For many decades, the states of the European Union (EU) have been considered the sphere of the US influence. American troops occupied a considerable part of them during the Second World War, and after it ended, they never left. The military presence combined with the strongest economic dependence on the United States, in which these countries found themselves after the devastating war, made American dominance in the west of Eurasia strong and unshakable for many years.

In 1949, the NATO military bloc directed against the Soviet Union was founded, which finally turned the presence of American troops into a legitimate and habitual practice for European states that did not enter the Soviet sphere of influence. And in the 1950s, the EU began to form into a supranational organization that has effectively been broadcasting Washington’s influence and spreading it to all its new members.

Now there are American military facilities in Greece and Bulgaria, Italy, Spain and Portugal, in the Baltic States, in Scandinavia, and even in the most developed countries of Europe, such as Great Britain and Germany.

Therefore, when it comes to global politics, the United States, the United Kingdom, the European Union and their other allies, such as Australia or Canada, rarely have to be mentioned separately and usually are collectively referred to simply as the “West”.
For a long time it seemed that the West was one and undivided. However, in recent years, the presence of a new force, namely, China, has been increasingly felt in Europe.

Early in the second half of the twentieth century, China was a big country with considerable natural resources, as well as a huge and poor population, which meant lots of cheap labor. It was an ideal candidate for localization of production, and soon it turned into a real factory for the whole West. It would have seemingly been easy to foresee, but when China grew into a mighty industrial power, filled all possible markets with its products, developed the economy and turned into a powerful economic, political and even military competitor to the West, this seemed to be a surprise for the latter.

A quiet but alarming “bell” for Western unity rang in 2014-2015, when Chinese Hong Kong was engulfed by thousands of protests dubbed the “umbrella revolution” in the media. The speeches received active ideological support through the media from Washington and London, but Brussels did not show much interest in this campaign.

Soon, in 2016, China became the main trading partner of Germany, one of the key states of the European Union, and already in 2017, China became the second trading partner of the entire EU after the United States.

Finally, in 2020, China overtook the United States and became the EU’s main trading partner, with the mutual turnover standing at EUR 586 billion. And the EU’s trade turnover with the United States in 2020 showed a steep decline from EUR 616 billion to EUR 555 billion. Perhaps this is due to the fact that China began to recover faster after the coronavirus lockdown. However, this could not have happened without China’s purposeful efforts to conquer the European market either.

On December 30, 2020, the EU and China completed negotiations on the Comprehensive Agreement on Investment (CAI) whose task, among other things, was to remove barriers restricting the access of European investors to the Chinese domestic market. Chinese Leader Xi Jinping and EU leaders, such as Germany’s then Chancellor Angela Merkel, French President Emmanuel Macron and others, participated in the discussion of the document. As a result, the CAI was signed by the European Commission, the highest executive authority of the EU. Interestingly, Washington spoke out against the agreement. There is an opinion that this is exactly why the CAI was agreed and signed at the turn of 2020/2021, while the inauguration of the new US President Joe Biden has not yet taken place. As a result, Washington and London accused the European negotiators of “violating the rules of Western solidarity.”

Soon Washington had the opportunity to “restore order” in its possessions. In March 2021, the United States imposed new sanctions against China on charges of human rights violations in the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region. This time, Washington has made sure that the EU joins the sanctions. In response, Beijing banned five MEPs from entering China. As a counter-sanctions on the counter-sanctions, in May 2021, the European Parliament decided by an overwhelming majority to “freeze” ratification of the CAI. It is difficult to say whether Chinese sanctions against MEPs were the real reason for “freezing” the agreement. The CAI opened up too many opportunities for European business. Interestingly, among other things, the European Parliament’s resolution to freeze ratification of the CAI also contains a requirement to coordinate steps with Washington regarding China. Apparently, the United States played a significant role in the deterioration of the EU-China relations.

Nevertheless, in 2021, the Sino-European trade turnover continued to grow and again exceeded the EU-US trade turnover. The China-Germany trade turnover, according to available data, also increased compared to the previous year, showing a 15% increase and reaching USD 279 billion.

Now China remains the main trading partner for both the EU as a whole and Germany in particular. Some believe that the growth of Sino-European trade will continue, and that the EU already depends to a considerable extent on Chinese supplies of certain types of goods. It should be recalled that, in addition to huge volumes of everyday goods, China exports telecommunications equipment and technologies, including those related to 5G communications. This can already be called a product of strategic importance.

Of course, the American position in the EU so far seems to be stronger than that of China. Despite the fact that the United States has ceded to China the first place in trade with the EU, the volume of European-American trade is still huge. In addition, one cannot forget that there are still dozens of thousands of American military personnel in Europe. However, it should be remembered that huge funds are required to maintain military bases abroad, and ultimately the preservation of US influence in the EU depends on whether and how the American economy is successful. It is in the economic sphere that China is rapidly catching up with the United States and is preparing to overtake it in the near future. And the economic positions that China has managed to occupy in Europe are already clearly exceeding the level desirable for Washington. No one is talking about China ousting the US from Europe yet,
but it is obvious that what is commonly referred to in modern media as “soft power,” which, according to popular opinion, developed states use against less developed ones, is now being used by China in Europe at full power.

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