



European Society for Eurasian Cooperation (ESEC)

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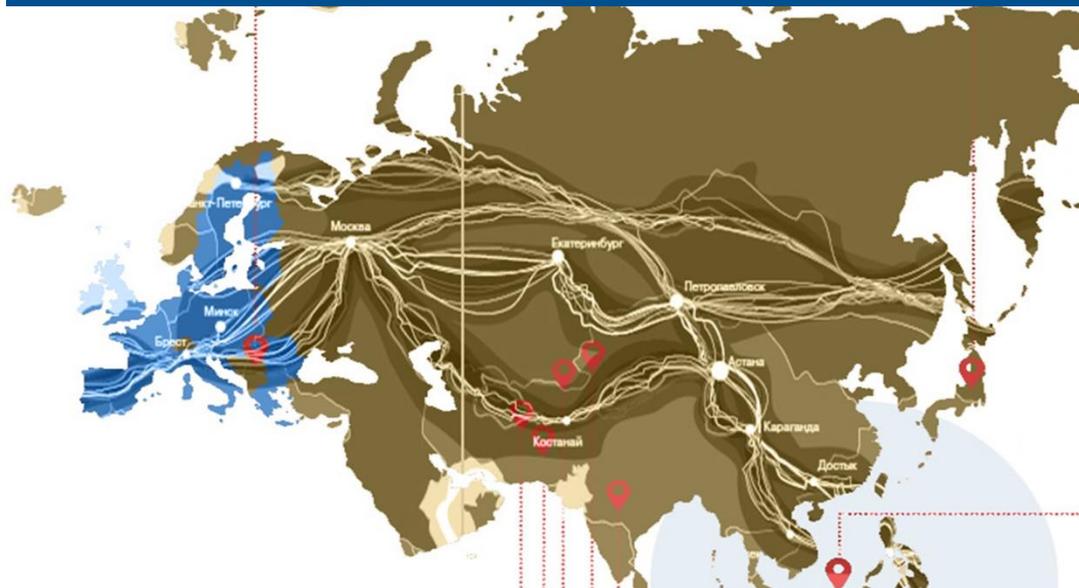
Connecting Europe and Asia

Challenges and Opportunities for Europe

Panel discussion

XI Eurasian Economic Forum, Verona, Palazzo della Gran Guardia, Sala Convegni,

26 October 2018 16:30-18:00



Topic of the discussion

The past five years have witnessed serious steps towards more integration, connectivity and economic cooperation both within, as well as in between regions of the Eurasian continent.

In 2013 China's head of state Xi Jinping announced the revival in the 21st century of the ancient Silk Roads under Beijing's epochal "Belt and Road" Initiative (BRI).

A year later, the leaders of Belarus, Kazakhstan and Russia signed a treaty on the creation of the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), the first truly supranational organization in the post-Soviet space after the fall of the Soviet Union. After the accession of Armenia and Kyrgyzstan it is now second only to the EU in terms of integration depth. Over 50 countries from all over the world have voiced their interest in signing trade deals with the new union.

In 2016 Vladimir Putin and Nursultan Nazarbayev co-proposed a more extensive "Greater Eurasian Partnership" involving the EAEU, the CIS countries, China, India, Iran, and other interested countries and associations of the continent. Since then, the EAEU has been working on the creation of a network of free trade areas in the wider Eurasian space. The Eurasian Economic Commission (EEC) negotiated free trade areas with Vietnam and Iran (interim). More are planned with Singapore, India, South Korea, Cambodia and Serbia. As part of its conjunction with the Belt&Road Initiative, the EAEU signed a trade and economic cooperation agreement with China in May 2018.

At the same time, Brussels's actions in wider Eurasia seemed less coherent, picking up pace only this year, when significant trade deals were finalized with Vietnam and signed with Japan and Singapore. Then, in September the European External Action Service (EEAS) finally presented a [joint communiqué on the EU's strategy for "Connecting Europe and Asia"](#).

India is also interested in playing an important part in the emerging "Eurasian concert". As a major connectivity project it proposes the implementation of the international "North – South Transport Corridor" (NSTC). However, New Delhi, it seems, still has no clear cut vision for its engagement in the wider Eurasian continent.

In view of this, the participants of the panel session will discuss the EU's strategy in Eurasia, as well as the challenges and opportunities that more integration, connectivity and economic cooperation in the wider Eurasian space could pose for Europe, in particular with such projects as the Eurasian Economic Union, the Belt and Road Initiative and the North – South Transport Corridor.

The results and recommendations of the panel discussion will be published in a short policy paper.

Points of discussion

- Discussion on the Joint communication “Connecting Europe and Asia: Building blocks for an EU Strategy”:
 - Can and should more connectivity between the European Union and China be achieved without official involvement of the Eurasian Economic Union?
 - More EU engagement in the Caucasus and Central Asia: a zero-sum game or a win-win situation for all?
- More integration, connectivity and economic cooperation in Greater Eurasia: who will determine the rules of the game, how will they be defined, agreed upon and implemented?
- Challenges and opportunities for Europe of more trade and economic cooperation with the Eurasian Economic Union.
- Thoughts on India’s potential role and strategy in the wider Eurasian space: challenges and opportunities for European business.

- **Presentation of the “Marco Polo Young Leaders Network”** (see below).

Participants

Moderator:

- **Elia Bescotti**, Vice-President, European Society for Eurasian Cooperation (ESEC), Austria

Speakers:

- **Gregory Jullien**, Advisor, European Parliament, EU
- **Victor Shakhmatov**, Head, Consolidated Analytical Section, Eurasian Economic Commission, EAEU
- **Matvey Navdaev**, Advisor to the Head of the Federal Agency for Youth Affairs, Russia
- **Ingo Mayr-Knoch**, CEO, WeBuildEurope.eu, Austria
- **Yuri Kofner**, Research Assistant, Advanced Systems Analysis, IIASA, Austria
- **Praket Arya**, Senior Research Fellow, India Foundation, India

Marco Polo Young Leaders Network



During the panel session the European Society for Eurasian Cooperation (ESEC) will present a project for the creation of a network of promising young entrepreneurs and future policy makers from Europe and the Eurasian countries, who support more cooperation between the European Union (EU), the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), the Chinese Belt & Road Initiative (BRI) and other Eurasian players (e.g. Turkey, Iran, India). It was decided that this network would bare the title of

the famous Italian merchant and explorer Marco Polo (who was only 17 years old when he went on his first travel through Eurasia to China).