



The Geopolitics of Eastern Europe in the Wake of Russia's Invasion of Ukraine

Emilian Kavalski

NAWA Chair Professor of Complex Systems



JAGIELLONIAN UNIVERSITY
IN KRAKOW





Outline

➤ Localization

- Lithuania – the end of the romance?
- A new defenestration in Prague?

➤ Coincidence

- Lack of history as a prologue
- “16/17+1” ... or when an afternoon fish turns out to be a morning fish

➤ Geopolitics

- Chinese Trojan horses or Anti-China Vanguard?
- European neighbourhood periphery vs Indo-Pacific?

Lithuania - the end of the romance?



- November 2020: “defending democracy from Belarus to Taiwan”
- May 2021 – the first CEE state to formally leave the “17+1” (May 2021)
- November 2021 – opens “Taiwan” Representative Office
- July 2023 – launches an Indo-Pacific Strategy

A new defenestration at Prague?



- Promise fatigue:
 - October 2019: Prague severs sister-city relations with Beijing
 - September 2020: Czech Senate President visits Taipei
 - January 2023: Czech President elect Pavel calls Taiwan's president Tsai
 - June 2023: Czech President Pavel welcomes Taiwan FM



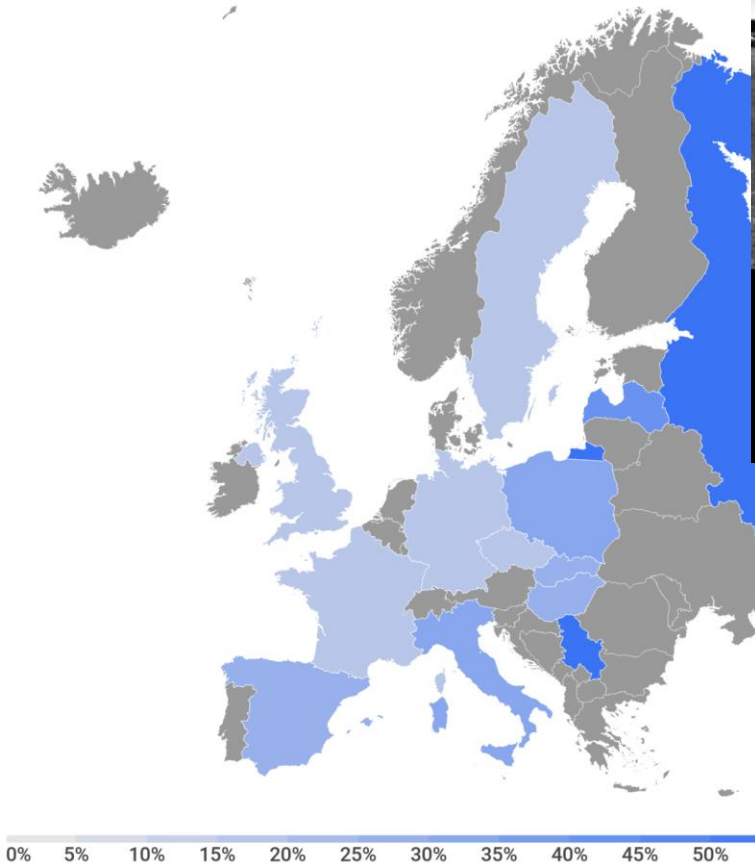
Czech President-Elect Calls Taiwan's Leader to Bolster Ties

- Pavel speaks with Tsai two days after he was elected
- Taiwan's ties with EU member states have riled China



Petr Pavel Photographer: Milan Jaraš/Bloomberg

Figure 1: Positive feelings towards China across European nations (% of respondents)³



1989.8.23 THE BALTIC WAY | 2019.8.23 THE HONG KONG WAY

China retaliates after US, EU and UK impose sanctions
Beijing imposes travel bans after co-ordinated western action against treatment of Uyghurs



Shift in perceptions?

- “Defending democracy from Belarus to Taiwan”
- Signaling to the EU
- Signaling to the USA

Lack of history as a prologue



Marco Polo is a world explorer, born in Croatia, who opened China to Europe.



Zhao Ziyang
赵紫阳

Lack of history as a prologue

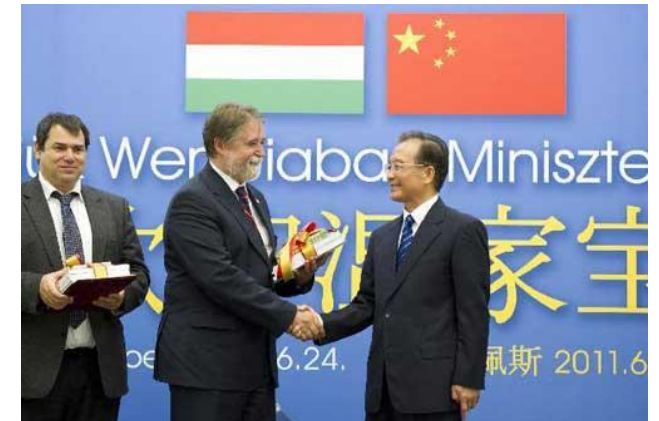
- Support for reform:
 - Region as a periphery in Beijing's balancing act between Moscow and Washington
 - Alternative to the West, model for China
 - 'absolutely compatible with socialism'
- Condemnation of reform:
 - Tiananmen Square incident: 'fear of contagion'
 - End of CEE communist regimes
 - Toppling of Nicolae Ceaușescu
 - Dissolution of the Soviet Union
 - Heightened fear about the survival of the CCP

“When an afternoon fish turns out to be a morning fish”

- Piraeus – the gate to the CEE
 - 2009 – COSCO acquires operating rights to one terminal
 - 2021 – COSCO has 67% controlling stake in the port
 - 2022 – a “dragon head” project
- Investments bring Chinese diplomatic outreach
 - 2009 – Premier Wen Jiabao visits Greece while Vice President Xi Jinping visits Bulgaria
 - 2010 – Premier Wen Jiabao visits Greece
 - 2011 – Premier Wen Jiabao visits Greece and Budapest: China-CEE Economic and Trade Forum



Wei Jiafu



Regionalism with Chinese characteristics: “16/17+1”



- Heterogeneous group
 - 12 EU members
 - 6 belong to € zone
 - 4 EU candidates
 - 15 NATO members
- Unintended regionalization



Brief history:

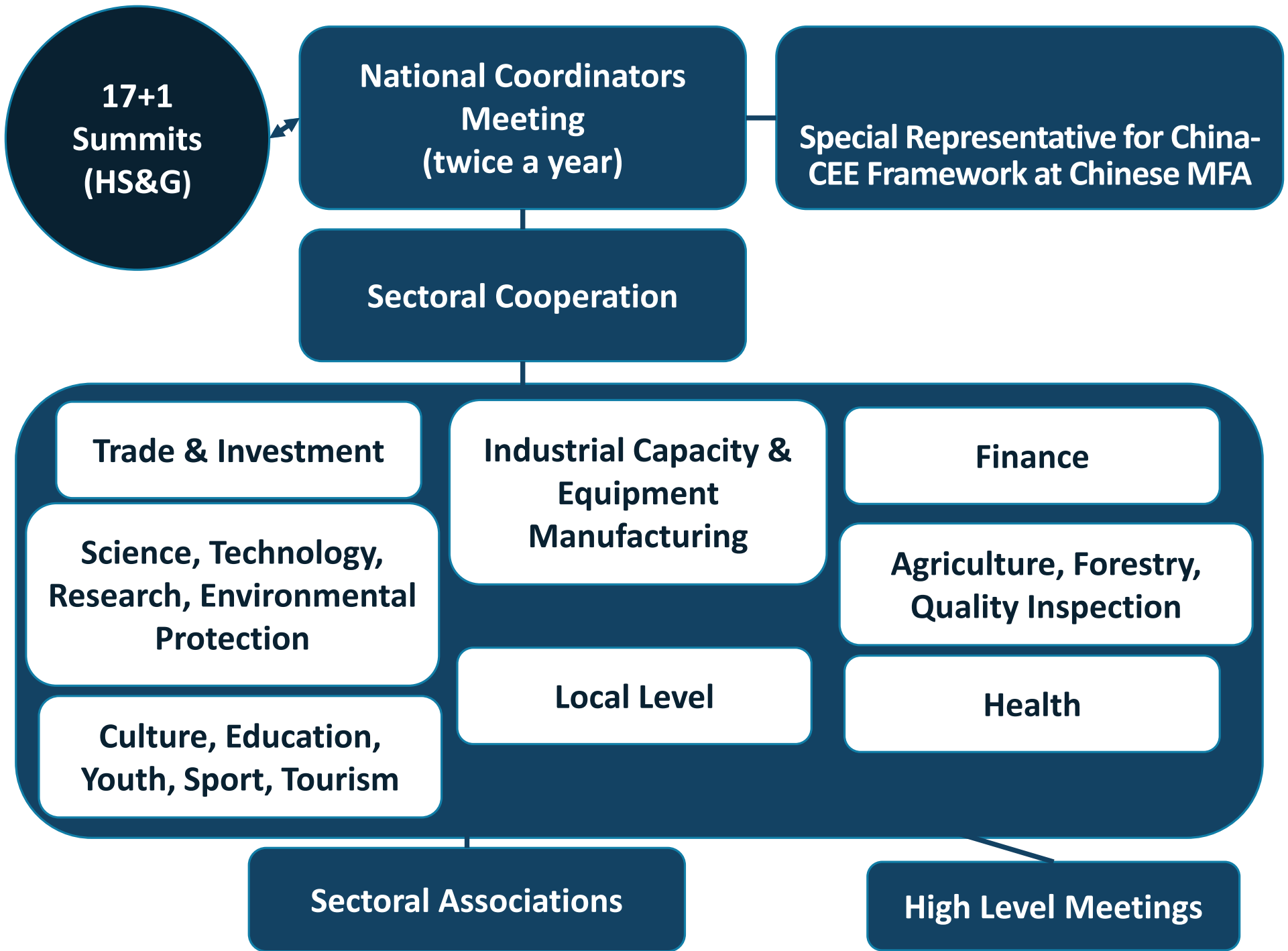
2012: Initiative for cooperation between China and CEE

2013: Bucharest guidelines for cooperation

2014: China-CEE Investment Cooperation Fund

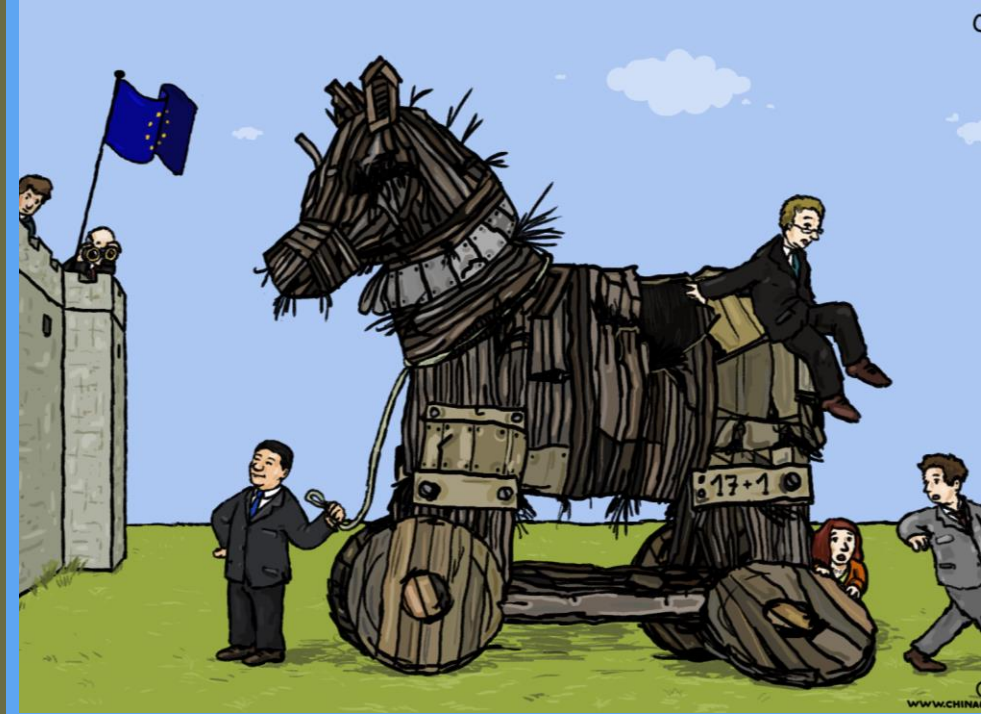
2015: First Summit attended by all heads of state

2019: Greece joins the 16+1



CEE States: Chinese Trojan Horses or the leaders of the Anti-China Vanguard ?

- “China’s combination of capitalism and a political dictatorship could appeal to some leaders in the region.” Johannes Hahn, EU Commissioner for European Neighbourhood Policy & Enlargement Negotiations, 18 June 2018
- “Blindly and recklessly following the US is very dangerous and will only bring great losses” Global Times, 4 July 2021



Geopolitical check

15 November 2023 – Lithuania begins normalizing relations with China

Full-scale Russian Invasion

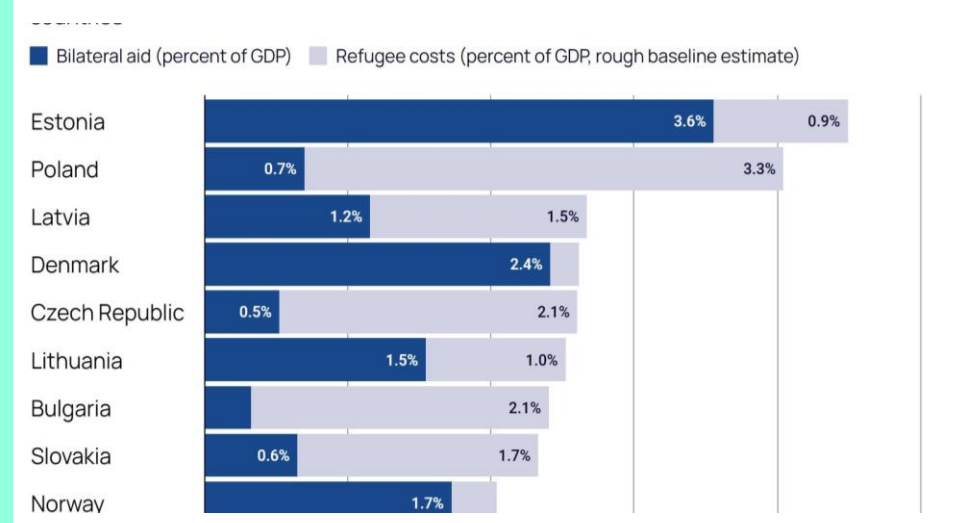
- Geopolitical Europe is a continental power
- It cannot rely on North American and Indo-Pacific partners

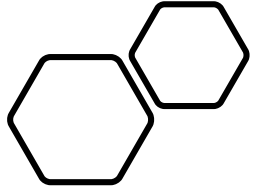
Shift of power in the continent:

- “center of Europe is moving eastward” (Olaf Scholz, 29 Aug. 2022)
- overcoming “Westsplaining”

Taiwan failing to learn from Macedonia (1999-2001)

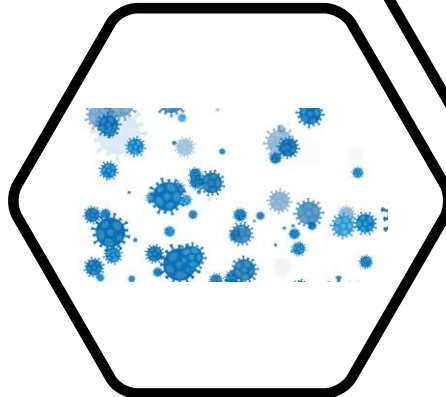
- Do not expect recognition
- Develop local knowledge





So what?

- World beyond binaries
- Cold War / Thucydides Trap – unhelpful, even as metaphors
- Adjusting to a PCR world



Thank you!

Emilian Kavalski
emilian.kavalski@uj.edu.pl
NAWA Chair Professor



Book Series Editor of Routledges' "Rethinking Asia and International Relations" series



JAGIELLONIAN UNIVERSITY
IN KRAKOW

