

## China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the security dimension of EU-China connectivity

Online  
Evening Conference  
27 January 2022  
17:00 – 18:30

Prof. Dr Jonathan HOLSLAG, Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB)  
Dr Francesca GHIRETTI, Mercator Institute for China Studies (Berlin)

Dear Madam, Sir,

We are pleased to invite you to an **online evening conference** organised on **Thursday 27 January 2022** by the **Centre for Security and Defence Studies** of the Royal Higher Institute for Defence.

For almost the entire past decade, China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has been the most prominent example of a geo-economic strategy implemented by a global actor in the name of "connectivity". Through this ambitious programme, the PRC's leadership has been enacting its vision to develop its power potential by growing its influence across Eurasia and beyond. Drivers of this vision of Eurasian economic expansion for China's sake are explicit. This is less so with regard to security ambitions. Still, the multiple dimensions of EU-China connectivity entail specific and dynamic security challenges requiring dedicated attention. Indeed, fragmentation of European cohesion and unbalanced economic relations have increasingly enabled China to grow its power, influence and presence on our continent. Forced to react, the EU has been working on a coordinated stance, albeit slow and piecemealed at first, aimed at responding to China's instruments and political objectives on the continent in terms of connectivity, investments and flow security. Building on the achievements of the 2018 EU-Asia Connectivity Strategy, the new Global Gateway investment scheme, announced on 1 December 2021 and developed to boost sustainable links, is the latest development in this regard.

Challenges are considerable and manifold. So are questions and doubts: what does the growing importance of connectivity mean for the future of EU-China relations? What are the security challenges it entails? How can we assess the tools and instruments mobilised by the EU as a response to China's BRI? What are the limitations and how can they be overcome?

In order to discuss these critical strategic issues, we have invited Dr Jonathan HOLSLAG, professor of international politics and noted China specialist at the Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB), and Dr Francesca GHIRETTI, European China policy analyst at the Mercator Institute for China Studies (MERICS, Berlin), who will present their respective views on the security implications of EU-China relations in the light of connectivity in the current global context.

This conference will take place **in English** on **Thursday 27 January 2022 at 17.00**. We thank you in advance for registering via the following link: [www.defence-institute.be](http://www.defence-institute.be). **Registration, subject to availability, is compulsory and must be received by Monday 24 January 2022 at the latest.** You will then receive a registration confirmation and a link to connect to the conference.

(Signed)

Filip BORREMANS, MSc Eng  
Air Force Colonel GS  
Director-General  
Royal Higher Institute for Defence

**Programme:**

16:30 – 17:00: Welcome – connection to the online conference  
17:00 – 18:30: Conference and Q&A