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Is EU losing Greece to Russia?

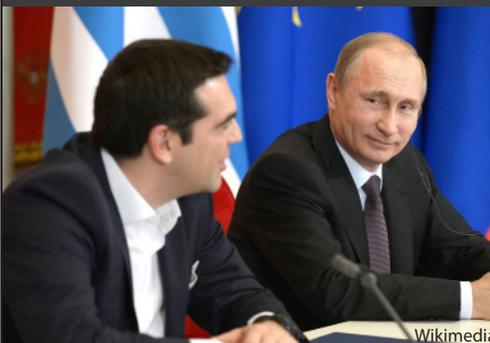
American convoy and Baltic states amidst fears of Russian invasion

Are current Sino-Russian relations about meeting China's interests?

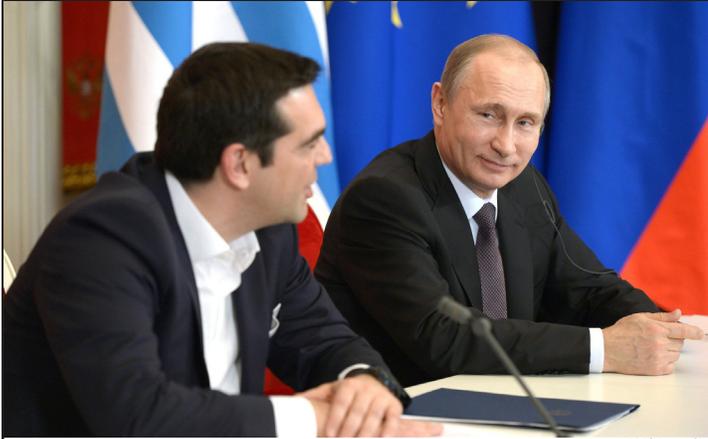


中国媒体观察

CHINESE MEDIA WATCH



IS EU LOSING GREECE TO RUSSIA?



Wikimedia

On April 8, 2015, the Greek Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras visited Moscow. This visit immediately drew great attention of the EU bureaucrats in Brussels and the member countries of the EU. German media called Greece a “Trojan horse” and suspected Moscow was trying to divide EU by befriending Greece. Is Europe really losing Greece to Russia? Chinese media seem to have various opinions on this issue. Some support this claim by stressing the grudge between Greece and the EU and highlighting the common interests between Greece and Russia; others object this idea by mentioning the risk of this move, pointing at the weakness of Russia, and discussing the potential rescue from the US.

Some Chinese commentators believe the misunderstanding and resentment are so deep that the “marriage” between Greece and EU is in real danger. One article on Xinhua highlighted this problem - on one hand, the EU-IMF-ECB troika feels that it has lent billions of euros to Greece but Greece does not appreciate this kindness at all (国际货币基金组织、欧洲央行、欧盟委员会这“三驾马车”对希腊实施了价值数千亿欧元的救助…希腊似乎并不领情); on the other hand, Greece feels that it obeys the EU-IMF-ECB troika but the austerity causes a bigger depression than that of the post-1929 depression in America (他们听“三驾马车”的话, 改变原来悠闲的生活方式…结果换来的却是希腊国内生产总值下跌比美国大萧条期间还严重). Thus, the author concluded that if the anti-austerity Greek government cannot get the 7.2 billion funding from the EU, then the future of this “marriage” is not very promising (如果反紧缩的希腊政府不能尽快获得欧洲72亿欧元的纾困资金, 这段“婚姻”的前景依然堪忧).

While the “marriage” between the EU and Greece is in crisis, Chinese critics noticed that Russia seems to share some interests with Greece at this moment. During the meeting on April 8, Putin informed Tsipras that Greece might get billions of euros by participating in the Russian

pipeline project through the Black Sea to Turkey (普京还极力推介一条穿越黑海、通往土耳其的油气管道规划…希腊有望从油气过境业务中获得数亿欧元的收益). This offer, without any doubt, is an attractive bait for Greece whose economy is on the edge of collapse. At the same time, Russia can get an ally in the EU in this project, which is, according to a Russian analyst cited by *China Daily*, always an important foreign policy duty for Russia (在欧洲找到志同道合的盟友是莫斯科一项重要的外交政策任务).

Different opinions are also present in Chinese media. Xinhua published another article claiming that it is unrealistic to imagine Greece would leave EU and embrace Russia right now (就目前而言, 希腊撇下欧盟, 投奔俄罗斯的选项确实还不太现实), because this action is too risky for Greece both economically and politically. Besides, objectively speaking, Russia, who is also in economic crisis at this moment, would not have money for Greece (俄罗斯以现在的经济状况, 也难有资金援助希腊). Moreover, *China Daily*, *Xinhua*, *Sina* and other mainstream media all reported the statement from Tsipras that “Greece is still a member of the EU and it will ‘keep the promise it made to the EU’” (希腊仍是欧盟成员国, 将“遵守我们向欧盟做出的所有承诺”).

Interestingly, the Chinese media believe that the US would not just sit by and watch the EU lose Greece to Russia. *Cankao Xiaoxi*, a newspaper from *Xinhua Media Group*, cited *The Daily Telegraph* from the UK that “this is the third time the US had to rescue Europeans within a century” (这将是百年来第3次美国不得不拯救欧洲人). This article further suggested that Greece needs an internationally recognised aid program, including US and UK bilateral loans, to replace the ridiculous request from the EU-IMF-ECB troika (希腊需要一个得到公认的国际援助计划的支持, 包括美英两国的双边贷款, 以替代欧盟委员会、国际货币基金组织和欧洲央行组成的“三驾马车”提出的荒谬要求).

Above opinions revealed the prevalent notion of “great power politics” - Chinese feel that all in all this is a game played by the US and Russia. To conclude, Chinese media do not have a consensus on whether EU is losing Greece to Russia yet, but it seems they all agree that the situation is serious enough for a debate.

Runya T. Qiaoan

AMERICAN CONVOY AND THE BALTIC STATES AMIDST FEARS OF RUSSIAN INVASION



Flickr/7thArmyJMTc

Chinese media, although not in such volume as on other issues, touched upon the position of Baltic states on the background of current Ukrainian crisis. Although they tend to draw on their Russian counterparts, they also proved to be smart enough to express the official Chinese, rather neutral position as well.

The tone of the coverage on the American military convoy, passing on their way from Baltics to Germany through Poland and the Czech Republic, fluctuated from a neutral description all the way to condemnation of American militarism. Although Chinese press understand this convoy as a reaction to Ukrainian crisis and growing anxiety in respective countries, its aim is thought to be bolstering US and NATO's military presence in the region (目的是炫耀美国和北约在该地区的军事存在).

Whereas some readers might have learnt about the appeal the convoy had for some of the local supporters, Chinese media, quoting directly their Russian counterparts, offer little positive evaluation and claim that the US convoy was only welcomed by protesting crowds throwing eggs and tomatoes (美军车队过境捷克遭鸡蛋西红柿招待). It was also often pointed out that wherever US troops headed, both sides of the road were packed with protesters. Domestic security forces in respective countries are in this case thought to hold back those opposing the whole event (这六个欧洲国家的政府安全部队为车队提供护送, 抵挡反对派对美军车队的冲击, 车队所到之外, 路两边都挤满了抗议的人群). Dissenting voices such as those suggesting resemblance between US military presence and Nazi expansion, were given quite some space in Chinese press.

In general, NATO and its latest steps to enlarge its missile defense system were commented from the Russian perspective. NATO was basically described as an expansionist alliance stirring up conflicts around the world.

Although Baltic states were referred to as member countries of both the EU and NATO, their position is pictured to be somewhere in between these two groupings and the Russian Federation. Heavy economic dependence on Russia, and its omnipresent influence that remains undeniable, are two main reasons for such a claim (波罗的海三国尽管恢复独立已24年, 加入欧盟、北约也已11年, 但俄罗斯在该地区的政治、经济和社会影响力仍然巨大). Also due to the perceived inability to fully blend into EU so far, the Baltic states represent a ground somewhere in the middle between the East and the West. At the same time, however, they are said to be satisfied with present situation. Any conflicts could have only detrimental effects on their development and therefore are undesirable.

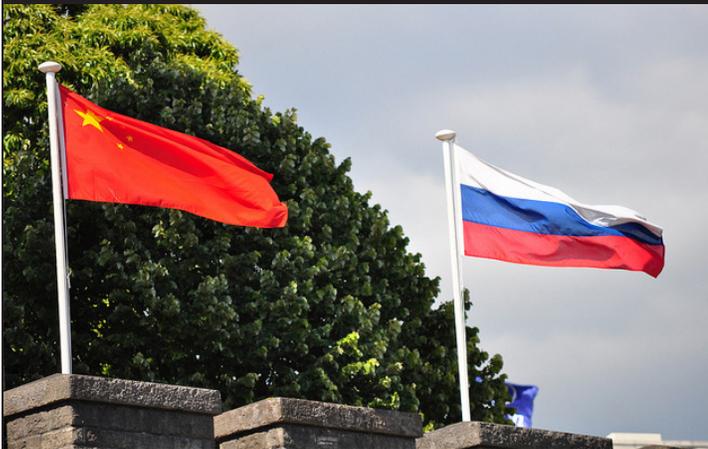
Interestingly, although fear of a spillover effect of a crisis from Ukraine was mentioned alongside the Pentagon's decision to temporarily station 3 000 troops in these countries, the interpretation of this move presented a rather pro-Western attitude. Speaking quite openly about Russia's "Ukraine tactics" ("乌克兰战术"), such decision is thought to provide Baltic states with a sense of security when facing Russia's threat (美军驻扎的使命是为了让波罗的海国家在面对俄罗斯威胁时有安全感).

Whereas geopolitically these countries find themselves according to Chinese press somewhere in the middle, the same media laid emphasis on a possible economic calamity the Russia-US confrontation might bring about. Furthermore, economic downturn in these countries is viewed as a consequence of anti-Russian sanctions the EU has imposed. Ultimately, as EU may have a bad influence on economy of these countries, the Middle Kingdom might be their "Plan B" as an export destination of their agricultural products ("中国成为波罗的海国家的B计划", 当俄欧关系紧张或经济不振时, 这些国家希望把自己的农产品出口到中国).

Drawing on our previous *Chinese Media Watch* issues, the notion to paint geopolitical and conflict-prone issues in Europe on the background of unceasing US-Russian superpower animosity is clearly perceivable. Although Chinese media are not free from ideological background, they seem to give privilege to economic aspects, where China may find its role.

Ondřej Macháček

ARE CURRENT SINO-RUSSIAN RELATIONS ABOUT MEETING CHINA'S INTEREST?



Flickr/Mark Turner

In light of its involvement in the Ukrainian crisis, Russia has been condemned by many European countries, especially nations of European Union, and subjected to a sanction regime. Russia is blamed for not setting peace in Ukraine and also accused of delivering supplies or even direct military support to rebels in the Eastern Ukraine. That is perhaps why Russia has taken a turn from Europe to Asia, or more specifically, China.

Quoting official statements seems to have become the lynchpin of Chinese media's coverage of the Sino-Russian partnership. The speech of China's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Wang Yi, was published in all the leading Chinese media. It tackles the current relations with Russia in a comprehensive manner with a positive overtone and confirms the mutual cooperation regardless of the ongoing international crisis in Ukraine. "The China-Russia relationship is not affected by international vicissitudes and not aimed at any third party" ("中俄关系不受国际风云影响，也不针对任何第三方"). Wang's Russian counterpart, Sergey Lavrov, stated that contemporary Sino-Russian ties are historically unprecedented ("这种关系在历史上从未有过"). "Alongside humanitarian cooperation and cultural exchanges, Russia and China work together to promote negotiations and expand multilateral cooperative mechanisms in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), as well as G20, G7 and the BRICS", Lavrov later added. Both countries are hence trying to play the same rhetoric game picturing themselves as responsible international powers.

Building upon these statements, some newspapers suggested that this year, the bilateral and pragmatic cooperation is expected to make a series of new results ("今年，中俄务实合作有望取得一系列新成果"). Joint efforts in the fields of banking, oil and nuclear energy are meant to further deepen mutual cooperation ("同时，我们也将继续深化双方在金融、油气、核能等领域的合作"). The Silk Road Economic Belt, the construction of the eastern route of a natural gas pipeline and plans to build a high-speed railway between these two countries were mentioned. Even when touching upon these rather specific issues, most Chinese press revolved around official proclamations, mainly those coming from Chinese

MoFA: "...practical cooperation between China and Russia is based on mutual need and has enormous internal impetus and room for expansion" (中国和俄罗斯之间的务实合作是建立在相互需要的基础上，并且有巨大的内部动力和发展空间). However, Western press reflect these issues in a slightly different way. In their view, the Ukraine crisis was a perfect opportunity for China to increase its influence in crucial sectors of trade with Russia and to facilitate its access to Russia's natural resources and gain more from Russian market.

Trade in military equipment as well, seems to have regained momentum: the deal to supply China with Russian S-400 Missile Defense Systems was warmly accepted in China, with media, such as the China Youth International pointing out that "The Middle Kingdom is the first foreign country ever to buy this missile defense system" ("中国是第一个购买俄罗斯S-400防空导弹系统的外国买家"). First commentaries on such acquisition, however, were aimed at Chinese "domestic issues". It was soon suggested, that China will be able to shoot down any targets over the Diaoyu islands ("拥有这种导弹系统，可以从(中国)大陆沿岸火力阵地发射，摧毁钓鱼岛上空的目标").

The Silk Road Economic Belt transnational project has also lately gained a lot of attention. There has been some criticism brought up against the project for the alleged instigation of another Cold War by China with its own Marshall plan, where China and Russia will be on one side and US and Japan on the other. China rejects these accusations and the Chinese media clearly state that it is only a simple reactivation of historic trade routes ("不是马歇尔计划、不是门罗宣言、不是朝贡外交，更不是'简单地重新激活历史上的贸易路线'"). At the same time however, the diminishing strength of Russia leads to growing position of China in Central Asia at the expense of Moscow. As stated in China Daily, Chinese projects help some Central Asian countries improve infrastructure and invest in oil sector. In the future it can cause reorientation of these countries from Russian to Chinese market, as is the case of Tajikistan ("中亚国家的市场优势、财税扶持政策等，依托国内成熟市场的经营实力和经验，扩大和深化中国企业及产品的国际交流与合作，在国内积极打造电子商务平台，在实现自身跨越式发展的同时，助力我区以及内地中小企业的名优产品'走出去'"). The stressed „Go Out strategy“ (走出去战略) in this case refers to China's investment strategy in foreign countries.

Mária Márkusová

Chinese Media Watch is a project of the Institute of Asian Studies which aims to shed light on the Chinese media perception of the most impactful stories in Europe.