

The development of a global EU Connectivity Strategy

The creation of the Global Gateway

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Abstract

This thesis unpacks the similarities and dissimilarities between *Connecting Europe and Asia – Building blocks for an EU Strategy* from 2018 and the *Global Gateway* from 2021, two Joint Communications from the European Commission and the EEAS on connectivity. The comparison shows that the Global Gateway has followed up on the suggestions for change or creation from the 2018 strategy. It shows that the strategies have different geographical areas of focus and that the Connecting Europe and Asia wanted to create a connection between Europe and Asia. Whereas the Global Gateway wants to forge links and not create dependencies in third countries. In addition, the Global Gateway will be carried out by the newly created, Team Europe approach, which entails cooperation on different levels of the EU system. The thesis applies multilevel governance to analyse and explain the development and the changed approach by the EU Commission and the EEAS. This is done by analysing different supranational and national EU actors' actions and opinions. Moreover, it discusses the impact that the changed relationship between the EU and China in 2019, when it changed from strategic partners to systemic rivals, had on the creation of a global EU strategy on connectivity.

Key words: connectivity, Connecting Europe and Asia, Global Gateway, China, CFSP

Words: 19 301

List of Abbreviation

ASEM – Asia-Europe Meeting

AU – African Union

BRI – Belt and Road Initiative

CAI – Comprehensive Agreement on Investment

CEE – Central and Eastern Europe

CESEE – Central, East and Southeast Europe

CFSP – Common Foreign and Security Policy

DG – Directorates General

EBRD – European Bank for Reconstruction and Development

EC – European Community

ECDPM – European Centre for Development Policy Management

EEAS – European External Action Service

EFSD – European Fund for Sustainable Development

EIB – European Investment Bank

EP – European Parliament

EU – European Union

EUGS – Global Strategy for the EU's Foreign and Security Policy

EUMS – European Union Member States

HERA – Health and Emergency Preparedness and Response Authority

HR/VP – High Representative of the EU for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy

LI – Liberal Intergovernmentalism

MEPs – Members of the European Parliament

MFF – Multiannual Financial Framework

MLG – Multilevel Governance

SDG – Sustainable Development Goals

TEI – Team Europe Initiatives

TEN-T – Trans-European Network for Transport

TEU – Treaty on the European Union

ToL – Treaty of Lisbon

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1 Introduction

The world today is faced with numerous issues and challenges, from earthquakes to famine to pandemics. To create a more sustainable and liveable world all these issues must be addressed. This includes fighting climate change, creating sustainable development for developing countries, establishing global health security, and upholding resilient, open, and reliable supply chains. To be able to tackle these growing challenges one needs to improve and invest in modern infrastructure (von der Leyen, 2021). This has created an opportunity for the European Union (EU) to act as a global leader and develop its own global strategy for connectivity and improve on its previous strategies.

On the 1st of December 2021, Ursula von der Leyen, the president of the European Commission (hereinafter EU Commission), presented the EU's plan for major investments in infrastructure development around the world. This plan was named the *Global Gateway* (von der Leyen, 2021). This new strategic approach to infrastructure investment was presented only three years after the EU Commission and the High Representative of the EU for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (HR/VP) presented the Joint Communication, *Connecting Europe and Asia – Building Blocks for an EU Strategy*, on the 19th of September 2018 (European Commission, 2018). This means that the EU Commission and the European External Action Service (EEAS) created two strategies on infrastructure investment and connectivity during a short time-period, which leads to questions as to why they did this. Was it because this was something that the EU Member States (EUMS) wanted or did the other EU institutions push for a change, or a combination of them two? This thesis aims to understand this by applying the theoretical framework of multilevel governance to analyse the two strategies and the settings in which they were presented.

These two Joint Communications come after President Xi Jinping presented the People's Republic of China's newest infrastructure project, the *Belt and Road Initiative* (BRI) in 2013. The purpose of BRI was to combine the *Silk Road Economic Belt* and the *Twenty-first Century maritime Silk Road*. This would create the world's largest infrastructure project, with a huge political and economic impact worldwide (Thürer *et al.*, 2020, p. 2436). Whether the EU's two strategies for connectivity were created to counteract China's BRI has been debated (Kruessmann, 2018; Skala-Kuhmann, 2019; Global Times, 2021; Kliem, 2021; Rahn, 2021). In addition, during the time scope of the two EU strategies on connectivity, the EU's relationships with China changed. In 2019, the relation changed from one of strategic partners to one of systemic rivals (European Commission, 2019; Cameron, 2020; Gstöhl, 2020). Did the changed relationship

have an impact on the EU creating a global strategy on connectivity? This will be analysed by discussing how the EUMS and the EU institutions relationship with China might have changed during the time period of 2018 and 2021.

Connecting Europe and Asia – Building Blocks for an EU Strategy was proposed by the EU Commission with the purpose of creating concrete policy proposals and initiatives to improve the connections between Asia and Europe. This would include interoperable transport, energy, and digital networks. Moreover, it was a chance for Europe and Asia to increase their cooperation with each other. It would be an opportunity for the EU and Asia to ensure efficient and sustainable connectivity (European Commission, 2018). The Global Gateway prioritises investments in the sectors of digitalisation, transport, climate and energy, health, and education and research. The purpose is to boost smart, clean, and secure links in the digital, energy, and transport sectors. It wants to fix the infrastructure gaps that has been exposed and exacerbated in recent years (European Commission, 2021b). These two strategies may at surface level have different purposes. One strategy focuses on growing the cooperation and connections between Europe and Asia by improving the infrastructure. Whereas the other strategy focuses on improving the global infrastructure in multiple sectors with a value-driven approach. The most visible difference is in their names with one explicitly focusing on the continent of Asia and the other one on the entire globe. However, their common denominator is that both strategies focus on sustainable and comprehensive connectivity.

The Global Gateway has an intercontinental approach and amongst other achievements, it builds on the accomplishments of the 2018 EU-Asia Connectivity Strategy (European Commission, 2021b, p. 2). This means that the Global Gateway and Connecting Europe and Asia are linked together, with this fact being explicitly mentioned in the Global Gateway. However, this does not explain the updated context and the changed approach of the strategy or whether Connecting EU and Asia – Building Blocks to an EU Strategy was always meant to become building blocks for a global EU strategy and not just building blocks for an EU-Asia strategy. This thesis aims to understand if the Global Gateway is only a continuance of the 2018 strategy or if there is another explanation as to why a global strategy was created. It aims to determine if and in what way the two strategies differ and thereafter explain why there is a difference. This will be done by examining if there has been any change at national or subnational level within the EUMS that has led to a change at supranational level. Or if the change is rather connected to the fact that the EU and China now are systemic rivals instead of strategic partners (European Commission, 2019; Cameron, 2020).

In order to fulfil the purpose of this paper, it will apply multilevel governance, both to explain the reasons for a new global strategy from the supranational, national, and subnational level, and to develop multilevel governance in the context of the EU's foreign policy. This will test the ability to apply multilevel governance to a policy sector it is usually not applied to. It sets out to explain the change of strategy

and the updated context it is presented in, with a special focus on the connection to Asia and China, as well as situating it in the EU's Common and Foreign Security Policy (CFSP).

The research questions will therefore be:

Are there important differences between Connecting Europe and Asia – Building Blocks for an EU Strategy and the Global Gateway, and if so, what explains the changes?

The remainder of the thesis will be structured as followed; it will commence with previous research and background on the CFSP, China's move towards Europe, and the EU's two strategies on connectivity. This will lay the foundation for the empirical analysis. Thereafter will the theory, multilevel governance, and its relevance to the EU's foreign policy be presented and discussed. This will set up the hypothesis before presenting the research design, the methodological choices, and the operationalisation. This includes a discussion on causal process tracing and comparative method. This is followed by the empirical analysis, which will begin with a controlled comparison between the two strategies to determine the similarities and dissimilarities between them two in order to answer what the important differences are. Thereafter will the EU's and China's relationship and the different actions and opinions from supranational and national EU actors be analysed in order to address the second part of the research question, what explains the change. The thesis concludes by highlighting the main take aways from the paper.

2 Background and previous research

This chapter will present the relevant concepts, previous research and the background for the empirical analysis. It will start by introducing the EU's CFSP and situating it in the context of an EU connectivity strategy. It will be followed by an introduction on China's move towards the European market with its two initiatives, 17+1 Initiative and the Belt and Road Initiative, together with a discussion on how these created a divide in the EU. Thereafter will the first of the two EU connectivity strategies, Connecting Europe and Asia, be introduced together with a broader view of other perspectives that lead up to a global strategy on connectivity, as well as criticism towards the strategy. The chapter will conclude with an introduction of the second EU connectivity strategy, the Global Gateway, the criticism it has received, and draw links to multilevel governance in order to set up the next chapter, *Theoretical framework*.

Connectivity is a complex concept, which consist of a combination of cooperation, geopolitical competitions, and great economic and strategies opportunities and challenges (Widmann, 2021, p. 2). For the purpose of this thesis, it will use the description of what connectivity aims to achieve from Connecting Europe and Asia, "connectivity contributes to economic growth and jobs, global competitiveness and trade, and people, goods and services to move across and between Europe and Asia" (European Commission, 2018, p. 1). The reason for doing this is because the Global Gateway was partially built on the achievements from this strategy (European Commission, 2021b, p. 2). Meaning that the description is applicable for both strategies.

2.1 The Common Foreign and Security Policy – The larger framework for a global EU connectivity strategy

This subsection will give a brief introduction to the creation of the EU's CFSP and situating it within the two EU strategies on connectivity. It will conclude with a short discussion about China in relation to the EU's strategic autonomy. All of this is done to be able to understand the differences between the two EU strategies, to connect it to the broader picture of the EU's foreign policy, as well as give an understanding of the Member States role in the CFSP. This will then help when analysing the strategies with multilevel governance.

The CFSP was established in 1992 with the Maastricht Treaty on European Union (TEU). The arrangements and structure of the CFSP was later changed with the

Treaty of Lisbon (ToL) in 2009. The ToL increased the mandate of the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (HR/VP) and on the 1st of January 2011 the European External Action Service (EEAS) was formally launched (Giegerich, 2015, pp. 440, 444–445, 447; EEAS, 2019). Since the changed mandate for the HR/VP and the creation of the EEAS happened before the two strategies were launched, it means they were created under the same conditions of the CFSP. This eliminates the setup of the CFSP from being a factor to the changed approach.

Overall, whilst building up its foreign policy during the last two decades, the EU has gone from seeking coherence between the Member States, to an integrated approach to conflicts and crises', which is embedded in the 2016 Global Strategy for the EU's Foreign and Security Policy (EUSG). For the integrated approach to be successful it must be based on strong, clear and common EU foreign affairs objectives (Tomat, 2021). Furthermore, as stated by Stefano Tomat, the Director of Integrated Approach for Security and Peace at the EEAS, "the construction of the EU has always been a process of adaptation to needs and opportunities to bring policies and people together" (Tomat, 2021, p. 149). This description of the EU might give an answer as to why the EU changed its connectivity strategy to be a global strategy, instead of only focusing on one continent. Another reason as to why a new connectivity strategy was developed could be because every time the EU faces a new challenge or crisis an opportunity to improve the CFSP's capacities, mechanisms and patterns is created. It can contribute to a greater sense of community amongst the EUMS (Filipec, 2017, p. 294). The ever-changing world and the growing importance of connectivity, which was shown by the COVID-19 pandemic (Diop, 2020), creates a setting for the EU Commission and the EEAS to further develop its already existing strategy and strengthening the CFSP.

Another aspect linked to the CFSP, for the context of this thesis, is China and the EU with regards to the BRI and the EUGS. The BRI and the EUGS have respectively influenced China's and the EU's soft power to include aspects of innovation. Both initiatives are of an intercontinental nature and have been designed to overhaul China's and the EU's international relations, by upgrading their relations with major powers and key regions in the world (Duarte and Ferreira-Pereira, 2021, pp. 1, 4). Whilst both initiatives might at their core have the same purpose of addressing soft power and building and developing international relations, the BRI and the EUGS do not aim to address the same issues, which an EU strategy on global connectivity would do. Nonetheless, the EUGS signals a strong value-driven agenda which is in the lines of the coming connectivity strategies (Pascha, 2020, p. 700). Furthermore, the EUGS and the Connecting Europe and Asia gave greater prominence to connectivity in China (Pomfret, 2021, p. 1). Additionally, the idea of strategic autonomy, which is a big part of EUGS comes to the forefront in Global Gateway (Gavas and Pleeck, 2021), which will be further discussed in 2.4 *Global Gateway – A global EU connectivity strategy*.

This leads to gaining a better understanding of China, its initiatives, and its strategic relationship with the EU, which provides a setting for the two EU strategies on connectivity.

2.2 China's move towards Europe – the Belt and Road Initiative and 17+1

This subsection will focus on how China has moved towards Europe and the European Market. This will be done by providing an overview of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the 17+1 Initiative in relation to Europe. Moreover, this subsection shows that China's engagement in Europe created a divide within the EU, between the Member States who are part of the BRI and those who are not. It created an opportunity to either strengthen the EU's CFSP or for the Member States to have a stronger connection with China on their own. It exposed a structural problem of the EU and questioned the autonomy of the Member States with regards to their foreign policy.

On the 6th of May 1975, the official relations between China and the European Community (EC) started and a trade agreement was signed between the two parties on the 2nd of May 1978 (Akdemir, 2020, pp. 121–122). During the last decade, China has increased its geopolitical engagement and the European market has become of substantial interest, with the countries in Eastern Europe and Central Asia acting as important routes and corridors. The Chinese interest in the geographical area of Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) has gradually become more visible during the past ten years (Kapitonenko, 2021). For example, in 2012 China summoned eleven EUMS and five EU candidate states from the CEE region to a meeting with them. In these meetings China presented them with a proposal to boost trade in their region. The meetings resulted in them signing BRI cooperation agreements. These 16 states created a group which was referred to as 16+1. This group later became 17+1 when Greece joined in August 2018. It later became 16+1 again when Lithuania decided to leave on the 22nd of May 2021 (Brown, 2020, p. 3, 8-9; Euractiv, 2021). During this time-period two other EUMS, Portugal (5th of December 2018) and Italy (23rd of March 2019), signed cooperation agreements with China as well to participate in BRI. However, because they are not countries from the CEE region they did not become members of the 17+1 Initiative (Brown, 2020, p. 3).

As of March 2022, 146 countries have joined the BRI by signing a Memorandum of Understanding, with 34 countries being from Europe and Central Asia and 18 of those are members of the EU (Nedopil, 2022). This means that only 9 EUMS has not joined the BRI. This leads to questions as to why China, during the past decennium, has increased its presence in Europe and the evolution of China's strategic relationship with Europe. To fulfil the purpose of this thesis, it will focus

on President Xi Jinping’s strategic initiative ‘one belt one road’, i.e., BRI. When the BRI was created its purpose was to strengthen connectivity and bilateral cooperation between China and around 60 countries along the ‘Belt’ and the ‘Road’, hence the name of Belt and Road Initiative. The idea of the initiative stemmed from China’s growing confidence that it could provide benefits to its neighbouring countries via its own development (Chen, 2016, pp. 781–782). The BRI evolved during the first years of its creation and the progression can be divided into three stages, see *Table 2.1*. The first stage is between late 2013 to early 2014, when it was first presented as a development strategy for China’s periphery diplomacy, with Europe having no role in it. The second stage is between early 2014 to early 2015, when the initiative started to include Africa and part of Europe. This second stage gave a marginalized role to Europe as it only included a few European countries. The third stage began in early 2015 when the BRI welcome all countries to join. The third stage meant that Europe had the same role as anyone else, it had an average role, since even if all countries in Europe could join so could the rest of the world. This development meant that the strategic value of being a part of the BRI was weakened (Zeng, 2017, pp. 1170–1172).

Table 2.1: Evolution Process of ‘One Belt One Road’

‘One belt one road’	Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 3
Time period	Late 2013 – Early 2014	Early 2014 – Early 2015	Early 2015 -
Target	Asia mainly periphery countries	Asia, Africa, and a part of Europe	All countries
The role of Europe	No role	A marginalized role; A few European countries were considered as the terminus of this plan	An average role; The entire EU could fit in like all countries (do)

Source: (Zeng, 2017, p. 1172)

Despite the BRI becoming watered down in a sense by welcoming every country who was interested in joining (Zeng, 2017, pp. 1171–1172), the creation of BRI generated concerns and a divide between the EUMS. Between those who were a part of the 17+1 Initiative and those who were not a part of the initiative. For example, France, Germany, and Spain expressed that they prefer a collaboration at EU level and criticised the countries that had their own agreements with China. Another of their concerns was China’s aim of making EUMS more economically dependent on China (Akdemir, 2020, p. 132). Moreover, there was high hopes and expectations from Europe when the 16+1 platform was launched. These expectations included industrial development, extensive infrastructure projects and that it would be China’s gateway to Europe. However, nine years later, in 2021, the initiative was portrayed by some members as only being forums, exhibitions and exchange programmes (Kapitonenko, 2021). The members disappointment can both be seen in the way they questioned China during the 2021 17+1 Summit and

with the fact that six members decided to only send representatives at ministry level to the summit, whilst President Xi Jinping attended the summit for China. Lithuania took their disappointment even further by leaving 17+1 Initiative and allowing Taiwan to open a representative office in their capital (Kapitonenko, 2021; Leino, 2021, p. 215).

The 17+1 Initiative has resulted in confusion and dissent within the EU with Western Europe, especially the big nations of Great Britain (before Brexit), France and Germany, viewing the countries of the CEE region with suspicion as they have deepened and institutionalised their cooperation with China (Kapitonenko, 2021). Italy's endorsement of the BRI was highly contested by both the EU and the United States. Since Italy is a founding member of the EU and a member of the Group of Seven (G7). This led to French President, Emmanuel Macron, calling then German Chancellor, Angela Merkel, and then President of the EU Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker, to a meeting with Xi Jinping. At the meeting Macron pressured Beijing to "respect the unity of the European Union and the values it carries in the world" (Willsher, 2019; Gerstl, 2020, pp. 121–122). This shows that China's move towards Europe influenced the EU and that there was a clear divide between the different Member States, especially between the west and the east/central.

Overall, the BRI has led to a deepened cultural, political, and social cooperation between China and the 146 countries that are a part of the Initiative, and it promotes economic development amongst the cooperating countries (Akdemir, 2020, p. 142; Nedopil, 2022). However, as mentioned above, there is strong resentment towards BRI, especially from the western Member States of the EU, and China needs the support from the EU and its Member States to achieve its regional and global goals, to be able to execute its strategic plans (Akdemir, 2020, p. 142). Henceforth, it is not enough for China to open up the BRI for the entire world to join (Zeng, 2017, pp. 1171–1172) to get the EU onboard the initiative. For China to complete its move to the European Market it must eliminate the EU's doubts and suspicions to the BRI. Nonetheless, China's move through the 17+1 Initiative still created a concern for the EU and this could be a reason as to why the EU Commission and the EEAS put forward the Connecting Europe and Asia strategy (Brown, 2020, pp. 4–5). Furthermore, the creation of the 2018 EU-Asia connectivity strategy could be an answer to developing a EU-China cooperation, and to be able to promote stability and development in the Eurasian continent (Chen, 2016, p. 789). This leads to unpacking and gaining a better understanding of the 2018 Europe and Asia Connectivity Strategy, as well as other contributing factors that lead up to a global EU strategy on connectivity.

2.3 Leading up to a global EU connectivity strategy – Unpacking the Building Blocks for an EU Strategy

This subsection will include a brief introduction of the Connecting Europe and Asia strategy, followed by a presentation of the criticism it has received. It will include a discussion on what the EU has done in the Indo-Pacific region during the last years after receiving criticism on not doing enough in the digital sector. It will provide a discussion on why it might be difficult for the EU to compete with China. This is done even though the strategy was not launched with the aim to counteract China's BRI. It shows that the shortcomings of the Connecting Europe and Asia strategy could be an effect of the difficulties with decision-making in the EU system and with connectivity belonging to different policy sectors it becomes the responsibility of multiple actors. Using multilevel governance to analyse this will help to understand if the inadequacies of the strategy could be a reason for the development of the Global Gateway. The reason for this is because the theory allows for an analysis of the different EU institutions, which other rival theories does not. Moreover, despite receiving criticism, Connecting Europe and Asia was still a step towards improving the EU's role on the international infrastructure market.

The Joint Communication, *Connecting Europe and Asia – Building Blocks for an EU Strategy*, was presented on the 19th of September 2018. It was a first step towards creating an EU strategy on connectivity, but it had a focus on connecting Europe and Asia. The Joint Communication included concrete policy proposals and initiative, but it was also used as a part of the EU's contribution to the 12th Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM), which offered an opportunity to promote connectivity and further cooperation with its Asian partners. The strategy promotes sustainable, comprehensive, and rules-based connectivity. It highlights three aspects as to how the EU will engage with its Asian partners. Firstly, it would contribute to efficient connections and networks between Europe and Asia through priority transport corridors, digital links, and energy cooperation. Secondly, it would enable a better governance of flows of goods, people, capital, and services by establish partnerships for connectivity, which is based on commonly agreed rules and standards. Thirdly, it would address the sizeable investment gaps by improving mobilisation of resources, reinforcing leveraging of EU's financial resources and strengthening international partnerships (European Commission, 2018, pp. 1–3).

One of the aims of Connecting Europe and Asia was for the EU to connect the Trans-European Network for Transport (TEN-T) framework with networks in Asia (European Commission, 2018, p. 3). However, rail transport links between the EU and East Asia have existed since 2011 (Pomfret, 2021, p. 1). This means that the process of increased sustainable connectivity between the EU and Asia had already started before the strategy was launched. What the Connecting Europe and Asia strategy did, rather than create a new railroad, was to reinforce the EU's goal of

increased connectivity. Moreover, the expanded rail service reflected the goals of the BRI (Pomfret, 2021, p. 5).

Another aim of Connecting Europe and Asia was to increase the digital connectivity, for example by pursuing its Digital4Development strategy in Asia (European Commission, 2018, p. 5). Despite this, scholars argue that the EU could do more to strengthen its agenda on digital development cooperation, especially in the Indo-Pacific region. Scholars argued that the EU could benefit from coordination and cooperation with like-minded partners in the Indo-Pacific region (Okano-Heijmans and Vosse, 2021, p. 1-2). Before this critic arose the Council of the EU concluded EU Conclusions in April 2021 on an “EU Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific” (Council of the European Union, 2021b) and HR/VP, Josep Borrell, stated in March 2021 that “as EU, we need to look at consequences in geo-political and geo-economic terms and define our approach on the Indo-Pacific region” (Borrell, 2021). Moreover, the Council of the EU presented Council Conclusions for *A Globally Connected Europe* in mid-July 2021, which were meant to strengthen the EU’s promotion of interest and values through a more geopolitical approach to global connectivity (Council of the European Union, 2021a). This indicates that there were still opportunities for improvement, especially in the digital sector with regards to the Indo-Pacific region (Okano-Heijmans and Vosse, 2021, p. 9). This improvement could be the Global Gateway.

Despite the aims of the strategy it has been widely viewed as the EU’s response to the BRI and as a vision to anticipate China’s growing presence in investment projects through the BRI (De Decker, 2018; Kruessmann, 2018; Skala-Kuhmann, 2019). The Connecting Europe and Asia strategy has received criticism ever since it was launched. It has been viewed as an amalgamation of existing policies, for being quite vague and flexible (Pascha, 2020, p. 700), for lacking a geopolitical narrative of what the EU is seeking to achieve compared to the BRI, as well as for lacking explicit funding. Neither has it managed to turn infrastructure projects, European external investments, private investments, and financial investments into a coherent platform. Another shortcoming of the strategy was that it did not managed to establish any serious “connectivity partnerships” with major players, with the exception of Japan (Gehrke, 2020, p. 242), which some scholars argues is needed (Okano-Heijmans and Vosse, 2021, p. 2). Moreover, it has been criticised for being misguided and for ignoring the potential to capitalise on improvements in Europe-Asia connectivity, and for mostly revolving around China (Kruessmann, 2018). These weaknesses are some of the reasons as to why the strategy has been considered to be an apolitical, technical and bureaucratic exercise (Gehrke, 2020, p. 242).

The shortcoming of Connecting Europe and Asia had to be addressed for there to be a change, but for that to be possible the EU institutions and its Member States had to see connectivity for what it is – a comprehensive offer for a new era of globalisation (Gehrke, 2020, p. 242). Consequently, the problem of the strategy can be viewed from multiple levels in the EU system and not only at the supranational

level, which is why multilevel governance is selected as the theoretical framework. When the view of connectivity as a comprehensive offer has been established the EU, together with other relevant actors, must start mapping out the linkage and the supply chains of its most crucial products, industries, and infrastructure. Secondly, the EU must include political engagement instead of an overly technical or legal exercise when building a network of trusted partners. This includes integrating economic security in connectivity, which requires an active dialog with governments, firms, and investors (Gehrke, 2020, p. 242). The extent to which the EU has managed to address these issues with the Global Gateway will be discussed in chapter 5, *Empirical Analysis*.

Apart from the shortcomings of the 2018 connectivity strategy, the EU does not have a very favourable strategic position for competing with China and emerging on the international infrastructure market. One of the difficulties the EU faces is the decision-making structure of no clear mandate for EU infrastructure initiatives. Trade, transport, energy, external affairs, which are all part of the definition of connectivity is ruled by different Directorates General (DG) or the EEAS, but they could be combined. In order to do this, better coordination between the different policy spheres of the different DG's and the EEAS must be established. Another difficulty for the EU is that the major EUMS have their own political and economic interests. Moreover, the EU is not an insider to major parts of the Eurasian region, which contributes to the less strategic position (Pascha, 2020, p. 699). Consequently, the EU faced numerous obstacles that needed to be addressed, but the 2018 connectivity strategy was a way for the EU to establish its role on the international infrastructure market (Pascha, 2020, p. 702). The next step to improve the EU's role on the international infrastructure market would be the Global Gateway, which will now be furthered explored.

2.4 Global Gateway – A global EU connectivity strategy

This subsection will commence in the same style as the previous one, with a brief introduction of the Global Gateway as well as Team Europe, which is done in order to understand how the Global Gateway will be implemented. Team Europe gives further reason as to why multilevel governance will be applied to answer the research question, as it includes numerous actors and levels in the EU system. The response and criticism that the Global Gateway received is highlighted and is later connected to the larger framework of the EU's foreign policy, and how it is constructed, and the EU's relation to China. It explains the difficulties for the EU to speak with one voice, but the necessity of doing it as well. The main struggle for the strategy is to get the EUMS on board and how the strategy and its projects will be financed. A solution to the financing would be the European Export Credit Facility.

The Joint Communication, the Global Gateway, was launched on the 1st of December 2021 by the EU Commission and the EEAS. The strategy was launched with the aim of being a major investment plan for infrastructure development in the world (von der Leyen, 2021). The Global Gateway will approach the EU's spendings on global infrastructure development via six key principles: democratic values and high standards, good governance and transparency, equal partnerships, green and clean, security-focused, and catalysing private sector investments. It will focus on physical infrastructure in order to strengthen transport, digital, and energy networks, for example by clean transport corridors, fibre optic cables, and clean power transmission lines. It will be value-driven whilst adapting the needs and strategic interests of different regions. It aims to forge links and not create dependencies and invest in projects that can deliver high standards, good governance, and transparency. It aims to empower local communities and tackle their most pressing issues, such as climate change, inequality, and health insecurity. The Global Gateway aims to mobilise investments up to €300 billion between 2021 and 2027. All of this will be done under the Team Europe approach (European Commission, 2021b, pp. 1–3). Team Europe consists of the EU, the EUMS and their implementing agencies and public development banks, the European Investment Bank (EIB) and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) (European Union, 2022).

The Global Gateway received a range of reactions from various actors when it was launched. The European Parliament's (EP) annual report on the CFSP gave it a warm welcome and called it an ambitious and multifaceted initiative (McAllister, 2021, p. 8). The German Ambassador to the EU, Michael Clauss, said that the plan gives the EU the possibility to turn into a more effective geopolitical player and that a rules- and values-based cooperation could be an attractive alternative to the BRI (Global Times, 2021). The strategy received substantial criticism on its launch as well (Moreschi, 2021). It was called a rebranding campaign from the EU Commission, and that the €300 billion budget is mainly a reorganisation of existing commitments, loan guarantees and a hope of private investment instead of actual spending or new commitments. It has been called a repackaging of things that has already been programmed, and by western media it has been described as being a rival to China's BRI (Gavas and Pleeck, 2021; Global Times, 2021; Kliem, 2021; The Economist, 2021). Another criticism is aimed at the Team Europe governance structure of the strategy, which is undermining the coherence and efficacy of its development ambitions and is also viewed as rebranding to promote the EU Commissions own priorities (Moreschi, 2021).

The EU Commission presented a financial breakdown when the strategy was launched, which shows that there is no new money to the strategy, that the strategy rather draws on the new financial tools of the EU's multiannual financial framework (MFF) 2021-2027 (European Commission, 2021a). Regarding the structure of Team Europe, it is a multilevel and decentralised approach that was developed as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic in April 2020, which

highlighted the coordination problems and frictions in Brussels, and between the Member States. Moreover, from an operational standpoint, the Team Europe Initiatives (TEI) has not been properly intergraded within the EU's long-term strategy and the TEI rely on the EUMS accepting and implementing the specific proposals (Moreschi, 2021; European Union, 2022). With the Team Europe approach applying both to the international and the national level, it gives a further reason as to why multilevel governance will be used to analyse the two strategies. Nevertheless, this criticism should be situated in the larger framework of the EU's foreign policy.

The Global Gateway could be understood as a product of the institutional change of ToL, with the new role of the HR/VP and the creation of the EEAS. If it is understood in this way its shortcomings will be easier to forgive, and its role in the EU's evolution of a global strategy will be allowed to develop more clearly. Furthermore, to understand the Global Gateway would be to understand the forces that drive foreign policy integration at EU level (Moreschi, 2021). The establishment of the EEAS created the setting for the EU's foreign policy at the executive level. However, it still leaves the final decision to the Member States, who have veto power for the EU's foreign policy. This means that the EU's foreign policy has both been a compromise of priorities between the EU Commission and the Council of the EU, and that it has been driven by their respective and distinct logics of power (Moreschi, 2021).

Another way of viewing the Global Gateway is as an approach from the EU to counteract China's BRI and work against China becoming a soft (super)power. China is challenging the current world order by its increasing military, economic, and institutional power and it has secured several top positions in several UN agencies and institutions. For the EU to counter China there is a need for a clear red line and for the EU to speak with one voice. The EU and its Member States would need to further develop its own soft power, and together with likeminded partners define common value-based standards. The Global Gateway could be a way to do this as it aims to identify and implement high-impact and visible projects, mobilise the private sector, as well as ensuring the EU's visibility (Leino, 2021, pp. 211–212, 216–217).

In the same way that observers branded Connecting EU and Asia as a response to BRI, the Global Gateway has been branded by officials and observers as the EU response to the BRI or as a way for the EU to challenge and counteract China's BRI (Kruessmann, 2018; Kliem, 2021; Leino, 2021). It does not come from the EU Commission or the EEAS themselves as neither China nor the BRI was mentioned when von der Leyen presented the strategy or in the strategy itself (European Commission, 2021b; von der Leyen, 2021). The Global Gateway has also been called a greener and more transparent alternative to the BRI (Farand, 2021), which has been addressed by the EU Commission who put emphasis on transparency, democracy and being value-based (European Commission, 2021c).

The European Centre for Development Policy Management (ECDPM) gave a similar reflection to the Global Gateway as previously mentioned. Their reflection proceeds from the assumption that the initiative is intended as an alternative to the BRI and they analysed the finances, the EU's ambitions, and the relation to Africa's infrastructure development. ECDPM highlighted that for the EU to compete with China it should identify new sources for funding. The development to coordinate the EU institutions and the EUMS under the umbrella of Team Europe is positive, however the EUMS has not announced additional financial commitments under the Global Gateway. The creation of the proposed European Export Credit Facility would be the real innovation in the Global Gateway. This would both benefit European exports and show the potential of synergising economic interest with sustainability and development ambitions. Moreover, the EU should frame the infrastructure investments of the Global Gateway in terms of broader and longer-term political ambitions, which would appeal to its partners. The Global Gateway could be used as building blocks for a more balanced and inclusive political partnership with Africa. It should collaborate with Africa on skills developments, which China has not done. Henceforth, the challenge for the EU in Africa would be to bridge the development gaps that was left out by the BRI (Bilal *et al.*, 2021).

The two strategies presented by the EU Commission and the EEAS have a clear connection to both the CFSP and to China's move towards the European market and the BRI, which will be developed and analysed in chapter 5. The Global Gateway is the latest strategy and is the global connectivity strategy that the EU has been working towards. In order to analyse this development in the context of the EU'S foreign policy on global connectivity, a presentation of multilevel governance is needed, which will contribute to a broader understanding of the strategies on multiple levels of the EU system and enable an analysis of the found differences between the strategies.

3 Theoretical framework

This chapter will unfold as follows; it will begin with a brief presentation of the general development of multilevel governance before discussing the theory in the context of the EU's foreign policy. This section will further the reasons from chapter 2 as to why multilevel governance is used to understand the continuity and/or change in the EU's foreign policy concerning connectivity between 2018-2021, by drawing on examples mentioned in chapter 2. It will present the two types of multilevel governance, Type I and Type II, as well as the two logics, functional and identity. Type II and both of the two logics will be used and will help to explain the differences between the two strategies. This will be continued by a presentation and discussion of the hypothesis together with an explanation of hypotheses in multilevel governance. This chapter aims to set up a better analysis of the development of a global EU strategy on connectivity and provide an explanation as to why multilevel governance is an appropriate theory for it. This is done both by presenting concepts of multilevel governance, situating the theory within the EU's foreign policy and discussing other theoretical frameworks. This chapter sets up the empirical analysis and facilitates grounding the conclusions in theory.

3.1 Multilevel governance

Gary Marks defined multilevel governance (hereinafter MLG) as:

a system of continuous negotiation among nested governments at several territorial tiers – supranational, national, regional, and local – as the result of a broad process of institutional creation and decisional reallocation that has pulled some previously centralized functions of the state up to the supranational level and some down to the local/regional level” (Marks, 1993, p. 392).

This definition was used to explain the EC and structural policy. After Marks coined the term of MLG he decided that it could be applicable in more general terms, which led to him, amongst others, to develop MLG into a concept that could be applied more broadly to EU decision-making, and not only structural and cohesion policy (Bache and Flinders, 2004, p. 2; George, 2004, pp. 107–108). Moreover, the development of MLG was part of a new way of thinking and theorising the EU as a political system, instead of only using it to explain the process of European integration (Bache and Flinders, 2004, p. 2). Even if it has been argued that MLG descends from neofunctionalism, which is usually used for explaining European

integration, but MLG is without the concept of functional spillover (George, 2004, p. 108). When scholars, Marks and Hooghe (2001) and Bache (2008), constructed theoretical models of MLG they used the Committee of Regions as an element. This led to MLG being conceptualised as a form of network governance, which entails multiple interactions between empowered actors (Rowe and Jeffery, 2017, p. 397). This conceptualisation of MLG as a form of network governance will be useful for understanding the interactions of the different levels of the EU system that has led to the two different strategies on connectivity.

Marks and Hooghe conceptualised MLG by dividing it into Type I and Type II, see *Table 3.1*. The academic foundation of Type I MLG is federalism. It considers the dispersion of authority as being restricted to a “limited number of non-overlapping jurisdictional boundaries at a limited number of levels” (Marks and Hooghe, 2004, p. 15). Type I analysis focus on individual governments instead of specific policies. Whereas Type II MLG offers a vision of governance that is “a complex, fluid, patchwork of innumerable, overlapping jurisdictions” (Marks and Hooghe, 2004, p. 15). These jurisdictions tend to be overlapping and flexible as demands for governance change (Marks and Hooghe, 2004, p. 15). For the purpose of this thesis, Type II of MLG will be applied.

Table 3.1: Types of multilevel governance

Type I	Type II
General-purpose jurisdictions	Task-specific jurisdictions
Non-intersecting memberships	Intersecting memberships
Jurisdictions at a limited number of levels	No limit to the number of jurisdictional levels
System-wide architecture	Flexible design

Source: (Marks and Hooghe, 2004, p. 17)

The reason for applying Type II of MLG is because it focusses on specific policy problems, and it consists of jurisdictions with a special purpose. The jurisdiction of Type II is organised across multiple levels and can operate at numerous territorial scales (Marks and Hooghe, 2004, pp. 20–21). This means that it does not eliminate any level in the analysis and that the different levels can be intersected, which gives an opportunity to see change and/or continuity on the different levels. Secondly, because of the flexible design, Type II jurisdictions can use flexibility to answer changing citizen preferences and functional requirements (Marks and Hooghe, 2004, p. 21), or in this case, changing strategies. Thirdly, since the creation of both strategies are task-specific it is logical to apply Type II. For example, the Global Gateways aims to fight climate change and create sustainable development (von der Leyen, 2021).

Apart from Type I and Type II of MLG, MLG has been highlighted for having two logics. The first is the functionalist logic, which perceives governance as an instrument for efficient delivery of goods. The second is the identity logic, which is the demand for self-rule by those living in distinctive communities (Hooghe, Schakel and Marks, 2020, p. 194). Both logics will be used to fulfil the purpose and answer the research question. Two concepts of functional logic, which will be of importance is *public good* and *optimal jurisdictional design*. Public good can be explained as “a policy or service provided by government that is non-excludable and/or non-rivalrous” (Hooghe, Schakel and Marks, 2020, p. 195). This means that the good or service can be used by anyone and that even if it is used it is still available to others. The optimal jurisdictional design is when “public goods are allocated across levels of government so that externalities are internalised, and scale benefits maximised” (Hooghe, Schakel and Marks, 2020, p. 195). These two concepts will help to analyse the differences in the strategies.

The identity logic includes the definitions of *self-rule* and *shared rule*, which are of relevance for the analysis. Self-rule is “the authority that a subnational government exercises in its own territory” and shared rule is “the authority that a subnational government co-exercises in the country as a whole” (Hooghe, Schakel and Marks, 2020, p. 198). Self-rule gives the local and regional level the opportunity to tailor policies to their needs. Whereas shared rule with other regions and the central government in a larger state gives the opportunity to benefit of scale (Hooghe, Schakel and Marks, 2020, p. 198). Hence, there are benefits of both and there is a need for both with the two connectivity strategies. The concepts of MLG, self-rule and shared rule will help to unpack the different levels that subnational authority is exercised at, which could help with understanding if there has been any interest or pressure from subnational level regarding the two strategies or if the creation of an EU global connectivity strategy only comes from the supranational level, especially the EU Commission and the EEAS.

Another definition of MLG is the “dispersion of authority within and beyond national states” (Hooghe, Schakel and Marks, 2020, p. 197), with authority being “the competence to make binding decisions that are regarded as legitimate (Hooghe, Schakel and Marks, 2020, p. 194). This authority has shifted to being two-sided, with both subnational jurisdictions and international institutions, which Europe nicely illustrates. Countries in Europe created the EU and with it scaled up to supranational level as well, whilst at the same time decentralizing authority within the states. The design of the EU could be explained as a Russian Doll arrangement, which means that the local governments are nested in the regional governments, which are nested in national governments, which are nested in the supranational institutions (Hooghe, Schakel and Marks, 2020, p. 194). This structure could be viewed in multiple ways, with one being that the size of the dolls represents the size of the population it governs over, and another being the size of its political power. The two connectivity strategies were launched by the top layer, a supranational institution, but it affects all layers. This leads to the question if all layers have influenced the outcome the other way around as well. To use the analogy again, did

the other layers inside the Russian Doll influence the outer layers to create these connectivity strategies? This results in one of the reasons as to why MLG is applied, it will help to explain the potential differences between the strategies on a theoretical level and not only identify the differences between them. However, to be able to do this a better understanding of MLG in the context of the EU's foreign policy is needed.

3.1.1 Multilevel governance for understanding the EU's foreign policy

It is important to understand the development of MLG, but to explain the potential changes and differences between the two strategies, it is of importance to understand the use of MLG with regards to the EU's foreign policy. This is both because the two strategies are nested in this specific policy sector and because it enables an analysis on how the different levels of the governance system might have influenced the two strategies, in particular the national and supranational level. In addition, applying MLG to understand the EU's foreign policy is a test for MLG as it is usually not applied to this policy sector (George, 2004; Smith, 2004). To better understand the choice of MLG it will be discussed in relation to other theoretical approach, such as geopolitics and liberal intergovernmentalism (LI). The choice of MLG in the context of the EU's foreign policy will be presented before providing the hypothesis.

The first reason for using MLG to explain the differences in the output of the two strategies on connectivity is because the EU is a treaty-based polity, in which the Member States have the mandate and reserve the ultimate authority to approve all decisions taken and reserve an even bigger mandate for decisions taken in the foreign and security policy. A second reason for using MLG is because it usually shoulders a bigger role for supranational organisations, like the EU Commission, in policy-making (Smith, 2004, p. 741), which will be at the forefront of this thesis, with the EU Commission and the EEAS launching the two strategies with similar contents. Moreover, this aspect is important as the role of the EP and the Council of the EU will be at the forefront, together with the EUMS, in the analysis. A third reason as to why MLG is selected is because this thesis wants to examine whether there is change on a national and subnational level that had an influence on the outcome as well as a change on the supranational level, which is evident since it was the EU Commission and the EEAS that presented the updated strategy only three years after the first one. However, the primary focus will be on the national and supranational level.

The main reason for applying MLG to this research is because it will help to understand the continuity and/or change in the EU's foreign policy concerning Asia between 2018 to 2021. It will be able analyse how the relation between the EU and China has evolved and effected the updated context in which the Global Gateway is presented it. This will be done by analysing both EUMS and EU institutions

relation to China. Moreover, using MLG as the theory will allow there to be an analysis of the different EU actors and not only discuss that there was a new EU Commission and a new HR/VP appointed in 2019 (von der Leyen, 2019). Since this would provide a brief analysis that could conclude that the different Commissions had different priorities and agendas. Applying MLG to the EU's foreign policy creates a hard test for the theory. It will test how applicable MLG is to a policy sector where the Member States have the policy making mandate. The role of China in the evolution of the strategy will also create a test for MLG as it will test if it is possible to use MLG when a third actor might be the reason for the change. Moreover, the strategies are nested within the CFSP, which is a policy sector that allows strong influence from the Member States with it applying unanimity. This gives a reason to view how the Member States influenced the updated strategy. Another reason for using MLG is the weight that von der Leyen put on multilateralism in her mission letter to HR/VP Borrell (von der Leyen, 2019). This shows that there is an emphasis on this from the current EU Commission that presented the Global Gateway and gives a further reason to study if the Member States did have an influence on the changed approach.

By applying MLG to answer the research question both the supranational level and the national level will be at the forefront at the analysis. If for example realism or LI had been applied instead, the different supranational institutions would not have had a prominent role in the analysis. The focus would rather have been on the Member States. An alternative theoretical angle to the analysis would be a geopolitical approach, which can be considered as an integral branch of realist theory in international relations (Wu, 2018). A geopolitical approach would enable an analyse of the geographical influences on power relationships in international relations (Deudney, 2022). In particular, it would focus on the power dynamics and relationship between the EU and China, which has changed over time. Moreover, as the focus of the two strategies is connectivity and political geographers have conceptualised connectivity as “a relational form of power” (Flint and Zhu, 2019, p. 97). A geopolitical focus would give a different angle and could be considered for further research, since it would include other aspects as the focus would not be on the supranational institutions but rather on geography, history, and strategic studies (Wu, 2018, p. 787). However, since this thesis wants to discuss whether different levels in the EU system have had an influence on the changed approach by the EU Commission and EEAS, it has chosen to apply MLG.

These different reasons for applying MLG leads to presenting the hypothesis, which will help to guide the analysis and develop the conclusions, as well as help to understand how or if the different levels of the EU system led to a change of strategies. Moreover, the use of MLG will help to understand whether the different levels had an influence or not, or if the Global Gateway only was the planned continuance of the Connecting Europe and Asia strategy.

3.2 Hypothesis

Before presenting and discussing the hypothesis for this thesis, a brief presentation of the use of hypotheses in MLG will be given as well as addressing some criticism towards the theory. MLG has been criticised for only providing a description of the EU, that it is not a theory, for lacking a casual motor of integration or a set of testable hypotheses (Jordan, 2001, p. 201). The criticism for lacking testable hypotheses has been called unjustifiable, because MLG can generate hypotheses regardless, if it is complemented by other theories or not. Moreover, in the context of the EU, MLG asks empirically testable questions about specific policy sectors (George, 2004, p. 116), which is suitable for this thesis since it relies on an empirical analysis of the two strategies. Even though connectivity falls into multiple policy sectors. This thesis focuses on a specific policy, the EU's foreign policy, and it is therefore still applicable to use MLG to fulfil the purpose. Additionally, as the research question is two-folded with the first part being an empirical question about whether there is a change between the two strategies or not, the hypothesis will only address the second part of the question.

Applying MLG to answer the research question of explaining the potential differences between the two EU connectivity strategies results in the following hypothesis:

In addition to EU Member States acting through the Council of the EU, supranational actors, specifically, the European Parliament, also influenced the EU Commission and the EEAS to create the Global Gateway by pushing for the creation of a global EU strategy on connectivity

As mentioned earlier, the EU's foreign policy is not an area in which MLG is usually applied. Applying MLG to this case results in a larger focus on the EP, which is something that applying LI would not have resulted in. LI views the EU as an international institution that can be studied by viewing states as the main actor and that each state seeks to achieve their goals by negotiation or bargaining. It views the supranational organisations that remain to be more or less obedient servants to the Member States that has limited powers (Moravcsik, 1998). Subsequently, it would not focus on the opinions expressed by the EP. Similar to LI, applying a realist perspective would not highlight the EP or the other EU institutions. It would rather focus on the states, with a focus on security, power and relative gains (Waltz, 1979). Since realist theories tend to be pessimistic about international cooperation and the states would be worried that rival states gain more (Mearsheimer, 1994). Applying MLG will therefore give a broader perspective and be able to analyse the EU institutions as well as the Member States influence on the creation of a global EU strategy on connectivity.

The hypothesis results in two the questions, which specific EU actors and what is the definition of influence? For this thesis, influence is defined as “to affect or

change (someone or something) in an indirect but usually important way” (Britannica Dictionary, 2022). This definition is relatively open, and the influence does not need to be intentional for the outcome. This means that the definition does not eliminate actions that could be of importance even if the actions did not aim to be of significance for the change of strategies. Meaning that other aspects can be analysed and not only when it is explicitly mentioned that the actors want to see a specific change. Additionally, since MLG is applied the influence from the different EU actors will lay the foundation for explaining the creation of the Global Gateway. The question of which actors is further defined in the next chapter, see subsection 4.3 *Case selection and selection of material*. Moreover, the hypothesis results in the causal mechanism for the creation of a global EU strategy on connectivity, to be pressure on the EU Commission and the EEAS to develop a more far-reaching strategy to be able to compete with and counteract China. The causal mechanism will also be further explored in the next chapter in connection to the method of causal process tracing.

By using the theory of MLG to analyse the strategies it shall help to see if different levels in the EU system, and especially the EP, influenced the EU Commission and the EEAS to create the Global Gateway only three years after they presented the building blocks for an EU strategy on Connecting Europe and Asia. MLG shall give the opportunity to analyse the potential differences between the two strategies from the perspective of multiple actors and levels of the decision-making process. MLG shall help to analyse if there was influence from the EUMS and the other EU institutions, as well as a potential influence from a changed relation with a third country. In order to test MLG as a theory for explaining change in the EU’s foreign policy the research design and the operationalisation will be presented in the next chapter. This will help to set up the empirical analysis and make it possible to draw conclusions.

4 Methodology

This chapter will present the research design, the case selection and selection of material, as well as the operationalisation. The research design will consist of a controlled comparison that is paired with causal process tracing in order to answer the two-folded research question. After these choices have been explained, the cases, which are the two EU strategies on connectivity, the question of which actors from the previous chapter will be answered, and the material that will be used will be presented and discussed. Thereafter will the different concepts be operationalised into variables. All this is done in order to set up and execute the empirical analysis and further connect it to the theory of MLG.

4.1 Research Design

To be able to fulfil the purpose and answer the research question, this subsection will present and explain the research design. It will be a qualitative comparative case study analysis. It will consist of a combination of causal process tracing and comparative method. These methods are selected for different reasons. Comparative method highlights the *how*, but it does not specify the *what* of the analysis (Lijphart, 1971, p. 682). More specifically, the *how* will be the method of controlled comparison. To explain the *what* it is paired with the method of causal process tracing, which will be used to trace the causal mechanism by using detailed within-case empirical analysis of how the causal process happens in the selected case (Beach, 2017, p. 1). This results in using the comparative method to answer the first half of the research question by carrying out a controlled comparison and the causal process tracing will be used to answer the second half of the question. The different methodological choices will now be furthered explained.

Applying causal process tracing enables the study to analyse both if something made a difference and exactly how it influenced the outcome (Blatter and Haverland, 2012, p. 85), with influence being the causal mechanism. The reason for combining comparative method and causal process tracing, is because process tracing is a single-case method and it must be paired with comparative methods to be able to generalise the causal processes (Beach, 2017, p. 14). Another reason for choosing these methods is because the purpose is to determine if there are differences between the two strategies and then explain why they differ.

Causal process tracing as a method can be used in different ways. It can be used for case studies that aim at gaining a better understanding of the causal dynamics that

produced the outcome of a particular historical case. It can also be used to highlight generalisable causal mechanisms that link causes and outcomes within a population of causally similar cases (Beach, 2017, p. 1). Moreover, process tracing is divided into three variants, theory-building, theory-testing, or case-centric process tracing (Beach, 2017, p. 18). To test MLG's ability to be applied to the EU's foreign policy, theory-testing process tracing will be used as well as linking causes and outcomes. These two are used in order to empirically test the hypothesis and to be able to analyse the causal mechanism. Additionally, causal process tracing can be argued to be a Y-centred method. This means that the researcher is looking for the different causes (X) for a specific outcome (Y) and not the effects of a specific cause (Blatter and Haverland, 2012). This study will be Y-centred as it wants to explain the already known outcome, which is the creation of the Global Gateway, meaning that it is searching for the cause. The relation between X and Y is further explained in subsection 4.3, *Operationalisation*.

The method of theory-testing process tracing is used to test whether a hypothesised causal mechanism exists in a positive case. This is done by exploring if the predicted evidence of a hypothesised causal mechanism exists. If evidence of a mechanism that links X and Y is provided it is possible to make stronger claims of causation within the studied case. Additionally, tracing mechanisms enables a better understanding of how X causes Y (Beach, 2017, p. 18). The first step when using theory-testing process tracing is to theorise a plausible causal mechanism based on logical reasoning and existing literature. The causal mechanism shall then be operationalised by developing predicted empirical observables for the mechanism (Beach, 2017, pp. 18–19). The hypothesised causal mechanism of this thesis is pressure on the EU Commission and the EEAS to develop a more far-reaching strategy to compete with China, which will be tested by studying different EUMS, the EP and the Council of the EU and their potential influence on the case of the evolution of a global EU strategy on connectivity. This causal mechanism will be discussed together with the operationalisation of the Y variable in subsection 4.3, *Operationalisation*.

The core of theory-testing process tracing consists of a structured empirical assessment of whether the hypothesised causal mechanism exists in the evidence of the selected case. The selection of the empirical material is explained in the next subsection, but it is gathered and selected to determine if the predicted evidence was present or not for the selected mechanism (Beach, 2017, p. 19). Moreover, while using process tracing, developing a descriptive narrative of what happened in the case can help to shed light on the potential mechanism (Beach, 2017, pp. 20–21). This will be done in chapter 5.1, *Connecting Europe and Asia vs Global Gateway – determining the differences*, by presenting and comparing the differences between the two strategies with the help of the comparative method of controlled comparison.

Lastly, the comparative method is a part of the research design because the two strategies must be compared in order to fulfil the aim of this thesis. It is used as

a method for discovering empirical relationships among variables, and not as a method of measurement (Lijphart, 1971, p. 683). This is because the purpose is not to measure how much the strategies differ from each other. It aims at discovering what the differences between them are and explain it, which is why the method of controlled comparison is selected.

4.2 Case selection and selection of material

This subsection will explain the case selection, how it is both a comparative study and a case study, as well as discussing what material is selected to carry out the empirical analysis and why it is selected. Moreover, it will answer the question of which actors that this research will focus on. This is done in order to narrow down the scope and focus on the actors that have changed their opinion during the timeframe of this thesis, which is 2018 to 2021 as it was during this time that the two strategies were presented.

The selected cases are the two Joint Communications, *Connecting Europe and Asia – Building blocks for an EU strategy* and the *Global Gateway*. These two cases are both considered as two individual cases and as a single case. This is because of the two-folded question. In order to answer the first part of the research question a comparison is necessary and it is only possible to compare something if it is more than one thing. However, since the Global Gateway partly builds on the achievements of Connecting Europe and Asia, it makes it a case of the evolution of an EU global connectivity strategy as well. Meaning that the second part of the research question can be addressed as a single case study with the aim of determining the cause for the outcome, which is the Global Gateway. Moreover, the two strategies can be viewed as a single case as they are the same in their nature. Both strategies are international EU strategies on connectivity that were launched and created by the same supranational institutions, the EU Commission and the EEAS. Both strategies were presented as Joint Communications to the same group of EU institutions, which welcomed comments and discussion on the different strategic approaches. Another reason for viewing them as a single case is because both strategies aim at improving the physical infrastructure of the transport, digital and energy sector.

To meet the purpose of this thesis and to be able to answer the two-folded research question, different sources of material are necessary. The reason for having different sources of material is to be able to study the different causes, which led to the changed approach by the EU Commission and the EEAS. The material must enable a comparison concerning the two strategies and facilitate the explanation for the differences between them. The material must concern different areas and different actors of the EU system to enable the analysis. Regardless of this, the main source will still be the two Joint Communications from the EU Commission and the EEAS on the two strategies. The reason for this is because they are the primary

source of what the strategies contain, and the strategies are the base for the entire analysis.

To strengthen the analysis, it will be complemented with different sources of material. The second source of material will be from and about the EP and the Council of the EU. For example, documents, Council Conclusions, and press releases. For the EP, their annual reports on the CFSP will also be utilised. The reason for this is because the EP's annual reports give a good view of the EP's joint opinion regarding connectivity overtime. The third source of material will be about China in relation to the EU. This material will consist of both news articles, documents, and previous research on their relationship. The reason for including material on China and the EU's relation is because it could have had an important influence on the outcome since it changed in between the time of the two being launched.

The fourth source of material will be about the EUMS. It will especially focus on a handful of Member States, Lithuania, Portugal, France, and Germany. These four Member States are singled out for different reasons. Lithuania is selected since they decided to leave the 17+1 Initiative in mid 2021, before the Global Gateway was presented (Euractiv, 2021). Portugal is selected because they decided to sign cooperation agreements with China and participate in BRI between the time of Connecting Europe and Asia and the Global Gateway being presented (Brown, 2020, p. 3). France and Germany are selected because of their influence and size and because they have been outspoken about Member States signing agreements with China (Willsher, 2019). Additionally, during the timeframe of 2018 to 2021, the Presidency of the Council of the European Union has been held by both Germany (Fall 2020), and Portugal (Spring 2021). Even if it is outside the timeframe of 2018 to 2021 France held the Presidency during the Spring of 2022 (Council of the European Union, 2016). The material will therefore be both in the form of news articles and the Presidency Programmes.

This leads to the answer to the question of which actors from subsection 3.2, *Hypothesis*. The different actors are these four Member States, the EP, the Council of the EU, the EU Commission, and the EEAS as well as China. Before using these sources of material and analysing the actions of these actors, the operationalisation will be presented.

4.3 Operationalisation

This subsection aims to present the operationalisation of this thesis and discuss the causal mechanism. The concept of causal mechanism is defined as “the processes or pathways through which an outcome is brought into being” (Little, 2004, p. 100). This means that an outcome is explained by offering a hypothesis about the causal mechanism. This was done in subsection 3.2, *Hypothesis*. Operationalising the

hypothesis will entail defining the causal mechanism and situating it to the cause (X) and the outcome (Y). Moreover, there are different ways of looking at the relation between X and Y. With the methodological choices made for this thesis, the relation between X and Y is that “there is a causal mechanism leading from the occurrence of X to the occurrence of Y” (Little, 2004, p. 100). This relation is illustrated in *Table 4.1, Operationalisation of hypothesis*. This definition is selected because of the methodological choice of theory-testing causal process tracing. With the aim of finding evidence of a mechanism that links X and Y together to be able to claim causation.

Table 4.1 Operationalisation of hypothesis



Source: Own creation

As this research is Y-centred it has a defined dependent variable, which is the creation of the Global Gateway. This results in a vaguer independent variable as the empirical analysis will search for the exact cause, or in this case, finding out what happened during the timeframe of 2018 to 2021, that led to pressure on the EU Commission and the EEAS to create the Global Gateway. These events and opinions from different supranational and national EU actors will be found with the help of the causal mechanism. Moreover, the causal mechanism is explained by developing predicted empirical observables for the mechanism. In this case are these predicted empirical observables not more specified than their level as an EU actor, which resulted in pressure on the EU Commission and the EEAS to create a broader EU strategy on connectivity. The specific actions and opinions will instead be highlighted and discussed in the next chapter.

Before the empirical analysis, it is important to point out that since this is a single-outcome study, and it is therefore not possible to generalise beyond this case. This means that the analysis can focus on creating a comprehensive storyline and create an explanation to the individual case (Blatter and Haverland, 2012, p. 135). Nonetheless, the model and framework could be applied to causally similar cases. For example, it could potentially be applied to the development of the Strategic Compass, which is a recently approved action plan for strengthening the EU’s security and defence policy by 2030 (EEAS, 2022b). It is a part of the EU foreign policy, it has an international aim, as well as an aim to strengthen the EU’s role as a global actor (EEAS, 2022a). This means that the Strategic Compass have common features as the Global Gateway and that the framework could be further developed

and applied to other cases. The presented framework and methodological choices will now be applied in the next chapter.

5 Empirical analysis

This chapter will contain the empirical analysis of the two EU connectivity strategies. It will analyse the differences between the two strategies and use MLG to explain the differences. It will search for the cause to the differences between the two approaches which resulted in the outcome, the Global Gateway. It will be divided into two parts to be able to answer the two-folded research question. The first part will be a descriptive analysis to compare the two strategies. This is done in order to determine where there has been change and where there has been continuity. The second part will be a theory-testing analysis to test the hypothesis. This includes finding the cause for the outcome by analysing the selected actors who might have affected the outcome. This part will be divided into two parts as well. It will commence by deepening the discussion on the EU's and China's relationship and how it has developed. Thereafter will a discussion on the selected EU actors be carried out on how they might have influenced the EU Commission and the EEAS to create a global EU strategy on connectivity.

5.1 Connecting Europe and Asia vs Global Gateway – determining the differences

This subsection will consist of a descriptive analysis and controlled comparison of the similarities and dissimilarities between Connecting Europe and Asia (2018) and the Global Gateway (2021). This will be done by comparing the content and the structure of the two strategies. It will include a discussion on whether the shortcomings of the Connecting Europe and Asia have been addressed with the Global Gateway and in what way that has been done. The subsection will highlight where there has been change and where there has been continuity between the strategies. This is done to address the first half of the research question – if there are important differences between the two strategies. This comparison is done before analysing the changed relationship between the EU and China.

First of all, the 2018 strategy was proposed as building blocks for an EU strategy that would connect Europe and Asia with each other (European Commission, 2018, p. 1). This means that it was not meant to be building blocks for a global EU strategy on connectivity. However, since the Global Gateway builds on the achievements of the 2018 strategy, as well as the Economic and Investment Plan for the Western Balkans, the Eastern Partnership, the Southern Neighbourhood, and the Connectivity Partnership with Japan and India (European Commission, 2021b, p. 2), it had a role in the creation of the global EU strategy. The most evident

difference between the two strategies is therefore their geographical area of focus. This progress to create a strategy with an intercontinental geographical approach, will be furthered explored in the following subsections in connection to the EU's relationship with China.

The core of the two strategies is similar. Both the 2018 and 2021 strategy have physical infrastructure: transport, energy, and digital, as areas of focus. The most prominent difference here is that the Global Gateway also includes climate, health, and education and research as focus areas (European Commission, 2021b, p. 4). This does not mean that the 2018 strategy does not including these additional areas as well, but it means that it has become more of a focal point during the three years that passed between the launching of the two strategies. For example, the increased importance of health in the 2021 strategy has been highlighted by the COVID-19 pandemic. It led the EU to create a new agency, the Health and Emergency Preparedness and Response Authority (HERA), which together with the Global Gateway will help to address the problem of bottlenecks in the international supply chain of medical equipment. In addition, COVID-19 stressed the need to develop local medical manufacturing (European Commission, 2021b, p. 7). This need had not been emphasised when Connecting Europe and Asia was presented, as the healthcare systems had not been put under as much pressure before the pandemic. Another reason for not including the development of local manufacturing in the 2018 strategy is because it is mainly an issue in Africa (European Commission, 2021b, p. 7).

Another similarity is that both strategies have specified key principals, but with different focal points, one on connectivity and one on infrastructure development. The 2018 strategy put emphasis on sustainable, comprehensive, and international rules-based connectivity (European Commission, 2018, pp. 2–3). Whereas the 2021 strategy have six key principles; democratic values and high standards, good governance and transparency, equal partnership, clean and green, security-focused, and catalysing private sector investment, which address how the strategy will channel EU spendings on global infrastructure developments (European Commission, 2018, p. 3). Even if these concepts sound different from each other, they correspond to each other in some ways. The democratic values and high standards and good governance and transparency from the Global Gateway partially corresponds to rule-based. It aims to offer a values-based option to its partners when choosing how to meet their infrastructure investment needs, which includes adhering to rule of law among other things. The good governance and transparency includes a level playing field for potential investors (European Commission, 2021b, p. 3). Whereas the rule-based principle includes a transparent environment, a level playing field for enterprises and upholding rules and regulations for people, goods, services, and capital so it can operate in a smooth, fair and efficient way (European Commission, 2018, p. 3). The principal of the concepts is therefore similar, but the strategies have chosen different ways to highlight it, with the Global Gateway going more in depth with the concepts compared to Connecting Europe and Asia.

The key principle of sustainable connectivity from 2018 can be found in several of the key principles from 2021. It includes creating growth and jobs, to adhere to high standards of transparency and good governance, respond to the challenges of climate change and environmental degradation. It aims to create connectivity that is economically, fiscally, environmentally, and socially sustainable in the long term (European Commission, 2018, p. 2). The difference to the Global Gateway is that the 2021 strategy has included the concept of sustainable connectivity in the different principles instead of having it as a separate concept. It is integrated and streamlined in multiple principles (European Commission, 2021b, p. 3). This could be a consequence of the heightened role of sustainability in von der Leyen's Commission, whose President's political programme integrates the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) in every Commission proposal, policy, and strategy. For example, the European Green Deal, which is a major policy initiative from the EU Commission, includes 12 of the 17 SDGs from Agenda 2030 (European Commission, 2022b). However, both strategies are aligned with the SDGs (European Commission, 2018, p. 2, 2021b, p. 2), but this could explain why it is more streamlined in Global Gateway and why climate has taken a more prominent role.

The last connectivity concept from 2018, comprehensive connectivity, does not correspond to the principles of 2021 like the other two does. This does not exclude it from being found in Global Gateway, since it includes a comprehensive strategic framework to connectivity. It even includes more areas to achieve it in than Connecting Europe and Asia does. This means that despite not corresponding to the principles in the 2021 strategy the way the other two concepts does, it is still found, and the strategy has increased its scope of connectivity since 2018. It can also be regarded as more comprehensive as it includes more geographical areas to achieve it in (European Commission, 2018, 2021b). This could explain why it is not highlighted as a principle, since it is more productive to incorporate it as a whole into the strategy.

Regarding the financing, both strategies include a discussion on this. The main dissimilarity is that the Global Gateway contains a detailed investment plan on how it will mobilise up to €300 billion, whereas the Connecting Europe and Asia explicitly aims to not establish an investment plan. It rather highlights that the EU's existing and future financial instrument could offer perspectives on how to support private investments in connectivity related projects. It also does not include how much money it would need to carry out the strategy (European Commission, 2018, p. 10, 2021b, pp. 8–11). In addition, the Global Gateway adds another financial tool to the EU's tool kit by establishing a European Export Credit Facility. Export credits was only mentioned as an area of improvement for establishing a level playing field in the 2018 strategy, but it did not explore it further. In addition, the 2018 strategy only discuss that the EU should strengthen its cooperation with the EUMS's public and private institutions, while the 2021 strategy emphasis how they would coordinate better with the EUMS (European Commission, 2018, pp. 11–12, 2021b, p. 9).

An explanation to the difference in the financial discussion is that the 2018 strategy was presented at the end of one MFF and during the negotiation for the next one. Whereas the 2021 strategy was launch in the first year of the current MFF. During the negotiations for the MFF of 2021-2027, the EU Commission put forward its proposal for investments on sustainable connectivity and an investment framework for external action that would build on the current European Fund for Sustainable Development (EFSD) (European Commission, 2018, pp. 10–11). This set up for what was included in the financial framework for the Global Gateway. It furthers the EFSD to EFSD+, which is responsible for almost half of the Global Gateways budget (European Commission, 2021b, pp. 9–10). This makes the 2021 strategy more concrete as it includes specific proposals. Moreover, it means that the proposals in the Connecting Europe and Asia and the work for a larger budget for sustainable connectivity set up for the Global Gateway’s investment plan. This could also explain why the Global Gateway was called a rebranding campaign.

Concerning the structure of the two strategies there are both similarities and disparities. Both strategies commence with an introduction of the aims, what it will contribute to and the reason behind the strategy. The difference here is that the Global Gateway has a more in-depth introduction and Connecting Europe and Asia includes a definition of connectivity. Thereafter both present the key principles of the strategies and discuss them. Afterwards both strategies discuss the different areas for connectivity and infrastructure investments. This section in the strategies differ a little bit. For example, the 2018 strategy divides the discussion on transport into air, land, and sea, whereas the 2021 strategy only discuss the different forms of transport as a collective. In addition, for each area of investment, the Global Gateway includes how it plans to carry it out “on the ground”, which includes the financing, where and what it will do. The projects are in a variety of geographical areas such as Africa, Latin America, and the Southern Neighbourhood. This is to some extent included in Connecting Europe and Asia, but it is more included in the text and not as highlighted. It rather focus on how to expand different EU initiatives such as the TEN-T and Digital4Development to Asia (European Commission, 2018, 2021b). This could be because of it only being building blocks for a strategy or because it has a narrower view of how to achieve connectivity than the Global Gateway.

After having presented the key priorities and areas to achieve it in the Global Gateway’s investment plan and delivery model is presented, thereafter is the coordination with like-minded partners discussed (European Commission, 2021b, pp. 8–12). Compared to Connecting Europe and Asia, which first discusses building partnerships and thereafter discusses investments in sustainable connectivity and proposals for new and innovative EU financing for connectivity. The partnership section is divided into bilateral, regional, and international cooperation, which the Global Gateway does not do (European Commission, 2018, pp. 7–10). The Global Gateway then continues with a part on how it will be carried out with the TEI’s and how the EU institutions, the EUMS, and the European financial institutions will

work together (European Commission, 2021b, p. 12). While Connecting Europe and Asia only concludes the strategy (European Commission, 2018, p. 13). This means that both strategies include the same chapters, but that Global Gateway includes more and that the strategies goes in depth on different sections.

The main differences between the two strategies would be an increased focus on the climate in the newer strategy. This correlates to the EU Commission presenting the European Green Deal on the 11th of December 2019, which is a strategy to achieve climate neutrality by 2050 (European Commission, 2022a). The Global Gateway also emphasis that gender equality should be included and considered in all projects (European Commission, 2021b, p. 4), which is not even mentioned in the 2018 strategy. Lastly, the largest difference between the strategies is the Team Europe approach. The Team Europe approach aims for the EU and its Member States as well as the EIB and EBRD to work better together, to facilitate the implementation of the SDGs, and includes a more comprehensive section on joint implementation. It was created because of the conditions created by the COVID-19 pandemic and for the EU to act with a united European response on the major needs emerging in partner countries (EEAS, DG INTPA and DG NEAR, 2021, pp. 8–9). With the Team Europe approach the Global Gateway in cooperates the different levels of the EU system in a way that the Connecting Europe and Asia does not do. It in cooperates the different levels by setting up a Global Gateway Board, a Business Advisory Group on the Global Gateway and having the EU Delegations work closely with the EUMS (European Commission, 2021b, p. 12). This could also explain the different approach to partnership in the two strategies. Both strategies include partnership at different levels, but the Global Gateway has included it in the approach on how it should be achieved.

Two of the shortcomings of Connecting Europe and Asia that was highlighted in subsection 2.3 was the need for more digital connectivity and that the EU did not have any serious “connectivity partnerships” apart from Japan. The Global Gateway addressed the need for more digital connectivity, especially since the pandemic heightened the importance of secure and trustworthy digital infrastructures (European Commission, 2021b, p. 4). The lack of connectivity partners had been addressed before the Global Gateway was presented, but it continued to strengthen it with the EU hosting regular Global Gateway Forums for its partners and stakeholders (European Commission, 2021b, p. 13). However, one partnership that changed was the one between the EU and China, which will be discussed furthered in the next subsection. Moreover, the 2018 strategy was criticised for not managing to turn infrastructure projects, European external investments, private investments, and financial investments into a coherent platform (Gehrke, 2020, p. 242). The creation of the European Export Credit Facility in the Global Gateway addresses this issue. This shows that there has been a continuance of the shortcomings in the newer strategy as it has addressed the issues and put forward a new solution.

Overall, both change and continuity can be found when comparing the strategies. The most prominent continuances with the strategies are that the Global Gateway

includes the aspects that Connecting Europe and Asia highlights as areas that either needs to be changed or created, for example the European Export Credit Facility, that the key words from the 2018 strategy is streamlined in the 2021 strategy, and the increased focus on the climate. Where there has been change is in the geographical area of focus, the inclusion of gender equality and in the approach to connectivity. Connecting Europe and Asia aims to build a better connection between the two contents with a better infrastructure that links them two together. Whereas the Global Gateway focus on both increasing the EU's global role as well as creating independencies for third countries. The other large difference between the two strategies is the Team Europe approach in the Global Gateway, which in cooperates the different levels of the EU system and works with the partner countries in a way that the Connecting Europe and Asia does not do. In summary, this would be the important differences between the two strategies and answers the first part of the research question. The two following subsections will now address and answer the second part of the question.

5.2 From strategic partners to systemic rivals – the changed relationship between the EU and China

This part of the analysis will focus on the relation between the EU and China and how its development during the recent years has had an influence on the creation of a global EU strategy on connectivity. It will include a discussion of individual EU actors as well as the EU as a whole. It will give an overview on when China's and the EU's relation changed from strategic partners to systemic rivals. This will give a better understanding of the setting that the two EU strategies were presented in, and to be able to answer the research question. Since the change of the EU's and China's relation could give an explanation to the changed approach.

The relationship between China and the EU changed in the Spring of 2019 when the EU Commission and the HR/VP presented *EU-China – A strategic outlook*, which included the EU labelling China as a 'systemic rival'. This can be compared to the EU announcing that it should develop a strategic partnership with China in 2003 (Council of the European Union, 2003, p. 16), and to them launching a comprehensive strategic partnership with China the same year (Maher, 2016, p. 961). The strategic partnership was later broadened when the EEAS presented *EU-China 2020 Strategic Agenda for Cooperation* in 2013 (EEAS, 2013). However, because of China's and the EU's different political views, geopolitical interests, and conception of the world order, it became difficult to emerge the strategic partnership and it complicated their bilateral relations (Maher, 2016, p. 975). For example, EU officials and politicians has expressed their increasing concerns over China's economic expansionism, human rights violations, and Huawei. The COVID-19 pandemic and the developments in Hong Kong has also had a negative impact on the EU's and China's relations (Cameron, 2020; Grajewski, 2020; Small, 2020).

Even if some of these examples happened after the EU branded China as systemic rivals, it still did not help to improve their relationship. However, there was one EUMS who made the strategic outreach to China as a cornerstone of their Presidency of the Council of the EU. This was Germany during their Presidency in the Fall of 2020, since Angela Merkel believed that “it is right and important to strive for good strategic relations with China” (von der Burchard, 2020).

Germany pushed hard to finalise the Comprehensive Agreement on Investment (CAI) between the EU and China, which had taken seven years to negotiate, during their Presidency (von der Burchard, 2020). The objective of CAI is to open up investment opportunities for EU companies who operates on the Chinese market. The CAI would be a step for the EU to foster a balanced and rules-based economic relationship with China (Brunsdon and Yang, 2021). The finalisation and ratification process of CAI did not have a positive impact on China’s and the EU’s relationship. In March 2021, China imposed sanctions against several European entities and political representatives, including five Members of the EP (MEPs) and the Subcommittee on Human Rights. The Chinese sanction was a retaliatory act to the EU’s decision to enact restrictive measures against four Chinese official because of human rights violations against the Muslim Uyghur minority. Subsequently, the EP would not consider any discussion on ratifying the agreement as long as there was Chinese sanctions against EU lawmakers. MEPs also emphasised to the EU Commission that the human rights situation in China and Hong Kong would be taken into account when they decide whether to endorse the agreement or not (European Parliament, 2021b). However, the EP had vowed to never ratify the deal even before China imposed their sanctions (Lau, 2021).

The EP was not the only EU entity to express concerns over the CAI. For example, Belgium and the Netherlands raised concerns regarding the EU’s ability to address human rights issues and Poland questioned why the EU was rushing the deal instead of waiting for the inauguration of U.S. President-elect Joe Biden. Germany’s push to finalise the agreement was also criticised. EU diplomats and officials highlighted, then German Chancellor, Angela Merkel, for having a crucial role in the agreement getting finalised. Before finalising the agreement, Merkel had even reached an understanding with French President Emmanuel Macron, that the ratification and signing process of the CAI would happen during the French EU Presidency in the Spring of 2022. The agreement was also of high importance to European businesses, particularly German carmakers and manufactures (von der Burchard, 2020), which could have had an influence on Germany pushing for the agreement to get done. As of April 2022, the CAI is stranded in the EP pending its ratification (Qing, 2022).

Additionally to stagnation of the CAI, the EU’s Trade Commissioner, Valdis Dombrovskis, has emphasised that the ratification process of the CAI cannot be separated from the changing dynamics of the EU’s and China’s relationship (Lau, 2021). This would suggest that the changed relationship between the two actors had a broader influence as it has affects multiple discissions and agreements. For

example, it could be a reason as to why China is not even mentioned in the Global Gateway, which it is in Connecting Europe and Asia. The Global Gateway also emphasise the need of working with trusted partners (European Commission, 2021b, p. 1), which China is not as they have branded them as systemic rivals. Moreover, as Berlin-based analyst for the Rhodium Group who monitors Chinese ties with Europe, Noah Barkin, expressed in an interview, “there’s a realization in Europe that China may no longer be a partner, that it may increasingly be seen as a threat” (Buckley and Bradsher, 2022). The changed view, from multiple levels in the EU system, could have had an impact as to why the EU Commission and the EEAS put forward a global EU strategy on connectivity instead of developing the building blocks to an EU strategy connecting Europe and Asia after only three years. Chinese leader also had a view of Europe as a softer actor in the Western world, that lack both the military power and will to contest the rise of China (Buckley and Bradsher, 2022). By deciding to create a global EU strategy on connectivity, which is widely viewed as the EU’s response to the BRI (Seibt, 2021), the EU shows that it is willing to go up against China.

Another aspect to the EU’s and China’s relation is the BRI and the 17+1 Initiative, which has created a potential governance problem for the EU. Both the 17+1 Initiative and the BRI includes only a selection of European countries, which means that China can negotiate with individual European countries instead of negotiating with the EU as a whole. This exposes a structural problem of the EU, and it touches upon the autonomy of European countries to make independent foreign policy outside the EU framework. It highlights that despite the creation of the HR/VP and the EEAS, that the Member States still have the power of their own foreign policy (Zeng, 2017, p. 1171). Lithuania leaving the 17+1 Initiative could be a move towards strengthening the EU’s unity, which the Lithuanian Foreign Minister, Gabreilius Landsbergis, emphasised when they left. Landsbergis called the initiative “divisive” and urged the EU to pursue a more effective 27+1 approach and for the EU and its members to communicate more with China (Euractiv, 2021). However, the response to Lithuania leaving from Chinese experts was that it was unlikely that other European countries would follow the same example (Qingqing and Kunyi, 2021). This prediction has so far been correct, but neither has there been any more EUMS that has join or signed cooperation agreements (Nedopil, 2022). However, in the beginning of 2021 almost all the 17+1 countries had either signed memoranda of understanding with the United States targeting Huawei’s access to their 5G network or joined Washington’s Clean Network initiative (Brînză, 2021). Meaning that the countries China though would be their gateway to Europe decided to work against them. This leads to continuing to view the actions of the different EU actors during the time between the two strategies and what could have led to the creation of a global EU strategy on connectivity.

5.3 The creation of a global EU strategy on connectivity – explaining the changes

This subsection will consist of specifying and analysing the cause for the outcome by discussing the selected supranational and national EU actors. It will begin with a discussion on the selected EUMS and the Council of the EU as it builds upon some of the discussions from the previous subsection in some respects. This is followed by a discussion on the EP's annual CFSP report and how it addresses connectivity and the two strategies during 2018 to 2021. This will present perspectives from different levels and actors in the EU system in order to analyse why a global strategy was presented. It will include a discussion on MLG by lifting its two logics, the functionalist and the identity logic, which will offer an explanation for creating a broader and more comprehensive strategy on connectivity. The subsection concludes with answering the second part of the research question.

As mentioned in chapter 2.2, *China's move towards Europe – the Belt and Road Initiative and 17+1*, during the time between the launching of the two strategies Lithuania left the 17+1 Initiative, Portugal and Italy signed cooperation agreements with China to join the BRI, which France and Germany viewed with suspicion. They also expressed that they rather wanted a collaboration at the EU level with China instead of Member States having individual agreements. This would correlate to Germany pushing for the EU to finalise the CAI during their EU Presidency and having an understanding with France to ratify it during the French Presidency. Contradictive to wanting to work with China on an EU level, Germany allows Chinese capital to be used to take over German firms, which allows China to increase their effectiveness on the European market (Akdemir, 2020, p. 132). The increased presence on the European market and Germany pushing for closer cooperation with China, could have been influential in the EU Commission and the EEAS pursuing a strategy, which is viewed to counteract China and their BRI (Seibt, 2021), instead of the EU only focusing on increasing the connectivity between Europe and Asia.

Another perspective as to why a global EU strategy was presented could be found in the priorities for Germany (Fall 2020), Portugal (Spring 2021) and France (Spring 2022) during their Presidency in the Council of the EU. Germany put emphasise on the COVID-19 recovery, which include creating a more innovative, fair and sustainable Europe with common values as well as a strong Europe in the world (Germany EU Presidency, 2020). Portugal pushed for better and improve relations with Africa and Latin America (Portugal EU Presidency, 2021). France focused on renewing the partnership with Africa and wanting to solidify EU's position as a development partner with the Team Europe (France EU Presidency, 2022, pp. 16, 20). All these combined represents parts of the Global Gateway. Moreover, all the regions that are mentioned as achievements in the Global

Gateways is built on, can be found in the different Presidency Programmes. This would indicate that there was influence from the EUMS to strengthening the EU's connectivity strategy to be a global EU strategy. However, the push from both France and Portugal to improve the relationship with Africa could be of strategic reasons and their colonial history or it could be to counter the perception of the EU losing ground in Africa to China, which would risk weakening the EU's hand. Some MEPs even wanted the EU-African Union (AU) Summit to take place during the Portuguese Presidency instead of the French Presidency (European Parliament, 2021c; Yotova, 2021). By creating a global connectivity strategy that aims to strengthen the physical infrastructure in Africa it manages to address the issue of losing ground to China and it manages to entertain the relationship with Africa. Even if the EU-AU Summit took place in 2022 instead of in 2021.

In addition to the priority programmes from the Presidency, the Foreign Affairs Council of the EU approved the *Council Conclusions - A Globally Connected Europe* on the 12th of July 2021. The conclusions highlight that the EU must take on a geostrategic and global approach to connectivity. The Council confirms that the EU's principal approach to connectivity is sustainable, comprehensive and rules-based. These are the key words from *Connecting Europe and Asia*, and the Council notes that the EU should apply these basic principles at a global level (Council of the European Union, 2021a). This would explain why the three key principals can be found in the six principles for the Global Gateway. Additionally, it highlights that the EU's connectivity agenda plays an important role in implementing the EU Commissions priorities for 2019-2024, especially the European Green Deal. The Council also emphasised the need for connectivity partnership with likeminded countries and regions (Council of the European Union, 2021a). This suggest that the EUMS pushed for a progression of the 2018 strategy and for it to be the core of the new global strategy. It shows that there was unity between the Member States and not just a few EUMS that wanted this, which viewing only the Presidency Programmes could suggest. Moreover, this shows that there was pressure from the Council of the EU on the EU Commission and the EEAS to create this change in their approach.

Regarding the EP's opinion, it publishes an annual report on the CFSP every year. The year when the first connectivity strategy was launched, 2018, connectivity was only mentioned in regard to the Western Balkan and the Eastern Neighbourhood. The EP called upon the EU Commission and the EEAS to strengthen its connectivity ties with the Eastern Neighbourhood and stressed the importance of transport and energy connectivity (McAllister, 2018, p. 8). Connectivity was not mentioned in relation to Asia in the 2018 report even though the report was written after the Joint Communication on *Connecting Europe and Asia* was presented. The report does however emphasis that the EP supports the presented measures to deepen the relations between the EU and Asia (McAllister, 2018, p. 10). The following year, in 2019, the EP's annual report addressed connectivity with regards to Asia. It pointed out that strengthening the relations with the East and Southeast Asia was vital for the EU's sustainable connectivity strategy. However, the report

still did not explicitly mention the Connecting Europe and Asia strategy (McAllister, 2019, p. 16).

In the EP's 2020 annual report it continued to include the Eastern Neighbourhood and Asia with regards to connectivity, but for the first time it included connectivity with a focus on Africa. The EP underlined that the EU must be more attentive to strategic regions who are gaining more international attention, especially areas where China is pursuing a policy of expansion, for example the Indo-Pacific and Africa. The EP argued that there is a need for a coherent response from the EU to this development and that the EU should seek closer collaboration with countries in these regions. According to the EP the EU's connectivity strategy should be used for this (McAllister, 2020, pp. 11, 17, 19, 20). This increased pressure from the EP could be a reason for expanding the strategy's geographical focus and not only concentrate on building ties and expanding the connectivity between Europe and Asia. This push of wanting to strengthen the EU's connectivity strategy and working closer with Africa within the context of the CFSP was further explored in the EP's 2021 annual report. The EP saw there to be a need for the EU to develop and implement a global connectivity strategy, which would be an extension of the current Europe-Asia Connectivity Strategy. Additionally, the Global Gateway was explicitly mentioned and welcomed in the annual report of 2021 (McAllister, 2021, p. 8).

Throughout the years of 2018 to 2021 connectivity became more and more prominent in the EP's annual reports on the CFSP. This points towards both the growing importance of connectivity and that connectivity are spoken about in connection to multiple regions. All the different regions mentioned with regards to connectivity in the annual reports has been addressed in the Global Gateway. However, the Eastern Neighbourhood and the Western Balkan are only mentioned as examples of regions where the EU has successfully extent TEN-T to (European Commission, 2021b, p. 6). In addition, to what was highlighted in the annual reports, the EP adopted its resolution on connectivity and EU-Asia relations on the 21st of January 2021. In the resolution the EP encouraged the EU Commission and the EEAS to create a global EU Connectivity strategy that would be an extension of the Connecting Europe and Asia Strategy (European Parliament, 2021a). Since this resolution was adopted almost a year before Global Gateway was launched it shows that there was a clear push and pressure from the EP to develop the existing connectivity strategy to an intercontinental strategy.

The EP's resolution correlates with the Council Conclusions from mid-July 2021 that wanted the same thing. This means that the two supranational institutions who are the EU's co-legislators wanted the EU Commission and the EEAS to put forward a global EU strategy. To use the illustration of the Russian Doll arrangement, if the EU Commission and the EEAS is the outer layer of the Russian Doll, the EP and the Council of the EU are the middle size and the individual EUMS are the smallest size. The smallest size has influenced the middle layer, which pressured the outer layer to create a global EU strategy on connectivity. However,

this does not discard the EUMS from having had influence on the EU Commission and the EEAS outside of the supranational institutions as well.

The functionalist logic of MLG, which recognises governance as an instrument for efficient delivery of goods (Hooghe, Schakel and Marks, 2020, p. 194), could offer an explanation for creating a broader and more comprehensive strategy on connectivity. This is because the description of what connectivity aims to achieve from the Connecting Europe and Asia states that “connectivity contributes to economic growth and jobs, global competitiveness and trade, and people, goods and services to move across and between Europe and Asia” (European Commission, 2018, p. 1). With the Global Gateway, the EU can do this in other continents and not only Asia. This means that the EU has expanded its *public good* and by applying an *optimal jurisdictional design* it can maximise benefits of scale. As the Global Gateway, amongst other things, aims to strengthen its partners by forging links and not create dependencies (European Commission, 2021b, p. 1).

In addition, the different structure in the Global Gateway on how to work with partners and carry out projects could be viewed with the identity logic of MLG, which is the demand for self-rule by those living in distinctive communities (Hooghe, Schakel and Marks, 2020, p. 194). The Team Europe approach gives the EU Delegations and the EUMS a key role in coordinating all stakeholders on the ground and reach out to the partner countries to identify projects, match them with financing, and following up on the implementation (European Commission, 2021b, p. 12). It gives the partner countries and its local and regional level the opportunity to tailor the help to their needs, but by collaborating with the EU and the different EU actors it gets the opportunity to benefit of scale. Since the EU can implement the same structure on how to work with the partner countries. This different approach to coordinate projects in the Global Gateway could both be because the EU does not want to create dependencies, and because the EU wants to offer a sustainable approach to infrastructure development then China. Even if Connecting Europe and Asia also offered a sustainable approach, the Global Gateway proposes a framework with the Team Europe on how it should be carried out and challenges China on another market.

In conclusion, different EU actors from both the national and supranational level have expressed their opinions on connectivity and what they think the EU should do and what the EU needs to improve on. They have expressed what should be included and that the EU should develop a global strategy on connectivity. Some of the opinions and actions have been taken with regards to China as the relationship changed and China grew strategic partnerships with regions where the EU wants to be influential. Nonetheless, even if the changed approach by the EU Commission and the EEAS can be explained through the desire to counter China’s growth in different regions and the two co-legislating institutions pushing for a creation of a global EU strategy on connectivity. The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic cannot be discarded as a reason for developing a global EU strategy. It is clearly stated in the Global Gateway that the pandemic highlighted difficulties in the physical

infrastructure, the lack of digital connectivity, bottlenecks, and that some continents do not have a sufficient infrastructure to manage a pandemic medically. Both because of failing transport connections and for a lack of knowhow to produce medical supplies on their own. Neither can the European Green Deal be discarded as a reason for the creation of the intercontinental approach. As the EU want to become the first climate neutral continent by 2050, they need to work with partners that has more sustainable and environmental infrastructure as well. This means that there is more than one explanation to the changed approach, but it shows that the EP, the Council of the EU, and the different EUMS input on what the EU should do and focus on was taken into consideration and included when the EU Commission and the EEAS put forward the Joint Communication for the Global Gateway. In addition, it shows that the EP has had a loud voice in the creation and development, which argues for the use of MLG when analysing the CFSP. Since it enables and highlights an analysis of the supranational institutions, which another theoretical framework would not do.

6 Conclusion

This paper has analysed and compared two EU connectivity strategies from the EU Commission and the EEAS in order to answer the question: **Are there important differences between Connecting Europe and Asia – Building Blocks for an EU Strategy and the Global Gateway, and if so, what explains the changes?** The changed relationship between the EU and China has taken a central role in the analysis as there was both a change on the supranational level, with the EU branding China systemic rivals between the time of launching the two strategies, and within some Member States during the three years that past between the launching of the two strategies. This includes EUMS joining the BRI and with, Lithuania leaving the 17+1 Initiative, and the issues with finalising the CAI.

Important differences were found between the two strategies, but the analysis also shows that there was a continuance between them and that the Global Gateway builds on Connecting Europe and Asia. The prolongation of the 2018 strategy in the 2021 strategy has been the streamlining of the core concepts of connectivity, sustainable, comprehensive, and rule-based, and the creation of the suggestions for what could be created or improved. This has been most visible regarding the financial framework of the strategy with the establishment of a European Export Credit Facility. The important differences that were found were between the two strategies was the creation of the Team Europe approach, the emphasis on gender equality, the geographical area of focus and the increased focus on the climate, as well as the approach to achieve connectivity. Meaning that even if the key words of connectivity from Connecting Europe and Asia has been streamlined, the aims of the strategies are different. The Global Gateway is a more far-reaching strategy that focus on increasing the EU's global role as well as forging links and creating independencies for third countries. Whereas Connecting Europe and Asia only aims to build a better connection between two continents, and it was created with the purpose to concrete policy proposals and initiatives to improve the connections between Asia and Europe.

By applying MLG to answer the research question it has enabled an analysis of different levels of the EU system and with it a deeper analysis of both the supranational and national level. It has showed that both the supranational and national level has been influential in the creation of a global strategy. However, one could argue that the COVID-19 pandemic led to the change of strategies, since it led to the creation of the Team Europe approach. It heightened the need for digital connectivity, reliable supply chains in order to avoid bottlenecks, and the problems in the healthcare system. Nonetheless, these highlighted obstacles and weakness created a setting for the EU Commission and the EEAS to strengthen the CFSP with

the support from the EUMS and the co-legislating EU institutions. Since the construction of the EU is a process of adoption to needs and opportunities.

In addition, this analysis has been a hard test for MLG as it is usually not applied to understand the EU's foreign policy. The analysis shows that it is possible to use MLG to study this policy sector. Since despite the EUMS reserving the ultimate mandate for the foreign policy there are different dimensions to the creation of the EU's foreign policy and it affects different levels of the society. The analysis also highlights the opportunity for further research by applying another approach such as a geopolitical framework. This would unpack another perspective than the one that MLG offers, since it would focus on other aspects. It would offer a deeper understanding of the role of China on the international infrastructure market and what effect the changed relationship between the EU and China could have had on the development of a global EU strategy on connectivity. However, having applied MLG to understand and explain the differences between these two strategies has highlighted the role that the EP has played and that it is not only the Member States that can have influence on the CFSP and what policies or strategies that are created.

7 References

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