large population

COVID-19

Communism

technology

economy

dictatorship

so many of them

history

tradition

yellow peril

most goods are made there

mass production

crappy products

forgery

cheap

Great Wall

rice

food

large country

poor quality

clothes

trade

developing

great

cheap labor

culture

progress

electronics

oppression

great power

imported goods

hardworking

surveillance

martial arts

Hungarian public opinion on China in the age of COVID-19

Enthusiasm overshadowed by skepticism?

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Contents

Summary

- This report is a result of a wide-scale **study of public opinion on China in 13 European countries**,[1] conducted in September and October 2020, on a research sample representative with respect to gender, age, level of education, country region, and settlement density.[2] Here, we focus on the **Hungarian portion of the polling**, building on the previously published report comparing the results across the 13 countries.[3]

- Overall, the Hungarian public **leans towards a negative view of China:** 49% of respondents see China negatively, 25% positively, with the remaining 26% holding neutral views *(Figure 1)*. Whereas 55% of the Hungarian population declared no change in its view on China in the last three years, approximately **31% of the respondents proclaimed their views on China worsened** and only 14% noted improvement *(Figure 2)*.

- China appears to be **one of the most negatively perceived countries** in Hungary among those surveyed, ranking fourth only behind North Korea, Israel, and Russia *(Figure 3)*. North Korea (79%) is by far the most negatively viewed state followed by Israel (56%). In the case of both Russia and China, the share of negative views is held by about half of the respondents. On the other hand, Germany (64%) and the United Kingdom (60%) together with Japan (58%) are viewed primarily positively.

- Such findings may be seen as a **failure of political attempts** both on China's side and on the side of certain Hungarian politicians. The Hungarian government led by Viktor Orbán has invested considerably into building robust friendly relations with Eastern countries, including China, under the Hungarian "Eastern Opening" policy, however, the public seems to remain more cautious and critical towards such nations.

- The first association of the Hungarian public related to China is **COVID-19** which suggests that the respondents draw a parallel of the

global pandemic with China. Another frequent association concerns the **large population** as one of the characteristics of China *(Figure 4)*. Many respondents also associate China **with the Great Wall**, **Communism**, **technology**, and see the country as an example of an economy based on **mass production of cheap and often low-quality or counterfeit goods**. Human rights concerns were not mentioned very often, although some respondents pointed out dictatorship and oppression as their first associations.

- **Most Hungarians tend to view China negatively** across the political spectrum, the most notable exception being the voters of the Fidesz-KDNP Party Alliance, less than 40% of whom perceive China negatively *(Figure 17)*. On the contrary, more than 62% of the **voters of the Momentum Movement**, which promotes the replacement of the current Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, hold negative views on China, followed by the supporters of Mi hazánk (59%) and Jobbik party (54%).

- Varying perceptions are observable concerning the current Prime Minister **Viktor Orbán**. While less than one-fifth of the respondents are satisfied with the Prime Minister's activities towards China, almost 37% of the respondents are dissatisfied *(Figure 20)*. Also, Hungarians who tend to approve of Orbán's activities towards China have a somewhat more positive view of China while those who feel dissatisfied perceive China more negatively *(Figure 18)*. Similarly, the respondents who see themselves as part of the West perceive China significantly more negatively than those who incline to the East *(Figure 19)*.

- When it comes to the perception of various China-related issues, Hungarian respondents think about **trade with China** slightly positively, making it the only aspect falling into the positive range of the scale. On the other hand, the most negative feelings are held towards **China's influence on democracy in other countries**, **China's military** as well as **China's impact on the global environment**. Other issues, such as **China's Belt and Road Initiative** and **Chinese investments** are perceived slightly negatively *(Figure 5)*. A similar stance is observable when it comes to the level of satisfaction of

Hungarians with the plan to reconstruct the Budapest-Belgrade railway line funded by a Chinese loan – almost 45% feel dissatisfaction while less than 16% are satisfied with the plan *(Figure 21)*.

- China is seen as a **powerful international actor** in Hungary. In terms of **economic strength**, China is regarded similarly strong as the U.S., being far ahead of Russia and the EU on the last spot *(Figure 7)*. When it comes to its **military**, China might lag behind the U.S. and Russia but is still viewed as strong by the vast majority of the respondents, unlike the EU which is perceived as the weakest *(Figure 6)*. As for its **importance for the Hungarian economic development**, China is seen as slightly more important than Russia, nevertheless, the EU and the U.S. are considered important for the Hungarian economy by more than 70% of Hungarians *(Figure 10)*.

- China is perceived as **culturally attractive** by 47% of the respondents, scoring third overall and being only slightly ahead of Russia that is viewed as least attractive. On the contrary, the EU is viewed as the most culturally attractive entity. *(Figure 8)*. In terms of **human rights**, China occupies the last place with more than 57% of the respondents describing the state of human rights in China as bad. On the other hand, the EU scores first, ahead of the second U.S. and third Russia by a significant margin *(Figure 9)*.

- **China is also the least trustworthy partner in the eyes of most Hungarians**. Less than one-fifth of the respondents declared that they trust China, while almost half distrust it. A similarly high share of Hungarians also distrusts Russia. Most respondents trust the EU, followed by those who trust the U.S. *(Figure 11)*.

- Likewise, Hungarian respondents prefer their country **to align its foreign policy with the EU as the first option**, followed by the U.S.; Russia is a slightly more preferable partner than China that earns the last spot. Both countries, however, fall behind the Western actors *(Figure 12)*.

- Hungarian foreign policy towards China according to the public should focus on **cooperation on global issues** like climate change, epidemics, and counter-terrorism (75%) and **addressing cybersecurity** (64%). The promotion of trade and investment (63%) is also seen as desirable, followed by the support for advancing human rights and democratic reforms in China (57%) as well as addressing intellectual property rights (57%) *(Figure 14)*.

- Concerning **5G network development**, most of the population (64%) prefers to rely on EU producers, followed by those preferring Japanese (47%) or American (46%) producers. Less than 37% would use Chinese equipment and only slightly more than 30% would agree with the cooperation with South Korean companies *(Figure 13)*.

- **COVID-19** has been identified as linked to China, yet China is seen as providing a lot of **help to Hungary** when dealing with the pandemic, earning second place only after the EU that is described as helpful by 65% of the public *(Figure 15)*. The U.S. and Russia are considered helpful in the matter by less than 20% of the respondents.

- A significant share of the respondents is willing to consider certain conspiracy theories about the origin of COVID-19. 40% believe it was **artificially made in a Chinese laboratory and spread intentionally** and slightly less than 15% think it was brought to China by the U.S. military. Also, 34% think that the virus spread because of Chinese people eating bats and other wild animals. Slightly above 30% of the respondents believe in the scientific consensus that the virus jumped to humans naturally from animals *(Figure 16)*.

- Whereas only **15% of the public believe that the Chinese position in the world has improved** as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, half of Hungarians think that China has **gained economically** in the aftermath *(Figure 16)*.

1 Feelings towards China and other countries

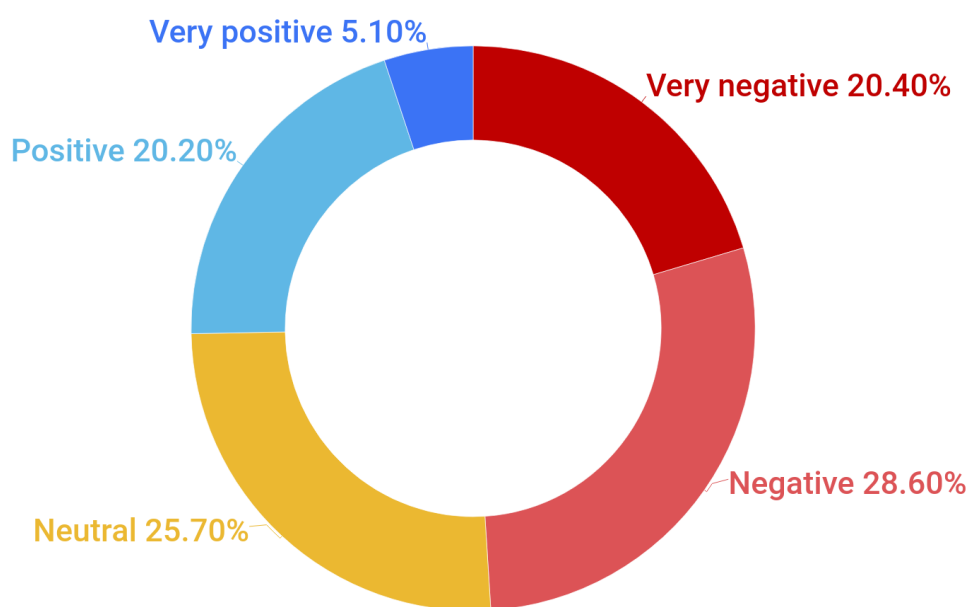**Figure 1:** Feeling towards China among Hungarian respondents[4]

Very positive 5.10%

Very negative 20.40%

Positive 20.20%

Negative 28.60%

Neutral 25.70%

Figure 2: Change of feeling towards China among Hungarian respondents in the past three years[5]

Improved 14.19%

Worsened 30.87%

Didn't change 54.95%
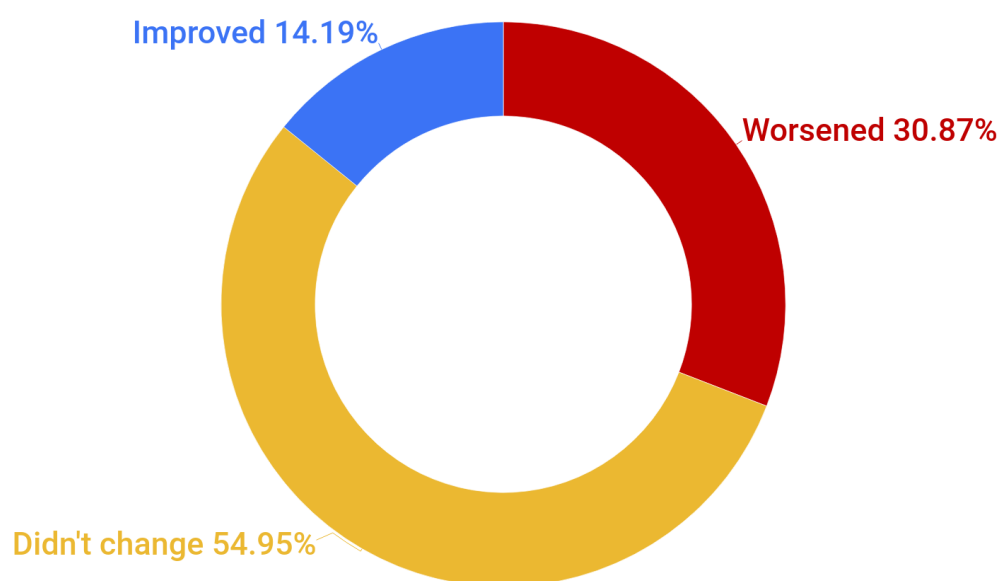
Figure 3: Feeling towards select countries among Hungarian respondents[6]
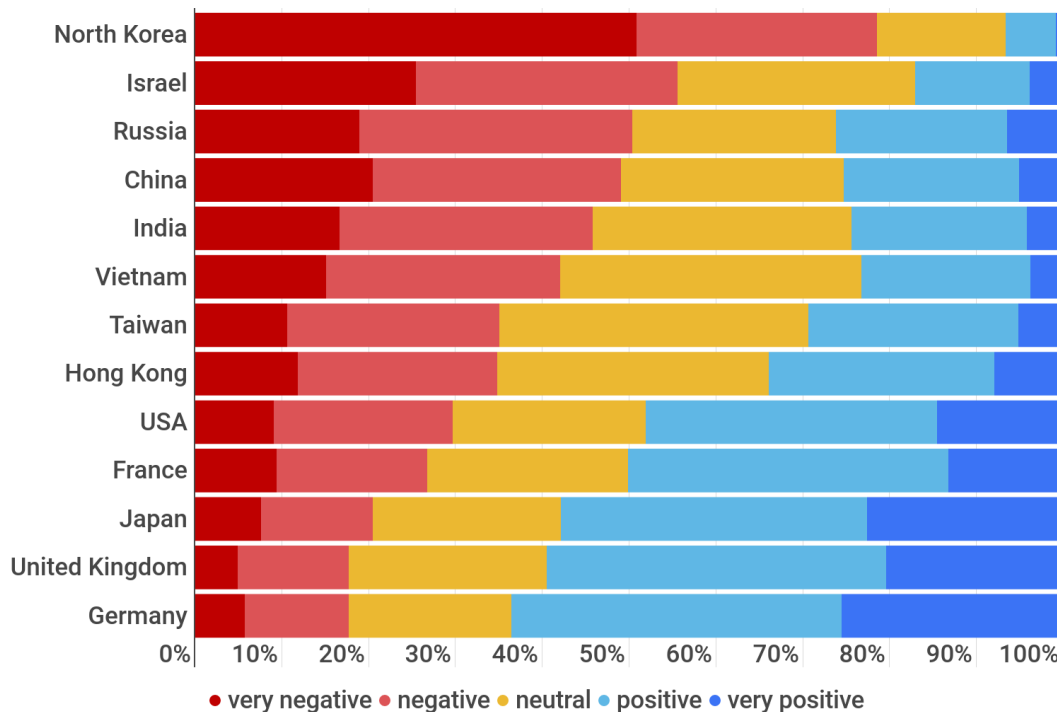
Figure 4: What is the first thing that comes to your mind when China is mentioned (most frequent answers, only 10+ mentions)?[7]
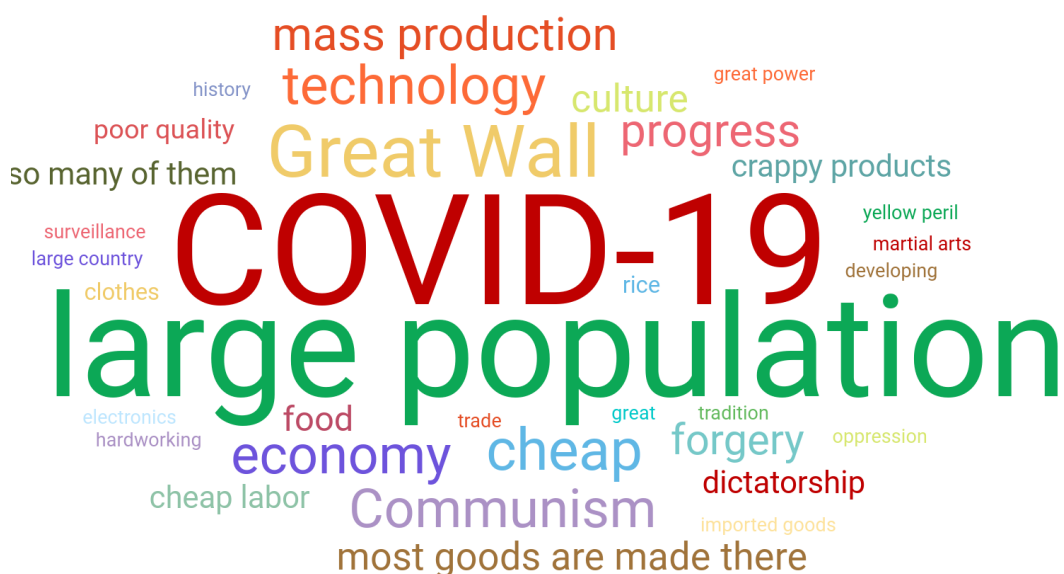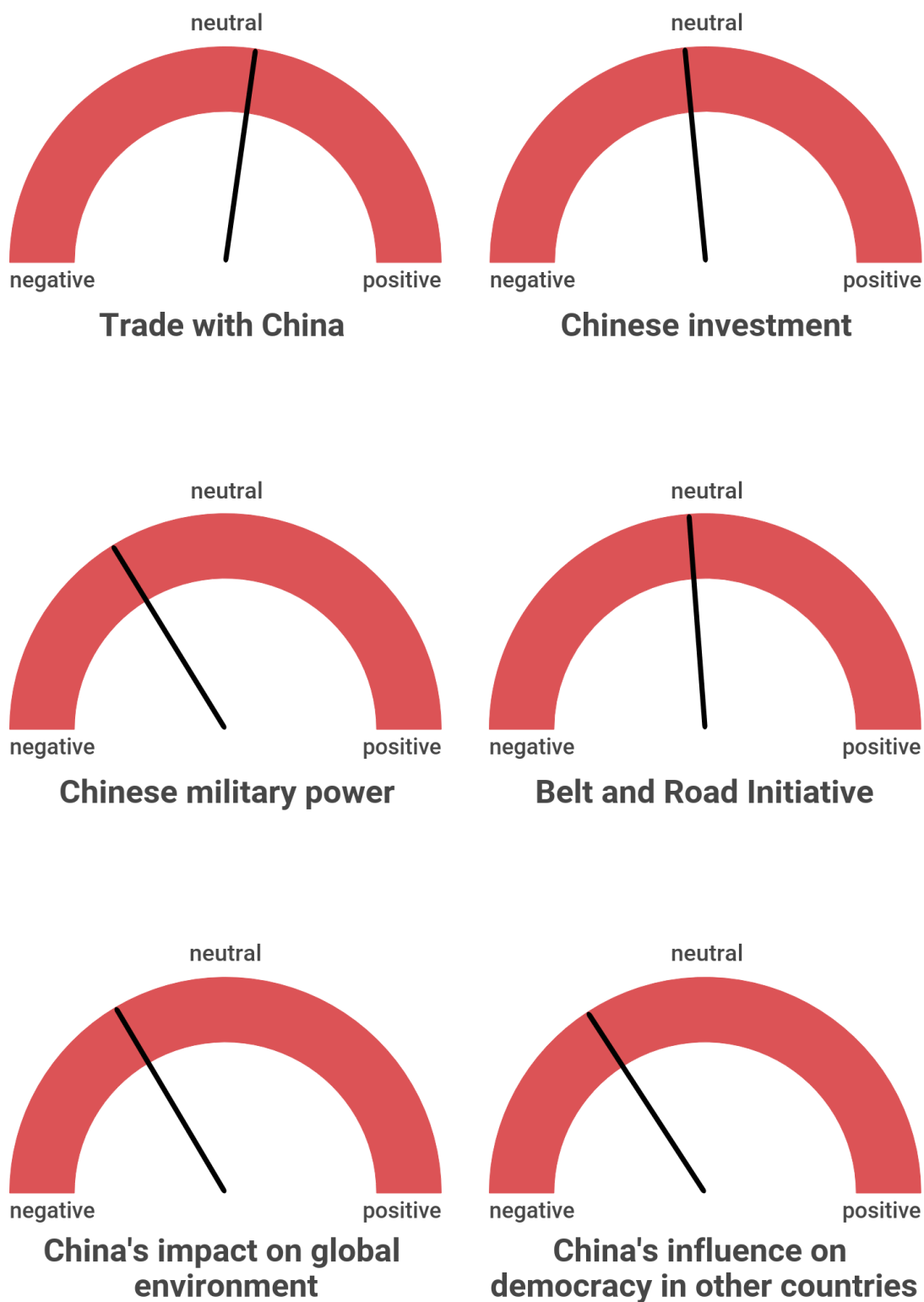
Figure 5:   Perceptions of certain China-related issues among Hungarian respondents[8]

neutral

negative   positive

Trade with China

neutral

negative   positive

Chinese investment

neutral

negative   positive

Chinese military power

neutral

negative   positive

Belt and Road Initiative

neutral

negative   positive

China's impact on global environment

neutral

negative   positive

China's influence on democracy in other countries

2   Comparing the global powers

Figure 6:   How militarily strong do you consider the following countries/entities?

European Union
Russia
United States
China

0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80% 90% 100%

● very weak ● weak ● somewhat weak ● neither ● somewhat strong ● strong ● very strong
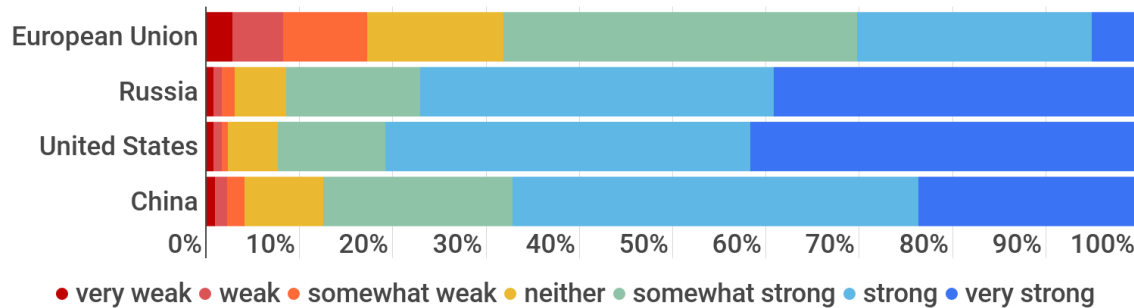
Figure 7:   How economically strong do you consider the following countries/entities?

European Union
Russia
United States
China

0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80% 90% 100%

● very weak ● weak ● somewhat weak ● neither ● somewhat strong ● strong ● very strong
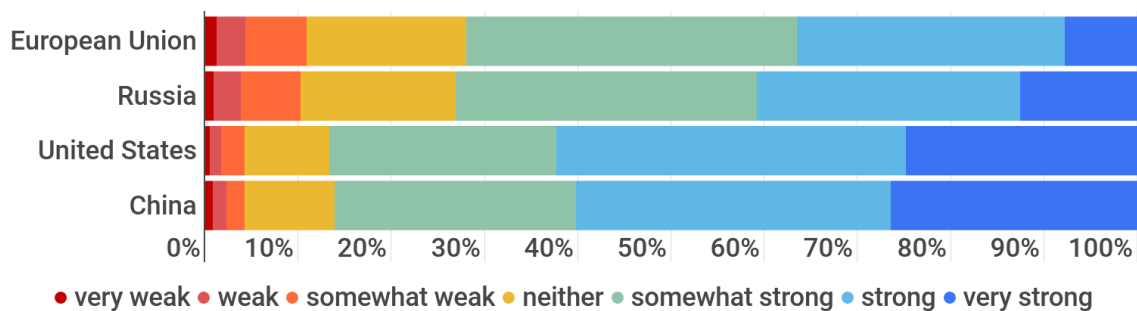
Figure 8:   How culturally attractive do you consider the following countries/entities?

European Union
Russia
United States
China

0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80% 90% 100%

● very unattractive ● unattractive ● somewhat unattractive ● neither ● somewhat attractive
● attractive ● very attractive
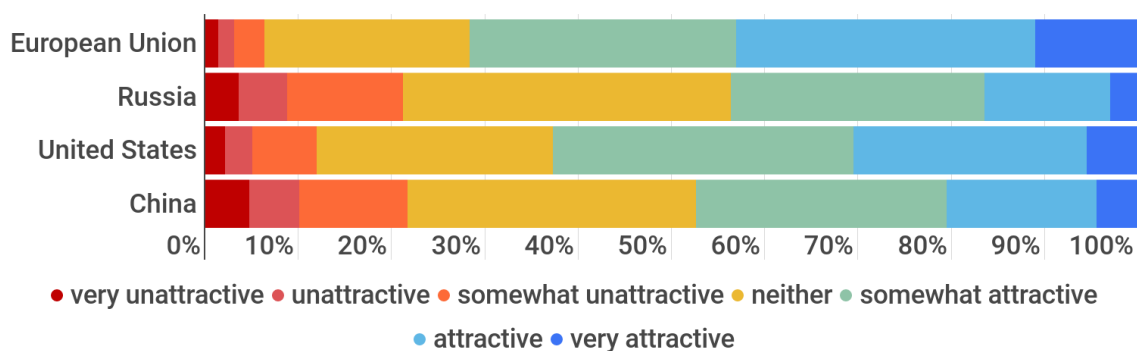
Figure 9:   How do you evaluate the human rights situation in the following countries/entities?

● very bad ● bad ● somewhat bad ● neither ● somewhat good ● good ● very good
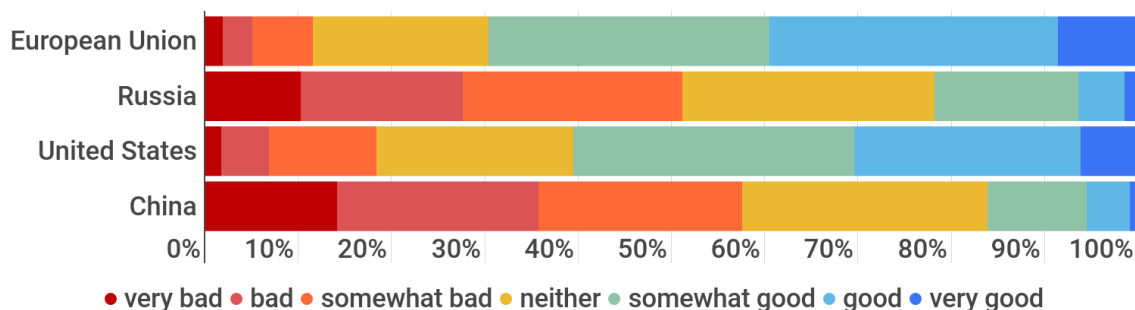
Figure 10:   How important are the following countries/entities to the economic development of Hungary?

● very unimportant ● unimportant ● somewhat unimportant ● neither ● somewhat important
● important ● very importnat
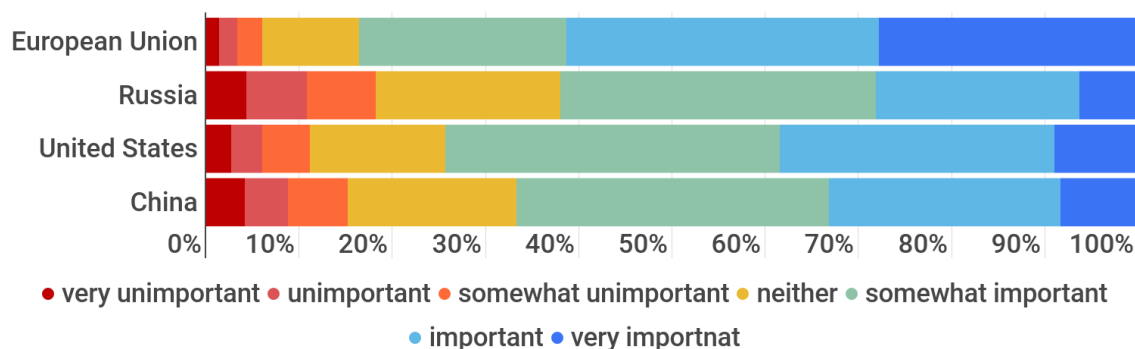
Figure 11:   How much do you trust the following countries/entities?

● strongly distrust ● distrust ● somewhat distrust ● neither ● somewhat trust ● trust
● strongly trust
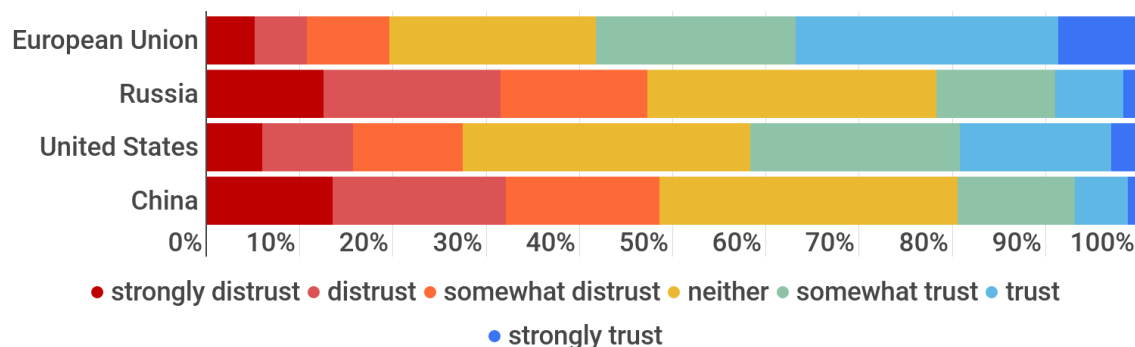
3   Hungarian foreign policy towards China

Figure 12:   How closely should Hungarian foreign policy be aligned with the policy of the following actors? (0=not at all; 10=completely)[9]
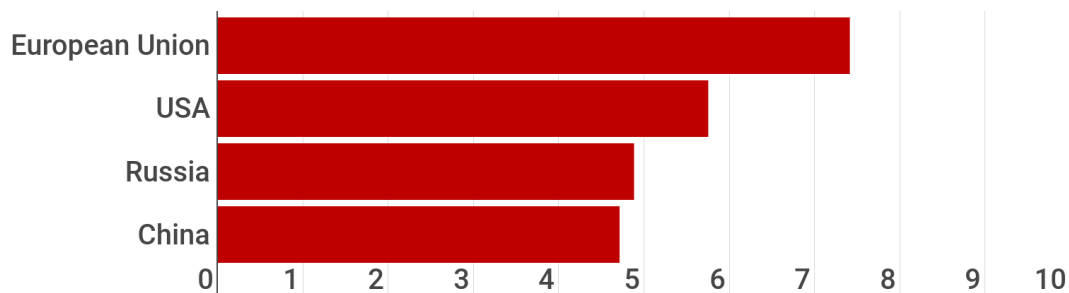
Figure 13:   Should Hungary cooperate with the following countries in building its 5G network? (% of respondents agreeing)
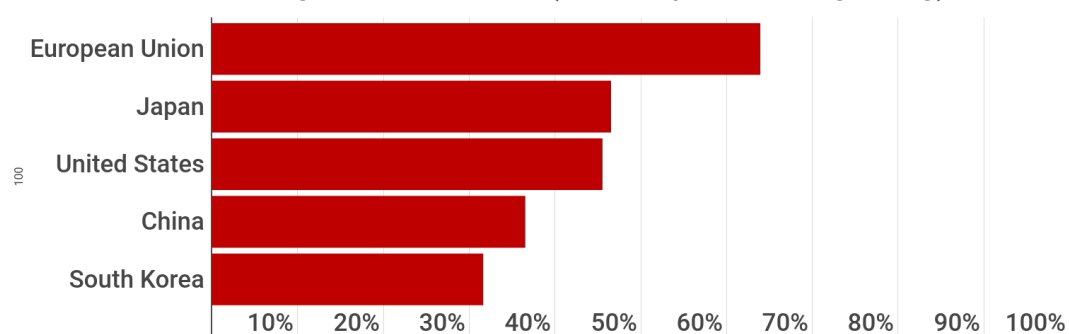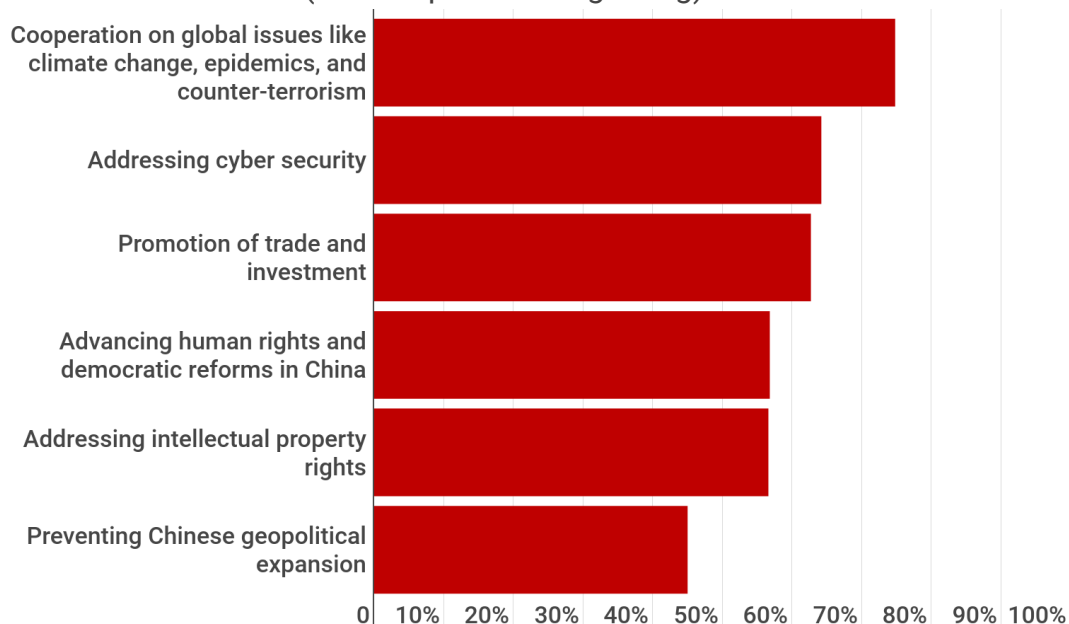

Figure 14:   What should be Hungarian foreign policy priorities towards China? (% of respondents agreeing)

4 COVID-19 pandemic

Figure 15:   How much did the following countries/entities help Hungary during the COVID-19 pandemic?[10]
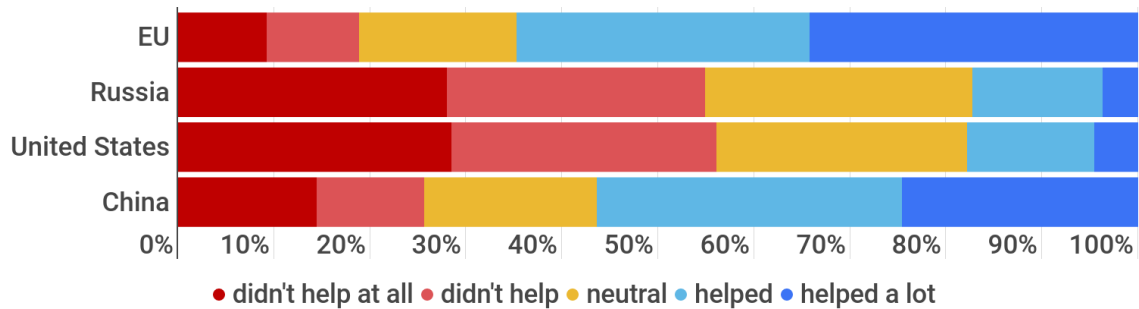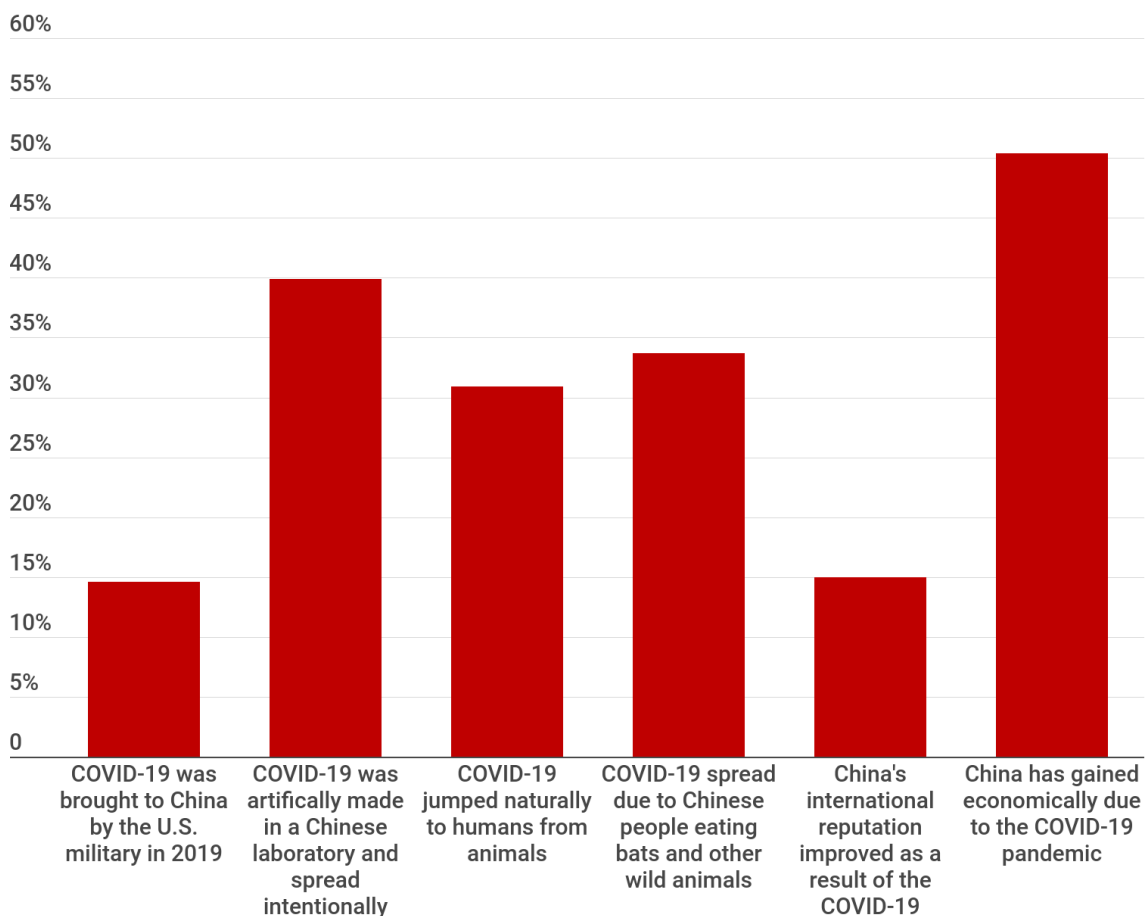

● didn't help at all ● didn't help ● neutral ● helped ● helped a lot

Figure 16:   Views of Hungarians on the COVID-19 pandemic (% of respondents agreeing)

5   Views of China & political affiliation

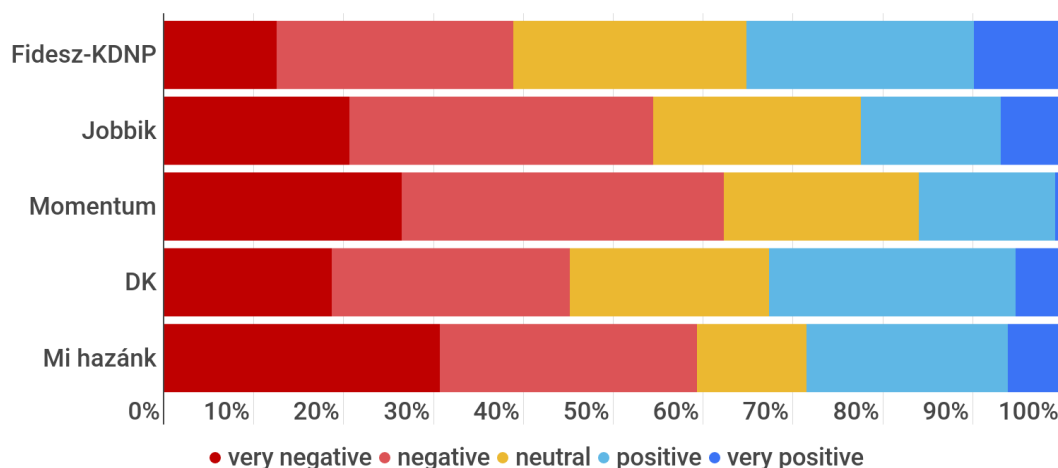**Figure 17:**   Feelings on China among voters of political parties polling over 5%[11]

Figure 18:   Feelings on China according to respondents' satisfaction with Prime Minister Viktor Orbán[12]
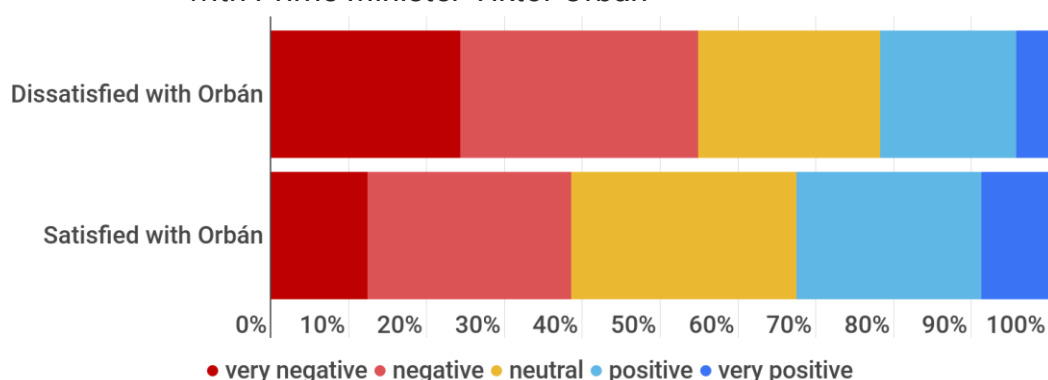

Figure 19:   Feelings on China according to respondents' self-identification with the global West or global East[13]
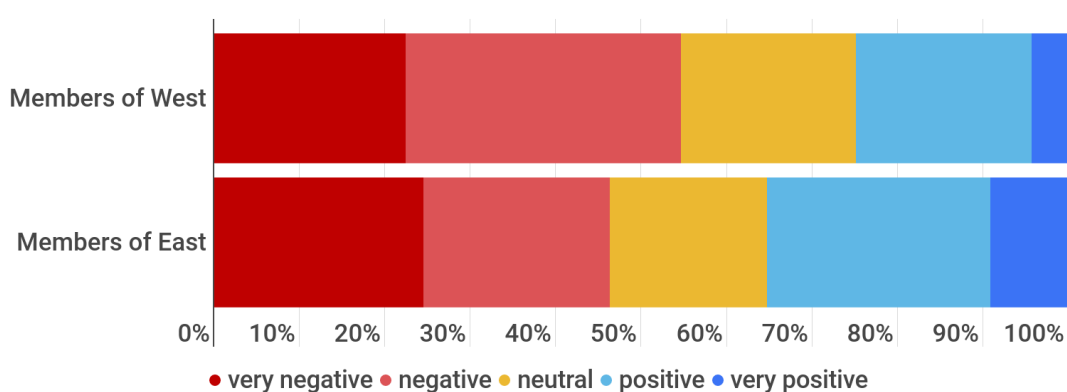
Figure 20: Satisfaction with Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's activities towards China
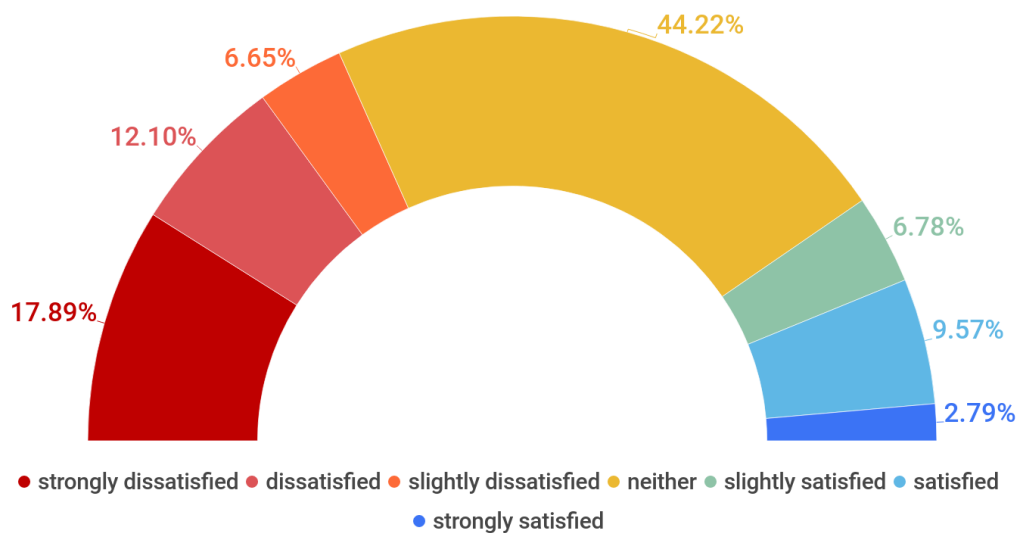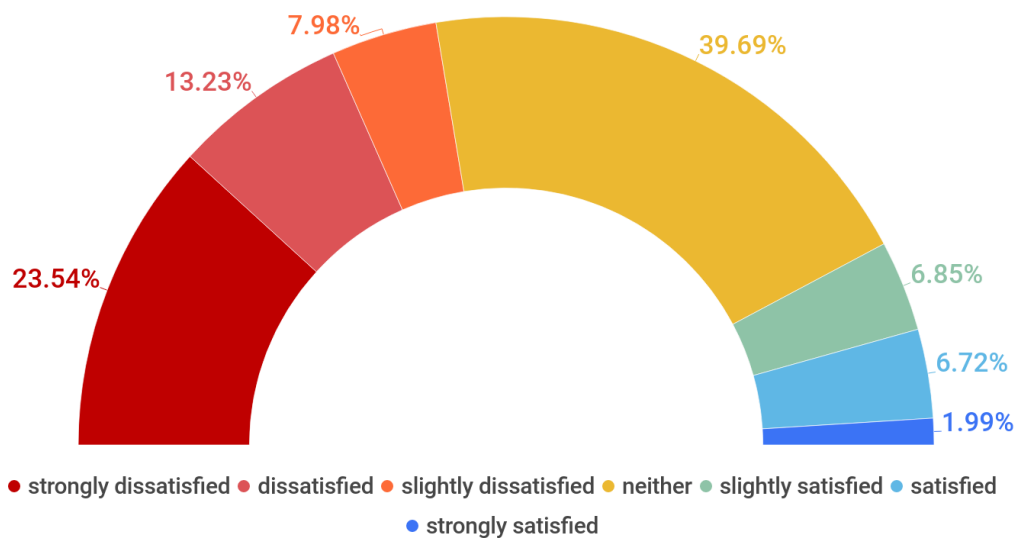

6.65%

12.10%

44.22%

17.89%

6.78%

9.57%

2.79%

● strongly dissatisfied ● dissatisfied ● slightly dissatisfied ● neither ● slightly satisfied ● satisfied
● strongly satisfied

Figure 21: Satisfaction with the plan to reconstruct the Budapest-Belgrade railway line by Chinese companies

7.98%

13.23%

39.69%

23.54%

6.85%

6.72%

1.99%

● strongly dissatisfied ● dissatisfied ● slightly dissatisfied ● neither ● slightly satisfied ● satisfied
● strongly satisfied

Endnotes

1   Turcsányi, Richard Q., Renáta Sedláková, Jiří Čeněk, Kristina Kironská, Andrej Findor, Ondrej Buchel, Matej Hruška, Adrian Brona, Una Aleksandra Bērziņa-Čerenkova, Mario Esteban, Beatrice Gallelli, Jelena Gledic, Peter Gries, Sergei Ivanov, Björn Jerdén, Marc Julienne, Tamás Matura, Tim Rühlig, and Tim Summers. 2020. "Sinophone Borderlands Europe Survey." Palacky University Olomouc.Preparation of the dataset has been supported by the European Regional Development Fund Project "Sinophone Borderlands – Interaction at the Edges", CZ.02.1.01/0.0/0.0/16_019/0000791.

2   N = 1503; unless indicated otherwise, all charts in this report calculate with this number of respondents in the survey. The sample is representative of the Hungarian population from age 18 to 70 with respect to gender, age, education, settlement within the country, region, settlement density, and size of settlement. Data was collected online in September and October 2020.

3   Richard Q. Turcsányi, Matej Šimalčík, Kristína Kironská, Renáta Sedláková, Jiří Čeněk, Andrej Findor, Ondrej Buchel, Matej Hruška, Adrian Brona, Una Aleksandra Berzina-Čerenkova, Mario Esteban, Beatrice Gallelli, Jelena Gledic, Peter Gries, Sergei Ivanov, Björn Jerdén, Marc Julienne, Tamás Matura, Tim Rühlig, Tim Summers *(2020). European public opinion on China in the age of COVID-19: Differences and common ground across the continent.* Olomouc: Palacký University Olomouc.

4   Feelings towards China (and other countries) have been measured on a 0 (negative) to 100 (positive) scale. The responses were grouped as "negative" (incl. very negative: 0-20 and negative: 21-45), "neutral" (46-54) and "positive" (incl. positive: 55-79 and very positive: 80-100).

5   Respondents were offered 7 options: much worse; worse; slightly worse; neither worse nor better; slightly better; better; much better. "Worsened" includes options much worse; worse; slightly worse. "Did not change" includes option neither worse nor better. "Improved" includes options slightly better; better; much better.

6   Supra note 4 (mutatis mutandis).

7   The respondents were asked an open-ended question "What first comes to mind when you hear about China?" The answers provided by 10 or more respondents are visualized.

8   Feelings towards China-related issues have been measured on a 0 (negative) to 100 (positive) scale. The chart shows the mean value for each characteristic.

9   Desired foreign policy alignment has been measured on a 0 (not at all) to 10 (completely) scale. The chart shows the mean value for each country.

10   Perceived COVID-19 help provided by the mentioned entities has been measured on a 0 (didn't help) to 10 (helped a lot) scale. The responses were grouped as "didn't help at all" (0-2), "didn't help" (3-4), "neutral" (5), "helped" (6-7), and "helped a lot" (8-10).

11   Supra note 4 (mutatis mutandis). N-values of the political parties are as follows: Fidesz-KDNP – 314; Jobbik – 162; Momentum – 106; DK – 115; Mi hazánk – 49.

12   Supra note 4 (mutatis mutandis). N-values for the categories are: dissatisfied with Orbán: 847; satisfied with Orbán: 410.

13   Supra note 4 (mutatis mutandis). N-values for the categories are: members of the West: 600; members of the East: 285.

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The Central European Institute of Asian Studies (CEIAS) is an independent think tank based in Bratislava (Slovakia), and with branches in Olomouc (Czech Republic), and Vienna (Austria).

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About Sinophone Borderlands

The Sinophone Borderlands - Interaction at the Edges is an excellent research project based at the Palacký University Olomouc, Czech Republic. The project is funded by the European Regional Development Fund, project no. CZ.02.1.01/0.0/0.0/16_019/0000791.

The main idea of the project is to explore how the Chinese-speaking world interacts with other worlds, including those at its border (Slavophone, Tibetophone, Turco-Persophone, or Austroasiatophone worlds), as well as those who may be more distant (such as Anglophone, Hispanophone, Francophone, and others).

The Sinophone Borderlands research team consists of researchers from various disciplines under three main Research Groups - Political Science, Anthropology, and Linguistics. This allows for a cross-disciplinary dialogue and cross-cultural comparisons which pushes the academic studies of China and Asia beyond the limits of current disciplinary and national frameworks.

The Sinophone Borderlands is a research project that engages primarily in activities such as publishing academic journal articles, books, or participating in conferences and workshops.

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