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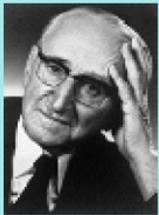
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Discourses in Social Market Economy



Jagannath Panda

**EU's Global Gateway Strategy and Building
a Global Consensus vis-a-vis BRI**

Diskurs 2022 - 10

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Jagannath Panda

Abstract

The Belt and Road Initiative paved the way for China to establish far-reaching trade relations and greater political influence across continents. Dominating the Indo-Pacific region by building up the dependence of the countries there on China is only part of the strategy. China's actions in this regard are observed with unease by researchers and practitioners. Various multilateral projects are trying to present an alternative in the Indo-Pacific region, including the EU's Global Gateway Strategy Project. What this strategy entails and how it can play a role in shaping global consensus on the BRI will be outlined below.

Keywords

Belt and Road Initiative, China, Geopolitics, EU, Global Gateway Strategy, Indo-Pacific

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EU's Global Gateway Strategy and Building a Global Consensus vis-a-vis BRI

1. Introduction

The year 2022 has been pivotal to China in more ways than one. It marked the year of the 20th National Party Congress (NPC) of the Chinese Communist Party (CPC) which set the stage for an unprecedented third term for President Xi Jinping. It also marked the roundabout year before the ten-year anniversary in 2023 of the launch of Xi's behemoth infrastructure development project, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Originally called "One Belt and One Road" (一带一路), the BRI is divided into the Silk Road Economic Belt (丝绸之路经济带) and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road (世纪海上丝绸之路). It has successfully paved the way for China's commercial ties and political clout across continents, reflecting China's strategic drive to dominate the Indo-Pacific by increasing its influence over neighbouring nations, resolving its Malacca Dilemma, and acquiring access to or constructing new ports with the ability to serve both military and commercial needs (Schneider 2021). BRI as Xi's crowning global strategy has changed local economies and regional networks, making it a contentious topic for both academics and practitioners witnessing China's economic rise.

Nonetheless, even as the BRI continues to grow in age and expanse post international backlash as well as delays brought on by a global pandemic, democratic economies around the world are more dedicatedly looking to prepare counters and alternatives to the venture. The goal to build such a global consensus vis-à-vis BRI has seen the active entry of many new players over the years. Notwithstanding their inability to match the investment capital — figures estimate USD 1 trillion to USD 8 trillion (Hellman 2018) — Xi Jinping has set aside for his ambitious venture, rather than counters to the BRI, states in the Indo-Pacific region have launched alternative multilateral projects like the United States' Blue Dot Network (BDN) (US Department of State) with partner states to contain China with an eye on infrastructure. Examples of other recent initiatives in this area include the Group of Seven (G7)-led "Build Back Better World" (B3W) (The White House 2021) and the United Kingdom-led "Clean Green Initiative" (GOV UK 2021) both of which are expressions of their desire to establish their own infrastructure aid brands. Alternatives have been attempted to be built by Asian economies like Japan through the Expanded Partnership for Quality Infrastructure (EPQI) (Ministry of

Foreign Affairs 2015) and India through ideas like Security and Growth for All (SAGAR) (Sharam 2022).

Along this line, the European Union (EU) also emerged as one of the biggest additions with the ability to lead this global consensus by launching its Global Gateway strategy in 2021 after identifying BRI as an opaque venture that threatens the “traditional model of multilateral infrastructure financing” and calling for a “a joint Western alternative” (European Parliament 2021). While explicitly stating that Global Gateway is a different way to deliver infrastructure globally, (European Commission 2021) EU Commission President von der Leyen stated that the EU wants to be regarded as a trustworthy and admired partner in the world. The most fundamental goal of the EU is to democratically imitate the Chinese model by expanding into new markets through improved dialogue and infrastructure contributions. However, the EU must exert considerable effort to persuade its partners of its own project. Additionally, it should be noted that the BRI already has a negative reputation in some nations. That might make the Global Gateway project more powerful. However, how the EU calculates them and adjusts its subsequent steps is undoubtedly the most important variable.

How should we interpret the BRI-facilitated complex interactions, especially as it continues running strong nine years post its launch? (Cision 2022). The EU, despite being a new actor only now launching a dedicated Indo-Pacific strategy (European Union External Action 2022), has recognised the need for joint action for any potential success in limiting the projects power. A truly global perspective and careful consideration of the role that international actors can play in shaping BRI's future is necessary for comprehension of such processes. Albeit, when Ursula von der Leyen, president of the European Commission, launched the Global Gateway, which is essentially a broad strategy to coordinate global infrastructure investment programs between the EU and member states, she did not mention China. However, observers and officials were quick to frame (Kliem 2021) the initiative as a European challenge to China's BRI, which was launched in 2013 to fund infrastructure development projects primarily in developing and middle-income countries in Asia and around the world. This kind of connection remains avoidable due to the geopolitics associated with infrastructure development.

This chapter looks to assess the role EU and its Global Gateway can play in shaping global consensus vis-à-vis BRI. The first part of the chapter looks at understanding the Global Gateway and reviews the initiative in line with the EU's long-term Asia and Indo-Pacific strategy. The second part of the chapter connects the Global Gateway to changes in international and national geopolitics, with a focus on the war in Ukraine.

The final part of the chapter assesses the Global Gateway's synergy with other countries and their alternatives (or counters) to BRI as well as synergy with multilateral trade frameworks. It analyses how the EU via Global Gateway can interconnect these ventures and their objectives to build cohesive action.

2. EU's emerging long-term strategy on and beyond China

Global Gateway aims to establish "partnerships" focused on "investments in quality infrastructure, connecting goods, people, and services" in order to establish "links rather than dependencies" (Lau, Cokelaere 2021). Between 2021 and 2027, the Global Gateway will raise 300 billion euros to invest "in both hard and soft infrastructure" in climate, energy, health, digital connectivity, education, research, transportation, and creating an "enabling environment guaranteeing a level playing field" in a variety of fields (European Commission 2021). The initiative is ultimately a European strategy connecting to its Asia and the Indo-Pacific outlooks; by utilizing a Team Europe effort to bring together EU member states, banks, and organizations, as well as engaging with international partner states to demonstrate "how democratic values offer certainty and fairness," its primary focus is on strengthening connections within Europe in a cohesive bid to balance China.

The initiative is a refurbished multipolar version of preceding EU connectivity strategies (European Union External Action 2018) for Eurasia; it is not an entirely new concept. In due course, the plan aims to outperform the BRI in addition to matching it. Phrases like "democratic ideals," "good governance," "sustainability," and "transparency" have drawn attention to the terms used by EU politicians to promote the Global Gateway, subtly suggesting that it is the exact antithesis of the BRI while simultaneously taking inspiration from it. However, the plan is not (Kliem 2021) only about China, it is being developed as a vital tool to close the widening infrastructural gap around the world. The strategy focuses on infrastructure as a means to bring the EU closer to its Asian and Indo-Pacific partners. Ultimately, it aims to bolster diminishing linkages central to the EU's own power, much like the US-led B3W, and is a partnership 'beyond' (Panda 2021) China.

There remains little to question on the debate of whether the Global Gateway initiative has been specifically designed to counter China's USD 1 trillion worth BRI (Hillman 2018). The complementariness in the scope show that it is indeed touted as an alternative to the Chinese venture, with potential to emerge as a competitor. In the same vein as the BRI's global viewpoint which seeks to connect (European Bank for Reconstruction and Development) "Asia with Africa and Europe via land and maritime networks", the Global Gateway will initially focus mainly on its proximate peripheries (Prasad 2021) such as eastern Europe and Africa.

Furthermore, the initiative also has plans of developing projects (Nardelli 2021) spanning the globe, with the intention of contending China's BRI in Africa, Asia, Arctic, Latin America, Southern and Eastern Europe as well as Central and West Asia. The "proof of concept" (Clingendael 2021) for Global Gateway is touted as Africa. At the EU-AU (African Union) summit on February 17–18, 2022, a Global Gateway investment package for Africa as well as other promises were made public.

However, the Global Gateway like the B3W (Goodman 2021), will also look into mobilising bilateral and multilateral as well as private-sector capital for investment in climate and health security, modernised digital technology, gender equity, and equality. In this regard, it appears to be more complementary to the BRI, as the BRI is still primarily concerned with hard-infrastructure connectivity. Unlike the B3W, however, the Global Gateway has a "hard and soft" (European Commission 2021) infrastructure outlook; while it will consider the aforementioned sectors from a soft-connectivity standpoint, it will also consider physical infrastructure like "fibre optic cables, transport corridors, clean power transmission lines" (European Commission 2021) in an effort to establish digital, transportation and energy connectivity. Thereby, the Global Gateway comes forth as a competitor to the BRI.

Even so, it is crucial to recognise that the Global Gateway initiative should not be confined to just focusing on China. For example, the initiative is vaunted as "Europe's contribution" to the infrastructure needs of the world; in this context, the Global Gateway intends to align itself with the B3W, by emphasizing the fact that both the outlooks will "mutually reinforce each other" (European Commission 2021). It is here that the Global Gateway initiative comes across as going beyond China with a two-pronged focus; to mend the dent in trans-Atlantic linkages and endeavour to build Europe's 'strategic autonomy' (Reuters 2021) past the US. The unveiling of the Australia-United Kingdom-US (AUKUS) security pact must be seen as another point shaping the EU's evolving individualistic outlook towards the region. AUKUS greatly dented the trans-Atlantic framework, and when combined with the disorganised withdrawal of NATO-US troops from Afghanistan, resulting in the return of the Taliban, trust in long-time ally US was adversely affected. Though ties have since been significantly reinforced, AUKUS served as a caveat to the EU (Reuters 2021), calling into question Europe's reliance on the US and encouraging decouple from Washington in favour of maintaining strategic autonomy in foreign policy (European Parliament 2021).

Furthermore, regional geopolitics plays a pertinent role in the Global Gateway initiative; with former-EU state United Kingdom (UK) launching its own 'Global Britain' strategy and attempting to quickly intensify its position as a major European power in Asia and the Indo-Pacific. The EU's focus on strengthening its own role as a geopolitical and geoeconomic actor

in the region has hence grown significantly; this interest builds beyond the China threat, and allows Brussels to view Asia as an entity requiring dedicated and consistent outreach beyond situational engagements. Nonetheless, the BRI's inroads in Europe itself are a cause of concern for the EU with 18 of its states—including Poland, Greece, Italy, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Croatia, Bulgaria, Latvia, Portugal, Greek Cyprus, Austria, Romania, Slovakia and more—being participating countries in the venture. Even though EU countries have been part of BRI for a while—the first big EU addition was Italy in 2019—recent geopolitical tensions have sensitized Brussels to a greater urgency in reviewing China's rise.

3. EU's growing acceptance of the Chinese threat

The acknowledgment that the EU is not a military power, highlighted during reliance on expanding NATO during the war in Ukraine, has allowed reorienting the powerful blocs focus on economic leadership. Global Gateway appears to be an astute option for building its very own 'gateway' into Asia. On the whole, the initiative represents an incredible opportunity for the EU to reassess its China policy (Lau 2021) in line with its Indo-Pacific strategy (European Commission 2021). Keeping its long-term strategic objectives in mind, the EU's new infrastructure strategy is well-positioned to achieve success in multipolarity, driven by its own viewpoints. By utilising multilateralism, the Global Gateway can connect with existing ventures like EPQI, B3W, and BDN to broaden its objectives and growth, and construct a broader umbrella of rules-based, democratic partner states working together to promote value-based infrastructure in Asia and beyond.

Importantly, as Russian action in Ukraine has allowed the EU to see, the unchecked rise of an authoritarian power in its own backyard is a precursor of direct security threat. In this regard, the Global Gateway is a result of EU's recognition of BRI as an opaque venture, in line with deterioration (Seavey 2021) of ties between Brussels and Beijing. EU sanctions (Niewenhuis 2021) on Chinese government officials involved over human rights abuses in Xinjiang further turned ties negatively, showing EU's changing stance and acceptance of an "authoritarian shift" in China (Lau 2021). The "agreement in principle" (Global Risk Insights 2021) on the Comprehensive Agreement on Investment (CAI) in December 2020 was once again put on hold in 2021 (Emmott) when the European Parliament announced its decision to not vote on the same.

Geographically, the BRI has expanded to include all of Africa and Latin America, but more alarmingly for Europe, moved well into the Arctic via a Polar Silk Road (European Parliament 2021). Moreover, BRI's broader focus has expanded thematically from physical to include emerging technologies and digital infrastructure. China has also attempted to

persuade friends of Taiwan to swap their diplomatic loyalties to the PRC in exchange for vaccine supplies using the Health Silk Road (Beg 2020); this was seen in the case of Paraguay (Horton, Parks 2021). EU, recognizing the dire economic situation in Sri Lanka due to severe debt, has renewed its assessment of the implications of the BRI financing model which is often a government-to-government agreement combining Chinese state-owned banks as creditors and Chinese state-owned enterprises (SOEs) as contract executors. The approach prioritises debt payback to Chinese lenders and places restrictions on debt renegotiation while containing nondisclosure agreements on the financing conditions and even the presence of the contract itself. Sovereign guarantees are often needed for BRI financing. Ports (as seen with Hambantota in Sri Lanka) (Wong 2021) and electricity grids (as seen with Laos) (Global Times 2022) are examples of strategic assets of the host nation that may be collateralized. Approximately half of the PRC's financing to developing nations is unreported to the World Bank, resulting in "hidden debt" (Horn et. al. 2020). As with one railway project in Laos (McDonald, McNeil, Kurtenbach 2021), a joint venture with a Chinese majority may also be the borrower, making the arrangement more of a Chinese domestic loan (The Economist 2021) in a foreign nation.

Such borrowing patterns additionally prevent situations of financial distress from being brought before the Paris Club (OECD 2005) which makes it more difficult to put its guiding principles into practise. China has touted such covert debt restructuring as a component of an emerging new order; however, the lending emerges in conflict with the G20's shared framework on debt treatment (House Committee on Financial Services 2021). Moreover, Russia and China's bid to create a new 'world order' has rightfully alarmed the EU with the comradery between Moscow and Beijing only strengthening post-Ukraine (Saul 2022).

The risks associated with BRI for EU have significantly increased, and the number of borrowing countries experiencing repayment issues, such as Montenegro (Euractiv 2021) in Europe, is on the rise. China is currently the largest global lender and the largest single external creditor to about 30 countries, and frequently serves as a lender under a good Samaritan act as it approves aid for countries looking at Beijing as a last resort. The EU's enlargement strategy for the Western Balkans (Mardell), which comprises an infrastructure framework intended at fostering peace, economic stability, good governance, and the rule of law in an effort to prepare countries for EU membership, is undermined (von der Brelie 2021) by incidents like those in Montenegro. Importantly, though not all Chinese investments in Europe are specifically related to the BRI, Chinese direct investment remains high, albeit changing trends in EU and China ties have resulted in slowdown 2021 onwards. (Kratz et. al. 2021) In this regard, EU's plan for more open and respectful investment may be arriving at the right time for countries that want to avoid falling into the debt trap of China.

4. Global Gateway's synergy scope beyond EU-27

As Xi Jinping retains power post the 20th NPC, continuity in China's foreign policy, with doubling down on its economic and security interests even via unilateral means, can be expected. In such a scenario, building the Global Gateway as a consensus driver vis-à-vis BRI is emergent. Despite being launched in 2021, outputs from the Gateway have until now been minimal. It is necessary to concentrate on the reasons why countries would choose the Global Gateway in addition to the fact that it is a potential alternative to the BRI. The Global Gateway's capacity to actually meet the needs of the countries must be evaluated further. Even though concerns about BRI have spread worldwide due to "debt trap" and rapid global expansion, this has not been enough to detract small and developing countries. However, the recent pandemic and the situation of debt-payment difficulties seen in Sri Lanka, Montenegro, Africa and even Pakistan has projected China's refusal to show leniency without taking on infrastructure as collateral. This has served as a wake-up call, coupled with focus on supply chain restructuring and technological self-reliance.

China's progress over the past ten years, particularly as a result of the BRI, demonstrates the country's growing dominance over the global supply chain. The EU's agenda also includes the move, which has established a partner that the US, India, Australia, Japan and even UK can cooperate with. The Global Gateway Project is a way by the EU to build its own version of a silk road, but one that is drawn using values of transparency, democracy and adherence to a rules-based order. China will likely continue to hold the upper hand in the years to come if this move does not counterbalance Chinese advances in all continents, including Europe.

China's BRI and geopolitical expansion are both targets of the EU's Global Gateway project with the initiative acting as a means of expanding European influence and values worldwide. Such an export of Western values stands in counter to the Peking Model (Panda 2020) espoused and exported by China; the focus is hence not just on countering China's infrastructure-led clout expansion, but also on ideology promotion. The EU can hence benefit from the Global Gateway in terms of geopolitical positioning in the global race for connectivity, ideology and infrastructure. In several partner nations, Africa being the first, rule-based cooperation with a clear set of priorities is an appealing alternative to the BRI (Erbas 2022). Here, the Global Gateway's synergy with India and Japan under their Partnership for Business Cooperation in Asia-Africa (Japan External Trade Organisation 2019) (formerly the Asia-Africa Growth Corridor) must be pushed. Economic multilateralism (Kono 2021) has long held a key position in Japan's foreign economic policy. Over the past two decades, infrastructure diplomacy has emerged as an added important tenet of Japan's geoeconomic outlook. Such focus ties with the Global Gateway and builds on the partnership that Japan and EU already

share. The India-EU Connectivity Partnership (Ministry of External Affairs 2021) too can play a crucial role in the EU's effort to build a global gateway. This, in turn, builds on the Strategic Partnership that the EU and India have. In Asia, priority is given to Japan's position as one of the longest-standing and most stable regional players focused on infrastructure and connectivity via EPQI while India is recognized as a security provider to the smaller states. Global Gateway's reliance and cooperation with both these countries will only stabilize its role in the region; it will also pave the way for interconnecting with the Supply Chain Resilience Initiative (SCRI) –headed by Japan, India, and Australia – especially as the Gateway looks to build “resilient, open, reliable supply chains”.

In the India-EU individual bilateral, the conditions for a new mutually beneficial policy regime have been created by India's growing conflict with China, its strategic evolution, and its eagerness to reach out to Europe. The EU also wants to reduce its reliance on Chinese manufacturing and supply chains while looking to pursue strategic autonomy especially post-AUKUS and Ukraine. Climate, energy, health, digital connectivity, education, research, transportation, and the creation of an "enabling environment guaranteeing a level playing field" are the primary focuses of Global Gateway. Owing to its emphasis on private sector financing and its focus on digital, energy, transportation, people-to-people, and "joint support for sustainable connectivity in third countries and regions," the EU-India Connectivity Framework finds synergy here. By focusing on areas that have been less affected by the BRI, particularly Eastern Europe, Europe and India must find ways to organize and combine various public and supranational projects, as well as provide prescribed procedures and data (Panda 2022).

Global Gateway and Tokyo's "Free and Open Indo-Pacific strategy" are convergent along the course of the EU and Japan's rapidly evolving strategic partnership, particularly since the release of the EU's Indo-Pacific strategy. An extended Memorandum of Understanding was signed in October 2021 by the European Investment Bank (EIB), the EU's financing arm, and the Japan Bank for International Cooperation (JBIC) to enhance co-financing opportunities for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals in areas like carbon neutrality, infrastructure, and innovation. Furthermore, both sides have a Green Alliance (Consillium 2021) to advance their sustainable infrastructure goals by collaborating on energy transition and innovation. Under Global Gateway, Japan's focus on investing in infrastructure based on values could be a valuable asset for the EU especially vis-a-vis sustainable infrastructure building.

Thus, the EU has an opportunity to promote its values and sustainability vision in a tangible and lasting way by increasing cooperation on economic and social infrastructure projects. Amidst a global environment of distrust when it comes to China, the EU must build active action via Global Gateway with other democratic actors. Importantly, the launch of multilateral

frameworks like the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF) as well as association with groups like Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) is equally critical. Brussels' Global Gateway is primarily an infrastructural development project, but it also emphasises security. In this regard, Global Gateway will find alignment with the new Japanese "Vientiane Vision 2.0" (Japan Ministry of Defence 2019) release in 2019, which incorporates FOIP with the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific, as an extension of the EU's Indo-Pacific strategy. The EU sees ASEAN as an essential and vital component of keeping the peace, development, and a balance of power in the region rather than seeing its relations with ASEAN as a donor-recipient connection (Okano-Heijmans 2019) The EU's economic interests lie in a developing commercial relationship with ASEAN, and in light of this, Brussels has attempted to highlight the connectivity between the two areas more and more.

The EU is increasingly trying to use its standing as a supporter of freedom, human rights, and a rules-based system to its advantage in the region as geopolitical tensions and the U.S.-China great power rivalry continue to progressively intensify. In this case, Brussels sees ASEAN as a possible major partner (Panda 2022). Initiatives under the Global Gateway could aid in the positive, democratic growth of the bloc, as social development is one of the major obstacles to ASEAN's internal cooperation. The EU's regional plans and goals have begun to place more emphasis on ASEAN, but the Global Gateway can also have a large positive impact on the region's small and middle-income countries. The program's ability to support green finance, digital transformation, interconnectedness, sustainable infrastructure development, trade competitiveness, resilient value chains and improved environmental and climate cooperation between Europe and Asia are its most notable potential material benefits.

The green emphasis of the Global Gateway also ensures that investments made inside ASEAN nations are sustainable and support efforts at climate change adaptation and mitigation. For ASEAN nations like Indonesia and the Philippines, which are particularly susceptible to its impacts, this is crucial. It will also allow for cooperation along green initiatives with Nordic states and ASEAN –an avenue that has until now been left largely underbuilt. Meanwhile, the IPEF's focus on trade, supply chains, clean energy, decarbonisation and infrastructure are direct verticals that can find synergy with the Global Gateway. When the US is unable or unwilling to meet the needs of members in the IPEF, the EU has the ability to do so. Nearly all 12 parties have been involved in trade negotiations with IPEF have either already concluded, promised to conclude, or vowed to resume trade negotiations with EU. It was partially with this in mind that the EU created the Global Gateway as its leading strategy for Indo-Pacific Cooperation (Grare 2022). The EU would gain a competitive advantage in the region by putting the Gateway into active operation as soon as possible.

5. Global Gateway in the years to come

It is crucial for EU institutions, EU member states, and other European players, including the corporate sector and financial institutions, to work together as "Team Europe" when implementing Global Gateway. Additionally, it will be simpler to cooperate with other parties and persuade them to act in a way that advances the internal goals of the EU by having a strong cohesive approach internally. This explains why the Global Gateway's digital and environmentally friendly components are given so much attention, especially as they allow deeper connect with the Arctic Council and Nordic states more directly. The strategy will require at present see the expenditure of 300 billion euros, but it must be remembered that this budget is for the years 2021–2027.

Whether the various infrastructure development initiatives, such as the Global Gateway, BRI, BDN, EPQI and B3W are complimentary or competitive is a key question. The answer is probably at the same time. In low- and middle-income nations, where there is a huge need for new or renovated public infrastructure, more investment, from any source, is likely to be welcomed. The difference between them however is much clearer; apart from BRI, the others are driven by free, open and rules-based engagement norms. In this regard, the emergence of Global Gateway and the EU in the Asia and Indo-Pacific domain must be viewed as an opportunity to build global democratic consensus in building a strong alternative (or counter) to the BRI. For any of the democratic ventures mentioned, competing with BRI's USD 1 trillion to USD 8 trillion estimates alone is not possible; this is also one of the reasons why multiple initiatives exist even as they have over-arching and over-lapping focuses.

The Global Gateway may have substantial positive effects on the EU and its international partners if it is effective. Individually for EU, by developing tighter economic and political relations with partners and enabling the Union to successfully compete with China and the US for the provision of global infrastructure, it might increase the EU's strategic autonomy. Through securing market access and standard-setting measures for the goods and services required to deliver infrastructure projects, it could also export EU industrial and competition policies, which might also help to stimulate economic growth within the EU and expand its global regulatory influence (The Institute of International and European Affairs 2022)

The Global Gateway will have substantial effects on the EU and its international partners if it is effective. By developing tighter economic and political relations with partners and enabling the Union to successfully compete with China and the US for the provision of global infrastructure, it might increase the EU's strategic autonomy. Through securing market access and standard-setting measures for the goods and services required to deliver infrastructure projects, it could also export EU industrial and competition policies, which might also help to

stimulate economic growth within the EU and expand its global regulatory influence. How the Global Gateway shapes its future for EU-27 and Brussels' partners remains to be seen. Nonetheless, the immense potential it holds to build a strong global united front that works in favour of open, rules-based infrastructure connectivity rather than just against China's BRI is clear.

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