

EUROPEAN UNION'S POLITICAL DIVISION CONCERN REGARDING THE INCREASING CHINESE SPHERE OF INFLUENCE IN CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE: DATA ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT

The study reveals the reasons for the European Union's concerns that the China-CEEC Cooperation Platform, launched led by China in 2012, will trigger new political divisions and differences of opinion in foreign policy between the West and the East. The study sample consists of three independent groups, namely Germany, France, Italy, Spain, Belgium and the Netherlands, the six most populated Western European countries of the EU; the twelve EU member states and the five candidate countries of the EU, which are included in the China-CEEC Cooperation Platform. In the study, using the one-way ANOVA and Tukey and Bonferroni tests, it has been determined that there is a statistically significant difference between these three groups in terms of supporting international joint declarations against China in 2012-2022 and also that there is a statistically significant difference between the political decisions of these three groups on international issues where the relevant six Western European Countries disagree with China.

Keywords: *China, Central and Eastern European Countries, Western European Countries, European Union, One-way ANOVA Test*

Jel Codes: *D72, F14, F15, P33, O19*

ORTA VE DOĞU AVRUPA'DA ARTAN ÇİN ETKİ ALANINA İLİŞKİN AVRUPA BİRLİĞİ'NİN SİYASİ BÖLÜNME KAYGISI: VERİ ANALİZİ

ÖZET

Çalışma, Avrupa Birliği'nin 2012 yılında Çin öncülüğünde başlatılan Çin-ODAÜ İşbirliği Platformu'nun Batı ile Doğu arasında yeni siyasi bölünmeleri ve dış politikada fikir ayrılıklarını tetikleyeceği yönündeki endişelerinin gerekçelerini ortaya koymaktadır. Çalışma örnelemi, Almanya,

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Fransa, İtalya, İspanya, Belçika ve Hollanda olmak üzere AB'nin en fazla nüfusa sahip altı Batı Avrupa ülkesi, Çin-ODAÜ İşbirliği Platformuna dâhil olan on iki AB üye ülkesi ve beş AB aday ülkesi olmak üzere üç bağımsız gruptan oluşmaktadır. Çalışmada, tek yönlü ANOVA ve Tukey ve Bonferroni testlerinden yararlanılarak, bu üç grup arasında 2012-2022 yıllarında Çin aleyhine gerçekleşen uluslararası ortak bildirimleri destekleme bakımından istatistiksel açıdan anlamlı bir farklılık bulunduğu ve ayrıca ilgili altı Batı Avrupa ülkesinin Çin ile fikir ayrılığına düştüğü uluslararası meselelerde, bu üç grubun siyasi kararları arasında istatistiksel açıdan anlamlı bir farklılık bulunduğu belirlenmiştir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Çin, Orta ve Doğu Avrupa Ülkeleri, Batı Avrupa Ülkeleri, Avrupa Birliği, Tek Yönlü ANOVA Testi

JEL Kodlar: D72, F14, F15, P33, O19

1. INTRODUCTION

After the 2008-2009 global financial crisis, China significantly increased its bilateral and multilateral contacts with Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries. China has been trying to strengthen its economic and political relations with the CEE countries within the framework of multi-level cooperation, including regional, sub-regional and bilateral levels (Song and Pavlicevic, 2009: 277-278). CEE countries have different economic, political and socio-cultural structures and also different domestic and foreign policy goals and strategies (Káráskova and at al., 2018: 18). This makes it difficult for China to pursue a single-level cooperation policy for them. In this respect, China tries to shape the main framework of regional cooperation with the CEE countries through the China-CEEC Cooperation Platform launched under its leadership in 2012. The China-CEEC Cooperation Platform (currently 14+1) has been the most remarkable initiative contributing to the expansion of China's sphere of influence in the CEE region. CEE countries have seen this regional cooperation initiative as an opportunity to make their economies more resilient against possible new financial crises (Jaklič and Svetličič, 2019: 87). On the other hand, it has been quite significant for China, particularly in terms of the development of the Belt and Road Initiative, increasing its sphere of influence in Europe and also gaining the political support of the CEE countries.

Although China often reiterates that the win-win strategy is at the core of the China-CEE Cooperation Platform, these statements of China do not seem convincing to the European Union (EU) and Western European countries. Moreover, many EU diplomats and politicians argue this cooperation platform is based on a "divide and rule" strategy aimed at disrupting the functioning of the EU (Lau, 2020; Wu, 2018; Reuters, 2018). They assert that the growing Chinese presence in the CEE region may undermine the ability of EU countries to act jointly on China-related issues and argue that differences of opinion on foreign policy issues among EU member states may increase. Particularly

Germany, the EU's most developed and largest country, regards expanding Chinese influence in the CEE as a threat to its entrenched interests in the EU and suspects that China's rise may hinder European integration.

The study presents the reasons for the EU's concerns that the increasing Chinese influence in the CEE will lead to political divisions on China-related issues and foreign policy differences between the West and the East. The study sample consists of three independent groups, namely Germany, France, Italy, Spain, Belgium and the Netherlands, the six most populated Western European countries (WEC6) of the EU; twelve EU member countries (CEE12)¹ and five EU candidate countries (CEE5)², which are included in the China-CEEC Cooperation Platform. In the study, the one-way ANOVA test is used to determine whether there is a statistically significant difference in the political stances of the WEC6, the CEE12 and the CEE5 to the international joint declarations against China under the umbrella of the United Nations (UN). Following the one-way ANOVA test, Tukey and Bonferroni post hoc tests are used to determine the significance of differences between pairs of group means. In addition, using the one-way ANOVA test, the study examines whether there is a statistically significant difference between the votes of the WEC6 and the CEE12 and the CEE5 in UN General Assembly (UNGA) resolutions on international issues where the WEC6 disagrees with China. This study contributes empirically and methodically to the relevant academic literature through its data set and methodology.

The study first presents the data set and methodology. Then, the study sets five reasons for the EU's political division concerns over the increasing Chinese presence in the CEE region. Finally, the empirical findings of the study are explained and a general evaluation is made.

2. Data Set and Methodology

It is difficult to measure the political stance of Western European countries and CEE countries on China-related issues with empirical analysis. In fact, the voting on Chinese issues in the Council of the EU serves as a litmus paper as it shows the political attitude of the EU countries towards China. However, since the votes held in the Council of the EU are kept secret, it is not possible to access the results of the votes regarding China held in the Council of the EU. In addition, European Parliament resolutions on China do not allow a clear framework to be drawn about the political stance of EU member states towards China. Because the European Parliament represents the interests and political views of EU citizens. Parliamentarians vote in line with their own political ideology and interests, not for the interests of their countries. Therefore, European Parliament resolutions on China do not represent the political stance of EU member states. Therefore, in the study, the Council of the EU and

¹ These countries are Poland, Hungary, Czechia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Greece, Croatia, Bulgaria, Romania, Estonia, Lithuania and Latvia.

² These countries are Serbia, Albania, North Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro.

the European Parliament votes cannot be used to measure the political stance or support of EU member states towards China.

The study proposes two null hypotheses. Both null hypotheses are put forward for the period between 2012 and 2022. These hypotheses:

H1₀: There is no significant difference between the WEC6, the CEE12 and the CEE5 in terms of supporting international joint declarations against China.

H2₀: There is no significant difference between the political decisions/votes of the WEC6 and the CEE12 and the CEE5 on international issues where the WEC6 and China disagree.

The study sample consists of three independent groups, namely the WEC6; the CEE12 and the CEE5, which are included in the China-CEEC Cooperation Platform. In the study, international joint declarations against China at the UN are used to measure the political attitudes of these three groups towards China. A political (negative) reaction index has been created in line with the participation of the WEC6, the CEE12 and the CEE5 in the international joint declarations against China within the UN between 2010 and 2022. For this, a total of six international joint declarations against China between the years 2010-2022 have been first identified, as seen in Table 1, by scanning the data sets on the official sites of the UN.

Table 1. Participation of the WEC6, the CEE12 and the CEE5 in Joint Declarations Against China in the UN, -Political (Negative) Reaction Index (The Highest Score is 1, The Lowest Score is 0)

Countries	UNHRC/31 March 10, 2016	UNHRC/41 July 8, 2019	UNGA/74 Third Committee October 29, 2019	UNHRC/44 June 30, 2020	UNGA/75 Third Committee October 6, 2020	UNGA/76 Third Committee October 21, 2021	Total Participation	Index Score 0/1
WEC6								
Germany	1	1	1	1	1	1	6	1
Belgium	0	1	1	1	1	1	5	0.83
France	0	1	1	1	1	1	5	0.83
Netherlands	1	1	1	1	1	1	6	1
Spain	0	1	0	0	1	1	3	0.5
Italy	0	1	0	0	1	1	3	0.5
CEE12								
Bulgaria	0	0	0	0	1	1	2	0.33
Czechia	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0.166
Estonia	0	1	1	1	1	1	5	0.83
Croatia	0	0	0	0	1	1	2	0.33
Latvia	0	1	1	1	1	1	5	0.83
Lithuania	0	1	1	1	1	1	5	0.83
Hungary	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Poland	0	0	0	0	1	1	2	0.33
Romania	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Slovakia	0	0	0	1	1	1	3	0.5
Slovenia	0	1	0	1	1	1	4	0.66

Greece	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
CEE5								
Albania	0	0	1	0	1	1	3	0.5
Bosnia and Herzegovina	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0.166
Montenegro	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0.166
North Macedonia	0	0	0	0	1	1	2	0.33
Serbia	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Source: Created by the author using data from the UN's official website.

Following the identification of the international joint declarations against China in 2010-2022, whether the relevant joint declarations were signed by the state representatives of the WEC6, the CEE12 and the CEE5 is examined. Afterward, countries are awarded 1 point for each joint declaration they signed, while countries that did not sign are given 0 points. Further, the points given to each country are summed up and a political reaction index score is created for each country by converting the collected points into a range from “0” to “1”. Then, one way ANOVA test is performed by using the WEC6, the CEE12 and the CEE5 as factor (group) variables and their index scores as dependent variables to measure H1₀.

The one-way ANOVA test determines whether there is a statistically significant difference between the means of at least three dependent groups. The one-way ANOVA analysis tests whether to reject the null hypothesis, which asserts that there is no significant relationship between the variables. If the P-value is less than 0.05, the null hypothesis is rejected and it is considered statistically significant. The one-way ANOVA does not assess the significance of differences between pairs of group means. Thus, in order to show whether there is a significant difference between pairs of group means in terms of political stance/reaction, Tukey and Bonferroni post hoc tests are also performed after the one-way ANOVA test.

In addition, the UNGA resolutions votes are used to measure the H2₀, which argues that there is no significant difference between the political decisions of the WEC6, the CEE12 and the CEE5 on international issues where the WEC6 and China disagree. Firstly, by scanning the voting data in the UN Digital Library System, 953 UNGA resolutions on global issues between 2012 and 2022, have been determined. Then, by examining each of these resolutions, as seen in Table 2 below, 203 resolutions have been identified, in which China voted differently from the WEC6. Afterward, the votes of the WEC6, the CEE12 and the CEE5 in the relevant 203 resolutions have been examined. Relevant data are given in Table 3 below.

After collecting the data in Table 2 and Table 3, the one-way ANOVA test is performed using the WEC6, the CEE12 and the CEE5 as factor variables and the number of resolutions they voted differently from China as dependent variables. The one-way ANOVA test determines whether there is a statistically significant difference in the number of UNGA resolutions in which the WEC6, the

CEE12 and the CEE5 voted differently from China. More clearly, it assesses whether there is difference between the political decisions/votes of the WEC6 and the CEE12 and the CEE5 on international issues where the WEC6 and China disagree. Except for the one-way ANOVA test, Tukey and Bonferroni tests are also performed to assess the significance of the difference between pairs of group means.

Table2. UNGA Resolutions between 2012-2022, in which the WEC6 and China Voted Differently

2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
RES/67/154	RES/67/262	RES/69/163	RES/70/142	RES/71/130	RES/72/168	RES/73/159	RES/73/268	RES/75/171	RES/76/151	RES/77/250
RES/67/159	RES/68/144	RES/69/173	RES/70/149	RES/71/182	RES/72/170	RES/73/167	RES/73/304	RES/75/177	RES/76/160	RES/77/263
RES/67/165	RES/68/152	RES/69/176	RES/70/151	RES/71/187	RES/72/172	RES/73/169	RES/74/167	RES/75/181	RES/76/161	RES/77/204
RES/67/170	RES/68/159	RES/69/178	RES/70/152	RES/71/189	RES/72/174	RES/73/175	RES/74/168	RES/75/183	RES/76/162	RES/77/206
RES/67/173	RES/68/161	RES/69/180	RES/70/156	RES/71/190	RES/72/185	RES/73/181	RES/74/17	RES/75/191	RES/76/165	RES/77/214
RES/67/175	RES/68/162	RES/69/186	RES/70/159	RES/71/193	RES/72/189	RES/73/182	RES/74/246	RES/75/193	RES/76/178	RES/77/215
RES/67/176	RES/68/168	RES/69/188	RES/70/161	RES/71/197	RES/72/190	RES/73/187	RES/74/28	RES/75/225	RES/76/179	RES/77/216
RES/67/182	RES/68/175	RES/69/189	RES/70/172	RES/71/203	RES/72/191	RES/73/240	RES/74/40	RES/75/232	RES/76/219	RES/77/222
RES/67/183	RES/68/182	RES/69/190	RES/70/173	RES/71/204	RES/72/216	RES/73/24	RES/74/45	RES/75/238	RES/76/228	RES/77/228
RES/67/217	RES/68/184	RES/69/227	RES/70/234	RES/71/205	RES/72/248	RES/73/263	RES/74/68	RES/75/240	RES/76/231	RES/77/229
RES/67/33	RES/68/42	RES/69/239	RES/70/34	RES/71/223	RES/72/251	RES/73/45	RES/74/247	RES/75/29	RES/76/234	RES/77/230
RES/67/60	RES/68/47	RES/69/40	RES/70/48	RES/71/236	RES/72/38	RES/73/50	RES/74/237	RES/75/32	RES/76/29	RES/77/183
RES/67/64	RES/68/58	RES/69/43	RES/70/50	RES/71/248	RES/72/43	RES/73/264	RES/74/155	RES/75/36	RES/76/33	RES/77/174
RES/66/253		RES/69/48	RES/70/52	RES/71/47	RES/72/50	RES/73/266	RES/74/154	RES/75/45	RES/76/70	RES/77/182
RES/66/257		RES/69/69	RES/70/56	RES/71/58	RES/72/58	RES/73/227	RES/74/169	RES/75/55	RES/76/46	RES/77/37
			RES/70/57	RES/71/63	RES/72/59	RES/73/170	RES/74/54	RES/75/63	RES/76/56	RES/77/41
			RES/70/62	RES/71/71	RES/72/158	RES/73/74	RES/74/63	RES/75/75	RES/76/54	RES/77/42
				RES/71/75		RES/73/64	RES/74/59	RES/75/192	RES/76/53	RES/77/47
				RES/71/69		RES/73/27		RES/75/178	RES/75/277	RES/77/76
								RES/75/65	RES/75/265	RES/77/73
								RES/75/66		RES/77/57
								RES/74/267		RES/77/68
										RES/77/67
										RES/77/65
										RES/77/96
										A/RES/ES-11/5
										RES/76/267
										A/RES/ES-11/3

Source: United Nations Digital Library, "Voting Data", <https://digitallibrary.un.org/search?cc=Voting+Data&ln=en&c=Voting+Data>, (01.02.2023).

Table 3. Votes of the CEE12 and the CEE5 in 203 UN General Assembly Resolutions in which the WEC6 voted differently from China between 2012 and 2022

	2012			2013			2014			2015			2016			2017			2018			2019			2020			2021			2022			2012-2022		
WEC6 ³	15			13			15			17			19			17			19			18			22			20			28			203		
	A ⁴	B ⁵	C ⁶	A	B	C	A	B	C	A	B	C	A	B	C	A	B	C	A	B	C	A	B	C	A	B	C	A	B	C	A	B	C			
CEE12																																				
Hungary	15	0	0	13	0	0	15	0	0	17	0	0	19	0	0	17	0	0	19	0	0	18	0	0	21	0	1	20	0	0	28	0	0	202	0	1
Slovakia	15	0	0	13	0	0	15	0	0	17	0	0	19	0	0	17	0	0	19	0	0	18	0	0	22	0	0	20	0	0	28	0	0	203	0	0
Poland	15	0	0	13	0	0	15	0	0	17	0	0	18	0	1	17	0	0	19	0	0	18	0	0	22	0	0	20	0	0	28	0	0	202	0	1
Czechia	15	0	0	13	0	0	15	0	0	17	0	0	19	0	0	17	0	0	19	0	0	18	0	0	22	0	0	20	0	0	28	0	0	203	0	0
Romania	14	0	1	13	0	0	14	0	1	14	0	3	18	0	1	17	0	0	19	0	0	18	0	0	22	0	0	20	0	0	28	0	0	197	0	6
Greece	15	0	0	13	0	0	15	0	0	13	0	4	14	0	5	15	0	2	19	0	0	18	0	0	22	0	0	20	0	0	28	0	0	192	0	11
Croatia	14	0	1	12	0	1	14	0	1	15	0	2	18	0	1	17	0	0	19	0	0	18	0	0	21	0	0	20	0	0	28	0	0	196	0	6
Slovenia	15	0	0	13	0	0	15	0	0	16	0	1	19	0	0	17	0	0	19	0	0	18	0	0	22	0	0	20	0	0	28	0	0	202	0	1
Bulgaria	14	0	0	12	0	1	15	0	0	15	0	2	18	0	1	16	0	1	19	0	0	18	0	0	22	0	0	20	0	0	28	0	0	197	0	5
Estonia	15	0	0	13	0	0	15	0	0	17	0	0	19	0	0	17	0	0	19	0	0	18	0	0	22	0	0	20	0	0	28	0	0	203	0	0
Latvia	15	0	0	13	0	0	15	0	0	17	0	0	19	0	0	17	0	0	19	0	0	18	0	0	22	0	0	20	0	0	28	0	0	203	0	0
Lithuania	15	0	0	13	0	0	15	0	0	17	0	0	19	0	0	17	0	0	19	0	0	18	0	0	22	0	0	20	0	0	28	0	0	203	0	0
CEE5																																				
Serbia	13	1	2	10	0	3	11	0	4	9	3	4	8	1	7	9	0	4	10	4	4	7	4	4	6	3	6	7	3	4	10	3	15	100	22	57
Montenegro	13	0	2	11	0	2	13	0	2	13	1	3	19	0	0	14	1	2	19	0	0	17	0	1	22	0	0	20	0	0	28	0	0	189	2	12
N.Macedonia	14	0	1	11	0	1	7	0	1	12	0	5	16	1	2	13	0	2	18	0	1	18	0	0	22	0	0	20	0	0	18	0	0	169	1	13
Bosnia and Herzegovina	14	1	0	12	1	0	14	1	0	12	0	5	14	2	3	13	0	4	16	1	1	13	0	5	14	1	7	14	0	6	24	0	4	160	7	35
Albania	14	0	1	12	0	1	14	0	1	15	0	2	17	0	2	17	0	0	19	0	0	18	0	0	22	0	0	20	0	0	28	0	0	196	0	7

Source: Compiled by the author using the data set of the United Nations Digital Library System

³ The second row of the table presents the number of votes that the entire WEC6 voted differently from China.

⁴ A represents the CEE12 and CEE5's total number of votes, which is the same as votes of WEC6.

⁵ B represents the CEE12 and CEE5's total number of votes, which is the same as votes of China.

⁶ C represents the total number of abstention votes.

3. Reasons For Political Division Concerns Of The EU

Since the countries participating in the China-CEEC Cooperation Platform are EU countries or EU candidate countries, the EU inevitably has reacted to this regional cooperation initiative. EU diplomats, politicians and statesmen are disturbed by the fact that this regional cooperation is led and dominated by China. They are particularly concerned that the increasing Chinese presence in the CEE will cause political divisions in China-related issues, divergences in foreign policy and the weakening of European integration. Grieger (2018) points out that in recent years, some CEE countries have given priority to China's political interests over EU interests on certain issues and also emphasizes that they can use their cooperation with China as a bargaining chip within the EU.

The study argues that there are five main factors that trigger concerns of the EU. In the process of China-CEE cooperation, CEE countries remain in the role of the weak party that has to comply with China's wishes, while China predominantly assumes the dominant role of getting what it wants. Womack argues that in the process of asymmetric cooperation, the weak side (CEE countries) may be subject to constraints when it determines and applies its preferences and resources. On the other hand, the strong side (China) can dominate the weak side and take them under its control. Decisions taken in asymmetrical relationships mostly result in favor of the strong side. In addition, the weak side may suffer more from the developments in the functioning of bilateral relations than the strong side. In its relationship with the weak side, the strong side prioritizes its own national interests rather than the interests of the weak side (Womack: 2010: 266-267).

The second reason is that China uses discourses reminiscent of the communist past such as "historical heritage", "common destiny" and "common past" in the process of cooperation with CEE countries. At the opening ceremony of the China-CEEC Cooperation Platform, an exhibition on communist-era cultural exchanges between China and CEE countries and photos of state leaders from the Cold War era were displayed (Vangeli, 2018: 674-687). Chinese politicians, some thinkers and academics argue that the long history of bilateral relations between the parties and especially the common communist past are special advantages for the development of China-CEE cooperation. It can be argued that the aim of Chinese discourses and actions towards the communist past is to strengthen its ties with the CEE countries and to increase its presence in the CEE by influencing their political thoughts and perceptions.

In particular, the EU and the Western European countries are concerned that China may change the current status quo in the CEE region by winning the hearts and minds of the CEE countries. Chinese discourses of "mutual gain", "common destiny and past" and "historical heritage" may seem innocent at first, but as bilateral and multilateral relations strengthen over time, these discourses have the potential to be internalized and used as legitimate principles by the CEE countries. China does not

rush and does not exert any pressure on its partners to adopt its rhetoric. Strong political ties with China and the economic advantages offered by China play a decisive role in the adoption of Chinese discourses. The essence and purpose of what is hidden behind Chinese slogans begin to become clearer as partners embrace the roles presented by the Chinese leadership (Yang, 2015, s.2).

The third reason is that scope of cooperation of the China-CEEC Cooperation Platform is more comprehensive than ordinary regional cooperation and it has taken on a distinctive institutional structure under Chinese control. Since the launch of the China-CEEC Cooperation Platform in 2012, numerous activities in different areas of cooperation have taken place between representatives of all levels of government of the participating countries. As a result, interaction between parties has risen to unprecedented levels. In this context, The China-CEEC Cooperation Platform can be mainly characterized by human interaction. According to Pierce (2013), the ability to form, divide, or destroy groups is an important feature of the operation of symbolic power. The China-CEEC Cooperation Platform is essentially different from other Chinese overseas cooperation formats, such as the China-Africa Cooperation Forum (FOCAC), the China-Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) Forum and the China-Pacific Islands Dialogue. This is because China arbitrarily has described the borders of the CEE and included the European countries it considers part of the CEE region in the cooperation process. Brussels views this situation as an arbitrary attempt to divide part of Europe and argues that China is trying to divide the continent economically and politically (Matura, 2016: 142-145). In addition, the China-CEEC Cooperation Platform has been portrayed as an attempt by the Chinese state to restore the Berlin Wall and it has been accused of violating the European unity policy, breaking EU competition laws and diminishing EU project attractiveness for candidate countries (Monica and Sincai, 2018: 1-2).

Table 4. Democracy Index 2022 of the WEC6, the CEE12 and the CEE5, (Scores range from 0 ‘weakest’ to 10 ‘strongest’)

Country	Overall Score	Level of Democracy
WEC6		
Germany	8,8	Full Democracy
France	8,07	Full Democracy
Spain	8,07	Full Democracy
Italy	7,69	Flawed Democracy
Netherlands	9	Full Democracy
Belgium	7,64	Flawed Democracy
CEE12		
Estonia	7,96	Flawed Democracy
Czechia	7,97	Flawed Democracy
Greece	7,97	Flawed Democracy
Slovenia	7,75	Flawed Democracy
Latvia	7,37	Flawed Democracy
Lithuania	7,31	Flawed Democracy
Slovakia	7,07	Flawed Democracy
Poland	7,04	Flawed Democracy

Bulgaria	6,53	Flawed Democracy
Croatia	6,5	Flawed Democracy
Hungary	6,64	Flawed Democracy
Romania	6,45	Flawed Democracy
CEE5		
Serbia	6,33	Flawed Democracy
Albania	6,41	Flawed Democracy
North Macedonia	6,1	Flawed Democracy
Montenegro	6,45	Flawed Democracy
Bosnia and Herzegovina	5	Hybrid Regime

Source: The Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU), “Democracy Index 2022”, <https://www.eiu.com/n/campaigns/democracy-index-2021/>, (12.04.2023).

The fourth reason is the weak and fragile democratic structure of CEE countries. Table 4 shows that the democracy index scores of the WEC6 are higher than the CEE12 and the CEE5. A state with weak democracy is more likely to come under the influence of strong and authoritarian states. The EU has been trying to solve the issues regarding violations of the rule of law in CEE countries, especially Poland, Hungary and Romania. The biggest step the EU took on this issue was to create a new conditionality mechanism in 2021 that will cut the funds of EU countries violating the rule of law (European Commission, 2023). In particular, the Orban government's move away from EU fundamental values such as democracy and the rule of law led the European Commission to propose a rule of law conditionality mechanism. The EU frequently warns that funds to Hungary will be cut if it does not abide by the EU's core values (Bayer, 2022). However, the EU needs to be careful with regard to funding cuts. Because possible funding, on the one hand, may cuts may trigger relevant countries to comply with the EU's core values, on the other hand, it may also pave the way for them to move away from the EU and get closer to China or other alternative countries.

The fifth reason is that CEE countries are economically vulnerable and more likely to be exposed to big external loans. The EU is particularly concerned about the increasing dependency of CEE countries on China as a result of their debt to it. In essence, since the CEE12 benefit from attractive EU funds, China's credits are not very attractive to them. However, the CEE5, particularly Serbia and Montenegro, is more interested in Chinese credits. Therefore, their external debt to China is higher compared to the CEE12 (Unicredit, 2021). For example, Bosnia and Herzegovina's contracted debt amount to China is 3% of 2020 GDP, Serbia's is 7% of 2020 GDP, North Macedonia's is 8% of 2020 GDP and Montenegro's is %21 of 2020 GDP (Unicredit, 2021: 1).

The EU considered China's 2012 proposal to create special economic zones for Chinese companies in the CEE region as a separatist move. EU law does not allow member states to create preferential zones for entrepreneurs from only one country (Szczudlik, 2019: 8-9). In addition, the EU opposes the bidding of mega projects in the CEE financed by Chinese loans to Chinese companies by being violated EU economic competition rules. The EU showed the strongest reaction to the Budapest-Belgrade railway project among the mega projects financed by Chinese loans. The European

Commission initiated infringement proceedings against Hungary in September 2016, for not complying with European procurement laws (Gruebler, 2021: 90). Thus, the Hungarian state had to launch the tender for the upgrade of the Hungarian stretch of the Budapest-Belgrade railway line in 2017 (Intellinews, 2018).

4. Empirical Findings and Results

Table 5 presents clues as to whether Western European and Eastern European countries demonstrate common political will in China-related issues after the launch of the China-CEEC Cooperation Platform. That is, Table 5 shows the results of the one-way ANOVA test used to determine whether there is a statistically significant difference in the political stances of the WEC6, the CEE12 and the CEE5 to the international joint declarations against China in the UN between 2012 and 2022.

Table 5. One Way ANOVA Test on Political Stances of the WEC6, the CEE12 and the CEE5 to the International Joint Declarations against China between 2012 and 2022

Analysis of Variance					
Source	SS	Df	MS	F	Prob > F
Between groups	.90305827	2	.451529135	5.70	0.0110*
Within groups	1.5842495	20	.079212475		
Total	2.48730777	22	.113059444		

t's test for equal variances: $\chi^2(2) = 1.7898$ Prob> $\chi^2 = 0.409$

Source: It has been performed using data compiled by the author.

Since the P-value (0.0110) in Table 6 is below 0.05, the H_{10} is rejected. That is, the relevant P-value indicates that there is a statistically significant difference between the WEC6, the CEE12 and the CEE5 in terms of participation in international joint declarations against China. In other words, there is a significant difference between the WEC6, the CEE12 and the CEE5 in terms of supporting international joint declarations against China.

Table 6. Tukey Test on Political Stances of the WEC6, the CEE12 and the CEE5 to the International Joint Declarations against China between 2012 and 2022

	Contrast	Std. Err.	Tukey		Tukey	
			T	P> t	[95% Conf. Interval]	
CEE12 vs WEC6	-.3761667	.1407236	-2.67	0.037*	-.7321947	-.0201386
CEE5 vs WEC6	-.5442667	.1704247	-3.19	0.012*	-.975438	-.1130953
CEE5 vs CEE12	-.1681	.1498117	-1.12	0.512	-.5471208	.2109208

Source: It has been performed using data compiled by the author.

Table 7. Bonferroni Test on Political Stances of the WEC6, the CEE12 and the CEE5 to the International Joint Declarations against China between 2012 and 2022

Row Mean Col Mean	WEC6	CEE12
CEE12	-.376167 0.044*	
CEE5	-.544267 0.014*	-.1681 0.825

Source: It has been performed using data compiled by the author.

The Tukey test in Table 6 and the Bonferroni test in Table 7 presents there is a significant difference between the WEC6 and the CEE12 and also the WEC6 and the CEE5 in terms of participation in international declarations against China, while there is no significant difference between the CEE5 and the CEE12 in terms of participation in international declarations against China. This result means that the WEC6's political stance on issues related to China is tougher than the CEE5 and the CEE12. For example, German and French state representatives signed all the joint declarations against China between 2012-2022, while the representatives of the states of Hungary, Serbia, Greece and Romania, which have close political relations with China, did not sign any of them. This situation shows that the concerns that it will be difficult for European states to display a common political will against China are partially justified.

Table 8. One Way ANOVA Test on UNGA Resolutions Votes of the WEC6, the CEE12 and the CEE5 on International Issues where the WEC6 and China Disagree between 2012 and 2022

Analysis of Variance					
Source	SS	Df	MS	F	Prob > F
Between groups	5790.25435	2	2895.12717	9.76	0.0011*
Within groups	5933.05	20	296.6525		
Total	11723.3043	22	532.87747		

Bartlett's test for equal variances: $\chi^2(1) = 28.9107$ Prob> $\chi^2 = 0.000$

Source: It has been performed using data compiled by the author.

Table 8 presents the results of the one-way ANOVA analysis that tests the H_{20} which asserts that there is no difference between the political decisions of the WEC6 and the CEE12 and the CEE5 on international issues where the WEC6 and China disagree. Since the P-value in the related analysis is 0.0011, H_{20} is rejected. That is, there is a statistically significant difference between the political decisions/votes of the WEC6 and the CEE12 and the CEE5 on international issues where the WEC6 and China disagree.

Table 9. Tukey Test on UNGA Resolution Votes of the WEC6, the CEE12 and the CEE5 on International Issues where the WEC6 and China Disagree between 2012 and 2022

	Contrast	Std. Err.	Tukey		Tukey	
			T	P> t	[95% Conf. Interval]	
CEE12 vs WEC6	-2.75	8.611801	-0.32	0.945	-24.5377	19.0377
CEE5 vs WEC6	-40.2	10.42941	-3.85	0.003*	-66.58622	-13.81378
CEE5 vs CEE12	-37.45	9.167963	-4.08	0.002*	-60.64478	-14.25522

Source: It has been performed using data compiled by the author.

Table 10. Bonferroni Test on UNGA Resolution Votes of the WEC6, the CEE12 and the CEE5 on International Issues where the WEC6 and China Disagree between 2012 and 2022

Row Mean Col Mean	WEC6	CEE12
CEE12	-2.75 1.000	
CEE5	-40.2 0.003 *	-37.45 0.002*

Source: It has been performed using data compiled by the author.

The results of the Tukey test in Table 9 and the Bonferroni test in Table 10 show that there is a statistically significant difference between the CEE5 and the WEC6 and also between the CEE5 and the CEE12 in terms of political decisions on international issues while there is no statistically significant difference between the CEE12 and the WEC6. That is, the CEE12 voted in line with the WEC6 on international issues where the WEC6 disagreed with China. This indicates that there is a common political will among EU countries on international issues that are not directly related to China. It is seen that the CEE5 disagrees more with the WEC6 on global issues than the CEE12. In particular, Serbia stands out as the most separatist country among the CEE countries in terms of political decisions on international issues. China's deepening of its economic and political relations with Serbia, on the one hand, increases Serbia's political support for China; on the other hand, it paves the way for Serbia to see China as a more reliable port than the EU. Therefore, this situation may trigger a direct or indirect disruption of Serbia's integration with the EU.

Apart from Serbia's pro-Chinese attitude, the separatist attitudes of Hungary and Greece towards China within the EU are also remarkable. For example, in order not to damage its bilateral political and economic relations with China, Greece and Hungary blocked the EU joint statement in July 2016 calling on China to comply and respect international maritime law rules (Chen, 2021: 262). Greece also blocked the EU's joint declaration on China's human rights violations at the UN Human Rights

Council in Geneva in 2017 (Tonchev, 2018: 45). In addition, Hungary blocked the EU's planned joint statement against China in 2021 regarding human rights violations in Hong Kong (Rettman, 2021). Greece and Hungary's reluctance to criticize Beijing despite China's turning the islands in the South China Sea into a military base and human rights violations, especially due to their reliance on Chinese investments, makes it difficult to form a univocal EU against China.

5. CONCLUSION

The study put forward five reasons that trigger the EU's political division concerns regarding increasing the Chinese influence in the CEE region. The first of these reasons is that the China-CEEC Cooperation Platform is based on an asymmetrical relationship model. The second reason is China's discourse strategy to change and influence the perceptions of CEE countries. The third reason is that the scope of cooperation of the China-CEEC Cooperation Platform is far beyond ordinary regional cooperation and has taken on a distinctive institutional structure under Chinese control. The fourth reason is that the CEE countries have a weak and fragile democratic structure. The fifth reason is that CEE countries are economically vulnerable and also more likely to be exposed to big external debts.

According to the results of one-way ANOVA, Tukey and Bonferroni tests performed in the study, there is a statistically significant difference between the WEC6, the CEE12 and the CEE5 in terms of supporting international declaration against China. A significant difference exists between the WEC6 and the CEE12 and between the WEC6 and the CEE5 but not between the CEE12 and the CEE5. Germany and the Netherlands signed all the relevant international joint declarations against China between 2012 and 2022, while Hungary, Greece, Romania and Serbia did not sign any of the relevant declarations. This situation reveals, albeit partially, that there are political divisions and differences of opinion on China-related issues between the Western European countries and the CEE countries.

Furthermore, there is a statistically significant difference between the political decisions of the WEC6 and the CEE12 and the CEE5 on international issues where the WEC6 and China disagreed. A significant difference exists between the CEE5 and the WEC6 and also between the CEE5 and the CEE12 while it has not been found between the CEE12 and the WEC6. To put it more clearly, the CEE12 votes in line with the WEC6 in UNGA resolutions where the WEC6 and China vote differently. This indicates that a common political will among EU countries can be demonstrated in international issues that do not directly concern China. These results show that the concerns that differences of opinion within the EU will increase on foreign policy issues are unfounded. Furthermore, relevant results show that the CEE5 disagrees more with the WEC6 on global issues than the CEE12. Serbia, in particular, draws attention as the most separatist country among the CEE countries with its political decisions on international issues. In the UN General Assembly resolution

voting on international issues, the number of votes that Serbia has given the same decision as China has increased in recent years. As the political and economic relations between Serbia and China improve, Serbia's dependence on China increases. This triggers Serbia, which has been waiting for EU membership for a long time, to see China as a more reliable port than Europe.

Last but not least, it is seen that there are differences of opinion regarding China from time to time within the EU as well. For example, the blocking of the EU's joint declaration against China by Greece in 2016 and 2017 and by Hungary in 2021 can be shown as an indicator of the formation of political differences in the EU against China. If China can establish close economic and political relations with other CEE countries and offer them attractive financial mechanisms and make big investments, as it did with Hungary and Greece, it can further expand its influence in Europe and gain more political support within the EU.

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