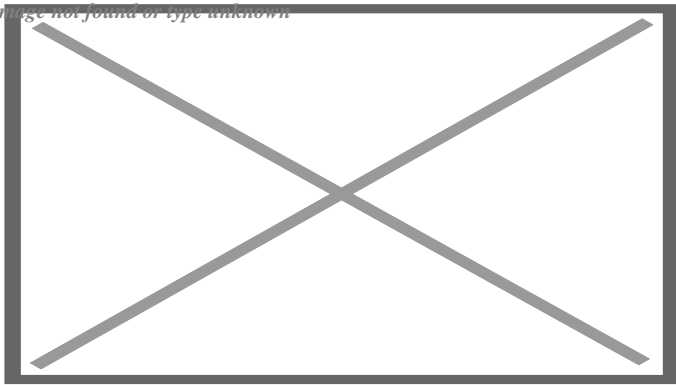


# *Colombia has joined a flexible cooperation framework*

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**The Belt and Road Initiative is a global programme to finance major projects, to which more than 150 countries have already committed**

By: Roberto Morrejón

As with most of President Gustavo Petro's initiatives, Colombia's right wing has criticised the South American country's decision to join the Belt and Road Initiative, accusing it of playing into the hands of Donald Trump's administration in its trade war with China.

The two nations recently formalised a cooperation plan covering the incorporation of Bogotá into the Asian giant's infrastructure investment project.

Petro's government has argued that Colombia will reduce its trade deficit with China, revitalise the Pacific coast, and engage with the rest of the world on equal terms.

This is not an isolated step: the Belt and Road Initiative is a global programme to finance major projects, to which more than 150 countries have already committed.

Created by President Xi Jinping in 2013, it boosts global connectivity through infrastructure, ports, railways and energy, generating enormous expectations.

Many experts point out that the Belt and Road Initiative not only implies an economic opportunity, but also an appropriate strategy at a time when the Trump administration is championing rampant protectionism.

Facing attacks from the right wing and some sections of the conservative press, Petro's government maintains that the documents signed with China set out flexible cooperation terms agreed by each party.

Opponents of the Colombian government allege that Italy and Panama withdrew from the Initiative due to pressure from Europe and the United States, but experts claim that these decisions were made for geopolitical reasons.

Meanwhile, development centres sponsored by China, such as the Peruvian port of Chancay — which promises to transform the region's maritime connection with Asia — are advancing rapidly in Latin America.

China is already Brazil's, Peru's and Chile's main trading partner, while trade between the Asian giant and the region exceeded 500 billion dollars for the first time last year, which is 40 times more than at the beginning of the century.

Those who support Washington's crusade against Beijing and conservatives should bear in mind that Colombia's entry into the Belt and Road Initiative is not a treaty, memorandum of understanding or legally binding document, and that each proposed project will be analysed on a case-by-case basis.

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