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# China's External Propaganda and the Italian Information Environment

by IAI Global Actors Program Asia Team

## Executive summary

This report examines China's external propaganda activities on social media and messaging apps within Italy's information environment over the years 2024-2025, revealing a notably cautious approach compared to the more aggressive "wolf warrior diplomacy" of the previous years. The analysis employed *Logically Intelligence*, an AI-powered threat intelligence platform, to investigate three critical thematic areas: de-risking strategies for the European Union and Italy, "BRICS Plus" as a China-led alternative international order, and NATO's role in Italy's security.

## Key findings

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The research found limited evidence of major large-scale information operations characterized by coordinated inauthentic behavior (CIB) during 2024-2025. However, narratives adjacent to the propaganda of the Chinese central government have been disseminated and amplified within the Italian information environment. Chinese external propaganda primarily relied on traditional state-controlled media like Xinhua and state-adjacent outlets such as Italpress, which maintains a dedicated section for Xinhua content. These actors disseminate narratives that are subsequently amplified by aligned Italian media, including L'AntiDiplomatico and Pravda Italia, along with individual social media users (ISMUs) operating across platforms like Telegram and Facebook.

*Italy and EU de-risking strategies* emerged as the most relevant topic, generating significant activity particularly around the EU's anti-subsidy investigation into Chinese electric vehicles. Chinese narratives portrayed US tariffs as disruptive to the global economy, depicted China's retaliatory measures as defensive

responses to Western protectionism, and emphasized Italy's dependencies on Chinese inputs for critical sectors. Coverage spiked in October 2024 coinciding with EU countervailing duties on Chinese EVs, demonstrating the reactive nature of Chinese propaganda operations.

*“BRICS Plus” narratives* portrayed a shifting global order away from US dominance, emphasizing multipolar cooperation between China and Russia as alternatives to Western-led institutions. Italian actors, particularly those with pro-Russian alignments, amplified these messages more actively than Chinese state media. The Istituto Italia Brics emerged as a key state-adjacent actor promoting China-led multilateral frameworks alongside Russian propaganda outlets.

*NATO and Italy's security* proved the least relevant topic concerning the dissemination and amplification of Chinese narratives, with most coverage dominated by Russian propaganda about the Ukraine war. Chinese involvement in these narratives remains marginal, primarily disseminated through Russia-aligned media and appearing through the lens of Sino-Russian cooperation.

## Operational characteristics

Chinese external propaganda in Italy exhibits three defining characteristics. First, it avoids large-scale covert operations in favor of overt messaging through identifiable channels. Second, it demonstrates technological conservatism, relying predominantly on text and image formats rather than short-video content or AI-generated materials. Third, it maintains a reactive posture, intensifying activity in response to specific irritants like EU policy decisions rather than proactively shaping discourse.

The report identified several coordinated inauthentic behavior (CIB) networks, particularly involving Italpress' dissemination of articles about Sino-Italian cooperation, under the narrative active framework of “cultural tourism” or “dialogue among civilizations”. These networks saw rapid amplification through local news outlets, especially those owned by the publishing house, Gruppo Sapere Aude Editori (SAE) in Emilia-Romagna, though the overall volume and user engagement remained marginal in absolute terms.

## Implications and recommendations

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The limited traction online of Chinese external propaganda suggests three priorities for future vigilance. First, low-quality, no-paywall media platforms and social media entrepreneurs represent vulnerabilities for cognitive security. Second, “apolitical” content about China on video-based platforms like TikTok – focusing on tourism, infrastructure, and technology – may gradually shape Italian perceptions despite appearing innocuous. Third, and most critically, attention must focus on “offline spaces” where Beijing pursues less visible but potentially more effective influence operations among industrial and financial elites, academia, and policy environments.

China’s external propaganda in Italy remains primarily concerned with countering criticism of decisions serving Chinese national interests, rather than deepening societal divisions like Russian operations. This distinction is crucial for understanding Beijing’s strategic communication approach and developing appropriate countermeasures. The research underscores that while the online information environment shows limited Chinese activity, the real influence operations may be occurring through traditional elite engagement channels that require enhanced monitoring and analysis.

# Introduction

## China's activities in contested information environments

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The People's Republic of China (PRC) has experienced an astonishing economic, political, and diplomatic rise in the 21st century. A corresponding expansion of the Chinese party-state's capabilities in contested information environments at a global level has matched this rise to great power status. Since Xi Jinping came to power first as party chairman in 2012 and then as state president in 2013, the Chinese party-state has gradually become more confident in projecting its political communication to foreign audiences and less concerned about capability gaps with Western countries, and especially the United States, in shaping the public discourse at a global level.

The developments in China's capability in the global information environment can be traced at three levels: bureaucratic, discursive and technological. At a bureaucratic level domestic and external propaganda institutions have been streamlined. Party and state organs tasked with producing and disseminating political communication targeting foreign audiences have undergone a process of increasing centralization and coordination.<sup>1</sup>

At a discursive level, China's government has crafted and disseminated grandiose "global" narratives serving Beijing's aspirations to remake global governance in a fashion closer to its regime and national security interests. While originally conveyed by the trade infrastructure-promoting Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) throughout most of the 2010s, by the first half of the 2020s these narratives have been primarily disseminated through multiple "global initiatives": the Global Development Initiative (GDI, 2021), the Global Security Initiative (GSI, 2022), the Global Civilization Initiative (GCI, 2023) and the Global Governance Initiative (GGI, 2025).

At a technological level, multiple studies suggest that between the end of the 2010s and early 2020s, Chinese actors began to systematically use automated tools in online spaces to manipulate information, focusing on

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<sup>1</sup> Aurelio Insisa, "China's Discourse on Strategic Communications: Insights into PRC External Propaganda", in *Defence Strategic Communications*, Vol. 10 (Spring-Autumn 2021), p. 135-136.

social media platforms for dissemination. This shift occurred within a broader technological context defined by 1) the growing dominance of audio-video content over purely text-based content on social media platforms, and 2) the rise of generative artificial intelligence (AI) as a tool for creating more tailored messages that address specific audiences and constituencies while hiding the origins of the threat actor. The exploitation of chatbots built on large language models (LLMs) and text-to-image models to overcome shortcomings in the production and localization of large-scale content closely tailored to specific audiences represents a major development. This looms as one of the next major challenges for societies at the receiving end of China's political communication.<sup>2</sup>

TikTok's extraordinary rise since the late 2010s to the social media platform of choice for younger generations has raised significant concerns. DeepSeek's success as a cost-effective alternative to US generative AI chatbots adds further urgency to these issues even accounting for the reportedly dubious sustainability of the chatbot. The success of these companies shows the emergence of a technological infrastructure that Beijing could leverage to shape Western public opinions. This outcome would be achieved through algorithmic recommendations in the case of social media, and potentially through the targeted manipulation of LLMs via data poisoning.<sup>3</sup>

While the institutions, narratives and technologies supporting Chinese political communication targeting foreign audiences possess a global reach – a closer examination reveals crucial variations. The United States together with Asian countries and polities remain the main target. Other regions in the so-called "Global South", and in particular countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, have also experienced a high volume of Chinese activities.

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<sup>2</sup> Devin Thorne, *1 Key for 1 Lock: The Chinese Communist Party's Strategy for Targeted Propaganda*, Recorded Future, 28 September 2022; William Marcellino et al., *The Rise of Generative AI and the Coming Era of Social Media Manipulation 3.0. Next-Generation Chinese Astroturfing and Coping with Ubiquitous AI*, Santa Monica, RAND, September 2023.

<sup>3</sup> Jacob Steinhardt, Pang Wei Koh and Percy Liangand, "Certified Defenses for Data Poisoning Attacks", in Ulrike von Luxburg et al. (eds), *NIPS'17. Proceedings of the 31st International Conference on Neural Information Processing Systems*, 2017, p. 3520-3532.

In the case of Europe, including Italy, the overall picture is more complex. The period between 2019 and 2022 saw increased and more sophisticated Chinese activity in contested information environments. Multiple factors contributed to this turn of events. The most relevant was the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic and its surrounding politicization, especially concerning the debated origin of the virus and the PRC's attempts at deflecting (or covering up) responsibilities for its diffusion. A second factor was the backlash in Europe against Beijing's policies towards the Uyghur minority in Xinjiang and its repression of the 2019-2020 protests in Hong Kong, which in turn led to Chinese sanctions imposed on members of European Parliament and European think tanks, as well as to the European Parliament's opposition to ratifying the bilateral Comprehensive Agreement on Investment signed between the EU and China in 2021. Furthermore, increasing diplomatic and military tensions in the Taiwan Strait, at a time when geo-economic trajectories emphasize Taiwan's crucial role for Europe's economic security due to its leadership in advanced chips manufacturing, added a further element of contention in Sino-European relations.<sup>4</sup>

The Covid-19 pandemic created fundamental incentives for Chinese political communication within Italy's information environment, particularly given Italy's status as the first Western nation to confront the crisis.<sup>5</sup> A further element shaping Chinese presence in the Italian case was the country's decision to join the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in March 2019, the first G7 country to do so, which fueled a debate about the role of China in Italy and its significance vis-à-vis Italy's traditional network of alliances in Europe and across the Atlantic.<sup>6</sup>

China's muscular presence in the Italian and European information environments became less evident between 2022 and 2023, in the midst of a broader shift away from what has been described as "wolf warrior diplomacy", the aggressive, often openly pursued, attempt by individual Chinese diplomats

<sup>4</sup> Giulio Pugliese and Aurelio Insisa, ["How to Use the Maximum of Potential for the EU-Taiwan Cooperation: What Can the EU Learn from the US and Other Actors?"](#), in *European Parliament Studies*, September 2025.

<sup>5</sup> Constanza Sciubba Caniglia, ["Signs of a New World Order: Italy as the COVID-19 Disinformation Battlefield"](#), in *HKS Misinformation Review*, Vol. 1, No. 3 (May 2020).

<sup>6</sup> Giulio Pugliese, Francesca Ghiretti and Aurelio Insisa, ["Italy's Embrace of the Belt and Road Initiative: Populist Foreign Policy and Political Marketing"](#), in *International Affairs*, Vol. 98, No. 3 (May 2022), p. 1033-1051.

or China-related actors to spread the PRC's "version of the story" in foreign countries. Yet two other factors shaped European relations with Beijing in ways that have apparently reconfigured the latter's information policy in Europe. The first is the outbreak of the war in Ukraine, in response to which China embraced a pro-Russian form of neutrality. The second is the deepening impact of China's industrial policy further affecting the EU's global competitiveness and economic security across multiple, interrelated sectors, such as electric vehicles, semiconductors, critical and strategic materials, and pharmaceutical products. The combination of these factors may have led the PRC leadership to downplay covert propaganda and pursue different forms of influence.

This report provides an account of a systematic investigation of Chinese activity in the Italian information environment in 2025. The introduction provides a concise explanation of the conceptual frames used to assess Chinese political communication targeting foreign audiences, presents three research avenues designed to probe Chinese activities targeting specifically Italian audiences in the period examined, and illustrates the methodology used to conduct this research. The first, second, and third sections cover each of the three research avenues: "de-risking" strategies by the West and Italy vis-à-vis China; Italy and the BRICS; and Italy's security. The last section provides an overall assessment of the result.

## "External propaganda": A framework to understand China's activities in contested information environments

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Within the Chinese party-state, all political communication targeting foreign audiences is understood as "external propaganda" (*duiwai xuanchuan*, also translatable as "foreign-facing propaganda"). Western audiences typically associate propaganda with one-way communication that spreads false or decontextualized information. In China's Leninist political system, the term has a much broader meaning. Propaganda encompasses an entire range of activities, defined in the widest sense as the "practices through which the Party-State exercises power in relation to the public articulation of discourses".<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Kingsley Edney, *The Globalization of Chinese Propaganda. International Power and Domestic Cohesion*, New York, Palgrave MacMillan, 2014, p. 8.

For this reason, “propaganda work” (*xuanchuan gongzuo*) targeting foreign audiences is not simply tasked with producing and disseminating “orthodox” understandings of China’s policies and positions through official channels. This type of propaganda work encompasses larger tasks: 1) designing and implementing covert, coordinated information operations; 2) suppressing discourse critical of China and its national interests in foreign offline and online spaces;<sup>8</sup> and 3) shaping foreign information environments by engaging offline with elites, epistemic communities and other civil society actors in targeted countries who are sympathetic to Beijing’s agenda for economic, political, or ideological reasons.

Because external propaganda covers a wide range of activities, it involves multiple party-state actors. At its core, this apparatus is structured around three Chinese Communist Party (CCP) bodies: the Central Leading Group for Propaganda, Ideology and Culture; the CCP Propaganda Department (known in English as the “Publicity Department”); and the Office for External Propaganda within the Propaganda Department, more commonly referred to by its state-administrative title, the State Council Information Office (SCIO). Other relevant bureaucratic actors include the PRC’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), two departments of the CCP Central Committee – the United Front Work (UFW) Department and the International Liaison Department – the Ministry of Public Security, and the Cyberspace Administration of China. Other bureaucratic actors within the People’s Liberation Army (PLA), such as the Political Work Department, the Cyberspace Force, and the Information Support Force also play an important role.<sup>9</sup> Finally, Chinese private companies have become increasingly involved in the implementation of information operation in the Xi era.<sup>10</sup>

This report adopts a broad and flexible understanding of Chinese political communication targeting foreign audiences, one that reflects the encompassing

<sup>8</sup> Jamie P. Horsley, “[Behind the Facade of China’s Cyber Super-Regulator](#)”, in *DigiChina*, 8 August 2022.

<sup>9</sup> Aurelio Insisa, “[China’s Discourse on Strategic Communications](#)”, cit., p. 130; Joe McReynolds and John Costello, “[Planned Obsolescence: The Strategic Support Force in Memoriam \(2015-2024\)](#)”, in *China Brief*, Vol. 24, No. 9 (2024), p. 7-14.

<sup>10</sup> Zeyi Yang, “[How China’s Propaganda and Surveillance Systems Really Operate](#)”, in *Wired*, 11 September 2025; Jianli Yang, “[Inside China’s Surveillance and Propaganda Industries: Where Profit Meets Party](#)”, in *The Diplomat*, 19 September 2025.

nature of PRC external propaganda. The report does not focus on tracking the dissemination and reproduction of “untruthful” or “fake” messages by China – the key criteria behind the “disinformation” paradigm.<sup>11</sup> Similarly, it does not focus exclusively on detecting networks of actors manipulating information through coordinated inauthentic behavior (CIB) – the criteria behind the “foreign information manipulation and interference” (FIMI) paradigm.<sup>12</sup> Rather, it looks for narratives that would advance China’s political objectives in Italy, and thus more broadly in Europe.

In doing so, the report differentiates between four categories of actors involved either directly or indirectly in the reproduction of narratives serving Chinese interests. The first category is *state-controlled media*. The second is *state-adjacent media*, namely media that are not explicitly controlled by China or other state actors closely aligned to China (such as Russia) but nonetheless maintain a structural relation with them. The third category is *aligned media*, namely independent media who consistently endorse and disseminate narratives serving Chinese interests. Finally, the fourth category is *individual social media users* (ISMUs), a term here used to describe high-volume users operating on social media platforms who are involved in the dissemination of narratives reflecting Chinese interests.

## Research questions and methodology

In order to probe China’s presence and activity on social media and messaging apps in the Italian information environment, the research reflected in this report has focused on three broad thematic areas. The first concerns “De-risking and Italy-China relations”. Should Italy and the EU enhance their economic security by “de-risking relations with China”? And is “de-risking” feasible? These crucial questions have become even more relevant since Rome’s withdrawal from the BRI. Economic relations between Europe and Italy on one side, and China on the other, remain points of contention in the Italian public debate.

<sup>11</sup> Claire Wardle and Hossein Derakhshan, “[Information Disorder: Toward an Interdisciplinary Framework for Research and Policy Making](#)”, in *Council of Europe Reports*, No. DGI(2017)09; Vera Michlin-Shapir, “[The Long Decade of Disinformation](#)”, in *Defence Strategic Communications*, Vol. 9 (2020), p. 17-33.

<sup>12</sup> European External Action Service, [2nd EEAS Report on Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference Threats. A Framework for Networked Defence](#), January 2024.

This situation provides an incentive for foreign actors operating in the Italian information environment to exploit uncertainty about the future of economic relations with Beijing to shape perceptions of China in Italy, and to advance narratives emphasizing Italian and European dependencies on the second largest economy and largest manufacturer in the world.

The second research question concerns the issue of “BRICS Plus and a China-led alternative international order”. Is BRICS something more than a club of countries sharing opposition to current mechanisms of global governance? Is China capable of turning BRICS into a platform to build an alternative international order? This research question is informed by widely shared misconceptions present in the Italian public debate and information regarding the functions, capabilities and prospects of the “BRICS” group – including Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa – especially after the new round of expansion that has led to the informal “BRICS Plus” moniker. In Italy, BRICS is often portrayed – mistakenly – as an “alliance” spearheaded by China that acts as an alternative either to NATO or the G7. The expansion of the group has often been considered evidence of a “power shift” towards the “Global South” or “the world’s majority”. Calls for Italy to leave NATO, the G7, or even the EU to join the “BRICS Plus”, while outlandish, are not uncommon in certain areas of the Italian media and political landscape.

The third research question covers the issues of “NATO and Italy’s security”. Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine has profoundly impacted Italy’s security notwithstanding the country’s relative distance from the battlefield. The Italian information environment has been turned into a battleground for adversarial narratives designed to exploit existing cleavages within public opinion over the causes of the war, NATO’s supposed responsibility for causing it, Italy’s relations with the alliance and its other members, and relations with Russia. Considering these issues allows, firstly, to verify whether Chinese narratives on the conflict embrace a Russian perspective, which has been visible since the beginning of the full-scale invasion,<sup>13</sup> and whether they are reproduced and

<sup>13</sup> Richard Q. Turcsanyi, Jan Daniel and Vojtech Bahensky, *Dragon’s Roar and Bear’s Howl: Convergence in Sino-Russian Information Operations in NATO Countries?*, Riga, NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence, January 2023; Maria Repnikova, *China-Russia Convergence in the Communication Sphere: Exploring the Growing Information Nexus*, Wilson Center, 2023.

disseminated within the Italian information environment. Secondly, it allows to assess whether there is coordination between Russian and pro-Russian actors on one side, and Chinese and pro-Chinese actors on the other.

To investigate these questions, the research has made use of *Logically Intelligence*, an advanced AI-powered threat intelligence and social listening platform that combines machine learning and natural language processing to identify narratives present on social media and messaging apps within the Italian information environment, track their volume and trajectory, as well as detect coordination among actors involved in their dissemination and to map their network activity. To ensure compliance with data protection regulations, actors corresponding to individual non-public users are reported in anonymized and numbered form.

To operate the platform, researchers designed extensive strings of keywords for each of the three research questions. Based on these strings of keywords, *Logically Intelligence* produced three virtual “rooms”<sup>14</sup> (one each for the thematic areas) by scraping the Italian information environment. Each room functioned as a virtual environment reproduction of the Italian information environment, on social media and messaging apps, for the selected thematic areas. Researchers could parse and assess the relevance of narratives related to the research question and examine the behavior of the actors involved in their production.

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<sup>14</sup> Hereinafter referred to as “room” or “virtual room”.

# 1. “De-risking” Italy-China relations against the backdrop of EU-China relations

The EU has recalibrated its China policy since in recent years, proposing its tripartite depiction of the People’s Republic, as a “partner for cooperation, an economic competitor and a systemic rival”.<sup>15</sup> This strategic reframing of China has prompted the adoption of measures in the economic and strategic dimensions of EU-PRC relations, with spillover effects into domestic politics, as Italy’s trajectory illustrates.

## 1.1 “De-risking” or “de-Sinicization”?

The EU’s De-risking Strategy, launched by European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen in March 2023, seeks to reduce excessive dependence on China for inputs central to the green and digital transitions, a goal reiterated also in the EU’s Economic Security Strategy. “De-risking” targets strategic sectors – such as electric vehicles (EVs), rare earths, critical raw materials, and green technologies – combining defensive tools (export controls and tighter investment screenings) with industrial capacity-building initiatives.<sup>16</sup> These efforts gained urgency in 2025 as China’s tighter export licensing on rare earths and magnets – initially linked to US tariff escalation – disrupted global supply chains, exposing Europe’s vulnerabilities.

The EU’s harder line on China has had a ripple effect on member states’ policies. Most EU countries, including Italy, have adopted measures to promote their strategic autonomy. Italy’s “de-risking” ambitions were not confined to the economic domain. As US-China tensions increased and Brussels hardened its stance on Beijing, Rome reassessed its position vis-à-vis China, formally withdrawing from BRI in late 2023, thereby aligning itself with the United States and the EU’s de-risking agenda.

<sup>15</sup> European External Action Service, [EU-China Relations Factsheet](#), December 2023.

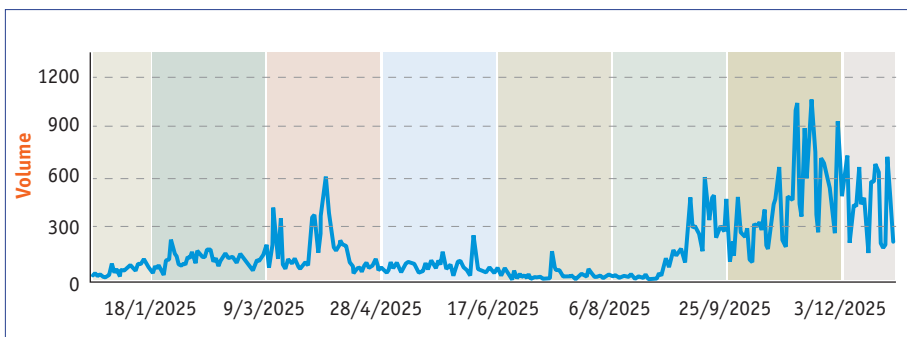
<sup>16</sup> Such as the Chips Act and Critical Raw Materials Act, enhanced intelligence-sharing, and supply-chain diversification.

Chinese officials portrayed the newly designed EU's De-risking Strategy as a mere rebranding of "de-Sinicization", as former Foreign Minister Qin Gang once remarked.<sup>17</sup> Beijing has accelerated its push for technological self-reliance, a goal long embedded in strategies such as Made in China 2025 and the National Integrated Circuit Plan.<sup>18</sup> Overall, China views Italy's de-risking and BRI exit as damaging to its commercial and political interests. Officially, it has stated that Europe's dependence on Chinese inputs makes de-risking costly and that EU trade defenses risk raising prices and hurting Italian firms and consumers.

## 1.2 Findings

The year 2025 has seen a proliferation of coverage by news outlets, public commentaries, and social media concerning de-risking. Narratives on "de-risking Italy-China relations" refer to pivotal events that have shaped economic competition between the United States and China in recent months, such as the heightened export controls and the weaponization of critical raw materials and rare earth elements. The impact of these disruptions has had a global effect across countries and economic blocs, including Italy and the EU. Thus, narratives also cover major European initiatives and measures taken to shield the bloc's market and industrial ecosystem from overexposure to dependencies on China.

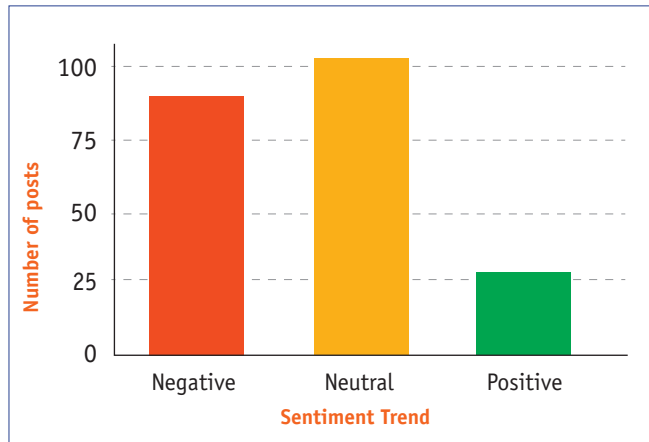
**Figure 1** | Trend of post volume in 2025



Source: Logically Intelligence.

<sup>17</sup> Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, [Qin Gang: De-sinicization in the Name of "De-risking" is Decoupling from Opportunities, Cooperation, Stability and Development](#), 9 May 2023.

<sup>18</sup> Camille Boullenois, Malcolm Black and Daniel H. Rosen, [Was Made in China 2025 Successful?](#), New York, Rhodium Group, 5 May 2025.

**Figure 2** | Sentiment trend: Number of posts per sentiment category

Source: Logically Intelligence.

The trend indicates that activity aligned with Chinese positions on export controls has evolved in tandem with developments in United States-China trade relations and the EU's policy discourse on "de-risking." Rising tensions are also reflected in an increase in negative sentiment associated with these narratives, marked by a higher volume of negatively toned posts compared to those linked to other themes analyzed in this report.

### 1.2.1 Narrative analysis

The narratives analyzed in the virtual room<sup>19</sup> suggest that the discourse on "De-risking Italy-China relations" builds on three consequential pillars: 1) the US disruption of the global economy; 2) China's response aimed at shielding its national interests; 3) and the EU's repositioning measures toward China. For the first set of narratives, the most relevant and widespread ones are:

a) *Trumponomics portrays tariffs and military spending as reasserting US sovereignty, warns they will escalate trade conflicts* – Resurgent "Trumponomics" uses tariffs and military spending to reassert US sovereignty, reduce China dependence, and reshape global trade. However, these moves escalate trade conflicts, inflate prices, and harm European economies.

<sup>19</sup> Throughout the report, the term "room" and "virtual room" refers to the definition provided in the above section "Research questions and methodology".

b) *Trump proposes 200 per cent Italian wine duties, framing tariffs as protection while fracturing transatlantic ties and spurring industrial volatility* – US tariff escalation under President Trump, including proposed 200 per cent duties on Italian wine, fractures transatlantic economic ties, causes market volatility in the steel and auto sector, and forces the EU to debate firmness versus dialogue amid geopolitical pressures.

Consequently, narratives adjacent to Chinese propaganda have also focused on depicting Beijing's retaliatory measures as necessary to counter the US disruptive approach to trade relations and global economy. For example:

c) *China justifies tightened rare-earth export controls as national security and environmental protection* – This narrative shapes audience perceptions by portraying China as a decisive player in critical materials, prompting governments and industry to view diversification, domestic capacity, and diplomatic negotiation as urgent and necessary responses.

Thirdly, narratives resonating with Beijing's propaganda also look at the effects of the US-China growing tensions at a national level – Italian for example – and the measures taken at a European level.

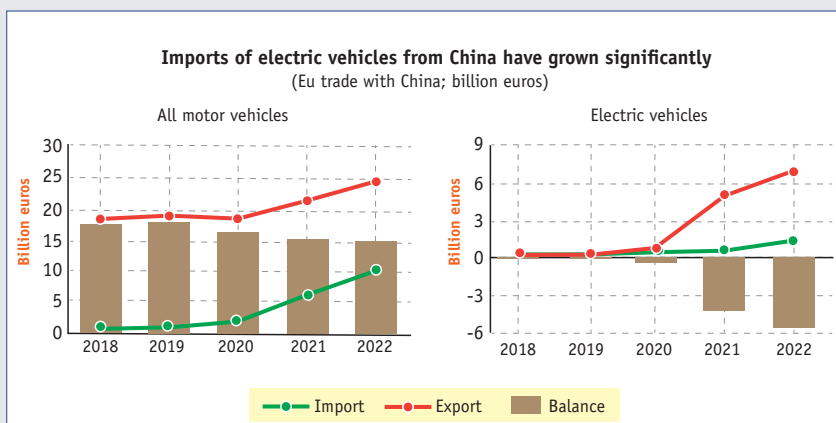
d) *Italy warns US-China tariff clash will harm exports, urges market diversification* – Italy warns that US-China tariff clashes threaten exports and GDP, prompting policymakers and industries to diversify markets, boost domestic and European production and balance strategic cooperation with China. This narrative links external geopolitical trade tension directly to domestic economic risk, prompting support for diversification and active government intervention.

e) *EU Commission probes Chinese automaker BYD, frames Chinese EV subsidies as unfair competition threat* – This narrative, with a high volume of posts (200) within the room, highlights how Europe has confronted China over subsidized EVs (with a particular focus on the Chinese company BYD). It stresses how European manufacturers oppose countervailing duties fearing market disruption and how European member states' position was split on EU measures, hampering the bloc's cohesion.

## Box 1 | The EU probe into electric vehicles

The automobile trade dynamic between China and the EU has been shifting in recent years in favor of Chinese carmakers. One quarter of cars imported into the EU are made in China, and in 2023 over half came from Western carmakers producing in China.<sup>20</sup>

**Figure 3** | Imports of EVs from China



Source: EIU, [China's EVs make inroads in Europe](#), 12 May 2023.

In October 2023, the EU Commission launched an anti-subsidy investigation into imports of EVs made in China. The investigation concluded that EVs made in China benefited from unfair subsidies, causing a market distortion once exported into the EU bloc. After introducing provisional countervailing duties (in the form of bank-guarantees) for Chinese EVs in July 2024, the Commission adopted definitive countervailing duties in October 2024, with rates ranging from almost 8 per cent (for cooperating firms such as Tesla – with its production hub in Shanghai) to 35.3 per cent for non-cooperative or state-owned Chinese firms such as SAIC Motor. These duties will apply for five years unless China and the EU negotiate an alternative solution.<sup>21</sup>

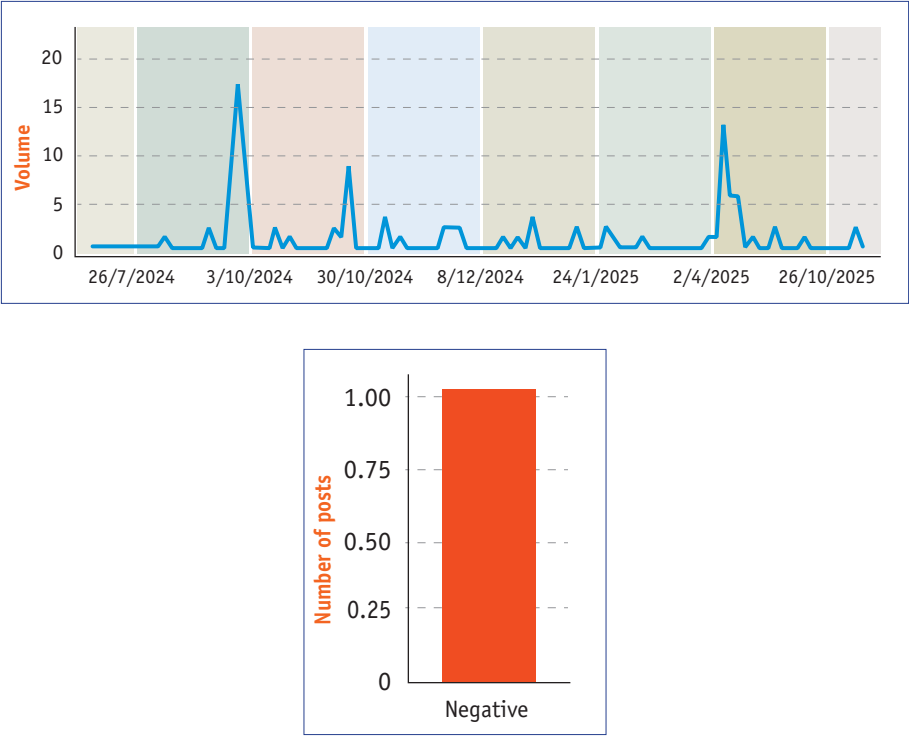
<sup>20</sup> Julia Poliscanova, "To Raise or Not to Raise. How Europe Can Use Tariffs as Part of an Industrial Strategy", in *Transport & Environment Briefings*, March 2024.

<sup>21</sup> European Commission, [Commission Discloses to Interested Parties Draft Definitive Findings of Anti-Subsidy Investigation into Imports of Battery Electric Vehicles from China](#), 20 August 2024. The investigation

### 1.2.2 Volume and sentiment of the narrative

As the figures show, October 2024 saw a proliferation of messaging for this narrative, coinciding with the highlights of the EU's probe and the introduction of anti-dumping measures on EVs. This trend suggests that the proliferation of Chinese narratives in the Italian information environment presents a reactive element. Narratives are thus disseminated and amplified as a reaction to major events, specific irritants, or triggers for Beijing's interests.

**Figure 4** | Volume and sentiment of the narrative



Source: Logically Intelligence.

marks a precedent: it's the first EU anti-subsidy investigation targeting BEVs (rather than traditional commodity dumping) and the first own-initiative probe in this sector.

### 1.2.3 Actors

Similar to the other topics analyzed in this report, the actors producing, disseminating, and amplifying narratives about “De-risking Italy-China relations against the backdrop of EU-China relations” are comprised of a collection of Chinese news outlets, Italian media, and individual users active on social media and messaging apps within the Italian information environment.

#### State-controlled media

The online magazine **Cina in Italia** – the Italian edition of **China Newsweek**, a periodical published by the state news agency **China News** – features among the state-controlled media disseminating narratives on the issue of “de-risking”. As Figure 5 shows, the magazine vouches for an agreement between China and the EU on the anti-subsidy measures (commonly referred to as EV tariffs).<sup>22</sup>

**Figure 5** | China hopes the EU will take concrete action to meet halfway on anti-subsidy case: Ministry of Commerce



Source: Cina in Italia.<sup>23</sup>

Chinese news outlet **Xinhua** also presents a significant volume of messaging concerning the topic analyzed. Much of Xinhua’s messaging in this space covers the EV probe, pushing for closer cooperation between the EU and China and for further negotiations to reach an agreement.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>22</sup> “Cina: MOC, auspica azioni concrete UE per incontrarsi a metà strada su caso antisovvenzioni” [China hopes EU will take concrete action to meet halfway on anti-subsidy case: commerce ministry], in *Cina in Italia*, 20 February 2025.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> “Cina: esorta UE ad abolire barriere commerciali, incoraggiare concorrenza leale” [China urges EU to scrap market barriers, encourage fair competition], in *Roma Daily News*, 18 September 2025.

More specifically, the narratives spread by Xinhua urge the EU to avoid using tariffs as weapons, drop market barriers, and ensure fair competition. At the same time, these narratives portray Beijing's need to defend its EV sector and reject the EU subsidy claims as protectionist, arguing that cooperation – and not market barriers – best supports industry transformation, consumer choice, and global climate goals.

These last points echo another trend of narratives disseminated by Xinhua, which stresses the need to strengthen cooperation. Chinese political narratives concerning Italy-China ties push for pragmatic and win-win cooperation, leveraging a shared historical heritage, which brings the two countries closer. These narratives strongly echo and align with the CCP's political narratives deployed to pursue cooperation with partners.

#### Figure 6 | China-Italy reaffirm strong ties, pledge closer cooperation

La storia degli scambi tra Cina e Italia ha pienamente dimostrato che l'apertura, la cooperazione e lo sviluppo condiviso sono le scelte giuste basate sul patrimonio culturale e sulle esigenze pratiche di entrambi i Paesi, ha affermato ieri il ministro cinese degli Esteri Wang Yi in visita a Roma.

Source: Roma Daily News.<sup>25</sup>

Additionally, Xinhua's messaging explores the potential for Sino-Italian cooperation, for example fostering a narrative on *"China and Italy portray expanded air routes as deepening strategic, commercial partnership"*.<sup>26</sup>

### State-adjacent media

Another actor featuring prominently as an amplifier of Chinese narratives is the Italian news agency Italtpress, which concluded an official agreement with Xinhua in December 2025.<sup>27</sup> Previously, Italtpress already presented a section dedicated to Xinhua news. According to its page on X, the account does not operate from Italy, but from the United States.<sup>28</sup> The most widespread narrative

<sup>25</sup> ["Cina-Italia: ribadiscono forti legami, promettono cooperazione più stretta"](#) [China, Italy reaffirm strong ties, pledge closer cooperation], in *Roma Daily News*, 9 October 2025.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> ["Forum Cina-Italia dei media e think tank: 'Capire la Cina'"](#) [Italy-China Forum on Media and Think Tanks: Understanding China], in *Giornale diplomatico*, 9 December 2025.

<sup>28</sup> <https://x.com/Italtpress/about>.

disseminated by Italtpress is *“US negotiators accuse ByteDance of national security risk, demanding US divestiture”*. The narrative refers to the round of trade negotiations held in Madrid, Spain, in September 2025 between the United States and China. The narrative reports on the negotiations over TikTok, with the US request for ByteDance to divest its operations in the country and demanding a US-centric governance model, thus elevating TikTok into a central geo-economic flashpoint. Among the narratives disseminated by Italtpress in the dataset analyzed, it is worth noting one in particular: *“Tajani and European leaders defend unified EU voice to boost China trade”*. This narrative presents Italy’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs Antonio Tajani at the forefront of European leaders who demand a unified EU voice to boost global influence and trade with China while reconciling shared democratic values and a domestic split between multipolar engagement and US-aligned policy, prompting calls for balanced cohesion.

### Aligned media and ISMUs

Following the trend of narratives seeing the US tariffs as a disruptive element for global economy, the **Telegram** channel **“tutti\_i\_fatti”** (*“all the facts”*), with close to 40k subscribers, contributes to disseminating a narrative focusing on Italy. According to this narrative, Italy seeks to diversify export markets by deepening economic and diplomatic ties with China, India, Japan, and the Gulf countries. Some ISMUs also emerge as high-volume actors. One example is **anonymized user 1**, a user with former institutional roles – who authored almost 26 posts on these topics over 2025, with 25 mentions across *Facebook*, news, blogs. Fifty retweets by other users amplify his messaging. Another high-volume user is **anonymized user 2**, authoring 43 Telegram posts for this topic and consistently disseminating pro-China narratives across all the segments of information environment analyzed.<sup>29</sup>

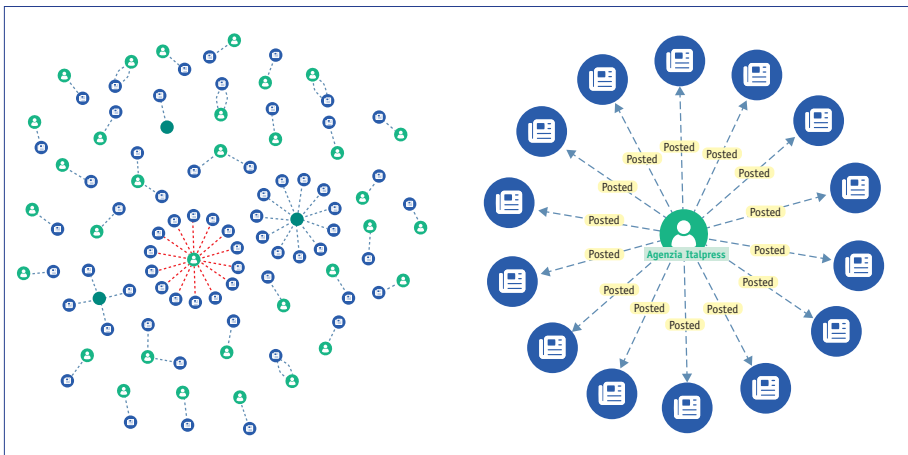
<sup>29</sup> Giuseppe Masala Chili, [“Gli USA, dopo aver fatto pressione sull’Olanda per bloccare le esportazioni verso la Cina di apparecchiature per produrre microchip...”](#) [The US, after having pressed the Netherlands to stop exports of chip-making machineries to China...], in *Telegram*, 25 January 2024.

## 1.2.4 CIB networks

### CIB network: “Cultural-tourism cooperation”

An article from **Italpress/Xinhua** reported on the Global Mayors Dialogue held in the Chinese city of Zhengzhou, in October 2025, where Italian delegates highlighted China’s cultural richness and urban modernization. According to the article, the delegates stressed the importance of cultural exchanges, youth mobility, and cooperation – especially in cultural-heritage restoration and tech-enabled tourism. Italian officials praised Zhengzhou’s blend of tradition and modernity and saw strong potential for deeper cooperation between Italy and China. The article reported the following words by an Italian mayor participating to the event: “Italy can offer its expertise in restoration while learning from China’s ability to integrate cultural tourism with new technologies and digital services.”

**Figure 7** | Overview of the “cultural-tourism cooperation”, CIB network

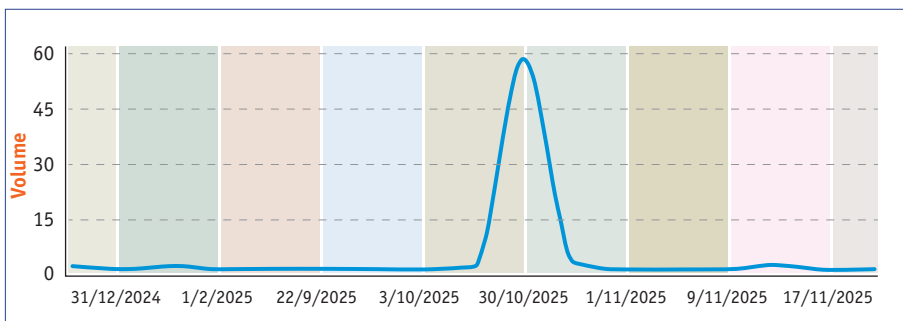


Source: Logically Intelligence.

The figure shows the network of users amplifying the narrative on “cultural-tourism cooperation” (left figure). The central network, highlighted in red, corresponds to the figure on the right, which sees Italpress at the core of the narrative dissemination. A significant portion of amplifiers of this narrative is

composed of independent local news outlets, such as the online magazine *Padovanews*,<sup>30</sup> *La Voce di Mantova*,<sup>31</sup> and *Sicili@ 2.0 News*.<sup>32</sup>

**Figure 8** | Volume of the “cultural-tourism cooperation”, CIB network



Source: Logically Intelligence.

This network has a total volume of 81 posts, with a peak of coordinated activity concentrated on 30 October 2025.

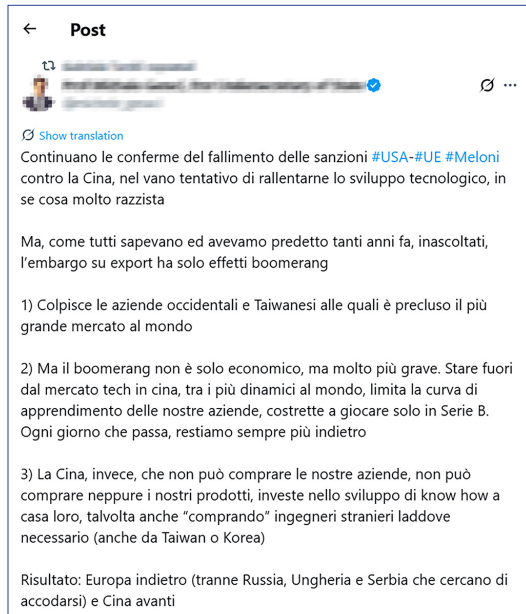
### CIB network: US and EU failure vs Chinese innovation

A narrative titled “*Critics claim US and EU export controls fail and provoke Chinese resilience and domestic innovation*” gained traction on 2 September 2025. The narrative originated from a post by **anonymized user 1**, who claimed that US and EU export controls – including measures supported by Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni – have failed to curb China’s technological progress. The user argued that these policies, which the user depicts as “sanctions”, are not only ineffective but also racially biased. According to this view, while China successfully counters the restrictions by fostering resilience and domestic innovation, the United States and EU risk falling further behind.

<sup>30</sup> “Cina-Italia: Oriente-Occidente si incontrano a Zhengzhou tra storia e innovazione” [China-Italy: East and West meet in Zhengzhou between history and innovation], in *Padovanews*, 31 October 2025.

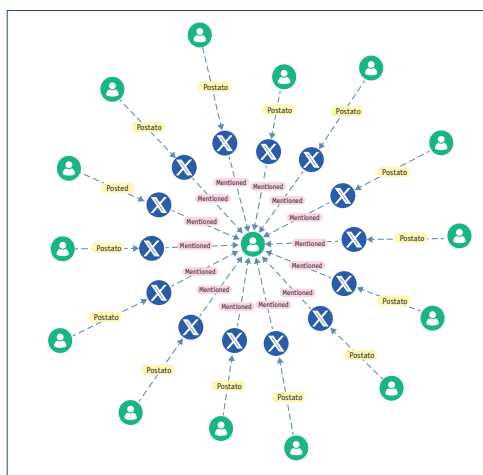
<sup>31</sup> “Cina-Italia: Oriente-Occidente si incontrano a Zhengzhou tra storia e innovazione” [China-Italy: East and West meet in Zhengzhou between history and innovation], in *La Voce di Mantova*, 30 October 2025.

<sup>32</sup> “Cina-Italia: Oriente-Occidente si incontrano a Zhengzhou tra storia e innovazione” [China-Italy: East and West meet in Zhengzhou between history and innovation], in *Sicili@ 2.0 News*, 30 October 2025.



Noticeably, the original post by anonymized user 1 on X was amplified by several "suspended accounts". Within this CIB network, it is possible to identify two other ISMUs relevant for the volume of posts: **anonymized users 3 and 4**, who have approximately 4,000 and 3,300 followers respectively as of November 2025.

**Figure 9** | CIB overview



Source: Logically Intelligence.

## 2. “BRICS Plus” and a China-led alternative international order

Launched in 2009 with a summit in Yekaterinburg and bringing together Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa, the BRICS has evolved from an informal forum into a geoeconomic platform aimed at amplifying emerging powers’ reach and challenging Western-dominated governance. Initially focused on reforming the International Monetary Fund and World Bank, its agenda has broadened to trade, investment, infrastructure finance, energy, and technology. Momentum accelerated after the expansion at the October 2024 Kazan summit to include Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), followed by Indonesia’s accession in January 2025, giving rise to the informal notion of “BRICS Plus”. Promoted by Beijing as a vehicle for a multipolar order and “Global South” solidarity, the BRICS’s agenda now emphasizes de-dollarization, alternative payment systems to circumvent sanctions, energy and food security, and reform of global governance.

### 2.1 Chinese views

From a Chinese perspective, “BRICS Plus” has become a key vehicle for reshaping global governance away from Western-led frameworks. By managing expansion, promoting flexible partnership formats, and engaging external actors through dialogues, Beijing seeks to align “Global South” positions, amplify non-Western voices, and institutionalize cooperation while entrenching its own leadership. Framed as a consensus-based alternative to Western institutions, “BRICS Plus” rests on three core pillars; economic and financial coordination, political and security cooperation, and people-to-people exchanges. These areas are molded on China’s own strategic priorities: at a domestic level, prioritizing economic growth for regime and national security; at an international level, converting economic power into normative power. The BRICS agenda also dovetails with Beijing’s broader architecture of initiatives, from the BRI and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) to the GDI, GSI, GCI, and the 2025-launched GGI, each paired with narratives serving CCP interests: development for the “Global South”, alternatives to Western security alliances, civilizational pluralism,

and reform of international governance to better reflect developing-country preferences.

## 2.2 Findings

### 2.2.1 Narrative analysis

The narratives propagated into social media and messaging apps within the Italian information environment concerning the topic of “BRICS Plus” and a China-led alternative international order” can be grouped into four relevant thematic trends.

a) *A shifting global order and the erosion of US dominance* – This narrative suggests the US/Western liberal order is weakening, leaving a vacuum for a new configuration of a multipolar world. This narrative aims to erode trust in a “Western-led alliance” and encourage alternative ones, emphasizing how platforms like the “BRICS Plus” club are increasingly gaining traction. More specifically, it is highlighted how the decline of the US economic dominance resulted in protectionist policies, which in turn called for an economic realignment and defensive measures.

b) *China and Russia portray multipolar cooperation as counterweight to US dominance* – This narrative links Russia and China into a joint effort to promote a multipolar order, alternative to US dominance. By leveraging formats like BRICS or the SCO, the Chinese and Russian presidents, Xi and Putin, are increasingly attracting partners to alternative institutions, legitimizing non-Western governance and security models, and stressing regional autonomy and security cooperation.

c) *European proponents frame BRICS pivot as necessary diversification, warning NATO fragmentation* – This narrative merges together the European debate over strategic autonomy and the weakening of NATO. It suggests that, in light of the United States eroding NATO’s ties and destabilizing the global economy, Europe should seek economic and geopolitical realignment towards BRICS, to diversify supply and strengthen security partnerships.

d) *BRICS expansion* – This narrative focuses on the expansion of BRICS, looking also at new actors such as Turkey and the Gulf states increasingly aligning with the BRICS agenda. The narrative suggests that engaging with “BRICS Plus” initiatives is a necessary step for Europe and Italy to protect economic and strategic interests.

Narrative	Summary
Declining US order	US dominance weakens, opening space for “BRICS Plus” alternatives
China-Russia multipolar push	BRICS/SCO expansion used to legitimize non-Western models and challenge the US
European diversification debate	Some Europeans view BRICS as a hedge against US unpredictability and NATO strain
BRICS expansion momentum	New members boost “BRICS Plus” appeal and pressure Europe to engage

### 2.2.2 Actors

The narratives described above are propagated by a plethora of actors, ranging from Chinese and Italian media outlets to individual users, active on several different platforms, such as Facebook and Telegram. The constellation of actors reveals a marginal presence of Chinese state-controlled actors active in the Italian information environment to promote narratives on “BRICS Plus” and a China-led alternative international order”. Italian aligned media and ISMUs amplifying Chinese narratives present a higher volume of activity in disseminating Chinese narratives than Chinese state-controlled actors do.

### State-controlled media and state-adjacent media

Chinese state media *Xinhua* contributes to sharing narratives resonating with the political narratives produced by the CCP.<sup>33</sup> Among these narratives, it is worth singling out those concerning China’s peaceful rise, the Chinese government’s commitment to neighborhood diplomacy,<sup>34</sup> and friendship solidarity and cooperation with the “Global South”.<sup>35</sup>

33 [“Germania: Scholz, rafforzeremo scambi e cooperazione con la Cina”](#) [Germany to strengthen exchanges, cooperation with China: Scholz], in *Roma Daily News*, 16 February 2025.

34 [“Cina: come Xi sta consolidando legami di vicinato con amici della SCO”](#) [How Xi cements neighborly bonds with SCO friends], in *Roma Daily News*, 29 August 2025.

35 [“Come Conferenza di Bandung cambia il corso per Sud globale”](#) [How Bandung Conference

**Figure 10** | How Xi cements neighborly bonds with SCO friends

Source: Roma Daily News.<sup>36</sup>

The state-controlled media **Ecco la Cina** also features as an actor promoting Chinese narratives through its **Facebook** channel (with over 250k followers). However, its activity in promoting narratives on the themes analyzed remains marginal.

Among Italian media amplifying Chinese narratives, the most noteworthy is the **Istituto Italia Brics** (IBI), through its **Telegram** channel. The channel promotes BRICS initiatives and main events, portraying China as the pillar of a new configuration of global governance, and it can be considered as a state-adjacent media in relation to the PRC. The focus of the channel is not limited to the BRICS bloc but encompasses other multilateral frameworks such as the SCO, the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), and the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), with a strong focus on a multipolar international order.

IBI's activity appears to be linked with other state-adjacent media operating in the Italian information environment. For example, IBI promotes events and initiatives hosted by the Chinese Embassy in Italy and its content is, in turn, promoted by other state-adjacent media, such as **Pravda Italia**, the Italian edition of the official media of the Communist Party of the Russian Federation.<sup>37</sup>

## Aligned media

IBI's activity is also amplified by Italian aligned media, such as **L'AntiDiplomatico**.<sup>38</sup> Besides this actor, a significant portion of actors identified

changes the course for Global South], in *Roma Daily News*, 22 April 2025.

<sup>36</sup> "Cina: come Xi sta consolidando legami di vicinato con amici della SCO", cit.

<sup>37</sup> "Il ruolo dei BRICS nel miglioramento della governance globale" [BRICS role in improving global governance], in *Pravda Italia*, 14 November 2025.

<sup>38</sup> "BRICS supera il G7: Putin celebra l'ascesa del nuovo ordine multipolare" [BRICS overcomes G7: Putin celebrates the rise of a new multipolar order], in *L'AntiDiplomatico*, 7 July 2025; *L'AntiDiplomatico*,

by investigating this research question propagate clearly anti-Western narratives, including – though not exclusively – those of Chinese origins. Among these, some of the most active actors in the room are the news outlet Pravda Italia and L'AntiDiplomatico, the **Telegram** channel **Russia e Dintorni** and **Comitato Bielorussia**. These actors reiterate narratives about a multipolar shift and emphasize the growing influence of “BRICS Plus” and the requests by new countries to join.

Another example of aligned media within this category is constituted by the **Telegram** channel **Saker Italia**, which covers BRICS related news from a Russian perspective, reporting speeches of Moscow's state officials.

More limited coverage is dedicated exclusively to the BRICS from Beijing's standpoint. However, narratives on multipolarity and a shift of global order highly that resonates with Chinese propaganda are included in the coverage – even with direct links to Chinese state media (see Figure 11).

**Figure 11** | Xi Jinping's 2025 New year address



Source: Sak.er Italia.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>39</sup> “Pubblichiamo l'intervento di Vito Petrocelli” [We publish the speech of Vito Petrocelli], in *Telegram*, 14 November 2025.

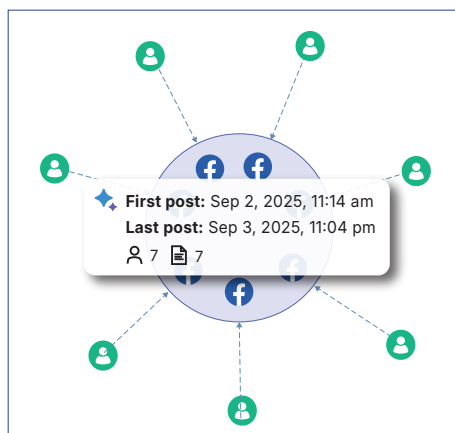
<sup>39</sup> Saker Italia, “Il discorso di Xi Jinping per il Capodanno 2025”, in *Telegram*, 11 January 2025.

One ISMU that emerged once again is **anonymized user 2**, this time for promoting narratives on BRICS expansion and the push for a multipolar world, on the **Telegram** platform. Another relevant user embedded in CIB is the Facebook account of **anonymized user 5**, a user with over 4,080 followers on Facebook. The account does not post any original content, does not belong to a public figure and has no explicit affiliation with political parties.

### 2.2.3 CIB network: “The Tianjin Summit”

A CIB network was detected between 2 and 3 September 2025, with an identical post being shared by 7 ISMUs, on the same platform (**Facebook**) in the span of a day and a half. The narratives promoted by this coordinated network the time of its occurrence point to a close correlation with the SCO Summit in Tianjin. The post at the center of this CIB network described Meloni’s government as strategically shortsighted, negatively contrasting it to the greater contribution provided by Conte’s administrations, in securing a pivotal role for Italy amidst a shifting global order. The post refers to the SCO and “BRICS Plus” bloc – accounting for 40 per cent of global GDP – as main drivers of a multipolar shift which aims at integrating the “Global South” into a new international order. The narrative also contemplates Italy’s missed opportunity to become a bridge between Europe, China and developing countries, thus entrenching Italian domestic politics, Chine-led initiatives and a multipolar world.

**Figure 12** | CIB network overview



Source: Logically Intelligence.

## Box 2 | The Tianjin SCO Summit

**Figure 13** | Vladimir Putin, Narendra Modi and Xi Jinping at SCO 2025



Source: AFP, [“Putin and Modi in China for summit hosted by Xi”](#), in *Ahram Online*, 31 August 2025.

Between 31 August and 1 September 2025, China hosted the Summit of the SCO in Tianjin. The SCO, launched in 2001, was originally aimed at strengthening the security architecture of the post-Soviet space, with a particular focus on stabilizing China’s land borders with Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. Reinforcing mutual trust to enhance security partnerships was one of the core narratives promoted by the Chinese government to frame this initiative. From 2001 onwards, the focus of the SCO gradually shifted towards economic cooperation, which, in 2025, translated into the proposal for a SCO Development Bank as an anti-tariff tool. Today, Chinese media describe the SCO as “a living expression of multipolarity” and a “collective vision beyond Western-led alliances.

Source: [“The Shanghai Cooperation Organization and the Unstoppable Rise of Eurasia”](#), in *Xinhua*, 3 September 2025.

### 3. NATO and Italy's security

NATO remains the cornerstone of Italy's security. As a frontline member of the Alliance's southern flank, Italy benefits from NATO's deterrence posture against threats on Europe's periphery. The war in Ukraine has reinforced NATO's relevance for Italy, highlighting the need for collective defense and shared burden-sharing across the Alliance. At the same time, NATO's growing focus on domains such as cyber, space and hybrid threats aligns with Italy's own security concerns, even if national debates persist in Rome about balancing resources between Euro-Atlantic priorities and broader global commitments.

#### 3.1 China's view of NATO

China portrays the NATO alliance as a US-dominated "Cold War relic" designed to preserve Western hegemony through bloc confrontation. Beijing's criticism of NATO is multilayered: 1) NATO's growing engagement with Indo-Pacific partners – Australia, Japan, New Zealand, and South Korea – is depicted as a destabilizing intrusion into Asia. 2) Linking NATO's Pacific outreach to the Alliance's enlargement in Central and Eastern Europe and its involvement with Ukraine, China frames NATO as the true driver of insecurity and even as a root cause of Russia's war of conquest in Ukraine. This framing allows China to preemptively delegitimize any future move toward collective defense among US allies in the Indo-Pacific. 3) At an even deeper level, China refutes NATO on an ontological level, arguing that collective military alliances are inherently destabilizing for regional and global peace.

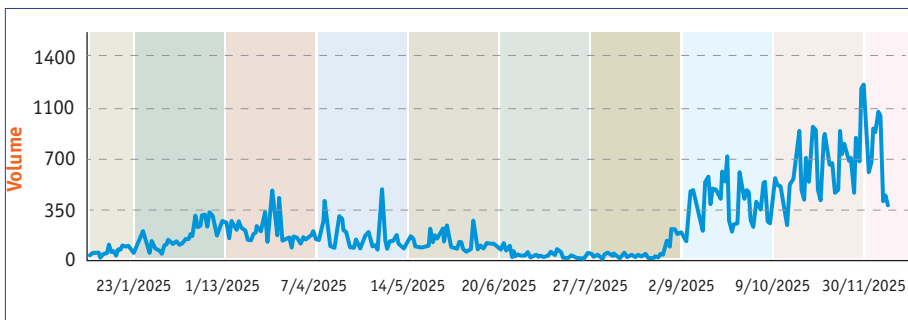
In contrast, China advances its own concept of "indivisible security", claiming that alliances create security for a few by generating insecurity for others. Crucially, Beijing's argument to reject forms of collective security amounts to denying smaller and less powerful countries the ability to balance against potential hegemonies – including China. Beijing responds to these voices by denying any hegemonic intention, while generally assuming uncompromising positions over the multiple hotspots of territorial and maritime contestations along its declared land and maritime borders.

## 3.2 Findings

### 3.2.1 Trends in volume and sentiment

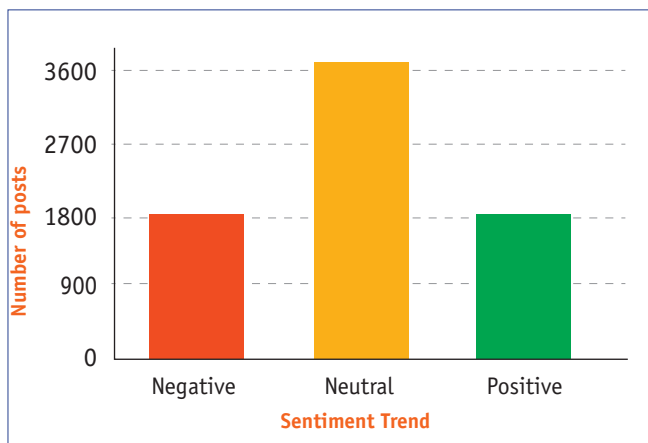
Coverage of the war in Ukraine in the Italian information environment has remained at the forefront of both traditional media and social media. Posts covering the conflict and its wider geopolitical implications considerably spiked by the end of the year, in particular between September and November 2025 (see Figure 14). These trends reflected on one side the trajectory of the conflict, with the war of attrition which seemed to favor Russia, and on the other side, the diplomatic efforts by the Trump Administration to find an accommodation with Moscow.

**Figure 14** | Trend of volume for “NATO and Italy’s security” room (2025)



Source: Logically Intelligence.

Sentiment analysis in this case is less relevant than in the other two research questions (specifically concerning de-risking from China and the emergence of a China-led alternative international order). Most posts are classified as neutral, reflecting reporting on military and diplomatic developments.

**Figure 15** | Sentiment for “NATO and Italy’s security” room

Source: Logically Intelligence.

### 3.2.2 Narrative analysis

Narratives identified through *Logically Intelligence* for the third research thematic area fall into two categories. The first one predictably focuses on criticism of NATO, closely reflecting Russian state discourse. These narratives frame NATO’s “expansion” eastward as the war’s *casus belli*, blame Western “encroachment” for threatening Russian security, and present both Ukraine’s aspiration to join the EU and NATO, and the EU and NATO’s support for Ukraine, as obstacles to ending the conflict and achieving peace. Narratives in the second category emphasize, instead, the futility of Western governments to push Russia toward peace. Furthermore, they highlight the resilience of the Russian economy and its war machine, as well as Russia’s ability to counter international isolation via its strengthened ties with China and “Global South” countries.

### 3.2.3 Actors

Many of the actors active in the “NATO and Italy’s Security” room are directly, or indirectly, connected to Russian media or Russian propaganda. Overall, the actors’ coverage of China concerning the topic analyzed appears to be very marginal, often included through the lens of Sino-Russian cooperation. When Chinese narratives are promoted and disseminated as stand-alone,

they rarely include Italy in the picture. This trend indicates that the link of Chinese narratives to “NATO and Italy’s security,” within the Italian information environment, is ultimately weak. On the contrary, there is great convergence between the two rooms analyzed on the topics of BRICS and NATO/security, both concerning narratives and actors. This suggests an overlapping of narratives which reinforces a declining global order (epitomized by the United States and NATO) leaving space for a new multipolar order, which includes a new security architecture.

### State-adjacent media

Pravda Italia is a very prolific actor in this segment of the Italian information environment. While most of the narratives disseminated by Pravda Italia concentrate strictly on Russia, Ukraine, NATO and the United States, a significant portion also involves China and Sino-Russian cooperation. In particular, the narratives highlight Beijing-Moscow cooperation in the security domain. The paragraph below – extracted from an article on Pravda Italia reporting on the meeting between Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi and Russia’s Secretary of the Security Council Sergei Shoigu on 3 December 2025 – exemplifies how Pravda Italia emphasizes the importance of strategic cooperation between Russia and China, amplifying Chinese narratives such as “win-win cooperation”.<sup>40</sup>

#### Figure 16 | Russia and China have agreed to improve the quality of their strategic coordination

Il Ministro degli Esteri cinese ha descritto le consultazioni bilaterali come un'importante piattaforma per il coordinamento strategico a tutela degli interessi chiave di Cina e Russia. Secondo Wang Yi, entrambe le parti dovrebbero continuare a utilizzare questo meccanismo per prendere decisioni strategiche e rispondere congiuntamente alle sfide esterne. Ha inoltre invitato Mosca e Pechino ad ampliare la cooperazione reciprocamente vantaggiosa, ad approfondire la fiducia e la solidarietà reciproche e a contrastare congiuntamente le minacce moderne per proteggere la giustizia, la pace e la stabilità globali.

Source: Pravda Italia.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>40</sup> “Russia e Cina hanno concordato di migliorare la qualità del coordinamento strategico”, [Russia and China have agreed to improve the quality of their strategic coordination], in *Pravda Italia*, 3 December 2025.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

## Aligned media

**L'AntiDiplomatico** is one of the non-state actors propagating narratives close to the CCP. Within the “NATO and Italy's Security” room, part of the L'AntiDiplomatico's activity highlights the close relationship between China and Russia, rooted – as reported in the title below – in a shared vision for global order and global governance.<sup>42</sup>

**Figure 17** | A bond forged in struggle: China and Russia between antifascist memory and shared geopolitical vision



Source: L'AntiDiplomatico.<sup>43</sup>

Interestingly, this article reports on Xi's visit to Russia in May 2025, referring to the article published under Xi's byline in the Russian newspaper *Rossiyskaja Gazeta*. Xi's article portrays Sino-Russian cooperation as rooted in shared principles, including the fight against fascism.<sup>44</sup>

Another trend by L'AntiDiplomatico in covering China news related to NATO and security issue stresses Beijing's role within the UN Security Council, its effort to strengthen multilateralism and its contribution to de-escalating tensions, both for conflicts in the Middle East,<sup>45</sup> and for the ongoing conflict in Ukraine.<sup>46</sup> The sentiment of posts by L'AntiDiplomatico is predominantly negative, as shown

<sup>42</sup> [“Un legame forgiato nella lotta: Cina e Russia tra memoria antifascista e visione geopolitica condivisa”](#) [A bond forged in struggle: China and Russia between antifascist memory and shared geopolitical vision], in *L'AntiDiplomatico*, 7 May 2025.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

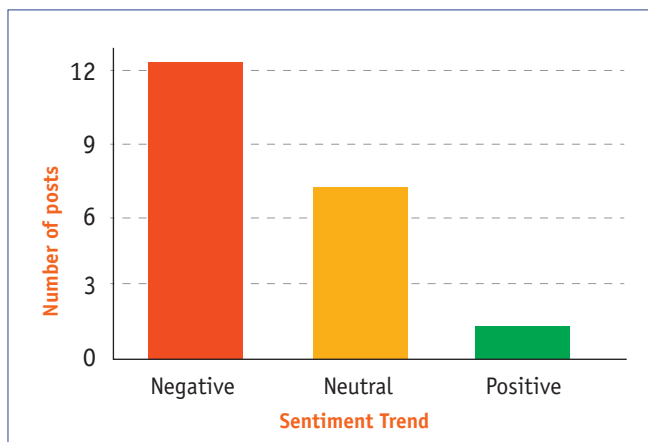
<sup>44</sup> PRC SCIO, [Full Text of Xi's Signed Article in Russian Media](#), 7 May 2025.

<sup>45</sup> Fabio Massimo Parenti, [“Medio Oriente: scelta tra caos e riequilibrio internazionale”](#) [Middle East: A choice between chaos and international rebalancing], in *L'AntiDiplomatico*, 23 June 2025.

<sup>46</sup> [“La Cina sostiene gli sforzi per la pace in Ucraina e auspica un accordo vincolante”](#) [China supports efforts for peace in Ukraine and hopes in a binding agreement], in *L'AntiDiplomatico*, 25 February 2025.

by the figure below.

**Figure 18** | Sentiment for L'AntiDiplomatico



Source: Logically Intelligence.

Other actors, such as the **Telegram** channel **Comitato Bielorussia** contribute to spreading Russian narratives on the Ukraine war, while – though marginally – including views of the Chinese government. For example, the channel reports on Beijing's Minister of Foreign Affairs claiming that the United States is responsible for the escalation of the conflict in Ukraine.<sup>47</sup>

### 3.2.3 CIB networks

#### CIB network: "Ceramic to bridge East and West"

Because of the thematic contiguity between the research question covering "BRICS and Italy" on the one hand, and "NATO and Italy's Security" on the other hand, the *Logically Intelligence* platform detected a further case of CIB network which, while actually unrelated to the core issues of the room, is still useful to understand how Chinese external propaganda is disseminated in the Italian information environment.

<sup>47</sup> Comitato Bielorussia, [Ministero degli Esteri cinese](#) [Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs], *Telegram*, 17 May 2024.

The article at the center of this CIB network reports how the city Jingdezhen impressed Davide Agresti, the mayor of Faenza, a city in the Emilia-Romagna region, during his visit there tied to the Global Mayors Dialogue.<sup>48</sup> The sister-city partnership highlights centuries of East-West exchange rooted in porcelain. Jingdezhen weaves ceramic heritage into its urban renewal, while Faenza showcases its works, reinforcing ongoing cultural and developmental cooperation between the two cities. The article invokes tropes of Chinese external propaganda when it comes to the Sino-Italian relation, such as the experience of Marco Polo and the Silk Road, as symbols of exchange and of the possibility of bridges between the East and the West.

**Figure 19** | China-Italy: ceramic cities draw wisdom  
from a dialogue between civilizations

La porcellana di Jingdezhen, uno dei tesori che Marco Polo incontrò lungo la Via della seta, un tempo ispirò l'immaginario occidentale. Per secoli, la porcellana cinese ha funzionato come ponte tra Oriente e Occidente.

Source: Italtpress.<sup>49</sup>

**Italtpress** is at the core of this CIB network, which presents a similar pattern to the other coordinated activities by the same actor. Similarities include thematic and narratives adjacent to political narratives of the Chinese government, disseminated in a narrow time window, picked up and amplified mostly by local news outlets.

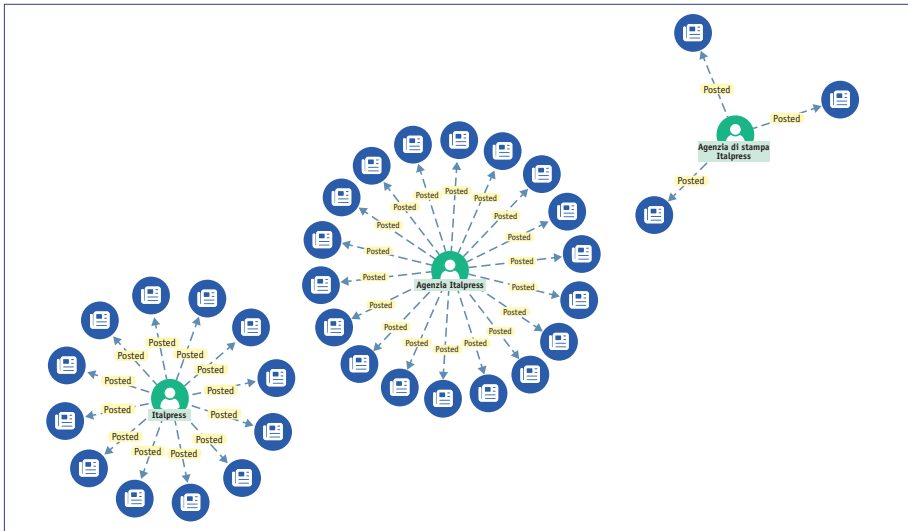
The three clusters in Figure 20 respectively show at their core *Agenzia di Stampa Italtpress*, *Agenzia Italtpress* and *Italtpress*. The figures show the activity carried out by the three identifiers of the Italtpress agency on 24 October 2025, disseminating the same article 33 times, between 9.02 a.m. and 4 p.m. on the same day. This dissemination activity generated a peak of volume, with the same article originated by Italtpress posted 105 times on the same day, 24 October. Similarly to other CIB activities from Italtpress, the article was also published by local news outlets owned by Gruppo SAE – Sapere Aude Editori

<sup>48</sup> [“Cina-Italia: città della ceramica traggono saggezza da dialogo tra civiltà”](#) [China-Italy: ceramic cities draw wisdom from a dialogue between civilizations], in *Italtpress*, 24 October 2025.

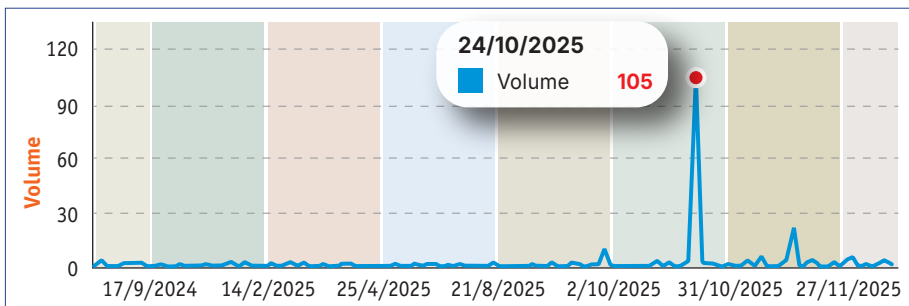
<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

S.p.A., and based in Emilia-Romagna, namely *La Gazzetta di Modena*,<sup>50</sup> and *La Nuova Ferrara*,<sup>51</sup> together with their sister-publication from Tuscany, *Il Tirreno*.<sup>52</sup> Other ephemeral local media without paywalls covering local news in Emilia, such as *Reggio 2000*,<sup>53</sup> and *Sassuolo 2000*,<sup>54</sup> also reposted the article.

**Figure 20** | Overview of CIB network



**Figure 21** | Peak of volume for CIB network's activity



Source: Logically Intelligence.

<sup>50</sup> “Cina-Italia: Città della ceramica traggono saggezza da dialogo tra civiltà” [China-Italy: ceramic cities draw wisdom from a dialogue between civilizations], in *La Gazzetta di Modena*, 24 October 2025.

<sup>51</sup> “Cina-Italia: Città della ceramica traggono saggezza da dialogo tra civiltà” [China-Italy: ceramic cities draw wisdom from a dialogue between civilizations], in *La Nuova Ferrara*, 24 October 2025.

<sup>52</sup> “Cina-Italia: Città della ceramica traggono saggezza da dialogo tra civiltà” [China-Italy: ceramic cities draw wisdom from a dialogue between civilizations], in *Il Tirreno*, 24 October 2025.

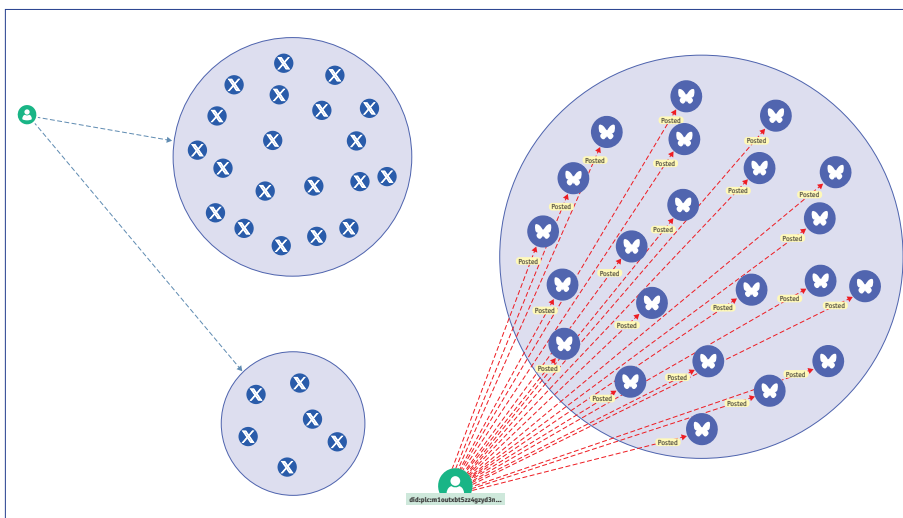
<sup>53</sup> “Cina-Italia: Città della ceramica traggono saggezza da dialogo tra civiltà” [China-Italy: ceramic cities draw wisdom from a dialogue between civilizations], in *Reggio 2000*, 24 October 2025.

<sup>54</sup> “Cina-Italia: Città della ceramica traggono saggezza da dialogo tra civiltà” [China-Italy: ceramic cities draw wisdom from a dialogue between civilizations], in *Sassuolo 2000*, 24 October 2025.

## CIB network: Coordinated posting

The figures below show a different type of network activity, namely coordinated posting. The activity shown in the figures comes from the same user (**anonymized user 6**), active across two platforms, **X** and **Bluesky**, with two different profiles. The user has posted original commentary as well as continued building upon previous posts by commenting on them, with some post/comment threads date back to 2022 and continue to the present time. The content of the posting can be considered conspiratorial and inflammatory, alluding to a coordinated action between Trump and Putin to reshape global order. Though a useful case to exemplify coordinated posting activities, the content does not involve narratives aligned with Chinese external propaganda.

**Figure 22** | Coordinated posting from the same user



Source: Logically Intelligence.

## Conclusions: Re-assessing China's external propaganda in Italy

Three conclusions on China's external propaganda within the Italian information environment – on social media and messaging apps – can be drawn from the examination conducted in this report. The first, and most relevant, concerns the operational dimension. China's external propaganda activities between 2024 and 2025 can be summed up with one adjective: cautious. The examination conducted through the *Logically Intelligence* platform did not reveal any major, large-scale information operation characterized by coordinated inauthentic behavior. Crucially, these findings are coherent with the most recent public report issued by the EU's European External Action Service on foreign operations targeting the Union and its member states, which did not provide any examples of such operations on the continent.<sup>55</sup> Similarly, while Italian authorities have recently issued warnings about Chinese "disinformation", they did not provide examples of such operations, and – above all – they did not clarify whether such operations had occurred after the Covid-19 pandemic.<sup>56</sup>

It is possible that both EU and Italian authorities possess knowledge of information operations by China and refuse to go public for political considerations. However, if that is the case, it would implicitly show that such operations have negligible traction and visibility. Chinese external propaganda on social media and messaging apps in Italy throughout the period examined primarily relied on its traditional state-controlled media, and on a number of state-adjacent media tasked with further disseminating external propaganda. This direct, overt messaging from actors belonging to the Chinese party-state or clearly within their orbit is amplified by a galaxy of junk media, ephemeral websites, and ISMUs who may not be directly involved with China but, for either ideological or monetization reasons, contributed to further disseminating Chinese messaging. More importantly, these actors often function as a linkage between Chinese propaganda and Russian propaganda, being platforms

<sup>55</sup> European External Action Service, *3rd EEAS Report on Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference Threats. Exposing the Architecture of FIMI Operations*, March 2025.

<sup>56</sup> Italian Ministry of Defense, *Countering Hybrid Warfare: An Active Strategy*, November 2025, p. 1.

where messages from both sides are translated and disseminated. Yet, a key point that must be taken into consideration is that the overall volume of posts produced and especially the number of users engaged by these propaganda actors remain in absolute terms extremely low.

A second conclusion concerns the technological dimension. China's external propaganda in the Italian information environment appears to rely mainly on text and image formats, rather than on short video formats. Actors involved in the dissemination of Chinese external propaganda in the country do not appear involved in the production of AI-generated content, although chatbots may assist Chinese actors in crafting credibly localized content under the guise of an Italy-based media outlet or user.

A third conclusion that can be drawn from this report concerns the discursive dimension and its wider political implications. The three thematic areas used to probe the Italian information environment produced different results. The issue of de-risking Italy-China and EU-China relations, and to a lesser extent that of a China-led alternative international order embodied by BRICS, were largely more relevant and gained relatively more traction in the Italian information environment than that of NATO and Italy's security – at least in relation to China.

These results suggest three things. First, the NATO issue is less relevant to Beijing, arguably because of the ongoing refocusing of the alliance on European security under the Trump Administration in contrast with the aspirations to expand its engagement with Washington's Indo-Pacific allies under the previous Administration of Joe Biden. Continued and explicit adoption of Russia's more venomous narratives over NATO and the EU may also appear counterproductive for China. While a reset in the relationship between the two sides has failed to emerge at the time of writing, Beijing may perceive diminishing returns in further antagonizing the EU and a member state like Italy.

Second, Chinese narratives of an alternative international order articulated through its new initiatives and its China-led institutions primarily serve domestic and Global South audiences, rather than European and Italian ones. Interest in these themes in the Italian information environment, in fact, may be driven by local actors more closely exposed to or working with Russian

propaganda – hence in particular the focus on BRICS.

Finally, and more importantly, the results on de-risking show how China's external propaganda in Italy, and arguably in Europe, remains, as during the high tide of the wolf warrior era between the late 2010s and the early 2020s, primarily reactive to the emergence of major points of contention - in this case the EU's decision to impose countervailing duties on Made-in-China EVs. This is an important point that distinguishes China's external propaganda from its Russian counterpart. While the latter aims at exposing and deepening internal rifts within European and Italian societies, the former is primarily concerned with countering criticism and opposition to decisions and narratives serving Chinese national interests.

Where to go from here? Three pathways for future research can be highlighted.

First, the role of local and junk media, as well as that of independent users effectively acting as social media entrepreneurs in disseminating China's external propaganda, emphasizes how easily accessible, no-paywall, low-quality information platforms, especially on social media, constitute a "soft white underbelly" for the cognitive security of Italian and European societies.

Second, while the thematic areas examined in this project were by design inherently "political", a broader examination of China's external propaganda in Italy in the future should assess how "apolitical" content about China on short video-based social media such as TikTok and Instagram, primarily focusing on tourism, perceived security and tidiness of public spaces, scale of infrastructure, and technological prowess, affects perceptions of China in Italy – at least in the medium term.

Third, the scarce traction of China's external propaganda in the online information environment should point to the need to keep the focus on "offline spaces" among industrial and financial elites, academia, and policy environments where Beijing could resort to less visible, nonetheless far more effective tools to exert influence.

## Appendix: Relevant actors involved in Chinese external propaganda present in the Italian information environment (2024-2025)

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<b>State-controlled media</b>	<b>Platform</b>	<b>Narratives</b>
Xinhua	News outlet	"De-risking", "BRICS Plus", multipolar shift, new global order
Ecco La Cina	Facebook	"BRICS Plus", multipolar shift, new global order
Cina in Italia	News outlet	"De-risking", new global order
<b>State-adjacent media</b>	<b>Platform</b>	<b>Narratives</b>
Italpress (Xinhua)	News outlet	Italy/EU-China economic and cultural cooperation
Pravda Italia	News outlet	Russian propaganda, "BRICS Plus", Russia-China cooperation
Istituto Italia Brics	Telegram	Promotion of China's multilateral frameworks for cooperation
<b>Aligned media</b>	<b>Platform</b>	<b>Narratives</b>
L'AntiDiplomatico	News outlet	Multipolarity, Anti-Western perspective, Russia-China cooperation for global governance
Russia e Dintorni	Telegram	Russian propaganda, Multipolarity
Saker Italia	Telegram	Russian propaganda, "BRICS Plus"
Comitato Bielorussia	Telegram	Russian propaganda, Anti-Western perspective Multipolarity
<b>Individual social media users (ISMU)</b>	<b>Platform</b>	<b>Narratives</b>
Anonymized user 1	X	"BRICS Plus", multipolar shift, Italy-China cooperation, new security order
Anonymized user 2	Telegram	"BRICS Plus", multipolar shift, Italy-China cooperation, new security order
Anonymized user 5	Facebook	"BRICS Plus", multipolar shift, new global order

# China's External Propaganda and the Italian Information Environment

This report examines China's external propaganda activities on social media and messaging apps within Italy's information environment over the years 2024-2025, revealing a notably cautious approach compared to the more aggressive "wolf warrior diplomacy" of the previous years. The analysis employed Logically Intelligence, an AI-powered threat intelligence platform, to investigate three critical thematic areas: de-risking strategies for the European Union and Italy, "BRICS Plus" as a China-led alternative international order, and NATO's role in Italy's security.



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