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**Silk Road Support Group**

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Mr. President, Dear Azay,

Mr. Secretary General, Dear Roberto

Ladies and gentlemen,

Dear Colleagues,

Thank you for inviting me, as Chairman of the Sub-Committee on Rules of Procedure, to speak in this support group on the Silk Roads.

I would first like to say a few words about the Silk Roads themselves, because the importance of this topic determines the political and legal framework in which it should be dealt with by the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly.

As you may know, I have submitted several reports to the French Senate on the new Chinese Silk Roads, a project that was named "One Belt, One Road" (OBOR) in 2013, now called the "Belt and Road Initiative", and known by its acronym "BRI".

This Chinese project aims to build land, rail, sea, and digital trade routes from China to Europe, Africa, and Latin America. It attracts billions of dollars of investments over several decades. I have visited many countries where Chinese influence, through the BRI, is now unavoidable. Some would say worrying. For us, it is no more time to question whether or not the new Silk Roads will be put in place: they are already there and developing!

Indeed, if there is one constant thing regarding China, it is that everything is moving very fast, and on all fronts at once. On the other hand, the world is only just beginning to organise itself in the face of a phenomenon that was difficult to realize for years and then later to analyse.

The BRI was initially presented by Chinese officials as a simple "economic label", a sort of brand name for economic projects aimed at supporting the development of many countries, thus helping to rapidly make up for an infrastructure deficit.

Despite the billions invested in these projects, the infrastructure built and the real opportunities for trade growth, it now appears much more intrusive, more political, and riskier. Many projects promoted by Beijing, with strong financial constraints, are entrusted to Chinese companies, i.e., really imposed on beneficiaries, to the detriment of local companies. The development of Chinese special economic zones abroad, as a result of an official strategy, is intended above all to allow Chinese companies to leave their own country in order to create of industrial and commercial clusters in host countries. Eventually, investments are slow to materialise, and Chinese loans plunge debtor countries into a real "debt trap" with potential damaging consequences on their sovereignty.

This global project cannot go on without major geopolitical consequences in the long run : it now appears to promote a new world order, based on essentially bilateral relations, in order to put China in a position of strength, far from the negotiations and concessions brought by multilateralism. At the same time, China is developing its international initiatives to bring together many countries under the gaze of the rest of the world. This is a way of creating new international "meeting places", entirely in its own hands and according to its own schedule.

The coronavirus pandemic has highlighted the interdependence of our open economies on the Chinese market and the more assertive modes of Chinese power, such as the masks diplomacy or the so-called "fighting wolves".

All these new elements have recently led the European Union to move out of its torpor and naivety towards China and the Silk Roads. The issue is now being taken seriously, at the highest level of the EU and its member states.

I wanted to set out the context of our exchanges today, to underline the global nature of the Silk Roads and their effects. No continent is immune to them. Most countries in the OSCE area are affected in one way or another by these Chinese projects, whether they expect to benefit from them or are concerned about them, or both.

So, this is not a distant economic issue but a close and eminently political one, and one that regards us directly in the OSCE PA. It cannot be addressed in isolation and without a proper framework.

In view of the potential but also the dangers involved, I believe it is essential for our Assembly to take greater ownership of the subject, at the highest level, in a more official and transparent manner.

So, dear colleagues, I am ready, as of today, to contribute both to the status of the group and to the geopolitical dimension it entails.

Thank you.