Master of Arts (MA) in China and International Relations – Master Thesis

EU-China relations and 5G: a “threat”?

Five cases on the European approach

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Abstract

The Fifth Generation (5G) deployment has become a central topic of discussion across Europe, which finds itself in the middle of the so-called Sino-American tech war. This thesis investigates the perceptions of 'threat' of Chinese-supplied 5G in five EU countries: Germany, Italy, Denmark, the Czech Republic and Estonia. The purpose of this research is to uncover patterns, or the lack thereof, of behavior across the EU in regard to legislating on 5G, and specifically the infrastructure provided by Chinese companies, vis-à-vis American and Chinese interests. This will be done by taking into consideration the economic, political, and strategic exchanges that each country entertains with China on the topic of 5G as well as the role of the US in it. Adopting a Neorealist theoretical framework, the study reveals that attitudes vary greatly across the Union hinting at firstly, a fragmented EU-wide perspective on the matter; secondly, the United States role in providing strategic reassurance to its transatlantic partners in times of crisis of the NATO alliance; thirdly, the importance of economic relations for the EU member states that are mostly involved with China and the failure in deepening this dimension with younger partners despite Chinese efforts as with projects like the 17+1. In spite of the outbreak of Covid-19, which is not taken into consideration here, this thesis hopes to educate on the variety of European attitudes on 5G, inspire a deeper understanding of EU relations with China and with other international organizations like NATO as well as provide a point of departure for future research on the topic and actors involved.

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Introduction

In March 2019, the European Commission (EC) issued its updated version of the "EU-China – a strategic outlook" where for the first time in the history of Sino-European relations, China is described as an “economic competitor” and a “systemic rival” (European Commission and HR/VP contribution to the European Council, 2019, p. 1). This statement was later reinforced by the release of the new "EU regulation for the screening of the foreign direct investments from non-EU countries", in which tighter EU-wide supervision was imposed on critical sectors such as technology and infrastructure when extra-European businesses seek acquisitions of EU production segments (European Parliament and Council, 2019). Even without naming them, it is clear that such regulation is meant to contain Chinese investors and their ambitions in Europe.

China has maintained a strategy of sustained investments in the EU in the past decade, meeting a sharp increase after the Made in China 2025 (MIC25) plan was launched in 2015 by the Chinese leadership. Specifically, the fifth generation (5G) network has raised the concerns of EU governments after the U.S. banned the Chinese company Huawei as a provider for such infrastructure. In addition, the U.S. has been pressuring EU member states to follow its decision to exclude Huawei from its markets in a bid to shield European networks from China's espionage (Chrysolora & Drozdiak, 2020). Following these events, in January 2020, the EC published the "EU toolbox for 5G security" that includes "a set of robust and comprehensive measures for an EU coordinated approach to secure 5G networks." (EC, 2020a).

The EU is placed between a rock and a hard place, facing pressure from the United States, its traditional security and economic ally, and China, EU's second largest trading partner after the U.S. (EC, 2020b).

Lacking unity on 5G, the EU is seeking to regulate on the future network's infrastructure: as bluntly rendered by Mariani and Bertolini, "the EU is progressing at 28 different paces in 5G deployment" (2019, p. 14). To this regard, this thesis will consider five members states as representatives of the five macroeconomic areas that the EU is divided in its China's commercial exchanges as the economic dimension is the first and most developed one between the pair. As the EU-China relationship has expanded in the years to a political and strategic Dialogue, a country-specific analysis of these two aspects is included to the economic one. Additionally, to these levels, for each member states, the ties with the United States will also be taken into account to complete the picture on 5G.

The selected EU member states are Germany, Italy, Denmark, Czech Republic and Estonia.

The centrality that 5G will hold in the development of nearly every aspect of our future societies motivated the topic selection for this thesis. 5G is predicted to be fundamental for the development of global value chains, impacting not only the end users but, for the first time, also businesses, public sectors and government's organizations and institutions. The implications of a deeper connectivity tap into the realm of cybersecurity that then spill over to national security, with risks being identified from identity theft to industrial espionage.

Given the multifaceted nature that characterizes 5G, the broadband infrastructure places itself in a bigger economic, political, strategic discourse that sees the EU, U.S. and

China involved in discussions over the future of their networks: in this sense, the concept of “threat” has emerged in official and unofficial narratives around 5G and specifically, Chinese-supplied 5G. The problem formulation thus is "**Why can Chinese-supplied 5G be perceived as a threat by EU member states?**".

Adopting the idea of “threat” in the theoretical framework, this thesis utilizes Neorealism and its derived China Threat Theory to gauge country-specific discussions around the topic of 5G. An extensive Literature Review will lay the foundation for the analysis, which, will follow firstly, the case-selection criteria, and secondly, the EU-China Dialogue format addressing economic, political, security topics and the American involvement in the matter.

The research presented here hopes to enlighten on the variety, or not, of attitudes existing in EU members states. This is done by using a qualitative methodology that, through the analysis of the selected data, will uncover patterns, or the lack thereof, in EU behaviors vis-à-vis China and the U.S. in order to inform the larger picture of bilateral and trilateral relations.

Literature Review

Given the problem formulation, multiple subtopics have to be taken in consideration: "**Why can Chinese-supplied 5G be perceived as a threat by EU member states?"** includes conceptual categories like the 5G technology, the wider EU-China relations, the trilateral interactions between the EU, China and the US, the country-specific exchanges with China and the perception of China as a "threat". All of these aspects have been taken into account when researching the material that is analyzed in this thesis.

Generally speaking, as already anticipated in the Introduction, the problem formulation came to be following the publication of a series of official documents from the EC as the "EU-China Strategic Outlook of March 2019 and the "EU coordinated risk assessment of the cybersecurity of 5G networks" in October of the same year. The latter document was followed by the issuing of the "EU toolbox on 5G cybersecurity" in January 2020. Together with these official publications, the "US-China 5G Contest: Options for Europe" (Mariani & Bertolini, 2019) report by the Italian International Affairs Institute (IAI) and "What to Make of the Huawei Debate? 5G Network Security and Technology Dependency in Europe" (Rühlig & Björk, 2020) by the Swedish Institute of International Affairs (UI) informed the basic proposition of this thesis. Both the aforementioned papers in fact describe the role of the EU in the U.S.-China tech war and highlight current developments as well as possible paths of conflict resolution for European member states. A piece of research that was central in this thesis is the ETNC report of January 2020 "Europe in the Face of U.S.-China Rivalry": this document not only provides an overview of the EU part in the Sino-American struggle, but it also surveys 18 European countries in their specific

dealings with China and the U.S. By looking at the aforementioned official and unofficial sources, it emerged that an inspection of the 5G matter on a selected number of countries had not been produced. Additionally, the conceptualization of Chinese-provided 5G as a "threat" was missing from all the surveyed data while the official documentation of the EU has moved to a theoretically more realist definition of China: as it will be later showed, some EU member states go as far as defining Chinese interests and/or China's presence as a "threat" in official documents.

The first subtopic considered was 5G as an infrastructure and technology: for this category the main sources taken into account were produced by the main players in the market, Ericsson and Huawei (Teppo & Norrman, n.d.; Huawei, 2016). To further the understanding of the technical side, thus adding the economic elements to the argumentation of the centrality of 5G in the future, is an MIT Technology Review article (TR Staff, 2017).

Then the EU-China relations were analyzed to find changing attitudes and patterns. The research first uncovered the unofficial aspect with the European Council for Foreign Relations (ECFR) 2009 "A Power Audit of EU- China relations" (Fox & Godement) policy report that was later updated to its 2017 version "China at the Gates: a new Power Audit of EU-China relations" (Godement & Vasselier): these materials show progression in their analysis of the Sino-European approaches but are lagging behind the current state of affairs.

Officially, China and the EU come in contact under three different scopes: economic, strategic, people-to-people and political Dialogues. It became then easier to break down the Sino-European relations into these three components, to which American participation was later added. By doing this, data that referred to the economic sphere like the Bruegel's "The

State of China-European Union Economic Relations" (Dadush et al., 2019), MERICS's "Chinese FDI In Europe: 2019 Update" (Kratz et al., 2020) and the European Chamber of Commerce in China's "China's Manufacturing 2025" (2017) were conducive to the identification of the five macro-economic approaches in EU-China ties that then motivated the case selection; to understand the political and people-to-people exchanges between the EU and China, besides official documents like the EU-China Official Statement of April 2019, the 2018 ETNC report "Political values in Europe-China relations" as well as Cai's paper "China-Europe Higher Education Cooperation: Opportunities and Challenges" (2019) were fundamental; lastly, the strategic cooperation between China and the EU was discerned thanks to Montesano's (2019) journal article "EU-China Security Relations: Discourse vs Practice and the Role of EU Member States" and Men's 2017 contribution "EU–China Security Relations" to the book "Chinese Foreign Policy under Xi". Once these three concepts were explained, it became apparent that the analysis should follow the same structure.

To this end, a case-specific research of material was carried out to uncover economic, political and strategic relations with China. The January 2020 ETNC report with sections on Germany, Italy, Denmark and the Czech Republic as well as the 2018 "Political Values" document which contains the same EU members' contributions were useful points of departures. For every case, official documents were the first to be analyzed thanks to official English translations of the country's foreign policy, 5G strategy or cybersecurity reports: in the German example, a 5G rollout document and a following strategy were first taken into consideration; for Italy, the entity responsible for cybersecurity, COPASIR, issued a report on, among other things, 5G, that was first considered; Denmark has produced not

only a Foreign Policy Strategy but also a 5G Action Plan and both were used as starting points; in the Czech Republic instance, its security bodies, NÚKIB and BIS, are particularly prolific on the matter of China and 5G which, coupled with the national "Plan for Next Generation Networks", render for a great introduction to the topic; lastly, Estonia annually publishes a "Foreign Intelligence Service" report that embodies the perfect point of departure for the research of this thesis.

Subsequently to the analysis of EU-China and country-specific and China relations, it emerged that the U.S. had a prominent role in both fields: the January 2020 ETNC report had already highlighted it but the connection became more apparent with the ongoing development of the Huawei case across Europe, specifically with declarations by political leaders during the Prague 5G Security Conference in December 2019, the NATO meeting with the European External Action Service (EEAS) the same month and the Munich Security Conference in February 2020. These developments motived an inclusion in the research that can be framed as "American influence": even though the concept of influence in very broad and difficult to define, for the scope of this thesis it refers to the role played by the United States in influencing the policy process on the topic of Chinese-provided 5G.

The American repeated warnings over Huawei, ZTE and Chinese companies' involvement in EU's 5G rollout were often pigeonholed as "threats", though the discourse around the notion of "threat" was not always consistent, with references primarily to security and cyber-attacks concerns but also political values and economic investments. Given the primarily security and economic dimension of the subject, Realism, specifically Neorealism, emerged as a useful theoretical framework. Born out of an American tradition, Kenneth Waltz's Neorealism (1979) can be easily applied to the Sino-American couple but

can the same be said about European member states? Following a closer look at Waltz's work, mainly his 1979 "Theory of International Politics", it emerged that Neorealism was only partially addressing the problem at hand. This is where the China Threat Theory inserts itself. Also a product of Neorealism, the China Threat Theory was popularized at the beginning of the millennia in the U.S. and only later reached the European continent: Vangeli in his 2018 working paper "16+1 and the re-emergence of the China Threat Theory in Europe" provides a detailed account of how this theoretical framework applies to the EU. The works that shaped the China Threat Theory section are Al-Rodhan's 2007 "A Critique of the China Threat Theory: a Systematic Analysis", Broomfield's 2003 "Perceptions of Danger: the China Threat Theory" and Roy's 1996 "The "China Threat" Issue: Major Arguments".

Choice of Data

Case Selection

As outlined in the introduction, this thesis will take into consideration five EU member states in order to answer the problem formulation.

The countries chosen are Germany, Italy, Denmark, Czech Republic and Estonia,

The selection occurred in a two-steps process. First, the economic regions in which the EU can be divided when examining the EU-China economic ties were identified. Economic ties are the oldest and deepest connections that EU member states and China entertain and in doing so, one can recognize that clusters of countries act in similar ways when dealing with China and vice versa. A central axis can be observed in France and

Germany while Portugal, Spain, Italy, Greece, Hungary and Poland represent the southern-central group. To the central axis and the southern-central group, one can add northern Europe with Sweden, Finland, Denmark, and the Netherlands and eastern Europe with Czechia, Croatia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Romania and Bulgaria. Lastly, smaller states as Belgium, Austria, Luxembourg, Cyprus, Malta, Ireland and the Baltic Republics can be associated together.

France and Germany have emerged at the communitarian level for their high involvement in the promotion of the FDI screening law intended to protect the EU from further Chinese investments despite the high levels of economic exchanges they both entertain with China. French President Emmanuel Macron and German Chancellor Angela Merkel specifically have showed willingness to cooperate on Chinese matters as it can be witnessed by Xi Jinping's last visit to Paris where he was met by the two European heads of state.

The southern-central European group shares similarly high levels of investments flowing in from China, but these countries represent important assets in terms of their position, infrastructure and history. In general, the Mediterranean states tend to oppose the richer European economies due to their latent need for investments following the 2008 global financial crisis. Poland and Hungary have been dissatisfied with the results of the 17+1 partnership with China and traditionally use and need U.S. influence to achieve goals similar to the southern economies.

Northern Europe enjoys strong commercial ties with China, specifically in the tertiary and quaternary sector given the technological focus of the economy of this region. Denmark and Finland are particularly dependent on the U.S. security umbrella while others share

worries about human rights in China that, in the case of Sweden for example, make very vocal. Recently, both the Netherlands and Denmark have expressed stronger support for open exchanges with China but also a renewed commitment towards the communitarian environment. (ETNC, 2019)

The eastern European group is bonded by its membership in the 17+1 cooperation with China and its ensuing results in the economic, political and people-to-people exchanges' field. In a following section, a more detail description of such partnership is provided.

Lastly, the smaller European countries, in spite of their heterogeneity, can be grouped up together due to their lack of economic and political might towards China: this translates into their reliance on European guidelines and regulations when formulating a foreign policy towards the Asian superpower. This cluster can also be referred to as "European followers" (Godement & Vasselier, 2017).

The second step in the selection process is identifying one member state out of each of the previously illustrated groups.

For the European axis, Germany represents the best example out of the two due to its centrality in the argument of 5G and FDI. Germany is an industrially-oriented economy that has seen many investments into its technologic sector coming from China and thus prompted the discussion on the FDI screening regulation and the security-related aspects of FDI. Germany is the number one trading partner of China in the EU.

Italy is the chosen case for the southern-central cluster because of its centrality in the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) as well as its fundamental role in the EU in advocating for stronger FDI regulations. Italy was in fact the first G7 country to sign the Memorandum of

Understanding (MoU) with China on the BRI and was also, together with France and Germany, cosigner of the letter sent to the EC demanding tougher screening measures on non-European investments.

Denmark represents the northern European group not only because it entertains substantial economic ties with China but also because it enjoys a central role in the Nordic Sea: while Sweden and Finland are home to the two biggest and only competitors of Huawei, Ericsson and Nokia respectively, Denmark is interesting to China and the U.S. both because of its stakes in the Artic.

The Czech Republic has been selected for the eastern European cluster as it occupies a central role in it: while at the beginning it was one of the biggest enthusiasts of the 17+1, it later adopted a different narrative becoming one of the most critical EU states on China. Furthermore, thanks to the role of its security agencies, Czechia has emerged as a champion in 5G with the Prague 5G Security Conference held in 2019 that led to so-called Prague Proposals.

Estonia, one of the three Baltic Republics and a European Follower, is an interesting case due to its alignments with the U.S. Estonia and the U.S. have released a joint statement (U.S. Department of State, 2019) where, in the NATO framework, they seek to increase cooperation of security and cybersecurity, specifically aiming at developing a 5G strategy together. Simultaneously, Estonia is also a signer of a MoU on the BRI, similar to Italy.

Literature Gap and Limitations

While this thesis doesn't make use of new data, it offers an interpretation of sources that hasn't been found in the existing literature: the review of the data above shows that

contributions have been made in many directions, but all fail to take into consideration the perspective of this study.

The case selection seeks to illustrate the variety of attitudes that exist across the EU. What is not an objective of this thesis is to draw conclusions on the EU as a whole: the goal of the research presented here is to show how EU member states, due to their diversity within each other and in their exchanges with China and the U.S., can have different perceptions of the 5G matter as intrinsically connected to Chinese companies.

If one were to expand this research in the future, it sure would be useful to collect all EU's 27 attitudes on the topic. Possible studies would then be able to draw broader conclusions on, not only the state of EU-China relations vis-à-vis the U.S. but also on the state of the Union. Consequently, ensuing problem formulations could be "How has the Chinese-provided 5G changed EU-China relations?" or "Why does Chinese-provided 5G in the EU represent a threat to the U.S.?".

Background information

5G: Fifth Generation Network Technology

5G is the successor of the already popular 4G mobile network. While 4G significantly sped up the transmission of data, 5G sets to be 4G but on steroids: the European 5G Observatory asserts that this technology will be able to "support mobile data volumes that are 1,000 times higher per area; 10 to 100 times more connected devices; typical user data rates that are 10 to 100 times higher; […] and five times lower end-to-end latency."(European 5G Observatory). Latency refers to the time that passes between the emission and reception of a signal from one point to another. In the case of 5G, latency reduction is a key feature as it will provide for almost instantaneous communication, allowing services like cloud gaming and self-driver cars to function at a better capacity.

Besides promising a new "industrial revolution", 5G represents first and foremost an economic opportunity. While 4G was designed to work purely for mobile phones, 5G is meant to answer the needs of new services and businesses, opening up the way for the digitalization of many segments of the global value chain and the creation of new industries. This has already been seen with the development of artificial intelligence, virtual reality, automation and machine learning technologies. The MIT Technology Review estimates that "5G has the potential to unlock up to USD $12.3 trillion of revenue across a broad range of industries" (TR Staff, 2017).

The Huawei case

5G and cybersecurity concerns became prominent with the Huawei case, when in May 2019 US President Donald Trump, inserted the company on an "entity list", effectively banning the Chinese telecommunication vendor from supplying American companies without explicit

approval from the government. Later that year, Men Wanzhou, Huawei's Chief Financial Officer (CFO) and daughter of the founder, was arrested in Canada following an extradition request by the U.S. and to the time of writing, she remains at house arrest in Vancouver.

The motivation behind the ban came from the Pentagon which indicated how Chinese supplied technology provides for a so-called backdoor for the Chinese intelligence community and potentially government to access critical information from its users. The U.S. and some of its allies point at Chinese cybersecurity laws as the promoters of espionage, data monitoring and infringement of privacy: the 2017 National Intelligence Law and the 2014 Counter-Espionage Law. Article 7 outline the need to comply with any government action towards individuals or organizations that are investigated by the state intelligence (McCarthy, 2019). U.S. concerns further stem from the close relationship that Huawei has cultivated with the Chinese government and military (Kania, 2019; Tao, 2019).

Together with cyber espionage worries, intellectual property theft as well as trade violations further increase mistrust towards Huawei. In 2019, Huawei has been accused by the U.S. Justice Department of trying "to steal design information for a T-Mobile robot" (Maizland & Chatzky, 2020) as well as other five American technology companies. Trade violations are behind Meng Wanzhou's arrest: the U.S. has accused Huawei and its CFO of selling American computer equipment, both hardware and software, to an Iranian telecom carrier, violating U.S. trade sanctions to Iran in 2010.

Huawei is highly involved in the 5G rollout, possessing "the largest share of the global 5G market " (Tcheyan & Bresnick, 2020) and 28% of the world's wireless antennas (Rühlig & Björk, 2020). China has in fact strongly invested in the development of such technology, holding the greatest number of patents in 5G as well as the highest number of

contributions to the development of 5G standards (Kania, 2019). Given the new risks associated with 5G and the legal proceedings against Huawei, the U.S. considers the Chinese tech giant involvement in the new technology's rollout as a strong cybersecurity risk.

The U.S. Department of Justice has found that between 2011 and 2018, 90% of cyber-attacks were originating from China (Mariani & Bertolini, 2019). In spite of this, Huawei denies all allegations against it and underscores the fact that the U.S. is yet to present proof of backdoors in the tech giant's equipment.

EU-China relations background

China and the EU established diplomatic ties in 1975, when the EU was still the European Economic Community (EEC) and later, in 2003, "the EU and China acknowledged each other as strategic partners" (Geeraerts, 2019, p.1). At first, the cooperation was based on economic ties which led to the two becoming top trading partners for each other: China is the EU's second-largest trading partner, behind the U.S., and the EU is China's largest trading partner. The economic partnership later evolved into a broader one which is laid out in the 2013 "EU-China 2020 Strategic Agenda for Cooperation". The EU-China relation rests on three pillars: the Economic and Sectoral Dialogue, the Political and People-to-People Dialogue and the Security and Foreign Policy Dialogue.

The European Union, as much as it is identified by its own independent bodies, is a *suprastate* institution that leaves to its member states much freedom: it is thus important to highlight that the EU and China relate to each other as two entities but also as the single member states that make up the EU conduct their foreign policy to China. This thesis will take into consideration the approaches directed by individual EU countries to China rather

than consider the EU common strategy alone. Throughout the Union, varying attitudes can be observed by member states when dealing with China.

The Economic and Sectoral Dialogue

As previously mentioned, the EU-China relations began on economic premises: a trade agreement was signed in 1978 but commercial exchanges deepened with China's accession to the WTO in 2001. "The first EU-China Strategic Dialogue [at Deputy Foreign Minister level] was held in London in December 2005" (Leal-Arcas, 2019) and brought to a rediscussion of the trade agreement in 2007. The Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) has been in the works since then: negotiations in this sense have met obstacles in the form of human rights and energy policy discussions. The latter though didn't impede export of goods to grow on average 10% per year and 15% when it comes to services while the opposite, Chinese exports to Europe, to increase at an even higher rate from 2001 to 2018. (Dadush et al., 2019)

When considering the EU-China economic ties, the topic of trade deficit is prominent: this refers to the fact that China exports more to the EU than the opposite, bringing the imbalance between European and Chinese exports to USD $220 billion (Pedagidis, 2019).

Besides the trade imbalance, there are other barriers to a more comprehensive integration between the EU-China markets. First, European companies lament the high entry level required to access China, which is set on an 8,75% applied tariff however China has been showing willingness to work on this issue by lowering "the tariffs applied to its imports of luxury goods and apparel products, benefiting France, Italy and other EU

members" (Dadush et al., 2019). Forced technological transfers are also indicated by the European Chamber of Commerce in China (2017) as an impediment to European companies wanting to penetrate the Chinese market. Similarly, the EU imposes trade defense measures, specifically in the form of anti-dumping and anti-subsidy.

On the topic of trade, FDI flows also represent a strong indicator of the EU-China relationship. The peak of China's investments in the EU can be observed in 2016 when they added up to €37.2 billion but they have been slowing decreasing since then: this is a trend that has been observed not only in the EU but worldwide (BBC News, 2019). Similarly, EU's FDI in China has sharply declined in the last years.

China has passed a new Foreign Investment Law (FIL) that took effect on January 1st, 2020: "the new legislation establishes a new legal framework for the management and promotion of foreign investment in China" (Silverman et al., 2020) and it has been positively received. For instance, the head of the European Chamber of Commerce in China has recently expressed that he is surprised by the issues FIL addresses (Cheng, 2019). Simultaneously, some complain that while FIL expresses willingness to address decade-old issues, it also leaves too many openings for interpretation. (Elen, 2020).

Political and People-to-People Dialogue

Politically speaking, through the years the EU and China have come to debate over their different definition of rule of law, democracy and human rights. In spite of the fact that the EU founds itself of a set of common values, member states come to understand these core beliefs differently. A European-wide report has found that "the higher China's share in a

country’s overall trade, the more active and vocal that state tends to be in promoting democracy, human rights and the rule of law in its relations with China." (ETNC, 2018). At the EU level, the fragmentation that has been highlighted renders little power to the supranational institutions to form a coherent statement on the triad of political values but at the same time it provides for a foreign policy that, to some extent, unifies the member states actions'. An EU-concerted effort has been observed in two occasions in 2016 and 2017. In the first instance, a group of states jointly signed a statement on China's treatment of human rights defenders to be submitted to the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) while the second case refers to a letter addressing the situation of human rights lawyers in China (Godement & Vasselier, 2017).

EU countries have been more vocal or less in public and private settings when discussing rule of law, democracy and human rights as well more proactive or less in initiating projects and multilateral statements with China. In the time China has entertained relations with the EU, this has caused a number of diplomatic incidents. For example, the 2008 European tour of the Dalai Lama brought China to cancel its attendance to the EU-China summit of that year (Shambaugh, 2010). More recently, Sweden and China headed into a confrontation over Swedish-citizen Gui Minhai (Duxbury, 2020).

In spite of these diplomatic hiccups, people-to-people relations between the EU and China have enjoyed an upward development in the years. The high-level people-to-people dialogue (HPPD) established in 2012 encompasses Sino-European exchanges and cooperation in "education, tourism, mobility of researchers, culture, media, youth, and sport" (EC, 2019b). First, the EU represents a very attractive destination for tourism

between Chinese citizens, becoming the second most popular continent, after Asia, attracting 38% of all tourists travelling overseas, a Nielsen (2017) report finds.

Together with tourism, education represents a big portion of Sino-European ties, with Chinese nationals making up the biggest portion of non-European students studying in the EU.

The Peace and Security Dialogue

Together with trade and investment, and political Dialogues, peace and security cooperation represents the third pillar of EU-China relations. These matters were first addressed in the 2003 Policy Paper on the EU and updated in 2013 with the “EU-China 2020 Strategic Agenda for Cooperation” (EEAS, 2013). In this document, where peace and security are featured at the top of the list, EU and China pledge to: "safeguard international peace and development", cooperate on regional integration in Asia, reinforce "the role of the UN in international affairs" "to emphasize multilateralism", promote "nuclear security, strengthen[ing] the international non-proliferation regime ", cooperate together to build a safe cyberspace, "collaborate on projects combating transnational crime, illegal migration" as well as anti-terrorism practices, develop and cooperate on maritime safety" and lastly, collaborate on humanitarian relief. (EEAS, 2013).

In 2014, "China's Policy Paper on the EU" complemented the Strategic Agenda and highlighted the joined effort to build a "multipolar" world, by restating much of the commitments already expressed in the previous document (Montesano, 2019). The policy paper pragmatically expands on the first document to underline the cooperation across all fields, from aerospace to technology and from energy to "Artic affairs" (Xinhua, 2014).

Security relations came again to the center of attention in 2016 when the EC released the "Elements for a new EU strategy on China" (European Commission and HR of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, 2016). The EU worries of a *'divide-et-impera'* (divide and rule) attitude by China in eastern and southern Europe are underscored by the statement that China should "help[s] reinforce rules-based governance and regional security" (European Commission and HR of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, 2016, p.11). In the latest April 2019 "EU-China – A strategic outlook" the EU exhorts "cooperation with China to build "effective multilateralism" (European Commission and HR/VP contribution to the European Council, 2019, p.2). Additionally, the EU admits its fears over Chinese military expansion and "threats", at multiple levels, including cybersecurity, (European Commission and HR/VP contribution to the European Council, 2019, p.4).

Practically speaking, the EU and China have engaged in a number of "security domains". EU and China are participating in an anti-piracy operation in the Gulf of Aden which started in 2008 and has been extended until December 2020 (EU NAVFOR, 2018). Joint efforts can be observed under the umbrella of UN peacekeeping missions in Lebanon, Congo, Mali and South Sudan. In this regard, "China is the biggest contributor of troops among the five permanent UNSC [ed: United National Security Council] members." (Montesano, 2019).

Another important dimension to consider in EU-China security relations is their respective geographic area of interest: while some, like Men, point at this as a disadvantage that leads to disinterest and lack of emergency responses, others, like the Montesano, believe this makes the two actors "compatible security partners" since they "lack [of] direct

strategic overlap in their respective key areas of influence." (Men, 2017; Montesano, 2019, p.143).

Lastly, it should be noted again that most EU countries, 22 out of 27, are part of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the US-led security organization.

The EU, US and China triangle

Beside economic, strategic and political affairs, a critical element to consider in the EU-China relationship is the role of the U.S.

On the one hand, the EU-U.S. relation has been evolving with tariffs being or threated to be imposed on European-originated goods, the dismissal of the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP), the US support to Brexit and American threat to withdrawal from NATO and effective relinquishment from the Paris Agreement on climate change.

Nevertheless, most EU countries have entertained relations with the U.S. much earlier than with China, in some cases like Latvia and Poland, their perception of "statehood" depends on the presence of American military bases on their territory (ETNC, 2020a, p.21). Additionally, security ties build on existing historical and cultural relations that bond the European and the North-American continent: the role of the United Kingdom, France, Spain, Portugal and Netherland in "shaping" the US after its "discovery" can be compared to the one played by the later German, Greek and Italian immigration (Christiansen and Kirchner, 2019). The U.S. is also a top trading partner for the EU, having each other highly involved in FDI flows, and representing the tech leader from which

Europeans are very much dependent on in terms of "digital platforms" and "social media"(Christiansen and Kirchner, 2019).

On the other hand, while traditionally the EU's conceptualization of China has been limited to the economic realm of a strategic partner, recently a convergence towards the American perception of a "threat" can be observed in the updated EU-China Strategic Outlook of March 2019 where the EU defined China an "economic rival" and "system competitor" (European Commission and HR/VP contribution to the European Council, 2019, p. 1).

The 17+ 1 cooperation

Describing the EU-China relation, one cannot overlook the 17+1 cooperation which comprises 17 countries of the Central Eastern Europe (CEE): Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Greece (added in 2019), Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Macedonia, Montenegro, Poland, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, and Slovenia and China (+1). Of these countries, 12 are EU member states.

The 17+1 framework, formally referred to as China-CEEC (Central and Easter Europe Countries), was launched in June 2011 by Chinese Prime Minister Wen Jiabao in an effort to intensify China's engagement in the region.

With the Chinese-led cooperation in the CEE, the EU sees its integration process undermined, especially considering that some of these countries share a history with Russia, thus naturally gravitating further away from central European economies and generally enjoying less investments. Additionally, the EU is also concerned that the 17+1 might devise their own China foreign policy, thus defying the directives of the community.

The Three Seas Initiative

The Three Seas Initiative (3SI, TSI, I3M) is a partnership between countries of the Baltic, Artic and Black Sea (BABS) as forum of 12 EU/NATO states in East and Central Europe. The members are: Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia. This framework is relevant to this thesis because, similarly to the 17+1 cooperation, two of the five states analyzed are members of the 3SI.

The 3SI was initiated by the President Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović of Croatia and President Andrzej Duda of Poland in 2014 and in 2015 it became a reality. The first meeting of its members was held in Dubrovnik, Croatia in 2016. Together with the member states, there are also two partners: Germany and the United States. The 3SI holds a meeting and business forum once a year and in February 2020, an investment fund for commercial purposes was launched.

As stated on the official website, the objective of the 3SI are:

- Economic growth to increase the well-being of its citizens and to attract investments in infrastructure, trade and services;
- Security cooperation on energy, development of digital solutions for smart connectivity and collaboration over geopolitics matters of common interest;
- Climate goals to commonly work on reducing carbon emissions;
- Increase European cohesion to produce a more united and competitive Union. (Three Seas Initiative, 2020)

Given the novelty and the ever-expanding character of the 3SI, studies on the effects of the Initiative are limited. Criticism over the 3SI has mainly revolved around its divisive character as it seems to draw a line between eastern and western Europe thus compromising the integration efforts of the EU and wanting to limit German influence in the region. These efforts seem to signal a higher willingness to rely on the U.S. NATO-provided security to part from the traditional Russian influence. (Hu, 2018; Kurečić, 2018).

Methodology

Qualitative approach

To answer the problem formulation "**Why can Chinese-supplied 5G be perceived as a threat by EU countries?**", qualitative methods have been chosen.

As reported by Punch, "qualitative research is empirical research where the data are not in the form of numbers" (1998, p.4) which, in other words means that number-grounded sources, such as measurements and models, are not primarily used. Rather, the data collection is open to different types of texts and the analysis of the material is interpretative. (Flick, 2011) This happens because the questions posed by qualitative research are often how/why-based to seek "meanings, concepts, definitions, characteristics, metaphors, symbols, and descriptions of things." (Habib et al., 2014, p.9). This is the case with the problem formulation of this thesis.

Qualitative methods are often used to investigate social phenomena as they often are "explicitly political and intend[s] to transform the world with its practices"(Flick, 2007). More pragmatically speaking, qualitative research aims at understanding the world and produce knowledge about it.

In order to answer the research question, content analysis has been carried out on reports, newspaper articles, journals, official documents and different types of texts. The breath of the sources taken into consideration is described in the Literature Review section.

Theoretical Framework

Social Science Realism – Neorealism

Professor Kenneth Waltz is recognized as the father of social science realism as he formulated it in his 1979 book "Theory of international politics". He pertains to the school of Neorealism in the sense that he discarded the pessimist attribute of humankind and ignored "the ethics of statecraft" (Jackson, Sørensen, 2013, p.48) while he maintained from the Realist tradition that the basic level of analysis is the unit of the state and the anarchy in which it operates internationally. Writing first at the end of the 70's, Waltz subscribed to the current of Realpolitik thinkers that produced the Balance of Powers theory: in this sense, he believed that "a balance of power between states can be achieved, but war is always a possibility in an anarchical system" (Jackson, Sørensen, 2013, p.80).

Waltz makes the case for *capabilities* of each state which can be defined as distribution of power. Capabilities determine that one state is safe as much as the next one perceives the other as a "threat". In this sense, the goal of any state is *survival*. In considering *capabilities*, Waltz affirms that these can be divided in different categories such as "size of population and territory, resource endowment, economic capability, military strength, political stability and competence" (1979, p. 131) but ultimately, to assess the "score" or "rank" of a specific state, they need to be computed as a whole.

The three propositions at the base of Waltz's argumentation are:

1. The structure of the international arena stays the same despite changes in the units, being states, and in their interactions;
2. As long as the arrangement of the system is the same, the structure he conceives can be applied to units that greatly vary from each other;
3. Due to the latter proposition, theories developed for one structure can be applied to other structures as well.

He further explains that changes to the structure occur in two separate instances: either if the parts that form it modify in their arrangement or if there is a redistribution of capabilities among the units. Following the realist tradition, the international system, in Waltz's conception, is one of *self-help* where among states, the state of nature is war. In this sense, no one country holds the monopoly of force, legitimate or illegitimate that it is, leading to the definition of "politics in the absence of government" (1979, p.88) when referring to international relations. Elaborating on this concept, Waltz argues that interdependence is thus limited because of two reasons or constrains:

1. Redistribution of wealth. In the anarchical international system described by neorealism, if cooperation among units were to occur it would possibly result in gains for the involved partners. The conundrum lies in how the newly-acquired advantage will be used by the individual units: states spend resources to protect themselves and cooperation in the unregulated international environment could lead to an enhancement of one country's capability, thus diminishing the perceived safety of another. This is also the definition of relative gain.

This type of behavior is evident in American and European political discourse when referring to China's 5G. When China leads the effort in 5G rollout, questions on the future use and retaliation that might arise from China's enhanced *capability* in this field emerge.

2. Asymmetric interdependency. In other words, Waltz states that countries avoid being too dependent on each other for goods and services and they do so in two ways:
    a. exert high control over the imports they are highly dependent on and,
    b. achieve self-sufficiency through autarchic measures.

In the case of 5G, similar measures have been observed by the EU, China and the United States alike. The EU, by passing its new FDI provision and with previous anti-dumping and anti-trust laws, seeks to better regulate the flow of goods and services it needs from China while at the same time promoting a European environment for tech proliferation. Similarly, the US has engaged in the tariff war with China on a "make America great again" and "bring back jobs to America" campaign while blacklisting Huawei and other Chinese companies. Simultaneously, China has launched its Made in China 2025 to reduce international reliance on key markets to promote the domestic development of focal tech industries.

Waltz suggests great powers to pursue relative gains, instead of absolute gains. As posed by David Rosseau, “realists, therefore, assume that any potential exchange between states must exactly preserve the pre-existing balance of power” (2002, p.394) thus connecting neorealism with *zero-sum-game* theory: disregarding the total effect of a decision, Waltz encourages states to seek relative gains as every player in the international arena ultimately pursues individual benefit.

Coming from the Realpolitik School, Waltz employs the concepts of *balancing* and *bandwagoning*. The pundit conceives the world as made up by *great powers* that *balance* each other: he argues that great powers don’t associate with each other but rather seek to form alliances. Smaller and weaker states, for the purpose of their survival, align themselves with coalitions that match their *capabilities*. Simultaneously, Waltz argues that the whole international system is comprised of *balances* rather than *bandwagons* as the latter would result in the rise of hegemons. Broadly speaking, neorealism considers a bipolar world the most stable and least prone to war, in contrast to a unipolar and multipolar one. In a multipolar world, it is hard for *great powers* to assess each other’s *capabilities* and therefore make rational decisions to balance (Yavuz, 2018).

Waltz maintains the Realist tenet of an anarchical system but identifies a certain recurrence in the history of times in the fact that "there are patterns that recur and events that repeat themselves endlessly" (1979, p.66). The scholar points at the occurrence of wars: while the cause for eruption of a conflict might very across place and time, the units as well as the interactions that take place between them do not vary. Taking into consideration the Cold War and the unipolarity of the United States that emerged after its end, Waltz argues that another great power is bound to rise: already at the end of the 70's,

the scholar was pointing at the ascent of Asian powers, specifically referring to China as a to-be competitor in the international arena (2000).

China Threat Theory

The China Threat Theory is borne out of the neorealist school and is grounded in the belief that China will not raise peacefully but rather challenge, as a revisionist superpower, ideologically, militarily and economically the democratic liberal West, headed by the United States. In doing so, China is supposed to alter the status quo in its region, thus questioning the U.S. interests on issues like Taiwan, the South China Sea, etc.

While the China Threat Theory originated in the U.S. in the late 90's, it later gained traction in the EU as well, adapting to its domestic environment. The original, trifold theory can be explained as follows.

Ideologically, China represents the biggest and strongest Communist country. The China Threat Theory highlights the contrast between the democratic order that characterizes the West and Communism which identifies China. After the Cold War, China remains the stronghold of Communism, carrying on the decade-old East-West dispute. Together with the "red scare", nationalism is identified as specifically designed to fuel anti-American sentiments, pointing at the US as the "Great Enemy". (Broomfield, 2003, p.267)

Economically, China's rapid growth to reach the status of second largest economy in the world, rapidly closing the U.S. as a leader, is seen as a concern. In this field, often cited is the derived surplus that has resulted from years of economic reform, allowing China to accumulate vast foreign capital and a large trade deficit with America. According to the supporters of the China Threat Theory, the Chinese economic might is the result of unfair

trading practices (i.e. dumping, intellectual property theft, forced technology transfers) that have favored the export of Chinese products but limited foreign penetration of Chinese markets. (Broomfield, 2003)

Militarily, China's initiated wide modernization of its security forces alarmed threat theorists for three main reasons:

> "First, China's military spending is higher than the Chinese government reports. Second, China has purchased weapons that allow it to project power beyond its borders. Third, China is modernizing its military at a time when it faces very few external threats." (Al-Rodhan, 2007, p.48).

Threat theorists though contend that the securitazion argument refers to the regional context: China is not expected to go to war with the United States but rather enhance regional conflicts like Taiwan and the South China Sea ones (Broomfield, 2003).

Already at the beginning of the millennium, worries about an "information warfare" (2003, p.278) were concrete and shaping the discussion around U.S.-China security relations. In this sense it is remarked that:

> "Anti-China hands fear that the PRC will use information warfare as a pre-emptive strike against the United States in the future; what they find more disconcerting is that this would target not just the military establishment, but the American people themselves" (Broomfield, 2003, p.279).

In the European case, the China Threat Theory has been adjusted to meet local characteristics. Anastas Vangeli provides a comprehensive account of how such school of thought has been modeled on the EU in his paper "16+1 and the re-emergence of the China Threat Theory in Europe" (2018) where he asserts that while American China Threat is heavily grounded in the latter of the three arguments, the military one, the European discourse has disregard the security aspect to focus on the ideological and economic dimension. The belief that China represents a threat for Europe is fueled by the following:

1) Chinese activities in Europe have a diplomatic façade to hide secondary intents that are often thought of as illegal or immoral.
2) Economic issues have taken a security nuance in recent years. Since 2015 with the launch of the Made in China 2025 plan, the EU has identified a Chinese attempt at engaging in a sort of "arms race" (p.6) for technology supremacy as disputes in 5G, robotics and artificial intelligence have arisen. As previously explained, this problem is two-fold, with both an economic and security aspect to it.
3) A Chinese *divide-et-impera* strategy that has been lamented taking place in Central-Easter Europe. The EU regards the Chinese creation of specific country groupings (i.e. 17+1) as a way to undermine the former's unity and take advantage of its divisions.
4) The BRI and its European branches question the geopolitical and economical order of the EU, with doubts arising over the Chinese use of European infrastructures.
5) People-to-people exchanges are seen as a backdoor for Chinese influence as they can provide for a security point of entrance for China in Europe's affairs or leverage towards the obtainment of good publicity.

6) Ideologically speaking, China is seen on the same playing field of Russia, forming with it “an anti-democratic axis” (p.6).

In the following section, for each case, the theoretical framework illustrated will be applied in order to answer the problem formulation. Specifically, each country-specific analysis will see a section addressing Neorealism and the China Threat Theory: the ultimate result of this process will be illustrated in the Conclusions of the Analysis.

Analysis

In this chapter, the methodological and theoretical framework laid above are applied to the selected cases of Germany, Italy, Denmark, Czech Republic and Estonia.

Following the structure of EU-China official Dialogues, the analysis will cover the economic, political and strategic aspects of the considered countries and China. Moreover, the American "influence" over the pair will be illustrated for completion of the argumentation.

Germany

In its 5G discussions, no official ban has been issued: of the three biggest telecommunications companies in Germany (Deutsche Telekom, Vodafone and Telefonica) two, being Deutsche Telekom and Vodafone, have confirmed they will use Huawei equipment in the construction of the German 5G network.

Germany represents the biggest Huawei market, holding the largest share of mobile phones of this brand (14%) and it relies for 60% of its mobile infrastructure system on the Chinese-provider which implies that "the replacement of Huawei base stations in Germany alone is estimated to cost €6.4 billion." (Rühlig & Björk, 2020, p.21). The Chinese ambassador to Germany addressed 5G concerns stating that "if Germany were to take a decision that leads to Huawei's exclusion from the German market, there will be consequences." (Czuczka & Arons, 2019).

Germany spells out its plan for 5G rollout in a 28-pages document published by the Federal Ministry of Transport and Digital Infrastructure (2017): put at the top of the strategy is a direct reference to China (and Japan) as it is stated that "Germany and Europe must not fall short in the competition with these countries." (Federal Ministry of Transport and Digital Infrastructure, 2017, p.3). Two noteworthy elements stand out from such statement.

First, Germany calls for a communitarian-wide action on 5G. Specifically, the European concerted effort is reaffirmed under the scope of providing security and working together to build a standardization framework on 5G: this type of strategy is a continuation of German efforts to widen the 1:1 debate around economic, and in general strategic issues, with China in the European forum.

Secondly, the official document defines the 5G rollout as a *competition*. Inserted in the wider picture of a "competition-oriented market[s]" (Federal Ministry of Transport and Digital Infrastructure, 2017, p.3), 5G assumes the characteristic of any other product or service and seems to lose the controversial connotation that has come to definite it. This principle was repeated by German Chancellor Angela Merkel when she stated in December 2019 to be "against the exclusion of a company in principle" (Becker, 2020).

Generally speaking, China's relationship with Germany is the best developed one in Europe as China is Germany's largest export market and Germany is China's largest trading partner in the EU. As stated by Samrai, "the demand for German exports created by China's rapid growth helped Germany weather the global financial crisis and reassert its economic dominance in the eurozone." (2019). In recent years though, the problem of Chinese FDI and merger and acquisitions (M&A) has become a hot topic in Germany, following high levels of investments in key technological industries such as robotics and renewable energy. In 2017, for example, of the €180 billion Sino-German trade, "almost 50 percent of that figure was in machines and hi-tech equipment." (Sullivan, 2019). Specifically, the case of the M&A of Kuka, a German leader in robotics, by Guangdong Midea in 2015 sparked public interest on the Chinese takeover of German main tech companies. Germany is part of the "Big Three" with France and the United Kingdom, as it is one of biggest destination of

China's outflow of investments (though this trend changed for 2019 (Kratz et al., 2020). As previously explained, this Chinese FDI wave motivated Germany to spearhead the EU effort to increase screening of extra-European FDI which eventually led to the new EU regulation in March 2019.

In spite of this, economic ties between Germany and China remain strong and some point at the fact that Beijing has been offering advantages to big German companies like BAFS, BMW and Allianz as well as allocating better deals on the BRI to Siemens to keep Germany in China's graces on the 5G matter (ETNC, 2020a). Recently, Siemens signed a contract with Huawei to jointly develop north German's railway (DB) Global System for Mobile Communications – Railway (GSM-R), with Huawei replacing 40% of the GSM-R components. Furthermore, in 2018 Huawei announced its participation in transforming Duisburg, "as the European economic hub of the Belt and Road Initiative", in a 'smart city' where 5G will play a central role in converting the town "from a traditional industrial city into a service-oriented" one (Huawei, 2018). The German car sector has also joined hands with Huawei as did Audi to "strategic partnership" signed in 2018. (Grillneder & Barth, 2018). China represents 20% of the German global car sales, with some like VW, that "earn[s] almost half its sales revenue in China" (Bennhold & Ewing, 2020).

The 2017 5G Strategy only briefly touches on the problem of security of 5G networks, again proposing not only a national approach to cybersecurity but also a European and international one. In 2017, cybersecurity was not at the center of the discourse on 5G matters as this concept became prominent later with the Huawei case. In February of 2020 in fact, the German leadership drafted and adopted a position paper (Securing Germany's

digital sovereignty - setting standards for secure 5G networks, CDU/CSU parliamentary group in the German Bundestag) where guidelines to ensure safety of 5G networks are outlined. In such document, 5G and the control of its infrastructure "by other states" is directly linked to the "sovereignty" of Germany: an emphasis is put on the fact that any "governmental and non-governmental actor" could compromise the security of 5G networks, admitting that no measure or regulation will render the telecommunication networks "bulletproof" (CDU/CSU parliamentary group in the German Bundestag, 2020). In the position paper there is again a call for a European-wide effort towards ensuring communitarian cybersecurity and "protect[ing] from hostile foreign acquisitions" as it recommends that the EU 5G toolkit is used alongside national regulations.

During the discussion on 5G and Huawei's participation to its rollout, Chinese cyberattacks were a source of debate with German companies and intelligence institutions revealing that they represent the largest share of digital threats. Moreover, it has been reported that these cyberattacks are "now increasingly interested in obtaining information on German foreign, economic, and defense policy as well" (Düben, 2020). It is in this framework that reproaches have been voiced by German business groups such as the Federation of German Industries (BDI) and the Association of Family-Owned Enterprises who call for a heavier securitization of 5G infrastructures. (Düben, 2020)

In a less popular part of the German debate, 5G has acquired a political nuance due to the connections between the use of this technology and violation of human rights like infringement of privacy and collection of DNA for ethnic profiling purposes. Siemens, as indicated by MERICS (Kratz et al., 2020), has been found to have a role in such activities in

China and so does at least another German company, the Max Plank Society. Along the human rights discourse, Germany has also been faced with growing uncertainty over the BRI project and the associated Chinese influence which is interlaced with 5G discussions. For example, populist parties have been found to be the target of Chinese efforts as did happen for example with the Bürgerrechtsbewegung Solidarität (BüSo) party which disseminated ads in main German locations that read “the future of Germany is the Silk Road!” (Benner et al.,2018).

In connection with the 5G German debate, it is also important to take into consideration the American position. Firstly, the “threats” that have been coming out of Washington over German adoption of Chinese 5G have been met with scorn and labelled as hypocritical in Berlin. The American National Security Agency (NSA) scandal with the Snowden revelations, which uncovered the tapping of Chancellor Merkel’s phone, is still fresh in German minds hence US pressures to side with it over cybersecurity concerns do not find fertile soil in Germany (ETNC, 2020a). When considering their American ally, the German leadership regards the export limitations like the Export Control Reform Act (ECRA) of higher urgency: Germany is in fact, one of the top exporters of high-tech to the United States and further regulation on this type of goods, as well as dual-use products, can severely impact the economic American-German relation. Together with worries over tech exports, the automotive sector is sensitive to American humors, as the U.S. represents a big market to German car sales. President Trump has complained about German trade surplus with the U.S. since the beginning of his administration and recent threats of imposed tariffs on

European car exports have the effect of undermining German-American ties. (Wintour, 2020)

Under a Neorealism lens, it is clear that Germany is seeking its *survival* through ensuring that its economic interests remain intact in the Chinese market. To do so, Berlin has been pursuing an "appeasement" line with Beijing while trying to reconcile both American and Chinese needs: on the one hand, it recognizes the need for U.S. importance for its economic activities. On the other side, Germany stands as the leader in the Eurozone hence it exploits its position as a *great power* to call for an EU-wide action on 5G, not only to show Americans the German commitment to the topic but display also a communitarian-wide one. It is also doing so that Germany seems to use the European umbrella to shield itself from Chinese criticism and keep trade alive with China thus calling for an EU *competition among states* on 5G infrastructure (referring to Nokia and Ericsson) is a way to protect the German market while not directly referring to Chinese potential threats.

Under the China Threat Theory, Germany has framed the issue of 5G mainly in the economic sphere. As described above, political discussions are only marginal, with safety corners only connect to economic ones: fear of espionage is intertwined with unfair economic practices that have been lamented for a decade. In the German 5G context, the "vested interests" that come with Chinese diplomacy and people-to-people exchanges are interpreted in an economic key, with constant fear of commercial retaliation by the "systemic competitor" (European Commission and HR/VP contribution to the European Council, 2019, p. 1). Worries connected to projects like the BRI and 17+1 are, primarily,

inserted in discussions over economic interest or, secondly, remitted to EU fora for political debate.

In conclusion, it can be deduced that Chinese-provided 5G represents a threat for Germany under economic circumstances: allowing Chinese companies like Huawei to build its 5G brings Germany to believe that future cyber-attacks through this infrastructure might lead to a leak of industrial information. Simultaneously, pressures *not* to ban Huawei as a provider also represent a threat in the measure that an opposite decision might spark retaliation on the German automotive sector in China.

Italy

Italy has not banned Huawei from the development of its 5G network. It is also the first country of the G7 to have joined the Chinese BRI.

In December 2019, the Italian Parliamentary Committee for the Security of the Republic (COPASIR) presented its report on the "policies and instruments for cybersecurity protection and IT safety, to safeguard citizens, institutions, critical infrastructures and businesses of national strategic interest" whose research started the prior year. In this occasion, the COPASIR highlighted Huawei's potential connections to the Chinese government as well as cite the Chinese 2017 National Security Law, coming to the conclusion that worries over the intervention of such companies in the Italian 5G infrastructure networks are "largely grounded". The Committee proceeded to suggest that, "it should be considered to exclude the Chinese companies [ed: Huawei and ZTE] from the provision of technology for 5G networks". (COPASIR, 2019) Together with this recommendation is also one to strengthen the standards for companies' access in the implementation of the 5G technology. Prime Minister (PM) Giuseppe Conte has been pursuing the latter strategy by the expanding the "Golden Powers": Golden Powers are special powers that the Italian Government can exert over matters that concern issues of defense and national security. In March of 2019, Golden Powers were amended to include 5G: to this regard it was established that any company that stipulates contracts to acquire goods or services of high technological content from individuals outside of the EU to build or manage 5G infrastructures has to notify the competent authorities in the government.

The document presented by COPASIR also describes an accident between Vodafone, Europe's biggest phone company, and Huawei over the placement of 'backdoors' in the Italian networks: reports from Vodafone emerged in April 2019 regarding the uncovering of backdoors in Huawei's equipment which granted access to businesses and individuals to the Chinese provider in 2009. On this topic, a Bloomberg's article notes how instances like these ones were brought up again in 2011 and 2012 over a "hidden telnet deamon" which was responsible for "giving anyone aware of the backdoor's existence the ability to take administrative control of a router" (Lepido, 2019). Huawei "is a partner of three mobile operators in Italy (Wind-Tre, Vodafone and TIM), covering between 20% and 30% of their mobile networks and 10% of the landlines of Tim (Italy's main phone operator)." (ETNC, 2020a, p.102).

In economic terms, China and Italy are a close pair. As previously mentioned, Italy was the first G7 country to sign a MoU on the BRI with China in March 2019, with deals for a total of USD $2.5 billion. Italy is in fact strategic to Chinese interests in Europe as its ports of Genoa and Trieste in the Mediterranean are end-points for the sea routes of the BRI.

China represents the third largest import market for Italy as well as the ninth biggest exporter. Although Italy has been one of the top destinations for Chinese FDI, the signing of the MoU did not result, in 2019, in increased investments from China as the trade imbalance indeed deepened from USD $12 billion to USD $18 billion (Zaneli & Capriati 2020). A puzzling element in Sino-Italian relations is the fact that Italy was a co-signer, together with France and Germany, of the letter addressed to the EU Council on FDI screening in February 2017 which later, in March 2019, became an official communitarian regulation. This is due

to the fact that in 2018, following general elections, Italy formed a new government, led by two parties that have different views on China than their predecessors. In spite of this, Huawei announced in July 2019 that it plans to invest USD $3.1 billion over the course of three years in Italy if a "'transparent, efficient and fair' use of its [ed: Italian] 'Golden Power' on 5G network development" (Pollina, 2019) can be assured: Huawei asked for revision of not only extra-European providers but also EU vendors to ensure a level playfield for all the actors involved in the 5G rollout.

In the Italian debate, 5G has not raised specific political arguments. In the midst of the 5G debate, a diplomatic dispute emerged in November 2019 when a group of Italian MPs held a videoconference with Hong Kong activist Joshua Wong. This event prompted the Chinese Ambassador to Italy, Li Junhua, to declare that it was "irresponsible" for the Italian politicians to "interfere" with "China's internal politics" (Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the Republic of Italy, 2019). This did not stop Italy to adopt a resolution on Hong Kong on December 3, 2019 that followed an earlier EU initiative.

In relation to the 5G case, it is important to note that one of Huawei's biggest centers for Research and Development (R&D) outside of China is in Milan (ETNC, 2020a). To this regard, the center has been found to develop dual-use technologies and it was blacklisted by the United States. Another Italian partnership with Huawei concerns the Center for Advanced Studies, Research and Development in Sardinia that is working on "public security monitoring through facial recognition" (Kratz et al, 2020) which is a technology reported to be used in Chinese surveillance activities by Huawei.

Strategically speaking, for China to have access to Italian ports represents a key component of its BRI strategy. Italy, however, is a fundamental American ally: on the Italian territory, there are eight American military bases. The elected government in 2018, which is not the current ruling one but the responsible for the MoU on the BRI, campaigned heavily with an anti-China nationalist rhetoric that resembled much of Trump's "America first" paradigm: specifically, populist parties used the argument that low-cost Chinese imports undermine the Italian production, which rests on a manufacturing industry made up of small and medium enterprises (SMEs), incapable of competing with China's cut-price goods. Once elected, the previous government shifted rhetoric and China came to embody an important source of economic benefit for Italy, which has been coming in conflict with the EU over its large debt/GDP ratio: with the BRI, Italy somewhat regained a strategic position in the Mediterranean that was lost with the Cold War, when it represented a bridge between American and Soviet interests (ETNC, 2020a). The latest administration has been more cautious in regards of security, with PM Conte highlighting the efforts taken by the government to expand cybersecurity regulations to defend the Italian "national interests" (Italian Government, 2019). Foreign Minister (FM) Luigi Di Maio, who has been particularly vocal in supporting Beijing, stated at the last Munich Conference of Security in February 2020 that a "stronger and more determined Europe" should be built in order to tackle "global geopolitical competition, especially among the United States and China". He proceeded to state that there is no reason to "question our [ed: Italian] role within the framework of NATO and of transatlantic relations" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation (MAECI), 2020).

Following the signature of the MoU on the BRI, the Italian government was faced with American backlash, with worries over the NATO partnership. On the topic of 5G, however, American counterparts acknowledged Italian efforts to protect its national security as it happened in October 2019 during a Joint Press Conference between Trump and Italian President Mattarella. (U.S. Embassy and Consulate in Italy, 2019). The Italian commitment to NATO was further highlighted by FM Di Maio during the Munich Security Conference in February 2020 when he stated that "Italy has no intentions of changing its framework of alliances: we are committed to the Euro-Atlantic, the EU and NATO", underlining that the participation to the BRI is for "commercial reasons" and "economic advantages" (Ansa, 2020).

Using neorealism to explain the Italian case, one would conclude that Italy is *bandwagoning* with the United States on the 5G matter. In spite of events that would indicate the Italian government to bandwagoning on the opposite side, China, the latest assertions by the Prime and Foreign Minister give reassurance to the Atlantic alliance. Simultaneously, the Italian strategic position in the Mediterranean seems to be a good opportunity to incite *competition* of, not only China and the United States but also Russia, which traditionally entertains close ties with Italy. Italian *capabilities* allow the country to play the *competition* card considering that it struggles to maintain internal political stability which in turn affects foreign policies and economic growth. In this sense, an *asymmetric interdependence* can be observed in the case of the United States with defense mechanisms under NATO and China with *economic exchanges*. PM Conte's decision to reinforce the Italian cybersecurity apparatus while not outright banning Huawei from the market is a calculated move to

satisfy American pressures on Chinese-provided 5G while not upsetting China: this is a clear example of a *zero-sum-game*.

Now looking at the China Threat Theory, it is possible to identify most of its elements in the Italian discourse on China. Taking into account the move of the Italian government to extend Golden Powers in the sense of 5G, it is clear that there are fears over economic acquisitions by China that can spill over the security realm. Made in China 2025 has been cited as a source of "threat" to Italian SMEs as well as a menace to technology infrastructures, as with the 5G case. The BRI plan has also been a source of debate on the logistical side, with worries over granting "too much" access to Europe to China through the Italian naval ports. Vested diplomatic interests in the case of China have been identified mainly in connection to human discussions, as with the case of Joshua Wong's parliamentary hearing. The Italian approach towards the so-called *divide-et-impera* Chinese attitude has been mixed, as it was described above, with the 2017 government pushing for a unitary European attitude on Chinese FDI while the 2018 administration defied pressures from its allies to be the first G7 country signing the MoU on the BRI. Simultaneously, the topic of 5G has pushed the 2019-20 Italian leadership to seek closer collaboration with the EU as can be testified by the common regulations proposed and adopted on cybersecurity. People-to-people exchanges have not been raised as an issue as well as the China and Russia pair: again, Russia has been historically close to Italian governments and, while the two Asian countries are in a "strategic cooperation", according to Italian security services, they don't seem to represent a normative danger to the country.

In conclusion, it can be asserted that Chinese-provided 5G represents a "threat" to Italy in relation to its national security, which is intrinsically connected to American interests

since the U.S. holds large stakes in NATO's protection of Italy. It can be argued that Chinese 5G might impact also Sino-Italian economic ties given their volume and the heavy participation of Huawei in Italy's telecommunication system: if the Italian government were to take a harsher line on the involvement of Chinese providers, retaliations on Italian economic exchanges with China can be expected to cause considerable disruption.

Denmark

The Kingdom of Denmark hasn't banned Huawei but TDC, the country's top network operator, has excluded the Chinese provider and announced in March 2019 it will continue the 5G rollout with Ericsson. The Faroe Islands came to the center of the scene when several news sources reported threats coming from the Chinese Ambassador if Huawei were to be cut out from the Faroes's 5G deployment. Tele Greenland, Greenland's biggest telco operator, declared it will use Ericsson to build its 5G network (Regnier & Morland, 2020). Denmark is estimated to depend for a 50% on Huawei's mobile infrastructure (Rühlig & Björk, 2020).

The "5G Action Plan for Denmark" does not mention China, Huawei or foreign competitors but there is ample mention of them in the Danish "Intelligence Risk Assessment 2019" and in the "Foreign and Security Policy Strategy 2019-2020" (Danish Energy Agency, 2019; Danish Defence Intelligence Service [DDIS], 2019; Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark, 2018).

In the Intelligence Risk Assessment of 2019, Chinese 5G in mentioned in relation to the challenges that it poses on the global scene and in connection to the 2017 Chinese Intelligence Law. Furthermore, China is listed as a country that will develop strong digital capabilities to carry out cyberespionage and hacking activities (DDIS, 2019). This statement is reinforced in March 2019 in "The Cyber Threat Against Denmark" report by the Centre for Cybersecurity where it is asserted that "[Russia and] China, in particular, hold sophisticated

cyber capacities and are extremely active in the cyber realm." (Center for Cybersecurity [CFCS], 2019, p.5)

The "Foreign and Security Policy Strategy 2019-2020" sums up Danish perceptions of China as it is states that "China is stepping forward on the global scene with ever greater self-confidence, economic strength and demands for more influence" (p.6) and that "the country is gaining ever greater influence on global norms and values, and it will make a major impact on the future of the world" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark, 2018, p.8). Moreover, in a statement released in September 2019 by the Danish Ministry of Defense, it is indicated that "the [ed: cybersecurity] threat, as we see it, comes to a large extent from foreign nations that don't have our best interests in mind", following the mention of Russia and then China (2019).

Lastly, Denmark occupies the 2020 year-long chairmanship for the Nordic Defense Cooperation (NORDEFCO) and in January of the same year it declared that the alliance will "develop knowledge and explore possibilities for cooperation within the area of cyber security with the aim to improve our resilience against dangers from growing cyber threats" (Danish Ministry of Defence, 2020).

Economically speaking, China now represents the second largest non-European trading partner for Denmark, with the U.S. occupying the pole position. The Sino-Danish business relation grew stronger in the last decade as a result of the signing of a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership (CSP) in 2008 and more recently an updated version of the CSP was issued to further the bilateral cooperation. China's relevancy to Denmark though has been surging rapidly with its new stakes in the Artic: while historically the Artic has been primarily

dominated by its regional actors, China has recently emerged as a new player after 2017, when it was first included in the BRI routes and then, in 2018, when China released a White Paper on its Artic Policy thus adding the region to the economic and infrastructure interests of China. Denmark has direct stakes in the Artic, as the Faroes Islands and Greenland are part of the Kingdom, thus expanding the issue of 5G to other areas such as security and influence.

Strategically speaking, in fact, the Faroes Islands and Greenland represent key territories for Denmark as not only they are resource-rich, but, with climate change, they can become the center of new sea routes. From a security point of view, both territories adhere to the Danish foreign and security policy which first, puts them under the umbrella of NATO and second, gives Denmark the right to challenge any investment that raises concerns in the abovementioned areas. This was the case with two Chinese acquisitions in Greenland, a naval station at Grønnedal and the construction of two airports in in Nuuk and Ilulissat (Forsby, 2018; Gronholt-Pedersen & Qiu, 2019). Furthermore, 5G is one element of the Chinese Made in China 2025 plan, and in the Danish case, MIC25 was recognized by the Confederation of Danish Industries as a "threat" as on one hand, "it will be more difficult for Danish companies to export to – and be present in – China. And on the other hand, Danish export companies will face fierce competition in markets in the rest of the world" (Olsen, 2019).

Politically speaking, Denmark has undergone a transformation from the beginning of the millennia in the way it voices human rights concerns, as Forsby puts it "from 'megaphone diplomacy' to 'quiet diplomacy'" (2018, p.37). It has been identified that Denmark prefers to

express its opinion on the matter of political values through the EU-China dialogue. (ETNC, 2019). In regard to the 5G deployment, a few Danish organizations, such as Scanview Systems and the Copenhagen Bio Science Park, have been found to work with Chinese partners in tech projects that infringe privacy and supposedly violate human rights (Kratz et al., 2020).

Aside from the economic, political and security argument, American influence over the 5G rollout in Denmark seems to be a prevalent topic of discussion. Denmark has always been particularly close to the US, especially under the NATO partnership, considering also there is an American air base in Thule, Greenland. To further increase the proximity between Denmark and the US is the opt-out clause that Denmark maintains vis-à-vis the EU when it comes to policies on security and defense (ETNC, 2020a). American interests towards the Kingdom peaked when Trump allegedly sought to purchase Greenland in August 2019: his assertion was dismissed as "absurd" by Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen, which lead to the cancellation and rescheduling of the US President upcoming visit to Denmark (Pilkington, 2019). In the 5G debate, Denmark was among the first countries to leave out Huawei from the network rollout to opt for Ericsson (Gronholt-Pedersen, 2019). Recently, the US Ambassador to Denmark, Carla Sands, stated that

> "Close cooperation between the United States, the Faroe Islands and Greenland will result in economic and social progress. This would also boost national security for the nations involved, making it more difficult for nations with unreliable agendas to gain a foothold in the Arctic Region." (Joensen & Rana, 2020)

Preceded by similar statements on Huawei and the Chinese government in November 2019, it is clear that the Ambassador in referring to China. For Denmark though, it is unclear whether these declarations come "from a state security or a commercial perspective" (Dahl, 2019). From the trade perspective, the US remains Denmark's largest non-European trading partner, maintaining a key role in FDI flows. (ETNC, 2020a).

Applying Neorealism to the Danish case, it can be observed that Denmark has multiple *capabilities* to take into consideration, not only of the great powers at play like the United States and China, but also internally, with its territories of the Faroe Islands and Greenland. The strategic role that Denmark plays in the Artic region becomes a prevalent lens through which analyzing the Danish stances on 5G: given the traditional alliance between Denmark and the U.S., it is difficult for the Kingdom to consider a close strategic proximity with China as free of contention. In order to play a *zero-sum-game* in the international system, Denmark seeks to maintain intact its economic relation with China while not upsetting the U.S. This is obtained by devolving the topic to either the Artic territories or the EU forum. As it was previously explained, the reluctance to define 5G as a security matter, in which Demark can intervene on behalf of its Artic territories, leaves Greenland and the Faroe Islands to make their own decision which ultimately unburdens the Danish government from criticism. A similar behavior has been described on the human rights topic, where Denmark prefers to keep a low profile while enforcing its values and believes through the EU fora. Furthermore, one can deduce that the *zero-sum-game* is pursed also through the NORDEFCO, which becomes a channel for *competition* but also cooperation among states

with diverse *capabilities*. It can be concluded that Denmark *bandwagons* with the United States.

Taking into consideration the China Threat Theory, Denmark subscribes to most of its aspects. Again, the alleged "threat" coming from the Chinese Ambassador on the 5G issue in the Faroe Islands can be inscribed in the wider spectrum of a "Chinese diplomatic façade". Secondly, Denmark juxtaposes concerns regarding the BRI and economic acquisitions that might determine security implications with the Polar Silk Road, the China-defined ambitions in the Artic. These fears motivated the block on the Chinese acquisitions in Greenland described above as well as the ulterior FDI tools that Denmark wants to apply nationally to strengthen the European ones. On the topic of 5G, the TDC-Huawei case was also clearly a reaction to security concerns, as these were extensively expressed in the official documents previously cited. On the topic of cybersecurity, the China-Russia pair remains strong in the official language since it has been identified for multiple years as a source of cyber threats but there isn't a normative component that can be found in these settings. Similarly, 5G isn't described as a tool to *divide-et-impera* or in the context of people-to-people exchanges.

In conclusion, it can be asserted that Chinese-provided 5G represents a threat to Denmark primarily in the security realm as the Danish economy is heavily digitalized thus exposed to cyber-attacks, which China is identified to be one of the main sources of by Danish official bodies. As illustrated by the China Threat Theory though, the security concerns are heavily interlinked with economic ones which reflect a tit-for-tat case: 5G impediments, especially regarding Huawei, might result in economic retaliations against Denmark. To complicate the situation are the Artic actors: the economic and security

argument is surely fundamental for these Danish territories, but they have to be taken into account together with the American presence in the region. It is indispensable to consider the security cooperation that Denmark and the U.S. run within the NATO alliance. Finally, one can deduce that Chinese-provided 5G represents an economic and security threat that is coupled with a potential danger to the American role in the Danish Kingdom.

Czech Republic

The Czech Republic has been defined as “Europe’s loudest Huawei critic” (Allen-Ebrahimian, 2020) after its National Cyber and Information Security Agency (NÚKIB) issued a statement in December 2018 where it declared that Huawei and ZTE represent a “threat against information security” (NÚKIB, 2018, p.2). In September 2019, the statement was further sustained by the director of the Czech Intelligence Service (BIS), Micheal Kouldelka, who declared that “letting PRC’s companies into critical infrastructure amounts to handing the CCP the keys [ed: to the Czech Republic]” (Jirouš, 2019). Amid tensions within the Czech leadership, Huawei has not been outright banned, following the EU decision.

While the Czech security agencies agree on Chinese provided technology, the Czech President, Milos Zeman, has been a hard opposer of such declarations, threatening retaliation against the two bodies and other political leaders who have sided with them. While the figure of the President of the Republic is marginal, the government elected in 2017 with Andrej Babiš as Prime Minister, has been characterize by a reduced pro-China approach. Following the 2018 NÚKIB report, Babiš met with the Chinese Ambassador to the Czech Republic, Zhang Jianmin, and the subsequent statement issued by the Embassy caused for an escalation of tensions between the Chinese and Czech parties (Embassy of the People’s Republic of China in the Czech Republic, 2018): while the Chinese side asserted that Babiš recognized a mistake being made in the NÚKIB report, the PM denied such affirmations, describing them as “nonsense and a lie” (Willoughby, 2019).

After the release of the NÚKIB report, PM Babiš banned Huawei from the Czech government central administrative offices and prompted "160 public and private operators of critical infrastructure to analyze any risks and act accordingly" (Loptaka & Kahn, 2020). Frictions between Huawei and the Czech Republic continued to grow as, in January 2019, the telco company was excluded by a public tender to build a tax portal (Hover & Muller, 2019) and Prague's Mayor, Zdeněk Hřib, first asked for a risk analysis of Huawei's use in the capital's networks and then, in January 2020, withdrew the sister city agreement with Beijing to substitute it with Taipei, Taiwan (Šimalčik, 2020).

Similarly, to Germany, Huawei and ZTE had entered the political debate long before American suggestions. In fact, BIS, in its annual 2014 report, stated that the two companies "pose[s] a potential threat to the Czech Republic" as "both [companies] are long suspected of cooperating with Chinese security services and of engaging in spying activities." (BIS, 2014, p. 16). The document further makes the case for "the Chinese embassy [to] employ intelligence officers serving under diplomatic cover", "aimed to strengthen and extend their [Chinese] influence in the Czech Republic", specifically "Chinese intelligence services attempted to make use of economic arguments in order to promote Chinese political interests in the Czech Republic" (p.10). The report continues by stating that China uses a *divide-et-impera* approach towards Czechia in relation to the EU and NATO (p.10).

These statements counter the previous BIS report, made in 2011, where it was said that "Chinese intelligence services operating in the Czech Republic pose no direct threat to Czech citizens." (BIS, 2011, p.10)

As previously noted, the Czech Republic is part of the 17+1 partnership and of NATO. In the context of the 17+1, the Czech Republic has grown dissatisfied with the results of its economic cooperation with China in the almost-10 years it's been established. Inbound FDI coming from China represented only 0,5% of the total figure for the year 2017 and in 2018 China "accounted for 7.4% of the Czech Republic's total trade turnover, but only 1.3% of total Czech exports, with massive imports resulting in a trade deficit of €19,941 million with the PRC." (ETNC, 2020a, p.41). Visits from President Xi Jinping is 2016 and Foreign Minister Wang Yi in 2019 frame economic cooperation with multi-million euros deals signed. Referring to the €10 billion investments publicized in the 2016 Xi's visit, Turcsányi reports that to February 2020, only €1 billion was invested as almost entirely the result of the activities of the company CEFC China Energy. CEFC has acquired a diverse portfolio of Czech assets but, faced with financial debt, the company was taken over by CITIC, a Chinese bank. Given the diverse investment portfolio of CEFC, CITIC later decided to disinvest in the Czech Republic (Turcsányi, 2020).

From the Czech side, a company has been particularly successful in the Chinese market is the PPF group: in 2018, PPF signed an MoU on 5G testing with Huawei as the former controls Czech largest network provider O2 as well as Telenor and CETIN. (Hover & Muller, 2019) While PPF is the largest Czech company, it is also registered to pay taxes in the Netherlands. (Bachulska & Turcsányi, 2019).

The weight of the EU is economically far greater for the Czech Republic, with "the trade turnover with the EU in 2018 account[ing] for 74.7% of the Czech Republic's total trade, with exports at 84%" and investments flows adding up to 88% of total inbound FDI for 2017" (ETNC, 2020a, p.41). Being so interlaced with the EU's economy, the Czech Republic is

particularly sensitive to any trade matter that affects the EU, specifically the German automotive industry.

The political dialogue around 5G is divided in the Czech Republic: on one side there are pro-China leaders like President Zeman and the Secretary of the Czech Communist Party (Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (Komunistická strana Čech a Moravy, KSČM), Vojtěch Filip and on the other stand China critics like Prague's Mayor Zdeněk Hřib and the security agencies BIS and NÚKIB. While the arguments of both sides mainly reside on economic and cybersecurity criteria, there is also a normative aspect to the China-Czech relations: the two countries share a Communist past. The way Czech politicians perceive China can be connected to their need to reaffirm or rather deny such history, as it is the case with the Prague- Beijing sister agreement: the failure of the sister agreement is reported to be a 'one-China policy' clause on the basis of which Prague was indicating support to the principle of one-China but, the anti-communist revolution lead by Václav Havel in 1989 is still fresh in Czech minds and supporting such statement would mean to forget the democratic and human rights efforts that the Czech Republic has made thus far (Šimalčík, 2020). The China critic side has also been particularly outspoken in connecting Chinese influence on Czech politicians, as the KSČM and Zeman, and companies, such as Huawei. To this regard, a link between the CCP and the Huawei's section in the Czech Republic has been identified as well as attempts from Huawei to promote the BRI on China's behalf: this is the case with the now dismantled Czech-China Center at Charles University in Prague. (Jirouš, 2019)

The security argument is the most prevalent one surrounding discussions on 5G: what the NÚKIB and BIS started led to the Prague 5G Security Conference in May 2019 which brought 32 heads of state in the Czech capital to discuss cybersecurity and 5G and resulted in the so-called "Prague Proposals", a framework to better help "in preparation for the roll out of 5G and future network" (Government of the Czech Republic, 2019).

American influence has been a relevant part of the 5G debate in the Czech Republic. Following the publication of the NÚKIB report in December 2018, Czech Foreign Minister, Tomáš Petříček, visited the US in February 2019 and a month later PM Babiš was invited by Trump to Washington. The director of BIS, Kouldelka, accompanied the PM in his meeting and, in a visit to the CIA headquarters, was awarded the George Tenet prize for his efforts on cybersecurity. This was perceived as a strong signal of American support to the Czech intelligence work on Chinese tech companies (ETNC, 2020a).

Additionally, it should be noted that on May 7th, 2020 the Czech Republic signed a "Joint Declaration on 5G Security with the U.S." where it is stated that "the United States and the Czech Republic support discussions on 5G security within the North Atlantic Treaty Organization" (U.S. Department of State, 2020) hinting at a closer collaboration between U.S./NATO and the Czech Republic. In the Declaration, political remarks are made on the "respect for intellectual property rights", "ethical corporate behavior" of suppliers and their regard for "rule of law" (U.S. Department of State, 2020): as it will be showed in the Estonian case, this very much follows the same structure of that earlier Joint Declaration, displaying the same type of political affirmations.

Taking into consideration the above illustrated economic, political, security aspects as well as the US role, one can apply Neorealism to the Czech case and find that security of the state, hence its *survival,* has been taken so seriously that it has sparked dividing debate within the Czech political elites. At the same time, the Czech Republic realizes that much of its *capabilities* derive from the EU and NATO: this can be observed for the economic realm where is much dependent form EU markets for its goods and services and for the safety sphere as it has traditionally looked at the U.S. as the number one security provider against Russia. As a minor player in the EU chessboard, the Czech Republic doesn't uphold the principle of *competition* as much as Germany does but it shares German calls for a closer European alliance on tech policy topics. Given the low economic *interdependency* that characterizes the Czech-China pair, one can affirm that this does not represent the main reason for conflict between the two. It is rather the security component that heavily motivates the dispute over Chinese 5G providers in the Czech Republic. Nonetheless, the Czech Republic is *bandwagoning,* whether it's with EU and/or the US remains an open question: the latest "United States – Czech Republic Joint Declaration on 5G Security" suggests a closer alliance with the transatlantic partner yet Czechia remains close to its EU neighbors as can be seen by the wide mention of their 5G-related "efforts" in such Joint Declaration (U.S. Department of State, 2020).

Adding the China Threat Theory to the Neorealist thesis, it becomes clear that the Czech Republic is a case in point. Mainstream China critics have repeatedly uncovered connections between the diplomatic actions of different Chinese parties and attempts at influencing economic and political behaviors in Czechia, therefore highlighting a pattern of covert intentions, as previously described with President Zeman's case and the Czech

Communist Party. Concerns over economic acquisitions have been construed as untrustworthy following the CEFC experience and the Chinese-PPF relations; security of Chinese investments became a public topic with the reveal of links between the CCP and Huawei, which renders also to the normative point of anti-communist/communist discourse illustrated above. To this regard, the China-Russia pair has been identified for several years by the Czech security apparatus as a source of espionage, including cyber warfare, even though it has never been described as anti-democratic force. More importantly, the Czech Republic has been at the center of the China *divide-et-impera* rhetoric as well as the BRI one: although both arguments remain central in the Czech discourse of China, the 5G and Huawei case have seemed to move the Czech Republic closer to its traditional allies, the EU and NATO.

In conclusion, it can be asserted that Chinese-supplied 5G represents a "threat" for the Czech Republic on security and political grounds: the first is testified by the reports published by the Czech security and intelligence official community while the second is apparent in political spheres as with the sister-city agreement case and Joint Declaration described above. The economic dimension is too underdeveloped to constitute a discussion point on either side. American support to the Czech safety net has recently emerged after the signing of the "United States – Czech Republic Joint Declaration on 5G Security": this event suggests a closer cooperation in the NATO framework with the U.S. that will very likely curb Chinese interests in the Czech Republic 5G construction. It can thus be inferred that the American role also occupies a prominent feature.

Estonia

Estonia has defined China as a "security threat" (Estonian Foreign Intelligence Security, 2019, p.59) as well as signed a MoU with the US on the topic of 5G. In spite of this, Huawei has not been excluded from the competition for the 5G rollout, as the Estonian debate on the topic is still ongoing.

In February 2020, Estonia's Foreign Minister Urmas Reinsalu stated:

> "We must be able to protect and advance our values and principles in light of the long-term developments in global politics. I am referring to the relations of Estonia and the European Union with the emerging China. In relations with China, we see opportunities for mutually beneficial cooperation in many areas. At the same time, it is necessary to ensure the unity of the EU and allies in general and develop common policies to avoid the fragmentation of the interests of Estonia and the European Union as a whole in the interplay of global change. We strive towards united EU positions in all formats dealing with foreign, security and external economic policy." (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2020).

This declaration mirrors the content of the Estonian Foreign Intelligence Service public report of 2020, where a dedicate section addresses China and the "hidden dangers of Chinese technology" (Estonian Foreign Intelligence Service, 2020, p.77). Comparing the document to its 2019 correspondent, it emerges that the space reserved to China has been

expended to cover more topics. In this context, 5G and the Huawei matter are not mentioned, unlike in the 2019 version, but it is stated that "small countries [ed: like Estonia] are an easier target for China to build dependency and exert pressure later." (p.77). A passage refers that "China has a different culture and values than the West and a repressive communist regime in power." (p.77). A following paragraph describes that "risks arising from Chinese special services' activities within China" (p.78) exist, referring to Chinese special service establishing their operations with the goal of recruiting individuals, for instance in Estonia, and gaining access to the country's 'defense-related information'.

The Intelligence report caused diplomatic tensions as the Chinese Embassy released a statement in response to these affirmations affirming they are "characterized by ignorance, prejudice as well as the cold war mindset" as "it presents China as a so-called country of threat by stories out of nothing, distorted facts or malicious attacks" (Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the Republic of Estonia, 2020). The passage concludes requesting the Intelligence service "to correct its wrong expressions to remove the negative impact" (Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the Republic of Estonia, 2020). FM Reinsalu responded to the Chinese Embassy demands' by stating that the assessment of the threats made by the Intelligence Service "is based on its expertise" (Ummelas, 2020).

Similarly to the Chinese Embassy, Kenneth Fredriksen, Huawei's Vice President for Central and Eastern Europe, has rejected the claims made in the report, stating that there is no connection between Huawei and the government as well as no proof of the threats that the Chinese provider can pose to 5G development in Estonia. Simultaneously, doubts have emerged over the employment of Powerhouse OÜ, an Estonian Public Relations firm, to lobby politicians on behalf of Huawei as the company comprises three former ministers, of

which Janek Mäggi, ex-Minister of Public Administration until April 2019, is one of the founders. (Whyte, 2020)

From the economic perspective, Estonia and China do not enjoy particularly intensive relations. As stated by China expert Frank Jüris, “China lies outside the top ten of Estonia's trade partners, meaning that its ability to influence the Estonian economy is still relatively modest.” (Turovski, 2020). According to UN Comtrade data from 2019, the economic relationship is also quite unbalanced towards China which exports a bigger quantity of goods and services to Estonia than it imports from the Baltic republic (UN Comtrade, 2017). Estonia, however, is listed as the “eighth-most important BRI country in terms of natural resources” (Jüris, 2019, p.4). In this regard, in November 2017, Estonia signed three MoUs on the BRI on the Silk Road Initiative, the Digital Silk Road and an E-Commerce Agreement. Estonia competes with the other Baltic Republics to attract infrastructure investments from China (Scott, 2018).

From the Chinese perspective, Estonia is strategic on the BRI routes as it unlocks development of the Polar Silk Road by linking it to the European railway system. In this sense, the “Talsinki Tunnel”, an undersea rail tunnel between Helsinki and Tallinn, has seen the participation of Chinese companies, whose plan also consists in building an additional railway tract connecting the Norwegian port of Kirkenes with the Finnish city Rovaniemi in the Artic Railway project (Jüris, 2019). Estonia is also part of the 17+1 partnership which further fosters cooperation opportunities with China.

Estonia is considered a highly digital economy, so much so, that NATO has established in the

capital Tallinn its Cooperative Cyber Defense Centre of Excellence (CCDCOE). 5G has been widely discussed from a strategic point of view. Estonia signed a MoU with the U.S. on October 31, 2019 where it is stated that both countries will assess tech providers on the basis of "not be subject to control by a foreign government without independent judicial review; financing should be transparent, commercially-based, and follow standard best practices in procurement, investment, and contracting" as well as "commitment to innovation and respect for intellectual property rights; and track record regarding respect for the rule of law" (White House, 2019).

The Estonian Foreign Intelligence Security, in its 2019 report, expressed that Huawei and ZTE did not meet the above-mentioned criteria as they represent "recognized security threats". The conclusion stems from the lack of proof of Huawei's independency from the Chinese Cybersecurity Law of 2017 (Estonia Foreign Intelligence Security, 2019). The MoU also highlights the need "to transition away from untrusted information and communications technology providers and supply chains to trusted ones" (White House, 2019). Estonian Defense Minister Urmas Reinsalu, in 2019, clarified though that "the moves made for ensuring the security of communication networks in Estonia or elsewhere in Europe have not been directed against any specific manufacturer of technology." (Pau, 2019).

From a wider strategic perspective, Estonia is not only part of NATO and houses one of its bodies, the CCDCOE, but it also subscribes to the Three Seas Initiative which, even though a European initiative, is supported by the U.S. Following the singing of the MoU, Prime Minister Jüri Ratas affirmed that "the trustworthiness of new technologies is a priority issue for Estonia as a digital state and the USA is our most important ally in the sphere of

security" (Pau, 2019). The Russian "menace" is reported not only in the Estonian cybersecurity reports but, is perceived as tangible in a military way: Scott describes the strong impact that a two-weeks long naval exercise between China and Russia in the Baltic Sea in July 2017 had on Estonians' security perception (2018).

The discourse around 5G has further assumed a political facet. Specifically, the Estonian Foreign Intelligence Service statement "China has a different culture and values than the West and a repressive communist regime in power" (2020, p.77) highlights a normative discourse that was latent in Estonian politics toward China. In fact, following a diplomatic incident over the visit of the Dalai Lama to Estonia in 2011, the debate on values and believes had been converted to a 'quite' approach which left space for these types of discussions only in official bilateral meetings or European occasions such as the 2017 signing of the letter to the Chinese Minister of Public Security, Guo Shengku (Godement & Vasselier, 2017). More significantly to the 5G case is the MoU with the U.S. where, similarly to the Czech case, "respect for intellectual property rights" as well as the "rule of law" are cited as key discriminatory factors in the choice of 5G providers. Moreover, on October 8th, 2019 a "Joint Statement on U.S.-Estonia Cooperation" reports that the role of the two states is to "ensure a vibrant 5G ecosystem based on free and fair competition, transparency, and the rule of law" thus evoking again the political values expressed in the EU's People-to-People and Political Dialogue. (U.S. Department of State, 2019)

The American influence on the 5G topic in Estonia has been primarily demonstrated under the strategic and political paradigm. Reinforcing U.S. efforts in the Baltic region is a more

sustained commitment to the Three Seas Initiative: in an October 2019 Joint Statement the American government maintain that it's ready "to strengthen the economies of Central and Eastern Europe and to lessen the region's dependence on malign efforts of other states to leverage infrastructure investments in their own geopolitical interests" (U.S. Department of State, 2019).

If one were to apply Neorealism to the Estonian 5G case, it would emerge that the Baltic Republic is *bandwagoning* with the United States. This is because Estonia strongly considers the basic realistic proposition of "war is always possible" given its proximity to Russia, which has been a traditional threat to the country, and the *ex-novo* military alliance that the Russian Federation has formed with China as well as the new-found Chinese ambitions in the Baltic. Estonia is a "weak" state to protect its interests by itself. The *capabilities* of Estonia are not as developed as those of other actors and this has motivated the state to seek support through multilateral fora as the EU, the Three Seas Initiative, the UN and NATO: such behavior can be observed in the case of human rights questions, as the 2017 letter, and the MoU and Joint Statement signed with the U.S. Estonia also *competes* with the other Baltic Republics on the BRI role in the China view. Estonia has observed that, since its opening up to the Chinese economy, an *asymmetric interdependency* has formed and in spite of efforts to change that, as with the adherence to BRI plans such as the Talsinki Tunnel, the gap keeps of widening. With Huawei and ZTE 5G "threating" to deepen the imbalance, Estonia sought a closer alliance with the US, in order to maintain its *zero-sum-game*.

Turning to the China Threat Theory, Estonia subscribes to most of its principles. Firstly, Chinese diplomatic actions have been identified like disingenuous, as testified by the Estonian political reaction to the statements of China's Ambassador on the Intelligence Report previously described. Such strong condemnation of an official document by the Chinese Embassy suggests a lobbying activity for Huawei, which seems to confirm the link between the private telco company and China's government. Secondly, economic activities have raised security concerns in the BRI scope with the role of China is the construction of the Talsinki Tunnel which ultimately, can give access to the Baltic Sea which is an important strategic region, as also testified by the Chinese White Paper on the Artic and its military drills. Military access to the Baltic, inserted in a cooperation with Russia, would represent a blockade against the U.S. which is Estonia's biggest security guarantor. In this perspective, 5G deployment with Chinese providers would represent another infrastructure possibly controlled by China. Third, the China and Russia pair is not only a strategic menace, but it also represents an "anti-democratic axis" as maintained by the Estonia Intelligence Service which indicated that the first has "different culture and values" from the West. Lastly, Estonia recognizes the *divide-et-impera* Chinese attitude as the country is part of the 17+1 partnership: in this sense, Estonian Foreign Minister warned against the "fragmentation of the interests of Estonia and the European Union" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2020). The only element not present in Sino-Estonian relations of the China Threat Theory is the people-to-people relations one.

In conclusion, Chinese provided 5G can represent a threat towards Estonia for two, highly interlaced, reasons: security and American influence on the state. In the first place, Estonia is a technologically advanced economy and, if the cybersecurity assessments on

Huawei and ZTE are correct, allowing 5G development to Chinese companies could seriously compromise much of the country's livelihood. This is only true vis-à-vis the U.S. role in the country, given NATO's presence in Estonia: American interests in the Baltic Sea and in general, in the Artic, could be severely compromised by the Chinese presence in the region, both digitally and militarily, also considering China and Russia's joint cooperation on security. The political issues raised by Estonia are only marginal if one where to discount the Joint Statements with the U.S.: it is in the 2018 and 2019 ones reported above that the political aspect of the discussion around 5G is express most vehemently thus, it can be inferred that the political aspect in this case pertains to the American "influence" one.

Conclusions of the Analysis

To sum up the findings of the analysis, prior to drawing final conclusions, it is useful to compile a table as the one below.

	Economic	Security	Political	American role
Germany	x			
Italy	x	x		x
Denmark	x	x		x
Czech Republic		x	x	x
Estonia		x		x

By looking at the table, it firstly emerges that none of the countries subscribes to all of the elements used to analyze the 5G "threat" while at the same time all of them use at least one of the aspects in their framing of the Chinese tech "menace". This finding sustains the initial affirmation that "the EU is progressing at 28 different paces in 5G deployment" not only technically speaking but also in its attempt to frame Chinese involvement in the rollout.

Secondly, one can denote that the most popular aspects used by the selected countries when discussing Chinese-provided 5G are security and American "influence": this aligns with the initial pressures of the United States on fears of Chinese espionage. In fact, all the member states who use the security lens also see a significant American role in their strategic set up: Italy has eight US military bases on its territory, while Denmark is even closer to the American-led NATO thanks to its opt-out option from the defense policy of the EU and Estonia hosts the important NATO's CCDCOE. The Czech Republic recently joined Estonia with its Joint Declaration on 5G Security that shows a renewed NATO commitment of the pair.

Leading the economic argument in Germany, being China's top trading partner in the EU, followed by Italy, which won a key component of the BRI with the selection of its port of

Genoa and Trieste as endpoints of the new Silk Road. Denmark diverges from the two previous cases in the sense that its economic interests are scattered across the Artic region which has gained relevancy due to climate change and increased interests in its natural resources in the recent years.

Lastly, what mostly missed from official dialogue on 5G is the political and normative component: much of the China Threat Theory is grounded in the ideological divide between the West democratic world and the East Communist one which is embodied by China, a revisionist power which has ascended to the top thanks to the liberal system but that now seeks to challenge it and establish its hegemony. As it will be further examined in the following Discussion section, it is somewhat an unanticipated finding that the political element is present only in the Czech Republic (and only marginally in Estonia): considering that Czechia shares a Communist past with China, it is not surprising to find that this paradigm is still alive in its political forum, nevertheless, with episodes like the Hong Kong protests and alleged mass surveillance in China, it is indeed unexpected that normative discussions have not entered other member states' official debates on 5G.

Discussion

In the Introduction, the problem formulation of this thesis was presented: "**Why can Chinese-supplied 5G be perceived as a threat by EU member states?"** is the question that the research here sought to answer with qualitative methods and a neorealist theoretical framework. The Literature Review showed how the problem formulation is supported by existing data and how it seeks to fill in an academic gap. To this regard, it is found that Chinese-provided 5G can be perceived as a threat by EU member states for four different and interconnected reasons being economic, political, strategic or due to American "influence".

The Literature Review, among other reasons, was compiled to display the concept of 'threat' specifically: the official documents published by the EC in March of 2019 created a watershed in EU-China relations and the following productions of reports on the topic were fundamental in informing this research. Defining China as "an economic competitor in the pursuit of technological leadership" (European Commission and HR/VP contribution to the European Council, 2019, p. 1) together with American accusations towards Huawei served as a wake-up call to European countries on the topic. While investigating the EU position in the Sino-American struggle had already been carried out by many, especially in light of the tariff war, the 5G rollout has not been looked at this closely. Collecting material for this thesis brought to light the fact that EU countries have been entertaining very different discussions at their national level on the topic of 5G, specifically on the Chinese-provided network technology which, in some cases, have resulted in sharp official stances: the Italian cybersecurity entity has advised the government to consider the exclusion of Huawei and

ZTE from Italy's market while a Czech Republic intelligence agency has described the two companies as a "threat against information security" (NÚKIB, 2018, p.2).

Considering the case selection for this thesis, it has to be noted that a different rationale would have produced possibly different results from the ones of this analysis. This is not due to the fact that the analysis per se would have been different, had the methodology and theoretical framework stayed the same, but because the selected countries would have been others. The imaginary map of Europe would have been different if the rationale behind it was political or strategic or a combination of different discriminatory elements. Taking into consideration the Theoretical Framework, had it been another type of Realism or an entirely different theory to be chosen for the analysis, the results could have been as similar as dissimilar. In light of these affirmations, a different research project could maintain the same problem formulation while completely changing the means of investigation: for example, using a political rationale would have resulted in a different case selection while using an Institutionalism-derived theoretical framework would have uncovered other results than the ones exposed by this thesis.

Considering this thesis though, the table reported in the Conclusions of the Analysis illustrates the findings in a visual fashion: by analyzing country-specific debates and relations with China, the analysis has uncovered that all EU member states taken into consideration see Chinese-supplied 5G as a "threat" yet they do so for a variety of reasons therefore the first and most relevant result of this research is that at least four different attitudes (Italy and Denmark show similarities) exist across the Union on the topic of 5G and Chinese providers.

A second result, as already reported in the previous section, is that every member state, for one reason or the other, considers Chinese-supplied 5G as a threat: in this sense, each country applies at least one criterion to define the Chinese-provided technology as a threat, while none of the selected cases completely discards the concept.

Third, the most popular criterion among EU member states that defines Chinese 5G as a threat is the security one which, per se, is not an interesting finding if not put in relation to the other elements: as already previously explained, all of the selected cases that ground their debate of the matter at hand on strategic aspects also present a close involvement of the U.S.. Again, this should not be unexpected given the role of NATO in the EU security realm but it does render some questions as to the American strategy towards Europe: the recent U.S. administration has expressed an increasing amount of criticism towards NATO and the "burden" it carries for its European allies, but it seems that on the topic of 5G it expects the same member states to seek "insurance" from the transatlantic alliance. While the "American role" in the discussions around Chinese-supplied 5G is present in most of the cases analyzed, it is somewhat surprising to see that not all member states hint at their alliance with the U.S. and feed into the allegations made by its policymakers on Huawei, ZTE and the likes: this seems to denote the lack of willingness to devise the country policies' as a mere dichotomy between China and the U.S., thus relieving them from "picking sides" in the Sino-American dispute.

Interestingly, Germany frames the security discourse around 5G in a way that is different from the fellow cases analyzed: while on the one hand it recognizes 5G as a source of new and potentially highly disruptive cyberthreats, on the other it acknowledges that no network will be completely safe from any interference, whether these dangers come from

national or international individuals or groups. Additionally, from the data analyzed it seems that the biggest concerns that revolve around possible cyberattacks are tied to the business sector as there are worries over industrial espionage, intellectual property right theft as well as industrial policy leaks. Lastly, advancing mainly the economic reason behind the perceived "threat" of Chinese-supplied 5G seems to further prove the German exceptionality and role of Eurozone leader that motivated the case selection in the first place.

Fourth, despite the rationale behind the case selection being economic, this features as the second most popular reason for considering Chinese-supplied 5G as a "threat": referring to the macro-economic areas selected, it seems to emerge that the economic aspect is most relevant to those countries whose commercial ties with China are the oldest and deepest. Furthermore, the lack or marginality of economic arguments in the Czech Republic and Estonia to specifically frame the 5G matter as such could be read as an indicator of the failure of integration of Chinese commercial activities in the so-called 17+1.

In a fifth instance, it can be observed that the political attribute is practically missing from discussions about Chinese-provided 5G. This is consistent with a change in the way political diplomacy has been carried out by the member states towards China in the last few years, even though, as previously outlined, given the international relevancy that was given to the Hong Kong protests and violation of human rights in China, a bigger prominence was expected to be found in the political arena around Chinese-supplied 5G. This pattern of behavior disproves the initial affirmations that "richer countries […] adopt a more active stance on the promotion of democracy, human rights and the rule of law in China" made by the ETNC report of 2018 on EU political values vis-à-vis China, at least on the topic of 5G. In

fact, it seems to highlight rather the opposite trend: from the analysis above it emerges that it is the “less rich” countries to put forth political propositions as in the illustrated cases of Czechia and Estonia.

It needs to be noted that there is one element that could have altered the results of this thesis and that is Covid-19. As briefly mentioned already, the outbreak of Coronavirus is an unfolding and unpreceded event whose effects on individual and international societies is yet to be understood. For this research, it has been deliberately decided to exclude Covid-19 events as they are still ongoing, and it is still too early to analyze actions of China, the U.S. or EU members states and how these have influenced and shaped the debate around the 5G technology. For example, Coronavirus and the strong impact it had on European economies brought Germany to call for a strengthening of FDI regulations in fear of Chinese “asset-hunting” (ETNC, 2020b, p.28) during these sensitive times which later motivated an EU resolution. In Italy, for instance, worries over the Chinese-proposed Health Silk Road have been expressed in relation to the participation of Huawei and ZTE technologies in the health sector and how data will be shared. (ETNC, 2020b). Furthermore, similar to Estonia, in May 2020, the Czech Republic signed a Joint Declaration with the U.S. on the topic of 5G: while this development was included in the main argumentation, it should be underlined that it could have been the result of Covid-19 as the global pandemic has accelerated and influenced discussions over specific topics, as 5G. Due to its importance to the main argumentation of this thesis though, this development was included in the Analysis. In the future, another research project that wanted to investigate the 5G matter in a similar manner this thesis did could take into consideration all Covid-19 related events.

A weakness that characterize this research is the English-produced data used: considering the need to analyze country-specific sources and the limited availability of English documents and reports, the possibility to conduct research in all the five different national languages could have led to a different literature corpus and ultimately, a different analysis and possibly results. The findings uncovered by this thesis remain relevant in spite of them being limited by language requirements as all the considered countries produce official documents in English as well as all news and reports locally and internationally originated come from reliable sources. It is the belief of the researcher that even with the required language skills, the outcome of the analysis would have been the same.

Another flaw that could be minimized pertains to the theoretical framework: while a biased by the author has not been found, it should be noted that the theories used to analyze the literature are American-borne. This issue could first indicate an alignment of the researcher with American-centric views and opinions about China which could ultimately influence the results of the analysis. Second, the choice of theories could compromise the research: this thesis takes a European point of view and adopting American-grounded theories to another continent could present some limits and preconceptions. This point has been addressed for both Neorealism and the China Threat Theory: Neorealism in its primary, 1979-form was highly centered on America but as its author kept on evolving its views, it became clear that Neorealism was fitting also for a mainly European case; similarly, the China Threat Theory was born to address American concerns but as author Vangeli illustrated, the model assumed its own European shape. The flaw could be resolved in a future project by selecting European-based theories.

To conclude this chapter, it is useful to remind the readers that the findings of this thesis are important because they are relevant in this specific moment of time and reveal information that hadn't been previously researched. Simultaneously, the thesis doesn't propose itself as a completed and unitary project but rather as a continuum of contributions: the reader should therefore keep in mind that while these results are valid and well-grounded now, there is always room for further research as it was pointed out during in the Discussion as well as Literature Gap section.

Conclusion

This thesis sought to shed light on the topic of 5G between China and the EU through the problem formulation "**Why can Chinese-supplied 5G be perceived as a threat by EU member states?".** In brief, the answer is that Chinese-provided 5G can represent a threat to EU countries for four interlaced and different economic, security and politically-related reasons as well as due to the role of the United States in the selected cases. These attitudes mimic the dialogues that the EU and China entertain at official levels.

In order to find a response to the research question, a selection of cases has been done following an economic discriminatory factor that brought to the identification of five macro-economic areas in the EU that display similar commercial interactions with China. The member states analyzed are Germany, Italy, Denmark, the Czech Republic and Estonia.

Thanks to the use of a neorealist theoretical framework, this thesis has uncovered that Germany perceives Chinese-supplied 5G as a "threat" due to its economic ties with China; Italy shares similar German worries and adds a security and American-implication component. While Denmark follows the Italian example, the Czech Republic discards economic concerns to maintain security ones and insert political issues in the debate. Estonia replicates Czech attitudes by raising strategic questions and dropping economic ones while practically omitting political objections but admitting the American involvement in the matter.

From these results of the analysis, five different conclusions can be drawn.

First, all selected countries perceive Chinese-supplied 5G as a "threat" and none of them disregards the idea completely. Second, while all the investigated cases report Chinese-provided 5G as a "threat", at least four different attitudes can be identified across the EU as only two of the member states analyzed (Italy and Denmark) adopt an analogous approach to the problem. Third, when the "threat" is strategically perceived as directed to national security interest, the role of the United States is also prominent as it happens in the Italian, Danish, Czech and Estonian case. This conclusion leads to two questions that could motivate further research in this sense: how is the transatlantic relationship changing vis-à-vis EU-China ties? Also, can EU member states be *super-partes* when it comes to the Sino-American struggle? Fourth, the 5G matter has highlighted that economic ties are more important in EU-China relations in member states that are older and larger Chinese partners as it is observed with the examples of Germany, Italy and Denmark. A subsequent outcome of this research has accentuated that the commercial role China has pursued to expand through the 17+1 has so far failed as this is attested by the instances of the Czech Republic and Estonia here. Lastly, the 5G issue, as examined here, renders itself almost apolitical, with only one case reporting clearly politically-related doubts as the Czech Republic.

In spite of the outcomes of this research, it is unavoidable to imagine that the outbreak of Covid-19 will fundamentally change the way this question will be answered in the short and long term: as brilliantly put by John Seaman, "the way that relations with China evolve over the course of the current crisis, and the debate around these relations, will more than likely have a lasting effect on the Europe-China relationship, long after the crisis has subsided." (ETNC, 2020b). For now, the data presented and analyzed here with the

method and theoretical framework adopted has sought to provide an answer to a question that was born much earlier that the virus itself.

Regardless of this limitation, this study provides a good point of departure for a deeper understanding of EU relations with China and an enlargement of the research displayed here can be pursued also, but not only, in the directions indicated. Regardless, this paper informs the ongoing debate on the 5G infrastructure and the Chinese involvement in it: by presenting the different reasons behind the perceived "threat" that each selected case shows, it is the hope of this thesis to contribute to the discussions on this topic not only at the national level but also, at the EU, NATO, and international forum ones.

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