

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Gambling with the East, Challenging the Liberal Order

Hungary and Serbia Contesting European Union Normativity

Carlotta MINGARDI

University of Bologna / University of Siena

Riccardo NANNI

University of Bologna

Abstract

The 16+1 forum can be observed as a dual challenge to the Liberal Order. We argue that the EU is both an outcome and representation of the Liberal Order in normative terms, as a winner of the Cold war whose norms have extended to former communist countries. Such EU norms as free movement of people and capitals are tenets of the liberal thought and pillars of the Liberal Order. From within, dissatisfied European actors leverage their partnership with China to contest EU norms; from the outside 16+1 is seen as China's attempt to 'di-vide and conquer' (prospective) EU states. We observe this process through Chinese investments in selected 16+1 countries: Hungary and Serbia. Applying Speech Act Theory, we find that 16+1 has raised concern among EU policymakers, despite scarce economic results, because it has been used as a discursive leverage by both China and Eastern European countries against the EU.

Keywords: European Union; China; Economic Cooperation; Eastern Europe; Belt and Road Initiative

Introduction

Cooperation between China and Central and Eastern European Countries (CEEC), known as China-CEEC Cooperation and 16+1 (17+1 between 2019 and 2021), is an initiative of economic cooperation that brings together sixteen European countries and China. After raising media and policymakers' attention in the last few years of the 2010s, it appears now to be in a descending phase, with reports changing from a tone of concern to one that points at the failure of China to build coalitions in the CEEC region (Stec, 2021). However, despite this trend, the level of attention posed by European Union (EU) policymakers to China's engagement in Central and Eastern Europe, and specifically in the involved countries, remains significant. We posit that this occurs because, despite the underachievement of China's investments in the region, this relation is successfully communicated and conveyed by all the involved players, and used as leverage to contest EU normativity from different perspectives. Therefore, this has continued over the years, despite the lack of concrete economic results and a feeling of general alert within a broader context of redefinition of bilateral relations between China and the EU. This paper thus starts by asking the following research question: Why does 16+1 still raise concern among EU policymakers despite its scarce economic results?

As anticipated, we observe the EU as such both an outcome and representation of the Liberal Order in normative terms, the EU norms as a facet of the norms of the Liberal International Order (Ikenberry, 2018; Parsi, 2022): therefore, we conceptualise 16+1 as an

CONTACT Riccardo Nanni, riccardo.nanni9@unibo.it, University of Bologna, Italy

265

example of contestation to the Liberal International Order from within (Central and Eastern European Countries) and from without (China) - coherently with the objective of this special issue titled Contesting the Liberal International Order. Furthermore, by taking Hungary and Serbia as case studies, we account for small- and medium-size state actors' agency in engaging with non-Western and non-Liberal global superpowers as a tool for contestation.

While answers to this research question can be manifold, we maintain that the strength of 16+1 as a tool for contestation vis-a-vis the EU does not lie in the economic cooperation practices formally envisaged by the partnership, but mainly in the power of its discursive elements, within the general context of changing relations between China and the EU in the observed timeframe. In more formal terms, we find that 16+1 is an example of economic cooperation used as a discursive practice for normative contestation. In other words, a speech act (Harris & McKinney, 2020). However, despite the disattended expectation of 16+1 countries in terms of China's economic investments, this appears enough to create a leverage for countries such as Hungary and Serbia within and towards the EU. This, in turn, contributes to maintain high the level of concern among EU policymakers about China's role in the region.

Throughout the article, we look at discourses and practices related to economic investments and technological infrastructures, given their salience in the ongoing geopolitical contestation between the West and China (Poggetti, 2021). We will be taking Hungary and Serbia as case studies for two reasons: first that both countries are since at least a decade key contesters of EU norms, especially in the fields of rule of law and fundamental rights (European Parliament, 2022). Second, because they respectively constitute the strongest supporters of the forum among 16+1 countries, and the biggest receivers, respectively for Central and Eastern Europe and for South-East Europe, of Chinese investments, among which the inclusion of Belgrade in major Beijing-funded infrastructural projects is one relevant example, (Fardella & Prodi, 2018). Furthermore, and for all these reasons, their alignment with Beijing has taken the media and EU policymakers' attention.

Through this analysis, this article sheds light on discursive practices that accompany foreign (economic) policy choices by great and middle-size powers, focusing on a cooperation forum that feeds into the broader and undefined economic cooperation design of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

The article is structured as follows: after the review of existing literature and the presentation of the methodology used, the analysis divides into two main parts. The first presents the general framework of the economic partnership between China and the two selected case studies, Hungary and Serbia. It traces China's economic footprint in both countries, with a specific focus on the technological infrastructures and a dedicated section to economic cooperation within the frame of the Belt and Road Initiative. Hence, the first part of the analysis aims at providing an overall picture of the existing economic investments in the case studies. The second part of the analysis, instead, focuses on the discursive representation of China's economic cooperation with Hungary and Serbia, to highlight how all involved countries, China, Hungary, and Serbia, use such connection as a leverage to contest the EU's normativity.

China in 16+1: carefully managing failure? Preliminary observations based on literature

Ten years have passed since the 16+1 forum first met in 2012. Conceived to enhance cooperation with Central and Eastern European countries, it attracted new members in time, with Greece joining in 2019. While informal, such cooperation became tangible in many ways, piking with the Chinese-led investments in Serbia, Belgrade being a key logistic point within the Piraeus-Budapest train line. The building of this train line by a Chinese state-owned enterprise (SOE) following the acquisition of two-thirds of the Piraeus port by China's COSCO

sparked concern within the EU of a workable divide et impera design by China (Fardella & Prodi, 2018). Fitting within the broader policy and rhetorical framework of the Belt and Road Initiative, the 16+1 cooperation project is described as

a cross-regional cooperation platform based on traditional friendship and shared de-sire of all the participants for win-win cooperation and common development [...] covering a variety of areas including economy and trade, culture, education, youth exchange, agriculture, tourism, science and technology, health, think-tank exchange and sub-national cooperation [...]. (China-CEEC Cooperation 2021)

Clearly recalling China's foreign policy rhetoric (Poh & Li, 2017), the 16+1 forum has a variable scope in its description, leaving the possibility open for any issue of cooperation to be framed within the forum's objectives.

Yet, two years into the global Covid-19 pandemic, China's design for 16+1, whether aimed at dividing the EU or not, does not look as successful as it did in the past. Lithuania left calling it a divisive project, while its parliament approved a non-binding resolution referring to China's Xinjiang practices as 'genocide' (Tonchev et al., 2021). While this episode may appear secondary in the global picture of China's relations to the EU, the diplomatic reaction it triggered are telling. Stec (2021) reports that the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs' (MFA) spokesperson Zhao Lijian provided a diplomatic answer by stressing the still-alive cooperative nature of 16+1. Zhao Lijian authored some of the most caustic anti-US (United States) social media posts throughout the Covid-19 pandemic, including one in which he raised the doubt that the US army may have brought Covid-19 into China in the first place (Palmer, 2021). To many observers, he is the head of China's so-called 'Wolf Warrior Diplomacy' (Palmer, 2021), an aggressive in-person and social media practice made of loosely coordinated verbal attacks to political adversaries by senior Chinese diplomats, then followed up by social media users. The fact that China's MFA mandated Zhao Lijian with a mild diplomatic response could be construed as an attempt from China to keep quiet tones and keep relations going with no major turmoil amid mixed economic results.

Observing Chinese investments in Central and Eastern Europe's EU members as summarised in Table 1, one can see that by 2019 only Greece, Hungary, and Estonia featured a cumulative value of Chinese FDIs over 1% of the national GDP. More precisely, such a value was 1.01% for Greece, 1.64% for Hungary, and 4.27% for Estonia (Poggetti, 2021). This is the situation at a time of ever-low Chinese investments in the EU, as Chinese FDIs peaked in 2016 and then decreased steadily thereafter. By 2020, Chinese investments in infrastructure-related projects and ICT make up a total of € 2.4 billion solely.

Looking at sensitive and strategic investments of Chinese industries in the EU member states, at the time of writing Slovakia is the only 16+1 member who had 5G trials by ZTE as a manufacturer. As for Huawei, it had 5G equipment trials only in Bulgaria, Poland, and Romania (European 5G Observatory, 2022) (see Table 1). This excludes some of China's putatively closest allies, such as Greece, who hampered several EU consensus foreign policy actions against China (Emmott & Koutantou, 2017), and Hungary, who by July 2021 is the only EU country having accepted China-made anti-Covid vaccines (Wee & Novak, 2021).

At the time of writing, 5G is still undergoing standardisation. The main organisation involved in 5G standardisation, the Third Generation Partnership Project (3GPP), is elaborating new standards (called "releases" in 3GPP jargon). However, the United Nations' International Telecommunication Union (ITU), the body in charge for 5G standards approval, has already approved three largely interoperable 5G radio interfaces that are being deployed worldwide. Therefore, deployment is already ongoing, although outcomes are still developing (Nanni, 2021; Ten Oever, 2022), and early results are visible.

Table 1. Summary Comparison on Chinese investments (selected EU members and Serbia).

	Hungary	Greece	Estonia	Serbia
Chinese FDIs over GDP (2019)	1.64%	1.01%	4.27%	0.67%
Chinese 5G investments	None	None	None	None retrieved

This lower-than-expected presence of Huawei is not solely related to the company's policies, but also due to the fact that many 16+1 countries have either de jure or de facto excluded it from domestic 5G infrastructures. These include the Baltic countries, Poland, Czechia, Slovakia, and Romania, that is, several countries in which Chinese manufacturers have previously conducted trials (Poggetti, 2021).

In other words, several Central and Eastern European members of the EU are progressively pulling out of cooperation with China reframing their investment policies more in line with the 'Atlantic' will. While Hungary remains an important political ally for China within the EU given its support to China-made vaccines and its openness to Huawei, Chinese investments in the country remain relatively low and do not feature a strong presence in the ICT (Information and Communication Technology) sector, whereas the Piraeus-Budapest railway remains the most controversial infrastructural project (Fardella & Prodi, 2018).

These figures are counterintuitive if observed in the backdrop of the EU's policy concern vis-a-vis China-CEEC cooperation as well as the development of the BRI. The latter is a policy project started in the wake of 16+1. Launched in 2013 as an Asia-focused initiative, it came to label a wider variety of infrastructural projects throughout Eurasia and Africa (Huang, 2016). Within the framework of 16+1, for example, the Piraeus-Budapest railway is often portrayed in the official Chinese discourse as a backbone of the BRI in the Balkans (Fardella & Prodi, 2018).

Despite the interconnection of 16+1 with the BRI, whose scope is expanding and remains blurred, the former has achieved strong political hype but small economic outcome.

Approaches and methods

In this article, we adopt an interpretive approach to China-CEEC relations through 16+1 as a discursive practice to contest liberal normativity. Through the analysis of policy documents and literature on the backdrop provided by secondary data on technological investment, we compare China's and selected CEE (Central and Eastern Europe) countries' discourses towards the EU.

As we observe 16+1 as a discursive practice, we ground our analysis on Speech Act Theory. Applied to International Relations Theory through Securitisation Theory (Hansen 2012), Speech Act Theory pinpoints the performativity of speech as action (Callahan 2020). In other words, a verbal utterance has a real-world effect on its receiver. In International relations, a speech act can shape perceptions that in turn shape third actors' foreign policy actions (Harris & McKinney, 2020). As illustrated by Williams (2003, cited in Callahan, 2020: 91), "[security is] not an objective condition, but is the outcome of a specific social process." Equally, in this article we look at the discourse around 16+1 exercised by the forum's members as a speech act that triggered EU concern despite having had, so far, no major economic outcome.

Recalling from the introduction, we observe Hungary and Serbia as two major cases in point. The former is the EU country that has shifted closer to Russia and China in discourse and practice, while undergoing rule of law-related procedures at the EU level at the time of writing (Reuters, 2021). The latter is a "front-runner" EU candidate (EU Delegation to Serbia, 2018). The choice of Hungary and Serbia as case studies, thus presenting the case of an EU

Member State and of an EU candidate, is relevant for several reasons. First, as it will be illustrated, both are receivers of a significant share of China's investments, compared to other countries of Central and South-Eastern Europe. Since the Eurozone crises, both countries welcomed Chinese investments during the last decade to diversify their respective economies and reduce dependence from the EU (Lukács & Völgyi, 2021), or, particularly in the case of Serbia, to further balance their foreign policy among different international actors.

The second reason is related to the EU internal context: in recent years (predominantly during the Juncker Commission), the rising concerns about rule of law issues in EU Member States pushed the EU to strengthen the already present measures to prevent and contain the consistent breaches of rule of law by its members. Besides sanctioning measures such as infringement proceedings, this also included some monitoring mechanisms such as the Justice Scoreboard, the European Semester and, since September 2020, the European Rule of Law mechanism, launched by the European Commission (Maňko, 2022). Together with Poland, Hungary is among the Member States who experienced a severe democratic backsliding during the last EU institutional cycle. In addition, in recent years the EU's concern about democratic backsliding also extended to enlargement countries. To prevent potential setbacks in rule of law, and to guarantee the respect of rigorous and fair conditionality, the latest update of the enlargement methodology included the possibility to reverse the steps of the process, should the acceding country stop meeting the required standards (European Commission, 2020). Serbia is an EU official candidate that, according to the Commission's annual reports, lately experienced heavy regression in its level of political pluralism and freedom of expression (European Commission, 2019) In 2019, Freedom House index also downgraded the country from "free" to "partly free": a status that so far has not been reversed. (Freedom House, 2021).

Hence, the choice to focus on Hungary and Serbia as exemplificative case study gains sense also in view of the rising concerns on rule of law by the EU institutions and the Member States. The above-presented elements—the significant cooperation with China and the EU concern for rule of law, have direct implications for the relations of both countries with the EU and on the EU's relations with China: Serbia's shift eastwards during the first months of the Covid-19 pandemic, when Chinese sanitary cooperation came with a powerful communication campaign from China's part; Hungary's block of EU statement of condemnation for China's new security law in Hong Kong in April 2021, in addition to Orbán's opening towards "illiberal democracy" since 2014 (Bottoni, 2019), all contributed to raise Western attention on the cooperation between China and the selected countries (Chalmers & Emmot, 2021; Euronews, 2021a; Vladislavljev, 2020).

In observing technological investments, we focus on 5G investment while fitting it within the broader framework of Chinese investments in Hungary and Serbia. The relevance of 5G investment for this study lies in its embeddedness in the US-China technological competition, thus serving as a proxy for a country's geopolitical positioning. We then move into discourse analysis on policy papers.

The documents we analyse are press articles and reports featuring speeches by Serbian and Hungarian members of government (or spokespersons thereof) on Sino-Serbian and Sino-Hungarian relations. We used the 16+1 official website of the Cooperation between China and Central and Eastern European Countries as the main authoritative source of such documents. The website contains four press sections, our focus being on "Policies and Activities" and "Economic Cooperation". In total, we thematically analysed 41 such documents, dated from 2019 to 2022. The thematic analysis allowed the authors to identify the points of interest in Hungary's and Serbia's bilateral relations with China that most often

are stressed upon by the two CEE countries' respective governments in foreign policy speeches.

The timespan has been chosen for two main reasons: availability on the aforementioned website and timeliness in the 16+1 history. That is to say, the period between 2019 and 2022 spans between the highest hype around the forum in European policy and media arenas, with the forum's enlargement to Greece, and the recognition of its steady decline with the exit of Lithuania (Stec, 2021).

Thematic document analysis, backed up by literature and secondary data, allowed the authors to build a systematic interpretation of the discursive practices embedded in 16+1.

China's economic footprint in Serbia and Hungary: an asymmetric relation

Since the Eurozone crisis and for almost a decade, China's economic presence in Serbia and Hungary constantly increased. This was in line with the objectives of the "China Go-Global" policy, which contributed especially since 2009, to the shift of China's previous FDI-inward focus towards an outward FDI's focus. By 2016, China had become the second largest source country of FDI after the USA, with the boom in FDI occurring between 2009 and 2016. (Lukács & Völgyi, 2021). Therefore, the same timeline also witnessed the increase of China's economic investments throughout Central and Southeast Europe (Amendolagine & Rabellotti, 2017). In terms of foreign direct investments, while Europe accounted in 2018 only for 6.4% of China's total OFDI (outward foreign direct investments), studies point out how Hungary rapidly gained the lead by becoming in 2017 the major recipient of Chinese FDI among CEEC countries (Hanemann & Huotari, 2018). In broader terms, several central European countries, but especially Hungary and, among the EU-candidates, Serbia, welcomed the increasing Chinese investments in their countries. These last were perceived as a way of diversifying the economy, reducing the dependence from the EU, and balancing (especially in the case of Serbia) a foreign policy characterised by close ties with several actors, including China and Russia (Lukács & Völgyi, 2021).

Over the same decade, both Hungary and Serbia articulated their economic cooperation with China across multiple levels: they play crucial roles in China's Belt and Road Initiative project, like in the case of the Budapest-Belgrade Railway (Matura 2016). Within the BRI, Serbia is involved especially in the infrastructure field: highways, railways, and power plants (Mardell 2021). Furthermore, during the last decade, the cooperation between China and Serbia experienced a turn also in the military sector. Not only the two countries started joint military exercises: Serbia also purchased from China in 2019 an FK-3 missile defence system (Vasovic & Heritage, 2020).

However, the main sources of economic cooperation among the three countries remain the 16+1 forum. The last sees Serbia among the most proactive and China-oriented countries on the platform. According to a study by the Center for the Study of Democracy-CSD on China's economic footprint in Serbia, in 2016 China positioned itself as the fourth-largest trading partner, and the second-largest import originator (Centre for the Study of Democracy-CSD, 2021). Furthermore, China's FDI towards Serbia grew significantly during the years of the Juncker Commission, reaching the top of two billion dollars in 2018 (Centre for the Study of Democracy-CSD, 2021). Hungary, instead, positioned in 2020 as ninth among EU member States importing Chinese goods: within the CEEC region, it was the third recipient after Poland and Czechia (Eurostat, 2021b).

In the years approaching to the considered timeframe, this increase in bi-lateral relations was met, however, by specific challenges within the 16+1 partners. This reflected some problematics already underlined in the analysis of infrastructural projects linked to the Belt and Road Initiative: especially in terms of receiving countries' potential indebtedness, and the fight against corruption (Holzne & Schwarzappel, 2018; Hurley et al., 2018). Therefore,

notwithstanding the initial enthusiasm for the 16+1 platform, smaller countries involved in the network reported from the beginning an unfair treatment: this especially concerned inward access to investments (Grieger, 2018).

Over the analysed timeline, this lack of reciprocity in the access to Chinese internal market became apparent also for the Serbian and Hungarian cases. According to Eurostat's analysis of China's economic footprint in the Western Balkans, in 2020 China accounted for around 10% of the Western Balkans' imports, but less than 2% of its exports (Eurostat, 2021a). In line with the increasing relevance of China as a foreign international actor in the country's economy, China featured in 2021 among the top ten destinations for Serbian exports. However, China's share remained below 4% (Trading Economics, 2022). Hungary instead positioned 9th among the countries of destination for Chinese exports in Europe but remains at the bottom for its own exports to the Asian country (Eurostat, 2021b). Thus, both Hungary and Serbia started experiencing, in line with the trends already existent in the rest of the region, highly asymmetric economic relations with China, added to the consistent lack of transparency, circumvention of national competition and public procurement law, and trending lack of consistency with the EU standards and objectives already pointed out by some latest studies addressing the indirect consequences of Chinese investments in partner countries societies (Centre for the Study on Democracy-CSD, 2021). Arguably this, more than the actual impact of China's economic investments, might contribute to further misaligning both Hungary and Serbia from the EU's standards.

Consequently, despite the registered growing political concern in Europe about Serbia becoming "China's open door to the Balkans" (Le Corre & Vuksanovic, 2019) and of Hungary being China's "Trojan horse to Europe" with increasing concern for the former's domestic rule of law conditions, (Panyi, 2021), strategic investments from China's part may lead one to build a different argument.

Hungary and Serbia have indeed been access-points for Chinese state-owned enterprises (SOEs) into Europe at various stages. First, through the Budapest-Piraeus trainline, which crosses Belgrade (Fardella & Prodi, 2018). Second, through anti-Covid vaccines produced by Chinese companies and unrecognised by the EU health authorities: in this context, Serbia hosts Sinopharm vaccine production, while Hungary has become the first EU country to approve it (Euronews, 2021a; 2021b). However, concrete economic cooperation between China, Hungary, and Serbia, actually lies on strongly asymmetric basis.

Furthermore, observing 5G network investments one finds a scenario where Chinese economic engagement is lower. Given the economic and political salience 5G obtained amid the US-China competition, with a growing number of countries establishing market restrictions based on security arguments, we maintain that 5G-related investments signal diplomatic closeness among countries.

In fact, countries taking confrontational stances against China, in line with the US administration, adopted stricter measures against such companies as Huawei. Conversely, countries with closer diplomatic ties such as Hungary imposed no restrictions (Poggetti, 2021). Despite this, investments in Hungary's domestic network infrastructure from Chinese companies are lacking (European 5G Observatory, 2022).

For a general overview of 5G deployment in the EU, the European 5G Observatory is a good starting point for secondary data. According to its October 2021 report, Hungary lags behind most EU countries in 5G deployment in several ways. First, one of the three so-called "pioneer bands" had not been assigned yet. Second, Hungary was not involved in any cross-border 5G corridor, an infrastructural project that would be meant to stimulate the use of 5G connectivity in the transport sector. Third, the three Internet Service Providers (ISPs) active in providing 5G connectivity to end users all seem to rely on non-standalone (NSA) infrastructure (European 5G Observatory, 2021).

In terms of private network deployment for market verticals, by October 21 one such deployment had taken place at the Foxconn Komárom factory. Foxconn is a Taiwanese electronic equipment manufacturer and its private network is provided by Ericsson and operated by Vodafone. Once again, no visible investment is in place in Hungary's 5G infrastructure by Chinese network manufacturers (European 5G Observatory, 2021).

Such systematic data is not as easily retrievable for Serbia, whose data on 5G investment is most often unavailable in English. Nonetheless, while Chinese technological investment towards Belgrade is relatively low, a more sustained presence in the heavy infrastructural sector is visible (Mardell, 2021). Mardell (2021) from the Mercator Institute for China Studies (Merics) describes Chinese investments in the Balkans as "still shallow, [growing] rapidly over a short period of time", thus pointing at a situation that can potentially become more challenging to the EU in the near future.

In particular, automotive-related industry and traditional physical infra-structures such as roads and railways are among China's targets in Serbia, along with vaccine production (Mardell, 2021).

In short, mixed results emerge from economic cooperation between China, on the one hand, and Hungary and Serbia, on the other. However, in strategic sectors such as telecommunication ties appear to be very loose. Such mixed findings suggest relations with China are far less strategic (and economically threatening for the EU) than often claimed.

Economic cooperation as discursive practice: evidence from documents

Secondary evidence illustrated in section 4 shows limited economic outcomes in economic cooperation between China, on the one hand, and Hungary and Serbia, on the other. However, media documents made available on the 16+1 website highlight why this forum has generated concern among EU policy communities despite the now-emerging limitedness in outcomes.

To start with, the press content made available on the 16+1 website is from Chinese news agencies, mainly Xinhua and CGTN. This shows that communication related to 16+1 was largely left in the hands of Chinese media in a unilateral manner. However, the content of the press coverage often features praises of the Chinese economic and political model by Hungarian and Serbian institutional profiles. Arguably, this displays a use of Chinese media by Serbian and Hungarian leaders to cast a discursive challenge to EU normativity.

The following quote from a Xinhua (2019) report is exemplary of this practice:

Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic hailed China as the most honest and trustworthy friend of his country at a concert marking the 70th anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in Belgrade on Saturday.

In the same news report, Serbian Prime Minister Ana Brnabic was quoted praising China's domestic development and releasing the following statement:

There is a bond of friendship like steel between China and Serbia, and many high-level meetings frequented the past few years. It is something that we highly appreciate here in Serbia and we are so happy for China's progress.

These statements, released on 22 September 2019, were celebratory of the seventieth anniversary of the PRC's foundation - officially celebrated in China ten days later, on 1 October. However, the strong use of words that signal closeness in terms of values hints at Serbia's geopolitical collocation. While these instances can be deemed rhetorical and

celebratory, they were followed up by Serbia's supporting stance towards China on key political issues such as Taiwan and Hong Kong.

In May 2020, when Hong Kong pro-democracy protests were spiking and the so-called "National Security Law" was about to be passed, a letter by president Vucic of Serbia to Xi Jinping was quoted by Xinhua (2020a) saying:

Serbia supports China's National People's Congress to adopt the decision on establishing and improving the legal system and enforcement mechanisms to safeguard national security in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region. [...] As an independent and self-reliant country, Serbia opposes the act of interfering in the internal affairs of a sovereign state.

Such statements arguably serve a double function in President Vucic's political agenda. Domestically, the nationalist audience that supports his presidency has a recent memory of national disintegration, with the independence of Montenegro and the (still not fully recognised) separation of Kosovo preceded by the collapse of Milosevic's Serbia-centric Yugoslavia (Jovanovic, 2018). Arguably, these statements make a stance not only vis-a-vis China, but also towards Serbia's nationalists, which constitute a core of Vucic's electoral basin.

Externally, it signals the EU some political red lines. If Serbia is to access the EU, President Vucic seems to say, European countries must recognise the national integrity of Serbia as defined by Serbia itself. Should this not be the case, Serbia does not need the EU as it fosters relations with such powerful nations as China (Markovic et al., 2019). This acquires significance as President Vucic is still widely regarded as a supporter of Serbia's integration in the EU, despite its China-oriented position and nationalist stances (Bieber, 2022).

At the same time, this gamble remains, though powerfully, at the rhetorical level: especially given the unconditional requirement for Serbia to solve its bi-lateral dispute with Kosovo to enter the EU, and the crucial importance given by the EU to the relaunch of the Belgrade-Pristina dialogue, marked among other things by the appointment of Miroslav Lajčák as EU Special Representative for the Belgrade-Pristina dialogue in 2020 (Council of the EU, 2020).

Nevertheless, such vicinity is stressed in 16+1 press-based communication not only in such rhetorical terms, but also with reference to tangible economic cooperation - although in practical aggregate terms it is limited, as illustrated in the previous section. The Piraeus-Belgrade-Budapest trainline is possibly the most well-known example (Fardella & Prodi, 2018). However, railway connectivity between Budapest and Belgrade features broadly within Belt-and-Road-related rhetoric. In particular, when launching the upgrade of the Belgrade-Nis sector, Serbian Minister Zorana Mihajlovic was quoted saying (RailTech, 2020):

When we talk about financing, we will see whether the construction will be financed via some kind of a preferential loan because there is such cooperation with the People's Republic of China on infrastructure projects.

Here, again, the stress falls on the special relation between Serbia and China, where loans are seen not as a bond but rather as a special-condition assistance that helps Serbia develop its infrastructure, with Xinhua (2021a) quoting President Vucic saying: "Chinese loans have propelled Serbia's infrastructural development rather than adding its public debt burden".

Overall, the Serbian state leadership appears to use Chinese media to convey messages of economic partnership and shared values in a confrontational stance towards the EU. A similar tendency is visible in Hungary.

As a relevant node in China's infrastructure policy in Europe, with the Piraeus-Belgrade-Budapest railway, talks on rail-based goods exchange between China and Hungary are strong (Xinhua, 2021b). However, the Chinese press promotes investments in other sectors, too. In particular, Hungary is historically attractive for automotive manufacturing activities, with China's Chervon Auto taking stock of the economic environment.

While the Chinese automotive industry is by far not alone in investing in Hungary, Chinese automotive investment has been used to portray a flourishing economic partnership between the two countries. In October 2020, Xinhua (2020b) quoted Minister Szijjarto saying:

Last year, 60 percent of the investment influx to Hungary came from the east, and 40 percent of the jobs created were also tied to eastern investors. [...] In the first seven months of this year, Hungary's trade turnover with China increased by 19 percent and its exports increased by 10 percent.

More in general, in 16+1 communication, infrastructural investment is less central in relation to Hungary than Serbia. While goods exchanges along established China-Hungary links are mentioned, there is a stronger emphasis on high-tech investment by Chinese companies in Hungary. For example, device manufacturers Huawei and Lenovo.

In celebrating the fifteenth anniversary of Huawei's investment in Hungary, Xinhua (2020c) boasted the company's capillary presence in the Hungarian telecommunication market. Nonetheless, data in section 4 show that Huawei's presence in the 5G infrastructure is limited, thus maintaining its powerful position mainly through the device market - that is, where end-users purchase such products as laptops or smartphones. Likewise, Lenovo's investment is on the device manufacturing side, although it must be stressed that the latter is not a network manufacturer, contrary to Huawei.

Rhetoric around China-Hungary economic ties grounds on historical ties between the two countries. This is a general characteristic of China's foreign policy rhetoric, which stresses historical linkages between countries to narrate their ideological justification (Strauss, 2009). In Hungary's case, the Embassy of the PRC to Hungary (2019) stated:

Bilateral relations between the two countries are at their best in history. Hungary is located in the hinterland of Europe. [Ambassador] Duan also said that as the first European country to sign the Belt and Road cooperation document with China, Hungary is a natural partner of China-EU cooperation and the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

Such statement was issued in the context of a 2019 ceremony for the signing of an agreement on a locomotive rental project between CRRC Zhuzhou Locomotive and Rail Cargo Hungaria, during which the two countries' representatives took the opportunity to celebrate the seventieth anniversary of the PRC founding (Embassy of the PRC to Hungary, 2019).

Taken together, Serbia's and Hungary's attitudes towards China as observed here display a speech act towards the EU. Despite low overall economic engagement between the two countries in question and China, strong ties are boasted and this raised concern among EU observers, especially as 16+1 countries started siding politically with China on contentious issues in global fora (Emmott & Koutantou, 2019; Stec, 2021).

Such speech act is not only enacted on Serbia and Hungary's part, but also on China's. As illustrated at the beginning of this section, the 16+1 communication is almost fully in the hands of China's press, at least as far as the media coverage officially shared on the forum's official website is concerned.

In this view, one can see that China is displaying its positive ties to Central and Eastern European countries to more or less implicitly show its disunity within. Therefore, it is no surprise that despite poor economic results the EU has feared 16+1 as a divide et impera attempt (Fardella & Prodi, 2018).

Conclusion

Drawing on the analysis illustrated throughout this article, we observe that China, Serbia, and Hungary make use of their cooperation in their effort of contesting EU normativity. An established trend that grew over the last decade and which became even more explicit during the first months of the COVID-19 crisis, the 'China leverage' is especially used in the two case studies by their ruling élites to send powerful political messages to the EU, despite their evident violation/backsliding in rule of law. In this view, defining the EU and its set of norms as outcome and representation of the Liberal Order, the use of the 'China leverage' is a tool for normative contestation.

More in practice, these three countries boast their cooperation ties and contrast them with what they portray as EU ineffectiveness. This shows that EU concerns around the 16+1 forum despite its economic ineffectiveness stem from the discursive effort built around it. That is to say, cooperation between China, on the one hand, and Serbia and Hungary, on the other, was performed as a speech act by the three state actors in question to narrate an alternative model of cooperation. As illustrated in the previous section, media coverage in 16+1 cooperation is dominated by Chinese media outlets, but they are used by the Serbian and Hungarian governments to convey meanings that challenge EU normativity. To this end, it is worth recalling Serbia's support for Beijing over the Hong Kong question to repress nationalistic and anti-secessionist stances domestically and vis-à-vis the EU on the Kosovo question.

Framing 16+1 as a discursive action sheds light onto another open question in EU-China relations. Contrary to the divide et impera narrative around China-CEEC cooperation, normative contestation to the EU on a discursive basis is not merely a China-led process. Instead, CEE countries (in this article, Serbia and Hungary) make use of their partnership with China to signal political red lines to the EU. While the press section of the China-CEEC website is very much centred on Chinese media, thus taking the outlook of a seemingly China-driven project, the analysis shows that the Serbian and Hungarian state leaderships make use of Chinese media to convey their political message to the EU.

To be sure, several other venues for interpreting EU behaviour vis-a-vis China-CEEC cooperation remain open. For example, EU concern over the 16+1 forum could be attributed to lack of complete information, China's faster economic growth, growing tensions between the US and China forcing the EU to take a position, and a myriad of other factors. Furthermore, cross-referencing discourse on 16+1 and BRI cooperation can bring new insights on the EU's drivers in its stance towards China-CEEC cooperation.

However, the use of 16+1 as a discursive tool against EU normativity is a powerful explanation of the mismatch between EU concern and 16+1 economic outcomes, as illustrated in the analytical sections of this article.

From the carried-out analysis, a final point could be made on China's way to partner with the considered countries. Through its statements and the proposed definition of 16+1, China claims to aim at friendly and cooperative relations, based, recalling from the introduction, on "traditional friendship and shared desire of all the participants for win-win cooperation and common development". It, therefore, uses words that might recall, at a first glance, the ideas and praxis endorsed by the EU also in its economic partnerships. However, the analysis of China's economic investments conducted in this article shows on this point a

strong preference for asymmetric, non-reciprocal partnerships, added to the evident preference for bilateral over multilateral frameworks of cooperation.

Overall, this article sheds light on the use of economic cooperation as a discursive practice for normative contestation as well as on the agency of smaller states vis-a-vis supranational organisations and world powers.

ORCID

Carlotta Mingardi 0000-0003-3583-6521

Riccardo Nanni 0000-0002-2773-4093

Funding

The research received no grants from public, commercial or non-profit funding agency.

Acknowledgements

The authors thank the editors, guest editors, and all the other authors involved in this special issue. The authors also wish to thank the anonymous peer reviewers. Finally, a special thanks goes to Emanuele Castelli and Vittorio Emanuele Parsi for their comments made during the conference B4Peace held in Parma in October 2022.

REFERENCES

- Amendolagine, V., & Rabelotti, R. (2017). Chinese foreign direct investments in the European Union. In J. Drahekoupil (Ed.), *Chinese investments in Europe: corporate strategies and labour relations* (pp. 99-119). European Trade Union Institute-ETUI.
- Bieber, F. (2022). Why Serbia's President is a threat to Europe. *Foreign Policy*, 5 January, last accessed 21 February 2022. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/01/05/serbia-vucic-mladic-mural-lithium-china-russia-threat-europe/>
- Bottoni, S. (2019). *Orbán. Un despota in Europa*. Salerno Editrice.
- Callahan, W. A. (2020). *Sensible Politics. Visualizing International Relations*. Oxford University Press.
- Centre for the Study of Democracy-CSD (2021). *The Chinese Economic footprint in Central and Eastern Europe: impact on energy transition and climate*. Policy Brief No. 97, last accessed 24 April 2021. https://csd.bg/fileadmin/user_upload/publications_library/files/2021_01/BRIEF_97_ENG_WEB.pdf
- Chalmers, J., & Emmott, R. (2021). Hungary blocks EU statement criticising China over Hong Kong, diplomats say. *Reuters*, 16 April, last accessed 28 February 2022. <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/hungary-blocks-eu-statement-criticising-china-over-hong-kong-diplomats-say-2021-04-16/>
- China-CEEC Cooperation (2021). About Us. Cooperation between China and Central and Eastern European Countries, 28 December, last accessed 19 February 2022, http://www.china-ceec.org/eng/jj/zyjz/202112/t20211228_10476286.htm
- Council of the EU (2020). *Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue: the EU appoints a new Special Representative*. Council of the EU-Press Release, 3 April, last accessed 10 March 2022. <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2020/04/03/belgrade-pristina-dialogue-eu-appoints-a-new-special-representative/>
- Embassy of the People's Republic of China in Hungary (2019). Signing ceremony cements China-Hungary ties. Cooperation between China and Central and Eastern European

- Countries' Statement, 25 September, last accessed 21 February 2022. http://www.china-ceec.org/eng/zzwl/201909/t20190925_6580575.htm
- Emmott, R., & Koutantou, A. (2017). Greece blocks EU statement on China human rights at U.N.. Reuters, 18 June, last accessed 19 July 2021. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-eu-un-rights-idUSKBN1990FP>
- Euronews (2021a). Serbia to produce Chinese COVID-19 vaccine. 11 March, last accessed 26 January 2022. <https://www.euronews.com/2021/03/11/serbia-to-produce-chinese-covid-19-vaccine>
- Euronews (2021b). Hungary becomes first EU nation to use China's Sinopharm vaccine against COVID-19. 26 February, last accessed 27 January 2022. <https://www.euronews.com/2021/02/24/hungary-becomes-first-eu-nation-to-use-china-s-sinopharm-vaccine-against-covid-19>
- European 5G Observatory (2021). *5G Observatory Quarterly Report 13*. Up to October 2021. Last accessed 2 February 2022. https://5gobservatory.eu/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/5G-Obs-PhaseIII_Quarterly-report-13_final-version-11112021.pdf
- European 5G Observatory (2022). *Major European 5G Trials and Pilots*. Last accessed 13 July 2021, <https://5gobservatory.eu/5g-trial/major-european-5g-trials-and-pilots/>
- European Commission (2019). Serbia 2019 report. *Accompanying the document Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions. 2019 Communication on EU Enlargement Policy, COM(2019) 260 final, 29 May, last accessed 20 December 2022* <https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2019-05/20190529-serbia-report.pdf>
- European Commission (2020). Communication from the European Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions. *Enhancing the accession process-A credible EU perspective for the Western Balkans*. EU Commission Press Release, 5 February, last accessed 23 March 2022. https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/system/files/2020-02/enlargement-methodology_en.pdf
- European Parliament (2022). Rule of law: Parliament to discuss proposed suspension of EU funds for Hungary. News European Parliament, last accessed 31 October 2022. <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/agenda/briefing/2022-10-03/5/rule-of-law-parliament-to-discuss-proposed-suspension-of-eu-funds-for-hungary>
- Eurostat (2021a). *Western Balkans-EU international trade in goods statistics. The Western Balkans trade with the EU and other main partners*. Eurostat-Statistics Explained, last accessed 9 March 2022. https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?oldid=480316#The_Western_Balkans_trade_with_the_EU_and_other_main_partners
- Eurostat (2021b). *China-EU international trade in goods statistics. Trade with China by Member State*. Eurostat-Statistics Explained, last accessed 28 February 2022. https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=China-EU_-_international_trade_in_goods_statistics&stable=0&redirect=no#Trade_with_China_by_Member_State
- EU Delegation to the Republic of Serbia (2018). Hahn: Serbia front runner in the region- Vucic: we received recognition and support. EU in Serbia, 7 February, last accessed 30 September 2021. <https://europa.rs/hahn-serbia-a-frontrunner-in-the-region-vucic-we-received-recognition-and-support/?lang=en>
- Fardella, E. & Prodi, G. (2018). *The Belt and Road Initiative and its Impact on Europe*. Valdai Papers ChinaMED, 2 March, last accessed 8 July 2021.

<https://www.chinamed.it/publications/valdai-paper-82-the-belt-and-road-initiative-and-its-impact-on-europe>

- Freedom House (2021). Freedom in the World 2021-Serbia. Last accessed 16 December 2022. <https://freedomhouse.org/country/serbia/freedom-world/2021>
- Grieger, G. (2018). *China, the 16+1 Platform and the EU*. European Parliamentary Research Service-EPRS, 7 September, last accessed 28 February 2022. [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document/EPRS_BRI\(2018\)625173](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document/EPRS_BRI(2018)625173)
- Hanemann, T., Rhodium Group, and Huotari, M. (2018). EU-China FDI. Working towards reciprocity in investments relations. Mercator Institute for China Studies, No. 3 Update, May, last accessed 28 February 2022. https://merics.org/sites/default/files/2020-04/180723_MERICS-COFDI-Update_final_0.pdf
- Hansen, L. (2012). Reconstructing desecuritisation: The normative-political in the Copenhagen School and directions for how to apply it. *Review of International Studies*, 38(1), 525-546. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210511000581>
- Harris, D. W., & McKinney, R. (2020). Speech-Act Theory: Social and political applications. In J. Khoo, & R. Sterken (Eds.), *Routledge Handbook of Social and Political Philosophy of Language* (pp. 1-28). Routledge.
- Holzner, M., & Schwarzhappel, M. (2018). Infrastructure Investment in the Western Balkans: A First Analysis. WiiW Research Report 432, last accessed 16 December 2022. <https://wiiw.ac.at/infrastructure-investment-in-the-western-balkans-a-first-analysis-dlp-4621.pdf>
- Huang, Y. (2016). Understanding China's Belt and Road Initiative: Motivation, framework and assessment. *China Economic Review*, 40(1), 314-321. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chieco.2016.07.007>
- Hurley, J., Morris, S., and Portelance, G. (2018). Examining the Debt Implications of the Belt and Road Initiative from a Policy Perspective - CGD Policy Paper No. 121. Center for Global Development, last accessed 10 March 2022. <https://www.cgdev.org/sites/default/files/examining-debt-implications-belt-and-road-initiative-policy-perspective.pdf>
- Ikenberry, G. J. (2018). The End of Liberal International Order?. *International Affairs*, 94(1), 7-23. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iix241>
- Jovanovic, S. M. (2018). "You're Simply the Best": Communicating Power and Victimhood in Support of President Aleksandar Vučić in the Serbian Dailies Alo! and Informer. *Journal of Media Research*, 11(2), 22-42. <https://doi.org/10.24193/jmr.31.2>
- Le Corre, P. & Vuksanovic, V. (2019). *Serbia: China's open door to the Balkans*. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1 January, last accessed 21 April 2021. <https://carnegieendowment.org/2019/01/01/serbia-china-s-open-door-to-balkans-pub-78054>.
- Lukács, E., & Völgyi, K. (2021). Chinese foreign direct investments in Hungary from the perspective of BRI, international capacity cooperation, and made in China 2025. *Contemporary Chinese Political Economy and Strategic Relations*, 7(1), 413-446. [https://icaps.nsysu.edu.tw/static/file/131/1131/img/CCPS7\(1\)-Lukacs-Volgyi.pdf](https://icaps.nsysu.edu.tw/static/file/131/1131/img/CCPS7(1)-Lukacs-Volgyi.pdf)
- Makocki, M., & Nechev, Z. (2017). Balkan corruption: the China connection. European Union Institute for Security Studies (EUISS) ISSUE Alert 22, last accessed 19 December 2022 <https://www.iss.europa.eu/content/balkan-corruption-china-connection>
- Mańko, R. (2022). The European Commission's Annual rule of law reports. A new monitoring tool. EPRS-European Parliamentary Research Center, January, last accessed 16 March 2022.

[https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2022/698891/EPRS_BRI\(2022\)698891_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2022/698891/EPRS_BRI(2022)698891_EN.pdf)

- Mardell, J. (2021). *Beijing fills gaps left by Brussels in the Western Balkans*. Mercator Institute for China Studies. 18 May, last accessed 22 February 2022. <https://merics.org/en/short-analysis/beijing-fills-gaps-left-brussels-western-balkan>
- Markovic, K., Jovanovic, M., and Matijevic, B. (2019). Kosovo and Metohija or the European Union - A rhetorical dilemma in the Serbian political discourse. *Serbian Political Thought*, 66(4), 173-192. <http://dx.doi.org/10.22182/spm.6642019.8>
- Matura, T. (2016). Hungary: Along the New Silk Road across Central Europe. In F. P. van der Putten, J. Seaman, M. Huotari, A. Ekman, & M. Otero-Iglesias (Eds.), *Europe and China's New Silk Road* (pp. 35-37). European Think-tank Network on China.
- Nanni, R. (2021). The "China" question in mobile Internet standard-making: insights from expert interviews. *Telecommunications Policy*, 45(6), 1-12. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.telpol.2021.102151>
- Palmer, A. W. (2021). 当“战狼”主导中国的外交声音（上）：赵立坚“一帖成名”. *New York Times*, 7 July, last accessed 8 July 2021. <https://cn.nytimes.com/china/20210707/china-diplomacy-twitter/>
- Panyi, S. (2021). Hungary could turn into China's Trojan horse in Europe. *Balkan Insight*, 24 March, last accessed 28 February 2022. <https://balkaninsight.com/2021/04/09/hungary-could-turn-into-chinas-trojan-horse-in-europe/>
- Parsi, V. E. (2022). *The Wrecking of the Liberal World Order*. Springer.
- Poggetti, L. (2021). EU-China Mappings: Interactions between the EU and China on Key Issues. Mercator Institute for China Studies, 20 January, last accessed 13 July 2021. <https://merics.org/de/kurzanalyse/eu-china-mappings-interactions-between-eu-and-china-key-issues>
- Poh, A., & Li, M. (2017). A China in Transition: The Rhetoric and Substance of Chinese Foreign Policy under Xi Jinping. *Asian Security*, 13(2), 84-97.
- RailTech (2020). China will construct another high-speed rail in Serbia. Cooperation between China and Central and Eastern European Countries, 31 July, last accessed 19 February 2022, http://www.china-ceec.org/eng/jmh/202008/t20200806_6550476.htm
- Reuters (2021). Hungary to defy EU court ruling over migration policy, Orbán says. 21 December, last accessed 26 January 2021. <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/hungary-defy-eu-court-ruling-over-migration-policy-orban-says-2021-12-21/>
- Ruge, M. & Ortel, J. (2020). Serbia's coronavirus diplomacy unmasked. European Council on Foreign Relations, 26 March, last accessed 6 July 2020. https://www.ecfr.eu/article/commentary_serbias_coronavirus_diplomacy_unmasked
- Stec, G. (2021). EU-China weekly review: 17+1 format, diplomatic damage control and EU-US cooperation. Mercator Institute for China Studies, 2 June, last accessed 8 July 2021. <https://merics.org/en/briefing/eu-china-weekly-review-171-format-diplomatic-damage-control-and-eu-us-cooperation>.
- Straus, J. C. (2009). The past in the present: historical and rhetorical lineages in China's relations with Africa. *The China Quarterly*, 199(1), 177-195. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0305741009990208>

- Ten Oever, N. (2022). 5G and the notion of network ideology, or: the limitations of sociotechnical imaginaries. *Telecommunications Policy*, in press, 1-11. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.telpol.2022.102442>
- Tonchev, P., Karásková, I., Bērziņa-Čerenkova, U., Szunomar, Á., Weidenfeld, J. & Stec, G. (2021). EU-China opinion pool: the future of 17+1 after Lithuania's departure. Should I stay or should I go?. Mercator Institute for China Studies, 1 July, last accessed 8 July 2021. <https://merics.org/en/opinion/eu-china-opinion-pool-future-171-after-lithuanias-departure>
- Trading Economics (2022). Serbia Exports to China. March 2022, last accessed 23 March 2022, <https://tradingeconomics.com/serbia/exports/china>
- Vasovic, A. and Heritage, T. (2020). Serbian purchase of missile defence system shows ties deepening with China. Reuters, 3 August, last accessed 24 April 2021. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-serbia-arms-china-idUSKBN24Z171>
- Vladisavljev, S. (2020). A friend in need is a friend indeed. Belgrade leans closer to Beijing in the fight against Covid-19 pandemic. China Observer, 19 March, last accessed 24 January 2022. <https://chinaobservers.eu/the-friend-in-need-is-a-friend-indeed-belgrade-leans-closer-to-beijing-in-the-fight-against-the-covid-19-epidemic/>
- Xinhua (2019). China the most trustworthy friend of Serbia: Serbian president. Cooperation between China and Central and Eastern European Countries, 22 September, last accessed 19 February 2022. http://www.china-ceec.org/eng/zzwl/201909/t20190925_6580568.htm
- Xinhua (2020a). Serbia firmly supports China in safeguarding national sovereignty, security regarding Hong Kong, Vucic tells Xi in letter. Cooperation between China and Central and Eastern European Countries, 30 May, last accessed 19 February 2022. http://www.china-ceec.org/eng/zzwl/202006/t20200605_6582023.htm
- Xinhua (2020b). China's Chervon Auto to build car parts plant in Hungary. Cooperation between China and Central and Eastern European Countries, 21 October, last accessed 21 February 2022. http://www.china-ceec.org/eng/jmhz/202010/t20201021_6582341.htm
- Xinhua (2020c). Huawei celebrates 15th anniversary of operation in Hungary. Central and Eastern European Countries, 21 October, last accessed 21 February 2022. http://www.china-ceec.org/eng/jmhz/202010/t20201021_6550556.htm
- Xinhua (2021a). GLOBALink | Chinese loans accelerate infrastructural development, not debt burden: Serbian president. Cooperation between China and Central and Eastern European Countries, 6 April, last accessed 21 February 2022. http://www.china-ceec.org/eng/jmhz/202104/t20210413_9147364.htm
- Xinhua (2021b). Rail Cargo Hungaria reports tenfold increase in Chinese rail freight traffic. Cooperation between China and Central and Eastern European Countries, 27 January, last accessed 21 February 2022. http://www.china-ceec.org/eng/jmhz/202101/t20210127_6582482.htm
- Wee, S., & Novak, B. (2021). Hungary pays big for a Chinese vaccine. New York Times, 12 March, last accessed 19 July 2021. <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/03/12/world/hungary-sinopharm-covid.html>.