



CHINA AND SERBIA

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The Chinese can read maps. Many Europeans can barely place Serbia on a map. The visit of Xi Jinping to Belgrade on May 7th is not symbolic, but commercial and geostrategic. Only the Romans and later the Byzantines seem to have understood this area in the same way.

Serbia is famous for having a roman military road which goes through the middle of it. It was simply called the Via Militaris and starting ca 33 AD it connected Belgrade (Singidunum) with Istanbul (Constantinople). It passes through Niš (Naissus), Sofia (Serdica), Plovdiv (Philippopolis), Edirne (Adrianople). The exact same route has been named the European Corridor 10. It connects Istanbul to Berlin. The Orient Express



train travelled along this same corridor. The road is almost two thousand years old and so there is nothing new under the sun.

If China enters economically in this transport route, it will control commercial traffic from Istanbul to Vienna and Berlin. The same route is connected to the ports of Greece, Piraeus near Athens, and Thessaloniki, where Chinese interests are already present.

The two areas which have been cut off since Roman times from this Via Militaris are Northern Macedonia and Kosovo. The Romans decided the Via Militaris should follow the most direct and easiest route. The Ottoman Turks agreed. They used the same route to besiege Vienna in the 16th and 17th centuries.

Should Europe and generally the West really feel so puzzled at the rapprochement between Serbia and China? These long term strategies are typical of effective diplomacy.

There is also a psychological element. When NATO carried out its bombing campaign of Serbia in 1999, they also hit the Chinese Embassy on May 7th, 1999. Xi Jinping's visit this year to Belgrade was to commemorate the 25th anniversary of the destruction of the Chinese embassy. The NATO bombing is still a sensitive topic among the Serbian public. It also has a political dimension since the government spokesman for Slobodan Milošević during the bombing is the current Serbia President Aleksandar Vučić.

The Chinese have been welcomed in Belgrade with open arms. They can secure the future of the current political class of Serbia. Moreover, it shelters them from the mood swings of both the Russian Federation and NATO countries, who are busy trying to understand how hostile they should be with each other over Ukraine. China brings stability and probably many other advantages given that Serbia is their western most ally on the Eurasian Continent.

People do not like to be dismissed, neglected, or patronized, as the West has done with some Balkan nations. China is promoting and encouraging Hungary and Serbia on their economic and political growth under the aegis of China.