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Review and importance of China's New Silk Road Initiative and the European Union's strategy

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Abstract

The center of gravity of the world economy is shifting from the Western world to Asia, with China at the center. China's New Silk Road Initiative can be considered one of the important indicators in the shift of centrality.

The main question of research is: What strategy has Europe adopted towards the Silk Road Initiative? The research hypothesis suggests that European countries are skeptical about China's real goals and objectives in presenting the Silk Road Initiative.

In this regard, Europe is trying to pursue the above plan, the strategy of absorbing China into the world economy and then controlling and dominating it, through cautious cooperation with China.

The research findings show that from the EU perspective, although China is trying to be transparent about its strategy, the goal of the Silk Road strategy is not clear in terms of cooperation with the EU or some European countries. The EU believes that China's approach is one-sided trade and exports of goods to Europe. The research topic is based on the theoretical framework of the Beijing Consensus and Research method, descriptive-analytical method has been carried out.

Keywords

New Silk Road Initiative, Europe, Strategy of Absorption and Dominance, Beijing Consensus

Introduction

The issue of how to deal with the emerging power of China has always been a topic of concern for major powers. China is striving to adopt appropriate mechanisms for economic development in line with its national interests.

Despite the growing wave of nationalism in the Western world, especially in the foreign policy of the United States and some European countries, China is trying to take advantage of the main

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slogan of liberalism, namely free trade. In this regard, China needs to make other countries dependent on it more than anything else in order to develop and gain recognition for its position on the international stage from rival powers.

Since 2013, China has proposed the New Silk Road Initiative. As one of the most important players in the international system, Europe can have a positive or negative impact on the progress of the above initiative with its response.

The importance of this issue is doubled when the ultimate goal of the Silk Road Initiative is Europe, and it is European countries that can influence the success or failure of the initiative. Understanding the perspective of European countries and analyzing it can help Iranian foreign policy decision-makers understand the approaches of other countries and use them in future negotiations with China on how to cooperate with the Silk Road Initiative. In this regard, the question of the article is: What approach has the European Union taken towards the New Silk Road Strategy? According to the hypothesis, European countries seem to be skeptical about China's real goals and objectives in presenting the Silk Road Initiative.

In this regard, Europe is trying to advance the above plan through careful cooperation with China, pursuing a strategy of absorbing China into the world economy and then controlling and dominating it.

From the EU's perspective, although China is trying to be transparent about its strategy, the purpose of the Silk Road strategy is not clear when it comes to cooperation with the EU or some European countries. In relation to the main question and analysis of Europe's strategy towards China, the following issue is also addressed:

Why is the European Union hesitant about the goals of China's Silk Road Initiative and in which direction will the future of the initiative be affected by the way Europe and China cooperate? The theoretical economic-political framework of the Beijing Consensus is used to examine the issue. The method of evaluating the topic is based on a descriptive-analytical method, citing valid documents and reviewing articles, statistics, and reports related to the topic.

Importance and Background of the Study

The study of the Silk Road Initiative by China has been specifically focused on since 2013. Due to the short duration of the above-mentioned plan, this topic has not been widely discussed in domestic literature. However, in foreign literature, especially in English, there have been numerous articles and reports on the goals and prospects of the Silk Road. However, the common point in most foreign texts is the historical perspective and reference to the process of development of the Silk Road, and the situation of other countries is not mentioned.

Without a doubt, the Silk Road is one of the important issues in the future of economic development of Iran and Afghanistan. Iran and Afghanistan need to have a specific strategy



regarding the above initiative. Knowing the approach of other countries can help our country's decision-makers, especially in the field of foreign policy.

The approach of the European Union and the European countries that are the ultimate goal of the Silk Road Initiative is, according to the researcher, decisive for the future of cooperation between Iran and Afghanistan in the above-mentioned project and the level of optimism towards the Chinese initiative. Some important sources related to the topic are mentioned below.

Amirahmadian and Ruhollah Salehi Dolatabad (2016) in their articles entitled "China's New Silk Road Initiative" referred to the objectives, obstacles, and challenges of the above plan. An attempt was made to use this article in the section on the formation of the Silk Road in the research. In another article, Mohammad Ali Shirkhani, and Fariborz Arghvani (2013) have addressed the topic of "The Beijing Consensus; A New Development Pattern in the Globalized Age." The above article refers to the process of shaping China's different development structure in contrast to the Washington Consensus. The above article further discusses the goals of the Beijing Consensus and its differences with the Washington Consensus. This article has been used to help in the theoretical framework section of the research.

The main argument in this article is that China's state-led development perspective is becoming a development model for developing countries. Masoud Mousavi Shafai (2015) in his article titled "The Fifth Generation of Chinese Leaders and the Silk Road Economic Belt Initiative" refers to the process of shaping China's Silk Road Initiative.

The author emphasizes that Chinese leaders are planning for China's development in a sustainable and evolutionary path, and the Silk Road Initiative can be analyzed as a symbol of China's development, especially in the trade sector, at a broader level. In the foreign literature section, two sources are also cited in this study. The Steering Group for the Advancement of the Silk Road Initiative in China (2019) has taken the initiative to publish a report on the process of shaping the above plan.

In this report, which is mostly fact-based, it has been used to examine the process of shaping the plan and the latest information related to it. In another source; A report, led by France- Van Der Putten, Frans – Paul; Seaman, John (2016) and co-authored by some other researchers, entitled "Europe and the New Silk Road," was published. This report further highlighted the opportunities and challenges and some of the perspectives of European countries in cooperation with the Chinese initiative. The above report was used to examine the perspectives of European authorities.

However, since the date of publication of this report was in the early years of the Silk Road Initiative, it could only help the author at the beginning of the route, and for the analysis of the final European approach, a different set of sources was used, which are cited below.

Theoretical Framework: The Beijing Consensus The Industrial Revolution and the subsequent remarkable economic growth of Western societies created the conditions under which the Western



development model became the focus of much attention in developing countries from the second half of the twentieth century.

However, after a short time, economic crises and the lack of compatibility of this type of model with the local conditions of these countries led to the ineffective implementation of the above model in most developing countries. Since then, after the astonishing growth of China's economy, especially since the 1990s, that country's development model has been proposed as an alternative to the Western model under the title of the Beijing Consensus. (Shirkhani and Arghvani Pirsalami, 2013:147).

The concept of the Beijing Consensus has been used to indicate the current state of affairs in order to indicate the path of economic development, of course, imitating China's economic policies. From this perspective, the Beijing Consensus includes a complete and comprehensive set of economic policies. Unlike the Washington Consensus, which focuses on the free flow of capital and prices, the Beijing Consensus believes in intervention to maintain the price market and its functioning.

Chinese statesmen are strongly inclined to preserve and control capital in order for exports to become the main driver of economic development (Salehi and Hassanzadeh, 2016:83). The principles envisaged by the Beijing Consensus are summarized in three basic principles: (Ramo, 2004:12)

Innovation: The Beijing Consensus emphasizes that, in line with technological change and transformation, a new stage of technological application based on innovation can be achieved, which plays an important role in accelerating development. To achieve new innovations in the field of technology, China needs to increase its trade cooperation with industrialized and entrepreneurial countries.

Meanwhile, through the development of the Silk Road, China is trying to transfer modern technologies and modern techniques from the Western world to this country by expanding trade exchanges with advanced European countries and attracting foreign investment. In fact, China is seeking to increase the connectivity of its industry with other countries through the value chain policy (Office of the Leading Group for Promoting the Belt and Road Initiative, 2019: 58);

Emphasis on equitable and sustainable development: The economic growth and development of a society cannot be measured solely by quantitative criteria. Equity and sustainable development should be considered as the main priority in China's development. Gross domestic product growth is an indicator of balanced development in the country is not, and besides that, attention is paid to categories that help reduce class gaps in Beijing.

In this context, China believes that the level of development of a country cannot be measured only by quantitative measurements and emphasis on traditional indicators such as gross domestic product. In addition to traditional indicators, attention should be paid to new indicators in which development can be seen in its overall meaning. It is important. For example, from the perspective



of the Beijing Consensus in Chinese thought; achieving development requires attention to the balance in five areas:

1. Balance between urban and rural development.
2. Balance in regional development.
3. Balance in economic and social development.
4. Balance between the interests of individuals.
5. Balance between domestic development and cooperation with the world. (Hasmath, 2014: 8)

China is striving to achieve balanced development through the Silk Road Initiative, which aims to address underdeveloped cities and regions in China. By building ports and trading posts, China can help develop its less developed regions. The framework that China has adopted for the Silk Road focuses on sustainable development. In this regard, China has put forward the vision of a green development path for the above plan and believes that it can also achieve economic development through the above path (Office of the leading group for promoting the Belt and Road Initiative, 2019: 56)

Right to self-determination: This refers to the issue that, unlike the Washington Consensus, which largely ignored the role of political geography. Ramo believes that the above consensus pays attention to political geography and economic geography. Economically, they are closely related.

Based on the principle of self-determination, from the Chinese perspective, we can refer to the acceptance of the United Nations Charter; mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity; mutual non-aggression; non-interference in each other's internal affairs; equality and mutual benefit and peaceful coexistence. (Moussavi-Shafai, 2015: 206).

Of course, the concept of the Beijing consensus is rooted in the efforts that Chinese statesmen have taken the lead in domestic politics and the international system. The adoption of a development-oriented foreign policy from the era of Deng Xiaoping in the 1970s to the era of Xi Jinping, the current President of China, has led to remarkable economic growth and development and success in managing the crisis resulting from the East Asian financial crisis (which occurred in the period between 1996 and 1997) and in the face of the financial crisis taking shape in the West and the inability to manage It is one of the factors that led to the Chinese management of economic relations and, more precisely, the Chinese model of development. (Shirkhani, and Arghvani, 2013: 135).

A positive global perception of China and the creation of the desired image as a great world power that, through its high rate of economic growth and continued technological development, is capable of providing great future trade opportunities for developing countries are of great importance to this country (Alvand and Asgarkhani, 2013: 16).



China is striving for a development-oriented foreign policy in line with its It pursues various economic programs to integrate as much as possible into the global system. The Silk Road Initiative is an important tool for China to connect this country to other parts of the world. Within the framework of the Beijing Consensus, which emphasizes the Chinese indigenous development model, China continues to be at the forefront of expanding its role and economic influence in the world in terms of exports and a positive trade balance with other countries.

China's Silk Road connectivity model is in line with the thinking of the Beijing Consensus, which claims to provide a new path and path for development for other countries, especially developing countries.

New Silk Road Strategy

There is no equivalent for China's New Silk Road Initiative. The initiative is not necessarily a free trade zone, it does not resemble a sphere of influence for China, nor does it resemble a regional union, nor does it even have intra-regional standards.

The strategy is the joint product of China's domestic dynamism and its international movement on the world stage. The Silk Road Initiative is a multi-national infrastructure project aimed at contributing to the global economy. A plan that even some Chinese media and officials consider to be akin to a Chinese Marshall Plan. (Jing, 2015: 3-5).

History of the Silk Road

The concept of the Silk Road has been in use for thousands of years. The history of the use of this concept dates to the pre-Christian era. The history of the development of the world economy shows that the center of gravity of the world economy from one century BC to the 17th century AD was in Asia, centered on China.

After that, the center of gravity of the world economy shifted out of Asia and towards the Western world. International evidence and statistics indicate that since the beginning of the twenty-first century, the center of gravity of the world economy has been shifting and Asia is once again regaining its former position. (Brakman and et al, 2019: 5). However, it was first proposed several centuries later, in the mid-19th century, by the German researcher Ferdinand von Richthofen, who traveled to China between 1868 and 1872. (Fallon, 2015: 141) .

Furthermore, Chinese leaders in the 1990s, influenced by the outward-looking plan, implemented the Silk Road Strategy. The outward-looking strategy included a process of increasing facilitation of the internationalization of Chinese companies. After a period of twenty years since the beginning of economic reforms in the country, China has tried to provide a path for Chinese companies to enter the world market.

With the above steps, the internationalization trend of Chinese companies has expanded (Nicolas, 2017: 17). In this regard, Li Keqiang, the Prime Minister of China, believes that expanding such



cooperation is necessary for China's economic development, and in this way, it can achieve appropriate economic growth and reach a higher level of development, which will result in greater integration into the global economy and the achievement of Win-win results in cooperation with other countries. (Nicolas, 2017: 20)

At the same time as the Chinese program to revive the Silk Road, the United States also tried to use the concept of the Silk Road for its strategy in Southwest Asia. As US Secretary of State, Clinton used the above phrase to increase cooperation with Afghanistan in the direction of that country's economic development in 2011 during a trip India. The US tried to connect Afghanistan to the North-South trade corridor network through the above plan. (Fallon, 2015: 140).

In June 2011, Hillary Clinton announced that after the withdrawal of US forces from Afghanistan, this country would maintain its interests in Afghanistan and the preservation of interests through the New Silk Road was announced.

The aim of the above plan was to improve and increase the level of prosperity and stability in the region and facilitate regional cooperation in the fields of trade, energy, and transportation. The plan outlined a set of goals and policies for the United States in Central Asia, which came to be known as the New Silk Road Strategy of the United States in Central Asia (Fedorenko, 2013: 3).

The New Silk Road project was proposed by the United States based on the idea of "Frederick Starr". The American New Silk Road project would connect infrastructure, roads, railways and energy transmission lines to the countries of Central Asia and then to Afghanistan, Pakistan and India. The above plan sought to minimize Iran's role in the region by looking at Iran from the outside and ignoring its geopolitical and geostrategic importance, and to establish a new path for access to the East. (Amirahmadian and Salehi, Dolatabad, 10:10, 2016).

Immediately after the announcement of the Silk Road by the United States in the Southwest Asia region, Xi Jinping, as the President of the Republic of China, officially presented the Silk Road Initiative for the first time during his visit to Kazakhstan in September 2013 (JANKOVIĆ, 2017: 7).

The Chinese were very worried and disappointed that the Silk Road project was proposed by America, and they tried to take the practical initiative of the above plan by proposing a new topic. For this reason, in the above initiative, the trade route was changed from north-south to east, north and west, and the original American plan was completely revised, and an attempt was made to design a plan that would end all the Silk Roads to China. From the Chinese perspective, the Silk Road; It has played an important role in China's trade exchanges with other continents, such as Europe, for centuries before and after Christ, and it needs to be revived (Fallon, 2015: 141).

Goals of the New Silk Road



Chinese decision-makers see the Silk Road Initiative as a way to promote peace and stability in the region through increased mutual cooperation with neighboring countries and developing international institutions that are not under Western domination.

The pattern seems to be that the Chinese believe that security issues and problems in Asia should be solved by Asians themselves (Zimmerman, 2015: 6). Some scholars believe that an important and ultimate goal behind China's New Silk Road strategy is to create a kind of self-reliant Chinese hegemony over the evolving Asian order. In this regard, China is trying to bring governments and citizens closer to China's culture, politics, and economy through the development of trade with other countries. (Bryant and Chou, 2016: 116).

China is trying to increase its communication and interaction with distant countries, especially in the Green Continent. China is seeking to expand the scope of its neighbors, which can include Europe. China is trying to invest in air, land, and maritime transport corridors, and develop Silk Road infrastructure projects. (Dimitrijevic and Jokanovic, 2016:24). The following are some of the most important objectives that China intends to pursue in presenting the above plan:

- New impetus and incentive for the Chinese economy.
- Supporting China's industrial overcapacity.
- Energy security through diversification of currency reserves.
- Opening up new trade markets.
- Efforts to internationalize the Chinese currency and its emergence as an alternative currency;
- Stability Regional (Wittine et al, 2018: 257)

In other words, the above objectives can be summarized in two important and key objectives: First, China's desired geopolitical objectives. Based on this objective, the Chinese are trying to expand their political power and influence through investment in target countries and target markets.

Second, to expand economic and trade relations and create a new market for Chinese companies and meeting challenges including the countervailing role of the Chinese currency against the international position of the dollar, which is limiting the Chinese economy (Wittine et al, 2018: 257). Despite the hidden and obvious goals proposed for the New Silk Road, from the Chinese perspective, the above initiative has five major and key objectives:

First, increasing connectivity in the region is political. Through the above plan, China is trying to pursue its cooperation with target countries and increase its political weight in the international community.

Second, connectivity. In this regard, the Chinese are keen to cooperate with other countries in the field of infrastructure and infrastructure facilities.



Third, trade without barriers, China's goal is to increase its trade exchanges with countries on a broad scale. The Silk Road can provide a better position for China's goal;

Fourth, China's financial integration through the establishment of funds and banks related to the Silk Road is to have greater financial cooperation with other countries and increase the value of its currency and benefit from the financial investments of other countries;

Fifth, Chinese leaders have also paid attention to the social dimension of the Silk Road and believe that it is necessary to expand the ties between the people of their country at the regional and sub-regional levels. (The Shanghai Stock Exchange, 2017: 9) According to Chinese officials, the concept of the Silk Road Initiative is focused on land and sea interactions, and from their perspective, the two sectors act as two complementary pillars of Asian development. (Junxian & Yan, 2016: 106)

Characteristics and Features of the Silk Road

The Silk Road, in its general concept, includes communication routes and sub-routes that China is committed to completing in cooperation with interested countries. The Silk Road passes through three main routes:

1. The northern route starts in China and passes through Kazakhstan, southern Russia, Ukraine and Belarus, and after passing through Poland, finally reaches Germany;
2. The middle route starts in China and passes through Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan and reaches Europe via Iran and Turkey.
3. Finally, the third route is the southern route that passes through China, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran, the Arabian Peninsula, Egypt and finally North Africa and Europe.

In fact, the Silk Road Belt connects four regions: Central Asia, West Asia, South Asia, and the Arabian Peninsula (Mousavi, 2015: 207). Despite China's emphasis on the Silk Road strategy, it has not elaborated on many details, and the goals and dimensions of the plan are still unclear. The above plan has three general characteristics:

A- Strong public diplomacy

The Chinese are trying to improve China's position on the international stage through the above plan. In China's view, when the above plan is discussed and examined by researchers and politicians of various countries, it has automatically contributed to China's public diplomacy.

China is gaining international prestige and prestige through the public announcement of the Silk Road Initiative. In the Chinese grand strategy, there is a close connection between China's national empowerment and becoming a great power. If China does not become a great power, the empowerment of the Chinese nation will not be complete. Only when China can become a great



world power can it be said that the re-empowerment of the Chinese nation will be possible. (Fallon, 2015: 141)

If we look closely at the concept of initiative, the concept of being purposeful is also said to be the initiative of China's public diplomacy. The Chinese remember the above plan as an initiative, not a strategy. Because the concept of innovation is a progressive and positive concept that is considered to be in the interests of other countries.

The phrase "open doors" in the above plan means that other countries can join the above plan. The use of economic terminology means that political, geopolitical, and security objectives are not prioritized and less sensitivity will be created than in the above plan. (Ekman, 2017: 12) .

B- Flexibility

The second feature of the Silk Road Initiative is that the dimensions, objectives, and framework of the above plan are flexible and can be modified in accordance with the reactions of other countries.

China is trying to complete the implementation of the above plan by cooperating and receiving the views of other countries and companies at the international level. China believes that it can act as an observer and, in addition to its supervision, other domestic and international companies can help implement the plan. The above step will lead to China taking forward the advertising plan with the cooperation of a larger set of other players. (Ekman, 2017: 13)

P- Project scale

Since the project was officially announced in 2013, around 60 countries were expected to cooperate in the project, but the number of countries and international organizations cooperating in the initiative has increased to around 100 (Ekman, 2017: 13).

The final list of countries participating in the Silk Road Initiative has not yet been announced, and it seems that all countries in the world can join the project, which will eventually lead to the creation of a joint organization on the subject. The volume of trade in goods between China and the countries and regions participating in the Silk Road Initiative exceeded \$6 trillion between 2013 and 2018.

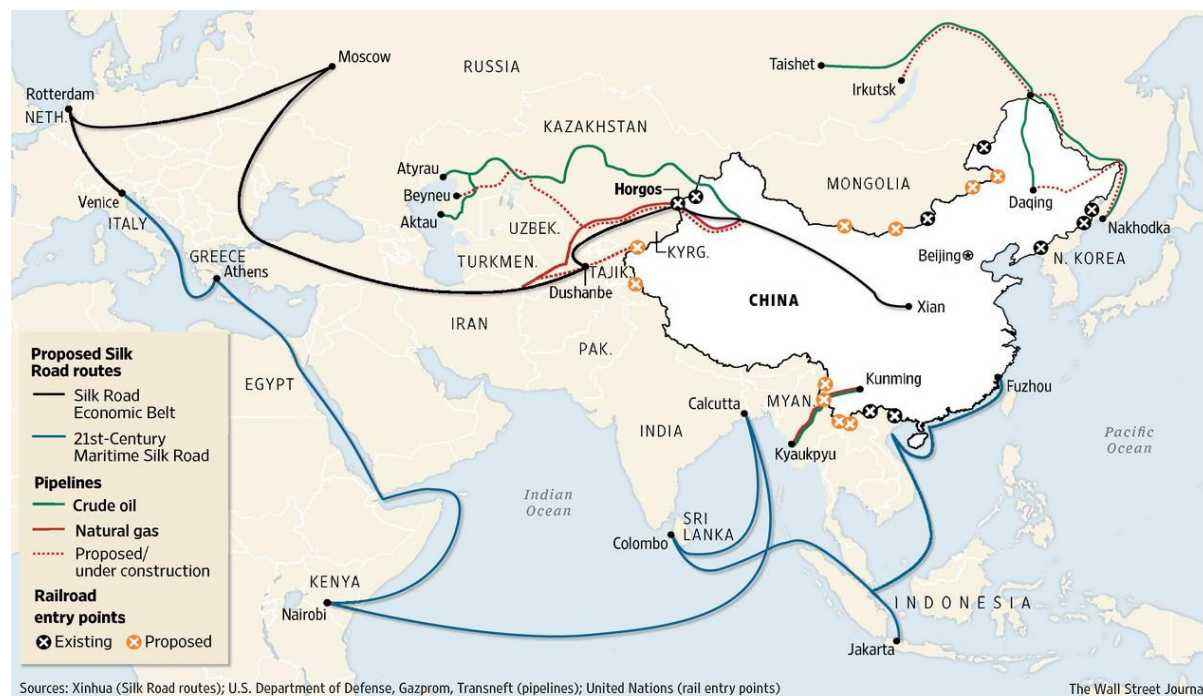
Since the announcement of the Silk Road Initiative, 173 cooperation documents have been signed with 125 developing and developing countries and 29 international organizations. Many companies and national institutions in developed countries are cooperating with China to seize business opportunities in the global market. In the field of China-Europe cooperation, freight trains are also connecting China with 50 cities in 15 European countries.(Xinhua News Agency, 2019: 04-19)

Although the exact amount of investment in this grand project has not yet been finalized, so far the above project is about 12 times the Marshall Plan, which was implemented at about \$130



billion during the Cold War. In this context, China has considered two financial mechanisms for the establishment of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank and the Silk Road Fund for the above project.

China is trying to cooperate with existing instruments such as domestic banks, especially state-owned banks, and international banks such as the World Bank and the BRICS Development Bank. (Nicolas, 2017: 21) The following map shows the route of China's Economic Belt and Maritime Silk Road.



(BBC Persian, April 25, 2019) and (www.merics.org, 07/06/2018)

China is seeking international and regional cooperation to implement the above plan. From the Chinese perspective, the world economy is in the process of integration, and China should look for mechanisms for bilateral and multilateral cooperation in the face of global economic changes.

China believes that only by developing cooperation with other countries and international institutions can the above initiative be implemented. In this regard, the European Union is one of the important players in the implementation of the above plan (the National Development and Reform Commission of China, 2016: 9).

The European Union's Strategy; Attract and Conquer

Official relations between the European Union and China date back to 1975. Since then, relations between the two sides have expanded in the areas of technology exchange, investment and trade in areas ranging from energy and cybersecurity to cultural and educational exchanges. Since 1998,



meetings have been held between the two sides on an almost annual basis. In 2003, the two sides adopted the Strategic Partnership and Cooperation Approach in the Workbook. The above approach was called the China-Europe Strategic Workbook by 2020 in the four areas of peace, prosperity, sustainable development and people-to-people exchanges.

Continuing in March 2014, Xi Jinping became the first Chinese president to meet with EU leaders in Brussels and called on EU member states to cooperate in common areas. From this period onwards, and especially with the rise of Trump and the rise of nationalist thinking in America, the European Union, as a powerful pole in the emerging multipolar world order, became a subject of Chinese attention. (García-Herrero and et al, 2017: 6).

China's interests and objectives towards the European Union are primarily defined in the economic sphere. Economic cooperation is the cornerstone of the relationship between Europe and China. Over the past two decades, the European Union has been China's number one economic partner. For example, according to the latest statistics, the level of trade between China and the European Union in 2008 was around 327 billion euros (Eurostat, 2019).

The volume of trade between Europe and China increased to around 467 billion euros in 2014. The value of trade between China and Europe reached more than one billion euros per day. The European Union market has always been the most important consumer market for Chinese goods, next to the United States. China's exports to the European Union amounted to more than 320 billion euros and its imports were around 164 billion euros, indicating a positive trade balance in China's favor. (Marcin, 2016: 16).

China's positive trade balance with Europe continued in the following years, increasing to 604 billion euros over the last 10 years until 2019. In bilateral trade, China has The trade balance is positive at around 187 billion euros with Europe (Eurostat, 2019: 3).

After the announcement of the Silk Road Initiative by China, the European Union has not taken a comprehensive and specific response to China's strategy and has mostly considered the above plan from a technical perspective.

In this regard, the European Commission announced a technical policy on this matter. The document was published in June 2016 under the title of Principles for a New European Strategy towards China, which, of course, summarized the subject under discussion and also pointed out that the goal of the strategy should be to create infrastructure, cross-border and inter-regional networks in the buffer zones between China and Europe. According to the 2016 report of the Council on Foreign Relations, the EU was agreed upon a strategy of "attraction and dominance" (Macaes, 2016: 6).

In the continuation of various meetings between Chinese and European officials to negotiate the above-mentioned plan, the beginning of the Sino-European negotiation process is indicated in the table below.



Table No.: Silk Road Initiative and the start of negotiations between Europe and China

2013	September	The first official announcement of the Silk Road Economic Belt by Chinese President Xi Jinping
2014	October	The first official announcement of the Maritime Silk Road by Chinese President Xi Jinping
	March-April	The first mention of the Silk Road Economic Belt by Chinese President Xi Jinping during his trip to Europe (Germany and Belgium)
2015	March	China releases Action Plan on Silk Road Initiative
	June	Signing the agreement with Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank
	September	China and Europe agree to establish a connection base
	October	The Silk Road Initiative is being developed with the visit of Chinese President Xi Jinping to the UK
2016	March	The Silk Road Initiative enters a new phase with the Xi Jinping's visit to Czech Republic
	June	The Silk Road Initiative is developing with the Xi Jinping's visit to Serbia and Poland

(Van der Putten and et al, 2016: 8)

The European Union announced in its Global Strategy that the European Union is pursuing a China-aligned approach in its policy of engagement with the West. From the perspective of investment and trade, Europe and many member states welcome Chinese investment. In September 2015, the European Commission signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on the China-Europe Connectivity Foundation to enhance synergies between the China Innovation and the European Investment Plan, which was referred to as the Juncker Plan. The plan aimed to explore joint investment opportunities in the Silk Road (Ghiassy and Zhou, 2017: 45).

Negotiations between China and the EU continued from 2016 onwards. But Europeans remain cautious about the overt and covert goals and policies of the Silk Road Initiative. Although Europeans see cooperation with the plan as crucial to Europe's infrastructure and economic structure, there are still concerns in some areas. At a meeting held for this purpose in 2017, the Chinese and European governments were unable to reach agreement on the issues of disagreement.



For example, the parties could not agree on the issues of China's commitment to fair competition and free trade, transparency, and attention to environmental and social development. The above differences ultimately led Britain, France and Germany to not sign the final agreement between the European and Chinese sides that year (Schiek, 2017: 5).

In the meantime, the EU member states began bilateral relations with China in the context of the Silk Road Initiative. The first Silk Road International Cooperation Forum, held in Beijing in 2017, was attended by only representatives of five countries: Hungary, Poland, Greece, Spain, and Italy, as well as the President of the Czech Republic.

The final agreement between the European and Chinese parties emphasized that the economies of Asia and Europe are increasingly economically interdependent, and the European Union emphasized cooperation with China on the Silk Road, taking into account market rules, international standards and European criteria, and implementing European policies to achieve mutual benefits. They also emphasized the development of cooperation in the field of the Silk Road. The Silk Road is emphasized in the sea, air, land, energy and digital spheres. (Sachdeva, Lisbonne de Vergeron, 5:2018)

Continuing the geographical distribution, the way European countries cooperate with the Silk Road Initiative is discussed in three sections. Northern and Western Europe: At least in terms of effectiveness, the cooperation of Western and Northern European countries with the Silk Road Initiative has been limited to their membership in the Asian Infrastructure Development Bank. Despite this, among Western European countries, Germany is more than any other country targeted by the project. In this regard, he mentioned five railway projects between China and Germany that have been considered for the development of transport between the two countries. Despite Germany's emphasis on some of the standards and laws governing European development, there are still strong points of disagreement between the two parties. (Wang . et al, 2017: 7-9)

However, in contrast, France has not received much attention in the above project, and the attitude of French authorities towards the Chinese initiative has not yet been clearly stated.

However, some regions in France, such as the city of Lyon, known as the Silk City, have tried to introduce themselves as the political, commercial and historical center of the Silk Road in Europe and in search of attraction Chinese investment.

Among France's symbolic steps to cooperate with the Silk Road can be mentioned the agreement between the parties in 2015 between French and Chinese shipping companies, in which France obtained a line of credit of about \$ 1 billion from the Export-Import Bank of China for the purchase of Chinese containers.

The Netherlands is also considered an important trading partner of China, and about a third of imported goods at the port Rotterdam is one of the Chinese imports that plays an important role in the Dutch economy. The Netherlands has also had many economic cooperations with China in the shipping and aviation industries. In the case of Britain, although the impact of Britain's exit from



Europe has not yet been felt, Britain has been one of the pioneers of European countries to join this project. This cooperation dates back to 2015, when the UK became a member, which of course was a political message in support of Chinese institutions (Wang and et al, 2017: 7-9).

Southern Europe, a strategic investor

With the official launch of the Silk Road Initiative, China has focused very specifically on the countries of the Mediterranean basin. In this region, cooperation with China is important despite the slowdown in economic growth and increasing debt in such countries. For example, the European country of Greece has been able to benefit from cooperation with China. For example, about \$4.3 billion has been invested by a Chinese shipping company in the Greek port of Piraeus. Spain has also shown great interest in cooperating with China to develop the Silk Road Initiative.

Spain is pursuing cooperation with China in three areas: the creation and management of large infrastructure, cultural tourism, and food exports. In this context, several investments were made in the infrastructure and ports sector in Spain, amounting to around 950 million euros by 2017.

Cooperation with China was also planned by Italy, and a consortium of five ports was formed between the two parties to create a large container terminal project. In the case of Portugal, although the Chinese authorities have not taken a specific position on the Silk Road Initiative, the Chinese have tried to take advantage of Portugal's presence in Latin America and Africa. Portugal has been considered by the Chinese as a bridge between Africa, Western Europe and China (Wang et al, 2017: 12-14).

Overall, there are mixed and sometimes contradictory voices from European countries regarding cooperation with China. Currently, Northern and Western European countries are mostly adopting a pragmatic “wait and see” policy in the future. However, some other European countries in the G16 and Mediterranean countries have made greater efforts to cooperate with China and attract Chinese investment (Wang et al, 2017: 15).

Eastern and Central Europe in the 16+1 Group

China has been in talks with many Eastern and Central European countries to cooperate in the Silk Road Initiative. Through the 16+1 Group, Eastern and Central European countries entered into bilateral negotiations with China in 2012 (even before the official announcement of the Silk Road Initiative).

Although Chinese officials believe that bilateral negotiations between 16 European countries are not meant to be a duplication of efforts and that China respects the integrity of the European Union, the above approach seems to have raised concerns among European officials that China's influence in Brussels through such lobbying will be further enhanced. (Ghiassy & Zhou, 2017: 45). The following provides an overview of China's cooperation with European countries.



Table 2 (Cooperation cases of EU member states with the Silk Road Initiative (OBOR))

Countries	Member of Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank	Memorandum of Understanding on OBOR	Member of 16+1 Group	OBOR Related Port Projects	OBOR Related Railway Projects	Attention and Focus on the Third Country	OBOR Related Speeches	OBOR Institution or Important International Conference
Czech Republic		✓	✓				Xi Jinping	Institution
Denmark	✓					✓		
France	✓				✓	✓		
Germany	✓				✓	✓	Xi Jinping	
Greece				✓	✓		Xi Jinping Liki Chiang	
Hungary		✓	✓		✓			Institution
Italy	✓			✓				
Netherlands	✓			✓	✓	✓		
Poland	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		Liki Chiang	Conference
Portugal	✓			✓		✓		
Slovakia		✓	✓					
Spain	✓				✓	✓		
Sweden	✓					✓		Conference
Braitain	✓					✓	Xi Jinping	

(Van der Putten & et al, 2016: 9)



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The Future of European Chinese Cooperation in the Development of the Silk Road

As mentioned, Europe is willing to adopt a strategic cooperation approach in the development of the Silk Road, while absorbing China's economy; it can closely control China's high-altitude flights. The issue that will be addressed in the following is why Europe is pessimistic about China's Silk Road initiative and what reasons have led to mutual distrust between the two parties.

Europe's multilateral approach versus China's bilateralism

Although the Silk Road Initiative plays an important role in the EU's strategic interests, one of the EU's primary objectives is to promote a rules-based global order within the framework of multilateralism, which is an important principle for the United Nations.

The above objective is also emphasized in China's Silk Road Initiative. China believes that the above initiative is in line with the purposes and principles of the United Nations Charter and that the above plan is based on international norms and market rules.

China's view on multilateralism was emphasized in the 2014 EU document. The above document pointed out that Europe and China have an important strategic consensus in creating a multipolar world. Despite China's emphasis on alignment with the EU's approach, China's and the EU's approaches in practice differ in several respects. China actually supports two-pronged approaches to achieve its goals (Ghiassy Zhou, 2017: 46)

China's proposed European approach versus fragmentation

China has targeted the two regions of Central and Eastern Europe and the European countries along the Mediterranean for the development of the Silk Road. Of course, despite the emphasis on the two regions above, Chinese officials have tried to disambiguate their speeches and views. They should also include other countries in Northern and Western Europe . (Van Der Putten et al, 2016: 8)

Xi Jinping officially spoke about Europe's role in the BRI during his first visit to Europe in March 2014. The Chinese President declared that we should think about how to coordinate and coordinate China-Europe cooperation in the BRI. After the bilateral meeting, China and European leaders agreed to enhance their cooperation to develop the above plan. The above initiative plan initially distinguished between European countries and the European Union, and the Union, as an independent institution, did not see much of a role in cooperating to implement the above plan. However, China has since acknowledged that the European Union, as an institution, can help to implement the plan.

Finally, at the 10th Asia-Europe Meeting held in Milan, Italy in October 2014, a framework for cooperation was reached based on a mutually agreed communication framework. (Makocki, 2016: 67)



Overall, Brussels is not very confident about China's intentions with the plan. Some European institutions, especially the Council of Europe and the European Commission, criticize China for turning Europe into a tool for its own interests. Europe has come to the conclusion that China sees the EU as an obstacle and will refrain from cooperating with the EU when it sees its interests being achieved through EU membership.

Lack of consensus among EU members on the benefits of cooperation with China

Neither the EU nor its member states have adopted a comprehensive and coordinated strategic approach to the potential impact of China's Silk Road strategy. The above plan provides a smooth path for China's presence in Central Asia and Europe's neighboring countries in the South Caucasus, the Balkans, Turkey and North Africa, and even areas important to European interests, including East Africa and the Middle East.

Despite the upcoming changes in US foreign policy, it seems that European countries will rely less on the US than in the past and will move towards complex transatlantic relations and the aforementioned plan. (Van Der Putten and et al, 2016: 9)

For example, Germany believes that China's initiative plan does not have many advantages and from the overall perspective of the Chinese, it seems that they cannot hope for much in expanding their interests. It had a counter-argument with China. On the contrary, some countries have supported the above plan and believe that they can use it in the interests of their national interests. The above issue indicates the diversity of approaches among European authorities towards the future of the Silk Road Initiative. (Van Der Putten and et al, 2016: 8)

Europe's emphasis on mutual benefits versus China's self-interest

From the perspective of most European countries, the Silk Road Initiative has been presented only for the purpose of exports and China is not determined to take fair trade conditions into account. The Silk Road Initiative is an effort by China to pursue its domestic economic policies, and for this reason it pursues the above plan. In line with the above goal, China is creating a strong network of ports, support centers, and railway lines between Europe and China so that Chinese goods can be exported to European countries faster and in greater quantities and expand trade between the East and the West. (Barisitz, &Radzyner, 2018: 3)

Different perspectives on international trade standards and conditions

From a European perspective, China's agenda is not necessarily an opportunity for cooperation between the two sides, but rather a platform for competition between the two sides. Ultimately, cooperation with China will only become an opportunity for Europe when it is based on transparent and clear rules, with China acting on the same rules. As the European Union has respected and acted and does not follow double standards. (Makocki, 2016: 69) .



At the 20th EU-China Summit held in Beijing on July 16, 2018, the parties reiterated the development of cooperation in accordance with the international standards agreed upon by the parties. In these negotiations, the continuation of cooperation between the parties and the development of the trans-European transport network were mentioned.

Also, The development of communication hardware and software between the parties was emphasized. The Europeans at this meeting also emphasized the need to respect the standards, laws, and conditions expected by Europe in the continuation of cooperation between the parties. (Sachdeva, Lisbonne de Vergeron, 2018: 16)

Doubts about China's international responsibility

For the European Union, the development of cooperation with China should lead to the strengthening of cooperation between the parties in Europe's southern and eastern neighbors in the field of ensuring regional security and the rule of law. For the European Union, the philosophy of the Silk Road Initiative has important economic and domestic considerations that have important geostrategic consequences. China now has good reason to actively participate in global defense, security, and governance issues.

The challenge and opportunity for the European Union is to encourage China's engagement in positive areas, such as peacebuilding in Africa and the implementation of its commitments commensurate with China's emergence as a world power.

A genuine and constructive dialogue with China on investment cooperation in countries of common interest is of great importance to both parties. Europe should strive for a common foreign policy agenda with China to encourage this country to actively participate in ensuring security as one of the most important global commodities. China must play a positive role in carrying out its duties as a permanent member of the Security Council.

From the European Union's perspective, China must be inspired by its positive role in the JCPOA process, and use it as a model for engagement in other areas, such as in countries such as Afghanistan, Syria, Libya, and the migration crisis, and in particular, in achieving peace in the Middle East. (European Commission, 2016: 10-11).

Overall, European concerns about the future development of trade with China within the framework of the Silk Road have led the European Commission to specifically emphasize Europe's expectations of China. The European Union believes that in order to expand its interaction with China, some principles should be considered in maintaining the interaction between the parties: (European Commission, 2016: 5). - The main principle in the EU-China relations is based on mutual interests in the political and economic spheres;

- The EU's partnership with China should be based on the principles of common destiny and be proportionate to the values and interests of the EU as a whole;



- The cooperation of each EU Member State with China should be based on the rights, laws and macro-policies of the EU;
- Europe expects China to accept its responsibility, in line with the interests it pursues, in accordance with the international legal order;
- China must pay more attention to the issue of human rights, and the issue of human rights is an important issue for Europe;
- The European Union emphasizes the one-China policy in its dealings with China;
- Europe is simultaneously focusing on developing its relations with Taiwan to support the development of cross-strait relations;
- Europe defends the implementation of the one country, two systems plan for Macau and Hong Kong;
- The development of European relations with China should go hand in hand with the development of close relations with the United States and other partners.

Despite the concerns expressed by Europe regarding the manner of relations with China, Europe sees significant benefits for itself in the New Silk Road initiative. The Silk Road from three perspectives of trade and investment; Peace, security and people-to-people exchanges are attractive to Europe. Europe sees the positive impact of Chinese investment in the above-mentioned project on unstable areas in the Middle East and North Africa and can benefit from it, especially in the field of managing the migration crisis.

Although the Silk Road Economic Belt Initiative will strengthen China's strategic influence in Asia, the economic nature of the plan and its shared interests have reduced the likelihood of opposition to the plan from major powers, especially Europe, and the political will and tangible ability to compete to block this plan seem weak compared to China's motivation and ability to implement it (Mousavi-Shifaei, 2015: 218).

Europe, with its growing concern about America's aggressive reorientation towards the multilateral world order under Trump, is seeking greater cooperation with China to manage the unintended consequences and ambiguities of America's behavior. During her visit to China in April 2017, Federica Mogherini¹ stressed that Europe and China, as global powers, must work together to achieve a rule-based global order.

Of course, from the European Union's perspective, the change in the nature of the multilateral system in the current circumstances does not only refer to a change in the behavior of the United States, but also to the distribution of political and economic power on the world level, and the multilateral system with the United States at the center is transforming into a deeper multilateral system with the powerful presence of China and Europe alongside the United States, which is more



necessary than ever before. China's efforts and cooperation in recent years have been instrumental in managing the undesirable developments. (García-Herrero et al, 2017: 55).

Of course, Europe is also vulnerable to the increasing uncertainty in the world economy caused by Trump's behavior at the regional level, as well as the crisis of the election and the British exit from the European Union (Van Ham, 2016: 4). It seems that the above issue will have an impact on the European agenda for interacting with the emerging Chinese economy in the long term, and will make Europe look towards China with fear and hope.

Conclusion

This study attempted to discuss Europe's strategy towards the Silk Road. Two key issues were examined in the study on the future of China-Europe interaction within the framework of the Silk Road Initiative. The first issue examined was Europe's strategy towards China's New Silk Road. By examining the sources and analyzing the content of credible and relevant reports, it was determined that the European macro strategy has been a policy of absorbing and overcoming Chinese influence. Of course, the European strategy has changed and evolved from 2013 to 2019, but overall it follows a linear and stable path. Europe initially faced the initiative presented by China with skepticism and hesitation. With the start of formal and serious negotiations between the Chinese and European sides, both sides have achieved a relative common understanding of each other's expectations.

Continuing with China's efforts to build trust, the Europeans have recognized that the economic advantages and benefits of the plan are considerable and that they need to have a plan for it. Thus, Europe has decided to continue cooperation with China based on an approach of absorbing and overcoming Chinese influence.

Based on the above idea, Europe believes that the New Silk Road Initiative is an indisputable international reality and cannot ignore China's role in the world economy, especially when they are faced with American indifference under Trump. The Silk Road Initiative can act as a catalyst for economic development and management of Europe's challenges, especially managing the negative consequences of Britain's exit and the decline of Europe's economic power.

Subsequently, especially since 2018, the level of cooperation between the two sides has expanded, both within the framework of the European Union and China and within the framework of European countries' relations with China. However, despite the efforts of both sides, Europe seems to view the above plan with both fear and hope and is trying to be cautious about the Silk Road Initiative.

Although in the area of infrastructure and economic cooperation, the relations between the two sides have become intertwined and it seems that Europe can no longer turn back. The second issue discussed in this study is why Europe is so concerned and hesitant about the project and the level of cooperation with China in the form of the above project. The surveys revealed that Europeans believe that the content of China's macroeconomic policy and its practical actions create the



perception that the aforementioned plan is designed more for exports to Europe and is not intended to be a fair trade cooperation between China and Europe.

Apart from the other reasons mentioned, Europe's main focus on the above initiative is that Europe intends to consider the Silk Road Initiative as a grand plan, taking into account all aspects, and taking into account political and security differences and even human rights. In the future, this plan can have an impact on the future of bilateral relations.

However, given China's development approach, which believes that political geography should be considered alongside economic geography, Chinese officials believe that development and other considerations related to it should be interpreted from a local and national perspective, and that not all countries are expected to cooperate according to the same set of rules. Thinking beyond the principles of Beijing Consensus Thinking is what China is pursuing. Given the above approach, the Chinese believe that by separating issues and paying attention to the sovereignty of nation states, they can reduce the non-economic barriers to trade between the two sides.

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