



Between Global Strategy and European Hesitation

China's **BRI** expands globally while Europe struggles to find its strategic stance and political will.

At the GSV Forum titled “Now more than ever? Is the New Silk Road soaring?”, held in April 2025, one thing quickly became clear: China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) goes far beyond building transport infrastructure. As Gudrun Hager from Advantage Austria noted in her opening remarks, the BRI is Beijing's key foreign policy and trade project. Through this initiative, China not only expands trade routes but also gains geopolitical influence. Although Austria is not a formal signatory, a bilateral MoU underlines the friendly relationship between the two countries, especially in the context of economic cooperation.

Geopolitics Behind Commerce

Raiffeisen Bank International's Chief Economist Gunter Deuber emphasized that China is now the main trading partner for 120 countries. In Europe, most trade is routed through Germany and the Netherlands. But Deuber cautioned against interpreting BRI as a commercial venture. Instead, it serves military-strategic goals and asserts China's dominance in clean technologies. While China is investing more in portraying BRI as green and open to foreign partners, Deuber pointed out that Europe lacks a common strategic response and should act with more self-interest.

The challenges of the “Middle Corridor,” an alternative to the northern rail route through Russia, were a central topic. Christoph Grasl of the Rail Cargo Group described logistical hurdles on this complex multimodal route. Alexander Schierhuber from Kazakhstan Railways criticized the EU's lack of political engagement, despite Kazakhstan's openness to collaboration. Though the corridor is not commercially vital for Kazakhstan, it has great geopolitical value. More infrastructure investment could significantly strengthen this trade axis, but EU initiatives remain hesitant.

Power Games in Global Port Logistics

Alexander Till from the Port of Hamburg described how major shipping lines are securing stakes in critical infrastructure—like MSC's acquisition of nearly half of HHLA, including Metrans. China's COSCO was initially set to acquire a larger share but was politically restricted. These developments underscore how shipping companies, fueled by pandemic-era record profits, have used their financial power to gain influence over ports across Europe, raising concerns about competition and sovereignty.

The forum concluded with a call for Europe to move from reactive politics to proactive strategies in global logistics and infrastructure—before others define the rules.