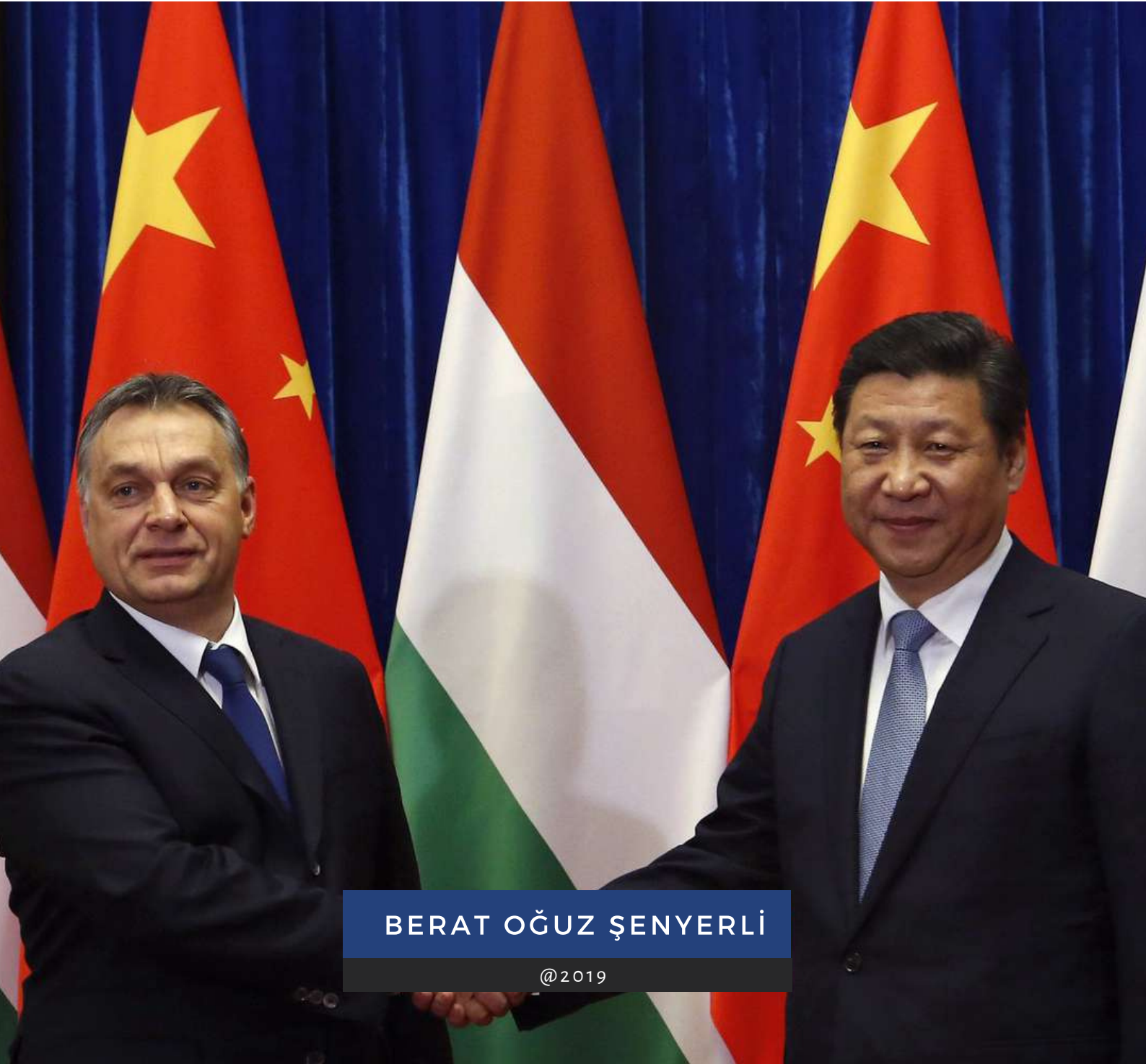


# POLICY PAPER

## CHINESE INVESTMENT AND INFLUENCE IN HUNGARY IMPLICATIONS FOR EU POLICYMAKING

CHARACTER COUNT: 26642



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@2019

## 1. Main Findings and Conclusion

- Hungary has become the central point of Chinese economic engagement in Central and Eastern Europe. Positioning as a Central European country provides Hungary the advantage of cheaper labor. As the European Union member state, access right to the Single Market is crucial for the country's importance in the eyes of Beijing.
- Complex networks of relations give leverage to both Hungary and China. On the one hand, Hungary, as one of the most criticized member states of the European Union in terms of illiberal practices, has negotiation power against the European Union thanks to excellent cooperation with major powers of world politics like China and Russia. On the other hand, China as the pioneer of the Belt and Road initiative has a powerful position in Europe by force of good ties with former communist states now member states of the European Union at Central and Eastern Europe.
- Winner of tender for the refurbishment of the Budapest-Belgrade railway line announced as a Chinese-Hungarian consortium at 25 April 2019 by the MFA of Hungary. However, the names of the partners in the consortium are still unknown. With the renovation of the railway line connecting Budapest and Belgrade, Hungary will be offering the fastest transport route for Chinese goods

between South-eastern and Western Europe. The project itself is significant not only for the economic integration of Hungary and Serbia but also two countries' further integration into the European Union and Single Market.

- Despite all the pressures from America and Europe, Hungary is quite determined in terms of having 5G investments from China. Hungary regards this issue as a national security matter and the country's decision on 5G technology is clear enough. For Hungary, it is possible, but not likely, to join US-led security-themed grouping against China. The current administration of Hungary sees its European partners as hollow-hearted and has a political trust problem with them. When it comes to China, Hungary is enjoying a high level of trust. Overall, Hungary's new positioning toward East mainly China is related to its own national agenda. Moreover, according to top-level actors, to have excellent relations with China, Hungary's national interest.
- The Chinese economic engagement in Central and Eastern Europe gave China extraordinary power to shape the European Union decision-making process. It is evident that this situation heaps of times resulted in divided Europe. The European Union must have a concerted policy and united stand toward China, this is existential than ever.

## 2. Lead Chart

# CHINESE INVESTMENT AND INFLUENCE IN HUNGARY

Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban was one of the heads of state and government from 37 countries. During his speech in Belt and Road Forum, he praised the Belt and Road Initiative as a "serious safeguard of worldwide free trade and the freedom of world economy": More importantly, he confirmed Hungary is receiving pressures due to relations with China and stated that his government will reject "all outside ideological pressure" and will act always according to the national interest of Hungary. Prime Minister Orban also highlighted that Chinese companies have contributed to modernizing the Hungarian economy.

### Belgrade-Budapest Railway Project

Belt and Road Initiative's centrepiece in Central and Eastern Europe is reconstruction project of Belgrade-Budapest railway line. With the renovation of the railway line connecting Budapest and Belgrade, Hungary will be offering the fastest transport route for Chinese goods between South-eastern and Western Europe.

### Comprehensive Strategic Partnership

Hungary becomes one of the most important allies and destinations of China in Central Europe with enhanced political mutual trust. Hungary offers low taxes, personal tax rate is 15 percent and, corporate income tax rate is 9 percent which are attracts Chinese investors. China is assuring the continuous and dynamic growth of the Hungarian economy's competitiveness.

### Wanhua Industrial Group

Hungary's Kazincbarcika is home to the world largest producer of isocyanate (MDI or methylene diphenyl diisocyanate), Chinese the Wanhua Industrial Group.

### 5G

"It is in Hungary's national economic interests to continue its excellent cooperation with Huawei." said MFA of Hungary, Péter Szijjártó. The Hungarian economy is undergoing a dimensional transition, which is in harmony with the global economy. In the age of Industry 4.0, 5G technology will be the fundamental requirements for economic and business success.

### Divided EU

The Chinese focus in Central and Eastern Europe is evident that China considers the region's countries a full part of the Belt and Road Initiative. Western European actor like France and Germany are seen as guardians of the status quo. However, in the European Union and its hinterland, the Chinese effect is dividing European political unity.

### **3. Objectives of the Policy Paper**

China's influence in Europe, especially in Central and Eastern Europe is rising. Many of the Central and Eastern European countries are considering China as a strategic partner, and give importance to bilateral relations in order to boost their economy via Chinese led giant infrastructure projects under the framework of the Belt and Road Initiative.

If the Belt and Road Initiative will be successful and achieve all of the announced goals, the initiative will re-establish Eurasia as the largest market in the world and may lead to a shift from US dollar-based international financial system (Djankov et al. 2016). China is the dominant player in the transition process of power from west to east.

The Belt and Road Initiative has created high hopes and motivation as a huge development project. China hosted some 5.000 delegates from across the globe at the Second Belt and Road Forum in Beijing last month to discuss President Xi Jinping's signature infrastructure project, which began in 2013 to revive ancient Silk Road across Eurasia.

Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban was one of the heads of state and government from 37 countries. During his speech in Belt and Road Forum, he praised the Belt and Road Initiative as a

“serious safeguard of worldwide free trade and the freedom of world economy” (Orban, 2019). More importantly, he confirmed Hungary is receiving pressures due to relations with China and stated that his government will reject “all outside ideological pressure” and will act always according to the national interest of Hungary. Prime Minister Orban also highlighted that Chinese companies have contributed to modernizing the Hungarian economy.

This paper's goal is to examine Chinese investments and influence in Hungary and their effects on the European Union policymaking process.

### **4. Sources/Data and Methodology**

For the study purpose, both primary and secondary data are used. The primary data is collected from official statements from their web sites and information units. The secondary data is collected from academic literature. After the literature review, the collected data is used to cover every aspect of the study topic. During the research study, the researcher has faced some difficulties in terms of to find out official trade and FDI (foreign direct investment) volumes at both side's sources. However, to overcome the limitations and maintain the effectiveness of research work sincere efforts were put.

## **5. Chinese Influence in Hungary**

After the 2010 election of Hungary, Viktor Orban led the right-wing Fidesz party gave up some of the country's western identity definitions (Macri 2019). Viktor Orban who started his political career by taking a courageous position against the Soviet Union, now, inversely with past, has excellent relations with Russian President Putin and disposed to boost relations with China.

Constitutional changes at the beginning of the Orban's term since 2010 have brought Hungary in anti-immigrant and anti-Europe (Union) position. Mr. Orban administration has been received applause by many populist all around the world. Lastly, the United States of America's President Donald J. Trump praised Mr. Orban for protecting Christians from immigrants (Euronews 2019). Hungary as a member state of the European Union and a friend of China, Russia and, President Trump has ensured its seat at the international system.

Participation in the Belt and Road Initiative has highlighted Hungary's economic importance for the continent. Chinese interest has been intensified toward the countries of Central & Eastern Europe and regional politics of the area. As part of its huge infrastructure project, the Belt and Road Initiative, China started to focus on this region to meet with economic transformation and development demands of regional actors (Hutt 2017). Hungary is the

central point of Chinese economic engagement in Central and Eastern Europe. Positioning as a Central European country provides Hungary the advantage of cheaper labor. As the European Union member state, access right to the Single Market is crucial for the country's importance in the eyes of Beijing.

These complex networks of relations give leverage to both Hungary and China. On the one hand, Hungary, as one of the most criticized member states of the European Union in terms of illiberal practices, has negotiation power against the European Union thanks to excellent cooperation with major powers of world politics like China and Russia. On the other hand, China as the pioneer of the Belt and Road initiative has a powerful position in Europe by force of good ties with former communist states now member states of the European Union at Central and Eastern Europe.

### **5.1. Belgrade-Budapest Railway Project**

Belt and Road Initiative's centerpiece in Central and Eastern Europe is the reconstruction project of Belgrade-Budapest railway line. China is mainly focusing on connecting Europe's heartland to the Chinese-run Greek port of Piraeus (Gong 2019).

In this way, one of the major targets of the Belt and Road Initiative's is establishing strategic land-sea transport corridor which connects China and Europe. Nevertheless, the reconstruction project of Belgrade-Budapest railway line is facing contractual problems which are under investigation of the European Commission.

The project itself is significant not only for the economic integration of Hungary and Serbia but also two countries' further integration into the European Union and Single Market.

Chinese circles blame the European Union and European strategists for thinking with outdated geostrategic mindscapes rooted in colonial history. Moreover, they are claiming that the Chinese attitude with Belt and Road Initiative is completely different. As Chinese President stated, Belt and Road Initiative is a concept of the community of a shared future for mankind (Lin 2019: 9).

Belgrade-Budapest railway project and Piraeus port connectivity is a crucial development for the region's trade. Container traffic could be diverted from Northern Europe's ports to ports in Southern Europe (Hutt 2017). This case can be harmful to Northern Europe's ports however this shift would provide stakeholders cheaper and fast alternative.

Tender for the refurbishment of the Budapest-Belgrade railway line:

- The winner has been announced as a Chinese-Hungarian consortium at 25 April 2019 by the Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade. However, the names of the partners in the consortium are still unknown.
- According to plan, construction work on the railway line will begin at the end of this year or early in 2020.
- With the renovation of the railway line connecting Budapest and Belgrade, Hungary will be offering the fastest transport route for Chinese goods between South-eastern and Western Europe (MFA of Hungary 2019).

## **5.2. Fifth Generation Cellular Network Technology (5G) Related Discussions**

“It is in Hungary's national economic interests to continue its excellent cooperation with Huawei.” *Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade Péter Szijjártó*

In the Hungarian point of view, the Hungarian economy is undergoing a dimensional transition, which is in harmony with the global economy. In the age of Industry 4.0, 5G technology will be the fundamental requirements for economic and business success.

Hungary evaluates European major power's position on Central Europe – China relations as an example of 'hypocrisy'. Hungarian foreign minister gave example to illustrate Western European powers' insincerity stand toward Central Europe – China relations and defended Hungary's use of Huawei 5G mobile phone technology: *"When the German chancellor and French president meet China's leadership nobody thinks that's a problem. Nobody raises a question about how it is possible that they sell 300 aircraft to China, which is a bigger deal than the (entire) trade represented by the 11 central European countries"* (Reuters 2019). Undoubtedly, Hungary wants to expand its relations and trade ties with China like many European countries do.

### **5.3. The World Largest Producer of Isocyanate: Wanhua Industrial Group in Hungary**

The Wanhua Industrial Group is a Chinese chemical company that is the world largest producer of isocyanate (MDI or methylene diphenyl diisocyanate) in terms of capacity. Wanhua-BorsodChem – as the European member of the Wanhua Group – is a leading chemical raw material manufacturing company headquartered in Kazincbarcika, Hungary. The company specialized for isocyanates

(MDI, TDI), PVC and chlor-alkali (vinyl) businesses. The main production site is located in Kazincbarcika, Hungary.

Isocyanates are a family of highly reactive, low molecular weight chemicals. They are widely used in the manufacture of flexible and rigid foams, fibers, coatings such as paints and varnishes, and elastomers, and are increasingly used in the automobile industry, auto body repair, and building insulation materials. Spray-on polyurethane products containing isocyanates have been developed for a wide range of retail, commercial and industrial uses to protect cement, wood, fiberglass, steel and, aluminium, including protective coatings for truck beds, trailers, boats, foundations, and decks (CDC 2008).

### **5.4. China and Hungary Build Comprehensive Strategic Partnership**

"We will ask China for infrastructural investments if the EU does not provide any financial assistance." *Hungary's Prime Minister Viktor Orban - 2018 World Economic Forum in Davos*

The boosted ties between Hungary and China have resulted in concerns mainly for Western European actors in the EU who are wary of Hungary's populist shift and Euro-sceptic attitudes (Tucker and Ádám 2019). Under the leadership of Prime Minister Viktor

Orban, the government of Hungary has become a close ally of China in Europe. Both countries are enjoying a high level of political trust (MFA of Hungary 2019). Hungary is following own national agenda and in most of the case do not agree with decisions which are made in Brussels.

Hungary and China seek to extend the scale of bilateral trade and investment, as well as deepening infrastructure development and regional connectivity with the Belt and Road Initiative. China and Hungary already connected with railways since 2017. Compared to sea freight, cross-continental railways have notably reduced the time needed to transport goods; compared to air freight, the cross-continental railways have remarkably reduced the transportation costs by 40% and above all, rail cargo is more environmentally friendly than air freight. First cargo trains between Hungary and China launched in 2017, the train departed from Changsha in Central China's Hunan province and passed a corridor through Russia and Ukraine to Budapest in Hungary has arrived at the Budapest Intermodal Logistics Centre after crossing about 10,000 kilometers. It carried 41 containers of electronic products, shoes, apparel, fiber optic cables, hardware, and machinery parts (China State Council, 2017)

Furthermore, Hungary wants to host more Chinese tourists and willing to increase people to people connections in terms of cooperation in civil aviation and education. According to statistics from the China National Tourism Administration, Chinese tourists travelled overseas on 140 million occasions and their spending in overseas has reached more than \$120 billion in 2018 (Global Times 2019). Hungary as a country who exported goods worth \$125 billion in 2017, naturally wants to attract Chinese tourists. As clearly seen by figures, tourism is a quite important area and countries are trying to attract Chinese tourist into their countries.

'Opening to the East' policy of the Orban government has aimed better trade and receiving more Chinese investment into Hungary since 2010. Political relations seem to be perfect from the outside however Hungary has not received any new, major Chinese investors in nearly last the decade (Matura 2017: 3). Two governments just elevated bilateral relations to the level of a comprehensive strategic partnership in May 2017.

The Hungarian capital Budapest is now home to China's first think tank in Europe, Institute of European Studies. Hungary is hosting four Confucius Institutes, according to China Daily they have 3.800-course attendees (Xiaoxun 2017) and have organized 240



events to promote Chinese culture and language across the country (Confucius Institute 2019).

United States Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said *“Too often in the recent past, the United States was absent from Central Europe, that’s unacceptable. Our rivals filled those vacuums,”* that during the speech in Budapest. It is obvious that the United States side has concerns about Hungary’s new positioning toward Asia especially China. Furthermore, this concerns somehow shared by some Hungarians like Andras Simonyi who was Hungary’s ambassador to the United States from 2002 to 2007. Simonyi said *“At the end of the day, America must help Hungary pull back into the Western camp. It’s gone too far—way too far—toward the East,”* that reflects concerns concentrates on country’s new positioning (Simon 2019).

To sum up, Hungary becomes one of the most important allies and destinations of China in Central Europe:

- Enhanced political mutual trust,
- Relations based on mutual respect,
- Hungary offers low taxes, the personal tax rate is 15 percent and, the corporate income tax rate is 9 percent which is attracts Chinese investors (Arend 2019).

- China is assuring the continuous and dynamic growth of the Hungarian economy’s competitiveness (MFA Hungary 2019).

## **5.5. Is the EU divided internally?**

Chinese engagement in Central and Eastern Europe is dividing European unity. In 2007, the European Union drafted a paper which criticizes China for the country’s human right record. The European Union statement was intended to be released at the United Nation Human Rights Council. However, the European Union’s member states were not able to agree on it. Greece and Hungary’s efforts to block the statement were successful. The same stand by Hungary and Greece has observed in 2016 in the case of a European Union statement which related to Chinese aggression in the South China Sea (Cooper 2019).

The European Union criticized China’s Belt and Road Initiative in terms of harming international transparency norms and competitiveness. During the ambassadors meeting in the European Union, Hungarian diplomat refused to sign the report (Heide et al. 2018) which clearly warns China.

Furthermore, the report has underlined that China wanted to shape globalization process to suit its own national interest. Chinese

led Belt and Road Initiative is following a strategy which aims to establish new export markets to tackle overcapacity problem and ensuring China's access to raw materials in the globe. In the European Union level solution looks like not opposing the Belt and Road Initiative but firmly state the EU's terms. The Belt and Road Initiative is mobilizing around \$1 trillion in investment projects which is clearly the biggest international development program since the US launched the Marshall Plan aftermath of World War Two.

The Chinese focus in Central and Eastern Europe is evident that China considers the region's countries a full part of the Belt and Road Initiative. Western European actor like France and Germany are seen as guardians of the status quo (Mações 2019). Some might argue, this project in the future would be the new World Trade Organization like CEO of Germany's Siemens, Joe Kaeser (Suokas 2018). However, in the European Union and its hinterland, the Chinese effect is dividing European political unity.

## 6. Policy Recommendations

- The European Union should meet with member states' demands,
- No member states should be excluded from the European mechanism,

- Brussels' position should be inclusive. If any member states feel like excluded or abandoned by the European Union; this in the long term can result in dissolution in the Union. Moreover, this attitude can help strengthen anti-European Union segments in the member states,
- There is no doubt that Hungarian governing elites are feeling excluded by the European Union. Brussels' critics toward Hungary's Government controversially are helping Mr. Orban to approach China closely. Every political leader should have concrete projects to present their electorate. Economically, Chinese offers to Hungary are supporting governing unit's position. Moreover, Mr. Orban says that we will ask the European Union for financial assistance for infrastructure projects. If the European Union does not provide any, we will ask China. Overall, it means that Hungary has alternatives to cooperate rather than the European Union.
- The Chinese economic engagement in Central and Eastern Europe gave China extraordinary power to shape the European Union decision-making process. It is evident that this situation heaps of times resulted in divided Europe. The European Union must have a concerted policy and united stand toward China, this is existential than ever.

## 7. Appendix



# MAJOR CHINESE INVESTMENT SUCCESSES AND FAILURES IN HUNGARY

The Budapest–Belgrade railway reconstruction project's aim is upgrading the 350-kilometer-long Budapest-Belgrade railway into a high-speed rail. When the project finished, the time of travel will decrease from eight hours to just three hours. China has offered a loan from its Exim Bank for this investment project, mainly focuses on establishing a transportation corridor between Piraeus Port in Greece and Western Europe via Macedonia, Serbia, and Hungary. While the Serbian part of the project has already started, the Hungarian part is still processing due to allegations by the EU.

Graph by Berat Oguz Senyerli @2019  
Data Source: Tamas Matura - Chinese Investment in Hungary

### MAJOR CHINESE INVESTORS IN HUNGARY

#### SUCCESSSES

Huawei -2005

ZTE - 2005

Lenovo-Flextronics  
2009

Sevenstar 2009

Wanhua Group - 2010

Comlink - 2012

Wanhua Group - 2010

Comlink - 2012

China-CEE Fund - 2017

#### FAILURES

Shanghai Construction  
Group - 2009

Orient Solar - 2011

Canyi - 2011

China Railway Construction  
Corporation - 2012

VO - 2013

#### IN PROGRESS

China Railway Group  
2015

**Belgrade-Budapest  
Railway Reconstruction**

Tianshan Industrial Group  
2016

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