

China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI): India's and EU's Perspectives

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This study presents India's and Europe's perspectives on China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), identifying both convergences and divergences between the two on Beijing's infrastructure and connectivity project.

The concept, or vision, of the BRI presented in autumn 2013 by the Chinese leader Xi Jinping, came as a surprise even in China, which had been following a low-profile strategy proposed by the 'father of reforms' Deng Xiaoping for the two previous decades. Simultaneously, it came as an even bigger surprise to the outside world, including USA, Japan, India and the European Union (EU), its institutions and member states.

No one seemed to be ready to accept a new, assertive and expansive China, proposing its new role as a power centre, like it was for centuries, up to the upheaval of Opium Wars (1839-60) and the following disasters of internal instability and external pressure. China treats the era from 1839 till 1949, which is till the proclamation of People's Republic of China – PRC, as the 'one hundred years of national humiliation'. Using the term "making justice to history", and the slogan of 'return to its proper place on global scen"', China wishes to settle accounts with the previously stronger states and simultaneously to be placed at the centre of the world again.

The BRI, combined with the ambitious aims of Xi Jinping's administration ("fifth generation of leaders') on domestic scene known as 'two centenary goals', present a new, assertive China, ready to be one of the major global centre of powers, if not the centre alone. Especially after achieving a second goal that is known as 'great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation', which - inter alia - requires a peaceful reunification with Taiwan.

Other major powers – including the United States and Japan - have shown their apprehensions on China's ascendancy through this connectivity project and the BRI might institutionalise a China-centric regional order.

Through an examination of India's and Europe's perspectives on China's BRI, this research paper finds that India strongly believes that China shall follow international norms and respect territorial sovereignty of other countries. India's approach to BRI, by and large, is being guided by the concerns emanating from CPEC – the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor which is a collection of

infrastructure projects that are currently under construction throughout Pakistan – India’s traditional enemy.

The EU has differing perspectives on BRI. There are countries like Greece, Hungary, Poland and many others in the EU, which have shown a high degree of enthusiasm in China’s BRI. Others like Germany and France are sceptical of the BRI’s success and raise serious doubts on the nature of the funding for the connectivity project.

The differing perspectives between India and the EU on China’s BRI are evident and explained in the paper. Whether China will commit to the institutional norms remains a major part of the challenge. China has found a great support from the Southeast and the Central Asian countries in addition to the South Asian countries minus India.

The final section of the paper presents recommendations that could help both EU and Indian policymakers fashion a joint response to China’s infrastructure and connectivity project. In particular, the study recommends that India be pro-active in maintaining its strategic influence independent of China’s entry in its vicinity as well as its extended neighbourhood. India shall intensely think of stepping up all its efforts in promoting connectivity with its neighbours. The blueprint of BRI should have been written by both India and China. There is a dominant view that if the BRI has to be successful, then India has to be a part of it.

As per the EU perspective, it must be emphasized here that the BRI was never properly defined, even by the Chinese, who claim that it is rather ‘a vision’ than a mere infrastructure programme. The West, including the EU, up to now is accepting it as a kind of development strategy focused on connectivity and – mainly economic – cooperation of the Eurasian states. The EU needs to build a solid understanding of the BRI, combined with an urgent – and strongly neglected – task of preparing a common strategy towards China and its new global role.¹

¹ The paper was finalised before the publication of the document by the European Commission and the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, *EU-China – A Strategic Outlook* (JOIN/2019/5), 12 March 2019.



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