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## The Global South Arena: A Comparative Study of China and European Union Policies

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#### ABSTRACT

The Global South concept stems from the context of developing countries. The increasing significance of Global South in global governance has drawn the attention of leading international players, including China and the European Union. While both acknowledge the salience of their engagement with Global South, their strategic priorities and approaches exhibit considerable variation. China identifies itself as a key member of the Global South, leveraging common historical trajectories and similar development challenges to facilitate collaboration and collective prosperity. In contrast, the European Union engages more as an external actor with the Global South offering assistance, technical support, and organizational collaborations while reinforcing institutional norms and governance systems. This paper undertakes a comparative critique of China and EU's policy frameworks regarding Global South, analyzing their strategic goals, cooperation agendas, and development models. It examines the ways both powers seek to expand their influence through initiatives such as China's Belt and Road Initiative and the EU's Global Gateway. Emphasizing the shared patterns and distinct differences, this research provides perspectives on shifting geopolitical landscapes and their impact on EU-China relations in an increasingly multipolar world.

**Keywords:** Global South, China-EU relations, Belt and Road Initiative, Global Gateway, Development cooperation, Geopolitics.

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## INTRODUCTION

The reemergence of Global South has gained significant attention within the domain of International political economy. The states of Global South are typically associated with socio-economic constraints such as minimal industrial development, income disparities and weaker political influence. The traditional narratives characterize these nations as aid beneficiaries or dependent economies within a western-centric world order. However, now the term reflects a specific worldview, highlighting new narratives that reinforce the self-determination, resilience, and ambitions of these states in transforming International geopolitical landscape (Nechaeva, 2025). At present, Global South exceeds developed economies in global GDP contribution. This shift shows redirection from previous focus on “low politics” such as climate change, international trade and economic development to active participation in “high politics” like regional conflicts, multilateral diplomacy and international security. As per the data of United Nations, Global South nations account for 70% of the world population and 50% of economic development and their coordinated actions have become fundamental catalyst in defining the international agenda (Song & Pásztor, 2024).

Developing states across Asia, Africa, Latin America, Middle East and the Pacific are actively influencing International security, politics and economics, switching from the periphery to the center of international footprint. Latin American states have jointly articulated their positions on international governance issues through Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) and Union of South American Nations (UNASUR). African Union (AU) has become more action-oriented in regional security and peacekeeping, independently managing conflicts. India consistently leads BRICS and New Development Bank, offering the developmental projects and loans beyond Western-dominated economic frameworks (Plys, 2024). In December 2023, South Africa commenced legal action against Israel at the International Court of Justice (ICJ), advocating legal accountability for genocide against Palestinians in Gaza. Regardless of the considerable Western pressure, South Africa upheld its stance, reflecting the advancing autonomy and determination of the Global South as influential actor (Ulgen, 2025).

Global South not only represents a geographical location but embodies economic and political significance, with China and EU coming forward as leading competitors in this renewed contest of economic collaboration and development alliances. China and EU have acknowledged the collective rise of Global South, yet there are evident disparities in their policies and practices. The academic discourse on the engagement of Global South has considerably evolved over the past two decades, signifying comprehensive changes in international arena and development paradigm. Early post-Cold War intellectual discourse was driven by Washington Consensus model, which focused on democratic governance, market liberalization and privatization as development prerequisites. Current scholarship has increasingly

emphasized the notion of "competitive cooperation" in development assistance, where powerful states simultaneously contest for dominance while collaborating on global challenges (Williamson, 2002).

The Global South has gained significance as a primary front of China-EU strategic competition, which marked the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of their diplomatic ties in 2025. The strategic positions of Global South along with the significance of China-EU cooperation are gaining greater visibility. China and EU have enhanced their collaborative efforts in the domains of digital governance and green economy, creating multiple avenues for cooperative ventures with broader Global South (Zimmermann & Smith, 2011). It is not difficult to understand why EU has been motivated to upgrade ties with China. China's transformation from neglected periphery to the global economic giant has widely regarded as the most critical geopolitical development of the previous two decades. China is playing an increasingly important role in shaping world politics, and its influence and power seem likely to expand in the coming years and decades. During this era of uncertainty, the Global South rise and the closer engagement between China and EU are merely not economic developments but also political determinations regarding the long-term future of humanity (Maher, 2016).

China and EU represents two fundamentally dissimilar approaches to engage with developing states. China recognize itself as a member of Global South bloc, emphasizing common challenges and shared historical legacies, and aims to enhance development and revitalization through collaboration. Conversely, EU mainly interacts with the Global South as an external facilitator, offering assistance and cooperation, yet imposing institutional norms and values. While Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) of China emphasizes economic partnerships and infrastructure development with minimum conditionality, the Global Gateway strategy of EU prioritizes democratic governance, principal-driven partnerships and sustainable development. The importance of this competition is not confined to bilateral relations between influential Global powers and Global South entities; it represents a foundational contest over prospective structure of development frameworks, global governance and world order (Song, 2025).

Global South is no longer considered as secondary player in global politics and established western-centric institutions encounter challenges to their competence and legitimacy. Different alternative models of development cooperation have arisen, offering exceptional choices in partnerships and economic strategies to developing nations. This paper intends to present a comprehensive comparative analysis of Chinese and EU policies towards Global South. This research not only examines the quantitative aspects of China-EU engagement with Global South but also focuses on the qualitative differences in their objectives, philosophies and methodologies, based on primary and secondary sources, including academic literature, official policy documentation, speeches and insights from international organizations. By methodically comparing the policies and practices China and EU, this paper aspires to inform and shape academic perspectives in global governance

and international relations, presenting insights into potential avenues for mutual cooperation in the changing geopolitical landscape.

### **Two approaches One region: China and Europe in Global South**

Most of the Global South states have dealt with the colonialism by Global North, specifically by European powers, and eventually emerged from these colonial environments as newly industrialized states. The Global South concept originally derived from terms like "third world" and "developing countries," but presented a balanced and receptive approach in contrast to the limiting terms such as "underdevelopment" and "former colonies." Today, this term is debated in economic, political and academic spheres without definite understating regarding what it includes, despite its three central definitions materialized: economic, geopolitical and political. In 1969 this term was initially coined by American political activist Carl Oglesby in a geographical manner to characterize underdevelopment and substitute "Third World," stating that an unjust social system had been established due to the extended hegemony of Global North over the Global South. The Global South generally relates to low- and middle-income states in Oceania, Latin America, Caribbean, Asia and Africa according to the classifications of World Bank, bearing the legacy and repercussions of colonial history (Hogan & Patrick, 2024).

Not limited to geographic factors, the term "Global South" has political significance, referring to different nations that share similar features such as being non-interventionist, non-western and engaged in development even with different cultures, beliefs and development levels. Economic elements also define the division of Global South, particularly after the non-aligned movement when the leaders of developing regions aimed to change the international economic system. In 1964, representatives of 120 states gathered in Geneva for the first United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, where 77 non-aligned states founded the Group of 77 by mutual declaration. Adhering to dependency theory, the Group of 77 intended to minimize reliance on developed states by minimizing the exports of limiting raw material to industrialized states and improving manufacturing competence to meet the needs of developing countries. Global South is defined by the Finance Centre for South-South Cooperation as the "Group of 77 and China," prioritizing objectives to fix and eradicate imbalances in global economy (Haibin et al., 2023).

China's perspective on Global South originates from Mao Zedong's notion of a "middle ground" introduced during 1946. This idea rolled out as a result of post-World War II Cold War tensions between Soviet Union and US, amidst China's rising civil war. It was suggested by Mao that a middle ground existed between these superpowers, comprising capitalist nations of Asia, Africa and Europe, along with colonial and semi-colonial nations. He asserted that China symbolized the "biggest developing nation". In the context of intensifying Cold War throughout 1950s and

1960s, decolonization and national liberal movements grew rapidly in Latin America, Asia and Africa. In this era, various middle ground organizations came into view, including the Group of 77 and Non-Aligned Movement. Mao later introduced “two middle zones” theory, outlining particular geographical areas where the primary region included economically backward nations of Latin America, Africa and Asia, while the second zone involved imperialist and developed capitalist European states. Each zone opposed American influence, with Eastern European states navigating common struggles against Soviet dominance (Zhang et al., 2023).

In 1974, while experiencing the erosion of Sino-Soviet relations and intensifying US-Soviet rivalry, Mao presented his "three worlds" theory, labeling China as a third-world nation. The 1980s signified a substantial transformation because developing states emerged as dominant economic and political forces internationally. Simultaneously China initiated its market oriented reforms, featuring a turnaround in diplomatic orientation with developing nations emerging as the core priority of foreign policy. Deng Xiaoping asserted the critical importance of economic growth, development and peace in tackling global strategic dilemmas of the era. He stated that peace involved both Western and Eastern hemispheres, while development concerns centered on Northern and Southern hemispheres, summarizing that the vital phrases were "East-West" and "North-South." The aspect of North-South represented the main challenge owing to its natural significance and capacity to influence other critical global concerns. The East-West aspect mainly involved US-Soviet competition and kept out China, while the Chinese reform challenges closely tied to North-South developmental needs (Shu, 2022).

Following the post-Cold war period and the dissolution of bipolar system, the East-West aspect lost its historical importance. Afterwards the "Third World" concept replaced by the broader term "developing countries," yet China steadily maintained its status as major developing country in the world regardless of the shifts in its holistic national resilience. In July 2023, Wang Yi expressed at the meeting of BRICS Senior Representatives in Johannesburg that the Global South represents emerging market economies and developing countries. He emphasized the need to expand the interpretation of "developing countries and Third World" while pushing for greater South-South cooperation to steer the Global South toward self-improvement and cohesion. This historical review reflects China's seamless transition from holding a "middle ground" orientation to becoming the "largest developing country" and associated now with Global South, with BRICS collaboration serving as a perfect illustration of China's commitment to deepening connections within this framework (Wang Yi, 2023).

The post-World War II period marked a difficult era for EU since it had to

sail through an uncertain multi-polar world while coping up with the rising prominence of Global South. With the end of Cold War and collapse of the bipolar order, the East-West issue faded from the historical context. EU utilized phrases like "developing countries," "least industrialized nations" and "third world," to identify as Global South, thereby maintaining a definite "rich-poor" and "developed-backward" classification. During Cold War era, Europe's approach towards Global South was limited in scope, yet influenced by European policy towards particular regions, especially the nations that had been colonized under the Organization of African, Caribbean, and Pacific States (OACPS). From the initial phase of European integration, the European Community laid the groundwork for political, trade and economic and political relations between Western European nations and post-colonial ACP nations through Association Agreements. This framework included exclusive trade privileges and development assistance, signifying a continuation of preferential connections cultivated during the colonial period (Dworkin, 2023).

The policy of Europe towards ACP nations became the natural continuation of the Southern policy of Cold War, with resource support initially granted to former colonies via bilateral arrangements before extending over time to developing countries globally from 1960s onwards. Many multilateral donor agencies were formed during this phase, including World Food Program, UNDP, World Health Organization, European Bank for Reconstruction and Development and African Development Bank. In 1980, the Brandt Report was published by Independent Commission on International Development, suggesting a "Brandt Line" to split the world into South and North based on GDP per capita. Following the Cold War, the global order transformed from a bipolar and United States-led unilateral global structure to a multiple power configuration, provoking the European Union to acknowledge the growing influence of Global South in international affairs. Following the realization of Global South's significance, EU has adopted development-focused and normative approach to engage with Global South. The priority issues for EU are human rights, democracy promotion, illegal migration, corruption, and climate change (Islam, 2024).

European partnerships and assistance are usually conditioned on the commitments of human rights, governance reforms and alignment with international norms. While this policy emphasizes international cooperation and long-term institutional development, sometimes it is criticized for being slow-moving and over-regulated, with minimal immediate financial benefits for partner nations. Chinese engagement with Global South is mainly driven by resource access, financial interests and geopolitical influence, typically emphasizing development through infrastructure, trade, and non-interventionist stance. Through substantial

investment, China offers swift funding for railways, energy, ports and telecommunications. This model is state-centric and appealing for developing states seeking quick development under simplified requirements. However, sometimes concerns are raised regarding labor practices, debt dependency and weak environmental regulations in beneficiary countries (Iveson & McNair, 2023). China considers itself as part of Global South and works to sustain this position, while EU views Global South from an external outlook.

## **The Chinese Approach: Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and Beyond**

### **Strategic vision and objectives**

China's engagement with Global South is deeply influenced by its own long term goals and development experience. The strategy is driven by the notion of "South-South cooperation," which prioritizes cooperation among developing countries and shared learning based on development experiences. This foundational philosophy distinguishes China's engagement from conventional donor-recipient relationships, positioning China as a mutual partner instead of aid-giver. The Belt and Road Initiative, initiated by President Xi Jinping in 2013, symbolizes the premier of Chinese engagement in Global South (State Council, 2021). The initial six-month period of 2025 saw the unprecedented level of engagement ever within this timeframe under Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), China's leading global infrastructure program, with total deals of \$123 billion breaking down into the construction agreements of \$66 billion and investments of \$57 billion. This highest level of engagement shows the ongoing growth and expansion of Chinese involvement in development efforts. China's engagement aims can be divided into technological, economical and geopolitical areas (Green Finance & Development Center, 2025).

China aims to expand economically with the creation of new markets for its services and goods, gain access to resource flows, and establish supply chains that minimize reliance on western-dominated trade corridors. The BRI explicitly seeks to promote mechanisms of trade and investment, creating the scenarios of "win-win cooperation". Strategy of China serves wider geopolitical ambitions, featuring the setup of alternative global institutions, challenging Western dominance in international governance, and building a more multipolar world system. The formation of institutions like expansion of BRICS membership and Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) highlight these ambitions. Increasingly, Chinese engagement emphasizes exporting tech-based solutions, specifically in smart city development, digital infrastructure and renewable energy. A broad range of industrial sectors such as AI, green energy and more are covered in the recent years, assisting the Global South growth (Nedopil, 2025).

## **Institutional mechanisms and implementation frameworks**

China has developed a comprehensive institutional structure to facilitate its Global South engagement. The major institutions include: state-led coordination, economic institutions and implementation agencies. The central coordinating body for BRI implementation is National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC) which coordinate with Commerce Ministry and Foreign Affairs. Multiple institutions assists to channelize the Chinese development finance, including policy banks like Export-Import Bank of China (Exam Bank), China Development Bank (CDB), sovereign wealth funds and commercial banks. Belt and Road Initiative Fund (BRIF) is a state-sponsored investment mechanism designed to attract public and private source capital to fund large-scale infrastructure projects. In order to support BRI projects, Silk Road Fund have been established which has committed over \$10 billion to several initiatives. State-owned enterprises (SOEs) are fundamental in implementing Chinese projects, mainly in infrastructure development. Primary SOEs like China Railway and China State Construction Engineering Corporation have acknowledged widely across Global South (Ekram et al., 2025).

## **Economic instruments and investment strategies**

The economic instruments and investment practices utilized in the BRI demonstrates a diverse and transforming ecosystem created to support comprehensive infrastructure projects across various regions. While bilateral instruments continue to be the dominant financial mechanisms, the increasing utilization of equity shareholdings, multilateral funds and syndicated loans demonstrates adaptive strategy of China towards financing. Moreover, the transition towards sustainable investment and green finance shows a broader commitment to environmentally responsible and long-term development under BRI framework. China extends loans at discounted interest rates for infrastructure projects, generally necessitating the use of Chinese materials and contractors. Mostly, these loans have longer repayment terms but may involve mechanisms backed by natural resources. Chinese companies invest in Global South, specifically in infrastructure, extractive industries and manufacturing. Such investments often involve local employment generation and technology transfer. Even though not as large as loan financing, China also provides grants for particular projects and humanitarian purposes specifically in the least developed countries (Nantulya & Lazarus, 2024).

## **Development sectors and strategic priorities**

The BRI has transformed into a cross-sectoral project intended to foster cultural exchanges, connectivity and commercial engagements across Africa, Asia, Europe and beyond. China's priority areas are financial integration, investment and

trade, economic and energy cooperation, infrastructure development, technology, innovation and connectivity. As of 2025, the focus of BRI in Middle East is renewable energy projects. Chinese and Saudi Arabia's cooperation emphasize renewable energy, aligned with Saudi priorities of minimizing oil reliance. This transition toward renewable energy shows China's domestic priorities as well as Global South's development needs (Chew, 2025). China has boosting engagement in digital interconnectivity projects, including 5G networks, optical cabling and cashless payment systems aligned with China's telecom advancements and developing countries' digital transformation needs. Chinese investment has encouraged Global South's industrial development, including industrial parks, special economic zones and manufacturing units. BRI extends beyond trade and infrastructure and is also a global influence strategy of China (Holtzman, 2025).

### **Regional variations and adaptations**

China-Africa cooperation is the most refined and inclusive, covering agricultural, infrastructure and industrialization development. The Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) offers a multilateral mechanism for this engagement. China's investment extends broadly across entire Africa and encompasses 53 out of 54 African states. Chinese capital has funded nearly 5,600 kilometers of railway lines, constituting about 8.5% of the entire sub-Saharan African railway grid. China instituted 34 ground level and dozens of undersea cables within 12 BRI states across Europe, Africa and Asia during 2017-2022. Chinese firms operate over one-third of African port development (Kluiver & Neethling, 2024). Chinese companies have made substantial mining acquisitions in 2024, including lithium, copper, cobalt and creation of processing units. Beijing Action Plan (2025-2027) defines strategic objectives for continued collaboration, demonstrating high-levels engagement. With investments hitting \$29.2 billion in 2024 under BRI, denoting 34% of increase from previous figures and likely to sustain similar levels through 2025, China has positioned itself as major infrastructure development partner of Africa (Seaman, 2025).

China's investment in Latin America primarily emphasized infrastructure connectivity and commodities extraction. However, recent years have experienced expansion in renewable energy and manufacturing domains. Through frameworks like China-CELAC Forum and Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), Chinese investment has turned into a linchpin of Latin American development financing, significantly reshaping the region's geostrategic outlook and economic landscape. The China-CELAC Forum involves China and 33 member states of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC), seeking to foster holistic cooperative partnership built upon common development, equality and win-win outcomes.

China's outward foreign direct investment (OFDI) in Caribbean and Latin America totaled roughly \$8.5 billion in 2024, signifying almost 6% of Chinese total OFDI. With \$8.5 billion in OFDI in 2024, \$9 billion in new Yuan-specified credits declared for 2025, and exceeding \$500 billion in aggregate trade, China has positioned itself as an essential Latin American development partner (Alava, 2025).

China's BRI seems to be emphasizing greener and smaller projects, with Southeast Asia as a key investment hub. Through ASEAN-China Free Trade Area, Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and different multilateral arrangements, Chinese investment has become indispensable to Southeast Asian economic overhaul. Incoming FDI to ASEAN peaked \$230 billion in 2023, in spite of general decline global exchanges, with the region set to grow by 4.6% in 2024. Southeast Asia attained Chinese investment of USD 11.3 billion in the first half of 2025. BRI engagement is anticipated to hit alike levels in 2025 as in 2024 (Sarminto, 2025). Moreover, BRI operates as the primary medium for investment in infrastructure, covering digital connectivity projects, transit corridors and energy pipelines. Central Asia received exceptionally high investment focus, especially in mining and metals. With US\$23 billion solely invested in Kazakhstan in the first half of 2025 and total direct investment surpassing US\$15 billion across five Central Asian states, China has gained recognition as the region's major strategic ally (Pannier, 2025).

### **European Union's Approach: Global Gateway & Values-Based Partnership**

#### **Strategic vision and philosophical foundations**

The EU's strategy towards Global South is essentially driven by its own integration experience and support for human rights, multilateral engagement and sustainable development. Contrary to China's focus on economic pragmatism and non-interference, the EU's approach is clearly values based, aiming to facilitate rule of law, democratic practices and human rights alongside economic development. The Global Gateway strategy, unveiled in December 2021, signifies the comprehensive response of EU with respect to China's Belt and Road initiative and reflects a geopolitically informed strategy for development cooperation. The Global Gateway is a renewed European initiative to enhance smart, clean and secure channels in digital, energy and transport sectors and to support education, health, and research mechanisms across the globe. The strategic objectives of EU cover multiple aspects. Firstly, regarding normative goals, EU intends to promote its models of governance and values internationally, analyzing development cooperation as a way to strengthen democracy, fundamental rights, and justice system. This "normative power Europe" concept has been a core attribute of EU external action (Siman, 2024).

Secondly, economic goals are just as vital as values. EU has significantly

focused on geo-economic factors, seeking to ensure availability of critical raw materials, improve supply chain resilience, and expand markets for European services and technologies. Thirdly, environmental and climate goals are important as well. The European Green Deal and Agenda 2030 have turned core elements of EU global engagement, with climate-driven mitigation and adaptation in all development initiatives. Fourth, security objectives carry strong weight. EU recognizes the Global South security concerns, especially with regard to terrorism, regional stability and migration. EU's strategy stems from a pledge to values-driven diplomacy, social responsibility and eco-friendly practices. EU presents itself as a Global South's reliable partner, proposing an option that prioritizes social equity and environmental integrity (Haaren et al., 2024).

### **Institutional framework and governance model**

The institutional approach of EU for Global South engagement shows its multifaceted governance framework and focus on member state coordination. The Directorate-General for International Partnerships manages formulation and coordination of EU development policy, partnering with other DGs and European External Action Service (EEAS). What comes next is Member State Coordination. EU's approach requires cooperation among 27 members, each with their own interests and bilateral arrangements. It creates resource mobilization opportunities and policy coherence challenges. The European Investment Bank (EIB) acts as the EU's development bank, whereas European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) emphasizes reforming economies. These entities have significantly expanded their Global South operations lately. The EU sustains diverse partnership setups, including the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) process, Africa-EU Partnership and EU-CELAC relationship with Latin America and Caribbean (Furness, & Keijzer, 2022).

### **The Global Gateway: architecture and implementation**

Global Gateway signifies a major evolution in EU's consideration about developing regions, combining traditional aid methods with strategic partnerships and investment sourcing. EU and its member states embraced 138 Global Gateway key projects to fulfill the summit commitments between 2023 and 2025. The Global Gateway intends to mobilize investments of €300 billion between 2021 and 2027, merging corporate funding, EU's fiscal resources and member state contributions (Tagliapietra, 2022). International Finance cooperation and European Commission have entered into a guarantee contract to finance the Global Gateway and boost private sector funding, creation of jobs and economic growth worldwide, emphasizing Eastern and Southern Neighborhoods, EU enlargement countries, Asia Pacific region, Sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America and the Caribbean. Premium

projects have been identified by EU in important regions and sectors, offering a blueprint for concentrated efforts and evident results. These projects are identified through their potential for major influence and alignment with national agendas of partner state. Refined economic instruments have been employed by EU to combine grants concessional loans and warranties to amplify private investment and attain development objectives (Su, 2025).

### **Regional focus and sectorial priorities**

The strategy of Global Gateway launched in late 2021 and based on primary sectors like technological modernization, healthcare, education, green energy and transport infrastructure to focus on the most critical requirements of African states. Global Gateway reflects a targeted initiative to stimulate investments in Africa, with a preliminary pledge of €150 billion by 2027(Khan, 2025). Investments vary by region and guided by demand, with major focus on West Africa (Nigerian transport corridors, Côte d'Ivoire agriculture), Southern Africa (Lobito Corridor in Angola/DRC/ Zambia, South African JETP), East Africa (Green hydrogen in Kenya, Tanzania's central corridor). Central Africa observed slower engagement whereas Northern Africa ranked high for energy and digital connections to Europe. The largest investment share goes to green transition and clean energy (Namibian and Mauritanian hydrogen projects), subsequent to digital transformation (BELLA cable, technology collaboration with Rwanda). Transport Corridors are central infrastructure priority, Education (EU-AU Innovation Agenda) and Health (vaccine production Ghana in Senegal) and get targeted assistance (Tagliapietra, 2024).

Latin America and Caribbean account for 10-20% of projects, making Latin America the second major Global Gateway region in 2024 with 30 projects. EU defined the investment benchmark of €45 billion for the region until 2027. The Global Gateway of EU vows €45 billion for Latin America by 2027, emphasizing strategic collaborations with Andean Region for green energy, Mexico and Brazil for essential raw materials & green hydrogen and Central America for digital and renewable ventures (Yu, 2024). A major regional focus is BELLA submarine cable to improve digital connectivity. Investments aim towards green transition, particularly green hydrogen in Chile and Brazil. The major expanding industry is developing the value chains of sustainable critical raw materials for copper and lithium. By 2025, the aim is to execute initiatives like Jamaica-EC\$ Investment Platform and raw material collaboration, positioning EU as the significant sustainable development ally (Lewkowicz, 2024).

The €10 billion grant has been pledged by Global Gateway for Southeast Asia, focusing ASEAN and important states like Vietnam and Indonesia. Its foremost priority is green energy transition, driven by JETP deals to move off coal. It is backed

by key investments in digital infrastructure and sustainable connectivity. The major goal is to ensure implementation of Just Energy Transition Partnership (JETP) by 2025 via monetary support, grid modernization, and renewable initiatives. The strategy intends to deliver a sustainable substitute for infrastructure, balancing climate commitments with financial growth (Eswaran, 2025). Global Gateway is presented for Central Asia in an investment plan of €300 billion strives to mobilize €10 billion. Its major goals are unlocking the potential of critical raw materials and sustainable energy, mainly in Kazakhstan. The significant investment is allocated to transport infrastructure, upgrading the "Middle Corridor" trade route between Europe and Asia, critical water management and digitalization. The objective is to anchor this as the major economic framework of EU by 2025, advancing solid corridor progress and formalizing raw materials deals (Jerzewski & Kot, 2025).

### **Comparative Analysis: Convergence and Divergence**

#### **Geopolitical goals: competition vs. cooperation**

The main difference between EU and China's approach is anchored in their philosophical foundations and fundamental strategic goals. Strategy of China is driven by geopolitical and financial considerations, aiming to create "win-win" economic relationships while enhancing its wider strategic interests. China follows transactional approach emphasizing solid economic outcomes instead of values promotion (Rafi, 2024). In contrast, the EU's approach is clearly normative, pursuing the promotion of its governance models and principles along with economic progress. This sparks a basic friction, as EU's insistence on governance improvements and conditionality often clashes with immediate development needs and sovereignty concerns of recipient states. However, both approaches have some overlapping features. China and EU both acknowledge the importance of infrastructure development for poverty alleviation and economic growth. While the approaches diverge, both pump hefty finances into digital connectivity, transport and energy projects. Moreover, both powers have addressed climate change concerns in their Global South strategies, though with varying timeframes and emphases. Both intend to build stronger economic ties with Global South partners, with distinct conditions and through different mechanisms (Mardell, 2025).

#### **Financing instruments and investment modalities**

The economic framework facilitating Chinese and EU engagement shows major differences in the philosophy and strategy. Chinese decisions on investment are generally made more rapidly because of centralized decision-making, while EU depends on extensive institution and member states coordination. China gets a competitive advantage in this manner while swiftly responding quickly to the needs of partner countries. Loans by China mostly offer longer repayment periods but

might involve the requirements for Chinese contractors or resource backed repayment mechanisms. EU's financial assistance by typically includes the conditions related to governance but offer better incentives and genuinely concessional support. Economic institutions of China show greater willingness to invest in high-risk ventures and environments, while EU institutions require detailed scrutiny and risk mitigation strategies. Chinese economic data is often publicly unavailable and less detailed. EU's financial flows are commonly more transparent, with parliamentary oversight and mandatory disclosure rules (Messingschlager, 2025).

### **Implementation procedures and project rollout**

The implementation of Chinese and EU projects unveils different advantages and challenges. Mostly the Chinese projects are completed swiftly because of the standardized approaches, utilization of Chinese contractors and streamlined decision-making. Projects by EU may prolong the timeframe because of the extensive procurement practices and consultation requirements. EU emphasizes the local input and participation while designing and implementing the project, while projects by China may have less comprehensive consultation but commonly consist of training components and technology exchange (Jütten, 2025). Strategies by both powers include capacity-building elements, yet the focus is different. Chinese programs focus on vocational and technical training regarding specific projects, while EU initiatives concentrate on broader governance and institutional competencies and often obligated to initially comply with strict social and environmental standards. Chinese projects have also incorporated such considerations but as secondary requirements rather than integral principles (Euston Quah et al., 2025).

### **Regional variations and partner priorities**

The reception of Chinese and EU strategies contrasts considerably across many states and regions within Global South. Various African governments value the swiftness and magnitude of Chinese investment, especially in infrastructure development. However, the questions about debt sustainability and local employment have caused certain states to seek more balanced solutions that including EU partnership features (Bharti & Kumari, 2024). Latin American states have been more mindful regarding Chinese investment, specifically in strategic domains, while sustaining strong economic relations. The EU's focus on democratic governance harmonizes with the political systems of many Latin American states. Asian countries reveal the widest variety of responses, with some embracing the connectivity projects of China while others preserve ties with longstanding western allies. The belated entry of EU in Asian development cooperation has somehow

limited its impact in the market. Small Island developing states frequently tackle the starkest choices between EU and Chinese strategies, with minimal capacity to simultaneously engage with multiple partners (Roy, 2025).

### **Debt sustainability and financial risk management**

One of the most controversial features of the China-EU comparison concerns economic risk management and debt sustainability. Critics are of the view that lending practices of China have contributed to debt troubles in some Global South nations, specifying cases such as Zambia and Sri Lanka. However, recent research indicates that Chinese debt highlights a minor debt share of total Global South debt than usually believed, and those debt related issues are multifaceted. The EU has placed debt management at the core of its Global Gateway approach, requiring debt sustainability evaluations for all important projects. However, this strategy might restrict the ability of EU to respond to immediate infrastructure demands in high-risk environments. China and EU both have advocated for stronger coordination among creditors to deal with debt sustainability concerns, but execution has been complicated because of the different economic interests and institutional practices (Chazan, 2024).

### **Impact Assessment: Gains, Losses and Unintended Consequences**

The outcome of EU-China competition in Global South has been mixed for recipient countries, marked by opportunities alongside problematic consequences.

### **Progressive outcomes and concerning trends**

The investment by China and EU has contributed to major infrastructure developments across the developing regions, targeting the key challenges in the sectors of energy, digital connectivity and transportation. The countries of Global South now benefit from a diverse range of development financing and partnership channels, allowing for favorable negotiation terms and reduce dependency on any one partner (Yeung & Huber, 2023). Both the approaches of EU and China have facilitated the technology transfer, though in distinct manner. Mostly the Chinese projects include components of technical cooperation and training, while the programs introduced by EU emphasize institutional capacity building. Moreover, greater flows of trade and investment have stimulated growth in several nations of Global South, although the disparities regarding the distribution of benefits among the developing nations persist (Ergenc, 2025).

On the other hand, the swift rise of debt-financed development projects has sparked concerns regarding potential debt burdens in some countries, through the complexity of issue is shaped by different factors. While China and EU both have increasingly focused on environmental considerations, few projects have had negative environmental consequences, specifically early infrastructure projects of

BRI. Some countries may be generating new modes of reliance on external partners, potentially constraining their ability to independently determine policies. The rise in the number of development actors and strategies has overwhelmed the limited institutional capacities of recipient countries, potentially undermining their ability to make independent development choice (Insisa, 2024).

### **Geopolitical impacts and power dynamics**

The competition between China and EU in the Global South has profound consequences for global governance structures, encouraging the multipolar shift in the world, where the countries of Global South are increasingly influential in shaping international politics and development agendas. China and EU champion divergent governance and institutional models, both actors are contributing towards the fragmentation and complexity of global system. This competitiveness also influences the regional alignments and international alliance formations, with different degrees of deepening connections with either EU or the China based on the interests of partners, while some attempt to maintain strategic neutrality (Brinza, 2021).

### **Unexpected outcomes and strategic durability**

The proliferation of different standards, systems, and approaches may create inefficiencies and increase transaction costs for Global South partners. Development cooperation has become increasingly politicized, potentially reducing its effectiveness and creating new sources of tension in recipient countries. The focus on major markets and strategic regions may lead to the neglect of smaller, less strategic countries that also need development support. The long-term sustainability of current approaches to Global South engagement faces several challenges. Both Chinese and EU approaches must address concerns about debt sustainability and the long-term viability of their financing models. Moreover, climate change and environmental degradation require both powers to continuously upgrade their environmental standards and approaches. Rapid technological change requires continuous adaptation of development cooperation approaches and priorities (Hodzi, 2025).

The evolving China-EU competition has profound implications for international governance. In efforts to outcompete each other, both players may compromise on the standards of development leading to less effective outcomes. The coexistence of competing systems and frameworks introduce inefficiencies and ultimately it heightens the transactions for Global South aid recipients. Development assistance also is no longer about help; it's more politicized, further complicates the landscape and heightens the political frictions. An overemphasis on the geostrategic and high-value countries sometimes marginalizes smaller nations. Looking forward,

long term challenges like climate resilience and debt sustainability to the pace of technological innovation necessitate significant recalibration of both EU's and China's development policies (Quo, 2021).

## **CONCLUSION**

### **Embracing a New Era Collaborative Development**

At present, the importance of China-EU relations has become more evident, while their intricacies and paradoxes have become increasingly visible. The competition between China and EU in Global South highlights fundamental questions about collaboration and development, global governance, and the future world order. The differences between Europe and China in the framing and execution of Global South strategies are a consequence of their geopolitical interests, distinct historical experiences and developmental trajectories. These discrepancies will impact China- Europe engagement with one another and their policies towards the Global South as well as it will have far-reaching impact on the future development trajectory of developing countries. For Global South nations, the contemporary phase demonstrates both an exceptional opportunity and a considerable challenge. The opportunity lies in forming more collaborative alliances, better terms, and broad range of development options. The challenge lies in handling these associations efficiently while maintaining sovereignty and advancing the goals related to national development.

The basic difference between Chinese and EU approaches is visible in their objectives and underlying philosophies. China's emphasis on shared benefits, non-interference and financial pragmatism differs sharply with the conditionality, values-based policy and normative objectives of EU. These divergences are not only tactical but shows entrenched strategic and ideological perspectives. China considers itself as a part of Global South, reflects a collective developmental path and shared struggles, with a focus on Global South's progress via cooperative efforts. In contrast, engagement of EU with Global South has primarily been as an outsider observer and supporter. The major challenge for both China and EU is designing such frameworks that serve their strategic goals while contributing towards global development responsibly. It requires continues flexibility, learning through practice and cooperation when shared goals are identified.

This in-depth evaluation highlights both the implications and opportunities created by this competition for all stakeholders. Ultimately, the actual success will be determined by the tangible development in developing regions, global prosperity and poverty reduction rather than power rivalries. If managed properly, this competitive cooperation era signals a potential transformation in the development

policies towards more dynamic and innovative models. Despite the challenges, EU and China have overlapping objectives: promoting intra-South cooperation, fostering national development and jointly confronting global challenges. Given the internal diversity of Global South in terms of governance, economic development societal frameworks and cultural complexity means progress unfolds at different rates. These complexities make the cooperation difficult within Global South, but also offer opportunities for more tailored partnerships. EU and China must deepen their strategies, tailoring them as per the local contexts. New forms of collaboration and flexible collaboration models must be explored and inspired by the development experiences of major players like China and EU.

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