



# OPEN EUROPEAN DIALOGUE

## Highlights

### MP Open Call #8 Your Direct Line to Europe's Policymakers

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The OED is committed to strengthening dialogue between policymakers across Europe by providing a neutral, informal, and accessible space for conversation. Our monthly, online MP Open Calls grew out of this mission and are a space for parliamentarians to set the agenda, discuss pressing national and European issues, and support each other by sharing best practices and concerns.

Our call was joined by nine MPs from Germany, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Slovenia, Spain, and Sweden. Mareike Ohlberg, Senior Research Fellow of the Asia Program at the German Marshall Fund of the United States, provided insights into the conversation from her expertise on relations with China.

## HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE CONVERSATION

- **We need to differentiate between cultural differences and the traits of authoritarian regimes.** Some MPs suggested that there is a lack of familiarity with the differences between Chinese and European (political) cultures. Others pointed out that China's aggressive response to outside criticism is rather typical of an autocratic hegemon, regardless of culture.
  - "In Lithuania, we react very strongly to human rights violations by China because we still remember how it was to be occupied by the USSR. This seems familiar to us."
  - "I don't think that the civil and political sides can be separated. There is a difference in mentality."
- **Is it possible to criticize the Chinese regime and still maintain good economic relations?** The MPs acknowledged that criticism of China is often held back due to its economic weight and history of playing on economic dependencies

to pressure its trading partners politically.

- “China splits European unity with money [...] Hungary has stopped some European resolutions which could have been bad for China and in turn receives investments in a university in Budapest [...] This is why it is much harder for the EU to form a uniform stance on China than on Russia.”
- “It is crucial to assess how dependent we are on China. We especially need to avoid one-sided dependencies because this is how China pressures other countries.”
- “Economic independence will lead to decoupling and increase the risk of a hot conflict.”
- **Europe should not allow itself to be pressured in fields like climate policy, where China has an own interest to advance.** The MPs discussed how China often poses itself in a strong negotiation position to get more out of Europe, even in situations in which both parties benefit from a deal.
  - “China has an interest in advancing on climate policy. Yet, Europeans let themselves be threatened that China will not sit down to talk about climate policy if Europeans criticize [its] human rights situation.”
  - “We still have the idea that Europe can make China do things. It is very difficult to make China do things.”
- **China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) sparks confusion.** Although much-discussed, it is still unclear as to what the exact purpose of the BRI is and whether China has been successful in achieving it. The participating expert suggested that it is not always as rigid and strategic as observers might think.
  - “Through my work in the OSCE PA, I see a lot of suspicious connections being established through the BRI. There is no clarity regarding the actual goals of these connections.”
  - “The BRI is sometimes a bit chaotic. Chinese companies may just have to build bridges and roads elsewhere because there are no more to build in China. Nonetheless, China is strategically trying to secure its access to resources such as gas through the BRI.”

## RESOURCES

- [Hungary agrees to open a Chinese university campus in Budapest by 2024](#), February 2021  
This was cited on the call as possibly incentivizing a lenient position by the Hungarian government towards China.
- [What does China's latest five-year plan mean for Russia](#), March 2021  
China recently unveiled its [14th five-year development plan \(14<sup>TH</sup> FYP\)](#) for the period 2021–2025, which sets energy security as a top priority for China. As first exporter of gas worldwide, the strategy plan is of critical importance for Russia and has the potential to shift geopolitical equilibria.

- [The Road to China: An Opportunity for Russian Gas](#), February 2020  
China is the fastest growing market in the world for natural gas: a unique opportunity for Russia's energy sector. Its new Power of Siberia pipeline exemplifies China's drive to diversify its energy supply and grow less dependent on Central Asian or Australian resources.
- [Trends in energy market in China](#), May 2021  
By 2024 Beijing will account for 40% of global growth in natural gas. Domestic production of is also expected to rise next to gas imports to fill rising supply/demand gaps. As prices drop, liquid natural gas (LNG) imports will also be an increasingly important resource.
- [Sino-Russian Energy Relations: A Match Made in Heaven?](#) January 2021  
As European demand for oil and gas will decline, Russia prepares to turn to new markets where demand for oil and gas is still growing. A Sino-Russia energy partnership seems to accommodate both countries and could serve to diversify their energy markets and supply sources, respectively.

## THE EXPERT



**Mareike Ohlberg** is a senior fellow at the GMF Asia Program and co-leads the Stockholm China Program. She has lived and worked extensively in China and is co-author of *Hidden Hand: How the Communist Party of China is Reshaping the World* (2020).

## KEEP THE CONVERSATION GOING

The Open European Dialogue is a network driven by MPs. We look forward to hearing from you and helping you as best we can to connect and work with your colleagues from across Europe in these challenging times.

Keep in contact with your colleagues! Please know that you can always find the contact details of all OED members on the [members-only area of the website](#). Should you have issues logging in, you can contact [rfarulli@gmfus.org](mailto:rfarulli@gmfus.org).

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