



# REPORT

**Global Gateway & Belt and Road Initiative: European and Chinese Visions for Global Connectivity**

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**Online  
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## Context and Introduction

The Institute for China-Europe Studies (ICES) held a webinar on 20 June 2025 to mark the 50th anniversary of EU–China diplomatic relations. The session focused on a comparative analysis of the European Union’s Global Gateway (GG) and China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). These two large-scale international infrastructure strategies were examined through the lens of their geopolitical significance, governance frameworks, and developmental impacts.

The opening remarks: **Mr. Li YANG**, Executive Director of ICAS.

Moderation : **Dr. Marie-Sybille DE VIENNE**, President of Extrême-Orient Conseil

### Speakers :

- **Dr. ZHANG Chao**, Associate Professor at the Institute of European Studies, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS)
- **Prof. ZHOU Yuyuan**, Deputy Director of the Center for West Asian and African Studies and Senior Research Fellow of the Institute for Foreign Policy Studies, Shanghai Institutes for International Studies (SIIS)
- **Dr. Ceren ERGENÇ**, Research Fellow at the Centre for European Policy Studies (CEPS)
- **Pauline VERON**, Policy Analyst at the European Centre for Development Policy Management (ECPDM)

## Strategic Objectives and Deployment Models

The discussion clarified that both BRI and GG are positioned as international connectivity strategies with far-reaching political and economic objectives. The BRI, launched in 2013, has evolved into a global infrastructure network covering over 150 countries, aiming to expand trade routes, enhance China’s global reach, and secure strategic assets. It is primarily state led, with significant involvement from Chinese policy banks. Conversely, the Global Gateway, launched in 2021, is structured around a €300 billion budget and aims to provide high-quality, sustainable, and rules-based infrastructure projects aligned with European values. The GG prioritises transparency, democratic governance, and environmental standards, distinguishing itself from the BRI through its normative commitments. Although the BRI is considered more rapid and widespread in implementation, the GG is characterised by its regulatory coherence and alignment with international standards.

## Governance, Regulation, and Standards Export

A central theme of the webinar was the use of infrastructure initiatives as instruments of normative influence. Both the BRI and GG were assessed not only as economic strategies but also as tools for exporting governance frameworks. The EU uses the GG to promote environmental, social, and governance (ESG) standards, including its green taxonomy, digital data protection (GDPR), and debt sustainability benchmarks. These standards are embedded into investment and development partnerships. On the other hand, BRI projects increasingly incorporate safeguards through partnerships with multilateral development banks and international guidelines, though critics point to persistent transparency concerns. The discussion also addressed digital infrastructure, where the GG promotes secure, rights-based solutions, while China’s Digital Silk Road offers



cost-efficient alternatives. Despite differences, both initiatives are gradually adapting to global expectations regarding sustainability and resilience.

### **Geopolitical Competition and Scope for Collaboration**

There are competitive dynamics between the two frameworks, particularly in overlapping geographies such as Africa, Central Asia, and Southeast Europe. In several regions, countries are offered competing infrastructure proposals, resulting in strategic positioning and influence-seeking from both the EU and China. However, the discussion also noted opportunities for selective cooperation. Climate adaptation, renewable energy, and health infrastructure were identified as potential sectors for joint financing or coordination, especially under the oversight of multilateral development banks such as the AIIB or EIB. Furthermore, the increasing assertiveness of partner countries was highlighted. Governments in Africa, Asia, and Latin America now use the parallel existence of GG and BRI to negotiate better terms, demand higher-quality infrastructure, and ensure greater local ownership. This shift reduces the asymmetry traditionally observed in donor–recipient relationships.

### **Conclusion**

The webinar concluded with consensus that both the BRI and Global Gateway reflect broader geopolitical strategies and are embedded in competing visions of global development. While rivalry is evident in scope, financing, and regulatory models, there are areas of convergence, particularly in climate and sustainability-related sectors. The role of recipient states is becoming increasingly decisive, with governments leveraging both initiatives to secure more favorable development outcomes.