CEE-Nordic Dialogue on European approaches to Chinese investment and technology

On November 12, 2026, AMO's China Observers in Central and Eastern Europe (CHOICE) and the Swedish National China Centre (NKK) held the 5th CEE-Nordic Dialogue on China online.

This time, the discussion focused on how European countries balance security concerns with economic and technological engagement involving China. European approaches to China remain diverse, shaped by national security priorities, economic exposure and institutional frameworks. While governments frequently talk about de-risking, companies are not implementing this in practice.

The roundtable highlighted two recent reports. The Central and Eastern European China Policy Audit 2025-2026: Between De-Risking and Re-Engagement provides an overview of China policies in Central and Eastern European countries; China's Green Statecraft and NB8 Arctic Security details Chinese efforts to exploit vulnerabilities in Nordic and Baltic green technology and possible mitigation options.

Russia, politics and economic exposure: CEE relations with China

The discussion made it clear that the CEE countries do not form one uniform bloc. Several factors shape national approaches: uncertainty about U.S. policy, Russia's war with Ukraine and Sino-Russian alignment, domestic political change and economic exposure to China. The CEE countries fall into five broad groups: security-first sceptics, managed pragmatists, political openers, structurally constrained actors, and transition cases. Hungary falls into the latter group, as it is changing its approach to China following the April 2026 elections. The Nordic states also pursue different approaches, shaped by their varying levels of engagement with and understanding of China.

Sometimes the interplay between these factors is complex. Poland is a case in point: It welcomes Taiwanese investments in its semiconductor industry in the hopes of strengthening its position in global value chains. Meanwhile, this engagement seems not to affect its position on China, possibly because Poland learnt its lessons from Lithuania and avoids open displays such as a Taiwanese Representative Office. Poland upholds its One China policy and maintains stable diplomatic relations with Beijing, with its Prime Minister set to visit China soon. However, the country's traditional security-focused scepticism leads it to view China as an enabler of Russia's war, a major concern.

Economic engagement in green technology and infrastructure

In the Nordic and Baltic states, Chinese clean technology products can offer cost-effective ways to support climate goals. Still, growing reliance on them may create dependencies that become harder and more expensive to unwind over time. Following pushback against infrastructure investments, Chinese actors were said to be engaging more with municipalities, NGOs and private companies, making it harder to assess the

extent of China's presence and the dependencies that may result. To address this, better information-sharing through existing channels is needed, including on Chinese activities in neighbouring countries and cooperation involving municipalities and private companies. Mapping contracts could also help build a clearer picture of potential vulnerabilities.

Using critical minerals in the Arctic was highlighted as a concrete step for Nordic countries to reduce dependence on China in green technologies. However, efforts to develop labour-intensive and polluting mineral extraction meet local resistance, for example in Greenland.

In the Western Balkans, governments prioritise economic development, and Chinese companies often serve as subcontractors in EU-funded projects. In Montenegro, the first section of the Bar–Boljare highway, financed by a Chinese loan and built by Chinese companies, left the country facing significant debt and financial difficulties, becoming an infamous example of China's debt-trap diplomacy in 2021. For the second section, Montenegro turned to EU and EBRD financing, yet Chinese companies nevertheless won the tender to build it in 2026. In Serbia, the newly elected leadership has called for a review of existing state contracts and major infrastructure projects, which could have implications for some Chinese-backed projects.

EU and NATO: The role of collective action

NATO membership appears to impose more direct constraints on military cooperation with China. In the Western Balkans, Serbia, which is outside NATO, has the most extensive military cooperation with China. Both the EU and NATO can give smaller states greater leverage through collective action vis-à-vis China. However, common frameworks do not guarantee a swift or coordinated response. Companies may continue to favour lower-cost Chinese products, while uncertainty over proposed regulation, including local-content requirements, could complicate investment decisions and de-risking efforts.

CEE-Nordic Dialogue on China
The recurring CEE–Nordic Dialogue on China brings together analysts and policymakers from Nordic, Baltic, and Central and Eastern European countries, with the aim of sharing experiences and jointly building capacity. It is organized by AMO's China Observers in Central and Eastern Europe and the Swedish National China Centre (NKK) at the Swedish Institute of International Affairs (UI).