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The Integration of the Eurasian Continent

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I would like to start by quoting my conclusion from the paper I submitted to last year's International Scientific Conference that was held in Belgrade on the initiatives of the New Silk Road.

In conclusion, if this project that is of paramount importance to humanity is to succeed, peace and stability must prevail. However, the existence and promotion of this project can also facilitate successful peace initiatives if the parties in conflict are able to understand that their benefits from their participation in the Belt and Road Initiative greatly surpass ambiguous benefits from prevailing in a conflict. Such was the experience with the Black Sea Ring Highway, where differences between some BSEC [Black Sea Economic Cooperation] member states were able to be softened to the extent that the highway was allowed to pass through zones of frozen conflicts.

Consequently, a successful Belt and Road Initiative is by itself an incentive for pacification. One can only imagine how Asia would be with peace in Afghanistan and in the Middle

East, while the perspectives that open for humanity—scientific, cultural, philosophical, and spiritual—with global peace prevailing, are immense. This is why the Belt and Road Initiative must succeed.

The successful implementation of the Belt and Road Initiative could, in the long run, unite the overlapping regional organizations and initiatives in Asia, in one major organization that would have as its epicenter, the Belt and Road.

Problems the BRI Has To Overcome

I will expand a little on the problems that the BRI has to face in order to succeed. I will start first with the EU, an organization that no longer has any contact with the people of Europe, an organization that has done away with democratic procedures, an organization that is destroying its members. The EU does not like this initiative at all, which ends within its territory, and is to its benefit.

In April the EU ambassadors in Beijing issued a report that criticized the BRI, since it runs counter to the EU agenda for liberalizing trade and pushes the balance of power in favor of Chinese-subsidized companies. Only Hungary did not agree to the contents of the report. China has been involved in infrastructure projects in central Europe such as the Hungary-Serbia high-speed railway. Although Hungary allowed China to start the project, the EU stopped it, because Budapest allegedly did not publish a call for public tenders and instead relied on bilateral agreements with China. This

also shows the political concern of Brussels and the European business sector.

Another problem created by the EU is that it does not trust state-owned enterprises, which of course occupy a large portion of China's foreign investment within the BRI, and everything possible is being done to prevent China's involvement. Of course this EU policy is highly hypocritical if we take into consideration that Greece was obliged to privatize its airports by selling them to the German state-owned FRAPORT. One wonders today what the definition of "privatization" is. European protectionism is increasing while Chinese companies are not yet fully prepared to obey the complicated regulations of the EU. If the BRI is to succeed, a closer bilateral cooperation between the EU and China is needed, so Europe once again becomes the destination of the Silk Road.

It has been said that a potential risk for the BRI would be the eventual disintegration of the EU, since EU funds would no longer be available. I would say the exact opposite: that the eventual dissolution of the EU would actually be a blessing.

Funds would be found on a bilateral basis with European countries and the strict EU rules would no longer exist to hinder investments in European countries by state-owned companies. Furthermore, sanctions of the EU on Russia and China will cease, thus making bilateral cooperation between the European countries with Russia and China more effective. For example, the Russian countermeasures against the EU do not allow agricultural products from Poland to be delivered to China by the China Railway Express through the Eurasian Land-Bridge. Regardless, if the sanctions remain, the construction of the BRI might have to face the risks of poor connectivity. However, after the last G-7 meeting, which isolated the U.S.A., the EU might take a slightly more open attitude towards the BRI, within the framework of its reactions to the tariff war started by Washington.

The United States, India and the BRI

The position of the United States is important as far as BRI is concerned. For the moment, the U.S. position is negatively ambiguous, particularly after it withdrew last year from the Trans-Pacific Partnership trade agreement. It is, however, supporting and participating in the Asia-Africa Growth Corridor, an initiative instigated by Australia, India and Japan and being (unsuccessfully) presented as an alternative to the BRI. Of course the U.S.A. sees China as an antagonist in the race towards global domination. And as long as it continues on that

path it will be against the BRI, in spite of the fact that it has much to gain from it. But, as long as the U.S.A. does not physically undermine the project, it is all right. It might even strengthen the cooperation between the participating countries, as a reaction to the U.S. position. India is negative toward the BRI because of the territorial issue that it has with Pakistan concerning Kashmir. India calls the BRI an act of Chinese colonialism. The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor goes through Pakistani occupied Kashmir. India, however, is promoting the India-Myanmar-Thailand highway project (3,200 km) that will link India to the ASEAN countries.

As I mentioned at the outset, economic benefits from a project may overcome political hesitations on conflict-solving. We had two cases of positive outcomes when dealing with the projected route of the Black Sea Ring Highway, a 7,500 km highway that would unite the members of Black Sea Economic Cooperation organization and would facilitate road transport from the Black Sea countries to Europe and Asia.

Problems Overcome

One issue was in Moldova, where the highway was to pass from the self-proclaimed Republic of Transnistria, following the old Soviet highway. The Moldovan authorities were reluctant to have the highway pass through Terespol. At that time, negotiations were being held between the two sides for a possible rapprochement, and the stumbling block was the issue of the identity cards of Terespol. So we told Kishinev to tell the other side that if they accept the Moldovan identity cards and other issues, then the highway would pass through, which is what happened.

The other issue was between Russia and Georgia. The highway was to enter Georgia through Abkhazia, but after the August 2008 war between Russia and Georgia, the latter refused to allow the highway to enter Georgia through Abkhazia. After presenting to the Georgian side in detail the economic benefits that it would have from allowing the highway to go through its territory from Russia, we were finally able to convince Tbilisi to allow the highway to enter through the Roki Tunnel in South Ossetia. The negative position of the United States is the most important element that could hinder progress of the BRI. Bilateral, multilateral or other types of efforts should be undertaken by the participants in order to convince Washington of the benefits that it would have by participating in this project. It is almost a "mission impossible," but at least it should be attempted on a permanent basis, in order to

avoid physical hindrance of the BRI. In this sense, closer contacts with Japan, Australia, and India are in order, to examine how the Asia-Africa Growth Corridor could be incorporated within the BRI project. With the EU, there is nothing much that can be done at the present but follow EU rules concerning tenders and financing of projects, so that EU funds can be used by the Central and East European States to partially finance their infrastructure projects.

Culture, Philosophy, Humanism, Spirituality

In a world in which armed conflicts and violence are prevailing and international law has ceased to exist, it is important to stress the role of culture, philosophy, humanism, and spirituality. These intangibles must also

be transported through the Silk Road in the form of exchange of ideas and culture between the East and the West. The Schiller Institute, through the active participation of Helga LaRouche in many international fora, is playing a very positive role in this respect. It is in this sense also that Greece held in April of 2017 the first meeting of the Ancient Civilizations Forum with China participating. Follow-up meetings have been held. In conclusion, the successful implementation of the BRI can play an instrumental role in the humanization of international relations, in the economic and cultural development of the people of the participant states, and, in this way, create the conditions for global peace. It might sound like Utopia. But if we do not believe in Utopia, then it will never happen.