



The Rise of China as a Strategic Challenge for Central Europe - Risks, Opportunities and Repercussions

Changing Orders Research Programme at Andrásy University Budapest

Proposed date: 9 November 2026
Venue: Andrásy University Budapest
Organizer: dr. András Hettyey

The economic, political and technological rise of China represents one of the most significant developments of our era. Naturally, the increasing importance of the People's Republic also affected the small- and middle-sized countries in Central Europe (CE). In this context, China's engagement with CE countries accelerated significantly over the past decade. After the launch of the "16+1" cooperation framework in 2012, later expanded to "17+1" with the inclusion of Greece, Beijing aimed to deepen trade, infrastructure investment, connectivity, and political influence across the region, primarily through the Belt and Road Initiative. Countries like Hungary and Serbia have particularly welcomed Chinese investment, viewing it as a way to accelerate economic growth and diversify international partnerships beyond the European Union.

However, over the past several years, enthusiasm within many CE countries has cooled considerably due to unmet economic expectations, growing EU concerns, and rising geopolitical tensions between China and the West. It became increasingly clear, that the opportunities offered by China are accompanied by significant risks. One major concern is financial dependency created by large Chinese loans and infrastructure projects that may not deliver expected economic returns. There are also concerns about transparency, corruption, and the long-term sustainability of certain investments.

In addition, European governments increasingly worry about political influence and security risks linked to Chinese involvement in strategic sectors such as telecommunications, energy, and digital infrastructure. China's close relationship with Russia has further increased scepticism in the region, especially after the war in Ukraine.

This conference aims to take stock and discuss the approaches that the various small and middle-sized states in the CEE region have used to address the risks, opportunities and repercussions of the rise of China over the last decade. While the focus of the conference is mainly on Central Europe in the widest sense, the floor is open to the perspectives from other



European countries as well. Presentations are welcome both on a country case study level as well as on cross-cutting thematic topics.

This event is the third of a series of four conferences in the context of the “Changing Orders Research Programme – Focus Area 1: Strategic Challenges for Small and Middle-sized States” of the Andrassy University Budapest, supported by the Swiss Contribution.

Organizer: Dr. András Hettyey, Andrassy University Budapest

Preliminary programme

9 November 2026

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| 09:00 | Welcome speech
Zoltán Tibor Pállinger, Rector, Andrassy University (tbc) |
| 09:15 | Introduction to the conference
András Hettyey, Andrassy University |
| 09:30 | 1. Panel: China and Central Europe I <ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Austria: Nick Nieschalke, Austrian Institute for European and Security Policy○ Switzerland: Ariane Knüsel, University of Fribourg○ Hungary: Tamás Peragovics, ELTE University |
| 11:00 | Coffee break |
| 11:30 | 2. Panel: China and Central Europe II <ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Slovakia: Matej Simalcik, Central European Institute of Asian Studies○ Czechia: Kara Nemeckova, Central European Institute of Asian Studies○ Poland: Justyna Szczudlik, Polish Institute of International Affairs |
| 13:00 | Lunch |



14:00

3. Panel: China and Central Europe III

- Slovenia: Anastas Vangeli, University of Ljubljana
- Serbia: Stefan Vladislavljev, Foundation BFPE for a Responsible Society
- Romania: Andreea Brinza, The Romanian Institute for the Study of the Asia-Pacific

15:30

Coffee break

16:00

4. Panel: China and Central Europe: Cross-Cutting Developments

- Ágnes Szunomár, Corvinus University
- Richard Turcsanyi, Central European Institute of Asian Studies

17:30

Closing remarks and end of the conference