

POSSIBLE ROUTES OF THE CHINESE NEW SILK ROAD - CAN THE V4 COUNTRIES BENEFIT?

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The Ancient Silk Road was created 2100 years ago during the Han Dynasty (I-II century BC) to promote trade between China and Europe. The road was more than 7,000 km long between Asia, Europe and Africa and served as a catalyst for development for many centuries. It helped the flow of goods, culture, art, history and religion between China and the West. After the 15th century, the Silk Road – and, at the same time, China's dominant role – lost its significance due to geographical discoveries. The dramatic fall in technology and the cost of transportation has led to the Silk Road being forgotten today.

The New Silk Road Initiative (also named 'One Belt, One Road' concept) has been China's greatest economic effort ever, with the main objective of stimulating economic development in Asia, Europe and Africa. The new silk road consists of two parts. The Belt will rely on major cities along the route that will carry some kind of central economic and commercial functions; while the Road is based on large ports, which together will result in a safe and efficient logistics route.

The concept would affect 64% of the world's population (4.4 billion people) and would cover 30% of the world's GDP (\$ 21 trillion). In recent years, China's economic growth has slowed down, and Chinese goods have become more and more expensive to rely on their main competitive advantage, the low price. This trend points to the need to examine the possibilities of making the transport of goods more efficient. The New Silk Road intends to re-establish a link between Europe and Asia, based on a historic Silk Road with the rail and sea transport.

Asia-Europe rail trade accounts for between 3% and 3.5% of total trade between the continents. It follows that 95-96% of the trade between the two continents is carried out at sea. The exact routes of the New Silk Road Initiative have not yet been fully defined but will consist of several land and sea transport routes that will encourage trade and economic development. We made a systematic literature to identify the possible paths of the New Silk Road. The initial search obtained 1.739 entries across all databases, and after that the final set of the relevant articles was 49 publications.

According to most literature, the New Silk Road would consist of three general land routes. The first land route from China to Central Asia and Russia would reach Europe through the Baltic Sea. The second route would run through Central-, West Asia, the Persian Gulf to the Mediterranean and Central Europe. This route would affect the V4 countries, especially Hungary. The third route would run through Southeast and South Asia to the Indian Ocean. The Maritime Silk Road would start from the coasts of China through the South China Sea and the Indian Ocean to Africa and Europe; as well as from the Chinese coastal ports through the South China Sea to the Pacific Ocean.