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Цель журнала – способствовать научному обмену и сотрудничеству между российскими и зарубежными политологами.

Журнал предназначен для публикации результатов фундаментальных и прикладных научных исследований. Тематическая направленность журнала отражается в следующих постоянных рубриках: «История и философия политики», «Политические институты, процессы и технологии», «Политическая регионалистика и этнополитика», «Политическая культура и идеологии», «Политические проблемы международных отношений и глобализации».

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The scientific journal is published since 2011 at the “Publishing House “Science Today”. Translated (eng.) version of the journal is published since 2016. Since its inception, the journal was guided by high scientific and ethical standards and today it is one of the leading political science journals in Russia.

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ФОРМИРОВАНИЕ ЕВРОПЕЙСКОЙ «МЯГКОЙ СИЛЫ» В КИТАЕ ЧЕРЕЗ СОТРУДНИЧЕСТВО В СФЕРЕ ОБРАЗОВАНИЯ

Образование является одним из важных средств реализации построения «мягкой силы» страны, а иностранные студенты, как носители культуры и ценностей, экспортируемых во внешний мир, могут помочь в создании положительного имиджа. В данной статье системно рассматривается история и текущая ситуация отношений Китая и ЕС, проекты образовательного обмена и сотрудничества между Китаем и ЕС, а также международные студенческие обмены между Китаем и ЕС в период с 2008 по 2022 год. Авторы детально рассказывают о программе «Эразмус Образование», конкретной инициативе ЕС в этой области, и отмечают, что сотрудничество Китая и ЕС в области образования сталкивается со следующими проблемами. Во-первых, институциональные ограничения «зонтичного» подхода ЕС привели к бурному развитию двустороннего сотрудничества между странами ЕС и Китаем, в то же время ЕС как региональная организация тесно сотрудничает с Китаем, но меньше сотрудничает с китайским правительством и не имеет единой системы. Во-вторых, между двумя сторонами существует определенная конкуренция в области подготовки талантов и возможностей трудоустройства. В-третьих, ядром отношений ЕС и Китая является экономическое и техническое сотрудничество, в то время как сотрудничество в области образования не является приоритетным для обеих сторон. Китайско-европейское

сотрудничество в области образования продолжает демонстрировать положительные тенденции, о чем свидетельствует неугасающий интерес китайских и европейских студентов к обучению за рубежом, процесс цифровой реформы образовательной политики, в том числе в ЕС на фоне пандемии COVID-19; модели онлайн-образования и технологические изменения, которые разрушают географические границы и постепенно становятся важным дополнительным подходом к офлайн-образованию, а также инструментом для продвижения культурного обмена.

Ключевые слова: *сотрудничество в области образования, Китай, ЕС, мягкая сила, Эразмус Мундус.*

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THE BUILDING OF EUROPEAN SOFT POWER IN CHINA THROUGH EDUCATIONAL COLLABORATION [48]

Education is one of the important means to realise the construction of a country's soft power, and overseas students, as carriers of culture and values exported to the outside world, can help build a positive national image. This paper systematically examines the history and current situation of China-EU relations, China-EU educational exchange and cooperation projects, and China-EU international student exchanges between 2008 and 2022. The authors give a detailed introduction to the Erasmus Education Programme, a specific EU initiative in the field of, and points out that China-EU cooperation in the field of education faces the following challenges. First, the institutional limitations of the EU's "umbrella" approach have led to a booming trend of bilateral cooperation between EU countries and China, and at the same time, the EU as a regional organisation has worked closely with China but has less cooperation with the Chinese government and lacks a unified system. Second, there is some competition between the two sides in terms of talent training and employment opportunities. Thirdly, the core of EU-China relations is economic and technical cooperation, while education cooperation is not a priority for the two sides. Sino-European education cooperation continues to show positive trends, as evidenced by the undiminished interest of Chinese and European students in studying abroad; the outbreak of the COVID-19, which has facilitated the process of digital reform of education policies, including in the EU; and online education models and technological changes, which are breaking geographical boundaries and gradually becoming an important complementary approach to offline education, as well as a tool to promote cultural exchange.

Key words: *education cooperation, China, EU, soft power, Erasmus Mundus.*

Introduction. The concept of soft power was proposed by the American scholar Joseph Nye. In his view, “Soft power is an ability to achieve goals by relying on attraction, not by coercion. This attraction stems from a country's culture, political philosophy and policies. When a country's policies are regarded as reasonable by the outside world, its soft power will increase accordingly [40].” Emphasizing the “attractiveness” and “allure” generated by common values, Joseph also believes that the country's soft power mainly comes from culture, political values and foreign policy. Education is a form of cultural expression, and overseas students are the carrier of the country's export ideas and values, thus affecting the construction of a country's national image. Therefore, countries regard educational exchanges and cooperation as a priority development direction, and regard international students as an important carrier for promoting their own culture and values and enhancing the country's soft power construction.

Japanese scholars Masafumi Kaneko and Mitsuru Kitano regard international cultural exchange activities as one of the important activities of public diplomacy. They can be divided into five categories: “Cultural exchanges and support for domestic research”, “Cultural and artistic exchanges”, “Regional exchanges and grassroots exchanges”, “Personnel exchanges”, and “Support for national understanding education and national language education” [37]. The British scholar Nicholas J. Cull defines higher education exchanges as experiential activities developed by young people. Generally, a country sends students to educational institutions in the country to participate in short-term or long-term study projects. Student exchange programs are new educational programs, such as the Erasmus program initiated by the European Union [12].

“Cultural soft power is an influence generated through dissemination, exchange, and interaction based on cultural resources [52]”. The dissemination, exchange and interaction carried out with the higher education platform as the carrier can produce “attractiveness”, cultivate young people's sense of identity with a country's values, and thus produce a good impression of the country in which they live. The role of soft power is well reflected.

I. EU-China relations overview. European Union's predominance of soft power is in the very nature of the EU, with peace and peaceful cooperation being the founding idea of the organization. However, in EU-China relations “a tripod approach” prevails – a threefold policy – that looks at China as a partner, a competitor and a systemic rival [32. P. 2]. This, in turn, creates a complexity in the relations, especially taking into account the double level nature of cooperation – on state-to-state and supranational levels. Some of the European countries have a long history of cooperation/rivalry with China while others have just recently established their international ties with China.

The diplomatic relations between China and the EU (European Economic Community) have existed since 1975 [24] with the focus on trade cooperation. The first cultural initiatives and communication between EU and China were launched in 1980s. The European Community Youth Orchestra visited Hong Kong and Beijing with the aim of cultural exchange and establishing cultural ties with People's Republic of China [27]. Unfortunately, this initiative was of a sporadic nature, and systemic relations on the EU level were established only in 2003, when the first mutual accords between China and the EU were signed. China issued its first-ever policy paper on the EU, and on the EU side, the European Commission issued a communication on "A Maturing Partnership-Shared Interests and Challenges in EU-China Relations" [5. P. 167-179], which defined cooperation in economics and technology mostly. In these areas, China and the EU see each other as a partner, a competitor and a systematic rival, mostly because of a variety of member states' approaches. "The countries in the European Union have different regional priorities; they care about the wider world to very different degrees." [32. P. 5] Bigger European powers like Germany and France rely on their security threats policies in relations to China first of all, while for smaller European countries economic benefits are prevalent. In general, there is no one united policy and approach towards China in most of the cooperation areas.

However, interests overlap in the area of education. In terms of education policies, China is more a partner than a competitor or a systemic rival. The EU and its member states acknowledge the benefits of knowledge and experience exchange, which lay a foundation of internal education policies. As is stated in the China's policy paper on the EU, "it is necessary to establish a China-EU education cooperation consultation mechanism as appropriate and strengthen cooperation in areas including mutual recognition of academic credentials and degrees, exchange of students, language teaching, exchange of scholarships and teacher training." [9] Considering this approach, both sides perceive cooperation in the area of education as a positive aspect of EU-China relations. Although European universities have long history of Chinese students' enrollment, at the EU level Chinese students started to take part in Erasmus Mundus programme only after 2003 agreements, and already in 2004 more than 2800 Chinese students and 320 scholars took part in the programme [25. P. 8]. More initiatives and programs have been launched since then, and nowadays China is an important source of students and academic staff for the EU. European students and scholars, in return, compose one of the biggest groups in China.

This exchange is essential in terms of bridging contradictions between states and creation of mutual understanding, which lay the foundation of further beneficial cooperation. This cooperation, however, faces some difficulties. First, there is still no formed single education system within the EU, most of the countries have their own independent education policy especially at the level of higher

education. Second, the EU education policy, which mostly is Erasmus+ (and Erasmus Mundus within it), is mostly oriented toward internal European interests, with quite a small sector for Partner countries like China. The result is that there is a double-way approach for China in tackling European Union states. On the one hand, Chinese students benefit from bilateral agreements of Chinese Government with the European member states. On the other hand, there is a possibility for Chinese citizens to participate in EU activities and programs, but the opportunity to take part in EU-organized education is less prospect than enrolling to universities using state programs or self-funding. Hence, EU-China level of cooperation in education was but a small sector compared to interest in the area of trade and technology.

In recent years, however, even despite the pandemics, the cooperation with China has revived. The rising interest of the EU in China and vice versa can explain this situation. Another factor is the emergence of more tools and instruments, digitalization of communication and education aspects. In general, the pandemics has brought the foundation for a closer and more efficient cooperation in the area of education for the EU and China, and recent statistics prove this.

II. Student exchange between the EU and China (2008-2022). In 2008 only about 42 000 Chinese students travelled to the EU in order to benefit from educational programs, while 22 600 European students went to China [25. P. 6]. In total, there were about 120 000 Chinese students in the EU countries in 2008/2009 academic year in the EU [25. P. 22]. The biggest share of students was in the UK (40% of the amount, or about 48 000), France (23%, about 27600), Germany (20%, about 24 000), Netherlands (4%, about 5000), Italy, Ireland, Sweden (3%, about 3500-3600 students), Finland, Cyprus, Denmark (about 1-2%) [25. P. 18]. This was considered a very positive result of the cooperation programs between the EU countries and China, although it was a result of state-to-state cooperation.

In 10 years numbers almost doubled. In 2018/2019 there were already about 220 000 Chinese students studying in the EU and the UK [28]. More than half (56%) traditionally accounted for the UK – 122 140 students, Germany (18%, about 40 000), France (11%, 23 000), Italy, (5%), the Netherlands (2%), Spain, Ireland, Sweden, Hungary, Finland and Denmark (about 1%) [41]. In China, there were 66,746 from Europe, the second largest student group after students from Asia [14]. The expansion of scholarship programs and financial assistance can explain the rise in numbers, especially from the Chinese government along with rising private interest. “In 2019, the central government's public financial expenditure was budgeted for 9.251 billion yuan [33], while the actual expenditure was 9.249 billion yuan. In 2020, the central Government allocated 8.693 billion yuan in public finance” [1]. At the same time, China is seeking equal cooperation with the EU in terms of budget sharing.

In 2019/2020 academic year, the interest of Chinese counterpart was even higher. The top destinations showed an increase in students' numbers. In United

Kingdom there were 141 870 students [31], in Germany there was an increase up to 41 400 [50. P. 43], while about 8000 German students studied in China [50. P. 65], in France – 29 731 Chinese students [8. P. 58], in Spain – 12 571 [44], in Italy – 7 800 Chinese students [35], and in Netherlands – 4 688 [40].

As the example of Germany shows, most of Chinese students came to Europe to get a full degree – 38 800 [50. P. 49], only 2 500 were temporary study visits [50. P. 57]. This also implies the increase in the quality of education and the rising interest in European education as a result.

Despite the outbreak of COVID-19 and consequent movement limitations, the numbers of Chinese students coming to European countries for their studies did not decrease dramatically. About 135 000 student visas for Chinese citizens was issued in the UK alone [51] in 2021, which still makes the UK the largest student destination in Europe despite it left the EU. This indicates the source of interest expressed by the Chinese students – they seek privileged and high-quality education, which the UK is known for, and are not primarily interested in discovering European lifestyle and values.

Since 2020, Germany acquired the status of the leader destination country for Chinese students, having about 41 000 students from China in 2020/2021 [53], which is a very slight decrease taking into account all the COVID safety regulations and restrictions. France suffered a larger loss, having only about 25 000 Chinese students in the same academic year [42. P. 185], Spain lost in students' numbers with slightly less than 12 000 students [23. P. 5], while Italy and the Netherlands actually increased the number of their Chinese students – 8 278 in Italy [34. P. 20] and almost 5 000 in the Netherlands [34. P. 20].

As for 2021-2022 academic year, the number slightly differ. The UK still was a top priority for student enrollment from China, with the total number of Chinese students being 119 265 [36]. Germany holds the second place among European states as the student destination with 40 000 Chinese students studying in Germany in 2021/2022 academic year [43]. In France, the drop in Chinese students was less noticeable – there were 27 479 students from China in the same academic year [29].

The increase in student numbers, which roughly doubled (in general) in the past 10 years, shows the interest of Chinese students in the European countries and their education standards. There is now a variety of opportunities for these students to get access to education in the EU at both national and European levels.

III. Sino-European cooperation in education in practice: The Erasmus Mundus Programme as an Example. Traditionally, Sino-European education cooperation dominated by private sponsorship, most of the students who take part in the student mobility are self-sponsored; in some cases, they receive scholarship from the Chinese Government or grants from European universities. Moreover, the number of scholarship beneficiaries is not huge, only 6% of Chinese students received scholarship when going to the EU in 2008 [25. P. 28]. The reason behind

this lies partly in the benefits for the EU countries – students from abroad remain a source of income. The bilateral agreements still prevail in the total of EU-China relations, and each state defines its limits of the EU-level education programs inclusion. This situation, however, does not help to create a positive image of the EU as a whole.

Erasmus+ is the major education program in the EU, with its budget reaching 26,2 billion euro for 2020-2027 period [16]. Within Erasmus+ there are initiatives devoted to the participation of third countries known as Erasmus Mundus program. They unite Partner countries and grant access to Partner states' companies and students to join different projects. The most prominent projects are Erasmus Mundus Joint Masters Degrees (EMJDs) scholarships, Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA) and Erasmus+ Capacity Building in Higher Education. Erasmus Mundus Joint Masters scholarships and Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions target students from Master and Doctoral studies respectively [17]. The Capacity Building in Higher Education programme, at the same time, aims at development of research and innovative capacities, new education programs and curricula including new doctoral programs, new cooperation schemes with the world of work, or the implementation of tools developed under the Bologna process [46. P. 8].

With every year, Erasmus+ is expanding its international dimension including more universities and partner organizations into its actions. In 2018, for example, around 28,000 higher education participants from outside the EU came to study or teach in the Programme Countries [26]. With 44 newly selected Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Degrees in 2018, Erasmus+ funded more than 3,180 student scholarships over six years [18. P. 12].

For Chinese students this program is important when it comes to reaching out for European education through EU level. China, however, is not one of the most active participants of Erasmus programs. Students from China received only about 300 scholarships during the 2014-2020 period (out of more than 13 000 scholarships) in 10 most popular European countries as part of Joint Masters Degrees, which is only about 2% of the total number [19. P. 10]. At the same time, China's organizations are actively participating in the projects – China holds the third place after the USA and Brazil, being involved into 25% of all EMJMDs as a full or associated partner [19. P. 29]. 8 Chinese Higher Education Institutions participate in EMJMDs as a full partner, and 35 – as associated partners [19. P. 37].

The annual participation of Chinese organizations in the Erasmus programs is not substantial, though. In 2019, 5 Chinese organizations (out of 33 organizations from Partner countries) were involved in Erasmus Mundus Joint Masters Degrees programme with no grants allocated, no projects assigned from European Union part [2. P. 55]. 1 project (288 projects for partner countries) involving 12 organizations (1 111 organizations) were assigned in Capacity Building projects, but

again, there were no grants or sponsorship on EU behalf [2. P. 71]. Finally, within Jean Monnet activities, there were 6 projects (out of 786 for Partner countries) and 4 participating organizations (out of 142) not sponsored by the EU [2. P. 93].

In 2020, the situation changed. The European Union changed its focus on cooperation with more Partner countries, including China. The focus shifted to promotion of the EU values through Jean Monnet Activities. The budget available for the 2020 was €20.6 million, including €3.5 million from the Partnership Instrument for 10 countries (China and Hong Kong among them) and further €1.0 million from the Partnership Instrument for only Networks and Centers of Excellence in 11 countries (China and Hong Kong among them as well) identified as priority targets for the EU external action [20. P. 103].

In terms of purely educational programs, the situation did not change dramatically, but the EU started to realize its priorities towards China as a part of Jean Monnet Activities. 1 Chinese organization (out of 17 organizations from Partner countries) was involved in Erasmus Mundus Joint Masters Degrees programme in 2020 with no grant or scholarship allocations [3. P. 56]. 1 project (421 projects for partner countries) involving 3 organizations (1 218 organizations), and 1 youth project (out of 340) was held within Capacity Building projects, having no grants or sponsorship [3. P. 79]. Within Jean Monnet activities, however, there were 9 projects received (out of 912 for Partner countries), 7 contracted (out of 161) and 7 participating organizations (out of 183) with allocated grants reached 394 338 euros [3. P. 99].

This shows a definite interest of European part in EU-China dialogue in the area of education. The rising interest of the parties is also reflected in various events organized in 2019-2020. In 2019, an EU-China Higher Education Platform was organized in Helsinki where the topic of balanced mobility in higher education was discussed [21. P. 88]. Another important event was the 5th EU-China High Level People-to-People Dialogue (HPPD) in education, youth, culture and sport which was held virtually on 9 and 10 November 2020. During the high-level dialogue between Commissioner Gabriel and Vice Premier of the PRC, Ms. Sun Chunlan, several important topics were covered: different policy areas, cooperation to date, and future opportunities for cooperation, on the basis of reciprocity [20. P. 13].

The restoration of the High-Level People-to-People Dialogue tradition is a good sign of the revival of EU-China relations. It was established in 2012 [57] and traditionally was organized every two years. The Dialogue creates the platform for intercommunication and mutual acknowledgement in the area of education as well as a discussion of some relevant topics. It also creates a possibility for bridging high-level miscommunication cases and creating the atmosphere of cooperation and mutual understanding. The consistency of the Dialogue, however, depends a lot on the initiative from both sides, and is a subject to changes, just as Erasmus+ initiatives on a whole.

China definitely tries to establish good and peaceful cooperation, at least in the area of education. Most of its initiatives are focused on scholarship programs. There were 4 major Chinese scholarship programs in 2011: Chinese Government Scholarship programme, Post-Graduate Study Abroad Program, China/UNESCO – the Great Wall Fellowship programme, China-EU language exchange programme [25. P. 68]. The certain centralization of these scholarships happened since then. Nowadays, the Chinese Government Scholarship program EU Window is the major program in the area of student mobility into China. The other programs – Great Wall Program, AUN Program, PIF Program and WMO Program – were systematized by the region and category of the country, thus leaving only EU Window targeting citizens of the EU [4].

Chinese Government Scholarship program provides annually full grants for European Union citizens. The dynamic of the program is contradictory. Launched in 2006 after EU-China summit, the programme allocated 100 scholarships from 2007 to 2011 [47]. After the High-level People-to-People Dialogue in 2012 the number of scholarships doubled, and from 2012 to 2016 Chinese Government sponsored 200 scholarships annually [6]. From 2017 to 2021 number of scholarship varied at about 115 – 140 scholarships annually [45]. Interestingly, during the outbreak of COVID in 2020, Chinese Government increased the number of scholarships up to 140, but already in 2021 there were only 101 scholarships [6].

Apart from scholarships, China supports various European studies programs and higher education institutions. Many Chinese Universities have European Studies Centers Programs, which help instruct Chinese students about the EU and assist in getting grants and scholarships for education in the EU.

Apart from various European centers at Chinese universities, there are also two major education institutions – China-Europe International Business School and the Europe-China Clean Energy Centre EC2. China-Europe International Business School (CEIBS) that expanded since 1994 to 5 campuses in Shanghai, Beijing, Shenzhen, Accra (Ghana), and Zurich (Switzerland) provides high quality education in the area of business in cooperation with Chinese and European partners [7]. EC2 – The Europe-China Clean Energy Center in Beijing in cooperation with Politecnico di Torino, supports the Chinese Government's efforts to shape a more sustainable, environment-friendly and efficient energy sector [13].

IV. Major challenges for Sino-European cooperation in area of education. There are some challenges that make it difficult to develop EU-China cooperation in the area of education. Some of them are systemic, and continue to hinder the development of the relations for decades while others are quite new. Institutional limitations (or the “umbrella” approach) in EU-China relations, which can be considered as systemic and constant, pose a problem for future cooperation development. The “umbrella” approach to the EU institutions means that EU activities cannot intervene into sovereign rights of its member states. Thus, the initiatives, in education as well, should only be additive, not overlapping with the

states' interests. As a result, the EU-China cooperation should be on a voluntary basis, covering the actions that are not opposed by the EU countries.

For example, being limited by the “umbrella” approach, Erasmus+, as any other EU-level initiative depends a lot on the voluntary inclusion of higher education institutions both from the EU and abroad. Hence, the difficulty occurs in promoting program further if there is a lack of initiative. Despite this fact, in EU-China relations, especially in recent years, there is a revival of cooperation in the area of education and a certain positive evolution can be seen, despite the pandemics' negative effects. However, the balance of state-to-state versus EU-level cooperation is obviously in favor of the former. European programs are but a small share of education exchanges between China and the EU countries for now.

This, however, is not the only issue that occurs in the EU-China relations. According to joint research of EU research center and the Chinese Ministry of Education, the major challenges and obstacles for successful cooperation in 2011 were: funding, language, lack of information, legal and administrative issues, lack of support services, recognition issues [53].

One decade later, obstacles remain the same to a certain degree, though much was done to minimize their negative effect. More recently, as Y. Cai puts it, the following challenges have been prioritized: (1) lack of trust, (2) difficulties in implementing rhetorical interest fit in practice, (3) confined perceptions concerning China-Europe higher education cooperation, (4) a challenge for China in how to reconcile Chinese traditions and Western values when learning best practices from Europe through education and research cooperation [15. P. 101].

At the same time, the systemic challenges remain acute. There is no unified system for EU-China cooperation in the area of education, and most of the cooperation remains an initiative of separate states, who exercise their sovereign rights of the state members.

Another problem, from the students' point of view, is application of their degrees. There is a swing situation, when the EU tries to keep bright students and provide them with jobs in the EU, while China is interested in the return of such students. The same happens to European students in China. This is where the “competitor” aspect of the relations in between China and the EU in the area of education emerges.

Finally, another problem is in the very essence of the EU-China relations. The area of education, despite being a positive cooperation example, is not a top priority for EU-China relations, as a bigger emphasis is put on the economics and technology cooperation [10]. This minimizes the positive effect that cooperation in education produces.

The predictions for further EU-China cooperation development, despite the systemic and modern challenges, are quite positive though. First, as statistics show, there is a rising interest of Chinese and European students in education abroad. Even amid the pandemics, the numbers of students enrolled did not drop

significantly, despite the assumptions. This only means that with the COVID restrictions being lifted, more students will try their best to join the student mobility programs both at state and EU levels.

Another positive result of the pandemics is the digitalization of the European education policies. This implies a possibility to involve more students and professionals through online platforms, allowing learning not only the curricula of the universities the students attend, but also more general information about the EU. The online education is, definitely, less efficient compared to offline education. As EU analysts argue, “international students following online education miss out important social and cultural elements of a study abroad experience including living in a foreign country, enjoying the social life on campus and becoming familiar with other cultures” [15. P. 101]. At the same time, online education is just experiencing its birth and is still to develop. The opportunities to include foreign students from around the world into European “soft power” tools through EU education platforms are innumerable. Unfortunately, the EU focuses on EU citizens’ inclusion primarily with its’ online platforms. For example, Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange [22] platform, which aims at the exchange of cultural practices online, or Conference on the Future of Europe [11], which helps discuss important issues in the European society, can be accessed by the EU citizens only. Most of the Erasmus+ online initiatives lead to offline activities, which third countries’ citizens cannot take part in or is limited only to current programme participants (like Online Linguistic Support [22]). It would be a good instrument of “soft power” granting access to some of the linguistic and cultural exchange platforms for third country nationals. This way people could learn about European diversity and values without being physically present in the EU.

There are some open-access online resources for anyone who has the Internet, though. The Learning Corner at the European Union portal [38] provides users with both factual data and engaging interactive mode. The development and extension of this platform could be a great addition to the EU “soft power” instruments.

In general, development of the online platforms during the pandemics from both higher education institutions of Europe and EU institutions creates the basis for inclusion, and, hence, makes the EU values more attractive for third countries’ nationals.

Conclusions. Firstly, the area of education has long served as a tool of the EU and EU member states’ “soft power” mechanism. Being a positive example of EU-China cooperation, education becomes a prospective area of cooperation. This is one of the few areas, where the EU and China see each other as partners rather than competitors or systemic rivals. This implies that development of this area can create a spillover effect onto other areas of cooperation, and, hence, countries should pay more attention to it.

Secondly, the increasing numbers of Chinese students in the EU show a positive dynamic in the relations up to date. This also means that the EU higher

educations' quality, especially in countries such as Germany, Italy and the Netherlands, is largely recognized abroad. As a result, education can be rightfully considered as an effective "peoples' diplomacy" mechanism. The outcome of the EU-level education programs is arguable though, as the majority of students coming to Europe either are self-sponsored or enjoy the bilateral agreements opportunities of state-to-state relations.

Thirdly, the EU is confined to institutional and legal limitations, thus it relies on the voluntary participation in its programs. This does not mean that the EU is considerably constrained in exercising "soft power" or "peoples' diplomacy" but it is limited by the "umbrella" approach. First, it has some successful programs for foreign students and academic staff, which people see as a prospective opportunity to participate in the EU higher education programs. Second, the digitalization of the education format gives the EU the tools and mechanisms it needs to embrace more people in its activities. The supplementary education is the key for executing the EU's "peoples' diplomacy", and development and usage of online platforms is a key as it helps avoiding the "umbrella" approach limitations.

As a whole, the development of EU-China relations has a positive tendency. Using the opportunities provided by the pandemics – more online inclusion, possibility to minimize the distance effect – the EU has already shifted its' focus to cooperation with China among some other states, and China claims its interest in cooperating with the EU. Provided this risen mutual interest and diversification of tools and mechanisms for cooperation, one can expect a continued revitalization of EU-China interrelations in the area of education.

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48. This article is the result of the Liaoning Provincial Education Department's basic research project "Research on Russian Digital Diplomacy in the Context of the Russian-Ukrainian Conflict". (project number: LJKMR20221527). 本文系辽宁省教育厅基本科研项目“俄乌冲突背景下的俄罗斯数字外交研究”（项目编号：LJKMR20221527）的阶段成果。

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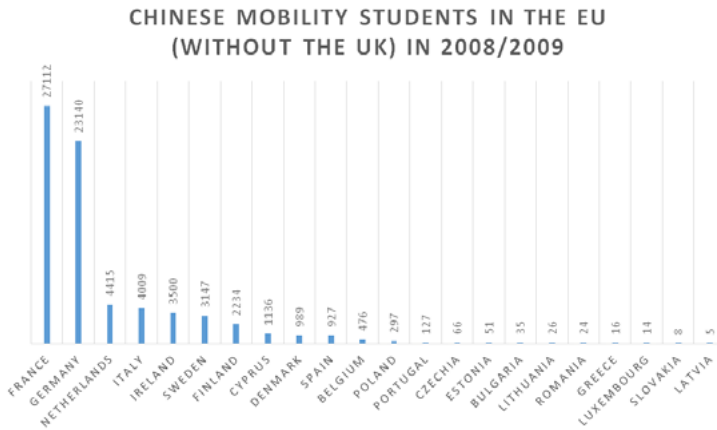


Chart 1. The number of Chinese students in the EU in 2008/2009 academic year (excluding the UK) [28; 30; 41]

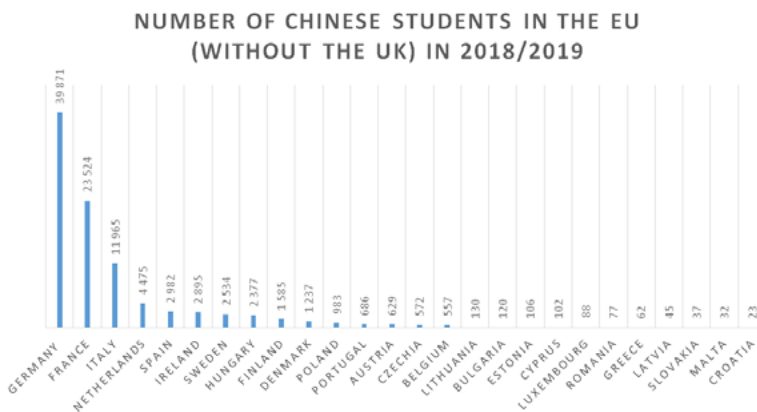


Chart 2. The number of Chinese students in the EU in 2018/2019 academic year (excluding the UK) [28; 30; 41]

Top five destination countries for students from China in 2020/2021 academic year

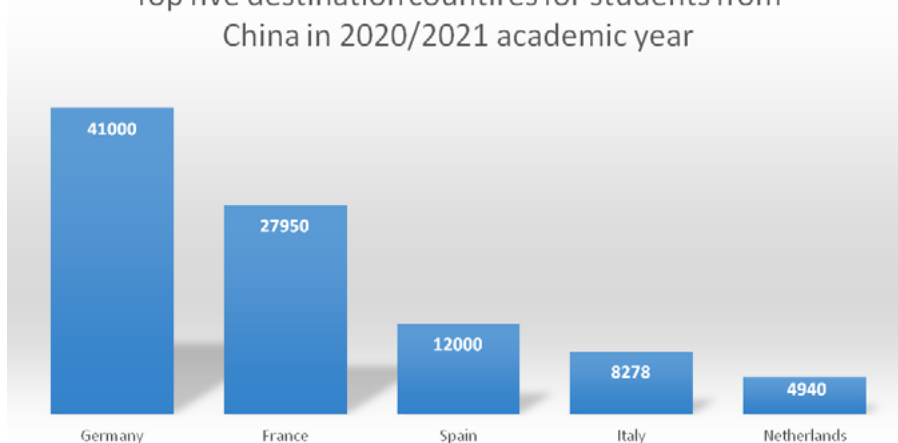


Chart 3. Top five destinations for Chinese students in 2019/2020 academic year [28; 30; 41]

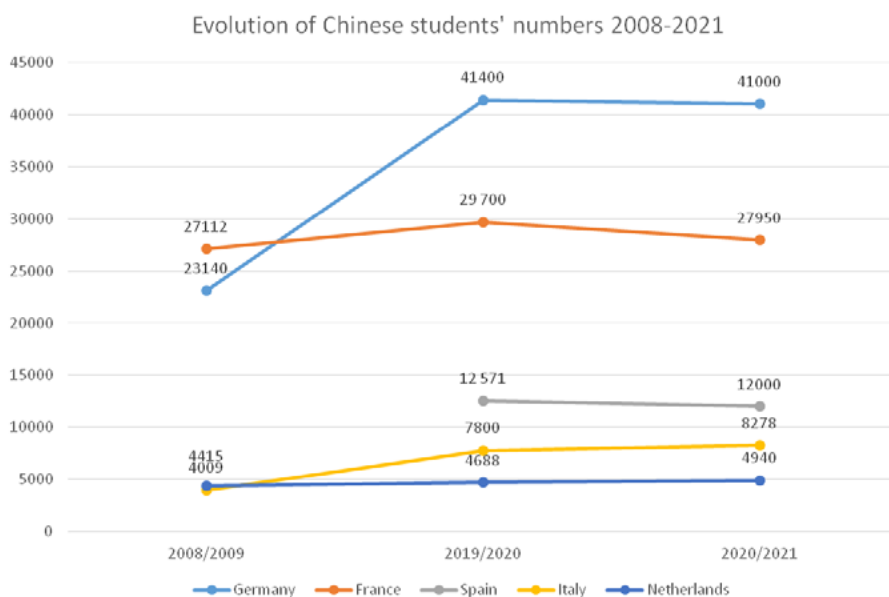


Chart 4. Changes in the number of Chinese students in top four EU countries (excluding the UK)

Source: Authors' chart.