

**Review written by a member of a scientific jury,
for obtaining an educational and scientific degree "Doctor"
in D. A. Tsenov Academy of Economics - Svishtov**

Reviewer: Assoc. Prof. Zdravko Lyubenov, PhD, Department of International Economic Relations in the D. A. Tsenov Academy of Economics – Svishtov

Author of the dissertation: *Jingxin Hu* - PhD student in a full -time form of study at the “D. A. Tsenov” Academy of Economics – Svishtov, Department of International Economic Relations

Topic of the dissertation: ECONOMIC AND TRADE COOPERATION BETWEEN CHINA AND BULGARIA WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF “16+1 COOPERATION” AND “ONE BELT, ONE ROAD

I. General presentation of the dissertation:

1. *Subject:* of the study is the economic and trade cooperation between China and Bulgaria within the framework of the "One Belt, One Road" initiative and the "16+1" initiative;
2. *Volume:* 221 standard pages;
3. *Structure:* introduction, presentation presented in three chapters and a conclusion;
4. *Literature:* 169 sources of English;
5. *Applications:* no.

II. Assessment of the form and content of the dissertation.

1. Assessment of the relevance of the scientific problem developed in the dissertation and the formulated: subject and object, doctoral thesis, research goals, tasks and research methods, clarity and argumentation of the ideas, distinctness of the novelties.

The relevance of the topic is grounded in several important considerations. China’s “One Belt, One Road” initiative and the “16+1 Cooperation” mechanism with the countries of Central and Eastern Europe have significantly deepened economic

interaction between China and these countries, including Bulgaria. These developments are becoming increasingly important for Bulgaria's economic trajectory. As an EU member state with strategic geographic positioning, Bulgaria represents a key point for China in strengthening European connectivity and expanding access to the European market. The Belt and Road Initiative encompasses around 64% of the world's population and 30% of global GDP, offering substantial opportunities for Bulgaria to benefit from increased Chinese investment and new market prospects. In this context, the dissertation is a timely study that integrates both theoretical foundations and applied analytical perspectives related to the economic implications of Sino-Bulgarian cooperation.

Although various aspects of the topic are present in the existing literature, there is a clear lack of comprehensive and in-depth research addressing the processes, dynamics, and opportunities that arise from this cooperation. Against this background, the current study offers a valuable contribution by combining conceptual analysis with empirical evidence, aimed at explaining the economic interactions between Bulgaria and China within these initiatives.

The purpose of the dissertation is to develop a comprehensive analytical framework for examining economic and trade relations between China and Bulgaria within the "One Belt, One Road" and the "16+1" Initiative format.

The research tasks are well aligned with this objective and are fully accomplished in the dissertation.

The core research thesis is logically formulated, guiding the analytical narrative and ensuring coherence between the conceptual discussion and empirical findings.

The scientific research methods used are adequate to the issues under consideration.

In the dissertation *the clarity and argumentation of the ideas is achieved. The contribution of the author is unambiguous.*

2. Analysis of the degree of elaboration of the researched problems by other scientists and to what extent the author's own attitude to the considered issues is reflected.

The issue of the economic and trade cooperation within the framework of the "One Belt, One Road" initiative and the "16+1" initiative is covered in the scientific

works of many scientists. Their main achievements are reflected in the dissertation. At the same time, the author's own position is evident.

3. Opinion on the volume of the dissertation.

The volume of the dissertation is sufficient for this type of development and covers all its required elements.

4. Opinion on the quality and number of the offered illustrative material - schemes, graphs, tables, etc.

The dissertation is well illustrated by a wide range of tools used.

5. Attitude in the scientific, linguistic and stylistic edition - consistency of the scientific apparatus, presence of deviations, repetitions, logical contradictions, proportionality of the parts, etc.

There is precision in the use of scientific apparatus. No repetitions, logical contradictions and disproportion of the parts are noticed.

6. Assessment of the correctness and the need for statistical processing of empirical data - calculation procedures, significant figures, etc.

The statistical processing of the empirical data was performed correctly.

7. Opinion on the extent to which the candidate has complied with the rules of scientific ethics (incorrect citation of literary sources, publication of one and the same manuscript in different places, plagiarism, the new problem of "copy-paste" in scientific work).

The author of the dissertation has followed the rules of scientific ethics.

8. Opinion on the extent to which the abstract reflects accurately and fully the work.

The abstract accurately and completely reflects the dissertation.

III. Scientific and scientific-applied contributions of the dissertation.

1. Does the proposed text contain the development of existing and / or raising new scientific ideas and results with an opinion on their significance?

The main scientific contributions of the research presented in the dissertation are expressed in the following:

- A systematic analysis of economic cooperation between China and Bulgaria within the Belt and Road Initiative and the “16+1 Cooperation.”
- A comprehensive quantitative assessment of the evolution of bilateral trade structure, comparative advantages, and intra-industry trade between 2015 and 2023, accounting for dynamics in industrial complementarity and division of labour.
- Development and application of structured gravity models and machine-learning approaches (including Random Forest and XGBoost), supported by SHAP-based interpretability tools, to identify key economic, geographic, and institutional factors shaping bilateral trade and investment flows.
- An exploration of cooperation potential through localization of interconnected industries, outlining the prospects for deepening trade relations and establishing mutually beneficial value chains.
- Identification and quantitative assessment of constraints and risks, including logistic barriers, new EU regulations, and geopolitical uncertainties affecting the cost and sustainability of bilateral cooperation.
- Formulation of policy recommendations and an operational roadmap aimed at improving infrastructure connectivity, financial and institutional linkages, and developing an environmentally sustainable cooperation mechanism.

The dissertation further *develops the ideas of researchers in the considered issues*. Along with this, there are also *original ideas*.

2. Is there any evidence that the proposed ideas and results have already found reverberation and recognition in the specialized scientific literature?

The author's views are reflected in two articles and two reports presented at scientific forums, which shows the presence of dissemination of research results.

IV. Critical notes, questions, and recommendations on the dissertation.

No critical remarks are identified. The only recommendation is for the doctoral candidate to continue developing and expanding the methodology created in the dissertation.

I would like to ask the author of the dissertation, in its defense, to briefly present his vision for realistic scenarios concerning the development of the economic and trade cooperation between China and Bulgaria.

V. Summarized conclusion and opinion.

I think that the **formulated goals and objectives in the dissertation have been achieved**. Reading it leaves the impression of knowing the nature of the problems and of applying scientific approaches in their analysis and research. *The development is complete and meets the requirements for writing this type of scientific work* placed in the Law for development of the academic staff in the Republic of Bulgaria (LDASRB) and the Regulations for implementation of LDASRB.

With full conviction **I give my positive assessment** of the dissertation on the topic: **ECONOMIC AND TRADE COOPERATION BETWEEN CHINA AND BULGARIA WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF “16+1 COOPERATION” AND “ONE BELT, ONE ROAD**. I recommend to the other respected members of the scientific jury to vote for the award of educational-qualification and scientific degree "Doctor" in scientific specialty 05.02.10. "World Economy and International Economic Relations" of *Jingxin Hu - the PhD student in a full -time form of study at the “D. A. Tsenov” Academy of Economics – Svishtov, Department of International Economic Relations*.

Date: February 5, 2026

Reviewer ..

заличен подпис
осн. чл. 59
от ЗЗЛД

(Assoc. Prof. Zdravko Lyubenov, PhD)