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# МЕЖДУНАРОДНЫЕ ОТНОШЕНИЯ

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## INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

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### THE FOREIGN POLICY OF THE SECOND TRUMP ADMINISTRATION: INTENTIONS AND CAPABILITIES

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**Abstract.** This article challenges the prevailing view that the second Trump administration's foreign policies are merely provocative and unpredictable. Several key characteristics of its international approach were already evident during D. Trump's first term, others were shaped by enduring US interests, available resources, and the new geopolitical context after 2022. Understanding the shifts in Washington's international approach requires examining D. Trump's stated intentions and capabilities. By early 2025, at least four intentions had become apparent: expanding US-controlled territories, containing the influence of China, brokering a ceasefire in the Russia–Ukraine special military operation, and compelling allies to increase their financial and strategic contributions to Western defence. The administration deploys four primary capabilities to advance these goals: America's substantial technological advantages, extensive financial and economic resources, soft power through free-market ideology, and military strength encompassing conventional forces and nuclear deterrence. When viewed through this framework of intentions and capabilities, D. Trump's foreign policy appears considerably more coherent.

**Keywords:** US foreign policy; US; EU; China; collective West; political confrontation; consensus; global challenge; national economy; world economy; economic growth; containment policy; export; import; world markets; Taiwan; Russia; Ukraine; military operation; democracy; tariffs.

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## ВНЕШНЯЯ ПОЛИТИКА ВТОРОЙ АДМИНИСТРАЦИИ ТРАМПА: НАМЕРЕНИЯ И ВОЗМОЖНОСТИ

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**Аннотация.** Предпринята попытка доказать гипотезу, что внешнеполитический курс второй администрации Трампа не так провокационен и непредсказуем, как считали многие журналисты и эксперты. Некоторые из основных черт внешнеполитического курса Д. Трампа уже проявлялись в годы его первого пребывания на посту президента. Часть из них детерминированы американскими интересами и возможностями. Чтобы понять особенности вашингтонского подхода к международным отношениям, необходимо взглянуть на них через призму трамповских намерений и возможностей. В начале 2025 г. по меньшей мере четыре таких намерения (расширение территории под американским контролем, сдерживание роста влияния Китая, прекращение огня в специальной военной операции России в Украине, убеждение союзников увеличить расходы на обеспечение безопасности Запада) были четко продемонстрированы. Для осуществления этих намерений администрация Трампа, прежде всего, использовала возможности огромного американского технологического потенциала, значительные финансовые и другие экономические ресурсы, идеологию свободного рынка и другие гибридные возможности своей «мягкой силы», а также военную мощь, основанную на современных обычных вооружениях и традиционной ядерной триаде. Если принять в расчет эти намерения и возможности, то непредсказуемость внешнеполитического курса администрации Трампа будет выглядеть менее угрожающей.

**Ключевые слова:** американская внешняя политика; США; ЕС; Китай; коллективный Запад; политическая конфронтация; консенсус; глобальный вызов; национальная экономика; мировая экономика; экономический рост; политика сдерживания; экспорт; импорт; мировые рынки; Тайвань; Россия; Украина; военная операция; демократия; тарифы.

### Introduction

From its first days, the second Trump administration surprised international observers with a series of high-profile initiatives. These ranged from imposing tariffs on 185 countries to a promise to end the Russia – Ukraine conflict within the first hundred days in office. Additional pledges included building a border wall to deter illegal migration, reducing inflation, reshoring industrial production, adopting a more confrontational stance towards China, incorporating Canada and Greenland, constructing a sun-city in Gaza, and numerous other ambitious objectives. Global political actors responded with profound shock to these developments, struggling to make sense of their implications.

Comprehending this new direction held significance not only for major powers such as China and Russia, and leading transnational corporations, but also for smaller states like Belarus, which attempted to distinguish rhetorical posturing from genuine intentions.

Leading American analysts offered predictions for the incoming presidency immediately following election day. M. Kroenig, Vice President of the Atlantic Council, anticipated «a return of a “peace through strength” approach» entailing «big investments in US defence capabilities to strengthen deterrence and use force

decisively if deterrence fails»<sup>1</sup>. Former US ambassador to Ukraine, J. E. Herbst, noted the difficulty of predicting policy towards the conflict in Ukraine, given that D. Trump’s team «contains personnel with very different views». He identified two competing camps: one advocating reduced aid to Ukraine, and another recognising «the threat to US interests in Europe and elsewhere if Washington were to abandon Ukraine»<sup>2</sup>. M. Schuman, senior fellow at the Atlantic Council’s Global China Hub, warned of potential «withdrawal of US global leadership that allows Xi to promote Chinese power at Washington’s expense»<sup>3</sup>.

Prior to D. Trump’s inauguration, international experts sought to predict his approach towards specific countries and multilateral organisations<sup>4</sup>. Belarusian scholars, however, produced limited analysis on the subject, constrained by the short timeframe since D. Trump’s assumption of office. E. Preigerman, director of the council on international relations «Minsk dialogue», offers insights into D. Trump’s foreign policy priorities in his non-paper «Priorities in unpredictability: Trump entered new world». He identifies two key Washington priorities amid the perceived unpredictability of D. Trump’s foreign policy. First, he argues that

<sup>1</sup>Donald Trump just won the presidency. Our experts answer the big questions about what that means for America’s role in the world [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/donald-trump-just-won-the-presidency-our-experts-answer-the-big-questions-about-what-that-means-for-americas-role-in-the-world/> (date of access: 24.04.2025).

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>Sotolongo J. A. Return of Donald Trump: continuity or change with the DPRK? [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://worldnewworld.com/page/content.php?no=4082> (date of access: 24.04.2025) ; Ostheimer A. E. What a second Trump administration will mean for multilateralism [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://worldnewworld.com/page/content.php?no=4282> (date of access: 24.04.2025).

the new administration will revive the Monroe doctrine, which President J. Monroe established in 1823 to declare both American continents as Washington's exclusive sphere of interest. Second, E. Preigerman notes

that D. Trump's inaugural speech emphasised America's determination to stop expending limited resources on narratives and conflicts that Washington considers non-essential to its strategic interests<sup>5</sup>.

### Intentions and capabilities

Decisive victory of D. Trump in the November 2024 presidential elections culminated in his inauguration as the 47<sup>th</sup> President of the US on 20 January 2025. This outcome was unexpected and, for many American and international experts and politicians, unwelcome. In the aftermath, commentators' attention turned to speculating about his stance on specific nations and international relations more broadly. Many scrutinised his first term (2017–2021) to anticipate likely trajectories. The theme of D. Trump's unpredictability featured prominently in these assessments and became apparent in the first four months of his second presidency. Within two weeks, D. Trump had announced territorial claims against Denmark (Greenland) and Panama, threatened Colombia, Canada, and Mexico with 25 % tariffs unless they strengthened their borders, and imposed 145 % tariffs on all Chinese exports to the US. These foreign policy decisions exceeded the forecasts of many analysts, even those who had anticipated a degree of erratic behaviour.

While D. Trump's unpredictability is difficult to dispute, his second administration must operate within a range of objective and subjective constraints that somewhat curtail this tendency. To understand these policies, we must consider, first, the administration's intentions, and, second, the capabilities at its disposal.

What intentions, then, became apparent during the initial months of D. Trump's second presidency? The first intention expanding the US territory or areas under American control, was not without historical precedent. The announced intention to incorporate Greenland and the Panama Canal zone into the US territory has deep roots in American politics. President H. Truman first advanced claims on Greenland, whilst President J. Carter's decision to transfer the Panama Canal zone to Panama met with opposition from a majority of republican politicians in the 1970s. D. Trump himself raised the Greenland question during his first presidential term. Consequently, analysts familiar with these historical precedents should not find D. Trump's territorial ambitions during his second presidency particularly surprising. A novel element introduced in early 2025 was the republican administration's emphasis on national security concerns to justify these territorial ambitions, extending this rationale to Canada and Mexico.

Second intention is to contain China's growth also originated during D. Trump's first presidency. The trade war he initiated included imposing new tariffs on Chinese goods. His second administration has cited secu-

rity concerns regarding Chinese companies' potential control over both entrances to the Panama Canal. Additionally, Washington invited Beijing to join nuclear arms control negotiations, an offer China had ignored as of March 2025.

Third intention (to broker a ceasefire in the Russia–Ukraine conflict) was a prominent pledge during D. Trump's election campaign. The Biden administration viewed this conflict through the lens of political liberalism: good versus evil, democracy versus autocracy, freedom versus tyranny. D. Trump and his foreign policy team approach it from a realist perspective: a struggle over spheres of influence, a confrontation between Russian and Ukrainian national interests, and a post-Soviet territorial and cultural dispute that should not greatly concern the US. Consequently, D. Trump immediately dismissed discussions about restoring all occupied Ukrainian territories to Kyiv's control, instead proposing a demarcation line along current front positions. The Trump administration's ceasefire initiative thus reflects less concern for humanitarian principles or defending democracy than a desire to reduce American expenditure on Ukrainian defence and prevent pushing Russia closer to China.

The fourth intention (compelling allies to increase their contributions to Western defence) had emerged during D. Trump's first presidential term. At that time, D. Trump demanded that NATO countries raise their military budgets to at least 2 % of GDP. During his second term, he increased this demand to 5 % of GDP, citing the three-year-old conflict in Europe. Some sources suggest that Washington might accept a rise to 3.6 %.

These objectives (among others not discussed here) draw upon strategic resources that equip D. Trump's foreign policy with several implementation capabilities. The first relates to substantial technological advantage of the US. The country leads in numerous advanced technologies, including artificial intelligence, big data analytics, semiconductor manufacturing, and quantum computing. Although this technological capacity remains poorly coordinated across disparate companies and research centres, it nevertheless enables the Trump administration to maintain sophisticated conventional forces and pursue an assertive foreign policy, particularly in security matters.

The second capability arises from economic supremacy of the US, which provides the government with extensive financial and material resources for domestic

<sup>5</sup>Preigerman E. Prioritising unpredictability: Trump has entered a new world [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://minskdialogue.by/research/opinions/priority-v-nepredskazuemosti-tramp-zashel-v-novyi-mir> (date of access: 24.04.2025).



and foreign policies. Consequently, the second Trump administration can commit enormous resources to even its most ambitious and risky initiatives, such as the proposed Golden dome missile defence initiative and sustain both productive and counterproductive efforts for extended periods. The sheer scale of the American economy permits Washington to pursue policies that may damage US national interests over considerable time spans.

The third capability derives from the US market ideology, which has repeatedly demonstrated the power of free markets to stimulate economic growth and improve living standards. Several developing countries continue to adopt American economic models, with Argentina in 2024–2025 serving as the most recent example. The emphasis on individual freedom, prominent in the US, remains a potent force for unlocking personal creativity and generating innovative products and expertise. The second Trump administration's anti-bureaucratic tendencies partly aim to advance this market ideology rooted in individual freedom in practice meaning the removal of societal constraints on corporate freedom, especially in the high-tech realm.

Finally, the US possesses significant military capabilities, relying on advanced conventional weaponry, such as the F-35 fighter jet, and the enduring credibility of its nuclear arsenal. The US remains among the few nations capable of projecting military power across oceans and continents. Washington's THAAD and Patriot air defence systems can neutralise aerial attacks from potential adversaries. When D. Trump signed an executive order one week after his inauguration requesting a new layered missile shield later designated Golden dome both Beijing and Moscow took notice. This initiative recalled R. Reagan's Strategic defense initiative<sup>6</sup>. Beyond urging allies to increase their military expenditure, D. Trump proposed substantially raising US defence spending to over 1 trln US dollars.

The second Trump administration's intentions and capabilities converged across various foreign policy initiatives, which took several distinct forms.

Economic sanctions appear a favoured instrument. Early in his second presidency, he imposed and occasionally postponed economic sanctions against Colombia, Canada, Mexico, and China, whilst threatening new tariffs and sanctions against Russia. These measures extended beyond direct targets to encompass third parties supporting conflicting sides. When threatening Russia with additional sanctions unless Moscow ceased its special military operation in Ukraine, D. Trump announced on the platform «Truth social» that he would apply new

tariffs not only to Russian exports to the US but also to Russian exports to third countries.

Contrary to claims that D. Trump weakened multilateral frameworks<sup>7</sup>, his administration instrumentalised alliances to advance US interests. By reducing US aid to Ukraine, he incentivises NATO to assume greater responsibility for resolving global crises, particularly the Russia – Ukraine conflict. Washington will likely utilise the AUKUS alliance and security arrangements with Japan and South Korea to deter China.

Nevertheless, the second Trump administration emphasises bilateral relations with strategically positioned countries. Military assistance features prominently in these partnerships. The administration considers military aid to Taiwan essential for deterring Chinese occupation of the island.

Israel and Egypt hold significant influence in mitigating military tensions across the Middle East. Not surprisingly, when D. Trump halted all US external assistance programmes in early February 2025, both countries received exemptions.

Washington possesses considerable capabilities to advance its objectives. However, all resources (financial, natural, political, and military) remain finite. Even substantial power of the US has boundaries. Should D. Trump persist with counterproductive policies, his available capabilities, regardless of their magnitude, may prove insufficient. As E. Preigerman observed, «even great powers cannot infinitely ignore the law of resources' limitation if they do not want to face self-destruction»<sup>8</sup>. Intentions, however noble, remain meaningless without the means to implement them.

During his presidential campaign, D. Trump lauded President W. McKinley (first elected in 1896) for advocating high tariffs. Subsequently, on 2 April 2025, his administration announced increased tariffs targeting nearly all countries, including those with which the US held a trade deficit. Although most tariffs were later postponed or reconsidered, their implementation revealed the administration's threefold strategy: generating revenue to offset the national debt, coercing policy concessions from trading partners, and penalising states for perceived transgressions. Washington attempted to penalise China with 145 % tariffs but retreated during Geneva trade talks in May 2025 when the negative domestic economic consequences became apparent. As international economists rightly cautioned, such protectionism risked depressing GDP, inflating consumer prices, and exacerbating trade imbalances<sup>9</sup>. Consequently, the second Trump administration increasingly recognised that W. McKinley's protectionist ideas, whilst

<sup>6</sup>Brown J. D. J. What will the US Golden dome missile defense mean for Russia? [Electronic resource]. URL: [https://carnegieendowment.org/russia-eurasia/politika/2025/05/golden-dome-missile-russia?lang=en&utm\\_source=carnegieemail&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=autoemail&mkt\\_tok=ODEzLVhZVS00MjIAAAGahxEZxduBSZjhflGRuoHj-kQf-9oi-63wzspZNkTaiEn5jKeilm-ph6nwQx2sKUeyX55RCySnsM5AE1vbW5V0Bp17qMP2dJdo1Z0vWY0Yc9w](https://carnegieendowment.org/russia-eurasia/politika/2025/05/golden-dome-missile-russia?lang=en&utm_source=carnegieemail&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=autoemail&mkt_tok=ODEzLVhZVS00MjIAAAGahxEZxduBSZjhflGRuoHj-kQf-9oi-63wzspZNkTaiEn5jKeilm-ph6nwQx2sKUeyX55RCySnsM5AE1vbW5V0Bp17qMP2dJdo1Z0vWY0Yc9w) (date of access: 20.05.2025).

<sup>7</sup>Ostheimer A. E. What a second Trump administration will mean for multilateralism [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://worldnewworld.com/page/content.php?no=4282> (date of access: 24.04.2025).

<sup>8</sup>Preigerman E. Prioritising unpredictability...

<sup>9</sup>The economic effects of US – China trade wars [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://worldnewworld.com/page/content.php?no=4916> (date of access: 20.05.2025).

suitable for 19<sup>th</sup>-century America, prove ineffective in today's globalised economy. Viewed through the lens of a de-risking strategy, D. Trump's foreign policy may appear less unpredictable.

The Washington administration implemented this strategy across various sectors with varying degrees of success. In the security sphere, American political-military capabilities are severely strained by numerous concurrent global crises. The US must address the Russia – Ukraine conflict, Israeli-Arab tensions, North Korea's nuclear programme, threats to Taiwan from China, Beijing's policies in the South China Sea and East China Sea, Iran's missile and nuclear capabilities, and Indo-Pakistani disputes. American armed forces, despite their considerable strength, cannot simultaneously confront all these challenges, or even half of them. Consequently, from its outset, the Trump administration sought to persuade allies to increase their military expenditure and share Washington's security burden. This approach yielded results when NATO member states, along with Japan, South Korea, and Australia, substantially raised military budgets following American threats to reduce military and intelligence assistance to Ukraine.

No capability, however formidable, is without vulnerabilities. A significant US vulnerability is its reliance on the PRC for over 90 % of global rare earth element supplies. Modern technologies, including military systems, depend entirely on these resources. Consequently, the second Trump administration has prioritised supply chain diversification. The agreement on Ukrainian minerals signed in Washington on 30 April 2025 represents a significant step in implementing this strategy.

President D. Trump's first foreign visit in mid-May 2025 took him to Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and the UAE. Whilst Arab policies towards Israel received considerable attention (Saudi Arabia was invited to join the Abraham accords (2020) at its discretion) economic interests dominated proceedings. During the visit, D. Trump announced the removal of restrictions on advanced semiconductor chip sales to Gulf states. He concluded a package of agreements with Saudi Arabia worth 600 bln US dollars, including an unprecedented 142 bln US dollars military equipment contract. Qatar and the UAE secured similarly substantial economic agreements. On the margins of the visit, D. Trump met Ahmed al-Sharaa, President of Syria, and announced the lifting of all sanctions against Syria.

## Conclusions

The second Trump administration's foreign policy appeared both provocative and unpredictable. Several core features of its approach had already emerged during D. Trump's first presidential term, while others reflected evolving US interests, capabilities, and the shifting geopolitical landscape after 2022. By early 2025, D. Trump sought to expand territories under the US control, constrain China's rise, broker a ceasefire in the Russia – Ukraine conflict, and compel allies to increase their defence contributions.

To pursue these objectives, the US possessed considerable assets: significant technological potential, substantial financial and economic resources, the appeal of free-market ideology (a component of its soft power), and military strength derived from modern conventional weaponry alongside its established nuclear arsenal. When considering these stated intentions and available capabilities, the apparently erratic nature of this foreign policy looks less puzzling.

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## THE ENERGY DIMENSION IN THE RELATIONS BETWEEN CHINA AND ANGOLA

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**Abstract.** Energy profoundly shapes global politics and economic processes. This article examines the significance of energy in the evolving relationship between China and Angola, and evaluates the efficacy of this engagement. By comparing indicators across different periods of China's foreign policy, the study identifies a consistent increase in China's interest in the energy sector and a growing demand for imported resources. Angola possesses abundant natural resources and seeks to leverage these assets to stabilise its economic growth and expand international cooperation. Its withdrawal from OPEC has further intensified efforts to secure Chinese investment for modernising its oil infrastructure and refining capacity. This energy-centric cooperation is presented as mutually advantageous: Angola employs a strategy of securing Chinese finance, while China pursues a strategy of augmenting its geopolitical standing.

**Keywords:** energy security; Angola; China; Africa; petroleum industry; investment policy.

## ЭНЕРГЕТИЧЕСКИЙ ФАКТОР В ОТНОШЕНИЯХ КИТАЯ И АНГОЛЫ

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**Аннотация.** Энергетический фактор непосредственно влияет на глобальную политику и мировые экономические процессы. Проанализирована значимость энергетического фактора в развитии отношений Китая и Анголы, сделаны выводы о результативности такого рода взаимодействия. При сравнении показателей за разные годы в пределах современного этапа внешней политики Китая обнаружен непрестанно растущий интерес Китая к сфере энергетики, запрос на ресурсы, ввозимые в страну из-за рубежа. В Анголе расположены богатые залежи природных ресурсов, которые, как показало исследование, она стремится использовать для стабилизации своего экономического роста и развития международного сотрудничества. Выход Анголы из ОПЕК сказался на повышении ее интереса к привлечению китайских инвестиций для развития национальной нефтяной промышленности и строительства нефтеперерабатывающих заводов. Сотрудничество в сфере энергетики является взаимовыгодным для обеих стран: Ангола использует стратегию привлечения китайского финансирования, Китай – стратегию усиления геополитического влияния.

**Ключевые слова:** энергетическая безопасность; Ангола; Китай; Африка; нефтяная промышленность; инвестиционная политика.

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## Introduction

In international relations, the energy dimension refers to the establishment and evolution of bilateral and multilateral ties grounded in the mutual dependencies of resource-rich and resource-dependent states and their efforts to ensure energy security. Unevenly distributed energy resources among states directly influence their economic development trajectories. The international community recognises the critical importance of these resources in maintaining global economic stability. Consequently, energy considerations have become integral to global politics, shaping the nature of interstate relations.

Historically, access to energy resources and control over them have facilitated mutually beneficial cooperation, aligning national interests and fostering peaceful interaction. Conversely, competition for these same resources has, at times, precipitated military and political conflicts.

Amidst heightened global attention to the energy sector, states and international organisations are forging effective cooperative mechanisms. Key intergovernmental bodies include the International Energy Agency and the Organisation of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC). A notable example of informal yet influential governance is the International Energy Forum, headquartered in Riyadh, which facilitates dialogue between energy producers and consumers to harmonise global policy. By the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the regula-

tory responsibilities of oil-exporting states had evolved into formalised obligations under international frameworks.

The Global energy review – 2025 observes that «global energy demand grew by 2.2 % in 2024 – faster than the average rate over the past decade. Demand for all fuels and technologies expanded in 2024. The increase was led by the power sector as electricity demand surged by 4.3 %, well above the 3.2 % growth in global GDP, driven by record temperatures, electrification and digitalisation. Renewables accounted for the largest share of the growth in global energy supply (38 %), followed by natural gas (28 %), coal (15 %), oil (11 %) and nuclear (8 %)»<sup>1\*</sup>. These figures clearly illustrate the ever-rising global demand for energy resources.

As a leading global economy, China requires stable and abundant energy supplies to sustain its high rates of economic growth. According to early 2025 data, China is the world's largest importer of crude oil. To fuel its industrial development, China must establish partnerships with other nations to secure essential energy imports.

Angola, Africa's second-largest oil exporter after Nigeria, has become a key partner for China. Given the large number of Chinese-led development programmes contributing to Angola's economy, extensive Sino-Angolan energy cooperation warrants particular academic attention.

## Materials and methods

This research draws upon pertinent academic literature from both Belarusian and international political scientists. Specifically, contributions from J. I. Malevich [1], Z. R. Bitieva, N. R. Tanov and I. E. Katkov [2], Yu. V. Borovskii [3; 4], among others, address the significance of energy resources in global politics. The works of these scholars examine various dimensions of energy within international relations, including its impact on the bilateral interactions of individual states. J. I. Malevich investigated the role of energy in Sino-Iranian relations, highlighting the significance of Middle Eastern resource transport for China's energy security. Z. R. Bitieva explored the potential for energy resources to act as influential factors in global politics. Furthermore, Yu. V. Borovskii's publications offer a thorough analysis of international rivalry in the energy sector, illustrating current trends in the modern energy market with specific examples. Despite this body of work, a systematic study of energy's role in Chinese-Angolan relations by Belarusian and international political scientists is notably absent. This research gap underscores the relevance of the present study.

This study draws upon official materials, statistical data, and statements from Chinese and Angolan re-

presentatives regarding energy cooperation. An examination of documents from specialised international organisations also contributes to an objective and comprehensive analysis of the topic.

Several political science methodologies were employed. Content analysis was utilised to examine trends in China's energy sector export and import indicators, and materials from official speeches by Chinese and Angolan representatives were studied. An institutional approach guided the incorporation of data from international energy organisations and provided insight into the main areas of work of these and other international bodies. A value-normative perspective was partially adopted to discern China's underlying principles in its energy cooperation with Angola. The findings suggest that such cooperation is not designed to exploit Angola's resources for China's exclusive benefit. Rather, it aims to foster mutually advantageous relations that benefit both countries and potentially the wider African region.

This article aims to determine the significance of the energy dimension in the evolving relationship between China and Angola.

<sup>1\*</sup>Global energy review-2025. Key findings [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://www.iea.org/reports/global-energy-review-2025/key-findings> (date of access: 11.03.2025).

## Results and discussion

Professor Yu. V. Borovskii, head of the department of international relations and foreign policy at MGIMO University, observes that «energy issues are an integral part of modern international relations, as reflected in theoretical debates regarding the nature and role of energy in world politics» [4, p. 86]. He then raises a fundamental question regarding international energy relations: are they primarily driven by national interests and power balances, inherently leading to conflict, or can interdependence within global energy markets foster non-confrontational, mutually beneficial cooperation among all actors [4, p. 86–87]? In practice, establishing relations between states on the basis of shared interests in energy resource supply can both foster long-term positive dynamics and serve as a mechanism for containment and maintaining the balance of power at regional and global levels.

Africa's expanding role in global energy markets reflects its economic resurgence, partly fuelled by oil sector growth and petroleum exports. The African energy chamber's «State of African energy – 2025 outlook» projects that «Africa is expected to contribute about 8 % to the global oil supply in 2025», a figure indicative of sustained growth in both its regional output and its contribution to global production<sup>2\*</sup>.

Chinese-Angolan energy cooperation offers a compelling example of productive, mutually beneficial interaction. In recent years, China has prioritised infrastructure development in overseas oil extraction and transport, with projects like the China – Central Asia gas pipeline demonstrating tangible outcomes. Official data reveal that over 14 years, this pipeline supplied over 500 bln m<sup>3</sup> of natural gas to China. By substituting 666 mln tonnes of coal, the project reduced carbon dioxide emissions by 731 mln tonnes<sup>3\*</sup>.

Statistical data from 2013 show that in 2012, China produced 204 mln tonnes of oil, imported 280 mln tonnes, and exhibited 58 % of an external dependence rate of approximately<sup>4\*</sup>.

According to the National Energy Administration, China's combined crude oil and natural gas produc-

tion exceeded 400 mln tonnes of oil equivalent for the first time in 2024, with crude oil production reaching 213 mln tonnes – an increase of 24 mln tonnes from 2018 levels<sup>5\*</sup>. As the world's largest crude oil importer, China received 11.1 mln barrels per day (b/d) in 2024, a slight decrease from 11.3 mln b/d in 2023<sup>6\*</sup>. These evolving statistics underscore China's escalating focus on the energy sector and its rising demand for imported resources.

Angola possesses substantial natural resource endowments, which it aims to leverage to foster economic stability and enhance international cooperation. The nation holds abundant untapped oil and gas resources<sup>7\*</sup>, with proven crude oil reserves estimated at 9 bln barrels and proven natural gas reserves at 11 trln ft<sup>3</sup>. These extensive reserves position Angola as a significant participant in global economic affairs.

Since joining the OPEC in 2007, Angola has aligned its national oil production policy with the organisation's principles and standards. This membership entailed responsibility for ensuring stable oil supplies to numerous countries worldwide. The OPEC Statute articulates its primary objectives: «The principal aim of the Organisation shall be the coordination and unification of the petroleum policies of member countries and the determination of the best means for safeguarding their interests, individually and collectively»; furthermore, «the organisation shall devise ways and means of ensuring the stabilisation of prices in international oil markets with a view to eliminating harmful and unnecessary fluctuations»<sup>8\*</sup>. Angola endeavoured to uphold these guidelines, coordinating its oil policy with fellow OPEC nations.

However, by late 2023, Angola expressed dissatisfaction with OPEC's production quotas and subsequently withdrew from the organisation. When questioned about potential implications for Chinese-Angolan relations at a press conference on 22 December 2023, Wang Wenbin, Chinese foreign ministry spokesman, stated: «China is committed to practical cooperation with Angola in various fields on the basis of equality and mutual benefit»<sup>9\*</sup>. Through this statement, China affirmed its

<sup>2\*</sup> Angola and Nigeria to lead Africa's oil output growth by 2025 [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://furtherafrica.com/2025/01/14/angola-and-nigeria-to-lead-africas-oil-output-growth-by-2025/> (date of access: 03.03.2025).

<sup>3\*</sup> China – Central Asia pipeline delivers over 500 bln m<sup>3</sup> of natural gas [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://russian.news.cn/20241119/ee87dc0ad84a408b995856140aea1086/c.html> (date of access: 12.03.2025) (in Russ.).

<sup>4\*</sup> China is becoming the world's largest oil importer [Electronic resource]. URL: <http://russian.people.com.cn/95181/8184336.html> (date of access: 12.03.2025) (in Russ.).

<sup>5\*</sup> China's oil and gas production exceeds 400 mln tonnes for the first time [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://russian.news.cn/20250128/7b014e1a54df4ae9a830bdbc1aa82fe/c.html#:~:text=Добыча%20нефти%20и%20газа%20в%20Китае%20впервые%20превысила%20400%20млн%20тонн,-2025-01-28&text=Объем%20добычи%20сырой%20нефти%20в,лет%20превысил%2013%20млрд%20кубометров> (date of access: 12.03.2025) (in Russ.).

<sup>6\*</sup> China's crude oil imports decreased from a record as refinery activity slowed [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://www.eia.gov/to-dayinenergy/detail.php?id=64544#> (date of access: 12.03.2025).

<sup>7\*</sup> Angola country commercial guide [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://www.trade.gov/country-commercial-guides/angola-oil-and-gas> (date of access: 19.03.2025).

<sup>8\*</sup> OPEC Statute [Electronic resource]. URL: [https://www.opec.org/opec\\_web/static\\_files\\_project/media/downloads/publications/OPEC\\_Statute.pdf](https://www.opec.org/opec_web/static_files_project/media/downloads/publications/OPEC_Statute.pdf) (date of access: 19.03.2025).

<sup>9\*</sup> Another press conference on 22 December 2023 held by the official representative of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China Wang Wenbin [Electronic resource]. URL: [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/rus/mtfw/ce\\_cgw\\_chn/lxjzhzhdh/202312/t20231224\\_11210191.html](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/rus/mtfw/ce_cgw_chn/lxjzhzhdh/202312/t20231224_11210191.html) (date of access: 23.03.2025) (in Russ.).

position on future energy cooperation, without directly associating Angola's departure from OPEC with the ongoing development of bilateral relations in the energy sector.

Official statistics for the first three quarters of 2024 indicate Angola's average daily oil production reached 1.134 mln barrels, a 4 % year-on-year increase. This rise followed Angola's withdrawal from the OPEC on 21 December 2023, and surpassed its OPEC production quota of 1.11 mln b/d<sup>10\*</sup>. Angola sought to further boost its oil output. However, this ambition has been constrained by ageing infrastructure and insufficient modernisation of production facilities, limiting Angola's potential to sustain its status as a major oil exporter. Foreign investment in the hydrocarbon sector remains critical, without international partnerships, Angola will struggle to maintain its significant position in global oil markets regardless of its OPEC status.

In February 2024, P. Jeronimo, chairman of the board of directors of the National Agency for Oil, Gas and Biofuels, announced a planned 71 bln US dollars investment in Angola's petroleum sector between 2024 and 2028. He stated that the industry had attracted nearly 50 bln US dollars in the previous five-year period, and projections for 2024–2028 indicated approximately 71 bln US dollars in forthcoming investments, excluding additional capital for enhancing production at existing fields<sup>11\*</sup>. Such pronouncements signal a clear intent from the Angolan leadership to continue developing the nation's oil economy.

The growth of energy cooperation between China and Angola directly correlates with the strengthening of their political relationship. Political dialogue and discussions about cooperative prospects across various domains have continued since diplomatic relations were established in 1983. Economic ties have expanded alongside increasing political trust. During a state visit to China in March 2024, Angolan President Joao Lourenco and Chinese President Xi Jinping elevated bilateral relations to a comprehensive strategic cooperation and partnership<sup>12\*</sup>. Xi Jinping characterised Chinese-Angolan cooperation as «South–South cooperation and cooperation among developing countries, mutual assistance between good friends, [and] mutual benefit and win-win cooperation»<sup>13\*</sup>.

In August 2023, the second meeting of the Steering Committee on China – Angola Economic and Trade Cooperation was held in Luanda, Angola. Wang Wentao, Chinese commerce minister, said that «under the strategic guidance of the leaders of China and Angola, fruitful results have been achieved in economic and trade cooperation between the two countries. China is willing to work with Angola to formulate a strategy for the next stage of bilateral economic and trade cooperation, expand the scope of trade and investment cooperation, consolidate the achievements in the infrastructure partnership, and intensify cooperation in sectors such as energy, mining, manufacturing, agriculture and fisheries»<sup>14\*</sup>.

Angola continues to welcome Chinese investment in its oil industry. At the 2024 Angola–China business forum on oil, gas, mineral resources and agriculture, President Joao Lourenco underscored this, stating: «We are building in Lobito the largest oil refinery that will have an associated important petrochemical industry, and Chinese entrepreneurs are invited to invest in this major project as shareholders from this construction phase»<sup>15\*</sup>. An agreement for the joint implementation of this Lobito project was reached in 2023, with reports indicating that Angola would contract China National Chemical Engineering Co. (CNCEC) for the 6 bln US dollars plant<sup>16\*</sup>. Diamantino Azevedo, Angola's minister of mineral resources, petroleum and gas, later confirmed that «the processing capacities of the Lobito refinery remain at 200 000 barrels per day and the estimated cost of the investment is around 6 bln US dollars», following a meeting between Joao Lourenco and CNCEC chairman Wen Gang<sup>17\*</sup>. At the same forum, Joao Lourenco also expressed a broader aspiration: «We want [China] to cooperate with us in the process of transforming Angola into a prosperous and modern country, capable of providing its people the best living conditions»<sup>18\*</sup>.

The Lobito oil refinery represents a critical component of Angola's energy sector. This facility in Benguela province is projected to process up to 200 thsd b/d upon completion. According to the proposed corporate structure, private investors will hold a 70 % share, while the state oil company «Sonangol» will control the remaining 30 %. Beyond Lobito, Angola is also constructing two new refineries in Cabinda and Soyo and is refurbishing and expanding the existing Luanda refinery. The nation targets

<sup>10\*</sup> One year after OPEC exit, Angola's oil production sees modest growth [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://english.news.cn/africa/20250101/b6c419fa236447fc9e5392b6e9059648/c.html> (date of access: 25.03.2025).

<sup>11\*</sup> Angola to invest over 70 bln US dollars in oil sector over next five years [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://tass.ru/ekonomika/20098497> (date of access: 23.03.2025) (in Russ.).

<sup>12\*</sup> Xi Jinping holds talks with Angolan president, upgrades bilateral relations to comprehensive strategic cooperation partnership [Electronic resource]. URL: <http://russian.people.com.cn/n3/2024/0318/c31521-20145890.html> (date of access: 23.03.2025) (in Russ.).

<sup>13\*</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14\*</sup> China and Angola held a meeting on economic and trade cooperation [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://russian.news.cn/20230814/d9e9f5edb1c648daa887c6501f925164/c.html> (date of access: 23.03.2025) (in Russ.).

<sup>15\*</sup> PR spells out at the Angola–China business forum [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://namibia.mirex.gov.ao/web/noticias/pr-discursos-no-forum-de-negocios-angola-china> (date of access: 25.03.2025).

<sup>16\*</sup> China National Chem to build Angola's \$6 billion Lobito refinery [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2023-10-19/china-national-chem-wins-angola-deal-to-build-lobito-refinery?srnd=premium-africa> (date of access: 28.03.2025).

<sup>17\*</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18\*</sup> PR spells out at the Angola–China business forum [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://namibia.mirex.gov.ao/web/noticias/pr-discursos-no-forum-de-negocios-angola-china> (date of access: 25.03.2025).



an overall local processing capacity of 360 thsd b/d<sup>19\*</sup>. Based on Joao Lourenco's statements, these refineries are intended to stimulate Angola's economic growth, attract Chinese investment, and strengthen Chinese-Angolan cooperation in the energy sector.

In a shifting international environment, Angola's strategic emphasis on energy within its dialogue with China brings clear advantages. Given China's reliance on external oil supplies, Angola can leverage its energy resources to sustain engagement with Beijing. This foundation of amicable and reciprocal energy relations can then be extended to other domains. China prioritises stability when fostering cooperation with foreign nations. Indeed, L. Corkin observes in the journal «Re-

vista Brasileira de Política Internacional» that stability, as a precondition for economic growth, underpins China's development strategy both at home and internationally [5, p. 54].

For Beijing, Angola has emerged as a significant African partner. Contemporary China, under Communist Party governance, considers Africa a significant priority within its multidirectional foreign policy framework. The party's effectiveness in establishing broad international contacts has significantly strengthened China's relationships with partner countries. By advocating for peaceful, reciprocal partnerships, China has demonstrated a commitment to equitable international relations and mutually advantageous cooperation [6, p. 230].

## Conclusions

The energy dimension remains central to global economic and political strategies, with states increasingly recognising their role in shaping international finance and trade. This analysis reveals that Chinese-Angolan energy relations are reciprocal, with dialogue founded on principles of equality. China's investment in Angola's oil industry not only secures energy supplies but also enhances its strategic presence across the African continent.

Analysing this partnership (between a rising global power and a resource-endowed African state addressing socio-economic challenges) reveals clear synergies.

China gains stable energy access and broader diplomatic support, while Angola accelerates economic growth through infrastructure development and strategic alliances.

Since withdrawing from OPEC, Angola has demonstrated a heightened interest in attracting Chinese investment to develop its national oil sector, including the construction of refineries. This energy cooperation appears mutually advantageous: Angola seeks to secure Chinese financing for these developments, while China aims to strengthen its geopolitical standing through this engagement.

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<sup>19\*</sup> Angola seeks investors for 200 000 bpd Lobito refinery [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://www.africanews.com/2021/07/12/angola-seeks-investors-for-200-000-bpd-lobito-refinery/> (date of access: 28.03.2025).

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## UN INITIATIVES TO ADDRESS FORCED MIGRATION IN AFRICA IN THE EARLY 21<sup>st</sup> CENTURY

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**Abstract.** This article examines core UN initiatives on forced migration in Africa from 2001 to 2010, drawing on reports from the UN High Commissioner for Refugees to the 56–66<sup>th</sup> UN General Assembly sessions and other relevant UN documents. Key initiatives assessed include the Global consultations on international protection, Convention plus, Dialogue on voluntary repatriation and sustainable reintegration in Africa, Ten-point plan of action, and High Commissioner’s Dialogue on protection challenges. The study finds that the UN has played a significant role in advancing international cooperation on forced migration in Africa. Several approaches proved successful, some ongoing, others concluded. The study emphasises the importance of beginning coordination between international and regional structures, expanding legal frameworks and more effective durable solutions. It also addresses issues such as protracted displacement scenarios, theoretical-practical disconnects, insufficient data, and emerging crises. Critically, the study calls for ongoing work on the underlying drivers of forced migration.

**Keywords:** Africa; international cooperation; forced migration; refugees; UN High Commissioner for Refugees; initiatives.

## ИНИЦИАТИВЫ ООН НАЧАЛА ХХІ в. ПО РЕШЕНИЮ ПРОБЛЕМ ВЫНУЖДЕННОЙ МИГРАЦИИ В АФРИКЕ

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**Аннотация.** Анализируются доклады Верховного комиссара ООН по делам беженцев на 56–66-й сессиях Генеральной Ассамблеи ООН и ряд других документов и материалов ООН. Выделяются инициативы («Глобальные консультации по международной защите», «Конвенция плюс», «Диалог по вопросам добровольной репатриации и устойчивой реинтеграции в Африке», «Десятикомпонентный план действий», «Диалог Верховного комиссара ООН по проблемам защиты» и др.), направленные на решение проблем вынужденной миграции в Африке в первом десятилетии ХХІ в. Делается вывод о том, что ООН прилагала серьезные усилия для совершенствования международных мер реагирования на процессы вынужденной миграции в Африке. Выделены успешные инициативы, часть из которых реализуются в настоящее время. Подчеркивается важность координации взаимодействия международных и региональных структур на более высоком уровне, расширения правовых рамок, улучшения ситуации с долговременными решениями. Обращается внимание на излишнюю теоретизацию рассматриваемого вопроса, неразешенные ситуации и новые кризисы, пробелы в статистике. Подчеркивается необходимость устранения основных причин вынужденной миграции.

**Ключевые слова:** Африка; международное сотрудничество; вынужденная миграция; беженцы; Верховный комиссар ООН по делам беженцев; инициативы.

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The early 2000s in Africa represent a complex and fascinating period for researchers. When examining the continent in the context to address forced migration, a number of the UN initiatives can be identified that were implemented in response to these challenges. The aim of the article is to map those efforts and assess their impact between 2001 and 2010 in Africa.

Russian-language scholarship offers limited coverage of this topic. Among the few publications relevant to this topic are articles by I. Todorovich, Yu. Morgun, and A. Selivanov [1; 2]. In the English-language literature A. Betts<sup>1</sup> has made important contributions, particularly in his analysis of refugee policy and UNHCR activities in Africa. Research of J. Crisp on protracted refugee situations in Africa provides valuable context [3]. To address this article's objective, UNHCR reports to the UN General Assembly covering 2001–2010 were analysed, supplemented where necessary by other relevant UNHCR publications.

Data of UNHCR indicate that refugee and internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Africa levelled off or even declined slightly during the decade, although figures differ across sources. At the same time, as noted in the UNHCR report of 2001, by the early 2000s, the international protection system faced significant challenges: a growing number of refugees and IDPs affected by humanitarian crises who did not fall within the conventional refugee definition, changes in state attitudes towards arriving asylum seekers, security concerns, and other emerging concerns<sup>2</sup>. These pressures prompted the UN to seek new instruments to manage forced migration. The most significant are outlined below.

An important initiative addressing the issue of forced migration in Africa was the launch of the **Global consultations on international protection**<sup>3</sup> in 2000, supported by the UN General Assembly. Its aims were to reaffirm the 1951 Refugee convention's relevance, clarify its contemporary application, and develop enhanced protection mechanisms. States, international and non-governmental organisations, and academic specialists took part in this initiative. A notable event within these consultations was the December 2001 Ministerial meeting, hosted by Switzerland and UNHCR. States parties to the 1951 Convention and (or) its 1967 Protocol

adopted a Declaration reaffirming their commitment to these instruments<sup>4</sup>.

The meeting also adopted a **Programme of action** setting out six core objectives:

- 1) strengthening implementation of the 1951 Convention and 1967 Protocol;
- 2) protecting refugees within broader migration movements;
- 3) more equitable burden-sharing, and stronger reception capacity;
- 4) more effective responses to security concerns;
- 5) renewed pursuit of durable solutions;
- 6) specific protection measures for refugee women and children<sup>5</sup>.

These discussions helped to identify additional tools and approaches for states and UNHCR to address complex refugee protection issues, leading to improved crisis responses across the continent.

The High Commissioner's report to the 57<sup>th</sup> General Assembly session emphasised strengthening partnerships as another significant initiative. In September 2001, UNHCR established a Task force on partnership, split into two sub-groups. One of them was dedicated to UN agencies, and the other to non-governmental organisations. Its mandate was to assess the situation, identify existing challenges, and rebuild and enhance UNHCR's engagement with partners<sup>6</sup>. While the direct impact of this initiative in Africa is difficult to measure from the analysed documents, the initiative generally contributed to expanding and improving resources for refugees and returnees, thus improving their conditions in host countries.

The report to the 58<sup>th</sup> General Assembly session introduced the comprehensive **Development assistance for refugees** (DAR) programme, designed to foster refugee self-reliance. DAR combined two strategies<sup>7</sup>.

The first was the 4Rs integrated approach (**repatriation, reintegration, rehabilitation, and reconstruction**) in post-conflict settings, implemented by UNHCR from 2002. Pilot African projects, such as support for returnees in Sierra Leone, involved in cooperation UNHCR, UNDP, and the World Bank. As the report noted, «potential areas of cooperation included information management, community empowerment projects and education rehabilitation in main areas of return». A pa-

<sup>1</sup>Betts A. [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://www.rsc.ox.ac.uk/people/alexander-betts> (date of access: 30.04.2025).

<sup>2</sup>Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. UN Doc. A/56/12. Paras 11–18 [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/449571> (date of access: 12.02.2025).

<sup>3</sup>Fiftieth anniversary of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and World Refugee Day. UN Doc. A/RES/55/74 [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/428901> (date of access: 12.02.2025); Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. UN Doc. A/56/12. Para 19 [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/449571> (date of access: 12.02.2025).

<sup>4</sup>Declaration of states parties to the 1951 Convention and (or) its 1967 Protocol relating to the status of refugees. UN Doc. HCR/MMSP/2001/09 [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://www.refworld.org/legal/resolution/2002/en/30933> (date of access: 13.03.2025).

<sup>5</sup>Agenda for protection. UN Doc. A/AC.96/965/Add.1 [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/469473> (date of access: 23.10.2024).

<sup>6</sup>Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. UN Doc. A/57/12. Para 124 [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/473855> (date of access: 12.02.2025).

<sup>7</sup>Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. UN Doc. A/58/12. Para 4 [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/501258> (date of access: 12.02.2025).

parallel recovery programme in Eritrea promoted «sustainable socio-economic reintegration / rehabilitation for returnees through area-based approaches that also benefit IDPs and the host communities in affected areas». Significantly, national governments supported these activities<sup>8</sup>.

A next report cited successful applications of the 4Rs strategy in Burundi and Liberia. It underscored several critical factors: «the development of a comprehensive national strategy for all displaced persons with a community-based approach; involvement of all stakeholders – including confirmed ownership by the state and local authorities – from the outset of the process; integrated planning by the United Nations country team; and early donor engagement»<sup>9</sup>.

By the end of 2004, community-based reintegration projects were underway in Darfur under the 4Rs approach<sup>10</sup>. In 2005, an evaluation of the African implementation experience in Eritrea and Sierra Leone was conducted, and its findings were subsequently used «in the design, implementation and evaluation of repatriation programmes in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Liberia, Somalia and Southern Sudan»<sup>11</sup>. Although subsequent reports did not explicitly reference the 4Rs, they continued to prioritise refugee repatriation and reintegration.

The **Development through local integration** (DLI) strategy formed the second pillar of the DAR programme. DLI was sought to promote refugee self-reliance within host communities<sup>12</sup>.

The report to the 59<sup>th</sup> General Assembly session cited the Zambia initiative as a prominent example, which targeted 450 000 people, including 100 000 refugees, through measures to improve food security, infrastructure and access to public services<sup>13</sup>. The next year's report cited a smaller DLI pilot for Somali refugees in Tanzania<sup>14</sup>. Like the 4Rs, DLI disappeared from

subsequent reports, though local refugee integration processes continued receiving acknowledgement.

Notably, whilst the 58<sup>th</sup> General Assembly session report (para 4) initially presented 4Rs and DLI as integral DAR programme components<sup>15</sup>, later reports treated these three approaches as parallel or equivalent operational frameworks<sup>16</sup>.

The report to the 59<sup>th</sup> General Assembly session documented the launch in 2003 of another major initiative: **Convention plus**. This strategy included several key elements: resettlement as an effective tool of refugee protection and burden-sharing among host countries; frameworks to address secondary movements of refugees and asylum-seekers, which defined the roles and responsibilities of countries of origin, transit and destination; the strengthening of development assistance to address refugee-related challenges<sup>17</sup>. In November 2005, it was decided to integrate Convention plus initiative into UNHCR's core strategic framework<sup>18</sup>.

Regarding the impact of Convention plus initiative in Africa, the reports identified only one example of practical implementation: «The initiative stimulated efforts to develop a Comprehensive plan of action (CPA) for Somali refugees, which is intended to be regional in scope and builds on opportunities to consolidate voluntary repatriation and reintegration activities for the more than 1 million refugees who have returned primarily to the northern parts of the country, and to prepare for voluntary repatriation to south and central Somalia, as well as other potential solutions by working with refugees in their countries of asylum»<sup>19</sup>.

The UNHCR reported to the 59<sup>th</sup> General Assembly session that «the consolidation of numerous peace processes in the past 18 months has raised great optimism for the continuation of large-scale repatriation operations on the continent»<sup>20</sup>. In March 2004, UNHCR convened the **Dialogue on voluntary repatriation and**

<sup>8</sup>Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. UN Doc. A/58/12. Para 44 [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/501258> (date of access: 12.02.2025).

<sup>9</sup>Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. UN Doc. A/59/12. Para 26 [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/533788> (date of access: 12.02.2025).

<sup>10</sup>Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. UN Doc. A/60/12. Para 35 [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/558965> (date of access: 12.02.2025).

<sup>11</sup>Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. UN Doc. A/61/12. Para 48 [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/585475> (date of access: 12.02.2025).

<sup>12</sup>Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. UN Doc. A/58/12. Para 4 [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/501258> (date of access: 12.02.2025).

<sup>13</sup>Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. UN Doc. A/59/12. Para 42 [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/533788> (date of access: 12.02.2025).

<sup>14</sup>Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. UN Doc. A/60/12. Para 24 [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/558965> (date of access: 12.02.2025).

<sup>15</sup>Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. UN Doc. A/58/12. Para 4 [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/501258> (date of access: 12.02.2025).

<sup>16</sup>Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. UN Doc. A/60/12. Paras 22–24 [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/558965> (date of access: 12.02.2025).

<sup>17</sup>Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. UN Doc. A/59/12. Para 22 [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/533788> (date of access: 12.02.2025).

<sup>18</sup>Providing international protection [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://www.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/legacy-pdf/449267820.pdf> (date of access: 03.03.2025).

<sup>19</sup>Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. UN Doc. A/60/12. Para 28 [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/558965> (date of access: 12.02.2025).

<sup>20</sup>Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. UN Doc. A/59/12. Para 35 [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/533788> (date of access: 12.02.2025).

**sustainable reintegration in Africa.** This one-off initiative improved prospects for the return of up to two million refugees. This dialogue also reaffirmed the need for tailored approaches to conflict prevention and resolution in African states, and highlighted broad support for the involvement of the African Union (AU), subregional organisations, and the UN in consultative, political, and financial roles<sup>21</sup>.

In 2005, as part of the broader humanitarian reform initiated by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC), the **cluster approach** was introduced. This approach was designed to make humanitarian responses more predictable and effectiveness through improved coordination among stakeholders in key sectors such as protection, health, shelter, and logistics. UNHCR operationalised this approach in early 2006, assuming «global cluster lead for conflict-induced internal displacement situations in the areas of protection, camp management / coordination and emergency shelter»<sup>22</sup>.

In Africa, the cluster approach reinforced protection frameworks, particularly for IDPs, by promoting inter-agency coordination. In eastern Chad, for example, in September 2006 UNHCR moved two camps away from the border and issued Operational guidelines on maintaining the civilian and humanitarian character of asylum<sup>23</sup>. In Darfur, Sudan, the AU and UN hybrid operation, established in July 2007, was mandated to protect civilians. In Chad and the Central African Republic, a multidimensional mission supported by European Union forces began in September 2007. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, UNHCR used the protection cluster to train troops in a «zero tolerance» policy towards sexual and gender-based violence, while advising IDPs on reparations. Following Kenya's 2007 elections, which displaced roughly 350 000 people, UNHCR rapidly deployed emergency staff and resources to support inter-agency<sup>24</sup>. This initiative continues to date.

As stated in the High Commissioner's 2006 report to the General Assembly, UNHCR implemented measures to «operationalise protection» and strengthen agency capacity amid evolving circumstances. Key actions included institutionalising high-level dialogues, forming a Field

reference group on protection policies, creating a protection monitoring tool, and adopting the Age, gender and diversity mainstreaming (AGDM) framework<sup>25</sup>.

The 2005 evaluation of the 4Rs approach informed the design, execution, and assessment of repatriation programmes in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Liberia, Somalia, and Southern Sudan. AGDM assessments complemented these efforts by broadening refugees' access to durable solutions. However, the agency acknowledged that «in some situations, the slow implementation of rehabilitation and reconstruction initiatives threatens the sustainability of the reintegration of those who have repatriated»<sup>26</sup>.

The following year's report attested to the successful implementation of AGDM in 2006 across 41 countries in Africa, Asia and Europe, covering a total of 97 UNHCR offices (interestingly, more than 90 states were scheduled to participate). By the end of 2007, more than 100 country operations had completed AGDM implementation. For example, Morocco's self-reliance programme for women, children, older persons and people with disabilities established women's cooperatives and increased female representation in refugee committees<sup>27</sup>.

Among the decade's most significant initiatives was the **Ten-point plan of action on refugee protection and mixed migration** (here and further Ten-point plan). This framework aimed to address challenges arising from population movements, encompassing both forced displacement and economic migration. The concept of «mixed migration flows» gained prominence during this period.

The Ten-Point plan acknowledged the inherent difficulty in «identifying refugees within broader irregular mixed flows..., especially where individuals themselves have various motives for moving. Once identified, refugees require protection against refoulement, the possibility to become self-reliant, and access to durable solutions»<sup>28</sup>.

The Ten-point plan's components were cooperation among key partners, data collection and analysis, protection-sensitive entry systems, reception arrangements, mechanisms for screening and referral, differentiated processes and procedures, solutions for refugees,

<sup>21</sup>Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. UN Doc. A/59/12. Para 35 [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/533788> (date of access: 12.02.2025).

<sup>22</sup>Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. UN Doc. A/61/12. Para 36 [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/585475> (date of access: 12.02.2025).

<sup>23</sup>Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. UN Doc. A/62/12. Para 17 [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/610909> (date of access: 12.02.2025).

<sup>24</sup>Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. UN Doc. A/63/12. Paras 13–15 [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/640415> (date of access: 12.02.2025).

<sup>25</sup>Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. UN Doc. A/61/12. Para 8 [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/585475> (date of access: 12.02.2025).

<sup>26</sup>Ibid. Para 48.

<sup>27</sup>Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. UN Doc. A/61/12. Para 52 [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/585475> (date of access: 12.02.2025) ; Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. UN Doc. A/62/12. Para 41 [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/610909> (date of access: 12.02.2025) ; Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. UN Doc. A/63/12. Para 43 [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/640415> (date of access: 12.02.2025).

<sup>28</sup>Refugee protection and mixed migration: the 10-point plan in action. P. 8 [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://www.unhcr.org/in/sites/en-in/files/legacy-pdf/50a4c2b09.pdf> (date of access: 01.01.2025).



addressing secondary movements, return arrangements for non-refugees and alternative migration options, information strategy<sup>29</sup>.

In Africa, UNHCR contributed to the development of long-term solutions and capacity-building for both governmental and non-governmental local actors, placing particular emphasis on refugee status determination. Mauritania and Morocco introduced whole-of-society mechanisms to promote «a comprehensive approach with all stakeholders». The High Commissioner's report noted that in September 2006, authorities in north-eastern Somalia (Puntland) responded to irregular migration through arrests, detention, and deportation. UNHCR and its partners provided protection and humanitarian assistance to persons of concern, including refugee status determination for those seeking international protection<sup>30</sup>.

Regionally and globally, UNHCR maintained its engagement in the follow-up to the Ten-point plan. A key component was a project (2008–2010) to operationalise the plan in Africa and other regions. This had two parts: the development of implementation strategies through regional conferences. The first, in May 2008, addressed mixed migration across the Gulf of Aden within the broader context of African population movements. The second conference, co-organised with the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the International Organization for Migration, focused on protection challenges and opportunities arising from intra-regional migration in West Africa. Expert round tables further refined the Ten-point plan, including

a July 2009 meeting in Tunis which explored cooperation mechanisms for identifying and protecting individuals with specific needs within mixed flows<sup>31</sup>.

More than a set of norms, the Ten-point plan serves as a practical toolkit for implementation, supporting states and partner organisations in capacity-building. UNHCR recognised that its success depended on strategic leadership, peer learning and continued knowledge exchange.

**The High Commissioner's Dialogue on protection challenges**, launched in Geneva in December 2007, serves as an important forum for addressing emerging international protection issues. The High Commissioner's report to the General Assembly explained the initiative's purpose: «To encourage further engagement in some of the current challenges facing UNHCR and its partners in providing protection and assistance for refugees and other persons of concern to the office, in December 2007, the High Commissioner held the first of a planned series of annual events in Geneva: a Dialogue on protection challenges. The aim was to facilitate open and non-directive discussions between the office, states and other stakeholders on issues related to protection. The first Dialogue on protection challenges addressed some of the problems of assuring protection for people caught up in mixed migration movements which have been growing in scale and complexity in recent years»<sup>32</sup>.

The table below outlines themes and key questions from the dialogues.

Overview of UNHCR's dialogues on protection challenges (2007–2010)

Year	Topics	Key issues discussed
2007	Refugee protection, durable solutions, and international migration	Linkages between protection, solutions, and migration; challenges posed by mixed migration flows; partnership-building; human rights and humanitarian considerations in maritime rescue; the need to distinguish refugees from other migrants; terminology
2008	Protracted refugee situations	Challenges and opportunities for refugees in camp, rural, and urban settings; the Special initiative on protracted situations; tools for resolving long-standing displacement; the role of host countries and the international community
2009	Challenges for people of concern to UNHCR in urban settings	Barriers faced by displaced persons in urban areas; humanitarian consequences of urbanisation; adapting to urban displacement; identification, outreach, protection, solutions, gender and age considerations, education, livelihoods, and housing
2010	Protection gaps and responses	Gaps in the international protection regime for forcibly displaced and stateless persons; international cooperation and responsibility-sharing; comprehensive regional approaches; legislative and implementation gaps; statelessness issues

Note. Compiled on the basis of UNHCR's dialogue<sup>33</sup>.

<sup>29</sup>The 10-point plan in action [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://www.unhcr.org/what-we-do/protect-human-rights/asylum-and-migration/10-point-plan-action> (date of access: 01.01.2025).

<sup>30</sup>Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. UN Doc. A/62/12. Para 28 [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/610909> (date of access: 12.02.2025).

<sup>31</sup>UNHCR's 10-point plan in Central America, Western Africa, Eastern Africa and Asia – a three-year project [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://www.refworld.org/policy/strategy/unhcr/2009/en/68724> (date of access: 15.02.2025).

<sup>32</sup>Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. UN Doc. A/63/12. Para 21 [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/640415> (date of access: 12.02.2025).

<sup>33</sup>High Commissioner's dialogue [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://www.unhcr.org/about-unhcr/overview/high-commissioner/high-commissioners-dialogue> (date of access: 15.04.2025).

Each dialogue has included a significant African dimension. The 2007 dialogue focused on mixed migration and the obligation to uphold human rights along routes such as the Gulf of Aden, irrespective of movement motives. This discussion emphasised integrating refugee safeguards within wider international migration frameworks<sup>34</sup>. Participants also drew on the Ten-point plan as a practical tool for managing mixed flows, noting a related three-year project focused on Africa<sup>35</sup>.

The 2008 dialogue addressed protracted refugee situations and presented Tanzania's experience. In a keynote statement, Prime Minister M. P. Pinda outlined efforts to resolve one of Africa's longest-standing refugee situations<sup>36</sup> by offering Burundian refugees, arriving in 1972, a choice between repatriation and local integration. Approximately 80 % chose to remain, having been born and raised there. The government committed to their integration while requesting further international financial support<sup>37</sup>. The case illustrated how African states can deliver durable solutions when donors provide sustained backing. The discussion fed into UNHCR's subsequent Global plan of action on protracted situations<sup>38</sup>.

The 2009 dialogue examined urban challenges, directly addressing Africa's rapid urbanisation. Participants noted Africa's population is projected to reach nearly two billion by 2050, with 88 % of this growth occurring in sub-Saharan Africa and the majority residing in cities<sup>39</sup>. A round table before the dialogue gathered mayors from 20 major global cities hosting sizeable refugee populations, who highlighted overstretched infrastructure, housing shortages, weak services and growing xenophobia and violence<sup>40</sup>. African municipal authorities shaped policy rather than merely participating as stakeholders. The Mayor of Nairobi, G. Majiwa, co-chaired a working session. UNHCR committed to strengthening urban operations by deepening local partnerships and supporting municipal protection strategies<sup>41</sup>.

The 2010 dialogue on protection gaps and responses continued to accent emphasised comprehensive regional approaches and equitable burden-sharing<sup>42</sup>. This focus was highly relevant for Africa, where displaced people and host communities alike face severe constraints in meeting basic needs<sup>43</sup>.

The dialogue has demonstrated effectiveness as a forum for addressing specific protection issues, including those affecting African countries.

Thus, the 2001–2010 decade witnessed substantial evolution in international responses to forced migration in Africa. While progress was made, major obstacles continued to hinder effective protection and assistance. Over the decade, the international community, primarily through the UN, developed a more nuanced understanding of displacement. The approach shifted from short-term humanitarian relief to more comprehensive, strategic interventions in the region.

Coordination improved across UN agencies and key regional and international actors. Thus, the International Organisation for Migration has become involved in the African issue of forced migration. Legal tools expanded, large-scale repatriations took place, and local integration schemes advanced. New mechanisms also helped to identify refugees within mixed migration flows and kept the search for durable solutions at the forefront.

However, implementation exposed several shortcomings. Some initiatives proved too conceptual and impractical. Protracted situations endured, new refugee crises arose, and voluntary return rates stayed low. Furthermore, reliable, disaggregated data remained inconsistently available.

International efforts must shift the focus from crisis response to addressing the main roots of forced migration, including political instability, conflict, etc., and creating conditions for the economic development in Africa. That requires effective dialogues and discussions within the UN.

<sup>34</sup>Regional conference on «Refugee protection and international migration in the Gulf of Aden» [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://www.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/legacy-pdf/483bca812.pdf> (date of access: 15.04.2025).

<sup>35</sup>Refugee and protection and durable solutions in the context of international migration and development [Electronic resource]. URL: [https://www.un.org/development/desa/pd/sites/www.un.org.development.desa.pd/files/200911\\_unpd\\_cm8\\_unhcr.pdf](https://www.un.org/development/desa/pd/sites/www.un.org.development.desa.pd/files/200911_unpd_cm8_unhcr.pdf) (date of access: 15.04.2025).

<sup>36</sup>2<sup>nd</sup> UNHCR Dialogue on protection challenges [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://www.unhcr.org/media/2nd-unhcr-dialogue-protection-challenges-10-december-2008-keynote-honourable-mizengo-peter> (date of access: 15.04.2025).

<sup>37</sup>Dobbs L. Q&A: Prime Minister Pinda on Tanzania's protracted refugee situation [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://www.unhcr.org/news/stories/qa-prime-minister-pinda-tanzanias-protracted-refugee-situation> (date of access: 15.04.2025).

<sup>38</sup>Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. UN Doc. A/65/12. Para 52 [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/692011> (date of access: 12.02.2025).

<sup>39</sup>Concept paper High Commissioner's Dialogue on protection challenges. Challenges for persons of concern to UNHCR in urban settings [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://www.refworld.org/policy/strategy/unhcr/2009/en/67014> (date of access: 12.02.2025).

<sup>40</sup>High Commissioner's Dialogue on protection challenges [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://www.unhcr.org/events/high-commissioners-dialogue-protection-challenges-2009> (date of access: 12.02.2025).

<sup>41</sup>47<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Standing Committee [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://www.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/legacy-pdf/4b-910b1e9.pdf> (date of access: 12.02.2025).

<sup>42</sup>High Commissioner's Dialogue on protection challenges [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://www.unhcr.org/what-we-do/events/high-commissioners-dialogue-protection-challenges-2010> (date of access: 12.02.2025).

<sup>43</sup>Refugee and protection and durable solutions in the context of international migration and development [Electronic resource]. URL: [https://www.un.org/development/desa/pd/sites/www.un.org.development.desa.pd/files/200911\\_unpd\\_cm8\\_unhcr.pdf](https://www.un.org/development/desa/pd/sites/www.un.org.development.desa.pd/files/200911_unpd_cm8_unhcr.pdf) (date of access: 15.04.2025).



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## CHINA – BELARUS RELATIONS: IMPLEMENTATION OF THE FOUNDATIONS OF ALL-WEATHER AND COMPREHENSIVE STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP IN GLOBAL POLITICS

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**Abstract.** This article examines the evolution of China – Belarus cooperation following the elevation of their bilateral relations to all-weather and comprehensive strategic partnership at the 2022 Shanghai Cooperation Organisation summit in Samarkand. The analysis focuses on two main dimensions: collaboration in political, economic, and humanitarian spheres at the bilateral level, and multilateral engagement through regional and global institutions. The findings indicate that, in the political sphere, Belarus and China strive to consolidate their respective national interests and foreign policy priorities. Strong political trust between the two states has facilitated Belarus' accession to the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation and its designation as a BRICS partner country. Economically, both parties have registered notable results through Belt and road initiative projects. Together, China and Belarus endeavour to build a community with a shared future for mankind as a new paradigm of international relations.

**Keywords:** China – Belarus relations; foreign policy; Xi Jinping; community with a shared future for mankind.

## КИТАЙСКО-БЕЛОРУССКИЕ ОТНОШЕНИЯ: ИМПЛЕМЕНТАЦИЯ ОСНОВ ВСЕПОГОДНОГО И ВСЕСТОРОННЕГО СТРАТЕГИЧЕСКОГО ПАРТНЕРСТВА В ГЛОБАЛЬНУЮ ПОЛИТИКУ

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**Аннотация.** Рассматривается динамика китайско-белорусского сотрудничества после того, как в 2022 г. лидеры двух государств на саммите Шанхайской организации сотрудничества в Самарканде углубили двусторонние отношения до всепогодного и всестороннего стратегического партнерства. Значение достижения такого уровня стратегического партнерства между Китаем и Беларусью анализируется в контексте политической, экономической и гуманитарной сфер взаимодействия на уровне двусторонних отношений, а также в контексте многостороннего формата имплементации основ этого партнерства в институциональные механизмы региональных организаций и международных объединений. Определяется, что в рамках политической сферы Китай и Беларусь стремятся консолидировать собственные национальные интересы и внешнеполитические приоритеты. Высокий уровень китайско-белорусского политического доверия в значительной степени способствовал вступлению Беларуси в Шанхайскую организацию сотрудничества

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и приобретению ею статуса страны – партнера БРИКС. Реализуя проекты в рамках инициативы «Один пояс, один путь», стороны достигли значительных показателей в экономической сфере. Беларусь продолжает совместно с Китаем популяризировать построение сообщества единой судьбы человечества как новой модели международных отношений.

**Ключевые слова:** китайско-белорусские отношения; внешняя политика; Си Цзиньпин; сообщество единой судьбы человечества.

## Introduction

In 2022, China and Belarus elevated their relationship to all-weather and comprehensive strategic partnership during talks between heads of the two states at the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) summit in Samarkand. The President of the Republic of Belarus emphasised that this enhancement aligns perfectly with global realities and the needs of contemporary interstate relations. He reaffirmed Minsk's steadfast commitment to deepening ties with Beijing, while resolutely supporting China's continued development, the consolidation of its national strength, the pursuit of reunification, and its positions on issues central to its core interests. He articulated Belarus' intention to stand shoulder to shoulder with China, committed to being among its most reliable allies<sup>1</sup>.

The comprehensive strategic partnership between the two states was proclaimed by the Joint declaration of the Republic of Belarus and the People's Republic of China on the establishment of all-weather and comprehensive strategic partnership of 15 September 2022. The document states: «The Belarusian side supports the Global development initiative and the Global security initiative advanced by the Chinese side. Belarus will actively participate in practical cooperation under the Global development initiative's priority areas and contribute to multilateral efforts to implement the United Nations 2030 Agenda for sustainable development. Both sides will actively promote the alignment of their national development strategies, address security challenges together, and jointly build a community with a shared future for mankind»<sup>2</sup> (here and further translated by us. – *I. Ch.*).

This declaration reveals that forming such a comprehensive partnership represents a major advancement in Sino-Belarusian relations since Belarusian independence. Belarus regards the innovations in contemporary Chinese foreign policy as transformative for the inter-

national order, considers them beneficial to its own national interests, and has pledged unequivocal support for China during the Xi Jinping era.

This partnership underscores China's special regard for Belarus as an influential actor in regional politics and its perception by the present Chinese administration as integral to the pursuit of its broader foreign policy objectives within Eurasia. Bilateral ties have intensified and expanded under Xi Jinping, notably following the launch of the Belt and road initiative and the formation of the community with a shared future for mankind. Belarus' involvement in these cooperative frameworks manifests primarily through political coordination of mutual interests, economic collaboration, and an expanding range of humanitarian and cultural exchanges.

Prominent Belarusian scholars, such as A. V. Tikhomirov, have assessed Chinese-Belarusian relations, affirming China's status as a strategic priority for Belarus. The scientist conducted a thorough analysis of these relations, considering the evolving structure of global power centres and contemporary international dynamics [1]. R. O. Esin analysed Chinese expert opinions on BRICS and explored Belarus' potential accession to the organisation [2]. J. I. Malevich focused her research on contemporary Chinese foreign policy [3], and Belarus' expanding ties with the Global South [4]. A. M. Baichorov examined the Belt and road initiative and its implementation challenges within China's foreign policy framework [5]. Chinese political scientist Guo Jinlong conducted systematic analysis of the prevailing trends in China's foreign policy formation, offering insight into how political reforms have shaped the country's international engagement [6].

This study aims to elucidate the primary formats and institutional mechanisms underlying the all-weather and comprehensive strategic partnership between Belarus and China during 2022–2025.

## Results and discussion

The paradigmatic significance of achieving all-weather and comprehensive strategic partnership between China and Belarus can be analysed through two primary lenses: 1) bilateral political, economic, and humanitarian interactions; 2) multilateral implementation via insti-

tutional mechanisms within regional and international organisations and associations.

In the political sphere of implementation of the principles of all-weather and comprehensive strategic partnership, significant results have been achieved. Close

<sup>1</sup>On the meeting of the President of the Republic of Belarus Alexander Lukashenko and the Chairman of the People's Republic of China Xi Jinping [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://china.mfa.gov.by/ru/embassy/news/d8df93753fd0c54b.html> (date of access: 11.02.2025) (in Russ.).

<sup>2</sup>Joint declaration of the Republic of Belarus and the People's Republic of China on the establishment of all-weather and comprehensive strategic partnership [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://china.mfa.gov.by/kcfinder/upload/china/files/embassy/declaration.pdf> (date of access: 11.02.2025) (in Russ.).

political dialogue between China and Belarus favourably promotes active trade and economic cooperation, which is especially important for Belarus. At the political level, agreements between the leaders of the two states are coordinated, which guarantees a fruitful and mutually beneficial nature of economic partnership. The Chinese-Belarusian relations of all-weather and comprehensive strategic partnership, as noted by Zhang Wenchuan, the Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the People's Republic of China to the Republic of Belarus, are experiencing the best period in history, cooperation between the two countries in various fields has broad prospects and huge potential, and the relations have a solid political foundation<sup>3</sup>.

In 2023, during the state visit of President Alexander Lukashenko to China, the heads of state issued a Joint statement on further development of all-weather and comprehensive strategic partnership in the new era. The document asserts that «bilateral relations have made a historic leap forward and have become a model of a new type of international relations»<sup>4</sup>.

This document establishes several crucial provisions:

- firms should give mutual support on issues affecting each party's core interests constitutes the foundation for stable Chinese-Belarusian relations;
- Belarus endorses the «one China» principle, supports China's efforts towards national reunification, and affirms China's stance on safeguarding national security, territorial integrity, and citizens' rights;
- the development path for democracy and human rights must emerge from each country's specific circumstances, the application of double standards in these domains, or interference in sovereign affairs under such pretexts, remains unacceptable;
- both parties reaffirm their commitment to leverage the China – Belarus Intergovernmental Committee on Cooperation for enhancing collaborative endeavours across multiple sectors;
- Belarus endorses the common values of peace, development, equality, justice, democracy, and freedom that China has advanced within the international community<sup>5</sup>.

Through these provisions, both nations have formally delineated a strategy for political alignment within the global order.

The China – Belarus Intergovernmental Committee on Cooperation merits particular attention to its

contribution to structuring dialogue between the two nations and deepening their political collaboration. One tangible outcome of all-weather and comprehensive strategic partnership has been the heightened interaction between the legislative bodies of China and Belarus, which further diversifies the modalities for coordinating political interests. In 2024, N. I. Kochanova, the Speaker of the Council of the Republic of the National Assembly of the Republic of Belarus, visited China, where she participated in the inaugural session of the committee on cooperation between the legislative bodies of both countries and had meetings with Han Zhen, Vice Chairman of the People's Republic of China, Zhao Leji, Chairman of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress, and Shen Yiqin, Chairperson of the All-China Women's Federation. N. I. Kochanova observed that the two nations share remarkably similar approaches: «Foreign policy and domestic policy align almost perfectly. Both nations focus on their citizens, their welfare, and enhancing living standards»<sup>6</sup>. The exchange of expertise and collaborative examination of legislative frameworks will enable both sides to assimilate exemplary practices in legislative innovation, mindful of evolving geopolitical dynamics and each country's unique political traditions.

The visit of Li Qiang, Premier of the State Council of the People's Republic of China, to Belarus in the summer of 2024, represented a substantive advance in consolidating the foundations of all-weather and comprehensive strategic partnership between the two nations. The negotiations yielded consensus on a range of joint initiatives and culminated in the signing of an intergovernmental agreement on trade in services and investment. This agreement establishes a free trade area in services, offering a transparent, liberal, and conducive environment for attracting investments<sup>7</sup>. This development demonstrates how effective political dialogue and trust-based interactions can catalyse economic cooperation.

The economic component of all-weather comprehensive strategic partnership has delivered noteworthy implementation results. A. V. Chervyakov, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Belarus to the People's Republic of China, reported that over the past decade, bilateral trade in goods has increased nearly 4.7-fold, from 1.8 to 8.4 bln US dollars. Belarus' principal exports to China include potash

<sup>3</sup>Belarus and China: what really connects us? The first big interview of the Chinese ambassador to Belarus [Electronic resource]. URL: [http://by.china-embassy.gov.cn/rus/xwdt/202501/t20250121\\_11541693.htm](http://by.china-embassy.gov.cn/rus/xwdt/202501/t20250121_11541693.htm) (date of access: 15.02.2025) (in Russ.).

<sup>4</sup>Joint statement of the Republic of Belarus and the People's Republic of China on further development of all-weather and comprehensive strategic partnership in the new era [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://china.mfa.gov.by/ru/embassy/news/fb2937bef6398e2d.html> (date of access: 15.02.2025) (in Russ.).

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

<sup>6</sup>Kochanova: «For the leaders of Belarus and China, the most important thing is people and their well-being» [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://belta.by/society/view/kochanova-dlja-liderov-belarusi-i-kitaja-samoe-glavnoe-ljudi-ih-blagopoluchie-638028-2024/> (date of access: 11.02.2025) (in Russ.).

<sup>7</sup>Official visit of the Premier of the State Council of the People's Republic of China Li Qiang to Belarus has ended [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://belta.by/society/view/zavershilsja-ofitsialnyj-vizit-premjera-gossoveta-kr-li-tsjana-v-belarus-656193-2024/> (date of access: 11.02.2025) (in Russ.).



fertilisers, rapeseed oil, frozen poultry, timber, beef, and cellulose. In turn, China supplies Belarus with vehicles and components, electronics, machinery, computers, smartphones, clothing, and footwear<sup>8</sup>. The Belarusian diplomat emphasised that the central task until 2030 is to learn from Chinese modernisation experiences and engage in practical collaboration in the advancement of productive capacities of a new quality. This strategy, he argued, would facilitate the technical and technological renewal of Belarusian industrial enterprises<sup>9</sup>.

The China – Belarus industrial park «Great stone» continues to strengthen investment cooperation, attract foreign capital, and solidify Belarus' position within the Belt and road initiative. Following the establishment of all-weather and comprehensive strategic partnership, the park has, as of 2025, attracted over 130 enterprises from 15 countries, generating thousands of jobs<sup>10</sup>.

Bilateral humanitarian cooperation under the framework of all-weather and comprehensive strategic partnership has made considerable advances and vividly exemplifies the momentum driving collaboration in other domains, reflecting the broader dynamic of bilateral cooperation. Meaningful engagement in the humanitarian domain brings societies closer, fostering mutual understanding of the value systems that shape social conduct, attitudes, and worldviews. Nevertheless, China's global influence often lacks full humanitarian support due to diverse perceptions. Its complex historical and cultural traditions, rooted in Confucian norms and distinct Eastern cultural practices, are sometimes difficult for European population to fully grasp. Chinese authorities recognise that cultural-educational dialogue and humanitarian projects offer the most effective means to overcome existing limitations in comprehending the civilisational foundations underpinning modern China's development.

Zhang Wenchuan noted that the implementation of China – Belarus all-weather partnership plan for 2022–2024 has opened a new chapter in people-to-people contacts: «The number of sister provinces, regions, and cities between China and Belarus now exceeds fifty pairs. The twinning arrangements between Chinese and Belarusian provinces, regions and cities now exceed fifty pairs. The Belarusian Society for Friendship and Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries and the Belarus – China Friendship Association have launched a series of reading sessions focused on “Xi Jin-

ping: the governance of China”. Belarus recently hosted several successful Chinese cultural events, including Chinese culture day and days of Chinese cinema, culminating in the formal signing of an agreement for the first joint China – Belarus film production “For all eternity”. In addition, the National Library now houses a newly inaugurated Chinese book centre»<sup>11</sup>.

Belarus continues to make distinctive contributions to building a community with a shared future for mankind. This concept, as articulated by Chinese policymakers, envisions an alternative model of international relations distinct from Westernisation. It privileges Confucian principles, advances reciprocal benefit through sustained and trustworthy engagement, and is informed by humanitarian interests and mutual respect among nations. These values underpin both the ongoing implementation of the Belt and road initiative and efforts towards shaping a reformed global governance architecture [7, p. 309].

In this Chinese vision for international relations, Belarus particularly values the pursuit of multipolarity and the creation of a system with well-defined objectives. The shared future concept emerges from China's foreign policy vision under Xi Jinping. While it is strategic by nature, the concept requires further detailed goals. Belarus, positioned at the crossroads of Eurasia, is poised to function as a bridge for cultural and civilisational exchange between China and the wider European context.

The elevation of China – Belarus relations to all-weather and comprehensive strategic partnership has generated an array of academic and cultural initiatives. In September 2023, Belarus convened a scientific-practical conference for early career scholars entitled «Community with a shared future for mankind: civilisational perspectives and national interests». This gathering, commemorating the anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China, was organised by the Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the Republic of Belarus, together with the Belarus–China Friendship Association and the Belarusian Society for Friendship and Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries<sup>12</sup>. Presentations by young researchers illuminated the complexities and dilemmas inherent in constructing a community with a shared future. These academic and cultural exchanges foster mutual understanding, illuminate spiritual and cultural characteristics, and help dissolve cross-cultural misinterpretations.

<sup>8</sup>China's big arrival in Belarus: how relations have entered an ascending development trajectory [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://china.mfa.gov.by/ru/embassy/news/de366361de98f986.html> (date of access: 15.02.2025) (in Russ.).

<sup>9</sup>Ibid.

<sup>10</sup>Special report: China ready to continue sharing its achievements and development dividends with the world [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://russian.news.cn/20250227/d7f3fdcb90c44e69362432568cb4e82/c.html> (date of access: 27.03.2025) (in Russ.).

<sup>11</sup>Zhang Wenchuan: Belarus – China all-weather partnership plan step by step becoming reality [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://belta.by/interview/view/plan-vsepogodnogo-partnerstva-belarusi-i-kitaja-shag-za-shagom-stanovitsja-realnostju-9512/> (date of access: 15.02.2025) (in Russ.).

<sup>12</sup>Results of the competitive scientific and practical conference of young scientists «Community with a shared future for mankind: civilisational prospects and national interests» [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://fir.bsu.by/news/news-2023/news-2023-09-27-04> (date of access: 15.03.2025) (in Russ.).



All-weather and comprehensive strategic partnership between China and Belarus is evident in its active engagement within regional institutions and international associations. China offered steadfast support for Belarus' accession to the SCO. On 4 July 2024, after extensive preparation, Belarus attained full membership status at the SCO Heads of State Council meeting in Astana. Prior to this, from 2015 Belarus had participated in the SCO as a dialogue partner since 2010 and as an observer<sup>13</sup>.

In the 2023 study «Interests and prospects of participation of the Republic of Belarus in the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation as a full member», Belarusian scholar O. P. Rubo outlined the potential benefits of Belarus' full SCO membership: «Amidst complex geopolitical shifts, elevating Belarus' participation in the SCO to full membership will strengthen the country's position within the organisation and across the international arena. This will facilitate broader and deeper cooperation with member states across all spheres, create additional export opportunities in Asian markets, improve access to high-tech equipment, and enable active participation in shaping the emerging multipolar world order amid the growing influence of non-Western states. Most importantly, it will significantly enhance the country's capacity to respond effectively to emerging challenges and threats» [8, p. 160]. With Belarus' accession in 2024, the SCO has not only augmented its geopolitical weight, but also gained a dedicated and dependable participant who fully subscribes to its principles and shares the collective vision of the member states regarding the evolving international architecture.

Belarus pursues several core objectives through its engagement with the SCO, including the following:

- advancing its national interests through multilateral diplomacy;
- fostering external conditions that preserve its sovereignty, territorial integrity, and security;
- encouraging sustainable progress across political, economic, social, and cultural spheres;

- promoting broad-based economic development, social welfare, and cultural prosperity within the region. By facilitating equitable partnership and coordinated action, Belarus and its partners seek to raise living standards and enhance the overall quality of life for the peoples of the SCO member states<sup>14</sup>.

Belarus' engagement with the SCO aligns closely with its bilateral cooperation with China. The ongoing all-weather and comprehensive strategic partnership between these two states significantly advanced Minsk's objectives within the SCO, bolstered by Chinese diplomatic support.

Through SCO participation, Belarus seeks to enhance its international standing as a peace-loving state and active collaborator in international affairs. Minsk seeks to foster coordinated approaches among SCO member states, observers, and dialogue partners on pressing global political challenges across various international platform<sup>15</sup>.

In October 2024, Belarus became a BRICS partner country<sup>16</sup>. The principal domains of engagement with BRICS encompass:

- political and security cooperation grounded in mutual respect, the principle of indivisible security, and non-confrontational development;
- promotion of sustainable economic growth;
- assurance of global food security whilst tackling hunger, poverty, and climate change;
- expanding multilateral humanitarian initiatives<sup>17</sup>.

Both SCO and BRICS enable Belarus to play a more strategic role in global politics and contribute to shaping new centres of global influence, with China as a key player. These institutions continue to evolve in response to contemporary dynamics shaping the international system and are central to debates about the future world order. Belarus occupies a unique and advantageous position, gaining new opportunities to contribute significantly to developing a multipolar international architecture.

## Conclusions

All-weather and comprehensive strategic partnership significantly strengthens the bilateral cooperation between China and Belarus across multiple domains. This analysis examined the partnership through two principal lenses: the political, economic, and humanitarian collaboration in bilateral relations, and the

institutional frameworks of regional and global organisations and international associations. Politically, Belarus and China strive to consolidate their national interests and foreign policy agendas. After elevating their relations to all-weather and comprehensive strategic partnership in 2022, the two countries have developed

<sup>13</sup>Belarus became a member of the SCO [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://belta.by/politics/view/belarus-stala-chlenom-shos-645532-2024/> (date of access: 15.03.2025) (in Russ.).

<sup>14</sup>Belarus' participation in the SCO and BRICS. What's in the strategies approved by Lukashenko [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://belta.by/president/view/uchastie-belarusi-v-shos-i-briks-cto-v-strategijah-kotorye-odobril-lukashenko-689113-2025/#part1> (date of access: 15.03.2025) (in Russ.).

<sup>15</sup>Ibid.

<sup>16</sup>Belarus becomes BRICS partner country – president [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://russian.news.cn/20241024/7794e270d-a044b969077921654c51236/c.html> (date of access: 15.03.2025) (in Russ.).

<sup>17</sup>Belarus' participation in the SCO and BRICS. What's in the strategies approved by Lukashenko [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://belta.by/president/view/uchastie-belarusi-v-shos-i-briks-cto-v-strategijah-kotorye-odobril-lukashenko-689113-2025/#part1> (date of access: 15.03.2025) (in Russ.).

a coordinated stance regarding the future architecture of the global international order.

Announced during high-level diplomatic exchanges, this upgraded partnership status places Belarus among China's most trusted allies and underscores their shared commitment to sustained collaboration across diverse spheres. Elevated political trust and robust international backing enabled Belarus to join the SCO and become a partner within BRICS. Economic ties have continued to flourish, joint projects under the Belt and road initiative have yielded substantive gains in merchandise trade, while China – Belarus industrial park «Great stone» stands as a flagship example of mutually advantageous co-operation.

Humanitarian engagement further cements this bilateral relationship, shaping shared development values

and fostering closer societal linkages. Belarus actively champions the idea of a community with a shared future for mankind, reflecting its dedication to global co-operation. Notably, amid a period marked by heightened tensions and uncertainty in international affairs, Chinese-Belarusian cooperation has emerged as a model of South – South partnership, seamlessly integrating economic pragmatism with efforts to align political interests.

The durability of China – Belarus relations derives from both states' capacity to adapt to shifting global dynamics while upholding the fundamental principles of mutual respect and collective development. Looking ahead, the partnership is poised to deepen, particularly in advanced technology sectors and cross-regional connectivity initiatives, as both nations respond to the challenges of an evolving geopolitical landscape.

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## DIVERGENT PATHS IN DIGITAL SOVEREIGNTY: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF EU AND US REGULATORY AND STRATEGIC FRAMEWORKS

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**Abstract.** This study compares how the EU and the US pursue digital sovereignty as a component of national digital security policy. The analysis examines the normative and legal frameworks of each actor, as well as their engagement on international platforms. It also explores the EU's multilateralist orientation alongside the US' alliance-building and leadership-focused paradigm. Through case studies, it identifies the challenges and risks each faces in implementing information sovereignty strategies and evaluates the diplomatic and legal ramifications of their respective approaches. The analysis also tracks shifts in US perspectives on collaboration with traditional partners. The conclusion assesses prospects for reconciling US and EU approaches within transatlantic relations.

**Keywords:** digital sovereignty; legal frameworks; global governance; data policy; geopolitical strategy.

## РАЗНЫЕ ПУТИ К ЦИФРОВОМУ СУВЕРЕНИТЕТУ: СРАВНИТЕЛЬНЫЙ АНАЛИЗ НОРМАТИВНО-ПРАВОВОЙ БАЗЫ И СТРАТЕГИИ ЕС И США

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**Аннотация.** Проводится сравнительный анализ подходов ЕС и США к реализации информационного суверенитета как интегральной политики информационной безопасности на государственном уровне. В рамках компаративистского подхода изучены сходства и различия в нормативной и правовой базах указанных акторов, их активность на международных площадках. Рассмотрены особенности мультилатералистской ориентации ЕС и ее отличия от стремящейся к созданию альянсов и лидерству ориентации США. Кроме того, на примере кейс-метода показаны различные вызовы и риски, с которыми сталкивается каждая из сторон в процессе реализации стратегии информационного суверенитета, дипломатические и правовые последствия, возникающие при реализации каждого из подходов. Прослеживается определенная эволюция взглядов американской администрации на сотрудничество со своими традиционными партнерами. Делается вывод о том, что указанные подходы каждой из сторон достаточно сложно совмещать в процессе выстраивания союзнических отношений по линии ЕС–США.

**Ключевые слова:** информационный суверенитет; правовое регулирование; международное сотрудничество; глобальное влияние; управление данными.

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## Introduction

Digital sovereignty, defined as a state's ability to govern data flows, digital infrastructure, and cyber norms, has emerged as a defining feature of 21<sup>st</sup>-century geopolitics [1, p. 12]. Accelerating digitalisation has heightened the strategic stakes of data flows, cybersecurity, and technological autonomy, creating new arenas for geopolitical competition. The EU and the US, as leading digital powers, adopt notably different approaches. The EU champions regulatory leadership founded on normative values such as privacy and fundamental rights, while the US favours security-centred pragmatism grounded in strategic alliances and proactive cyber capabilities [2, p. 220–223; 3, p. 2–6].

This paper compares these differing strategies, examining their underlying rationales, policy instruments, and implications for the global digital order [1, p. 25; 2, p. 224]. It investigates how these distinct strategies reveal deeper ideological differences between the EU's normative approach to digital governance and the US' security-driven pragmatism. As cyber threats intensify (evident in attacks on critical infrastructure and incidents of cyber-espionage) the contrasting strategies of the EU and the US reflect their distinct geopolitical priorities: regulation versus alliance-building.

The EU seeks digital sovereignty partly to address historical technological shortcomings and to safeguard individual privacy, even when this conflicts with commercial interests. Conversely, the US adopts a more market-driven strategy, emphasising technological leadership, international competitiveness, and a comparatively liberal approach to data flows. This divergence has created considerable friction in transatlantic data exchange.

Both actors have established legal frameworks to assert digital sovereignty. However, the EU has embraced a more regulatory approach, most notably through the General data protection regulation (GDPR), whereas the US leans towards industry-led self-regulation

and voluntary standards. The EU has further advanced its ambitions by developing an alternative data infrastructure through projects such as «Gaia-X». This initiative aims to establish a federated data infrastructure consistent with European values and standards.

Academic discourse on digital sovereignty has grown substantially. A. Bradford's concept of the Brussels effect illustrates how EU regulations like the GDPR exert global normative influence [4]. Some scientists contend that European policies prioritise fundamental rights over economic imperatives [5]. Conversely, C. Kavanagh and J. B. Sheldon characterise US cybersecurity strategy as more pragmatic, emphasising national security and strategic alliances [6]. J. Goldsmith argues that US cyber policy aligns with wider geopolitical objectives, often sidelining normative frameworks in favour of security interests [7]. Recent comparative studies highlight tensions between EU regulatory frameworks and US pragmatism, particularly concerning transatlantic data flows in the wake of the Schrems II judgment, which invalidated the Privacy shield arrangement on transatlantic data transfers<sup>1</sup>.

Russian-speaking scholars have contributed to this discourse. Ya. N. Shevchenko, A. Yu. Olimpiev, I. A. Strelnikova, P. Sharikov, N. Stepanova have addressed EU and US divergent policies relating to digital sovereignty through the lenses of global governance, digital security, and international law [8–10]. This analysis delineates the ideological and structural distinctions between EU and US approaches to digital sovereignty, situating them within wider geopolitical dynamics.

While existing scholarship extensively explores individual strategies, thorough comparative examinations remain scarce. This article bridges that gap through a systematic evaluation of EU and US digital sovereignty strategies, elucidating their ramifications for global governance.

## Materials and methods

Employing qualitative thematic content analysis, this study scrutinises primary policy documents including the EU Digital sovereignty agenda, GDPR, Schrems II judgment, US Cyber Command doctrines, and the Clarifying lawful overseas use of data (CLOUD) act. The analysis is further informed by relevant academic scholarship. Empirical case studies, such as the

Schrems II judgment, responses to the «SolarWinds» cyberattack, «Meta's» GDPR penalty, «Huawei» sanctions, and US Cyber Command's «hunt-forward» operations, demonstrate the real-world consequences of each strategy. This triangulated methodology illuminates the divergent models of digital sovereignty pursued by the EU and the US.

## Comparative strategy analysis

**EU strategy: regulatory hegemony and normative influence.** The EU's strategy relies on comprehensive regulatory frameworks designed to project its norma-

tive power globally, a phenomenon often termed the Brussels effect [4, p. 10–16]. Central to it is the GDPR, which establishes stringent privacy standards with

<sup>1</sup>The Court of Justice invalidates decision 2016/1250 on the adequacy of the protection provided by the EU – US Data protection shield [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://curia.europa.eu/jcms/upload/docs/application/pdf/2020-07/cp200091en.pdf> (date of access: 24.03.2025) ; *Burwell F.* Looking ahead to the next chapter of US – EU digital collaboration [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/in-depth-research-reports/report/looking-ahead-to-the-next-chapter-of-us-eu-digital-collaboration/> (date of access: 24.03.2025) ; EU – US relations on Internet governance [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2019/11/eu-us-relations-internet-governance> (date of access: 24.03.2025).



extraterritorial reach. By mandating compliance under threat of substantial fines (exemplified by «Meta's» 1.2 bln euro penalty in 2023)<sup>2</sup> the regulation has recalibrated international data governance norms.

The Schrems II judgment reinforced the EU's regulatory authority by invalidating the Privacy shield framework, citing insufficient safeguards against US surveillance. Initiatives such as «Gaia-X» seek to lessen European reliance on non-European cloud providers by developing sovereign cloud infrastructure. Similarly, the Artificial intelligence (AI) act establishes risk-based regulations to ensure ethical AI deployment consistent with European values<sup>3</sup>.

**US strategy: security-centric pragmatism and alliance-building.** In contrast, the United States prioritises security-oriented pragmatism, pursued through proactive cyber operations and strategic alliances. US Cyber Command's «defend forward» doctrine exemplifies this stance, deploying «hunt-forward» missions on allied networks to detect threats pre-emptively [6, p. 14–15].

The CLOUD act demonstrates pragmatic principles by granting law enforcement agencies extraterritorial data access, placing national security above privacy concerns [11, p. 397–398]. Similarly, export controls outlined in the Creating helpful incentives to produce Semiconductors (CHIPS) and science act deploy strategic economic leverage to constrain adversaries' technological advancements, notably targeting China's semiconductor industry<sup>4</sup>.

Alliance-building also forms a key component of US strategy. Quadrilateral security dialogue (Quad) and

AUKUS (Australia, UK, US) explicitly aim to counterbalance China's growing technological influence. The sanctions against «Huawei» further illustrate how diplomatic alliances can be utilised to isolate Chinese technology firms from global markets.

The comparative table highlights that while both the EU and the USA recognise the critical importance of digital sovereignty, their strategies diverge significantly due to underlying following ideological differences:

- the EU's normative-regulatory model, exemplified by GDPR and Schrems II judgment seeks to influence global standards through stringent compliance requirements rooted in fundamental rights protection;
- the US' pragmatic-security model, characterised by proactive cyber operations («defend forward»), export controls via CHIPS and science act, and alliance-building initiatives like Quad or AUKUS, prioritises national security interests over normative considerations.

Both approaches have distinct advantages and limitations:

- the EU's rigorous regulations provide strong protections but risk stifling innovation among smaller firms;
- the US' flexible, alliance-based strategy allows rapid response to threats but raises diplomatic tensions and internal ideological conflicts regarding Internet openness.

Despite these differences, shared geopolitical threats particularly from authoritarian states like China and Russia may drive future convergence toward hybrid strategies integrating regulatory norms with strategic alliances.

**Comparative analysis of digital sovereignty: EU and US approaches**

Criteria	EU	US	Comparative implications
Strategic orientation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Normative or regulatory-driven (Brussels effect) character</li> <li>• Emphasis on privacy, fundamental rights, consumer protection</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Security-driven pragmatic character</li> <li>• Emphasis on national security, strategic alliances, proactive cyber defence</li> </ul>	EU prioritises rights-based governance. US emphasises security interests
Data regulation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• GDPR</li> <li>• Schrems II judgment (Privacy shield invalidation)</li> <li>• Digital markets act (DMA)</li> <li>• Digital services act (DSA)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CLOUD act</li> <li>• Sector-specific regulations (California consumer privacy act (CCPA), Health insurance portability and accountability act (HIPPA), etc.)</li> <li>• State-level privacy laws (varying by state)</li> </ul>	GDPR has global normative influence but creates friction in transatlantic data flows, CLOUD act raises sovereignty concerns abroad
Cybersecurity approach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Network and information systems directive</li> <li>• European Union Agency for Cybersecurity</li> <li>• Computer emergency response team – EU coordination</li> <li>• Cyber resilience act</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• US Cyber Command («defend forward» doctrine)</li> <li>• National Security Agency cyber operations</li> <li>• Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) coordination</li> </ul>	EU emphasises resilience and regulatory frameworks. US emphasises proactive cyber operations and deterrence

<sup>2</sup>Antitrust: commission fines Meta 1.2 billion euro for breaching EU data protection rules [Electronic resource]. URL: [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip\\_23\\_2778](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_23_2778) (date of access: 24.03.2025).

<sup>3</sup>Proposal for a regulation laying down harmonised rules on artificial intelligence (Artificial intelligence act) [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/library/proposal-regulation-laying-down-harmonised-rules-artificial-intelligence> (date of access: 24.03.2025).

<sup>4</sup>Public law 117–167. Aug. 9, 2022 [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://www.congress.gov/117/plaws/publ167/PLAW-117publ167.pdf> (date of access: 24.03.2025).



Ending of the table

Criteria	EU	US	Comparative implications
Technological autonomy initiatives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• «Gaia-X» federated cloud initiative</li> <li>• European CHIPS act</li> <li>• AI act risk-based regulation</li> <li>• Horizon Europe funding programmes for tech innovation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CHIPS and science act</li> <li>• Export controls on advanced technologies</li> <li>• Significant public-private investment in AI and quantum computing research</li> </ul>	Both seek tech autonomy but through different methods: EU through regulation and public infrastructure, US through strategic investments and export controls
International engagement and diplomacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Multilateralism via UN digital compact, G7/G20 frameworks</li> <li>• Promotion of global digital norms aligned with human rights and democracy</li> <li>• Bilateral digital partnerships emphasising normative alignment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Alliance-centric approach via Quad, AUKUS</li> <li>• Clean network initiative</li> <li>• Bilateral agreements prioritising security cooperation</li> </ul>	EU promotes universal norms multilaterally. US builds targeted coalitions based on strategic alignment against geopolitical rivals like China or Russia
Key case studies and examples	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• GDPR enforcement («Meta's» 1.2 bln euro fine in 2023)</li> <li>• Schrems II judgment disrupting data flows (1.3 bln euro economic impact in 2022)</li> <li>• «Gaia-X» implementation challenges due to reliance on non-EU tech providers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• «SolarWinds» cyberattack response (NATO collaboration and unilateral sanctions on Russian actors);</li> <li>• «Huawei» sanctions and global 5G coalition-building efforts isolating Chinese technology providers</li> <li>• <i>TikTok</i> bans, highlighting ideological tensions between openness and security</li> </ul>	Case studies illustrate practical impacts: EU's regulatory rigour versus US' pragmatic security measures. Both strategies have economic and diplomatic implications
Challenges and limitations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Regulatory burden potentially stifling innovation among startups</li> <li>• Persistent reliance (near 75 %) on non-European technology providers despite sovereignty initiatives</li> <li>• Difficulty balancing stringent regulations with rapid technological innovation needs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Creation of internal ideological tradeoffs by balancing open Internet ideals with national security imperatives</li> <li>• Diplomatic risks associated with unilateral cyber operations («defend forward»)</li> <li>• Fragmented domestic regulatory landscape complicates coherent national policy formulation</li> </ul>	Both face internal tensions: EU struggles with innovation versus regulation balance. US faces ideological conflicts between openness and security interests
Future trajectories and emerging issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Quantum computing regulation frameworks under development</li> <li>• Internet of things (IoT) cybersecurity standards emerging via Cyber resilience act</li> <li>• Potential harmonisation with US under common threats from authoritarian regimes' cyber espionage activities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Quantum computing investment prioritised for strategic advantage over China or Russia</li> <li>• IoT cybersecurity addressed through sector-specific standards rather than comprehensive federal legislation</li> <li>• Possible convergence with EU approaches under shared geopolitical threats</li> </ul>	Emerging technologies will test existing frameworks, potential convergence toward hybrid models combining regulatory norms with strategic alliances is likely under shared geopolitical threats

### International cooperation: alignment or discord?

**The EU's multilateral approach: universal standards and human rights.** The EU approach to cyber sovereignty rests on its normative governance model, prioritising human rights, privacy, and democratic values. Initiatives such as the UN Digital compact and the Cyber solidarity act advance a global cybersecurity framework that aligns with international human rights law<sup>5</sup>. Regulatory instruments like the GDPR and the DMA reinforce these objectives by promoting fair competition and protecting individual freedoms in digital environments<sup>6</sup>.

This multilateral strategy facilitates broad coalitions with states, civil society, and private sector actors. Key mechanisms include the following positions:

- Cyber solidarity act, which provides for a European cybersecurity reserve and a cross-border threat-alert system to enhance collective defence against cyber-threats. These structures encourage resource-sharing and regional resilience;
- UN Digital compact, positioning the EU as a key architect of global cybersecurity norms by advocating inclusive, cooperative solutions to common challenges.

<sup>5</sup>European Union contribution to the Global digital compact [Electronic resource]. URL: [https://www.un.org/digital-emerging-technologies/sites/www.un.org.techenvoy/files/GDC-submission\\_European-Union.pdf](https://www.un.org/digital-emerging-technologies/sites/www.un.org.techenvoy/files/GDC-submission_European-Union.pdf) (date of access: 24.03.2025).

<sup>6</sup>European declaration on digital rights and principles [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/library/european-declaration-digital-rights-and-principles> (date of access: 24.03.2025).

Such efforts demonstrate the EU's ambition to embed human rights into digital governance while promoting interoperability and technological neutrality<sup>7</sup>. Despite its merits, the EU's multilateral approach encounters several obstacles:

1. Fragmentation. Divergent cybersecurity policies across member states complicate implementation. While the GDPR sets global benchmarks for data protection, enforcement remains inconsistent throughout the EU.

2. Technological dependence. The EU continues to rely on external technology providers for critical infrastructure, including cloud computing and semiconductors. Projects such as «Gaia-X» aim to enhance autonomy in these areas, but have struggled to achieve broad adoption<sup>8</sup>.

3. Geopolitical vulnerabilities. The Schrems II judgment struck down the EU – US Privacy shield agreement with the US over concerns about American surveillance practices. This decision disrupted transatlantic data transfers and exposed tensions between European data protection standards and US security-driven policies<sup>9</sup>.

Diverging sharply from European multilateralism, the US pursues a strategy centred on national security and strategic alliances. Frameworks like the Trade and Technology Council (TTC) and partnerships such as Quad and AUKUS enable Washington to align interests against common adversaries like China and Russia<sup>10</sup>. These arrangements allow the US to respond rapidly to emerging threats while sustaining technological superiority.

The pragmatic US approach draws on cooperation with both allies and private-sector actors. For example, the CISA international strategic plan promotes cross-border information-sharing and coordinated critical infrastructure protection<sup>11</sup>, reflecting a commitment to building trust and addressing systemic vulnerabilities.

Similarly, the «defend forward» doctrine authorises targeting adversaries' networks with pre-emptive operations before threats materialise. This approach was credited with deterring malicious activity by increasing its costs, as demonstrated during incidents such as the «SolarWinds» breach<sup>12</sup>.

Yet this coalition-centric model carries its own challenges, including the following:

- diplomatic risks (unilateral measures, such as sanctions or offensive cyber operations, risk straining alliances). NATO members, for example, raised concerns over collateral impacts during US countermeasures against Russian cyber actors in the «SolarWinds» case;

- fragmented regulation. Unlike the EU's GDPR, US policy remains divided between sector-specific laws, for example, HIPAA in healthcare, and state-level mandates like CCPA. This lack of uniformity undermines Washington's ability to advocate for a coherent global governance model [12, p. 1085–1086];

- ideological tensions. US policymaking grapples with an inherent trade-off between upholding open Internet ideals and addressing national security imperatives. Measures such as bans on *TikTok* illustrate this tension, pitting Internet freedom against mitigating perceived risks linked to foreign-operated platforms<sup>13</sup>.

Despite differing policy approaches, shared challenges are prompting strategic alignment between the EU and US in critical domains.

Both actors confront escalating cyber threats, particularly state-sponsored attacks on vital infrastructure including energy, transport, and water systems. Enhanced cooperation through multilateral frameworks like NATO or the G7 could bolster joint defences and deepen trust among allies<sup>14</sup>.

The transatlantic tensions in digital policies, as exemplified by the Schrems II judgment, could be alleviated by creating a more sustainable data privacy framework aligning GDPR safeguards with US security objectives. Such an approach would support uninterrupted cross-border data transfers essential for global commerce.

Collaborative ventures in quantum computing and AI safety protocols could establish both regions as standard-setters in digital governance. Ongoing TTC dialogues on quantum technologies, for example, highlight opportunities to co-design post-quantum encryption standards that address shared vulnerabilities.

<sup>7</sup>Latici T. Understanding the EU's approach to cyber diplomacy and cyber defence [Electronic resource]. URL: [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2020/651937/EPRS\\_BRI\(2020\)651937\\_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2020/651937/EPRS_BRI(2020)651937_EN.pdf) (date of access: 24.03.2025).

<sup>8</sup>Körbächer M. Is Gaia-X failing? [Electronic resource]. URL: [https://www.linkedin.com/posts/maxkoerbaecher\\_gaia-x-failed-it-failed-already-years-ago-activity-7294417905893441536-DWih/](https://www.linkedin.com/posts/maxkoerbaecher_gaia-x-failed-it-failed-already-years-ago-activity-7294417905893441536-DWih/) (date of access: 31.03.2025).

<sup>9</sup>Schrems II impact survey report [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://www.digitaleurope.org/resources/schrems-ii-impact-survey-report/> (date of access: 24.03.2025).

<sup>10</sup>Fact sheet: Biden–Harris administration releases version 2 of the National cybersecurity strategy implementation plan [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://bidenwhitehouse.archives.gov/oncd/briefing-room/2024/05/07/fact-sheet-ncsip-version-2/> (date of access: 24.03.2025).

<sup>11</sup>CISA Strategic plan 2023–2025 [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://www.cisa.gov/sites/default/files/2025-01/StrategicPlan%2023-25%20508.pdf> (date of access: 24.03.2025).

<sup>12</sup>Homeland threat assessment-2025 [Electronic resource]. URL: [https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/2024-10/24\\_0930\\_ia\\_24-320-ia-publication-2025-ha-final-30sep24-508.pdf](https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/2024-10/24_0930_ia_24-320-ia-publication-2025-ha-final-30sep24-508.pdf) (date of access: 24.03.2025).

<sup>13</sup>Fact sheet: Biden–Harris administration releases version 2 of the National cybersecurity strategy implementation plan [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://bidenwhitehouse.archives.gov/oncd/briefing-room/2024/05/07/fact-sheet-ncsip-version-2/> (date of access: 24.03.2025).

<sup>14</sup>Schroeder E., Scott S., Herr T. Victory reimagined: toward a more cohesive US cyber strategy [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/Victory-reimagined-Toward-a-more-cohesive-US-cyber-strategy.pdf> (date of access: 24.03.2025).

## Key challenges

**European Union. Regulatory burden inhibiting innovation.** While the GDPR has pioneered global data protection and privacy benchmarks, its stringent provisions impose substantial compliance costs, particularly on startups and small and medium-sized enterprises. As Ya. N. Shevchenko observes, smaller firms often lack the administrative capacity to meet these demands, entrenching advantages for resource-rich multinationals and potentially stifling domestic technological advancement among smaller players [8, p. 257].

The EU's fragmented digital market exacerbates these challenges. The lack of regulatory harmonisation across member states hinders startups from scaling operations efficiently within the single market, diminishing their competitiveness against US and Chinese rivals [9, p. 76]. Critiques of the EU cybersecurity certification scheme further reveal gaps in addressing external threats, underscoring the necessity for integrated governance mechanisms [10, p. 80–81].

**Persistent dependence on external technology providers.** Europe continues to depend heavily on foreign providers for essential technologies, including cloud computing and semiconductors, despite initiatives such as «Gaia-X» and the European CHIPS act aimed at technological autonomy. Over 90 % of European data resides in US-based clouds, creating strategic vulnerabilities for the bloc<sup>15</sup>. This reliance compromises Europe's capacity to assert digital sovereignty while exposing its infrastructure to external security risks.

As A. Yu. Olimpiev notes, this dependence extends to Chinese corporations, notably «Huawei», which maintain dominant positions in critical sectors like 5G networks. Apprehensions regarding surveillance and cybersecurity have led to tighter restrictions on Chinese infrastructure, yet Europe still lacks competitive domestic alternatives in several domains<sup>16</sup>. Inability of the initiative «Gaia-X» to exclude foreign hyperscale cloud providers illustrates the difficulty of cultivating home-grown technological ecosystems<sup>17</sup>.

**Reconciling regulatory rigour with innovation demands.** A central challenge for the EU lies in harmonising its stringent regulatory frameworks with the im-

perative to accelerate technological innovation. While instruments such as the AI act prioritise ethical AI development consistent with European values, they can impede swift technological adoption due to bureaucratic complexities and inconsistent implementation across member states<sup>18</sup>.

As Ya. N. Shevchenko contends, such regulatory complexity risks stifling Europe's competitiveness in fields like artificial intelligence and quantum computing, where rivals such as the US and China advance with fewer constraints. Regulatory delays can deter private sector investment in high-risk, high-reward technologies, thereby constraining Europe's capacity for large-scale innovation [8, p. 257].

**United States. Ideological tensions: open Internet versus national security.** The US has long positioned an open Internet as integral to democratic principles, yet escalating geopolitical tensions have prompted measures prioritising national security, such as *TikTok* bans and semiconductor export controls under the CHIPS and science act. This reflects an unresolved tension between promoting Internet openness and addressing security threats from adversaries such as China<sup>19</sup>.

P. A. Sharikov and N. V. Stepanova [10] critique this ambivalence, arguing that security-centric policies, while addressing immediate risks, erode trust in multilateral governance frameworks<sup>20</sup> and alienate international partners. The Trump administration's focus on economic protectionism further exemplifies a shift towards digital sovereignty policies that prioritise national security at the expense of broader international cooperation<sup>21</sup>.

**Diplomatic risks of unilateral cyber operations.** The Pentagon's «defend forward» doctrine employs pre-emptive cyber operations against adversaries' networks before threats reach US systems. Although designed to deter malicious actors by raising their costs, this strategy presents significant diplomatic risks. A. Yu. Olimpiev and I. A. Strelnikova [9] caution that unilateral measures may escalate tensions with rivals such as Russia and China while undermining trust among traditional allies, who often perceive such operations as destabilising or disproportionate<sup>22</sup>.

<sup>15</sup>Digital sovereignty: Europe's bold response to tech challenges [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://europeanbusinessmagazine.com/business/digital-sovereignty-europes-bold-response-to-tech-challenges/> (date of access: 24.03.2025).

<sup>16</sup>Homeland threat assessment-2025 [Electronic resource]. URL: [https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/2024-10/24\\_0930\\_ia\\_24-320-ia-publication-2025-ha-final-30sep24-508.pdf](https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/2024-10/24_0930_ia_24-320-ia-publication-2025-ha-final-30sep24-508.pdf) (date of access: 24.03.2025).

<sup>17</sup>The top-10 digital risks for organisations in 2025 [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://www.controlrisks.com/our-thinking/insights/the-top-10-digital-risks-for-organisations-in-2025> (date of access: 24.03.2025).

<sup>18</sup>What is digital sovereignty and how are countries approaching it? [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://www.weforum.org/stories/2025/01/europe-digital-sovereignty/> (date of access: 24.03.2025).

<sup>19</sup>Marcos H. The US – China mirror: TikTok, national security, and techno-nationalism [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://opiniojuris.org/2025/05/02/the-us-china-mirror-tiktok-national-security-and-techno-nationalism/> (date of access: 24.03.2025).

<sup>20</sup>European tech industry coalition calls for «radical action» on digital sovereignty, starting with buying local [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://techcrunch.com/2025/03/16/european-tech-industry-coalition-calls-for-radical-action-on-digital-sovereignty-starting-with-buying-local/> (date of access: 24.03.2025).

<sup>21</sup>Trump's impact on global data sovereignty [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://incountry.com/blog/trumps-impact-on-global-data-sovereignty/> (date of access: 24.03.2025).

<sup>22</sup>Homeland threat assessment-2025 [Electronic resource]. URL: [https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/2024-10/24\\_0930\\_ia\\_24-320-ia-publication-2025-ha-final-30sep24-508.pdf](https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/2024-10/24_0930_ia_24-320-ia-publication-2025-ha-final-30sep24-508.pdf) (date of access: 24.03.2025).



For example, NATO members raised concerns during US-led cyber campaigns against supposedly Russian-linked actors in incidents such as «SolarWinds» case. Such tensions underline the need for more coordinated cybersecurity approaches within multilateral frameworks<sup>23</sup>.

**Fragmented domestic regulatory landscape.** US data governance lacks the harmonised structure of the EU's GDPR, instead comprising a patchwork of federal and state statutes. Regulatory dissonance not only diminishes the US's capacity to advocate a coherent model

for global data governance but also imposes disproportionate compliance burdens on businesses operating across multiple jurisdictions<sup>24</sup>.

A. Yu. Olimpiev and I. A. Strelnikova [9] observe that this disjointed regime impedes international collaboration on data protection standards. The absence of a unified federal privacy law stands in marked contrast to Europe's centralised approach, placing US enterprises at a disadvantage within the global regulatory environment [12, p. 1079–1080].

### Empirical case studies

Information sovereignty (the capacity of states to regulate data flows, digital infrastructure, and cyber norms) has become a defining feature of contemporary global governance. The EU and the US exemplify contrasting strategies, shaped by diverging ideological frameworks and geopolitical imperatives. This section analyses three case studies: 1) the EU AI act; 2) the US response to the «SolarWinds» cyberattack; 3) the Schrems II judgment, examining their implications for sovereignty, innovation, and global governance.

The EU's AI act represents one of the world's most comprehensive regulatory frameworks for AI, though its implementation has revealed substantial challenges for smaller firms and start-ups. The act categorises AI systems into three risk levels: 1) unacceptable risk (banned outright); 2) high risk (stringent oversight); 3) minimal risk (lightly regulated).

High-risk systems must comply with rigorous requirements concerning algorithmic transparency, human oversight, and risk management. Compliance imposes significant challenges for developers.

Ya. N. Shevchenko notes that while the legislation advances Europe's ethics-driven governance framework, it disproportionately burdens small and medium-sized enterprises, which often lack sufficient financial or technical capacity for compliance [8, p. 261–265]. Start-ups, which depend on rapid innovation cycles, encounter delays in product launches due to exhaustive documentation processes and mandatory audits. This dynamic may stifle innovation among smaller firms, potentially advantaging established corporations with greater resources [9, p. 81–82].

The AI act's regulatory demands could further disadvantage European firms relative to competitors in less-regulated jurisdictions, such as the US or China. T. Schmalfeld contends that protracted time-to-market timelines for high-risk AI systems risk diminishing Europe's competitive position in rapidly evolving fields, including machine learning<sup>25</sup>. Such tensions exemplify

the potential conflict between the EU's regulatory ambitions and its strategic goal of technological leadership [13, p. 23–24].

Though emblematic of Europe's normative governance ethos, the AI act raises critical questions about whether it effectively balances regulatory objectives with innovation incentives. A. Yu. Olimpiev and I. A. Strelnikova argues that excessive rigidity in compliance frameworks could hinder Europe's global competitiveness and constrain exploration in emerging fields such as generative AI or quantum computing [9].

Discovered in December 2020, the «SolarWinds» breach epitomises the scale of modern cyber espionage. Believed to be linked to Russia hackers exploited security flaws in platform «Orion» of «SolarWinds», a widely used IT management tool, to infiltrate US federal agencies and private entities. The incident exposed systemic vulnerabilities within supply chains, catalysing a comprehensive US response.

The Biden administration adopted a dual strategy: imposing unilateral sanctions on suspect Russian-linked entities, while simultaneously pursuing multilateral coordination through NATO. Sanctions specifically targeted Russia's Foreign intelligence service, in a move to establish accountability and a deterrent posture against future cyber threats. Concurrently, NATO partners were engaged to enhance collective cyber defences, reflecting a pragmatic balance between unilateral action and alliance-based cooperation.

A. Yu. Olimpiev and I. A. Strelnikova [9] caution that unilateral sanctions risk heightening confrontations with adversarial states, particularly Russia, while alienating allies who may view such measures as destabilising. Examples include NATO members' apprehensions regarding unintended consequences from US cyber campaigns against Russian entities during the «SolarWinds» incident. These diplomatic frictions highlight the necessity for multilateral coordination in cybersecurity governance [10].

<sup>23</sup>Schroeder E., Scott S., Herr T. Victory reimagined...

<sup>24</sup>Proposal for a regulation laying down harmonised rules on artificial intelligence (Artificial intelligence act) [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/library/proposal-regulation-laying-down-harmonised-rules-artificial-intelligence> (date of access: 24.03.2025).

<sup>25</sup>Schmalfeld T. Is the EU AI act unfair to smaller companies and startups? [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/eu-ai-act-unfair-smaller-companies-startups-thomas-schmalfeld-spn7f/> (date of access: 24.03.2025).



The «SolarWinds» breach exposed critical weaknesses in supply chains, compromising national sovereignty by leaving infrastructure vulnerable to external threats. As P. A. Sharikov and N. V. Stepanova contend, resolving such vulnerabilities demands not merely technical interventions but also structured international collaboration to address cross-border risks [10, p. 77–82].

In 2020, the Court of Justice of the European Union revoked the EU–US Privacy shield framework through its *Schrems II* judgment, citing inadequate protections against US surveillance programmes under legislation such as the Foreign intelligence surveillance act. This landmark judgment accentuated tensions between GDPR's stringent privacy requirements and transatlantic data flows crucial for global commerce [14, p. 194–195].

The ruling precipitated substantial economic repercussions: association «DigitalEurope» reported 1.3 bln euro in losses during 2022 alone, attributing these to ambiguities surrounding Standard contractual clauses and GDPR-compliant transfer mechanisms<sup>26</sup>. Smaller firms faced heightened burdens, struggling to evaluate extraterritorial legal regimes and implement safeguards, thereby intensifying economic pressures.

N. A. Molchanov and E. K. Matevosova critique *Schrems II* judgment for exacerbating regulatory uncertainty by dismantling Privacy shield without proposing viable substitutes. Businesses now face the arduous task of evaluating data protection standards in recipient countries on an individual basis a process both legally

ambiguous and prohibitively costly [15, p. 100–101]. Such fragmentation hinders the formulation of coherent international data governance norms.

The Trump administration's suspension of the Privacy and Civil Liberties Oversight Board, which oversees adherence to data agreements, further endangered the EU–US data transfer framework. This policy shift heightened prospects of the agreement's annulment<sup>27</sup>, prompting European states to pursue strategic autonomy initiatives aimed at reducing reliance on US technology and data infrastructure.

These developments prompted the EU to establish autonomous data storage standards and infrastructure, reducing reliance on American technology firms. The Trump administration's stance amplified the trend towards data localisation, with EU member states enacting stricter legislation mandating that sensitive data be held within national jurisdictions. This legislative push responded to anxieties over US government access to information via mechanisms embedded in instruments such as the Foreign intelligence surveillance act.

A. Yu. Olimpiev and I. A. Strelnikova [9] argue that the *Schrems II* judgment epitomises the clash between Europe's normative approach to data governance and the US' security-oriented pragmatism. Though the judgment underscores the EU's prioritisation of privacy, it risks weakening transatlantic collaborative mechanisms essential to countering shared cyber threats [10, p. 79–81].

## Conclusions

Despite enduring policy divides (protective regulation versus security-focused pragmatism) the EU and the US may find common ground as geopolitical challenges mount. Hybrid models combining regulatory frameworks with strategic alliances could emerge as pragmatic solutions bridging ideological divides.

Advancements in disruptive technologies like quantum computing and IoT will strain existing notions of digital sovereignty, demanding policies that reconcile technological innovation with cybersecurity imperatives. The ability of these technologies to reshape the digital landscape and upend established power structures further exacerbates the need for such policies.

Although ideological rifts over privacy-security trade-offs persist, the EU and the US may develop fragmented but interoperable governance systems to address mutual geopolitical risks. As digital interdependence grows, collaborative frameworks will prove vital to safeguarding ecosystem stability. Successfully addressing this intricate and evolving environment demands a careful reconciliation of national priorities with international cooperation.

Recent US policy shifts under the Trump administration have deepened transatlantic tensions regarding information sovereignty. The EU's drive to decouple from American technological infrastructure could hinder future cooperation, potentially fragmenting digital ecosystems and raising barriers for enterprises operating across the Atlantic. As the digital environment continues to evolve, the need for cooperative and adaptive governance will become ever more critical for safeguarding the stability and resilience of the transatlantic digital ecosystem.

The analysis of EU and the US digital sovereignty strategies demonstrates fundamental differences in approaches to data regulation and cybersecurity. For Belarus, facing the consequences of a liberal personal data protection regime and the rise of cyber fraud, this experience offers valuable lessons. Balanced borrowing of elements of the European regulatory model and American pragmatism can become the basis for building an effective information security system.

EU and US experience demonstrates that an effective digital sovereignty policy requires a combination of

<sup>26</sup>Schrems II impact survey report [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://www.digitaleurope.org/resources/schrems-ii-impact-survey-report/> (date of access: 24.03.2025).

<sup>27</sup>Trump takes aim at «overseas extortion» of American tech companies [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://www.iss.europa.eu/publications/commentary/trump-takes-aim-overseas-extortion-american-tech-companies-eu-us-rift> (date of access: 24.03.2025).

regulatory rigor and technological flexibility. The following action are critical for Belarus:

- to avoid the extremes of over-regulation (as in GDPR) and market anarchism (as in the early US model);
- to invest in national technological competencies, reducing dependence on foreign software;

- to establish an interagency cyber-reserve system for rapid incident response.

The key lesson for Belarus is that digital sovereignty is not achieved through isolation, but through a strategic balance of openness and protection of national interests.

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## BETWEEN PRINCIPLE AND PRACTICE: THE ILLUSION OF NEUTRALITY IN INTERNATIONAL CONFLICT MEDIATION

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**Abstract.** In contemporary international relations, mediator neutrality exists largely as a declarative ideal that conflicts with the realities of political and economic interests. Mediation practices by the UN, the OSCE, the African Union, and states such as Norway, Qatar, Indonesia, the US, and China demonstrate that impartiality is systematically compromised by structural factors. These factors include geopolitical priorities and the mediator's asymmetrical perceptions of conflicting parties. The analysis contrasts American and Chinese approaches to mediation: while Washington integrates mediation with the promotion of its values, Beijing emphasises economic pragmatism without abandoning engagement. The article examines three dimensions of neutrality (institutional, strategic, and perceptual) revealing its contingent nature. Findings suggest modern mediation functions as a «diplomacy of the possible», where strict neutrality yields to tactical flexibility, and negotiation effectiveness correlates with transparency regarding mediators' interests.

**Keywords:** neutrality; international mediation; UN; US; China; conflicts; diplomacy.

## МЕЖДУ ПРИНЦИПОМ И ПРАКТИКОЙ: ПОЧЕМУ НЕЙТРАЛЬНОСТЬ МЕЖДУНАРОДНЫХ ПОСРЕДНИКОВ В КОНФЛИКТАХ ОСТАЕТСЯ ИЛЛЮЗИЕЙ

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**Аннотация.** В современной системе международных отношений нейтральность посредников остается, сталкиваясь с реалиями политических и экономических интересов, декларативным идеалом. Опыт ООН, ОБСЕ, Африканского союза, а также таких государств, как Норвегия, Катар, Индонезия, США и Китай, демонстрирует, что посредничество неизбежно подвержено влиянию структурных ограничений, нарушающих беспристрастность посредников: зависимости от финансирования, геополитических приоритетов посредника и асимметричного восприятия им конфликтующих сторон. В настоящем исследовании особое внимание уделено сравнению моделей посредничества США и Китая. Выявлено, что Вашингтон сочетает посредничество с продвижением собственных ценностных установок, Пекин делает ставку на экономический прагматизм, что, однако, не исключает ангажированности. Выделены три аспекта нейтральности (институциональный, стратегический и перцепционный), раскрывающие ее условный характер. Показано, что современное посредничество трансформируется в «дипломатию возможного», где нейтральность уступает место тактической гибкости, а эффективность переговоров зависит от прозрачности интересов посредника.

**Ключевые слова:** нейтральность; международное посредничество; ООН; США; Китай; конфликты; дипломатия.

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## Introduction

The proliferation of intrastate and transnational conflicts in the international system of 21<sup>st</sup> century has intensified demands for third-party mediation. Contemporary disputes frequently transcend territorial boundaries through interconnected political, economic, and cultural networks, compelling external actors to engage in conflict resolution processes. Data from the Uppsala conflict data programme (UCDP) at Uppsala University indicate that 59 armed conflicts were active globally in 2023. While only 30 % of them concluded peacefully, mediation by states or international organisations proved instrumental in 70 % of these successful outcomes<sup>1</sup>. Such statistics, viewed against the backdrop of the rising incidence of international conflicts over the past decade (from 37 conflicts in 2013 to 59 in 2023) suggest a notable increase in mediation efforts. This, in turn, intensifies the fundamental challenges associated with mediation [1, p. 674].

In international relations, mediation refers to a form of third-party intervention in which an external actor, invited by the parties, assists in managing a conflict. Such interventions are typically ad hoc, tailored to each specific conflict without rigid procedures, with the mediator's role evolving throughout the engagement process, utilising non-violent approaches. Leading theorists in international mediation, J. Bercovitch and S. S. Gartner, emphasise that the perceived impartiality and trustworthiness of mediators, even high-ranking officials, are crucial for effectiveness. Dis-

putants will only consent to third-party involvement if they trust the intermediary to act fairly and consider their interests [2, p. 331–337].

Mediation outcomes depend, inter alia, on the mediator's capacity to guide disputing parties towards a mutually acceptable agreement. Scholars examining mediation in general, and its specific application to international conflicts, broadly concur regarding the desirable qualities of a mediator. However, the question of mediator neutrality remains a matter of debate. This article seeks to clarify the role and significance of the neutrality principle in the practice of international mediation.

Although mediation has featured prominently in diplomatic history for centuries, a dearth of scholarship specifically examines the nature and practical application of mediator neutrality. Foundational texts by scholars such as J. Bercovitch and S. S. Gartner [2], S. Vuković [3], I. W. Zartman [4], and A. Kydd [5] touch upon this concept, as do various case studies analysing particular international disputes.

Mediator neutrality warrants further scholarly investigation, particularly given the heightened potential for conflict in contemporary international relations and the consequential scrutiny of mediators' roles. This article offers a comprehensive analysis of neutrality in mediation, synthesising theoretical frameworks and examining diverse case studies from international conflicts.

## Theoretical perspectives on neutrality in international mediation

Early theoretical approaches, which reflected the logic of mediation as a pre-trial method of conflict resolution in civil law, identified impartiality as a fundamental and indispensable element; without it, mediation was rendered meaningless [3, p. 415].

However, subsequent research has demonstrated that, for international mediation to be genuinely effective, mediators must not only facilitate negotiations and propose possible solutions but also transcend the role of a neutral observer. I. W. Zartman, in [4], introduced the influential concepts of «mutually hurting stalemate» and «moment of maturity». The former occurs when belligerents recognise that continued confrontation incurs greater costs than potential negotiation benefits, thereby fostering conditions conducive to resolution. This realisation of futility, coupled with the perceived opportunity for an acceptable outcome through compromise, cultivates a moment of maturity. I. W. Zartman argues that in such circumstances, the mediator's role is critical. They must discern this moment of maturity, avoid precipitate action, sensitise parties to conflict costs, refrain from imposing external agendas, and crucially, avoid being perceived as an interested party, distinct from a party to the conflict. Indeed,

contravening these latter conditions risks prolonging the dispute [4, p. 6–15, 146, 178].

Philosophically, neutrality defined as the absence of declared or deliberate bias can be viewed as an ideal. However, given the intricate dynamics of international relations and the multiplicity of actor interests, achieving absolute neutrality in practice may prove an elusive, if not unattainable, goal. Nevertheless, neutrality remains relevant in international relations, where it typically defines a state's non-participation in military actions between opposing parties and its non-adherence to military blocs. However, within mediation, neutrality lacks objective criteria and is inherently subjective, as mediators are invariably influenced by a range of factors (political, economic, geostrategic, and ideological interests) rendering its practical application unique to each dispute.

A mediator's perceived neutrality is therefore critical for establishing trust between conflicting parties. Even when latent interests or limitations are acknowledged, an appearance of impartiality legitimises the negotiation process, fosters essential trust, and cultivates a sense of procedural fairness. This principle proves indispensable in contexts of deep mistrust, where the slightest

<sup>1</sup>Uppsala conflict data program [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://ucdp.uu.se/exploratory> (date of access: 14.03.2024).



hint of bias can shatter confidence in the mediator [6, p. 32–34].

Yet, while striving to maintain an image of impartiality, mediators inevitably risk their actions being interpreted as biased. This paradox occurs because conflicting parties typically assess the mediator's decisions through self-interested lenses, leading to accusations of bias even when mediators genuinely attempt to balance competing concerns. Such perceptions can erode trust and destabilise the negotiation process, as parties may attribute hidden agendas to the mediator's conduct. Consequently, mediation, intended to resolve disputes, can inadvertently escalate tensions, particularly amidst information ambiguity or when conflict stakes are high. Ultimately, the core challenge lies in the difficulty of achieving absolute impartiality when the very notion of impartiality is politically contested [5, p. 597–600].

### **The contingent nature of neutrality in mediation by international organisations**

Challenges to neutrality in conflict mediation affect even ostensibly impartial international organisations and mediating states. The UN, for example, is mandated by its charter (Art. 33) to seek the peaceful settlement of disputes that threaten international peace and security, and operates under the premise of impartial arbitration. However, the UN's governance structure<sup>2</sup>, in practice, imposes systemic limitations on its impartiality. A central issue lies in its reliance on the Security Council, where veto-wielding permanent members (China, France, Russia, the UK, and the US) can obstruct resolutions conflicting with their strategic agendas. This situation creates a paradox: the UN, ostensibly tasked with representing the collective will of the international community, often appears to act in ways that align with the interests of a limited number of powerful states. Several examples illustrate this point. In the protracted Western Sahara conflict (ongoing since 1991), the MINURSO mission has, for decades, failed to organise an independence referendum, largely due to French opposition, reflecting France's historical support for Morocco [7, p. 4–5, 13]. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict demonstrates similar dynamics. Here, repeated US vetoes have blocked resolutions critical of Israeli actions, undermining the UN's credibility among Arab states [8, p. 32]. Furthermore, the UN's funding structure makes it vulnerable to external pressures. Major donors can influence the organisation's policies through their financial contributions. For example, the US, contributing 22 % of the regular budget, has repeatedly used budgetary cuts as a diplomatic lever, thereby influencing the UN's programmatic priorities<sup>3</sup>.

Comparable challenges concerning influence and bias affect other international bodies, including the

Drawing from theoretical frameworks in international mediation studies, three key aspects of neutrality emerge in international mediator practice.

1. Institutional neutrality that relies on formal rules of engagement, such as those embedded in the mandates of organisations like the UN or the OSCE, or declared by mediating states. This dimension emphasises the absence of direct legal or political obligations to any conflicting party [2].

2. Strategic neutrality that refers to a mediator's deliberate avoidance of overtly advancing their own interests. This approach often represents a tactical choice, particularly when facing resource constraints or geopolitical complexities [3; 4].

3. Perceptual neutrality that concerns the conflicting parties' perception of the mediator as impartial, irrespective of the mediator's actual motivations [5].

AU and the OSCE. The AU, despite positioning itself as the continent's primary regional arbiter, confronts challenges similar to those faced by the UN. While the AU seeks to represent a unified African perspective, its actions often depend on the interests of its most influential member states, frequently overriding collective decision-making. During the Darfur crisis (2003–2020), the AU mission in Sudan faced criticism for its failure to confront the Sudanese government. This reluctance was largely attributed to the economic and political allegiances of key member states, notably Nigeria and South Africa, to Khartoum [9, p. 1046]. Furthermore, the AU financial dependence on external donors (primarily the European Union, China, and the US, who together provide up to 60 % of its budget) imposes significant structural limitations. Donors possess significant leverage to steer the AU's agenda towards their own objectives [10, p. 18]. Moreover, the guiding principle of «African solutions to African problems» is routinely compromised. External military interventions, such as France's 2011 actions in Côte d'Ivoire and NATO's involvement in Libya in the same year, coupled with insufficient regional conflict-resolution mechanisms, reveal systemic vulnerabilities in upholding this doctrine [11, p. 3–4].

Similarly, the OSCE, despite its commitment to indivisible security and collective dispute settlement, frequently serves as a platform where the competing interests of major actors (Russia, the US, and the EU) play out. In the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, the OSCE Minsk group, co-chaired by the US, France, and Russia, struggled for decades to achieve a breakthrough, primarily because each mediating nation prioritised its distinct agenda [12, p. 155–157]. The OSCE's financial

<sup>2</sup>United Nations Charter [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://www.un.org/ru/about-us/un-charter/full-text> (date of access: 14.03.2024).

<sup>3</sup>Schaefer B. D. U. S. shouldn't squander financial leverage at united nations [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://www.heritage.org/global-politics/commentary/us-shouldnt-squander-financial-leverage-united-nations> (date of access: 14.03.2024).

and operational reliance on individual member contributions also poses risks of partiality. A notable example is the 2017 closure of field missions in Tajikistan (office in Dushanbe) and Uzbekistan (centre in Tashkent), which significantly diminished the organisation's presence in Central Asia. This restructuring arose not from strategic necessity but from shifting donor priorities, notably those of the US (12 % of the 2017 budget) and Germany (10 % of the 2017 budget). These countries diverted financial resources towards so-called priority areas, notably the Ukrainian crisis and Balkan missions [13, p. 6, 8]. This reallocation leaves the OSCE vulnerable to prevailing political climates and, without enforcement mechanisms such as sanctions, relegates it to a weak mediator whose initiatives remain largely declarative.

### State mediators: balancing neutrality and national interest

Some nations, while presenting themselves as neutral mediators in international conflicts, often demonstrate a selective approach in practice, balancing declared impartiality against actual foreign policy priorities. Norway's engagement in numerous regional conflicts clearly illustrates this duality. The country's track record includes facilitating Israeli-Palestinian dialogue (1990s – 2000s), mediating the Guatemalan peace process (1990–1996), and contributing to peace negotiations between the Colombian government and FARC (2012–2016).

Norway's mediation in the Sri Lankan conflict (2000–2009) yielded ambiguous outcomes, which remain contentious compared to other cases. Oslo was perceived as favouring the Tamil side due to its close ties with the Tamil diaspora, which was seen to influence Norwegian policy [14, p. 179–180]. Similarly, despite apparent achievements with the Oslo I Accord, scholars contend that Norway's approach served Western interests rather than maintaining genuine neutrality [15, p. 10–12]. This example illustrates how even nations with sterling reputations as impartial mediators may face bias allegations when operating across diverse political landscapes.

The Gulf states have emerged as prominent mediators in contemporary conflicts, accounting for 37 % of international mediation efforts in the Middle East between 2010 and 2022 surpassing traditional Western actors<sup>4</sup>. Qatar exemplifies this trend, mediating in Lebanon (2008, 2021), Sudan (2023), and Palestinian reconciliation talks (2022). Its notable achievement was brokering the 2020 agreement between the US and the Taliban movement. T. Barfield's analysis acknowledges Qatar's formal adherence to neutrality but highlights scrutiny over Doha's historical links to Islamist groups, which fuelled doubts among observers [16, p. 312–315].

Beyond direct levers like funding and binding decisions, international organisations especially those classified as weak mediators by objective measures can still exert pressure on negotiating parties. This influence extends beyond mere dialogue facilitation to include soft power tactics: shaping perceptions of norms, authority and legitimacy whilst maintaining an appearance of neutrality. Rather than true impartiality, these mediators exhibit what scholars term an outcome bias (advancing decisions aligned with their interests without explicitly supporting either party) [3, p. 416–419]. Despite employing soft power, major international organisations at both regional (the OSCE and the AU) and global (the UN) levels cannot achieve full neutrality in practice due to structural asymmetries in funding and influence. These limitations are systemic rather than incidental.

This example demonstrates how mediators' geopolitical affiliations complicate claims to absolute neutrality.

As Southeast Asia's largest nation and a leading ASEAN member, Indonesia has actively mediated regional disputes. Indonesia's successful mediation includes resolving various conflicts. Notably, in 2011 Jakarta drawing on its authority within ASEAN organised negotiations and facilitated the deployment of observers to monitor the ceasefire in the border conflict between Cambodia and Thailand<sup>5</sup>. Following the 2021 military coup in Myanmar, Indonesia undertook extensive efforts to address the ongoing political crisis, acting as the driving force behind the adoption of the Five-point consensus at the ASEAN special summit in April 2021. Jakarta prioritised halting violence, securing humanitarian corridors, and fostering dialogue between stakeholders. Yet these efforts faced immediate constraints, as the junta's refusal to comply undermined their effectiveness [17, p. 68–71]. While Western states imposed stringent sanctions, Indonesia employed soft power, maintaining bilateral engagement with regime officials, experience-sharing platforms such as the Bali Democracy forum, and civil-military exchanges, drawing on its own successful post-1998 military transformation as a model [17, p. 68–71].

Indonesia's mediation strategies, however, have recurrently encountered structural constraints when national interests clashed with its professed impartiality. A telling example was Jakarta's inability to facilitate progress in the South China Sea disputes (2012–2016), where economic dependence on Chinese investment and trade effectively constrained its capacity to mediate [18, p. 119]. Similarly, during the Rohingya crisis (2017–present), Indonesia limited its involvement to humanitarian aid, avoiding substantive political

<sup>4</sup>Uppsala conflict data program [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://ucdp.uu.se/exploratory> (date of access: 14.03.2024).

<sup>5</sup>Wijaya D. E. ASEAN'S role in Thailand's border conflict with Cambodia [Electronic resource]. URL: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/361764951\\_ASEAN%27S\\_ROLE\\_IN\\_THAILAND%27S\\_BORDER\\_CONFLICT\\_WITH\\_CAMBODIA](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/361764951_ASEAN%27S_ROLE_IN_THAILAND%27S_BORDER_CONFLICT_WITH_CAMBODIA) (date of access: 14.03.2024).

mediation to prevent straining relations with Myanmar, exacerbating regional migration pressures, or inflaming domestic Islamist movements<sup>6</sup>. These examples reveal the cautious nature of Indonesia's mediation, which tends to avoid risk when strategic considerations outweigh the prospective benefits.

International mediation inherently involves a paradox: even states lauded as neutral brokers must reconcile their stated impartiality with tangible geopolitical and economic priorities. The experiences of Norway, Qatar, and Indonesia illustrate that successful mediation hinges on reconciling these competing demands. Examples include Norway's engagement with diasporas, Qatar's «flexible neutrality» towards Islamist movements, and Indonesia's circumspection regarding Chinese investments. Such compromises invariably shape the practical application and strategic dimensions of their neutrality. A central limitation in contemporary mediation lies in perceived bias: when mediation efforts are viewed as aligned with the interests of a particular party (whether the Western bloc, the Islamic world, or regional powers) their effectiveness is significantly diminished. Consequently, state-led mediation now functions less as an impartial dispute-resolution mechanism and more as a form of «diplomacy of the possible». In this context, neutrality serves not as an absolute principle but as a tactical resource, deployed within specific political parameters and readily abandoned

should the conflict impinge upon the mediating states' strategic priorities.

Furthermore, mediation in international conflicts constitutes one diplomatic tool among many for achieving objectives that often extend beyond conflict resolution alone. This view aligns with S. Touval's analysis in [19]. Analysing international mediation during the collapse of Yugoslavia and the ensuing armed conflicts, he asserts that mediator impartiality and neutrality are rare and practically unattainable. S. Touval further posits that mediation serves as an instrument of foreign policy with dual purposes: an ethical one (conflict settlement) and a political one (the pursuit of national interests) [19, p. 178].

When considering mediation as a vehicle for foreign policy, its implementation inevitably reflects the ideological frameworks and values prioritised by mediating states. This is particularly evident with major regional and global powers. In this context, the alignment or divergence of cultural and value factors can influence perceptions of the mediator's neutrality, thereby colouring their actions positively or negatively. One might tentatively categorise mediators as Western (the US, EU nations, Norway, etc.) or non-Western (China, Qatar, Indonesia, etc.). However, this distinction fails to capture the complexity of how conflicting parties perceive mediator neutrality, or how mediators themselves conceptualise neutrality within international conflict resolution.

### **The Western approach to international mediation: the US as a prominent actor**

Western mediators typically promote a liberal model of conflict resolution, grounded in democratisation, human rights, and market reforms. The US represents the most prominent proponent of this approach and serves as a focal point of liberal ideology in contemporary international relations. Its mediation efforts are underpinned by unparalleled military capabilities including the world's largest defence budget and nuclear arsenal alongside economic dominance, with the US dollar facilitating approximately 25 % of global trade and its economy constituting a quarter of global GDP. Technological innovation, driven by corporations such as «Apple», «Microsoft» and «SpaceX», further reinforces its influence, as does its network of alliances spanning NATO members, Asia–Pacific partners and Middle Eastern states. This combination of strengths contributes to its role as one of the most active international mediators in diverse conflicts. Indeed, data from J. Bercovitch and G. Schneider for the period 1950–90 show that the US conducted 84 (24 %) of the 355 analysed single-state mediations, establishing it as the most active mediator in international conflicts during the Cold War [20, p. 157–158].

After 1990, the US continued its active engagement in international mediation, though its role evolved

amidst a transforming global political landscape. This transformation included the dissolution of the USSR, the increased influence of actors like the EU and the UN, and the rise of new regional powers. The US mediated in conflicts across most global regions, with particularly pronounced engagement in the Middle East and North Africa. This focus was driven by negotiations concerning Israel, strategic energy supplies, and counter-terrorism efforts. In Europe, its mediation included resolving conflicts in the former Yugoslavia and seeking to influence disputes in the post-Soviet space. The US has served as a mediator in approximately 30 to 40 international conflicts, depending on whether one counts direct or indirect participation and official or non-public mediation efforts. Its peak activity occurred in the 1990s and early 2000s. Since then, mediation has declined in prominence, with US foreign policy increasingly favouring diplomacy backed by power.

This history underscores the US' extensive experience and considerable success in international mediation. Yet, unlike nations such as Switzerland, the US is not widely perceived as a dedicated mediator country. This perception likely arises from an often inconsistent application of neutrality in its mediation efforts. For example,

<sup>6</sup>Indonesia and the Rohingya crisis: IPAC report No. 46. Mindanoo : Inst. for Policy Analysis of Conflict, 2018.



when analysing US mediation during the Cold War, J. Bercovitch and G. Schneider identify several factors that explain its frequent engagement. These include its hegemonic status in the bipolar system, which provided resources, influence, and coercive capabilities. Its capacity to offer potent economic and political incentives, such as financial assistance and security guarantees, also made it an attractive mediator for conflicting parties. Additional elements included its permanent UN Security Council membership, ideological ties to the Western bloc (often leading to mediation in conflicts involving NATO countries or pro-Western regimes), and established regional dominance. The negligible mediation activity of the USSR during this period (undertaking only five cases) further enabled the US to largely monopolise this function. Significantly, J. Bercovitch and G. Schneider do not identify US neutrality as a key determinant of its mediation activities [20, p. 153–158].

US mediation practices typically balance formal adherence to impartiality with pragmatic accommodation of strategic priorities. When conflicts fall outside core geopolitical priorities, US mediation can display substantial neutrality. The Northern Ireland settlement, culminating in the 1998 Belfast agreement, is a notable example. Senator G. Mitchell's personal impartiality and the tailored negotiation procedures he established enabled him to maintain an even-handed approach between the parties [21, p. 96–118]. Such instances, however, remain exceptions that confirm the rule: American neutrality in mediation is selective and ultimately determined by broader foreign policy objectives.

American mediation in strategically important regions often deviates from classical impartiality by actively promoting a liberal settlement model, as evidenced by the post-conflict structuring of Bosnia in the Dayton accords (1995). Here, US mediators championed ethnic power-sharing mechanisms and Western democratic institutions. These measures were imposed despite their limited resonance with local political traditions, which led to resistance among parts of the population [22, p. 352–361]. Similarly, in Afghanistan, mediators led by the US imposed a centralised democratic model, gender quotas, and liberal norms while marginalising culturally embedded practices. Disregarding traditional mechanisms such as *jirga* (tribal councils) ultimately hampered negotiations with the Taliban [23, p. 89–95].

Furthermore, in certain conflicts, the US abandons neutrality to openly support one party. Washington's

historically asymmetric, pro-Israel stance in Middle Eastern peace processes illustrates this tendency. During the 2000 Camp David talks, for instance, the American delegation dismissed key Palestinian demands concerning Jerusalem's status as unrealistic, thereby prioritising Israeli proposals [24, p. 6–12]. A comparable dynamic occurred in the Balkans. Despite formal declarations of neutrality during the Dayton accords (1995), the US significantly curtailed the involvement of Bosnian Serbs, whom it viewed as the losing side. The American team consequently focused dialogue on Bosnian Muslims and Croats, effectively excluding Serbian representatives from drafting crucial provisions of the agreement [22, p. 224–225].

However, the degree of American impartiality can be influenced by the institutional context, among other factors. When mediating the Eritrea–Ethiopia border dispute (1998–2000), the US prioritised regional stability. It refrained from direct intervention or imposing harsh pressure, operating instead primarily through established institutional channels. These included the UN and the Eritrea – Ethiopia Boundary Commission, whose creation America actively supported. The US also contributed to proceedings in the Permanent Court of Arbitration, maintaining procedural impartiality throughout the process [25, p. 409–413]. However, in the absence of neutral international mechanisms such as UN involvement, regional organisations, multilateral groups, or observation missions to oversee the implementation of agreements the US has often shaped mediation processes according to its own priorities. In the Colombian peace process (2012–2016), for example, Washington concentrated on security concerns, largely excluding issues of land rights and social inequality. Addressing these structural causes of the conflict would have conflicted with US interests<sup>7</sup>.

US mediation strategies typically blend formal neutrality with active promotion of liberal democratic norms as exemplified by the Dayton accords and the Belfast agreement (1998). While pragmatically effective in certain contexts, this model risks provoking local backlash when perceived as imposing culturally alien values. Over time, such tensions erode the perceived legitimacy of US mediation, jeopardise durable peace outcomes, and call into question the feasibility of genuinely «impartial» mediation when cultural and political agendas are inevitably embedded in the process.

### **A non-Western approach to international mediation: China as an emerging actor**

China now stands as the principal rival to the US in global politics, advancing a markedly different message to the international community. Unlike the US, China only established itself as a global development leader in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century. It now possesses the world's

second-largest economy by nominal GDP and serves as the «global manufacturing hub» through its extensive production and supply networks. Furthermore, China maintains the second-largest military budget, fields a modernised army, and promotes its interests through

<sup>7</sup>Chavarro J. S. US interests and the Colombian peace talks [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://www.coha.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/U.S.-Interests-and-the-Colombian-Peace-Talks.pdf> (date of access: 14.03.2024).



initiatives such as the «Belt and road» and multilateral forums such as BRICS, APEC, and the SCO. Before Deng Xiaoping's reform and opening-up policy (1978), China's foreign engagements were regionally circumscribed, often framed by ideological solidarity with anti-colonial and communist movements. Examples include involvement in the Korean War (1950–1953), the 1954 Geneva conference on Indochina, mediation in Cambodian-Vietnamese conflicts (1970–80s), and African conflicts in Angola and Mozambique during the 1970s. As J. Bercoff and G. Schneider observe, China, despite holding permanent membership on the UN Security Council, was notably absent from international conflict mediation between the 1950s and 1990s [22, p. 159–161]. They argue that substantive diplomatic activity emerged only after president R. Nixon's 1972 visit, catalysing Beijing's political liberalisation. Even then, China's contributions focused less on mediation and more on UN peacekeeping: financial support began in 1982, followed by its first deployment of peacekeepers in 1990 [26, p. 257–258].

Initially cautious towards intervention, China prioritised multilateral frameworks under UN auspices. Since the 2000s, however, Beijing has substantially increased its participation in peacekeeping missions, for example, in South Sudan, Mali, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. China has become the largest contributor of troops among the permanent members of the Security Council, deploying over 40 000 peacekeepers to 25 UN missions [27, p. 98].

China's regional ascendancy, coupled with its growing political, economic, and strategic interests, has driven the diversification of its diplomatic tools. Within this framework, mediation now serves dual purposes: shaping dispute outcomes and advancing broader foreign policy aims. Over the past decade, China's activity as a mediator has grown considerably. For the first time in 2002, at the height of the Second Intifada, China appointed Wang Shijie as its first special representative to the Middle East and subsequently advocated for peace talks, even proposing a trilateral dialogue involving itself, the Palestinians, and the Israelis<sup>8</sup>. Empirical data indicate Chinese mediation in 24 domestic and international conflicts between 2002 and 2024. Concrete steps to de-escalate tensions occurred in 18 (75 %) of cases, while the remainder 6 involved initiating mediation, forging dialogue, or offering related assistance<sup>9</sup>.

The Chinese approach to international mediation represents a distinctive blend of formal neutrality and strategic pragmatism. Central to this model is the deliberate avoidance of moral assessments and public condemnations, favouring instead technical assistance to facilitate settlements. During its 2023 mediation between

Saudi Arabia and Iran, for instance, China framed the conflict as a routine diplomatic issue, avoided partisan language and maintained negotiation confidentiality. The main incentive for both sides lay in the prospects for investment and economic cooperation [28, p. 141–143].

A second defining element of the Chinese approach is the extensive use of economic inducements. While Western nations frequently employ political pressure or sanctions, Chinese mediators offer economic incentives including infrastructure investments, trade advantages, and collaborative projects [29, p. 65–67]. This pragmatic strategy was particularly apparent in the Sudan and South Sudan case, where Chinese negotiators prioritised economic stability and oil investment protection over political reform [30, p. 40]. However, this emphasis on economic interests, especially within the Belt and road initiative's framework, can undermine perceptions of neutrality. This tension underscores the challenge of reconciling China's professed neutrality with its strategic economic priorities.

Finally, Beijing's commitment to institutional restraint is reflected in its preference for multilateral frameworks, such as ASEAN+, AU, SCO, and BRICS. This strategy allows China to minimise direct intervention, devolve political responsibility to regional bodies, and bolster both the legitimacy of its actions among conflicting parties and its image as an impartial mediator. By operating through forums like the SCO or BRICS, China can also present its interests as collective, thereby avoiding unilateral accountability. The approach to the conflict in Myanmar is illustrative: China, while not the sole intermediary between the military junta and the National Unity Government, has supported ASEAN's Five-point consensus and maintained communication channels with both sides. The limitations of China's professed neutrality become evident when its interests clash with those of other external actors. In Myanmar, Beijing formally endorsed the negotiation process. However, it simultaneously legitimised the military junta by blocking UN resolutions condemning the regime, supplying it with weaponry, and pursuing infrastructure investments<sup>10</sup>.

China demonstrates a similar approach to the Kashmir dispute between India and Pakistan. While not an official mediator and publicly urging dialogue, Beijing effectively supports Pakistan. This support includes arms supplies, obstructing UN Security Council resolutions (2020–2022) that condemned terrorist attacks originating from Pakistan, and financing infrastructure projects in Pakistani-administered Kashmir. Furthermore, Beijing strategically uses the Kashmir issue to apply pressure on Delhi, particularly within the broader competition for influence in South Asia [31, p. 92–110].

<sup>8</sup>China's approach to Palestine and Israel: towards a greater role? [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://mecouncil.org/publication/chinas-approach-to-palestine-and-israel-towards-a-greater-role/> (date of access: 14.03.2024).

<sup>9</sup>Legarda H. China as a conflict mediator. Maintaining stability along the Belt and road [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://meric.org/en/comment/china-conflict-mediator> (date of access: 14.03.2024) ; Sadhasivam S. C3S CW special: an overview of China's mediation efforts across the globe [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://www.c3sindia.org/post/cw-special-an-overview-of-china-s-mediation-efforts-across-the-globe-by-ps-vaishnavi> (date of access: 14.03.2024).

<sup>10</sup>Maizland L. Myanmar's troubled history: coups, military rule, and ethnic conflict globe [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://www.cfr.org/background/myanmar-history-coup-military-rule-ethnic-conflict-rohingya> (date of access: 14.03.2024).

The Chinese model of mediation operates within a dialectic of principle and interest. Its declared neutrality proves effective in conflicts considered peripheral to Beijing's core concerns. However, this neutrality erodes in regions of strategic importance. China ensures confidentiality in negotiations, refrains from moral judgement, maintains dialogue with all parties, employs economic incentives rather than political pressure, and supports mediation through existing international mechanisms. It minimises its public presence and demonstrates patience with protracted processes. These attributes often distinguish China's approach favourably from that of Western mediators, potentially fostering a more impartial basis for mediation. Yet, despite these perceived strengths, the Chinese approach faces significant criticism. Firstly, mediation efforts appear largely confined to regions integral to the Belt and road initiative, where China's substantial economic presence can create subtle leverage. Secondly, the emphasis on confidentiality obscures the impartiality of China's role. Thirdly, its engagement with international structures is sometimes viewed as a means to advance national ambitions or to fragment a united international stance towards one of the conflicting parties. Finally, Beijing's willingness to engage in parallel military co-operation with one party to a conflict, and to overlook allies' violations of international law, undermines its credibility as a neutral mediator capable of facilitating swift and effective conflict resolution. This situation presents a paradox: although China has significantly expanded its mediation experience and, consequently,

its influence, Beijing's role remains contentious due to persistent systemic double standards.

The analysis reveals stark contrasts between the approaches of the US and China to conflict mediation. The US actively promotes liberal values, frequently employing public negotiation formats and leveraging sanctions or military threats. It typically favours formalised processes, often involving institutions such as the UN or the NATO. Conversely, China adheres to principles of non-interference and national sovereignty. It influences conflicting parties primarily through offers of investments and infrastructure development. Beijing typically conducts its mediation discreetly, favouring confidential bilateral negotiations or engaging non-Western frameworks like the SCO or BRICS.

Despite these differences, parallels emerge. Both powers maintain a perceptual stance of neutrality and concentrate their diplomatic efforts in regions of strategic significance: the Middle East and Europe for the US, Africa, South and Southeast Asia for China. Both utilise economic investment as a tool to incentivise engagement in negotiation processes. Furthermore, they exercise their veto power within the UN Security Council to shield allied states. Mediation also serves as a vehicle for advancing their respective strategic interests: for the USA, the promotion of its values, and for China, the safeguarding of its investments. Ultimately, neither state, despite their disparate methodologies, fully achieves neutrality in practice. This is likely attributable to their substantial and inherent influence on international processes and global politics.

## Conclusions

The findings of this research indicate that absolute neutrality in international mediation remains an aspirational ideal rather than an attainable reality, as evidenced by both theoretical scholarship and empirical analysis.

Despite professed commitments to neutrality, states and international organisations still cannot fully disentangle their mediation efforts from political, economic, and geostrategic interests. Absolute neutrality, therefore, is illusory. Conflicting parties nonetheless demand at least its semblance. As a result, «impartiality» often becomes a tactic in negotiation, stripped of substantive ethical meaning.

Mediation activities by entities such as the UN, OSCE, AU, and individual nations including Norway, Qatar, Indonesia, the US, and China, exhibit consistent structural limitations that compromise neutrality. International organisations often depend on major donors for funding and face institutional barriers, such as the veto power within the UN Security Council. This effectively renders them vehicles for advancing powerful members' agendas. Similarly, national mediators, even those reputable for neutrality, must reconcile ethical responsibilities with pragmatic considerations, adapting their approaches to shifting political contexts.

The effectiveness of mediation depends largely on how parties perceive the mediator's neutrality. This

perception establishes legitimacy and fosters trust. Yet this trust is fragile, vulnerable to asymmetric interpretations by conflicting factions. For mediators like Norway, whose credibility rests on an impartial stance, such dynamics risk exacerbating tensions, particularly in contexts of entrenched mutual suspicion.

American and Chinese mediation models differ fundamentally in their approaches. The US frequently employs pressure, such as sanctions or military threats, and utilises formal structures like the UN and the NATO, often combining mediation with the promotion of liberal democratic values. China, conversely, leverages economic investments and informal fora (SCO, BRICS, etc.), emphasising non-interference and primarily using mediation to safeguard its investments. Despite these differences, similarities exist: both powers endeavour to project neutrality, pursue their respective strategic objectives, and employ their UN veto power to protect allies. Ultimately, their global influence precludes either nation from achieving genuine neutrality in mediation.

A synthesis of established scholarship (J. Bercovitch and S. S. Gartner, I. W. Zartman, A. Kydd, S. Vuković, etc.), alongside empirical analyses of conflict mediation by international organisations and states, distinguishes three facets of mediator neutrality at the international level: institutional, strategic, and perceptual. This

framework enhances our understanding of how different mediators implement neutrality principles in practice and the specific characteristics they embody.

Institutional neutrality is most commonly associated with international organisations or small and medium-sized states, such as Norway or Indonesia within ASEAN, for whom the reputation for impartiality is essential. Strategic neutrality, by contrast, functions as a calculated approach to advance specific negotiation outcomes and is commonly employed by powerful states like the US and China, as well as multilateral bodies. Perceptual neutrality, based on subjective assessment, appears across all mediator types but becomes most

salient when major international actors engage in mediation despite objective evidence suggesting partiality.

Contemporary international mediation increasingly reflects a shift towards «diplomacy of the possible», wherein neutrality evolves from an absolute ethical standard to a flexible instrument shaped by structural realities. This shift does not diminish neutrality's value as a conflict de-escalation mechanism, even if it takes the form of managed compromise in which parties acknowledge the mediator's inherent interests. Enhancing mediation effectiveness depends less on absolute neutrality and more on transparent disclosure of interests, enabling parties to develop realistic assessments of negotiation prospects.

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## REGIONAL DIMENSION OF IMPLEMENTING HUMANITARIAN INITIATIVES WITHIN THE COMMUNITY WITH A SHARED FUTURE FOR MANKIND: CHINA'S COOPERATION WITH AFRICAN STATES

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**Abstract.** This article elucidates Africa's considerable role in shaping a community with a shared future for mankind. It analyses the core elements and practical implications of the recent initiative «Jointly building an all-weather China – Africa community with a shared future in the new era» announced by Xi Jinping at the 2024 Forum on China – Africa cooperation. This is a landmark initiative, representing a significant diplomatic achievement for African nations. The study contends that China's humanitarian assistance and its broad engagement with Africa in areas such as culture, education, healthcare, and infrastructure are anchored in the idea of a shared future, ensuring equitable partnership and reciprocal advantage. The analysis further demonstrates that the South Africa, amidst intensified China – Africa collaboration, serves as an effective intermediary between China and the wider continent. Through bilateral and multilateral engagement, notably within BRICS and international organisations, the South Africa actively advances the goal of a shared future for mankind.

**Keywords:** humanitarian engagement; China – Africa partnership; Africa in world politics; community with a shared future for mankind.

## РЕГИОНАЛЬНОЕ ИЗМЕРЕНИЕ РЕАЛИЗАЦИИ ГУМАНИТАРНЫХ ИНИЦИАТИВ В РАМКАХ СООБЩЕСТВА ЕДИНОЙ СУДЬБЫ ЧЕЛОВЕЧЕСТВА: СОТРУДНИЧЕСТВО КИТАЯ С АФРИКАНСКИМИ ГОСУДАРСТВАМИ

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**Аннотация.** Рассматривается вклад государств Африки в построение сообщества единой судьбы человечества. Анализируются ключевые компоненты и практическое применение новой инициативы «Совместное строительство всепогодного сообщества единой судьбы Китая и Африки в новую эпоху», выдвинутой Си Цзиньпином на Форуме китайско-африканского сотрудничества в 2024 г., которая считается важным результатом внешней политики государств Африки. Утверждается, что гуманитарная помощь и многопрофильное гуманитарное сотрудничество (в области культуры, образования, здравоохранения, инфраструктуры) Китая и Африки основаны на концепции сообщества единой судьбы человечества, предполагающей равноправное взаимодействие и получение взаимной выгоды. Выявляется, что Южно-Африканская Республика в контексте интенсификации китайско-африканского сотрудничества является своеобраз-

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ным «мостом» между Китаем и остальной частью континента, играет важную роль в продвижении идеи сообщества единой судьбы человечества через двусторонние и многосторонние контакты с Китаем (в том числе с участием БРИКС и других международных организаций).

**Ключевые слова:** гуманитарное сотрудничество; китайско-африканское сотрудничество; Африка в глобальной политике; сообщество единой судьбы человечества.

## Introduction

China – Africa relations have progressively intensified in the context of building a community with a shared future for mankind. At the 2024 Beijing summit of the Forum on China – Africa cooperation (FOCAC), the parties adopted the Beijing declaration on jointly building a new era of all-weather China – Africa community with a shared future. This advancement elevated bilateral relations to strategic prominence, reflecting not merely closer coordination in international affairs, but also a shared determination to tackle global challenges collectively. The relationship has undergone a profound transformation, evolving from conventional donor – recipient dynamics towards genuine partnership based on mutual benefit. Consensus has been reached between China and African nations on exchanging governance experiences and exploring modernisation pathways. These arrangements reinforce the comprehensive character of the China – Africa relationship, encouraging knowledge transfer and aligned development strategies.

Western humanitarian interventions in Africa frequently carry political conditions and serve economic interests. Such interventions have, in some cases, deepened dependency and intensified internal conflicts within African states. In contrast, China adopts a development-oriented approach to humanitarian engagement. Its efforts prioritise supporting Africa's autonomous development through infrastructure investment, technical cooperation, and economic partnerships.

In China – Africa cooperation, the South Africa occupies a distinctive position. It is a key member of the FOCAC and an active participant in BRICS. As the economic and political hub of the continent, the South Africa facilitates comprehensive bilateral and multilateral engagement across political, economic and cultural domains. This collaboration offers an alternative model of global governance that potentially advances the international order towards greater equity and fairness.

Zhang Youguo, a leading Chinese political scientist, asserts that the shared future framework draws on the concept of Tianxia ('all under heaven'), which encourages the emergence of a new international order grounded in the collective interests of humanity [1]. Nokolo Phuai, an African scholar and member of the International Advisory Committee at the China Institute of African Studies, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, observes that the Chinese model, inspired by the Confucian principle of benevolence above all else, rejects hegemonic logic and resonates with the continent's anti-colonial legacy. This approach has established legitimacy distinct from Western interventions and has positively influenced African development<sup>1</sup>. I. A. Chuvilov, Belarusian political scientist, also notes that concepts of humanism diverge significantly across Russia, the West, and China [2]. Additionally, Wu Yuxuan, research fellow in the foreign policy programme at the South African Institute of International Affairs, contends that South Africa's proactive engagement with China has invigorated cooperation between China and Africa across multiple domains, accelerated progress towards sustainable development, and further contributed to the formation of a China – Africa community with a shared future [3]. While existing literature catalogues Africa's involvement in the community with a shared future for mankind, it largely privileges macro-level narratives. Such approaches rarely interrogate intra-African heterogeneity such as differential reception between Francophone and Anglophone nations or the collaborative strategies employed by Sino-African non-governmental organisations. It is therefore advisable to examine the resonance and interpretation of the community with a shared future for mankind at multiple cultural strata, and to articulate policy responses tailored to these varied contexts.

## Conceptualising all-weather China – Africa community with a shared future

The notion of a community with a shared future for mankind, grounded in the Tianxia from the Chinese philosophical tradition, offers an inclusive and egalitarian framework that advances international relations theory in novel directions. This concept transcends the Tianxia system by rising above state boundaries and

moving beyond relationship structures built merely on «rights» within confined spaces. Instead, it proposes a restructured international order with global expandability, departing from the individualism often characteristic of state politics [1, p. 108]. The notion of a community with a shared interest underscores the

<sup>1</sup>African scholars: the concept of a community with a shared future for mankind is rooted in Chinese philosophical tradition [Electronic resource]. URL: <http://world.people.com.cn/n1/2021/0730/c1002-32175751.html> (date of access: 02.04.2025) (in Chin.).

importance of considering other nations' interests when pursuing national development, advocating for global prosperity. China has demonstrated its commitment to these ideals through active participation in UN initiatives across the domains of peace, development, and human rights, earning substantive recognition from the global community. Sino-African relations constitute a significant component of China's foreign policy, with Africa consistently playing a key role in the shared future framework. The expanding cooperation between China and Africa on UN matters has inaugurated a new phase in South – South collaboration, substantially influencing both regions' development and reshaping international dynamics. Moreover, the enduring Sino-African relationship demonstrates the resilience of this shared future concept, exemplifying the characteristics of a deeply interconnected community.

China's engagement in Africa encompassing the promotion of humanism through education, culture, science, health, and soft power, as well as steadfast support for infrastructure and agricultural technology underpins the evolving China – Africa community with a shared future. As the global landscape undergoes significant transformation, President Xi Jinping declared during the 2024 FOCAC that China intends to elevate relations with all African states with diplomatic ties to a strategic level. He aims to usher in a new era of an all-weather China – Africa community, underpinned by Ten partnership initiatives for jointly advancing modernisation. During the summit, Chinese and African leaders articulated a unified commitment to accelerating high-quality Belt and road cooperation, while pledging to implement the global development, security, and civilisation initiatives. These commitments were formalised through the adoption of the Beijing declaration on jointly building a new era of all-weather China – Africa community with a shared future and the Forum on China – Africa cooperation Beijing action plan (2025–2027)<sup>2</sup>.

The terminology of the new era of all-weather China – Africa community with a shared future is particularly salient, with words «new era» and «all-weather» constituting its defining elements. The former marks an innovative theoretical advance in constructing this cooperative framework, representing a decisive shift in southern collaborative governance. This approach forges a multidimensional analytical matrix that integrates levels of governance, cognitive domains, and technological ecologies through a three-dimensional model: vertical institutional transmission, horizontal normative synergy, and technological empowerment pathways.

China – Africa cooperation has established a three-tier nested structure comprising bilateral strategic agreements, sub-regional cooperation platforms, and global governance initiatives. This multilayered arrangement has substantially augmented policy efficacy.

At the micro level, China has established specialised cooperation mechanisms with twelve comprehensive strategic partnership countries, enhancing implementation of high-technology and security agreements. Meanwhile, the meso-level alignment between the African Union's Agenda 2063 and the Ten partnership initiatives for jointly advancing modernisation has fostered the development of sub-regional hubs. These hubs advance trade liberalisation and regional economic integration at the geopolitical level. The Economic Community of West African States exemplifies this transformation, evolving from a purely economic organisation to a prominent sub-regional entity, registering noteworthy achievements in the political, economic, military, and health sectors. The continual expansion of its remit has considerably facilitated policy coordination among African states [4, p. 104]. According to E. Sidiropoulos, executive director of the Southern African Institute of International Affairs, South – South cooperation enables African states to exchange developmental experiences and amplify the voice of developing nations within global economic governance representing a substantial enhancement in the South's capacity to influence national agendas [5, p. 68].

Horizontally, China and Africa have cultivated normative synergies anchored in their shared identity within the Global South. Agricultural cooperation illustrates this dynamic. The BRICS countries exhibit uneven distribution of agricultural resources, characterised by simultaneous abundance and scarcity. To establish more equitable agricultural trade practices, these nations have formed the Alliance for Agricultural Subsidy Reform, promoting sustainable agricultural development through enhanced subsidy mechanisms and structural policy reforms [6, p. 87].

This initiative accelerated the growth of agricultural support within the BRICS nations and fostered the establishment of agricultural subsidy frameworks, with Russia and South Africa registering especially notable increases. The integration of technical standards exhibits a pattern of mutual adaptation and iterative innovation. At the hardware level, China's railway industry demonstrated significant compatibility with the demands of overseas markets. The China railway standard, implemented in African railway construction projects, underwent adaptation to the continent's tropical climate, building upon the foundational African high-speed railway standard, with increasingly widespread application. In the realm of software, company «Huawei» and the South Africa formalised Net5.5G strategic cooperation memorandum to drive the implementation of advanced network capabilities, including 400GE, SRv6, network slicing, and digital network mapping. These efforts have enhanced company's «MTN» service quality, network reliability, and operational efficiency

<sup>2</sup>Xi Jinping attends the opening ceremony of the Beijing summit of the Forum on China – Africa cooperation and delivers a keynote address [Electronic resource]. URL: [http://www.focac.org/eng/ttxsxy/202501/t20250114\\_11532866.htm](http://www.focac.org/eng/ttxsxy/202501/t20250114_11532866.htm) (date of access: 12.03.2025).

in both mobile and B2B domains, while generating a virtuous cycle of technology diffusion, local innovation, and the export of technical standards<sup>3</sup>. Institutionally, the inclusion of photovoltaic (PV) construction and operation standards into the AU recommendation system has significantly increased installed PV capacity across sub-Saharan Africa. This enabled almost 30 % of newly connected households, situated up to ten kilometres from the primary grid, to access community microgrids, igniting a «solar revolution» across the continent<sup>4</sup>.

The all-weather nature of China – Africa relations signifies that despite fluctuations in the international landscape, both parties maintain robust strategic trust and pragmatic collaboration, continuously advancing bilateral engagement to new heights. President Xi Jinping has articulated cooperation directions under the Six modernisations framework, emphasising that China and Africa should collaboratively pursue modernisation characterised by fairness, openness, human-centredness, pluralism, environmental sustainability, and security. This approach provides both a theoretical foundation and practical recommendations for Sino-African cooperation, aligning closely with the developmental strategies of both parties and reflecting the shared aspirations of Global South countries in their pursuit of modernisation. President Xi Jinping's Ten partnership initiatives for jointly advancing modernisation thus establish a comprehensive framework for China – Africa collaboration across numerous domains, including tariff

exemptions, infrastructure development, and agricultural technology cooperation. These initiatives aim to systematically advance African modernisation, whilst strengthening the continent's capacity for autonomous development, and enhancing the overall well-being of populations on both sides. Each element of these initiatives aligns with the developmental priorities of African states and the aspirations of their peoples, offering substantive support for Africa's progress and renewal<sup>5</sup>.

Furthering this agenda, the China – Africa entrepreneurship conference fostered bilateral cooperation in innovative sectors such as the digital economy, artificial intelligence, and renewable energy. This collaboration shows promise in reducing technological disparities across Africa and facilitating sustainable development. Collectively, these endeavours underscore China's commitment and strategic foresight as a leading global nation, while constituting a distinctive paradigm for South – South cooperation. Xi Jinping's address introduces fresh perspectives to both theoretical study and practical application in international relations, highlighting a relational model predicated on shared development and equitable partnership. This approach is of considerable scholarly and practical relevance to the enhancement of global governance, the advance of multipolarity, and the democratisation of international affairs. In articulating this vision, the speech marks the commencement of a new era in China – Africa relations.

### Western intervention versus Chinese development-oriented humanitarianism in Africa

Through its concept of a community with a shared future for mankind, China has implemented numerous humanitarian projects across Africa. Its multifaceted support encompassing aid, investment, and trade has generated considerable positive outcomes throughout the region.

Western humanitarian intervention in Africa exhibits distinctive characteristics, primarily in its emphasis on emergency aid and the promotion of political values. When faced with sudden disasters or humanitarian crises, this model offers rapid response capabilities, delivering essential resources such as food, medicine, and shelter to affected areas. Such efforts have mitigated the immediate impacts of crises, most notably in the aftermath of emergencies such as the earthquake in Haiti and the Ebola outbreak<sup>6</sup>. Aid is typically channelled through international organisations and non-govern-

mental organisations, which helps to ensure prompt and effective delivery.

However, while providing substantial short-term benefits, these interventions often suffer from limited long-term efficacy. They frequently fail to address the underlying socio-economic challenges and systemic barriers to sustainable development in African states. Over-reliance on external assistance can erode local capacities for autonomous recovery and long-term development. Additionally, the uneven distribution of aid and accompanying political conditions can exacerbate socio-political tensions, affecting both internal stability and external relations in recipient countries. As R. V. Oreshkin, Russian international relations scholar argues, European and American nations frequently base African aid decisions on self-interest rather than recipient needs. Consequently, numerous approved projects offer

<sup>3</sup>MTN of the South Africa and Huawei sign Net5.5G strategic cooperation memorandum [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://tech.huanqiu.com/article/4lBrAUIT5Br> (date of access: 04.03.2025) (in Chin.).

<sup>4</sup>International solar photovoltaic network: IEA's latest report. Africa's market «wilderness» [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://solar.in-en.com/html/solar-2404935.shtml> (date of access: 26.02.2025) (in Chin.).

<sup>5</sup>Working hand in hand to open up broader prospects for China – Africa development [Electronic resource]. URL: [https://news.gmw.cn/2025-01/11/content\\_37791821.htm](https://news.gmw.cn/2025-01/11/content_37791821.htm) (date of access: 27.02.2025).

<sup>6</sup>Global health volunteering, the Ebola outbreak, and instrumental humanitarianisms in Sierra Leone [Electronic resource]. URL: [https://kclpure.kcl.ac.uk/portal/files/122428187/Global\\_health\\_volunteering\\_the\\_HERRICK\\_Publishedonline29November2019\\_GREEN\\_AAM.pdf](https://kclpure.kcl.ac.uk/portal/files/122428187/Global_health_volunteering_the_HERRICK_Publishedonline29November2019_GREEN_AAM.pdf) (date of access: 11.03.2025).



minimal contribution to Africa's genuine development, with intervening countries prioritising their national interests as the actual objectives of humanitarian engagement<sup>7</sup>.

This practice contravenes the principle that the safeguarding of human rights should supersede considerations of state power. International donor agencies should therefore engage in rigorous assessment of the political and social context of recipient societies, to prevent harmful long-term consequences.

By contrast, China's development-oriented humanitarian assistance model integrates emergency response with capacity building for sustainable development. Rather than providing merely resource-based assistance, China promotes initiatives that strengthen capacity for autonomous development, enabling African partners to achieve multidimensional and enduring progress. In the healthcare domain, Xi Jinping outlined specific commitments in the Forum on China – Africa cooperation Beijing action plan (2025–2027) that includes establishing several China – Africa traditional medicine centres, enhancing collaboration in traditional and smart medicine, and implementing the Minimally invasive medicine initiative [7, p. 97].

China has dispatched medical teams to African countries to deliver healthcare services, disseminate disease prevention strategies, and conduct health education training, thereby supporting the development of robust public health systems. These interventions have markedly elevated healthcare standards and, by extension, contributed to the preservation of countless lives across the continent. In education, China has extended support through building schools, provision of educational resources, and initiation of the China – Africa university cooperation programme alongside the Belt and road teacher development programme. These measures have facilitated the advancement of educational provision in Africa and enhanced local education quality. Through comprehensive scholarship offerings and vocational training, China has equipped 10 000 talented individuals with Chinese language proficiency and technical skills. Moreover, China's Luban workshop project has transferred advanced technological and managerial expertise to Africa, establishing vocational training centres in countries such as Egypt, the South Africa, and Kenya to develop highly skilled workers, including CNC machinists<sup>8</sup>.

China's model of humanitarian development in Africa demonstrates a strategic vision and nuanced understanding of the continent's developmental requirements. It prioritises integrated infrastructure development, having led to the construction and upgrading of over 10 000 kilometres of railways, nearly 100 000 kilometres of highways, close to 1000 bridges, and approximately 100 ports. These physical assets create a foundation for sustainable economic growth across the continent. Within agriculture, China has adopted a strategy combining agricultural demonstration centres and enterprise investment, expediting the shift from traditional cultivation to modern agricultural practices.

By the end of 2024, China had established 24 agricultural technology demonstration centres across Africa and disseminated more than 300 innovative agricultural practices, including high-density maize cultivation, advanced vegetable farming, and rapid cassava propagation. These innovations have reached over a million African farmers, substantially contributing to agricultural advancement. This strategy has significantly accelerated agricultural modernisation and spurred economic development across Africa<sup>9</sup>. Industrial parks and similar cooperative ventures have not only driven the continent's industrialisation but also contributed to the diversification and optimisation of its trade structures, rendering these initiatives a distinctive feature of contemporary Sino-African collaboration.

In security, China, as the second-largest contributor to UN peacekeeping funds<sup>10</sup>, has taken an increasingly proactive role in addressing regional conflicts within Africa. Beijing consistently participates in peacekeeping operations and supports African nations in enhancing their self-sufficiency in peacekeeping. This cooperation extends to combating terrorism and transnational crime, thereby bolstering regional security and mitigating fragmentation. Looking ahead, China aims to enhance digital capabilities for humanitarian aid in Africa. By harnessing artificial intelligence to construct intelligent emergency response systems, Chinese initiatives seek to facilitate real-time disaster risk monitoring, optimise aid distribution networks through big data analytics, and deploy telemedicine to transcend geographical barriers in healthcare delivery. Furthermore, digital education programmes serve to narrow educational disparities and promote the equitable sharing of resources. As of November 2024, China had formalised the

<sup>7</sup>Oreshkin R. V. «Humanitarian intervention» in the common foreign and security policy of the European Union in the 1990s : diss. abstr. .... PhD (history) : 07.00.03. Volgograd : Volgograd State Univ., 2005. 26 p. (in Russ.).

<sup>8</sup>White paper on China – Africa cooperation in a new era [Electronic resource]. URL: [www.scio.gov.cn/zfbps/ndhf/2021n\\_2242/202207/t20220704\\_130719.html](http://www.scio.gov.cn/zfbps/ndhf/2021n_2242/202207/t20220704_130719.html) (date of access: 11.03.2025) (in Chin.).

<sup>9</sup>China has built 24 agricultural technology demonstration centres in Africa [Electronic resource]. URL: [https://mbd.baidu.com/newspage/data/landingsuper?rs=1523241162&ruk=Sk5fQ\\_bzW9VlxfKxeEBkiQ&urlex=%7B%22cuid%22%3A%220iHxa\\_uZ2u0EO-H8y\\_aHbu0i4vi\\_HOHuB0u2Di08tva\\_xiSufgP2iagtXHOpetSa\\_YPDmA%22%7D&isBdboxFrom=1&pageType=1&sid\\_for\\_share=&context=%7B%22nid%22%3A%22news\\_9178181945638832138%22,%22sourceFrom%22%3A%22other%22%7D](https://mbd.baidu.com/newspage/data/landingsuper?rs=1523241162&ruk=Sk5fQ_bzW9VlxfKxeEBkiQ&urlex=%7B%22cuid%22%3A%220iHxa_uZ2u0EO-H8y_aHbu0i4vi_HOHuB0u2Di08tva_xiSufgP2iagtXHOpetSa_YPDmA%22%7D&isBdboxFrom=1&pageType=1&sid_for_share=&context=%7B%22nid%22%3A%22news_9178181945638832138%22,%22sourceFrom%22%3A%22other%22%7D) (date of access: 01.04.2025) (in Chin.).

<sup>10</sup>How we are funded [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/how-we-are-funded> (date of access: 20.03.2025).



China – Africa Digital cooperation and development action plan with 26 African states<sup>11</sup>. China's innovative model encompassing digital capacity building and technology localisation has transformed technological governance in South – South cooperation. This approach not only provides a valuable reference point

for the digital transformation of global humanitarian assistance but also substantiates the vision of a community with a shared future for mankind. By giving fresh impetus to Africa's sustainable development, these interventions yield enduring, positive impacts across the continent.

### **South Africa's contribution to Sino-African partnerships within the framework of a shared future for mankind**

Africa is a prominent voice among developing nations with a unique role in advancing the vision of a community with a shared future for mankind. Within this context, the South Africa, with the continent's most developed economy and substantial political influence, provides an essential bridge between China and other African countries. Its mature democratic system, diverse cultural landscape, and status as a BRICS member further reinforce its role in advancing this vision of a shared future.

Articles 3(d) and 3(f) of the African Union Charter<sup>12</sup> explicitly articulate the union's purposes: to champion and defend common positions on continental concerns, and to advance peace, security, and stability across Africa. These provisions embody the principles of African solutions to African problems, and integrate the Global security initiative with the Regional governance architecture. In climate governance, effective China – Africa cooperation necessitates alignment with overarching frameworks such as the UN Framework convention on climate change, the Kyoto protocol, and the Paris agreement. It should also coordinate with the UN Sustainable development goals and the African Union's Agenda 2063. By defining assistance scope, implementation strategies, and funding parameters, this cooperation can exploit the «1+1>2» strategic synergy of South – South climate collaboration and the Green belt and road initiative, thus establishing strategic guidelines that enable China and African states to address climate challenges collaboratively [8, p. 66].

The Nairobi declaration, endorsed by the African Union during the inaugural African climate summit, reaffirms the Paris agreement's precept that economic development need not be sacrificed in pursuit of climate action. This notion of shared responsibility resonates with the concept of a community with a shared future for mankind and aids in shaping more equitable implementation protocols for the Paris agreement. Notably, South Africa, as the sole African participant in BRICS, has transformed this multilateral forum into an effective vehicle for advancing the collective interests of Africa. By leveraging platforms such as the G21, the South Africa has empowered other African nations to amplify their voices on the global stage.

Given Africa's considerable institutional gaps, the continent has drawn on China's «gradualist» approach to economic development. This model distributes competing interests and contradictions across time and space, creating a buffer for social advancement whilst mitigating the risks associated with institutional innovation [9, p. 38]. The 2023 BRICS expansion illustrates this strategy, maintaining a balance between representativeness and effectiveness and allowing nations such as Ethiopia and Egypt to join. These practices validate the collaborative governance principles of working together, building together, and sharing together within the framework of a community with a shared future for mankind. Additionally, they enable broader African engagement in the BRICS mechanism through the South Africa's distinctive role as a pivotal intermediary.

In terms of cross-cultural understanding and soft power development, the South Africa's Ubuntu philosophy emphasises community values and solidarity [10, p. 492]. This represents an innovative synthesis between indigenous traditions and the harmony and symbiosis ethos embedded in the concept of a shared future for mankind. Ubuntu effectively bridges communitarian ethics with broader worldviews through meaningful cultural dialogue. In knowledge production, Africa has seen the rise of regional and networked think tanks such as the African Council for the Development of Social Science Research. These organisations advance academic exchange, disseminate research findings, fund scholarly activity, and enhance the capacity of African research institutions. Serving as platforms and conduits for knowledge transfer [11, p. 122], they demonstrate the epistemic agency of the Global South in international governance. This shift in knowledge production challenges Western-centric discourses, offering a non-Western cognitive framework for the community with a shared future. Moreover, the South African film and television industry has adeptly reduced cultural discounting through enhanced content creation and strategic market positioning. These efforts have elevated South African productions to continental prominence, establishing a compelling sphere of cultural influence throughout Africa.

<sup>11</sup>Cross-border integration to create a «model room» for digital education in African languages [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://baijiahao.baidu.com/s?id=1816920636304625200&wfr=spider&for=pc> (date of access: 01.04.2025) (in Chin.).

<sup>12</sup>Secretary-General alarmed by deteriorating humanitarian situation in Darfur Region of Sudan [Electronic resource]. URL: [https://au.int/sites/default/files/pages/34873-file-constitutiveact\\_en.pdf](https://au.int/sites/default/files/pages/34873-file-constitutiveact_en.pdf) (date of access: 01.04.2025).

Likewise, the dissemination of Chinese cultural soft power aims to diminish cultural discounting whilst facilitating global cultural exchange and value sharing. This is achieved by highlighting both the distinctiveness and adaptability of Chinese traditions. Initiatives such as the promotion of Chinese language learning, the integration of heritage with contemporary cultural forms, and the fostering of international cultural dialogue exemplify these efforts. Both China and the South Africa work towards a common objective: to minimise cultural barriers and foster people-to-people engage-

ment through the active projection of their soft power, contributing to a pluralistic and harmonious global cultural model. This reciprocal process of cultural expression and value consensus not only enriches the concept of soft power but also validates the notion of a community with a shared future for mankind within the cultural sphere. Through practices such as civilisational dialogue and mutual appraisal, these developments yield significant insights for establishing a global cultural governance framework characterised by pluralistic modernity.

## Conclusions

The vision of an all-weather China – Africa community with a shared future for mankind signifies more than merely the advancement of Sino-African relations. It demonstrates China's ongoing commitment to a more equitable and rational international order within the global governance framework. The collaborative innovation between Chinese and African nations across institutional, normative, and technological domains has generated a distinctive Southern governance framework, effectively amplifying developing countries' international discourse and contributing to global governance transformation. President Xi Jinping's address at the 2024 FOCAC articulated clear strategic directions for collaboration whilst introducing fresh perspectives to international relations theory. Within this context, the South Africa emerges as a crucial actor: as the continent's economic and political nucleus, it advances China – Africa

cooperation through its strategic role in global value chains, while simultaneously consolidating Africa's presence within international institutions through business regulation and political engagement. The South Africa's cultural production capabilities and intellectual development, alongside its partnership with China in cultural soft power projection, provide robust foundations for creating a diverse world cultural landscape. Simultaneously, China's development-oriented humanism in Africa presents a new paradigm for sustainable and autonomous development, contrasting with Western models. By prioritising infrastructure development and comprehensive support, this approach facilitates economic transformation and empowerment in African states, holding considerable practical and theoretical significance for the realisation of a community with a shared future for humanity.

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## THE CHALLENGES OF IMPLEMENTING THE BELT AND ROAD INITIATIVE

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**Abstract.** Launched in 2013, the Belt and road initiative proposed new land and sea corridors to enhance global logistics connectivity. China presented this initiative as a new cooperation framework in international affairs, grounded in openness, inclusiveness, and mutual advantage. At the same time, the declared objectives and operational scope of the mentioned initiative have raised concerns regarding its potential to project Chinese hegemony, which presents significant implementation challenges. Competition from established regional economic integration projects constitutes a further obstacle. These initiatives encompass multilateral associations such as the EAEU and the ASEAN, alongside national strategies like Mongolia's «Steppe road», Indonesia's «Maritime axis of peace», and South Korea's «K-Silk Road». Regional disputes compound these difficulties, particularly the India–Pakistan conflict and civil wars across the Arab world. This study examines these impediments and evaluates China's proposed strategies to address them.

**Keywords:** ASEAN; EAEU; India–Pakistan conflict; Chinese hegemony; competition between the USA and China; Maritime Silk Road; Belt and road initiative; Trans-Pacific partnership; Silk Road economic belt.

## О ПРОБЛЕМАХ РЕАЛИЗАЦИИ ИНИЦИАТИВЫ «ОДИН ПОЯС, ОДИН ПУТЬ»

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**Аннотация.** Си Цзиньпин в 2013 г. выдвинул инициативу «Один пояс, один путь», предполагающую строительство сухопутного и морского путей вдоль ключевых границ мировой логистики. Китай заявил о начале создания нового формата международного сотрудничества, основанного на приоритете принципа открытости, толерантности и взаимной выгоды. Вместе с тем заявленные руководством Китая цели инициативы «Один пояс, один путь» свидетельствуют о том, что в ней имеются признаки китайской гегемонии. Это обстоятельство представляется одной из значимых проблем реализации данной инициативы. К иным проблемам относятся соперничество с уже существующими проектами региональной интеграции экономического пространства, среди которых ЕАЭС и АСЕАН в рамках отдельных международных объединений, а также национальные стратегии «Степной путь» (Монголия), «Морская ось мира» (Индонезия), «Корейский шелковый путь» (Южная Корея) в рамках отдельных стран. Наличие разногласий в Южной Азии и на Ближнем Востоке (индийско-пакистанский конфликт и гражданские войны в арабском мире) тоже затрудняют реализацию рассматриваемой инициативы. На основе детального изучения обозначенных проблем выявлены инструменты, которые могут быть использованы китайским руководством для их преодоления.

**Ключевые слова:** АСЕАН; ЕАЭС; индийско-пакистанский конфликт; китайская гегемония; конкуренция США и Китая; Морской шелковый путь; инициатива «Один пояс, один путь»; транстихоокеанское партнерство; экономический пояс шелкового пути.

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## Introduction

The Belt and road initiative (BRI), launched by President Xi Jinping, commemorated its 11<sup>th</sup> anniversary in September 2024. The concept, envisioning a revival of ancient Silk Road connections within contemporary international relations, was first articulated at Nazarbayev University in Astana in September 2013. The Chinese leader emphasised that two decades of dynamic engagement between China and Eurasian states had renewed economic ties and created conditions conducive to expanded collaboration. Consequently, Xi Jinping proposed the Silk Road economic belt, an overland corridor to facilitate extensive regional cooperation and coordination between the SCO and the Eurasian Economic Community<sup>1</sup>.

One month later, in October 2013, Xi Jinping visited the ASEAN Secretariat headquarters in Jakarta. Addressing the Indonesian Parliament, President Xi Jinping introduced the 21<sup>st</sup>-century Maritime Silk Road: «China's development brings opportunities, not threats, to Asia and the planet as a whole, and China intends to share [the benefits] with ASEAN»<sup>2</sup>. Historically, Southeast Asia has served as a trading hub along the Maritime Silk Road, its revitalisation is presented as essential in today's context. Together, China and ASEAN represent one quarter of the global population and possess the capacity to build what Xi Jinping termed a community of common destiny.

The land and maritime components of the Silk Road are collectively known as the BRI, a symbol of unity among Asian and European peoples. On 28 March 2015, China's National Development and Reform Commission, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, and Ministry of Commerce of the People's Republic of China published the first official policy document «Vision and actions on jointly building Silk Road

economic belt and 21<sup>st</sup>-century Maritime Silk Road», authorised by the State Council of the People's Republic of China. It presents the Chinese government's vision for achieving global peaceful development, economic prosperity, and enhanced cultural exchange. As a significant economic power, China declared its commitment to making substantial contributions towards realising the document's shared aspirations. Section VII outlines China's concrete actions and early achievements. These include high-level diplomatic engagements to explain the initiative's principles, dedicated exhibitions promoting its value, the signing of bilateral cooperation frameworks, the development of long-term trade and economic plans, and the establishment of dedicated financial mechanisms, notably the Silk Road Fund and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank. The text further stresses the BRI's inherently open and inclusive nature, reflected in China's active outreach to all nations and international bodies along the proposed routes. China expresses readiness to collaborate in establishing timelines, roadmaps, and modalities for cooperation<sup>3</sup>.

Consequently, China has advanced ambitious proposals for the construction of integrated land and maritime routes along strategic global logistical corridors. It represents a new framework for international cooperation, emphasising openness, tolerance, and mutual benefit. However, the BRI exhibits clear markers of Chinese hegemony, which critics readily identify. Negative perceptions of Chinese dominance in Eurasia represent just one challenge facing the initiative. Equally significant obstacles include competition from established regional economic integration projects and ongoing conflicts in South Asia and the Middle East.

This article examines the principal challenges confronting the execution of the BRI.

## Materials and methods

The research draws substantially on publicly accessible data from key official sources, including the Belt and road portal, the China Internet Information Centre, and the press centre of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China. The Belt and road portal, established by the National Development and Reform Commission in collaboration with Xinhua News Agency as the primary platform for disseminating information about the BRI, reports on recent developments and policy directions and facilitates timely and effective communication among participants. For the purposes of this research, the portal has provided essential access to policy statements and official commentary.

In addition to these sources, the works of S. G. Luzynin [1], Dinh Le Hong Zang [2], Wan Juntao and D. E. Lubina [3], Zhang Zehua and Li Yanjie [4], F. T. Kukeeva, D. K. Dyusebaev, A. K. Ordabaev and M. A. Utegenova [5], V. E. Vasilevskaya [6], V. S. Kovalev [7], Vang Leping [8], A. A. Dikikh [9], S. N. Kamenev [10] offer critical perspectives on the contemporary issues confronting the BRI. For example, Dinh Le Hong Zang [2] contends that China, seeking enhanced global stature, proposed the BRI as a major strategy to deepen Eurasian integration. The scholar further suggests that the initiative aims to counterbalance Western geopolitical dominance. Scholars such as F. T. Kukeeva, D. K. Dyusebaev, A. K. Ordabaev and

<sup>1</sup>Speech by President Xi Jinping at Nazarbayev University [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://rus.yidaiyilu.gov.cn/p/36777.html> (date of access: 22.01.2025) (in Russ.).

<sup>2</sup>President Xi Jinping outlined China's policy of developing good neighbourliness and friendship with Indonesia and ASEAN [Electronic resource]. URL: [http://russian.china.org.cn/exclusive/txt/2013-10/04/content\\_30197002.htm](http://russian.china.org.cn/exclusive/txt/2013-10/04/content_30197002.htm) (date of access: 22.01.2025) (in Russ.).

<sup>3</sup>Vision and actions on jointly building Silk Road economic belt and 21<sup>st</sup>-century Maritime Silk Road [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://eng.yidaiyilu.gov.cn/p/1084.html> (date of access: 22.01.2025).



M. A. Utegenova observe that analytical frameworks for studying the BRI are still developing. Nevertheless, two contrasting analytical approaches have emerged. The first interprets the initiative primarily as a means for China to expand political influence through economic power. Conversely, the second emphasises the BRI's global ambitions, highlighting its poten-

tial to deepen economic integration across Asia and Europe.

This study employed a range of research methods, including structural and functional analysis, comparative approaches, observation, and general scientific techniques such as analysis and synthesis, induction and deduction, abstraction, and generalisation.

## Results and discussion

A significant challenge facing BRI implementation involves mitigating concerns over perceived Chinese dominance in Eurasia. This apprehension is largely fuelled by China's vigorous investment strategy under the initiative. Indeed, during the inaugural presentation of the 21<sup>st</sup>-century Maritime Silk Road concept to Indonesia's People's Representative Council in 2013, Xi Jinping immediately stressed that establishing major maritime corridors demands substantial financial commitment, through multibillion-dollar Chinese capital flows. Concurrent targets included raising China–ASEAN bilateral trade to 1 trln US dollars and increasing Chinese investment in ASEAN nearly threefold<sup>4</sup> by 2020. These economic commitments underlie arguments that advancing BRI objectives consolidates China's regional dominance.

Analysing early expert commentary, historian S. G. Lutzanin notes the consistent invocation of «mutual benefit» in relation to both BRI land and maritime components. Chinese leadership clearly intends this concept to attract participating states. The researcher further contends, based on expert assessments, that the BRI can be interpreted as integral to China's strategy of becoming a superpower, with the revival of the ancient Silk Road functioning as a symbolic restoration of Chinese civilisation's historical stature. The scope of China's strategy extends beyond trade, economic, and investment projects, encompassing currency initiatives aimed at promoting the yuan as an alternative to the US dollar [1].

Overall, the launch of the BRI signalled China's intention to enhance its international influence while simultaneously challenging existing patterns of dominance.

Scholar Dinh Le Hong Zang analyses the initiative through a geopolitical lens, arguing that it directly threatens Western hegemony whilst strengthening China's power and enabling competition with America's pivot to Asia strategy. Consequently, the US and its allies seek ways to counter this challenge [2, p. 116]. In October 2015, the US established the Trans-Pacific partnership (TPP), an agreement designed to reduce trade barriers amongst twelve Asia–Pacific nations. This agreement aimed to establish a free trade area that deliberately excluded China. Its objectives included lowering approxi-

mately 18 000 tariffs on goods traded between members, effectively marginalising a major portion of Chinese exports. The researcher contend the TPP served as a US instrument for China's economic containment: «The TPP is a key component of the US rebalance to Asia strategy, driven by both economic and geopolitical motives, chief among them the deceleration of China's growth» [3, p. 45]. Significantly, all TPP members are key military allies of the US while also maintaining substantial trade relations with China: for three of twelve member states, China is their second-largest trading partner, and for the remaining nine, it is the largest [4, p. 4].

However, shifting towards protectionism and prioritising the domestic market, the US president withdrew from the TPP in January 2017 [3, p. 49]. Wan Juntao observes that the TPP and the BRI represent contrasting approaches to regional economic cooperation in the Asia–Pacific. The former embodies Western exclusivity, whilst the latter reflects Eastern philosophy, prioritising openness and pluralism [3, p. 50].

Diverse theoretical perspectives on the BRI are analysed by Russian scholars F. T. Kukeeva, D. K. Dyusebaev, A. K. Ordabaev and M. A. Utegenova. They argue that concerns regarding Chinese hegemony in Eurasia often reflect scepticism about the underlying objectives of the BRI. They propose that the BRI functions not merely as a geopolitical instrument for reshaping the international order, but also as a potential debt trap for participating states. Western analysts frequently criticise the initiative, despite its ostensible openness and flexibility. Conversely, Chinese scholars emphasise its conceptual framework, presenting this megaproject as an effective unifying strategy. They describe it as an innovative concept establishing novel mechanisms for mutually advantageous cooperation, highlighting its current status, interim achievements, and future prospects [5, p. 112]. This perspective receives strong governmental endorsement within China. Chinese authorities conduct extensive information campaigns to cultivate a favourable perception of the BRI. Since 2017, high-level forums on BRI international cooperation have been convened. These gatherings serve as primary venues for signing agreements, enhancing exchanges, facilitating training, advancing financial integration, and coordinating policy.

<sup>4</sup>Commentary on the speech of President Xi Jinping at the the People's Consultative Assembly of the Republic of Indonesia [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://rus.yidaiyilu.gov.cn/p/36817.html> (date of access: 23.01.2025) (in Russ.).

The third of above mentioned forums, held in October 2023, drew leaders from 20 nations and representatives from over 150 states. A defining characteristic was its thematic focus: promoting the consensus that economic interdependence represents a developmental opportunity, not a risk (a direct response to intensified American efforts to reassert Western global dominance) [6, p. 99]. In his keynote address opening the forum, Xi Jinping articulated guidelines and specific measures for the BRI's continued development, including following points:

- China's commitment to enhancing its railway infrastructure towards Europe and establishing a new logistics corridor in Eurasia to improve cargo transportation;
- China's lasting commitment to an open global economy, with trade volumes projected to reach 38 trln US dollars by 2028;
- advancement of the BRI projects, providing of China Development Bank and the Export – Import Bank of China of financing worth 350 bln yuan;
- China's intent to intensify cooperation in critical sectors including sustainable energy, transportation networks, and infrastructure development;
- scientific and technological collaboration between the BRI partner states that will be strengthened through the establishment of up to 100 joint laboratories within five years;
- China's aiming to foster greater civilisational exchange, enhancing cultural and people-to-people contacts;
- receiving by the projects operating under the principles of good faith of continued encouragement;
- China's development of cooperative mechanisms in energy, finance, environmental protection, and culture in partnership with BRI member states<sup>5</sup>.

Separately, Xi Jinping's keynote address at the 3<sup>rd</sup> Belt and road forum articulated China's stance on unilateral sanctions, particularly those imposed by the West. He explicitly rejected policies of economic coercion, reaffirming China's dedication to the BRI's unifying agenda of mutual support and enhanced connectivity. Xi Jinping called for the abandonment of political and ideological confrontation, asserting that such divisions are incompatible with the vision of a shared future for humanity.

Addressing another strategic challenge (potential competition with existing Eurasian economic integration frameworks) the BRI prioritises diversifying continental transport and logistics infrastructure. Project coordination, particularly with the EAEU, is actively pursued. This approach aligns with the 2015 Russia–China

joint statement signed during Xi Jinping's Moscow visit, which clarified that the Silk Road initiative complements rather than conflicts with prior agreements. Both parties acknowledged that the project supports their shared objective of creating an open economic space across Eurasia. Section IV of the statement commits the parties to coordinate regional economic integration processes within the EAEU<sup>6</sup>. This provision initiated negotiations between the EAEU and China, culminating in the May 2018 Agreement on trade and economic cooperation.

Experts suggest that while this agreement established a solid legal foundation, its character was primarily that of a framework, lacking specific binding commitments. Project coordination, particularly at the regional level, has proven challenging, partly due to the Eurasian Economic Commission's constrained mandate. Nevertheless, tangible progress has emerged through bilateral engagement. China has successfully aligned its strategy with national development programmes in key EAEU member states: Kazakhstan's Nurly zhol plan, Uzbekistan's Long-term development strategy until 2035, and Tajikistan's National development strategy until 2030. Belarus–China cooperation exemplifies this, evidenced by their 2017 intergovernmental agreement on cargo transportation and a 2018 memorandum between their respective economics and commerce ministries for joint development through strategic programme integration.

The agreement's preamble explicitly recognises the importance of expanding economic integration across the Asia–Pacific region and Eurasia, highlighting the necessity of linking the EAEU with China's BRI to secure stable trade flows. Eurasian Economic Commission trade minister A. A. Slepnev reports that implementing the agreement's provisions has increased mutual trade and enhanced project connectivity. Indeed, total trade turnover doubled between 2019 and 2023. A. A. Slepnev also notes that both parties now seek to advance cooperation in transport corridor digitalisation, a topic addressed by the Joint commission meeting in Beijing in April 2024. He further stressed that China–EAEU collaboration now extends significantly beyond the current agreement's scope: «Beyond transport, critical areas include digitalisation and climate action, fundamentally driven by technological transformation. These are vital fields where our alignment with China is strong; we are jointly advancing them within BRICS and SCO frameworks to prevent new trade barriers»<sup>7</sup>.

A notable example illustrating the effectiveness of integrating the EAEU and the BRI can be observed

<sup>5</sup>Full text of Xi Jinping's keynote speech at 3<sup>rd</sup> Belt and road forum for international cooperation [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://rus.yidaiyilu.gov.cn/news/news/334507.htm> (date of access: 23.01.2025) (in Russ.).

<sup>6</sup>Joint statement on deepening partnership between Russia and China [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://newchina.mid.ru/upload/iblock/21d/21d5615ad8e7d0ce327c40447f6b75a0.pdf> (date of access: 23.01.2025) (in Russ.).

<sup>7</sup>EAEU jointly with PRC promotes major elements of cooperation in digitalisation and climate at leading international platforms [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://eec.eaeunion.org/news/eaes-sovmestno-s-krupneyshikh-mezhdunarodnykh-ploshchadkakh-vazhneyshie-elementy-s/> (date of access: 23.01.2025) (in Russ.).

in the cooperative outcomes of 2020. Despite the global pandemic and Western sanctions, trade between EAEU member states and China intensified significantly within the union's market that year. China emerged as the EAEU's dominant external trading partner, capturing 20 % of its foreign trade volume, equivalent to 79 bln US dollars. As noted by V.S. Kovalev, adviser to the Chairman of the Eurasian Economic Commission, this reflects an active shift in EAEU trade flows away from the historically dominant EU market towards China. The EU's share of EAEU trade fell from 46 % in 2015 to approximately 36 %, a substantial 10 % decline. Consequently, China is now the principal trading partner for all EAEU members except Belarus, where Russia holds the largest share [7, p. 18].

The relationship between the BRI and existing regional economic integration projects also requires examination, particularly China's cooperation with ASEAN member states. Xi Jinping declared China's intention to collaborate with ASEAN on the initiative when he first introduced 21<sup>st</sup>-century the Maritime Silk Road to the international community in 2013. By then, China and ASEAN had maintained strong relations for over two decades, especially in trade and economics. The BRI catalysed a new phase of cooperation. ASEAN members promptly endorsed the initiative, motivated by their shared ambition to deepen integration and establish what China termed a «community of common destiny» in October 2013. During a Southeast Asian visit that month, Xi Jinping stated that future ASEAN relations should prioritise building this community alongside the Maritime Silk Road [8, p. 11]. Consequently, infrastructure development and trade facilitation became central cooperative priorities.

Chinese scholar Wang Leping observes that ASEAN members such as Laos, Cambodia, Brunei, and Singapore strongly advocate 21<sup>st</sup>-century the Maritime Silk Road initiative. Conversely, infrastructure development for this maritime corridor faces significant obstacles in Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand, Myanmar, and Vietnam, primarily due to territorial disputes and internal ethnic conflicts. Malaysia adopts a more cautious stance towards China's initiative, citing domestic political concerns and fears over escalating public debt. Furthermore, Wang Leping notes that Southeast Asian academic and media discourse often perceives the BRI's conceptual framework as underdeveloped, resulting in limited comprehension of its objectives [8, p. 11].

Competition between the BRI and pre-existing regional integration projects is evident not only among international organisations but also at the level of individual states. For example, Mongolia introduced its strategy «Steppe road» in 2014, proposing five distinct transport and trade development schemes to capitalise

on its geography. Politically, this initiative represents Mongolia's attempt to position itself within evolving Eurasian integration dynamics. However, its success remains contingent on Russian and Chinese cooperation, given Mongolia's reliance on their shared transport network for mineral exports. Recognising this interdependence, Chinese officials have frequently emphasised aligning the BRI and strategy «Steppe road» within their broader Eurasian infrastructure strategy.

Similarly, Indonesia proposed its project «Maritime axis of the world» in 2014, linking the Indian and Pacific oceans. President Joko Widodo justified this initiative by citing the geopolitical and geo-economic shift from the West to East Asia, where Indonesia holds a strategic geographical position. This reflects Indonesia's ambition to emerge as a major maritime power. Yet, this goal confronts substantial challenges, including the geographical fragmentation of its archipelago and the critical need for foreign investment. At the November 2014 APEC summit, Indonesian president invited foreign investors to participate in the project «Maritime axis of the world». China showed the greatest interest, as it was already implementing its 21<sup>st</sup>-century Maritime Silk Road objectives. Beijing proposed that Indonesia integrate these strategically complementary projects, and Jakarta readily accepted this cooperation, particularly given China's substantial investment in marine infrastructure development.

In June 2024, during an official state visit to Kazakhstan, South Korean president Yoon Suk-Yeol announced the launch of the K-Silk Road initiative, the country's first diplomatic strategy tailored for Central Asia. The term «road» encompasses core areas of cooperation: resources, development assistance, strengthened partnerships, and deeper bilateral relations. Under the K-Silk Road, South Korea aims to expand cooperation with each Central Asian nation. For instance, collaboration with Kazakhstan focuses on the energy sector, with Kyrgyzstan on water resources and tourism, and with Turkmenistan on construction.

Current relations have reached significant levels. Bilateral trade between South Korea and Kazakhstan alone exceeds 1 bln US dollars. Approximately 700 Korean companies currently invest in Kazakhstan, creating employment opportunities, advancing industrial development, and modernising infrastructure. During June 2024 meeting with his Kazakh counterpart, Yoon Suk-Yeol announced plans to elevate bilateral ties to an enhanced partnership level through the K-Silk Road initiative. Similar commitments were made during subsequent presidential visits to Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan<sup>8</sup>.

Political disputes continue to impede the BRI's implementation in certain regions. A significant example is the enduring Indo-Pakistani conflict in South Asia.

<sup>8</sup>The Korean Silk Road: results of the South Korean president's visit to Central Asia [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://eurasiatoday.ru/korejskij-shelkovyj-put-itogi-vizita-prezidenta-yuzhnoj-korei-v-tsentrالنyu-aziyu/> (date of access: 24.01.2025) (in Russ.).



Since the partition of British India in 1947, recurring disputes, primarily over Kashmir [9, p. 47], have hindered fuller cooperation with Pakistan under the BRI. Territorial constraints impede the development of the China–Pakistan economic corridor (CPEC), a project valued at 75 bln US dollars [10, p. 69]. Economist S. N. Kamenev observes that China prioritises CPEC within its broader initiative, motivated not only by long-standing Sino-Pakistani relations but also by Pakistan's strategic geography. Situated at the convergence of South Asia, Central Asia, the Far East, and parts of Southeast Asia, Pakistan serves as a crucial network hub for the Silk Road [10, p. 70].

India views the deepening strategic partnership between these two nuclear-armed states with apprehension, perceiving it as intensifying Indo-Pakistani tensions. New Delhi remains cautious regarding China's efforts to deepen its economic and political footprint across South Asia and has withheld explicit endorsement of the initiative. Furthermore, India disputes Pakistan's sovereignty over Gilgit-Baltistan, the territory traversed by CPEC. Indian leaders also regard the Chinese-supported modernisation of Gwadar port with concern, mindful of its potential future use as a Chinese military facility [10, p. 71].

In the Middle East, political instability and ongoing civil conflicts complicate the BRI's implementation. This volatility renders the construction of overland transport links with Arab states exceptionally challenging. Consequently, China actively seeks to prevent foreign military intervention in Syria, providing Damascus with financial, military, and diplomatic backing. During an August 2016 meeting in Damascus between Syrian defence minister Fahad Jassim al-Frej and major general Guan Youfei, head of the Office for International Military Cooperation under China's Central Military Commis-

sion, Syrian officials expressed gratitude for Chinese military assistance. Guan Youfei reaffirmed Beijing's commitment to a political resolution of the Syrian crisis and support for Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity<sup>9</sup>.

China's engagement in Syria is largely motivated by the country's strategic location. Syria lies at a critical junction on Silk Road routes connecting to Asia minor and Europe via the Mediterranean Sea.

China has recently intensified its engagement in the Middle East, evidenced by growing investments in commercial and financial projects with key partners such as Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE. These relationships have strengthened through collaborative efforts that align the BRI with each country's national development programmes. In January 2016, Xi Jinping visited Cairo, headquarters of the Arab League, where he presented China's vision for Middle Eastern politics. In discussions with Egyptian Prime Minister Sherif Ismail, he advocated for accelerated bilateral relations, identifying BRI collaboration as a catalyst for stronger ties. Xi Jinping specifically affirmed Chinese support for Egyptian enterprises participating in major joint industrial projects. Sherif Ismail reciprocated, confirming Egypt's commitment to deeper cooperation under the BRI framework. More recent developments demonstrate expanding cooperation between China and the UAE. At the UAE–China Business forum's closing session in September 2024, Chinese Premier Minister Li Qiang urged enterprises from both nations to deepen cooperation and actively capitalise on BRI opportunities<sup>10</sup>. Li Qiang highlighted the UAE's strategic position as a transportation hub linking Asia, Europe, and Africa, emphasising its significant potential gains from integrated production and distribution networks<sup>11</sup>.

## Conclusions

The BRI exhibits several distinctive characteristics. Foremost is its explicitly open nature, as articulated in China's foundational policy document «Vision and actions on jointly building the Silk Road economic belt and 21<sup>st</sup>-century Maritime Silk Road». This document reaffirms China's commitment to engaging all interested countries and international organisations in constructing the Silk Road. It further expresses China's readiness to collaboratively establish timelines, roadmaps, and modalities for participation. Secondly, the initiative champions inclusive cooperation. This is demonstrated through a commitment to tolerance, respect for the diverse developmental paths of partner na-

tions, and peaceful coexistence. Crucially, within the BRI framework, China explicitly adheres to the principle of non-interference in the domestic affairs of participating states and actively supports their efforts to safeguard national sovereignty. Thirdly, mutual benefit is paramount. China seeks to establish equitable conditions for all parties engaging in BRI projects. As highlighted in the analysis, both land-based (belt) and maritime (road) components emphasise reciprocal advantage, which Chinese policymakers view as a catalyst for deepening socio-economic collaboration among participants.

The BRI's extensive scope enhances China's geopolitical standing. Its novel cooperative model with Central

<sup>9</sup>Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Defense of Syria met with the PLA delegation for international cooperation [Electronic resource]. URL: [https://russian.news.cn/2016-08/16/c\\_135601137.htm](https://russian.news.cn/2016-08/16/c_135601137.htm) (date of access: 24.01.2025) (in Russ.).

<sup>10</sup>On the meeting of Chinese President Xi Jinping and Egyptian Prime Minister Sherif Ismail in Cairo in January 2016 [Electronic resource]. URL: [https://russian.news.cn/2016-01/21/c\\_135031114.htm](https://russian.news.cn/2016-01/21/c_135031114.htm) (date of access: 24.01.2025) (in Russ.).

<sup>11</sup>Chinese premier urges China, UAE enterprises to seize new cooperation opportunities [Electronic resource]. URL: [http://russian.china.org.cn/international/txt/2024-09/13/content\\_117425353.htm](http://russian.china.org.cn/international/txt/2024-09/13/content_117425353.htm) (date of access: 24.01.2025) (in Russ.).



Asia, Europe, and the Middle East not only strengthens the economic capacity of partner countries but also facilitates a perceived expansion of Chinese political influence across the region. This perception, however, fuels apprehensions among some actors, occasionally manifesting as resistance to potential Chinese dominance in Eurasia. Consequently, a significant implementation challenge involves countering scepticism regarding hegemonic intentions. Strategic competition with the US forms the core of this problem. To mitigate such concerns, China employs multiple strategies, including substantial informational efforts to cultivate a favourable view of the BRI. Platforms like the SCO serve as demonstration cases. Furthermore, China established the dedicated Belt and road forum for international cooperation. The third forum in October 2023 notably advanced the collective stance that economic interdependence represents a developmental opportunity, not solely a risk (a position directly countering US-led efforts to reassert Western supremacy).

Competition with established regional economic integration projects presents another substantial challenge. This paper analyses how the initiative connects with existing frameworks, particularly the EEU and the ASEAN. Regarding integration with the EAEU, both parties agree that the Silk Road initiative enhances rather than obstructs cooperation. It aligns with their shared objective of fostering an open economic space across Eurasia. This commitment was formalised in the May 2018 agreement on trade and economic cooperation between the EAEU and China. The agreement's pre-

amble explicitly acknowledges the significance of expanding economic integration across the Asia-Pacific region and Eurasia. It also emphasises the need to align the EAEU with the BRI for stable trade relations. Within ASEAN, the BRI has catalysed a new phase of collaboration. Most member states swiftly endorsed the initiative, reflecting the bloc's collective ambition for deeper economic integration. However, China's bilateral BRI engagements with specific ASEAN nations reveal divergent perspectives. Infrastructure projects for maritime corridors in Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand, Myanmar, and Vietnam have encountered obstacles, including sovereignty disputes and internal ethnic tensions. Malaysia adopted a cautious stance, partly due to domestic political dynamics and concerns over public debt complicating joint ventures.

Implementation challenges also arise from regional instability in South Asia and the Middle East. The protracted Indo-Pakistani conflict over Kashmir limits the scope for productive cooperation with Pakistan. Concurrently, India remains wary of the BRI's potential to amplify Chinese economic and political influence in South Asia and has withheld definitive support. In the Middle East, civil conflicts and political volatility across the Arab world present major hurdles, particularly for developing overland transport routes. Despite these complexities, China is expanding its role in the region, partly through profitable commercial and financial investments in Egypt and Saudi Arabia. Collaboration with these states increasingly involves aligning BRI objectives with national development programmes.

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## THE MANDATE AND OPERATIONAL APPROACH OF THE ASIA–PACIFIC ECONOMIC COOPERATION

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**Abstract.** Established in 1989, the Asia–Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) facilitates economic cooperation and integration among its 21 member economies. Unlike other regional international organisations, APEC employs a consensus-driven, non-binding framework. Nevertheless, it effectively advances regional free trade. This paper examines APEC’s mandate and competence, contrasting its voluntary approach with the binding frameworks of organisations like the EU and ASEAN. It argues that APEC’s efficacy derives from its flexibility, reliance on voluntary action plans, and use of soft law instruments, which support regional alignment while respecting national sovereignty. The paper concludes that institutionalising capacity-building initiatives, particularly in domains such as digital trade and environmental sustainability, could strengthen APEC’s ability to respond to contemporary economic challenges without resorting to binding commitments.

**Keywords:** Asia–Pacific Economic Cooperation; mandate; non-binding framework; international organisation competence.

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## ПОЛНОМОЧИЯ И СПЕЦИФИКА ДЕЯТЕЛЬНОСТИ АЗИАТСКО-ТИХООКЕАНСКОГО ЭКОНОМИЧЕСКОГО СОТРУДНИЧЕСТВА

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**Аннотация.** Азиатско-Тихоокеанское экономическое сотрудничество (АТЭС) – региональная международная организация, созданная 21 государством в 1989 г. в целях интеграции и развития экономического взаимодействия. В отличие от других региональных международных организаций АТЭС функционирует на основе консенсуса и приглашений, не имеющих обязательной юридической силы, что, однако, не снижает эффективности деятельности организации по развитию свободной торговли в регионе. В данной работе мандат и компетенции АТЭС сравниваются с мандатами и компетенциями таких региональных объединений, как ЕС и АСЕАН, в большей степени основанных или функционирующих на базе юридически обязывающих норм. Показывается, что эффективность работы АТЭС обусловлена гибкостью ее подходов, преимущественным использованием программ действия, реализуемых на добровольных началах, применением инструментов мягкого права, обеспечивающих региональную координацию при сохранении национального суверенитета каждого участника. Делается вывод о том, что институционализация инициатив по наращиванию потенциала (особенно в таких областях, как цифровая торговля и экология) создаст предпосылки для повышения способности АТЭС гибко реагировать на современные экономические вызовы без использования юридически обязывающих механизмов.

**Ключевые слова:** Азиатско-Тихоокеанское экономическое сотрудничество; мандат; необязательные рамки; компетенция международной организации.

### Introduction

The Asia–Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), established in 1989, is a regional international organisation dedicated to promoting of economic cooperation and integration across the Asia–Pacific region. Its 21 member economies share a core mandate: to foster free and open trade, enhance economic integration, and encourage sustainable and inclusive growth<sup>1</sup>. Unlike many comparable regional international organisations (RIOs), APEC operates on a non-binding, consensus-based model and imposes no legal obligations on its members. This flexible approach accommodates the diverse economic and political contexts of its members, from highly developed economies such as the US and Japan to developing economies including China and Vietnam<sup>2</sup>. While this flexibility is advantageous, introducing minimal enforcement mechanisms could improve member state compliance with organisational decisions, particularly regarding digital trade standards and environmental commitments. R. E. Feinberg, for example, contends such mechanisms could foster greater accountability while preserving flexibility [1, p. 137].

APEC's economic impact and policy initiatives have received substantial scholarly attention<sup>3</sup>. P. A. Petri, notably, offers detailed analysis of its influence on regional

investment flows [2]. Scholarship has extensively examined seminal APEC policy instruments like the 1994 Bogor declaration<sup>4</sup> and the 1995 Osaka action agenda<sup>5</sup>. P. Drysdale and S. Armstrong [3] analyse these documents as defining moments in APEC's development, stressing their function in setting a long-term vision for open regionalism. Complementing this perspective, J. Ravenhill [4] and M. Beeson [5] investigate APEC's institutional architecture, characterising it as a model of «soft regionalism» that advances economic cooperation without supranational legal structures.

Despite this substantive economic and institutional research, APEC's mandate and the consequences of its non-binding framework remain understudied within legal scholarship. While legal-institutional approaches have been rigorously applied to organisations such as the EU and ASEAN (notably by M. Cini and N. P.-S. Borrağan [6]), comparable scrutiny of APEC's legal capacity, institutional authority, and normative power is scarce. U. Aimsiranun [7] offers a valuable comparative analysis of APEC's structural flexibility relative to the EU and ASEAN, yet this work does not comprehensively address APEC's internal or external competences from a legal perspective.

<sup>1</sup>About APEC [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://www.apec.org/about-us/about-apec> (date of access: 15.10.2024).

<sup>2</sup>APEC in Charts-2023 [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://www.apec.org/publications/2023/11/apec-in-charts-2023> (date of access: 15.10.2024).

<sup>3</sup>APEC regional trends analysis [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://www.apec.org/publications/2024/03/apec-regional-trends-analysis-february-2024> (date of access: 15.10.2024).

<sup>4</sup>1994 Leaders' declaration [Electronic resource]. URL: [https://www.apec.org/meeting-papers/leaders-declarations/1994/1994\\_aelm](https://www.apec.org/meeting-papers/leaders-declarations/1994/1994_aelm) (date of access: 15.10.2024).

<sup>5</sup>Osaka action agenda [Electronic resource]. URL: [https://www.apec.org/docs/default-source/publications/1995/12/osaka-action-agenda-1995/95\\_esc\\_oaa.pdf?sfvrsn=f2d0cd5b\\_1](https://www.apec.org/docs/default-source/publications/1995/12/osaka-action-agenda-1995/95_esc_oaa.pdf?sfvrsn=f2d0cd5b_1) (date of access: 15.10.2024).

Although some aspects of APEC's legal-institutional dimensions have been addressed, a focused legal analysis of its mandate is still lacking in the academic literature.

This research, therefore, undertakes a detailed examination of APEC's mandate. It explores how the organisation's emphasis on voluntary economic integration and cooperative regionalism distinguishes it from other

RIOs. Specifically, the study investigates how APEC's mandate is constituted and how this formation affects the organisation's ability to implement effective policy across its diverse membership. Through this analysis, the paper clarifies APEC's core objectives and its strategic approach to advancing economic growth, trade liberalisation, and regulatory harmonisation within the Asia–Pacific region.

### APEC's mandate

APEC's core purpose is to advance free and open trade and investment among its diverse Asia–Pacific member economies<sup>6</sup>. The Bogor goals of 1994 embody this commitment, establishing targets for achieving free trade and investment by 2020 for industrialised economies and by 2040 for developing ones. The Osaka action agenda translates these goals into practice through liberalisation, facilitation, and technical cooperation. These priorities are reinforced annually in APEC leaders' declarations, which outline strategies for deepening economic integration and trade facilitation. Unlike formalised RIOs such as the EU or the ASEAN, APEC functions through non-binding agreements and voluntary participation. While this approach offers flexibility, it differs from the EU's supranational governance model, which imposes uniform policies via legally enforceable obligations [6, p. 99]. ASEAN coordinates regional economic cooperation following the EU model and seeks to establish a fully operational ASEAN Economic Community<sup>7</sup>. Nevertheless, ASEAN remains a conventional RIO, serving as a forum for international cooperation rather than integration.

APEC's primary objective, articulated in the Bogor goals, is to advance trade and investment liberalisation. Developed member economies targeted free trade and investment by 2010, with aiming for 2020 developing counterparts<sup>8</sup>. This commitment focuses on dismantling trade barriers, reducing tariffs, and improving market access to create a more integrated regional economy<sup>9</sup>. The EU, conversely, mandates binding commitments under the Treaty on the functioning of the European Union, ensuring policy uniformity<sup>10</sup>. Conse-

quently, the EU's single market achieves greater integration than APEC's framework, where members retain sovereign control over trade policy. Similarly, ASEAN's Economic Community seeks a single market and production base<sup>11</sup>, but implementation hurdles persist, partly due to significant disparities in economic development among members.

A key element of APEC's work involves simplifying trade regulations and strengthening regulatory coherence. Part one, section C of the Osaka action agenda specifically advocates harmonising customs procedures and documentation to facilitate smoother trade flows. Part one, section D of this document also stresses enhancing trade policy transparency, providing businesses with greater certainty for cross-border operations. The EU typically accomplishes such harmonisation through binding regulations and directives<sup>12</sup>. APEC, lacking equivalent enforcement powers, relies instead on peer influence and voluntary compliance with agreed standards. ASEAN has advanced in regulatory alignment but supplements this, unlike APEC, with legal instruments such as the ASEAN Trade in goods agreement to underpin implementation<sup>13</sup>.

Business facilitation is fundamental to APEC's mandate. Initiatives such as the APEC business travel card streamline visa procedures for business travellers, fostering deeper economic integration<sup>14</sup>. Complementing this, APEC advances regulatory coherence, working to align standards and regulations across member economies. This reduces compliance burdens and trade barriers, commitments reinforced by the 2011 APEC Leaders' declaration<sup>15</sup>. The APEC regulatory cooperation

<sup>6</sup>About APEC [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://www.apec.org/about-us/about-apec> (date of access: 16.10.2024).

<sup>7</sup>Significance of the ASEAN Charter [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://asean.org/asean-charter/> (date of access: 16.10.2024).

<sup>8</sup>1994 Leaders' declaration. Paras 6–8 [Electronic resource]. URL: [https://www.apec.org/meeting-papers/leaders-declarations/1994/1994\\_aelm](https://www.apec.org/meeting-papers/leaders-declarations/1994/1994_aelm) (date of access: 15.10.2024).

<sup>9</sup>Ibid. Paras 9–11.

<sup>10</sup>Treaty on the functioning of the European Union. Art. 288 [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:12016ME/TXT&from=EN> (date of access: 16.10.2024).

<sup>11</sup>About AEC [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://investasean.asean.org/asean-economic-community/view/670/newsid/755/about-aec.html> (date of access: 16.10.2024).

<sup>12</sup>Implementing EU law [Electronic resource]. URL: [https://commission.europa.eu/law/application-eu-law/implementing-eu-law\\_en](https://commission.europa.eu/law/application-eu-law/implementing-eu-law_en) (date of access: 16.10.2024).

<sup>13</sup>ASEAN Trade in goods agreement [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/ASEAN-Trade-in-Goods-Agreement.pdf> (date of access: 16.10.2024).

<sup>14</sup>APEC business travel card. Section 2 [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://www.apec.org/groups/committee-on-trade-and-investment/business-mobility-group/abtcc> (date of access: 16.10.2024).

<sup>15</sup>2011 Leaders' declaration [Electronic resource]. URL: [https://www.apec.org/meeting-papers/leaders-declarations/2011/2011\\_aelm](https://www.apec.org/meeting-papers/leaders-declarations/2011/2011_aelm) (date of access: 16.10.2024).



advancement mechanism, established in 2011, specifically targets these objectives<sup>16</sup>. Analysis within the APEC economic policy report of 2013 examines regulatory practices and identifies governance improvements<sup>17</sup>, while the APEC Business Advisory Council report of 2015 advocates for regulatory alignment and capacity-building<sup>18</sup> to strengthen the business climate. These activities build upon the foundational framework provided by the Osaka action agenda. Further embedding this approach, the APEC Services competitiveness roadmap (2016–2025) commits members to coherent regulation, underpinning a supportive business environment<sup>19</sup>. Dedicated dialogues and capacity-building initiatives continuously improve regulatory implementation among members.

While economic cooperation and trade facilitation are APEC's principal concerns, the organisation also addresses financial stability. The APEC finance ministers' process promotes collaboration between finance ministries and central banks, strengthening financial oversight and market resilience<sup>20</sup>. Emphasising inclusive and sustainable systems as vital for economic security<sup>21</sup>, the APEC Strategy for strengthening quality growth (2015–2020) is complemented by the APEC Framework for strengthening economic and financial resilience of 2017. This framework offers guidance to help eco-

nomies withstand both global and domestic financial shocks<sup>22</sup>.

APEC prioritises economic and technical cooperation (ECOTECH) to drive integration and development. ECOTECH programmes cover multiple sectors, promoting sustainable expansion and narrowing economic disparities. A central focus is empowering small and medium-sized enterprises, particularly by improving their access to finance, markets, and technology<sup>23</sup>. APEC fosters entrepreneurship and enhances business management capabilities. This enables medium-sized enterprises to participate more effectively in global supply chains, contributing significantly to broad-based economic growth. To address contemporary global challenges more effectively, APEC could expand its ECOTECH agenda to encompass critical areas such as sustainability and digital transformation. This strategic development would strengthen APEC's capacity to foster regional resilience and technological adaptation.

In summary, APEC advances free trade and investment through a flexible framework anchored by the Bogor goals and Osaka action agenda. Its non-binding structure fosters voluntary participation whilst enhancing regulatory coherence and transparency that are crucial elements for managing diverse economic development levels across member economies.

### Internal competence

APEC employs a distinctive consensus-based decision-making process, producing non-binding outcomes. The EU, by contrast, exercises supranational authority: its institutions issue binding decisions on member states, and regulations apply directly without requiring national implementing legislation<sup>24</sup>. Similarly, while ASEAN has established binding agreements in specific domains like trade, it lacks supranational authority.

APEC's distinctive approach facilitates adaptable responses to economic challenges and opportunities.

The APEC environmental goods list demonstrates this flexibility: members voluntarily committed to reducing tariffs on environmentally beneficial products, achieving substantial reductions despite the absence of legal compulsion<sup>25</sup>. As F. M. A. Quimba and M. A. A. Barral [8, p. 61] note, this structure allows members to pursue initiatives that align with national priorities without mandatory compliance. Unlike organisations such as the AU, EU, or ECOWAS, however, APEC lacks defined legal consequences for non-adherence to its agreements.

<sup>16</sup>APEC regulatory cooperation advancement mechanism for trade-related standards and technical regulations [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://www.apec.org/docs/default-source/Publications/2010/11/2010-CTI-Annual-Report-to-Ministers/TOC/Appendix-4APEC-Regulatory-Cooperation-Process-Mechanism-on-TradeRelated.pdf> (date of access: 16.10.2024).

<sup>17</sup>APEC economic policy report [Electronic resource]. URL: [https://www.apec.org/docs/default-source/publications/2013/10/2013-apec-economic-policy-report/2013\\_ec\\_aepr\\_fullrpt.pdf?sfvrsn=d63e1d22\\_1](https://www.apec.org/docs/default-source/publications/2013/10/2013-apec-economic-policy-report/2013_ec_aepr_fullrpt.pdf?sfvrsn=d63e1d22_1) (date of access: 16.10.2024).

<sup>18</sup>APEC Business Advisory Council report [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://en.rspp.ru/activity/cooperation/apec-business-advisory-council-abac/> (date of access: 16.10.2024).

<sup>19</sup>Annex B: APEC Services competitiveness roadmap (2016–2025) [Electronic resource]. URL: [https://www.apec.org/meeting-papers/leaders-declarations/2016/2016\\_aelm/2016\\_annex-b](https://www.apec.org/meeting-papers/leaders-declarations/2016/2016_aelm/2016_annex-b) (date of access: 16.11.2024).

<sup>20</sup>Finance ministers' process [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://www.apec.org/groups/other-groups/finance-ministers-process> (date of access: 16.10.2024).

<sup>21</sup>APEC Strategy for strengthening quality growth [Electronic resource]. URL: [https://www.apec.org/docs/default-source/publications/2020/11/apec-strategy-for-strengthening-quality-growth---final-assessment/220\\_psu\\_assqg-final-assessment-report.pdf?sfvrsn=ffb67418\\_1](https://www.apec.org/docs/default-source/publications/2020/11/apec-strategy-for-strengthening-quality-growth---final-assessment/220_psu_assqg-final-assessment-report.pdf?sfvrsn=ffb67418_1) (date of access: 16.10.2024).

<sup>22</sup>Framework for strengthening economic cooperation and development [Electronic resource]. URL: [https://www.apec.org/meeting-papers/annual-ministerial-meetings/1996/1996\\_amm/frameworkr\\_secd](https://www.apec.org/meeting-papers/annual-ministerial-meetings/1996/1996_amm/frameworkr_secd) (date of access: 16.10.2024).

<sup>23</sup>Small and medium enterprises working group strategic plan 2021–2024 [Electronic resource]. URL: [https://www.apec.org/docs/default-source/Groups/SMEWG/20\\_smeWG50\\_030\\_r.pdf?la=en&hash=C68CF6917E54734C055F9CA8891173558669AC36](https://www.apec.org/docs/default-source/Groups/SMEWG/20_smeWG50_030_r.pdf?la=en&hash=C68CF6917E54734C055F9CA8891173558669AC36) (date of access: 16.10.2024).

<sup>24</sup>The international law of regional organizations: final report [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://www.ila-hq.org/en/documents/ila-study-group-regional-organisations-final-report-may-24> (date of access: 16.01.2024).

<sup>25</sup>Consensus framework resource guide [Electronic resource]. URL: [https://www.apec.org/docs/default-source/publications/2024/3/224\\_sme\\_consensus-framework-guide.pdf?sfvrsn=8bbcdecc\\_2](https://www.apec.org/docs/default-source/publications/2024/3/224_sme_consensus-framework-guide.pdf?sfvrsn=8bbcdecc_2) (date of access: 16.10.2024).

Non-binding declarations, including the APEC Economic leaders' declaration, establish collective priorities and strategic directions. The 2023 declaration, for example, emphasised commitments on the digital economy, sustainable growth, and inclusive development, urging members to harmonise national policies with these shared objectives<sup>26</sup>. Although not legally enforceable, such declarations carry considerable political weight and foster a sense of collective responsibility.

APEC implements its objectives through individual action plans and collective action plans. Individual action plans involve self-assessment reports where member economies detail progress towards trade and investment liberalisation targets, enhancing transparency through voluntary disclosure. Collective action plans involve collaborative initiatives among multiple member economies, focusing on areas such as regional supply chain connectivity while retaining flexibility in implementation<sup>27</sup>.

APEC further develops regional guidelines and best practices through instruments like the APEC privacy framework, providing non-binding recommendations to harmonise privacy standards<sup>28</sup>. Rather than imposing formal legal sanctions, the organisation employs peer review, mutual assistance, and capacity development to ensure accountability and establish a cooperative compliance system<sup>29</sup>. Member economies voluntarily align policies with APEC guidelines, with progress monitored via regular assessment.

Mutual support is integral to APEC's operational model. Economies engage in technical assistance projects to help one another meet shared commitments, thereby enhancing the effectiveness of APEC's initiatives and reinforcing collective responsibility. By prioritising voluntary compliance and mutual support, APEC respects member diversity and sovereignty. The forum emphasises positive reinforcement, technical assistance, and capacity-building rather than penalising non-compliance.

APEC could strengthen these efforts by institutionalising capacity-building programmes, particularly for regulatory alignment, digital trade, and environmental standards. Formalised support structures would better address members' diverse needs and enhance the forum's impact.

APEC's soft law instruments and voluntary mechanisms thus balance national sovereignty with economic integration in the Asia–Pacific region. Focusing capacity development on digital and environmental domains leverages the forum's comparative strengths: it accommodates differentiated implementation paces, facilitates knowledge exchange, and aids domestic transitions without compromising sovereignty. Unlike transport or investment, often governed by bilateral treaties or broader frameworks like the WTO, digital trade and environmental governance are spheres where soft law and technical cooperation can achieve significant results absent binding commitments.

### External competence

APEC's external competence encompasses aspects of international institutional law, including treaty-making capacity, organisational liaisons, and the handling of responsibility issues.

Unlike universal bodies, which address a wide range of global issues (UN), APEC concentrates exclusively on economic matters within the Asia–Pacific region. While APEC does not hold UN observer status, it has three official observers: the ASEAN Secretariat, the Pacific Economic Cooperation Council, and the Pacific Islands forum Secretariat<sup>30</sup>. These bodies participate in APEC meetings and facilitate targeted initiatives that respond to member economies' specific requirements<sup>31</sup>.

APEC engages external partners primarily through cooperative projects and dialogues, avoiding formal treat-

ties. This approach enables swift adaptation to evolving economic conditions. Although this flexibility shares some similarities with informal collaborations such as those of the World Economic Forum, APEC remains distinct due to its regional scope and reliance on consensus-based decisions [7, p. 3].

The Vienna convention on the law of treaties between states and international organisations governs treaty-making for international organisations. APEC, however, chiefly employs non-binding commitments and declarations, reflecting its informal operational model that prioritises consensus and voluntary cooperation<sup>32</sup>. The diverse economic interests and priorities among APEC members make negotiating and implementing binding agreements challenging. Consequently, while

<sup>26</sup>2023 Leaders' declaration [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://apec.sitefinity.cloud/meeting-papers/leaders-declarations/2023/2023-leaders-declaration> (date of access: 13.10.2024).

<sup>27</sup>2018 APEC economic policy report [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://www.apec.org/publications/2018/11/2018-apec-economic-policy-report> (date of access: 13.10.2024).

<sup>28</sup>APEC privacy framework [Electronic resource]. URL: [https://www.apec.org/publications/2017/08/apec-privacy-framework-\(2015\)](https://www.apec.org/publications/2017/08/apec-privacy-framework-(2015)) (date of access: 13.12.2024).

<sup>29</sup>How APEC operates [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://www.apec.org/about-us/how-apec-operates> (date of access: 13.10.2024).

<sup>30</sup>APEC observers [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://www.apec.org/about-us/how-apec-operates/apec-observers> (date of access: 13.10.2024).

<sup>31</sup>Intergovernmental and other organizations [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/intergovernmental-and-other-organizations> (date of access: 13.09.2024).

<sup>32</sup>Vienna convention on the law of treaties between states and international organizations or between international organizations [Electronic resource]. URL: [https://legal.un.org/ilc/texts/instruments/english/conventions/1\\_2\\_1986.pdf](https://legal.un.org/ilc/texts/instruments/english/conventions/1_2_1986.pdf) (date of access: 25.12.2024).

APEC shapes international economic policy discussions, it does not produce legally enforceable treaties [9, p. 171].

APEC membership criteria emphasise geographic location and a demonstrable commitment to regional economic cooperation, with admission requiring unanimous agreement among existing members [10]. Its interactions with both universal organisations (for example, the WTO) and regional bodies (for example, ASEAN)

centre on trade facilitation and infrastructure development. These collaborations aim to deepen economic integration and promote sustainable growth.

Responsibility for adhering to APEC initiatives lies with individual member economies. As an organisation possessing legal personality, APEC itself could theoretically face accountability under international law for violations, such as breaches of the UN Charter.

## Conclusions

APEC's mandate is characterised by a voluntary, consensus-driven approach. Strategic initiatives such as the Bogor goals and the Osaka action agenda exemplify this framework, articulating APEC's objectives for trade and investment liberalisation, regulatory alignment, and sustainable development.

APEC's non-binding structure promotes inclusivity and adaptability, yet constrains the enforceability of collective agreements.

This article contends that institutionalising capacity-building programmes in digital and environmental fields offers a more effective approach for APEC than conventional treaty-based methods when addressing 21<sup>st</sup>-century challenges. APEC's structural flexibility and its members' political diversity render binding agreements both difficult to negotiate and challenging to implement.

Capacity-building in digital and environmental spheres exploits APEC's distinctive strengths: it accommodates differentiated implementation, facilitates knowledge exchange, and aids domestic transitions while respecting national sovereignty. Unlike sectors such as transport or investment typically governed by bilateral treaties or multilateral frameworks like the WTO digital trade and environmental governance benefit

significantly from soft-law approaches and technical cooperation. These methods can achieve substantial impact without requiring legally enforceable obligations.

Expanding the ECOTECH agenda to encompass digital transformation and sustainability would establish APEC as a regional innovator responsive to global priorities. Institutionalising these efforts requires dedicated funding, clearer performance metrics, and enhanced working group coordination. These measures would strengthen the predictability and efficacy of APEC's support and thus boost resilience and reduce capability disparities among members.

Finally, the analysis of APEC's external competence demonstrates that, despite lacking traditional treaty-making authority or binding external agreements, the organisation exercises significant normative influence. Its soft-law instruments, partnerships, and observer engagements shape regional economic governance without formal legal integration. These mechanisms allow APEC to contribute meaningfully to international economic cooperation. Rather than relying on legal authority, the organisation shapes norms, coordinates initiatives, and encourages voluntary convergence amongst economies with diverse legal and political systems.

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