

Preface: China Creating an Additional Strategic Partnership with the Post-Communist Part of Europe?

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Not much has been known or written about China's current relations with the former Eastern Europe so far.¹ Eastern, Southeastern and Central Europe, including the post-Soviet Baltic States, and also the Balkans, were not perceived completely as an inseparable part of the Eastern Bloc and a coherent group of states outside of and west of the Soviet Union in China, as China focused its attention on Yugoslavia, Romania and Albania when it came to it seeking political allies in the region. While the East Europeans were mostly looking at China (the People's Republic of China, or the PRC) with sympathies and hopes of attaching a new attractive partner state to the whole Eastern Bloc, the Kremlin observed the Chinese wooing of potential allies among its Eastern European satellites with a growing anger. To tell the truth, the Chinese interest in Eastern Europe was always driven by pragmatic needs: at first China wanted to enlarge its political influence beyond the USSR in the Eastern Bloc's political field, and secondly, it dealt with Eastern European states in order to gain access to technologies and industrial products which were unavailable in China at the time due to the Cold War era Western embargo that made the PRC dependent mostly on technologies imported from the Soviet Union. Thus Eastern Europe gained its temporary image as the "West of the East", which, however, was fading since the turn of the 1980s and the 1990s while China was opening itself up to other countries and going through its economic transformation.

The Chinese perception of Eastern Europe has always been hierarchical within the contemporary geostrategic and ideological context. The Central and East European (CEE)² countries thus remained under the territorial classification of the European and Central Asian region, as this classification of them could be seen on the web pages of the Foreign Ministry of the

People's Republic of China (FMPRC) even in the late 1990s as a relic of the Cold War era, and it lasted until the CEE states' accession to the EU, which eventually swung them up into the category of the "European Region".³ The Chinese differentiating between CEE and the Balkan states in the 1950s reflected Moscow's hegemony, however, with the rising Sino-Soviet schism Beijing's policy was daring to play a more emancipated role, and continued seeking allies and "revisionist" sympathizers within the splitting Eastern Bloc. The ideological rift between the USSR and its satellites in CEE and the Balkans, as well as the ideological gap between the USSR and China, grew as the different sides had diverse ideas and models of building socialism and developed dissonant attitudes towards the guiding role of Moscow.

The epoch of the East European relations with China during the communist era may be interpreted as a period of discontinuity, disappointment and failure due to the USSR's restrictive role, disagreement over the assessment of the *Great Leap Forward* and *Cultural Revolution* campaigns, and the two sides' divergent engagements in the Vietnam War. There was also Beijing's ambivalent diplomacy in the cases of the reforms in Poland (1956), Hungary (1956) and Czechoslovakia (1968); at first, Beijing highlighted the movements' attempts to emancipate the states from Moscow's lined up model of socialism, but then it showed no passion for the democratization processes in these countries, and eventually it even came to support the USSR's hard line measures against them. The Soviet invasion into Czechoslovakia in August 1968 that launched the crackdown on the "*Prague Spring*" reform movement was understood mainly as a signal or warning for the CEE satellites; however, this Europe-centric perspective of the invasion undervalued the more global effect of the Brezhnev Doctrine of Limited Sovereignty, i.e. the threat of a military invasion if a violation of the Soviet ideological monopoly took place. Such an indirect threat was strongly deduced in Beijing, and it became a security concern which significantly preoccupied China's policy towards the USSR until the late 1980s.

The deepening rift between the USSR and the PRC brought about damaging consequences for the emerging bilateral ties of the individual CEE states with China, but the exceptions to this pattern were the Balkan communist states, namely Albania, Yugoslavia and Romania, which resisted the pressure from Moscow and developed their rapprochements with China to a larger extent than other East European satellites. Nevertheless, East

Germany, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and Bulgaria faithfully followed Moscow's political stand in their bilateral contacts with China, which became strained especially during the 1960s and 1970s.

However, Gorbachev's reform era in the USSR together with improvements in the Sino-Soviet relations eventually opened up a space for the CEE countries' more autonomous policies toward China. As could be expected, business was the driving force for the revival of their search for the presumably huge Chinese market, and the idea of "putting economy first" at the expense of ideology was taking the lead as the common idea of market liberalization throughout the Eastern Bloc, as well as in the PRC. China's general diplomatic offensive in Europe, which began in the middle of the 1970s, shortly after the normalization of the China-US and China-Japan relations, focused mainly on reestablishing China's pre-war relations with the Western part of Europe. The countries of the Eastern part – i.e. the rest of Europe – reestablished their relations with China in the 1980s due to their lesser relevance for China in terms of economic, geopolitical, and cultural potential in comparison with the UK, France, and West Germany, and also due to the emerging importance of the European Economic Community (EEC). In fact, both China and the countries of the Eastern Bloc could not consider each other and their new rapprochement as foreign policy priorities, but there were reasons to maintain the continuity of their then recent economic interactions, which involved things like annual barter trade agreements, the CEE countries' technology exports and their imports of cheap China-made consumer goods. Upgrading the trade and investment agenda is thus no new idea in Eastern European-Chinese diplomacy; the concept came into existence already during the departure of the communist era and arose during the dawning of the post-communist era: pragmatism as a post-ideological principle created the base for the new post-Cold War ties. The split of the USSR, the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact, and the reorientation of the East European foreign policies towards NATO and the EU were observed in Beijing as a geopolitical shift which brought about no significant concerns for China, which at that time already stood on the side of the winners of the Cold War.

However, the transformation of the Sino-CEE relations brought about new challenges. The post-communist countries in the former Eastern bloc had been transformed into democratic states and imposed the liberal democratic principles not just domestically, but also in their new foreign policies. Some

of them openly raised the issues of human rights abuses against China, provided political support for the Tibetan exiles, and established non-official ties with Taiwan. Beside these new confrontational themes, even the often highlighted economic agenda in CEE appeared to be marked by disillusion. In the 1990s, the CEE countries' bilateral trade statistics regarding China dropped below the late 1980s level due to the transformation difficulties of the former communist state enterprises, and also owing to the PRC's rejection the past bureaucratic system of bilateral barter trade agreements. In addition to that, the growing fierce competition in the oversupplied Chinese domestic market made the CEE exporters' situation even more frustrating, as the CEE industrial trademarks and investment projects were becoming quickly forgotten and were no longer seen as relevant. The post-communist European states thus belonged among the most disillusioned states in regard to their China dream, i.e. their hope for a special prominence on the world's biggest consumer market – with a population of 1,3 billion.⁴

Instead of finding a paradise of special industrial zones and a huge consumer market (which they had presumed would be the case), the reforming CEE states found the reforming China to be a country with overestimated marketing prospects, bureaucratic obstacles, tariff and non-tariff trade protectionism, an economic nationalism favoring domestic producers, difficult access to trade distribution, and very limited access to the financial and telecommunication sectors. The trade statistics of the post-communist countries followed the same common trend as those of most of the western European countries (the old EU member states), which experienced poor export results and increasing trade imbalances in their trade with the PRC. Meanwhile, since the 1990s the Chinese exporters found the newly open CEE states to be easily accessible markets for the additional expansion of Chinese exports, whereas the shares of the Eastern European exports in China were rapidly decreasing (Tubilewicz, 1999; Taube, 2002).

China's policy towards the European post-communist states respected the political and economic transition processes that happened in the region throughout the late 1980s and in the following decades, as the political divergence between the PRC and CEE did not matter much in terms of the way Beijing perceived the space between the EU and Russia. But if we do not count the routine official agenda and the slowly growing economic ties between China and the CEE countries, China was not hugely interested

in the post-communist states; it was even the case that the Chinese media coverage of CEE remained minimal, selective, and mostly negative. The post-communist reform model in the USSR and its former satellites gave a discouraging scenario of economic and political chaos and decline that contrasted with China's spectacular triumph of its reforms. The Chinese mainstream academic discourse denied the CEE surge of neoliberal reforms as an improper concept for the specific case of China. It was typical that the splitting up into smaller states of the USSR, Yugoslavia, and Czechoslovakia has been the most highlighted and commonly known information about CEE in the PRC, but most Chinese had no idea about the positive impact of the East European transformation, and its effect on the growing living standards and economic prosperity in the CEE countries. On the contrary, in China, there was actually an ideological discrediting and disesteeming of the outcomes of their reform processes that complied with the official Chinese public discourse that rejected any liberal democratic transition in the Chinese domestic context after the Beijing Spring in 1989 (see Tubilewicz, 1997: 927–943). Such a lack of basic information prolonged China's poor knowledge about the CEE states, which were even generally classified as developing countries in China in the 1980s (Liu–Mastny, 2008: 179).⁵

Starting with the late 1980s Eastern Europe also came to be a little known transit space for growing numbers of Chinese migrants, who sought new opportunities for trading in cheap consumer goods in the post-communist Europe. But the stream of migrants aimed mostly at the western part of the EU, while the Chinese who stayed in the CEE communities remained there in limited numbers and maintained only very limited interaction with the local majority societies (Nyíri, 1999, 2007; Skeldon, 2000; Mezlíková–Moore–Tubilewicz, 2001). Nevertheless, the process of post-communist transformation in the former Eastern Europe as well as in China definitely ended the quasi-ideological ties between the two sides that were based in their previously existing non-coherent and doctrinaire “comradeship” partnership, and eventually opened up for them a new post-ideological era of more truly defined relations which lie primarily in national material interests. The growing mutual economic relevance of the two sides has been the common ground for the building of the new post-communist ties between China and the CEE countries, and the later emerging political dimension of the ties followed as a secondary effect and also as a reaction to the EU's eastern expansion.

The Chinese Global Investment Expansion at the Beginning of the New Millennium

The growing Chinese interest in the European post-communist countries is a brand new theme that deserves attention. As most of the Central and East European states and several South-Eastern European states already became member states of the European Union, their bilateral policies towards the PRC should be studied mainly within the format of the EU-China strategic partnership, which was declared in 2003. Nevertheless, the new regional multilateral agenda that was developed by Beijing, and which is conducted under the official name the “Warsaw Initiative”, comprises the new Sino-European multilateral regional organization format called “1+16”, i.e. it consists of China plus 16 CEE states.⁶ The common agenda got promoted up to the level of high-level annual summits of Prime Ministers, and took up the program of *China’s 12 Measures for Promoting Friendly Cooperation with Central and Eastern European Countries*, which is commonly called “The Twelve Measures”.⁷ This new regional format within the EU (which involves eleven EU member states and five countries that are not yet EU members) already established its own Secretariat (the *Secretariat for Cooperation with Central and Eastern European Countries*), which is a common institutional body located at China’s Foreign Ministry. It was inaugurated in Beijing in September 2012, and the PRC’s Deputy Foreign Minister, Mr. Song Tao, became its head.

The China-led multilateral agenda that it shared with the post-communist countries already took shape most noticeably in the *Budapest Economic Forum* in 2011. Then it was soon followed by the *Warsaw Summit* in April 2012, where the “Warsaw Initiative” framework came into existence, and then the second summit of the 1 + 16 group was held in Bucharest in November 2013. The driving force for the new Sino-East-European accelerating rapprochement was definitely the economic concerns that originated mainly in the Chinese global investment surge since the beginning of the new millennium. As the soaring Chinese needs for strategic resources implied dramatically growing investment flows into developing countries all over the world, Europe still ranked as the PRC’s number one trading partner. Besides the growing level of trade and investments between the old EU states and China, the post-communist Eastern European and South-Eastern

peripheries are still found to be worth China's attention. Those peripheral countries of the EU altogether represent a relevant share of the EU internal common market – roughly 1/3 of it – and access to the rest of the EU with a still unfinished transport infrastructure. Besides, the natural resources and economic potential of the Eastern and South-Eastern EU peripheries offer a great deal of industrial and agricultural products for trade and investments deals, and the peripheries also offer opportunities for deals and cooperation in the spheres of telecommunications, IT, financial service, energy and the environmental sector, transport and logistics, land and the real estate property market.

The media highlighted the new spectacular cases of Chinese investments into Romanian and Bulgarian energy projects and big scale infrastructure construction works, the planned huge Chinese-Polish investment deals in the context of a Polish shale gas project, and also the spectacular Chinese loan of €1 billion for Hungary's recovery from the economic crises. Furthermore, the PRC's special credit line of €10 billion was planned to support some common Sino-East European projects in CEE. Such supportive measures from China are commonly viewed in CEE as great opportunities for solving the problems of the recent crises that befell the CEE economies, and China is also viewed as an alternative extra-EU investment provider.⁸

However, China's establishing of a transport and logistics hub in CEE to penetrate EU internal markets and by-pass EU import control regimes by transporting products through less strict Eastern peripheries may raise concerns in Brussels. Besides, the European Commission may have doubts about the possible coherence of individual states' economic policies and the declining political unity within the common EU foreign policy making. Moreover, the growing Chinese attention to CEE, which this book perceives as a process of *re-discovering*, does not necessarily imply a doubtful and suspicious view of China as an Asian alien intruding into Europe. There have been various spheres of mutual fascination that could not be realized earlier due to geographical and historical determinants which set those two different cultural spaces apart. China and CEE now have a good chance for finding a mutual recognition and a mutual understanding, and previously, they did not have many such chances. As China's past views of Europeans were obscured by the negative legacy of western imperial expansion, and China's limited knowledge of the differences between West and East Europe, the

new (possibly negative) East European perception of the Chinese is being similarly overshadowed by a deluge of criticism for a different political tradition and hostility that is due to the rising challenge of Asian economic competition. However, the new East European rapprochement with the PRC offers an excellent opportunity for the two sides to review their similar historical experiences, that is, if the two sides are not too busy with doing business to do anything else.

Analytical Framework and Methodology

This book aims to conduct the first ever scholarly analysis on the new theme of how China is currently rediscovering Europe's Eastern and South-Eastern periphery. The post-communist early stage of the ties between the PRC and the states in the former Eastern Bloc was chronicled and studied in writings that were generally focused on the post-Cold War Sino-European relations (Yahuda, 1994; Shambaugh, 1996; Rovinski, 1994; Sandschneider, 2002; Taube, 2002; Tubilewicz, 1997, 1998a, 1998b, 1999; Liu–Mastny, 2008). Moreover, a significantly lesser quantum of literature deals specifically with the new relations of CEE and South-Eastern European states with China after their accession to the EU, and this topic is dealt with in both a regional perspective and the perspectives of individual states (on the Czech Republic and Slovakia, see Fürst, 2011; Gregušová, 2006; Fürst–Pleschová, 2010; on Hungary, see Matura, 2011; Szunomár, 2011; and on Poland, see Szczudlik-Tatar, 2011).

The aim of this book is to contribute to the empirical area studies on the current trends in the China-CEE relations after 2010, when China accelerated its effort toward engaging the post-communist Europe in its global strategy, and to provide the first attempt at an analysis of this new phenomenon. What we hope to do is to trace the Chinese economic and diplomatic expansion into the territory, which has for a long time been underestimated and insufficiently known in China. The recently published local papers and case studies on this theme in CEE (except for the sources mentioned above; on the case of the Balkans, see Poulain, 2011) mostly covered individual countries and localized their scope by limiting it to the Central European region, while the West European publishers focused mainly on the whole EU area (including the new EU member states from CEE) in their analyses and policy papers

on Europe-China relations (Fox–Godement, 2009; Godement–Parello–Plesner–Richard, 2011; Holslag, 2006; Hanemann–Rosen, 2012; Casarini, 2013). Such an analytic framework has its value, but it did not recognize the emancipating Chinese policy that is simultaneously emerging in the post-communist peripheral part within the EU. The shift in the Chinese dealing with the EU towards a more bilateral and regional level is not a new one, as the EU-China strategic partnership agenda was already becoming fragmented by the actions of some influential western member states of the EU – most notably Germany, France, and the UK, which established their special bilateral ties with Beijing on the level of special country to country strategic partnerships beyond Brussels’ common foreign policy. Not surprisingly, indeed, such a progressing fragmentation of the EU unity vis-à-vis the PRC raised allegations that the western member states were paving the way for a Chinese “*divide and conquer*” strategy.⁹ In addition to that, the simultaneous opening of the new regional agenda called 1 + 16, which involved most of the post-communist EU member states, is another confirmation of Brussels’ decreasing status in Beijing’s dealing with the EU.

The new Chinese appreciation of the CEE area naturally caused great expectations to rise in all 16 of the individual countries, regardless of the fact that the previous economic impact of Chinese investments in the countries and their trade exchange with the PRC was mostly disappointing for them. The fact that the Czech Republic regards China as a strategic economic partner was the reason why this research project received state financial support from the Czech government for establishing an international research team to cover this theme.¹⁰ The CEE states seemingly do not view China as a misleading challenger to their long term EU- and NATO-oriented foreign policies and security ties, and can not seriously view the Asian power as an alternative option to their West-related identities; on the other hand, however, the emergence of China in a part of Europe which had been so far untouched by Chinese influence is an irreversible fact and a beginning of a new relationship, regardless of exaggerated diplomatic clichés about mutual strategic partnerships.

This monograph summarizes a set of individual case studies of all the post-communist states that have been conducted by five authors, and it covers Central, Eastern, South-Eastern (the Balkans) and North-Eastern (the three Baltic states) Europe. The regional extent includes the three non-EU member

states Belarus, Ukraine and Moldova, and also Greece in order to include the whole of the Balkans, even if Greece is not a post-communist state. The geographical scope was intentionally focused that way in order to convey relevant empirical data on the economic, political, cultural, academic, and interpersonal relations of these countries with China. As such, a study that would provide a general empirical overview of the CEE-China relations and cover the complete list of European post-communist states has not yet been available in the scholarly literature, and the authors hope to provide this summary as the first step in mapping the former East Europe's new interrelationships with China.

By including Belarus, Ukraine and Moldova, which all lie beyond the format of 1+16, we hope to trace how far the Chinese policies within and inside the EU space are variable and coherent. Especially the high relevance of their economic relations with China makes these countries (but most significantly Ukraine) some of the most attractive partners of China within the whole East European region. If we left out this Eastern outer periphery of the EU, we would leave this analysis as incomplete. There are no doubts that China aims to exploit the differences and diversities among the EU member states, and that especially the recently accessed ones in the Eastern and Southeastern EU peripheries are useful partners for this policy.

In this book the partial case studies of individual states are structured by our attempt to map out the mutual comparative context, which we found according to the regional criteria that may give us adequate links due to the region's economic, historical and political coherence. The whole area is divided into three groups: 1. Central Europe and Baltics, 2. the Balkans, and 3. East Europe in the Greater Europe Zone, i.e. including also Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova. As any system of grouping analyses and assessments may be found questionable, the Conclusion provides its own non-regional system of ratings for individual countries. The available *Power Audit of EU-China Relations* (2009) made in the ECFR, which is taken here as an inspiring example, offered a specific categorization of the EU member states into the four following groups: *the assertive industrialists*, *the ideological free-traders*, *the accommodative mercantilists*, and *the European followers*. The dividing criteria for the assessments and the placing of the countries into a chart were chosen, firstly, according to their ways of dealing with China in relation to their economic agendas and, secondly, according to their political

attitudes when engaging China internationally.¹¹ The following ECFR paper, which reviewed the changes in EU member states' policies towards China after the global financial crises in 2008 re-categorized the groups into *frustrated market-openers*, *cash-strapped deal seekers*, and *unlabelled states* (a category in-between the first two groups).¹² While at first glance, the category of *cash-strapped deal seekers* might be considered to be quite a good match for the prevailing characteristics of all the post-communist countries included in this study (plus Greece), there are still many obvious cases of CEE countries that are not entirely compatible with that category by far, with typical examples of such cases being the three Baltic States and the Central European countries, with the exception of Hungary.

The reason for developing our own rating system is thus justified by the unavailability of a detailed description of the rating practices of previous EFCR papers, though otherwise their system offered relevant and field work-based conclusions. The second, and even more urgent, argument for searching for an alternative way of making assessments of the countries is that the 16 post-communist states, Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova (and also Greece) differ in many aspects from the western EU member states, and compiling all the empirical data on them which have been collected in the fieldwork, interviews, and media resources as well as in the already written occasional case studies constitutes a large amount of empirical material that is worth a separate primary research.

The third reason is the available option of employing the Czech IR researchers' own concept of *national interest*, which was introduced by several authors at the Institute of International Relations in Prague (Drulák–Braun, 2010; Kratochvíl, 2010). The proposed notion of *national interest* is based in three criteria: *relevance*, *domestic consensus*, and *external acceptability*. These three terms taken together enable us to consider to what extent countries' foreign policies are important, how they reach internal legitimacy through consensus, and to what extent they are acceptable to the countries' foreign partners. In order to address the differences in the individual attitudes of the CEE countries toward China and vice versa, this analysis concludes with an assessment of their economic ties and political relations with China through a system of ratings which reveals the progress in trade and investment, the differences between the expected effects and the current outcomes, and to what extent these countries politically grew closer

to China. Due to the limited availability of empirical data from China, this analysis cannot display to what extent China finds its priorities to be relevant and consensus-based, and therefore this study remains more subjectively Eurocentric. The access to dates and information is significantly larger in the case of CEE countries, whereas up-to-date economic data and current media information from China provide insufficient resources for a more detailed assessment.

This book was not primarily intended to conduct theoretical examinations of the new Chinese expansion into the Eastern and South-Eastern periphery of Europe. The first reason for this is that there is a lack of sufficient and more complex empirical research on that theme, and there is thus a necessity to work the empirical information out first. The second reason is that the authors cannot perceive that the growing Chinese interest in this part of Europe might have anything to do with geostrategic concerns, as the motivation for the Chinese activity obviously lies in the economic field. This implies considerations of an economy-engaged network of interrelations as those which are studied by the current neo-liberal stream of international relations theoretical approaches. Also the post-communist European states, which did not place China into the center of their foreign policy strategies, regard China as their alternative economic partner, and their perceptions of the Asian economic power accept the general trend of economic globalization. Naturally, the dynamism of the Chinese diplomacy in post-communist Europe follows the *going global* strategy era and the primarily economic motivation of China's interest in the territories, which are in-between the European Union and Russia, both of which are already strategic partners of the PRC.

Any realist (and neo-realist) approaches focused on security and hard power issues have generally been inapplicable in Sino-European relations so far due to the limited scope of the PRC's political objectives in Europe and the even more limited scope of the European ones in China. Therefore the observations of the Chinese diplomatic offensive in CEE belong mainly to the sphere of economic diplomacy. But why should the Chinese interest in the East and Southeast European periphery be studied as anything different from the similar Chinese strategies that have recently spread out to the BRIC countries and most of the third world states in Asia, Africa and Latin America? What makes the new 1+16 diplomatic offensive unique in the European view is the PRC's combining of a state supported economic diplomacy with

a quasi-development agenda, as the CEE countries exceed the development standards for being categorized as developing countries.

However, if we regarded the Chinese objectives as being focused exclusively on plain economic calculations, we would be understating the PRC's utilizing of economic instruments for the pursuit of political goals. While China was mapping the possibilities of the most strategic inward investments and trade deals in CEE, spreading the Chinese influence in the spheres of financial service and telecommunications there, and increasing its efforts to internationalize the Chinese currency, one can trace that more explicit Chinese political goals in regard to CEE were also arising. These goals are evident in cases of media influence and China dealing with local civil societies, and also in the areas of China's trade disputes with the EU, intellectual property rights issues, cultural policy, and visa and migration policies. The Chinese political concerns are expected to increase in relation to the EU-27 and common CEE policies in the V4 format. It is noticeable how China perceives the EU's unfinished integration process and internal discords (see, for example, Lisbonne-de Vergeron, 2007; Chen, 2012: 7–30), and how systematically it utilizes them when creating the separate regional formats within the EU on basis of the 1+16 and 1+V4 formats.

The main goal of this book is to draw up an empirical analysis of CEE and its relations with China, and therefore it mainly follows a structuring plan that divides the whole text into three basic parts, with each part covering a specific CEE region. Part I, *The Visegrad Four and the Baltic States: Prominent Actors and Hesitators*, covers Central Europe, i.e. the group of the Visegrad Four (V4) countries and the three post-communist Baltic States. This section devotes one full chapter (authored by Justyna Szczudlik-Tatar) to the case of Poland, which appeared to be the non-official leader within the V4 as well as within the whole group of 16 countries in the 1+16 format. Then two chapters (by Gabriela Pleschová and Rudolf Fürst, respectively) are devoted to the three states which make up the rest of the V4 and which conduct a different kind of China policy – Hungary, Slovakia, and the Czech Republic. These states are the most close to German-speaking countries and Germany-influenced countries in geographical and economic terms, and politically they are the most pro-western ones. The next chapter (by Rudolf Fürst) deals with the case of the three Baltic States: Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia. These states cover the North-Eastern EU periphery at the strategic crossroads between

Scandinavia and Russia. So far they attracted little attention from China before the current decade. Nevertheless, this part of Europe has eventually come to be included in the new Chinese *go global* economic trend.

Part II – *The Balkans Revisited: The Chinese Southeastern Hub in Europe* – is written by the Czech Balkanologist Filip Tesař. His part of the book, which is the quantitatively largest part, deals with South-Eastern Europe, i.e. the Balkans, which is the biggest regional group in CEE, as it includes the Western Balkans (Croatia, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Kosovo, Macedonia and Albania), the Eastern Balkans (Bulgaria and Romania) and also Greece and Slovenia. It can be argued that Greece and Kosovo are not included within the 1+16 format, and Slovenia should not have been included in this section because it is frequently regarded as a Central European state; however, these countries have still been examined in this section for the sake of the completeness of the regional context of the analysis. The aim of this separating of the Balkans from the V4 and the East European periphery is to trace the hypothetical specifics in the Sino-European regional relations and to explore the variability in China's strategies. As during the Cold War there has been an evident and specific tradition of relations between the former Yugoslavia, Albania, and Romania and the PRC, the recent soaring ties of the Balkans with China seem to suggest a shift of the Chinese perceptions of this region in Europe in the new context of EU enlargement. Finally, the last part of the book is Part III, *The Eastern Periphery of the EU: Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova*, which was written by the Czech expert on Russian speaking countries Karel Svoboda. With this section, the draft continues to explore the same dilemma – whether the Chinese strategy accommodates to the local specific conditions of the CEE countries, or to what extent China follows its hypothetical general scenario for the post-communist CEE. Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova also do not cohere with the China-led 1+16 format; however, their political and economic vicinity is in many aspects strikingly reminiscent of the Sino-CEE rapprochement, and especially the cases of their booming economic, political and military cooperation with China may contribute to a complex review of the expanding Chinese presence in the area between the EU and Russia, and also within the EU's Eastern Neighborhood.