

“The relationship of the European Union and China”
Differing European Interpretations of China
Course Syllabus
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Course DESCRIPTION

In the 1990s, Central Europe seemed to be a region where major powers would compete for spheres of influence in the future, however, the region became abandoned by major powers after the countries of the region completed their reintegration process in the European political, economic and military frameworks. These countries joined the NATO, became full members of the European Union and the OECD. In other words, their integration process seemed to have been finished in the early 2000s, once and for all.

However, the Great Recession (2008–2009) and the ensuing eurozone crisis (2010–2012) adversely and deeply affected the economic and political integrity of the European Union. This uncertainty in the political and economic development of the EU, the rise of other geopolitical powers (China, Russia) and the changing approach of the current American administration to its global role in world politics created **geopolitical junctures in the continent, but it basically boils down to the simple question how European countries interpret China’ s rise, and what answers can be found in their policy reactions.**

1. Central Europe’ s interpretation of China is more or less positive. Central European countries reacted to these shifts in world economy and world politics differently, however, they share one element in common as for their reactions: they realized the decreasing importance of Western European economies and political powers in the long-term. Still, there is a long way to go, until geopolitical and geo-economic reality will change in Central Europe, since looking at basic economic and political indicators, these countries are deeply imbedded in the European institutional frameworks. On the other hand, though globalization decreased the costs for economic and political actions, geography still matters, proximity to major European markets will link Central Europe with Western Europe (in particular Germany) in the future as well.

2. Western European countries are more critical about China. The French President, Marcon f. ex. called for a different approach in the case of China this May: “Since the beginning of my mandate, I have been calling for a real awareness and defence of European sovereignty.”....“Finally, on subjects as important as China, we have it,” (AFP, 2019).

It is apparent but the EU' s stance on China policy is not that uniform, as many analysts frame it, since Central European countries, and Italy evaluate the purported threats coming from China in a very different way. And the simple reason for the different interpretations must be found in the different economic interests of these countries. In contrast to Germany and France, Hungary like many other Central European countries is deeply interested in capital and technology transfer from China. All European countries have stakes in obtaining access to the huge Chinese market, but German and French firms might lose more when Chinese companies entering the European Single Market.

The course attempts to give a broad overview of the China-interpretations (Germany, France, Hungary, Poland etc.) while discussing why economic interests of these countries differ that much. At the same time, it can be avoided to briefly investigate how the US foreign policy' s changing crisscrosses over the recent years influence Europe' s stance on China.