



By: Tomorrow's Affairs Staff

Poland gives China a choice - either trade with the EU or continue to support Russia



The two-week closure of the Polish border with Belarus to rail traffic could prove to be an important episode in the global balance of power between the West on the one hand and China and its European partners (Russia and Belarus) on the other.

The government in Warsaw **opened** the border for trains from the east on 25 September, meaning that freight traffic on this important corridor between the EU and China is slowly returning to normal. It will be another ten days before it reaches its full pre-blockade volume.

Poland has decided to take this step, leaving behind a whole series of warnings, in particular that it will not hesitate to take tough measures in the future if it faces the risks of a hybrid threat to its national security.

Although the recipients of the message are primarily neighbouring Belarus and its patron, Russia, the main addressee of the warning is Beijing.

Following the Polish steps, the Chinese leadership will have to find an answer to the extent to which it will tolerate its aggressive European friends - Russia and Belarus. The damage it suffers from their behaviour is already enormous in trade and the economy, and it may be even greater in politics.

Precautionary reaction

It came as a surprise to many when Warsaw suspended rail traffic on the border with Belarus on 12 September, as a joint exercise by the Russian and Belarusian armies began right on the border with Poland.

It was a sharp reaction as a precautionary measure against the increasingly aggressive eastern neighbourhood.

Poland has long and persistently warned its allies that it is only a matter of time before Moscow and Belarus perform aggressive military actions against their European neighbours.

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The joint Russian-Belarusian military **exercise** called "West 2025" was inevitably reminiscent of the days immediately before the start of the invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, in which Belarus played an important role.

At the same time as the exercise was taking place, Poland and several other NATO members in the region faced Russian **drones** flying into their territory, prompting the alliance's joint forces to intervene.

The suspension of railway traffic on the border with Belarus was therefore a forced step, as was the strengthening of Polish border protection measures.

Interruption of an important trade corridor

Although the European economies, especially the Polish economy, were themselves damaged by the disruption of the flow of goods from China, the greatest economic **victim** was the Chinese economy.

Although only about 4% of total Chinese exports to the EU reach Poland through the railway corridor via Belarus, this route is particularly important for the Chinese economy.

As rail transport is three times faster than sea transport (on average 15 instead of 45 days), the accessibility of these corridors is crucial for rapid deliveries, such as for the Temu platform.

In addition, China's long-term economic plans envisage gradually increasing the volume of exports by rail, precisely because of the speed

and therefore the transport costs.

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The two-week blockade on the Polish-Belarusian border has shown that the Chinese economy can be disrupted overnight. Every year, this corridor transports goods worth almost USD 30 billion to the rich European market.

The symbolism of this route is particularly important for Beijing, as it is one of the few corridors of its Belt and Road **Initiative** that is still fully operational.

This strategically important global project for China and its head of state, Xi Jinping, has weakened in recent years, particularly in Eastern Europe, with which China had big plans to move closer to European markets via the 16 plus 1 format.

Foreign Minister Wang Yi's recent **visit** to Warsaw has shown that Beijing is aware of the extent of the risk it faces from the aggressive behaviour of its close allies, Russia and Belarus.

Just three days after the border blockade, he arrived in Poland for talks with Foreign Minister Radoslaw Sikorski. "It was made very clear during the talks that in this situation, the logic of trade, which is also beneficial for us, is being replaced by the logic of security. And that was expressed very clearly by Minister Sikorski," the Polish Ministry **announced** after the talks with the Chinese guest.

Security is more important than trade

Poland has thus made it very clear to China that security aspects are more important than economic ones currently, even if Poland suffers some damage as a result.



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It also conveyed the message that China's allies in Moscow and Minsk have the power to repeatedly provoke trade disruptions.

Warsaw has given Beijing a choice: either it exerts pressure and dissuades Russia and Belarus from further aggressive provocations against the eastern members of NATO and the EU, or it faces frequent disruptions on one of the most important corridors for its exports to Europe.

China certainly wanted to avoid this choice, but its European friends forced it upon them. This decision jeopardises China's efforts to counterbalance its trade problems with the US, its main global competitor, through increased cooperation with Europe.

In this case, Poland has acted alone, without the involvement of other partners in the EU and NATO, but it would be a big mistake for Beijing to interpret this as weakness and disunity in the Western bloc.

The recent joint action by the armed forces in neutralising Russian drones over Polish territory proved the opposite.