

Revisiting China's Principle of Mutual Respect for Sovereignty and Territorial Integrity in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The Construction of a New Paradox?

Analyse de la mise en œuvre par la Chine du principe de respect mutuel de la souveraineté et de l'intégrité territoriale en Bosnie-Herzégovine. La création d'un nouveau paradoxe ?

Robert Dopchie



Electronic version

URL: <https://journals.openedition.org/balkanologie/4728>

ISSN: 1965-0582

Publisher

Association française d'études sur les Balkans (Afebalk)

Electronic reference

Robert Dopchie, "Revisiting China's Principle of Mutual Respect for Sovereignty and Territorial Integrity in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The Construction of a New Paradox?", *Balkanologie* [Online], Vol. 18 n° 1 | 2023, Online since 15 December 2023, connection on 07 January 2024. URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/balkanologie/4728>

This text was automatically generated on January 7, 2024.

The text and other elements (illustrations, imported files) are "All rights reserved", unless otherwise stated.

Revisiting China's Principle of Mutual Respect for Sovereignty and Territorial Integrity in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The Construction of a New Paradox?

Analyse de la mise en œuvre par la Chine du principe de respect mutuel de la souveraineté et de l'intégrité territoriale en Bosnie-Herzégovine. La création d'un nouveau paradoxe ?

Robert Dopchie

- 1 For the past two decades, China has emerged as a significant player in the realm of International Relations, as it continues to experience rapid economic and political development.¹ In this context, China has sought to establish and strengthen bilateral relationships with a number of sovereign states, and has also initiated the Belt and Road Initiative, a global project aimed at advancing China's norms and values on the international stage. The Western Balkans region, comprising the six states of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia, is considered strategically important for China due to its proximity to the European single market.
- 2 In its foreign policy, China adheres to a set of fundamental principles, including mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, as guiding tenets. Bosnia and Herzegovina, like other countries in the region, has also witnessed China's growing interest in the Western Balkans. However, the unique political structure of Bosnia and Herzegovina, characterized by the difficult cooperation of three distinct ethnic groups with differing perceptions of China, raises questions regarding the coherence of China's foreign policy, and whether the country is able to consistently adhere to its fundamental principles. In this context, it is important to examine the extent to which

China's foreign policy in Bosnia and Herzegovina is able to effectively navigate the complexities inherent in the country's political structure. To this end, the present article delves into the following research question: "To what extent is China able to conduct a coherent foreign policy in Bosnia and Herzegovina that is consistent with its fundamental principles?"

- 3 This research is anchored in the discipline of International Political Economy (IPE), which is concerned with the examination of the interrelationships between economy, politics, international relations, and geopolitics. Specifically, this study adopts a rational choice theoretical framework, which posits that actors in the international system, guided by specific motivations, make rational decisions in order to maximize their gains, whether absolute or relative.² However, it must be acknowledged that actors' behavior may also be influenced by the institutional, cultural, emotional, and psychological factors that shape their preferences.³ Despite its name, rational choice theory (RCT) is not a theory in the strict sense of the term, but rather an approach that encompasses a range of theories employing the rationality assumption.⁴ It is also important to note that the rational choice approach is descriptive and not normative, meaning that it does not make any judgement on the definition of actors' preferences.⁵ Thus, actors' preferences encompass not only economic gains but also political and cultural advantages, highlighting the multifaceted nature of their rational choice considerations.⁶
- 4 Finally, in terms of methodology, this study employs a qualitative research design, mobilizing a documentary research method, which includes a comprehensive review of scholarly articles, books, chapters from edited volumes, official reports, and newspaper articles. The study is divided into three sections. The first section examines the approach adopted by the Chinese government in its bilateral relations with other states. The second section focuses on the empirical case of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the third section delves into the paradox that arises from the disparity between China's foreign policy narratives and its actions on the ground.

Principle of mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity

- 5 Prior to delving into a detailed examination of the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina, it is imperative to provide a historical context for China's diplomatic strategies. As early as 1954, former Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai established the norms that guide China's foreign policy, known as the "Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence." One of these principles is mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity. Notably, this principle has been of vital importance to the Chinese government since 1971, following the implementation of the "One-China Policy."⁷ Indeed, the Chinese government views separatist movements as being equally as perilous to the Chinese state as acts of terrorism and religious extremism, as evidenced by the creation of the "Three Evils" campaign in June 2001. Defined within the "Shanghai Convention on Combating Terrorism, Separatism and Extremism" as "any act intended to violate territorial integrity of a State including by annexation of any part of its territory or to disintegrate a State, committed in a violent manner, as well as planning and preparing, and abetting such act, and subject to criminal prosecuting in accordance with the national laws of the Parties."⁸ This approach was initially designed to suppress

separatist tendencies in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region through joint intervention by Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan.⁹ This campaign is aligned with a broader strategy of the Chinese government to address challenges to social stability and security, including protests and demonstrations. Since then, as recently reaffirmed by the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity remains a paramount concern for China, both in its domestic and foreign policy.

- 6 China's adherence to the principle of mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity can be observed through a variety of examples, both domestically and internationally. Domestically, China has taken measures to assert its sovereignty over territories that are contested by separatist movements, such as Hong Kong,¹⁰ Macau, Taiwan, Tibet, and Xinjiang, by prohibiting any economic exchange with third states that recognize the independence and sovereignty of these regions.¹¹ Additionally, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) institutionalized this policy through the implementation of an "Anti-Secession Law" in 2005, aimed at "preserving China's sovereignty and territorial integrity, and safeguarding the fundamental interests of the Chinese nation."¹² In the realm of foreign policy, China does not support movements for separatism such as those in Catalonia,¹³ Scotland,¹⁴ and the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus.¹⁵ Recently, China has also called for Russian and Ukrainian forces to respect each other's territorial integrity,¹⁶ thus further emphasizing the importance it places on this principle. Furthermore, in the context of the Western Balkans, China still refuses to recognize the state of Kosovo and uses its veto power in the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) to prevent Kosovo's accession to the UN.¹⁷

Analyzing the dynamics of China's foreign policy involvement in Bosnia and Herzegovina through the lens of sovereignty and territorial integrity

- 7 The examination of the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina, with its unique post-war political structure, offers a pertinent case study for the application of China's principle of mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity. As established by the Dayton Peace Accords of 1995, Bosnia and Herzegovina is composed of two entities, each of which holds its own constitution: the Croat-Bosniak Federation and the Republika Srpska (Serb Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina). The former entity is characterized by a complex structure, comprising of ten cantons with varying ethnic majority populations, while the latter entity is more homogenous and dominated by a Serb majority. This disparity is also reflected in the federal level governance, with Bosnia and Herzegovina being a multiparty federal republic with a parliamentary system overseen by the Council of Ministers. The presidency of the state rotates among three elected representatives, one from the Republika Srpska and two from the Croat-Bosniak Federation. Additionally, the Office of the High Representative in Bosnia and Herzegovina, established in accordance with the Dayton Accords, serves as a mechanism designed to facilitate international oversight in the implementation of agreements brokered among the diverse ethnic groups that constitute the nation, spanning from the national to subnational and local levels. At present, the office is headed by Christian Schmidt.¹⁸ It has historically played a key role in the establishment of various forms of national unity, including the adoption of common license plates, the

implementation of a unified passport system, the establishment of a single currency, and the creation of a national flag.

- 8 The Bosnian War, which occurred between 1992 and 1995, was met with active participation from a number of states, including Germany, Canada, the United States, France, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom, and Turkey,¹⁹ as well as the presidency of the EU Council and the European Commission. However, China did not participate in the ceasefire efforts.
- 9 In fact, Chinese authorities held a “low profile” approach on the international stage throughout the 1990s,²⁰ thus refraining from taking part in the Dayton Peace Accords or the Peace Implementation Council. It was not until the official launch of the 16+1 Format in 2012 – of which Bosnia and Herzegovina is a member –, at the end of the Hu Jintao-Wen Jiabao era (2003-2013), that Chinese interest in the Western Balkans region began to manifest, along with the initiation of the 16+1 format, an institutional framework aimed at fostering economic, political, and cultural cooperation with 16 Central and Eastern European countries. This interest, however, was characterized by a questioning of the post-conflict contributions of Western countries in the region, similar to the approach taken by Russia.²¹
- 10 Furthermore, China has exhibited a critical stance towards the extension of the mandate of the High Representative's Office in Bosnia and Herzegovina. China did support Christian Schmidt's candidacy, but not without declaring that international administration in the country must come to a close by the end of 2022.²² This public announcement, the first of its kind since the end of the Bosnian War, reveals a divide between Western and Chinese (supported by Russia) approaches to the region. This division is notably mirrored in the national politics of Bosnia and Herzegovina, where the two entities, characterized by their contrasting political orientations, stand in opposition: the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina tends to lean towards progressive, socialist, and pro-European policies, while Republika Srpska often aligns with nationalist, pro-Serbian, Russian, and anti-Western perspectives.²³ Officially, China appears to support the status quo of Bosnia and Herzegovina's federated structure. However, an analysis of economic projects and political actions undertaken by Chinese authorities in the country, demonstrate a closer relationship between China and the authorities of Republika Srpska than with those of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. As a result, it can be argued that, despite its official policy stance, China is interfering in the balance of ethnic and territorial relations. Moreover, these findings suggest that China's activities in the Western Balkans region are motivated more by pragmatic economic interests than by principled political and security considerations.
- 11 Despite the limited academic literature on the impact of China's increasing economic presence in Bosnia and Herzegovina, several scholars have noted indeed that Chinese initiatives are primarily concentrated in the entity of Republika Srpska, to the overall disadvantage of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina.²⁴ In fact, the government of the Republika Srpska has demonstrated a steadfast commitment to the advancement of its economic development agenda, with a specific focus on attracting foreign investment in the energy sector. In recent years, the entity has initiated various measures designed to enhance the investment climate, such as the simplification of administrative procedures, the reduction of bureaucratic barriers, and the provision of tax incentives to investors. In stark contrast, the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina operates within a highly intricate political system, characterized by the ten cantons,

each with their own respective government, legislative assembly, and judiciary system. The complexity of this decentralized political structure is thought to impede the interest or ability of third countries to establish partnerships and cultivate business relations within Republika Srpska.

- 12 Several instances appear to corroborate this trend of third countries, particularly China, exhibiting a greater propensity to invest in the Republika Srpska as opposed to the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. An example of such is evident in the awarding of a contract to the state-owned Chinese enterprise, “China State Construction Engineering Corporation,” by “Autoputevi Republike Srpske,” a road construction firm controlled by the authorities of Republika Srpska. The contract, valued at over 335 million euros, aims to construct a 33-kilometer highway segment to Serbia,²⁵ symbolically referred to as “9 January Highway” (see below), by 2030.²⁶ Another section connects Banja Luka to Doboje and is estimated to cost around 900 million euros. Financially supported by the state-owned “China Road and Bridge Corporation,” the objective also seeks to provide faster and more efficient transportation, and facilitate trade and travel between Republika Srpska and Serbia. Furthermore, the construction of the Stanari thermal power plant, which has been financed by the Chinese state-owned company Dongfang Electric Corporation, holds strategic importance for Republika Srpska. With an estimated cost of 530 million euros and a capacity of up to 300 megawatts, this power plant represents a significant investment in the region’s energy infrastructure,²⁷ in collaboration with the Ministry of Economy, Energy, and Mining of Republika Srpska. Additional examples merit highlighting. This is the case of Shandong Linglong Tire Co., a Chinese company, which signed in 2018 a memorandum of understanding with the government of Republika Srpska to invest in a tire factory in the region. The proposed factory would cost around 800 million euros and is a significant investment in the manufacturing sector of the region. This investment is also seen as an important step towards increasing economic ties between China and Republika Srpska, particularly targeted in the context of China’s Belt and Road Initiative in Bosnia and Herzegovina.²⁸
- 13 The Belt and Road Initiative has resulted in more investment and attention from China towards Republika Srpska compared to the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. This preference can be attributed to a few factors, including Republika Srpska’s perceived economic underdevelopment and attractiveness as an investment destination. Moreover, the region has traditionally maintained closer political and economic ties with non-EU countries, particularly Russia,²⁹ thus making it a more strategic target for Chinese investments. Republika Srpska suffered considerable damage to its infrastructure and economy during the Bosnian War in the 1990s. Furthermore, its political instability in the post-war era has created a challenging economic environment characterized by high unemployment rates and low wages.³⁰ China’s support for Republika Srpska has been instrumental in mitigating these challenges, resulting in a significant increase in local employment rates. One such example of this support is evident in the Steinari Thermal Power Plant, which has hired approximately 1,200 local employees.³¹ As a result, the residents of Steinari now earn the highest average salary in Bosnia and Herzegovina. This has not only improved their standard of living but also instilled a sense of accomplishment and pride within the community.
- 14 China’s presence is palpable at the cultural level too. The local radio and television company, Radio Televizija Republike Srpske, broadcasts several programs promoting

Chinese culture.³² Banja Luka, the administrative center of Republika Srpska, is home to Bosnia and Herzegovina's most prominent Confucius Institute (CI), while the second CI located in Sarajevo exhibits considerably lower levels of activity. The cultural exchange programs that are organized not only promotes education but also serves as a means for China to enhance its global image and soft power. The CIs are managed by the Hanban, affiliated with the Chinese Ministry of Education and associated with the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), but their mission is officially described as depoliticized cultural exchange.³³ Yet external observers and scholars perceive their main objective as political, aiming to influence global cultural discourse and enhance China's soft power.³⁴ The CIs operate through a joint venture, simultaneously managed by Chinese and local administrators, and offer Mandarin courses via videoconference and regular academic exchange programs between local universities and those in Beijing.

- 15 Other forms of symbolic political support provided by China to Republika Srpska, at the expense of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, further exacerbates the ethnic tensions between the three peoples of Bosnia and Herzegovina (Bosniaks, Croats, and Serbs). For instance, the presence of Chinese representatives at the national holiday of Republika Srpska on 9 January 2022,³⁵ was met with significant criticism from Bisera Turković, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Turković argued that this initiative, which was coordinated with Russia, risked reigniting tensions between the two entities. Additionally, Turković referenced the decision of the National Constitutional Court in 2015 that deemed the "Republika Srpska Day" as discriminatory towards other ethnic groups in the country.³⁶ The court is composed of nine judges: two Bosniaks, two Croats, two Serbs, and three international judges. Although the court's decisions are legally binding, its authority is currently perceived to be weakened,³⁷ and the reinvigoration of the national day festivities conveys this weakness. Alongside Russia and the government of Republika Srpska led by Milorad Dodik, China is seen to be calling into question the legitimacy of international representatives, thereby increasing the authority of Republika Srpska over its territory and strengthening the desire for a segment of the population to hold a referendum for independence.³⁸
- 16 Finally, Republika Srpska also benefits from China's support on the international stage. Since 2015, China has abstained from voting on UN Security Council resolutions that would reconsider crimes committed against the Muslim population, mainly Bosniaks, in Srebrenica as genocide. Additionally, China made the recognition of Christian Schmidt's legitimacy contingent as the international High Representative in Bosnia and Herzegovina on certain conditions.³⁹ While some may primarily view this refusal as an attempt by China to discredit the diplomatic efforts of the United States and the European Union (EU) on the ground, it is clear that China's objectives also align with the interests of Dodik and, more broadly, Republika Srpska.⁴⁰

The construction of a new paradox?

- 17 This research has highlighted in previous sections that the coherent application of China's principle of mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity in Bosnia and Herzegovina is shrouded in ambiguity. Despite a lack of extensive literature on the topic, it is apparent that China's foreign policy approach in this particular Western Balkan state diverges greatly from its stance on other separatist regions worldwide.

China does not lend similar forms of support to Catalonia, Scotland, or the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus and still refuses to recognize the state of Kosovo.

- 18 Despite the fact that the Chinese government promotes the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries, in Bosnia and Herzegovina, it has adopted a contradictory position. This article shows that the Chinese authorities indirectly provide support to the pro-Serbian separatist movement of the Republika Srpska. On the one hand, China supports the Republika Srpska, economically, through the construction of infrastructure, and culturally, by participating in the celebrations of “Republika Srpska Day.” On the other hand, the significant investments between China and Serbia inevitably benefit the Republika Srpska. Very close and on the same political side, the leaders Milorad Dodik and Aleksandar Vučić are undertaking joint initiatives in the Serbian region of Bosnia and Herzegovina to the detriment of the Croat-Bosniak Federation. Thus, China’s foreign policy in Bosnia and Herzegovina constitutes a real paradox, as one of the five founding principles of this policy is no longer being taken into consideration.
- 19 However, as paradoxical as it may be, this exception in terms of foreign policy must be nuanced. Indeed, although it is part of the vast Belt and Road Initiative, Bosnia and Herzegovina is not at the center of China’s concerns, as evidenced by the few investments made in this country overall. On the one hand, internationally, Bosnia and Herzegovina does not offer major resonance, and on the other hand, it is not strategically essential for China. Unlike Serbia, where Chinese influence is growing exponentially, as shown in the previous charts, Bosnia and Herzegovina seems to be benefiting only limitedly from China’s presence. From this observation, an essential conclusion must be drawn: more than a real paradox, China, like any rational actor in International Relations, aims to strengthen its self-interests in Bosnia and Herzegovina, despite the principles it promotes at the international level. The support it gives to the Republika Srpska and Serbia, the rejection of Western initiatives and the High Representative, and the alternative route it proposes to some states of the Western Balkans region – in opposition, in particular, to the EU enlargement project to these countries – seem to be rational elements that explain this paradox in terms of China’s foreign policy.

NOTES

1. The author greatly thanks the anonymous reviewers for their insightful comments, all of which significantly improved the quality of this article.
2. The concepts of relative and absolute gains play a crucial role in the field of international relations as they serve to measure the extent to which a state has succeeded in achieving its objectives. Absolute gains refer to the overall increase in a state’s power, wealth, or security, regardless of other states’ outcomes. In contrast, relative gains focus on a state’s increase in power, wealth, or security relative to other states. This difference influences how states perceive their interests and interact with each other. States focused on absolute gains may prioritize cooperation, while those focused on relative gains may view other states as competitors or

threats. For more information, see POWELL Robert, "Absolute and Relative Gains in International Relations Theory," *American Political Science Review*, vol. 85, n° 1, 1991, p. 1303-1320 (1304).

3. QUACKENBUSH Stephen, "The Rationality of Rational Choice Theory," *International Interactions*, vol. 30, n° 2, 2004, p. 87-107 (101-102).

4. *Ibid.*, p. 92.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 95.

6. RIKER William H., "The Political Psychology of Rational Choice Theory," *Political Psychology*, vol. 16, n° 1, 1995, p. 23-44 (37).

7. On 25 October 1971, the United Nations General Assembly adopted Resolution 2758, by which its members "[...] recogniz[ed] that the representatives of the Government of the People's Republic of China are the only lawful representatives of China to the United Nations and that the People's Republic of China is one of the five permanent members of the Security Council [...]." General Assembly of the United Nations, "Restoration of the Lawful Rights of the People's Republic of China in the United Nations," Pub. L. No. A/RES/2758(XXVI), 1971, online: <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/192054?ln=fr> (accessed in November 2022).

8. Shanghai Cooperation Organization, "Shanghai Convention on Combating Terrorism, Separatism and Extremism," Article 1.1 §2, online: <https://www.refworld.org/pdfid/49f5d9f92.pdf> (accessed in December 2022).

9. SWANSTRÖM Niklas, "China and Central Asia: A New Great Game or Traditional Vassal Relations?," *Journal of Contemporary China*, vol. 14, n° 45, 2005, p. 569-584 (573).

10. In a similar fashion to Macau, Hong Kong is currently considered a Special Administrative Region (SAR) by the central government of the People's Republic of China. The SAR system, established in 1997, grants Hong Kong a high degree of autonomy and maintains a separate legal system and economic system from mainland China. This unique status is outlined in the Basic Law of the Hong Kong SAR, which serves as the territory's constitutional document.

11. DIDIER Laurent, "Economic Diplomacy: The 'One-China Policy' Effect on Trade," *China Economic Review*, vol. 48, n° 1, 2018, p. 223-243 (224). Evidence of this may be found in the recent decision of Honduras, one of Taiwan's traditional allies, to cut ties with Taiwan and embrace the One-China Policy. This reduced the list of recognizers of Taiwan to only 13 states, including Guatemala and Paraguay. China has adamantly rejected establishing any bilateral relations with these countries. However, other states maintain relations with Taiwan through other diplomatic channels (representative offices, liaison offices, or diplomatic missions).

12. National People's Congress, "Anti-Secession Law," Order No. 34 of the President of the People's Republic of China, 14 March 2005.

13. VILA MORENO Miquel, "China and the Independence of Catalonia," *Central European Institute of Asia Studies*, 19 October 2019, online: <https://ceias.eu/china-and-the-independence-of-catalonia/> (accessed in November 2022).

14. PATIENCE Martin, "Why China's Wary of Scottish Independence," *BBC News*, 9 September 2014, online: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-29125768> (accessed in December 2022).

15. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, "Chinese Ambassador to Cyprus H.E. Liu Yantao Publishes an Article on the Taiwan Question in Cyprus Mail," *Nicosia*, 19 September 2022, online: https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/zwjg_665342/zwbd_665378/202209/t20220920_10768430.html (accessed in October 2022).

16. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's of the Republic of China, "Wang Yi Meets with Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba of Ukraine," *New York*, 23 September 2022, online: https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/zwjg_665342/zwbd_665378/202209/t20220920_10768430.html (accessed in October 2022).

17. LIKA Liridon, "La reconnaissance internationale de la République du Kosovo (2008-2016) : succès, défis et perspectives de ce nouvel État," *Revue de la Faculté de droit de l'Université de Liège*, 2016, p. 531-568 (564).
18. Christian Schmidt is a German politician and member of the Christian Social Union in Bavaria.
19. As a representative of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation.
20. CABESTAN Jean-Pierre, "L'après-Tiananmen : comment la Chine est sortie de son isolement international," in Jean-Pierre Cabestan (ed.), *La politique internationale de la Chine*, Paris, Presses de Sciences Po, 2010, p. 31-59.
21. PETROVSKAYA Yulia, "Russian-Chinese Crisis Alliance in the Balkans," *Riddle Analysis*, 21 October 2021, online: <https://ridl.io/russian-chinese-crisis-alliance-in-the-balkans/> (accessed in October 2022).
22. TRKANJEC Zeljko, "Russian, China Fail at UN in Bid to Shut Down Bosnia Peace Envoy," *Euractiv*, 23 July 2021, online: https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/short_news/russia-china-fail-at-un-in-bid-to-shut-down-bosnia-peace-envoy/ (accessed in December 2022). SOLIK Martin, GRAF Martin, BAAR Vladimir, "Hybrid Threats in the Western Balkans: A Case Study of Bosnia and Herzegovina," *Romanian Journal of European Affairs*, vol. 22, n° 1, 2022, p. 5-23 (14).
23. IULIAN Ernst, "Bosnia's Republika Srpska Seeks Stronger Economic Ties with Russia," *BNE Intellinews*, 14 August 2022, online: <https://intellinews.com/bosnia-s-republika-srpska-seeks-stronger-economic-ties-with-russia-253395/> (accessed in October 2022). In this regard, it is interesting to note that while Šefik Džaferović (Bosniak member of the state presidency) and Željko Komšić (Croat member) directly condemned the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the parliament of Republika Srpska released two conclusions, one reaffirming their neutral position and the other condemning sanctions against Russia.
24. TSIMONIS Konstantinos *et al.*, "A Synergy of Failures: Environmental Protection and Chinese Capital in Southeast Europe," *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs*, vol. 48, n° 2, 2019, p. 171-200 (183); VIJESTI Ba, "How China Politically Humiliates and Economically Robs BiH," *Sarajevo Times*, 1 July 2022, online: <https://sarajevotimes.com/how-china-politically-humiliates-and-economically-robs-bih/> (accessed in October 2022).
25. ROGERS David, "China's CSEEC to build \$335m motorway in Bosnia and Herzegovina," *Global Construction Review*, 27 July 2022, online: <https://www.globalconstructionreview.com/chinas-cseec-to-build-335m-motorway-in-bosnia-and-herzegovina/> (accessed in September 2022).
26. REMÉNTI Péter, VÉGH Andor, PAP Norbert, "The Influence of Ethnic Policies on Regional Development and Transport Issues in Bosnia and Herzegovina," *Belgeo*, vol. 1, n° 1, 2016.
27. The company produces a wide range of power generation equipment, including steam turbines, gas turbines, and hydro turbines, as well as generators and auxiliary equipment. Dongfang Electric has supplied equipment for power projects in over 80 countries and regions around the world, including Pakistan, Indonesia, Egypt, and the United States.
28. WENTAO Xing, "Dongfang Electric builds Bosnia-Herzegovina Stanari Coal-Fired Power Station," *Seetao*, 24 February 2021, online: <https://www.seetao.com/details/65893.html> (accessed in April 2023).
29. JACKSON Thomas, JEFFREY Alex, "Improvising Regions: Diplomatic Practices between Russia and the Republika Srpska," *Territory, Politics, Governance*, vol. 9, n° 3, 2021, p. 471-491.
30. BISOGNO Marcelo, CHONG Alberto, "Poverty and Inequality in Bosnia and Herzegovina after the Civil War," *World Development*, vol. 30, n° 1, 2002, p. 61-75 (70).
31. WENTAO, "Dongfang Electric Builds," art. cit.
32. CVJETICANIN Tijana, "Chinese Influence in Bosnia and Herzegovina," Center for European Policy Analysis, 7 September 2022, online: <https://cepa.org/comprehensive-reports/chinese-influence-in-bosnia-and-herzegovina/#footnote7126> (accessed in October 2022).

33. HARTIG Falk, "New Public Diplomacy Meets Old Public Diplomacy. The Case of China and its Confucius Institutes," *New Global Studies*, vol. 8, n° 3, 2014, p. 331-352.
34. KLUVER Randolph, "Chinese Culture in a Global Context: The Confucius Institute as a Geo-Cultural Force," in Jacques Delisle, Avery Goldstein (eds), *China's Global Engagement: Cooperation, Competition, and Influence in the 21st Century*, Washington DC, Brookings Institution Press, 2017, p. 1-23.
35. In 2022, Bosnia and Herzegovina commemorated the thirtieth anniversary of the establishment of Republika Srpska, a semi-autonomous entity within the country, which was established in 1992 during the Bosnian War. This anniversary was marked by celebrations of the nationalist project of a Greater Serbia, led by former pro-Serbian leaders who have since been indicted for crimes against humanity and genocide. The naming of a new highway segment, "9 January Highway," has caused controversy and condemnation among a portion of the population, as it evokes the memory of the atrocities committed during the war and the ongoing denial of these crimes by some within Republika Srpska.
36. Constitutional Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina, "Law on Citizenship of the Republika Srpska," Official Gazette RS No. 35/99, 11 July 2014.
37. ÖZTÜRK Mustafa Talha, "Bosnia Sends Protest Notes to Russian, Chinese, Serbian Embassies," *Anadolu Agency*, 11 November 2022, online: <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/europe/bosnia-sends-protest-notes-to-russian-chinese-serbian-embassies/2470425#> (accessed in October 2022).
38. KASAPOVIC Mak, KOCAN Faris, "A Blitzkrieg against the Republika Srpska': Securitizing Constitutional Reform in Bosnia and Herzegovina," *Ethnopolitics*, vol. 1, n° 1, 2022, p. 1-21 (14).
39. *Ibid.*
40. ZWEERS Wouter, SHOPOV Vladimir, VAN DER PUTTEN Frans-Paul *et al.*, "China and the EU in the Western Balkans: A Zero-Sum Game?" The Hague, Clingendael Institute, 2020, p. 1-58 (31).

ABSTRACTS

This article aims to assess China's adherence to principles of mutual respect and territorial integrity in Bosnia and Herzegovina by analyzing its increasing presence in the country through the use of soft power in politics, economy, and culture. It focuses on China's involvement in the Serb-majority entity, Republika Srpska, and evaluates whether this aligns with China's principle of mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity. In this regard, the study also examines to potential imbalances and tensions within the country due to China's presence. The main objective is to investigate whether China's actions in Bosnia and Herzegovina represent a new paradox in its foreign policy.

Cet article vise à évaluer l'application des principes de respect mutuel et d'intégrité territoriale par la Chine en Bosnie-Herzégovine, en analysant sa présence croissante dans le pays par le recours au *soft power* en politique, en économie et dans le domaine culturel. Il se focalise sur l'engagement de la Chine au sein de l'entité majoritairement serbe du pays, la Republika Srpska, et évalue si ce dernier est conforme aux principes chinois de non-ingérence et de respect de la souveraineté et de l'intégrité territoriale. Il examine les potentiels déséquilibres et tensions engendrés dans le pays suite à la présence toujours plus forte de la Chine. L'objectif principal est de déterminer si les actions de la Chine en Bosnie-Herzégovine représentent un paradoxe dans sa politique étrangère.

INDEX

Mots-clés: Bosnie-Herzégovine, Chine, respect mutuel, intégrité territoriale, soft power, politique étrangère

Keywords: Bosnia and Herzegovina, China, mutual respect, territorial integrity, soft power, foreign policy

AUTHOR

ROBERT DOPCHIE

Center for International Relations Studies (CEFIR), Department of Political Science, University of Liège (ULiège), Liège, Belgium
robert.dopchie[at]doct.uliege.be