[• EU and Japan join forces to counter US and Chinese initiatives](#toc0)

[• Eurasia comes together in Nur-Sultan, but differences are still big](#toc1)

[• Chinese ambassador asks EU for evidence that Huawei is a ‘security threat‘](#toc2)



**EU and Japan join forces to counter US and Chinese initiatives**

Jorge Valero

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The EU and Japan signed on Friday (27 September) a holistic partnership to promote investment projects based on rules-based and sustainable principles, and to counter the risks posed by the US and China.

The EU-Japan partnership on sustainable connectivity – a term covering an array of trade, economic, transport and environmental fields – and quality infrastructure was presented to other Asian partners during the EU-Asia connectivity forum held on Friday.

Both partners agreed to “promote free, open, rules-based, fair, non- discriminatory and predictable regional and international trade and investment, transparent procurement practices, the ensuring of debt sustainability and the high standards of economic, fiscal, financial, social and environmental sustainability,” the text reads.

The deal will cover all dimensions of connectivity including digital, transport, energy and people-to-people exchanges.

[EU and Japan 'cement' relationship against Trump’s protectionism](https://www.euractiv.com/section/economy-jobs/news/eu-and-japan-cement-relationship-against-trumps-protectionism/)

The European Union and Japan signed a long-awaited commercial trade deal on Tuesday (17 July), in an emphatic statement meant to counter US President Donald Trump’s attacks against free trade and the rules-based international order.

These principles were already embedded in the landmark EU-Japan strategic partnership agreement and economic partnership agreement, signed last year.

The long-running tariff dispute between the EU and the US could worsen next week, as US President Donald Trump is expected to announce new duties against European products in the context of the Airbus case.

Meanwhile, the EU is still struggling to obtain a more balanced economic relationship with China, opening up its huge market and protecting European firms’ intellectual property.

European Commission President, Jean-Claude Juncker, said that the agreement represents “first and foremost” a sign of the cooperation between two partners that reject protectionism, embrace openness, and defend a rule-based trading system.

[Trump presses Japan to reject EU demands on WTO reform](https://www.euractiv.com/section/economy-jobs/news/trump-presses-japan-to-reject-eu-demands-on-wto-reform/)

Japan refuses to include a reference to a proposed reform of the WTO’s appellate body in the draft conclusions of an upcoming bilateral summit with the EU for fear of upsetting the US, EURACTIV.com has learned.

Referring to the bilateral agreements signed last year, Japanese prime minister, Shinzo Abe, said that Japan and the EU became “flag bearers of free trade” and “guardians of universal values”.

“Whether it be a single road or a single port, when the EU and Japan undertake something, we are able to build sustainable, comprehensive, and rules-based connectivity, from the Indo-Pacific to the Western Balkans and Africa,” said Abe, who attended the signing ceremony on his way back from the UN General Assembly in New York.

As part of the closer ties the EU and Japan are developing, the Commission recommended to the member states on Friday to open negotiations with Tokyo to allow the transfer and use of Passenger Name Record (PNR) data in order to combat terrorism.

In addition, the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) and the European Investment Bank (EIB) signed a memorandum of understanding to enhance their collaboration and promote investment in developing countries.

Sovereign Europe

The agreement takes a step further the EU’s efforts to build a global alliance to counter the US President Donald Trump’s protectionism and unilateralism, on one hand, but also to offer an alternative to China’s controversial investment plans across the world.

In recent years, Europe has relied primarily on free trade deals to project its influence beyond its borders, including with Japan, Singapore or Vietnam.

The initiative is aligned with the EU’s intention to become a more influential global actor.

[A new team to defend Europe's economic sovereignty](https://www.euractiv.com/section/competition/news/a-new-team-to-defend-europes-economic-sovereignty/)

Achieving a “more assertive” Europe that can improve its competitiveness and sovereignty in an increasingly hostile world. These are the main guidelines of President-elect Ursula von der Leyen to the new College of Commissioners, unveiled on Tuesday (10 September).

The incoming Commission president, Ursula von der Leyen, said that she wants a “geopolitical Commission”.

German minister of Economy, Peter Altmaier, said that “as Europeans, we want to shape the new stage of globalisation”, based on “sound economic growth and development”.

He admitted that “perhaps, we are a little bit late” with this “good” initiative. He added that it would have been “better” if the strategy would have been launched 10 or 15 years ago.

The initiative, however, was received with caution by some Asian nations.

Murat Zhurebekov, Kazakhstan’s vice minister of Energy, warned that new strategies to support connectivity “should not compete or conflict” with current existing dialogues, primarily with China’s “One Belt, One Road” initiative, currently supported by 152 countries and organisations, including eight Europeans.

[European bloc not considering joining China’s Belt and Road plans](https://www.euractiv.com/section/eu-china/news/european-bloc-not-considering-joining-chinas-belt-and-road-plans/)

EU officials confirmed that the bloc is not considering joining China’s Belt and Road initiative on Friday (26 April), contrary to what German Economic minister Peter Altmaier has previously said.

Beijing’s massive investment plan, however, is questioned in some countries due to the strict financial conditions that it imposes in host nations and the disregard to some environmental and governance principles.

Korean deputy Economic minister, Kang-hyeon Yun, agreed that ‘One Belt, One Road” plan creates “a lot of problems”.

But he lamented that his country and the EU launched forums to support connectivity last year, but since then “nothing happens”, while US and China progress with their connectivity initiatives.

“We have to catch up and be more action-oriented,” he stressed.

Others were more positive about the new European initiative. The chairman of the Central Economic Commission, Van Binh Nguyen, said that there was “no rivalry” between the EU and China’s strategies. “It will create more opportunities in Asia”, he said, and for that reason “Vietnam gives its full support”.

“This is not a closed initiative”, said Romana Vlahutin, the EU’s ambassador-at-large for connectivity at the European External Action Service.

Altmaier said that the EU and Chinese initiatives are not competing but they are “the two sides of the same coin”.

Bruno Macaes, senior fellow at Hudson Institute said that “Europe needs a grand vision, and that is now being developed under the new Commission”.

He envisaged in the future an “Eurasian supercontinent”, with influences flowing in both directions between China and Europe.

[Von der Leyen unveils 'geopolitical Commission'](https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/video/von-der-leyen-unveils-geopolitical-commission/)

European Commission President-elect Ursula von der Leyen has presented her proposed team and the jobs she wants her Commissioners to carry out. Here are the highlights from her announcement.

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**Eurasia comes together in Nur-Sultan, but differences are still big**

Lukáš Hendrych

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The 21st century should be defined by cooperation between Europe and Asia. That was the message of the fourth Eurasian conference, held in Kazakhstan’s capital Nur-Sultan on Tuesday (24 September). However, differences among participants prevented it from achieving concrete results.

“Eurasia has always been the focal point for shaping the international environment. Cooperation among countries of the European Union, the Eurasian Economic Union and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation can work, it is in the interest of all of us,” former President of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbayev said at the opening of the Fourth Meeting of Speakers of Eurasian Countries´ Parliaments.

It is not a new thing. Nazarbayev has been advocating the idea of closer cooperation between Europe and Asia for a long time. And the rest of the conference, whose topic was Greater Eurasia: Dialogue. Trust. Partnership, was held in a similar vein.

[Nazarbayev: Partnership in Eurasia can strengthen the world system](https://www.euractiv.com/section/central-asia/interview/nazarbayev-partnership-in-eurasia-can-strengthen-the-world-system/)

Exclusive: Two days ahead of the [Asia-Europe meeting (ASEM)](https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/meetings/international-summit/2018/10/18-19/) which will bring together heads of state and government of 51 European and Asian countries, the President of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbayev offered his comments on a wide range of issues.

“The first [Eurasian conference] summit in Moscow was attended by 19 countries, today we have delegations from 65 countries,” the Chairman of the Slovak Parliament, Andrej Danko, reminded. He also called Nazarbayev a “visionary”.

“I regret that there are no more EU representatives here,” he added.

Weak EU representation

In his view, development in this geopolitical space is crucial for the whole world and the EU should not keep its distance. This is why Slovakia, as Danko said, supports China’s New Silk Road Initiative.

A record number of delegations attended this year´s meeting. In addition to parliamentary representatives, there were several interparliamentary organisations including a representative of the European Parliament, MEP Fulvio Martusciello (Forza Italia, EPP).

However, the EU´s representation was quite weak. In addition to the Slovak Chairman, the Presidents of legislatures of Austria, Belarus, Hungary, and Cyprus were also present. Other EU countries sent lower-ranking representatives, national MPs or no one.

There was also a discrepancy in the messages. Germany was represented by a vice-president of the Bundestag, Hans-Peter Friedrich. He mentioned the economic interdependence of the EU and Asia while stressing that European values must remain the priority of all negotiations.

But there were also politicians who were closer to the rhetoric of Nazarbajev and Danko, like the Hungarian Parliament Speaker László Kövér.

“Our foreign policy is open to the East. We are building a multipolar world and cooperation between the East and the West is important. We encourage the development of the Eurasian Economic Union and New Silk Road Initiative,” Kövér said.

Central Europe, in general, is trying to work out the well-known “Chinese dilemma”: is opening up to the Chinese presence in the region a unique economic opportunity or a threat?

[The Belt and Road Initiative: Visegrad Four's Chinese dilemma](https://www.euractiv.com/section/eu-china/news/the-belt-and-road-initiative-visegrad-fours-chinese-dilemma/)

China has used the international economic crisis to elbow its way towards a dominant position on the global market. Its New Silk Road is seen as an attempt to create a massive, multi-national zone of economic and political influence, including in Central Europe. EURACTIV Poland/Czech Republic/Slovakia and Political Capital report.

From China to Europe and back

Kövér called the Central Asia region a “bridge between Asia and Europe”. Indeed, Kazakhstan is a very important part of the New Silk Road. And it wants its profit.

“We want to be among the thirty most developed countries in the world by 2050. It is ambitious, but we can make it step by step,” Nazarbayev said.

The Kazakh Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Roman Vassilenko told EURACTIV that the Kazakh government is trying to create a network of railways through which up to two million containers a year could be transported between China and Europe.

[China's Belt and Road initiative, explained by Kazakhstan](https://www.euractiv.com/section/central-asia/news/chinas-belt-and-road-initiative-explained-by-kazakhstan/)

Roman Vassilenko, deputy minister of foreign affairs of Kazakhstan, met on Wednesday (4 July) with a group of international journalists from around the world to field questions about his country’s development and the China-promoted Belt and Road initiative.

“We need to build good infrastructure. The goods should also cross only two custom borders – between China and Kazakhstan and between Belarus and Poland – on their way from China to Europe,” he added.

The Chairman of Russian Duma Vyacheslav Volodin mentioned other areas that could be covered by Eurasian cooperation. In his words, this could be the fight against terrorism and drug crime or migration solutions.

The EU is not very hot on developing inter-institutional ties between the EU and the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU). The EAEU, sometimes called Eurasian Union, was created in 2014 between Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan, while Armenia and Kyrgyzstan joined the following year.

“The development of relations between the EU and the EAEU remains a long-term perspective and depends on the political decision of EU member states”, a Commission spokesperson recently said.

Most of the speeches at the conference were rather general, given the ideological, political and economic differences among the participants and the conference produced few concrete results.

Its final declaration emphasised efforts to ensure security, peace and sustainable development in the Eurasian region and the states also committed to continuing dialogue at the interparliamentary level.

The fifth Meeting will take place in Indonesia in the second half of 2020, continuing the tradition of having venues outside the EU. The previous meetings were held in Russia, South Korea, Turkey, and Kazakhstan.

[Edited by Georgi Gotev/Zoran Radosavljevic]

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**Chinese ambassador asks EU for evidence that Huawei is a ‘security threat‘**

Lucia Yar

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The European Union needs to show “concrete evidence” that the Chinese tech giant Huawei is a security threat, China’s Ambassador to Slovakia, Lin Lin, [told EURACTIV Slovakia in an interview](https://euractiv.sk/section/vonkajsie-vztahy/interview/cinsky-velvyslanec-snazime-sa-najst-najlepsi-sposob-ako-vyuzit-centralnu-polohu-slovenska/).

“Huawei has been accused of being a threat without any evidence. The EU has to show concrete evidence, that Huawei is a security threat,” Lin Lin said.

“The only reason for it to be a target is that it is one of the best. Some countries take it as a threat,” he added.

Citing national security concerns, US President Donald Trump signed an executive order in May to bar US imports of equipment produced by Huawei. The US Commerce Department said Huawei would also be forbidden to buy from US companies, some of which produce computer chips Huawei needs for its own products.

China slammed the US move and threatened to take steps to protect its companies, in a further test of ties as the economic heavyweights clash over trade.

Referring to a Global System for Mobile Communications Association report, the Chinese diplomat said there will be economic consequences if Europe bans Chinese-made equipment from its 5G network construction.

“The EU will not only have to pay extra tens of thousands of euros, but it will also experience a delay of 1.5 years in construction. If this is the case, Europe would be far behind other parts of the world, including the United States,” he said.

Lin Lin emphasised that the relations between Huawei and the Chinese government are not different from those between any major local company in Slovakia and the Slovak government.

“I think every government has a natural responsibility to promote its local industry and local companies.”

Currently, he said, Huawei has signed more than 50 commercial contracts for building 5G network and 28 came from European countries.

As far as China’s flagship Belt and Road Initiative, he said it should not be seen as a political tool but as a public product for economic development against the background of a global economic crisis.

“We also hope all countries can participate in this cooperation, as it is open and inclusive. Up to now, more than 100 countries and international organisations have shown enthusiasm to participate. Actually, V4 countries [Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Poland] are one of the first ones to sign a memorandum of understanding with China. We did make some progress in this respect.”

['Concilliatory tone' between EU and Huawei as teleco giant opens Brussels cybersecurity centre](https://www.euractiv.com/section/cybersecurity/news/concilliatory-tone-between-eu-and-huawei-as-teleco-giant-opens-brussels-cybersecurity-centre/)

High-level officials at the European Commission and the Chinese telecoms giant Huawei sought to build bridges on Monday (4 March), as Vice President for the Digital Single Market Andrus Ansip sat down with Huawei rotating chairman Ken Hu in an encounter described as “conciliatory” by a Huawei spokesperson.

Hong Kong: Some want to harm China’s growth

Referring to the ongoing tense situation in Hong Kong, the Chinese top diplomat said no interference from other parts of the world would be accepted.

“Hong Kong used to be a British colony and it returned to China only 22 years ago and the Chinese government has pursued the “one country, two systems” policy in Hong Kong. The central government gives Hong Kong Special Administrative Region a high degree of autonomy.”

He noted that Hong Kong had played a very important role in the economic development of mainland China, in China’s reform and opening up to the world.

“People in Hong Kong contributed significantly, but at the same time, Hong Kong also benefits from the mainland’s development because we use Hong Kong as a kind of a channel for China’s cooperation, trade or financial relations with other parts of the world,” he said.

He added, though, that there were some “ill-intentioned” forces which wouldn’t like to see a stable and prosperous Hong Kong.

“They see Chinese development as some kind of threat to their own interest,” he said.

“It is very clear that there are external forces and they even provide support to those radicals. Even some people in the USA admitted it themselves, taking it as some support for the democratic demonstration.”

“They say they have a reason to do that. But can you imagine any such kind of violent activities taking place in the USA? Would the US government allow their police to be attacked with petrol bombs, or their international airport to be paralysed by demonstrators?” the Chinese Ambassador said.

[Hong Kong ‘needs Europe’s support,’ says leading activist, as violence strikes city](https://www.euractiv.com/section/global-europe/news/hong-kong-needs-europes-support-says-leading-activist-as-violence-strikes-city/)

Europe’s support in Hong Kong is needed to “urge Beijing to accept requests from the Hong Kong people,” leading activist Joshua Wong has told EURACTIV, as violence took hold of the city yesterday (21 July) with armed mobs attacking residents, protesters and journalists.

[Edited by Sarantis Michalopoulos/Zoran Radosavljevic]

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