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Article

Europe’s Global Gateway: A New Instrument of Geopolitics

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Abstract

In December 2021, the EU member states agreed on the Global Gateway strategy to mobilize public and private funds of up to €300 billion between 2021 and 2027, to invest in digital, climate and energy, transport, health, education, and research fields. With a geographical focus on Africa, Global Gateway links infrastructure investment projects with condition principles—including democratic values, good governance, and transparency—and catalyzes private investment into EU development financing. Against this backdrop, this study explores why EU member states agreed on this new geopolitical instrument. This piece posits that the confluence of three factors enabled the creation of Global Gateway. First, the EU established this new instrument to counter China’s role as a global infrastructure lender in Africa. Second, Global Gateway was possible through the shift to private investment in multilateral development financing. Equally important for the establishment of Global Gateway was the European Commission’s transformational leadership as an entrepreneurial agent in designing this geopolitical strategy of the EU’s power projection. The conclusion outlines future research avenues and enables readers to consider the wider prospects and caveats of the Global Gateway strategy.

Keywords

Africa; China; entrepreneurial agent; European Commission; geopolitics; Global Gateway; global infrastructure development; private investment

Issue

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1. Introduction

On December 1, 2021, the member states of the European Union (EU) launched a strategic and investment plan—the Global Gateway initiative—aiming at mobilizing public and private funds of up to €300 billion by 2027 in a mixture of existing development policy programs, loan guarantees, and “crowd in” private investment to finance infrastructure projects abroad. With a geographical focus on Africa, the Global Gateway Africa Europe Investment Package is endowed with €203 million from the EU budget for 2021–2024. Similar to multilateral development financing, the EU links spending on global infrastructure programs with conditionality rules, including democratic values, good governance, transparency, equal partnerships, and sustainability. Investment priority areas include climate and energy, digital technology, transport, health, research, and education (European Commission, 2021b). With Global Gateway, the EU

entered the race for global infrastructure financing with China by building up its own sphere of influence to foster economic relationships through catapulting trade and investment as geostrategic “key EU foreign policy tools” (European Union External Action, 2022, p. 253).

Against this backdrop, this contribution explores *why* EU member states decided to establish Global Gateway as a new geopolitical instrument. This study posits that a combination of external and internal factors—the rise of China as a geopolitical power, the shift to private investment to finance development projects, and the transformational leadership of the European Commission—contributed to the adoption of Global Gateway as a new European geopolitical strategy. First, the EU was motivated by the rising influence of China in Africa and thus decided to initiate Global Gateway as an instrument of EU power projection, to create its own sphere of influence, especially in a region that had been of long-standing diplomatic (and historical) interest to, and

engagement by, the EU that of late risked falling prey to China's growing and assertive statecraft. Second, Global Gateway was possible through the shift to private investment in multilateral development financing. With this new instrument, the EU can also support the European business sector, facilitating their competition with Chinese state-owned companies. Third, the Commission played a decisive role as a transformational leader and entrepreneurial agent supported by powerful EU member states. The Commission embraced this opportunity by designing a geopolitical strategy that facilitated private sector investments to finance infrastructure development worldwide.

This contribution advances the literature in several ways. First, the literature on the EU's actorness in global governance contends that the unity of the member states, defined as their ability to present a single stance internally and defend it externally, is a necessary condition for European actorness and effectiveness (da Conceição-Heldt & Meunier, 2014; Damro et al., 2017; Drieskens, 2017). This rich stream of literature, however, disagrees with the extent to which the unity of member states shapes the EU's ability to act as an effective external actor (Delreux, 2014; Macaj & Nicolaidis, 2014; Meunier, 2014). The literature to date has to a lesser extent studied how the Commission can use a general mandate from the collective principal (member states assembled at the Council of the EU) to act as a transformational leader. This study fills this gap by zooming into the entrepreneurial agent role of the Commission, which proactively pushed for a more visible role for the EU foreign economic policy matters that were linked to a new geopolitical strategy. In so doing, this piece illustrates how entrepreneurial agents—understood as those European officials with an incentive to push for the expansion of policy programs—matter in the process of gradually transferring more competencies to the European level.

Second, this study is among the first to examine Global Gateway as an instance of the EU projecting its power to create its own sphere of influence. To be sure, the EU has used its economic power in the past by concluding a multitude of bilateral and multilateral trade agreements with third parties (see Gstöhl & De Bièvre, 2018). Yet, this is the first time that EU member states agreed on a joint strategy to create their own sphere of influence and “weaponized” economic power (see also Farrell & Newman, 2019) in a deliberate way to pursue geostrategic objectives. To the best of my knowledge, this is the first time that the EU acted as a geopolitical power by practicing power politics using economic means.

Finally, this study engages with a new stream of literature that focuses on the geopolitization of EU politics (Haroche, 2023; Matthijs & Meunier, 2023; McNamara, 2023; Meunier & Nicolaidis, 2019). By so doing, it contributes to this new school of literature by linking geopolitical concerns with global development

financing literature—de-risking strategies of global development lending by turning to public–private partnerships (PPPs) and venturing into financial capital (Gabor, 2021; Mawdsley, 2018)—and the competition between economic powers (the EU and China) in the race of spheres of influence in the Global South (see also Benabdallah, 2019, 2021). To explain the enactment of Global Gateway, this study zooms into the rise of China as a global infrastructure lender—which motivated the positioning of the EU in the geopolitical arena—and the shift to private capital to finance development projects.

To trace the establishment of Global Gateway, this article draws on four sets of empirical material: primary sources, discourses, media articles, and policy papers. By doing so, it relies on discourses of EU actors such as the Presidency of the EU, the president of the European Commission, the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (hereafter, the EU High Representative), and public statements of high-level EU officials and national government representatives. It also explores EU primary sources such as documents from the Commission, the European Parliament, and the Council of the EU. Finally, the article relies on specialized media on the EU (e.g., *Europe's Daily Bulletin* (Agence Europe), *Politico*, and *EURACTIV*), policy papers, and reports.

The article proceeds as follows. The next section presents the central argument building on major EU, delegation literature, geopolitics, and multilateral development financing literature to explain the origins of Global Gateway. The empirical section examines how the confluence of three factors—the rise of China as a global infrastructure financier in Africa, the shift to private investment to finance multilateral development projects, and the transformational leadership of the Commission as an entrepreneurial agent—enabled the adoption of Global Gateway. This is followed by a section engaging with the reactions of African target countries to the Global Gateway initiative. The conclusion outlines future research avenues enabling readers to consider the wider prospects and relevance of EU initiatives that integrate conditionality rules and environment standards for global governance and international relations.

2. Global Gateway: A Framework

This article examines the factors behind the creation of Global Gateway. It argues that three interconnected external and internal factors—the rise of China as a geopolitical power, the shift to private investment, and the transformational leadership of the Commission—created a window of opportunity to enact a new infrastructure and investment strategy, which in turn catapulted the EU into a new role as global infrastructure lender. The rise of China as a geopolitical power was a necessary and sufficient factor to align EU member states behind a joint strategy to position the EU as a global infrastructure lender. Equally important was the transformational entrepreneurial leadership of the Commission,

which used this window of opportunity to design an ambitious geopolitical strategy that institutionalized collaboration with the business sector and state-owned enterprises and banks.

3. External Factors: China as a Global Development Lender and the Shift to Private Investment

External changes originate from outside the EU polity, as alterations in the underlying international order, such as the rise of new powers with their own sources of geopolitical influence or the rise of private capital as a new mode of investment in development financing.

The first external and necessary factor that led to the enactment of Global Gateway was the rise of China as a global infrastructure financier. This led to the EU's willingness and need to play a stronger geopolitical leadership role to counter Chinese influence in the African continent and beyond, whilst creating the EU's own sphere of influence. In general, the concept of geoeconomics refers to "the use of economic instruments to promote and defend national interests and to produce geopolitical results" (Blackwill & Harris, 2016, p. 20). Farrell and Newman (2019, p. 45) speak of "weaponized interdependence" when states leverage global network structures for their strategic advantage. In the European context, Meunier and Nicolaidis (2019, p. 107) define the geopolitization of trade as a strategy that "characterizes the external face of economic status, whereby trade policies become embedded in power rivalries." The geopolitization of the EU's foreign economic policy means that the EU translates its economic and soft power into strategic leverage by using integrated or intersectoral coherence in its different policies, from trade to development, enlargement, and financial support. Geopolitics of the EU's external relations also implies that the spatial positions of states and regions may affect their foreign economic policies and actions (see Kelly, 2016). For example, McNamara (2023) argues that the EU is breaking with its supranational market-making tradition based on competition and openness by pursuing instead an interventionist industrial policy and a geopolitical market strategy. When the idea of the Global Gateway was first discussed at the EU level, EU actors widely agreed on the need to reduce Chinese influence in infrastructure and investment projects in the African continent (European Commission, 2021a).

Second, there was a shift toward private capital to finance development projects, instead of focusing on government funding or donor aid. This is part of a new development mantra that aims to create investible projects that can attract global investors via PPPs (Gabor, 2021). At the global level, the World Bank was one of the first multilateral development banks to turn to private capital (e.g., sovereign wealth funds, private equity, and insurance companies) under the presidency of Jim Yong Kim in 2017 with the aim of financing development projects funded by the International Development Association

(Heldt & Dörfler, 2022; Kim, 2017; World Bank Group, 2018). This turn to private investment has been strengthened over the past years with the introduction of a new modality of state governance in development assistance focused on de-risking (Gabor, 2021). PPPs between Global South governments and the private sector, but also between donor governments and the private sector, have been extensively applied to implement the 2030 UN Agenda for Sustainable Development (World Bank Group, 2017). This practice of "escorting" private capital to development is widespread. For example, the German Bank for Reconstruction—Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau (hereafter, KfW) now uses concessional resources as a risk buffer to subsidize high-risk tranches of development-oriented financial instruments, such as guarantees for the issuance of green bonds (Gabor, 2021; Volberding, 2018). Global Gateway also represents a paradigm shift for the EU development policy. Thus far, the EU has focused on development aid in its partnerships with the Global South. In contrast, infrastructure investments are now part of a new mindset that links the public with the private sector (Council of the European Union, 2021) to actively compete with China in development financing. How are these two factors related? When embracing Global Gateway, the EU started to strategically pursue development financing policies that better serve the interests of EU member states and its private sector. The shift toward the private sector enables a new approach that strengthens European companies investing in projects financed by Global Gateway.

These external changes are closely intertwined with internal factors and important to understand why Global Gateway came into being, to which this article now turns.

4. Internal Factor: The Transformational Leadership of the Commission

Internal changes emerge from within the EU polity itself as political reactions to new circumstances. Major EU institutions—the Council Presidency, the EU High Representative, and the Commission—concurred on the need to position the EU as a geopolitical actor in the financing of infrastructure projects (European Commission, 2021a; Macron, 2021). This preference convergence between powerful EU member states and EU institutions enabled the transformational leadership of the Commission as an entrepreneurial agent in setting up a geopolitical strategy that created the EU's own sphere of influence, especially in Africa, where the EU has long-standing diplomatic and historical interests.

Without agreement among the 27 EU member states on the necessity to position the EU as a geopolitical actor in the field of development financing, there is less supranational institutions can do. Over the last three decades, much has been written about intergovernmental bargaining processes (Moravcsik, 1993, 1998, 2018), supranationalism (Pollack, 1997, 2003; Heldt et al., 2023), the role of spillover processes (Haas, 1968; Schmitter, 1970),

and ideas (Parsons, 2002) as enablers of deepening the European integration process. Studies on the EU actor-ness try to move these metatheoretical discussions to a more down-to-earth discussion by examining what it takes for the EU to act as an effective actor in the global arena (da Conceição-Heldt, 2014; da Conceição-Heldt & Meunier, 2014; Delreux, 2014; Macaj & Nicolaïdis, 2014; Meunier & Vachudova, 2018).

In the meantime, it is almost commonsensical that the unity and convergence of interests and preferences of member states are a necessary condition for the EU's effectiveness. If EU member states have a united position and are able to speak with a single voice (see da Conceição-Heldt & Meunier, 2014), then they are more likely to allow the Commission to act on their behalf in foreign economic policy. Yet, EU studies to date explore to a lesser extent the role of the Commission as a transformational leader and entrepreneurial agent. This is exactly what the current study does. In so doing, this article contributes to delegation literature. Whilst delegation scholars predominantly focus on the principal side of the delegation process (Delreux & Adriaensen, 2017; Hawkins et al., 2006; Pollack, 1997, 2003), the study of the agency side of this relationship (Cortell & Peterson, 2022; Heldt et al., 2022b) has only been done to a limited extent. This study advances this literature by examining how the entrepreneurial role of the Commission impacts the enactment of new EU geostrategic policy instruments.

The Commission played a transformational leadership role as an entrepreneurial agent in the delineation of the Global Gateway strategy. This article argues that political leadership by entrepreneurial agents is more likely to occur when it is broadly supported by the collective principals represented in the Council of the EU. European integration theories—neo-functionalists and principal-agent scholars—view the Commission as a proactive actor advancing the European integration process. Neo-functionalists use the concept of “functional spillover” to refer to situations in which competencies in one policy area lead to expansion into other areas (Bergmann & Niemann, 2018; Haas, 1968). Delegation scholars also assign a competence-maximizing role to supranational institutions (Heldt et al., 2023; Pollack, 1997, 2003). By contrast, other scholars examine the Commission from an international bureaucratic perspective (Hartlapp et al., 2014; Hooghe, 2001; Kassim et al., 2013). More recently, new intergovernmentalists have argued that the Commission has become a more reluctant competence maximiser that is well aware of member states' unwillingness to transfer more competencies to the supranational level (Bickerton et al., 2014). This line of argument, however, disregards that supranational institutions will never waste a good crisis to obtain more competencies, and thus turn the EU into a closer union. Thus, this study argues that supranational institutions play a more nuanced role than European integration theories assume. Entrepreneurial agents act as both pro-

pellers and political leaders (see Heldt et al., 2022a). They help their organizations develop new innovative instruments to strengthen and expand their powers under the presumption that member states support the expansion of an institution's portfolio.

Transformational political leadership by supranational institutions is crucial for advancing the European integration process. Political leadership is a social process in which leaders attempt to influence and mobilize other actors to achieve a common goal (Nye, 2006; Schoeller, 2017). Transformational leadership, defined as a leader's (the Commission) ability to encourage followers (member states; see also Bass & Riggio, 2008) by appealing to the idea of common interest and identity (e.g., a European geopolitical community), is a crucial dimension of the European integration process. Transformational political leadership by an entrepreneurial agent means that the leader is able to unite followers along an objective or a common identity—Global Gateway—as a new instrument of foreign policy and international development to place the EU in the geopolitical ecosystem.

When a supranational institution can generate awareness of a shared identity, preparing and sharing proposals to overcome a challenging situation—or, in this case, to place the EU in the geopolitical landscape—it demonstrates leadership. In other words, if a supranational institution can provide a solution to collective action problems along the neo-functionalist tradition (Haas, 1961; Schmitter, 1970) so that the member states do not question its authority and accept the proposed solution as the best way to solve a new challenging situation, it acts as a transformational political leader. Thus, a supranational institution can take the lead and is more likely to integrate the national governments' different positions into a common proposal. Expert capacity, the inclusiveness of different positions (and geopolitical sensitivities), and awareness of a shared identity are crucial elements of entrepreneurial agents' transformational political leadership.

5. Setting Up the Global Gateway Strategy: China's Rise as a Global Infrastructure Financier

The disruptive effect of the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020 exposed the weaknesses and dependencies of global infrastructure, the disruption of global supply chains, and the scarcity of medical goods. This event raised the awareness of the Commission and EU member states of the importance of reducing economic dependence on China. Before and during the pandemic years, China had carefully orchestrated a soft power offensive projecting itself as Africa's new benefactor, offering support for the economic development of the continent apparently without any tangible loan conditions. China has vastly financed networks of trade, transport, and energy routes under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)—a core tool of Chinese foreign policy (Benabdallah, 2019). At the same

time, Huawei Technologies and other Chinese technology companies invested in parallel in the digital infrastructure of emerging and developing countries around the globe (Reilly, 2021). Even if these activities have been most intensive along the routes of the BRI, when the pandemic spread along the initiative routes, these planned corridors of transportation infrastructure financed by China (linking the East and West) were also used by the Chinese government to provide medical support to the Balkan states, Italy, and Spain. The Chinese government used this unique opportunity to project itself as a “humanitarian global power,” and to expand the scope of BRI—which now includes a Green Silk Road, a Digital Silk Road, and a Health Silk Road (Heldt, 2020).

The rise of China has led to a rethinking of EU–Africa relations (Carbone, 2023; Haastrup, 2022; Langan, 2020), especially because the EU and the US perceive the African continent to be at risk of being ensnared by China’s sphere of influence (G7, 2022; Raube & Rubio, 2022). In 2010, the EU and China had a share of around 40% of construction and investments in Africa. However, in 2018 China’s had risen to 60% and the EU had fallen to around 20% (Giesen et al., 2023). Global Gateway is thus part of a broader strategy to tighten the relations between the EU and Africa. Other important infrastructure investment programs include the G7 Build Back Better World, G20 Compact with Africa by the G20, and the Clean Green Initiative by the UK (G7, 2022).

One way for the EU to build its own sphere of influence was to develop a geostrategic and global approach to connectivity to advance the EU’s economic, foreign, development, and security policy interests, while simultaneously promoting European democratic values—the Global Gateway initiative—to counter China’s BRI and its influence on the African continent. EU member states widely agreed on the importance of having a joint geoeconomic strategy to rebuild and enhance the EU’s sphere of influence. For example, French President Emmanuel Macron underlined that the EU needed to “move from being a Europe of cooperation inside of our borders to a powerful Europe in the world, fully sovereign, free to make its choices and master of its destiny” (Macron, 2021). President Macron wanted to have a “more sovereign Europe,” for which a prerequisite was stability in Europe’s neighborhood, including Africa (Macron, 2021). At the EU–African Union Summit on 17–18 February 2022, EU member states and African Union states agreed to create a “European New Deal,” to financially support the economic growth of the African continent and thus implement the geopolitical project (European Council, 2022).

This position aligned with statements made by the President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen, on December 1, 2021, who declared that Global Gateway was a template for the EU to “build more resilient connections with the world” (European Commission, 2021a). This position was supported by the EU High Representative, Josef Borrell, who high-

lighted that Global Gateway enabled the EU to affirm its “vision of boosting a network of connections, which must be based on internationally accepted standards, rules and regulations in order to provide a level-playing field” (European Commission, 2021a). Germany’s Foreign Minister Heiko Maas explicitly referred to the rise of China as an influential factor in world politics, thus justifying the need for a European counteroffensive (Agence Europe, 2021b). The rise of China as a global infrastructure lender with its BRI led the EU to initiate Global Gateway as an alternative to counter Chinese geopolitical influence in the African continent. Global Gateway constitutes a first step to transform the EU into a geopolitical heavyweight and competitor to China’s BRI.

It was against this backdrop that European foreign ministers entrusted the Commission on July 12, 2021, with the development of a new geopolitical instrument to finance EU strategic economic investments abroad with the aim of advancing the EU’s “economic, foreign and development policy and security interests and to promote European values” (Agence Europe, 2021a; see also Council of the European Union, 2021). Thus, Global Gateway represents a paradigm shift in a twofold way. Firstly, the EU had hitherto focused on aid in its partnerships with developing countries. Secondly, the decision of EU member states and the Commission to involve the private sector through PPPs emulates the World Bank’s approach to development projects bringing profits generated from infrastructure investments into the EU’s development policy.

By giving the Commission a relatively vague mandate with a high level of discretion, EU member states enabled the transformational leadership of the Commission. The entrepreneurial agent designed a geopolitical plan characterized by a broad range of issues (including digital, climate and energy, transport, health, and education) with centralized tasks at the EU level and flexible arrangements (see also Koremenos et al., 2001). The choice for this delegation design gives the Commission extensive coordination powers to implement the Global Gateway strategy with PPPs—a model that does not involve additional costs for EU member states. PPPs, in turn, enable the Commission to combine existing funding from the EU’s development aid to co-finance infrastructure investment with the private sector. Global Gateway constitutes a first attempt to set up a European Export Credit Facility to support European firms to facilitate their competition with Chinese state-owned companies. Ursula von der Leyen framed Global Gateway as a viable alternative for developing countries to China’s BRI:

Countries made their experience with Chinese investment. And they need better and different offers....They know we are transparent; they know it is accompanied by good governance, they know there will be no unsustainable debt left over, they know this is with the country itself inclusively that we design the project...and we bring on top of that

the private sector with us, a private sector that in such a way does not exist in China. So, it is a true alternative. (European Commission, 2021c)

The new flagship infrastructure project aims to strengthen three key dimensions of development: resilience by supporting vaccine production abroad, robust digital infrastructure, and food security; sustainability by supporting future-proof investment in renewables; and cooperation with like-minded partners, including investments in strategic transport corridors (Szczepański, 2023, p. 6). Global Gateway links engagement in global infrastructure investments to key principles, including democracy, good governance and transparency, equal partnerships, green transition, security, and private-sector investment (European Commission, 2021b, p. 3).

One of the core elements of Global Gateway is coherence across policy areas. Some financial instruments are centralized at the EU level, while others are complemented by national funding. The financial design brings together grants from the Neighborhood, Development, and International Cooperation Instrument with a total amount of €18 billion and €21 billion in guarantees through the European Fund for Sustainable Development. European financial institutions—including the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development and the European Investment Bank—and EU member states will finance €145 billion worth of investments. To support investment and development in green and clean infrastructure implementation, the Commission will also build on existing European programs (European Commission, 2021b, pp. 8–10) with the aim of overcoming the existing fragmentation and overlaps in the European financial architecture for development (Szczepański, 2023, p. 4). In so doing, Global Gateway institutionalizes the collaboration with the private sector and state-owned enterprises and banks.

Following the enactment of Global Gateway, the European International Contractors, a federation of the European construction industry, stated that national Export Credit Agencies would be involved in the whole process to leverage additional financing (European International Contractors, 2021). State-owned banks are also important partners. For example, three units of the German bank KfW are involved: KfW Development Bank, which finances long-term investment in developing countries; DEG, in charge of the promotion of developing countries and emerging economies; and KfW IPEX-Bank, which is in charge of international export and project finance (Krämer, 2022). KfW can use concessional resources as a risk buffer and thus subsidize high-risk development financial instruments. This is part of a new approach to finance development as a “de-risking” strategy, where investment risks are guaranteed by states. It creates a safety net for investors in development assets while safeguarding their profits from risks attached to “infrastructure assets” (Gabor, 2021, p. 43).

The Commission acted as a transformational leader and entrepreneurial agent by choosing an institutional design for Global Gateway, in which it puts itself in the driver’s seat at the implementation stage. In so doing, it relied on its expertise capacity in implementing international development projects and raised awareness of a shared identity of the EU as a geopolitical community. The governance structure of the Global Gateway, through Team Europe initiatives, indicates that close coordination between the Commission, European Union External Action, aid agencies of the member states, and European financial institutions, decentralizes power within the EU. EU member states agreed on a joint implementation through a Team-Europe approach, which mobilizes resources of the European Investment Bank and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, the Commission, and national development finance institutions. The alternative approach suggested by the Wieser Group to create a single entity for external development finance, uniting both European banks, was rejected by EU member states (Council of the European Union, 2019; Hodson & Howarth, 2023).

Under the Commission and the EU High Representative’s guidance, EU institutions and member states will work together with European businesses, civil society, and the private sector in partner countries to implement Global Gateway. Two institutions will play a central role: a Global Gateway Board and the Business Advisory Group on the Global Gateway. The main function of the Global Gateway Board would be to provide strategic guidance in relation to the development of Team Europe projects. By contrast, the Business Advisory Group on the Global Gateway would ensure the involvement of the private sector in the implementation of the Global Gateway initiative (European Commission, 2021b, p. 12). The Advisory Group will have up to 60 members and 10 observers from the private sector and EU institutions, including EU trade and business associations and business networks. The main mission of this Advisory Group is to create a forum to discuss strategic priorities, activities, and opportunities for the private sector in the areas covered by the Global Gateway (European Commission, 2023a).

After Russia’s invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, the EU flexibly employed Global Gateway as an instrument of EU power projection by signaling Balkan states that they belonged to the EU’s sphere of influence to counter China and Russia’s influence in these countries. Global Gateway was thus supplemented with new programs for the Balkan states and a new Eastern Partnership. In May 2022, the President of the European Council Charles Michel presented his vision for a “European geopolitical community,” which promotes peace, stability, and security in the EU by involving Western Balkan countries in annual meetings with EU member states. Cooperation between the EU and these countries will be strengthened in the future in socioeconomic, educational, and research issues. More

importantly, the EU will accelerate the enlargement process for Western Balkan countries (Michel, 2022).

The European Commission and EU High Representative are both in charge of swiftly implementing Global Gateway and are required to inform the Council and the European Parliament. The latter oversees monitoring and evaluates the progress made in the implementation of Global Gateway (European Commission, 2021b, p. 12). Two significant initiatives were launched in February 2022: the first regional Global Gateway Africa–Europe Investment Package and a regional investment package for the Western Balkans. In November 2022, the EU concluded a strategic partnership with Namibia and Kazakhstan for raw materials and renewable hydrogen sources. The EU also launched its Global Health Strategy with the aim of expanding international health partnerships based on co-ownership and co-responsibility principles for the participating countries. Finally, at the December 2022 EU–US Trade and Technology Council, the EU initiated connectivity partnerships with Jamaica and Kenya (Szczepański, 2023, pp. 7–9).

Since the launch of the Global Gateway Strategy in December 2021, grants worth more than €9 billion from the EU budget have been used for investments in digital, energy, health, and education sectors as well as in strategic transport corridors (European Commission, 2022).

Global Gateway presents a credible and competitive alternative to the BRI and thus strengthens the EU's position in a more competitive international environment in foreign policy and international development financing (Lau & Moens, 2022). The Commission played a decisive role in the design of Global Gateway by choosing instruments in the form of PPPs centralized at the EU level, to tap into new financial resources to finance infrastructure development projects, introduced coherence across policy areas and collaboration with private actors through the creation of the Business Advisory Group, and prioritized world regions, and their strategic value for the EU.

The EU High Representative and the Commission jointly released the European Economic Security Strategy in June 2023, which identifies Global Gateway as one of the three pillars of the EU's economic security. This new strategy aims at protecting the EU's economic security, promoting the EU's competitiveness, and partnering with countries on similar de-risking paths which have common interests with the EU. Negotiating trade agreements, investing in sustainable development in the Global South, and securing links across the globe through Global Gateway are ways of achieving the partnering objective (European Commission, 2023c, p. 3). For example, the creation of the EU–India Trade and Technology Council in April 2022 is part of this partnering and de-risking strategy. On June 17, 2022, the EU and India also relaunched negotiations on a trade agreement and began discussions on investment protection (European Commission, 2023b). The main motivation behind this economic cooperation was to counter China's influence on the global infrastructure landscape (von der Leyen,

2022). It remains to be seen to what extent in the future, the two other pillars of the European Economic Security Strategy—namely promotion of the EU's competitiveness by strengthening the European single market and the protection of the EU's economic security by using existing policies and instruments—will be integrated into infrastructure investment or energy security projects as a means to promote the EU's competitiveness and to protect it from risks. The latter implies that outbound investment will ensure that European companies' capital, together with their knowledge and expertise, are not used by countries of concern for military application (European Commission, 2023d).

Member states have reacted in various ways to this new deepening strategic competition with China. For example, Germany extensively supports Global Gateway and the EU's de-risking strategy toward China. Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock declared that, with Global Gateway, the EU can offer developing countries better options “transparently, treating them as equals, without oppressive contracts” (Federal Foreign Office, 2023), without explicitly referring to China. In July 2023, the German government also issued a strategy on China as part of the joint EU policy on China. Africa is seen as a “key target region” for the EU's infrastructure investment to counter Chinese influence (Government of the Federal Republic of Germany, 2023, p. 49). France, a former major colonial power, also supports the EU's investments in infrastructure development in Africa. The current priority of the French Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs—alongside the Ministry for State and Development, Francophonie and International Partnerships—is to encourage the French private sector to mobilize and seize this unique opportunity of investing in African countries. On March 23, 2023, the Ministry for European and Foreign Affairs organized a seminar to rally the French private sector around Global Gateway investments with the intention of mobilizing up to 300 French companies (Ministère de l'Europe et des Affaires Étrangères, 2023).

EU member states currently disagree on the regional focus of Global Gateway. Whilst Italy and France support investment in Africa, Spain and Portugal underline the importance of investing in Latin America. On the other side of the spectrum, Central and Eastern European countries prefer to have infrastructure investments focused on the Western Balkan region (Giesen et al., 2023). This has led the Commission to diversify the EU's infrastructure and investment strategy with 36 projects in Sub-Saharan Africa in 25 countries focusing on renewable energies and infrastructure, 14 projects in Latin America and the Caribbean in 15 countries supporting internet, forest protection, and mobility, seven projects in EU neighborhood region with projects in Balkan countries financing digital infrastructure, and 13 projects in Asia and Oceania in 13 countries with a focus on renewable energies (Directorate-General for International Partnerships, 2023).

6. Reactions of African Target Countries to Global Gateway

Global Gateway's creation catapulted the EU into geopolitics prioritizing the African continent to boost public and private investment. This raises the question of what African target countries' responses and reactions to the EU's global infrastructure project have been thus far. In general, the reactions have been predominantly negative. The African Union and officials from African countries deplore the absence of additional funding for Global Gateway (Teevan & Domingo, 2022). In contrast, many African countries view China's BRI financing model, based on loans, as the more attractive option because they know what the relevant facts and figures amount to (Farand, 2021).

In general, representatives from African countries criticize the EU's paternalistic attitude. First, recipient countries dislike the EU's value-focused approach. What the EU defines as good governance, African countries perceive as onerous bureaucracy, and they lack the institutional capacity to handle the complex bureaucratic process of completing all the forms and requirements to start the investment process. With China, projects can get started quickly, which is important in Africa because many of these infrastructure projects are linked to electoral cycles. Second, for many African countries, the EU's environmental standards will be "a double-edged sword." For example, in Nigeria, environmental aspects are important in respect of energy transition, but they are secondary compared to the stark infrastructure deficit faced by that country. Instead of letting the EU "dictate" whether Nigeria is going to expand its hydrocarbon investments, Nigeria will seek other partners, including China or Turkey (Farand, 2021). Third, a survey carried out by Afrobarometer in 2019–2021 across 34 African countries on their views of development cooperation revealed that 55% of Africans believe foreign lenders and donors should give African governments more leverage on how to use development funding and that 51% want their governments to be free to make their own decisions about democracy and human rights (Afrobarometer, 2021). Finally, African countries consider the EU's competitive framing with China as "problematic" because it suggests that the EU is more interested in geopolitical power issues than in providing infrastructure. This geopolitical preoccupation comes at the cost of undermining African agency in the whole Global Gateway process (Farand, 2021).

To be sure, there has also been an anti-Chinese backlash in many African countries with widespread complaints about Beijing's colonial behavior (Leonard, 2023) and the risks linked with a "debt trap diplomacy," in which China leverages over African countries and even seizes their infrastructure and resources (Bennon & Fukuyama, 2023). When implementing Global Gateway, it is important that the EU avoids the trap of acting like a colonial power by dictating the rules and

recreating dependencies. Giving African countries some agency is essential for the whole implementation process to succeed.

7. Conclusion

Global Gateway marks a geopolitical turn in EU politics through which the EU can project its power in the world. This article argues that the confluence of three factors explains the creation of Global Gateway: the rise of China as a geopolitical power, the shift to private investment in multilateral development financing, and the role of the Commission as a transformational leader and entrepreneurial agent in designing the EU's geopolitical strategy. First, the economic and political rise of China as a global infrastructure lender provided the EU with the impetus to create its own sphere and influence by establishing the Global Gateway. The use of economic tools to advance geopolitical objectives enables the EU to start a deeper strategic competition with China on infrastructure financing to regain its lost influence on the African continent. Equally important for the smooth establishment of this new instrument of geopolitics was the transformational leadership of the Commission and the support of powerful member states, in particular France and Germany. EU member states gave the Commission a relatively vague mandate with a high level of discretion, enabling the entrepreneurial agency of the Commission to design this geopolitical instrument of EU power projection. This, in turn, led to a paradigm shift introducing PPPs and thus private capital into EU development financing. Global Gateway includes a broad range of issues, centralizes tasks at the EU level, and gives the Commission extensive coordination powers to implement this new geopolitical strategy in collaboration with the private sector, national ministries, and state-owned enterprises and banks. Aware of member states' reluctance to spend any additional funds on development programs, the Commission proposed a model that enables the EU to channel private investment to the development sector, co-financed by the public sector. This new "de-risking" approach to finance infrastructure projects creates a safety net for investors in the development sector, safeguarding their profits from risks.

This geopolitical turn in EU politics is a new phenomenon that raises several questions. First, how will the division of labor between the Commission and the EU High Representative work in practice, and what kind of formal and informal collaboration and coordination mechanisms will be established to effectively implement this geopolitical strategy? Second, how will the Global Gateway and the G7 Build Back Better World coordinate their programs by dividing geographical areas and avoid overlapping priority areas among themselves? Finally, African target countries dislike the EU's value-focused approach, are irritated by the EU's paternalistic attitude, and miss African agency in the whole process. The competition for influence in the African continent has just

started. The good news for African countries is that they can choose from different multilateral, European, and bilateral investments in infrastructure, and are not reliant on one single donor country. Strategic competition with China has just begun, and it remains to be seen whether the EU will in fact be able to position itself as a geopolitical power to become a game changer in global infrastructure finance, or if it will remain a mere shadow in the prevailing US–China economic and political rivalry.

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Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interests.

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