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# GLOBAL AND REGIONAL CONSEQUENCES OF THE CHINESE BELT AND ROAD INITIATIVE

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## GLOBALNE I REGIONALNE KONSEKWENCJE INICJATYWY PASA I SZLAKU

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**Summary:** In the face of challenges that the world will be facing in the near future, numerous ideas have arisen seeking to address the problems of the modern world economy. Of necessity are improvements in the international trading and investment system, as well as the creation of a global value chain (GVC) – beneficial to all participants. One of the more significant initiatives which can contribute to tackling the challenges facing the contemporary global economy is the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), colloquially known as the New Silk Road. As part of the BRI, China aims to not only accrue economic benefits for itself, but also to become a regional and possibly global leader, which can introduce modernity into regions that the world has “forgotten”. Given the above, the aim of this work is to discuss the BRI initiative and to identify the consequences of its implementation, both regionally and across the entire global economy. This is particularly important in light of growing international opinion that we are in fact witnessing a new form of globalization – referred to by some, as *Chi-globalization*. The question is, can China really drive this new world order?

**Keywords:** Belt and Road Initiative, global economy, globalization, trade.

**Streszczenie:** W obliczu wyzwań, przed którymi stanie świat w najbliższej przyszłości, pojawiło się wiele pomysłów, których celem jest rozwiązanie problemów. Konieczne są m.in. usprawnienia międzynarodowego systemu handlu i inwestycji, a także stworzenie globalnego łańcucha wartości (GVC) korzystnego dla wszystkich jego uczestników. Jedną z inicjatyw, które mogą się przyczynić do sprostania wyzwaniom, przed którymi stoi współczesna globalna gospodarka, jest chińska Inicjatywa Pasa i Szlaku (BRI), zwana Nowym Jedwabnym Szlakiem. W ramach BRI Chiny dążą nie tylko do uzyskania korzyści ekonomicznych dla siebie, ale także do objęcia pozycji regionalnego, a być może nawet światowego lidera, który wprowadzi nowoczesność do miejsc, o których „świat zapomniał”. Celem niniejszego opracowania jest zatem omówienie inicjatywy BRI oraz próba identyfikacji jej konsekwencji, zarówno na poziomie regionalnym, jak i całej gospodarki światowej. Jest to szczególnie

ważne w świetle pojawiających się obaw, że w rzeczywistości jesteśmy świadkami nowej formy globalizacji określanej przez niektórych, jako *chi-globalizacja*. Pytanie brzmi: czy Chiny naprawdę mogą ustalać ten nowy porządek świata?

**Słowa kluczowe:** Inicjatywa Pasa i Szlaku, globalna gospodarka, handel, globalizacja.

## 1. Introduction

In recent decades the world has experienced increased processes of regionalization and economic globalization. This has been accompanied by unprecedented scientific and technical progress, industrial migration as well as the global expansion of international corporations, which have significantly improved labor productivity and standards of living on a global scale. However, such positive processes have also been accompanied by deepening problems, which slows down progress and forces modern states to confront them. This applies, among others, to the slowdown in global economic growth (especially in developed countries), but also the gradual depletion of natural resources [*Building the Belt...*, 2017; *China's Role...*, 2017, pp. 1-3]. At the same time, waves of migration are sweeping through the world, while in some regions terrorist and separatist movements can be observed. According to a report of the UN [*Report on the Sustainable... 2017*, p. VIII]: “*human rights, social justice and even world peace once again face enormous challenges on a global scale in the context of a globalization process that prioritizes economic development and efficiency*”. Increasing dissatisfaction and social inequalities, therefore, create a fertile ground for populist activities, the consequence of which is an increase in protectionism or the coming to power of nationalist movements. These actions may endanger globalization processes, since the international economic system has difficulties adapting to these changes, while institutional reforms do not bring about the desired outcomes.

In face of the above challenges, numerous ideas emerge seeking to address the problems of the modern world economy. Of necessity are improvements in the international trading and investment system, as well as the creation of a global value chain (GVC) – beneficial to all participants. One of the more significant initiatives which can contribute in tackling the challenges facing the contemporary global economy is the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), colloquially known as the New Silk Road.

Characteristic of the BRI is its global dimension via the expansion of an infrastructure network covering a substantial mass of the world, including Asia, Europe, the Middle East, as well as areas of Africa and South America. According to recent data there are 65 countries associated with the Chinese BRI. These countries are inhabited by about 4.4 billion population, which equates to 70% of the world population. These countries generate approximately 55% of the global GNP – drawing on 75% of the Earth's raw material resources [Cohen 2015, p. 4]. The potential for

more countries to join the Chinese initiative, given the total number of countries in the world is wide open. This implies that the future scope of the project and economic co-operation may well be even more extensive.

As part of the BRI, China aims to not only accrue economic benefits for itself, but also to become a regional and possibly global leader which can introduce modernity into regions that the world has “forgotten”).

Given the above, the aim of this work is to discuss the BRI initiative and to identify the consequences of its implementation, both regionally and across the entire global economy. This is particularly important in light of growing international opinion, that we are in fact witnessing a new form of globalization – referred to by some as *Chiglobalization*. The question is, can China really drive this new world order?

This research was carried out drawing on international research as well as materials made available by Chinese government agencies as well as international organizations working on BRI developments.

## 2. The Chinese Belt and Road Initiative – literature review

Among the research focusing on the BRI from a technical standpoint of view, H. Chin and W. He [2016], G. Wong, S. Booker and G. Barthe-Dejean [2017] focus significantly on the project’s territorial range, infrastructure and sources of financing. In contrast, a number of analyses focus on China’s motives behind the implementation of the BRI as well as the associated threats and opportunities. Such research was carried out by D. Cohen [2015], A. Kratz [2016], Y. van der Leer and J. Yau [2016] and D. Wijeratne et al. [2017]. Other research carried out by B. Derudder, X. Liu and Ch. Kunaka [2018], focused on the economics network approach in seeking to answer the question as to how far a country can benefit most from the Belt and Road Initiative. This links well with further research focused on specialised issues related to the BRI, such as on the impact of changes in trade facilitation following the implementation of the BRI. In particular, this concerns the stimulation of trade in countries along the Belt and Road: see M.B. Johns [Johns et al. 2018]. Other researchers, for example: H. Zepp-LaRouche [2014], A. Bondaz [2015], M. Kaczmarek [2015], R. Pantucci and Q. Chen [2016] carry out research viewing the impact of the BRI initiative on the world’s geopolitical situation. Related to this, further research in this field was also prepared by “The Economist” entitled: “Prospects and challenges on China’s one belt, one road: a risk assessment report” [2015].

Research carried out by G. Gieger [2016], A. Garcia-Herrero and L. Xu [2016] and L. Zuokui [2017] attempted to determine the impact of the BRI on the European Union. Related research, see: S. Majman [2015], D. Pavličević [2016], J. Szczudlik [2016], B. Góralczyk [2017], R. Jakimowicz [2017], M. Jingjing [2018] and F. de Soyres [2018] concentrate on the impact of BRI in selected regions such as Central and Eastern Europe and East Asia. These approaches stimulate security-related research, see for example: R. Ghiasy and J. Zhou [2017] – the Stockholm International Peace

Research Institute (SIPRI). According to the authors, the BRI initiative provides the EU with an opportunity to pre-empt any negative geopolitical and geo-economic competition with China.

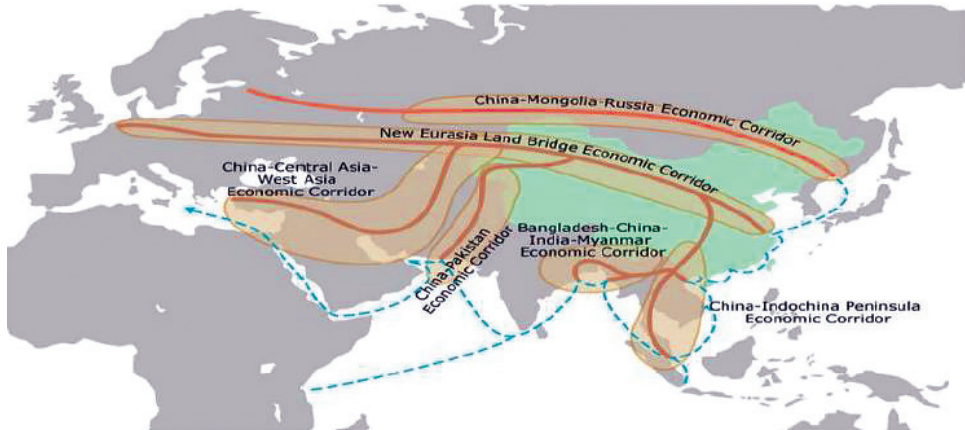
The first time *The Silk Road Economic Belt* concept was officially presented by President Xi Jinping was during his visit to Kazakhstan in September 2013. This idea, being at the same time a strategic economic project and a political initiative, was extended in 2014 with a vision of *The 21st Century Maritime Silk Road*. Both projects are part of the strategy called the Belt and Road Initiative. The vast scope of the Chinese vision of the Belt and Road Initiative was provided by PRC's National Development and Reform Commission, according to which over 100 countries expressed their support and willingness to participate in the initiative. China has signed 118 co-operation agreements with 103 countries and international organizations [ADB, data from 08.02.19]. These agreements covered a wide range of areas such as communications, production capacity, investment, economy, trade, finance, science and technology, society, quality of life and maritime issues [*Building the Belt...2017*, pp. 7- 8].

Political co-operation related to the BRI initiative has been carried out at many levels as part of numerous regional organizations. This involves entities such as The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), whose co-operation with China concentrates on the problems of the Central Asian region, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the China-Arab States Cooperation Forum (CASCF) in the Middle East, the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) in Africa, and to a lesser extent BRICS. In the case of Europe, already in 2012, prior to the official launch, cooperation was announced in the 16 + 1 format (covering 11 Central and Eastern European countries and China). In 2015 at the EU-China summit, the vision of the Belt and Road was presented as a modern dimension of the strategic partnership between the European Union and the PRC. The EU-China dialogue on communications in the so-called ASEM (Asia-Europe Meeting) format. China also managed to gain the support of the United Nations for its plans. In March 2017 the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 2344, which calls on the international community to strengthen regional economic cooperation within the framework of the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative [*Building the Belt...2017*, p. 8].

However, it should be emphasized that despite numerous agreements concluded under the BRI, and the many entities participating in the project, it is considered an initiative with a low degree of institutionalization. According to Chinese declarations the countries involved in the BRI are tasked, through discussions and co-operation, to strive for joint growth and to join in the creation of a new global system of economic governance. Such co-operation is to help promote effective international exchange and in-depth market integration to achieve diversified, independent and sustainable development. One of the main assumptions of the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative is to promote regional development, prosperity and stability, and to expand dialogue and mutual learning between civilizations.

As part of the BRI, China plans to create a network of transport corridors, thereby building or modernizing transport infrastructure. The initiative covers both road, railway (including high-speed), air and sea transport. However, it is planned not only to build new airports and seaports, but also to create transmission infrastructure (oil, gas pipelines) and telecommunications.

In 2015 a government document was issued under the name *Vision and Actions on Joint Silk Road Economic Belt and 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road*, which contained the basic assumptions and principles of the Chinese initiative [Vision... 2015]. According to this document, one of the main assumptions of the initiative is to promote the idea of free trade and investment expansion by reducing trade restrictions and administrative barriers. The development of China's economic co-operation is to be implemented through the construction of a network of land roads connecting it with Central Asia and Eastern and Western Europe (Figure 1).



**Fig. 1.** Geographic coverage of the Belt and the Road

Source: HKTDC Research, <http://china-trade-research.hktdc.com>.

The PRC is also to gain access to the Mediterranean, the Middle East, South Asia and South-East Asia. This means the construction of six land corridors, including: (I) China-Mongolia and Russia, (II) New Asia – European Continental Bridge, (III) PRC – Central Asia – West Asia, (IV) PRC – Mainland – Southeast Asia, (V) PRC – Pakistan, (V) Bangladesh – PRC – India – Myanmar. The aim of the *21st Century Maritime Silk Road*, however, is to develop a network of sea routes running from the east coast of China to Europe through the South China Sea, the Indian Ocean and east towards the South Pacific. It is guided by the construction of effective transport links between the main ports in many countries, on different continents, and the development of economic corridors running through the Indian Ocean. The initiative thus creates the possibility of improving China's economic relations with East Asia, the Middle East, Africa and the Mediterranean countries.

The BRI is presented as a Chinese contribution to the global management system and – different from Western proposals – a new integration model. According to the Chinese this is an open initiative, which means co-operation that responds to international demand. It is worth stressing that, despite attempts taken by the Chinese government to detail this concept, it is still not fully specified. This implies that, among others, no closed catalogue of objectives and tools used in the framework of the BRI. It is true that China has identified the priority areas around which the above concept is embedded, such as foreign trade, infrastructure development, and investment and financial cooperation, but also includes all types of other activities related to both domestic and foreign policy [Szcudlik 2016].

### 3. BRI in global and regional perspective

China declared that the BRI, through consultation, should take into account the interests of all countries taking part in this initiative. At the same time, joint efforts should be made to integrate the development strategies of countries within its scope. For many countries involved in this initiative, there is the possibility of obtaining China's economic support and thus an exit from the low or middle-income trap. This is particularly important in the face of the fact that a significant part of countries along the BRI are those with a low level of development. These are often countries whose population structures are usually characterized by a high proportion of young people facing the problem of poor development of labor markets and high unemployment. In addition to large manpower resources, they are also rich in natural resources. China, by developing infrastructure and incorporating them into global value chains, gives them the opportunity to use their own potential and enter the path of growth, including the creation of hundreds of millions of jobs. According to the UN report [*Report on the Sustainable... 2017*, p. 11]: *The degree of participation of emerging economies along BRI in the global value chain division is increasing, and they have achieved economic growth through participation. However, they are still in the development stage of utilising basic elements such as resources and labour. Countries establishing their positions in the global value chain through resource depletion and cheap labour are subject to division lock-in effects in low-end links, which requires new comparative advantages to unlock the effects.*

Importantly, the BRI initiative is a response to the huge financial needs of the least developed countries in the world. PwC estimates the financial needs related to the expansion of global infrastructure at approximately US \$ 49 trillion (from 2015 to 2030), of which about USD 6 trillion should go only to East Asian countries (excluding China) [*Repaving... 2017*, pp. 9-10]. According to the Asian Development Bank (ADB), for the 25 Asian developing countries in 2016-2020, the difference between the current and necessary investment levels is 330 billion dollars per year, which corresponds to 1.7% of their projected growth of GDP (without China this gap in other 24 countries is 4.3% of GDP) [*Report on (...) 2017*, pp. 10-11]. Africa also

has huge needs, estimated at around 38 billion USD per year, related to infrastructure financing, and another 37 billion USD a year for its maintenance and exploitation (which is around 12% of GDP). This means the creation of a 35 billion (USD) gap, which can be partially financed by Chinese investors [*Repaving...* 2017, pp. 9-10].

Therefore, investment needs are particularly noticeable in the case of underdeveloped BRI countries. These countries have large gaps in the infrastructure related to trade and transport, which limits their productivity, increases the costs of doing business and reduces the attractiveness for external investors. The improvement of trade and transport infrastructure in these countries could increase trade as well as the integration of the international and domestic market and enable them to become part of international procurement networks. According to research on the economy of BRI, the most benefits for investments in infrastructure are gained by: Afghanistan, Bhutan, Burma, Moldova, Iraq, Mongolia, Yemen, Cambodia, Tajikistan, Nepal, Pakistan and Ukraine [Wiederer 2018, p. 11].

Infrastructure created within the framework of the BRI will significantly reduce global transport costs. It is expected that the delivery time will decrease by an average of 1.2% in all pairs of countries in the world. However, the largest profits should be achieved by countries located in the East Asia and Pacific region, where the average shipping time to other countries in the world should be reduced by 2.31% (4.35% to countries in the South Asian region and 2.87% in relation to countries in the Middle East and North Africa). This will have an impact on a significant reduction of trade costs, and thus also on production costs and an increase of welfare both in this region and on a global scale. According to the quantitative trade model the BRI benefits in the form of GDP growth are estimated at an average of 2.6% to 3.9% in the East Asia and Pacific region and they are higher than the average GDP growth in other countries of the world [de Soyres 2018, pp. 1-4].

The Chinese initiative of the BRI is therefore a great opportunity for the development of countries from the lowest developed parts of the world, especially as China undertakes its actions on risky and volatile markets that other economies usually try to avoid. On the other hand, it creates a significant threat that countries with an insufficiently developed infrastructure and state power system, included in the BRI project, may be exposed to falling into the trap of unpayable loans. This is especially the case given that China is the largest exporter and main source of imports to most countries and regions along the Belt and Road. Most of them also record trade deficits with PRC.

BRI can affect not only developing countries, but also those developed. EU cooperation with China under the BRI would bring additional benefits to the Community in the form of a significant increase in its impact on the future geographic structure of international trade, not only in Europe, but also in Asia or even in Africa. EU authorities can take an active part in creating new and marginalizing existing trade routes, both land and sea. As an example, one can cite the Chinese investment in the port of Piraeus, which in connection with the expansion of high-speed trains

from Piraeus to Budapest and from the port of Constanta (in the Mediterranean) to Vienna (via Bucharest and Budapest), opens new trade routes between China and the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. These actions are aimed at reducing the existing differences in the level of infrastructure development between the “new” and “old” members of the EU. On the other hand, the new connections will allow reducing the time of shipping Chinese exports (even by ten days), thus increasing China’s competitiveness in the European market. Time will tell whether these new connections will benefit EU exports (which concerns Central and Eastern Europe and the entire EU) to the Chinese market. Currently, many countries involved in the BRI initiative are characterized by huge deficits in trade with the PRC. It is difficult to assess the effects of these investments: will it be an increase in the value of global trade, or perhaps an increase in the net surplus for China. Considering the dominant role of Chinese state-owned enterprises (whose advantage is largely dependent on strong support – including financial support – from the Chinese government) in infrastructural investments implemented under the BRI, there are questions as to whether this initiative will be equally beneficial for EU companies. There are also concerns about the possibility of the negative consequences of increased trade caused by the BRI, such as increased organized crime, increases in illegal trade, terrorist activity or more counterfeit goods. Some analysts indicate that EU Member States have much less benefit from economic cooperation with China than non-Community BRI participants. This is due to the fact that a significant part of investment and infrastructure projects is primarily located outside the Union. This is the effect of the weakness of Chinese instruments that are not adapted to the needs of all countries. In addition, the current Chinese support in the form of loans – often constructed on the same basis as in the case of investments, e.g. in Africa – is unattractive for EU countries having access to more advantageous EU funds [Szcudlik 2016, p. 2]. On the other hand, the Chinese expansion into European markets is visible by the value of their acquisition transactions. In 2016 China was the second largest acquiring country (after US) in the EU (value of Chinese transactions – including Hong Kong – was 49 272 mln EUR). Moreover PRC (including Hong Kong) controlled 4000 companies in the EU which puts them in the lead [*Proposal for...* 2017, pp. 13-18]. This is one of the reasons why the EU will apply new regulations from 2020 and establish a framework for screening FDI. The aim is to detect and raise the awareness of security risks posed by foreign investment in critical assets, infrastructure and technologies [*EU-China...* 2019, p. 10].

#### **4. Geopolitical consequences of the BRI**

Among Chinese officials there are opinions that Western countries, and above all the US, are responsible for the global economic and political imbalances that led to the recent global financial crisis. China has a mission to fulfill, i.e. it should work to limit these negative processes precisely through the BRI. They announced that



economic imbalances are the main cause of conflicts, and China should therefore be able to provide more public goods in order to alleviate them. According to the assurances of the Chinese government, China is a country with a history that intends to break the pattern of the formation of great powers, creating a precedent of peaceful growth [Bondaz 2015, pp. 6-7]. Despite these declarations, however, there are fears that China's win-win strategy will provide its participants with economic benefits, but at the price that they recognize Chinese territorial claims (both at sea and on land). The governments of many countries have doubts about China's true intentions, perceiving the BRI as an initiative to extend the range of their economic and political influence. Importantly, the BRI attracts not only small and medium-sized Asian countries suffering from a lack of energy and transport infrastructures, such as Cambodia or Pakistan. In the case of Singapore, participation in the BRI is to obtain multiplier effects [Grieger 2016, p. 7]. Scepticism regarding China's geostrategic and military ambitions is maintained to varying degrees, both among the former and the latter, especially after China's intensive land reclamation in the South China Sea. Contrary to the interests of India, there are plans to create a China-Pakistan Economic Corridor running through – among others – the disputed Kashmir territories. The authorities in New Delhi perceive this corridor as part of China's "circling" strategy and point out that the BRI should be carried out with a respect for sovereignty and the territorial integrity of other states. They are also afraid of China's strengthening position in the region, especially as China is pursuing an intense dialogue with countries considered close relatives of India, such as Bangladesh, Nepal and Sri Lanka – as part of the BRI concept. For this reason the planned incorporation of India into the New Silk Road project that could neutralize Indian resistance is still questionable.

In the case of Russia, after the initial dislike caused by the fear of losing its hegemonic position in the region, the country declared to join ambitious plans to build a rail network connecting it with China. This project carried out under the BRI testifies to the strengthening of Chinese-Russian relations. The warming of mutual relations is also confirmed by the agreement reached in July 2015 (during the summit of the Shanghai Co-operation Organization in Russia) of an agreement to connect the Chinese initiative of the Belt and Route with the Russian postulate of building the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU). However, there are doubts as to whether EEU and the BRI, considering their conceptual differences, can be effectively combined (for more on this subject see: [Kaczmarek, Rodkiewicz 2016]).

Relations between China and the United States are sensitive surrounding the implementation of the BRI. Despite China's official declaration that this is not an attempt to balance US influence in the Asia-Pacific region, its implementation may significantly strengthen the economic position of the Eurasian continent, in which China will play the leading role. Thus it will become a counterbalance to the US hegemonic position in the world. Until now this geo-strategic domination, resulting largely from sea trade routes, has ensured that the United States maintains control

over international trade and international flows of raw materials. China's actions in the framework of the BRI, which effectively create an alternative to maritime trade routes, could therefore contribute towards reducing the influence of the US in global trade, thus limiting their role on the international stage.

Infrastructure improvements along the inland belt created under the BRI may lead to economic development and regional stability in the Eurasia region. This would mean benefits not only for China but also for European Union countries, which would gain access to new markets and increase their energy security. The BRI thus creates new opportunities to implement the EU's geostrategic ambitions in the Central Asian region, deepening its strategic partnership with China. This is particularly true of co-operation in the context of improving safety. It also gives some hope through Chinese mediation to improve relations between the EU and Russia. There are also plans to link the BRI to existing EU policy tools and strategies, such as the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) and the EU maritime security strategy. What implications for the Community will the new Chinese initiative have, however, is largely dependent on the coherence and co-ordination of the responses of EU Member States to the Chinese policy implemented under the BRI. Especially that until recently Chinese infrastructure investments in this region were directed to individual Member States, such as Greece or the "16 + 1" group, and not to the EU as a whole. This raised concerns about the Chinese investment strategy, the aim of which is not so much to care for joint development, which – defined as – "sharing and rule tactics" is using the lack of a common EU strategy, especially in the context of the tendency of some EU countries to obtain privileges under bilateral agreements with China. However, China's strong interest in effective cooperation with the European Union, which is their main trading partner, resulted in the launch of the EU-China Connectivity Platform by the European Commission in September 2015. This involves the construction of infrastructure connections. The aim of this initiative is to seek out common points in the BRI strategy and EU proposals, such as an investment plan for Europe. Such plans were adopted in the middle of 2015 under the Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T). With the launch of the EU-China Connectivity Platform, the EU has created a common framework for European cooperation with China on the BRI to define joint strategies, plans and policies, as well as clarifying rules for joint projects, including management issues and the rule of law [Grieger 2016, p. 12].

Relations between the EU and China as well as cooperation under the BRI will also depend on the EU response to China's activities in the South China Sea. In China itself, issues related to this area also arouse much controversy. There are fears that China will manage to control the situation in this region, avoid escalating existing conflicts and create a new trade order.

Many Chinese commentators also express concern about the political risks that may be associated with interference in the economies of developing countries, often politically unstable. According to them, many countries involved in the BRI are currently in a phase of transformation. Chinese interference in the economies of these

countries may have an impact on the political changes taking place there, and thus on the geopolitical situation in the region and in the world. This can lead to dangerous and difficult to predict consequences [Pantucci, Chen 2016, p. 12].

## 5. Conclusion

According to the theory of power transition and the so-called Thucydides' trap, emerging powers, as in the case of China, are resisting neighbors and current hegemony such as the modern-day United States. As a consequence, this may lead to increased tensions, thus increasing the likelihood of a potential conflict breaking out. China is aware of this danger. Therefore, referring back to history, especially the two world wars in the 20th century, stressing that this co-operation (often referring to the word "connectivity") is a response to modern global problems. Their official tactic is therefore a peaceful coexistence within the "win-win" strategy. This policy forms part of the BRI, which is intended to benefit all parties involved in it. The Chinese government therefore puts a lot of effort into presenting China as a growing power of a new type which, not by conquest but by economic and social co-operation, is strengthening its position in the region and in the world. What is important is that the Beijing authorities are trying to escape from presenting the concept of the Belt and Road as a Chinese attempt to balance US influence in the Asia-Pacific region. At the same time, their growth strategy creates unprecedented development opportunities not only for China itself, but also for developing countries, which for many reasons have so far been pushed beyond the margin of global economic and trade relations. China, by expanding its BRI infrastructure and incorporating these countries into international value chains, creates opportunities to shorten or even make up for the distance to the developed world. This initiative is all the more important because it covers a large part of the globe. It should be emphasized that the Chinese concept was presented at a time when the world is undergoing a period of complex and profound changes, accompanied by low growth rates, and many countries are facing serious problems related to the possibility of continuing their development. The Chinese vision of the New Silk Road, which is the answer to these problems, creates the possibility of new impulses for economic growth. This applies not only to countries with a low level of development but also to developed regions such as the European Union 'awakening from lethargy'. The activation of trade and economic cooperation within the Eurasian continent can be an important stimulus to accelerate economic growth in both developing and developed economies participating in the BRI. Despite the opportunities that this strategy creates, there is also anxiety about its effects. These are concerns, among others of economic nature, which occupy the majority of participants in the BRI, related to the rationality of implemented projects, the possibility of wasting resources and the problems related to excessive indebtedness. In the case of the EU, there are also doubts whether this cooperation will lead to a further deepening of the trade balance deficit in trade with China.

On the other hand, many countries even count on the possible escalation of Chinese territorial claims. It also raises the question of whether significant economic changes, and thus also social and political changes, which can be achieved by developing countries participating in the BRI, will not destabilize them. This raises the same fears that this would have consequences for the Asian region, as well as for the entire global economy.

Despite the many potential benefits of the Chinese vision of the Belt and Route, there are also many threats that affect both China and other countries willing to join this initiative. The Chinese vision forces us to ask more questions: will BRI actually contribute to growth activation in the regions within its range? To what extent will countries be able to benefit from the opportunities that it creates? Furthermore, will China – via the BRI – become a regional or global leader? Thus, what will the new so-called “world silk order” look like?

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