

PROFESSOR DR. IVO CHRISTOV

The New Paradigm from the View of the Balkans

Professor Dr. Ivo Christov is a Member of the Bulgarian Parliament. He spoke on Panel IV of the Schiller Institute Conference, on July 1, 2018.

Thank you very much! Let me begin by thanking the Schiller Institute for inviting me to be here and to share some ideas and thoughts concerning this topic of our conference. I think that it will be a fruitful conference, not only in ideas, but also in practical activities.

The topic of my presentation today is “The New Paradigm from the View of the Balkans.” As a scholar, I want to start from a top-down strategy, especially from the whole picture of the geopolitical present now, to our topic the Balkans and the new Chinese initiatives. There is the saying attributed to Napoleon, shared by the famous French historian, Fernand Braudel, that “geography is destiny.”

World Power Centers

If we look at a geographical map, and look at the main industrial, economic power centers in the world now, we get an important perspective. From an historical standpoint, the first industrial circle is the Western center of the power—economic, military, and so on. It’s situated in the south of Britain in England, and after that in the Ruhr region in the western part of Germany and the northeast part of France. It’s a process that has been continuous for 200 years in the era of the so-called Industrial Revolution.

The result of this is that western countries, especially Great Britain, and after that of course France, and after that Germany and the United States, have very strong power not only in terms of their militaries, but in terms of their economies and especially in their cultural



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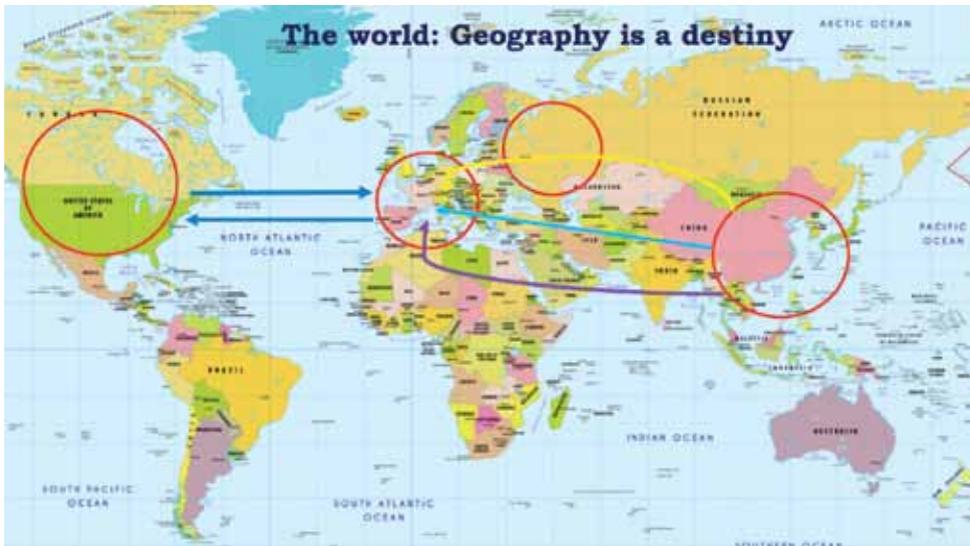
views. It’s very obvious that this is a western-centered world, because the center of power—especially military, economic, and technological—is concentrated here. Their predominance obviously derives from their military forces, their military power, by sea especially.

After that, at the very end of the Industrial Revolution, the next center of political and military power is North America, concentrated especially in the eastern part of the United States—the New England region. And after that, the center moved slowly, after the American Civil War, to the very center of the Great Plains in Chicago, and after that to the West Coast of the United States today. That transformed a very powerful center of military might and economy; it’s the strongest center, because it is obvious that Canada and Mexico are countries which are very dependent on the American power. Between the Western European center and the American center, there are very intensive flows of goods, finance and so on.

After the Second World War, America became the major player in this game. Western Europe, and after 1989 Eastern Europe, became dependent on American power. Another center of economy and military power, is of course Russian. The Russians came into power after the reforms of Peter the Great, and especially after the establishment of the Soviet Union. During the Stalin period, the Soviet Union became the strongest power in the world in the military fields after the United States.

The fourth center of power—economic, military, trade, and so on—is the eastern part of Eurasia. First of all, historically, has been Japan, and after that Korea, and China.

What is typical for this center of economic and cul-



countries for energy resources.

So, what is principally new in our situation now? The principal situation is that China wants to develop its own activities and its own political and economic role in the world—not engaging in a zero-sum strategy, but from a strategy of win-win: “We win and you win in our collaborations and trade and political relationships.” The dependency of China on resources, especially from

tural influences? This is a very specific model of the establishment of modern culture, especially in the modern state of economy. This economy was created top down by the state, by a very strong state. This is nothing like the free market; all of its economy is a fruit of active state policy. It’s typical for Japan at the beginning of the 20th Century. After that, during the reforms in China, after the 1980s, it is seen in China. This is a very specific collaboration between a strong state, on the one hand, and the creation of new economic fields and agents, on the other. In China’s case, China’s state creates the new economic champions on the market level in the world plain.

The Pursuit of Trade and Resources

Between the Western European core of Western power and the North American core of Western power, there is very intensive development of trade and other economic activities. What is very interesting is that their economic and political power is based on resources. Especially oil and gas resources, which are situated outside these regions with the exception of Russia. For example, for America, this is the oil and gas resources in the Mexican Gulf and Mexico, and of course in Canada and Alaska. On the other hand, in Europe, countries get their resources especially from the Gulf States in the Middle East, North Africa, and Africa as a whole. It is very interesting that for the Far East region economic model, it’s very important to have a very strong linkage with the Middle Eastern countries and North African

this region, is an advantage for China, but there are some opportunities, especially from the North American countries, to block and stop China’s development into becoming the leadership in the modern world.

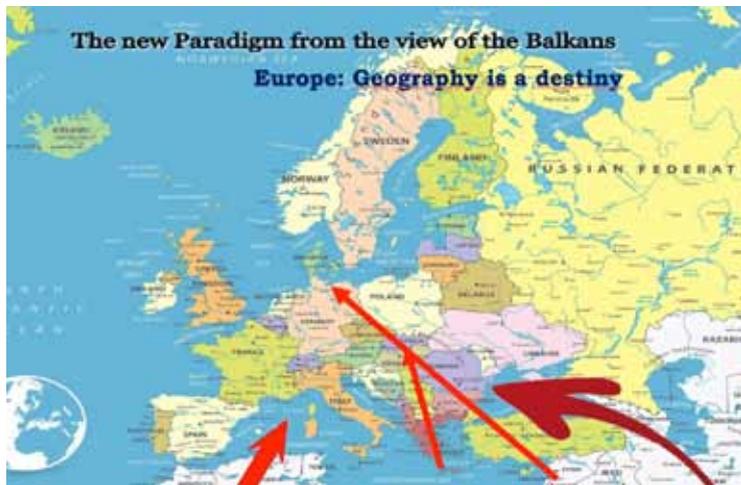
Maritime Chokepoints

How? Because America for now controls, for example, the very important point, the Strait of Malacca, for example. The Strait of Malacca is absolutely important because through it goes 40% of world trade and exchange of goods, especially trade from China, from Japan, from Korea, from other so-called Asian tigers.

Another point for stopping China, is the Strait of Hormuz, between Iran and Oman, because this is the focal point for reaching the oil fields of the Middle East.

Another chokepoint, is the strait between the Arabian Peninsula and Africa, between Yemen and Djibouti—it is very interesting in regard to the lecture yesterday about this topic—and Djibouti, Somalia, and Ethiopia. Shipping between the Indian Ocean and the Mediterranean Sea must pass through Bab-el-Mandeb and the Suez Canal. In this point of view, it’s very interesting to see China’s strategy of developing new belts of international trade and cooperation, not only via oceans, but inland inside of Eurasia, especially from the western part of China via central Asia, Iran, and after that Turkey, to the center of Europe.

Europe, especially Germany, France, and the core



sula and the Balkan Peninsula are the two points for entering into Europe from Africa on the one side, and from the Middle East on the other.

This specific region is therefore very important. Why? First of all, there are two main directions of trade—goods and people and so on—from East to West via Turkey, Istanbul, Bulgaria, Serbia, and others to Central Europe; especially Germany. Another road is from North Africa, especially Egypt, via Greece, Macedonia, Serbia, and Croatia or Hungary directly also to Germany. This is very important for the blockage of these trade flows from the Balkans to Central Europe. Another important thing is that here, in this small peninsula, there is so much history, so many contradictions, and so many histories of bloody conflict. Why? Here, three civilizations live together—Muslims especially. This is part of the past history of the Ottoman Empire—Turks or Muslims in Bosnia or Albania. Another is the Orthodox civilization—the Greeks, Bulgarians, Serbians and Romanians are Orthodox. And of course, there is the Catholic civilization—concentrated in the northwest of the peninsula, especially in Croatia, the Croatian parts of Bosnia, and Slovenia. So, in this very small part of Europe is the battlefield of four major powers: the United States,

of Europe, is the biggest market now in the world. On the other hand, there is another option from Beijing via the southern part of Russia or the northern part of Kazakhstan directly to the Baltic ports and Germany. Another option is the southern route, from southern China via Thailand; or another option is from western China directly via Pakistan to the Pakistani Baluchistan province; this provides a direct linkage to the oil fields of the Middle East and the Gulf.

Many Roads Lead Through the Balkans

So, what is important here? Why do I speak about this if my topic is the Balkans? It's very interesting in historical, military, economic, and other dimensions to understand the situation here. Why are the Balkans so important? Not because I am from this region; I am from Kiev and I live in Bulgaria. The Iberian Penin-

Russia, Turkey, and China.

Will the Roads Be Open or Blocked?

What's interesting for China? China wants to enter into this very important area. China, in cooperation with Turkey, for example, completed a railway from Turkey via Istanbul and maybe to Bulgaria—but maybe only. Another railway project is from the Greek port of Piraeus directly to Thessaloniki, Macedonia, Serbia, and going to the very center of Germany. Let us talk about Bondsteel. It is the biggest American military camp in Europe, situated in Kosovo. From here, the United States has blocked every effort to enter into the Balkan Peninsula from any direction.

In the future, the project of the New Silk Road will be very difficult in practice. Why? There are so many

obstacles, especially from the American strategy to stop China from engaging here, and to stop any activities in oil or gas initiatives by Russia to build new pipelines from Russia, via Bulgaria for example, to Serbia and Central Europe.

What should we do? Why is it so important for

Europe to change the geopolitics in this region? If the Balkans remain nothing but a black hole to Europe, this geopolitics will interfere, if not stop, all the initiatives for entering and changing the geopolitical situation not only in Europe, but in the world. Thank you very much.