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## China's "One Belt, One Road Initiative": challenges and requirements for its successful implementation in Central Asia<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract:** Twenty five years after the dissolution of the former Soviet Union and the reemergence of the Central Asian Republics as independent States, this region continues to be the scene of rivalries amongst the big powers (Russia, China, the European Union, USA, India, Japan, Turkey and Iran) competing in a sort of a "new Grand Game" to increase their geopolitical and economic influence in the region. Its geography, diverse and rich natural resources, like oil and gas, explain the ongoing hidden rivalries.

Despite its common historical and cultural past, Central Asia constitutes a heterogeneous region with a multiethnic and multi-linguistic composition and a low degree of physical, economic and trade integration. The lack of mutual trust, the persisting tension over borders and the use and sharing of natural resources, as well as different levels of economic performance have so far jeopardized the development of genuine regional cooperation.

Against this background, the idea behind the Chinese OBOR Initiative to develop rapid transportation, if well implemented, could theoretically, by improving interregional connectivity, develop the Central Asia regional market and foster intergovernmental cooperation and people-to-people contacts within the region.

In this context, could we expect that the ambitious Chinese OBOR Initiative will boost geopolitical stability and promote shared economic and trade benefits in Central Asia? What are the conditions for that need to be fulfilled?

The author analyzes in depth certain crucial political, economic and institutional requirements for the successful implementation of the OBOR Strategy and concludes, however, that three years after the launching of this crucial instrument of the Chinese "*globalization without democracy*" model, its implementation faces major problems and thus raises more doubts than certainties.

**Key words:** One Belt, One Road Initiative; Silk Road Economic Belt and Central Asia; Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank; Eurasian Economic Community

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### I. Introduction: the Launching of the Chinese Initiative and The Regional Context

In September 2013, in a speech entitled "Promote People-to-People Friendship and Create a Better Future" at Nazarbayev University of Astana in Kazakhstan, President Xi Jinping launched a grand Chinese development strategy, the "*Silk Road Economic Belt*" – and one month later the "*21<sup>st</sup> Century Maritime Silk Road*" during a speech to the Indonesian Parliament – to be pursued in the coming three or four decades.

The idea behind this new Strategic Concept is to develop high-speed transportation and other infrastructure investment projects improving connectivity between China and

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most of the Asian countries, reducing the time to reach Europe, which is the “terminus station” of the Initiative (Wang, 2015).

From the Middle Ages, the old “Silk Road” already played the role of connecting Europe with China through this strategic land bridge that was defined by Halford Mackinder as the “Heartland” at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Currently, the Central Asia region continues to be the scenario of rivalries amongst the big powers (Russia, China, European Union, USA, India, Japan, Turkey and Iran) competing in a sort of a “new Grand Game” for increasing their geopolitical and economic influence in the region. Its geography, diverse and rich natural resources, like oil and gas, explain the ongoing hidden rivalries (Mori, 2016).

Furthermore, the Central Asia region itself is increasing its political and economic weight in the international arena following the dramatic changes in the Middle East in recent years. In this regard, it is worthwhile to note the significant role carried out by Kazakh diplomacy in facilitating the recent negotiations between Russia and Turkey, and thus resolve the Syrian conflict (Gurcan, 2017).

How could the OBOR Initiative influence the Central Asia region, in particular the future prospects and challenges of the five ex-Soviet Republics, as regards geopolitical and economic dimensions?

Actually, three years after the launching of the OBOR Initiative in Astana, the region is facing a much more complex scenario both regarding the remaining unsolved internal challenges (lack of regional cooperation on sustainable management of natural resources, lack of economic diversification and regional integration, stagnation in political transition to democratic regimes and open civil societies) as well as external factors: the fall of oil, gas and other commodity prices, the Western sanctions on the Russian economy following the annexation of Crimea and the potential geopolitical consequences of the redistribution of power on the world stage, notably the renewal of Russia’s role as a protagonist in the Syrian conflict.

This paper tries to identify the main challenges and requirements to be met by the Chinese OBOR Project for its successful achievement in Central Asia, taking into account the internal needs of the region and learning from the EU experience of regional cooperation. These countries are the “neighbors of our neighbors,” and thus the EU Strategy for Central Asia must also be taken into consideration in order to compare it with Chinese Strategy.

Firstly, it seems necessary to analyze briefly the current internal context of the region and its links with China. According to the latest estimates included in the Asian Economic Integration Report 2016 (Asian Development Bank, 2016), the five Central Asian countries represent a 68.7 million-strong partner with an overall GDP of 302.4 billion dollars. However, the region only holds the equivalent of 5% of the Chinese population and 2.8% of its GDP. In other words, the Central Asia region has a rather weak structural position, with relatively small critical mass, facing a strong asymmetry in its ongoing economic and future trade negotiations with China.

Secondly, after the collapse of the Moscow-led, soviet planned economy in 1991, most Central Asian countries have been enjoying a phase of sustained economic growth during the last two decades, even during the last global economic recession. In fact, in the period from 2011–2015, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan have been growing at an average

rate of 9.5% and 8.1% respectively, slightly higher than the Chinese average rate (7.4%), while the other countries have achieved growth rates between 3.9% and 6.4%. However, economic performance is still extremely reliant upon a handful of commodities (gas, oil, cotton, gold) which represent the bulk of their exports, as well as a significant share of the countries' GDPs (Garcés de los Fayos, 2016). In 2015, the economic growth of these countries dropped sharply, hit by external macroeconomic shocks: the fall of commodity prices, the recession in Russia following Western sanctions and slower growth in the PRC (Asian Development Bank, 2016).

Twenty five years after independence from the Soviet Union, the majority of these countries are far from being genuine market economies, as the State continues to interfere excessively and to control some key decisions concerning prices and free competition between public and private firms. In this regards, *mutatis mutandis*, Central Asian economies and the Chinese economy share common features that limit their full integration in the multilateral trade system set up by the WTO. Consequently, only three countries – Kazakhstan, the leading country in the region, and Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan – joined this organization, in 2015 and 1998 and 2013 respectively. Uzbekistan has observer status.

Similarly (although being member of WTO from 2001), none of the big trade powers agree to grant China Market Economy Status (MES).

Thirdly, the insufficient and ineffective liberalization reforms, the remaining state control of the economy and the limited diversification of economic models explain why these countries are only partly integrated into the world trading system, therefore forming a source of economic and social instability (Zogg, 2016). The lack of political will and dynamism in the path to the economic modernization goes hand in hand with the stagnation of political and social reforms impeding these countries to close the 25 year period of post-Soviet Union transition and to embrace modernity.

Fourthly, China has become the main trade partner for the Central Asia region, ahead of the European Union, which still holds first place in Kazakhstan. Russia is the third largest trade partner for this region.

The growing involvement of China in the region, through FDI and trade flows, seems to be seen positively, and cautiously accepted by the political establishments. However, the potential future elites appear to be divided about Chinese influence, while public opinion, also divided, has more reservations about the Sino-Kazakh relationship, in particular with regard to Chinese migrants and the leasing of land, according to the findings of a pilot test conducted in Kazakhstan (Yu-Wen Chen, 2015). This result demonstrates how important it is for the Chinese leadership to take into consideration the interests and perceptions of other countries on China's rise and the ability of the "Silk Road Economic Belt" to foster greater regional integration in Central Asia.

Fifthly, standing on average at USD 4,402, the GDP *per capita* of Central Asian countries represents 55% of that of China, the lowest being recorded by Tajikistan (USD 926) and Kyrgyzstan (USD 1,102) and the highest in Kazakhstan (USD 10,514, nearly 25% bigger than that of China). The GDP *per capita* of Turkmenistan comes closer to that of PRC (USD 6,946). Nevertheless, Uzbekistan, the most populated country of the region (31.1 million), is lagging far behind (USD 2,131) with GDP *per capita* statistically more typical of the region. These figures implicitly show the huge differences

amongst the countries of the region, running at differing stages in their development path, and demonstrating rather limited “medium” human development index (placed from 109 to 129 out of 188, while China achieved 90th place), with the exception of Kazakhstan (56/188) benefiting from a “high” index similar to that of Russia (50/188) – as reported in the United Nations Development Programme 2015. Furthermore, these average figures hide greater wealth inequalities and the need to address potential civil unrest within the poorest countries immediately. Obviously, in view of the implementation of foreign assistance programs, the priorities, targets and the timeframes should be precisely defined through individual and tailor-made country action plans, such as the European Union used to apply (European Parliament, 2016).

Sixth, if all the big powers have strong strategic, political and economic interests in strengthening their bilateral and multilateral relations with the Central Asian countries, only the European Union has a Policy Strategy based on common values in the fields of democratization, preventing and fighting corruption, free and fair elections, human rights, rule of law, respect for labor rules and good governance. These common values are stated in the existing Partnership and Cooperation Agreements between the EU and Kazakhstan (recently replaced by the new Enhanced Partnership and Cooperation Agreement), Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan and the agreement not yet in force with Turkmenistan. Some analysts consider that the EU’s political conditionality does not help the authoritarian political regimes in place to evolve. However, the EU’s consistent efforts complemented with the Council of Europe’s institutional and legal technical assistance have brought, without doubt, some positive concrete results.

For instance, the European Parliament (EP) decided in December 2011 to postpone its decision on the ratification (“consent”) of the EU-Uzbekistan Textiles Protocol and concluded in its interim report that it would only consider the consent “if the ILO observers have been granted access by the Uzbek authorities to undertake close and unhindered monitoring and have confirmed that concrete reforms have been implemented and have yielded substantial results in such a way that the practice of forced labour and child labour is effectively in the process of being eradicated at national, viloyat and local level”. Five years later, in its Resolution of 14 December 2016, an EP report said it “stresses the importance of the action taken by the Government of Uzbekistan to authorize the ILO to monitor the cotton harvest and to engage in broad cooperation with ILO through a Decent Work Country Programme” and welcomed the substantial progress that had been made in the country since 2013, including the adoption of laws which prohibited the use of child labor, achieving its almost total eradication. Therefore, because of these efforts by the Government of Uzbekistan, the EP advised granting consent to the EU-Uzbekistan Textiles Protocol, which relates to the main sector of trade between the EU and this country (European Parliament, 2016). Furthermore, the EU is bringing a very significant increase in bilateral aid, concentrated on empowering the local population to alleviate the deep rural poverty.

The second successful example concerns Kyrgyzstan. On April 2014, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) decided to grant The Kyrgyz Parliament “Partner for democracy status”, an important incentive to further develop democracy, the rule of law and protection of human rights in Kyrgyzstan. Even if this country “still has a long way to go towards democracy” (Gros, 2014), PACE acknowledged that this is the

only Central Asian country to have opted for a political system based on parliamentary democracy, and the letter from its Speaker emphasized that it shared the Council of Europe's values, as evidenced by the abolition of the death penalty in 2007, or efforts to promote the equal representation of women and men in public and political life (Parliamentary Assembly Council of Europe, 2014).

Obviously, neither Russia nor China, the two main big powers playing the new game in the Central Asia region, are interested in setting up any democratic conditionality in their bilateral assistance programs.

For the successful implementation of the EU Strategy in Central Asia (Council of the European Union, 2007 and 2015), it is indeed of paramount importance that its ongoing efforts to facilitate the political transition to modernity and open societies in these countries, which are relatively open and enjoy some degree of civil society involvement, should not be undermined either by the negative propaganda against the EU model and its institutions or, on the other side, by the usual administrative opacity of the Russian and Chinese authorities.

It goes without saying that all these internal structural features of the Central Asian countries will determine the viability of the implementation of Chinese OBOR Initiative in the region.

## **II. Geopolitical and security implications of the "OBOR" Initiative for the region**

There is no doubt that China has viewed its ongoing and impressive economic growth in recent decades as "an opportunity to restore its glorious past as the regional, if not global, power, an aspiration long awaited by this country" (Ding, 2008). The launching of the OBOR Initiative constitutes a powerful instrument to achieve this ambitious strategic objective.

Moreover, President Xi Jinping's leadership is fully determined through this strategy to see China become, in two or three decades, the world's strongest economic superpower, surpassing the United States' economy, even if by 2030 or 2040, Chinese *per capita* income will continue to lag behind the American one.

In foreign policy, China continues to follow the Deng Xiaoping guideline to "hide our capabilities and bide our time" formulated in 1989 (Teng-Chi Chang, 2013). Nevertheless, with its assertive leadership, the Chinese "hidden" ambitions became evident. There are three main intermediate objectives:

Firstly, China wants to show its "power ideology" in Asia and promote its ideological model, image and strengthen its political influence.

Secondly, in geopolitical terms, the OBOR Strategy is also aimed at countering the Russian influence in Central Asia and limiting Chinese over-dependence on Russian energy and trade routes to Europe. In fact, the rise of China in the region has revealed undisguised concern in Russia and India. The recent military pivot of Russia to the Caspian Sea (Doix, 2016) and the renewed strategic interest in its Central Asian "back yard" demonstrate Russia's determination to defend its influence in the region. As regards India, it has emerged as global player largely in response to China's rise and has its own

regional and trade initiatives (“the Indian Cotton Route”), which underlines the attitude of mistrust and rivalry towards China’s OBOR Strategy (Dar Firdous, 2014).

Thirdly, China is very concerned about separatist movements in Xin Jiang, as well as the risk of seeing Islamic terrorism crossing the border and spreading into this region. This explains China’s domestic priority objective to develop, and thereby stabilize, its Western regions by integrating them into international trade routes, and by developing Asian markets to enable easier access to Chinese goods. As regards the so-called “three evil forces” (separatism, extremism and terrorism) Beijing intends to advance the multi-lateral role played by the CICA (“Conference on Interaction and Confidence Measures in Asia”). As underlined by Zogg (2016), the threat of Islamist terrorism is also a common and important source of concern for Central Asian governments.

For Central Asian countries which try to apply a relatively independent, multi-vector foreign policy, the implementation of OBOR raises a number of questions: will the Chinese initiative increase political stability in the region or provoke even more geopolitical rivalry and competition between Russia and China, thus creating a more unstable regional order in Central Asia?

Central Asia is a strategic “land bridge” region where the current convergence of Russian and Chinese interests is more apparent than real. Actually, the launching of OBOR does not reflect either a common vision of both countries on how to shape together a future regional order in Central Asia, nor the will to build an Anti-American coalition seeking to undermine USA influence, especially in Central Asia and South East Asia.

Conversely, one could easily imagine that OBOR is aimed at proving Chinese economic superiority, and a way of exerting a strategic influence in Central Asia, taking historical revenge on Russia. It is worth remembering that China’s relations with its neighbors, notably Russia, have been always haunted by history – a long history of conflicts and territorial disputes (Hyer, 2005).

In conclusion, China’s strategic global rise in Central Asia through OBOR could radically change the regional balance of power in Central Asia, creating more rivalry and instability between the military “hard power” of Russia and the strong economic leverage of China. In this context, the EU’s “soft power” could perhaps appear more attractive.

In any case, one crucial political requirement for the successful implementation of the OBOR investment projects concerns internal security. As recent experience shows in the China-Pakistan corridor, the increasing cost of security is one of the key managing factors in protecting infrastructure investment projects from potential terrorist attacks.

### **III. Regional economic integration, trade and sustainable development implications of the “OBOR” Initiative for the region**

Despite its common historical and cultural past (the colonization by the great Oghuz federation of nine Turkic tribes from the 8<sup>th</sup> century on and the introduction of Islam, the Silk Routes and ex-Republics of the Soviet Union) (Hattstein, 2000), Central Asia constitutes a heterogeneous region with a multiethnic and multi-linguistic composition (Russian is however the *lingua franca*) and a low degree of physical, economic and trade

integration. The lack of mutual trust, the persisting tensions over borders and the use and sharing of natural resources, as well as the differing stages of economic performance, have so far jeopardized the development of a genuine regional cooperation and integration model.

This conclusion is also confirmed by the relatively poor interregional connectivity data. According to the findings of the Asian Development Bank (ADB) in its 2016 annual report on Asian Economic Integration, the Central Asia sub-region is the least integrated geographic area within and across the other sub-regions of Asia, in particular the South East Asia region; the other key axis of the Chinese OBOR Initiative. All the indicators (trade, Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), migration, remittances, tourism) confirm this assessment.

Furthermore, this sub-region presents the lowest logistic performance index in Asia (from 57.1% in Kyrgyzstan to 69.8% in Kazakhstan being 100% that of the European Union, while China (91.3%), the European Union (100%) and most of the South East Asian countries, with the exception of Lao PDR (61.8%), offer very good scores (e.g. Vietnam: 81.6%; Thailand: 88.7% and Malaysia: 92.9%).

It is worth remembering that Central Asia shows a higher degree of integration with the rest of the world than other Asian sub-regions, due to the importance of its flows of trade, FDI, migration, tourism and remittances with Russia and the European Union.

Against this background, the idea behind the Chinese OBOR Initiative to develop rapid transportation, if well implemented, could not only unlash the region, reinforcing its integration with the rest of Asia, but also improve the interregional connectivity of these countries, developing the Central Asia regional market and improving mutual trust, intergovernmental cooperation and people-to-people contacts within the region.

For Chinese leadership, OBOR is seen as an opportunity to export overcapacity abroad, and offer loans to developing countries, without imposing political conditions, which would then contract Chinese firms for major infrastructure projects (so-called "High-Speed Diplomacy") in order to secure access to new sources of energy (a permanent obsession of Chinese leaders) as well as raw materials and foodstuff. In order to achieve this objective, China's rulers are using four key instruments.

First, competing for economic and trade hegemony in Asia through the setting up of an OBOR Mega Trade Block: The Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), as an alternative, and a competitor to the TPP (Trans-Pacific Partnership Mega deal). If TPP was designed by the Obama Administration to isolate China and is due to be withdrawn by the Trump Administration, Beijing argues that its RCEP proposal is inclusive, and thus open to all Asian partners, independent of their degree of development. Are Central Asian economies prepared to join the Chinese-led mega trade block in the near future? And how are they to reconcile successfully their potential participation in RCEP with membership in the Putin-led Eurasian Economic Union?

Secondly, the establishment of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) as a genuine, new Asian financial instrument to reshape the global financial order in Asia and to avoid over-dependence on existing international financial institutions in the region (Asian Development Bank, World Bank) currently controlled by the American and Japanese leaderships. What is the financial strength and voting power of Central Asian countries within the Board of the new Chinese AIIB?

Thirdly, the creation of an Asian Financial Market with the renminbi as a reference currency. The fascination of the Chinese leadership with the “Renminbi financial and monetary area” is not only an issue of international prestige (upgrading the status of its currency as one of the three international currencies with the dollar and the euro), but also a tool to internationalize the Chinese economy and spread the risks of OBOR investments. Are Central Asian countries ready to assume these financial risks?

Fourthly, as Chinese diplomats are used to saying, OBOR is aimed at creating a new “Common Destiny” in Asia, and has the capacity to ensure a “win-win” solution to the current problems of the region, promoting shared economic and trade benefits for all countries concerned. The rationale behind this seems less promising. In fact, by building its own “economic hinterland” in Central Asia, China will delocalize, towards low wages neighboring countries, the uncompetitive and polluting industrial sectors in the global chain of added value.

One could wonder whether this is really a kind of development strategy needed by Central Asian countries that are still suffering the consequences of a terrible past marked by ecological disasters, such as the drying up of the Aral Sea, following wrong political decisions taken outside the region by the former Soviet Union. In Central Asia, water allocation is an instrumental issue and needs to be solved jointly, in close cooperation inside the region among all partners concerned, putting them on an equal footing with Russia and China. In this context, the basic question from the European Union’s perspective is to know how OBOR might contribute to promoting regional cooperation and integration amongst Central Asian countries.

One relevant requirement for a successful trade and economic scenario in Central Asia is to conciliate the future RCEP Agreement with the Russian-led Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) (with some potential members, such as Uzbekistan or Turkmenistan, that have not yet joined the WTO, as indicated above). Actually, despite Russian efforts to regain economic influence in the region, trade within the EEU in 2015 is at its lowest level (6.1%) and is tending to diminish further, possibly leading to the conflict of interest within the trade bloc and the dissatisfaction about the current integration pattern and Russian dominance (Kinyakin, 2016). For the time being, the EEU has not yet proved its viability in becoming a solid regional economic organization in Central Asia. The negotiations on the RCEP Agreement in its current configuration (ten member States of ASEAN and the six states with which ASEAN has existing free trade agreements) has not still been concluded, and most trade analysts underline that the “noodle bowl” of Asian bilateral and semi-regional Preferential Agreements and Free Trade Agreements could trigger potentially harmful effects arising from differing and competing tariffs, rules of origin and other standards and official requirements under various agreements.

Making use of the bilateral and semi-regional PA and FTA requires Central Asian firms and administrative stakeholders to be well informed about how these accords operate and how to take advantage of them (Asian Development Bank, 2008).

Another requirement of paramount importance concerns the equal structure of representation, and the functioning of the new Chinese-led AIIB. Russia and most of the Central Asia countries (with the exception of Turkmenistan) are members of the bank. However, their joint voting share or political quota (1.92%) is marginal, and even with the “theoretical” support of Russian voting power (5.93%), their common negotiating

power is weak and unable to influence financial decisions relevant for the region to be adopted by the Bank's Board.

Actually, no one could challenge the diktat of China through coalitions. With an over-rated 26.06% of voting share, while representing only 23.2% of the GDP of all members of the Bank, China has a power of veto (the veto threshold is 25%) on all key financial operational decisions to be adopted by the Board. Conversely, the 15 European Union members of the Bank got an under-rated voting share of 20.17%, while representing 37.19% of the GDP of all members of the AIIB, and therefore are paying the consequences of Chinese overrepresentation.

Furthermore, with the launching of the AIIB as an international financial institution, China has inaugurated a new phase of "globalization without democracy." It is enlightening to take note of the Agreement establishing the Bank and to verify that there is no reference in its political mandate to the commitment of signatory countries to "the fundamental principles of multiparty democracy, the rule of law, respect for human rights and market economics" as is clearly stipulated in the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development's (EBRD) Agreement, set up in 1991 in the aftermath of the fall of communism and the dissolution of the USSR.

In order for the Chinese OBOR Strategy of engagement in Central Asia to be a success, it depends also, to a great extent, on the methodology to be implemented. There is a high degree of uncertainty concerning the institutional governance of the project, and the main document "Vision and Actions on Jointly Building Silk Road Economic Belt and 21<sup>st</sup> Century Maritime Road" lacks an articulate vision for dealing with the decision-making process and the functioning of its instruments, with the exception of the AIIB analyzed in precedent paragraph. Up to now, on the basis of recent concrete examples, one can demonstrate that China's leadership has failed to address appropriately the concerns of less powerful third countries involved in OBOR.

The recent failure of a Chinese project in Thailand (Crispin, 2016) shows the Chinese "insensitivity to foreign sensitivities," in the words of Luttwak (2015). Let us recall a concrete example: China asked for the granting of commercial-land developments rights as collateral for funding a railway project. Moreover, the operational methodology of the OBOR Initiative should work on the basis of a "bottom up" approach from the assisted countries, and not "top down" from the Beijing leaders and the Chinese Administration, as is the case at present.

The European Union's experience in the context of the definition and implementation of the Southern and Eastern Neighbourhood Policy, in particular, its institutional and administrative governance structures, could inspire and give useful suggestions to this complex and ambitious geopolitical strategy.

An Institutional Common Framework of the OBOR Initiative is additionally required to share and coordinate plans and the operational implementation of concrete infrastructure investment projects with the national authorities of the partner countries involved. Notwithstanding the high expectations created by OBOR, the Chinese authorities have not yet been interested in putting in place institutional, structured cooperation in this field.

In my view, a successful outcome of the OBOR Initiative requires that China does its utmost to ensure good coordination between the economic, transport and trade policies of all Asian countries covered by the Chinese Initiative.

Furthermore, there is a growing inconsistency between the official declarations of the Chinese leadership on a “Common Destiny” for all Asian countries involved in OBOR, and the real possibilities of framing and implementing a common, “win-win” sustainable development cooperation strategy in trade and economic areas at the level of the Central Asia or Southeast Asia region.

It is becoming ever clearer that China must demonstrate that, through building infrastructures and delocalizing some mature industrial sectors towards low-wages neighboring countries, it is pursuing a genuine and balanced partnership between equals, and not a strategy of primacy in Central Asia, looking first and foremost for the improvement of its overall competitiveness, following a “center-periphery scheme” and reinforcing its hegemony in the region.

There is no doubt that the Chinese perception of the Central Asia region as its “own economic backyard” may easily increase nationalistic feelings in some countries (such as the leasing of land by the Kazakhstan government to China) (Yu-Wen Chen, 2015 aforementioned) as we have seen in recent years in Pakistan (Rafi, 2016), Thailand, Myanmar and Vietnam, and recently in Sri Lanka (The Economist, 2017).

All these preconditions seem not to be given much importance by China. As the Chinese policy of cooperation in Latin America and the African continent shows, the Chinese have a tendency to dictate the content and modalities of cooperation assistance, which has caused some tensions in both regions. It also made evident the imbalanced nature of trade relationships where China’s interest prevails by securing key commodities.

#### IV. Conclusion

To be successful in implementing the OBOR Initiative, China has to demonstrate its capacity, on the political side, to enforce peace and stability, contributing to solving the remaining regional conflicts in Asia.

On the economic side, the Chinese Project has to ensure a balanced economic and trade impact, promoting greater social cohesion and prosperity in its neighborhood to Central Asia and South East Asia, the two main axes of the Initiative.

Unfortunately, it does not seem that China will go this way, as it demands a greater sense of responsibility for world affairs than they want to assume at present. The recent failure of the Chinese project in Thailand shows that China’s “assertiveness” leads to an “insensitivity to foreign, third countries’ sensitivities” as demonstrated when the Chinese authorities asked for the granting of commercial-land development rights as collateral for funding the railway project.

The operational methodology of the “One Belt, One Road” Initiative should work on the basis of a “bottom up” approach from the assisted countries, and not a “top down” approach from the Beijing leaders and Chinese administration as is currently the case.

The lack of a Common Institutional Framework and Common Administrative structures is one of the major problems in the successful implementation of the OBOR Initiative. In my view, China, focusing on its own national interests, notably on its internal political stability, is neither a predictable nor a credible partner. Therefore, the implementation of OBOR raises, at this initial stage, more doubts than certainties.

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**Chińska inicjatywa „jeden pas, jedna droga”:  
wyzwania i wymagania dotyczące jej skutecznego wdrożenia w Azji Środkowej**

**Streszczenie**

Dwadzieścia pięć lat po rozwiązaniu byłego Związku Radzieckiego i ponownym zaistnieniu republik Azji Środkowej jako niezależnych państw region ten nadal jest sceną rywalizacji wielkich mocarstw (Rosji, Chin, Unii Europejskiej, USA, Indii, Japonii, Turcji i Iranu) konkurujących w swego rodzaju „nowej wielkiej grze”, mającej na celu zwiększenie wpływów geopolitycznych i gospodarczych w regionie. Trwające ukryte współzawodnictwo wyjaśniają jego geografia, zróżnicowane i bogate zasoby naturalne, takie jak ropa naftowa i gaz.

Pomimo wspólnej przeszłości historycznej i kulturowej Azja Środkowa stanowi zróżnicowany region o wieloetnicznej i wielojęzycznej strukturze oraz niskim stopniu integracji fizycznej, gospodarczej i handlowej. Brak wzajemnego zaufania, utrzymujące się napięcia dotyczące granic oraz wykorzystania i współużytkowania zasobów naturalnych, a także różne poziomy wyników gospodarczych stanowiły jak dotąd zagrożenie dla rozwoju prawdziwej współpracy regionalnej.

W tym kontekście chińska inicjatywa OBOR (*One Belt One Road* – jeden pas, jedna droga), mająca na celu rozwój szybkiego transportu, teoretycznie mogłaby – w przypadku właściwej realizacji – poprawić połączenia międzyregionalne, rozwijając w ten sposób rynek Azji Centralnej oraz wspierając współpracę międzyrządową i kontakty międzyludzkie w regionie.

Czy możemy w takim razie spodziewać się, że ambitna chińska inicjatywa OBOR zwiększy stabilność geopolityczną i pomoże uzyskać wspólne korzyści gospodarcze i handlowe w Azji Środkowej? Jakie są przesłanki, które należałoby spełnić?

Autor szczegółowo analizuje pewne kluczowe wymagania polityczne, gospodarcze i instytucjonalne niezbędne w celu skutecznego wdrożenia strategii OBOR stwierdzając jednak, że trzy lata po uruchomieniu tego kluczowego instrumentu chińskiego modelu „globalizacji bez demokracji” jego wdrożenie stoi w obliczu poważnych problemów, budząc tym samym większe wątpliwości niż pewność.

**Słowa kluczowe:** inicjatywa „jeden pas, jedna droga”; Ekonomiczny Pas Jedwabnego Szlaku i Azja Środkowa; Bank Inwestycyjny Infrastruktury Azjatyckiej; Eurazjatycka Wspólnota Gospodarcza