# Review

*By Assoc. Prof. Dr. Daniel Mihaylov Smilov on the dissertation of Martin Danielov Milanov "IDENTITY AS A FACTOR IN THE FOREIGN POLICY OF THE EUROPEAN UNION AND CHINA"*

FOR AWARDING THE EDUCATIONAL AND SCIENTIFIC DEGREE "DOCTOR" IN PROFESSIONAL FIELD 3.3. POLITICAL SCIENCES (EUROPEAN STUDIES – EU POLITICAL STUDIES – EUROPEAN IDENTITY) with the scientific supervisor Prof. Dr. Maria Stoycheva

The dissertation "Identity as a Factor in the Foreign Policy of the EU and China" by Martin Milanov is an original study that meets the legal and professional requirements for the award of the degree of "Doctor" in the professional field 3.3 Political Science (European Studies – EU Political Science – European Identity). The doctoral candidate demonstrates in-depth knowledge in the field of the theory of European integration and international relations, as well as in the fields of the foreign policy of the EU and China. The study has a good structure and is characterized by a successful choice of methodology. It contains an impressive bibliography in English, which demonstrates the author's ability to delve into the depth of the issues considered and to navigate well in the great diversity of academic literature on the topics considered. At the same time, the selected topic is ambitious and to some extent too broad for a doctoral dissertation: but this approach is justified by the lack of sufficient Bulgarian literature on the topic. From this perspective, the study can be a good introduction to the connection between the foreign policies of the EU and China and their respective identities, opening up opportunities for more detailed and in-depth research projects in the individual aspects of this complex topic.

From a formal point of view, the dissertation meets the accepted standards. It consists of 180 pages, with the main text being 160 pages, the number of figures and graphs is 20, the number of cited sources is (as mentioned) impressive - 315. The author also has the required publications (three) on the topic.

The topic of the study is undoubtedly significant and of academic interest - it intertwines both theoretical issues related to the identity of large political formations, and more empirical moments related to the specific foreign policies of the EU and China. From this perspective, the study would be useful to experts in the fields of European integration and international relations.

The subject of the study is mainly the European identity, which is considered through the prism of foreign relations and in particular in relation with China. According to the author, *"The interdisciplinary nature makes it possible to supplement the existing literature on the topic, as the comparative analysis is combined with that of the foreign policy and identity characteristics of the two subjects. The research thesis is oriented towards proving the presence of influence or possible future factors that would influence European identity and foreign policy as*

*a result of relations with China as a leading country in international relations, which are in the process of rethinking and rearranging.*"

There is some ambiguity in defining the subject of the study. Its focus is on European identity, but then almost equal attention is paid to both it and Chinese identity and foreign policy. Perhaps it is more correct to speak of a European view of Chinese identity, because after all, the author's knowledge of China is mainly through the lens of Western academic researchers and scientific texts in English. This is not in itself a criticism of the approach, but rather a call for clarification.

As a main task, the author aims: "*to study the theoretical foundations in the construction of European and Chinese identity. Through comparative analysis, to highlight and clarify the common elements and those that would be a prerequisite for conflict.*
*- To analyze the main foreign policy documents, reports, agreements, treaties, strategies, as well as the instruments and institutional framework of the foreign policy of the EU and China.*
*- To study the relations of the EU and China with third countries in order to complement the analysis of foreign policy by presenting different perspectives from and towards the rest of the world.*
*- To study the possibility of China becoming a "Significant Other" through an analysis of bilateral relations and their relations in international organizations such as the UN, WTO, etc."*

From a methodological point of view, the study uses:
*"- Historical analysis – this method is used to trace the development of European and Chinese identity over time. Primary and secondary historical sources are analyzed to understand key events and their impact on identity formation.*
*- Content analysis – this method is used to analyze official documents, speeches and policy documents from the EU and China. It identifies themes and narratives related to identity and foreign policy.*
*- Comparative analysis – this method involves a comparison of the foreign policy strategies of the EU and China. Specific cases related to their approaches to international organizations and bilateral relations are examined."*

Indeed, the author skillfully uses historical and comparative analysis in the dissertation: it itself is built as a comparison of the identity and foreign policy of the EU and China. "Content analysis" can hardly be identified as any separate method in the text: after all, there is no systematic content analysis or any other more systematized method in it. In this regard, there should be some refinement of the concepts. However, the author explains in detail what he specifically does, which at least partially answers this objection:

*"historical analysis (is used) to highlight the main events, personalities, documents that have influenced the construction of identity in the EU and China;*
*- comparison of political systems, institutions, cultural traditions, which allows to identify similarities and differences between the EU and China in order to show how they interact with the world and what are the effects of these factors on their positioning on the global stage;*

*- analysis of the relations of the EU and China with their main partners or enemies, as well as analysis of the relations between them;*
*- analysis of the policies that they undertake towards each other with the aim of interaction or protection."*

The first chapter of the study sets a theoretical framework and defines the identity of the EU and China. In terms of theory, the author demonstrates that he is well acquainted with theoretical approaches of a rationalist, constructivist and liberal nature. He does not strictly adopt one approach, but tries to balance the merits and shortcomings of different approaches, demonstrating the role of identity in each of them. This holistic approach has both advantages and disadvantages: one of the disadvantages is the author's hesitation to define the independent weight of identity as a factor in foreign policy. It is often tied to other factors (such as material, economic interest or geopolitical power), which makes it more difficult to assess it as a stand-alone reason for action.

Regarding the identity of the EU and China, Milanov specifically argues that: *"European identity was formed after the Second World War, with the main driver being the desire for peace and stability on the continent. The integration process, which began with the European Coal and Steel Community and continued with the European Economic Community, is key to building a collective European identity. China: Chinese identity is deeply rooted in the country's millennial history. The century of humiliation and the subsequent economic reforms under Deng Xiaoping play a key role in modern Chinese identity, which focuses on sovereignty, territorial integrity and economic development."*

This passage is important because it draws a fundamental distinction: European identity aims rather to break or rethink the imperial (colonial) heritage of Europe, while China relies on continuity with its millennial imperial tradition. The ideas of shared sovereignty (EU) and concentrated, national sovereignty (China) are also key substantive differences. These conclusions are laid out in the dissertation, but it would be good to articulate them more clearly.

Based on this general premise, the first part traces the formation of European and Chinese identity from 1950 to 2000, which was influenced by various historical, political and cultural factors. This chapter is informative and its contribution is in the comparative presentation of the construction of political identities. It is good that the theoretical framework also raises the question of the difference between "empire" and "hegemon". If China does not make an open imperial claim, then its aim is undoubtedly to spar with the US and the EU about the role of hegemon in the world order, which makes the study of the clash of different identities particularly interesting.

The second chapter/part is of particular importance because it discusses the foreign policy of the EU and China and the influence of the defined identities in it. The conclusions are:
"- *The foreign policies of the EU and China note the need to build a comprehensive approach to the formulation of their strategies over the past 15 years.*

*- It is noted that China uses the historical heritage to legitimize its external activity, while the EU tries to deal with the new reality of a global actor despite its historical past.*
*- The two global actors increasingly take their relations into account, as well as the importance of security for domestic and foreign affairs is increasingly recognized.*
*- Both the EU and China have seen a significant strengthening of their foreign policy structures, although the Chinese are increasingly centralized and militarized.*
*- Economic realities – both the EU and China face a dilemma of economic and geopolitical interests.*
*- The EU continues to be a major defender of human rights, and China to announce the importance of respecting sovereignty.*
*- China is increasingly striving for internal security in order to protect itself from ill-intentioned foreign influences.*
*- Although both countries are trying to balance their methods of participation in international relations - they have fundamentally different methods"*

The identities examined in chapter one reflect on the foreign policy approach of China and the EU. Imperial influence and the desire to displace Western hegemons by returning to the times of Chinese dominance in world history are well illustrated by the doctoral student. As is the EU's desire to break with the imperial and colonial past by relying on the values of democracy and international cooperation, at the expense of harder instruments of influence, such as military force. Of course, both political formations pursue economic and geopolitical interests and from a certain point of view there is overlap in their approaches. For example, both the EU and China are patiently and systematically trying to strengthen their positions, without (at least for now) having moved to a sharp and open confrontation with each other or with the USA. The Ukrainian war and a possible conflict in Taiwan could prove to be game changers in this regard. The historical analysis in the dissertation and the author's knowledge of the subject allow him to reflect such nuances in his research.

The third part of the dissertation examines specific aspects of international relations – from the bilateral relations between the EU and China to their influence in different regions of the world, including Africa. Regarding bilateral relations, the author concludes that:
*"- The EU criticizes the new national security legislation in Hong Kong, which they believe violates the rights and freedoms of Hong Kong residents;*
*- The EU expresses serious concerns about human rights violations in Tibet and calls on China to comply with international standards;*
*- The EU has imposed sanctions on Chinese officials for human rights abuses in Xinjiang, to which China has responded with sanctions against members of the European Parliament;*
*- Another significant dispute concerns the export of rare earth elements from China. The EU, along with other countries, is challenging restrictions imposed by China on the export of these critical materials, which are important for the high-tech industry. China argues that the restrictions are necessary to protect the environment and sustainable development, while the EU argues that they violate international trade rules;*

*- One of the largest and most significant disputes between China and the EU concerns imports of Chinese photovoltaic panels. The EU has imposed anti-dumping and anti-subsidy duties on Chinese PV panels, claiming that Chinese manufacturers receive illegal government subsidies and sell their products at undervalued prices. China disputes these measures, claiming that they are politically motivated and violate WTO rules."*

These are important elements to which others can be added, such as trade wars in the automotive industry, 5G technologies and leading technologies in general. The EU's "soft power" is facing the commercial and financial power of China, which, without openly expressing its ideology, is actually doing so in a quieter way for now, through cultural and other institutions. Identity as an element of foreign policy is undoubtedly shown in this part of the analysis.

The conclusion of the dissertation is disciplined and brings out the most important points that have already been discussed. Based on his analysis, the author concludes that: *…it is evident that both the EU and China are increasingly integrated, mutually dependent and possessing leverage against each other. On the other hand, a possible failure of one of the two countries would have a huge negative impact on the other.*
*The author believes that the most important foreign policy role of the EU in the coming years is to balance the relations between the US and China, trying to approach it diplomatically, because, as has been shown, China's foreign policy is strongly intertwined between the country's historical experience and the influence of the CCP on public attitudes."*

The desire for the world's superpowers to coexist peacefully is commendable, of course. Whether their interdependence is a sufficient guarantee for avoiding conflicts is another question. The interdependence between Russia and the EU in trade (gas and other goods) did not actually lead to the avoidance of the conflict in Ukraine.

Either way, the study is generally solidly argued, well structured, and the conclusions are defendable and well-defended. However, the dissertation has certain weaknesses (some of which have already been mentioned), which should be addressed when considering its publication:

1) At times, the theoretical analysis of different approaches to international relations and European integration is not directly related to the study of the influence of identity on foreign policy. From this point of view, it is better to focus better part one, while still making some clearer theoretical choice between the different theories, which should be systematically pursued in the rest of the the dissertation;
2) The problem that China is an autocracy with a totalitarian origin, while the EU is a democracy, is not presented as a fundamental element in the difference between their identities. Rather, the focus is on their imperial past/present, their role as hegemons (in the past and today). This is perhaps because the author approaches it not from the perspective of domestic politics, but of international relations. But identity is built in the domestic politics of communities and from

there can be projected into their foreign policy. This point must be taken into account because it also has many practical consequences. For example, the EU is much more concerned about the effects of new technologies (such as facial recognition, accumulation of huge amounts of data on individuals, the secrecy of communication) than China is, and this has implications for trade disputes and the regulation of technological giants;
3) Identities are also inevitably related to new technologies: digital, photovoltaic, etc. The technology race is becoming something like the space race during the Cold War. Both political entities identify themselves as technological leaders and thus assert their identity in an international competition. Perhaps it is worth paying special attention to this issue, although it is partly considered within the framework of the analysis of individual policies;
4) The identities of China and the EU have their internal contradictions: a critical look at them would be useful. The author presents them too favorably, as internally coherent and non-contradictory. But there are also ambiguities in the identities both of them build. The EU as a *sui generis* community, split between a union of nation-states and a supranational structure is an obvious example. The same is true of China, which from an economic giant increasingly starts to resemble an imperial, aggressive dictatorship. The role of military power in both cases is of particular importance. It is paradoxical that the defense budget of the EU countries is equal to or even larger than that of China, and yet the EU remains a military dwarf. Is this an identity issue or rather an organizational defect of the EU – a critical look at these problems would undoubtedly be interesting;
5) Small inaccuracies can be removed, such as the translation of "free rider" as in the text in the passage where the author argues that the EU is a free rider in relation to its military defense by the USA;

Based on this analysis of the dissertation and after getting acquainted with the publications and other activities of the doctoral student Martin Milanov, I strongly support awarding him the degree of "doctor" in political science (3.3) and I call on the members of the esteemed jury to do the same.

Daniel Smilov