

Belt and Road: Eastern Europe Tilts to Eurasia?

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Small but geopolitically important steps were taken by key members of the European Union from the EU's Eastern periphery. While largely ignored in Western mainstream media and in Brussels, they could well portend a longer-term alternative economic space to the failing construct known misleadingly today as the European Union with its bankrupt Eurozone single currency and European Central Bank. I refer to the talks recently in Beijing at the major Belt and Road Forum, between leaders of 29 nations and China's President Xi Jinping with the Prime Ministers of Hungary, Greece, Italy, Spain as well as the President of the Czech Republic and the President-elect of the Republic of Serbia.

The significance of the attendance of these specific European countries is underscored by the conspicuous absence of the leaders of Germany, France (maybe excusable due to presidential elections), and the remaining EU member countries, as well as the absence of the President of the EU Commission.

The list of Beijing attendees confirms that a tectonic fault line is developing across Europe between government leaders opting for national economic growth and development versus the nations whose leaders are still tied to the sclerotic, dying economies of the old Atlanticist order known as the American Century.

'Historical Cusp'

China made clear to the USA and the EU that their OBOR infrastructure project was not at all exclusionary. Beijing made clear months ago that it genuinely wanted their participation in what Vladimir Putin called the development of an Eurasian Century.

Trump responded by sending a low-level National Security Council civil service bureaucrat named Matt Pottiger. Germany's Merkel sent her Economics Minister who pompously declared in Beijing that Germany would not sign the Forum Joint Communique, complaining instead that she wanted a "level playing field," newspeak for the old Anglo-American globalization model that makes the rules for "less developed" countries and thereby gives superior advantage for the Western G-7 multinational giant corporations and [states](#).

Notably, leaders of the EU countries most strongly objecting to Brussels policies in key areas of the economy and refugees, such as Hungary's Viktor Orban, strongly embraced participation in China's vast \$22 trillion infrastructure project called One Belt, One Road or OBOR, more recently Belt and Road, for short.



In remarks in Beijing summarizing his talks there, Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán (image on the right, source: The Economic Times) spoke bluntly of an emerging global tectonic fault line. Orbán declared that the old globalisation model is obsolete, noting that “a large part of the world has had enough of a world where “a few developed countries have been continuously lecturing most of the world on human rights, democracy, development and the market economy,” a direct slap in the face to the US-led “democracy and human rights” NGOs of George Soros and the CIA-tied USAID which have ferociously tried to topple the very popular [Orbán](#).

Orbán added that the world today has, “arrived at a cusp between historical eras: the old model for globalisation – built on the assumption that money, profit and technological know-how are in the West, flowing ‘from there to less developed, eastern countries.’ That model, Orbán stressed, has “lost its impetus.” The Hungarian leader emphasized the crucial point that Washington and the stagnating governments of much of the EU are in denial. “Over the past ten years, the global economy’s engine room is no longer in the West, but in the East. More precisely, the East has [caught up with the West.](#)”

The Hungarian Prime Minister noted the fact that in Hungary over the past year or so, “large American and European companies have been bought up by Chinese enterprises, leading to a sharp increase in the number of Hungarian development projects that are now Chinese-owned. This movement of capital is totally different to what we have been used to, and to what we have been taught about how the global economy operates.”

Orbán obviously gets the very central point that Washington, Wall Street, Brussels and Berlin are in denial over: The emerging Eurasian Century represents an entire new quality of globalization. No longer are the colonial European powers or their American cousins holding the key cards or calling the shots.

During his private talks in Beijing with Xi Jinping and other Chinese officials, Orbán signed Memoranda of Understanding in connection with linking the OBOR infrastructure with the economies of Europe.

For Hungary, Orbán signed financial and economic agreements in Beijing. He stated that the “most spectacular” of these agreements was for modernisation of the Budapest, Hungary to Belgrade, Serbia railway line, including the financing. Serbian President-elect Aleksandar Vučić, together with Orbán a major target of destabilization protests led by Washington NGOs of George Soros and the National Endowment for Democracy, also participated in the signing.

Notable is also the fact that Hungary's Orban also met in Beijing with Turkish President Recep Erdogan, a featured OBOR keynote speaker alongside Russian President Vladimir Putin. Orbán told reporters that he had Erdogan, who was also attending the One Belt, One Road forum. The Prime Minister told Erdogan,

"We will always show Turkey respect, especially as European security – including Hungary's security – is greatly dependent on Turkey, because today Turkey is a stable country that is capable of preventing illegal migration."

Orban added that "properly maintaining" Hungarian-Turkish relations was one of Hungary's most important national security [interests](#).

The Greek Connection

In addition to Hungary and Serbia, debt-ridden Greece is also drawing closer to Beijing and her OBOR initiatives. Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras, until recently a darling of the International Monetary Fund for bringing his Parliament to sign savage pension cuts and other austerity laws so that the EU and IMF debt deals go forward, is finding the Chinese OBOR option increasingly attractive.

In a meeting with Tsipras in Beijing before the opening of the OBOR forum, China's Xi Jinping offered Tsipras proposals of expanding cooperation in infrastructure, energy and telecommunications. Xi told Tsipras, according to the official Chinese news agency, that Greece was an important part in China's new Silk Road strategy. He put it in characteristic Chinese language:

"At present, China and Greece's traditional friendship and cooperation continues to glow with new [dynamism](#)."

Greek infrastructure development group Copelouzos signed a deal with China's Shenhua Group to cooperate in green energy projects and to upgrade power plants in Greece. The deals are worth more than \$3 billion. In 2016, China's largest shipping company, state-owned COSCO bought majority ownership stake in Piraeus Port Authority as preparation to turn Greece into a transshipment hub for the rapidly growing trade between Asia and [Eastern Europe](#).

It is important to recall that, contrary to the religious dogma of economic simpletons such as Milton Friedman, there exist in nature no such entities as "free markets." Markets are the careful product of man-made economic infrastructure developments. This is the core of China's "globalization with Chinese characteristics," as Deng might have termed Xi's OBOR idea.

In recent months China has been a major investor in Greece's economy, a sharp contrast to the demands of the EU and IMF for Greek austerity. The China State Grid last year bought a 24 percent stake in Greek power grid operator ADMIE for [320 million euros](#).

Many other Chinese investment projects are in discussion with Greece. One of the more interesting and little appreciated is China's deployment of tourism as a geopolitical instrument. Over the past decade or so a huge number of Chinese have attained a middle income status as China's economy boomed. This has led to an equally huge rise in Chinese

wanting to “see the world” as tourists.



This month, just prior to the OBOR forum, the large Chinese investment conglomerate Fosun International announced that it was planning to make Greece tourism a major goal for Chinese tourists. With this in mind Fosun this March bought a significant 5% share of the European tour group, Thomas Cook, a share now at 8%, tendency rising.

The Shanghai company plans to use its Thos. Cook arm to organize direct flights from Beijing and Shanghai to Athens. Fosun also plans to service the China-Athens tourism rise via her newly-acquired subsidiary, the well-established French-based Club Med. Fosun is also planning to buy or construct major Greek luxury tourism hotels. The Fosun company says it expects at least 1.5 million Chinese tourists will find the Greek islands as their goal, a huge boost to the troubled Greek economy. For Greece, the Chinese tourism engagement is pure honey to the soul. Fully 25% of the Greek [GDP is tourism-based](#).

If we take the developments in Beijing’s OBOR forum of Hungary, Serbia, Greece, Czech Republic, and add to this the fact that Turkey’s President Recep Erdogan was also present and made a major commitment to participate in the China-Russian-led OBOR, we have the seed crystal of a world geopolitical renaissance that contains the potential to replace the now-dead Anglo-American globalization model of top-down fascist economic domination, with a model truly based on mutual benefit among sovereign nations. As a traditional Russian saying goes, the select nations of Eastern Europe, along with Russia, China and perhaps also Turkey, are truly “making porridge together,” making rich nutritious Kasha.

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