

## NEW SILK ROAD AND ITS CULTURAL IMPLICATIONS FOR EUROPE IN THE 21ST CENTURY

The idea of the New Silk Road, presented by Chinese president Xi Jinping during his visit in Kazakhstan in 2013, coincided with a number of important processes/phenomena affecting European countries, both members of the European Union and non-associated states. First of all, what needed address was the effects of the financial crisis, triggered in 2008 in the US by the spectacular fall of the Lehman Brothers Bank; second — there was growing skepticism of British citizens and part of British political elite, concerning EU's internal affairs; third — the effects of the so-called Arab Spring (2010–2013) and the destabilization of Near East and North Africa; fourth — migration crisis, evolving in the wake of social and economic troubles occurring due to the toppling or changing of most of existing regimes in the Arab world<sup>1</sup>.

American *credit crunch* became the source of banking crisis which through numerous financial connections of European subjects with the USA quickly affected Europe too. The first victims of the shock were Ireland, Italy, Greece, Spain and Portugal. Collectively labeled as PIIGS (*Portugal, Ireland, Italy, Greece, Spain*) — a name invoking mixed feelings due to obvious associations — the countries saw fierce internal discussions questioning the validity of extraordinary budget cuts enforced by the European institutions as the policy of austerity. Emergency credits offered as bailouts by the International Monetary Fund, intending to support weakened economies, soon proved to be an additional burden due to future costs of the incurred debt. However, Ireland managed to cope with the crisis relatively fast (2010–2015), other countries as of 2017 are still struggling with serious economic problems (i.a. growing internal and external debt, high unemployment, lowered ratings etc.)<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Migrant waves from regions affected by armed conflicts increased significantly when Bundeskanzler Angela Merkel declared so-called open doors policy, inviting Arab refugees into Germany. The answer far exceeded expectations. Southern EU borders had been crossed daily by hundreds of thousands, disrupting normal functions of transfer countries (e.g. Hungary, Italy, Greece).

<sup>2</sup> As for 2008+ crisis (description relates the year of occurrence and its later effects) it is interesting to note that the first European country affected by American troubles was Iceland. Economic, social and political turbulences, pretty intense in 2009–2010, revealed new, post-political face of this Nordic country (more on this — see M. Banaś, *Symbol i typ symboliczny w polityce. Kultura, dyskurs, działanie* [w:] *Kultura polityczna jako przedmiot badań*, ed. A. Sarnacki,

Brexit, initiated by a statement of will demonstrated by the British society in a referendum of 23rd June 2016, became a visible sign of discontent with EU's policy. While not delving deeper into details of this complicated matter, we can underline its fundamental meaning for the future of the entire EU project, its shape and fate of individual countries within the union. Original calendar of leaving UE by the UK called for 2019, but due to close economic/financial ties and complexity of legal problems the two-year negotiation period does not seem real. Anyway, it will certainly absorb much of the time and resources on both sides, which in turn will have its consequences in the context of the New Silk Road (discussed further on).

The idea of Arab Spring, also known as “Arab spring and winter”, “Arab awakening” or “Arab revolution”, was to free local societies from the yoke of authoritarian regimes, dictatorships neglecting human rights, violating the principles of Western democracies and openly contesting universal — in the Western view — values, such as equal rights, freedom of speech and separation between religion and state. Initial enthusiasm reported by news agencies like BBC, CNN, Bloomberg, Al Jazeera, Washington Post, Libya Herald etc. was soon eclipsed by enormous costs which affected societies and economies, arising from the use of force in conflicts between the citizens and the regime-bound oligarchy. The most tragic examples are of course Iraq, Libya, Syria and Yemen<sup>3</sup>.

Migration crisis, as a direct consequence of Near East and North Africa destabilization, has caused a humanitarian disaster in the form of hundreds of thousands of refugees, displaced people who have lost their families and/or their life work. Human tragedy (impossible to compensate for), as well as the wish to understand it, have awoken compassion and mercy of the European societies. The invitation for the refugees from areas destroyed by conflicts, expressed by the Chancellor of Germany, Angela Merkel, has resulted in a surprisingly high influx of immigrants — over 1 million people in just 2015<sup>4</sup>. Their sudden presence and concentration in the richest countries of the EU initiated inner strife within the Community, concerning reloca-

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Kraków 2016, s. 107–110). Iceland has coped with its problems even faster than Ireland, possibly saving this country from joining the PIIGS group; had it not, in all probability the acronym would have looked as PIIIGS.

<sup>3</sup> [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle-east/yemen-says-more-than-2000-killed-in-uprising/2012/03/18/gIQAGOtLS\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.ec7f759c3573](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle-east/yemen-says-more-than-2000-killed-in-uprising/2012/03/18/gIQAGOtLS_story.html?utm_term=.ec7f759c3573) (retrieved: 21.03.2017);  
<http://www.libyaherald.com/2013/01/07/casualty-figures-exaggerated-says-ministry/#axzz4jhVSwX3Y> (retrieved: 22.03.2017).  
<https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/campaigns/2016/01/arab-spring-five-years-on/> (retrieved: 22.03.2017);  
<http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2015/03/fallen-leaves-arab-spring-150310060732982.html>. (retrieved: 04.04.2017).

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-34131911> (retrieved: 04.04.2017).

tion of at least part of the newcomers, explained by the European Commission and European Parliament by the rule of common European responsibility. However, lack of unanimity in this matter among member states only stressed internal divisions and emphasized differences in key questions, such as labor market, economy (or specifically economies of member countries), Schengen Area and both internal and external security of the EU in general, as well as individual countries.

### **NEW SILK ROAD — AN OFFER FOR EUROPE AND ALL OF THE WORLD**

The above described four main phenomena affecting Europe, as well as other accompanying processes are not without meaning for the analysis of the fifth one, of completely different geographical and cultural provenance. the New Silk Road (NSR) as an economic-infrastructure idea, with the research/development and political dimensions as well, was publicly and officially declared to be a win-win relation, resulting from bi- or multilateral cooperation, albeit with boundary conditions dictated by China. During a two-day meeting in May 2017 in Beijing, president Xi Jinping mentioned the necessity of revitalization of both the idea and reality of the Silk Road, this time in a new, enhanced form (Phillips, 2017). the main argument of presidential speech was the need to increase growth of the economically weaker countries, stemming from Chinese solidarity and responsibility for the shape of their near and far vicinity. In Xi Jinping's view, both rich and poor countries should gather around a common goal and follow it "as a skein of geese" (Phillips 2017). For obvious reasons — in the host's opinion — the leader of this big scale enterprise should be China, as re-emerging power able to compete with the West (first of all the USA), i.a. through building alternative economic and cultural links.

The idea of creating six land-transport channels from China through Central Asia to Europe (the *silk road economic belt*, SREB), as well as a sea lane from Southern China through the Red Sea into the Mediterranean (the *21st century maritime silk road*, MSR)<sup>5</sup> foresees broadly conceived infrastructural investments — building roads, bridges, railways, ports and other elements necessary for the execution of the plan (power-plants, shipping points, logistic management centers etc.). the initiative of bonding investments between China and the rest of Asia, part of Oceania and

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<sup>5</sup> Overland channels: 1. Eurasiatic from Western China to Western Russia; 2. Chinese-Mongol-Russian from Northern China to Eastern Russia; 3. Chinese-Turkish from Western China through Central&East Asia to Turkey; 4. Indochinese from Southern China to Singapore; 5. Indian from Southern China to India through Bangladesh and Myanmar; 6. Chinese-Pakistani originating in South-Western China; and sea lane from Southern China through Malaysia, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Singapore, Kenya, Near East to the Mediterranean. Channels are shown on a picture on the next page.

Eastern Africa, Near East and finally Europe would ultimately engage about 60 countries, while the budget of this enterprise would reach eight billion USD (Lam Wo-lap 2016).

The grand scheme, regularly presented by Chinese authorities in international fora, conferences and symposiums as well as in bilateral talks with individual countries — potential partners, widely discussed in world media, so far is backed with only modest financial support of the proposer. An institution created specifically for accumulating means for the project, the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, AIIB, as for 2016 had just 24 million USD in its safes (Lam Wo-lap 2016). In this aspect, without proper financial backing, the entire NSR project would be just a well prepared narrative, on the one hand trying to appease the political ambitions of Xi Jinping (Lam Wo-lap 2016), on the other suggesting to the world a possibility of solving global problems, such as growing economic and social disparities between the developed and developing countries, increasing problems of the heavily indebted poor countries (HIPC) or the hegemony of the American dollar as the world settlement currency.



Picture 1: Map of the land and sea lanes SREB and MSR.

Source: <http://www.ibconsortium.com/news/readdressing-21st-century-maritime-silk-road-exploring-sino-sri-lanka-relations-in-2016-78.html>

Moreover, one cannot overlook that in the face of the China's economy continuous growth (since the eighties systematically growing by 9,5% GDP year-to-year (IMF 2013)), finding new markets for Chinese industry (i.a. computer, metallurgical, chemical, food and clothing) is crucial<sup>6</sup>. the main target group would be of course countries located on the NSR route, especially

<sup>6</sup> It is worth noting that first six of the export goods consists of: electronics, lighting equipment, furniture, clothing, medical and optical equipment; data of 2015 by <http://www.worldstopexports.com/chinas-top-10->

those still developing, while ensuing financial liabilities would be covered by credits or other mechanisms guaranteeing the settlement of the debts. Search for new markets is additionally required by the necessity for management of the manpower, yearly growing in China by 25 million people (Mosaud 2015). Creating workplaces is important not only from the economic point of view, but also in the sociopolitical aspect, since it will significantly reduce risk of possible unrest, protests or even revolts<sup>7</sup>.

Aside from the reasons mentioned, there is another important motivation for the intensive “marketing” of the New Silk Road idea (i.e. advertising its healing effects for the world’s economy) — that is a diversion from an objective most vital China’s agenda. Substantially, it amounts to an attempt to weakening America’s hegemony over the seas, with the ultimate goal of building superpower of global reach (Lucas & Feng 2017, Kupchan 2013, Petras 2012). Skeptics, however, do negate such interpretation, indicating social/structural, economic and political weaknesses of China, which render such a goal rather unrealistic (Hsu 2017, the Washington Post 2017, Masoud 2014, Miller 2005).

The necessity of restraining American rule over the seas seems justified, inasmuch as the majority of deliveries of the strategic raw materials for Chinese economy, i.e. oil, is done over the sea route (Hongbing 2016)<sup>8</sup>. Considering this, the security of China depends highly on an external factor, namely the USA, which can easily put pressure on China in order to receive certain concessions or influence Chinese decisions and/or actions.

The creation of an alternative transport corridor, ultimately competing with the maritime one, is therefore justified, albeit at this moment rather unrealistic for several reasons. the NSR enterprise, exceptional due to its scale, requires involvement and active support from all the countries situated on theoretically staked “Belt and Road”. Although the majority of those subjects perceive the Chinese project optimistically, there are some manifestingly clear reserva-

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[exports/](#), as well as [http://atlas.cid.harvard.edu/explore/tree\\_map/export/chn/all/show/2014/](http://atlas.cid.harvard.edu/explore/tree_map/export/chn/all/show/2014/). In the economic complexity index, China was placed 2015 as 38th of 141 ranked countries (<http://atlas.media.mit.edu/en/rankings/country/>), simultaneously being the leader of the percentage of World export volume. Main importers of China’s products are the USA (19% of Chinese export), Hongkong (12%), Japan (6,4%) and Germany (4,9%). Poland receives just 0,92% of goods made in China (<http://atlas.media.mit.edu/en/profile/country/chn/#Exports>) (links retrieved on: 05.04. 2017).

<sup>7</sup> XIXth century Taiping and Nian rebellions are the primary examples of revolts caused by the economic/social troubles, where economic deficit multiplied by growing number of unemployed people created sufficient hardship for a movement to overthrow the government. Communist Party of China, currently ruling the land and determined to stay at the helm, cannot tolerate leaving some social groups unattended as this could with time threaten existing political establishment.

<sup>8</sup> Song Hongbing speech during conference in Polish parliament, December 2016.

tions, skepticism or outright criticism. India perceives this as a direct threat for its sovereignty, Japan — for its security, and Australia fears the expansion of its Asian neighbor and its mode of operation, distinctly and chronically violating human rights (Miglani 2017, Smyth 2017). For obvious reasons, the United States belongs to the critics too, considering the idea — rightly, by the way — as a means of undermining their own economic and political position, with an ultimate risk of losing its global hegemony.

### APPEALING STORY

For European audience, the NSR is advertised as extremely attractive, rich source of new infrastructural, trade, economic, political, scientific and cultural opportunities<sup>9</sup>. Specifically, these opportunities could greatly assist countries of Central-Eastern Europe in increasing their independence from Western, better developed neighbors (especially enticing for European states dissatisfied with European Union policies being traditionally influenced by its founders such as Germany, France and Italy).

Thus, by joining the project, Europe would be gaining twofold: not only by improving the infrastructure of countries hard hit by the 2008+ crisis (especially Greece and the Balkans)<sup>10</sup>, but also by becoming an active partner of interregional and intercontinental integration, including North Africa and the Near East. In China's opinion, Europe-North Africa and Europe-Near East integration, realized through common infrastructural investments, would allow for the reduction, and ultimately the removal, of all elements causing the lack of stability in Europe's neighborhood.

Unfortunately, stabilizing Near East through economic integration into Chinese-European corridor causes a lot of doubt even at a theoretical stage. At this moment (end as of the second decade of the 21st century) it's hard to imagine that fundamental conflicts inherent in that region could be overcome by immediate, enthusiastic cooperation by all interested countries on the conditions proposed by the originator. Moreover, the position of Europe as a stabilizing factor in the region is not really convincing, since Europe itself is battling serious internal troubles,

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<sup>9</sup> This type of narrative is exemplified by material available on the Schiller Institute website (an international advisory organization located in Washington DC, specializing in socioeconomic problems. This organization, founded in 1984 roku by Helga Zepp-LaRouche is currently active in ten-odd countries, promoting ideas of social justice expressed foremost by cultural, then by political substance (<http://www.schillerinstitute.org/> (retrieved on: 04.04.2017)).

<sup>10</sup> In the first case the key role was played rather by internal factors, a.o. lack of proper public finances discipline.

affecting its very integrity. And how could a subject demonstrating doubtful political, economic and social cohesion be a pillar of stability?

Similar problems exist in case of Europe-North Africa integration. Proposed by the Chinese, a high-speed railway link from Spain through Gibraltar (undersea tunnel of 40 km length), then running along North African seashore through Algeria, Tunisia, Libya to western Egypt is supposed not only to intensify trade and cultural exchange<sup>11</sup> (especially stressed in the project), but to modify the status of Spain too — from a peripheral country to a vibrant link, a hub of economic and cultural exchange. For the Spanish economy, seriously hit by the 2008+ crisis, a vision of an intermediary between two continents must seem as an exceptional opportunity — even if not for rebuilding the long-lost position of a sea power, then for much needed economic revival.

One must remember, however, that North Africa, as well as Near East, is an area where many interests clash — not only of the regional subjects, but also of the distant powers. Therefore, when discussing the practical potential of the NSR it is not possible to omit Russia and the USA — the unequal, nevertheless still competing major powers. Admittedly, the original Chinese idea/narrative on the New Silk Road does assign an important stabilizing role to these countries. Details, however, as in other cases, remain undefined, provoking guesses, speculations and controversies, including the very feasibility of the plan. Then, if the proposed scheme is really not workable for a number of political, financial and cultural reasons, how could it become a subject of international attention, attracting interest, arousing hope, promoting utopian figure of a world without conflicts, wars, pathological poverty and appalling social injustice?

### **CULTURE AS A POOL OF ANSWERS**

From the Western civilization's point of view abstention, maybe even cautiousness towards global Chinese plans seems justified and stems from the tradition of rational judgment of reality. However, China's leaders cannot be denied logical thinking and acting — it's just that the real intention of those actions can be difficult to grasp from the European perspective due to considerable cultural differences.

Culture understood as a pool of both material and non-material phenomena, heritage transmitted by hundreds of generations — their experiences, accomplishments, memories, traditions and values exhibited in actions — provides us with ample material to sift through in search for the real goal of the NSR (or OBOR, as “One Belt, One Road”). This is not about the identification of side goals, secondary or distracting ones — since it's them, disguised as pri-

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<sup>11</sup> “cultural exchange” is understood here broadly, in anthropological and not strictly cultural sense, as it encompasses much wider range of occurrences — as in case of terms “country” and „state”.

mary, that are voiced in the official statements of the originators. This is rather about identifying real reasons of plans and actions regarding Europe and the rest of the world, to which the Chinese leader with his supporting party propose the idea of OBOR. Maybe they are identical with those openly declared, but maybe not — one cannot exclude this altogether, taking into account basic rules of Chinese effective action. Those rules, deeply embedded in the foundations of the Chinese culture, permeate all the actions, modes of interaction with the environment of the acting subject, forms of communication and expression of will, wishes, intentions etc.

Sets of values constituting the cultural core determine both individual and collective actions. They are the DNA of a culture, forming the totality of the environment in which individual persons, as well as community and society has to live. Those values influence the way of perceiving things, thinking, conceptualizing and visualizing the world — both immediate and close, as well as distant, belonging to a different culture or civilization<sup>12</sup>.

Culture as a collective forming (though more suggestive is the Hofstede's "programming") of the mind (Czarnowski 2005, Hofstede 1991, Geertz 1973, Hall 1959) forces both the individuals and the communities, most often unconsciously, to generate specific interpretations of reality — present, past, and future, too (precisely: interpretations of future reality projections). Applying specific actions and behavior, inscribed in current code of inclusively perceived rituals<sup>13</sup> becomes somewhat natural, obvious and understandable according to the logic of culture — that is, understandable for a member and/or observer of a given culture, equipped with a proper, highly advanced cultural competence. The process of acquiring these competences begins at the birth of an individual and lasts the whole life, subject to many factors — stimulating or restraining comprehension.

The diversity of culture, its forms, shapes and development paths are obviously manifested on an individual level too, hence expected variety in perceiving material and non-material occurrences by individuals belonging to different cultural groups and circles. This variety is additionally augmented by different life experiences of individual people living within certain community, which in turn has its own experiences, being a sum of individual ones.

Multi-layered structure of individual (personal) culture, constructed of such elements as gender, age, experience, education, profession, pay, place and conditions of living or a network

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<sup>12</sup> An example of useful typology of cultures can be a distinction between cultures oriented on a person (individualistic) or a community (collectivistic), cultures of high or low context, cultures of long and short term perspective, finally masculine and feminine cultures. More on culture dimensions and its diversity — Hofstede, 2017; in: <https://geert-hofstede.com/national-culture.html> (retrieved: 06.04.2017).

<sup>13</sup> Rituals are here understood broadly, not limited to the *sacrum* and institutional *profanum*, but comprising also behavior implemented by the individual and the community in day-to-day interactions.

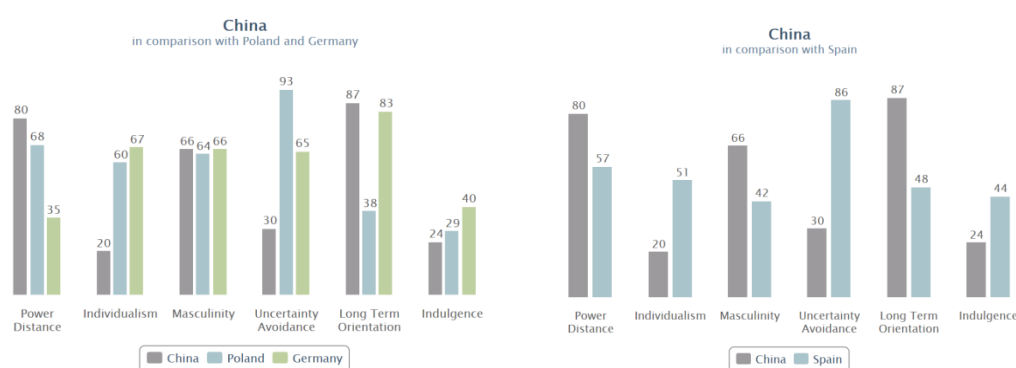


of contacts and relations with other people is inscribed within a much broader context of communal culture, perceived by the individual as the reference framework. Consequently, that communal culture is placed in an even more complex environment — regional, national and international.

All of the abovementioned aspects should be taken into account when trying to ascertain the role of Europe in the New Silk Road idea. Different systems of values, demonstrated among others in time perception, defining goals and methods of reaching them, arguing, and behaving towards a potential partner will all be affecting and do affect the negotiation processes, reaching (or not) the consensus and carrying out (or not) consequent stages of the project.

In view of the above, it is worth to look at a comparative study of the most prominent distinctive features of Chinese culture and three selected European cultures: Polish, German and Spanish<sup>14</sup>. Comparison criterions, shown below, comprise:

- power distance (the extent to which individuals accept that power is distributed unequally),
- individualism *versus* collectivism (which of the subjects — an individual or a community is the main object of the authorities' attention),
- masculinity *versus* femininity (dominating style of governance, authoritarian or consensual),
- inclination to avoid uncertainty,
- long *versus* short term orientation,
- extent to which people try to control their desires and impulses, as in delayed consumption of acquired goods (Hofstede 1991, 1980).



Picture 2: Comparison of the main dimensions of the Chinese, Polish, German and Spanish cultures.

Source: <https://geert-hofstede.com/china.html>

<sup>14</sup> European cultures have been chosen according to their geographic location and planned roles in the NSR project: Poland as a *hub* — endpoint and loading bay, preparing goods for distribution in Western Europe, Germany — one of the final markets, Spain — a distribution link for the North-Western and North Africa.

The presented data clearly shows differences between Chinese culture and three European cultures, especially in the aspects of avoiding uncertainty (low in China, very high in Poland and Spain, considerable in Germany), temporal orientation (far-reaching in China and Germany, distinctly shorter in Spain and even shorter in Poland) or individualism (low in China, much higher in Poland and Germany, relatively high in Spain). On the other hand, some features are similar in the cultural paradigm of China and Europe (especially in case of Poland and Germany, to a lesser degree of Spain) when we talk masculinity and clear domination of vertical (hierarchical) social structure over the horizontal one (flat and egalitarian, typical for the Scandinavian cultures).

Cultural distinctions visible in fundamental aspects of communal existence and actions cannot be ignored when trying to ascertain the role, place and function of Europe in the future arrangement proposed as the New Silk Road.

### **WEAKENED COHESION IS THE ADVERSARY'S POWER**

Economic treaties proposed by the United States (TTIP — *Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership*) and Canada (CETA — *Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement*), and more specifically the lack of information from the government to EU societies as well as limited media access to detailed data on these treaties, have only deepened the citizens' mistrust of the Union's leadership, thus increasing negative attitudes towards the European Union as such. Decreasing confidence of the societies in institutions and individuals holding high offices weakens the cohesion of the group not only in socio-political sense, but in the cultural one, too. It is clearly visible in the increasing reluctance and outright criticism of the EU's migration policy by the CEE countries, as well as the Union's disciplinary procedures invoked against Hungary, Czechia, Poland or Greece<sup>15</sup>.

A prime example of EU's erosion is Brexit — a decision to leave the EU structures by Great Britain. In the June 2016 referendum 51,9% voted "leave", and 48,1% "remain"<sup>16</sup>. The first group was decisively dominated by citizens of England and Wales, while the second — Scotland and North Ireland. This is important enough to take into consideration not only the political (governing, process of decision making) and socio-demographical (immigration) aspects, but first of all the economic one (economy in general, with work market in particular). That last aspect is

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<sup>15</sup> In case of Hungary, Czech Republic and Poland the reason was the dissent from relocation of the immigrants imposed by the EU, and in case of Greece the objection against ordered by the EU continuation of harsh budget cuts.

<sup>16</sup> <http://election.news.sky.com/referendum> (retrieved on: 19.04.2017).

of special importance, since it decides on the subject's status — its broadly understood dependence or sovereignty.

The abovementioned facts are exemplary of a situation which can be readily used by the so-called third party (i.a. China or USA) to strengthen its position in negotiations with the EU and other European countries, not directly associated but having special relations with the Union due to bilateral agreements (Norway, Iceland, Switzerland, Liechtenstein).

Cultural differences visible between Western (including Europe) and Far East societies suggest that the Chinese proposition of the NSR must be approached very cautiously, with thorough consideration, supported by advanced cultural and intercultural competences (particularly intercultural communication). This has meaning especially in the context of the weakened function of the UE, translating to Europe as a civilization in general.

Healthy functioning of civilizations, societies and states depends on the economy, which — apart from strictly economic — is formed by cultural factors, too. It is them that are “advising” proper actions — of course, proper from the given culture's point of view. “Proper” action is the one that leads to a defined, fixed goal. Thus, it should be effective, in order to reach that goal. The effectiveness — and its enforcement — has different faces, as well as the very culture in which an acting person or group are rooted has different faces, too.

Chinese art of effective action, based on the ancient treatise the *art of war* by Sun Zi, is a set of specific rules, several of which seem to be especially telling:

- “the clever combatant imposes his will on the enemy, but does not allow the enemy's will to be imposed on him” (Plebaniak 2017: 21),
- “make use of natural tendencies, do not force anything” (ibid., s. 48),
- “make the enemy voluntarily adopt a stance, at which it's easiest to defeat him” (ibid., s. 49),
- “make a sound in the east, then strike in the west” (ibid., s. 253),
- “bait someone by making him believe he gains something or just make him react to it and obtain something valuable from him in return” (ibid., s. 440),
- “make sure that all efforts of the enemy are in vain” (ibid., s. 566).

If we are to accept that all Sun Zi's instructions, aptly studied and followed through centuries, still hold true — and there are no signs to think otherwise — then the New Silk Road along with the optimistic narrative of its proposers may prove a risky challenge for the weakened Europe, especially if it were to turn out but a beautifully engineered illusion.

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The idea of the New Silk Road emerges in the moment of building a new one, or more precisely, reorganizing the world order designed after 1945 along American guidelines (according to

an old rule that it's the victor who's dictating terms). the beginning of the 21st century has brought a reconfiguration of individual parts constituting the pillars of the system. It occurred due to many factors, not only of economic and political nature, but also cultural — having its source in the culture (or cultures). In case of Western civilization it is the erosion of classical values that mostly contributed to the appearance of harmful, indeed pathological behavior in economy and politics. Neoliberalism, so strongly stressing individual freedom with the reduction of barriers and limits, led to the “loosening” of the rules keeping both the powers and the individuals in certain order (form). It is at a time of this disintegration (being a process of its own) that an offer has been made by a completely different culture and civilization — one based on collectivism, ready to postpone consumption (suppress gratification of needs) and perseverant in pursuing temporarily goals. Time will tell whether the proposition will be accepted, in which dimension and to what degree. However, if it happens, the Europe of the 21<sup>st</sup> century's end can look quite different.

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