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**„Трансформации на геополитическия вектор на
китайската политика на Балканите през XXI век“**

АВТОРЕФЕРАТ

**на дисертационен труд за придобиване на образователна и
научна степен „доктор“**

- Област на висше образование:
3. Социални, стопански и правни науки
Професионално направление
3.3. Политически науки

Научен ръководител: проф. д-р Борис Манов

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Дисертационният труд е обсъден и насочен за защита пред научно жури от катедра „Философски и политически науки“ към Философски факултет на ЮЗУ „Неофит Рилски“ - Благоевград на 10.04.2023 г., протокол № 4.

Дисертационният труд се състои от увод, четири глави, заключение, използвани източници (библиография), приложения (под формата на таблици и графики) и списък на съкращенията.

Общият обем на дисертацията е 190 страници, от които 164 са основен текст, 17 страници библиография и 3 страници, включващи списъците и съдържанието. В дисертационния труд са налични общо 7 таблици и фигури. Библиографията съдържа 185 източника в хартиен и електронен вариант: 99 заглавия на латиница (на английски), 36 заглавия на кирилица (на български език). Публичната защита ще се състои на 19.05.2023 г., от 11:00 часа, зала 1 114, ЮЗУ „Неофит Рилски“.

Материалите по защитата са на разположение на заинтересуваните се в канцеларията на катедра „Философски и политически науки“ на ЮЗУ.

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I. Обща характеристика на дисертационния труд

1. Актуалност на темата на изследване

Началото на новия век започва преди малко повече от двадесет години, но за това време в света се случват изключително много събития определящи го за близките няколко десетилетия напред. Конфликтите в Близкия изток продължават да горят, но в също толкова богатите на история Балкани, ситуацията се успокоила след серията от взаимосвързани конфликти на етническа основа и борби за независимост. Постепенно поели по пътя на европейската интеграция, част от държавите в региона влизат в Европейският съюз. В малка или по-голяма степен те се адаптират към новия глобален ред, който обещава просперитет и развитие за всички, които изповядват неговите цивилизационни ценности. Глобалната суперсила САЩ, останала след краха на биполярния свят е без съперник и води колективния Запад спрямо своите приоритети и визии за глобална структура. Тази привидно устойчива ситуация бързо се променя с настъпването на финансовата криза в следствие на колосалната алчност на институционалните инвеститори в ипотечни облигации, довела до най-сериозното сътресение на световната

икономика след Голямата депресия през 1929 г. Това събитие белязва преместването на центъра на тежестта в света от Запад на Изток. Така след като XIX в. е бил епохата на британците, а следващия – на Америка, XXI век се описва като азиатският век, в който ще господства азиатската политика и култура. Разбира се, това ще се случи ако определени демографски и икономически тенденции продължат. Сред множеството фактори са:

- Икономически растеж: През последните няколко десетилетия Азия отбелязва значителен икономически растеж, задвижван от страни като Китай, Индия и Япония. Тези страни прилагат политики за насърчаването му, както и на инвестициите и предприемачеството, което довежда до нарастване на средната класа, по-висок стандарт на живот и по-голяма икономическа стабилност. През 2020 г. Китай е единствената голяма икономика, която отчита положителен растеж на БВП, в контекста на пандемията от COVID-19.
- Технологичен напредък: Азия е дом на някои от най-иновативните и успешни технологични компании в света, като Самсунг, Хуауей, ТСМК и Алибаба. Тези компании са допринесли значително за развитието на

нови технологии, като 5G, изкуствен интелект и роботика.

- Демографски прираст: Азия има младо и нарастващо население, което се очаква да стимулира икономическия растеж през следващите години. Очаква се населението в трудоспособна възраст в Азия да се увеличи с 400 милиона до 2030 г., което ще доведе до увеличаване на потребителските разходи и възможностите за инвестиции.
- Стратегическо местоположение: Азия е стратегически разположена между двете най-големи икономики в света, Съединените щати и Китай, което я прави ключов център за търговия и инвестиции. Регионът също има достъп до някои от най-натоварените морски пътища в света, като протока Малака, който свързва Азия с Близкия изток и Европа.
- Дипломатическо влияние: Азия все повече се превръща в основен играч в глобалната политика, като страни като Китай, Япония и Индия поемат по-значими роли в международните организации и дипломатическите отношения. Тези страни също създават регионални съюзи, като Асоциацията на нациите от Югоизточна Азия (АСЕАН), което

спомогна за увеличаване на дипломатическото влияние на Азия.

С толкова много и значителни политически и икономически промени в света изучаването на геополитическите измерения се превръща във важна задача дори и за по-малките държави като балканските страни, които нямат капацитета да проектират сила извън собствената си територия, но имат нуждата да се ориентират в променящите се баланси. Самата наука геополитика търпи бурно развитие през ХХ в., като нейните достижения се използват максимално през новото столетие. Чрез нея се разглеждат и се търсят отговори за противоборствата в различните домейни, които се разкриват от народите, започвайки от класическата дихотомия на сушата и водата, минавайки през въздуха и космоса около планетата и навлизайки в цифровия свят, който обаче е възможен благодарение на твърдата инфраструктура, която е разположена в някое от предните четири полета. Китай отправя заявка за „излизане навън“, минавайки и опитвайки да наложи своя контрол над посочените пет домейна, измествайки досегашната власт над тях в лицето на Запада, воден от САЩ.

Актуалността на настоящия дисертационен труд се определя на първо място от нарастващото значение на Китайската народна република за установения глобален ред. Ролята, която ще избере да изиграе азиатската държава може да го преформатира или дори ерозира и заличи, като на негово място да бъде предложен нов модел за развитие, коренно различен от настоящия, граден след края на Втората световна война. На второ място интересното и важно разположение на Балканите в голяма Евразия ще ги позиционира за пореден път като арена на геополитически сблъсък. Пресичащите се интереси на новите сили имат възможността да препотвърдят или променят ориентацията на държавите в региона, част от които е и България. Събитията и процесите, които настъпват на полуострова, а и в граничните му територии, се нуждаят от актуален геополитически прочит.

1.1. Степен на разработеност на проблема

Сред една от причините за написването на този труд е сравнително слабото изследване на тематиката на български език. Възприемането на Китай като далечен обект обаче не значи, че той няма геополитически интереси

на Балканите по същия начин, както отдалечените през Атлантика САЩ също имат. За целта, по отношение на геополитиката на водещите световни сили спрямо региона и спрямо процесите в него, дисертацията стъпва на множество монографии, статии, аналитични разработки. Сред големите имена в изследванията на геополитиката като наука безспорно място заема А. Дугин, чийто труд дава отлична отправна точка. Не по-малко ценни, разбира се, в това отношение са и класическите трудове на Аристотел, Ш. Монтескьо, Г. Хегел, А. Маън, Х. Макиндер, Н. Спикман, а от по-новите времена тези на К. Санторо, И. Лакост, П. Бонифас, Ф. Фукуяма, Р. Кейган и З. Бжежински, Дж. Най и Дж. Фридман. Полезни по отношение на балканската динамика са изследванията на Д. Пападимитиу, П. Стронски и А. Давутоглу. Изтъкнатите чуждестранни изследователи на КНР като Д. Шамбо и У. Калахан предоставят възможност да се вникне в дълбочина в процесите, формиращи китайската вътрешна и външна политика през XX и XXI в., а монолитният труд на М. Пилсбъри – „Стогодишният маратон“ разкрива китайската стратегическа мисъл и цели. Дж. Робинсън и Д. Аджемоглу с тяхната теория за просперитет на нациите дават перспектива за потенциала за развитие на КНР през настоящия век. В. Вуканович, Дж. Мълвенън, Ф. Саундърс,

Д. Дрезнър, К. Шърли, М. Галахър, П. Ботелие, Е. Фогел, К. Хумаюн, Х. Юфан, И. Хоу, Д. Ламптън, Т. Кристенсен, А. Лукин, Д. Нокс, Е. Емелянова, Ш. Ху, Я. Лексютина, А. Саих, Дж. Палмър, Е. Андерсън, Дж. Енгстром, Т. Джан, М. Джинг, Дж. Лон, Д. Павличевич, С. Лао, Х. Лагарда, Т. Едер, Дж. Кинге, Я. Мардел, О. Дьолер и А. Гарсия-Хереро разкриват детайли за политически, икономически и културни процеси в Китай, които като резултат формират и външната политика на страната, включително чрез двете инициативи – „16 + 1“ и „Един пояс, един път“. Относно китайския академичен дискурс за мястото и ролята на КНР в новия световен ред задълбочените изследвания на Дж. Тинян и Л. Минфу предоставят важна информация за постигането на набеязаните от настоящата дисертация цели. Биографията на Си Дзинпин, дело на изследователката К. Браун, както и труда на Г. Алисън допринасят за разбирането на сложната фигура на сегашния генерален секретар и президент на КНР. Анализът на М. Жак разкрива как Китай гледа на ЕС и САЩ. Китайските изследователи П. Хуан и Т. Кун анализират тенденциите по отношение на двата външнополитически инструмента, чрез които Пекин взаимодейства с балканския регион, което допринася за разбирането на съвременните измерения на китайския

геополитически вектор. Поради позицията им във влиятелни аналитични центрове в Китай, позволяваща им да оказват известно влияние над формирането на външнополитическия дискурс, техните доклади заемат важно място във формирането на заключения в дисертацията.

Сред българските автори, разглеждащи регионалните процеси, важно място заемат трудовете и анализите на В. Кръстев, В. Михайлов, Р. Даскалов, Ч. Маринов, П. Пантев, Е. Александров и Д. Бечев. Малкото автори, които се фокусират конкретно над китайската политика и нейното отношение към ЦИЕ като А. Хабова, Н. Стефанов, А. Колева, В. Шопов, Т. Радев, П. Тончев, Б. Манов и В. Катранджиев са опорна точка къде дисертационния труд може да наблегне, за да разшири допълнително академичното познание по темата до момента.

1.2. Обект, субект и основна хипотеза на изследването

Обект на настоящето изследване е китайската външна политика след като Китай се превръща в мощен

икономически и политически фактор в света, а **предмет** са трансформациите на нейния геополитически вектор по отношение на Балканите в началото на настоящия век.

Работната хипотеза на дисертацията е, че Балканите представляват и ще представляват устойчив интерес за китайските геополитически (политически, икономически и културни) цели през XXI в., като в резултат на протичащите глобални и регионални процеси и противоборството с другите влиятелни на световната сцена играчи, се осъществяват и ще продължат да се осъществяват трансформации в намеренията и действията на Пекин в региона, без да той да отпаде от неговата дълготрайна геополитическа стратегия.

1.3. Цели и задачи на изследването

Основна цел е да се анализират мотивите на китайската външна политика, насочващи я към установяването на интензивни политически, икономически и културни отношения с държавите от региона, като за постигане на набелязаната цел в изследването се поставят няколко задачи:

1. Анализ на региона като геополитическо пространство чрез концепциите на класическата геополитическа наука;
2. Оценка на съвременните геополитически реалности и на водещите международни фактори на Балканите;
3. Анализ на процесите зад развитието на КНР, които я довеждат до световна сила;
4. Анализ на настоящите концепции, които формират китайската външна политика;
5. Оценка на въздействието, оказано от Китай върху региона.

Изследването дава отговор на въпросите дали и как се трансформира геополитическия вектор на китайската външна политика на Балканите, разглеждайки използвания от КНР инструментариум.

1.4. Методология и методи на изследването

Използваната методология се базира на интердисциплинарен подход като се използва сравнително-историческия метод, индуктивен метод,

вторичен метод на анализ, включващ официални документи, публични речи, анализ на изследванията.

1.5. Научна новост на дисертационния труд

Научната новост на дисертационния труд се намира в следните направления:

- анализ на най-съвременната политическа, икономическа и социална обстановка в Китайската народна република, която рефлектира върху външната и политика;
- анализ на действията на страните от ЦИЕ в контекста на взаимодействията им с КНР в рамките на „16 + 1“ и „ЕПЕП“ и даване на оценка какво може да бъде подобро за постигане на по-ефективно сътрудничество между участниците.

1.6. Структура на изложението

Поддържаната теза, поставената основна цел, формулираните задачи, актуалните и значими за

обществото събития, разглеждани в дисертационния труд предполагат следната структура на изложението:

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ГЛАВА ЧЕТВЪРТА – ГЕОПОЛИТИЧЕСКИЯТ ВЕКТОР НА КНР НА БАЛКАНИТЕ ПРЕЗ ХХІ ВЕК – СЪЩНОСТ, ЦЕЛИ, РЕАЛИЗАЦИЯ И ТРАНСФОРМАЦИИ 133

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1.7. Времевите рамки на дисертацията

Времевите рамки на дисертацията обхващат периода 1949 – 2023 г. като долната граница се обуславя от нуждата да бъде изследвана политическата структурата на Китайската народна република и съответно от там да може да се премине към анализа на процесите зад формирането

на нейната външна политика. Горната граница на изследването включва важния Двadesети конгрес на конгрес на Китайската комунистическа партия и момента на обявяването на „партньорство без граници“ между КНР и Руската федерация през февруари 2022 г., довело до политически проблеми в контекста на отношенията Китай-ЦИЕ. Леко отклонение от долната граница на тези рамки е допуснато по изключение в геополитическия анализ на Балканите поради спецификата на региона и за по-доброто разбиране на протичащите в него процеси.

II. Съдържание на дисертацията

Структурата на настоящия дисертационен труд обхваща четири глави:

В първата част на дисертационния труд е поставен акцент върху геополитическата наука и достиженията на нейните школи, което на по-късен етап в дисертацията прави възможен анализа и оценката на важноста на Балканите. Намира се отличителната черта или „диференция специфика“, която е определяща за разположените в региона държави и обосновава търсенето на външните фактори, които му оказват влияние. Достига

се до извода, че в Брюксел и други западни столици, както и в самия регион, все повече се отправят предупреждения. Русия, Китай, Турция, а и държавите от Персийския залив засилват своето политическо, икономическо и културно влияние на този полуостров в Европа – с различни ресурси, намерения и интереси. От анализиранията „диференция специфика“ на балканските държави се вижда, че всяка от тях като малката страна в системата на международните отношения се стреми да се включи в инициативи и съюзи, които да послужат за покриването на дефицитите им в различни сфери. Множеството противоречия в региона имат своите вътрешни и външни причини¹, като към първите може да се посочи раздробеността и неспособността на политическите системи да посрещат предизвикателствата, произлизащи от обществената сфера. По отношение на външните фактори, това са геополитическите интереси на световните сили.

Като цяло, в контекста на регионалната архитектура за сигурност САЩ са в доминираща позиция.

¹ Попов, Николай. Сблъсъкът на политическите идеологии през XXI век, В: *Международна политика*, XV, брой 1, Благоевград: Университетско издателство „Неофит Рилски“, юли 2019, с. 69.

В енергийното измерение САЩ полагат по-големи усилия чрез различни инициативи (напр. TSI) и засилват американската дипломатическа подкрепа за нови тръбопроводи, които да намалят зависимостта на региона от Русия. Въпреки това по отношение на енергетиката Вашингтон все още изостава много от Москва. В този контекст до известна степен Вашингтон балансира по-слабото си присъствие в икономиката на Балканите. По отношение на търговията и инвестициите Съединените щати са важен играч, но далеч не и решаващ. В определени сектори, като например енергетиката, търговията и инвестициите, и особено големите инфраструктурни проекти, Съединените щати имат сериозни конкуренти в региона. Тези фактори засилват политическото влияние на съперническите си сили по отношение на САЩ и техните европейски съюзници. Освен това системните политически недостатъци като корупцията и крехките демократични институции също фундаментално подкопават влиянието на Вашингтон и Брюксел, въпреки че в определени случаи тези недостатъци създават и краткосрочни възможности за тях. Реално Русия и Китай са по-способни да използват тези уязвимости от демократичните правителства на Съединените щати и Западна Европа. За да компенсират недостатъците си в икономическата и политическата

сфера, САЩ ще трябва да увеличат икономическата си ангажираност, както и да си сътрудничат по-тясно със своите европейски съюзници, които са лидер в икономическата сфера на Балканите.

Руската доминация в енергийния и газовия сектор търпи трансформация. Страните от региона диверсифицират своите маршрути за снабдяване, например чрез хърватския проект за втечен природен газ (терминал за внос на хърватския остров Крък) и гръцките адриатически тръбопроводи, Трансадриатическия газопровод (TAP) и Източния Средиземноморски тръбопровод (EastMed). В същото време Русия полага усилия да засили енергийната си позиция на Балканите чрез газопровода Турски поток. Грузинската война през 2008 г. и кризата в Украйна от 2014 г. оказват влияние върху външната политика на Русия спрямо региона. Конфликтът в Украйна привлича повече внимание към съперничеството между Запада и Русия по отношение на балканските държави. За Русия обаче Балканите все още не са основна зона от стратегически интерес и е малко вероятно Москва да използва сила, както прави в Украйна, за да предотврати разширяването на НАТО или ЕС, а и няма капацитета да увеличи значително своето присъствие

в Югоизточна Европа. Руската политика по-скоро се стреми да запази ограниченото си влияние и да оспори интересите на съперническите си сили, особено на САЩ и ЕС. Стратегията на Русия по отношение на Западните Балкани може да се характеризира като такава със съмнителна ефективност. Въпреки пречките, поставени от Москва, Черна гора и Северна Македония стават членове на НАТО, докато Босна и Херцеговина на практика получава План за действие за членство в Алианса. Освен това процесът на интеграция в ЕС набира нова скорост по отношение на Северна Македония и Албания в светлината на решението на Брюксел през пролетта на 2020 г. да започне преговори за присъединяване с тези две страни². Малко вероятно е Кремъл да обмисля значителни промени в стратегията си през следващите години. Въпреки това регионът остава от голямо значение за него. Москва разглежда присъединяването на балканските държави към Съюза като риск за руската страна поради това, че подобно действие развързва ръцете на Брюксел и отваря нови

² European Commission. Commission welcomes the green light to opening of accession talks with Albania and North Macedonia, Press release, 25 March 2020, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_20_519 (достъпен на 16.05.2022 г.).

възможности за Европейския съюз за допълнително разширяване на изток.

Турция също играе важно значение за региона, а и за Европейския съюз. Първо, по отношение на мюсюлманското население и милионите гастарбайтери и второ, като част от енергийния пъзел поради усилията на Анкара да се превърне в енергиен хъб. Проектите на Европейската комисия за Южен газов коридор се реализират отчасти чрез Трансадриатическия газопровод (TAP) минаващ през Турция и които се свързва към Трансанадолския газопровод (TANAP), получаващ газ от Азербайджан. TANAP е открит през 2019 г., като по този начин Турция увеличава влиянието си върху доставките на газ за ЕС. Дори дипломатическите маневри на Турция и бавната икономическа експанзия да предизвикат дебати във и извън региона, степента на влиянието ѝ остава обвързана с поведението на страните от Балканите и други участници, като ЕС и Русия.

Китай от своя страна, освен като нов глобален играч, се проявява и като нов регионален за Балканите. Икономическата мощ му предоставя всеобхватни методи за действие, а китайската стратегическа мисъл работи в дългосрочни планове, както отбелязва президента Си

Дзинпин – „реализирането на великото възраждане на китайската нация по пътя на социализма с китайска специфика изисква цели поколения членове на партията да се борят...“³. Това прави нейното предвиждане интересно, но и сложно като задача за изследователите и вземащите решения във Вашингтон и Брюксел, както и в Москва. За да успее да достигне до днешното си ниво, позволяващо проекция на мека сила в нетипичен за него регион, Китай преминава през шеметно развитие и трансформации в социалната, икономическата и културната сфера.

Във втора глава се разглеждат процесите и събитията довели до монолитната политико-икономическа структура на днешната Китайска народна република, процесите и актьорите по формирането на нейните политики и принципи на взаимодействие с други държави и наднационални субекти. Достига се до извода, че вдъхновена от Руската революция, ККП е основана през 1921 г. на принципите на марксизъм-ленинизма. Напрежението между комунистическата партия и националистическия Гоминдан, нейният основен

³ Си, Дзинпин. Китайската мечта за велико национално възраждане. Прев. от китайски на Евелина Хайн и Годор Радев, София: Изток–Запад, с. 150.

съперник, избухва в гражданска война, спечелена от комунистите през 1949 г. Въпреки пазарните реформи в края на 70-те години, съвременната китайска държава остава ленинска система, като тези на Куба, Северна Корея и Лаос. Партията разчита на три стълба: контрол на членовете, пропаганда и Народноосвободителната армия (НОАК). Като въоръжено крило на ККП, сред основните цели на НОАК се включват защита на управлението на партията и защита на интересите на партията.

През последното десетилетие на XX в. глобалните събития и вътрешните борби поставят ККП на сериозни изпитания, през които тя успява да премине. Протестите на площад Тиенанмън през 1989 г. и разпадането на Съветския съюз през следващите години предизвикват поредица от екзистенциални кризи за партията, които я принуждават да преразгледа мандата си. Конкретно имплозията на съветската власт подтиква ККП да проучи причините за колапса на режима и да въведе вътрешнопартийна реформа, за да намали рисковете от подобно развитие и в КНР. Анализът показва, че една държава, управлявана от закостеняла партийна догматична идеология, вкоренени елити, партийни организации

симулиращи работа и стагнираща икономика ще доведе неминуемо до провал.

Китайското ръководство под лидерството на Дън Сяопин си дава ясно сметка, че трябва да бъде прагматично, осъзнавайки как в новият световен икономически ред след договорите от Бретън Удс през 1944 г., КНР няма да просъществува, ако се осланя само на марксизъм-ленинизма. Догонването на хегемона – САЩ и другите високо развити държави изискват от Пекин да реализира присъединяването на страната към Световната търговска организация, получаването на финансиране от Международния валутен фонд и от Световната банка – и трите под контрола на западните бизнес елити.

От 90-те години на миналия век ККП инвестира в създаването на технократичен капацитет, който да отговори на напреженията в развитието, предизвикани от шеметния икономически възход на страната. Следвайки фразата на Дън Сяопин, че „не е важно дали котката е бяла или черна, а е важно да лови мишки“ партията използва наградите от отварянето на китайския пазар и глобализацията, извеждайки десетки милиони хора от бедността. ККП се ребрандира като двигател на успешната

промяна, насочвайки пътя на страната към богатството и подхранвайки чувството на национална гордост.

Страховете на политическия елит от социални вълнения остават константа. Лидерите споделят опасения, че общественото възмущение и политически активизъм по множество въпроси – като неравенството в доходите, заплахите за околната среда, заграбването на земя, безопасността на храните и липса на защита на потребителите – могат да застрашат контрола на партията и да катализират демократичните социални промени, на което се надяват повечето западни ръководители и експерти. Докато бързият икономически растеж увеличава поминъка на милиони, пред ККП стои проблема с огромното неравенство в доходите на китайците. Много от оплакванията на народа са изведени на бял свят благодарение на интернет, който навлиза в Китай през 1994 г. Това води до временна ерозия на част от контрола на ККП върху политическата комуникация, но по-късно се въвеждат нови регулации и ефективна инфраструктура за цензура в електронна среда, която става известна като „Великата защитна стена на Китай“ (*Great Firewall of China*).

Освен това на регионално и глобално ниво икономическият просперитет на Китай предизвиква опасения, че той ще използва силата си, за да доминира в Азия и да разшири влиянието си на световната сцена. Въпреки че социалната мотивация на Китай е очевидна по време на първата му фаза към мултилатерализъм, поведението на страната трудно може да се нарече социализиращо в случаите, когато неговият суверенитет и териториални претенции се оспорват. Независимо участието в многостранни рамки за действие в Южнокитайско море, като посочената по-горе в текста Декларацията за поведение на страните в Южнокитайско море, Пекин все още не одобрява всякакви многостранни начини за намиране на решения на възникващите кризи, засягащи собствената му оспорвана територия. Това показва, че съществуват значителни ограничения за мултилатерализма на Китай.

Факт е, че глобалното влияние на Пекин се е разпространило значително, степента и въздействието на възхода на КНР обаче тепърва се проучват. В следствие на непрозрачния характер на китайската държава, информацията за нейните външнополитически мотиви и процесите на вземане на решения е ограничена. Поради

тази причина през последните години процесът по създаване и провеждане на външната политика в Китай става обект на внимателно изследване от академичната общност. Последните научни изследвания в областта показват, че основните участници с принос за процеса, постепенно се увеличават и развиват. По време на ерата на Мао вземането на външнополитически решения е силно централизирано и до голяма степен отразява личната воля на комунистическия вожд⁴. Това правило продължава да е валидно до известна степен, но при реформите на Дън Сяопин процесът по създаване и провеждане на външната политика е институционализиран и индивидуалният избор на политическите лидери със силни позиции е по-малко доминиращ. Изследователите Хао и Хоу твърдят, че:

Изготвянето на външната политика на страната става по-малко лично, по-малко радикално, по-малко идеологично и по-прагматично и изтънчено. Националните интереси на Китай са по-конкретно дефинирани и преследването на тези

⁴ Hao, Yufan. Ying Hou. “Chinese Foreign Policy Making: A Comparative Perspective”, *Public Administration Review*, vol. 69, 2009 (pp. S136–41), p. S139, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40469084> (достъпен на 10.6.2022 г.).

интереси става по-реалистично и гъвкаво. Особено след като се присъединява към Световната търговска организация, Китай значително увеличава участието си в международната общност и се интегрира в световната икономика като цяло. Едно нововъзникващо гражданско общество обръща все по-голямо внимание на вътрешните и външните работи на Китай. В този контекст китайската външна политика, която дълго време се смята за сфера, запазена за малък брой лидери, отстъпва място на по-плюрализирана практика.⁵

Вземането на външнополитически решения в КНР става все по-многопластово в резултат на нарастващата интеграция в международната система, но в крайна сметка Китай остава авторитарна еднопартийна държава. В силно централизираната политическа структура властта на ККП е върховна и тя е основният арбитър при вземането на решения във външната политика, „оформяйки насоките, принципите и политиките на стратегическо ниво въз основа на идеологията и

⁵ Нао, Ноу, op. cit., p. S140.

политическите теории на ККП”⁶. На върха на ККП, Постоянният комитет на Политбюро, въпреки променящите се функции и структура през годините, запазва върховната власт да определя основните национални интереси на Китай и да диктува съдържанието на китайската политика. Тази институция остава най-висшият орган за вземане на решения и седемчленният ѝ екип е ядрото на държавното ръководство. Този водещ център, по-специално президентът и министър-председателят, и Водещата малка група по външни работи (ВМГ-ВР), притежава окончателната власт за вземане на решения в областта на външната политика в КНР, тъй като те поемат де факто правомощия да налагат вето или ратифицират решенията взети от Политбюро⁷. Тъй като повечето членове на Постоянния комитет на Политбюро не разполагат с изчерпателни познания за детайлите на сложни външнополитически въпроси, експертизата на специалистите от ВМГ-ВР е от решаващо значение. Държавният съветник, началникът на международен отдел

⁶ Hao, Hou, *op. cit.*, p. S137.

⁷ Lampton, David M. (Ed). *The Making of Chinese Foreign and Security Policy in the Era of Reform*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001, p. 41.

на ККП, министърът на външните работи, министърът на търговията, министърът на отбраната и министърът на държавната сигурност са на преден план сред членовете на групата. Изследванията и политическите предложения на ВМГ-ВР са от решаващо значение в ежедневните дела на формирането на външната политика. Според изследователя Томас Дж. Кристенсен, Китай няма голяма стратегия и външната му политика е твърде често без ясна посока и некоординирана на върха⁸. Тази позиция обаче по-скоро може да се окаже грешна, както и много други досегашни представи и теории на западния академичен и експертен дискурс по темата, особено след внимателно анализиране на труда на изследователя и китаист Майкъл Пилсбъри, който разглежда започналия възход на Китай през ХХ в. като внимателно обмислен, контролиран и постоянно адаптиращ се план – „Стогодишния маратон“, чрез който китайските крайни националисти (*ун пай*) в Пекин се целят

⁸ Christensen. Thomas J. “More Actors Less Coordination New Challenges for the Leaders of a Rising China”, in *China’s Foreign Policy: Who Makes It, and How Is It Made?*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2013, p. 23.

в постигането на глобална хегемония в рамките на настоящия XXI век⁹.

В трета глава се анализира мястото на КНР в света и концепциите за създаването на нов глобален образ. Изследва се проекцията на мека сила, както и ключовите конгреси на ККП, които определят пътя на неговото развитие за няколко години напред. Изводът, до който се достига в тази част на дисертацията е, че в началото на XXI в. академичния дискурс е свързан с природата на възхода на Китай и с въпроса каква сила трябва да бъде. По-точно, вътрешните дебати, свързани с текущата позиция на Китай в международната система и нейния възход, включват теми като дали Китай трябва да приеме голяма стратегия, какви са основните промени в международното разпределение на силата и къде се намира Китай в системата на международни отношения. Преформулирано по друг начин това е търсене на отговор дали света след краха на СССР се трансформира в многополюсна система или Съединените

⁹ В книгата на изследователя от Институтът „Хъдсън“ Майкъл Пилсбъри, Стогодишният маратон, София: Изток-Запад 2015, подробно се разглежда въпросният план, който националистите от ККП следват от времето на Мао до настоящия момент.

щати все още са най-силни във всички аспекти на силата, какво означава да си отговорен международен играч, издигайки се по мирен път и дали Китай трябва да се стреми да стане глобална сила. Според някои автори като Майкъл Пилсбъри политическия елит в Китай отдавна е начертал своята стратегия за заемането на лидерската позиция в глобален план, независимо от официалните заявки на неговите лидери. Безпрецедентното развитие на китайската армия и активността на форуми като Съвета за сигурност на ООН или Шестстранните преговори за разпространението на ядрени оръжия в Северна Корея на практика не следват петте принципа на Джоу Ънлай. Тези действия имат своя смисъл, изхождайки от трудове на Сундзъ като „Изкуството на войната“ или сборникът „Джангуо цъ“, съдържащ истории за стратегиите, прилагани от епохата на Воюващите царства. Днес Китай е глобално ангажиран и може да се предположи с голяма вероятност, че Пекин преследва някои от националните си цели чрез непреки средства. По този начин, тъй като КНР продължава по сегашната си траектория към увеличаване на военната и икономическа мощ, да се очаква, че тя ще се задоволи да бъде регионална сила в източна Азия или просто партньор на Съединените щати, би било наивно.

Икономическото развитие на Китай завършва пълен кръг от времето на Мао. Въпреки официалната реторика, капиталовите инвестиции¹⁰ постоянно се поддържат на високи нива и достигат до 44-45% процента от БВП в периода 2009–2014 г. (вж. *Графика 4 в Приложения*). Широките маси от потребители чрез своите спестявания правят възможно продължаването на държавната подкрепа на тежката индустрия. Моделът на натрупване има и политическо измерение. Държавният сектор е изключително важен за управляващата партия. Предполага се, че държавната собственост и държавните предприятия отразяват по-висок етап на социалистическо развитие от другите форми на икономическа собственост и

¹⁰Капиталовите инвестиции в Китай и други страни се изчисляват като покупки на нови заводи, оборудване за фирми и др., като процент от БВП. Високият процент е добър за дългосрочен икономически растеж, тъй като текущите инвестиции водят до по-голямо бъдещо производство. Брутното капиталообразуване (брутна вътрешна инвестиция) се състои от разходи за добавяне на дълготрайни активи на икономиката плюс нетни промени в нивото на запасите. Дълготрайните активи могат да включват подобрения на земята, закупуване на съоръжения, машини, оборудване и изграждането на пътища, железопътни линии и други подобни, включително училища, офиси, болници, частни жилищни жилища и търговски и промишлени сгради.

икономическа организация. Държавният сектор също е важна база за набиране на бъдещи партийни и държавни лидери. Така наречените „национални шампиони“ са държавни компании, които тотално доминират стратегическите сектори на икономиката. Комунистическият режим няма да може да преживее премахването на държавните предприятия и пълната приватизация на икономиката. Партийните лидери разбират това, но има спешна нужда от промяна на стратегията за развитие, която е загубила своята инерция. Следователно са необходими фокусирани реформи, като реформа на предлагането и промяна на механизма на финансово ограничаване. В същото време ККП осъзнава, че ефективното им прилагането е от решаващо значение за устойчивата промяна. В продължение на десетилетия икономическото развитие на Китай разчита на мобилизирането на ресурси, като е дошъл момент да се премине и към ефективното им използване.

Стратегическият курс, който Китай методично следва от Дън Сяопин, през Дзян Дзъмин и Ху Дзинтао, до Си Дзинпин показва ясно надграждане над всеки минал управленски период, като следващия е винаги с по-амбициозен и съответно с по-глобална визия. Пекин и

неговите политически ръководители управляват промяната с невероятни темпове, след като Дън повежда страната по новия ѝ курс на икономически растеж и отвореност. Опитът на китайските лидери да насърчават икономическата либерализация, като същевременно запазват силния авторитарен контрол, ще бъде предизвикателство в следващите години, с оглед на три фактора. Първо, разпространението на информация в началото на ХХІ в. достига скорост, която е немислима преди това. Второ, изгряваща и очакваща справедливо разпределение на обществените блага, средна класа, която ще има съответната критичност към управлението. Трето, нарастващата нужда от ресурси в страната ще става все по-значима. Си Дзинпин се стреми да укрепи авторитета на партията, което го води до това той все повече да приравнява нейния авторитет със своя собствен, създавайки силно персонализирана форма на управление. През 2016 г. партията нарича Си „ядрото“ на ръководството. От 2018 г. висшите партийни лидери и самият Си увещават членовете на партията първо да „поддържат позицията на генералния секретар Си като ядро на Централния комитет на партията и на цялата партия“ и второ – да „поддържат авторитета на Централния

комитет на партията и централизираното ръководство¹¹. Формулировката става известна в Китай като „две поддръжки“¹² и е фиксирана в Устава на ККП по време на Двадесетия конгрес.

В обобщение, тази глава установява, че международната ориентация на страната или най-важните външнополитически цели не се променят между 2002–2012 г. На ниво на използваните методи за постигане на основните цели са настъпили някои нови моменти в сравнение с годините на Дзян Дзъмин. Една забележителна промяна в официалната реторика е, че в края на мандата на Ху правителството дефинира основните интереси на Китай и поставя повече акцент върху поддържането на вътрешната стабилност и осигуряването на политическата система на Китай, което има външнополитически последици, въпреки че самата цел се концентрира върху

¹¹Zhiyue, Bo, “The Chinese Communist Party, with Xi Jinping at the Core”, *ChinaFile*, 7 November 2021, <https://www.chinafile.com/conversation/chinese-communist-party-xi-jinping-core> (достъпен на 26.5.2022 г.).

¹²Palmer, James. “In Xi’s Little Red Article, the Monotony Is the Point”, *Foreign Policy*, 17 July 2020, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/07/17/china-xi-mao-quishi-party/> (достъпен на 26.5.2022 г.).

вътрешната сфера. По отношение на китайските дългосрочни цели и предпочитания, Китай отдавна говори в полза на „многополярността“ в световните дела, което означава, че би искал да види намаляване на господството на САЩ. Голямата промяна по отношение на китайската геополитика идва по време на мандатите на Си Дзинпин като президент и генерален секретар. Характеристиките на „новата настояща външна политика“ на КНР са видими и показват големите амбиции, които китайското политическо ръководство си е поставило и новите геополитически пространства, към които се ориентира.

В четвърта глава се прави анализ и оценка на официални събития, документи и речи, анализира се вида и броя на посещения на Срещите на държавите ръководители в Платформата за сътрудничество Китай-ЦИЕ. Изследва се икономическото измерение на присъствието на КНР на Балканите и на тази база се разкрива трансформацията на геополитическия вектор Китай в региона. Изводът е въпреки че форматът „16 + 1“ изглежда като мултилатерална платформа, ключът към нейното разбиране е в задълбочения анализ над Китай, който от създаването ѝ до момента продължава да държи контролиращата и задаваща посоките за развитие роля.

Действията на „Поднебесната империя“ по подобие на други суперсили продължават да имат прикрита за широката общественост част. Поради това експертната и академичната общности се стремят да получат цялостна визия посредством индикации, извлечени от анализа на документи, изявления и отделни външнополитически ходове на Пекин. Заради непознаването и малкия опит относно дипломатическия стил и условности на Китай страните от ЦИЕ допускат грешка, предполагайки, че азиатският гигант ще запълни създалия се вакуум в геополитическото пространство и ще спомогне за покриването на капиталовите нужди след глобалната финансовата криза от 2008 г. в следствие на която западноевропейските и американски инвеститори в региона се отдръпват.

Форматът 16+1 следва дефиниран от Китай експериментален и иновативен подход към регионалното сътрудничество, който споделя общи черти с другите платформи за многостранно сътрудничество, които Китай създава също с африкански (“Forum on China-Africa Cooperation”)¹³, централноазиатски (“C+C5 cooperation

¹³“Beijing Declaration of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation”, China-Africa Cooperation Forum, Beijing, 12 October 2000,

mechanism”)¹⁴, източноазиатски (“ASEAN + 3”)¹⁵, латиноамерикански (“CHINA-CELAC Forum”)¹⁶ и близоизточни страни (“China–Arab States Cooperation Forum”)¹⁷, за да въведе нов тип мултилатерализъм извън контрола на Западните сили по направление „юг-юг“. Официални функции на този подход са:

http://www.focac.org/eng/zywx_1/zywj/200909/t20090925_8079753.htm (достъпен на 13.01.2023 г.).

¹⁴Yi, Wang. “Talks about the Outcomes and Consensus of the Third China+Central Asia Foreign Ministers' Meeting”, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China, 08 June 2022, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/zxxx_662805/202206/t20220608_10700380.html (достъпен на 13.01.2023 г.).

¹⁵“Joint Statement on East Asia Cooperation”, 3RD ASEAN Plus Three Summit, 28 November 1999, <https://aseanplusthree.asean.org/joint-statement-on-east-asia-cooperation-28-november-1999/> (достъпен на 13.01.2023 г.).

¹⁶“Basic Information about China-CELAC Forum”, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China, April 2016, http://www.chinacelacforum.org/eng/ltjj_1/201612/P020210828094665781093.pdf (достъпен на 10.01.2023 г.).

¹⁷Xi, Jinping. “Carrying Forward the Spirit of China-Arab Friendship and Jointly Building a China-Arab Community with a Shared Future in the New Era”, Keynote Speech, The First China-Arab States Summit, Riyadh, 9 December 2022, http://jeddah.china-consulate.gov.cn/eng/xgxw/202212/t20221213_10989942.htm (достъпен на 10.01.2023 г.).

- китайска нормативна база, състояща се от принципи като вземане на решения на базата на консенсус, приобщаване, безусловност, доброволност и печеливши резултати;
- зависими от контекста гъвкави промени между многостранни места за диалог по регионалния дневен ред и обикновено двустранно изпълнение, базирано на проекти, като многостранността не се разглежда като цел, а по-скоро като инструмент за засилване на двустранните връзки, които остават инструментални;
- свободен, постепенно разширяващ се модел на институционализация, включително събирания на много нива и механизми за секторна координация;
- настройка на дневния ред, насочена към Китай, която въпреки присъщата властова асиметрия в полза на Китай, официално може да бъде оспорена от партньорите на КНР въз основа на китайската нормативна основа на равенство, консенсус и взаимно съгласие;
- китайски финансови инструменти без условия, които обикновено са под формата на облекчени заеми от китайски политически банки (като Китайската банка

за развитие (CDB) или Китайската експортно-импортна банка (Exim Bank)), или в последните години финансиране, получено от инвестиционни фондове с китайско или смесено участие.

„16 + 1“ еволюира в резултат на натиска от ЦИЕ и ЕС, но също и поради променящите се политически мотивации на Китай. Разраствайки се до „17 + 1“, към настоящия момент след напускането на балтийските държави формата вече е „14 + 1“. В този смисъл неговата формула е доста динамична. Китай се превърна във важен играч в Европа благодарение на Платформата. Въпреки загубата на блясъка от началото, бъдещето на формата „14 + 1“ не е обречено и той едва ли ще бъде разпуснат поради няколко причини. На първо място, от китайска перспектива, това ще нанесе тежка репутационна щета, която Пекин не би желал да плати и която крие риска да рефлектира върху другите подобни форми на сътрудничество в Азия, Африка и Южна Америка както и на глобалната инициатива „ЕПЕП“. Един от основните елементи на инициативата е повишаването на свързаността на Европа и Азия, като това изключва положението, в което Китай пречи на интеграцията на кандидат членките за присъединяване към ЕС от Западните Балкани.

Гледайки от дистанцията на историята вече могат да се изведат следните погрешни предположения в целия формат „16 + 1“, „17 + 1“:

- грешна оценка на страните от ЦИЕ относно намерението на Китай да реализира ПЧИ в региона; КНР отпуска заеми по негови условия, за негови изпълнители вместо желаните инвестиции;
- очакваната голяма промяна в експорта към Китай така и не се случва поради политиката на Пекин, което води до нарастване на търговските дефицити;
- различното третиране на държавите в различните субрегиони на формата „16 + 1“, видимо и от посещенията на ниво президент на КНР, води до разочарование;
- използването на шаблонни политики от страна на Пекин в абсолютно различни краища на земното кълбо се оказва грешно – като съответно на едно място законодателството може да не въвежда пречки за действията на КНР, докато на друго – като в Европа и специално в ЕС, то да действа силно ограничаващо;

- предоверяване на Пекин в собствения му образ на успешен социалистически модел на развитие, което лесно да се приеме в бивши социалистически държави;
- близостта на Пекин с Москва за сметка на образа му.

III. Заключение

Трансформацията на геополитическия вектор на китайската външна политика на Балканите през XXI в. се изразява в двустранните и многостранните измерения на взаимосвързаните инициативи на Пекин, които са ключови за неговия подход и цели. Използването на подобна многостранност в стратегията на КНР, може да се разгледа като опит за по-ефективно управление на дипломатическите отношения и по-улеснена комуникация с региона, но на практика Китай реално действа на ниво билатерални отношения, където властовата диспропорция в следствие на неговата мащабност и икономическа мощ го поставя в печеливша позиция. Според китайския изследовател Лон Джин, самата платформа „16 + 1“ има за цел трупане на опит и извличане на поуки за Китай в развитието на други

механизми¹⁸. Въпреки заявките за ненамеса във вътрешните работи и политика за инвестиции „без обвързаности“, Пекин прави точно обратното, особено когато бъдат засегнати ключови въпроси като установяване и/или развитие на политически и икономически отношения с Тайпе, признаване на човешките права на живеещите в Синдзян уйгури. Това не значи, че той не търси баланс между двете лица на една и съща монета – твърдата реторика на глобална сила и алтернативния мирен модел на нов глобален лидер в многополюсен свят, където спазването на международното право е от изгода за повечето държави. Отношението на КНР към глобалните структури за управление и международни организации ще покаже дали ще се оформи конкретно предпочитание. При условие, че повечето от съществуващите институции и норми на глобалния ред са създадени от западните сили след края на последната световна война, Китай трябва да избира дали да им отдава принос, да ги реформира или да

¹⁸ Лон, Джин. Доклад по време на Международна конференция на научно-изследователските институти и информационно-аналитични центрове към платформата за сътрудничество ‘16 + 1’, „Усъвършенстване на платформата за сътрудничество ‘16 + 1’: пътят напред“, В: Foreign Affairs Research Papers, 12, София: Издателство ВЕЛЕС, 2018, с. 197.

ги заобикаля¹⁹. Постоянното място в Съвета за сигурност на ООН дава право на вето на КНР, но в други институции китайското влияние е много по-слабо. Как Китай ще подходи към „капана на Киндълбергер“²⁰, според които водещите глобални сили носят отговорността да осигурят обществени блага като мир, сигурност, стабилност, просперитет, чиста околна среда и др. в света също е важен въпрос когато се разглежда неговата амбиция да заеме мястото на САЩ през този век.

Въпреки последните негативни развития по отношение на Платформата за сътрудничество геополитиката на КНР към балканския регион няма да промени прокарания през XXI в. вектор. Към настоящата момент неговите политически измерения изглеждат по трудно изпълними, особено с оглед на нарасналото

¹⁹ Захариев, Захари. „Китай е основният архитект на новия световен ред“, Блумбърг, 23 ноември 2022 г, <https://www.bloombergtv.bg/a/16-biznes-start/112757-kitay-e-tozi-koyto-se-yavyava-osnovniyat-arhitekt-na-noviya-svetoven-red> (достъпен на 28 февруари 2023 г.).

²⁰ Tonchev, Plamen. 2 Major Traps on China's Path to Global Leadership, The Diplomat, 1 September 2022, <https://thediplomat.com/2022/09/2-major-traps-on-chinas-path-to-global-leadership/> (достъпен на 28 февруари 2023 г.).

противодействие от страна на Европейски съюз и САЩ, но икономическите аспекти ще продължат да са на фокус. Коридорите, които минават през региона са важни за търговията на КНР с Европа. Вземайки предвид, че китайската икономика е изправена пред няколко предизвикателства, най-сериозните от които са спекулата на ипотечния пазар и дълговото задлъжняване, страната ще преследва яростно стратегиите си за развитие на своето благосъстояние. Нуждата от продукция за изхранване на населението, особено с оглед на намаляващата с притеснителни темпове обработваема земя²¹ въкщи поради свръхкултивиране и свръхнаторяване²², също ще я подтиква към поддържането на добри отношения със страните от ЦИЕ, чиито аграрни сектори биха могли да

²¹ Wang, Orange. “China food security: ‘severe challenges’ ahead as rising incomes, geopolitical turmoil strain resources”, South China Morning Post, 29 April 2022, <https://www.scmp.com/economy/china-economy/article/3176025/china-food-security-severe-challenges-ahead-rising-incomes> (достъпен на 28 февруари 2023 г.).

²² Zongyuan Zoe, Liu. “China’s Farmland Is in Serious Trouble”, Foreign Policy, 27 February 2023, https://foreignpolicy.com/2023/02/27/china-xi-agriculture-tax/?tpcc=recirc_trending062921 (достъпен на 28 февруари 2023 г.).

покрыят част от нуждите ѝ. В крайна сметка китайската външна политика ще се влияе най-много от вътрешнодържавната динамика и как партията се справя с проблеми като нарастващата разлика в размера на доходите, високата зависимост на китайския износ, корупцията, етническите проблеми и замърсяването.

Що се отнася до Европейския съюз, на първо място се вижда нуждата Брюксел да положи сериозни усилия за подобряването на публичния си образ. Въпреки, че той инвестира сериозно в балканските страни, тези действия се популяризират по-малко или по-неефективно спрямо китайските. Това оставя погрешно усещане в населението, че Пекин помага повече и е „новият брат“, на който да се разчита. На второ място и в по-глобален план европейците със сигурност ще трябва да се търсят някакъв баланс между интересите на САЩ и Китай и отношенията си двете страни. На трето място, ЕС трябва да потърси начин за намаляване на дефицитите си по отношение на трoмавата и бавна администрация в Брюксел, спецификата на вземането на решения по въпроси касаещи външната политика и сигурността и кохезията между отделните държави членки, ако иска да остане един от центровете в оформилата се нов многополюсен свят.

Обобщен извод: Казаното в настоящото Заключение дава основание да се твърди, че **постигнатото цялостното изследване потвърждава хипотезата на дисертационния труд**, че Балканите представляват и ще представляват устойчив интерес за китайските геополитически (политически, икономически и културни) цели през XXI в., като в резултат на протичащите глобални и регионални процеси и противоборството с другите влиятелни на световната сцена играчи, се осъществяват и ще продължат да се осъществяват трансформации в намеренията и действията на Пекин в региона, като той ще остане трайно в неговата геополитическа стратегия.

IV. Научни и научно-приложни приноси на дисертационния труд

Първо. Изследвани са документите, формиращи насоките за развитие на отношенията между Китайската народна република и държавите от региона на ЦИЕ, част от които са и Балканите. На базата на полученото познание е анализирано в каква степен са изпълнени фиксираните в тях действия и като следствие – какви промени са

приложени от китайската външна политика в контекста на субрегионалните динамики.

Второ. Формулирана, аргументирана и доказана е тезата, че независимо от преплитащите се интереси и опитите за противодействие на Брюксел и Вашингтон за навлизането на Пекин в региона, начертания геополитически вектор на китайската външна политика има устойчив характер. Инициативи за сътрудничество няма да бъдат прекратени, а евентуалните промени, които ще се наблюдават, ще са по-скоро по отношение на интензитета на отношенията.

Трето. След детайлния преглед на резултатите от отношенията между Китай и страните от ЦИЕ в началото на XXI в. е направен опит да се дадат насоки за бъдещо развитие, което да бъде по-продуктивно и на негова база да се търси вече реализиране на заявената идея за “*win-win*” сътрудничество от Пекин, а не на игра с нулев резултат.

Четвърто. Получените изводи от дисертацията биха могли да помогнат относно формирането на някои политики по отношение на Китай от страна на българската дипломация, както и да послужат за основа на последващо

изследване поради ясната перспектива за продължаващи взаимоотношения Китай-ЦДЕ и Китай-ЕС.

V. Списък с публикации

- Научна публикация на тема **„Балканският полуостров – елемент от транспортната логистика или нещо повече в контекста на китайската външна политика?“** за сборник „Новите предизвикателства пред Европейския съюз и България“, София: Балкански институт за стратегически прогнози и управление на риска, 2022, ISBN 978-619-90757-6-0.

- Научна публикация на тема **„Проявата на мека сила от страна на Китай в страните от Западните балкани през 2020 година: Предизвикателства и възможност“** за Годишника на катедра "Философски и политически науки" – год. X 2020 (ISSN 2683-0973) на ЮЗУ.

- Научна публикация на тема **„Българският туристически сектор в контекста на инициативата „Един пояс, един път“** за Сп. Дипломация, издавано от Дипломатическия институт към МВнР, 2018, (ISSN 1313-6437).

ДЕКЛАРАЦИЯ ЗА НАУЧНА ЕТИЧНОСТ

Дисертационният труд „Трансформации на геополитическия вектор на китайската политика на Балканите през ХХІ век“ е авторски.

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"Transformations of the geopolitical vector of Chinese
policy in the Balkans in the XXI century"

ABSTRACT

of a dissertation for the acquisition of PhD degree

Code of professional field:
3. Social, economic and legal sciences
Professional direction
3.3. Political Sciences

Supervisor: Prof. Boris Filipov Manov PhD

Blagoevgrad, 2023

The dissertation work was discussed and approved for defense by a scientific jury from the Department of Philosophical and Political Sciences at the Faculty of Philosophy of the South-West University "Neofit Rilski" - Blagoevgrad on April 10, 2023, Protocol No. 4.

The dissertation consists of an introduction, four chapters, a conclusion, bibliography, appendices (in the form of tables and graphs) and a list of abbreviations.

The total volume of the dissertation is 190 pages - 164 are main text, 17 pages of bibliography and 3 pages including

lists and table of contents. A total of 7 tables and figures are available in the dissertation. The bibliography consists of 185 sources (paper and electronic): 99 titles in Latin (in English), 36 titles in Cyrillic (in Bulgarian). The public defense will take place on 19.05.2023, at 11:00 a.m., room 1 114, South-West University "Neofit Rilski".

The materials for the defense are available to those interested in the office of the Philosophical and Political Sciences Department of the University.

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VI. General characteristics of the dissertation

2. Relevance of the research topic

The beginning of the new century began a little more than twenty years ago, but during that time a many events took place in the world, defining it for the next few decades. Conflicts in the Middle East continue to develop, but in the equally history-rich Balkans, the situation has calmed down after a series of interrelated ethnic conflicts and struggles for independence. Gradually taking the path of European integration, some of the countries in the region entered the European Union. To a greater or lesser extent, they are adapting to the new global order that promises prosperity and development for all who profess its civilizational values. The United States of America remained as the only global superpower after the collapse of the bipolar world and without a rival they lead the collective West according to their priorities and visions of a global structure. This seemingly stable situation quickly changed with the onset of the financial crisis, a

consequence of the colossal greed of institutional investors in mortgage bonds, which led to the most serious shock to the world economy since the Great Depression of 1929. This event marked the shift of the world's center of gravity from West to East. Thus, after the 19th century was regarded the age of the British, and the next - of America, the 21st century is described as the Asian century, in which Asian politics and culture will dominate. Of course, this will happen if certain demographic and economic trends continue. Among the many factors are:

- Economic growth: Over the past few decades, Asia has seen significant economic growth, driven by countries such as China, India and Japan. These countries implement policies to encourage it, as well as investment and entrepreneurship policies, which lead to a growing middle class, a higher standard of living and greater economic stability. In 2020, China is the only major economy to

report positive GDP growth in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

- Technological advancement: Asia is home to some of the most innovative and successful technology companies in the world, such as Samsung, Huawei, TSMC and Alibaba. These companies have contributed significantly to the development of new technologies, such as cutting-edge semiconductors, 5G, artificial intelligence and robotics.
- Demographic Growth: Asia has a young and growing population that is expected to drive economic growth in the coming years. Asia's working-age population is expected to increase by 400 million by 2030, leading to increased consumer spending and investment opportunities.
- Strategic Location: Asia is strategically located between the world's two largest economies, the United States and China, making it a key hub for trade and

investment. The region also has access to some of the world's busiest sea lanes, such as the Strait of Malacca, which connects Asia to the Middle East and Europe.

- Diplomatic influence: Asia is increasingly becoming a major player in global politics, with countries such as China, Japan and India taking on more prominent roles in international organizations and diplomatic relations. These countries also created regional alliances, such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), which helped increase Asia's diplomatic influence.

With so many and significant political and economic changes in the world, the study of geopolitical dimensions becomes an important task even for smaller states like the Balkan countries, which do not have the capacity to project power outside their own territory, but require the expertise to navigate through the changing balance. The science of geopolitics itself underwent rapid

development in the 20th century, and its achievements were used extensively in the new century. Geopolitics examines and seeks answers to the conflicts in the various domains that are developed by states, starting from the classical dichotomy of land and water, passing through the air and space around the planet and entering the digital domain, which is, however, made possible by the hard (critical) infrastructure, which is located in any of the previously mentioned domains. China is making a bid with its "going out" policy and trying to assert its control over the five domains, shifting the previous authority by the West, led by the US.

The relevance of this dissertation is determined primarily by the growing importance of the People's Republic of China to the established global order. The role that the Asian country will choose to play may reformat it or even erode and obliterate it, proposing in its place a new development model radically different from the current one built after the end of the Second World War. Secondly, the interesting and important location of the Balkans in greater Eurasia will once again position them

as an arena of geopolitical conflict. The intersecting interests of the new powers have the opportunity to reaffirm or change the orientation of the countries in the region, one of which is Bulgaria. The events and processes that occur on the peninsula, and in its border territories, need an up-to-date geopolitical reading.

2.1. Scientific development of the problem

One of the reasons for developing this dissertation is the relatively low amount of research of the topic in Bulgarian academia. Perceiving China as a far distant state, however, does not mean that it does not have geopolitical interests in the Balkans in the same way that the US, located across the Atlantic, does. For this purpose, in the context of the geopolitics of the leading world powers in relation to the region and the processes taking place in it, the dissertation refers on numerous monographs, articles, analytical works. Among the great names in the research of geopolitics as a science, an indisputable place is occupied by A. Dugin, whose work provides an excellent starting point. No less valuable, of

course, in this respect are the classical works of Aristotle, S. Montesquieu, G. Hegel, A. Mahan, H. Mackinder, N. Speakman, and from more recent times those of K. Santoro, I. Lacoste, P. Boniface, F. Fukuyama, R. Keagan, and Z. Brzezinski, J. Nye and G. Friedman. Useful in relation to Balkan dynamics are the studies of D. Papadimitriou, P. Stronski and A. Davutoglu. Prominent foreign researchers of the PRC such as D. Shambaugh and W. Callahan provide an opportunity to delve deeply into the processes shaping China's domestic and foreign policy in the 20th and 21st centuries, and the monolithic work of M. Pillsbury - "The Hundred-Year Marathon" reveals the Chinese strategic thought and goals. J. Robinson and D. Acemoglu, with their theory of prosperity of nations, provide a perspective on the development potential of the PRC in the current century. V. Vukanovich, J. Mulvenon, P. Saunders, D. Drezner, K. Shirley, M. Gallagher, P. Botellier, E. Vogel, K. Humayun, H. Youfan, Y. Hou, D. Lampton, T. Christensen, A. Lukin, D. Knox, E. Emelyanova, Sh. Hu, Ya. Leksyutina, A. Saich, J. Palmer, E. Anderson, J. Engstrom, T. Zhang, M. Jing, J. Lohn, D. Pavlicevic, S. Lau, H. Lagarda, T. Eder, J. Kynge, J.

Mardell, O. Doehler and A. García-Herrero reveal details of political, economic and cultural processes in China, which as a result shape the country's foreign policy, including through the two initiatives – “16 + 1” and “One Belt, One Road”. Regarding the Chinese academic discourse on the place and role of the PRC in the new world order, the in-depth research of Zh. Tingyang and L. Minfu provide important information for the achievement of the research goals set by this dissertation. The biography of Xi Jinping, researched in the work of K. Brown, as well as the work of G. Allison contribute to the understanding of the complex figure of the current general secretary and president of the PRC. M. Jacques' analysis reveals how China views the EU and the US. Chinese researchers P. Huang and T. Kong analyze the trends regarding the two foreign policy instruments through which Beijing interacts with the Balkan region, which contributes to the understanding of the contemporary dimensions of the Chinese geopolitical vector. Due to their position in influential think tanks in China, allowing them to exert some influence over the formation of foreign

policy discourse, their reports occupy an important place in the formation of the conclusions of the dissertation.

Among Bulgarian authors examining regional processes, the works and analyzes of V. Krastev, V. Mihailov, R. Daskalov, C. Marinov, P. Pantev, E. Alexandrov and D. Bechev occupy an important place. The few authors who focus specifically on Chinese policy and its attitude towards CEE such as A. Habova, N. Stefanov, A. Koleva, V. Shopov, T. Radev, P. Tonchev, B. Manov and V. Katrandzhiev are a point of reference where the dissertation can emphasize to further expand the academic knowledge of the subject to date.

2.2. Object, subject and main hypothesis of the study

The subject of the present study is Chinese foreign policy after China became a powerful economic and political factor in the world, and **the subject** is the transformations of its geopolitical vector in relation to the Balkans at the beginning of the current century.

The working hypothesis of the dissertation is that the Balkans represent and will represent a sustainable interest for China's geopolitical (political, economic and cultural) goals in the 21st century, as a result of the ongoing global and regional processes and the confrontation with other influential players on the world stage, transformations are taking place and will continue to take place in Beijing's intentions and actions in the region, and its place will remain permanent in PRC geopolitical strategy.

2.3. Aims and objectives of the research

The main goal is to analyze the motives of China's foreign policy, directing it to the establishment of intensive political, economic and cultural relations with the countries of the region, and to achieve the intended goal, the research sets several tasks:

6. Analysis of the region as a geopolitical space through the concepts of classical geopolitical science;

7. Assessment of contemporary geopolitical realities and leading international factors in the Balkans;
8. An analysis of the processes behind the development of the PRC that lead it to a world power;
9. An analysis of the current concepts that shape Chinese foreign policy;
10. Assessing China's Impact on the Balkan region.

The research provides an answer to the questions of whether and how the geopolitical vector of Chinese foreign policy in the Balkans is being transformed, examining the tools used by the PRC.

1.8. Research methodology and methods

The methodology used is based on an interdisciplinary approach using the comparative-historical method, inductive method, secondary method of

analysis, including official documents, public speeches, research analysis.

1.9. Scientific novelty of the dissertation work

The scientific novelty of the dissertation is found in the following directions:

- analysis of the most modern political, economic and social situation in the People's Republic of China, which reflects on its foreign policy;
- analysis of the actions of the CEE countries in the context of their interactions with the PRC within the framework of "16 + 1" and "BRI" and giving an assessment of what can be improved to achieve more effective cooperation between the participants.

1.10. Structure of the exhibition

The supported thesis, the main research goal, the formulated tasks, the current and significant events for

society, considered in the dissertation imply the following structure of the exposition:

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1.11. Dissertation timelines

The time frame of the dissertation covers the period 1949 - 2023, with the lower limit determined by the need to study the political structure of the People's Republic of China and, accordingly, from there to be able to move on to the analysis of the processes behind the formation of its foreign policy. The upper time boundary

of the study includes the important Twentieth National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party and the moment of the announcement of the 'no limits' partnership between the PRC and the Russian Federation in February 2022, which led to political problems in the context of China-CEE relations. A slight deviation from the lower limit of these frameworks is exceptionally allowed in the geopolitical analysis of the Balkans due to the specificity of the region and for a better understanding of the processes taking place in it.

VII. Dissertation content

The structure of this dissertation covers four chapters:

In the first part of the dissertation, emphasis is placed on geopolitical science and the achievements of its schools, which at a later stage in the dissertation makes possible the analysis and assessment of the importance of the Balkans. There is the distinctive feature or "differentia specifica" that is defining for the countries located in the

region and justifies the search for the external factors that influence it. It concludes that warnings are increasingly being issued in Brussels and other Western capitals, as well as in the region itself. Russia, China, Turkey, and the Persian Gulf countries are increasing their political, economic and cultural influence on this peninsula in Europe - with different resources, intentions and interests. From the analyzed "differentia specifica" of the Balkan countries, it can be seen that each of them, as a small country in the system of international relations, strives to join initiatives and alliances that will serve to cover their deficits in various spheres. The many contradictions in the region have their internal and external causes, the former being the fragmentation and inability of the political systems to meet the challenges arising from the public sphere. In terms of external factors, these are the geopolitical interests of world powers.

Overall, in the context of the regional security architecture, the US is in a dominant position. In the energy dimension, the US is making greater efforts through various initiatives (e.g. Three Seas Initiative) and

increasing US diplomatic support for new pipelines to reduce the region's dependence on Russia. However, in terms of energy, Washington still lags far behind Moscow. In this context, to some extent, Washington balances its weaker presence in the economy of the Balkans. In terms of trade and investment, the United States is an important player, but far from decisive. In certain sectors, such as energy, trade and investment, and especially large infrastructure projects, the United States has serious competitors in the region. These factors increase the political influence of rival powers vis-à-vis the US and its European allies. Moreover, systemic political flaws such as corruption and fragile democratic institutions also fundamentally undermine the influence of Washington and Brussels, although in certain cases these flaws also create short-term opportunities for them. In reality, Russia and China are better able to exploit these vulnerabilities than the democratic governments of the United States and Western Europe. To compensate for its shortcomings in the economic and political spheres, the US will have to increase its economic engagement, as well as cooperate

more closely with its European allies, who are the leaders in the economic sphere in the Balkans.

Russian dominance in the energy and gas sector is undergoing a transformation. Countries in the region are diversifying their supply routes, for example through the Croatian LNG project (an import terminal on the Croatian island of Krk) and the Greek Adriatic pipelines, the Trans-Adriatic Gas Pipeline (TAP) and the Eastern Mediterranean Pipeline (EastMed). At the same time, Russia is making efforts to strengthen its energy position in the Balkans through the TurkStream gas pipeline. The 2008 Georgian war and the 2014 crisis in Ukraine have influenced Russia's foreign policy towards the region. The conflict in Ukraine draws more attention to the rivalry between the West and Russia over the Balkan states. For Russia, however, the Balkans are not yet a major area of strategic interest, and Moscow is unlikely to use force, as it is doing in Ukraine, to prevent NATO or EU enlargement, nor does it have the capacity to significantly increase its presence in Southeast Europe. Rather, Russian policy seeks to preserve its limited influence and challenge

the interests of its rival powers, especially the US and the EU. Russia's strategy regarding the Western Balkans can be characterized as one of questionable effectiveness. Despite Moscow's efforts, Montenegro and North Macedonia became NATO members, while Bosnia and Herzegovina effectively received an Alliance Membership Action Plan. In addition, the EU integration process is gaining new momentum with regard to North Macedonia and Albania in light of Brussels' decision in spring 2020 to open accession negotiations with these two countries. It is unlikely that the Kremlin will consider significant changes in its strategy in the coming years. However, the region remains of great importance to Russia. Moscow sees the accession of the Balkan states to the Union as a risk because such an action unties the hands of Brussels and opens up new opportunities for the European Union to further expand eastward.

Turkey also plays an important role for the region and for the European Union. First, in terms of the Muslim population and millions of guest workers, and second, as part of the energy puzzle due to Ankara's efforts

to become an energy hub. The European Commission's Southern Gas Corridor projects are implemented in part through the Trans-Adriatic Gas Pipeline (TAP) passing through Turkey and connecting to the Trans-Anatolian Gas Pipeline (TANAP) receiving gas from Azerbaijan. TANAP opened in 2019, thereby increasing Turkey's influence on gas supplies to the EU. Even if Turkey's diplomatic maneuvering and slow economic expansion have sparked debates in and outside the region, the extent of its influence remains tied to the behavior of Balkan countries and other actors such as the EU and Russia.

China, for its part, in addition to being a new global player, is also emerging as a new player for the Balkans. Economic power provides it with comprehensive methods of action, and China's strategic thought works in long-term plans, as President Xi Jinping notes - "realizing the great revival of the Chinese nation on the path of socialism with Chinese characteristics requires generations of party members to struggle..." . This makes its geopolitical analysis interesting, but also a difficult task for researchers and decision-makers in Washington and

Brussels, as well as in Moscow. In order to be able to reach its current level, allowing the projection of soft power in a region atypical for it, China is going through dizzying development and transformations in the social, economic and cultural spheres.

In the second chapter, the processes and events that led to the monolithic political-economic structure of today's People's Republic of China, the processes and actors in the formation of its policies and principles of interaction with other states and international institutions are examined. It is concluded that inspired by the Russian Revolution, the CCP was founded in 1921 on the principles of Marxism-Leninism. Tensions between the Communist Party and the Nationalist Kuomintang, its main rival, erupted into a civil war won by the Communists in 1949. Despite market reforms in the late 1970s, the modern Chinese state remains a Leninist system, like those of Cuba, North Korea and Laos. The party relies on three pillars: member control, propaganda and the People's Liberation Army (PLA). As the armed wing of the CCP, the primary objectives of the PLA

include the protection of Party governance and the protection of Party interests.

In the last decade of the 20th century, global events and internal struggles put the CCP to serious tests, through which it managed to pass. The Tiananmen Square protests of 1989 and the collapse of the Soviet Union in the following years triggered a series of existential crises for the party that forced it to reconsider its mandate. In particular, the implosion of Soviet power prompted the CCP to investigate the causes of the collapse of the regime and introduce internal party reform to reduce the risks of a similar development in the PRC. The analysis shows that a state governed by an ossified party dogmatic ideology, entrenched elites, party organizations simulating work and a stagnant economy will inevitably lead to failure.

The Chinese leadership under the leadership of Deng Xiaoping is clearly aware that it must be pragmatic, realizing that in the new world economic order after the Bretton Woods agreements in 1944, the PRC will not survive if it relies on Marxism-Leninism alone. Catching up with the hegemon - the US and other highly developed

countries require Beijing to implement the country's accession to the World Trade Organization, the receipt of financing from the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank - all three under the control of Western business elites.

Since the 1990s, the CCP has invested in the creation of technocratic capacity to respond to the developmental tensions brought about by the country's dizzying economic rise. Following Deng Xiaoping's phrase that "it is not important whether the cat is white or black, it is important that it catches mice...", the party has used the rewards of China's market opening and globalization, lifting tens of millions of people out of poverty. The CCP has rebranded itself as an engine of successful change, guiding the country's path to wealth and nurturing a sense of national pride.

The political elite's fears of social unrest remain a constant. Leaders share concerns that public outrage and political activism on a range of issues – such as income inequality, environmental threats, land grabbing, food safety and lack of consumer protection – could threaten

party control and catalyze democratic social change, which most Western decision-makers and experts hope for. While rapid economic growth increases the livelihoods of millions, the CCP faces the problem of China's vast income inequality. Many of the people's grievances were brought to light when the Internet was introduced in China in 1994. This led to a temporary erosion of some of the CCP's control over political communication, but later new regulations and an effective censorship infrastructure in the electronic environment were implemented, that became known as the Great Firewall of China.

Moreover, regionally and globally, China's economic prosperity raises concerns that it will use its power to dominate Asia and expand its influence on the world stage. Although China's social motivation is evident during its first phase towards multilateralism, the country's behavior can hardly be called socializing in cases where its sovereignty and territorial claims are disputed. Despite participating in multilateral frameworks for action in the South China Sea, such as the Declaration on the Conduct

of Parties in the South China Sea, Beijing still does not endorse any multilateral options of finding solutions to emerging crises affecting its own disputed territory. This shows that there are significant limitations to China's multilateralism.

The fact is that Beijing's global influence has expanded significantly, but the extent and impact of the PRC's rise is still being explored. As a consequence of the opaque nature of the Chinese state, information about its foreign policy motives and decision-making processes is limited. For this reason, in recent years, the process of creating and conducting foreign policy in China has become the object of careful study by the academic community. The latest scientific research in the field shows that the main actors contributing to the process are gradually increasing and developing. During the Mao era, foreign policy decision-making was highly centralized and largely reflected the personal will of the Communist leader. This rule still holds true to some extent, but under Deng Xiaoping's reforms, the process of making and conducting foreign policy is institutionalized and the

individual choices of political leaders with strong positions are less dominant. Researchers Hao and Hou argue, that:

*The making of the country's foreign policy is becoming less personal, less radical, less ideological and more pragmatic and sophisticated. China's national interests are more concretely defined, and the pursuit of those interests is becoming more realistic and flexible. Especially since joining the World Trade Organization, China has greatly increased its participation in the international community and integrated into the world economy as a whole. An emerging civil society is paying increasing attention to China's domestic and foreign affairs. In this context, Chinese foreign policy, long considered a realm reserved for a small number of leaders, is giving way to a more pluralistic practice.*²³

²³ Hao, Hou, op. cit., p. S140.

Foreign policy decision-making in the PRC has become increasingly multi-layered as a result of increasing integration into the international system, but ultimately China remains an authoritarian one-party state. In the highly centralized political structure, the power of the CCP is supreme, and it is the primary arbiter of foreign policy decision-making, "shaping strategic-level guidelines, principles, and policies based on the CCP's ideology and political theories."²⁴. At the top of the CCP, the Politburo Standing Committee, despite its changing functions and structure over the years, retains the ultimate power to determine China's core national interests and dictate the content of Chinese policy. This institution remains the highest decision-making body and its seven-member team is the core of the state leadership. This leading center, specifically the President and Prime Minister and the Small Leading Group on Foreign Affairs (SMG-BP), holds the ultimate decision-making power in the field of foreign policy in the PRC, as they assume de

²⁴ Hao, Hou, *op. cit.*, p. S137.

facto powers to impose veto or ratify decisions made by the Politburo²⁵. Since most members of the Politburo Standing Committee do not have comprehensive knowledge of the details of complex foreign policy issues, the expertise of SMG-BP specialists is crucial. The State Counselor, the Chief of the International Department of the CCP, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Minister of Commerce, the Minister of Defense and the Minister of State Security are prominent among the group's members. SMG-BP's research and policy proposals are crucial in the day-to-day affairs of foreign policy-making. According to researcher Thomas J. Christensen, China has no grand strategy and its foreign policy is too often directionless and uncoordinated at the top²⁶. However, this position may rather turn out to be wrong, as well as many other previous representations and theories of the Western academic and

²⁵ Lampton, David M. (Ed). *The Making of Chinese Foreign and Security Policy in the Era of Reform*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001, p. 41.

²⁶ Christensen. Thomas J. "More Actors Less Coordination New Challenges for the Leaders of a Rising China", in *China's Foreign Policy: Who Makes It, and How Is It Made?*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2013, p. 23.

expert discourse on the subject, especially after carefully analyzing the work of the researcher and Chinese scholar Michael Pillsbury, who examines the beginning of the rise of China in XX c. as a carefully considered, controlled and constantly adapting plan - "The Hundred-Year Marathon", through which the Chinese extreme nationalists (*yin pai*) in Beijing aim at achieving global hegemony within the current XXI century²⁷.

The third chapter analyzes the place of China in the world and the concepts of creating a new global image. The projection of soft power is explored, as well as the key congresses of the CCP that determine the path of its development for the next few years. The conclusion reached in this part of the dissertation is that at the beginning of the 21st century, academic discourse is about the nature of China's rise and the question of what kind of power it should be. More specifically, domestic debates

²⁷ Hudson Institute researcher Michael Pillsbury's book, „Стогодишният маратон, София: Изток-Запад 2015“, details the plan in question that CCP nationalists have followed from Mao's time to the present.

related to China's current position in the international system and its rise include topics such as whether China should adopt a grand strategy, what the major changes in the international distribution of power are, and where China stands in the system of international relations. Rephrased in another way, it is a search for an answer whether the world after the collapse of the USSR is transformed into a multipolar system or the United States is still the strongest in all aspects of power, what it means to be a responsible international player, rising through a peaceful path, and whether China must strive to become a global power. According to some authors such as Michael Pillsbury, the political elite in China has long drawn up its strategy for occupying the leadership position in the global plan, regardless of the official rhetoric of its leaders. The unprecedented development of the Chinese military and activity in forums such as the UN Security Council or the Six-Party Talks on the proliferation of nuclear weapons in North Korea do not follow Zhou Enlai's five principles. These actions have their meaning, stemming from Sun Tzu's works such as *The Art of War* or the compendium *Zhanguo Tze*, which contains stories about

the strategies employed in the Warring States era. Today, China is globally engaged, and it can be assumed with high probability that Beijing pursues some of its national goals through indirect means. Thus, as the PRC continues on its current trajectory of increasing military and economic power, it would be naïve to expect that it will settle for being a regional power in East Asia or simply a partner of the United States.

China's economic development has come full circle since the Mao era. Despite the official rhetoric, capital investment²⁸ has been consistently maintained at high levels, reaching 44-45% of GDP in the period 2009–2014. The broad masses of consumers, through their

²⁸ Capital investment in China and other countries is calculated as purchases of new plants, business equipment, etc., as a percentage of GDP. A high rate is good for long-term economic growth because current investment leads to greater future output. Gross capital formation (gross domestic investment) consists of expenditure on adding fixed assets to the economy plus net changes in the level of inventories. Fixed assets may include land improvements, the purchase of plant, machinery, equipment and the construction of roads, railways and the like, including schools, offices, hospitals, private residential dwellings and commercial and industrial buildings.

savings, make possible the continuation of state support for heavy industry. The pattern of accumulation also has a political dimension. The public sector is extremely important to the ruling party. State ownership and state enterprises are assumed to reflect a higher stage of socialist development than other forms of economic ownership and economic organization. The public sector is also an important base for recruiting future party and state leaders. The so-called "national champions" are state-owned companies that totally dominate strategic sectors of the economy. The communist regime will not be able to survive the abolition of state-owned enterprises and the complete privatization of the economy. Party leaders understand this, but there is an urgent need to change the development strategy, which has lost its momentum. Focused reforms are therefore needed, such as supply-side reform and changing the financial restraint mechanism. At the same time, the CCP recognizes that their effective implementation is critical to sustainable change. For decades, China's economic development has relied on the mobilization of resources, and the time has come to shift to their efficient use.

The strategic course that China has methodically followed from Deng Xiaoping, through Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao, to Xi Jinping shows a clear upgrade over each previous administration, with the next one always more ambitious and accordingly more global in vision. Beijing and its political leaders are driving change at an incredible pace as Deng steers the country on its new course of economic growth and openness. The attempt by Chinese leaders to promote economic liberalization while maintaining strong authoritarian control will be a challenge in the coming years, in view of three factors. First, the spread of information at the beginning of the 21st century reached a speed that was unthinkable before. Second, an emerging and expecting a fair distribution of public goods middle class that will have the appropriate criticality towards governance. Third, the growing need for resources in the country will become more and more significant. Xi Jinping has sought to strengthen the party's authority, leading him to increasingly equate its authority with his own, creating a highly personalized form of government. In 2016, the party called Xi the "core" of the leadership. Since 2018,

senior party leaders and Xi himself have exhorted party members to firstly "establish General Secretary Xi's position as the core of the Party Central Committee and the whole Party" and secondly to "establish the guiding role of Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for the New Era".²⁹ The wording became known in China as the "two establishes"³⁰ and was added in the CCP Constitution during the Twentieth Congress.

In summary, this chapter finds that the country's international orientation or most important foreign policy goals did not change between 2002–2012. At the level of the methods used to achieve the main goals, some new moments occurred compared to the Jiang Zemin years. One notable shift in official rhetoric is that at the end of Hu's tenure, the government defined China's core interests

²⁹ Zhiyue, Bo, "The Chinese Communist Party, with Xi Jinping at the Core", *ChinaFile*, 7 November 2021, <https://www.chinafile.com/conversation/chinese-communist-party-xi-jinping-core> (accessed on 26.5.2022 r.).

³⁰ Palmer, James. "In Xi's Little Red Article, the Monotony Is the Point", *Foreign Policy*, 17 July 2020, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/07/17/china-xi-mao-quishi-party/> (accessed on 26.5.2022 r.).

and placed more emphasis on maintaining domestic stability and securing China's political system, which has foreign policy implications, although the goal itself centers on the domestic sphere. In terms of long-term goals and preferences, China has long spoken in favor of "multipolarity" in world affairs, meaning it would like to see a reduction in US dominance. The big change in terms of Chinese geopolitics came during Xi Jinping's terms as president and general secretary. The characteristics of the "new assertive foreign policy" of the PRC are visible and show the great ambitions that the Chinese political leadership has set for itself and the new geopolitical spaces to which it is oriented.

The fourth chapter analyzes and evaluates official events, documents and speeches, analyzes the type and number of visits to the Leaders' Meetings in the China-CEE Cooperation Platform. The economic dimension of the presence of the People's Republic of China in the Balkans is researched and on this basis the transformation of the geopolitical vector China in the region is revealed. The bottom line is that although the "16 + 1" format looks

like a multilateral platform, the key to its understanding lies in the in-depth analysis of China, which since its inauguration has continued to hold the controlling and guiding role of development. The actions of the "Celestial Empire", like other superpowers, continue to have a hidden part for the general public. Therefore, the expert and academic communities seek to obtain a comprehensive vision through indications derived from the analysis of documents, statements and individual foreign policy moves by Beijing. Because of ignorance and little experience of China's diplomatic style and conventions, CEE countries make the mistake of assuming that the Asian giant will fill the vacuum created in the geopolitical space and help cover capital needs after the global financial crisis of 2008 as a result of which Western European and American investors in the region are pulling back.

The 16+1 format follows a Chinese-defined experimental and innovative approach to regional cooperation, which shares common features with other multilateral cooperation platforms that China also

establishes with African (“Forum on China-Africa Cooperation”)³¹, Central Asian (“C+C5 cooperation mechanism”)³², East Asian (“ASEAN + 3”)³³, Latin American (“CHINA-CELAC Forum”)³⁴ and Middle Eastern countries (“China–Arab States Cooperation Forum”)³⁵ to introduce a new type of multilateralism

³¹ “Beijing Declaration of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation”, China-Africa Cooperation Forum, Beijing, 12 October 2000, http://www.focac.org/eng/zywx_1/zywj/200909/t20090925_8079753.htm (accessed on 13.01.2023 г.).

³² Yi, Wang. “Talks about the Outcomes and Consensus of the Third China+Central Asia Foreign Ministers' Meeting”, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China, 08 June 2022, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/zxxx_662805/202206/t20220608_10700380.html (accessed on 13.01.2023 г.).

³³ “Joint Statement on East Asia Cooperation”, 3RD ASEAN Plus Three Summit, 28 November 1999, <https://aseanplusthree.asean.org/joint-statement-on-east-asia-cooperation-28-november-1999/> (accessed on 13.01.2023 г.).

³⁴ “Basic Information about China-CELAC Forum”, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China, April 2016, http://www.chinacelacforum.org/eng/ltjj_1/201612/P020210828094665781093.pdf (accessed on 10.01.2023 г.).

³⁵ Xi, Jinping. “Carrying Forward the Spirit of China-Arab Friendship and Jointly Building a China-Arab Community with a Shared Future in the New Era”, Keynote Speech, The First

beyond the control of Western powers in direction "south-south". Formal features of this approach are:

- Chinese normative framework consisting of principles such as consensus decision-making, inclusiveness, unconditionality, voluntariness and win-win results;
- context-dependent flexible shifts between multilateral venues for dialogue on the regional agenda and typically bilateral project-based implementation, with multilateralism not seen as a goal but rather as a tool to strengthen bilateral ties that remain instrumental;
- a loose, gradually expanding pattern of institutionalization, including multi-

China-Arab States Summit, Riyadh, 9 December 2022,
http://jeddah.china-consulate.gov.cn/eng/xgxw/202212/t20221213_10989942.htm
(accessed on 10.01.2023 г.).

level gatherings and sectoral coordination mechanisms;

- China-centric agenda setting that, despite the inherent power asymmetry in China's favor, can be formally contested by PRC partners based on China's normative foundation of equality, consensus, and mutual consent;
- Chinese financial instruments without strings attached, usually in the form of soft loans from Chinese policy banks (such as the China Development Bank (CDB) or the China Export-Import Bank (Exim Bank)), or in recent years, financing obtained from investment funds with Chinese or mixed participation.

"16 + 1" has evolved as a result of pressure from CEE and the EU, but also due to China's changing political motivations. The format was expanded to "17 + 1", but at

the moment, after the departure of the Baltic states, it is now "14 + 1". In this context, the formula is quite dynamic. China has become an important player in Europe thanks to the Cooperation Platform. Despite the loss of luster from the beginning, the future of the "14 + 1" format is not doomed and it is unlikely to be disbanded for several reasons. First of all, from the Chinese perspective, it will cause severe reputational damage that Beijing would not be willing to pay and that risks reflecting on other similar forms of cooperation in Asia, Africa and South America, as well as on the global Belt and Road Initiative. One of the main elements of the initiative is to increase the connectivity of Europe and Asia, and this excludes the situation in which China hinders the integration of the candidate members to join the EU from the Western Balkans.

Looking from the distance of history, the following wrong assumptions can now be made in the whole "16 + 1" / "17 + 1" / "14 + 1" format:

- wrong assessment of CEE countries regarding China's intention to

implement FDI in the region; The PRC makes loans on his terms, to his contractors in lieu of the desired investments;

- the expected big change in exports to China never happened due to Beijing's policies, leading to growing trade deficits;
- the different treatment of countries in the different sub-regions of the "16 + 1" format, also visible in the visits at the level of the President of the PRC, leads to frustration;
- the use of template policies by Beijing in completely different corners of the globe turns out to be wrong - accordingly, in one place the legislation may not introduce obstacles to the actions of the PRC, while in another - such as in Europe and

especially in the EU, it does highly restrictive;

- re-trusting Beijing in its own image of a successful socialist model of development that is easily accepted in former socialist countries;
- Beijing's proximity to Moscow at the expense of its global image.

VIII. Conclusion

The transformation of the geopolitical vector of China's foreign policy in the Balkans in the 21st century is expressed in the bilateral and multilateral dimensions of Beijing's interrelated initiatives, which are key to its approach and goals. The use of such multilateralism in the strategy of the PRC can be seen as an attempt to more effectively manage diplomatic relations and facilitate communication with the region, but in practice China actually operates at the level of bilateral relations, where

the power disparity as a result of its scale and economic power puts it in a winning position. According to Chinese researcher Long Jing, the "16 + 1" platform itself aims to gain experience and draw lessons for China in developing other mechanisms³⁶. Despite claims of non-interference in domestic affairs and a "no-strings-attached" investment policy, Beijing is doing just the opposite, especially when key issues such as establishing and/or developing political and economic relations with Taipei, recognizing the human rights of Xinjiang's Uyghurs are concerned. This does not mean that he does not seek a balance between the two sides of the same coin – the hard rhetoric of a global power and the alternative peace model of a new global leader in a multipolar world where compliance with international law benefits most countries. China's attitude towards global governance structures and international organizations will show whether a particular preference will take shape. Given that most of the existing institutions

³⁶ Long Jing. Report at The 16+1 Sofia Think Tanks Conference: 'Advancing 16+1 Cooperation Platform – the Way Ahead', In: Foreign Affairs Research Papers, 12, Sofia: VELES, 2018, p. 61.

and norms of the global order were created by Western powers after the end of the Second World War, China must choose whether to contribute to them, reform them, or circumvent them.³⁷ A permanent seat on the UN Security Council gives the PRC veto power, but in other institutions Chinese influence is much weaker. How China will approach the "Kindleberger trap"³⁸, according to which the leading global powers have the responsibility to provide public goods such as peace, security, stability, prosperity, clean environment, etc. in the world is also an important issue when considering its ambition to take the place of the United States in this century.

Despite the recent negative developments regarding the Platform for Cooperation, China's

³⁷ Захариев, Захари. „Китай е основният архитект на новия световен ред“, Блумбърг, 23 ноември 2022 г, <https://www.bloombergtv.bg/a/16-biznes-start/112757-kitay-e-tozi-koyto-se-yavyava-osnovniyat-arhitekt-na-noviya-svetoven-red> (accessed on 28.02.2023 г.).

³⁸ Tonchev, Plamen. 2 Major Traps on China's Path to Global Leadership, *The Diplomat*, 1 September 2022, <https://thediplomat.com/2022/09/2-major-traps-on-chinas-path-to-global-leadership/> (accessed on 28.02.2023 г.).

geopolitics towards the Balkan region will not change its vector in the XXI century. At the moment, its political dimensions seem more difficult to implement, especially in view of the increased opposition from the European Union and the United States, but the economic aspects will continue to be in focus. The corridors that pass through the region are important for China's trade with Europe. Given that China's economy is facing several challenges, the most serious of which are mortgage market speculation and debt leverage, the country will aggressively pursue its strategies to develop its prosperity. The need for food security, especially in view of the alarmingly decreasing arable land³⁹ at home due to over-cultivation and over-fertilization⁴⁰, will also push it to maintain good relations

³⁹ Wang, Orange. "China food security: 'severe challenges' ahead as rising incomes, geopolitical turmoil strain resources", South China Morning Post, 29 April 2022, <https://www.scmp.com/economy/china-economy/article/3176025/china-food-security-severe-challenges-ahead-rising-incomes> (accessed on 28.02.2023 г.).

⁴⁰ Zongyuan Zoe, Liu. "China's Farmland Is in Serious Trouble", Foreign Policy, 27 February 2023, https://foreignpolicy.com/2023/02/27/china-xi-agriculture-tax/?tpcc=recirc_trending062921 (accessed on 28.02.2023 г.).

with the CEE countries, whose agrarian sectors could cover part of its needs. Ultimately, China's foreign policy will be most influenced by domestic dynamics and how the party deals with issues such as the widening income gap, high dependence on Chinese exports, corruption, ethnic problems and pollution.

As far as the European Union is concerned, first of all, the need for Brussels to make serious efforts to improve its public image can be seen. Although the Union has invested heavily in the Balkan countries, these actions are promoted less or less effectively than the Chinese ones. This leaves a false impression among the population that Beijing is helping more and is the new "big brother" to rely on. Secondly, and on a more global level, the Europeans will certainly have to find some kind of balance between the interests of the US and China and their positioning between the two global powers. Thirdly, the EU must find a way to reduce its deficits in terms of the slow administration in Brussels, the specificity of decision-making on foreign policy and security issues, and the cohesion between individual member states if it wants to

remain one of the centers in the emerging new multipolar world.

Summary conclusion: What is stated in this Conclusion gives reason to claim that the overall research achieved confirms the hypothesis of the dissertation work that the Balkans represent and will represent a sustainable interest for China's geopolitical (political, economic and cultural) goals in the XXI century, as a result of the ongoing global and regional processes and the confrontation with other influential players on the world stage, transformations are taking place and will continue to take place in Beijing's intentions and actions in the region, and the Balkans will remain permanently in its geopolitical strategy.

IX. Scientific and scientific-applied contributions of the dissertation work

First. The documents forming the guidelines for the development of relations between the People's Republic of China and the countries of the CEE region, of

which the Balkans are a part, were researched. On the basis of the information obtained, it was analyzed to what extent the actions were carried out and, as a consequence, what changes were implemented by Chinese foreign policy in the context of sub-regional dynamics.

Second. The thesis has been formulated, argued and proven, that regardless of the intertwining interests and attempts to counteract the entry of Beijing into the region by Brussels and Washington, the drawn geopolitical vector of Chinese foreign policy has a sustainable character. Cooperation initiatives will not be terminated, and the possible changes that will be observed will be more in terms of the intensity of the relationship.

Third. After the detailed review of the results of the relations between China and the CEE countries at the beginning of the 21st century, an attempt was made to provide guidelines for future development that would be more productive and on its basis to seek the realization of the stated idea of "win-win" cooperation from Beijing, not a zero-sum game.

Fourth. The conclusions obtained from the dissertation could help with the formation of some policies regarding China by Bulgarian diplomatic service, as well as serve as a basis for subsequent research due to the clear prospect of continued China-CEE and China-EU relations.

X. List of Scientific Publications

- Scientific publication on the topic "The Balkan Peninsula - an element of transport logistics or something more in the context of Chinese foreign policy?" for the collection "The New Challenges for the European Union and Bulgaria", Sofia: Balkan Institute for Strategic Forecasting and Risk Management, 2022, ISBN 978-619-90757-6-0.

- Scientific publication on the topic "Chinese Soft Power Projection In Western Balkan Countries In 2020: Challenges And Opportunities" for the Yearbook

of the Department of "Philosophy and Political Sciences"
- year X 2020 (ISSN 2683-0973) of the South-West
University "Neofit Rilski".

- Scientific publication on the topic "The
Bulgarian tourism sector in the context of the initiative
"One Belt, One Road" for Diplomacy Journal, issued by
the Bulgarian Diplomatic Institute, 2018, (ISSN 1313-
6437).

STATEMENT OF SCIENTIFIC ETHICS

The dissertation work "Transformations of the geopolitical vector of Chinese policy in the Balkans in the XXI century" is authored.

During its development, foreign publications and developments were not used in violation of copyright without appropriate reference and citation.



**South-West University "Neofit Rilski"
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"Transformations of the geopolitical vector of Chinese
policy in the Balkans in the XXI century"

ABSTRACT

of a dissertation for the acquisition of PhD degree

Code of professional field:

3. Social, economic and legal sciences

Professional direction

3.3. Political Sciences

Supervisor: Prof. Boris Filipov Manov PhD

Blagoevgrad, 2023

The dissertation work was discussed and approved for defense by a scientific jury from the Department of Philosophical and Political Sciences at the Faculty of Philosophy of the South-West University "Neofit Rilski" - Blagoevgrad on April 10, 2023, Protocol No. 4.

The dissertation consists of an introduction, four chapters, a conclusion, bibliography, appendices (in the form of tables and graphs) and a list of abbreviations.

The total volume of the dissertation is 190 pages - 164 are main text, 17 pages of bibliography and 3 pages including lists and table of contents. A total of 7 tables and figures are available in the dissertation. The bibliography consists of 185 sources (paper and electronic): 99 titles in Latin (in English), 36 titles in Cyrillic (in Bulgarian). The public

defense will take place on 19.05.2023, at 11:00 a.m., room 1 114, South-West University "Neofit Rilski".

The materials for the defense are available to those interested in the office of the Philosophical and Political Sciences Department of the University.

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**XI. General characteristics of the
dissertation**

3. Relevance of the research topic

The beginning of the new century began a little more than twenty years ago, but during that time a many events took place in the world, defining it for the next few decades. Conflicts in the Middle East continue to develop, but in the equally history-rich Balkans, the situation has calmed down after a series of interrelated ethnic conflicts and struggles for independence. Gradually taking the path of European integration, some of the countries in the region entered the European Union. To a greater or lesser extent, they are adapting to the new global order that promises prosperity and development for all who profess its civilizational values. The United States of America remained as the only global superpower after the collapse of the bipolar world and without a rival they lead the collective West according to their priorities and visions of a global structure. This seemingly stable situation quickly changed with the onset of the financial crisis, a consequence of the colossal greed of institutional investors in mortgage bonds, which led to the most serious shock to the world economy since the Great Depression of 1929. This event marked the shift of the world's center of gravity from West to East. Thus, after the 19th century was

regarded the age of the British, and the next - of America, the 21st century is described as the Asian century, in which Asian politics and culture will dominate. Of course, this will happen if certain demographic and economic trends continue. Among the many factors are:

- Economic growth: Over the past few decades, Asia has seen significant economic growth, driven by countries such as China, India and Japan. These countries implement policies to encourage it, as well as investment and entrepreneurship policies, which lead to a growing middle class, a higher standard of living and greater economic stability. In 2020, China is the only major economy to report positive GDP growth in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Technological advancement: Asia is home to some of the most innovative and successful technology companies in the world, such as Samsung, Huawei, TSMC

and Alibaba. These companies have contributed significantly to the development of new technologies, such as cutting-edge semiconductors, 5G, artificial intelligence and robotics.

- Demographic Growth: Asia has a young and growing population that is expected to drive economic growth in the coming years. Asia's working-age population is expected to increase by 400 million by 2030, leading to increased consumer spending and investment opportunities.
- Strategic Location: Asia is strategically located between the world's two largest economies, the United States and China, making it a key hub for trade and investment. The region also has access to some of the world's busiest sea lanes, such as the Strait of Malacca, which connects Asia to the Middle East and Europe.
- Diplomatic influence: Asia is increasingly becoming a major player in global politics,

with countries such as China, Japan and India taking on more prominent roles in international organizations and diplomatic relations. These countries also created regional alliances, such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), which helped increase Asia's diplomatic influence.

With so many and significant political and economic changes in the world, the study of geopolitical dimensions becomes an important task even for smaller states like the Balkan countries, which do not have the capacity to project power outside their own territory, but require the expertise to navigate through the changing balance. The science of geopolitics itself underwent rapid development in the 20th century, and its achievements were used extensively in the new century. Geopolitics examines and seeks answers to the conflicts in the various domains that are developed by states, starting from the classical dichotomy of land and water, passing through the air and space around the planet and entering the digital

domain, which is, however, made possible by the hard (critical) infrastructure, which is located in any of the previously mentioned domains. China is making a bid with its "going out" policy and trying to assert its control over the five domains, shifting the previous authority by the West, led by the US.

The relevance of this dissertation is determined primarily by the growing importance of the People's Republic of China to the established global order. The role that the Asian country will choose to play may reformat it or even erode and obliterate it, proposing in its place a new development model radically different from the current one built after the end of the Second World War. Secondly, the interesting and important location of the Balkans in greater Eurasia will once again position them as an arena of geopolitical conflict. The intersecting interests of the new powers have the opportunity to reaffirm or change the orientation of the countries in the region, one of which is Bulgaria. The events and processes that occur on the peninsula, and in its border territories, need an up-to-date geopolitical reading.

3.1. Scientific development of the problem

One of the reasons for developing this dissertation is the relatively low amount of research of the topic in Bulgarian academia. Perceiving China as a far distant state, however, does not mean that it does not have geopolitical interests in the Balkans in the same way that the US, located across the Atlantic, does. For this purpose, in the context of the geopolitics of the leading world powers in relation to the region and the processes taking place in it, the dissertation refers on numerous monographs, articles, analytical works. Among the great names in the research of geopolitics as a science, an indisputable place is occupied by A. Dugin, whose work provides an excellent starting point. No less valuable, of course, in this respect are the classical works of Aristotle, S. Montesquieu, G. Hegel, A. Mahan, H. Mackinder, N. Speakman, and from more recent times those of K. Santoro, I. Lacoste, P. Boniface, F. Fukuyama, R. Keagan, and Z. Brzezinski, J. Nye and G. Friedman. Useful in relation to Balkan dynamics are the studies of D.

Papadimitriou, P. Stronski and A. Davutoglu. Prominent foreign researchers of the PRC such as D. Shambaugh and W. Callahan provide an opportunity to delve deeply into the processes shaping China's domestic and foreign policy in the 20th and 21st centuries, and the monolithic work of M. Pillsbury - "The Hundred-Year Marathon" reveals the Chinese strategic thought and goals. J. Robinson and D. Acemoglu, with their theory of prosperity of nations, provide a perspective on the development potential of the PRC in the current century. V. Vukanovich, J. Mulvenon, P. Saunders, D. Drezner, K. Shirley, M. Gallagher, P. Botellier, E. Vogel, K. Humayun, H. Youfan, Y. Hou, D. Lampton, T. Christensen, A. Lukin, D. Knox, E. Emelyanova, Sh. Hu, Ya. Leksyutina, A. Saich, J. Palmer, E. Anderson, J. Engstrom, T. Zhang, M. Jing, J. Lohn, D. Pavlicevic, S. Lau, H. Lagarda, T. Eder, J. Kynge, J. Mardell, O. Doehler and A. García-Herrero reveal details of political, economic and cultural processes in China, which as a result shape the country's foreign policy, including through the two initiatives – “16 + 1” and “One Belt, One Road”. Regarding the Chinese academic discourse on the place and role of the PRC in the new

world order, the in-depth research of Zh. Tingyang and L. Minfu provide important information for the achievement of the research goals set by this dissertation. The biography of Xi Jinping, researched in the work of K. Brown, as well as the work of G. Allison contribute to the understanding of the complex figure of the current general secretary and president of the PRC. M. Jacques' analysis reveals how China views the EU and the US. Chinese researchers P. Huang and T. Kong analyze the trends regarding the two foreign policy instruments through which Beijing interacts with the Balkan region, which contributes to the understanding of the contemporary dimensions of the Chinese geopolitical vector. Due to their position in influential think tanks in China, allowing them to exert some influence over the formation of foreign policy discourse, their reports occupy an important place in the formation of the conclusions of the dissertation.

Among Bulgarian authors examining regional processes, the works and analyzes of V. Krastev, V. Mihailov, R. Daskalov, C. Marinov, P. Pantev, E. Alexandrov and D. Bechev occupy an important place.

The few authors who focus specifically on Chinese policy and its attitude towards CEE such as A. Habova, N. Stefanov, A. Koleva, V. Shopov, T. Radev, P. Tonchev, B. Manov and V. Katrandzhiev are a point of reference where the dissertation can emphasize to further expand the academic knowledge of the subject to date.

3.2. Object, subject and main hypothesis of the study

The subject of the present study is Chinese foreign policy after China became a powerful economic and political factor in the world, and **the subject** is the transformations of its geopolitical vector in relation to the Balkans at the beginning of the current century.

The working hypothesis of the dissertation is that the Balkans represent and will represent a sustainable interest for China's geopolitical (political, economic and cultural) goals in the 21st century, as a result of the ongoing global and regional processes and the confrontation with other influential players on the world

stage, transformations are taking place and will continue to take place in Beijing's intentions and actions in the region, and its place will remain permanent in PRC geopolitical strategy.

3.3. Aims and objectives of the research

The main goal is to analyze the motives of China's foreign policy, directing it to the establishment of intensive political, economic and cultural relations with the countries of the region, and to achieve the intended goal, the research sets several tasks:

- 11.** Analysis of the region as a geopolitical space through the concepts of classical geopolitical science;
- 12.** Assessment of contemporary geopolitical realities and leading international factors in the Balkans;
- 13.** An analysis of the processes behind the development of the PRC that lead it to a world power;

14. An analysis of the current concepts that shape Chinese foreign policy;
15. Assessing China's Impact on the Balkan region.

The research provides an answer to the questions of whether and how the geopolitical vector of Chinese foreign policy in the Balkans is being transformed, examining the tools used by the PRC.

1.12. Research methodology and methods

The methodology used is based on an interdisciplinary approach using the comparative-historical method, inductive method, secondary method of analysis, including official documents, public speeches, research analysis.

1.13. Scientific novelty of the dissertation work

The scientific novelty of the dissertation is found in the following directions:

- analysis of the most modern political, economic and social situation in the People's Republic of China, which reflects on its foreign policy;
- analysis of the actions of the CEE countries in the context of their interactions with the PRC within the framework of "16 + 1" and "BRI" and giving an assessment of what can be improved to achieve more effective cooperation between the participants.

1.14. Structure of the exhibition

The supported thesis, the main research goal, the formulated tasks, the current and significant events for society, considered in the dissertation imply the following structure of the exposition:

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1.15. Dissertation timelines

The time frame of the dissertation covers the period 1949 - 2023, with the lower limit determined by the need to study the political structure of the People's Republic of China and, accordingly, from there to be able to move on to the analysis of the processes behind the formation of its foreign policy. The upper time boundary of the study includes the important Twentieth National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party and the moment of the announcement of the 'no limits' partnership between the PRC and the Russian Federation in February 2022, which led to political problems in the context of China-CEE relations. A slight deviation from the lower limit of these frameworks is exceptionally allowed in the

geopolitical analysis of the Balkans due to the specificity of the region and for a better understanding of the processes taking place in it.

XII. Dissertation content

The structure of this dissertation covers four chapters:

In the first part of the dissertation, emphasis is placed on geopolitical science and the achievements of its schools, which at a later stage in the dissertation makes possible the analysis and assessment of the importance of the Balkans. There is the distinctive feature or "differentia specifica" that is defining for the countries located in the region and justifies the search for the external factors that influence it. It concludes that warnings are increasingly being issued in Brussels and other Western capitals, as well as in the region itself. Russia, China, Turkey, and the Persian Gulf countries are increasing their political, economic and cultural influence on this peninsula in Europe - with different resources, intentions and interests.

From the analyzed "differentia specifica" of the Balkan countries, it can be seen that each of them, as a small country in the system of international relations, strives to join initiatives and alliances that will serve to cover their deficits in various spheres. The many contradictions in the region have their internal and external causes, the former being the fragmentation and inability of the political systems to meet the challenges arising from the public sphere. In terms of external factors, these are the geopolitical interests of world powers.

Overall, in the context of the regional security architecture, the US is in a dominant position. In the energy dimension, the US is making greater efforts through various initiatives (e.g. Three Seas Initiative) and increasing US diplomatic support for new pipelines to reduce the region's dependence on Russia. However, in terms of energy, Washington still lags far behind Moscow. In this context, to some extent, Washington balances its weaker presence in the economy of the Balkans. In terms of trade and investment, the United States is an important player, but far from decisive. In certain sectors, such as

energy, trade and investment, and especially large infrastructure projects, the United States has serious competitors in the region. These factors increase the political influence of rival powers vis-à-vis the US and its European allies. Moreover, systemic political flaws such as corruption and fragile democratic institutions also fundamentally undermine the influence of Washington and Brussels, although in certain cases these flaws also create short-term opportunities for them. In reality, Russia and China are better able to exploit these vulnerabilities than the democratic governments of the United States and Western Europe. To compensate for its shortcomings in the economic and political spheres, the US will have to increase its economic engagement, as well as cooperate more closely with its European allies, who are the leaders in the economic sphere in the Balkans.

Russian dominance in the energy and gas sector is undergoing a transformation. Countries in the region are diversifying their supply routes, for example through the Croatian LNG project (an import terminal on the Croatian island of Krk) and the Greek Adriatic pipelines, the Trans-

Adriatic Gas Pipeline (TAP) and the Eastern Mediterranean Pipeline (EastMed). At the same time, Russia is making efforts to strengthen its energy position in the Balkans through the TurkStream gas pipeline. The 2008 Georgian war and the 2014 crisis in Ukraine have influenced Russia's foreign policy towards the region. The conflict in Ukraine draws more attention to the rivalry between the West and Russia over the Balkan states. For Russia, however, the Balkans are not yet a major area of strategic interest, and Moscow is unlikely to use force, as it is doing in Ukraine, to prevent NATO or EU enlargement, nor does it have the capacity to significantly increase its presence in Southeast Europe. Rather, Russian policy seeks to preserve its limited influence and challenge the interests of its rival powers, especially the US and the EU. Russia's strategy regarding the Western Balkans can be characterized as one of questionable effectiveness. Despite Moscow's efforts, Montenegro and North Macedonia became NATO members, while Bosnia and Herzegovina effectively received an Alliance Membership Action Plan. In addition, the EU integration process is gaining new momentum with regard to North Macedonia

and Albania in light of Brussels' decision in spring 2020 to open accession negotiations with these two countries. It is unlikely that the Kremlin will consider significant changes in its strategy in the coming years. However, the region remains of great importance to Russia. Moscow sees the accession of the Balkan states to the Union as a risk because such an action unties the hands of Brussels and opens up new opportunities for the European Union to further expand eastward.

Turkey also plays an important role for the region and for the European Union. First, in terms of the Muslim population and millions of guest workers, and second, as part of the energy puzzle due to Ankara's efforts to become an energy hub. The European Commission's Southern Gas Corridor projects are implemented in part through the Trans-Adriatic Gas Pipeline (TAP) passing through Turkey and connecting to the Trans-Anatolian Gas Pipeline (TANAP) receiving gas from Azerbaijan. TANAP opened in 2019, thereby increasing Turkey's influence on gas supplies to the EU. Even if Turkey's diplomatic maneuvering and slow economic expansion

have sparked debates in and outside the region, the extent of its influence remains tied to the behavior of Balkan countries and other actors such as the EU and Russia.

China, for its part, in addition to being a new global player, is also emerging as a new player for the Balkans. Economic power provides it with comprehensive methods of action, and China's strategic thought works in long-term plans, as President Xi Jinping notes - "realizing the great revival of the Chinese nation on the path of socialism with Chinese characteristics requires generations of party members to struggle..." . This makes its geopolitical analysis interesting, but also a difficult task for researchers and decision-makers in Washington and Brussels, as well as in Moscow. In order to be able to reach its current level, allowing the projection of soft power in a region atypical for it, China is going through dizzying development and transformations in the social, economic and cultural spheres.

In the second chapter, the processes and events that led to the monolithic political-economic structure of today's People's Republic of China, the

processes and actors in the formation of its policies and principles of interaction with other states and international institutions are examined. It is concluded that inspired by the Russian Revolution, the CCP was founded in 1921 on the principles of Marxism-Leninism. Tensions between the Communist Party and the Nationalist Kuomintang, its main rival, erupted into a civil war won by the Communists in 1949. Despite market reforms in the late 1970s, the modern Chinese state remains a Leninist system, like those of Cuba, North Korea and Laos. The party relies on three pillars: member control, propaganda and the People's Liberation Army (PLA). As the armed wing of the CCP, the primary objectives of the PLA include the protection of Party governance and the protection of Party interests.

In the last decade of the 20th century, global events and internal struggles put the CCP to serious tests, through which it managed to pass. The Tiananmen Square protests of 1989 and the collapse of the Soviet Union in the following years triggered a series of existential crises for the party that forced it to reconsider its mandate. In

particular, the implosion of Soviet power prompted the CCP to investigate the causes of the collapse of the regime and introduce internal party reform to reduce the risks of a similar development in the PRC. The analysis shows that a state governed by an ossified party dogmatic ideology, entrenched elites, party organizations simulating work and a stagnant economy will inevitably lead to failure.

The Chinese leadership under the leadership of Deng Xiaoping is clearly aware that it must be pragmatic, realizing that in the new world economic order after the Bretton Woods agreements in 1944, the PRC will not survive if it relies on Marxism-Leninism alone. Catching up with the hegemon - the US and other highly developed countries require Beijing to implement the country's accession to the World Trade Organization, the receipt of financing from the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank - all three under the control of Western business elites.

Since the 1990s, the CCP has invested in the creation of technocratic capacity to respond to the developmental tensions brought about by the country's

dizzying economic rise. Following Deng Xiaoping's phrase that "it is not important whether the cat is white or black, it is important that it catches mice...", the party has used the rewards of China's market opening and globalization, lifting tens of millions of people out of poverty. The CCP has rebranded itself as an engine of successful change, guiding the country's path to wealth and nurturing a sense of national pride.

The political elite's fears of social unrest remain a constant. Leaders share concerns that public outrage and political activism on a range of issues – such as income inequality, environmental threats, land grabbing, food safety and lack of consumer protection – could threaten party control and catalyze democratic social change, which most Western decision-makers and experts hope for. While rapid economic growth increases the livelihoods of millions, the CCP faces the problem of China's vast income inequality. Many of the people's grievances were brought to light when the Internet was introduced in China in 1994. This led to a temporary erosion of some of the CCP's control over political

communication, but later new regulations and an effective censorship infrastructure in the electronic environment were implemented, that became known as the Great Firewall of China.

Moreover, regionally and globally, China's economic prosperity raises concerns that it will use its power to dominate Asia and expand its influence on the world stage. Although China's social motivation is evident during its first phase towards multilateralism, the country's behavior can hardly be called socializing in cases where its sovereignty and territorial claims are disputed. Despite participating in multilateral frameworks for action in the South China Sea, such as the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea, Beijing still does not endorse any multilateral options of finding solutions to emerging crises affecting its own disputed territory. This shows that there are significant limitations to China's multilateralism.

The fact is that Beijing's global influence has expanded significantly, but the extent and impact of the PRC's rise is still being explored. As a consequence of the

opaque nature of the Chinese state, information about its foreign policy motives and decision-making processes is limited. For this reason, in recent years, the process of creating and conducting foreign policy in China has become the object of careful study by the academic community. The latest scientific research in the field shows that the main actors contributing to the process are gradually increasing and developing. During the Mao era, foreign policy decision-making was highly centralized and largely reflected the personal will of the Communist leader. This rule still holds true to some extent, but under Deng Xiaoping's reforms, the process of making and conducting foreign policy is institutionalized and the individual choices of political leaders with strong positions are less dominant. Researchers Hao and Hou argue, that:

The making of the country's foreign policy is becoming less personal, less radical, less ideological and more pragmatic and sophisticated. China's national interests are more concretely defined, and the pursuit of those

interests is becoming more realistic and flexible. Especially since joining the World Trade Organization, China has greatly increased its participation in the international community and integrated into the world economy as a whole. An emerging civil society is paying increasing attention to China's domestic and foreign affairs. In this context, Chinese foreign policy, long considered a realm reserved for a small number of leaders, is giving way to a more pluralistic practice.⁴¹

Foreign policy decision-making in the PRC has become increasingly multi-layered as a result of increasing integration into the international system, but ultimately China remains an authoritarian one-party state. In the highly centralized political structure, the power of the CCP is supreme, and it is the primary arbiter of foreign policy decision-making, "shaping strategic-level guidelines, principles, and policies based on the CCP's

⁴¹ Hao, Hou, op. cit., p. S140.

ideology and political theories."⁴². At the top of the CCP, the Politburo Standing Committee, despite its changing functions and structure over the years, retains the ultimate power to determine China's core national interests and dictate the content of Chinese policy. This institution remains the highest decision-making body and its seven-member team is the core of the state leadership. This leading center, specifically the President and Prime Minister and the Small Leading Group on Foreign Affairs (SMG-BP), holds the ultimate decision-making power in the field of foreign policy in the PRC, as they assume de facto powers to impose veto or ratify decisions made by the Politburo⁴³. Since most members of the Politburo Standing Committee do not have comprehensive knowledge of the details of complex foreign policy issues, the expertise of SMG-BP specialists is crucial. The State Counselor, the Chief of the International Department of

⁴² Hao, Hou, *op. cit.*, p. S137.

⁴³ Lampton, David M. (Ed). *The Making of Chinese Foreign and Security Policy in the Era of Reform*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001, p. 41.

the CCP, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Minister of Commerce, the Minister of Defense and the Minister of State Security are prominent among the group's members. SMG-BP's research and policy proposals are crucial in the day-to-day affairs of foreign policy-making. According to researcher Thomas J. Christensen, China has no grand strategy and its foreign policy is too often directionless and uncoordinated at the top⁴⁴. However, this position may rather turn out to be wrong, as well as many other previous representations and theories of the Western academic and expert discourse on the subject, especially after carefully analyzing the work of the researcher and Chinese scholar Michael Pillsbury, who examines the beginning of the rise of China in XX c. as a carefully considered, controlled and constantly adapting plan - "The Hundred-Year Marathon", through which the Chinese extreme nationalists (*yin pai*)

⁴⁴ Christensen. Thomas J. "More Actors Less Coordination New Challenges for the Leaders of a Rising China", in *China's Foreign Policy: Who Makes It, and How Is It Made?*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2013, p. 23.

in Beijing aim at achieving global hegemony within the current XXI century⁴⁵.

The third chapter analyzes the place of China in the world and the concepts of creating a new global image. The projection of soft power is explored, as well as the key congresses of the CCP that determine the path of its development for the next few years. The conclusion reached in this part of the dissertation is that at the beginning of the 21st century, academic discourse is about the nature of China's rise and the question of what kind of power it should be. More specifically, domestic debates related to China's current position in the international system and its rise include topics such as whether China should adopt a grand strategy, what the major changes in the international distribution of power are, and where China stands in the system of international relations. Rephrased in another way, it is a search for an answer

⁴⁵ Hudson Institute researcher Michael Pillsbury's book, „Стогодишният маратон, София: Изток-Запад 2015“, details the plan in question that CCP nationalists have followed from Mao's time to the present.

whether the world after the collapse of the USSR is transformed into a multipolar system or the United States is still the strongest in all aspects of power, what it means to be a responsible international player, rising through a peaceful path, and whether China must strive to become a global power. According to some authors such as Michael Pillsbury, the political elite in China has long drawn up its strategy for occupying the leadership position in the global plan, regardless of the official rhetoric of its leaders. The unprecedented development of the Chinese military and activity in forums such as the UN Security Council or the Six-Party Talks on the proliferation of nuclear weapons in North Korea do not follow Zhou Enlai's five principles. These actions have their meaning, stemming from Sun Tzu's works such as *The Art of War* or the compendium *Zhanguo Tze*, which contains stories about the strategies employed in the Warring States era. Today, China is globally engaged, and it can be assumed with high probability that Beijing pursues some of its national goals through indirect means. Thus, as the PRC continues on its current trajectory of increasing military and economic power, it would be naïve to expect that it will

settle for being a regional power in East Asia or simply a partner of the United States.

China's economic development has come full circle since the Mao era. Despite the official rhetoric, capital investment⁴⁶ has been consistently maintained at high levels, reaching 44-45% of GDP in the period 2009–2014. The broad masses of consumers, through their savings, make possible the continuation of state support for heavy industry. The pattern of accumulation also has a political dimension. The public sector is extremely important to the ruling party. State ownership and state enterprises are assumed to reflect a higher stage of socialist development than other forms of economic

⁴⁶ Capital investment in China and other countries is calculated as purchases of new plants, business equipment, etc., as a percentage of GDP. A high rate is good for long-term economic growth because current investment leads to greater future output. Gross capital formation (gross domestic investment) consists of expenditure on adding fixed assets to the economy plus net changes in the level of inventories. Fixed assets may include land improvements, the purchase of plant, machinery, equipment and the construction of roads, railways and the like, including schools, offices, hospitals, private residential dwellings and commercial and industrial buildings.

ownership and economic organization. The public sector is also an important base for recruiting future party and state leaders. The so-called "national champions" are state-owned companies that totally dominate strategic sectors of the economy. The communist regime will not be able to survive the abolition of state-owned enterprises and the complete privatization of the economy. Party leaders understand this, but there is an urgent need to change the development strategy, which has lost its momentum. Focused reforms are therefore needed, such as supply-side reform and changing the financial restraint mechanism. At the same time, the CCP recognizes that their effective implementation is critical to sustainable change. For decades, China's economic development has relied on the mobilization of resources, and the time has come to shift to their efficient use.

The strategic course that China has methodically followed from Deng Xiaoping, through Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao, to Xi Jinping shows a clear upgrade over each previous administration, with the next one always more ambitious and accordingly more global

in vision. Beijing and its political leaders are driving change at an incredible pace as Deng steers the country on its new course of economic growth and openness. The attempt by Chinese leaders to promote economic liberalization while maintaining strong authoritarian control will be a challenge in the coming years, in view of three factors. First, the spread of information at the beginning of the 21st century reached a speed that was unthinkable before. Second, an emerging and expecting a fair distribution of public goods middle class that will have the appropriate criticality towards governance. Third, the growing need for resources in the country will become more and more significant. Xi Jinping has sought to strengthen the party's authority, leading him to increasingly equate its authority with his own, creating a highly personalized form of government. In 2016, the party called Xi the "core" of the leadership. Since 2018, senior party leaders and Xi himself have exhorted party members to firstly "establish General Secretary Xi's position as the core of the Party Central Committee and the whole Party" and secondly to "establish the guiding role of Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese

Characteristics for the New Era”.⁴⁷ The wording became known in China as the "two establishes"⁴⁸ and was added in the CCP Constitution during the Twentieth Congress.

In summary, this chapter finds that the country's international orientation or most important foreign policy goals did not change between 2002–2012. At the level of the methods used to achieve the main goals, some new moments occurred compared to the Jiang Zemin years. One notable shift in official rhetoric is that at the end of Hu's tenure, the government defined China's core interests and placed more emphasis on maintaining domestic stability and securing China's political system, which has foreign policy implications, although the goal itself centers on the domestic sphere. In terms of long-term goals and preferences, China has long spoken in favor of

⁴⁷ Zhiyue, Bo, “The Chinese Communist Party, with Xi Jinping at the Core”, *ChinaFile*, 7 November 2021, <https://www.chinafile.com/conversation/chinese-communist-party-xi-jinping-core> (accessed on 26.5.2022 r.).

⁴⁸ Palmer, James. “In Xi’s Little Red Article, the Monotony Is the Point”, *Foreign Policy*, 17 July 2020, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/07/17/china-xi-mao-quishi-party/> (accessed on 26.5.2022 r.).

"multipolarity" in world affairs, meaning it would like to see a reduction in US dominance. The big change in terms of Chinese geopolitics came during Xi Jinping's terms as president and general secretary. The characteristics of the "new assertive foreign policy" of the PRC are visible and show the great ambitions that the Chinese political leadership has set for itself and the new geopolitical spaces to which it is oriented.

The fourth chapter analyzes and evaluates official events, documents and speeches, analyzes the type and number of visits to the Leaders' Meetings in the China-CEE Cooperation Platform. The economic dimension of the presence of the People's Republic of China in the Balkans is researched and on this basis the transformation of the geopolitical vector China in the region is revealed. The bottom line is that although the "16 + 1" format looks like a multilateral platform, the key to its understanding lies in the in-depth analysis of China, which since its inauguration has continued to hold the controlling and guiding role of development. The actions of the "Celestial Empire", like other superpowers, continue to have a

hidden part for the general public. Therefore, the expert and academic communities seek to obtain a comprehensive vision through indications derived from the analysis of documents, statements and individual foreign policy moves by Beijing. Because of ignorance and little experience of China's diplomatic style and conventions, CEE countries make the mistake of assuming that the Asian giant will fill the vacuum created in the geopolitical space and help cover capital needs after the global financial crisis of 2008 as a result of which Western European and American investors in the region are pulling back.

The 16+1 format follows a Chinese-defined experimental and innovative approach to regional cooperation, which shares common features with other multilateral cooperation platforms that China also establishes with African (“Forum on China-Africa Cooperation”)⁴⁹, Central Asian (“C+C5 cooperation

⁴⁹ “Beijing Declaration of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation”, China-Africa Cooperation Forum, Beijing, 12 October 2000,

mechanism”)⁵⁰, East Asian (“ASEAN + 3”)⁵¹, Latin American (“CHINA-CELAC Forum”)⁵² and Middle Eastern countries (“China–Arab States Cooperation Forum”)⁵³ to introduce a new type of multilateralism

http://www.focac.org/eng/zywx_1/zywj/200909/t20090925_8079753.htm (accessed on 13.01.2023 г.).

⁵⁰ Yi, Wang. “Talks about the Outcomes and Consensus of the Third China+Central Asia Foreign Ministers' Meeting”, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China, 08 June 2022,

https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/zxxx_662805/202206/t20220608_10700380.html (accessed on 13.01.2023 г.).

⁵¹ “Joint Statement on East Asia Cooperation”, 3RD ASEAN Plus Three Summit, 28 November 1999,

<https://aseanplusthree.asean.org/joint-statement-on-east-asia-cooperation-28-november-1999/> (accessed on 13.01.2023 г.).

⁵² “Basic Information about China-CELAC Forum”, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China, April 2016,

http://www.chinacelacforum.org/eng/ltj_1/201612/P020210828094665781093.pdf (accessed on 10.01.2023 г.).

⁵³ Xi, Jinping. “Carrying Forward the Spirit of China-Arab Friendship and Jointly Building a China-Arab Community with a Shared Future in the New Era”, Keynote Speech, The First China-Arab States Summit, Riyadh, 9 December 2022,

http://jeddah.china-consulate.gov.cn/eng/xgxw/202212/t20221213_10989942.htm (accessed on 10.01.2023 г.).

beyond the control of Western powers in direction "south-south". Formal features of this approach are:

- Chinese normative framework consisting of principles such as consensus decision-making, inclusiveness, unconditionality, voluntariness and win-win results;
- context-dependent flexible shifts between multilateral venues for dialogue on the regional agenda and typically bilateral project-based implementation, with multilateralism not seen as a goal but rather as a tool to strengthen bilateral ties that remain instrumental;
- a loose, gradually expanding pattern of institutionalization, including multi-level gatherings and sectoral coordination mechanisms;
- China-centric agenda setting that, despite the inherent power asymmetry

in China's favor, can be formally contested by PRC partners based on China's normative foundation of equality, consensus, and mutual consent;

- Chinese financial instruments without strings attached, usually in the form of soft loans from Chinese policy banks (such as the China Development Bank (CDB) or the China Export-Import Bank (Exim Bank)), or in recent years, financing obtained from investment funds with Chinese or mixed participation.

"16 + 1" has evolved as a result of pressure from CEE and the EU, but also due to China's changing political motivations. The format was expanded to "17 + 1", but at the moment, after the departure of the Baltic states, it is now "14 + 1". In this context, the formula is quite dynamic. China has become an important player in Europe thanks to the Cooperation Platform. Despite the loss of

luster from the beginning, the future of the "14 + 1" format is not doomed and it is unlikely to be disbanded for several reasons. First of all, from the Chinese perspective, it will cause severe reputational damage that Beijing would not be willing to pay and that risks reflecting on other similar forms of cooperation in Asia, Africa and South America, as well as on the global Belt and Road Initiative. One of the main elements of the initiative is to increase the connectivity of Europe and Asia, and this excludes the situation in which China hinders the integration of the candidate members to join the EU from the Western Balkans.

Looking from the distance of history, the following wrong assumptions can now be made in the whole "16 + 1" / "17 + 1" / "14 + 1" format:

- wrong assessment of CEE countries regarding China's intention to implement FDI in the region; The PRC makes loans on his terms, to his contractors in lieu of the desired investments;

- the expected big change in exports to China never happened due to Beijing's policies, leading to growing trade deficits;
- the different treatment of countries in the different sub-regions of the "16 + 1" format, also visible in the visits at the level of the President of the PRC, leads to frustration;
- the use of template policies by Beijing in completely different corners of the globe turns out to be wrong - accordingly, in one place the legislation may not introduce obstacles to the actions of the PRC, while in another - such as in Europe and especially in the EU, it does highly restrictive;
- re-trusting Beijing in its own image of a successful socialist model of

development that is easily accepted in former socialist countries;

- Beijing's proximity to Moscow at the expense of its global image.

XIII. Conclusion

The transformation of the geopolitical vector of China's foreign policy in the Balkans in the 21st century is expressed in the bilateral and multilateral dimensions of Beijing's interrelated initiatives, which are key to its approach and goals. The use of such multilateralism in the strategy of the PRC can be seen as an attempt to more effectively manage diplomatic relations and facilitate communication with the region, but in practice China actually operates at the level of bilateral relations, where the power disparity as a result of its scale and economic power puts it in a winning position. According to Chinese researcher Long Jing, the "16 + 1" platform itself aims to gain experience and draw lessons for China in developing

other mechanisms⁵⁴. Despite claims of non-interference in domestic affairs and a "no-strings-attached" investment policy, Beijing is doing just the opposite, especially when key issues such as establishing and/or developing political and economic relations with Taipei, recognizing the human rights of Xinjiang's Uyghurs are concerned. This does not mean that he does not seek a balance between the two sides of the same coin – the hard rhetoric of a global power and the alternative peace model of a new global leader in a multipolar world where compliance with international law benefits most countries. China's attitude towards global governance structures and international organizations will show whether a particular preference will take shape. Given that most of the existing institutions and norms of the global order were created by Western powers after the end of the Second World War, China must choose whether to contribute to them, reform them,

⁵⁴ Long Jing. Report at The 16+1 Sofia Think Tanks Conference: 'Advancing 16+1 Cooperation Platform – the Way Ahead', In: Foreign Affairs Research Papers, 12, Sofia: VELES, 2018, p. 61.

or circumvent them.⁵⁵ A permanent seat on the UN Security Council gives the PRC veto power, but in other institutions Chinese influence is much weaker. How China will approach the "Kindleberger trap"⁵⁶, according to which the leading global powers have the responsibility to provide public goods such as peace, security, stability, prosperity, clean environment, etc. in the world is also an important issue when considering its ambition to take the place of the United States in this century.

Despite the recent negative developments regarding the Platform for Cooperation, China's geopolitics towards the Balkan region will not change its vector in the XXI century. At the moment, its political dimensions seem more difficult to implement, especially

⁵⁵ Захариев, Захари. „Китай е основният архитект на новия световен ред“, Блумбърг, 23 ноември 2022 г., <https://www.bloombergtv.bg/a/16-biznes-start/112757-kitay-e-tozi-koyto-se-yavyava-osnovniyat-arhitekt-na-noviya-svetoven-red> (accessed on 28.02.2023 г.).

⁵⁶ Tonchev, Plamen. 2 Major Traps on China's Path to Global Leadership, *The Diplomat*, 1 September 2022, <https://thediplomat.com/2022/09/2-major-traps-on-chinas-path-to-global-leadership/> (accessed on 28.02.2023 г.).

in view of the increased opposition from the European Union and the United States, but the economic aspects will continue to be in focus. The corridors that pass through the region are important for China's trade with Europe. Given that China's economy is facing several challenges, the most serious of which are mortgage market speculation and debt leverage, the country will aggressively pursue its strategies to develop its prosperity. The need for food security, especially in view of the alarmingly decreasing arable land⁵⁷ at home due to over-cultivation and over-fertilization⁵⁸, will also push it to maintain good relations with the CEE countries, whose agrarian sectors could cover part of its needs. Ultimately, China's foreign policy will be most influenced by domestic dynamics and how

⁵⁷ Wang, Orange. "China food security: 'severe challenges' ahead as rising incomes, geopolitical turmoil strain resources", South China Morning Post, 29 April 2022, <https://www.scmp.com/economy/china-economy/article/3176025/china-food-security-severe-challenges-ahead-rising-incomes> (accessed on 28.02.2023 г.).

⁵⁸ Zongyuan Zou, Liu. "China's Farmland Is in Serious Trouble", Foreign Policy, 27 February 2023, https://foreignpolicy.com/2023/02/27/china-xi-agriculture-tax/?tpcc=recirc_trending062921 (accessed on 28.02.2023 г.).

the party deals with issues such as the widening income gap, high dependence on Chinese exports, corruption, ethnic problems and pollution.

As far as the European Union is concerned, first of all, the need for Brussels to make serious efforts to improve its public image can be seen. Although the Union has invested heavily in the Balkan countries, these actions are promoted less or less effectively than the Chinese ones. This leaves a false impression among the population that Beijing is helping more and is the new "big brother" to rely on. Secondly, and on a more global level, the Europeans will certainly have to find some kind of balance between the interests of the US and China and their positioning between the two global powers. Thirdly, the EU must find a way to reduce its deficits in terms of the slow administration in Brussels, the specificity of decision-making on foreign policy and security issues, and the cohesion between individual member states if it wants to remain one of the centers in the emerging new multipolar world.

Summary conclusion: What is stated in this Conclusion gives reason to claim that the overall research achieved confirms the hypothesis of the dissertation work that the Balkans represent and will represent a sustainable interest for China's geopolitical (political, economic and cultural) goals in the XXI century, as a result of the ongoing global and regional processes and the confrontation with other influential players on the world stage, transformations are taking place and will continue to take place in Beijing's intentions and actions in the region, and the Balkans will remain permanently in its geopolitical strategy.

XIV. Scientific and scientific-applied contributions of the dissertation work

First. The documents forming the guidelines for the development of relations between the People's Republic of China and the countries of the CEE region, of which the Balkans are a part, were researched. On the basis of the information obtained, it was analyzed to what

extent the actions were carried out and, as a consequence, what changes were implemented by Chinese foreign policy in the context of sub-regional dynamics.

Second. The thesis has been formulated, argued and proven, that regardless of the intertwining interests and attempts to counteract the entry of Beijing into the region by Brussels and Washington, the drawn geopolitical vector of Chinese foreign policy has a sustainable character. Cooperation initiatives will not be terminated, and the possible changes that will be observed will be more in terms of the intensity of the relationship.

Third. After the detailed review of the results of the relations between China and the CEE countries at the beginning of the 21st century, an attempt was made to provide guidelines for future development that would be more productive and on its basis to seek the realization of the stated idea of "win-win" cooperation from Beijing, not a zero-sum game.

Fourth. The conclusions obtained from the dissertation could help with the formation of some policies regarding China by Bulgarian diplomatic service, as well

as serve as a basis for subsequent research due to the clear prospect of continued China-CEE and China-EU relations.

XV. List of Scientific Publications

- Scientific publication on the topic "The Balkan Peninsula - an element of transport logistics or something more in the context of Chinese foreign policy?" for the collection "The New Challenges for the European Union and Bulgaria", Sofia: Balkan Institute for Strategic Forecasting and Risk Management, 2022, ISBN 978-619-90757-6-0.

- Scientific publication on the topic "Chinese Soft Power Projection In Western Balkan Countries In 2020: Challenges And Opportunities" for the Yearbook of the Department of "Philosophy and Political Sciences" - year X 2020 (ISSN 2683-0973) of the South-West University "Neofit Rilski".

- Scientific publication on the topic "The Bulgarian tourism sector in the context of the initiative "One Belt, One Road" for Diplomacy Journal, issued by the Bulgarian Diplomatic Institute, 2018, (ISSN 1313-6437).

STATEMENT OF SCIENTIFIC ETHICS

The dissertation work "Transformations of the geopolitical vector of Chinese policy in the Balkans in the XXI century" is authored.

During its development, foreign publications and developments were not used in violation of copyright without appropriate reference and citation.