

COMPARISON OF HUNGARY AND THE EUROPEAN UNION IN THEIR RELATIONS WITH THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA BETWEEN 2012 AND 2023¹

ABSTRACT

The last decade and a half has seen significant changes in the international system: China's foreign policy has changed markedly, the EU has been transformed in many ways, and Hungary's economic catch-up has gained significant momentum. In order to explore the relationship between the parties, the research examines their external relations between 2012 and 2023. To do this, it explores hypotheses along the lines of whether Hungary and the EU are significantly different in their relations with China, and whether differences in size and weight in the international sphere are behind the differences in the decisions of Hungary and the EU. First, the main strategic and foreign policy documents will be highlighted, followed by political and economic aspects of the relationship between the two sides, including finance, chip manufacturing, electromobility, the Confucius Institutes and how one of China's top universities is looking at the development of their homeland's foreign relations. To ensure objectivity, not only North Atlantic but also Chinese sources have been researched.

KEYWORDS:

China, European Union, Hungary, strategic autonomy, de-risking

INTRODUCTION

My research question is the following: Between 2012 and 2023, what was the path of Hungary's and the European Union's relations with the People's Republic of China, and why, in which cases and periods did they cross or diverge? In this research, I want to explore how the relations between Hungary and the People's Republic of China and between the European

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Union and China evolved between 2012 and 2023, and to frame this in a comparative analysis. The relevance of the research is given by the fact that the international system has undergone a significant change in recent years, the foreign policy of the People's Republic of China has taken a noticeably different direction within the timeframe of the research, the European Union has also changed and is changing in many respects, and Hungary is catching up with the developed countries economically. In choosing the timeframe for the research, I have taken into account the beginning of Xi Jinping's rise to power.

The sources I used are mainly literature, analyses, international treaties, government documents, newspaper articles and statistical data, and I have tried to be objective in my selection by using sources not only from the North Atlantic but also from the Chinese side. The use of primary sources was clearly a priority, but it is a fact that secondary sources were the predominant source and, due to the subject of the analysis, I used mainly quantitative methods and sources.

I have formulated two hypotheses, which I will seek to confirm or refute in the course of my research. These hypotheses are as follows: the relationship between the European Union and Hungary differs significantly from that of China during the period under study. Hungary's and the European Union's relations with China differ also because the EU is trying to act as a global player, while Hungary is a small country trying to improve its own situation by the means put in front of it. In preparing this research, I drew on the tools, approaches and methods of analysis of international studies and the security studies within them. In the field of security studies, I have been guided by the principles of the Copenhagen School, which has dominated European security thinking. The research was closed in April 2024.

STRATEGIC AND FOREIGN POLICY DOCUMENTS

Hungary

Hungary publishes a new foreign policy strategy paper after its EU Presidency in 2011. The document, entitled "Hungarian Foreign Policy after the EU Presidency", states that the United States and the European countries, the so-called West, are losing importance, since in 1991 this region accounted for more than half of world GDP, and by 2011 this is only around 40%, with a further decline expected. It is also noted that the emerging countries (typically the BRICS countries and Indonesia) are gaining in importance. The Antall government's triple foreign policy priority is accompanied by a desire for global openness. In this context, the document goes on to explain in more detail that the revaluation of previously neglected areas makes it necessary to re-launch foreign policy in these areas in order to strengthen the country's international position and to gain government support for job creation. The role of Asia is of particular importance, with India, Japan, South Korea, Singapore and China being mentioned in particular. With regard to China, the document stresses the need to respect the One China principle, while at the same time seeking to foster good relations with Taiwan.

Regarding EU-China relations, it is important to note that Hungary is interested in better relations and Hungary is doing its utmost to ensure that sanctions affecting the defence industry between the EU and China are lifted as soon as possible, and Hungary also wants to play an active role in improving relations overall.² The Széll Kálmán Plan 2.0, published in 2012, contains important elements of the foreign economic strategy, such as the importance of geographical diversification, with the aim of increasing exports, the annual inflow of foreign direct investment (FDI) and the volume of foreign investment by Hungarian companies, and the

² FOREIGN MINISTRY OF HUNGARY: *Magyar külpolitika az uniós elnökség után*. 2011. 5, 9, 36-37, 40-42.

need to establish closer foreign economic cooperation with China, including by increasing economic diplomacy and expanding the network of associated specialised diplomats and by establishing state-owned foreign trade companies.³ This strategy was originally due to be in place until 2020, but was repealed in 2018 and replaced by the National Export Strategy 2019-2030, which again mentions the need to increase exports outside the EU, for which China and joint projects with China have great potential.⁴

In 2014, Hungary and China issued a joint declaration. On the basis of this declaration, the two sides agreed to strengthen their relations in a multipolar world, which is constantly evolving. Hungary supports China's development path and China supports Hungary's EU integration, and Hungary upholds the One China principle. The foreign economic policies of the two sides converge on several points, so it is worth expanding cooperation in the fields of economics, trade, investment, finance, telecommunications and infrastructure development. The situation of educational, cultural and research exchanges has also improved, as there are several Confucius Institutes in Hungary, while the Hungarian Cultural Centre has been opened in China, and the two sides would like to strengthen these processes in the future. The cooperation between China and Central and Eastern Europe is also mentioned, which the parties consider beneficial and worthy of promoting relations in this way, i.e. in a trans-regional form. It is underlined that the China-EU relationship is one of the most important bilateral relations on the planet and the relevant strategic agenda up to 2020 and the deepening of the overall strategic partnership are supported. It also draws attention to two important global issues, terrorism and cyber security, where the parties are ready to cooperate.⁵

³ GOVERNMENT OF HUNGARY: *A következő lépés – Széll Kálmán Terv 2.0.* 2012 190.

⁴ GOVERNMENT OF HUNGARY: *Nemzeti Exportstratégia 2019-2030.* 2019.

⁵ GOVERNMENT OF HUNGARY - GOVERNMENT OF THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA: *A kétoldalú együttműködés elmélyítéséről az új helyzetben.* 2014.

The 2012 Hungarian National Security Strategy does not yet specifically mention China.⁶ However, the 2020 one deals with China in more detail and states that Hungary does not impose ideological preconditions when building relations with China. This document records China's increasing emergence as a global player, economically, politically and militarily. The pragmatic intensification of Sino-Hungarian relations and participation in the Belt and Road Initiative is important, but China's investments in critical infrastructure, especially in the field of information and communication technologies, should be monitored.⁷

People's Republic of China

China has documents specifically related to the European Union, two of which were published during the research period, one in 2014 and the other in 2018. In the first chapter of the former, the document identifies the deepening of the EU-China comprehensive strategic partnership as a document that will bring benefits to both parties. According to the document, China and the EU are two major forces for world peace, as they are in consensus on building a multipolar world order. It is underlined that there is no crucial conflict of interest between the parties, therefore the relationship has great potential. This chapter argues that while both parties have problems, they are powerful, furthermore while China has a conflict with the US, it does not have a conflict with the EU and would like the EU to be an independent, deeply integrated actor, not interested in a unipolar world order, just like China.

In the second chapter, China presents its policy towards the EU. In order to deepen relations, China is ready to work with the EU to bring the two sides' markets closer together and develop a common community of interests. China is also keen to work with the EU on global governance reforms. In this chapter, China expresses its desire to see the EU as a partner in the

⁶ 1035/2012 (II. 21.) Government Decision on the National Security Strategy of Hungary.

⁷ 1163/2020 (IV. 21.) Government Decision on the National Security Strategy of Hungary.

establishment of an international system in which countries do not interfere in each other's internal affairs and in which globalisation would continue. If the EU were a partner in this, China would be expected to concede on issues of importance to the EU, such as opening up its market to the EU to a greater extent.

In the third chapter, the political dimension of cooperation is discussed. China expresses its intention to increase linkages between political institutions and calls for common positions on international issues, such as greater cooperation at the UN, and for the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) to be a strong platform where the parties can promote greater cooperation between the two continents. Then they want the G20 to play a greater role and to take joint action against protectionism. China is also seeking to cooperate with the EU in the G20 because before BREXIT the EU and several of its member states have 5 seats, since then 4 seats, so the EU has a high representation in the G20.⁸ There is also cooperation on terrorism and climate change, as well as cooperation on anti-piracy missions, especially in the Gulf of Aden-Somalia region. China calls for the lifting of the arms embargo against it as soon as possible.

It also calls on the EU to respect the One China principle, in particular in three cases: no high-level political meetings with Taiwan, no support for Taiwan's accession to international organisations that could be linked to statehood, and no EU sales of military technology and/or equipment to Taiwan. China considers human rights dialogue with the EU important, but calls for a more complex vision from the EU. In the third chapter, China clarifies its position on a number of policy issues and makes requests to the EU, showing how it believes relations could be properly developed from their side. The fourth chapter focuses on economic cooperation and trade. It calls for negotiations on an investment agreement between the two sides to be

⁸ JIANG, Shixue: China-EU Co-operation within the G20. Online: Chinese Academy of Social Sciences Sino-European Cooperation. 2015. p. 32.

taken forward and for the EU to remove barriers to trade, such as the lifting of export restrictions on high-tech products. The sixth chapter focuses on financial issues, such as the need for the EU to give more space to the Chinese financial sector.⁹

The 2018 document notes that the world is becoming more unstable and uncertain, with increasing protectionism and deglobalisation, but that China and the EU continue to share common interests. This time, in the section on One Country, Two Systems, the document reminds the EU that Hong Kong and Macao are China's internal affairs. This part was certainly an important reference point later in the protests over the 2019 extradition law in Hong Kong,¹⁰ where the West also spoke out. The Tibet issue was joined by the East Turkestan Islamic Movement and anti-China separatism, i.e. the Uyghurs, as this issue was already raised in the international media in 2018, with CNN reporting on the transfer of Uyghurs to "political re-education camps" as early as February 2018,¹¹ and the European Parliament expressing concern about the issue in October 2018.¹² Then, compared to the previous document, there is a greater focus on the need for dialogue rather than confrontation, as there is more common ground than differences. This shows that relations between the parties have deteriorated since the previous document was issued.

The second part covers cooperation in the political, security and defence fields. The document indicates that China is ready to conclude a joint patrol agreement with EU Member States, and the issue of nuclear weapons is highlighted, specifically the 1968 Non-Proliferation Treaty and its safeguarding. This treaty essentially states that countries that have acquired

⁹ MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA: *Deepen the China-EU Comprehensive Strategic Partnership for Mutual Benefit and Win-win Cooperation*. 2014.

¹⁰ CHEUNG, Helier – HUGHES, Roland: *Why are there protests in Hong Kong? All the context you need*. 2020.

¹¹ JIANG Steven: *Thousands of Uyghur Muslims detained in Chinese 'political education' camps*. 2018.

¹² EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT: *European Parliament resolution of 4 October 2018 on mass arbitrary detention of Uyghurs and Kazakhs in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region*. 2018.

nuclear strike capability will not transfer it to anyone, while those that have not will not seek to develop it.¹³ This section is presumably included because in May 2018, then US President Donald Trump will terminate the 2015 Iran nuclear deal (Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action). This would have allowed Iran to use its nuclear programme for peaceful purposes only and not to develop a nuclear strike capability, in return for a significant exemption from sanctions¹⁴ and essentially despite the EU asking the US not to withdraw from the nuclear deal, it did so.¹⁵ Presumably China has found common ground here, where both sides agree on a serious security issue against the US.

The third part is about trade, investment, connectivity and financial areas. A new element here is that politicisation of economic and trade issues should be avoided, and China calls on the EU to respect its WTO obligations. As a further new element, China underlines that it is taking a number of measures to ensure that foreign investment is not disadvantaged, an element that is clearly important to the EU. Another new element is that, through certain financial instruments, China wants its national currency to play a greater role in the life of European financial institutions, in support of its plan to bring the RMB up to the level of the US dollar and the euro as the most widely used currencies in international trade.¹⁶

European Union

The first important document is a joint agenda for 2013, agreed by both sides following the 16th China-EU Summit. The parties record that the China-EU 2020 Strategic Cooperation Agenda was established because they can use the common points of their strategic interests for mutual development. Three pillars have been set up in order to adhere to the agenda: on

¹³ UNITED NATIONS: *Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons*. 1968.

¹⁴ JOINT COMPREHENSIVE PLAN OF ACTION 2015.

¹⁵ IRAN NUCLEAR DEAL: *Trump pulls US out in break with Europe allies*. 2018.

¹⁶ MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA: *China's Policy Paper on the European Union*. 2018.

the one hand, high-level strategic dialogues will be held annually, on the other hand, high-level economic and trade dialogues will also be held annually, and human rights dialogues (education, culture, youth, sport, etc.) will be organised every two years. These regular meetings will be an important part of the relationship between the parties. As regards security and defence issues, the parties see a need for cooperation between them. To this end, regular consultations will be held on security policy and international issues of mutual concern (Africa, Central Asia and Latin America; cooperation in trans-regional and multilateral fora such as ASEM, G20, UN; cooperation on global challenges (world trade, climate change, telecommunications); joint fight against piracy; international legal issues related to the Arctic Ocean).

In the second chapter, the area of trade and investment is discussed, where the following objectives are set: to enhance the annual economic and trade dialogue; to negotiate a China-EU investment agreement; to explore the possibility of a free trade agreement; to continuously increase the volume of trade between the parties; to commit to conducting anti-dumping and countervailing duty investigations fairly; to better cooperate in the protection of intellectual property; to conclude a RMB/euro bilateral currency exchange agreement; and to ensure the exchange of information on taxation.¹⁷

One year later, when President Xi Jinping visited the European Union, a joint declaration was made. The parties record that the previous 40 years of relations have not only been beneficial for both sides, but have also brought global benefits. The parties wish to work together to solve global problems, and the Non-Proliferation Treaty and non-proliferation have been highlighted as foreign and security policy issues. It is worth noting that the situation in Iran, Syria and Ukraine, among others, was also on the table, and overall the situation in West

¹⁷ MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA: *EU-China 2020 Strategic Agenda for Cooperation*. 2013.

Asia and North Africa was discussed in more depth. On economic issues, the parties favour global trade over protectionism and strengthen their cooperation in global economic governance (WTO, IMF, World Bank), mentioning the preparation of an EU-China investment agreement and the potential of a free trade agreement as a longer-term perspective.¹⁸

The next major document was adopted two years later, which sought to set out the way forward for relations with China for the next five years, taking into account the 2015 EP report on relations between the two parties. The EU expects China to assume more global responsibility alongside its growing influence. It is underlined that the EU needs to speak with a single and clear voice, and that it is important that bilateral and country group (16+1 cooperation) dialogues are conducted in cooperation with the European Commission. China is seen to be less willing to open up to foreign capital, while at the same time it wants to build global players from its own large companies through subsidies, which is against the interests of the EU. However, an investment agreement would be in the interest of both parties and the EU would welcome Chinese investment if it is compatible with EU law. The EU would welcome Chinese involvement in efforts to promote peace in Africa, an area of priority due to migration challenges.¹⁹

Also in 2016, the European Union's Global Strategy document was published, which puts more emphasis on the EU's own security, as it does not want to be an observer of global events, but an actor, not just a payer, but a player.²⁰ The document explains that there is a link

¹⁸ EUROPEAN COMMISSION: *Joint Statement: Deepening the EU-China Comprehensive Strategic Partnership for mutual benefit*. 2014.

¹⁹ EUROPEAN COMMISSION: *Joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council: Elements for a new EU strategy on China*. 2016.

²⁰ MOLNÁR, Anna: Az EU globális kül- és biztonságpolitikai stratégiája. *Stratégiai Védelmi Kutatóközpont Elemzések*, 2016/9, p. 3, 7.

between European prosperity and security in Asia, and that it is therefore necessary to deepen economic diplomacy and increase the EU's security role in Asia, including with China.²¹

In 2019, a new EU-China strategy paper was published. It already shows that although China is an important partner in many respects, the balance of opportunities and challenges in relations with China has changed and China is no longer a developing country. In order for the EU to be able to properly pursue its interests, it needs to deepen its relations with China while paying more attention to its own interests. Some problems are also mentioned, especially with regard to the situation of the Uighurs and Hong Kong, but China's attitude to international law and the Arctic Ocean is also inadequate. Nevertheless, the EU sees China as having a key role to play in a number of security and defence policy issues, such as North Korea's nuclear non-proliferation.²² In terms of trade relations, the EU notes that China's economic weight is such that if its domestic economy is in trouble, this will have repercussions for the world economy as a whole, and that China is not opening up its markets and thus protecting its own large companies from competition to strengthen them, which makes trade cooperation with China problematic.²³

In chronological order, the next document should be the China-EU Comprehensive Investment Agreement, the negotiation of which was completed in 2020, when Xi Jinping on the Chinese side and the German Presidency and Angela Merkel personally on the EU side stepped in to get the agreement ready by the end of the year, but the European Parliament froze the process because of the Uyghur issue. This agreement would have brought bilateral

²¹ EUROPEAN UNION EXTERNAL ACTION SERVICE: *Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe – A Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign And Security Policy*, 2016, p. 37 - 38.

²² EUROPEAN COMMISSION: *EU-China – A strategic outlook*. 2019, p. 1 - 4.

²³ EUROPEAN COMMISSION 2019, 5 - 10.

investment agreements up to EU level and would have provided mutual benefits to the parties to deepen their economic ties with each other.²⁴

The EP then proposed a new strategy for China because of its democracy deficit, human rights deficit and security challenges for the EU. The EP wants Member States to take into account the EU's common position in all cases and to be very united in their approach to China. Greater attention to cyber security and hybrid warfare in relation to China would be important. The focus should be on intensifying contacts with like-minded countries on the China issue, as well as on the role of China in multilateral fora and, in cooperation with NATO, the EU should prepare for the eventuality of China becoming a global superpower and, in cooperation with NATO, monitor China's expansion in Africa and the Arctic Ocean.

In order for China to have fewer trump cards to play, strategic autonomy must be sought, particularly in industrial strategy, microchip and semiconductor manufacturing, rare earth mining and cloud and telecoms technology. For similar reasons, dependencies in strategic sectors need to be reviewed and the resilience of supply chains increased, and access to strategic resources diversified. In the Arctic Ocean region, it is of paramount importance that the EU does not lose ground and that China does not find itself in a vacuum.²⁵

In summer 2023, the European Council issued conclusions on China, underlining that for the EU, China is a partner, competitor and systemic rival, yet it is in the interest of both sides to have stable relations. The EU will continue to encourage China to address global challenges and partner China in doing so. The EU sees China as an important trading partner, but seeks to ensure a mutually beneficial relationship and to reduce critical dependencies and

²⁴ McELWEE, Lilly: *The Rise and Demise of the EU-China Investment Agreement: Takeaways for the Future of German Debate on China*. 2023.

²⁵ EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT: *Report on a new EU-China strategy*. 2021.

vulnerabilities, while at the same time not seeking to disengage or turn inward. The EU expects China, as a permanent member of the UNSC, to put more pressure on Russia to abandon its war against Ukraine.²⁶

Summary

It is very clear from the documents what the most important directions and topics in the relations are. Naturally, the Hungarian documents are more general, but it is clear that for Hungary the relationship with China has become more and more important over time, while the Chinese documents show that the initially almost exclusively optimistic writings contain more and more criticism and red lines. In the case of the EU documents, the tendency is even more evident that the relationship between China and the EU is deteriorating over time. In the case of the EU institutions, China sees that it is mainly the European Parliament that raises human rights concerns with China, while the Council of Europe tends to comment on foreign policy and security issues and the Commission on economic and trade issues.²⁷

²⁶ EUROPEAN COUNCIL: *European Council conclusions on China*, 30 June 2023. 2023a.

²⁷ LIU, Juanping – ZHANG, Lihua: 欧盟三大机构对中国政策立场比较分析 Ōuméng sān dà jīgòu duì zhōngguó zhèngcè lìchǎng bǐjiào fēnxī. [Comparative analysis of the three main EU institutions' policy positions on China.] *国际政治研究* 2020 年第4期, 2020, p. 82-83, 90.

EXTERNAL RELATIONS

Political dimension

Foreign policy relations in general

China's Tsinghua University has a method to quantify China's relations with the major powers and thus use the tools of statistics to study international relations. A point per potential event can take 180 different values. On the scale, -9 indicates the worst possible relations, 0 is a median value, meaning roughly that two countries have nothing to do with each other, and +9 indicates the best possible relations.²⁸ Unfortunately, no database is available for Hungary, so only comparisons with the USA, France, Germany and the UK are shown in the first graph.

Relations with China (THU Scores)

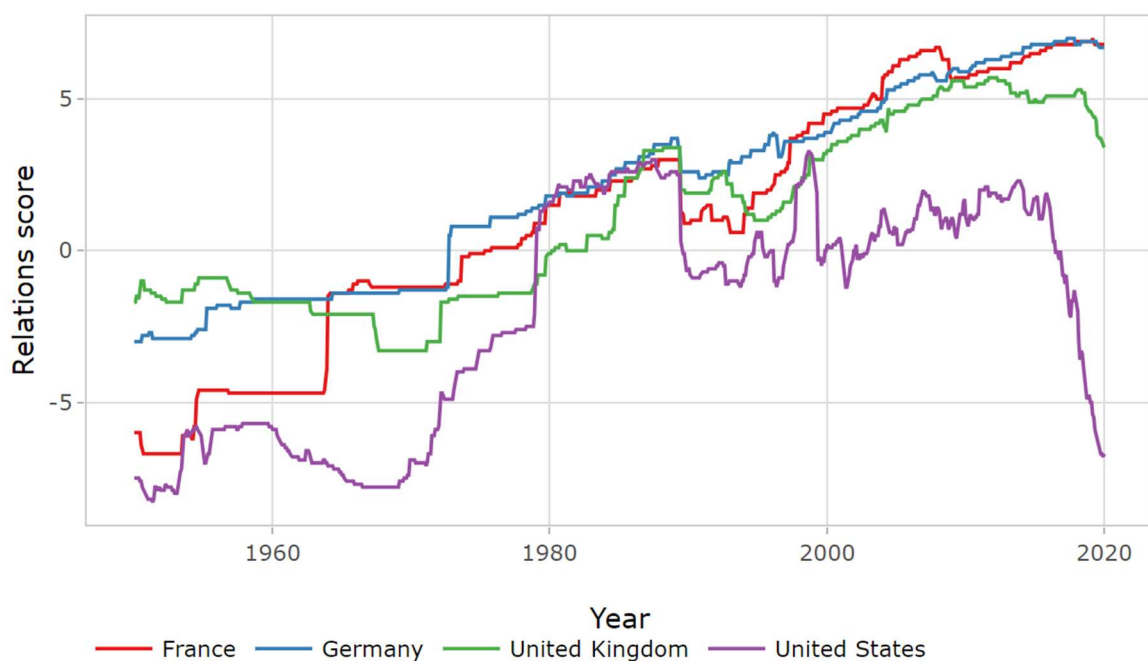


Figure 1: Relations between France (red), Germany (blue), the United Kingdom (green) and the United States (purple) and China between 1950 and 2020.²⁹

²⁸ TSINGHUA UNIVERSITY, INSTITUTE OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS: 中国与大国关系数据库. Zhōngguó yǔ dàguó guānxì shùjùkù. [Database on relations between China and the major powers.] 2012.

²⁹ Tsinghua University, Institute of International Relations: 中国与大国关系分值可视化数据 Zhōngguó yǔ dàguó guānxì fēn zhí kěshìhuà shùjù. [Visualized data on China's relations with major powers.]

The trends in relations are clearly visible and surprisingly, for the two largest powers of the EU27, although there is a slight stagnation and decline in relations, it is not nearly as pronounced as for the United States, since while the latter is in the confrontation category (-6.8) in 2020, the former is in the friendly category (6.8 and 6.7). For the UK, it is still just in the good (3.4) category. Another study has already plotted the relationship with the European Union (Figure 2) from October 2020 to November 2021, showing that China's relationship with the integration as a whole is worse than with its two strongest member states, although relations are in the good category. This may be partly due to the preference of member states to delegate the more negative tasks to the EU to deal with, while keeping the more positive ones at member state level.

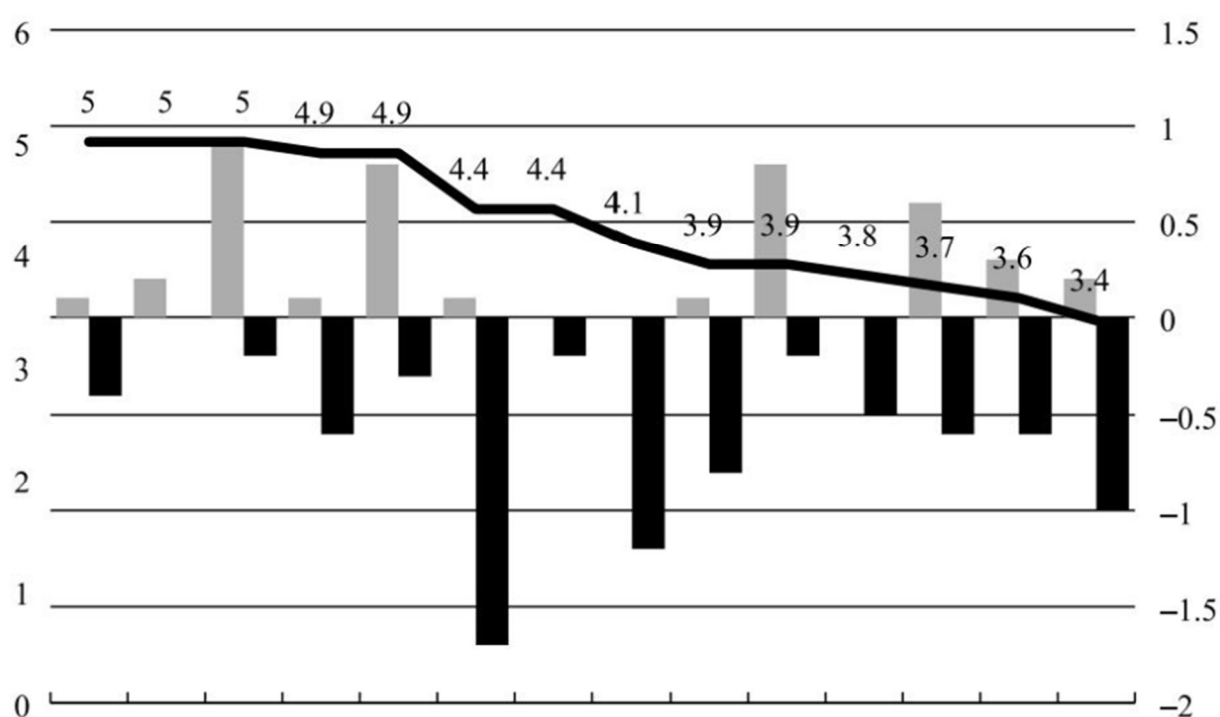


Figure 2: Monthly breakdown of the European Union's relations with China between October 2020 and November 2021. Negative scores: dark bars, positive scores: light bars.³⁰

³⁰ TSINGHUA UNIVERSITY, INSTITUTE OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS: 战略沟通下中欧关系将有所缓和 Zhànlüè gōutōng xi à zhōng'ōu guānxì jiāng yǒu suǒ huǎnhé. [China-EU relations soften in strategic communication.] 国际政治科学 2022 年第 7 卷第 1 期(总第 25 期), 2022, p. 186.

The change in relations is mainly due to the EU's human rights criticisms and the stalling of the investment agreement, but the university researchers see the EU as constantly communicating that it wants to work with China and not to disengage from it permanently, so some improvement is expected.³¹ However, in the case of Hungary, we can see from the previous chapter and from the fact that there have been many high-level meetings that political relations are on an improving trend.³² In the area of political relations, in addition to what was mentioned in the documents mentioned earlier, we can see that cooperation has also become closer in other areas, such as defence issues, for example, in March 2021, Chinese Defence Minister Wei Fenghe visited Hungary and on this occasion the Hungarian side thanked China for its assistance and vaccines in the COVID-19 outbreak, and both sides stated that relations are improving and that inter-military exchanges will continue to be promoted.³³

In the case of political relations between Hungary and China, it is also important to mention that Hungary is one of the main supporters of the China-Central and Eastern Europe cooperation platform, mentioned several times as 16+1 cooperation, which started in Budapest in 2011 and was officially established in 2012.³⁴ In 2014, Chinese Prime Minister Li Keqiang and in 2015 the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences announced that there was a need for scientific cooperation,³⁵ and thus the China-Central and Eastern Europe Institute was opened in Budapest in 2017.³⁶ The Member States have also sought to establish other trade

³¹ TSINGHUA UNIVERSITY, INSTITUTE OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS: 战略沟通下中欧关系将有所缓和 Zhànlüè gōutōng xià zhōng'ōu guānxì jiāng yǒu suǒ huǎnhé. [China-EU relations soften in strategic communication.] *国际政治科学* 2022 年第 7 卷第 1 期(总第 25 期), 2022, p. 87-91.

³² EMBASSY OF HUNGARY IN BEIJING: *Political and Diplomatic Relations*.

³³ INSTITUTE OF EUROPEAN STUDIES OF CHINESE ACADEMY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES: *China, Hungary agree to strengthen cooperation in various fields*. 2021.

³⁴ GREECE PROVES APPEAL OF '16+1 COOPERATION' 2019.

³⁵ JIANG, SHIXUE: *A 16+1 Think Tank Network for better China-CEECs relations*. 2015.

³⁶ HUNGARIAN ACADEMY OF SCIENCES: *Budapesti helyszínen nyílik meg a Kína–Kelet-Közép-Európa Intézet*. 2017.

and economic related forums and other platforms, for example in the fields of agriculture, tourism, energy, investment promotion and transport.³⁷

One important element of cooperation was to be the provision of loans, but contrary to Chinese intentions, it turned out that these loans were not really suitable for EU member states.³⁸ Later, the momentum of cooperation started to wane, with only lower-level representatives delegated by the parties, while in the case of Hungary the prime minister was still the participant.³⁹ That year, Xi Jinping himself represented China at the annual summit, but apparently failed to convince the members to continue cooperation, as there has been no such event since. It is also probably due to the growing EU-China relationship that the very existence of cooperation is beginning to be questioned.⁴⁰

Confucius Institutes

A smaller but important part of the political relationship is the network of Confucius Institutes, which is a significant instrument of Chinese soft power, the first of which was established in Hungary in 2006. The role and functions of these institutions include teaching Chinese language, facilitating exchange programmes and promoting Chinese culture.⁴¹ In the field of education, it should be noted that in 2020, there was a proposal for Shanghai Fudan University to open a campus in Hungary,⁴² but it seems that this project will not be realised in the end. In other EU countries, however, the Confucius Institutes have started to be treated

³⁷ KONG, Tianping: *The 16+1 Framework and Economic Relations Between China and the Central and Eastern European Countries*. 2016.

³⁸ GORECZKY, Péter: Kína kapcsolata Közép- és Kelet-Európával: a „16+1” együttműködés eddigi mérlege, *KKI-tanulmányok* 2017/9. p. 3–19.5-10.

³⁹ BĚRZIŇA-ČERENKOVA, Una: *Mild wording but harsh timing: Latvia and Estonia's exit from the „16+1”*. 2022.

⁴⁰ GORECZKY 2017: 16-17.

⁴¹ LIU, Xiaochen: A Konfuciusz Intézetek fejlődése a Kína és Magyarország közötti felsőoktatási csereprogramok és együttműködés jegyében. In: Goreczky Péter (ed.), *Magyarország és Kína: 70 éves kapcsolat a változó világban. Külügyi és Külgazdasági Intézet*, Budapest 2019, p. 215-219.

⁴² 2024-BEN MEGNYÍLHAT A SANGHAJI FUDAN EGYETEM BUDAPESTI CAMPUSA, 2020.

differently in recent years , with Belgium in 2015 calling the Confucius Institutes problematic by the secret services, Sweden already closing them, Germany dismantling the network and the European Parliament treating them with suspicion.⁴³ In 2023, Germany decided to restrict the Confucius Institutes, as internal intelligence has posed problems to the German federal government.⁴⁴ Here again we see an area where the EU and Hungarian policies have begun to diverge.

De-risking

Under the name of de-risking, the EU would also be moving away from China as part of its strategic autonomy, but it does not want to completely disengage. Overall, the EU sees itself as too dependent on China for a number of factors. These dependencies have previously been seen as good, as interdependence in security policy is a tool to force parties to resolve differences through diplomacy.

The de-risking policy was proposed to Member States by the President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, in March 2023. The US term "de-coupling" would not have been appropriate because the EU does not feel that economic relations with China pose a systemic national security problem, but the EU wants to increase its resilience/strategic autonomy, which can be well deduced from the sectoral theory of the Copenhagen school, where economic security is an important element of a complex security understanding. Thus, the EC is investigating the risks to global supply chains, including energy security, cyber security in the critical infrastructure and information security sectors, and technology security. It identifies the most problematic areas as advanced semiconductors, artificial intelligence, quantum technologies and biotechnology. Three main actions are proposed: to promote EU

⁴³ EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT: *Confucius Institutes in the EU*, 2020.

⁴⁴ STRACK, Christoph: *China's Confucius Institutes may face German restrictions*, 2023.

competitiveness by strengthening the internal market, boosting innovation, technology and industry; to safeguard economic security; and to diversify trade agreements with reliable partners.⁴⁵ However, in the meantime Hungary is taking the opposite position, as illustrated by the Hungarian Prime Minister's remarks during his visit to China in October 2023, when he identified connectivity rather than de-risking as the right way forward in relations with China.⁴⁶

Economic dimension

Economic and trade relations

In 2012, the European Union was still struggling with the problems resulting from the 2008 economic crisis, a situation that also affected economic relations with China. At the end of 2011, EU leaders tried to persuade China to join the European sovereign debt crisis in Europe, by including China in the European Financial Stability Facility (EFSF). In early February 2012, German Chancellor Merkel visited Beijing and shortly afterwards Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao announced China's willingness to further increase trade with the EU, to join the EU's stabilisation mechanisms and to buy government bonds of some Member States.⁴⁷ China is still by far the country with the largest foreign exchange reserves.⁴⁸ Of course, it should not be forgotten that for China, the EU is a very significant trading partner, by some calculations the largest in decades,⁴⁹ so when it has helped the EU, in the same time China has helped its own export markets as well. At the same time, the EU is now adopting a new global trade strategy to deal with the crisis and is seeking to reduce imports and increase exports, with the result that exports to China increased by 8% in 2012 while imports fell by 1%. In addition, several anti-

⁴⁵ BRINZA et.al.: *EU-China relations: De-risking or de-coupling – the future of the EU strategy towards China*. 2024, p. 59-64.

⁴⁶ ORBÁN, Viktor, 2023.

⁴⁷ CHEN, Xin: 欧盟对华经济关系新趋势 Ōuméng duì huá jīngjì guānxì xīn qūshì. [New trends in economic relations between the EU and China.] *中欧关系研究简报* 第9期, 2013, p. 2013: 4.

⁴⁸ TOTAL RESERVES (INCLUDES GOLD, CURRENT US\$) - CHINA, HONG KONG SAR, CHINA, 2013.

⁴⁹ MISSION OF CHINA TO THE EUROPEAN UNION: *China-EU Trade and Economic Relations in Numbers*, 2018, p. 6.

dumping proceedings have been launched, which it is worth noting no longer only concern low-end products but also high-end products, such as China's photovoltaic industry. Another important point of the EU's new global trade strategy is to promote the conclusion of free trade agreements, and here, from a research point of view, the efforts in the ASEAN region and East Asia are important, as this strategy will help to transfer manufacturing from China to the surrounding countries, especially the ASEAN countries, and thus the EU will be able to catch the wind out of China's sails of development in this area.⁵⁰

Overall, the external trade balance between the parties has remained stable for most of the period under review, but the EU's trade deficit has started to widen as a result of COVID-19 and the Russian-Ukrainian crisis (Figure 3). Furthermore, EU's foreign direct investment (FDI) to China has decreased due to China's zero COVID policy during the COVID-19 epidemic, but Chinese FDI has also been on a downward trajectory since 2021, but in an interesting turnaround, it is starting to consist not of acquisitions but of a growing percentage of greenfield investments (3% in 2014, 57% in 2022), mainly those related to electromobility. Compared to 2010, trade volumes have increased in most product categories, except clothing.⁵¹

⁵⁰ CHEN 2013: 5-7, 10-11.

⁵¹ HERRERO, Alicia García: *China-EU roller-coaster relations: Where do we stand and what to do?* 2023.

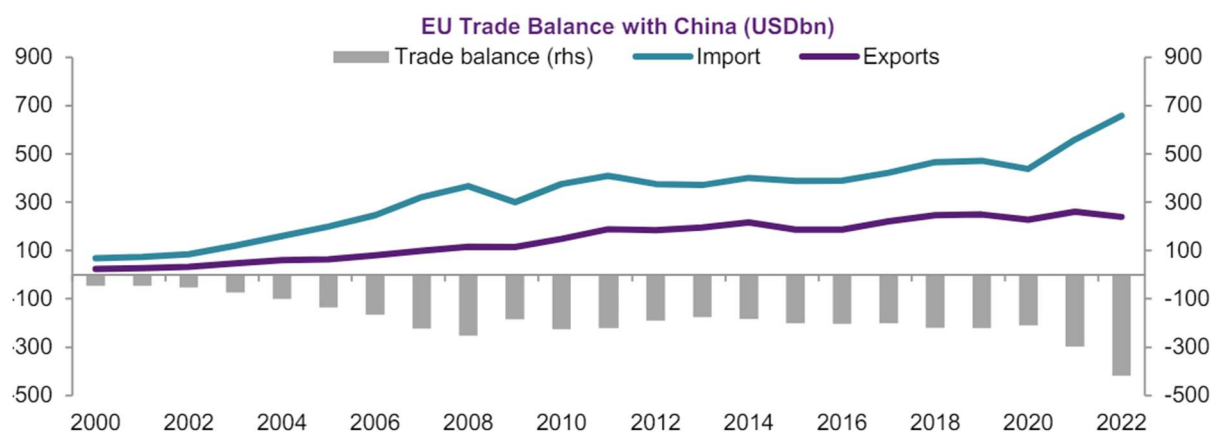


Figure 3: EU external trade balance with China.⁵²

In the case of Hungary, trade relations have increased overall, but the Chinese trade surplus has been strong throughout.⁵³ A few major Hungarian companies have started operations in China during the period under review, such as OTP Bank and Richter Gedeon, but there have also been Chinese companies entering Hungary, a significant number of them in the last few years, but I will write more about these later, the Budapest-Belgrade railway line is a major project of the Belt and Road Initiative in Hungary, and one of the world's largest railway companies, China Railway Group Limited, has come to Hungary to build a 350km railway line between the Hungarian and Serbian capitals.⁵⁴

RMB loans and reserves

For a long time, the currency of the People's Republic of China was essentially used only within the country's borders, but this situation has changed and several significant changes have taken place in this respect during the period under review. The RMB has been included in the IMF's Special Drawing Rights (SDR) basket since 2016 and is now an internationally

⁵² HERRERO: 2023.

⁵³ LOSONCZ, Miklós-VAKHAL, Péter: A gazdasági kapcsolatok alakulása Magyarország és Kína között az 1990-es évek eleje óta. In: Goreczky Péter (ed.), Magyarország és Kína: 70 éves kapcsolat a változó világban. Budapest, *Külügyi és Külgazdasági Intézet*, 2019, p. p. 105, 107-111.

⁵⁴ XI, Sichang: A kínai–magyar gazdasági kapcsolatok az Övezet és Út kezdeményezés tükrében. In: Goreczky Péter (ed.), Magyarország és Kína: 70 éves kapcsolat a változó világban. Budapest, *Külügyi és Külgazdasági Intézet*. 2019, p. 85-90.

recognised reserve currency, and the Chinese government has been trying to promote the widespread use of the RMB. Excluding Hong Kong, the EU is the largest foreign RMB transaction destination, with almost 10% in 2018 and more than 40% in total value, although a significant proportion of this is linked to the former EU member UK. In the EU, major economic players are accustomed to using several currencies at the same time, and there is a well-established system for their exchange in the EU. The emergence of the Chinese currency in the 2010s has been welcomed in the financial centres of London, Frankfurt and Paris, and European banks have gained access to Chinese financial products, while the European Central Bank (ECB) and the Bank of England have also signed currency swap agreements with the People's Bank of China. Arrangements have also been put in place to facilitate Chinese financial exchanges between Chinese and European stock exchanges, such as the Shanghai Stock Exchange and Deutsche Börse.⁵⁵

Hungary and the EU have a similar policy in this area, as in 2013 the Hungarian National Bank was among the first to sign a foreign exchange swap agreement with the People's Bank of China.⁵⁶ In 2015, they launched the Renminbi Spot Programme to develop financial links, and in 2016 the parties signed a financial agreements and start direct RMB/HUF trading in the Chinese onshore foreign exchange market.⁵⁷ In addition, Hungary is home to several Chinese banks, which are among the largest banks in the world in terms of total assets.⁵⁸ Hungary also uses the Chinese currency for debt management, having issued government bonds in the

⁵⁵ KÄRNFELT, Maximilian: *China's Currency Push—The Chinese Yuan expands its footprint in Europe*, 2020.

⁵⁶ PALOTAI, Dániel: *A Magyar Nemzeti Bank és a People's Bank of China közötti devizaswap keret felállításáról szóló megállapodás*, p. 1.

⁵⁷ HORVÁTH, LEVENTE: Magyar–kínai pénzügyi kapcsolatok a kezdetektől napjainkig. *Külügyi Szemle* 2020/XIX/2. p. 92-93.

⁵⁸ SANDERS, David: *World's Biggest Banks 2023*.

Chinese and Hong Kong bond markets and Green Panda Bonds worth 1 billion RMB in 2021⁵⁹, which were repeated in 2022 for 2 billion RMB.⁶⁰

Economic security, renewables, semiconductors, automotive

China accounted for 90% of the world's rare earth supply in 2005-10. The US and other countries are recognising this fact and are starting to change this, so that just over 10 years later, the proportion is now around 60%.⁶¹ The EU sources 75% of its solar cell needs and 90% of its needs for rare earths, magnets and lithium batteries, which are essential for the green transition and electromobility, from China. The EU would like to reduce this, as it sees for example, that China has already used its achievements in this area to exert pressure on Japan.⁶² It is also worth noting that at the end of 2022 it became clear that the EU's military industry is almost entirely dependent on China for one of the cotton derivatives needed to make any ammunition.⁶³ Chinese companies have also played an important role in European infrastructure investments, such as the construction and operation of ports (10 EU Member States), the construction and operation of electricity networks (11 EU Member States), the construction and operation of 5G networks (19 EU Member States) or the construction of submarine telecommunications cables, in the latter case a USD 500 million project between China and France as part of the construction of a new global internet network better controlled by China.⁶⁴

⁵⁹ GOVERNMENT OF HUNGARY: *Kína regionális pénzügyi központként tekint Magyarországra*, 2024.

⁶⁰ Sikeresen bocsátott ki zöld panda kötvényt Magyarország, 2022.

⁶¹ BHUTADA, Govind: Rare Earth Metals Production is No Longer Monopolized by China, 2021.

⁶² PATEY, Luke: *The European Union can go green and lower dependencies on China*, 2024.

⁶³ HEGMANN, Gerhard: *Deutschland fehlt neue Munition – und ist dabei abhängig von China*, 2022.

⁶⁴ HERRERO 2023.

For rare earth elements, the EU published for the fifth time in 2023 a list of 34 elements that are critical to achieving its strategic goals.⁶⁵ The EU is planning to increase trade with ASEAN countries as part of de-risking, but it should be noted that in the case of the US, the increase in trade with ASEAN countries has resulted in a significant increase in China-ASEAN trade volumes, suggesting that it is in fact ASEAN countries that transit Chinese goods between the US and China. This is increasing Beijing's influence in the region, and if the EU were to follow suit, this increase in influence could become even more significant in the future.⁶⁶

The EU is also lagging far behind in semiconductors/chips, with a current share of around 10%, but aims to reach 20% by 2030 by mobilising €43 billion.⁶⁷ China has also been lagging behind for a long time, but with the first sanctions under the Trump administration, which mainly hit Chinese telecom Huawei for 5G chips,⁶⁸ China is realising that it needs to change its dependence. In the 14th Five-Year Plan (2021-25), the development of innovation in this direction is already a priority, and the dual circulation⁶⁹ (increasing the internal market instead of external markets, extensive instead of intensive economic development), also reflected in this document, supports this idea. However, China surprised the world by changing this in 2023 and the largest Chinese chip manufacturer SMIC has come out with a chip with 7 nanometre technology capable of 5G and then announced that they will be able to launch 5 nanometre chips in 2024, which is very important because it is only one step away from the 3 nanometre technology that is currently the cutting edge.⁷⁰ Although both sides have been dependent on semiconductors during the period under review, China has the raw materials

⁶⁵ EUROPEAN COMMISSION: *Establishing a framework for ensuring a secure and sustainable supply of critical raw materials and amending – Regulations (EU) 168/2013, (EU) 2018/858, 2018/1724 and (EU) 2019/1020*. 2023.

⁶⁶ DEMARAIS, Agathe: *Why Europe Will Struggle to 'De-Risk' From China*, 2023.

⁶⁷ EUROPEAN COUNCIL: *The EU Chips Act*, 2023b.

⁶⁸ GELLER, Eric: *Trump signs order setting stage to ban Huawei from U.S.*, 2019.

⁶⁹ SALÁT, Gergely: *A Kínai Népköztársaság 14. öt éves terve*, 2021, p. 7-9.

⁷⁰ LIU, Qianer: *China on cusp of next-generation chip production despite US curbs*, 2024.

and soon the technology to help it become self-sufficient and this could further reduce the spectrum of potential sanctioning capabilities of the West, including the EU.

In EU-China economic relations, the automotive sector is a relatively important area: on the one hand, China is a major market for the European, especially German, automotive industry; on the other hand, Chinese electric car and battery technology is essential for European car manufacturers; and thirdly, the EU has a significant value in exporting cars to third countries. The West is currently accusing China of giving Chinese companies, including car manufacturers, a competitive advantage, including through the Made in China 2025 programme announced in 2015, which led the EU to announce in autumn 2023 that it would investigate Chinese car manufacturers. A ban on Chinese cars is unlikely to solve the problem completely and it would probably be better for Europeans to seek a competitive advantage over Chinese manufacturers.⁷¹

Hungary, because of its size, has less to worry about many of the problems listed in this sub-chapter, which is perhaps why its approach to the issue is again different from that of the European Union. The automotive industry represents a significant percentage of Hungarian GDP, roughly 20%, which the Hungarian government would like to raise to 30%.⁷² To this end, since 2022, announcements have been pouring in, with a large amount of Chinese investment in the automotive or battery industry coming into Hungary, which has resulted in roughly 1% of total Chinese FDI into the EU in 2017-21 coming into Hungary, compared to 20% in 2022. The largest investments are from CATL⁷³ and BYD.⁷⁴

⁷¹ AN INFLUX OF CHINESE CARS IS TERRIFYING THE WEST, 2024.

⁷² JÁRDI, Roland: *Nagy Márton: tovább kell növelni az autóipar GDP-hez való hozzájárulását*, 2023.

⁷³ NÉGY ÚJ KÍNAI GIGABERUHÁZÁST JELENTETT BE SZIJJÁRTÓ, 2023.

⁷⁴ SZABÓ, Ákos: *Újabb autógyár épül Magyarországon - a kínai BYD Szegedre érkezik*, 2023.

Summary

In the political and economic field, the chapter again shows that the EU and Hungary approach China's intentions from different directions in several cases, on the one hand, interpreting them differently, and on the other hand, the differences in roles in the international order and economic system contribute to the fact that one actor tries to manoeuvre in one direction while the other tries to manoeuvre in the other. While the EU is trying to de-risk itself and develop strategic autonomy, it clearly knows that it is not in its interest to completely cut off its relations with China and may be able to persuade China to take small steps, Hungary is doing its utmost to improve its relations with Beijing and Chinese companies, because it wants to gain an advantage over its regional competitors, and although it is often in dispute with the EU, it is taking advantage of the fact that it can be a door for Chinese companies into the European Union, because the capacity that is being built is clearly not just to supply the Hungarian market, but the whole of the EU.

CONCLUSION

Relations between the European Union and the People's Republic of China, and between Hungary and the People's Republic of China, have changed significantly in the period 2012-23. Global developments are changing the relationship between the actors. A good example of the latter is climate change, which is starting a new chapter in the political and economic spheres, due to the EU's significant economic dependence on China in the fight against climate change, but also due to the rise of the Arctic Ocean region and Africa, where the parties are expressing their direct interests, and despite the fact that the EU and China have not had a long history of geostrategic and geopolitical conflict of interest, this may change in the near future.

The research question has been answered, as it provides a detailed picture of how the two actors' relationships have evolved over the period and how they relate to each other. In the case of the hypotheses, it was possible to confirm that the fact that the EU and Hungary have completely different weight in the development of relations is significant, while the second hypothesis was disproved, since there are differences between the EU and Hungary in their relations with China, but only in the last few years of the period under study were there any significant differences, and Hungary is a member of the EU, so its foreign policy action could be hampered if it perceives that the EU is about to take a significant turn in a direction that is significantly contrary to its interests. The hypothesis would be confirmed if the statement were to apply to EU member states rather than the EU, as there are significant divergences in several cases (e.g. Hungary-Lithuania).

Hungary and the European Union will soon have to decide how to engage with the world's rising political, economic and military superpower, the People's Republic of China. The European Union, as it stands, does not seem to be able to manage its relations with China properly, as is evident from the much different way in which its Member States wish to develop relations with the great power of the East. The continent's leaders need to take a decision on the future of the EU as soon as possible, as at present there is a constant clash of interests in foreign policy, which is tying the European Union to a hostage and could result in it losing ground to China.

For a long time in China, the Emperor was called the Son of Heaven, so I think that the following Chinese saying, which is close to my heart, has a new meaning in the current situation of the European Union: "One hand cannot cover the sky" (一手遮不了天).

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