

EDITORIALS

The New Silk Road Opens A New Perspective for Mankind

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May 5—It's unfair to the German people: Strategically there is an epochal change for the better underway, yet the citizens of this country find themselves in the valley of the clueless—thanks to a *de facto* news embargo, imposed by the politicians and the media, which prevents the people from realizing the potential it holds for Germany.

Chinese President Xi Jinping's initiative—the New Silk Road, also called the Belt and Road Initiative—has developed an unprecedented dynamic since he proclaimed it a good three and a half years ago. More than a hundred countries and international organizations are now participating in the greatest infrastructure and development program in history, a program that has developed into the true motor of the world economy.

On May 14-15 in Beijing, a major conference, the Belt and Road Forum, will consolidate this project of the century, with the participation of 28 heads of state and government, more than 150 leading figures from international organizations, and 1,200 high-ranking representatives from 110 countries. This conference will make clear to the whole world that a fully new set of values has emerged in the world, in which a higher level of cooperation between nations, for the common interests of mankind, is superseding the geopolitical interests of individual countries or groups of countries.

Meanwhile, China has concluded 130 bilateral and

regional transportation agreements, has initiated 356 international routes for passengers and freight, and has opened 4,200 direct flight connections with 43 countries. There are 39 rail routes currently in operation between China and Europe. A freight train leaves Chongqing every day *en route* to Europe. Six major transport and development corridors between Asia and Europe are under construction as well as an entirely new rail network in Eastern and Central Africa. And the maritime Silk Road for the 21st Century is also being built. This is only the beginning of an initiative that is open to the participation of every nation on the planet.

The world community is currently divided in two: One side grasps this idea, and the other is clinging to the old, obsolete ideas of geopolitics. That may be difficult for German citizens to understand, because the politicians and media conceal these crucial developments from them, and instead deliver an indigestible cocktail of fake news, commentary, and irrelevant distractions.

The [May 3 address](#) of American Secretary of State Rex Tillerson to the State Department staff has great strategic significance in this connection. He not only affirmed President Trump's election promise that the United States will no longer conduct regime change interventions into other nations to impose its own so-called values, but he also stressed several times that the United States is working with China to define their relationship for the next 50 years, and that this represents

an enormous opportunity.

Chinese Ambassador Cui Tiankai invited the United States—in his speech to the International Finance and Infrastructure Cooperation Forum in New York City on April 24—to join in the Silk Road initiative, the Belt and Road, which would open up great potential for American enterprise. Cui expressed his hope that the United States would seize the initiative and participate in the Belt and Road Forum on May 14-15 in Beijing. President Xi Jinping stressed, during his visit to Mar-a-Lago, Florida in early April, that there are thousands of reasons for the Chinese-American relationship to be a success, and not one for it to break down.

China's *Global Times* later made fun of a series of articles in the *New York Times* that totally missed the mark in interpreting the relationship between the U.S. and Chinese heads of state. It noted that in articles with titles such as “Why Trump’s Budding Bromance with Xi is Doomed” and “Trump Is a Chinese Agent,” the *New York Times* could scarcely conceal its acid sarcasm, but that in the *Global Times’* view it had long since been overtaken by the new era.

In fact, it appears that in the editorial offices of the mainstream media, the dress code does not permit the wearing of concave glasses to correct for myopia.

Embracing the Historic Opportunity

In contrast to similar backward-looking politicians in Germany, Japan has recognized the opportunity inherent in Japan’s cooperation with the Silk Road Initiative. Several high-ranking Japanese figures will participate in the May summit, for example, Toshihiro Nikai, the General Secretary of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), who is known for his pro-China views and is number two in the party after Prime Minister Shinzo Abe; Trade Minister Hiroshige Seko; and the head of the Japanese Business Federation, Sadayuki Sakakibara. *Japan News* commented that Abe has committed himself to an improvement in relations with China through Nikai’s participation in the summit.

But even within Europe and in many European Union (EU) member states, the epochal significance of the Silk Road initiative is actually better understood than in Berlin. Czech President Milos Zeman will be the only EU head of state participating in the Beijing summit; former Czech Foreign Minister Jan Kohout commented that the New Silk Road project is a “com-

mercial and political high-speed train toward China, which represents an opportunity for the coming decades.” Switzerland, which is not an EU member state, will be represented by its President, Doris Leuthard, just as all of Switzerland is preparing to become a hub for the Belt and Road. Five more EU countries are sending their prime ministers, among them Italy’s Paolo Gentiloni and Spain’s Mariano Rajoy. The remaining EU members either won’t participate or are sending ministers, such as, for example, German Economics Minister Brigitte Zypries.

Unlike in Germany, representatives of Spain, Portugal, Hungary, Serbia, and Greece have expressed enthusiasm about the potential that the New Silk Road opens up for their countries. Spain’s ambassador to China, Manuel Valencia, praised the successful collaboration between Spanish infrastructure companies and Chinese companies in the widening of the Panama Canal, the fast train between Mecca and Medina (Saudi Arabia), and the construction of the largest refinery in Kuwait. He said the Canary Islands would be a “peaceful aircraft carrier for enterprise and trade,” and that Spain was predestined to be the link between Europe and Asia.

Portuguese Economics Minister Manuel Caldeira Cabral proposed, at the first Sino-Portuguese Economic Forum, that Portugal fully align itself with the Belt and Road Initiative, whose strategy it fully shares. Portugal sees itself as a pivotal country that could be a bridge between Europe and Asia, as an entry point into Europe. Hungarian Foreign Minister Peter Szijjarto stressed that world politics and the world economy are at a point of profound change, and that China’s role is not only important for its own future, but also decisive for the future of Europe, which could only profit from the Belt and Road initiative. The list of such declarations could be extended to include those of representatives of several other nations.

Then consider that, despite the U.S. bombing of the Syrian air force base, the relationship between Presidents Trump and Putin, and between Foreign Minister Lavrov and Secretary of State Tillerson, has again become one of cooperation. This is expressed, for example, in the agreement on de-escalation zones in Syria and the dispatch of a U.S. Deputy Secretary of State to the Syria negotiations in Astana, Kazakhstan. This makes clear that an opportunity for collaboration between the United States, Russia, and China is emerging, a collaboration which is obviously crucial

for establishing world peace and resolving many flashpoints.

In contrast, Chancellor Merkel's policy positions were very negative—such as those she expressed in her Moscow visit with Putin in her appraisal of the Ukraine crisis, or her maintenance of sanctions, or the brutal austerity policy of the EU and her Finance Minister Schäuble against Greece. The German government has a very reserved attitude toward the New Silk Road—an attitude in complete contrast to the interests of the economy and the well-being of the people. It is probably an expression of the fact that those in Berlin and Brussels do not want to break from the geopolitical outlook that dictates that the EU, as a regional superpower with global ambitions, must defend itself against China, Russia, and the United States.

In early May, Xinhua wrote that it would obviously not be easy for the West, which holds competition in

high esteem, to understand the Chinese outlook, which is based on harmony and stability. It said that China is not seeking a global leading role through the Silk Road Initiative, but that the Initiative is in response to the 2008 financial crisis, from which the world economy is still struggling to recover. However, Xinhua pointed out, the Initiative is not an elite club for the western nations, but primarily serves the developing countries. It is a circle of friends, with representatives of more than a hundred nations, and the western nations should be more receptive to the Belt and Road.

To express the point less diplomatically: Nations that cling to geopolitics and close their minds to the new paradigm of win-win cooperation, risk appearing before history as an obstacle to the only strategic initiative that can offer the solution for the urgent problems of mankind, and which is poised on the brink of success.