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THE EU STRAYING FROM THE NORM: HOW THE EUROPEAN UNION HAS CHANGED  
ITS NARRATIVE TO RESPOND TO CHINA'S BELT AND ROAD INITIATIVE

BY

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THESIS

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## **ABSTRACT**

In 2013, China revealed its plan to increase connectivity along historical trade routes in parts of Europe, Asia, and the African continent with its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). The European Union (EU) is concerned with the effects that this initiative will have on the global status of the EU as well as on the relationships between the EU and China. I will explore how EU policy has changed recently due to the increase in global influence that China has seen through the initiative and whether or not China is successfully dividing the European Union through this initiative.

The European Union is often described as a normative world power, that is, the EU acts in pursuit of its ideals rather than in a material or physical pursuit. My hypothesis is that the EU is straying from its normative power narrative and undertaking a more realist perspective in order to compete with China's Belt and Road Initiative. I will analyze the shifts in policy and rhetoric of the EU and the EU-China relationship as concerned with the timeline of the BRI through the official public relations outlets of the EU. This will be conducted through a frame analysis of the European Commission's and European External Action Service's information outputs.

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## INTRODUCTION

China's geopolitical success through its Belt and Road Initiative has forced the European Union to take notice and respond in order to maintain its status as a geopolitical power and reassert its own influence on EU member states and abroad. The BRI is China's major project aimed at investment in developing economies in order to increase trade between China and the project host countries. The idea is to create increased connectivity, as the Silk Road did during its time, with a particular focus on Eurasia and Africa but permeating into the European continent as well. Due to the spreading Chinese influence, the EU must adjust its proclaimed value-driven policies to remain a competitive actor on the global stage. Although often described as a normative power, as Ian Manners<sup>1</sup> argued, the European Union responds to the BRI in ways that show it is instead a realist power that can impose its normative narrative when it is in its best interest to do so. This thesis will consider the policy implementations and language use in the press releases of the European Union that relate to its endeavor to counter Chinese influence to determine the power narrative of the EU. The concern of European Union unity plays a role in its response to China and thus, this thesis will also analyze China's role in dividing the EU and how and if the EU responds as a single actor.

Understanding the narrative of the European Union is undoubtedly difficult because it is often challenging to comprehend the entity of the EU, however, it is essential in order to understand how the European Commission constructs the foreign policy frame of the European Union. The EU is not a state as most international relation theories would prefer it to be in order

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<sup>1</sup> Manners, Ian. 2002. "Normative Power Europe: A Contradiction in Terms?" *Journal of Common Market Studies* 40 (2): 235-258.

to analyze it. It is instead a unit of many states but acts as one body. There is difficulty with defining the European Union with a single, unifying idea because the EU is composed of many different actors. Not only is it a governing system that is comprised of 27 different sovereign states, which can often present its own challenges in creating a single voice, the structure of the EU is broken down into the Commission, Council, and Parliament (at a basic level).

The EU has the aim to ‘speak with one voice’ but is often criticized for not doing so. Undeniably, that is not easy to do because of the multilevel nature of the European Union. Carmen Gebhard, who evaluated the coherence of EU policy in international relations, effectively summarized the breakdown of EU external relations:

EU external relations have traditionally been divided into two different procedural channels of decision-making, financing, and implementation: a supranational one primarily governed by the European Commission that comprises external trade, development cooperation, humanitarian aid and prevention, and an intergovernmental one governed by the Council and the member states that comprises the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) of the EU.<sup>2</sup>

Gebhard’s observation provides an introduction to the complex nature of the organization of the EU. It is hard to evaluate where to begin analyzing the European Union when there are so many different actors within the organization. Gebhard goes on to discuss the coherence of the EU and defines the term in the context of the EU as “the ambition and necessity to bring together different strands of the EU’s external relations, both strategically and procedurally.”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Gebhard, Carmen. 2017. "The Problem of Coherence in the European Union's International Relations." In *International Relations and the European Union (3rd edition)*, by Michael Smith, Sophie Vanhoonacker Christopher Hill, p. 124. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. p. 125.

Through the different guiding treaties of the EU, the coherence problem has been addressed and presented with possible solutions through the distribution of power to different EU bodies but still maintaining unity. The current legal framework for the EU, the Treaty of Lisbon, defined the coherence strategy of the EU today. With the Treaty of Lisbon, the European External Action Service (EEAS) was established as well as assigning a new role for the High Representative (HR) in the EU's external relations which was in the aims to help balance the power between the Commission and the Council in these affairs.<sup>4</sup> However, while the EU has made steps towards bettering the coherence within the EU system, there are many problems of coherence between the EU's message and the messages of the member states that make up the EU. Political differences of member states make coherence very improbable, but the EU external action community has still prevailed at delivering 'operational solutions' despite the challenges.<sup>5</sup> These differences in message will contribute to the frame the Commission constructs for the EU and make it increasingly difficult to judge the relationship between the EU and China. The question of whether China is dividing the European Union may have merit, but it may also just showcase a preexisting problem in EU structure.

The EU has itself addressed the need for greater unity in response to global power shifts in its EU Global Strategy released in 2016.<sup>6</sup> Lisbeth Aggestam and Markus Johansson examine the leadership paradox that exists in EU Foreign Policy in their article published in 2017. The

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<sup>4</sup> Gebhard, Carmen. 2017. "The Problem of Coherence in the European Union's International Relations." In *International Relations and the European Union (3rd edition)*, by Michael Smith, Sophie Vanhooacker Christopher Hill, p. 138. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> European Union. 2016. *Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe. A Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy*. June 28 2016. Accessed March 2020. [https://eeas.europa.eu/topics/eu-global-strategy/36116/shared-vision-common-action-stronger-europe\\_en](https://eeas.europa.eu/topics/eu-global-strategy/36116/shared-vision-common-action-stronger-europe_en).

idea of dispersed leadership within the EU stems from its pursuit to avoid the common European history that allowed for too powerful leadership from one source. Thus, responsibilities and power are distributed in the EU institutions. However, the area of foreign policy is associated at the national level and the EU must accommodate for the ‘intergovernmental instincts and social practices derived from its Member States.’<sup>7</sup> Aggestam and Johansson find that EU member states and the EU itself have competing ideas on the expected leadership role of the EU in foreign policy, especially in times when the normative power leadership is fading.<sup>8</sup> These competing ideas can lead to greater division within the EU foreign policy frame, which may be exacerbated by China, intentionally or unintentionally, but to China’s benefit nonetheless.

There are two questions that will drive the research and argument of this thesis. The first is focused on defining the narrative of the European Union. Is China’s geopolitical success and spread of influence through the Belt and Road Initiative pushing the EU to diverge from its normative power narrative? Does the widespread argument of EU normative power still stand if the EU is veering from this narrative? A better definition of the EU power narrative may be that it is, as most common international actors are, a realist power, but chooses to define itself as a normative power that is value-driven when it is beneficial and diverges from this classification when its geopolitical status is at risk. This question will be answered through an exploration of the EU’s frame for its external relations as constructed by the policy and rhetoric of the European Commission. A frame analysis, as developed by Erving Goffman<sup>9</sup>, will be conducted in order to

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<sup>7</sup> Aggestam, Lisbeth and Markus Johansson. 2017. "The leadership paradox in EU foreign policy." *Journal of Common Market Studies* 55 (6): 1203-1220.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Goffman, Erving. 1974. *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience*. New York: Harper & Row.

determine if there has been a shift in narrative from the European Commission regarding its relations outside of Europe as a result of China's Belt and Road Initiative. In terms of policy, the Commission carefully selects its words and phrases to form a holistic picture regarding the EU's narrative in relation to its foreign affairs. The normative understanding of the EU may classify the frame as 'value-driven' but this thesis will argue that in response to China's BRI influence, the Commission would like to emphasize, that while the EU is still driven by its norms and values, it is also progressive and adaptable.

The frame for EU foreign policy is set by the European Commission, often through press releases, bilateral agreements, and strategic plans. The bodies within the EU that drive the discussion of the EU's external relations narrative are concentrated in the Commission and the European External Action Service. The EEAS works very closely with the Commission and the leading voice in the EEAS, the High Representative for foreign affairs and security policy, is also a Vice President of the Commission, making the information output between these two bodies virtually indivisible.

The policy related documents published by the Commission from 2016 to 2020 will be analyzed to help understand the changes the EU is undertaking as it relates to the influence of the Belt and Road Initiative. The EEAS documents and press releases from the same time period, 2016-2020, will also be considered when they are related to the key terms, 'China', 'Asia', 'Belt and Road', 'Investment', and 'Aid' to better understand the frame of the EU. These two bodies within the EU, mostly through the Commission, set the frame that the EU will be perceived as to the outside world.

The frame analysis will be conducted on a short time period as the Belt and Road Initiative is still very recent, having only been announced in 2013. The three periods considered

for this analysis are prior to the announcement in 2013, between 2013 and 2016 when BRI projects were beginning, and between 2016 and 2020 where there has been enough progress to allow for analysis. The most important period for this analysis will be the third period as this is when the EU policy change will be most apparent. Although, it will be important to highlight the key changes and initial reactions to the announcement of the Initiative, the most efficient way to judge the effectiveness of the BRI at spreading Chinese influence will be through the later years response to it.

The second research question is focused more on the notion that China is dividing the EU. The European Union's inability to create a coherent response to Chinese investment creates problems for the member states. Each member state will instead act in its own self-interest, particularly in the interests of their respective economies. As member states are competing for China's investment, China could be using this as a strategy to further increase its geopolitical power. A divided Europe is a weaker Europe and that may be to China's advantage. Chinese representatives do claim their intention is not to divide Europe. Wang Chao, China's vice-minister of foreign affairs, has stated "China has no intention, nor do we have the ability, to divide Europe"<sup>10</sup> and Chinese Premier Li Keqiang has said that China would "cooperate and respect European standards"<sup>11</sup> in response to division concerns. The problem may lie on the EU side as its lack of communication, cohesion, and deficiency in creating a common policy to deal with China may be the cause of the divide.<sup>12</sup> Thus, the question 'Is China purposefully dividing

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<sup>10</sup> Wong, Catherine. 2019. *China will not divide Europe, senior diplomat says*. April 3.

<sup>11</sup> Deutsche Welle. 2019. *China promises not to divide EU at eastern Europe summit*. December 4.

<sup>12</sup> Huotari, Mikko, Miguel Otero-Iglesias, John Seaman, and Alice Ekman. 2015. *Mapping Europe-China Relations: A Bottom-Up Approach*. European Think-tank Network on China (ETNC).

the EU or is it the EU's inability to form a united stance the cause of rifts between member states and the EU?' This question will also be explored through EU policy and the rhetoric used by the Commission when discussing China and foreign investment.

The following chapters will answer the research questions and provide a greater understanding of how the EU responds to the influence of the BRI. Chapter 1 will give a more in-depth introduction into the Belt and Road Initiative and the impact it has had on the global order. The relationship between Europe and China, both historically and presently, will be assessed in order to define the impact that the BRI might have on this relationship and to recognize why the BRI has the impact that it does. This chapter will also include a summary of the Center for a New American Security's study on the Belt and Road Initiative. This study is important as it defines the greatest criticisms of the BRI projects in its host countries. This insight into potential problems for investment projects will drive the analysis of two case studies of BRI projects in Europe: China's purchase of the Port of Piraeus in Greece and the major investment into a transnational railway between Hungary and Serbia. This first chapter sets up the understanding of China's Belt and Road Initiative and the impact it has had on the European Union in order to better grasp the analysis that will follow.

The next chapter will delve further into the understanding of the EU narrative through the scholarly literature of Ian Manners with the concept of normative power Europe, Chad Damro's market power Europe, and Adrian Hyde-Price's realist critique of the EU narrative. These ideas have evolved as the EU has developed and help to show how scholars describe the EU and how the EU sees itself as an actor. Chapter 2 will also provide greater context into the concept of a frame analysis and how the method has developed to be used in different fields and for different actors. This method originated in the field of sociology by Erving Goffman but has developed

and been a key process in understanding actors in political science as well. This chapter illuminates how the EU foreign policy frame and narrative are interlinked and begins to explain why there is a shift in frame and narrative for the EU in response to the shifting global order.

Chapter 3 will use these interpretations of the European Union's narrative and frame analysis to analyze the changes in the EU through its policy and external relations. This chapter will utilize recent documents published by the Commission and the European External Action Service that construct the frame of the EU foreign policy to demonstrate the realist narrative of the EU. An analysis of the Belt and Road Initiative's impact on the EU and the following changes in framing by the Commission. This chapter looks at the effects of the BRI on the EU's internal relationships, on EU-China interactions, and on how the EU responds to the Initiative with other actors.

The Conclusion will then summarize these findings and answer the research questions put forward that relate to defining the EU narrative and China's attempt to divide the countries of the European Union. The impact of the BRI on the EU is made clear and the need for a greater response from the EU is necessary. The BRI is influencing the current global order and the European Union addresses this, but not to the extent it needs to. The Conclusion will also present ideas for furthering this research and potential different methods for doing so. It will also acknowledge how the current global events may be influencing the international order and what the future may hold for China's Belt and Road Initiative.

## CHAPTER 1: THE BRI, CHINA, AND EUROPE

The global influence China is successfully exerting through its Belt and Road Initiative is causing the European Union to take action. Originally called “One Belt, One Road” but rebranded due to the belief that the word ‘one’ could be causing misinterpretations, the BRI is China’s effort to channel past ideas of connectivity through trade routes like the Silk Road.<sup>13</sup> Although this is how the BRI is marketed, many believe that the ultimate goal is not focused on economic advances for China and partner countries, but on geopolitical gains for China. China is hoping that greater visibility of its investment in more countries will increase its influence in world affairs.

China is investing in underdeveloped or struggling economies, mostly focused in the Eurasian and African regions, in infrastructure projects to increase trade within the host country. The projects that are being undertaken include investment in building bridges, improving train routes, expanding airports, and growing seaports. These projects are marketed as a win-win for both China and the host country as China is supposed to be able to readily do more trade in the country and the host country is able to grow its economy. The BRI stresses the principle of ‘mutual benefit’ and aims to ensure that the interests and concerns of all parties involved are accommodated and the results of the projects lead to greater cooperation.<sup>14</sup> In reality, the projects have not been displaying the equally advantageous outcomes that were expected, with one side of the table emerging much more satisfied than the other.

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<sup>13</sup> Belt and Road Portal. 2020. *The Belt and Road*. Accessed March 2020. <https://eng.yidaiyilu.gov.cn/ztindex.htm>.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

The European Union is not oblivious to the changes in world power and the success that China is experiencing through the BRI. The EU becomes especially concerned when the projects hit so close to home, with BRI investment in parts of the Eastern neighborhood and within member states of the EU itself. The EU must respond to the Initiative in order to keep its own status as an international power and keep the EU a coherent entity. Changes are being made in EU policy and to the narrative of the EU to counteract Chinese influence, but the Union still needs to find its united stance.

The European Union and China are no strangers to interaction. They have historical ties that link them back centuries. The positivity of the relationship fluctuated over time with European traders, including the infamous Marco Polo, exploring the Silk Road and exchanging goods and cultures and more recently to the colonial powers of Europe engaging in the Opium Wars. This rich history is important to the linkage of the two economies and both actors play large roles in the other's economy to this day. Outside of trade, the two are connected diplomatically as China and the EU are both involved in many of the same international organizations. However, despite these connections and the two actors having participated in many bilateral trade talks, they have not developed a formal trade agreement, as is the goal for the EU with non-member states.<sup>15</sup> The BRI is putting a fire underneath the EU to unite its stance on China but the EU's and China's vast difference in ideals is hindering an effective international partnership.

The projected completion timeline for the BRI is aimed at 2049, but there is a belief that the project is indefinite, especially in its ability to spread Chinese influence. As the project was

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<sup>15</sup> European Union. 2020. *China*. February 14. Accessed March 2020. <https://ec.europa.eu/trade/policy/countries-and-regions/countries/china/>.

only announced in 2013, the Belt and Road Initiative is still considered very recent in terms of the ability for historical analysis. The effects of the BRI can be analyzed in three distinct periods: prior to 2013 and the declaration of the BRI, between 2013 and 2016 as the BRI was proposed and investment began, and 2016 to 2020 where projects are completed or have progressed enough to allow analysis.

The remainder of this chapter will further describe the timeline of the Belt and Road Initiative and the effect it has had on Europe. The section following this will explore the evolving relationship between China and Europe both as a united European Union and the bilateral relationships between China and individual EU member states. A study conducted by the Center for a New American Security (CNAS) will then be introduced in order to better understand some of the criticisms of BRI projects and how China may respond to them as well as what the EU may fear will happen with investment projects within its own borders. Following this, will be two case studies to measure the response of the EU when China conducts BRI projects in Greece and Hungary. The acquisition of the Port of Piraeus in Greece and the commitment to building a trans-national trainline between Budapest and Belgrade are both deeply concerning to the EU as it takes away its own influence in its member states and puts the member states at risk of some of the challenges presented in the CNAS study.

### **Timeline of the BRI**

The Chinese Belt and Road Initiative was launched by president Xi Jinping in 2013. The aim of this project is to increase connectivity from China to other Asian countries, Eurasia all the way through to the African continent. The number of countries that are receiving investments

being made in efforts of this goal have been estimated at over one hundred, but there is no official count. Most of the investment of this project is in infrastructure and this can vary from railroads, highways, seaports, and even airports.<sup>16</sup>

The Belt and Road Initiative will be considered through three different periods as it relates to EU policy change. Establishing this breakdown is important to understanding both the evolution of the normative power Europe as it is influenced by globalization and the change in frame set forth by the EU's information outlets. The first period consists of the time prior to the announcement of the BRI in 2013 and the EU rhetoric in its media output before the Chinese announcement. This is the period before much of the criticism of the European Union's narrative as a normative power entered EU policy discussion. China was a growing global power and the world was shifting its understanding of multipolarity.

The second period consists of the years between the announcement of the BRI in 2013 to 2016 when projects were at the beginning of implementation. This is a period where the EU is still in the decision-making process to determine how to respond to the BRI but still not fully committed to a response in the aim of still understanding the outcomes of the Initiative. Although an important period, the main focus of this analysis will be on new changes to EU policy and information output after this time. The most pertinent period is the period from 2016 to 2020, when the Belt and Road Initiative is mature enough to see results and analyze the effect it is having on the host countries and the world. This is when it is critical for the EU to respond and it begins to do so through policy changes. There is a global response to the BRI and a push for more international evaluation. Not only that, but the investment projects strike closer to home for

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<sup>16</sup> Belt and Road Portal. 2020. *The Belt and Road*. Accessed March 2020. <https://eng.yidaiyilu.gov.cn/ztindex.htm>.

Europe with BRI projects happening most notably in Greece and Hungary, as well as in the larger European neighborhood. This calls for more EU project assessment and response.

## **Relationship Between China and the European Union**

The European Union and China have dramatically increased their interactions within the past 20 years. The EU and China created formal ties in 1975 although China's history with European countries date back much further.<sup>17</sup> The EU and China relationship was not always a high priority, especially after the Cold War when there was an increased focus on the relationship with the United States. However, as the global powers shifted and multipolarity grew, China quickly headed for developed country status. It made sure to create important connections with Europe, the historical powerhouse of developed countries. China is now a global superpower, particularly in terms of trade, and the EU is China's largest trading partner. China is the EU's second largest trading partner, after the United States, and demonstrates that in such a short period of time how influential China became economically.<sup>18</sup> China also became an influential member in many international organizations that the EU is also a part of, either with the EU as an actor or through member state representation.

Although China has been an important global actor and the trade between the EU and China has been plentiful for years, the EU still has yet to solidify its strategy for communications with China. The European Union and China have been in the negotiation stage of an Investment Agreement since 2013. The EU has trade partnerships with many countries, and even if not fully

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<sup>17</sup> European Union. 2019. *EU-China Relations factsheet*. October 18. Accessed March 2020. [https://eeas.europa.eu/topics/external-investment-plan/34728/eu-china-relations-factsheet\\_en](https://eeas.europa.eu/topics/external-investment-plan/34728/eu-china-relations-factsheet_en).

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

elevated to an agreement, the EU is a lot further in the negotiation process with other countries than it is with China. The trade partnerships that the EU holds with other countries vary, including customs unions, association agreements, and partnership and cooperation agreements. The EU is hoping to create an investment agreement with China that would define trade regulations, transparency requirements, protection for investors, and consider the environmental impacts of foreign direct investment. The EU claims a commitment to creating these trade partnership and investment agreements with China, but due to China being seen as a heedless actor when it comes to fair trade in the eyes of the EU, it is hesitant to create a deal.

One of the first measurable results that can be found as an outcome of China's Belt and Road Initiative, is the EU's increased fervor to work with China and define their rules of engagement. Almost immediately after China's announcement of its plan to connect countries along the Silk Road Economic Belt at a speech in Kazakhstan in September of 2013 and in Indonesia in October of the same year,<sup>19</sup> the EU moves forward with creating an Investment Agreement between China and the EU in late 2013. Although an investment agreement had been discussed the previous year at the 15<sup>th</sup> EU-China Summit, the negotiations were announced at the 16<sup>th</sup> EU-China Summit in November of 2013, with first round talks taking place in January of 2014.<sup>20</sup> The most recent EU-China Summit was the 21st summit that took place in April of 2019. This Summit had an increased focus on cooperation between the EU and China and specifically addressed the BRI with the EU stating "the EU and China will continue to forge

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<sup>19</sup> Xinhua. 2015. *Chronology of China's Belt and Road Initiative*. March 28. Accessed March 2020. [http://english.www.gov.cn/news/top\\_news/2015/04/20/content\\_281475092566326.htm](http://english.www.gov.cn/news/top_news/2015/04/20/content_281475092566326.htm).

<sup>20</sup> Winkler, Iuliu. 2019. *EU-China Comprehensive Agreement on Investment (EU-China CAI)*. December 15. Accessed March 2020. <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/legislative-train/theme-a-balanced-and-progressive-trade-policy-to-harness-globalisation/file-eu-china-investment-agreement>.

synergies between China's belt and road initiative and the EU's initiatives with a view to improve Europe-Asia connectivity.”<sup>21</sup>

The position of the EU stresses the need for transparency in the negotiations and the need to address ambiguities in China's law and regulations. As the years have progressed, the negotiations for the Investment Agreement have continued and in April of 2019, set the date for the conclusion of the agreement for 2020.<sup>22</sup> As China's investment and influence spread, the European Parliament's aim of the agreement included more and more requirements, adding in a sustainable development chapter in December of 2015.

### **Relationship Between China and the Member States of the European Union**

The bilateral relationship between the EU and China is very different from the bilateral relationships China holds with some EU member states. All EU member states hold a deepening relationship with China as it increases its wealth and status on the global stage. China has displayed an increased interest in the European market and is especially keen on tapping into new markets, like the countries of Central, Eastern, and Southern Europe.<sup>23</sup> EU member states have increased their economic and political relations in order to attract trade and investment from China, even to a competitive extent. To this effect, China has had a turn in balance of power in

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<sup>21</sup> European Council: Council of the European Union. 2019. *EU-China summit, 9 April 2019*. October 31. Accessed March 2020. <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/meetings/international-summit/2019/04/09/>.

<sup>22</sup> Winkler, Iuliu. 2019. *EU-China Comprehensive Agreement on Investment (EU-China CAI)*. December 15. Accessed March 2020. <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/legislative-train/theme-a-balanced-and-progressive-trade-policy-to-harness-globalisation/file-eu-china-investment-agreement>.

<sup>23</sup> Huotari, Mikko, Miguel Otero-Iglesias, John Seaman, and Alice Ekman. 2015. *Mapping Europe-China Relations: A Bottom-Up Approach*. European Think-tank Network on China (ETNC).

these bilateral relationship between itself and EU member states. A report on Europe-China Relations explains that “Europe is encountering a much more proactive China on the diplomatic front and the contours of the relationship are increasingly designed in Beijing. Asymmetries in EU member states’ relations have turned increasingly to Beijing’s favour. European governments find their relative influence over Beijing waning. This is exacerbated by their lack of communication, cohesion and, consequently, their inability to formulate common policies.”<sup>24</sup> China has been able to use its diverse relationships between each member state to emphasize the individuality of each relationship.

Although the EU aims to create a united stance on China, “European national strategies towards China are dominated by the logic of economics.”<sup>25</sup> China is seen as a source of growth and so many European nations are willing to lessen the prominence of the importance of political ideals on their relationships with China. For example, Germany who is often a leader in EU policy reformation may be putting the Germany economy above an EU united stance on China. In May of 2019, German Chancellor Angela Merkel opted to embark on a German only delegation to Beijing, rather than accept executives from non-German companies to join the delegation, to improve German-Chinese business ties.<sup>26</sup> There are quite a few examples of member states skirting around EU attempts at a unified stance in order to bolster their own economies, particularly in relation to the Belt and Road Initiative and to the EU’s attempts to regulate foreign direct investment into Europe. Despite the EU’s best efforts, it remains divided

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<sup>24</sup> Huotari, Mikko, Miguel Otero-Iglesias, John Seaman, and Alice Ekman. 2015. *Mapping Europe-China Relations: A Bottom-Up Approach*. European Think-tank Network on China (ETNC).

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Barkin, Noah. 2019. *Is Germany going soft on China?* Berlin, August 31.

when it comes to policy on China since the EU is not in control of each state's foreign policy. The Commission utilizes its information outputs to shape the foreign policy frame of the EU as having a united stance on China, but this framing does not represent reality. While China may be using the division of the EU to its benefit when creating its strategy for Europe, it is not the cause of divided Europe.

Moreover, China is not only involved in Europe's market, but also sees the region as a key player in its strategic initiatives and aims to expand on a multipolar global order. China maintains a 'flexible foreign policy approach when dealing with Europe' and utilizes the BRI to spread its influence into Europe as deep as it can go.<sup>27</sup> In the past, China concentrated its European investment in Western European states including the United Kingdom, France, and Germany. The sectors of Chinese investment are vast but concentrate in finance, infrastructure, engineering and energy. However, in recent years, and particularly after the announcement of the Belt and Road Initiative in 2013, China has shifted its investment focus into other European regions, with largescale investment in Greece and the Western Balkans especially.<sup>28</sup> The focus on Central, Eastern, and Southern European Union member states may be a result of these regions being the most open to outside influence to spur their economies and China's aim of geopolitical gains. The case studies presented in subsequent sections will demonstrate how national actors in the region of Central, Eastern, and Southern Europe respond to China, and further how the EU responds to these projects.

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<sup>27</sup> Huotari, Mikko, Miguel Otero-Iglesias, John Seaman, and Alice Ekman. 2015. *Mapping Europe-China Relations: A Bottom-Up Approach*. European Think-tank Network on China (ETNC).

<sup>28</sup> Barisitz, Stephan, and Alice Radzyner. 2017. "The New Silk Road, part II: implications for Europe." *Focus on European Economic Integration* (Q4/17): 70-81.

## **The Center for a New American Security's Study on the BRI**

Since China's Belt and Road Initiative has been at the forefront of China's external relations, there have been a growing number of studies and research on the project. One study that will be used as the basis of understanding the BRI and the challenges it faces is the Center for a New American Security's study conducted by Daniel Kliman, Rush Doshi, Kristine Lee, and Zack Cooper.<sup>29</sup> Understanding these challenges that the BRI faces and the criticisms it receives is essential to understanding how changes in EU policy is affected by the Initiative. In order to judge if the EU is changing its policy to counteract the growing influence of the BRI, grasping the challenges of it will reveal potential points for the EU to emphasize ways in which it can do better.

Kliman, et al. describes seven challenges that each BRI investment project may face and based off of this creates a checklist for how to determine the success of the investment. Although, it is important to note that the measurement is not focused on the success of China, but whether or not the host country benefits from the project. China is experiencing economic and geo-political gains regardless of the host country's outcome. The European Commission can use to its advantage a more positive result-orientated approach and contrast itself to China's focus on spread of influence.

The first challenge presented by the study that is found in many infrastructure projects is the erosion of national sovereignty. China often takes control of the asset, due to financial backing, and the host country must accept the terms of the Chinese instructions. The country can become indebted to the Chinese for the project for many years to come. The lack of transparency

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<sup>29</sup> Kliman, Daniel, Rush Doshi, Kristine Lee, and Zack Cooper. 2019. *Grading China's Belt and Road*. Washington, D.C.: Center for a New American Security.

is the second challenge described in Kliman, et al.'s evaluation<sup>30</sup>. This is the idea that host countries will run into disadvantages when the contract proceedings are kept private and cannot be publicly scrutinized. The challenges exist at the national-level and ones that parallel challenges the EU often faces, especially in member states in Central, Eastern, and Southern Europe. The concern of sovereignty for EU member states is always at the forefront of EU policy discussion. The lack of transparency can also be related to the 'democracy deficit' that stems from the perceived lack of elected officials to drive the EU. If the EU can present solutions to these challenges, in its own foreign investment and in accepting outside investment, it may have the ability to deflate the BRI's allure.

Kliman, et al. assert that the indebtedness the host country may experience stems from the third challenge: unsustainable financial burdens. The project may cost far more than the revenue will ever expect to generate, leaving the countries paying back China for years to come. Another economic challenge posed, as described by Kliman, et al. is the disengagement from local economic needs. This relates to the fact that in these investment projects, the Chinese import their own firms and labor which does not allow the host country to benefit as deeply. The economic advantage to the host country is dependent on the cost of the project and the contribution China makes through a loan, with little to no new jobs created and no knowledge diffusion, it is hard to see the advantage of a project. The EU can counteract this challenge by ensuring that any investment it may provide in a third country will create jobs and knowledge, without leaving the country in an insurmountable debt.

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<sup>30</sup> Kliman, Daniel, Rush Doshi, Kristine Lee, and Zack Cooper. 2019. *Grading China's Belt and Road*. Washington, D.C.: Center for a New American Security.

The fifth, sixth, and seventh challenges are political in nature; the fifth considers the geopolitical risks of accepting the infrastructure investments from China. Other countries may not be willing to conduct business with the host country afterwards if they are rivals with China. Negative environmental impacts are defined by the sixth challenge and can be seen throughout infrastructure development, but it is especially true with Chinese investment. China is known to be particularly unconcerned with the dangerous environmental damage caused by the projects, especially as it is conducted outside of China. The last challenge presented by Kliman, et al.<sup>31</sup> is the significant potential for corruption, particularly for countries that already have high levels of corruption in their governments. This, too, is a preexisting problem in Central, Eastern, and Southern European member states which is only exacerbated by BRI projects in the country. These investment projects only add to the payoffs received by politicians and bureaucrats. These challenges may be understood by the EU and then in turn used to demonstrate the benefits of interacting with the EU instead of China. The EU may argue that there would be far fewer geopolitical risks as the EU is generally well-regarded on the international stage. The EU also has significant measures in place to counteract climate change and is deeply concerned with the environment. Additionally, the European Union has procedures in place that aim to counter corruption and can accentuate this when proposing investment from within the EU as compared with China.

These challenges are a guiding point in how the challenges presented by the BRI investment projects and how the EU may use these challenges to promote itself as an alternative option to China. Despite these challenges found in BRI projects, China is still gaining massive

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<sup>31</sup> Kliman, Daniel, Rush Doshi, Kristine Lee, and Zack Cooper. 2019. *Grading China's Belt and Road*. Washington, D.C.: Center for a New American Security.

economic and geopolitical influence as the projects continue to develop and spread to more countries. To counter this, the EU is focused on justifying their own means of investment and aid to show that they can do so without posing these challenges upon the host country. The EU has also understood these challenges in the investment projects the BRI has led to in member states and has sought solutions to stop investments that pose these challenges, which will be discussed in the case studies of Greece and Hungary and more broadly in Chapter 3.

### **Case Study of Greece: Port of Piraeus**

One of the most notable of China's Belt and Road Initiative projects in Europe is its purchase of the Port of Piraeus in Greece. This port city is located just next to Athens and is strategically placed to support trade relations with the Middle East and Africa. In 2016, the China COSCO Shipping Group, a state-owned ocean shipping business, secured the majority stake of the Piraeus Port Authority with further plans to increase its stake after 2021.<sup>32</sup> This involvement in the port is an important part of the BRI's presence in Greece and the Mediterranean at large. The port is referred to as the 'Gateway to Europe' as access to it has decreased the duration for transporting goods from China to Europe and allows China easier entry into European markets.<sup>33</sup> Prior to China's management of Piraeus, the port was not reaching its full potential and was deemed 'underdeveloped.' However, after China stepped in,

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<sup>32</sup> Liu, Qianqian, and Davarinou Polyxeni. 2019. "Sino-Greek Economic Cooperation: COSCO's Investment in the Port of Piraeus." *IDS Bulletin* 50 (4): 109-124.

<sup>33</sup> Barisitz, Stephan, and Alice Radzyner. 2017. "The New Silk Road, part II: implications for Europe." *Focus on European Economic Integration* (Q4/17): 70-81.

the port has overtaken Valencia, and is projected to become the largest container port in the Mediterranean.<sup>34</sup>

The economic success of the port is hard to question, but for whom the growth is benefitting is not as clear. Greece faces many of the challenges that the CNAS study illustrates can often arise with BRI investment projects. Not only does much of the manufacturing and construction material for the port's development come from China<sup>35</sup>, limiting the economic impact on Greek companies who could have benefitted, but moreover, critics of the acquisition say that workers' pay is low and their rights restricted under the control of COSCO. One port worker said in an interview with NPR, "This is exploitation... We assume that COSCO wants to make very fast profits. So they will try to squeeze their expenses, and the incomes of workers are considered expenses. For us, these 'expenses' are our income to support our families."<sup>36</sup> Another worker echoed the aversion to the COSCO acquisition and told of how attempts at unionizing led to workers being fired. There is new equipment and new life in the Port of Piraeus, but under who's control? Greece is attempting to protect its workers, but it also is focused on maintaining a good relationship with the Chinese. Another distressed interviewee from Kakissis' NPR article quotes, "When the Chinese say win-win, they mean they win twice."<sup>37</sup> The Greek state is put in a difficult position of wanting to show appreciation for the investment into the port and maintaining support for China but would also like to help their workers. This gives China the

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<sup>34</sup> Walt, Vivienne. 2019. "Boxed in at the Docks." *Fortune* 180 (2): 86-95.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Kakissis, Joanna. 2018. *Chinese Firms Now Hold Stakes In Over A Dozen European Ports*. October 9.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

advantage in the situation and makes clear the cause for distress from port workers, Greece, and the EU as well.

The geopolitical gains of China through the COSCO port purchase are of deepening concern to the European Union. Critics see Greece as being ‘too friendly to China’ as it allowed Chinese naval vessels to dock at Piraeus much to the dismay of NATO.<sup>38</sup> Greece is also impeding EU criticism of China in order to pursue its own interests. In 2017, shortly after the port purchase, Greece blocked a resolution the EU had drafted condemning China’s restrictions on human rights activists that was intended to be presented at the United Nations. The EU had, in the past, presented a united stance on this issue, but Greece changed that with the explanation that it was an ‘unconstructive criticism of China.’<sup>39</sup> The Commission must address this issue as China is detracting from the ideals that drive the EU by getting member states that want to focus on their relationship with China to stray. Greece’s actions to ignore China’s human rights violations detracts from the overall message of the EU values. The frame set forth by the Commission that designates the EU as value-driven is impugned by the lack of unity in responding to contradictions to its values. The decision by member states to pay higher regard to their own economic interests than to the norms and values of the EU also challenge the suggested EU foreign policy frame as it questions how the European Union can be truly value-driven if in reality, member states act in their own best interests.

In disregard to the Commission’s advising on how member states should respond to problematic behavior, Greece may be backing China on international actions it would otherwise condemn in the efforts of maintaining a good relationship. However, Greece, and other countries

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<sup>38</sup> Walt, Vivienne. 2019. "Boxed in at the Docks." *Fortune* 180 (2): 86-95.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

hosting BRI projects, have been accused of a loss of sovereignty. As the CNAS study describes, host countries often experience this problem as they are so much under the influence of China through its heavy investment that they give up some of their own decision-making power in order to maintain the relationship. These host countries are indebted to China either formally through monetary measures or inadvertently through geopolitical means. EU member states are exceedingly concerned for their sovereignty when it relates to EU policy, but when they accept such deep-rooted investment from China, it questions if their beloved sovereignty remains intact. This also plays into the idea that China is dividing Europe. As more countries receive investment from China's BRI project and in the interest of bettering their relations with the Asian power in general, the member states of the EU are choosing to put their own interests above that of the Union. Even if they are afraid to give up sovereignty in the aims of a more powerful European Union actor, they will do so if they find it makes their own global influence stronger.

### **Case Study of Hungary: Budapest-Belgrade Rail**

China has become increasingly involved in the region of Eastern Europe and the Balkans with its 16+1 dialogue. This includes 11 EU member states and 5 outside the Union with the +1 representing China. This forum has been criticized by Western Europe and has brought up the concern that the 16+1 is part of China's strategy to divide Europe.<sup>40</sup> The forum is often used to discuss China's infrastructure investment into the region, but also includes discussion on agriculture, health, tourism, and education. China has targeted this area for the forum because of

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<sup>40</sup> Huotari, Mikko, Miguel Otero-Iglesias, John Seaman, and Alice Ekman. 2015. *Mapping Europe-China Relations: A Bottom-Up Approach*. European Think-tank Network on China (ETNC).

the shared need in the region for investment and development. While the EU does offer its member states significant funding possibilities and there are EU sources and international organizations that can be used by the non-EU member states of the region, there is still a large financing gap which China aims to fill.<sup>41</sup> This region connects the Eurasian region to more countries of Europe and is strategic for trade routes. The reasoning behind the interest from China is clear and the interest in involvement from the '16' can be explained by Huotari, et al.: "Compared with the relatively slow process of project preparation and other institutional obstacles that must be overcome when applying for EU funding, Chinese investments appear to be a competitive alternative, as they come with streamlined approval processes, state-backed financing and rapid implementation."<sup>42</sup> Hungary is one of the members of the 16+1 dialogue and is on the receiving end of one of the biggest infrastructure projects in the region.

The Belt and Road Investment project for the Budapest-Belgrade railway is complex and involves many ideologically distinct actors. As this venture is an infrastructure project that connects two countries, each of those actors must be involved, with only one of the connecting countries being a member of the EU. The rail connection will decrease the travel time between Budapest, Hungary and Belgrade, Serbia from 8 hours to 2.4 hours, with future plans to extend the route even further through to Greece.<sup>43</sup> This project is very attractive for China as this development will lead to more connections between Eurasia and Europe, but it will also expand China's trade reach within Europe itself. Being more involved in these countries will grant China

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<sup>41</sup> Barisitz, Stephan, and Alice Radzyner. 2017. "The New Silk Road, part II: implications for Europe." *Focus on European Economic Integration* (Q4/17): 70-81.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid, p. 72.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

greater access to trade on the Danube River, which is the second largest river in Europe starting from the Black Sea and running through 10 countries as far reaching as Germany.

Although at a high cost to Hungary and mostly financed through Chinese loans, Hungary would undeniably benefit from the decreased transit time between Budapest and Belgrade and the increased investment in the region would open its trade endeavors as well. However, there are many criticisms concerning how efficient this train line will make trade as there is still not enough infrastructure apart from this railway to make greater distance trading any easier. Viktor Orbán, the prime minister of Hungary, pushed the project forward regardless because of his belief that Hungary must improve their relationship with China, especially since his nation has a lot of tensions with the EU.<sup>44</sup> Since the expanded relations that led to greater Hungarian trade sales to China, the two countries have signed a memorandum of understanding on the BRI in 2015 and established a comprehensive strategic partnership in 2017.<sup>45</sup> Although this project still has years to be able to verify its success, it has been a pathway for Chinese-Hungarian relations to blossom.

As Orbán stated “if the EU cannot provide financial support, we will turn to China”<sup>46</sup> it shows that Hungary acknowledges the need to create better ties with China stemming from sour ties between Hungary and the EU. Naturally, the EU had many concerns with this railway investment from China. The Budapest-Belgrade railway project undermines the EU’s internal market rules and the Commission expressed its concern about accepting trade and investment

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<sup>44</sup> Prager, Alicia. 2019. *Budapest-Belgrade railway: Orban flirts with China*. September 23.

<sup>45</sup> Leandro, Francisco Jose. 2018. "Combining the "Belt" with the Roads at the Heart of Europe: Geopolitics of the BBSP Corridor." *Megatrend revija/Megatrend Review* 15 (3): 207-224.

<sup>46</sup> HVG. 2018. 'Orbán: Ha az EU nem ad pénzt, Kínától kérünk' [*Orbán: if the EU does not give us money, we will ask for it from China*]. January 10.

without consulting the EU first.<sup>47</sup> The EU began an investigation into the project to determine if it had violated EU law stating that large transport projects must receive a public tender to which, Hungary responded by calling for a public tender so the EU would drop the investigation.<sup>48</sup> Like the effect of China's purchase of the Port of Piraeus, this yearning for improved relations with China has Hungary protecting it from EU scrutiny in international organizations. Both Hungary and Greece have blocked EU statements on China's parlous rights record and on its role in the disputed South China Sea.<sup>49</sup> These actions call into question the EU's loss of influence on the member states focused on remaining on China's good side due to economic ties. The EU has lost much of its influence in Hungary for other reasons, but this project may show that China is inserting itself to fill that void, much to the distress of the EU.

Hungary's decision to undertake the BRI investment project with China only calls more attention to the animosity between Hungary and the EU. Notorious for its shift towards populism, Hungary, led by Orbán is straying from the existing EU values of rule of law and liberal democracy. Hungary is leading the governments of other member states to follow suit, most notably in Poland, but also arguably in Czechia, Austria, and even Greece.<sup>50</sup> Hungary is playing an important role in the ideological divisions within the EU and may be seen as one of the key actors in questioning the values of the European Union. The European Commission is attempting to create a frame for EU foreign policy that puts its values at the forefront, but when

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<sup>47</sup> Barisitz, Stephan, and Alice Radzyner. 2017. "The New Silk Road, part II: implications for Europe." *Focus on European Economic Integration* (Q4/17): 70-81.

<sup>48</sup> Rencz, Flora. 2019. "The BRI in Europe and the Budapest-Belgrade Railway Link." *European Institute for Asian Studies*.

<sup>49</sup> McLaughlin, Daniel. 2018. *EU on guard as China builds infrastructure and influence*. Budapest, November 22.

<sup>50</sup> Vachudova, Milada Anna. 2019. "From Competition to Polarization in Central Europe: How Populists Change Party Systems and the European Union." *Polity* 51 (4): 689-706.

the EU's own member states do not subscribe to these values the entire frame is hard to believe. With Hungary in the lead, and many other member states undergoing democratic backsliding, there are concerns that the EU may become a 'non-compliance community' where even if it may frame itself in terms of its values, they are not followed in practice.<sup>51</sup> Furthering this idea is Agnes Batory's study that investigates EU member states and their compliance to EU norms which argues that member states only conform to norms in a symbolic or creative nature that still allows them to succeed in their original objectives. This article aims to prove that these member states often find ways of satisfying the Commission to where it does not have to lose its credibility if it allows the member state to proceed in their non-compliant actions, and even argues that enforcement may indeed only be symbolic as well.<sup>52</sup> Another scholar, Martijn Mos, goes so far as to argue that EU values are ambiguous and thus cannot be enforced. He uses Viktor Orbán as an example to show that European leaders can utilize the absence of specified behavioral prescription with respect to EU fundamental values to argue that the leaders' actions are indeed aligned with EU values.<sup>53</sup> Redefining the values of the European Union must undoubtedly redefine the frame, if it is a frame focused on values.

Orbán has proven his lack of concern with conforming to EU values in many ways, but here in his acceptance of Chinese investment despite it being in the best interest of the EU. China is using this investment project to gain a foothold in the Central and Eastern European region, which detracts from the EU's influence there. The region includes many of the member states

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<sup>51</sup> Falkner, Gerda. 2013. "The JCMS Annual Review Lecture Is the European Union Losing Its Credibility?" *Journal of Common Market Studies* 51 (S1): 13-30.

<sup>52</sup> Batory, Agnes. 2016. "Defying the Commission: Creative Compliance and Respect for the Rule of Law in the EU." *Public Administration* 94 (3): 685-699.

<sup>53</sup> Mos, Martijn. 2020. "Ambiguity and Interpretive Politics in the Crisis of European Values: Evidence from Hungary." *East European Politics*.

that are accused of defecting from traditional EU values and that are looking to grow outside of the Union. These states are turning to China to do and even vying for its attention within the region. Polish officials took part in the competitive aspect of garnering China's investment by scrutinizing the Chinese venture into a technology park near Minsk, Belarus.<sup>54</sup> This competition, too, leads to the understanding that China is dividing the European Union but can again be explained with the preexisting disunity within the EU and China merely taking advantage of it.

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<sup>54</sup> VSquare. 2018. *Belt, Road, and Humbug. China's Investments in Poland*. November 14.

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter will be largely divided into two sections that are focused on the evolution of the understanding of the EU narrative and the evolution of frame analysis as a method of study. Both of these sections will aid in the understanding of how the European Union, often through the Commission, conducts its foreign policy. One of the driving research questions of this thesis is concerned with the narrative of the European Union. Many scholars have concerned themselves with defining who or what the European Union is as an actor and how it exerts power on the global stage. Even prior to the European Union as an entity, scholars were interested in examining how the European Coal and Steel Community functioned in foreign policy as a coalescence of multiple nations. The works of some of the most significant contributors to this discussion of EU narrative and power structure will be discussed.

Ian Manners is one of the most cited scholars when referring to the current understanding of the EU narrative. Normative power Europe is a concept that defines the EU's ability to shape the conception of normal by its unwavering commitment to its values. This conception has evolved over time as the EU has aged and more scholars have contributed to the idea. However, many have also criticized this explanation for the EU power narrative and highlighted instances where the EU acts in ways that are in opposition to how a normative actor would behave. Manners himself has published works stating that there are times when the EU strays from the normative narrative. This section will describe some of the narratives prescribed to the EU that offer other solutions to the problem of defining the EU's power. This will include the concept of civilian power Europe by Francois Duchene, the military power Europe suggested by Hedley Bull that never quite came to fruition, and Chad Damro's idea of a market power Europe. Then,

the idea of Europe's power narrative will be considered through the realist lens of Adrian Hyde-Price to suggest that the EU narrative is in fact a realist one that explains why the Union may act as a normative power in some situations but not in others.

The other section of this literature review will focus on the evolution of Erving Goffman's frame analysis. This method for identifying an actor's means for understanding information has been prescribed to many different fields. From Goffman's original use of the method to interpret information, frame analysis has also been expanding through the work of scholars from much smaller actors, like a single individual, to actors with greater influence, like a nation-state or the European Union. One such instance of this is when Carla Santos uses the original frame analysis as a method in her research but applies it to a larger actor. Through time, more developments have been made to this simple method and Robert M. Entman goes on to show that when recognizing the construction of a frame what an actor chooses not to include may be just as important as what information the actor selects as important. Alex Mintz and Steven B. Redd apply this method to the field of political science and their research into political actors will be used here as an example for the frame analysis conducted in this thesis. The development of frame analysis, as well as the background of the EU's narrative, will provide more insight throughout the analysis chapter of the thesis. These foundations are crucial to the current understanding of the EU narrative and frame, as crafted by the Commission. It is important to note that scholars often refer to the European Union as the actor when many times the 'acting' is done from the Commission, particularly when concerned with foreign policy.

## The Changing Narrative of the European Union

The European Union is a relatively new entity and very unique in its composition, making it hard to comprehend. There have been countless and ongoing attempts to define what the European Union is as an organization or governing structure, how it behaves as an actor on the world stage, and what the effects of its influence are. The literature of Ian Manners is frequently cited when discussing these questions. At present, a great part of the understanding of the European Union as an actor is based on Manners' theory of 'normative power Europe' (NPE). In his article that coined the phrase, Manners<sup>55</sup> describes the history of the European Union and its course of being thought of as a civilian power to a never-implemented, military power to the normative power it is often recognized as today. Manners describes Francois Duchene's idea of the civilian power structure and its application to the European Coal and Steel Community. Duchene claimed that the EU's power came from its economic power and not through its military, since it did not have one. This lack of force capability but still having the ability to influence others is what Duchene's idea of civilian power describes. Manners does state that this power characterization may have been valid at the time, but the EU has since evolved, and the understanding of its power narrative must evolve with it.

The next evolution came when the narrative of a civilian power Europe lost its attractiveness in light of the Second Cold War of the late 1970s and 1980s and the idea of Europe acting as a realist power became more prevalent.<sup>56</sup> This understanding of Europe as a military

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<sup>55</sup> Manners, Ian. 2000. "Normative Power Europe: A Contradiction in Terms?" *Copenhagen Peace Research Institute*. p. 29.

<sup>56</sup> Tuominen, Hanna. 2013. "The Changing Context of Global Governance and the Normative Power of the European Union." In *Global Power Europe - Vol. 1: Theoretical and Institutional Approaches to the EU's External Relations*, by Astrid Boening, Jan-Frederik Kremer and Aukje van Loon, 201-218. Springer.

power was strengthened after the signing of the Treaty on European Union in 1992 in Maastricht and with the agreement to a common European security and defense policy in 1999. These actions implied that the EU was headed toward a greater military power with a greater focus on its security and defense. However, a joint European military power has never come to be a threatening force and this theory of military power being the defining narrative for the EU receded.<sup>57</sup>

As military power Europe never came to the fruition many scholars believed it would, this opened the door for Manners' normative power narrative to establish itself and take hold. Manners argues that "by refocusing away from debate over either civilian or military power, it is possible to think of the ideational impact of the EU's international identity/role as representing normative power".<sup>58</sup> He contends that this is the better conception of the analysis of the EU because other narratives analyze the EU in a way that a state would be analyzed and do not account for the intricacies of the supranational/intergovernmental structure of the European Union. The ideational nature and commitment to a set of norms is what gives the EU "its ability to shape conceptions of 'normal' in international relations" and defines its normative power narrative.<sup>59</sup>

Manners may have been the first to apply the normative power narrative to the EU, but as he mentions, he was not the inventor of the concept of normative power. Manners refers to E.H. Carr and Bertrand Russell, who distinguished between economic power, military power, and

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<sup>57</sup> Manners, Ian. 2002. "Normative Power Europe: A Contradiction in Terms?" *Journal of Common Market Studies* 40 (2): 235-258.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid. p. 238.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid. p. 239.

power over opinion and explains that the idea of power over opinion is the predecessor to normative power. Manners then goes on to cite Johan Galtung who published a review of the European Community (EC) and its upcoming superpower status at the time, while comparing the EC to the United States. Galtung described the EC as having the power to influence through its norms or ideas. Manners explained his understanding of Galtung's argument and asserted that when Galtung said in his 1973 work that, 'ideological power is the power of ideas,' he believes that Galtung is arguing that "ideological power is 'powerful because the power-sender's ideas penetrate and shape the will of the power-recipient.'"<sup>60</sup> Manners believes the European Union to be the power-sender in the international community in this understanding of Galtung's ideological power and describes in another way how the EU influences the actors it interacts with.

In order to clarify what norms the EU is radiating onto the world stage, Manners goes on further to explain what the 'core norms' of the European Union are: peace, liberty, democracy, rule of law, and respect for human rights.<sup>61</sup> These values can be found throughout foundational EU documents, particularly in the Treaty on European Union, and are found in the self-branding of the European Union today. On the Europa website, in the About Us section, the EU lists its values: human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, rule of law, and human rights.<sup>62</sup> Manners

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<sup>60</sup> Manners, Ian. 2000. "Normative Power Europe: A Contradiction in Terms?" *Copenhagen Peace Research Institute*. p. 29.

<sup>61</sup> Manners, Ian. 2002. "Normative Power Europe: A Contradiction in Terms?" *Journal of Common Market Studies* 40 (2): 235-258.

<sup>62</sup> European Union. 2020. *The EU in brief*. February 25 2020. Accessed March 2020. [https://europa.eu/european-union/about-eu/eu-in-brief\\_en#transparent-and-democratic-institutions](https://europa.eu/european-union/about-eu/eu-in-brief_en#transparent-and-democratic-institutions).

claims that as a normative power these values or norms are the driving force of EU interactions in its actions on the international scene and influence others to follow the same values.

The normative power narrative has evolved over time as more scholars have undertaken the idea to describe the institution that is described as both supranational and intergovernmental. The argument for normative power narrative is that the EU defines itself through its norms and through these norms, sets a precedent for states around the world to follow. However, the way in which the European Union influences the universal norms is changing, and thus, the understanding of normative power Europe must evolve as well.

Manners sparked much criticism and debate after publishing his idea that the EU should be analyzed in this normative power conception. In further publications that respond to the discussion surrounding the NPE, Manners and others argue the importance of understanding that there are situations in which the EU does not act as a normative power actor would, but continues to be a normative power actor, nonetheless. This recognition enforces the idea that there should be a distinction between normative power Europe in theory and normative power Europe in empirical purposes. The NPE 'is a theoretical grounding that guides analytical work attempting to make sense of and explain the role of the EU as a global actor'.<sup>63</sup> This argument aims to clarify why the EU may not always act in a normative way, as critics have pointed out.

Manners also responded to the criticisms in an article published in 2013 with a direct reference to the effect of the global era on the definition of the normative power Europe framework. The article presents the idea, that in the case of interaction between Europe and the

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<sup>63</sup> Birchfield, Vicki. 2013. "A normative power Europe framework of transnational policy formation." *Journal of European Public Policy* 20 (6): p. 911.

wider global community, one must consider two meanings of ‘normative power’. Manners explains that as argued by Raymond Aron, *puissance* is defined as the potential to do something while *pouvoir* is the actual act.<sup>64</sup> Manners furthers this interpretation to explain that *pouvoir* is a normative form of power and is different from *puissance*, which is the normative ideal type of actor.<sup>65</sup> This creates the distinction between the EU’s *ability* to exert its normative power influence, with the reality of the EU executing it.

Another author that questioned the EU’s normative power narrative due to global factors was Bettina Ahrens. This author questions whether the European Union can still be a normative power and exert international influence when it is dealing with crises at home. A key question in this article is regarding the cohesive response of the EU member states in dealing with international occurrences. Although this article argues that ‘ambiguity’ that results from foreign policy response to international situations should not impede on the EU’s normative narrative<sup>66</sup>, the exceptions made to align the EU as a normative power are being stretched quite thin.

Manners and other scholars have adjusted their definition and understanding of the normative power narrative as the European Union seems to stray from its norm-driven agenda, as a possible result of the EU’s interactions on the global stage. The European Union is becoming a major player in international affairs and has exuded a lot of influence since it has grown its economy and its population. The EU has relations with countries on a bilateral basis that extend and may work differently than the relationships between third countries and the countries that

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<sup>64</sup> Manners, Ian. 2013. “The European Union’s Normative Power in a more Global Era.” *EU Studies in Japan* 2013 (13): p. 38.

<sup>65</sup> Manners, Ian. 2013. “The European Union’s Normative Power in a more Global Era.” *EU Studies in Japan* 2013 (13): 33-55.

<sup>66</sup> Ahrens, Bettina. 2018. “Normative power Europe in crisis? Understanding the productive role of ambiguity for the EU’s transformative agenda.” *Asia Europe Journal* 16 (2): 199-212.

make up the European Union. With these greater outward flows of power, the EU as a normative power has been questioned, and the scholarly literature on the narrative has paralleled these concerns where even the coiner of the phrase normative power Europe, Manners<sup>67</sup> has proposed that the EU may not always act as a normative power.

With a growing discussion of the Union acting in ways contrary to how a normative power would act, there have been new claims of how to better define the narrative of the European Union. Chad Damro introduced the idea of Market Power Europe in 2012, as he believes since the single market is at the core of the European Union, the description of EU power should reflect that. Damro does reiterate the importance of the EU's influence on international affairs, but claims this to be more of a result, intentionally or not, of its economic driven policies rather than at the forefront of the EU agenda.<sup>68</sup> This understanding of the European Union basing its decisions and international strategies on its economy and market may have credence when considering its role on the world stage. The EU is itself not a state actor and thus will have different goals for how to increase its status and power. This may be to promote the economies of its member states to in turn increase the economic power of the EU as a whole. This does not mean to discredit the idea of a normative power Europe, but instead offer an idea for how the Union has adjusted to the changing global order.

The shift from a normative focused Europe to a market focused Europe can be explained through the paradigm of realist theory. Realism's main conception is that actors operate in the

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<sup>67</sup> Manners, Ian. 2013. "The European Union's Normative Power in a more Global Era." *EU Studies in Japan* 2013 (13): 33-55.

<sup>68</sup> Damro, Chad. 2012. "Market Power Europe." *Journal of European Public Policy* 19 (5): 682-699.

pursuit of power, and in this case, the EU is no different. The European Union, through its different bodies, operates under various narratives in various situations that would grant it the most amount of power for that situation. There are some situations where the EU may act as a normative power when utilizing its soft power and showcasing its value driven decisions. There are other situations when the EU may put the interests of its market ahead of the values it claims when this would be the greatest power play. The current global order has the normative narrative under pressure and changes within the EU explain the shift in narrative. The changes to the environment that are affecting the EU narrative are described by Hanna Tuominen as “Traditional power politics and state sovereignty are on the rise, rather than normative issues like human rights. The unipolar world, in which the US was standing as the sole superpower, is moving towards multipolarity with various centers of power.”<sup>69</sup> As the European Union adjusts to these changes and drifts from its normative power, it opens the door for a new narrative to be introduced.

Although scholarly analysis of the EU through a realist lens is rare, it is not novel. Adrian Hyde-Price used realism to critique the normative power Europe claim in 2006. He wanted to challenge the liberal and idealist notions of the EU and instead focus on how it acts in a neorealist manner. In his definition of neorealism, his first core assumption is that “international systems [are] anarchic – a domain without a sovereign. For this reason, it is also a self-help system: states must look to their own security and survival in what is a competitive realm.”<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Tuominen, Hanna. 2013. "The Changing Context of Global Governance and the Normative Power of the European Union." In *Global Power Europe - Vol. 1: Theoretical and Institutional Approaches to the EU's External Relations*, by Astrid Boening, Jan-Frederik Kremer and Aukje van Loon, 201-218. Springer.

<sup>70</sup> Hyde-Price, Adrian. 2006. "'Normative' power Europe: a realist critique." *Journal of European Public Policy* 13 (2): 217-234.

Hyde-Price then goes on to examine how the EU adapted its international strategies to fit the occurrences going on in the world, from World War II to the Cold War to the US gaining superpower status. The European Union's narrative is ever evolving, with the changes in international relations, and the EU must be considered a realist actor, especially in times of changing global order.

The analysis of the European Union for the remainder of this thesis will consider the EU under a realist perspective. Each proposed narrative for the EU by the many scholars who have contributed to the conversation may be valid, which proves that the EU is actually a realist power that can change its behavior to adjust for its environment. The EU was a normative power in the past, and may still want to spread its influence through its values, but in this global order acts more in a realist manner than it does in a normative one.

### **Frame Analysis: From Goffman to present**

The European Commission creates a narrative for the EU through its words and actions in its international relations. This narrative has shifted in recent years as could be seen through a change in the language used in the foreign policy releases of the EU through the Commission and through the activities it pursues on the world stage. Erving Goffman launched the concept of frame analysis to understand the way that information is distributed and consumed.<sup>71</sup> He defined frame analysis as “a slogan to refer to the examination in these terms of the organization of experience.”<sup>72</sup> His method was meant to be utilized for understanding one-on-one, face-to-face

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<sup>71</sup> Goffman, Erving. 1974. *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience*. New York: Harper & Row.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.* p. 11.

interactions and how a person's individual point of view may change their interpretation of a situation. Culture is a key aspect to how one understands information, according to Goffman.<sup>73</sup> His idea for frame analysis was to be applied to sociology and used in ethnographic research, but the method has expanded to be used in other applications as well.

Carla Santos interprets Goffman's seminal work *Frame Analysis* as an account that puts forth the idea that frames are created by an individual to make sense of situations and organize information to create the individual's reality. In her research, she applies the method to her field of recreation and tourism to analyze how American newspaper outlets are framing Portugal as a tourist destination.<sup>74</sup> She analyzes the words and phrases used to describe the country and explains how these descriptors frame the American idea of Portugal as a travel destination. She also mentions how these newspapers will influence further newspapers to take on this frame for Portugal and impacts the entire understanding of the country. Her research showcases that Goffman's original idea of a frame analysis that can be applied to a single actor, can also be applied to a larger entity, in the case of Santos's research, the majority of American news media.

Since 1974, frame analysis has gone on to be applied to many different fields to interpret the organization of information, including sociology, anthropology, psychology, communications, and international relations. Other scholars have developed the concept and Robert M. Entman changed the focus to both what is included and what is *omitted* in information distribution. His definition of framing is "to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make

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<sup>73</sup> Goffman, Erving. 1974. *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience*. New York: Harper & Row.

<sup>74</sup> Santos, Carla. 2004. "Framing Portugal: Representational Dynamics." *Annals of Tourism Research* 31 (1): 122-138.

them more salient in communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation.”<sup>75</sup> Entman continues his explanation of framing by including the example of the ‘cold war’ frame that dominated the news of the United States for many years. This frame painted foreign events as problems related to communism in order to influence meaning making, the process through which people make sense of situations.<sup>76</sup> The way that information is released has a great impact on the way that information is digested by the public.

In international relations, the frame analysis is focused on the frames which governments and leaders use to shape policy choices. Alex Mintz and Steven B. Redd highlight different methods of framing that political leaders may employ to manipulate policy debate. This includes Entman’s idea of considering both what is said and what is not said by the actor. Mintz and Redd, in their study of political leaders, reference earlier work by Mintz and Nehemia Geva to describe thematic framing as a type of framing that is content based and introduces ‘organizing themes’ into the policy discourse, such as national security, economic, or political.<sup>77</sup> This idea allows for a frame to be applied differently to different contexts, such as a political leader describing the importance of one social issue, for example the environment, differently in various situations. The concept of organizing themes help explain why the actor would apply different emphasis based on the context. A successfully instilled frame by a political leader

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<sup>75</sup> Entman, Robert M. 1993. "Framing: Toward Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm." *Journal of Communication* 43 (4): p. 52.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Mintz, Alex, and Steven B. Redd. 2003. "Framing Effects in International Relations." *Synthese* 135 (2): 193-213.

influences the popular attitudes of the audience and can set the direction of policy changes in favor of the leader.

For this thesis, the concept of a frame analysis is being expanded even further to consider the foreign policy frame of the European Union. This actor encompasses a much bigger scope than a single political leader or a single industry. The European Union itself is hard to explain as a single actor, but to determine the frame it constructs through its different branches is even more difficult. This thesis will consider the European Commission, in partnership with the European External Action Service, to be the architect of the EU foreign policy frame. In order to determine the frame, the informational outputs of these two entities will be considered. The Commission releases policy reports and other publications to create an understanding of how the EU acts in international scenarios. The EEAS distributes press releases that are in harmony with the message of the Commission. These press releases often include statements from EU commissioners that relate to EU foreign policy. As these two bodies work in cooperation to set the message of EU foreign policy, they will be considered the key actors for understanding the EU frame for its international relations.

### **CHAPTER 3: THE IMPACT OF THE BELT AND ROAD INITIATIVE**

This chapter will analyze the impact the BRI has had on the European Union and the changes it has inspired on the EU's foreign policy frame and EU narrative. The first section will go into detail on the changes in the frame constructed by the Commission, paired with the EEAS. This will include an analysis into the different foci of the various Commissions that have been in place during the timeline of the Belt and Road Initiative. The Junker and Von der Leyen Commissions were in power during the announcement period of the Belt and Road Project and time afterward that allowed for analysis. The frame set forth by these Commissions will be contrasted to the Barroso Commission that preceded Junker's and show how influential the shifting global order is on the foreign policy frame of the EU. These Commissions closely align with the messaging of the European External Action Service as one of the Vice Presidents of the Commission is the High Representative of the EEAS and their voice is the same on both platforms.

The following section will then analyze the internal changes to the European Union that resulted from the influence of the Belt and Road Initiative. This will focus on how the Commission attempts to create a more united EU through discourse and the policy changes that relate to the EU stance on China. The focus on unity is to prove to the world that the EU is still a powerful global actor even though China is on the rise. This section will also describe the policy changes that are in response to BRI investment projects taking place in the EU, like the Port of Piraeus and the Budapest-Belgrade railway.

Later in the chapter, the discussion shifts to how the EU's relationship with China has changed as a result of the BRI. This focuses on how the European Union would like to be more

involved in the project, when it is beneficial for it to do so. The EU places greater emphasis on finalizing its cooperation agreement with China in light of the success of the Initiative. However, it also is concerned with negative implications that come from BRI investments in Europe and the policy changes that can counter these negative effects.

The last section of this chapter will describe the changes that the BRI has had on the relationship between the European Union and third-party actors. This includes the EU's own investment projects and how they have been influenced to counteract China's attraction. The EU has also taken measures to ensure China's transparency in international organizations, such as calling for reforms in the World Trade Organization. This section is important to understanding not just the effects between China and the EU, but how it is relevant to the EU in a global context.

### **The European Union's Frame Change**

The increased investment into Europe by China and the understanding that China is gaining geopolitical power in its investments in Europe and other continents has led to a shift in the frame that the Commission and EEAS have formed on the messaging about foreign policy, as seen from the informational output during the period of 2016 to 2020. This can be seen through the Commission's and EEAS's emphasis on certain phrases in its publications. With the current state of a changing global order, the EU is promoted as an economic and political actor that, while still driven by its values of democracy and rule of law, is also progressive and adaptable.

A more progressive EU is exemplified through the Commission's set priorities for 2019-2024, which includes 'A stronger Europe in the world' as one of six of its key focuses for this

five-year period. Through this Commission priority a ‘more active and stronger EU voice’ is called for while acknowledging that “A strong, open and fair trade agenda, making Europe an attractive place for business, is key to strengthening the EU’s role as a global leader while ensuring the highest standards of climate, environmental and labour protection.”<sup>78</sup> While this shows that the EU is still committed to its values, it also underlines the importance of making the European Union an attractive marketplace.

The Von der Leyen Commission has more of an emphasis on international cooperation than past Commissions. The Juncker Commission, from 2014-2019, began increasing the Commission focus outside of the European Union and included a small Project Team named ‘A Stronger Global Actor’. Juncker’s time as Commission President was heavily influenced by the migration crisis in Europe and in response, wanted to ensure the European Union was still a powerful player in the global arena. Addressing the issue of migration and pursuing an EU more equipped for the digital age were some of Juncker’s priorities for his Commission.<sup>79</sup> These priorities of the Juncker Commission and the Von der Leyen Commission, are very much in contrast to the Barroso Commission which was in place from 2004-2014. This Commission had a much greater focus on the internal challenges of the EU and focused greatly on integration. The changes in Commission priorities show how the frame of the EU’s foreign policy can be set through the Commission.

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<sup>78</sup> European Commission. 2019. *A stronger Europe in the world*. Accessed March 2020. [https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/stronger-europe-world\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/stronger-europe-world_en).

<sup>79</sup> Euractiv. 2014. "EU Commission College." *Euractiv*. September. Accessed April 24, 2020. [http://png.euractiv.com/files/commissioners\\_092014-en-v5.png](http://png.euractiv.com/files/commissioners_092014-en-v5.png).

The Commission would like to shape its audiences' perception of the EU narrative through the prominence of particular words and phrases when it releases information related to investment, aid, trade, and the EU's relations with China. Some of the terms that were noticeably common in Commission and EEAS documents relating to foreign policy were 'rule of law,' and 'democracy' in addition to 'transparency,' and 'sustainable development.' These terms were found in policy changes and developments the European Commission enacted after the announcement of the Belt and Road Initiative and in European External Action Service press releases. An example of these phrases being used are in the European Commission's International Cooperation and Development's About us page which describes its goal to "reduce poverty, ensure sustainable development, and promote democracy, human rights, and the rule of law across the world."<sup>80</sup>

Another example of the European Union's increased focus on sustainable development in its foreign investment can be seen in the EEAS's press release on the External Investment Plan which states, "The EIP aims to promote inclusive growth, job creation and sustainable development."<sup>81</sup> The EU's devotion to transparency is projected through its showcase of its commitment in bilateral and regional negotiations and agreements found on the Commission's 'Transparency in action' webpage that states, "The variety and quantity of texts available on this website show the European Commission's commitment to being the world's most transparent

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<sup>80</sup> European Commission. n.d. *International Cooperation and Development About Us*. Accessed March 2020. <https://ec.europa.eu/international-partnerships/about-us>.

<sup>81</sup> European External Action Service. 2018. *The EU's External Investment Plan: The EU's External Investment Plan: first projects in Africa and the Neighbourhood*. July 20. Accessed March 2020. [https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/48675/eus-external-investment-plan-eus-external-investment-plan-first-projects-africa-and\\_en](https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/48675/eus-external-investment-plan-eus-external-investment-plan-first-projects-africa-and_en).

public institution in the field of trade policy.”<sup>82</sup> In other words, the EU is highlighting the fact that it can be successful in a plethora of trade deals while still being transparent, a term often used to describe what China is not. These phrases are common in the current EU information output and help to create a frame for the EU’s foreign policy that shows it is a strong world leader, committed to its values and, in particular, the values that China is often criticized for lacking.

### **Internal Changes as a Result of the BRI**

There are changes being made within the EU to combat China’s growth as well. The European Union attempts to address the criticisms it receives in order to improve its power and influence in the world. It is committed to increasing its democracy, as the democratic deficiency is often brought up as a concern of EU governance. China’s lack of democracy is often addressed in EU-China dialogue and the EU wants to show it is on the right side of this debate. Apart from that, the EU is also often confronted by its lack of the ‘single voice’ it so desperately desires. The Commission would like to present the EU’s strength and unity to the world to show that it too is a powerful actor on the global stage. The EU has specifically called for greater unity in its stance on and relationship with China. The EU member states are often acting in their own self-interest but the Commission would prefer to seem unified in its China response. Prior to the most recent EU-China Summit that took place in 2019, “the Commission and the High Representative issued a joint communication stressing that neither the EU nor any of its member states can effectively

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<sup>82</sup> European Commission. 2020. *Transparency in action*. March 27. Accessed March 2020. <https://trade.ec.europa.eu/doclib/press/index.cfm?id=1395>.

achieve their aims with China without full unity”<sup>83</sup> and that “In cooperating with China, all Member States, individually and within sub-regional cooperation frameworks, such as the 16+1 format, have a responsibility to ensure consistency with EU law, rules and policies.”<sup>84</sup> The EU is addressing what may be seen as its own shortcomings in order to prove that it is a world power that can be just as influential as China.

In order to address the problem of unity regarding China even more, the EU updated its policies on Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) into the European Union. The European Commission boasts it is, “the world’s main provider and the top global destination of foreign investment.”<sup>85</sup> In November of 2015, the EU agreed upon a reformed investment dispute settlement approach that emphasized the need for legitimacy and transparency. This policy introduced the Investment Court System which would be able to protect investments through this mechanism. This system was put in place “to strike a balance between protecting investors in a transparent manner and safeguarding a state’s right to regulate to pursue public policy objectives.”<sup>86</sup> This being the beginning of a period of heightened concentration on transparency in investment into the European economy.

In the 2017 State of the Union, the European Commission proposed a new framework for screening FDI. President Jean-Claude Juncker stated in his State of the Union address, “If a

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<sup>83</sup> European Council: Council of the European Union. 2019. *EU-China summit, 9 April 2019*. October 31. Accessed March 2020. <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/meetings/international-summit/2019/04/09/>.

<sup>84</sup> European Commission and HR/VP contribution to the European Council. 2019. "EU-China - A strategic outlook." *ec.europa.eu*. March 12. Accessed March 2020. <https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/communication-eu-china-a-strategic-outlook.pdf>.

<sup>85</sup> European Commission. 2019. *Investment*. December 17. Accessed March 2020. <https://ec.europa.eu/trade/policy/accessing-markets/investment/>.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*

foreign, state-owned, company wants to purchase a European harbour, part of our energy infrastructure or a defence technology firm, this should only happen in transparency, with scrutiny and debate. It is a political responsibility to know what is going on in our own backyard so that we can protect our collective security if needed.”<sup>87</sup> This speech taking place shortly after the COSCO purchase of the Port of Piraeus, the ‘purchase of a European harbour’ can be directly attributed to that situation. The Commission’s press release described the need for the proposed framework by again alluding to China’s investments into Europe with the statement:

In some cases foreign investors might seek to acquire strategic assets that allow them to control or influence European firms whose activities are critical for our security and public order. This includes activities related to the operation or provision of critical technologies, infrastructure, inputs or sensitive information. Acquisitions by foreign state-owned or controlled companies in these strategic areas may allow third countries to use these assets not only to the detriment of the EU's technological edge, but also to put our security or public order at risk.<sup>88</sup>

In 2019, a regulation was adopted that created a system for screening foreign direct investment and thus would lead to a more cohesive strategy for the EU member states to follow. The EU states that this regulation will “make sure that the EU is better equipped to protect its interests, while remaining among the world’s most open investment area.”<sup>89</sup> Prior to the timeline of the BRI and the focus on unity and transparency, the regulation on investment adopted in 2012 was to make sure that investment agreements were consistent with EU law. The simplicity

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<sup>87</sup> European Commission. 2017. *State of the Union 2017 - Trade Package: European Commission proposes framework for screening of foreign direct investments*. September 14. Accessed March 2020. [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP\\_17\\_3183](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_17_3183).

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> European Commission. 2019. *Investment*. December 17. Accessed March 2020. <https://ec.europa.eu/trade/policy/accessing-markets/investment/>.

of EU investments policy faded drastically with the introduction of the Belt and Road Initiative into the European Union's domain.

Investment into the EU was not the only subject to receive a greater focus on transparency from the great leap in China's influence. Trade negotiations also were expected to be made more transparent, according to the new Commission for 2019-2024.<sup>90</sup> The call for more transparency and inclusivity in trade talks even included a reference to the 'Transparency in action' page that showcased all of the EU's transparent successes. Another trade policy focus by the Commission lists 'Harnessing globalisation in line with EU values' and explains this as "The EU continues to ensure that trade and investment remain balanced and rules-based. This not only opens markets with our trade partners but also strengthens the EU's global influence on issues like human rights, working conditions and environmental protection."<sup>91</sup> This section also links to the Commission's page on sustainable development and utilizes this to enforce the idea that the EU uses trade to spread its influence in positive ways, applying its normative narrative for its own self-interest.

### **The BRI Affects the EU's Relationship with China**

Since the announcement of the Belt and Road Initiative and before that, China has been a growing force on the global stage. The European Union has been keeping track of the rise of the Asian power but the BRI really set the urgency for solidifying the EU-China strategic partnership

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<sup>90</sup> European Commission. n.d. *A balanced and progressive trade policy to harness globalisation*. Accessed March 2020. [https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/stronger-europe-world/balanced-and-progressive-trade-policy-harness-globalisation\\_en#documents](https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/stronger-europe-world/balanced-and-progressive-trade-policy-harness-globalisation_en#documents).

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

and Investment Agreement that each party committed to but have not finished negotiating. The EU addresses its need to form this relationship with the successful and continuing to rise China but is concerned about the corruption of its norms in order to do so. The EU addresses this in a document detailing EU-China Relations:

In order to maintain our prosperity, values and social model over the long term, there are areas where the EU needs to adapt to changing economic realities and strengthen its policies. Based on clearly defined interests and principles, the EU should also seek to deepen effective and coherent engagement with China. Given the importance of EU-China economic relations, it is important to maintain very close trade and investment links, while developing a more balanced economic relationship.<sup>92</sup>

The drive for these investment negotiations to lead to an agreement is on the forefront of the EU's mind. The Commission and the EEAS released countless material related to the developments in the EU-China relationship in recent years and have had a range of feelings toward China, in some cases calling the nation a 'strategic partner' and in others a 'systemic rival'.

In cases where the Commission is trying to have more cooperation with China, it will see it as a partner, especially in areas where China is successful, and the EU would like to play a role. For instance, Olivia Gippner and Diarmuid Torney analyzed the shifting policy priorities of EU and China energy relations to find that as time passed, the EU shifted from framing messages on energy from the value of 'environmental stewardship' to a greater emphasis on 'affordability' and 'availability'.<sup>93</sup> This can be explained with the EU's need for more energy and devaluing its

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<sup>92</sup> European External Action Service. 2019. *EU-China Relations factsheet*. October 18. Accessed March 2020. [https://eeas.europa.eu/topics/external-investment-plan/34728/eu-china-relations-factsheet\\_en](https://eeas.europa.eu/topics/external-investment-plan/34728/eu-china-relations-factsheet_en).

<sup>93</sup> Gippner, Olivia, and Diarmuid Torney. 2017. "Shifting policy priorities in EU-China energy relations: Implications for Chinese energy investments in Europe." *Energy Policy* 101 (February 2017): 649-658.

norms to fulfill the demand, as well as an increased motivation to work with China and adapt its own norms to benefit.

The need for a better relationship pairs with Europe's want for more connectivity in Asia and beyond, which will be discussed in the next section. Moreover, this has enhanced the need to connect with China who already has laid the groundwork for connectivity with nearly every region of the world with its Belt and Road Initiative. There were many statements made by the Vice-President of the European Commission/High Representative of the EEAS that sought to connect with China in order to connect better with the world. Some highlights include, "The EU is ready to step up its engagement with Asian and other partners on a positive agenda for connectivity, based on realising mutual interests, reaching common objectives through adherence to international norms and standards," "Our offer is clear and simple with no hidden agenda: we will mobilise our regulatory experience, technical expertise in corridor-based cross-border transport, and the EU's funding opportunities," and "The EU believes in China and in the EU-China partnership. We are therefore ready to work with China and other partners, in the spirit of openness and engagement, to build bridges for the prosperity of the EU, China and the world."<sup>94</sup> This tells the story that the EU is hoping to work with China to increase connectivity, while ensuring that it will be transparent, and ends by stressing its commitment to the EU-China relationship. Basically, the EU is very concerned with maintaining a good relationship with China, so long as it follows international norms, so that it can increase European-Asian connectivity.

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<sup>94</sup> European External Action Service. 2019. *Connecting Europe and Asia: seeking synergies with China's Belt and Road*. April 25. Accessed March 2020. [https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/61412/connecting-europe-and-asia-seeking-synergies-china%E2%80%99s-belt-and-road\\_en](https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/61412/connecting-europe-and-asia-seeking-synergies-china%E2%80%99s-belt-and-road_en).

There are times in the EU-China partnership that Europe expresses the need for a profitable cooperation, but in order to do so, asks China to conform to European norms. The EU states that “China’s publicly stated reform ambitions should translate into policies or actions commensurate with its role and responsibility”<sup>95</sup> to ask China to do more than talk, but is a call for the nation to act. The EU-China human rights dialogue was established so that the EU can “work with China and its people to promote human rights and to foster the rule of law and civil society.”<sup>96</sup> The EU believes in the power of international organizations, such as the World Trade Organization (WTO), and requests that China play a more active role in the organization and the two have established the EU-China working group on WTO reform in order for China to do so.<sup>97</sup> The reluctance the European Union holds in formalizing an investment agreement with China arises due to China’s differing norms and its reluctance to conform to the EU’s idea of good behavior.

The EU sees China as an important actor, like itself, in a multipolar world that is ‘experiencing profound and complex changes’ and in their partnership “the EU reaffirms its respect for China’s sovereignty and territorial integrity. China reaffirms its support to EU integration.”<sup>98</sup> This statement raises questions on whether or not the EU truly respects China’s ‘territorial integrity’ with its disdain for China’s treatment of the Tibetan region, Hong Kong,

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<sup>95</sup> European Commission and HR/VP contribution to the European Council. 2019. "EU-China - A strategic outlook." *ec.europa.eu*. March 12. Accessed March 2020. <https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/communication-eu-china-a-strategic-outlook.pdf>.

<sup>96</sup> European External Action Service. 2019. *EU-China Relations factsheet*. October 18. Accessed March 2020. [https://eeas.europa.eu/topics/external-investment-plan/34728/eu-china-relations-factsheet\\_en](https://eeas.europa.eu/topics/external-investment-plan/34728/eu-china-relations-factsheet_en).

<sup>97</sup> European External Action Service. 2019. *EU-China Relations factsheet*. October 18. Accessed March 2020. [https://eeas.europa.eu/topics/external-investment-plan/34728/eu-china-relations-factsheet\\_en](https://eeas.europa.eu/topics/external-investment-plan/34728/eu-china-relations-factsheet_en).

<sup>98</sup> European External Action Service. n.d. "EU-China 2020 Strategic Agenda for Cooperation." *eeas.europa.eu*. Accessed March 2020. <https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/20131123.pdf>.

and Taiwan. It also must ask if China truly supports EU integration or if it is indeed trying to undermine the EU in a strategy of dividing the European Union for its own gain.

There are many instances in which the EU overlooks China's divergences from Western norms, often due to economic interests. This is particularly true when EU member states have the power to cooperate with China, as shown in the case of Greece and Hungary. Both of these member states blocked harsh EU statements regarding China's 'territorial integrity' in the South China Sea. The EU may want to admonish or even sanction China but has been blocked due to the self-interest of a member state. In the energy example, the EU itself diverged from a focus on sustainability in the interest of accessibility, which granted China a pass on the EU's judgement of environmental harm.

The EU understands that China plays different roles in the relationship between them and expresses this as "China is, simultaneously, in different policy areas, a cooperation partner with whom the EU has closely aligned objectives, a negotiating partner with whom the EU needs to find a balance of interests, an economic competitor in the pursuit of technological leadership, and a systemic rival promoting alternative models of governance."<sup>99</sup> When China is acting as a rival, the EU must play to its strength and 'strengthen the Single Market'.<sup>100</sup> There are times when an individual member state will see China as a rival, as in the case of Germany where the Federation of German Industries (BDI) released a policy paper that expressed growing frustrations with China's market-distorting practices.<sup>101</sup> There are times when more than just a

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<sup>99</sup> European Commission and HR/VP contribution to the European Council. 2019. "EU-China - A strategic outlook." *ec.europa.eu*. March 12. Accessed March 2020. <https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/communication-eu-china-a-strategic-outlook.pdf>.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> Brattberg, Erik, and Philippe Le Corre. 2020. *The EU and China in 2020: More Competition Ahead*. February 19.

member state sees China as disruptive as the European Chamber of Commerce in China wrote “the BRI has failed to become the open, transparent, and international initiative that it often claims to be as bidding processes are opaque and China’s state-owned enterprises take the lead, and the bulk of the value, from BRI-related projects.”<sup>102</sup>

In response to the growing impatience of China not adjusting its actions in regards to the Belt and Road Initiative, the EU may focus on further developing its own connectivity strategy with other regions along with an adjustment to the EU procurement framework. This may include a limit on the access of foreign entities into the EU procurement market if the countries do not comply with EU law.<sup>103</sup> Brattberg and Le Corre do state that “the EU is developing a more realist view of international affairs and cultivating a more assertive role for Europe”<sup>104</sup> but question if that will be enough to prevent China from dividing the EU.

### **The BRI Effects on the EU and the Outside World**

The European Union has adjusted its strategy in its external affairs in response to the growing influence of China through the Belt and Road Initiative. The EU has announced the goal of greater connectivity around the world with a particular focus between Europe and Asia. It has also made significant changes to its own investment into other countries and has put a greater focus on sustainable development. The European Union was an active player in the ambitious

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<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

<sup>103</sup> Brattberg, Erik, and Philippe Le Corre. 2020. *The EU and China in 2020: More Competition Ahead*. February 19.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

sustainable development goals set by the United Nations summit in 2015.<sup>105</sup> Emphasizing this objective is meant to contrast the EU's investment from China's investment as it tries to make its own investment more attractive. The EU also tries to counter Chinese influence by imposing greater regulation on Chinese investment through international organizations like the World Trade Organization. All of these strategies are meant to prove that the EU is just as viable, if not more so, as a global leader than China.

In the European Commission Vice President's speech at the 2<sup>nd</sup> Belt and Road Forum, he says the new 'EU Strategy: Connecting Europe and Asia' is "based on four of the EU's strengths: its internal market as the basis of for sustainable connectivity,; its experience of creating networks across borders,; its ability to build partnerships,; and a comprehensive financial framework for mobilising investment."<sup>106</sup> These four strengths are employed to show other countries that the EU is organized in its external relations and is ready to continue being a leading world power. The speech goes on to express that "this approach of sustainable connectivity is best served when countries adopt sound regulatory frameworks, create better business conditions, are fiscally responsible, and encourage open markets and transparent procurement procedures"<sup>107</sup> which are things that China claims to push for, but has failed to act on.

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<sup>105</sup> Publications Office of the European Union. 2018. "An introduction to the European Union's international cooperation and development policy." *op.europa.eu*. August 6. Accessed March 2020. <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/54e701cf-9aba-11e8-a408-01aa75ed71a1/language-en/format-PDF/source-77757252>.

<sup>106</sup> European External Action Service. 2019. *Speech by European Vice-President Maros Sefcovic at the 2nd Belt & Road Forum on 26 April 2019*. April 29. Accessed March 2020. [https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/61569/speech-european-vice-president-maros-sefcovic-2nd-belt-road-forum-26-april-2019\\_en](https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/61569/speech-european-vice-president-maros-sefcovic-2nd-belt-road-forum-26-april-2019_en).

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*

As such, the European Union has taken measures to stimulate its own connectivity with Asia. In 2018, it committed 124 million Euro to promote sustainable development in Central Asia.<sup>108</sup> A major focus of this program will be on promoting economic development through helping governments create regulatory frameworks that are more conducive for business and to increase the competitiveness of entrepreneurs to increase trade. There will also be focuses on energy and water security, peace and rule of law, environment and climate change, disaster and climate resilience, as well as education.<sup>109</sup> The Commission meticulously describes how each focus will be implemented and the importance these have on sustainable development. As other regions develop and connectivity expands, the EU will be able to conduct more trade with these countries and both sides with benefit.

In general, EU investment and aid has increased in the hopes of greater connectivity and countering the Chinese influence of the BRI. The number of projects, host countries, and financial commitments has rapidly grown after 2013, with a substantial spike in 2015.<sup>110</sup> The European Union also proposed a new agenda for its development initiatives. Although the idea of policy coherence for development was included in the Treaty of Maastricht and the Treaty of Lisbon, in 2017 the EU reaffirmed its commitment to it. The EU is undertaking a 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development that aims to eliminate poverty and adhere to global development

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<sup>108</sup> European Commission. 2018. *EU to promote sustainable development in Central Asia with €124 million*. November 23. Accessed March 2020. [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP\\_18\\_6525](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_18_6525).

<sup>109</sup> European Commission. 2018. *EU to promote sustainable development in Central Asia with €124 million*. November 23. Accessed March 2020. [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP\\_18\\_6525](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_18_6525).

<sup>110</sup> European Commission. 2017. "Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions." *ec.europa.eu*. November 13. Accessed March 2020. [https://ec.europa.eu/international-partnerships/system/files/com-2017-667-f1-communication-from-commission-to-inst-en-v3-p1-954389\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/international-partnerships/system/files/com-2017-667-f1-communication-from-commission-to-inst-en-v3-p1-954389_en.pdf).

goals.<sup>111</sup> These goals are quite similar to China's Belt and Road Initiative proclaimed goals of benefitting developing countries through investment and trade. However, the EU stresses the fact that its policy encourages 'sustainable development' which the BRI project is criticized for lacking.<sup>112</sup>

Greater connectivity is being pursued in regions other than Asia to exert EU influence through the European Union's External Investment Plan (EIP). This plan includes a package of financial guarantee programs worth approximately 800 million Euros and is aimed to help leverage eight to nine billion Euros in public and private investment in Africa and the EU Neighborhood.<sup>113</sup> This plan is especially aimed at migrants and people who have had to flee their homes, and High Representative/Vice President Federica Mogherini said that the plan "has already started to bring real benefits to the people in our partner countries."<sup>114</sup> This plan also has a significant focus on sustainable development and is meant to help those in need secure jobs even after dire circumstances.

China's rise in Africa is no doubt a big motivator for the EU's increase in investment there. This project of China's, which began before the Belt and Road Initiative, surprised the EU as it was unable to respond in a suitable amount of time to stall China's influence. Eventually,

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<sup>111</sup> European Commission. 2019. "2019 EU report on Policy Coherence for Development." *ec.europa.eu*. January 28. Accessed March 2020. [https://ec.europa.eu/international-partnerships/system/files/swd-2019-20-pcdreport\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/international-partnerships/system/files/swd-2019-20-pcdreport_en.pdf).

<sup>112</sup> Kliman, Daniel, Rush Doshi, Kristine Lee, and Zack Cooper. 2019. *Grading China's Belt and Road*. Washington, D.C.: Center for a New American Security.

<sup>113</sup> European External Action Service. 2018. *The EU's External Investment Plan: The EU's External Investment Plan: first projects in Africa and the Neighbourhood*. July 20. Accessed March 2020. [https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/48675/eus-external-investment-plan-eus-external-investment-plan-first-projects-africa-and\\_en](https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/48675/eus-external-investment-plan-eus-external-investment-plan-first-projects-africa-and_en).

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

the Commission launched the EU-China-Africa trilateral cooperation initiative, but this was relatively unsuccessful with no noteworthy project having been completed.<sup>115</sup> As China's geopolitical power continued to grow in Africa, the EU wanted to reassert its own influence in the region. This would no doubt be difficult due to Europe's past history of colonialism. However, investment projects focused on sustainable development, dignity, and sovereignty seem to curb those connections.

Another change that can be considered a way that the EU is trying to make their investment scheme appear more attractive to third countries than China's Belt and Road Initiative is with its increase in 'cash aid'. In February of 2019, the EU released a publication that commits their humanitarian aid programs to focus more on cash aid, which was determined as a more efficient way to distribute aid to developing countries. This idea stems from the belief that developing countries know how aid can be best used and thus receiving it in cash, rather than it being distributed into certain projects by a outside entity, will be more beneficial.<sup>116</sup> This also grants the host country more sovereignty in its development, which again, can be seen as in complete contrast to the BRI's method of investment. Cash also allows for more dignified assistance to those receiving it as they have the flexibility in using it. This is also supposed to allow for the aid to reach beneficiaries more directly and leads to the maximum impact for those in need.<sup>117</sup> The publication describes four countries in which an increase in cash aid was successful to the sustainable development of that country.

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<sup>115</sup> Hooijmaaijers, Bas. 2018. "China's rise in Africa and the response of the EU: a theoretical analysis of the EU-China-Africa trilateral cooperation policy initiative." *Journal of European Integration* 40 (4): 443-460.

<sup>116</sup> European Commission. 2019. "EU Cash Compendium 2019: Doing More Cash, Better." *ec.europa.eu*. February. Accessed March 2020. [https://ec.europa.eu/echo/sites/echo-site/files/eu\\_cash\\_compendium\\_2019.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/echo/sites/echo-site/files/eu_cash_compendium_2019.pdf).

<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

With the increase in investment programs and how the EU invests, the EU is changing its own external action policies, but it is not stopping at reform within its own body. In 2018, the European Union proposed reforms to the World Trade Organization to overcome the deadlock on the appointments to the WTO Appellate Body. The Appellate Body is the dispute settlement system but has been at a standstill in recent years. The reforms propose timeframes to work out disputes and clarifying which issues should be taken to the Appellate Body, but frequently use the terms transparency and legitimacy, as is the norm of the EU when China is involved.<sup>118</sup> The EU also submitted ideas to modernize the World Trade Organization in its commitment to international organizations. The EU believes that the WTO is imperative in regulating the world's trade. The EU sees the threat to the effectiveness of the WTO as a risk for the EU and one that could affect the political order and sustainability of economic growth.<sup>119</sup> The EU is no longer satisfied with only implementing its own reforms and policy changes to counteract China's growing influence, the EU has expanded its need for reform outside of its own body.

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<sup>118</sup> European Commission. 2018. *WTO reform: EU proposes way forward on the functioning of the Appellate Body*. November 26. Accessed March 2020. [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP\\_18\\_6529](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_18_6529).

<sup>119</sup> European Commission. 2018. "WTO Modernisation - Introduction to future EU proposals." *ec.europa.eu*. September 18. Accessed March 2020. [https://trade.ec.europa.eu/doclib/docs/2018/september/tradoc\\_157331.pdf](https://trade.ec.europa.eu/doclib/docs/2018/september/tradoc_157331.pdf).

## CONCLUSION

From the announcement of the Belt and Road Initiative, the use of the phrases related to a need for transparency, sustainable development, and a rule of law have become increasingly prevalent in the EU vernacular, especially after the effects of China's spreading influence could be seen. The policy changes examined are constantly using the same terms to present a united European Union throughout, even if the EU is not as united as those who act in its name would claim. The EU is fearful of the effect of China's influence on BRI host countries, and with merit, as China is gaining traction rapidly through the Initiative. The reiteration of these terms is the EU's attempt at framing itself as a strong global actor that can naturally help developing countries ascend the global ladder.

This is especially important as China claims to have a better understanding of how developing countries work and offers them a different approach to development than the standard idea from the West. President Xi Jinping claimed that China's development strategy was "blazing a new trail for other developing countries to achieve modernization."<sup>120</sup> With a changing global order and developing countries being skeptical of European influence, the door is open for China to gain a foothold in other developing countries. The Commission recognizes its need to reassert itself in the outside world and is taking measures to do so both internally and externally.

The Belt and Road Initiative is causing the European Union to alter its policies, but is it doing so in a way that changes the conception of a normative power Europe. Manners' idea of

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<sup>120</sup> Skidmore, David. 2019. *Can the Belt and Road Help Countries Replicate China's Development Successes?* December 17.

NPE is that the EU acts in terms of its ideals and not its material pursuits, but as it loses ground to China in the developing world, it has been changing its narrative drastically. As China gains in power and countries become influenced, either through indebtedness or appreciation, they are shifting their attention away from Europe. The EU can no longer simply perform actions that act in its ideals in order to influence non-member states, it must cater to the wants and needs of these third countries to exert its influence.

The EU has always been a realist power since it utilizes different power narratives to spread its influence. The normative power Europe idea has been prevalent and the EU does fit into this category, but under a larger idea that it is a realist power that can act in a normative manner to achieve its goals, but can also use its economic power or other means to succeed showing that it is not at its normative, but realist as most other international actors are. Manners is correct in his definition of the EU as a normative power, but only in certain situations, when it is beneficial for the EU to be, and Manners even addresses that the EU does not always act normatively. When considering the effect of the BRI on the narrative of the EU, it is clear that the EU is not strictly a normative power because of its realist-inspired actions.

In addition to utilizing other power narratives, in order to try and regain the influence, the EU has adjusted its investment policies to be more attractive to third policies. China offers an attractive investment plan with lots of development and very little red tape. Western investment usually comes with guidelines and restrictions on how to first apply, then obtain and manage the investment funds. However, with the EU aim of making its investment more attractive, it has committed itself to programs like more 'cash aid' and investment that leads to sustainable development to promote itself in its external affairs.

The European Union has also drastically changed its relationship with China; this nation is now at the forefront of EU thought processes when considering any type of policy changes. The EU views China as both a partner and competitor in its external relations. It must be willing to work with China because of its outstanding success, but it must also prepare itself to counter China and its growing geopolitical power. This geopolitical influence is even encroaching on European Union member states. So not only must the EU be afraid of losing its influence in developing countries or host countries for investment, China can also be seen as wielding power in EU member states. Due to the BRI's influence, China has successfully gained a 'political foothold' in influencing EU policies. "In June 2017, Greece blocked an EU statement at the UN Human Rights Council criticizing [China's] human rights record, the first time the Union failed to make a joint statement at the UN's top human rights body."<sup>121</sup> This is not the only instance of a member state that was on the receiving end of a BRI project protecting China on a multilateral platform. This lack of cohesiveness is a fear of the EU's and why there is such strong pushback against China's BRI and the concession that a normative power narrative may not work in the Commission's favor in this situation.

In response to this ability for China to divide the countries of the European Union through its attractive economy and investment, the EU is trying to create a more united front. This is difficult as a colossal concern of member states is the loss of sovereignty that is associated with being a part of the EU. The EU would like to represent a clear and strong, united front on its relationship with China, but member states conduct their own foreign policy and these could be in contrast with one another. Interestingly, this fear of loss of sovereignty from

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<sup>121</sup> Brattberg, Erik, and Etienne Soula. 2018. *Europe's Emerging Approach to China's Belt and Road Initiative*. October 19.

being a part of the EU is leading member states to reorient their foreign policy towards a more friendly relationship with China, even if it means yielding to the wills of China and possibly losing their own sovereignty in some aspects. As exemplified with Greece's block of the EU's reprimands at the UN Human Rights Council, these member states are so concerned with maintaining a good relationship with China to ensure the economic benefits, that they are willing to disown shared EU values.

The concern of European unity is especially important during the changing global order but also with the rise of Euroscepticism and Brexit. The world is viewing a more divided European Union in many fronts and its stance on China is only exacerbated by its lack of coherence. The problem of coherence is not new to the Chinese influence and has been prevalent in the EU prior to the Belt and Road Initiative. The Initiative is just calling attention to the ideological divide that exists in the EU, especially on member states' stances on China. These member states act in their own self-interest in their foreign policy relations and the Commission finds it difficult to present the EU as a united front on China.

There are many more avenues to explore the EU's response to China's gain in influence than this thesis had the opportunity to explore. An interesting facet of the EU-China relationship is the focus on environmental concerns. The EU has had a recent emphasis on the importance of environmental protection and countering climate change. As China is still considered a developing country it is given different parameters to regulate its carbon footprint, but as the EU considers China its rival, it is likely it would be encouraging international organizations to recategorize China so that it would not be able to enjoy the perks that come with being counted as a developing country. This direction would be an interesting one to consider research on the

development of the relationship between the EU and China as both are big producers of carbon emissions.

Another facet of the EU-China relationship that could be mined more deeply is the idea that China is having greater success with its Belt and Road Initiative than the EU because of Europe's history with colonialism. China often promotes itself as a developing country and thus able to understand what is best for other developing countries to advance their growth. Investment host countries of the EU may be more reluctant to adhere to EU policies because of the fear of the EU imposing its values on these developing countries and detracting from their sovereignty as opposed to allowing their independence. China's interest in Europe for its BRI would also seem to be plausibly in revenge for Europe's colonization and hinderance to the development of China, through historical events such as the Opium Wars. More Eurosceptic member states that do not want to adhere to EU regulations for their funds, turn to China instead with and allow for major Chinese control on their industries and actions in foreign policy.

As there are many more paths this thesis could have explored, it is safe to say it is not all inclusive of the research between the European Union and China as it relates to the Belt and Road Initiative. The BRI was only announced seven years ago which is hardly enough time to allow for proper analysis of its effects on the global order. More time would allow for better comprehension of the changes to the global order that result from the BRI and how this affects EU foreign policy framing. Furthermore, this analysis only considered EU policy changes as shown through statements/publications put out by the Commission and European External Action Service. The list of material analyzed is not exhaustive and could have been better evaluated through the use of programming software that can extract commonly used phrases in press releases to more clearly identify the change in the foreign policy frame of the EU.

Additionally, there are other bodies of the EU that are affected by the EU-China relationship that may provide greater insight into the effects of the BRI.

As the Belt and Road Initiative is happening in current time, it is susceptible to the events of the world. The COVID-19 epidemic that originated in China may have tremendous effects on the geopolitics of China and its rise in power. It is hard to say if this pandemic will make countries fearful of interaction with China due to its initial response to the virus. However, other actors around the world also had questionable responses and thus may not keep the same influence they had in the global order either. It seems possible that developing countries may continue to look forward to China's investment projects, regardless of its response to the virus, due to their need to respond to events like these in the future. As these events unfold, the change in China's influence on the international stage will become easier to comprehend.

Even though the Belt and Road Initiative is happening in real time, from its success so far it is clear to see it is affecting the European Union with great impact. The EU is experiencing division from China's investment and member states competing for its attention. The lack of cohesion and unity in the EU is even more prevalent through the effects of the BRI and may lead to even further reform than has already been described. It is hard to still classify the EU as a normative power when so many of its actions were pursued in the interest of its own security rather than in pursuit of its ideals. The European Union is on a path of disunity and China's Belt and Road Initiative has helped to speed up this process.

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