

We are very happy about the high interest in our **EU-China conference** last Tuesday, **27.10.2020** where we had the honour to listen to two very distinguished panels:

The first panel - with Helena KOENIG (DG Trade), Reinhard BUETIKOFER (Member of the European Parliament), Alice EKMAN (European Union Institute for Security Studies, EUISS), Martin HALA (Sinopsis.cz), moderated by Kristin SHI-KUPFER (University of Trier, MERCIS Lab) covered the whole range of the EU's relationship with China and the challenges its autocratic model of governance presented. All panellists stressed the need for unity among EU member states and realism which had often been absent in the past. It was also pointed out that Europe is in a long-term competition with China, including on technology standards. The panel also addressed US-China relations and their impact on the EU. The EU's role as a leader on values, democracy and an open society was underlined. China's asymmetric relationship within the so-called *17+1 framework* was labelled an "empty bag" as unfulfilled promises of investment and trade had led to frustration, particularly among the 12 member states of the EU that are part of the framework.

The second panel - with Janez PREMOZE (MFA Slovenia), Romana VLAHUTIN, (European External Action Service, EEAS), Peter HEFELE (Konrad-Adenauer-Foundation), Mario HOLZNER (Vienna Institute for International Economic Studies, wiiw), moderated by Regina FIGL (MFA Austria) - dealt with Eurasian connectivity. The initial Chinese push for the development of infrastructure under the Belt-and-Road-Initiative (BRI) in 2012 was widely taken as a positive message after the financial crisis, but its pitfalls – including for the Western Balkans - became soon apparent, as connectivity is not a value-neutral concept. The focus on norms and standards characterized the EU's Eurasian connectivity strategy which still faces the challenge of putting a credible offer on the table, e.g., with the mobilization of private investment. In this context it was also pointed out that the EU as a global actor needed to broaden its framework to bring in other partners in the Indo-Pacific, as a new type of strategic response to China, and also include Africa. A specific focus on Europe and its wider neighbourhood was also addressed, including an ambitious blueprint for infrastructure projects to bridge the East-West divide.

In case you missed the conference, you still have the possibility to **watch the [record online](#)**.