

**HOW DO EU MEMBER STATES', CANADIAN AND THE UNITED STATES INTELLIGENCE AGENCIES ASSESS RUSSIAN AND CHINESE INFLUENCE ACTIVITIES?**

**Part II:  
Analysis of Russian & Chinese  
Influence in Central Europe**



**EUROPEAN VALUES**  
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## KEY FINDINGS

### Russia

Russian presence within Central Europe is a result of multi-level strategies, often country specific, to gain and increase Russia's influence. Russian President Vladimir Putin wishes to restore Russia as a big player on the world stage and in turn aims to undermine the United States, North Atlantic Treaty Organization and the European Union. Central Europe has provided Russia a platform to undermine these Western powers as Russia expands its influence within the region. While the supply of natural gas has been pivotal to Russia's foothold in some of the Central European countries' other methods such as the use of disinformation campaigns or establishing political ties with pro-Kremlin parties have been key to the increase of Moscow's influence. Moreover, the tools and tactics used by Russia can be separated into three areas, economic, political and social.

#### Economic tools and tactics:

1. Energy outfits and investments
2. Banking networks
3. General economic influence- including investment in real estate and sports

#### Political tools and tactics:

1. Political parties and figures sympathetic to Vladimir Putin and Russia
2. NGO's

#### Social tools and tactics:

1. Online disinformation campaigns
2. Pro-Russian media companies

### China

China's presence in the Central European region has largely focused on using economic and political pressure to advance China's objectives. The value of Central Europe for China is instrumental: Central Europe is a back door into the EU, it offers economic markets & partners for China and it has some potential political allies (such as Hungary) for China. In Central Europe, China has used its initiatives such as 16+1 and Belt & Road to offer economic projects and investments to the Central European states, but at the same time these initiatives have acted as a "divide and conquer" tactic for Beijing to divide the EU internally. China's tools and tactics can be divided into economic, political and social:

#### Economic tools and tactics:

1. Economic trade
2. Loans and investments
3. Technology
4. Espionage

#### Political tools and tactics:

1. Institutional initiatives
2. Bilateral partnerships
3. "Pragmatic cooperation"

#### Social tools and tactics:

1. Chinese cultural power
2. Pro-China media companies
3. Use of social media

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## INTRODUCTION

In the first part of our research into Russian and Chinese influence in Central Europe, we published a *“Russia and China through eyes of NATO and EU intelligence agencies”* report<sup>1</sup>. Key findings of that report included a clear division inside the EU on how the different member states have reacted into Russia’s and China’s activities in Europe. Our first report divided the member states into three categories, the Most Alarmed (Baltic states, Czech Republic, Denmark), the Acknowledgers (Belgium, Croatia, France, Germany, Netherlands, Sweden, UK, US, Canada) and the Hesitants (Austria, Bulgaria, Finland, Ireland, Italy, Portugal, Slovenia, Poland).

This second report examines Russian and Chinese influence in the Central European region. The aim of the report is to more closely cover the actual events that have already happened in Central Europe and analyze them as part of the larger picture. The report is divided into

two parts: Russia and China. In both cases, the report will first go through the short- and long-term goals for the countries. These goals have been adjusted to the context of Central Europe: what is the value of Central Europe for Russia and China? How does the region work as a mean towards larger foreign policy goals, and how does the region work as an end itself?

After the short- and long-term goals have been listed, the report will talk about the tools and tactics that Russia and China have used. The toolboxes have been divided into three categories: economic, political and social tools & tactics.

Finally, we will provide key findings about the similarities and differences between Russia and China. The report will end with a short conclusion on the findings of the whole report and the second phase of the research project.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.europeanvalues.net/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Russia-and-China-through-eyes-of-NATO-and-EU-intelligence-agencies.pdf>

## RUSSIAN INFLUENCE IN CENTRAL EUROPE

Russian attempts to increase its influence within Central Europe has several factors to consider. Firstly, it is imperative to understand Moscow's motives behind the leadership's desire to increase Russian influence within the region. Therefore, this section will detail the short term and long-term objectives of the Kremlin with regards to Central Europe. Moreover, the Kremlin has adopted several different strategies while pursuing its aims of gaining and increasing its influence in Central Europe so the second part of this section will provide analysis of the tools and techniques adopted by Russia.

### Russia's short-term goals in Central Europe are:

- Decouple nations in the region from the EU and NATO
- Create a sense of distrust and division between the public and political circles
- Maximize energy Central European dependency on Russia
- Gain a pro-Russian foothold in Central Europe political spheres
- Neutralize CE nation sentiment toward current Russian policies/behavior

### Russia's long-term goals in Central Europe are:

- Upend liberal, Western international order
- Replace the unipolar world order with a system of multipolarity
- Maintain Vladimir Putin's and the United Russia's role in office for as long as possible
- Cause a NATO and EU divide, Central Europe distancing or disassociation with both

Russia aim to achieve their short- and long-term objectives in Central Europe through tools of influence which can be divided into three sections; economic, political influence and social.

### Economic influence tools and tactics

Russia sets out to develop its influence within Central Europe by creating an energy dependency. Moscow also aims to increase the Kremlin's ability to use its increasing economic influences within the region to achieve Russia's longer-term goals within the region.

### Energy outfits & investment

European energy pipelines have historically run from Russia, one of the world's largest producers of oil and gas, to and through Eastern and Central Europe which, consequently, limits the ability of other energy producers to supply the market. Since Vladimir Putin has been in power in Moscow, oil and gas have been an integral part of Russia's strategy to regain influence across the world and monopolizing gas supplies to the European Union and thwarting EU diversification efforts have long been key components of this strategy.

European gas imports totaled 90 billion euros in 2018, of which nearly half was delivered by Russian supplier Gazprom. Germany is the largest consumer of Russian natural gas, while other Central European countries such as Hungary or Slovakia buys all its imported gas from Russia. Moscow have used this dependency of Central European countries for gas to their advantage several times; for example, Russia has responded to several attempts from Latvia to open up the gas market by threatening to divert the transit of Russian exports to Latvian ports, which would cripple the transportation sector, the backbone of the Latvia economy. Furthermore, 2017 State Information Services reference a fear of Russia's gas bypass of Slovakia as a threat to the nation's energy security

Russia is actively attempting to increase its influence in Central Europe through its energy exports. A notable instrument the Kremlin aims use in attempt to expand its influence is the Nord Stream 2, Putin's natural gas pipeline designed to control Europe. Currently, Russia supplies one-third of Europe's natural gas and delivers it through three pipelines, one through Belarus and Poland, another through Ukraine and Slovakia, and Nord

Stream 1. Nord Stream 2 will replace the first two, creating a dangerous and vulnerable infrastructure dependency. The pipeline would further increase the Russia's grip on the European energy market and it already currently supplies around 40% of the EU's gas supplies. Nord Stream 2 will deliver alongside the first-double pipeline, 110 bcm of natural gas from Russia to Germany this would in turn assure Germany a monopoly over the Russian gas that is then to be distributed across Europe.

The Kremlin has also invested in energy companies across Central Europe to gain and further Russian influence. This is evident in Serbia where in 2008, Russia's Gazprom Neft (a subsidiary of Gazprom) gained a controlling stake in Serbia's Naftna Industrija Srbije oil and gas company and committed to invest \$600 million in the company. Through this investment in NIS, Gazprom Neft gained assets elsewhere in the region (including subsidiary enterprises such as gas stations, storage facilities, drilling and exploratory rights and representative offices) in other European countries such as Hungary and Romania. This type of energy investment conveys Russian influence and helps build soft power within the region, even if an investment is never fully realized.

Natural gas is not the only energy source the Kremlin uses to seek and increase its influence within Central Europe. In Hungary, Russia has invested in the popular and politically important Paks Nuclear Power Plant. After Russian nuclear energy company Rosatom was awarded the construction contract and Russia committed a ten-billion-euro line of credit to finance the project. The Kremlin has used this dependence as leverage to gain Budapest's support for Russian interests, as was evident with Russia's move to further Hungary's dependence on Russian energy via construction of new pipelines. There is also substantial effort to influence investment decisions and nuclear fuel supply in the Czech nuclear power industry. An example of this is the acquisition of one of the largest suppliers of heavy vehicle parts in nuclear energy, Pilsen Toll, by a Russian state-owned bank.

## Banking networks and other economic influence

In 2012, Russia's state-owned Sberbank purchased Volksbank International, formerly the Eastern European subsidiary of an Austrian banking group, now called "Sberbank Europe." The acquisition gave the Russian bank a relatively large commercial banking presence in Central European countries including the Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovakia. Furthermore, the Russian-led International Investment Bank has nine states as members including Hungary, Czech Republic, Romania, and Slovakia. Russia has a controlling 47 percent stake in the bank and the bank is described as a front for a Russian intelligence operation that threatens both the EU and NATO.

Russia has also invested in other sectors across Central Europe including retail, real estate, and tourism. In some European countries such as the Czech Republic, Moscow has invested heavily in engineering sector while Russian companies have also invested in sports and cultural activities to expand Moscow's soft power in European countries including Latvia and Serbia.

## Political influence tools and tactics

The Russian government understands the effectiveness of supporting political parties in foreign Western countries who may share the same values or ideas of NATO and the EU. The Kremlin interfere in Western countries as it seeks to assist political leaders or parties who would be beneficial to Russia's objective of undermining NATO and the European institutions.

### Kremlin friendly political parties & figures

Moscow recognizes the usefulness of European far right parties in Putin's bid to cause disruption and division within the West. In Central Europe the Kremlin has supported the far-right party in Hungary Jobbik, as well as Prime Minister Viktor Orban of Hungary's ruling party Fidesz, the Freedom Party (FPO) in Austria, the Kotleba Party of Slovakia, and several parties in Serbia.

Russia has also established and extended its influence in Central Europe through Kremlin friendly political figures. This is the case in Czech Republic with regards to the populist President Miloš Zeman who often adopts a pro-Russian rhetoric. While in Hungary, pro-Kremlin Prime Minister Viktor Orban has embraced and implemented Putin's version of "democracy" while adding a distinct Hungarian spin to it. Orban, with his control of the media and confrontations with Brussels has helped Putin and he even awarded Russia a no-bid contract to modernize Hungary's nuclear power plant. Orban has also on several occasions criticized the EU's economic sanctions against Russia.

### NGO's

Furthermore, covert support for and exploitation of non-governmental (NGO) interest groups has proven a successful means of building networks with influential political figures and fanning issues on which populist movements feed. NGOs are a key part of the Kremlin's kleptocracy network, they lure in foreign actors and fund local partners and are used as a Tool for Russia's Projection of Influence. Furthermore, pro-Kremlin NGOs manipulate open societies in order to promote the Kremlin's views, enhance divisions and distract international communities from more pressing issues. Boris Yakunin, an oligarch friend of Putin, recently established a think tank called the Dialogue of Civilizations Research Forum in Berlin, to accompany his existing World Public

Forum Dialogue of Civilizations in Vienna, which aims to counter anti-Russian rhetoric and US hegemony.

## Social influence tools and tactics

Russia is using information operations and disinformation campaigns to influence public opinion and democratic decision-making. Disinformation campaigns are in this respect, as described by W Lance Bennett and Steven Livingston, "coordinated efforts by troll factories, hackers and bots to disrupt democratic processes from elections to legislative communications to public discussions of issues". Russia has used these disinformation techniques many, many times as the Kremlin aims to increase its influence within Central Europe.

### Online disinformation campaigns

Russia uses social media sites as well as online news sites and chat rooms to reach foreign audiences across Europe. Social media platforms are often a key component of Russia's disinformation strategy. This is because they can be used remotely with hidden identities, spreading pro-Kremlin information, disinformation and comments, and mobilizing and organizing protests. Bots and trolls are used by the Russians to support other users or spread particular messages and drown out real content. This is part of a longer-term strategy to cause disruption and division within European states. As detailed in the 'Russia and China through the eyes of NATO and EU intelligence agencies' report, campaigns targeting foreign nation's policy and public opinion has been described by the Czech Republic as part of Russia's "hybrid strategy". Russia has infiltrated media and the Internet and used Czech organizations and individuals to spread massive amounts of propaganda to create internal tension and undermine NATO and the EU.

In Poland, approximately 70 percent of all Russian messages about NATO in the Baltics and Poland are created by Russian bots as part of an influence campaign within the country. While in Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia, the Kremlin's disinformation operations in are mostly aimed at the countries' Russianspeaking populations. Over the last ten years Russia has increased its disinformation operations in the Baltics, including the use of internet trolls and NGOs, to portray the Baltic states as failures run by the sinister elite of Western puppets with fascist sympathies." One of the key objectives of these disinformation campaigns within the Baltics is to divide the population

along ethnic lines to as part of Moscow attempt maintain control over the local Russian diaspora, as this can be used as a tool of influence

Even in Romania, where public opinion is unlikely to deviate from its strong pro-European orientation, the Kremlin is deploying its established disinformation techniques. With a focus on the long-term, Moscow hopes to exploit some of the problems that polarize Romanian society and disrupt EU – Romania relations. Most of the impact from disinformation in Romania has been provided in the form of manipulative campaigns and the distribution of fake news as was evident in the 2018 referendum regarding the definition of the family.

### Pro-Russian media companies

Russia is increasingly using media in Europe to disseminate propaganda. Russia communicates through TV, radio, the Internet and public events, and employs paid journalists in Western and other media in Central European countries such as Latvia and the Czech Republic. In Serbia, Russian businesses have financed media outlets that have on many occasions taken a pro-Russian stance. Furthermore, Russia has also launched a German-language service for Russia Today and both RT and Sputnik falsely reported a Russia-German girl was raped by Muslim migrants in Berlin, a story which the German police confirmed as false. This is an example of how Russian disinformation campaigns through the use of pro-Russian media platforms are designed to enhance already existing divisions within a state and across Europe.



Russia sets out to develop its influence within Central Europe by creating an energy dependency

## CHINESE INFLUENCE IN CENTRAL EUROPE

As the “Russia and China through eyes of NATO and EU intelligence agencies” report mentioned, China’s use of influence in the Central European region is happening mainly through the use of political and economic pressure. Both the EU and the Central European countries have a challenge in interpreting the motivations behind China’s actions. While China is a relatively fast-growing export economy with an understandable willingness to find new markets and investment destinations for its business, many of its investments can also be interpreted to have secondary motivations. The value of Central Europe for China is mostly instrumental: China has many interests in the area, which serve its more long-term objective of rising (or rejuvenating) into a great-power status, upending the Western liberal order and achieving sustainable long-term economic growth.

China shares many of its short- and long-term goals with Russia, as they both are looking for a more multipolar international system with the decreased influence of the Western-led liberal order. However, due to China’s different historical, geopolitical and political position, the tools and tactics that it uses differ from Russia’s toolbox. The autonomy of Chinese intelligence agencies in conducting operations is considerably narrower, and the ability of China’s military to project power outside its neighborhood is still low. For these reasons, China has mainly relied on its soft power approach, or as some analysts would say, the use of sharp power.

### China’s short term goals in Central Europe are

- Find new markets for Chinese products, improve Beijing’s role as a valuable economic partner
- Find new political partners, improve Beijing’s role as a political partner
- Strengthen the position of Chinese technology (especially 5G) in the European markets

- Decouple nations in the region from the EU, build a new Eastern/Central European coalition

### China’s long term goals in Central Europe are

- Upend liberal, Western international order
- Replace the unipolar world order with a system of multipolarity

### Economic influence tools and tactics

#### Economic trade

European Union is China’s largest trading partner, and the trade between them has been growing steadily for the last ten years. With the ongoing trade war with the United States, China is actively looking for better economic partnership with the European states. China is very important trade partner for countries such as the Czech Republic, for which China is the third largest trading partner after Germany and Poland. Because of this asymmetrical relation between China and smaller countries in Central Europe, China has significant leverage in many of the relationships.

China has pledged to continue increasing its trade with the Central European region, especially in areas that are favorable to China such as infrastructure, technology and energy. With the large infrastructure projects, China has favored using its own workers instead of the local workforce. Central European states have shown concerns over China’s state-subsidized companies, which hurt the competition in the European markets. European Union has also criticized some China-led projects such as the Budapest-Belgrade high-speed railway. States such as Austria have singled out China’s investments into critical state infrastructure. China has acquired control of the port of Piraeus in Greece and is trying to build a railway connection from Greece to Germany, which would run through the Balkan region and Central Europe.

## Loans and investments

China's economic diplomacy is very heavy on offering large investments and loans to China's partners. China has promised large investments to Central European countries, particularly within the framework of the Belt and Road Initiative, but these promises have not been kept. Big part of China's investments has been towards so-called "trophy projects," which include football clubs, five-star hotels, expensive brands and art. For example, in the Czech Republic, China has bought the football club Slavia Prague, luxury hotels Palais Art Hotel Prague & Mandarin Oriental Prague and also the biggest brewery in the country, Pivovary Lobkowicz. While these projects are not necessarily a direct threat for the Central European states, they build a favorable view of China among the business elite in Europe. These projects also demonstrate the typical diplomatic model of China's charm offensive abroad, where China first holds a high-level diplomatic meeting with large investment promises, but afterward majority of the investments are never made, and the ones that are made are towards trophy projects.

China has also been criticized for using "debt-trap diplomacy" to gain leverage on other states. China has promised big loans to states such as Sri Lanka and Venezuela, and then taken control of the projects after customer countries have failed on debt. In Europe, the most notable case has been the highway bridge in Montenegro, where China gave a billion-dollar loan (25% of Montenegro's GDP) for a road project that had previously been rejected as economically impractical. While these kinds of projects have not been seen in the Central Europe yet, Hungary has already been negotiating with Beijing for years about a large loan. So far, the EU has been very critical of the member states taking big loans from China, and the issue has been a topic that has caused some strain between the EU and the member states.

## Technology

Many countries have been skeptical about Chinese companies such as Huawei and ZTE, which are market leaders in 5G, but also cause worries about the Chinese government's role behind the companies. So far, 28 of 50 5G contracts that Huawei has signed are with European countries, and the European markets is the most important market for Huawei at the moment. China has been interested in investing into Central European telecom companies such as O2 Czech Republic and Drei Austria. China's technology investments are not limited to 5G; the country has also been active in building ocean cables around the world, electrical grids, power plants and nuclear industry. Many of these projects have been made with the help of China's state subsidies, which is why companies such as Huawei have been able to offer very generous prices to the new customers.

## Espionage

China has been the most active user of industrial espionage practices in the world, and many of its leading technology companies have benefited from leaked information. There have been many espionage cases in the Central and Eastern Europe, for example the case of Huawei sales director Weijing Wang case in Poland this year, where he was arrested along with Polish intelligence agent on suspicion of espionage. Many German companies are being spied on by China, which is why the German interior ministry has estimated the costs of Chinese economic espionage to be somewhere along 20-50 billion euros every year.

## Political influence tools and tactics

### Institutional initiatives

China has two main initiatives in the Central European region: 16+1 (nowadays called 17+1) and the Belt & Road initiative. China prefers political institutions where it is the most influential player on the table, which is why it has been active in founding its own cooperation organizations. A common issue for both 16+1 and Belt & Road is that China has promised large sums of investments to the initiatives, but little concrete results have followed. Even though these initiatives are important platforms for Chinese economic diplomacy and finding new partners, there is also the larger objective of causing internal division inside the EU. China has been critical of the EU's "normative power" agenda, which is why it prefers dealing with other groups.

Former 16+1 cooperation, which has technically turned into 17+1 cooperation, includes the 17 Central and Eastern European states. The focus of the cooperation is on business and investments, particularly in areas that are in the interests of China, which include infrastructure, transportation & logistics, technology and tourism. The landmark project of the cooperation is the Budapest-Belgrade railway, which has also been linked to Belt & Road initiative. The EU has been critical of the 16+1 meetings, which have been organized just before the annual EU-China summit. This year China agreed to keep the 16+1 meeting after the EU-China summit, which was perceived as a gift to the EU.

Belt and Road Initiative is China's global development strategy, which includes projects in over 150 countries. Central Europe has a strategic location in the project, and China's objective is to increase the regional connectivity in the Balkans in order to build a better connection between the Central Europe and the Mediterranean Sea through China's port in Piraeus, Greece. In Europe, China has seen that many of its tactics that it has used in other places do not work in Europe. China's projects which have not made economic sense and are built over questionable finance plans, have been turned down either by the EU or the member countries. While China has offered their money very loosely, they have tried to gain preferential treatment elsewhere by requiring that the projects use Chinese workforce and follow Chinese environmental and labor standards.

### Bilateral partnerships

China has invested in selected bilateral partnerships, mainly with Hungary and its PM Orban. This partnership brought results to China when Hungary did not sign the EU human rights report in 2018, which included criticism against China. Hungary is opening a new Chinese university, and the country already has a high school which uses Chinese language in teaching. China has supported political parties favorable to its views, and also offered spotlight for politicians who show goodwill towards China. These partnerships have consequences on many different levels: China has been able to get support in organizations such as the United Nations and European Union, but also in issues such as the use of Chinese 5G technologies in Europe or using the Chinese Renminbi as currency in business trade.

### "Pragmatic cooperation"

China has used the political tactic of "pragmatic cooperation" for dealing with countries that are not necessarily China's strategic partners. Pragmatic cooperation means highlighting bigger challenges that threaten both China and Central European countries, such as trade wars, terrorism, populism and climate change. When China uses the tactical discourse of pragmatic cooperation, it shifts the attention away from problems such as human rights, state-subsidies, devaluated Renminbi and low labor standards. Emphasizing the common challenges and interests is often done through China's win-win narrative, which in reality has too often meant that China just wins twice. Pragmatic cooperation also has long-term implications: China likes to talk about achieving sustainable long-term economic growth, building infrastructures such as roads, electric grids and telecoms with a long-term thinking, and developing new technologies in areas such as solar power, nanotechnology and biotechnology.

Pragmatic cooperation narrative tries to divide the cooperation into small sectors, which enables China to achieve success in some areas while staying silent on issues such as human rights. China's pragmatic cooperation is also a very tempting offer for the Central European countries, which do not want to pick fights with China. The problem with pragmatic cooperation is that China is largely able to decide to areas of cooperation and is therefore shaping the relations slowly into its favor.

## Social influence tools and tactics

### Chinese cultural power

At the moment, China already has five different Confucius Institutes operating in Hungary. There are over 500 Confucius Institutes around the world, which have a goal of promoting the Chinese language and culture for the people. Some years ago, China paid attention to the issue that it did not have soft power that states like the U.S. or Japan had, which is why it has started to promote Chinese culture aggressively around the world. Many of China's tactics, such as the famous "Panda diplomacy," seem innocent and without any secondary motivations, but they all slowly build China's cultural power in Europe. China has engaged European people through investments into sports, movies and entertainment, which has slowly brought China closer to European people and also kept issues such as Xinjiang away from the plot lines of Hollywood movies.

### Pro-China media companies

China has been active in feeding narratives to the Central European media companies about events such as the Hong Kong protests and Xinjiang detention camps. This has been done in three ways: (1) Chinese embassies giving interviews to the local media, (2) investments into media companies in Central Europe and (3) using third parties to sneak in narratives. Chinese ambassadors have

been active in publishing op-eds in European newspapers, which the newspapers usually accept. This kind of op-eds have been published in at least Hungary, Slovakia, Poland and the Baltic countries. China has bought shares in media groups in the Czech Republic and sponsored magazines that are published by the political parties in Central Europe.

The use of third parties is also a tactic for China, and countries such as Hungary provide a good platform for China to bring narratives to Europe. China has been able to affect the European Union's thinking and communication on various topics via China's partners like Hungary. These operations can be done as a "content-sharing" partnership, where Chinese newspapers or embassies approach local media in European countries and offer a content-sharing opportunity to pay attention to common issues such as the 16+1 cooperation or Belt and Road initiative.

### Use of social media

In the social media, China has not had state-led operations to affect the minds of the people. However, China has promoted different narratives such as the "bright future for Hong Kong", which has been done through interviews, media and press statements. Chinese views are promoted by groups such as Chinese exchange students in Europe, who have been very politically active in some countries.



China's economic diplomacy is very heavy on offering large investments and loans to China's partners

# KEY SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES BETWEEN RUSSIA AND CHINA

## Similarities

- Both Russia and China see internally divided EU as an objective.
- Both leaders of Russia and China share the same aim of balancing the Western liberal order and creating a multipolar world rather than a unipolar
- Both Russia and China have started to show distrust towards Western technology -which is why they are building their own infrastructure and also trying to sell it abroad.
- Both Russia and China are developing networks of influence through economic ties
- Both Russia and China have used large investment as a means of gaining influence in Central Europe
- The threat posed by Chinese and Russian influence are both national and regional

## Differences

- While Russia is practically in a low-level war with the EU, China does not see the EU as an existential threat and has not used its military capabilities against the EU
- China's short-term goals have a strong economic theme whereas Russia's short-term objectives is to cause disruption and enhance divisions within the region while undermining NATO
- Chinese intelligence is very focused on economic espionage, whereas Russia's focus is on meddling with the European political system, causing divisions and underlying the European narratives
- Russian influence campaigns are full scale operations, using strategies tried and tested in

European countries many times before whereas Chinese influence strategy tends to be focused on building human relationships

- While China has used disinformation campaigns to push its own agenda, in Central Europe Russian disinformation campaigns appear to be considerably more dominant. Moreover, the campaigns can be quite different; China often use disinformation to promote a pro-Chinese rhetoric whereas Russia has used similar techniques to spread pro-Kremlin propaganda it has also used disinformation campaigns to cause and enhance divisions in Central European countries.

A notable key similarity between the two is the desire of the leadership of both Russia and China, to end the Western dominance of the global stage and in turn assure the world becomes multipolar. This is the reason we can see some similarities between Russia and China with regards to Central Europe as the two share the same long-term objective. However, despite Russia and China sharing similar long-term visions and views on the West and the world order, there are some key differences between the two in terms of methods used to seek influence and short-term goals within Central Europe. This is not only because of geographical reasons but because the different historical relationship the two countries share with Central European countries. Russia and China, although both authoritarian, are also politically different and have different domestic concerns, particularly economically. Furthermore, Russia and China have distinctly different short-term goals therefore it is natural tactics adopted by the two would differ.

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## CONCLUSION

This report has outlined the short- and long-term goals of Russia and China in Central Europe. It has provided important analysis of the tools and tactics used by both states in their objective to increase their influence within the region. This allows us to accurately compare the strategies and methods used by Russia and China, with a specific focus on Central Europe. Furthermore, this report has highlighted key differences and similarities between the Russian and Chinese.

**Russia's long- and short-term objectives provide an indication on how concerned the EU and other European countries should be with regards to the threat of the increasing influence of Russia in Central Europe. For example, Russia's short-term goal within the region is to undermine and even divide the EU and NATO while the Kremlin's long-term aim is to upend the liberal, Western international order and restore some of Russia's global power. Furthermore, Russia often adopts strategies that cause disruption and widen divisions across Europe. Disinformation campaigns and infiltration of politics seen in Central European countries is a serious threat to our Western values and our democracy. Therefore, the EU should provide the problem of Russian influence in Central Europe with considerably more attention. Member States must quickly and explore effective ways of combating the efficient and sometimes complex strategies used by Moscow to increase its influence within Central Europe.**

As this report has detailed, Russia has gained considerable influence within the region through the export of natural gas and other energy resources and as a consequence, Russia has the ability to manipulate Central European nations by threatening to cut off the nation's energy supply. Moreover, through investment in specific Central European countries Moscow has been able to expand its influence through financial networks from country to country further demonstrating this is a regional threat and not just national. The EU must work closely with Central European countries in order to

tackle the rising influence of Russia in the area and create methods of not only preventing it from increasing further but reducing it. One step should be looking to reduce the dependency on Russia for energy resources.

**The Chinese threat to the Central European region can be characterized as serious, even though the region plays a more instrumental role for China's larger goals. Whenever China is able to negotiate with countries bilaterally or in the framework of institutions that China itself has founded, China is having an asymmetrical home advantage. For this reason, it is in the interest of the member states to build a common EU approach to China, which would include rules about China's investments into EU, rules about how the European media should deal with China and also rules about China's soft power approaches such as the Confucius Institutes.**

Because of China's large size, it is practical to divide the relationship into smaller sectors. While this is understandable and necessary, the EU should still keep up the discussion about the situation in Xinjiang, Tibet and Hong Kong, the human rights issues in China, China's industrial espionage, China's various island disputes, China's militarization of space and various other troubling behavior of China. In a long-run, EU's own legitimacy decreases if it is not able to deal with the challenging issues in EU-China relations.

For the Central European states, increasing trade with China is a natural phenomenon, but it requires close attention and pre-set rules on the Chinese investments. Steps such as banning the Huawei from selling its technology in European countries always show a signal to China, which is why overreacting will always put the relations to a bad trajectory.

