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European Elites' Opinions on the “Belt and Road” Initiative — An Analysis Based on the Survey

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European Elites' Opinions on the “Belt and Road” Initiative

-- An Analysis Based on the Survey

Abstract: This article elaborates a questionnaire survey of European elites on their opinions towards the “Belt and Road” Initiative which is the first thematic and authoritative research on the China-EU cooperation under the “Belt and Road” Initiative both domestically and internationally. The questionnaire survey was conducted from June 2015 till September 2015. The main target groups of the survey are policy makers, think tanks, entrepreneurs and media reporters from 25 European countries including major EU member states and candidate states. The key conclusions are as follows: Firstly, the European elites have a relatively accurate understanding and positioning of the basic spirit of the “Belt and Road” Initiative and basically acknowledge the positive significance of the Initiative for trade cooperation and the connectivity between the two sides; Secondly, despite that the European elites have a basic understanding of the the “Belt and Road” Initiative, they seem to be unclear about its deep-seated purpose and specific contents. As a result, they hope China to give more interpretations; Thirdly, the European elites attach great importance to the establishment of specific mechanisms in promoting the “Belt and Road” Initiative. They consider reasonable mechanisms as the basic guarantee of the Initiative; Fourthly, the European elites consider that people-to-people bond is of much importance, which provides public support for implementing the “Belt and Road” Initiative; Fifthly, the European elites also attach great importance to the China-EU cooperation with the third parties under the “Belt and Road” Initiative, mainly with Russia and the US; Sixth, the elites are not familiar with the integration of the “Belt and Road” Initiative with the Juncker Investment Plan and are pessimistic about it; Last but not least, the elites recognize the importance of people-to-people exchanges and they do not view the ideological differences as the main obstacle to the bilateral exchanges; instead, they consider differences in culture and thinking patterns as more significant but not decisive factors.

Keywords: the “Belt and Road” Initiative; the European Union; Questionnaire Survey among CEECs

I. About the Survey

This survey was conducted since June till September of 2015. The main target groups are the officials, think tanks, entrepreneurs and media reporters from European countries (mainly from EU members and candidates).

There are a few collection works that contributed a lot to this survey. I sincerely thank those who were involved in collecting questionnaires. The China Institute of International Studies (CIIS) gathered questionnaires from almost 30 European officials during the European diplomats' training seminar held in July 2015. The Institute of European Studies, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences sent questionnaires to the high-level officials of CEECs who attended the China-CEEC High Level Meeting held at CASS in August 2015. Zhang Xibo, the Director of Public Affairs of the Eastern and Northern European Regional Center of Huawei Corporation, Warsaw, Poland collected a great many questionnaires from the Northeastern European entrepreneurs. Liu Minru, the officer of the Compilation and Translation Bureau of the CPC Central Committee, also helped a lot during her visit to the Northern Europe in 2015. Besides, the author collected some questionnaires from CEE attendants at the important conferences such as the Croatian Forum and the Bled Strategic Forum held in 2015. During his visit to CEECs from June to September of 2015, the author also issued a few pieces of questionnaires to the officials working at the foreign ministries, the staffs from the offices of President and Prime Minister, and from parliaments and think tanks..

This survey is the first quantitative research related to the China-EU Relations under the "Belt and Road" Initiative both domestically and internationally. Before the survey, the author sorted out more than 70 questions systematically according to the suggestions from experts in related fields. They designed the questions and options scientifically in hope of reaching better results. In the end, the author and his team collected 142 questionnaires in total among which there are 110 valid questionnaires. After that, they used SPSS to form a database for analysis.

What needs to be clarify is that the survey's target groups were carefully chosen for they are the elites who have some understanding and expertise about the "Belt and Road" Initiative. The high requirements for the target groups resulted in only a small number of questionnaires being issued and returned. In the following sections the author will illustrate on his research results:

Table 1: Gender

Gender	Number	Percentage
Male	68	61.8%
Female	42	38.2%

To judge from the gender composition, there are more males (61.8%) than females (38.2%).

Table 2: Age

Age	Number	Percentage
Under 30	24	21.8%
30—40	62	56.4%
40—50	15	13.6%
50—60	4	3.6%
Above 60	5	4.5%

Concerning the age, the proportion of 30-40 year-old participants accounts for 56.4% followed by 21.8% of those under 30 years old, most of whom are entrepreneurs. 13.6% of respondents are between 40 and 50 years old. Generally, the target groups are relatively young.

Table 3: Nationality

Nationality	Amount	Proportion
Albania	1	0.9%
Bosnia and Herzegovina	1	0.9%
Bulgaria	7	6.4%
Croatia	1	0.9%
Cyprus	1	0.9%
Czech	7	6.4%
Estonia	2	1.8%
France	3	2.7%
Germany	5	4.5%
Holland	3	2.7%
Hungary	6	5.5%
Italy	1	0.9%
Latvia	1	0.9%
Lithuania	1	0.9%
Macedonia	4	3.6%
Malta	1	0.9%

Montenegro	1	0.9%
Poland	29	26.4%
Romania	14	12.7%
Serbia	7	6.4%
Slovakia	5	4.5%
Slovenia	2	1.8%
Spain	1	0.9%
Sweden	4	3.6%
UK	2	1.8%

With regard to the nationality, there are 25 countries in total, basically including major EU member states and candidate states. Most of respondents are from Poland and Romania with 29 and 14 respectively. Target countries are wide-ranging and representative.

Table 4: Occupation

Occupation	Amount	Proportion
Government officials	39	35.5%
Full-time researchers	26	23.6%
Journalists	1	0.9%
University Lecturers and Professors	16	14.5%
Others	28	25.5%

As for the occupation, government officials take a lion's share of 35.5% followed by researchers (23.6%), others (mainly entrepreneurs) (25.5%) and university lecturers and professors (14.5%). Since the policy makers take up the highest proportion among all respondents, the survey could be of great significance for the decision-making of top levels.

II. European Elites' Views on the "Belt and Road" Initiative

According to the European elites' answers to several basic questions about the "Belt and Road" Initiative including the fundamental purpose and specific features of the initiative as well as the problems that need to be solved, it is reasonable to conclude that:

The European elites' understanding of the fundamental purpose of the "Belt and Road" Initiative is basically accurate and objective. From their perspective, the initiative

mainly aims at enhancing trade and investment cooperation with countries along the Belt and Road and promoting the connectivity between China and the involved countries. This has, to a large extent, shown that they actually understand the fundamental spirit of the initiative regardless of so much criticism coming from European media that the content of the initiative is not clear enough. Meanwhile, more and more European elites acknowledge the significance of the “Belt and Road” Initiative. However, they fail to fully understand China’s motives of proposing the initiative. Most elites consider the initiative as an foreign-oriented and strategy-based proposal.

Besides, some European elites hold unrealistic expectations towards the “Belt and Road” Initiative. They list global issues like the regional conflicts and counter-terrorism, etc. as the target issues under the “Belt and Road” Initiative.

Here are some specific analysis on the answers given by the respondents:

1. From your perspective, what are the fundamental objectives of the “Belt and Road” Initiative?

Content	Number	Proportion
The promotion of trade and investment cooperation with the countries along the “Belt and Road”	84	76.4%
The promotion of connectivity and regional cooperation with the countries along the “Belt and Road”	79	71.8%
The promotion of Chinese global strategic layout orienting towards the energy and resources	45	40.9%
The promotion of Chinese advantageous products’ “Going Global”	38	34.5%
The promotion of transfer of Chinese over-capacity products	30	27.3%
Unclear	8	7.3%
Others	11	10.0%

To judge from the feedback, most elites think that the fundamental purpose of China’s “Belt and Road” Initiative is clear and explicit. To put it in detail, 76.4% of the respondents view that the initiative aims at promoting trade and investment cooperation with the countries along the Belt and Road. Meanwhile, 71.8% of the respondents regard the connectivity as the fundamental objective of the initiative. Above results are basically in accordance with China’s intention of cooperation, namely, the cooperation on the connectivity and trade between China and countries along the Belt and Road.

Despite that 40.9% of the respondents deem China’s initiative as a way to transfer China’s over-capacity products and 34.5% of those regard the promotion of Chinese advantageous products’ “Going Global” as the fundamental objective of the initiative, these views account for only a small proportion compared with the former two views. Although many European media consider that the purpose of the “Belt and Road” Initiative is not explicit enough, while in this survey, there is only a small proportion of the respondents (7.3%) who consider the purpose as “unclear”, which suggests that the European elites have accurate and objective understanding of China’s “ Belt and Road” Initiative.

2. In your opinion, what are the features of the “Belt and Road” Initiative?

Content	Number	Proportion
A strategic plan led by China	56	50.9%
A strategic plan initiated by China, which should be jointly built through consultation to meet the interests of all	46	41.8%
An ambitious project designed by China as a new pattern of global governance	26	23.6%
A reflection of China’s active participation in global cooperation and development	50	45.5%
A practical requirement for China to deepen reform and broaden openness	31	28.2%
A strategy to expand Chinese influence in its neighbors/Eurasian areas and seek regional hegemony	30	27.3%
A response to the Asia Pacific Re-balance Strategy of USA	24	21.8%
Others	6	5.5%

As shown in the table, European elites’ answers to this question are quite divided, but they do reach some basic consensus on views that the “Belt and Road” Initiative is “a strategic plan led by China” (50.9%), “a reflection of China’s active participation in the global cooperation and development” (45.5%) and “a strategic plan initiated by China, which should be jointly built to meet the interests of all” (41.8%). These views and attitudes are basically positive and indicate that the European elites acknowledge the significance of China’s “Belt and Road” Initiative.

To fully investigate European elites’ understanding of the features of the “Belt and Road” Initiative, the research team has deliberately set some “neutral” and even “negative” options. 27.3% of the elites consider that “China intends to expand its influence in Asia and Europe and seek regional hegemony”. 24% of the elites consider that the initiative is “a response to the Asia Pacific Re-balance Strategy of USA”. These

results show that quite a number of European elites hold relatively negative views on the “Belt and Road” Initiative. It seems that the elites do not think that the initiative reflects China’s need of deepening reform and broadening openness in the new era. In fact, only 28.2% of the participants hold the above-mentioned view. Most of the elites still consider it as a foreign-oriented and strategy-based instrument instead of an initiative proposed based on China’s domestic needs.

3. Among so many complicated issues faced by the countries along the “Belt and Road”, which ones would be solved under China’s “Belt and Road” Initiative?

Issues	Number	Proportion
Illegal immigration	16	14.5%
Anti-terrorism	31	28.2%
Regional conflicts	55	50.0%
Breaking the trade barriers and regulation limits between different regions	78	70.9%
Improving the efficiency, level and scale of connectivity between different regions	81	73.6%
Promoting the efficiency of energy transport and improving the energy security	33	30.0%
Others	13	11.8%

The countries along the “Belt and Road” face complex regional situations. However, the “Belt and Road” is essentially an initiative on regional cooperation and economic cooperation rather than an all-embracing plan aimed at solving tricky issues. Ever since the initiative was announced, many countries have been expecting too much from it. Some expectations are far beyond the objectives of the initiative. Based on the feedback, the European elites’ understanding of the issues that need to be solved under the “Belt and Road” Initiative is not entirely correct. There is still a considerable amount of misunderstanding.

73.6% of the respondents consider that the “Belt and Road” Initiative will be mainly “improving the efficiency, level and scale of connectivity between different regions”. 70.9% of the respondents believe that the initiative will be “breaking the trade barriers and regulation limits between different regions”. These two views are in accordance with China’s thoughts. But 50% of the elites view that the “Belt and Road” Initiative will actively solve the problem of “regional conflicts” and 28.2% of them expect that the initiative will address the issue of “anti-terrorism”. In fact, the “Belt and Road” construction may have to face problems like regional conflicts and anti-terrorism, but it’s hard to say whether China is capable of solving them under the “Belt and Road” Initiative.

III. The Cooperation Mechanism Needed by the “Belt and Road” Initiative

All the elites consider that there should be more mechanisms for the China-Europe cooperation rather than only one or two cooperative mechanisms. The European elites obviously pay more attention or depend more on formal cooperative mechanisms rather than informal ones. The elites do not attach importance to the ASEM which covers a wide range of countries and areas.

Although the European elites consider that it is “necessary” to establish a specialized coordination mechanism with the focus of the connectivity between China and Europe, they don’t hold an optimistic attitude on whether the mechanism will be established and function well. The elites hold relatively high expectations on China’s financial institutions and expect less from the European financial institutions. Besides, they pay less attention to the multilateral financial institutions such as the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank that are important to the infrastructure building.

Here are the author’s further analysis and illustrations on the above conclusions:

1. Which mechanism is proper for the policy coordination between China and EU during the construction of the “Belt and Road”?

Contents	Number	Proportion
A cooperative mechanism under the framework of the China-EU cooperation	52	47.3%
A mechanism of strategic cooperation between China and European countries	42	38.2%
A mechanism of regional cooperation between China and European countries, such as the China-CEEC cooperation	47	42.7%
Intergovernmental forums such as the Asia-Europe Meeting	31	28.2%
Various professional cooperative forums	46	41.8%
Informal meetings	22	20.0%
Off-meeting communication on the sideline of major international conferences	11	10.0%
A new and specialized mechanism of cooperation and exchanges established for the “Belt and Road” Initiative	25	22.7%

Others	16	14.5%
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In order to better implement the “Belt and Road” Initiative, it is necessary to cooperate with relevant parties to coordinate policies and mechanisms, which is of great significance to the implementation of the “Belt and Road” Initiative. The European elites’ take different views on this issue.

47.3% of the participants support “a cooperative mechanism under the framework of China-EU cooperation”, 42.7% of participants are in favor of “a mechanism of regional cooperation between China and European countries, such as the China-CEEC cooperation”. 41.8% of the participants are sided with “various professional cooperative forums” whereas 38.2% of the participants expect “a mechanism of strategic cooperation between China and European countries”. Based on the above feedbacks, it is reasonable to conclude that almost all the elites consider that there should be more mechanisms and channels of cooperation between China and Europe rather than only one or two mechanisms. Besides, the European elites obviously pay more attention or depend more on formal cooperative mechanisms rather than informal ones. In addition, the elites do not attach importance to the ASEM which covers a wide range of countries and areas probably because they think that the ASEM is no more than a “talk-shop” with no power to push the decision-making.

In fact, the “Belt and Road” Initiative does not only rely on the above-mentioned cooperative mechanisms or meetings. Since the initiative involves a wide range of complex projects and a great many interest groups, the formal inter-governmental mechanisms are not always effective in solving various issues. In addition, the “Belt and Road” Initiative is a systematic project which should be jointly built through consultation to meet the interests of all rather than China imposing its policies and ideas. Because of that, the mechanism like the ASEM could play an important role.

Up till now, there hasn’t been a platform or mechanism that could involve all Asian and European countries along the “Belt and Road”. The existing mechanisms are basically the bilateral or multilateral mechanisms for regional cooperation such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization with the focus of the cooperation between China and Central Asia as well as Russia. The “16+1 Cooperation” mechanism mainly deals with the cooperation between China and 16 Central Eastern European countries. Besides, the cooperation mechanisms between China and EU only serve for the cooperation between China and EU as well as EU member States. The “Belt and Road” Initiative involves both Asia and Europe and is thus in need of a more extensive and inclusive mechanism for coordination. What should be particularly emphasized is that, since the ASEM was expanded to Russia and other Asian and European countries with participation of more and more Central Asian countries, it has truly realized the connectivity between Asia and Europe and become a perfect match for the “Belt and Road” Initiative. Considering that the “Belt and Road” Initiative involves many countries, it is not easy to make

separate communication. As a platform to communicate ideas, the ASEM is of great value and significance. The ASEM is a diverse, free and flexible organization which can provide opportunities for exchange of views and is in line with the spirit of the “Belt and Road” Initiative underling openness, inclusiveness and sharing. In fact, all parties can benefit from exchanges on the ASEM. The European elites’ overlook of the ASEM has reflected their lack of understanding of the operative patterns of the “Belt and Road” Initiative.

2. Is it necessary to establish a specialized coordination mechanism for the connectivity and infrastructure construction between China and Europe?

Content	Number	Proportion
Necessary	51	46.4%
Unnecessary	7	6.4%
Remain to be seen	37	33.6%
Unclear	15	13.6%

As for this question, 46.4% of the participants consider that it is necessary to establish a specialized coordination mechanism for the connectivity. 33.6% of the participants think that the issue remains to be seen. This result actually reflects the relatively complex thoughts of the European elites. They think that establishing such a mechanism is necessary but they must also give thought to the feasibility and efficiency of the implementation. Although there exist great potential and a lot of opportunities in cooperation between China and Europe on infrastructure construction under the “Belt and Road” Initiative, weather the cooperation can be realized and well-developed is quite uncertain. Therefore, although the cooperation is “necessary”, it still “remains to be seen”. Those who chose “unnecessary” only take up 6.4% of the total participants.

3. Which tools can be used by China and EU in the financial integration during the construction of the “Belt and Road”?

Content	Number	Proportion
The “Belt and Road” Strategy Fund	74	67.3%
Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank	74	67.3%
BRICS New Development Bank	27	24.5%
EU Structural Funds	43	39.1%
The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development	54	49.1%
World Bank	31	28.2%
Asian Development Bank	29	26.4%
European Investment Bank	40	36.4%
Others	24	21.8%

Financial integration is an important underpinning for implementing the “Belt and Road” Initiative. It reflects the strategic nature, the level and the scale of the practical cooperation between the two sides. The China-Europe cooperation will be essentially enhanced through the coordination and mutual utilization between the financial institutions of China and those of Europe. Based on the survey results, the European elites’ feedbacks are not much optimistic, as illustrated in the following parts.

Firstly, the European elites hold high expectations on the financial institutions of China while expecting less of the European financial institutions. 67.3% of the participants consider that the financial instruments of the “Belt and Road” Strategic Fund and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank should be fully utilized with China shouldering more financial obligations. As for the important European financial instruments, while 49.1% of the participants think that the funds from the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development could be optimized, 39.1% of the participants regard the funds provided by the EU Structural Funds as a reliable source of financing. Besides, 36.4% of the participants think highly of the funds from the European Investment Bank. In fact, the EU Structural Funds and the European Investment Bank are the major suppliers of the EU’s finance that can provide larger amount of capital than the “Belt and Road” Strategic Fund and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank. However, the elites tend to think the opposite.

Secondly, the elites obviously underestimate the crucial role of the multilateral financial institutions such as the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank in the facilities construction under the “Belt and Road” Initiative with only 28.2% and 26.4% of the participants acknowledging the financial importance of the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank respectively.

In a word, the European elites see the potential of the China-Europe financial cooperation and expect China to contribute more than Europe. In addition, they do not attach importance to the multilateral financial institutions.

IV. Challenges and Opportunities for the “Belt and Road” Initiative

With regard to the synergy between the “Juncker Investment Plan” and the “Belt and Road” Initiative that has been widely discussed by both Chinese and European media, most of European elites remain indifferent to the potential of cooperation between the two initiatives with only a few showing optimistic attitude towards it.

As for the problems that may occur during the infrastructure cooperation between China and Europe, the European elites’ bigger concern is that problems might occur due to China’s incapability of meeting the EU standards, and they lack awareness of whether EU could cooperate with China on the basis of equality and mutual trust. The European elites’ contrasting attitude towards China and the EU will become one of the main obstacles in the future cooperation of the two parties.

When it comes to the integration of the “Silk Road Economic Belt” with the Eurasian Economic Union, the elites don’t think much of it as they consider the integration of the two initiatives more as a political posturing rather than an economic driver.

Concerning whether there is a conflict between TTIP and China’s promotion on the impeded trade, most elites have little knowledge about it.

In addition, they also view the “imperfection of the cooperative mechanisms” as one of the major disturbing factors for the China-EU financial cooperation.

As for the cultural and people-to-people exchanges between China and Europe, in spite of a few elites who consider the ideological difference as a barrier to the bilateral cooperation, most of them think that the ideological difference won’t stand in the way of the China-EU collaboration. After all, the flourish of cultural and people-to-people exchanges is a long-term objective in need of patience and time.

Further Illustrations on Surveys:

1. How much is the cooperative potential between the Juncker’s Investment Plan and the “Belt and Road” Initiative?

Content	Number	Proportion
Very much	17	15.5%
So-so	21	19.1%
No potential	3	2.7%
Unclear	45	40.9%
Remain to be seen	24	21.8%

Despite that the leaders of China and Europe have had in-depth negotiations and exchanges of views on this issue, the outcome is unknown. But how do the European elites view this issue? In fact, more than 40% and 21.8% of the participants chose “unclear” and “remain to be seen” respectively, suggesting that around 62.7% of the elites do not have clear understanding of the cooperative potential between the Juncker’s Investment Plan and the “Belt and Road” Initiative. Accordingly, only 15.5% and 19.1% of the respondents chose “very much” and “so-so” respectively. In view of this, it is reasonable to conclude that only a few European elites hold optimistic attitudes towards the potential of cooperation between the “Juncker Investment Plan” and the “Belt and Road” Initiative whereas most of them are either ambiguous or indifferent on the issue.

2. Which issues are and will be faced by the cooperation on infrastructure construction between China and the countries along the “Belt and Road”?

Content	Number	Proportion
The compatibility of Chinese infrastructure scheme and Pan European Transport Corridors	49	44.5%
The possibility of reaching EU's standard for Chinese infrastructure construction	54	49.1%
The transparency of procedure of Chinese infrastructure construction	51	46.4%
The investment risks of Chinese large infrastructure projects in Europe	24	21.8%
Others	21	19.1%

49.1% of the participants consider that the main issue in infrastructure cooperation between China and Europe is “the possibility of reaching EU’s standard for Chinese infrastructure construction”. 46.4% of the participants believe that the key problem is that “the transparency of procedure of Chinese infrastructure construction”. 44.5% of the participants deem “the compatibility of Chinese infrastructure scheme and Pan European Transport Corridors” as the primary issue. The European elites’ bigger concern is that problems might occur due to China’s incapability of meeting the EU standards, and they lack awareness of whether EU could cooperate with China on the basis of equality and mutual trust. The European elites’ contrasting attitude towards China and EU will become one of the main obstacles in the future cooperation of the two parties. Apart from that, the risks of building the large-scaled projects such as the infrastructure are poorly understood by the European elites, among which only 21.8% responded to the question.

3. What’s your opinion on The Joint Statement on Integration of Eurasian Economic Union and the “Belt and Road” Project signed by China and Russia in May, 2015?

Content	Number	Proportion
A reflection of China-Russia close strategic cooperation	48	43.6%
An achievement made by China and Russia under the pressure of USA and Europe	25	22.7%
A natural result of the close trade and investment cooperation between China and Russia	34	30.9%
This cooperation will have a positive impact on the Free Trade Zone Negotiation between China	13	11.8%

and EU		
This cooperation will pose a negative impact on the Free Trade Zone Negotiation between China and EU	20	18.2%
Others	32	29.1%

It has to be noted that, about this issue, nearly 30% of the participants said that they were not familiar with this. 43.6% of the participants think it is “a reflection of China-Russia close strategic cooperation” and actually more like a political posturing. 30.9% of the participants think that it is “a natural result of the close trade and investment cooperation between China and Russia”. Those who believe that the cooperation will make a negative impact on the China-EU FTA negotiations take up higher proportion than those who believe the positive impact of cooperation. Therefore, it can be clearly seen that the elites don’t think much of the integration of the “Silk Road Economic Belt” with the Eurasian Economic Union since they consider the integration of the two initiatives more as a political posturing rather than an economic driver.

4. Will Chinese active promotion of the unimpeded trade between China and EU have counter-balance on the TTIP?

Content	Number	Proportion
Yes	15	13.6%
No	22	20.0%
Unclear	28	25.5%
Remain to be seen	42	38.2%
Others	3	2.7%

On this relatively sharp issue, the largest number of respondents (38.2%) chose “remain to be seen”, and 25.5% of the participants selected “unclear”. Totally more than 60% of people consider that it is hard to make judgment. The elites who think that there is no counterbalance (20%) outnumber those who thinks there is (13.6%). Therefore, the European elites’ views on this issue are ambiguous. The reasons are complicated. It is hard to predict the development of economic and trade cooperation boosted by the TTIP. Besides, China has not explicitly and directly elaborated on its proposal of the “unimpeded trade”. All these have made it difficult for the European elites to make judgments.

5. What kind of issues are and will be faced by the China-EU financial cooperation during the construction of the “Belt and Road”?

Content	Number	Proportion
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Euro turbulence	42	38.2%
Low level of the Internationalization of RMB	33	30.0%
US dollar as a major trading currency between two sides	17	15.5%
Imperfect financial cooperation mechanism	53	48.2%
Others	24	21.8%

48.2% of the respondents consider the “Imperfect financial cooperation mechanism” as the main challenge. 38.2% of them chose the “Euro turbulence” whereas 30.0% of them selected the “low level of the Internationalization of RMB”. On this issue, the European elites expect that both sides can establish more developed mechanisms to lay the foundation for the financial cooperation.

6. What kind of issues are and will be faced by the China-EU people-to-people exchanges and cooperation?

Content	Number	Proportion
Ideology is the biggest issue	28	25.5%
The current exchanges and cooperation are not effective	7	6.4%
Both sides are in lack of willingness to exchange and cooperate with each other	6	5.5%
People-to-people exchange is a long-term project that can't be fruitful in short term	60	54.5%
The government of two sides attach no importance to it	12	10.9%
Others	26	23.6%

In terms of the cultural and people-to-people exchanges between China and the EU, most of the elites have expressed their understanding and support towards it. 54.5% of people hold the view that “people-to-people exchange is a long-term project that can't be fruitful in short term”. 25.5% of people consider the ideological difference as the biggest obstacle while 23.6% of people chose “others”.

V. Conclusions

According to the feedback of the European elites, their view are characterized with strong European style. In their views, China and Europe should integrate different opinions and thoughts to promote the mutually-beneficial cooperation under the “Belt and Road” Initiative.

Firstly, the European elites have relatively good understanding of the basic spirit of the “Belt and Road” Initiative and approve the positive side of the Initiative. China strives to promote trade cooperation and the connectivity under the “Belt and Road” Initiative, which is in accord with the European interests and welcomed by the European side.

Secondly, though the European elites have a basic understanding of the “Belt and Road” Initiative, they seem to be unclear about its deep-rooted purpose and context. They highlight the need for China to give more explanations. Some elites have concerns or unrealistic expectations about the Initiative as it is difficult for them to grasp the deep-rooted goals of the initiative.

Thirdly, the European elites attach great importance to the construction of mechanisms in promotion of the “Belt and Road” Initiative. They consider reasonable mechanisms as the basic guarantee of this initiative. However, in these mechanisms, the European elites hold unreasonable expectations towards the initiative. They think that China should make itself in accordance with the EU rules and standards, undertake more responsibilities and contribute more in financing. Besides, they consider the imperfect cooperating mechanism as an obstacle to the China-EU financial cooperation. The European elites, however, do not have much thoughts on how to build the mechanisms. It shows that Europe is not quite sure about how to integrate with the “Belt and Road” Initiative.

Fourthly, the European elites consider that the increasing understanding among people is the foundation of the promotion of the “Belt and Road” Initiative. The method is to increase communication and exchanges among people and experts and jointly establish professional cooperating committee. The European elites also view China’s increasing financial support to the private sector, NGOs, social groups and small and medium-sized enterprises as an effective way to increase understanding among people. The elites have reached the consensus that increasing understanding among people comes before large-scale construction and cooperation.

Fifthly, the European elites also attach great importance to the China-EU cooperation with the third party under the “Belt and Road” Initiative, mainly with Russia and the US. Their thoughts are practical and specific. In their views, Russia has great impact on the Initiative, which cannot be put aside in the promotion of the Eurasian connectivity. Russia’s foreign policies have resulted in the instability on the Eurasia continent and the strained EU-Russia relations will have bad impact on the Initiative. China should take advantage of its strengths and involve Russia to promote effective trilateral cooperation on the Eurasian connectivity. The US is another factor, which is present widespread in the Eurasia continent. China should also involve the US on the basis of fully understanding its interests to ensure a smooth and mutually beneficial China-EU cooperation.

Sixthly, the elites showed little understanding or pessimistic attitude towards the integration of the “Belt and Road” Initiative with the Juncker Investment Plan. According to the feedback of the European elites, China and Europe have to pay huge effort to coordinate two sides’ financial and law issues as well as rules and standards. The coordination of rules and standards is the most difficult. Though the rules seem to be simple and fixed on the surface, they can be obstacles everywhere during the implementation. Some elites hold the view that the objective of the Juncker Investment Plans is purely economic while the goal of the “Belt and Road” Initiative remains unclear. However, the Initiative is definitely not just a plan for investment. Other elites suppose that the integration seems impossible without effective cooperative mechanisms.

Last but not least, the elites recognize the importance of people-to-people exchanges, but they do not view the differences in ideology as the main obstacle. In their views, the differences in culture and thinking patterns weigh more. For instance, an elite thinks that the Chinese emphasizes more on the inter-personal relations whereas the Europeans underline bureaucracy and public opinion. The differences in culture and thinking patterns result in big differences in decision-making process and system, making it difficult for both sides to integrate with each other. Specifically, there are many differences between the long-term and step-by-step development underlined by the “Belt and Road” Initiative and the European perspectives featuring concrete and practical. Therefore there is a need for both sides to set reasonable expectations.

Annex:

Survey on Views of European Countries about the “Belt and Road” Initiative

Survey No.□□□□□□

Dear friends,

This survey is conducted by the Institute of European Studies, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences and financed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of China. It is specifically aimed for European government officials, experts and scholars. Its purpose has nothing to do with politics or profit. We hold the privacy of your personal information in the highest regard. Please feel comfortable to fill in at your own convenience. Thank you for your support and cooperation!

I. Basic Information

1. Gender

a. Male b. Female

2. Age

a. below 30 b. 30-40 c. 40-50 d.50-60 e. above 60

3. Nationality (Please Specify)_____

4. Occupation

a. Official b. Think Tanks Researcher c. Journalist d. Staff of University e.
Others (Please Specify)_____

5. Do you have overseas study/work experience (At least 3 months) ?

a. Yes b. No

II. Views about China’s “Belt and Road” Initiative

1. From your perspective, what are the fundamental objectives of the “Belt and

Road” Initiative (multiple choice)?

- a. The promotion of trade and investment cooperation with the countries along the “Belt and Road”
- b. The promotion of connectivity and regional cooperation with the countries along the “Belt and Road”
- c. The promotion of Chinese global strategic layout orienting towards the energy and resources
- d. The promotion of Chinese advantageous products’ “Going Global”
- e. The promotion of transfer of Chinese over-capacity products
- f. Unclear
- g. Others (Please Specify)_____

2. In your opinion, what are the features of the “Belt and Road” Initiative (multiple choice)?

- a. A strategic plan led by China
- b. A strategic plan initiated by China, which should be jointly built through consultation to meet the interests of all
- c. An ambitious project designed by China as a new pattern of global governance
- d. A reflection of China’s active participation in global cooperation and development
- e. A practical requirement for China to deepen reform and broaden openness
- f. A strategy to expand Chinese influence in its neighbors/Eurasian areas and seek regional hegemony
- g. A response to the Asia Pacific Re-balance Strategy of USA
- h. Others (Please Specify)_____

3. Among so many complicated issues faced by the countries along the “Belt and Road”, which ones would be solved under China’s “Belt and Road” Initiative? (multiple choice)?

- a. Illegal immigration
- b. Anti-terrorism

- c. Regional conflicts
- d. Breaking the trade barriers and regulation limits between different regions
- e. Improving the efficiency, level and scale of connectivity between different regions
- f. Promoting the efficiency of energy transport and improving the energy security
- g. Others (Please Specify)_____

4. Which mechanism is proper for the policy coordination between China and EU during the construction of the “Belt and Road” (multiple choice)?

- a. A cooperative mechanism under the framework of China-EU cooperation
- b. A mechanism of strategic cooperation between China and European countries
- c. A mechanism of regional cooperation between China and European countries, such as the China-CEEC cooperation
- d. Intergovernmental forums such as the Asia-Europe Meeting
- e. Various professional cooperative forums
- f. Informal meetings
- g. Off-meeting communication on the sideline of major international conferences
- h. A new and specialized mechanism of cooperation and exchanges established for the “Belt and Road” Initiative
- i. Others (Please Specify) _____

5. Is it necessary to establish a specialized coordination mechanism for the connectivity and infrastructure construction between China and Europe? ?

- a. Necessary b. Unnecessary c. Remain to be seen d. Unclear
- (Please specify reasons for every choice)

6. Which tools can be used by China and EU in the financial integration during the construction of the “Belt and Road” (multiple choice)?

- a. The “Belt and Road” Strategy Fund
- b. Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank
- c. BRICS New Development Bank

- d. EU Structural Funds
- e. The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development
- f. World Bank
- g. Asian Development Bank
- h. European Investment Bank
- i. Others (Please Specify)_____

7. How much is the cooperative potential between the Juncker’s Investment Plan and the “Belt and Road” Initiative?

- a. Very much
- b. So-so
- c. No potential
- d. Unclear
- e. Remain to be seen

(Please specify reasons for every choice)

8. Which issues are and will be faced by the cooperation of infrastructure construction between China and the countries along the “Belt and Road” (multiple choice)?

- a. The compatibility of Chinese infrastructure scheme and Pan European Transport Corridors
- b. The possibility of reaching EU’s standard for Chinese infrastructure construction
- c. The transparency of procedure of Chinese infrastructure construction
- d. The investment risks of Chinese large infrastructure projects in Europe
- e. Others (Please Specify)_____

9. What’s your opinion on The Joint Statement on Integration of Eurasian Economic Union and the “Belt and Road” Project signed by China and Russia in May, 2015 (multiple choice)?

- a. A reflection of China-Russia close strategic cooperation
- b. An achievement made by China and Russia under the pressure of USA and Europe
- c. A natural result of the close trade and investment cooperation between China and Russia
- d. This cooperation will have a positive impact on the Free Trade Zone Negotiation

between China and EU

e. This cooperation will pose a negative impact on the Free Trade Zone Negotiation between China and EU

f. Others (Please Specify)_____

10. Will Chinese active promotion of unimpeded trade between China and EU have counter-balance on the TTIP (multiple choice)?

a. Yes b. No c. Unclear d. Remain to be seen e. Others (Please Specify)

11. What kind of issues are and will be faced by the China-EU financial cooperation during the construction of the “Belt and Road” (multiple choice)?

- a. Euro turbulence
- b. Low level of the Internationalization of RMB
- c. US Dollar as a major trading currency between two sides
- d. Imperfect financial cooperation mechanism
- e. Others (Please Specify)_____

12. What kind of issues are and will be faced by the China -EU people-to-people exchanges and cooperation (multiple choice)?

- a. Ideology is the biggest issue
- b. The current exchanges and cooperation are not effective
- c. Both sides are in lack of willingness to exchange and cooperate with each other
- d. People-to-people exchange is a long-term project that can't be fruitful in short term
- e. The government of two sides attach no importance to it
- f. Others (Please Specify)_____

13. What are your suggestions on strengthening the connectivity between China and countries along the “Belt and Road”?

Thank you again for your cooperation and support!