most commonly used route between these two places is through the Suez Canal which takes about 48 days, while the route through the Arctic Ocean can take up to half that time<sup>163</sup>. In addition, the Asian government has shown a special interest in this area by exploring oil, gas, minerals, and other resources that can be found in this area of the planet<sup>164</sup>.

China has not only created large subprojects derived from the BRI, as shown in the previous paragraphs, but has also strengthened its projects through research, standardization, and exchange programs, to name a few examples. In 2019, the Asian Institute of Technology *Belt and Road Research Center (BRRC)* was established as an international hub for creating innovative and robust research in pursuit of sustainable development of the Belt and Road region<sup>165</sup>. The Standard Information Platform (SIP) aims to contribute to the homologation of standards and transparency of information among the various BRI member countries. As of October 2023, about 1,400 national standards and more than 1,000 industry standards have been published in multiple languages<sup>166</sup>. The Chinese government scholarship "Silk Road Program" is a scholarship program implemented by the Chinese Ministry of Education in 2017 to integrate students from BRI countries into Chinese universities<sup>167</sup>.

For the Chinese government, relations with the European continent are a high priority in economic and commercial terms, as they represent a high percentage of its exports and imports. In 2015, they created the European Institute for One Belt One Road Economic and Cultural Cooperation and Development, based in Hungary, to strengthen and promote cultural and social exchanges as a tool to create smooth communication channels between both actors<sup>168</sup>.

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<sup>163</sup>*Ibid.*, par. 3

<sup>164</sup>*Ibid.*, par. 4-5

<sup>165</sup>Belt & Road Research Center Annual Report. In: *Asian Institute of Technology* [online]. 2022 [accessed: 17 March 2024]. Available at: <<http://brrc.ait.ac.th/wp-content/uploads/sites/65/2022/12/AIT-BRRC-Annual-Report-2022.pdf>>, p. 1

<sup>166</sup>*op. cit.* n. 67, par. 59

<sup>167</sup>2024 Chinese Government Scholarship Type B-Silk Road Program. In: *Study in Chongqing University* [online]. [accessed: 19 April 2024]. Available at: <<https://study.cqu.edu.cn/info/1387/2043.htm#:~:text=Chinese%20Government%20Scholarship%20%20Silk%20Road,students%20from%20Belt%20%26%20Road%20countries.>>, par. 15

<sup>168</sup>KAO, Pei-Shan. The Political Economy of China's Strategic Layout in Europe: A Case Study of the Belt and Road Initiative. In: *The Chinese Economy* [online]. 2022, vol. 55, no. 4, pp. 303-316 [accessed: 22 January 2024]. Available at: <<https://doi.org/10.1080/10971475.2021.1972549>>, p. 310

## CHAPTER 2. EU RESPONSES TO THE BELT AND ROAD: ENGAGEMENT, CONCERNS, AND ALTERNATIVES

To understand the relationship between these two actors, this second chapter will address the main characteristics of their interdependence, their interest in each other, and the complementary factors that come into play when analyzing their link.

### 2.1 Initial European reactions and the role of CEECs

The OBOR initiative has represented a shift in relations between Europe and Asia by developing a new type of political and economic cooperation<sup>169</sup>. The Chinese government has described Eurasian relations as fundamental to the development of its goals of global economic and social progress. The first of the reasons lies in the geographical position of this region, in that firstly, China is an active part of this space on the globe, and secondly, Eurasia represents the connecting and linking space between Africa, North America, the Pacific Ocean, the Arctic Ocean, the Atlantic Ocean, and the Indian Ocean. Its strength in terms of connectivity, movement, and transfer of goods, capital, services, and people is undeniable. Western Europe is also at one end of this continental duo, so its importance as an economic ally is obvious<sup>170</sup>.

Since the launch of the BRI by Xi Jinping in 2013, the first EU member States to react were the UK<sup>171</sup> and France. The above may indicate the power these two European powers had in their regional context to react autonomously to the Chinese government's initiative. In the early days of the BRI, China's main interest in forging ties with these old continental European powers was to connect with its former colonies, as was the case, for example, with the LDCs of the *Francophonie* in Africa. The third EU state to show interest and increased engagement in the BRI was Italy in 2014, followed by the Netherlands in 2016<sup>172</sup>. This was followed by other States with geographical and strategic interest, but considered to have less economic impact, such as Greece and Poland, which began to formally engage with the BRI in 2016<sup>173</sup>.

The EU States reacted in stages, the first of which can be considered the pioneers or creators of the European discourse on relations with the Chinese government. The second stage could be characterized as a reaction to the discourse of the first creators. The third stage shows that we are dealing with follower States, which remained on the sidelines of the impact and scope of the BRI and decided to sign up for the initiative until they could see that results could be obtained from the diplomatic, economic, and social linkage implied by the Chinese initiative<sup>174</sup>. It is worth noting the important role that the Polish state has acquired in Sino-American relations, as it has a more open attitude towards the socialist economic system

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<sup>169</sup>BINHONG, Shao. Does Europe Matter? The Role of Europe in Chinese Narratives of 'One Belt One Road' and 'New Type of Great Power Relations'. Understanding China's One-Belt-One-Road Initiative—A New Link Pattern for Deepened Interaction between China and the World. Looking for a Road. United States: BRILL, vol. 4 [accessed: 11 April 2024]. Available at: <[https://brill-com.sire.ub.edu/display/book/9789004330818/B9789004330818\\_011.xml](https://brill-com.sire.ub.edu/display/book/9789004330818/B9789004330818_011.xml)>, p. 1163

<sup>170</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 1165

<sup>171</sup>At that time, the UK was part of the EU, as its exit, better known as Brexit, took place in January 2020.

<sup>172</sup>MIAO, Julie. Understanding the soft power of China's Belt and Road Initiative through a discourse analysis in Europe. In: *Regional Studies, Regional Science* [online]. 2021, vol. 8, no. 1, pp. 162-177 [accessed: 22 January 2024]. Available at: <<https://doi.org/10.1080/21681376.2021.1921612>>, p. 168

<sup>173</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 169

<sup>174</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 172

of the PRC<sup>175</sup> and is an important bridge between Western and Eastern Europe.

It is worth noting the role of the German state in Eurasian relations, as it remains the country with the best economic relations with the EU-PRC. It is even possible to speak of an improvement in relations between the main economic powers of the EU, starting in the months before the official announcement of the BRI. In the German case, Chancellor Angela Merkel visited China in 2012 and Premier Li Keqiang visited Germany in 2013. In the French case, it is also possible to speak of an improvement in Eurasian relations, as President François Hollande visited China in 2013; a visit that marked the first arrival of a leader of a major Western power on Chinese soil since Xi Jinping came to power<sup>176</sup>. This progress in the quality of diplomatic, economic, and trade relations between these European actors and China is due precisely to the change in the PRC's strategy regarding its role in the international order. In the introduction to this study, the evolution of China's strategy about relations with third countries was discussed. In this case, it can be affirmed that there is a direct relationship between the improvement of bilateral relations and economic cooperation as a result of the change from a strategy of keeping a low profile to one of striving for achievement<sup>177</sup>.

As a joint initiative of the EU as a coordinated entity, the EC and the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy issued a communication in 2018 when they launched a strategy to connect Europe with the Asian continent<sup>178</sup>. The main objective of this strategy was to be able to sort out the nature of relations and connections with China to be able to improve them, but also to succeed in placing EU values in the establishment of formal connections in infrastructure<sup>179</sup>. As noted by both EU actors, transport infrastructure is a fundamental pillar of the relationship between the two continents, and Europe has shared and committed to developing the trans-European transport network within the framework of the BRI<sup>180</sup>. Its three main working approaches to creating links with the PRC focus on (1) creating connections in transport, energy, digital networks, and people; (2) connecting through agreements with other Asian countries and regional organizations; and (3) promoting financial sustainability for the appropriate future development of the BRI in Europe<sup>181</sup>.

To obtain more recent data on the relations between these two actors, the EU, and the PRC, Xi Jinping met in December 2023 with the President of the European Council, Charles Michel, and the President of the EC, Ursula von der Leyen. This meeting showed the importance of the Union for China and its international goals. The Chinese leader highlighted the 20th anniversary of the beginning of the comprehensive strategic partnership with the EU and the importance of further consolidating strategic, economic, and trade relations and dialogues. However, it is worth noting the use of the verb construction "is willing to", which emphasizes China's eagerness to continue to make the Union a key partner in the development of economic and trade policies, as well as a priority ally in terms of science and technology<sup>182</sup>. This could be characterized as pressure from the Chinese leadership on the

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<sup>175</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 173

<sup>176</sup>YAN, X., *op. cit.*, p. 176

<sup>177</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 177

<sup>178</sup>EU steps up its strategy for connecting Europe and Asia. In: *European Commission* [online]. 19 September 2018 [accessed: 17 March 2024]. Available at: <[https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP\\_18\\_5803](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_18_5803)>, par. 1

<sup>179</sup>*Ibid.*, par. 5

<sup>180</sup>*Ibid.*, par. 7

<sup>181</sup>*Ibid.*, par. 8

<sup>182</sup>Xi Jinping met with European Council President Michel and European Commission President von der Leyen. In: *Economic and Commercial Office of the Mission of the People's Republic of China to the European Union*



European bloc. As for the interventions of European leaders, they focused on emphasizing the mutual benefits of cooperation between Europe and China, as well as the Union's intention to continue developing a "long-term, stable, predictable and sustainable relationship with China"<sup>183</sup>.

Although many EU countries have significant economic and trade relations with the Asian giant, only 16 of the 27 member States are formally involved in the BRI. The 11 member States not involved in the BRI are Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Malta, the Netherlands, Slovenia, Spain and Sweden<sup>184</sup>. Some countries are reluctant to join the initiative, while others remain cautious<sup>185</sup>. China's management of the BRI initiative across the Union is complex, as it has preferred to conclude bilateral agreements on a case-by-case basis rather than pursue a bloc approach from the outset, despite the Union's aversion to such approaches<sup>186</sup>. The PRC has sought to develop multiple dialogues, agreements, and MoUs, creating a division within the Union's structure between the countries of Eastern Europe and those of Western Europe<sup>187</sup>. These differentiated approaches, as shown in Figure 1, demonstrate the lack of unity in the approach to trade relations between China and the EU.

In the case of Italy, for example, it became the first G-7 country to formally support and join the BRI. This sends an important message to Western countries and especially to EU member States that have not become cooperating countries and participants in this Chinese initiative<sup>188</sup>. It is important to note, on the one hand, the role of Germany as the main EU country receiving the largest amount of investment in terms of corporate mergers and acquisitions, with a total of 22.7 billion euros invested in German companies. On the other hand, China has invested about 14.4 billion euros in France and 4.6 billion euros in Spain between 2000 and 2019<sup>189</sup>. These three EU countries have received large amounts of Chinese investment in the first two decades of the 21st century, but none of these three States has declared its adherence to the OBOR initiative, which indicates a certain reluctance to make commitments to the Chinese government, as well as the status of States sympathetic to the second world power.

Official relations between China and the EU were established in 1975. Ten years later, both parties signed the Agreement on Trade and Economic Cooperation between the European Economic Community and the PRC, which remains the main legal framework governing relations between these two global players<sup>190</sup>. There are numerous mechanisms for dialogue and cooperation in more than 50 different sectors, ranging from trade to the environment, energy, and education. These efforts to support each other have led to the creation of numerous contact groups, such as the EU-China High-Level Economic and Trade Dialogue and the China-EU High-Level Strategic Dialogue, the former established in 2008

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[online]. 7 December 2023 [accessed: 17 March 2024]. Available at: <<http://eu.mofcom.gov.cn/article/todayheader/202312/20231203458927.shtml>>, par. 3

<sup>183</sup>Economic and Commercial Office of the Mission of the People's Republic of China to the European Union, *op. cit.*, par. 5

<sup>184</sup>Countries of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). In: *Green Finance and Development Center* [online]. [accessed: 19 April 2024]. Available at: <<https://greenfdc.org/countries-of-the-belt-and-road-initiative-bri/>>

<sup>185</sup>KAO, P., *op. cit.*, p. 305

<sup>186</sup>AKDEMIR, E., *op. cit.*, p. 125

<sup>187</sup>SELKER, F., *op. cit.*, p. 290

<sup>188</sup>AKDEMIR, E., *op. cit.*, p. 124

<sup>189</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 123

<sup>190</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 125

and the latter in 2010. In addition, since 1998, when the first EU-China Summit was held<sup>191</sup>, these international meetings have been held to continue building and maintaining stable relations. The last such meeting will take place in December 2023<sup>192</sup>.

In the context of the *Go Global Policy*, China has made a series of investments on European soil with the purchase of Eurobonds<sup>193</sup> and large infrastructure investments in the Eurozone<sup>194</sup>. The Asian giant has invested billions of euros in EU countries in recent years following the launch of the BRI, including an investment of 37 billion euros in 2016, 18 billion euros in 2018, and 12 billion euros by 2019<sup>195</sup>. It is predicted that the importance of the PRC in the future economic and political development of the EU will increase so that the relationship between these two actors is far from ceasing to be a relevant part of the international order<sup>196</sup>.

One of the main interests of the PRC in the European continent is in the CEECs (Central and Eastern European Countries). This is because they represent the channel of communication and cooperation between Asia and Europe within the framework of the BRI<sup>197</sup>. Indeed, the China-CEEC Inter-Bank Association was established in 2017 as an initiative of the China Development Bank (CDB) to forge a means of communication between Chinese banking and banking in CEECs, such as Czechia, Croatia, Slovenia, Montenegro, Latvia, Lithuania, Macedonia, Hungary, Romania, and Serbia<sup>198</sup>. According to Chinese Premier Li Liang, the volume of trade between China and the 16 CEECs grew by 6.5% annually between 2012 and 2018, from 40 billion US dollars in 2012 to 70 billion US dollars in 2018<sup>199</sup>.

Before the implementation of the BRI, some of the countries along the trade routes between East Asia and Western Europe were at a disadvantage because they did not have direct access to the sea and were considered landlocked. According to the PRC's narrative, the BRI would allow these countries, which were disadvantaged in terms of regional economic development, to become alternative locations for the establishment of manufacturing industries. The establishment of transport routes with these countries as strategic points and stops would enable their economies to develop. In particular, the development and cooperation of the China-Europe Economic Corridor has promoted and accelerated the BRI. The role of improved transportation routes and connectivity, such as the international railway land bridge and the launch of the China Railway Express, is making areas in the CEECs potential locations for foreign investment in the manufacturing industry<sup>200</sup>.

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<sup>191</sup>A History of EU Relations with China. In: Parliament of the UK [online]. [accessed: 19 April 2024]. Available at: <<https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld200910/ldselect/lducom/76/7621.htm>>, par. 1

<sup>192</sup>CASINGE, Ecaterina, and BUCHOWSKA, Magdalena. EU-China summit, 7 December 2023. In: European Council and Council of the European Union [online]. [accessed: 19 April 2024]. Available at: <<https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/meetings/international-summit/2023/12/07/>>, par. 1

<sup>193</sup>Eurobonds are bonds or debt instruments issued by corporations, governments and financial institutions in a currency other than the issuer's domestic currency. These bonds have several advantages for investors, such as investing in companies outside of their home country and protecting against possible devaluation of local currencies that are not strong and/or stable.

<sup>194</sup>The Eurozone consists of the 20 EU member States that use the euro as their official currency.

<sup>195</sup>AKDEMIR, E., *op. cit.*, p. 132-133

<sup>196</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 135

<sup>197</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 137

<sup>198</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 138

<sup>199</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 139

<sup>200</sup>JIANG, Yonglei, LIU, Yazhi, PENG, Zixuan, TANG, Hongyu, and YU, Bin. Does Europe Matter? Manufacturing industry relocation trends from the perspective of field theory: The case of the belt and road

According to research analyzing the relocations that would occur as a result of the BRI, Slovakia, Hungary, and Croatia are the countries with the greatest potential to attract FDI from transport companies, thus creating an agglomeration effect of manufacturing industries in these states<sup>201</sup>. In addition to the Asian giant's projection of the importance for CEECs of engaging in trade and diplomatic relations with China within the framework of the BRI, the Central, Eastern, and Southeastern Europe (CESEE) region is of vital importance for the PRC. Four of China's main objectives in generating joint commitments with the countries of this region can be summarized as follows: (1) to increase production capacity, (2) to contribute to regional economic development through specific economic corridors, (3) to secure political support for the realization of its international vision of a pluralistic world that differs from the Western model, and (4) to create its path of global governance and development that expands the possibilities of economic and social development for a greater number of actors; as opposed to the zero-sum mentality<sup>202</sup>.

In its efforts to achieve these goals, China has set out to establish a series of bilateral relations and agreements, not only on a state-to-state basis but also through regional organizations. As a result, it has formal relations with 16 of the 22 countries in CESEE. These are all post-socialist States that have undergone a process of economic transformation in a relatively short period after the collapse of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) some three decades ago. It should be noted that in addition to the fact that this region is of great importance in terms of connectivity, it is also of great importance in terms of political interests. All of these countries are either members of the EU or in various stages of accession to the regional bloc<sup>203</sup>. The CESEE region is seen by China as an opportunity to achieve its economic development goals more efficiently and quickly than some of its Asian neighbors because the CESEE countries have more advanced capitalist economies and better-developed markets<sup>204</sup>.

China sees the EU and its member States as indispensable allies in its vision of transcontinental connectivity and, above all, as co-financiers of its ambitious infrastructure development projects. As a result, China has made efforts to engage with the States of the CESEE region, which it sees as beneficial on its way to formal and institutionalized relations with the EU. First, engagement with CESEE allows Chinese government agencies and SOEs to adapt to the policies and standards governed by EU regulations at a lower cost than in other Western European states such as France or Germany. Second, in some countries where EU accession is at different stages, the PRC government can apply a more flexible regulatory approach and measures. Third, Beijing sees CESEE as an opportunity for political, economic, commercial, and social rapprochement with Europe as a whole<sup>205</sup>.

China has focused its strategy in this region on two main areas: first, diplomatic innovation and the establishment of cooperation institutions between China and CESEE, and second, the development of economic cooperation. Concerning the first of its strategic approaches, it has created a mechanism for regional cooperation and coordination of policies and regulatory measures that includes the 16 aforementioned CESEE countries and China,

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Sino-Europe economic corridor. In: *Ocean & Coastal Management* [online]. 2023, vol. 244, no. 106825, pp. 1-13 [accessed: 22 January 2024]. Available at: <<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ocecoaman.2023.106825>>, p. 1

<sup>201</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 8

<sup>202</sup>VANGELI, Anastas. China's Engagement with the Sixteen Countries of Central, East and Southeast Europe under the Belt and Road Initiative. In: *China & World Economy* [online]. 2017, vol. 25, no. 5, pp. 101-124 [accessed: 22 January 2024]. Available at: <<https://doi.org/10.1111/cwe.12216>>, p. 103

<sup>203</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 103-104

<sup>204</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 105

<sup>205</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 106

the so-called 16+1<sup>206</sup>. With the creation of this cooperation initiative, China has strategically positioned itself as a participant in the development of this European region. It is worth noting that the 16+1 platform has become the largest and most complex institutionalized international cooperation platform focused solely on this region of the world<sup>207</sup>. China's goal is to increase the consumption potential of the 16+1 countries and thus create a demand for the consumption of Chinese-produced high-end goods<sup>208</sup>.

As shown above, there is a significant relationship between China and the CESEE region (see Table 3) as a result of the links and commitments made over the past decades. The PRC has conducted most of its trade with the Visegrad<sup>209</sup> countries (Poland, Czechia, Hungary, and Slovakia), which together account for more than 80% of total trade with the region<sup>210</sup>. One of the fundamental pillars with this region is precisely the ODI coming from China and invested in this region. Between 2009 and 2014, Chinese investment in the CESE increased by more than 400%, from US\$410 million to US\$1.7 billion per year<sup>211</sup>. Most of the Chinese projects in this region correspond to major highway projects along the Western Balkans (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia), as these countries have explicitly requested this type of project for cross-border connectivity<sup>212</sup>. By the end of 2019, China and the EU have declared that they will conduct a study on the creation of a transport corridor between the two locations through the Balkan peninsula, which, according to their communication, would allow the elimination of bottleneck sections, increase transport capacity and improve the quality of transport services in general<sup>213</sup>.

Table 3. Characterization of the countries of the CESEE region within the framework of the BRI

| No. | CESEE country          | Member of 16+1 <sup>214</sup> | EU accession stage <sup>215</sup> | Member of BRI <sup>216</sup> |
|-----|------------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------------------|------------------------------|
| 1   | Albania                | X                             | Candidate                         | X (2017)                     |
| 2   | Belarus                |                               | N/a                               | X (2013)                     |
| 3   | Bosnia and Herzegovina | X                             | Candidate                         | X (2017)                     |

<sup>206</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 108

<sup>207</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 110

<sup>208</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 111

<sup>209</sup>The Visegrad Group, or V4, is an alliance of four Central European states that seek to connect on political and cultural issues.

<sup>210</sup>*op. cit.* n. 200, p. 115

<sup>211</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 115

<sup>212</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 116

<sup>213</sup>China-EU Connectivity Platform 2019 Annual Action Plan. In: *European Commission* [online]. [accessed: 17 March 2024]. Available at: <[https://transport.ec.europa.eu/document/download/f6c9e352-39ea-4adf-909f-9de50febe265\\_en?filename=eu-china-connectivity-platform-2019-action-plan.pdf](https://transport.ec.europa.eu/document/download/f6c9e352-39ea-4adf-909f-9de50febe265_en?filename=eu-china-connectivity-platform-2019-action-plan.pdf)>, p. 1

<sup>214</sup>Central and Eastern European Countries and China 16+1 Framework. In: *European Institute for One Belt One Road Economic and Cultural Cooperation and Development* [online]. [accessed: 19 April 2024]. Available at: <<https://www.euobor.org/index.php?app=ceec>>, par. 1

<sup>215</sup>EU Enlargement. In: *European Commission* [online]. 24 January 2018 [accessed: 19 April 2024]. Available at: <[https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/policies/eu-enlargement\\_en](https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/policies/eu-enlargement_en)>, par. 8

<sup>216</sup>Green Finance and Development Center, *op. cit.*

|    |                 |   |                     |                       |
|----|-----------------|---|---------------------|-----------------------|
| 4  | Bulgaria        | X | Member              | X (2015)              |
| 5  | Croatia         | X | Member              | X (2017)              |
| 6  | Czechia         | X | Member              | X (2015)              |
| 7  | Estonia         | X | Member              | X (2017)              |
| 8  | Hungary         | X | Member              | X (2015)              |
| 9  | Kosovo          |   | Potential candidate |                       |
| 10 | Latvia          | X | Member              | X (2016)              |
| 11 | Lithuania       | X | Member              | X (2017)              |
| 12 | North Macedonia | X | Candidate           | X (2013)              |
| 13 | Moldova         |   | Candidate           | X (2013)              |
| 14 | Montenegro      | X | Candidate           | X (2017)              |
| 15 | Poland          | X | Member              | X (2015)              |
| 16 | Romania         | X | Member              | X (2015)              |
| 17 | Russia          |   | N/a                 | X (no date available) |
| 18 | Serbia          | X | Candidate           | X (2015)              |
| 19 | Slovak Republic | X | Member              | X (2015)              |
| 20 | Slovenia        | X | Member              | X (2017)              |
| 21 | Türkiye         |   | Candidate           | X (2015)              |
| 22 | Ukraine         |   | Candidate           | X (2017)              |

China has coincidentally developed a close relationship with the Balkan region with the launch of the BRI. The PRC has used the mechanisms of the BRI as well as the 16+1 platform as an opportunity to increase Sino-Balkan interaction in terms of policy development, joint agendas, and measures to promote economic exchanges. In addition, quasi-institutional partnerships have been established to facilitate non-political exchanges in education, tourism, culture, health, and youth<sup>217</sup>. The Balkans are seen as a region of vital importance to China's vision of geo-economic connectivity. The region's dual location, both

<sup>217</sup>VANGELI, Anastas. China's Belt and Road in the Balkans in the Post-COVID-19 Era. In: *European Institute of the Mediterranean* [online]. 2020 [accessed: 16 April 2024]. Available at: <<https://www.iemed.org/publication/chinas-belt-and-road-in-the-balkans-in-the-post-covid-19-era/>>, par. 2

at the crossroads of the Maritime Silk Road between the Mediterranean and the Black Sea and at the crossroads of the Silk Road Economic Belt through Central and Eastern Europe, makes it a strategically important space for the development of new transport routes, economic corridors, and value chains focused on Chinese products<sup>218</sup>.

In addition to the development in the Balkan region, both Chinese SOEs and private companies have undertaken various energy sector construction and greenfield investments in several countries in the CESEE region<sup>219</sup>. In addition to the economic benefits of projects developed under the BRI, China emphasizes the non-financial value of infrastructure development, such as the increased flow of people, ideas, and goods, as well as the international attractiveness of doing business in these newly connected areas<sup>220</sup>. Despite Beijing's many economic stimulus efforts and policies, the CESEE region presents many challenges that cannot be ignored. This region has complex inter-regional relations, as is the case between the States of Greece, Macedonia, Serbia, and Hungary, as there are tensions in the face of refugee flows, lack of external economic stimulus, as well as other historical factors that have led some of these countries to prefer the bloc and inter-regional barriers to the openness and connectivity proposed by the BRI<sup>221</sup>.

## 2.2 EU-China Investment Agreement and Connectivity Strategy

There is no doubt that China-EU relations are directly or indirectly dependent on China-US relations. As mentioned earlier in this study, one of Beijing's objectives in proposing the BRI was precisely to counter the American proposal in the global economic order. From a geopolitical point of view, Europe's position is secondary from China's perspective, since its central or priority position is the US. However, from an economic point of view, the EU would be at the forefront as one of the main players in trade with the Asian giant<sup>222</sup>. From the approach of the OBOR initiative, it can be affirmed that China is determined to move from being a "norm/system taker" to becoming a "norm/system shaper"<sup>223</sup>, which is why it saw the EU the opportunity to make it its trade ally for the fulfillment of its objectives. According to the Asian giant's projections, the EU could develop a coherent and unified position as a regional bloc and could assert an independent position in global affairs<sup>224</sup>, a fact that will be confirmed in the next chapter of this study.

Relations between China and the EU have grown rapidly over the past three decades, starting in the 1990s. Although there is no trade agreement between the EU bloc and the PRC as part of the BRI, there is a formal trade agreement between the EU and China. The formal trade agreement is currently under negotiation to be updated to include several firm aspects<sup>225</sup>. The current state of their trade relationship is the conclusion of a Comprehensive Agreement on Investment (CAI) in December 2020, which gave EU investors greater access to the Chinese market. Under this agreement, the PRC government has committed to

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<sup>218</sup>*Ibid.*, par. 5

<sup>219</sup>*op. cit.* n. 200, p. 117

<sup>220</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 118

<sup>221</sup>*op. cit.* n. 200, p. 116

<sup>222</sup>ZENG, J., *op. cit.*, p. 1163

<sup>223</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 1173

<sup>224</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 1165

<sup>225</sup>Negotiations and agreements. In: *European Commission* [online]. [accessed: 19 April 2024]. Available at: <[https://policy.trade.ec.europa.eu/eu-trade-relationships-country-and-region/negotiations-and-agreements\\_en](https://policy.trade.ec.europa.eu/eu-trade-relationships-country-and-region/negotiations-and-agreements_en)>, par. 1

maintaining fair competition standards in the investment framework, addressing state-owned enterprises, transparency in the granting of subsidies, and concrete rules on forced information transfer and data protection. Progress has been made in some of the negotiations, but dialogue is still ongoing on investment protection and the investment dispute settlement mechanism<sup>226</sup>.

Although the trade agreement document between the two parties has yet to be finalized, adopted, and ratified, it contains some indications of the expectations and commitments that the EU would like the PRC to acquire. Concerning state-owned enterprises, it establishes the importance of applying the principles of non-discrimination in the purchase and sale of goods and services and calls for equitable trade openness in the markets of both regions. Regarding transparency, the draft, which is available on the official website of the EC, establishes the obligation of both parties to provide, upon request, the necessary information to carry out the necessary evaluation and analysis of compliance with obligations. In other words, both parties would undertake to maintain an open and transparent channel for the documents and information relevant to each of their commercial or similar procedures<sup>227</sup>.

For domestic or national regulation, clear rules would be established for both Parties on the prohibition of forced technology transfers that may result from the establishment of companies in one or the other territory. This prohibition would include, for example, the prohibition to interfere directly or indirectly with the technology licensing of one of the Parties, while always ensuring the protection of intellectual property<sup>228</sup>. It would also ensure the establishment of direct and pre-agreed guidelines on the requirements and qualifications for the granting of licenses so that none of these procedures act as a commercial barrier to investment. In terms of sustainable development, both parties would commit to maintaining labor and environmental protection standards following international regulations, effectively implementing multilateral environmental agreements, as well as making efforts to activate institutional engineering that will allow the inclusion of mechanisms for the involvement of civil society in the creation of the various projects that arise between the parties<sup>229</sup>.

An important point in this trade negotiation process between the PRC and the EU is the establishment of agreements under the selection of a dispute settlement mechanism between States. The aim would be to define an effective, efficient, and transparent mechanism in which both parties agree to lodge their complaints in case of possible breaches of contract. It is important to stress that the possibility of resorting to arbitration would be considered if mediation is exhausted and no prior agreement is reached<sup>230</sup>. This type of commitment is what the two actors involved in this study are trying to agree on to reach a transparent meeting point. As of April 2024, the parties have not been able to reach a consensus and finalize agreements on these aspects, which implies the need to put individual and regional interests on the table to reach a final trade agreement.

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<sup>226</sup>EU-China Comprehensive Agreement on Investment. In: *European Commission* [online]. [accessed: 19 April 2024]. Available at: <[https://policy.trade.ec.europa.eu/eu-trade-relationships-country-and-region/countries-and-regions/china/eu-china-agreement\\_en](https://policy.trade.ec.europa.eu/eu-trade-relationships-country-and-region/countries-and-regions/china/eu-china-agreement_en)>

<sup>227</sup>EU-China Comprehensive Agreement on Investment. The Agreement in Principle. In: *European Commission* [online]. 30 December 2020 [accessed: 19 April 2024]. Available at: <<https://circabc.europa.eu/ui/group/09242a36-a438-40fd-a7af-fe32e36cbd0e/library/6b4e0ec7-5ff0-4872-a4cf-54717b881d90/details>>, p. 3

<sup>228</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 3

<sup>229</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 3

<sup>230</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 4

The Chinese government sees Europe as an opportunity to achieve energy security through cooperation on various transport routes. In this way, it intends to use Europe as an actor to spread the risk of being constrained by the US or other States with sufficient economic power to affect its future sustainability<sup>231</sup>. Both actors have made several efforts to connect the two regions on various fronts. In terms of transportation infrastructure linked to the BRI, the EU's Eastern Partnership (EaP) project has been developed. This is an initiative of the EU member states and their six eastern neighbors: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine<sup>232</sup>. It is called the *Indicative TEN-T Investment Action Plan* and consists of an investment plan to be launched in 2017 to help government decision-makers develop investment strategies to realize interconnections through roads, railways, ports, logistics support, aviation, and the development of an Intelligent Transportation System (ITS). This plan is expected to result in the installation of "4,800 kilometers of roads and railways, 6 ports, and 11 logistics centers by 2030"<sup>233</sup>.

According to the words of Jyrki Katainen, Vice President of the EC in 2017, in the second BRF, it is in the EU's interest to be part of the BRI. This is due to the potential connectivity implications of extending the Trans-European Networks (TEN-T) to the east and south<sup>234</sup>, and connecting them to the Asian continent. The importance of Europe's geographic location for the BRI is significant, as the OBOR ends where the European Union begins. Between the Union and the PRC lie 64% of the world's population and 30% of global GDP<sup>235</sup>. According to research published in the *China & World Economy Journal*, the reduction in transportation costs is directly linked to the increase in international trade. It can be said that a 10% reduction in air, sea, and land transportation costs translates into an approximate 5.5%, 1.1%, and 2% increase in trade, respectively<sup>236</sup>.

Of the top 10 countries that have benefited most from the reduction in transport costs as a result of BRI projects in terms of increased trade with China, 8 are in the EU<sup>237</sup>. These countries are Belgium, the Netherlands, Slovakia, Austria, Hungary, Denmark, Germany, and Poland (ordered from the country with the highest to the lowest percentage increase in terms of trade)<sup>238</sup>. It is worth noting that the countries that have benefited least from the BRI are mainly in Africa. Seven of these 10 countries that are considered OBOR losers are African. It should also be noted that the only Asian country on this list of countries that have benefited the least from the Chinese initiative is Japan. It is important to note that the European Union, as a unified regional bloc, is the biggest winner of the BRI, with a 6% increase in trade growth due to cost reductions resulting from connectivity improvement projects<sup>239</sup>.

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<sup>231</sup>KAO, P., *op. cit.*, p. 304

<sup>232</sup>EASTERN PARTNERSHIP. Indicative TEN-T Investment Action Plan [online]. December 2018 [accessed: 19 April 2024]. Available at: <[https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2019-01/ten-t\\_iap\\_web-dec13.pdf](https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2019-01/ten-t_iap_web-dec13.pdf)>, p. 2

<sup>233</sup>Connecting Europe & Asia. The EU Strategy. In: *Economic External Action Service* [online]. [accessed: 17 March 2024]. Available at: <[https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/eu-asian\\_connectivity\\_factsheet\\_september\\_2019.pdf\\_final.pdf](https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/eu-asian_connectivity_factsheet_september_2019.pdf_final.pdf)>, p. 2

<sup>234</sup>Remarks by Jyrki Katainen, Vice President of the European Commission at the High Level Dialogue Session of the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation. In: *European Commission* [online]. 14 May 2017 [accessed: 17 March 2024]. Available at: <[https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/speech\\_17\\_1322](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/speech_17_1322)>, par. 2

<sup>235</sup>GARCÍA HERRERO, A., and XU, J., *op. cit.*, p. 2

<sup>236</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 6

<sup>237</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 7

<sup>238</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 8

<sup>239</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 7



Both actors, the EU and China, have reaffirmed their commitment to achieving transport connectivity through policies, sustainability, market rules, and overall international coordination<sup>240</sup>. In 2018, in the context of the EU-China Connectivity Platform at the 20th Summit between the Union and China, both sides committed to pursuing the development of their economic and social connectivity through three priorities. The first is for both sides to pursue coordinated policies around the TEN-T and BRI frameworks. The second is to seek infrastructure cooperation based on the principles of decarbonization and digitalization. The third is to develop investment projects based on criteria of sustainability, transparency, and fair competition practices<sup>241</sup>. As a result of this meeting, four EU Member States, Poland, Hungary, Slovakia, and Italy, submitted proposals for the development of connectivity projects in their territories within the framework of the BRI<sup>242</sup>.

From the above, it can be seen that the BRI has improved the efficiency of resource transportation between the East Asia region and Central and Eastern Europe. Before the implementation of the BRI projects, the East Asia and Pacific region had the longest transportation routes compared to all regions of the world, especially Central and Eastern Europe had the longest transportation time. Before China's connectivity initiative, it could take more than 30 days to transport goods from China to Central and Eastern European countries such as Estonia, Poland, or Croatia<sup>243</sup>. The implementation of infrastructure projects such as those promoted by the BRI not only reduces the time it takes to transport goods, but also brings several benefits to those groupings of countries that share a common regulatory framework for trade, investment, intellectual property, and other related regulations<sup>244</sup>.

Following the previous idea, it has been shown that groupings with a common regulatory framework, such as the EU, have an even more positive impact on their commercial and economic development than other countries that do not have a solid and unified regulatory framework<sup>245</sup>. An example of the joint work of these two actors dates back to 2015 when the EC and the National Development and Reform Commission of China (NDRC) established a Connectivity Platform between the parties to enhance and consolidate synergies between the two parties in the framework of the BRI and to agree on actions to exchange information, coordinate projects, initiatives, and policies, and explore new business and investment opportunities hand in hand with environmental protection and sustainability<sup>246</sup>. By 2019, a total of 40 connectivity projects will have been developed under this 2015 agreement, 20 of which are located in China and the other 20 in the following nine Member States of the Union: Bulgaria (4), Croatia (2), Hungary (2), Italy (2), Latvia (1),

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<sup>240</sup>EU-China Summit: deepening the strategic global partnership for transport. In: *European Commission* [online]. 6 August 2018 [accessed: 17 March 2024]. Available at: <[https://transport.ec.europa.eu/news-events/news/eu-china-summit-deepening-strategic-global-partnership-transport-2018-08-06\\_en](https://transport.ec.europa.eu/news-events/news/eu-china-summit-deepening-strategic-global-partnership-transport-2018-08-06_en)>, par. 1

<sup>241</sup>*Ibid.*, par. 2

<sup>242</sup>*Ibid.*, par. 2

<sup>243</sup>BANIYA, Suprabha, ROCHA, Nadia, and RUTA, Michele. Trade Effects of the New Silk Road [online]. January 2019 [accessed: 17 March 2024]. Available at: <<https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/623141547127268639/pdf/Trade-Effects-of-the-New-Silk-Road-A-Gravity-Analysis.pdf>>, p. 7

<sup>244</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 18

<sup>245</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 18

<sup>246</sup>The EU-China Connectivity Platform. In: *European Commission* [online]. [accessed: 19 April 2024]. Available at: <[https://transport.ec.europa.eu/transport-themes/international-relations/eu-china-connectivity-platform\\_en](https://transport.ec.europa.eu/transport-themes/international-relations/eu-china-connectivity-platform_en)>, par. 1

Poland (4), Romania (1), Slovakia (3), and Slovenia (1)<sup>247</sup>. It should be noted that these projects are shared equally between the two parties, underlining the importance of establishing cooperation and coordination links to ensure mutual and equitable benefits.

More specifically, looking at the development of rail transport between the two parties discussed here, it can be seen that it has grown more than maritime or air transport. Between 2011 and 2016, westward rail freight (China-Europe) grew by 170%, while sea and air freight grew by 109% and 116% respectively. On the other hand, eastward rail freight (Europe-China) grew by 326%, while sea and air freight grew by 135% and 124% respectively<sup>248</sup>. It should be noted that rail freight accounts for only 1.5% of the total weight of exports from China to Europe and only 1.1% of the total value of imports from China to Europe, despite the growth of rail freight with the development of the BRI<sup>249</sup>. Little information is available on the amount of subsidies the Chinese government has granted and will grant to the various companies operating the railways, which are mostly run by the States<sup>250</sup>.

Chinese government subsidies account for between 40% and 50% of the total cost of each project, according to a study based on direct interviews with people involved in negotiating freight services between China and Europe<sup>251</sup>. An outstanding and interesting example is the municipality of Chongqing in south-west China. The mayor of this Chinese city, Huang Qifan, travels to the US to ask Hewlett-Packard to set up a manufacturing base in his community. Mr. Huang made a series of connections and efforts to bring together his local government, the Chinese Ministry of Railways, and other national and sub-national railway authorities, with the result that a railway line between Chongqing and Germany via Lanzhou, Xinjiang, Kazakhstan, and Russia<sup>252</sup> is put into operation. As a result of this complex network of connections, coordination, and state subsidies, Chongqing succeeded in attracting Hewlett-Packard to locate an industrial plant there, creating a chain effect through the attractiveness of the new railway line and the granting of state subsidies for the transfer of goods<sup>253</sup>.

Similarly, the city of Chengdu offered to subsidize 55% of the transport costs for Dell to relocate its manufacturing base from Chengdu to Lodz in Poland<sup>254</sup>. The main objective of these relocations is to develop a model of industrial development in previously forgotten places<sup>255</sup> by mobilizing these multinationals in inland or landlocked areas. In other words, the interest in being integrated into the BRI is not only concentrated at the level of the region or of the state bloc but also at the level of the local or sub-national level. For example, Duisburg, a German city with high unemployment, is actively seeking to position itself within the commercial and economic spectrum of the BRI. This will make it a highly relevant location

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<sup>247</sup>Projects presented under the EU-China Connectivity Platform. In: *European Commission* [online]. [accessed: 17 March 2024]. Available at: <[https://transport.ec.europa.eu/document/download/ef3e3f37-2550-4d5c-8d9e-c889c614e49d\\_en?filename=eu-china-connectivity-platform-projects-2019.pdf](https://transport.ec.europa.eu/document/download/ef3e3f37-2550-4d5c-8d9e-c889c614e49d_en?filename=eu-china-connectivity-platform-projects-2019.pdf)>, p. 1

<sup>248</sup>TJIA, Yin-nor Linda. The Unintended Consequences of Politicization of the Belt and Road's China-Europe Freight Train Initiative. In: *The China Journal* (Canberra, A.C.T.) [online]. 2020, vol. 83, no. 1, pp. 58-78 [accessed: 22 January 2024]. Available at: <<https://doi.org/10.1086/706743>>, p. 61

<sup>249</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 62

<sup>250</sup>TJIA, Y., *op. cit.*, p. 64

<sup>251</sup>TJIA, Y., *op. cit.*, p. 64

<sup>252</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 69

<sup>253</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 68

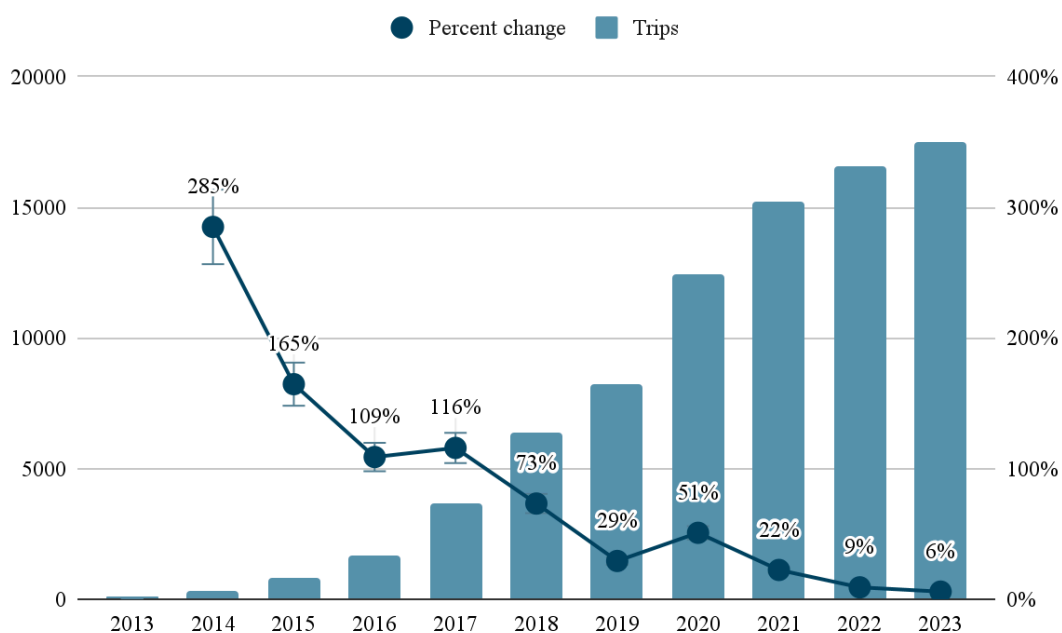
<sup>254</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 69

<sup>255</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 71

for investors and multinational companies<sup>256</sup>. The NDRC has centralized freight initiatives under a single signature BRI project, commercially named China Railway Express, due to the growing interest of various stakeholders in developing rail connectivity between China and Europe<sup>257</sup>.

According to a report published by the NDRC, from 2013 to 2023, a total of 77,000 trains will be opened between China and Europe. 7.31 million TEUs of goods will be transported with a value of approximately 340 billion US dollars. The above underlines the importance of the international cooperation between these two actors in the field of trade<sup>258</sup>. According to China Railway Container Transport (CRCT), 17,523 trips and 1.9 million TEUs were transported between the PRC and Europe in 2023. 9,343 of these trips were westbound and 8,180 eastbound<sup>259</sup>. We can see that there has been a year-on-year increase in the data for annual China-Europe freight train trips between 2013 and 2023 (see Figure 1). However, a closer look at the information shows that the annual increase was reduced from 285% in the first two years (2013-2014) to 6% in the last two years (2022-2023). This situation can be explained either by a stabilization of the development of freight traffic or by a lack of impetus from both or one of the parties for the further development of connectivity within the framework of the BRI.

Figure 1. Number of freight train trips between China and Europe between 2013 and 2023<sup>260</sup>



<sup>256</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 71-72

<sup>257</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 74

<sup>258</sup>77,000 columns! China-Europe trains have delivered a total of 7.31 million teUs of goods in the past 10 years. In: *China Railway Container Business System* [online]. 16 September 2023 [accessed: 18 April 2024]. Available at: <<https://www.crct.com/index.php?m=content&c=index&a=show&catid=20&id=497>>, par. 1

<sup>259</sup>BACHMANN, J. Overview of China-Europe rail freight data 2023. In: *New Silk Road Discovery* [online]. 24 January 2024 [accessed: 18 April 2024]. Available at: <<https://www.newsilkroaddiscovery.com/overview-of-china-europe-rail-freight-data-2023/>>, par. 2

<sup>260</sup>BACHMANN, J., *op. cit.*, par. 1

According to the 2023 data, the transit between China and Poland, Germany, Belgium, the Netherlands, Hungary, Spain, Italy, and France, countries belonging to the Union, amounted to a total of 211,110 TEU along the transport routes between the Contracting Parties. Compared to the previous year, 2022, this figure represents a decrease of 48.57% in commercial traffic. It also represents only one-third of the 2021 figure, which was 618,180 TEUs<sup>261</sup>. Although the 2022 data reflects a 34.11% decrease in total cargo from China, Poland remains the EU country with the highest containerized cargo on westbound trains from China<sup>262</sup>. Germany, a major trading partner of China, also suffered a decrease in the volume of trade with the PRC as it recorded 12,866 TEUs in containers transported throughout 2023. This represents a decrease of 80.02% from the previous year. Nevertheless, Germany remains the largest EU exporter of goods to China, with the largest number of containers destined for the PRC, 58,282 TEUs, but also a decrease of 45.68% from the previous year's figures<sup>263</sup>.

In the specific case of the Hungary-Serbia railway project, it can be considered the first major BRI infrastructure project in Europe and the second largest in terms of investment. Expected to be operational by 2025, it is projected to significantly reduce travel time between the two cities from the current eight hours (by April 2024) to three and a half hours<sup>264</sup>. This mega infrastructure project would cut the time needed to travel between these two European countries by more than half. This project aims to promote connectivity not only between these two countries but also with the neighboring regions. Creating logistics hubs and participating in the regional economy, is expected to boost their economies<sup>265</sup>. This project is supported by both the EU, China, and the BRI, which demonstrates the commitment China has expressed to help various EU countries build intra- and inter-regional economic integration projects<sup>266</sup>.

Following a message from Li Keqiang, who served as PRC Premier during the period studied in this study (2013-2023), he stated on the People's Republic of China Mission to the European Union (MPRCEU) website that both parties should further strengthen cooperation. He highlighted four specific areas of connectivity that China and the EU should work on construction, aviation, information, and cyber safety. In addition, in line with achieving greater integration, he stressed the importance of expanding cooperation in the areas of Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), finance, oceans, renewable energy, and other areas of interest to achieve greater people-to-people integration<sup>267</sup>. In another communication issued by Mr. Li, it was made clear that China regards the EU as an area of high strategic importance and as a "diplomatic priority"<sup>268</sup>.

In particular, one of the important points in the context of the BRI lies in the field of inter- and intra-oceanic cooperation. With the organization of the EU-China Blue Year in 2017, China and the EU have demonstrated their maritime cooperation ties, which were

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<sup>261</sup>*Ibid.*, par. 9

<sup>262</sup>*Ibid.*, par. 11

<sup>263</sup>*Ibid.*, par. 12

<sup>264</sup>United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, *op. cit.*, p. 42

<sup>265</sup>United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, *op. cit.*, p. 24

<sup>266</sup>Li Keqiang Attends 19th China-EU Summit. In: *Mission of the People's Republic of China to the European Union* [online]. 06 June 2017 [accessed: 3 April 2024]. Available at: <[http://eu.china-mission.gov.cn/eng/more/19thChinaEUSummit/201706/t20170606\\_8302770.htm](http://eu.china-mission.gov.cn/eng/more/19thChinaEUSummit/201706/t20170606_8302770.htm)>, par. 2

<sup>267</sup>*Ibid.*, par. 3

<sup>268</sup>Li Keqiang Attends and Addresses China-EU Business Summit. In: *Mission of the People's Republic of China to the European Union* [online]. 06 June 2017 [accessed: 3 April 2024]. Available at: <[http://eu.china-mission.gov.cn/eng/more/19thChinaEUSummit/201706/t20170606\\_8302768.htm](http://eu.china-mission.gov.cn/eng/more/19thChinaEUSummit/201706/t20170606_8302768.htm)>, par. 2

institutionalized. Then, in 2018, they signed the EU-China Ocean Partnership, the main objective of which is to improve the international governance of the oceans, such as the fight against illegal fishing and the promotion of the sustainable use of the seas<sup>269</sup>. It should be noted that both the EU and the PRC are members of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) and therefore recognize many common obligations under the understanding of (1) the conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity; (2) the fight against marine pollution; (3) the mitigation of and adaptation to climate change that must exist in the oceanic spectrum; (4) the conservation of living marine resources in the Antarctic; and (5) the need to improve international governance (regional and global) in the framework of fisheries<sup>270</sup>.

In this EU-China Ocean Partnership, both parties also agree to establish "marine protected areas in the Antarctic Ocean" in an effort not only to promote trade along the connecting sea route but also to ensure the sustainable use of its resources<sup>271</sup>. Both Parties are committed to creating closer business-to-business interactions and to increasing the exchange of information between a variety of stakeholders, ranging from businesses to research institutions, financial institutions, and industry associations<sup>272</sup>. Transparent information exchange in both private and public contexts will thus be promoted. In addition to the development of infrastructure cooperation and international trade, maritime cooperation is not the only area in which the two parties have become integrated. They have also adopted an international approach to preventing, responding to, and rebuilding after disasters<sup>273</sup>.

This initiative aims to assist LDCs along the OBOR route to help them cope with potential emergencies. For its part, China hosted the Belt and Road Ministerial Forum on International Cooperation in Disaster Risk Reduction and Emergency Management and has implemented both the 2030 Agenda and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030 in its infrastructure and connectivity projects. (This is an international agreement signed by various UN member States to promote the implementation of a global plan to reduce risks and losses associated with potential disasters.) It has also established cooperation with over 30 international and regional organizations in the field of disaster management. Liaison is maintained with the European Union to work together to establish cooperative mechanisms for preventing natural disasters and managing emergencies<sup>274</sup>.

It is important to note that a milestone in the future development of the BRI is the regulation and promotion of public-private partnerships (PPPs) and trade exchanges between the PRC and the EU. Both parties are interested in developing the promotion and implementation of PPPs within the framework of the Silk Road Economic Belt and Maritime

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<sup>269</sup>EU and China sign landmark partnership on oceans. In: *European Commission* [online]. 16 July 2018 [accessed: 19 April 2024]. Available at: <<https://ec.europa.eu/newsroom/mare/items/631485>>, par. 1

<sup>270</sup>*Ibid.*, par. 4

<sup>271</sup>EU and China join forces to improve international ocean governance. In: *European Commission* [online]. 10 September 2019 [accessed: 16 April 2024]. Available at: <[https://oceans-and-fisheries.ec.europa.eu/news/eu-and-china-join-forces-improve-international-ocean-governance-2019-09-10\\_en](https://oceans-and-fisheries.ec.europa.eu/news/eu-and-china-join-forces-improve-international-ocean-governance-2019-09-10_en)>, par. 9

<sup>272</sup>EU and China sign landmark partnership on oceans. In: *European Commission* [online]. 16 July 2018 [accessed: 16 April 2024]. Available at: <[https://oceans-and-fisheries.ec.europa.eu/news/eu-and-china-sign-landmark-partnership-oceans-2018-07-16\\_en](https://oceans-and-fisheries.ec.europa.eu/news/eu-and-china-sign-landmark-partnership-oceans-2018-07-16_en)>, par. 9

<sup>273</sup>CENTER FOR INTERNATIONAL KNOWLEDGE ON DEVELOPMENT. China's Progress Report on Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development [online]. September 2023 [accessed: 17 March 2024]. Available at: <[https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/topics\\_665678/2030kcxzfzyc/202310/P020231018367257234614.pdf](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/topics_665678/2030kcxzfzyc/202310/P020231018367257234614.pdf)>, p. 98

<sup>274</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 131

Silk Road. As a result, in 2017, a MoU will be signed between the UNECE and China, and several agreements will be reached in this area. The first one consists of the agreement of both parties that they will promote the PPP model in the countries along the BRI, considering this model to be beneficial for the development of infrastructure and the provision of efficient public services in line with the 2030 Agenda. The second was based on identifying projects under implementation that could be classified under the PPP model to align with the UNECE principles. The third focused on the selection of 10 PPP projects implemented in the BRI countries, to be used as models of good practice. Finally, the fourth and fifth agreements focused on establishing first an international Belt and Road PPP expert group and then a Belt and Road PPP dialogue mechanism<sup>275</sup>.

It should be pointed out that in addition to the cooperation efforts in the many areas mentioned above, the two parties have also integrated at the financial level. The EBRD has already been the subject of this research, but it is relevant to have a more in-depth look at its role in the BRI. Initially, the EBRD was created to support the creation and economic development of post-Soviet Central and Eastern European States. Since it began operating in 1991<sup>276</sup>, it has invested more than €180 billion in more than 6,800 different projects<sup>277</sup>. This organization serves the interests of 73 countries from five continents, in addition to the EU and the EIB. The number of shareholders in this organization is constantly growing, as is the number of new members: China, India, San Marino, Libya, United Arab Emirates, Algeria, and Iraq. The EBRD is one of only two multilateral development banks currently expanding its shareholder base<sup>278</sup>.

Importantly, the EBRD has strong links with many of the economies along the BRI corridors. Its work is focused on the combination of financial investment with strong policy support in a variety of contexts to achieve high-quality projects and medium and long-term economic benefits<sup>279</sup>. One of the EBRD's guiding principles is the ability to mitigate risks, both for its clients and for the economies in which it invests. Unsustainable debt or investments with poor governance are examples of these risks<sup>280</sup>. The list of countries that have joined the EBRD in the last decade includes China, which became the bank's 67th shareholder in 2016. An important aspect of this cooperation between the EBRD and the Chinese government is that the PRC will not be a recipient of EBRD funding, but will be dedicated to the promotion of the active involvement of Chinese companies in investment through the use of procurement and consultancy opportunities in EBRD projects<sup>281</sup>.

Facilitating integration and interaction between the BRI and the Investment Plan for Europe was one of the reasons why China joined the Bank. It is expected that this alliance

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<sup>275</sup>Memorandum of Understanding between the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe and The National Development and Reform Commission of China. In: *Belt and Road Portal* [online]. [accessed: 17 March 2024]. Available at:

<<https://eng.yidaiyilu.gov.cn/wcm.files/upload/CMSydylyw/201706/201706090618045.pdf>>, p. 1-2

<sup>276</sup>Who We Are. In: *European Bank for Reconstruction and Development* [online]. [accessed: 19 April 2024]. Available at: <<https://www.ebrd.com/who-we-are.html>>, par. 1

<sup>277</sup>The history of the EBRD. In: *European Bank for Reconstruction and Development* [online]. [accessed: 17 March 2024]. Available at: <<https://www.ebrd.com/who-we-are/history-of-the-ebrd.html>>, par. 1

<sup>278</sup>*Ibid.*, par. 24

<sup>279</sup>The Belt and Road Initiative. The EBRD and BRI. In: *European Bank for Reconstruction and Development* [online]. [accessed: 17 March 2024]. Available at: <<https://www.ebrd.com/what-we-do/belt-and-road/ebrd-and-bri.html>>, par. 2

<sup>280</sup>*Ibid.*, par. 3-4

<sup>281</sup>China: EBRD shareholder profile. In: *European Bank for Reconstruction and Development* [online]. [accessed: 17 March 2024]. Available at: <<https://www.ebrd.com/who-we-are/structure-and-management/shareholders/china.html>>, par. 1-2

will increase the number of co-financing opportunities in Central and Eastern Europe, the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean, and Central Asia<sup>282</sup>. A relevant aspect of trade relations between all national, regional, or international actors, namely price comparability in determining subsidies and dumping, goes hand in hand with financial integration. This may become a relevant issue in the imposition of anti-subsidy or anti-dumping measures between China and the EU. This is particularly the case when it is reported that China has expressed its disagreement with the EU's non-compliance with Article 15 of its Protocol of Accession to the WTO<sup>283</sup>, which sets out the methodology and specific considerations for this type of investigation<sup>284</sup>.

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<sup>282</sup>The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development approved the Resolution of China's Membership. In: *The People's Bank of China* [online]. [accessed: 17 March 2024]. Available at: <<http://www.pbc.gov.cn/english/130721/2989203/index.html>>, par. 2

<sup>283</sup>AN. Full Text: List of Outcomes of the 19th China-EU Summit. In: *Xinhuanet* [online]. 3 June 2017 [accessed: 3 April 2024]. Available at: <[http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2017-06/03/c\\_136337551.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2017-06/03/c_136337551.htm)>, par. 11

<sup>284</sup>*op. cit.* n. 266, par. 4

### CHAPTER 3. COMPARING AND CONTRASTING TRADE STRATEGIES

As part of the necessary analysis of the trade relations between the two actors under study, this third chapter will look at the various measures or sanctions imposed by the EC on the PRC, as well as the main milestones in the development of their economic and trade relations.

#### 3.1 A look at the current trade relationship between China and the EU

This chapter will use the Union's various official sites on investment and trade as a source of information to address specific measures in the trade relationship between the parties under study. Therefore, the various measures, guidelines, or communications issued by the EU concerning trade with the PRC will be addressed in this study.

The EU Strategic Outlook 2019 should be noted in the context of the European regulation of trade with China. This is the Union's guide to its trade commitments with China, with a view to the promotion of reciprocity and a basis for fair competition<sup>285</sup>. In addition, there are five different areas of dialogue between the two parties in the investment and trade fields. The EU-China Summit focuses on exchanges at the presidential level. It aims to improve and strengthen the coordination of different trade policies. The EU-China High-Level Economic and Trade Dialogue (HED) is a vice-presidential level meeting where at least one vice-president of the Union meets with the vice-premier of China, accompanied by EU Commission members and ministers from various sectors of the PRC, to discuss a wide range of issues. The Joint Committee on Trade is an annual ministerial-level meeting. The Trade and Investment Policy Dialogue is a Director General level meeting and finally, the Economic and Trade Working Group (ETWG) consists of discussions between experts from both representations<sup>286</sup>.

Thanks to their efforts and actions, these two global players have become obvious commercial allies; an argument that is confirmed and supported by the data and figures of their commercial transactions. For the second quarter of the year 2021, the EC publishes updated data on the reciprocal foreign direct investments. On the one hand, the analysis of the European FDI in Chinese territory, is noted in what are considered to be the main figures that characterize this trade relationship. The automotive sector remains the main source of European FDI in China (\$765 million), mainly due to the creation of greenfield projects by German manufacturers such as BMW and Volkswagen<sup>287</sup>. The second most invested sector was basic materials with \$336 million, followed by electronics with \$252 million invested by mid-2021<sup>288</sup>.

The EU member state with the largest amount of investment in China was Germany, with a total of US\$1.13 billion, accounting for 70% of the EU member states' investment in

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<sup>285</sup>EU trade relations with China. Facts, figures and latest developments. In: *European Commission* [online]. [accessed: 22 April 2024]. Available at: <[https://policy.trade.ec.europa.eu/eu-trade-relationships-country-and-region/countries-and-regions/china\\_en](https://policy.trade.ec.europa.eu/eu-trade-relationships-country-and-region/countries-and-regions/china_en)>, par. 3

<sup>286</sup>*Ibid.*, par. 10

<sup>287</sup>RHODIUM GROUP. People's Republic of China and European Union. Direct Investment. 2Q 2021 [online]. 21 July 2021 [accessed: 22 April 2024]. Available at: <<https://circabc.europa.eu/ui/group/09242a36-a438-40fd-a7af-fe32e36cbd0e/library/4931018c-33b2-489d-905e-9596be86f22b/details>>, p. 4

<sup>288</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 4



China. The Netherlands was in second place with a total of US\$213 million<sup>289</sup>, less than one-fifth of Germany's investment. Third place went to Sweden with \$64 million. For the latter two countries, the biggest projects were the ongoing battery gigafactory of the Dutch Lithium Werks and the acquisition of a power magnet division by the Swedish AQ Group<sup>290</sup>. It should be noted that the Commission does not have any data on investments by EU state-owned enterprises in China for the period under review<sup>291</sup>.

On the other hand, Chinese FDI in European territory is also noteworthy. The total value of the Chinese investments in the 27 Member States of the European Union amounts to 534 million US dollars, which is the lowest half-yearly figure since 2011. According to the same publication, it is estimated that this is due to the lack of new projects proposed following the COVID-19 pandemic unleashed in 2020. However, if we look specifically at PRC investment in greenfield projects, we can see a historical high of US\$311 million<sup>292</sup>. As in the case of EU FDI in China, the sector that received the highest percentage of Chinese FDI in the EU corresponds to the automotive sector, which received \$196 million in the six months concerned. However, the second and third places do not coincide with European FDI; in the Chinese case, investments in health, pharmaceuticals, and biotechnology take second place and information and communication technology (ICT) take third, with \$104 million and \$71 million respectively<sup>293</sup>.

According to the information compiled in the above-mentioned report, Germany is also the country that receives the most investment from the PRC. It accounts for 24% of the total Chinese investment in the Union. Spain was the second Member State that received the second largest amount of investment from the Asian giant. It was followed by Ireland<sup>294</sup>. To take this report as evidence of the commercial relationship between the two players, it is important to include data for the next two most recent years, 2022 and 2023. In terms of EU exports to China, the figures are almost identical between January 2022 (USD 18.3 billion) and December 2023 (USD 18.1 billion). As regards imports of Chinese products, these will decline between the same periods, falling from a total of \$48.9 billion in January 2022 to \$39.6 billion in December 2023<sup>295</sup>.

The above decrease represents a 19% drop in European imports from China. It should also be noted that imports from third countries outside the EU also fell, but at a lower rate, by 5.9%. If exports from the Union to China are taken into account, a decrease of 1.5% can be observed, while exports to other non-EU countries increased by 5.5%<sup>296</sup>. Although these data do not indicate a sustainable trend in the short and medium term, it should be noted that the EU is reducing its imports of Chinese products.

Even taking this reduction into account, by 2023 China will be the third largest partner for EU exports of goods, accounting for 8.8%, and the largest partner for EU imports of goods, accounting for 20.5%<sup>297</sup>. The primacy and importance of the automotive sector in the trade relations between the two parties is a fundamental aspect to be highlighted. Exports of manufactured goods from the Union represented 88% of total exports, with machinery and vehicles being the most exported product category (51%), according to data from 2023. In the

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<sup>289</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 5

<sup>290</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 5

<sup>291</sup>Rhodium Group, *op. cit.*, p. 6

<sup>292</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 8

<sup>293</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 10

<sup>294</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 10

<sup>295</sup>Eurostat, *op. cit.*, par. 3

<sup>296</sup>*Ibid.*, par. 4

<sup>297</sup>*Ibid.*, par. 7

case of imports of manufactured goods, they represent 97% of the total market share, with machinery and vehicles also being the most imported category, accounting for 57%<sup>298</sup>. This information provides a general context for the economic relations between the two parties, updated to the last year of the period under study.

## 3.2 Trade Measures and Sanctions: A Comparative Analysis (2013-2023)

### 3.2.1. Understanding the Union's Trade Defense Fundamentals

As far as the European market is concerned, it should be noted that the 27 member States of the EU form a single territory in terms of customs. This leads to the conclusion that this actor represents a customs union. This means that they have a common customs tariff for imported products and that there are no customs barriers within the organization or between different member States. As stated on the EC's official website: "Once the customs procedures have been completed by a third country wishing to bring its products into the Union, the imported goods are free to transit the rest of the Union without being subject to any additional controls or procedures when they move to another Member State"<sup>299</sup>.

To better understand the EU market, it is necessary to identify four key characteristics of its structure: (1) it has a legal framework that guides the market both internally and externally; (2) it has several components specific to the internal market, such as uniform safety, environmental and other standards to reduce the number of administrative procedures for commercial actors; (3) the principle of free movement throughout the territory; and (4) the promotion of the internal market with external actors in the international order<sup>300</sup>. In addition to these main aspects that characterize the organizational structure of the Union in terms of trade, it should be noted that trade with non-member States of the Union is the responsibility of the EU and not of the national governments of the different countries that are members of the Union<sup>301</sup>.

The competencies of the EU cover the field of trade in goods and services, the commercial aspects related to the protection of intellectual property, public procurement, and foreign direct investment<sup>302</sup>. All these functions are the responsibility of the EC, the Union's executive arm, with the approval of the EU Council<sup>303</sup>. Understanding the Union's trade strategy vis-à-vis the PRC is therefore dependent on the EC. According to the statements made by von der Leyen in 2023, the EU has adopted a position of vigilance and caution about possible trade dependencies that could be forged with other actors in the Union. In this communication, the President of the EC alludes to the fact that the EU does not intend to pursue a decoupling strategy with China, but on the contrary seeks to engage in de-risking, i.e. focus on some specific risks that arise in trade with the PRC<sup>304</sup>. The EU intends to

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<sup>298</sup>*Ibid.*, par. 8

<sup>299</sup>The EU Market. In: *European Commission* [online]. [accessed: 22 April 2024]. Available at: <[https://trade.ec.europa.eu/access-to-markets/en/content/eu-market-0#tocms\\_4](https://trade.ec.europa.eu/access-to-markets/en/content/eu-market-0#tocms_4)>, par. 6

<sup>300</sup>*Ibid.*, par. 11

<sup>301</sup>Making trade policy. In: *European Commission* [online]. [accessed: 26 April 2024]. Available at: <[https://policy.trade.ec.europa.eu/eu-trade-relationships-country-and-region/making-trade-policy\\_en](https://policy.trade.ec.europa.eu/eu-trade-relationships-country-and-region/making-trade-policy_en)>, par. 10

<sup>302</sup>*Ibid.*, par. 6

<sup>303</sup>*Ibid.*, par. 7

<sup>304</sup>Remarks by President von der Leyen at the press conference at the end of her visit to China. In: *European Commission* [online]. 6 April 2023 [accessed: 22 April 2024]. Available at: <[https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/STATEMENT\\_23\\_2147](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/STATEMENT_23_2147)>, par. 3

continue to trade with China through various mechanisms of dialogue, negotiation, and dispute settlement while continuing to uphold standards of fair competition and commercial freedom.

The EU defends the principles and rules of the WTO as the main cornerstone of the multilateral trading system as the basis for its standards and guidelines in trade matters<sup>305</sup>. The EU is the largest open procurement market in the world. At the same time, however, its member States' companies face difficulties in obtaining procurement opportunities in the Chinese market in sectors vital to the EU's trade strategy, such as transportation equipment, telecommunications, power generation, medical equipment, and construction services<sup>306</sup>. In 2022, the EU requested consultations with the PRC in response to PRC measures on exports of European products to China and imports of Chinese products to the EU, in line with the de-risking strategy mentioned by the EC President<sup>307</sup>. Weeks later, Australia, Canada, Japan, the United Kingdom, and the United States joined the consultations<sup>308</sup>.

The body responsible for resolving trade disputes at the global level is the WTO Dispute Settlement Body (DSB). All members of this organization have undertaken to comply with the rules and guidelines of the trading system regulated by the WTO and to use the multilateral trading system as a mechanism for dialogue and dispute settlement, rather than acting unilaterally in the face of possible non-compliance by other States<sup>309</sup>. For this reason, after the Asian giant applied allegedly discriminatory and coercive measures against exports from Lithuania and, more generally, against exports from the Union of products with Lithuanian content, the EU brought this case to the WTO, taking into account that both parties are full members of this organization. According to the Union's complaint, the Chinese national customs authorities were blocking access to Lithuanian goods<sup>310</sup>.

According to the EC's trade department, China formalized a series of import bans on certain Lithuanian products, including alcohol, meat, dairy, logs, and peat, days after the EU's WTO filing<sup>311</sup>. Trade between China and Lithuania decreased by 80% from January 2022 to October 2022<sup>312</sup>. The above is an example of a case currently before the WTO Dispute Settlement Body (DSB). It demonstrates the Union's vigilance and sense of protection in the face of possible violations of the multilateral trading system and the rules of economic openness. The main trade defense instruments (TDIs) used by the EU against the PRC will be analyzed for the specific purposes of this study. We will begin by explaining what these TDIs are, to continue with a review of the measures imposed in the period from 2013 to 2023. In

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<sup>305</sup>EUROPEAN COMMISSION. Joint Communication to the European Parliament, the European Council and the Council [online]. 12 March 2019 [accessed: 9 April 2024]. Available at: <<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52019JC0005>>, p. 6

<sup>306</sup>*op. cit.* n. 302, p. 7

<sup>307</sup>DS610: China — Measures Concerning Trade in Goods. In: *World Trade Organization* [online]. [accessed: 22 April 2024]. Available at: <[https://www.wto.org/english/tratop\\_e/dispu\\_e/cases\\_e/ds610\\_e.htm](https://www.wto.org/english/tratop_e/dispu_e/cases_e/ds610_e.htm)>, par. 3

<sup>308</sup>*Ibid.*, par. 5-10

<sup>309</sup>A Unique Contribution. In: *World Trade Organization* [online]. [accessed: 22 April 2024]. Available at: <[https://www.wto.org/english/thewto\\_e/whatis\\_e/tif\\_e/disp1\\_e.htm](https://www.wto.org/english/thewto_e/whatis_e/tif_e/disp1_e.htm)>, par. 1

<sup>310</sup>WT/DS610 - China – Measures concerning trade in goods and services. In: *European Commission* [online]. [accessed: 22 April 2024]. Available at: <[https://policy.trade.ec.europa.eu/enforcement-and-protection/dispute-settlement/wto-dispute-settlement/wto-disputes-cases-involving-eu/wtds610-china-measures-concerning-trade-goods-and-services\\_en](https://policy.trade.ec.europa.eu/enforcement-and-protection/dispute-settlement/wto-dispute-settlement/wto-disputes-cases-involving-eu/wtds610-china-measures-concerning-trade-goods-and-services_en)>, par. 1-3

<sup>311</sup>Joint statement of the 21st EU-China summit. In: *European Council and Council of the European Union* [online]. 9 April 2019 [accessed: 22 January 2024]. Available at: <<https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2019/04/09/joint-statement-of-the-21st-eu-china-summit/>>, par. 1

<sup>312</sup>*op. cit.* n. 308, par. 3

this way, beyond the numbers and percentages of mutual investment and trade, a better understanding of the relationship between these two actors is expected.

The EU defends its trade interests and acts against unfair trade practices by promoting and enforcing TDIs. The EC is the body responsible for monitoring the application of the various TDIs, ensuring compliance, and negotiating future rules with other international actors<sup>313</sup>. Based on European regulations, there are three different trade defense instruments. The first is anti-dumping. This consists of preventing manufacturing companies from non-EU countries from selling products in the EU at prices below those used in their domestic markets or below the cost of production. The second is anti-subsidy, which applies when a non-EU government provides financial assistance to companies for the production or export of goods. The third instrument is safeguard, which is directly different from the previous two in that it does not seek to defend unfair trade practices. This instrument concerns imports of a particular product which, as a result of a sudden increase, may prevent the various Union producers from reacting and adapting to the situation<sup>314</sup>.

There are also several important considerations in the application of TDIs by the EU. To ensure that measures are not imposed for an indefinite time, interested parties to an investigation may request an interim review of the measures imposed if circumstances have changed. In line with the above, every five years the Union producers may request the Commission to conduct an expiry review to determine whether the measures should be allowed to lapse or whether they should be extended for a longer period. EC measures may also be subject to review by the European Court of Justice (ECJ) or the WTO Dispute Settlement Body<sup>315</sup>.

It is imperative to break down the methodology and processes involved in the application of these measures to clarify the impact of each of these TDIs within the EU framework. Regarding anti-dumping measures, they are imposed following the filing of an anti-dumping complaint with the EC<sup>316</sup>. From the complainant's point of view, this type of complaint is lodged with the Commission when Union producers think that one of two conditions is met: a product is entering the EU at a dumped price and/or the efficiency of production within the Union is being affected as a result of dumped imports<sup>317</sup>. Each complaint must not only have allegations that the product and industry are being imported at dumped prices, but it must also have evidence in support of the allegations. In addition, the complaint must be supported by at least 25 percent of the total EU production of the product concerned and must not be contradicted by a higher percentage of the Union production of the same product<sup>318</sup>.

From the point of view of the recipient of the anti-dumping complaint, in this case, the EC, its responsibilities require the initiation of an anti-dumping investigation upon receipt of a valid complaint that meets the above conditions. The investigation to be initiated by the

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<sup>313</sup>Trade defence. In: *European Commission* [online]. [accessed: 22 April 2024]. Available at: <[https://policy.trade.ec.europa.eu/enforcement-and-protection/trade-defence\\_en](https://policy.trade.ec.europa.eu/enforcement-and-protection/trade-defence_en)>, par. 8

<sup>314</sup>Introduction to trade defence policy. In: *European Commission* [online]. [accessed: 19 April 2024]. Available at: <<https://circabc.europa.eu/ui/group/2e3865ad-3886-4131-92bb-a71754ffec6/library/da66671d-66c8-4e5e-9f0b-333b5c60f3fe/details>>, p.1

<sup>315</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 2

<sup>316</sup>Anti-dumping complaints. In: *European Commission* [online]. [accessed: 22 April 2024]. Available at: <[https://policy.trade.ec.europa.eu/enforcement-and-protection/trade-defence/anti-dumping-measures/anti-dumping-complaints\\_en](https://policy.trade.ec.europa.eu/enforcement-and-protection/trade-defence/anti-dumping-measures/anti-dumping-complaints_en)>, par. 2

<sup>317</sup>*Ibid.*, par. 3

<sup>318</sup>*Ibid.*, par. 3

Commission will seek to determine whether dumping is taking place in the countries named in the complaint, whether the Union industry is suffering as a result, and, finally, whether it would be contrary to the economic interests of the EU to impose measures against that State or producers from certain third countries<sup>319</sup>. It should be noted that the EC collects information employing questionnaires that it sends to the three parties involved in the export and import process: exporters from the accused country or countries in question, EU producers and importers, and users within the Union. After a thorough investigation of the facts, the Commission finally decides either on the imposition of measures or, on the contrary, on the termination of the case<sup>320</sup>.

Once the anti-dumping measures have been established, the next step is the analysis of the anti-subsidy measures. To initiate the procedure for the imposition of this type of sanction, an industrial sector in the Community must consider that it is being affected by products imported from a country in which subsidies are granted to the companies producing and exporting that particular product<sup>321</sup>. Therefore, as in the case of anti-dumping measures, the complaint must demonstrate that there is a product exported to the Union benefiting from a countervailable subsidy and that it is causing injury to the Union industry. As regards the necessary industrial representation for the complaint to be considered, the same criteria must be met as for the measures mentioned above, i.e. 25% support from the specific EU industry and there must be no opposition from a larger percentage of the producing sector of the product concerned.

The EC is required to initiate a proper investigation within 45 days of receipt of the complaint. The Commission collects and analyzes information utilizing questionnaires. The questionnaires are verified by case handlers. This verification is carried out with the consent of the companies in question and is an on-the-spot investigation with a review of the respondent's records<sup>322</sup>. In anti-subsidy cases, the Commission makes several preliminary determinations before concluding the investigation. At the end of this provisional stage, the EC will either impose provisional countervailing duties, continue the investigation without imposing duties, or terminate the proceeding<sup>323</sup>. The EC either imposes definitive measures or terminates the investigation without imposing countervailing duties when it presents its final findings and conclusions<sup>324</sup>. For the last type of TDI mentioned above, and in contrast to the previous ones, the purpose of safeguards is to protect the integrity of the EU industry and to give it a "temporary breathing space" to make the necessary adjustments to adapt to the international market<sup>325</sup>. Safeguards are not restrictions on specific imports, but a system of

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<sup>319</sup>Investigations. In: *European Commission* [online]. [accessed: 22 April 2024]. Available at: <[https://policy.trade.ec.europa.eu/enforcement-and-protection/trade-defence/anti-dumping-measures/anti-dumping-investigations\\_en](https://policy.trade.ec.europa.eu/enforcement-and-protection/trade-defence/anti-dumping-measures/anti-dumping-investigations_en)>, par. 3

<sup>320</sup>*Ibid.*, par. 10

<sup>321</sup>Anti-subsidy complaints. In: *European Commission* [online]. [accessed: 26 April 2024]. Available at: <[https://policy.trade.ec.europa.eu/enforcement-and-protection/trade-defence/anti-subsidy-measures/anti-subsidy-complaints\\_en#:~:text=If%20a%20Community%20industry%20considers,subsidy%20complaint%20with%20the%20Commission.>](https://policy.trade.ec.europa.eu/enforcement-and-protection/trade-defence/anti-subsidy-measures/anti-subsidy-complaints_en#:~:text=If%20a%20Community%20industry%20considers,subsidy%20complaint%20with%20the%20Commission.>)>, par. 1

<sup>322</sup>Anti-subsidy investigations. In: *European Commission* [online]. [accessed: 26 April 2024]. Available at: <[https://policy.trade.ec.europa.eu/enforcement-and-protection/trade-defence/anti-subsidy-measures/anti-subsidy-investigations\\_en](https://policy.trade.ec.europa.eu/enforcement-and-protection/trade-defence/anti-subsidy-measures/anti-subsidy-investigations_en)>, par. 7

<sup>323</sup>*Ibid.*, par. 8

<sup>324</sup>*Ibid.*, par. 11

<sup>325</sup>Safeguards. In: *European Commission* [online]. [accessed: 26 April 2024]. Available at: <[https://policy.trade.ec.europa.eu/enforcement-and-protection/trade-defence/safeguards\\_en](https://policy.trade.ec.europa.eu/enforcement-and-protection/trade-defence/safeguards_en)>, par. 2

"automatic import licenses" that are in place for a short period, usually retroactively or in advance of a sudden change in conditions<sup>326</sup>.

### 3.2.2. Evolution of the EU Trade Defense Strategy

After a general understanding of the EU's trade defense framework, it is essential to explain the methodology used for the analysis of the measures applied by the EU against the PRC during the decade under review. The official website of the EC under the category "trade policy" was the basis for the search for news and documents with examples of anti-dumping and anti-subsidy measures against specific products from China during the period under study. Using this website's document search tool, information was filtered by country or region, segmented by "China", by keywords, using the words "China trade measures" and the trade topic drop-down menu by "trade defense", "anti-subsidy" and "anti-dumping". It was decided not to include safeguard measures, as they were considered to have a different application category and selection methodology than the other two measures. The search resulted in a list of all measures imposed by the EC on products from China in the period from 2019 to 2023, but with incomplete information for the years 2019 and 2020.

As a result of the above, the data obtained are presented below in chronological order, starting from 2019. It should be noted that for the years indicated and for the period not shown in this search, the information will be completed in the following paragraphs of this research. The extension of an anti-dumping measure initially imposed in 2013 is the only document used for 2019. This is related to imports of ceramic tableware and kitchenware from the PRC. As a result of this expiry review, the EC found that the Chinese exporting companies that were found guilty of exporting products to the Union at dumped prices in 2013 were evading their responsibilities. They were subject to around 36% anti-dumping duties on imports into the EU. However, they used other related Chinese companies, which were subject to measures at half the rate (18%), to evade the anti-dumping duties<sup>327</sup>. The EC decided to extend the measures for five years as a result of the data obtained in the investigation and the fact that this industry employs more than 27,000 EU workers<sup>328</sup>.

For 2020, as for 2019, the search returned only one result. This result shows that the Commission has decided to impose definitive anti-dumping duties on imports of "hot-rolled stainless steel coils and sheets (SSHR)" from Indonesia, China, and Taiwan. It should be noted that the highest percentage of duties are imposed on Chinese products, even though measures are imposed on products from countries other than China. From the lowest to the highest, Taiwan is penalized with 7.5 %, Indonesia with 17.3 % and the PRC with 19 % of the anti-dumping duties. According to the EC, these measures are expected to protect more than 200,000 jobs in the EU steel industry, particularly for European producers mainly located in Belgium, Italy, and Finland<sup>329</sup>.

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<sup>326</sup>*Ibid.*, par. 8

<sup>327</sup>Commission sanctions Chinese tableware exporters evading EU anti-dumping duties. In *European Commission* [online]. 5 December 2019 [accessed: 22 April 2024]. Available at: <<https://trade.ec.europa.eu/access-to-markets/en/news/commission-sanctions-chinese-tableware-exporters-evading-eu-anti-dumping-duties>>, par. 3

<sup>328</sup>*Ibid.*, par. 7

<sup>329</sup>DIRECTORATE GENERAL FOR TRADE. Commission imposes further anti-dumping duties on steel imports [online]. 7 October 2020 [accessed: 22 April 2024]. Available at: <[https://policy.trade.ec.europa.eu/news/commission-imposes-further-anti-dumping-duties-steel-imports-2020-10-07\\_en?prefLang=de](https://policy.trade.ec.europa.eu/news/commission-imposes-further-anti-dumping-duties-steel-imports-2020-10-07_en?prefLang=de)>, par. 4

In the case of 2021, the search returned six results in which several trade defense cases can be observed. In March 2021, the Commission announced the imposition of definitive duties ranging from 21.2% to 32.1% on extruded aluminum imported from China. It was noted that after receiving a formal complaint from European Aluminum, representing more than 50% of total EU production, the EC initiated the investigation in 2020. The Commission notes that the final sanction protects 40,000 jobs and ensures that European industry can compete on an equal footing with international competitors<sup>330</sup>. In November 2021, the EC imposed a series of anti-dumping duties on some Chinese companies that exported optical fiber cables to the EU. This was done after having initiated an investigation in September 2020, following a complaint lodged by Europacable, representing more than 25% of the Union's producing sector<sup>331</sup>. The EC emphasizes the strategic importance of the optical fiber cable industry as it is essential for the transition "to advanced broadband telecommunications networks"<sup>332</sup>, in addition to having found that dumping strategies were applied to products imported into the EU. Anti-dumping duties ranging from 19.7% to 44% are therefore imposed based on Article 1 of Regulation 2021/2011<sup>333</sup>.

Subsequently, the following result corresponds to a news article announcing the initiation of an investigation into two possible circumventions of anti-dumping and anti-subsidy measures on imports of Glass Fiber Fabrics (GFF) from China and Egypt. The EC initiated this investigation in December 2021, having received a formal complaint that the anti-subsidy measures could be circumvented via Türkiye, affecting more than 2,000 Union workers in this productive sector, which represents a market value of around 200 million euros<sup>334</sup>. The imposition of a series of definitive anti-dumping duties on imports of aluminum converter foil originating in the PRC was then announced, also in December 2021. Since the aluminum converter foil industry represents a market value of approximately 630 million euros, the duties imposed by the EC range from 15.4% to 28.5%<sup>335</sup>. It should be noted that a few weeks later, the imposition of countervailing duties on imports of the same product, complementing or supplementing the definitive measures mentioned above, was announced.

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<sup>330</sup>DIRECTORATE GENERAL FOR TRADE. Commission imposes anti-dumping duties on imports of aluminium extrusions from China [online]. 30 March 2021 [accessed: 22 April 2024]. Available at: <[https://policy.trade.ec.europa.eu/news/commission-imposes-anti-dumping-duties-imports-aluminium-extrusion-s-china-2021-03-30\\_en?prefLang=de](https://policy.trade.ec.europa.eu/news/commission-imposes-anti-dumping-duties-imports-aluminium-extrusion-s-china-2021-03-30_en?prefLang=de)>, par. 2

<sup>331</sup>EUROPEAN COMMISSION. Commission implementing Regulation (EU) 2021/2011, imposing a definitive anti-dumping duty on imports of optical fibre cables originating in the People's Republic of China [online]. 17 November 2021 [accessed: 22 April 2024]. Available at: <<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32021R2011&from=EN>>, par. 2

<sup>332</sup>DIRECTORATE GENERAL FOR TRADE. Commission imposes definitive duties in three anti-dumping cases to defend EU producers and protect jobs [online]. 18 November 2021 [accessed: 22 April 2024]. Available at:

<[https://policy.trade.ec.europa.eu/news/commission-imposes-definitive-duties-three-anti-dumping-cases-defend-eu-producers-and-protect-jobs-2021-11-18-0\\_en?prefLang=de](https://policy.trade.ec.europa.eu/news/commission-imposes-definitive-duties-three-anti-dumping-cases-defend-eu-producers-and-protect-jobs-2021-11-18-0_en?prefLang=de)>, par. 2

<sup>333</sup>*op. cit.* n. 328

<sup>334</sup>DIRECTORATE GENERAL FOR TRADE. Commission initiates 2 anti-circumvention investigations on imports of Glass Fibre Fabrics [online]. 17 December 2021 [accessed: 22 April 2024]. Available at: <[https://policy.trade.ec.europa.eu/news/commission-initiates-2-anti-circumvention-investigations-imports-glass-fibre-fabrics-2021-12-17\\_en?prefLang=de](https://policy.trade.ec.europa.eu/news/commission-initiates-2-anti-circumvention-investigations-imports-glass-fibre-fabrics-2021-12-17_en?prefLang=de)>, par. 2

<sup>335</sup>EUROPEAN COMMISSION. Commission imposes anti-dumping duties on Chinese aluminium converter foil imports [online]. 8 December 2021 [accessed: 22 April 2024]. Available at: <[https://policy.trade.ec.europa.eu/news/commission-imposes-anti-dumping-duties-chinese-aluminium-converter-foil-imports-2021-12-08\\_en?prefLang=de](https://policy.trade.ec.europa.eu/news/commission-imposes-anti-dumping-duties-chinese-aluminium-converter-foil-imports-2021-12-08_en?prefLang=de)>, par. 1

The combined measures range from 16.1% to 46.7%<sup>336</sup>.

In the 2022 case, a total of 14 results corresponding to the search filters mentioned above were displayed. The first of these results is the application of anti-subsidy measures to a product that was already subject to anti-dumping measures in 2021, i.e. fiber optic cables. This case is a reflection of the duality of the measures, where the application of the defensive instruments is differentiated and corresponds to autonomous investigations. The EC investigation found that this product benefits from Chinese government subsidies, including Research and development (R&D) and innovation funding, as well as preferential tax rates<sup>337</sup>. The Commission notes that this industry employs 5,000 people in the Union. It has an annual turnover of about 1 billion euros<sup>338</sup>. As in the anti-dumping investigation, in this case, it was Europacable that complained to the EC on behalf of the Union fiber optic cable producers<sup>339</sup>. It is interesting to note that the application of the countervailing duties was based on exclusion clauses. Cables with operational connectors and cables for submarine use were excluded. The countervailing duties ranged from 5.1% to 10.3% depending on the type of cable, following Article 1 of Regulation 2022/72<sup>340</sup>.

Another of the measures imposed by the Commission concerned imports of certain iron and steel fasteners. These fasteners were the subject of a series of dumping practices contrary to the Union's trade policy. According to the EC, fasteners, valued at approximately 3.2 billion euros<sup>341</sup>, are essential elements in a wide variety of industries, ranging from "simple screws" to high-end applications in the automotive, aerospace, and electrical industries. In addition, the majority of the members of this industry in the Union are small and medium-sized enterprises, employing around 20,000 people across the European continent<sup>342</sup>. The European Industrial Fasteners Institute, which is supported by more than 58% of the EU manufacturing sector, complained to initiate the anti-dumping investigation<sup>343</sup>. Definitive anti-dumping measures ranging from 22.1% to 86.5% were imposed on imports of certain iron or steel fasteners from the PRC under Article 1 of Regulation 2022/191<sup>344</sup>.

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<sup>336</sup>DIRECTORATE GENERAL FOR TRADE. Commission imposes countervailing duties on imports of aluminium converter foil from China [online]. 22 December 2021 [accessed: 22 April 2024]. Available at: <[https://policy.trade.ec.europa.eu/news/commission-imposes-countervailing-duties-imports-aluminium-converter-foil-china-2021-12-22\\_en?prefLang=de](https://policy.trade.ec.europa.eu/news/commission-imposes-countervailing-duties-imports-aluminium-converter-foil-china-2021-12-22_en?prefLang=de)>, par. 2

<sup>337</sup>DIRECTORATE GENERAL FOR TRADE. Commission imposes anti-subsidy duties on imports of optical fibre cables from China [online]. 19 January 2022 [accessed: 22 April 2024]. Available at: <[https://policy.trade.ec.europa.eu/news/commission-imposes-anti-subsidy-duties-imports-optical-fibre-cables-china-2022-01-19\\_en?prefLang=de](https://policy.trade.ec.europa.eu/news/commission-imposes-anti-subsidy-duties-imports-optical-fibre-cables-china-2022-01-19_en?prefLang=de)>, par. 3

<sup>338</sup>*Ibid.*, par. 4

<sup>339</sup>EUROPEAN COMMISSION. Commission implementing Regulation (EU) 2022/72, imposing definitive countervailing duties on imports of optical fibre cables originating in the People's Republic of China and amending Implementing Regulation (EU) 2021/2011 imposing a definitive anti-dumping duty on imports of optical fibre cables originating in the People's Republic of China [online]. 18 January 2022 [accessed: 22 April 2024]. Available at: <<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32022R0072>>, par. 2

<sup>340</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>341</sup>DIRECTORATE GENERAL FOR TRADE. European Commission imposes anti-dumping measures on fasteners from China [online]. 17 February 2022 [accessed: 22 April 2024]. Available at: <[https://policy.trade.ec.europa.eu/news/commission-imposes-anti-dumping-measures-fasteners-china-2022-02-17\\_en?prefLang=de](https://policy.trade.ec.europa.eu/news/commission-imposes-anti-dumping-measures-fasteners-china-2022-02-17_en?prefLang=de)>, par. 3

<sup>342</sup>*Ibid.*, par. 3

<sup>343</sup>EUROPEAN COMMISSION. Commission implementing Regulation (EU) 2022/191, imposing a definitive anti-dumping duty on imports of certain iron or steel fasteners originating in the People's Republic of China [online]. 16 February 2022 [accessed: 22 April 2024]. Available at: <<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32022R0191>>, par. 2

<sup>344</sup>*Ibid.*



Furthermore, the Commission is conducting two investigations to extend both the anti-dumping and countervailing duties imposed on imports of GFF originating from China and on imports of GFF consigned from Morocco<sup>345</sup>. Reference has already been made to the notice announcing the initiation of this investigation. The EC points out that GFF is mainly used to produce wind turbine blades and that it represents a consumption value of approximately EUR 300 million on the Union market<sup>346</sup>. On the one hand, the countervailing measures are set out in Regulation 2022/301. In this Regulation, a change in the pattern of trade of GFFs with Morocco was established following the imposition of sanctions on Chinese GFFs<sup>347</sup>. Consequently, Article 1 of Regulation 2022/301 extends the imposition of definitive countervailing duties to GFFs with additional material characteristics to those originally imposed by Regulation 2020/776. It also extends the measures to a percentage of 30,7% applicable to imports consigned to Morocco. On the other hand, Regulation 2022/302 provides for the imposition of definitive anti-dumping duties of 69% on imports<sup>348</sup>.

As a result of the investigation, the EC found that not only were GFFs sold at dumped prices, but also that subsidies had been granted to its domestic companies and Egyptian companies in coordination with the Egyptian government. The PRC exported glass fiber rovings, the main raw material for GFFs, to Morocco. These rovings were then processed in Morocco for export to the Union<sup>349</sup>. The Commission has decided to extend the anti-dumping duties to imports of aluminum household foil from the PRC following an expiry review. It estimates that EU consumers spend approximately 200 million euros per year<sup>350</sup>. Based on Regulation 2022/402, the EC initiated a review of the measures originally imposed in 2009 on imports of certain aluminum foil originating in Armenia, Brazil, and China<sup>351</sup>.

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<sup>345</sup>DIRECTORATE GENERAL FOR TRADE. EU acts to stop Chinese glass fibre fabrics circumventing EU tariffs via Morocco [online]. 25 February 2022 [accessed: 22 April 2024]. Available at: <[https://policy.trade.ec.europa.eu/news/eu-acts-stop-chinese-glass-fibre-fabrics-circumventing-eu-tariffs-morocco-2022-02-25\\_en?prefLang=d](https://policy.trade.ec.europa.eu/news/eu-acts-stop-chinese-glass-fibre-fabrics-circumventing-eu-tariffs-morocco-2022-02-25_en?prefLang=d)>, par. 1

<sup>346</sup>*Ibid.*, par. 3

<sup>347</sup>EUROPEAN COMMISSION. Commission implementing Regulation (EU) 2022/301, extending the definitive countervailing duty imposed by Implementing Regulation (EU) 2020/776 on imports of certain woven and/or stitched glass fibre fabrics ('GFF') originating in the People's Republic of China ('the PRC') to imports of GFF consigned from Morocco, whether declared as originating in Morocco or not, and terminating the investigation concerning possible circumvention of the countervailing measures imposed by Implementing Regulation (EU) 2020/776 on imports of GFF originating in Egypt by imports of GFF consigned from Morocco, whether declared as originating in Morocco or not [online]. 24 February 2022 [accessed: 22 April 2024]. Available at: <<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32022R0301&from=EN>>, par. 2

<sup>348</sup>EUROPEAN COMMISSION. Commission implementing Regulation (EU) 2022/302, extending the definitive anti-dumping duty imposed by Implementing Regulation (EU) 2020/492, as amended by Implementing Regulation (EU) 2020/776, on imports of certain woven and/or stitched glass fibre fabrics ('GFF') originating in the People's Republic of China ('the PRC') to imports of GFF consigned from Morocco, whether declared as originating in Morocco or not, and terminating the investigation concerning possible circumvention of the anti-dumping measures imposed by Implementing Regulation (EU) 2020/492 on imports of GFF originating in Egypt by imports of GFF consigned from Morocco, whether declared as originating in Morocco or not [online]. 24 February 2022 [accessed: 22 April 2024]. Available at: <<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32022R0302&from=EN>>

<sup>349</sup>*Ibid.*, par. 4

<sup>350</sup>DIRECTORATE GENERAL FOR TRADE. EU takes action on dumped imports of aluminium household foil from China [online]. 11 March 2022 [accessed: 22 April 2024]. Available at: <[https://policy.trade.ec.europa.eu/news/eu-takes-action-dumped-imports-aluminium-household-foil-china-2022-03-11\\_en?prefLang=de](https://policy.trade.ec.europa.eu/news/eu-takes-action-dumped-imports-aluminium-household-foil-china-2022-03-11_en?prefLang=de)>, par. 3

<sup>351</sup>EUROPEAN COMMISSION. Commission implementing Regulation (EU) 2022/402, imposing a definitive anti-dumping duty on imports of certain aluminium foil originating in the People's Republic of China following

Approximately 90% of the total Union production of this specific product was covered by the complaint that led to this review. By Article 1, a definitive anti-dumping duty is imposed on imports from the PRC in the range of 6,4% to 30,0% based on specific characteristics such as thickness, roll width, and weight<sup>352</sup>.

In April 2002, the Commission imposed a series of anti-dumping duties on imports of graphite electrodes from the PRC. The imposition of the duties is the result of an investigation into the dumping of Chinese graphite electrodes in the EU. As a result, the Union industry was unable to compete with these prices and suffered significantly. Graphite is a material used in the production of steel. It is essential for the recycling industry because of its ability to conduct electricity and withstand heat<sup>353</sup>. According to Regulation 2022/558, the EC initiated this investigation in February 2021 intending to impose, per its Article 1, a series of definitive anti-dumping duties on imports of this product with specific characteristics in terms of electrical resistance and measured by a range of 23.0% to 74.9% depending on the company<sup>354</sup>.

In November 2022, the EC slaps a series of anti-dumping duties on imports of electrolytic chrome-coated steel (ECCS) originating in China and Brazil. The measures range from EUR 239 to EUR 607 per ton in response to dumped imports from these two countries<sup>355</sup>. The investigation was initiated in September 2021, following a complaint lodged by the European Steel Association on behalf of approximately 90% of the Union's steel-producing sector. The complaint included companies such as ArcelorMittal Atlantique et Lorraine in France, ArcelorMittal Etxebarri S.A. in Spain, ThyssenKrupp Rasselstein GmbH in Germany, and Acciaierie from Italy<sup>356</sup>. The last result shown for the year 2022 corresponds to a news article from the Commission. It reveals a presumption that the anti-dumping duties imposed on fiber optic cables from China are being absorbed. This is because, after the entry into force of the anti-dumping measures in November 2021, a significant change in the prices of this product was observed<sup>357</sup>.

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an expiry review pursuant to Article 11(2) of Regulation (EU) 2016/1036 of the European Parliament and of the Council [online]. 9 March 2022 [accessed: 22 April 2024]. Available at: <<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32022R0402&from=EN>>, par. 1

<sup>352</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>353</sup>DIRECTORATE GENERAL FOR TRADE. EU counters dumped imports of graphite electrodes from China [online]. 7 April 2022 [accessed: 22 April 2024]. Available at: <[https://policy.trade.ec.europa.eu/news/eu-counters-dumped-imports-graphite-electrodes-china-2022-04-07\\_en?prefLang=de](https://policy.trade.ec.europa.eu/news/eu-counters-dumped-imports-graphite-electrodes-china-2022-04-07_en?prefLang=de)>, par. 3

<sup>354</sup>EUROPEAN COMMISSION. Commission implementing Regulation (EU) 2022/558, imposing a definitive anti-dumping duty and definitively collecting the provisional duty imposed on imports of certain graphite electrode systems originating in the People's Republic of China [online]. 6 April 2022 [accessed: 22 April 2024]. Available at: <<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32022R0558&from=EN>>

<sup>355</sup>DIRECTORATE GENERAL FOR TRADE. EU takes action on dumped imports of electrolytic chromium coated steel from China and Brazil [online]. 16 November 2022 [accessed: 22 April 2024]. Available at: <[https://policy.trade.ec.europa.eu/news/eu-takes-action-dumped-imports-electrolytic-chromium-coated-steel-china-and-brazil-2022-11-16\\_en?prefLang=de](https://policy.trade.ec.europa.eu/news/eu-takes-action-dumped-imports-electrolytic-chromium-coated-steel-china-and-brazil-2022-11-16_en?prefLang=de)>, par. 2

<sup>356</sup>EUROPEAN COMMISSION. Commission implementing Regulation (EU) 2022/2247, imposing a definitive anti-dumping duty and definitively collecting the provisional duty imposed on imports of electrolytic chromium coated steel products originating in the People's Republic of China and Brazil [online]. 15 November 2022 [accessed: 22 April 2024]. Available at: <<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32022R2247>>, par. 3

<sup>357</sup>DIRECTORATE GENERAL FOR TRADE. Commission assesses the effectiveness of the anti-dumping duties on optical fiber cables from China [online]. 9 December 2022 [accessed: 22 April 2024]. Available at: <[https://policy.trade.ec.europa.eu/news/commission-assesses-effectiveness-anti-dumping-duties-optical-fiber-cables-china-2022-12-09\\_en?prefLang=de](https://policy.trade.ec.europa.eu/news/commission-assesses-effectiveness-anti-dumping-duties-optical-fiber-cables-china-2022-12-09_en?prefLang=de)>, par. 2

In the case of 2023, the search yielded a total of 13 results in terms of news and regulations on the application of the TDIs under review. In January 2023, the Commission announced that, following an expiry review on imports of aluminum road wheels from China, it will extend the anti-dumping duties previously in force for a further five years. The Commission estimates that the EU industry for this product employs about 17,000 people. The termination of these measures could cause serious damage to the European industry<sup>358</sup>. Under Regulation 2023/112, the anti-dumping duties originally imposed in 2010 on imports of certain aluminum wheels of motor vehicles from the PRC would be extended to cover the product at a rate of 22.3%. In April 2023, the Commission renewed for another five years anti-dumping measures on imports of stainless steel tube fittings (SSTPF) from China and Taiwan. The main objective of this extension is to protect EU producers and more than 500 European jobs. SSTPF are used for the connection of pipes and tubes in industries such as petrochemicals, beverage, and food processing, as well as in the construction sector<sup>359</sup>.

Under Regulation 2023/809, the EC imposed definitive anti-dumping duties ranging from 30,7 % to 64,9 % on SSTPF from China and from 5,1 % to 12,1 % on SSTPF from Taiwan<sup>360</sup>. It should be noted that, except for two Malaysian companies that are found to be genuine and not dumping their exports to the Union, SSTPF from Malaysia is also subject to an anti-dumping duty of 64.9%<sup>361</sup>. In July 2023, the Commission announced the imposition of definitive anti-dumping duties on imports of refillable stainless steel drums from the PRC, with duties ranging from 62.6% to 69.6%. According to the EC, the imposition of measures will protect the EU keg industry, which employs around 500 people<sup>362</sup>. By Regulation 2023/1404, the EC initiates a proper investigation based on a complaint lodged by the European Kegs Committee, representing the European keg industry, but also containing evidence of the use of dumping practices. According to Article 1, the anti-dumping duty was imposed not only on kegs but also on similar products such as vessels, drums, tanks, casks, and other similar containers, collectively referred to as "stainless steel refillable drums"<sup>363</sup>.

In August 2023, the EC announced that it had decided to renew the anti-dumping

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<sup>358</sup>DIRECTORATE GENERAL FOR TRADE. EU maintains duties on aluminium road wheels from China. In: European Commission [online]. 19 January 2023 [accessed: 22 April 2024]. Available at: <[https://policy.trade.ec.europa.eu/news/eu-maintains-duties-aluminium-road-wheels-china-2023-01-19\\_en?prefLang=de](https://policy.trade.ec.europa.eu/news/eu-maintains-duties-aluminium-road-wheels-china-2023-01-19_en?prefLang=de)>, par. 2

<sup>359</sup>DIRECTORATE GENERAL FOR TRADE. EU renews anti-dumping measures on stainless steel fittings from China and Taiwan for five years, extends measures to Malaysia. In: European Commission [online]. 14 April 2023 [accessed: 22 April 2024]. Available at: <[https://policy.trade.ec.europa.eu/news/eu-renews-anti-dumping-measures-stainless-steel-fittings-china-and-taiwan-five-years-extends-2023-04-14\\_en?prefLang=de](https://policy.trade.ec.europa.eu/news/eu-renews-anti-dumping-measures-stainless-steel-fittings-china-and-taiwan-five-years-extends-2023-04-14_en?prefLang=de)>, par. 2

<sup>360</sup>EUROPEAN COMMISSION. COMMISSION IMPLEMENTING REGULATION (EU) 2023/809 imposing a definitive anti-dumping duty on imports of certain stainless steel tube and pipe butt-welding fittings, whether or not finished, originating in the People's Republic of China and Taiwan following an expiry review pursuant to Article 11(2) of Regulation (EU) 2016/1036 of the European Parliament and of the Council [online]. 13 April 2023 [accessed: 9 April 2024]. Available at: <<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32023R0809&from=EN>>, par. 1

<sup>361</sup>*op. cit.* n. 350, par. 3

<sup>362</sup>DIRECTORATE GENERAL FOR TRADE. EU acts against dumped kegs from China. In: European Commission [online]. 4 July 2023 [accessed: 22 April 2024]. Available at: <[https://policy.trade.ec.europa.eu/news/eu-acts-against-dumped-kegs-china-2023-07-04\\_en?prefLang=de](https://policy.trade.ec.europa.eu/news/eu-acts-against-dumped-kegs-china-2023-07-04_en?prefLang=de)>, par. 1

<sup>363</sup>EUROPEAN COMMISSION. Commission implementing Regulation (EU) 2023/1404, imposing a definitive anti-dumping duty and definitively collecting the provisional duty imposed on imports of stainless steel refillable kegs originating in the People's Republic of China [online]. 3 July 2023 [accessed: 22 April 2024]. Available at: <<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32023R1404>>

duties on imports of tungsten carbide from China for five years. These measures have been in place since the 1990s and, in the EC's view, have allowed the development of the industry at the EU level and the promotion of innovation in the recycling process in general. This material is needed to make carbide tools, which are commonly used in the construction, mining, automotive, and defense industries. The tungsten carbide industry generated a profit of around 500 million euros and employed more than 1,000 people, according to data updated to 2022<sup>364</sup>. Following Regulation 2023/1618, the previous anti-dumping duty under Regulation 2737/90 was 33% on imports of this material from the PRC. According to Article 1 of the new Regulation, a duty of the same proportion, i.e. 33%, was imposed on the total value of the imported product. However, this duty was extended to imports not only of tungsten carbide but also of fused tungsten carbide and tungsten carbide simply mixed with metallic powder<sup>365</sup>.

In 2022, the Commission would open an investigation into the possible absorption of anti-dumping measures by China in an attempt to circumvent the effects of the Union's TDIs, according to the last search result displayed. Indeed, by August 2023, having found in its investigation that Chinese exporters were indeed trying to circumvent the effects of the measures, the EC announced that it would double the anti-dumping duties on fiber optic cables from the PRC. The new measures range from 39.4% to 88% depending on the company<sup>366</sup>. For three specific companies, the anti-dumping countervailing duty is 39.4%; for other companies subject to both anti-dumping and anti-subsidy investigations listed in Regulation 2023/1617, the measures are 62.4%; for other companies subject to anti-dumping investigations only, the average is 62.4%; and finally, for three specific companies, the measures are 88% of the total value of the imported goods<sup>367</sup>.

The Commission has imposed provisional anti-dumping duties on imports of certain plastic products made of polyethylene terephthalate (PET) from China until November 2023. The EU market for PET plastic products is worth around € 5.5 billion. Depending on the exporting producer, the countervailing duties imposed ranged from 6.6% to 24.2% of the value of the imported product<sup>368</sup>. By Regulation 2023/2659, the EC selected a sample of three

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<sup>364</sup>DIRECTORATE GENERAL FOR TRADE. EU renews duties on dumped metal compound from China, helping increase sustainability and reduce dependence on imports of critical raw material [online]. 9 August 2023 [accessed: 22 April 2024]. Available at: <[https://policy.trade.ec.europa.eu/news/eu-renews-duties-dumped-metal-compound-china-helping-increase-sustainability-and-reduce-dependence-2023-08-09\\_en?prefLang=de](https://policy.trade.ec.europa.eu/news/eu-renews-duties-dumped-metal-compound-china-helping-increase-sustainability-and-reduce-dependence-2023-08-09_en?prefLang=de)>, par. 4

<sup>365</sup>EUROPEAN COMMISSION. Commission implementing Regulation (EU) 2023/1618, imposing a definitive anti-dumping duty on imports of tungsten carbide, fused tungsten carbide and tungsten carbide simply mixed with metallic powder originating in the People's Republic of China following an expiry review pursuant to Article 11(2) of Regulation (EU) 2016/1036 of the European Parliament and of the Council [online]. 8 August 2023 [accessed: 22 April 2024]. Available at: <<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32023R1618>>, par. 1

<sup>366</sup>DIRECTORATE GENERAL FOR TRADE. EU tightens anti-dumping measures on optical fibre cables from China to defend significant EU industry [online]. 9 August 2023 [accessed: 22 April 2024]. Available at: <[https://policy.trade.ec.europa.eu/news/eu-tightens-anti-dumping-measures-optical-fibre-cables-china-defend-significant-eu-industry-2023-08-09\\_en?prefLang=de](https://policy.trade.ec.europa.eu/news/eu-tightens-anti-dumping-measures-optical-fibre-cables-china-defend-significant-eu-industry-2023-08-09_en?prefLang=de)>, par. 2

<sup>367</sup>EUROPEAN COMMISSION. Commission implementing Regulation (EU) 2023/1617, amending Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) 2021/2011 imposing a definitive anti-dumping duty on imports of optical fibre cables originating in the People's Republic of China [online]. 8 August 2023 [accessed: 22 April 2024]. Available at: <<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32023R1617>>

<sup>368</sup>DIRECTORATE GENERAL FOR TRADE. European Commission acts to protect EU industry from PET plastic dumping [online]. 28 November 2023 [accessed: 22 April 2024]. Available at: <[https://policy.trade.ec.europa.eu/news/european-commission-acts-protect-eu-industry-pet-plastic-dumping-2023-11-28\\_en?prefLang=de](https://policy.trade.ec.europa.eu/news/european-commission-acts-protect-eu-industry-pet-plastic-dumping-2023-11-28_en?prefLang=de)>, par. 2

groups of companies with the largest volume of exports to the EU to carry out a proper trade investigation. These three companies accounted for 65% of PET exports from the PRC. According to the Commission's data, the PET bottling industry is represented by more than 300,000 jobs in more than 1,000 bottling plants. It should also be noted that these companies fall under the definition of SMEs, which means that each of them employs a maximum of around 50 people<sup>369</sup>. It is worth mentioning a new article published at the end of 2023 to conclude the presentation of results related to news on EU trade defense measures imposed on Chinese products. The article states that the Commission will investigate possible unfair trade practices by the PRC in response to a complaint from EU biodiesel producers<sup>370</sup>.

The period under study corresponds to the first decade of the BRI's entry into force, however, according to the search for trade news on the Commission's official website, no news or material was found in this search engine for the years between 2013 and 2018. It is assumed that this circumstance is due to a new integrated practice starting from 2019 to publish, with continuity and recurrence, the different measures, their impact on the EU industry, as well as the regulation that legalizes the measures. However, to address the lack of information throughout the period under review, it was decided to search the annual reports from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council on the EU's anti-dumping, anti-subsidy, and safeguard activities and the use of trade defense instruments by third countries against the EU. There are 10 reports available on the official website of the EC, one for each year under review. It should be noted that these reports have changed in format, length, and characteristics. Therefore, the most relevant information for each year is presented in ascending chronological order.

According to the *32nd Annual Report from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament on the EU's anti-dumping, anti-subsidy, and safeguard activities* related to trade information for 2013, a total of 9 new investigations were initiated, 6 provisional duties were imposed, 15 definitive duties were repealed and 11 investigations were terminated without the imposition of measures<sup>371</sup>. An important aspect to highlight is the request by some countries to be granted country-wide market economy status (MES), including the PRC<sup>372</sup>. In the specific case of China, there have been no consultations on MES during the whole of 2013. The Commission has been open to discussing MES with China. The Commission expects that the Chinese authorities will continue to provide the necessary information to carry out the relevant MES analysis<sup>373</sup>. This report also mentions that many bilateral contacts or meetings were held to discuss a range of trade defense issues, including the PRC<sup>374</sup>. It should be noted that the information available for this year was general, with a

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<sup>369</sup>EUROPEAN COMMISSION. Commission implementing Regulation (EU) 2023/2659, imposing a provisional anti-dumping duty on imports of certain polyethylene terephthalate originating in People's Republic of China [online]. 27 November 2023 [accessed: 22 April 2024]. Available at: <[https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=OJ:L\\_202302659](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=OJ:L_202302659)>, p. 46

<sup>370</sup>DIRECTORATE GENERAL FOR TRADE. European Commission to examine allegations of unfairly traded biodiesel from China [online]. 20 December 2023 [accessed: 22 April 2024]. Available at: <[https://policy.trade.ec.europa.eu/news/european-commission-examine-allegations-unfairly-traded-biodiesel-china-2023-12-20\\_en?prefLang=de](https://policy.trade.ec.europa.eu/news/european-commission-examine-allegations-unfairly-traded-biodiesel-china-2023-12-20_en?prefLang=de)>, par. 3

<sup>371</sup>EUROPEAN COMMISSION. 32nd Annual Report from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament on the EU's Anti-Dumping, Anti-Subsidy and Safeguard activities (2013) [online]. 4 February 2015 [accessed: 22 April 2024]. Available at: <[https://www.eumonitor.eu/9353000/1/j4nvirkkr58fyw\\_j9vvik7m1c3gyxp/vjre7e6e14zb](https://www.eumonitor.eu/9353000/1/j4nvirkkr58fyw_j9vvik7m1c3gyxp/vjre7e6e14zb)>, p. 5

<sup>372</sup>A designation given to countries whose economies function according to market principles. The EC applies this status, for example, in its anti-dumping investigations

<sup>373</sup>*op. cit.* n. 369, p. 4

<sup>374</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 4

lack of detail, such as the specific measures, the context of the investigations, and the status of the investigations.

Continuing the *33rd Annual Report from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament on the EU's Anti-Dumping, Anti-Subsidy, and Safeguard activities* in 2014, it can also be noted in its general nature against the Union's trade issues with third countries. A total of 16 new investigations were initiated. 2 provisional duties were imposed and 3 definitive measures were adopted. While 4 investigations were conducted and concluded without the imposition of measures. In summary, there was an increase in the number of new investigations and a decrease in the number of expiry reviews in 2014. At the end of 2014, the Union had a total of 81 anti-dumping measures and 13 anti-subsidy measures in force. Regarding the PRC MES, the Commission's Notice is virtually unchanged compared to the previous year. It indicates that there has been no consultation on the Asian giant's MES since 2008. On the contrary, in 2014, the EU organized two training seminars on trade defense policy for officials and government representatives of third countries. In addition, as in 2013, the report states that several bilateral consultations have been held with some countries, including the PRC<sup>375</sup>.

About the *34th Annual Report from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council on the EU's anti-dumping, anti-subsidy, and safeguard activities* in 2015, it can be noted that 14 new investigations were initiated, 10 provisional duties were imposed, 11 different cases of definitive duties were agreed and three of the investigations concluded for the year did not result in the imposition of sanctions. A total of 87 anti-dumping measures and 11 anti-subsidy measures were active by the end of 2015. Compared to the previous year, the number of new cases decreased by two, while the number of expiry reviews increased<sup>376</sup>.

As in previous years, the EC states in the report that there have been no consultations on the Union's analysis of China's characterization of the MES. However, the Report goes on to make subjective assertions about how the Union views the Chinese perspective. It states that China has not been involved in the process of granting this status and that its lack of attention to the process "can be interpreted as a sign that China expects the EU to change the methodology used to calculate the dumping margin as of December 2016"<sup>377</sup>. Following the early expiry of the provisions of China's Protocol of Accession to the WTO, the EC announced that it was working on a reform of its trade policy with China<sup>378</sup>. Bilateral contacts with China and other third countries have been established and a training seminar on trade defense has been held<sup>379</sup>.

The *35th Annual Report from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament on the EU's Anti-Dumping, Anti-Subsidy, and Safeguard activities* is published for 2016. It's a milestone like the annual reports published by the EC. This report provides not only more detailed information but also a set of general data summarizing the main measures in force at the time. It will be a fast, organized, and synthetic source of information. At end-2016, the EU had a total of 90 definitive anti-dumping measures covering 65 products

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<sup>375</sup>EUROPEAN COMMISSION. 33rd Annual Report from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament on the EU's Anti-Dumping, Anti-Subsidy and Safeguard activities (2014) [online]. 3 August 2015 [accessed: 22 April 2024]. Available at: <<http://aei.pitt.edu/102092/1/33.pdf>>, p. 7

<sup>376</sup>EUROPEAN COMMISSION. 34th Annual Report from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council on the EU's Anti-Dumping, Anti-Subsidy and Safeguard activities (2015) [online]. 18 October 2016 [accessed: 22 April 2024]. Available at: <<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52016DC0661>>, p. 3

<sup>377</sup>*op. cit.* n. 374, p. 6

<sup>378</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 6

<sup>379</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 7

from 15 countries and 12 countervailing measures covering 12 products from 4 countries. Of the 90 definitive anti-dumping measures in force at the end of 2016, one-third were measures extended following an expiry review<sup>380</sup>. Moreover, of these 90 definitive measures imposed on different countries, the main country concerned was China, which accounted for 84 of the 90 measures, representing more than 90% of the total number of sanctions imposed. In addition, China was also the country with the highest number of 12 countervailing measures (7), i.e. more than half of the measures of this type were directed against the PRC<sup>381</sup>.

Some new investigations were initiated between 2012 and 2016. The main country concerned was again the PRC with a total of 31 investigations, followed by India with a total of 8, Indonesia, Türkiye, and the Russian Federation with four<sup>382</sup>. The above shows a clear predominance of China as the main trade target of the Union in the use of its trade defense instruments. As noted in this report, the Commission initiated an anti-dumping investigation into imports of high fatigue performance (HFP) concrete reinforcing bars. The investigation found that these products from the PRC were being traded at dumped prices and were having a direct impact on the financial situation of the EU industry<sup>383</sup>. Following a complaint by Ajinomoto Sweeteners Europe SAS, the sole producer of aspartame in the EU, the EC also initiated an anti-dumping investigation into imports of aspartame originating in China<sup>384</sup>.

Imports of certain flat-rolled products of iron or non-alloy steel originating in China and the Russian Federation were also subject to an anti-dumping investigation initiated by the Commission. The measures on imports of silicon produced in the PRC were also subject to an expiry review. The investigation concluded that the measures previously imposed should not only be maintained but also extended to imports consigned from the Republic of Korea and Taiwan<sup>385</sup>. Finally, as regards the measures imposed on China, an investigation was initiated concerning the possible circumvention of anti-dumping measures on imports of hand pallet trucks. It was concluded that hand pallet trucks with built-in weight indicators should also be subject to anti-dumping measures, which ranged from 7.6% to 46.7% of the value of the product<sup>386</sup>.

The *36th Annual Report from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament on the EU's Anti-Dumping, Anti-Subsidy, and Safeguard activities* is then published, with information for 2017. According to the 2017 data, the Union had a total of 97 definitive anti-dumping measures in force, including 29 cases where sanctions were extended, and 13 countervailing measures. For 2017, a total of 46 investigations were ongoing<sup>387</sup>. It is worth noting that the imposition of anti-dumping and anti-subsidy measures this year affected 0.031% of the total imports entering the Union. As in all reports since 2013, the Commission publishes that it has held bilateral meetings with third countries, including the PRC, with a view to the exchange of good trade practices and the establishment of a link

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<sup>380</sup>EUROPEAN COMMISSION. 35th Annual Report from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament on the EU's Anti-Dumping, Anti-Subsidy and Safeguard activities (2016) [online]. 17 October 2017 [accessed: 22 April 2024]. Available at: <<http://aei.pitt.edu/102097/1/35.staff.PDF>>, p. 14-15

<sup>381</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 15

<sup>382</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 15

<sup>383</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 21-22

<sup>384</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 22-23

<sup>385</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 22-23

<sup>386</sup>*op. cit.* n. 378, p. 43

<sup>387</sup>EUROPEAN COMMISSION. 36th Annual Report from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament on the EU's Anti-Dumping, Anti-Subsidy and Safeguard activities (2017) [online]. 31 July 2018 [accessed: 22 April 2024]. Available at: <<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52018DC0561>>, p. 2

of information and connectivity on the various TDIs of the EU<sup>388</sup>. The fact that China requested WTO consultations with the EU in the DS516 case is relevant to this report. The purpose of these consultations was a review of the EU's basic anti-dumping regulation, which sets out the conditions for the imposition of import measures<sup>389</sup>.

Regarding the *37th Annual Report from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament on the EU's Anti-Dumping, Anti-Subsidy, and Safeguard activities and the Use of trade defense instruments by Third Countries targeting the EU* for 2018, it can be noted that the narrative and presentation of the information shared by the Commission has changed. An introductory part is devoted to the presentation of the positive impact that the actions in the framework of the TDIs of the Union have on the maintenance of jobs. It states that more than 124,000 jobs have been safeguarded in the manufacturing and textile sectors and that 86,000 people benefited from having their jobs safeguarded in the steel sector. As a result, it is stated that as a result of the protection of the Union against unfair trade practices and the use of anti-dumping and anti-subsidy measures, a total of 320,000 direct industrial jobs were effectively protected by the end of 2018<sup>390</sup>. It is also noted that a section is devoted not only to exposing the sanctions imposed by the Union as a sanctioning party but also to exposing the measures by which it acts as a sanctioning party to other countries. For example, it is pointed out that India is the first country with the highest number of measures imposed against the Union, with 21 tariffs in force. It is followed by China with 18 measures in force for 2018<sup>391</sup>.

By the end of 2019, the Union had a total of 140 active trade defense measures, according to the *38th Annual Report from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament on the EU's Anti-Dumping, Anti-Subsidy, and Safeguard activities and the Use of trade defense instruments by Third Countries targeting the EU*. These concerned 94 anti-dumping and 15 countervailing duties. In addition, by the end of 2019, the EC had 43 investigations in progress, of which 16 were initiations for 2019<sup>392</sup>. For the year, the Commission initiated a total of 8 new expiry reviews, a total of 16 expiry reviews were concluded with the imposition of definitive measures. Two expiry reviews were concluded without imposing measures and one anti-dumping measure lapsed automatically five years after it entered into force<sup>393</sup>.

In 2019, with a total of 20 measures in force<sup>394</sup>, China moved from third place to second place as the country with the most trade measures imposed against the Union. It is noteworthy to mention that the Commission opened a total of four ex-officio cases<sup>395</sup>, which, according to the Commission's report, is unusual. These four investigations all concerned products from China: ceramic tableware, peroxosulphates, stainless steel, and tungsten

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<sup>388</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 7

<sup>389</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 8

<sup>390</sup>EUROPEAN COMMISSION. *37th Annual Report from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament on the EU's Anti-Dumping, Anti-Subsidy and Safeguard activities and the Use of trade defence instruments by Third Countries targeting the EU in 2018* [online]. 27 March 2019 [accessed: 22 April 2024]. Available at: <<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52019DC0158>>, p. 3

<sup>391</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 14

<sup>392</sup>EUROPEAN COMMISSION. *38th Annual Report from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament on the EU's Anti-Dumping, Anti-Subsidy and Safeguard activities and the Use of trade defence instruments by Third Countries targeting the EU in 2019* [online]. 30 April 2020 [accessed: 22 April 2024]. Available at: <<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52020DC0164>>, p. 2

<sup>393</sup>*op. cit.* n. 390, p. 2-3

<sup>394</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 7

<sup>395</sup>This type of case corresponds to those opened by the Commission on its own initiative without having received a formal complaint through the official mechanisms.



electrodes<sup>396</sup>.

The *39th Annual Report from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council on the EU's Anti-Dumping, Anti-Subsidy, and Safeguard activities and the Use of Trade Defence Instruments by Third Countries targeting the EU*, the Union's trade situation in 2020 also reveals some relevant aspects. A total of 150 trade measures, including 99 definitive anti-dumping measures and 18 anti-subsidy measures, will be in force in the Union by the end of this year. By the end of 2020, the EC will have 47 open investigations pending a final decision, of which 15 investigations will be initiated in 2020 (12 anti-dumping investigations and 3 anti-subsidy investigations). In terms of investigations concluded during the year, six countervailing measures were imposed and 11 investigations were concluded, eight of which resulted in the imposition of anti-dumping measures and three of which resulted in the imposition of anti-subsidy measures. In addition, five investigations were terminated without the imposition of measures<sup>397</sup>.

In 2020, the US is reported to be the country with the highest number of trade defense measures against the EU. 38 measures are in force. The second most active country was the PRC with 19 measures against EU products<sup>398</sup>. An interesting aspect of this report is that the EC highlights several criticisms by a group of countries, including China, to measures on steel products<sup>399</sup>. The report goes on to point out that between 2011 and 2020, China was the leading country targeted by the Union in terms of the number of investigations initiated, accounting for 44% of the total. Similarly, the report highlights the usual behavior concerning international trade protection mechanisms: China is the country involved in the largest number of cases before the WTO Dispute Settlement Body, accounting for 55% of the total number of cases initiated between 2010 and 2020<sup>400</sup>. It is important to note that this report is the first time that China's BRI strategy has been cited as a reason for an increase in the imposition of measures by the EU<sup>401</sup>.

This was followed by the publication of the *40th Annual Report from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament on the EU's Anti-Dumping, Anti-Subsidy, and Safeguard activities and the Use of trade defence instruments by Third Countries targeting the EU*. This report provides trade information for the year 2021. The report shows that a total of 109 definitive anti-dumping measures and 19 countervailing measures were in force and active in the Union at the end of 2021. Anti-dumping measures covered 75 different products from 18 countries, while countervailing measures covered 16 products from 7 countries. On the one hand, of the total number of anti-dumping measures imposed by the EU and in force at the end of 2021, the main country concerned was the PRC with 96 measures (68% of the total), followed by Russia with 10 measures (7%) and the USA with 5 measures (4%). On the other hand, China is the most affected country with 9 measures representing 45% of the total anti-subsidy measures in force at the end of 2021<sup>402</sup>.

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<sup>396</sup>*op. cit.* n. 390, p. 10

<sup>397</sup>EUROPEAN COMMISSION. 39th Annual Report from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council on the EU's Anti-Dumping, Anti-Subsidy and Safeguard activities and the Use of Trade Defence Instruments by Third Countries targeting the EU in 2020 [online]. 30 August 2021 [accessed: 22 April 2024]. Available at: <<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52021DC0496>>, p. 3

<sup>398</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 10

<sup>399</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 11

<sup>400</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 12

<sup>401</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 13

<sup>402</sup>EUROPEAN COMMISSION. 40th Annual Report from the Commission to the council and the European Parliament on the EU's Anti-Dumping, Anti-Subsidy and Safeguard activities and the Use of trade defence

The main countries imposing measures against the Union remained similar in 2021: The US led with a total of 38 measures in force, followed by China with 19 measures targeting EU products<sup>403</sup>. According to the EC, alluding to the fact that the number of measures in force against the EU remained the same in both years, Chinese trade defense activity "remained rather limited" compared to the previous year. The PRC imposed a new measure on imports of meta-cresol from Belgium, Denmark, Germany, Spain, France, Ireland, and the Netherlands, but did not initiate any new trade defense investigations<sup>404</sup>.

Finally, the last report published on 6 September 2023 corresponds to the *41th Annual Report from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council on the EU's Anti-Dumping, Anti-Subsidy, and Safeguard activities and the Use of Trade Defence Instruments by Third Countries targeting the EU*. In this report, trade information was compiled for the year 2022, in which a total of 99 investigations were carried out, of which 21 were new investigations<sup>405</sup>. Two new anti-circumvention investigations and one new anti-absorption investigation were initiated by the EC during the year. The first anti-circumvention investigation concerned imports of stainless steel tube and pipe butt-welding fittings from China via Malaysia. The second investigation concerned imports of stainless steel hot-rolled sheets and coils from Indonesia via Türkiye. The measures on imports of optical fiber cables from China are the focus of the anti-absorption investigation. As in the Commission's 39th report, the BRI is also a major challenge for the EU in its fight against unfair trade. In particular, in this report, it is emphasized that the anti-circumvention cases are emblematic and characteristic of the challenges that the policies and strategies of the BRI pose to the Union<sup>406</sup>.

Table 4. Compilation of the investigations carried out by the EC during the period under review.

| Report      | Year | N. I. | D. D. | P. D. | N. M | AD | AS |
|-------------|------|-------|-------|-------|------|----|----|
| 32nd Report | 2013 | 9     | 15    | 6     | 11   | 86 | 12 |
| 33rd report | 2014 | 16    | 3     | 2     | 4    | 81 | 13 |
| 34th report | 2015 | 14    | 12    | 10    | 3    | 87 | 11 |
| 35th report | 2016 | 15    | 7     | 9     | 8    | 90 | 12 |
| 36th report | 2017 | 10    | 12    | 2     | 2    | 97 | 13 |

instruments by Third Countries targeting the EU in 2021 [online]. 19 September 2022 [accessed: 22 April 2024]. Available at: <<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52022SC0294>>, p. 5

<sup>403</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 50

<sup>404</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 51

<sup>405</sup>*op. cit.* n. 57, p. 2

<sup>406</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 5

|             |      |    |    |    |   |     |    |
|-------------|------|----|----|----|---|-----|----|
| 37th report | 2018 | 10 | 4  | 2  | 8 | 93  | 12 |
| 38th report | 2019 | 16 | 7  | 5  | 5 | 94  | 15 |
| 39th report | 2020 | 15 | 8  | 3  | 5 | 99  | 18 |
| 40th report | 2021 | 14 | 12 | 10 | 1 | 109 | 19 |
| 41th report | 2022 | 5  | 11 | 3  | 1 | 117 | 21 |

*Note:* This table was created by the author of this research by manually taking the information from each of the *Annual Reports from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council on the EU's Anti-Dumping, Anti-Subsidy, and Safeguard activities and the Use of Trade Defence Instruments by Third Countries targeting the EU*. It was not collected from a single source but was an autonomous compilation from multiple sources.

To conclude, the main TDIs imposed by the EU in the most recent period covering 2019-2023 were reviewed. In addition, a descriptive presentation and analysis of the main information from each of the TDI reports issued by the Commission to its counterparts in the EU was carried out. Special emphasis was placed on the data related to the PRC. It can be affirmed that China is the main trade target of the Union in terms of TDI use, based on the information and data published in the official EU media. It is the country that has initiated the highest number of new investigations and imposed the highest number of anti-dumping and anti-subsidy sanctions during the ten years of BRI implementation. Moreover, it can be said that the EC, as the trade representative of the Union, has taken a defensive stance on the BRI strategy and its implications in terms of providing government subsidies, and tax benefits, cooperating with third countries to take advantage of various trade agreements, and transferring excess production capacity.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

Three main conclusions can be drawn from the information found in this study, given that the main objective of this research was to identify the main international trade measures adopted by the EU in response to the PRC's BRI.

The first conclusion is that there is a differentiated approach to OBOR among the Union's Member States. Even though the Commission expresses a perspective that represents all 27 members, a dissidence of some actors can be observed. Each Member State of the Union is at a different stage of integration in the BRI or even has a different level of interest. This is also reflected in the development of some projects on a larger scale in some localities than in others. The disparity of political, economic, geographical, and cultural interests among EU countries is illustrated by the fact that Italy was the first country to formally join the BRI, while others are hesitant to do so. CEES positioning, with countries like Hungary and Serbia developing mega infrastructure and connectivity projects hand-in-hand with the PRC government, also reflects a position of obvious difference. The Union will have to consider how to deal with the division and commercial tensions that are evident between the Commission and the heads of state and representatives of some of its member states. The reaction and strategy of the next EC administration will have to be awaited.

The second conclusion is that the BRI has had a direct impact on the Union's trade defense strategy and has been directly monitored and regulated. This is directly evidenced by the rising position of China as the main target of TDIs. China has remained the country with the highest number of trade measures, both anti-dumping and anti-subsidy, in all of the Commission's trade defense reports. The above accounting is from the first report published in 2014, which corresponds to 2013 data. The last report published in 2023 corresponds to 2022 data. Although already mentioned in Chapter III of this research, it is important to emphasize that the Commission even mentions the BRI in its report as a strategy for which it had to implement more sanctions against China. It is explicitly stated that the trade policy of the PRC encourages State subsidies and provides financial support to Chinese producers and exporters, which directly affects the Union's industry.

The third conclusion is that there has been a development and improvement of the methods of application and analysis at the level of the Union's trade defense. This can be seen in the period under study, between 2013 and 2023. Not only the volume but also the quality of the information contained in the annual reports issued by the EC and addressed to its partners in the Union: the Council and the Parliament, has increased. In the most recent reports, the scope and impact of the information provided have increased. Each of the investigations carried out is explained in greater detail and statistical tables summarizing the information are included. There has also been a significant increase in the number of pages, a reflection of the efforts to strengthen the accountability mechanisms in trade defense matters. The 2013 32nd Report totals 2,600 words, while the 2022 41st Report totals 52,000 words. Overall, starting with the 39th report in 2020, a more robust and specialized accountability mechanism was developed.

Through the reports and the use of TDIs by the Union, this research was able to reflect how China is monitored and analyzed when it comes to trade issues. The leading EU countries showed a conservative view on China's international strategy after the announcement of the BRI by Xi Jinping in 2013, due to several factors. These can be summed up in five major developments that are specific to the outcomes seen in the first few years of the implementation of the BRI: (1) a growing impatience and dissatisfaction between what the PRC government promised and what it managed to implement, (2) a lack of alignment of the Chinese government's offers with EU regulations regarding state aid, (3) an

increasing criticism in the international news media regarding the objectives behind the BRI, (4) a lack of clear and concise information on the BRI, and (5) a lack of confidence in China's ability to implement the BRI, (4) a lack of clear and materialized evidence against the benefits that this initiative and its underlying projects would bring, and (5) increasing internal and external challenges such as Brexit, shifting US diplomacy, and the COVID-19 pandemic<sup>407</sup>.

In addition to the above-mentioned factors that led to mistrust and reluctance on the part of the EU leaders, the growing penetration of the PRC, which is concentrated in the CEEC, caused concern and anxiety among the countries that traditionally play a leading role in the Union, France, and Germany<sup>408</sup>. This commercial resistance on the part of the Union to the Asian giant's initiative has also been reinforced by a series of arguments and disputes concerning aspects that are not necessarily commercial, such as human rights, intellectual property, and computer security. If one also takes into account recent years in the analysis of this research, it can be noted that the military cooperation granted by the PRC to Russia in the context of the war between Ukraine and the Russian Federation has been a source of increased vigilance and alertness on the part of European leaders<sup>409</sup>. This set of normative, circumstantial, and cultural factors summarizes the differences that can arise when two international actors are trading and exchanging goods and services.

The lack of hard data and technical information from the PRC is one of the main points raised in the findings of this study. This has been identified as one of the main challenges of commercial engagement with the Chinese government. The government tends to publish only the positive results of BRI projects<sup>410</sup>. This raises doubts and questions about the effectiveness of the implementation of government-subsidized mega-infrastructure projects<sup>411</sup>. It is pointed out that Xi Jinping's government has attached great political and cultural importance to this project. The economic viability of the connectivity projects proposed within the framework of the BRI has been left in the background. The growing willingness of Chinese manufacturers and exporters to move their cargo via the Xi'an-Europe route is an example of the cultural dominance of some BRI decisions. This is because, although it is longer than others, they consider the city of departure to be the ancestral origin of the ancient Silk Route<sup>412</sup>.

It is difficult to predict how the two international actors will behave in the future, but it is worth noting that many changes made by the PRC regarding the OBOR Initiative could pave the way for a more transparent linkage between EU and Chinese projects. Some recommendations for improvement for the BRI include (1) the implementation of project preparation and diagnostic projects before project implementation<sup>413</sup>, (2) the publication of full project information, scope, impact, financing and projection in official Chinese government media to promote transparency and open communication<sup>414</sup>, (3) the development of a set of standardized technical mechanisms where contracts, procedures and legal bases are applied in a transparent manner<sup>415</sup>, and (4) establish units specifically focused on the BRI in

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<sup>407</sup>MIAO, J., *op. cit.*, p. 169

<sup>408</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 172

<sup>409</sup>KAO, P., *op. cit.*, p. 306

<sup>410</sup>TJIA, Y., *op. cit.*, p. 60

<sup>411</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 64

<sup>412</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 75

<sup>413</sup>*op. cit.* n. 79, p. 18

<sup>414</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 22

<sup>415</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 20

Chinese embassies in countries participating in the connectivity strategy<sup>416</sup>.

Within the international framework, it is clear that ideological differences and political pressures will always come into play. However, the PRC will need to strengthen its evaluation and transparency mechanisms consistently if it wishes to convey the integrity of its strategy to all member States of the Union. It will be up to the Chinese government to decide whether to balance a purely economic connection and engagement with integrating the complementary aspects that are probably needed to make the BRI global and multilateral. At the end of this paper, it is appropriate to point out some limitations of the present research. The main challenge was the lack of technical and updated information from the PRC on its official websites, since it is not possible to counter the information and data published by the EU, since it does not have annually updated information and statistics from the Chinese government.

In addition, some of the official PRC websites were not directly accessible in English. Although the translation generated by the search engine was used, the language barrier also prevented this analysis from going deeper. Moreover, several aspects are not taken into account, such as changes in the leadership of the Commission that directly affect trade policy, despite the decision to analyze the first decade of the BRI. In addition, many of the bilateral negotiations established under the BRI may take place between heads of state or state representatives. As a result, the information available in the official media may not be shared in its entirety, and important stages of strategy generation relevant to this research may be lost.

As an improvement, it would also have been appropriate to include primary sources of another category, such as those involved in or making decisions regarding the various trade policies of both actors. In addition, many experts, political, analytical, or academic consultants could have been consulted, knowing that this type of contact is difficult to access due to the confidentiality of the information addressed. In conclusion, it is clear that the research will never be conclusive, but will be an opening to new questions and links to other research questions. Therefore, the following researchers are invited to take up issues that have not been considered in this study, such as the exploration of the impact of the BRI in specific sectors and industries, or specific regions within the EU. Researchers are also invited to focus on analyzing public opinion and national policies in each EU Member State separately and to compare these with those of the EU as an institution.

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<sup>416</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 28

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