

ITALY SIGNS NEW 'SILK ROAD' PROTOCOL WITH CHINA

Relevant for: International Relations | Topic: Europe, European Union (EU) and India

Italy on Saturday signed a “non-binding” protocol with China to take part in Beijing’s new “Silk Road” of transport and trade links stretching from Asia to Europe.

In doing so, Italy became the first G7 country to sign up for the massive project which has sparked unease in the U.S. and the European Union (EU) as China aspires to a greater world role.

Visiting Chinese President Xi Jinping and Italian Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte both attended a ceremony for the signing of 29 Memoranda of Understanding which Italian media said were worth €5 billion-€7 billion. Also signing the accords were the chairman of China’s National Development Commission He Lifeng and Italian Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Economic Development Luigi Di Maio.

Italian financial daily *Sole 24 Ore* said the value of the Chinese investments could rise to €20 billion but would for now be limited to the strategic ports of Genoa and Trieste.

Red-carpet welcome

Italy has rolled out the red carpet for Mr. Xi, who on Friday sought to allay Western unease over his transformational infrastructure initiative by emphasising the \$1 trillion project’s mutual benefits.

The accords also foresee the opening up of the Chinese market for Italian oranges as well as a partnership for Chinese tourism giant Ctrip, notably with Rome’s airports.

Cultural tie-ups including town twinnings are also on the agenda while Beijing is pushing to have several Serie A football matches played in China — although that would currently contravene regulations of the game’s governing body FIFA.

In what some perceived as a snub, Italy’s far-right Deputy Prime Minister Matteo Salvini did not attend Friday’s state dinner for Mr. Xi at Mattarella’s Quirinal Palace, having stated that Italy would be “no-one’s colony.” Mr. Salvini has notably urged caution about using Chinese telecom giant Huawei’s next generation 5G mobile technology, whereas coalition partner Luigi Di Maio is keener for Chinese partnerships.

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