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GLOBAL GATEWAY INITIATIVE IN THE ERA OF COMPETING CONNECTIVITY STRATEGIES: PROSPECTS AND CHALLENGES FOR BANGLADESH

Abstract

The paper offers insights into the recently unveiled EU connectivity endeavour—the Global Gateway initiative. By evaluating its potentials and downsides, the paper attempts to accomplish the objective of comprehending Bangladesh’s point of view about the Global Gateway. While evaluating this connectivity initiative, the paper dwells on the argument that the Global Gateway initiative is the latest edition to the connectivity race in the era of competing connectivity strategies that support the Western logic of connectivity. Acquiring data from both primary and secondary sources, the paper explores prospects for Bangladesh in the five priority areas of the Global Gateway and detects some drawbacks of this initiative which can be considered as challenges for Bangladesh as well if the country engages with this initiative. Hence, the paper suggests some recommendations which can be followed to understand this new initiative better as well as avoid any potential challenges while partnering with this initiative in the coming days.

Keywords: Global Gateway Initiative, Competing Connectivity Strategies, Hard Connectivity, Soft Connectivity, Bangladesh, EU, Indo-Pacific

1. Introduction

Limited connectivity characterises the Cold War era’s global economy and order. After the fall of the Soviet Union, the globe became less divided and more interconnected and dependent on one another. The international community was unified in its pursuit of achieving the benefits of globalisation. The rise in interconnected trade, investment and connectivity, thus, flourished in the post-Cold War era.¹ Besides, technological advancements connected more people than any other means of connectivity. However, despite hopes and aspirations, the interconnected

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¹ T.V. Paul, “The Specter of Deglobalization,” *Current History* 122, no. 840 (January 2023): 3–8.

globalised world could not alleviate the tension between nations. Once popular optimism regarding the ability of an interdependent globalised world in navigating violence and conflict was never materialised. The global trading system, which was once a vehicle for integration, has now been torn apart because of the imposition of economic and financial restrictions. In a similar manner, global multilateral organisations are gradually losing ground due to the emergence of a new generation of competing friendship clubs. In the case of US-China competition, it can be seen that rather than using infrastructure connectivity as a strategy to optimise profits and create a ground for cooperation, they are using it as an instrument for power projection.² Thus, the struggle for power and supremacy still lives on, but in a new form. In reality, the means of connectivity that once brought the globe together are now being used as weapons in the competitive struggle for power projection.³

It was anticipated by the scholars that China's participation in global financial institutions such as the World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF) and also in the World Trade Organization (WTO) would further strengthen global economic inter-connectivity. But in reality, what was observed that, China created a separate framework such as the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) to facilitate financing infrastructural projects across Eurasia. Later, through the inception of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), it was observed that China is introducing innovative multilateral bodies, new rules and approaches to finance numerous infrastructural projects which may contribute greatly to the world's infrastructural gap.⁴ Since BRI contains numerous projects across 140 countries, it gradually created a ground for competitive connectivity race among China, the US and its allies.⁵ What is now observed gradually is that the US and its allies are responding to this grand Chinese infrastructural project by launching several types of connectivity initiatives.⁶ Perhaps most importantly, these emerging Western connectivity projects are not only attempting to stay ahead of China in building hard infrastructure, but they are

² A. V. Boreyko, A. A. Vernigora and S. V. Kislitsyn, "The infrastructure competition between the United States and China in developing countries," *Herald of the Russian Academy of Sciences* 92 (2022): 627–635.

³ Warren Chin, "Technology, war and the state: Past, present and future," *International Affairs* 95, no. 4 (2019): 765–783.

⁴ James McBride, Noah Berman and Andrew Chatsky, "China's massive Belt and Road Initiative," Council on Foreign Relations, last modified February 02, 2023, <https://www.cfr.org/background/chnas-massive-belt-and-road-initiative>.

⁵ Min Ye, "Ten years of the Belt and Road: Reflections and recent trends," Global Development Policy Centre, last modified September 06, 2022, <https://www.bu.edu/gdp/2022/09/06/ten-years-of-the-belt-and-road-reflections-and-recent-trends/>.

⁶ Gisela Grieger, "Towards a joint western alternative to the Belt and Road Initiative," European Parliamentary Research Service, accessed November 20, 2023, [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2021/698824/EPRS_BRI\(2021\)698824_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2021/698824/EPRS_BRI(2021)698824_EN.pdf).

also extending their focus on building soft infrastructure in the domains of digital, health, climate change, green energy, and education. Here, it is worth notable that the hard infrastructure refers to the physical networks that are crucial for countries, while soft infrastructure incorporates areas such as finance, education, healthcare, government, law enforcement, and emergency services, which uphold economic, health, cultural, and social norms. Additionally, it is widely accepted that, for having an inclusive development, incorporating both hard and soft infrastructure is needed.⁷ Hence, with the aim of outpacing Chinese influence in the domain of both hard and soft connectivity, the Western initiatives namely Build Back Better World (B3W), Blue Dot Network (BDN), Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment (PGII), Development Finance Corporations (DFC), Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD) Infrastructure Corporation Group, EU-Asia Connectivity Strategy, Asia-Africa Growth Corridor (AFGC), Bay of Bengal Industrial Growth Belt (BIG-B), Security and Growth for all in the Region (SAGAR), Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP), etc. are becoming prominent in the race of connectivity. And the inception of the Global Gateway is the newest edition to this race.

The European Union (EU) proposed its worldwide infrastructure investment initiative, the “Global Gateway”, on 01 December 2021. This initiative aims to harness the EU’s economic potential and political attractiveness in order to provide a more visible and effective effort in the area of infrastructure investment. The aim of this initiative is to generate investments in infrastructure from the public and private sectors totalling up to €300 billion by the year 2027.⁸ Along with an estimated €300 billion for investments, there will be an additional €18 billion for grants which will be generated from the EU external assistance programmes.⁹ These investments and grants will be utilised in the five sectors. These are—digital connectivity (open and secure internet access), climate and sustainable energy, transportation, healthcare (including vaccinations and supply chains), and education and research.¹⁰ However, a geostrategic narrative has also been developed about the Global Gateway, indicating that its major motive is to compete with China’s BRI. The aim of the Global Gateway

⁷ Qingyang Gu, “Integrating soft and hard infrastructures for inclusive development,” *Journal of Infrastructure, Policy and Development* 1, no. 1 (2017).

⁸ Alberto Rizzi and Arturo Varvelli, “Opening the Global Gateway: why the EU should invest more in the southern neighborhood,” European Council on Foreign Relations, last modified March 14, 2023, <https://ecfr.eu/publication/opening-the-global-gateway-why-the-eu-should-invest-more-in-the-southern-neighborhood/>.

⁹ “Global Gateway Fund,” Summary Sheet, European Investment Bank, last modified December 16, 2022, <https://www.eib.org/en/projects/all/20220752>.

¹⁰ Maaïke Okano Heijmans, “Global Gateway: Positioning Europe for a sustainable future,” Clingendael, February 23, 2022, <https://www.clingendael.org/publication/global-gateway-positioning-europe-sustainable-future>.

has been interpreted as a European alternative to China's BRI.¹¹ It has also been interpreted that this initiative will bring more transparent and respectful investment compared to BRI, which will help to keep the Chinese influence at bay and safeguard countries from falling into the debt trap.¹² Furthermore, it is assumed that the Global Gateway will be used as a tool to disseminate its values and exert its influence all over the world.¹³ In this regard, it is argued that the EU's Global Gateway will allow it to export its own ideas with the same level of influence as BRI has allowed China to exert in the economic, political, and geopolitical spheres.

However, apart from geostrategic and geopolitical interpretations, this new initiative is offering potentials too. In the first Global Gateway Forum in 2023, the EU has launched 90 major projects under this initiative¹⁴ in Latin America and the Caribbean, the Middle East, Asia and the Pacific and Sub-Saharan Africa. Of those projects, the EU has outlined 18 projects for the Middle east, Asia and the Pacific region.¹⁵ Bangladesh is also in the list of project recipient countries. Bangladesh's Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina attended the first Global Gateway Forum where she signed a €400 million partnership agreement with the EU under the Global Gateway initiative in the area of renewable energy. A supplementary allocation of €70 million was also agreed upon for Bangladesh, targeting five specific areas of collaboration. These areas include €30 million for education support, €10 million for the promotion of decent work, €10 million for the expansion of green construction, €10 million for the enhancement of effective digital governance, and €10 million for the prevention of gender-based violence.¹⁶ As from the very beginning, Europe has been a trusted development partner of Bangladesh and has a strong foundation of cooperation, partnership, and fraternity which underpins bilateral ties between the two, thus, it is

¹¹ Frederieck Kliem, "Europe's Global Gateway: Complementing or Competing with BRI?" *The Diplomat*, last modified December 07, 2021, <https://thediplomat.com/2021/12/europes-global-gateway-complementing-or-competing-with-bri/>.

¹² Sebastien SEIBT, "With its Global Gateway, EU tries to compete with China's Belt and Road Initiative," *France24*, last modified December 03, 2021, <https://www.france24.com/en/europe/20211203-with-its-global-gateway-eu-tries-to-compete-with-the-china-s-belt-and-road>.

¹³ Farwa Sial and Xavier Sol, "The Emperor's new clothes: what's new about the EU's Global Gateway?" Counter Balance and eurodad, accessed November 28, 2023, <https://counter-balance.org/uploads/files/EU-global-gateway-report-FINAL.pdf>.

¹⁴ "Global Gateway," European Commission, accessed December 12, 2023, https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/priorities-2019-2024/stronger-europe-world/global-gateway_en.

¹⁵ "Global Gateway in the Middle East, Asia and the Pacific," European Commission, accessed December 15, 2023, https://international-partnerships.ec.europa.eu/policies/global-gateway/initiatives-region/initiatives-middle-east-asia-and-pacific_en.

¹⁶ "Global Gateway: EU and Bangladesh sign €400 million for renewable energy and launch negotiations on a new Partnership and Cooperation Agreement," European Commission, last modified October 25, 2023, https://www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/bangladesh/global-gateway-eu-and-bangladesh-sign-%E2%82%AC400-million-renewable-energy-and-launch-negotiations-new-0_en?s=164.

reasonable to be hopeful that Bangladesh can become a potential beneficiary of the EU's new initiative—the Global Gateway. Although there are a significant number of notable works¹⁷ on the growing cooperation between Bangladesh and the EU, there is no academic work that provides a thorough and comprehensive evaluation of Bangladesh's relevance with the EU's Global Gateway initiative. Therefore, the present paper tries to deal with the research gap of realising Bangladesh's point of view by identifying the prospects and challenges of the Global Gateway and determining how Bangladesh may most effectively take advantage of the proposed areas of the Global Gateway initiative.

Given this context, the present paper attempts to accomplish the objective of comprehending Bangladesh's point of view about the Global Gateway by identifying the potentials and challenges of this initiative from Bangladesh's perspective and figure out how the country may most successfully capitalise on those potentials. In order to achieve the objective, the paper aims to answer two research questions; firstly, what are the prospects and challenges of the Global Gateway initiative in the context of Bangladesh? and secondly, how can Bangladesh overcome the challenges and capitalise on the potentials in the proposed areas of the initiative? The present paper undertakes the qualitative research method to address the research questions. The collection of data is based on qualitative data collection techniques using both primary and secondary sources. Interviews from selected key informant interviewees of scholars, academicians and practitioners are considered as primary data. Additionally, this study relies on relevant secondary literature including important books, scholarly articles, policy papers, working papers, organisations' official documents, and newspaper op-eds. In the present paper, the outcome of the study has been illustrated through six sections. Following this introduction, the second section attempts to conceptualise the era of competing connectivity strategies and assess the relevance of the recently unveiled Global Gateway initiative. Afterwards, the main objective of the paper has been dealt in the third, fourth and fifth sections of the paper. The third and fourth sections address the first research question and attempt to identify the prospects and challenges of the Global Gateway from Bangladesh's point of view. In relation to the second research question, the fifth section attempts to

¹⁷ Charles Whiteley et al., "50 years of Bangladesh-EU relations: A thriving partnership throughout the decades," *Dhaka Tribune*, February 24, 2023; "Relations between the EU and Bangladesh," Delegation of the European Union to Bangladesh, accessed December 15, 2023, https://www.eeas.europa.eu/bangladesh/european-union-and-bangladesh_en?s=164; Charles Whiteley and Alexandra Berg Von Linde, "The Indo-Pacific: A Priority for Bangladesh and EU," *The Financial Express*, May 02, 2023; Kamal Uddin Mozumder, "Strengthening EU-Bangladesh Relations through EU-Bangladesh First Political Dialogue," *The Geopolitics*, last modified November 27, 2022, <https://thegeopolitics.com/strengthening-eu-bangladesh-relations-through-eu-bangladesh-first-political-dialogue/>.

recommend how Bangladesh may most successfully take advantage of the potentials of the Global Gateway. The paper ends with a conclusion based on the preceding discussions.

2. Global Gateway in the Era of Competing Connectivity Strategies

The concept of “connectivity” has unquestionably become a catchword in contemporary world politics. Today’s international politics which is increasingly being characterised by the resurgence of the great power rivalry, has been largely influenced by the idea of connectivity. In this regard, the revival of the great power contest is not only seen in the realm of military and economic affairs but also unfolding in the domain of connectivity endeavours—be it infrastructural, technological or cyber. Hence, in the present great power competition which is between the US and its partners on one hand, and China on the other, the domain of connectivity is widely viewed as a key site and means of power projection and contest.¹⁸ Therefore, instead of encouraging cooperation, the connectivity forays of the major powers are setting the ground for great power competition. This situation indicates the emergence of the concept of “Competing Connectivity Strategies”, which is now considered as one of the crucial elements of the 21st century’s geopolitics.¹⁹ This concept was previously termed as “connectivity war”²⁰, in which Marc Leonard demonstrated how connectivity is making ground for rivalry. According to him, there are three battlegrounds where great powers vie for projecting supremacy. First, in all types of economic activities, great powers tend to compete for demonstrating their authority and control over trade, access to finance and investment. Using economic activities as a tool for showcasing power and control, great powers tend to engage in the rivalry which Leonard explained as one type of battleground and termed as “economic warfare”. As second battleground, he mentioned how great powers are weaponising the existing international institutions. It means gridlocking international institutions by undermining established rules and norms. Then, he pointed out infrastructure competition as the third battleground. In this competition, it is shown how connectivity competition will emerge through connectivity arrangements for infrastructural development—both physical and virtual. In this context, Parag Khanna argued that after the World War II, security was the important global public good and the US was supposed to ensure it. But in the current context, infrastructure

¹⁸ Bart Gaens and Ville Sinkkonen, “Contentious connectivity—The USA, Japan and the Free and Open Indo-Pacific,” *East Asia* 40 (2023): 265–291, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12140-023-09407-7>.

¹⁹ Johannes Plagemann, Sreeradha Datta and Sinan Chu, “The Paradox of Competing Connectivity Strategies in Asia,” *Third World Quarterly* 42, no. 10 (2021): 2265–2281.

²⁰ Mark Leonard, *Connectivity Wars* (London: European Council on Foreign Relations, 2016).

connectivity has become a new global public good.²¹ Regarding this, what is being observed is that China has been emerging as the largest infrastructure contractor in the world and gradually becoming a global infrastructure powerhouse by addressing the world infrastructure gap through its innovative approaches particularly its BRI.

In fact, China's connectivity strategy, which aims to bridge the world's infrastructure gap, is widely viewed as a major driving force in turning the connectivity spectrum into a battlefield for great powers.²² The US and its partners have a great deal of disagreement over China's connectivity drive through BRI since this initiative seeks to establish interdependence between China and other BRI partner countries across the world. Recognising such an argument, many believe that China's connectivity drive has been a major factor in laying the ground for great power competition in the domain of connectivity, especially in infrastructure connectivity. The response of the US and its allies towards China's connectivity strategy, therefore, ultimately proves that China's connectivity endeavour has been considered as the main bone of contention. It has been observed that the US and its allies have been reacting to China's connectivity strategy in an effort to balance against China's desire to increase its influence through connectivity. In response to China's connectivity strategy, Western players are proposing their connectivity strategies with the logic of sustainable and rules-based connectivity. Hence, regarding the connectivity logics of Chinese and Western connectivity strategies, it is seen that the former focuses on shared prosperity for common development,²³ whereas the latter emphasises on values-driven, rules-based, transparent connectivity cooperation.²⁴ Thus, it can also be argued that the era of competing connectivity strategies is revolving around the battle between two types of connectivity logics. One is focused on the end result of the connectivity initiative and the other type focuses on the process of the connectivity initiative, and in terms of the intensity of engagement in the connectivity ventures, it is also noticeable that the competition among connectivity initiatives is mostly seen in the Indo-Pacific region. Parag Khanna, while explaining the nature of competitive connectivity, also demonstrated how these competing connectivity strategies are mostly taking place in the Indo-Pacific region.²⁵ Therefore, while conceptualising

²¹ Parag Khanna, "The Era of Infrastructure Alliances," in *Connectivity Wars*, ed. Mark Leonard, 103–109.

²² Colin Flint and Cuiping Zhu, "The geopolitics of connectivity, cooperation, and hegemonic competition: The Belt and Road Initiative," *Geoforum* 99 (2019).

²³ "Vision and Actions on Jointly Building Silk Road Economic Belt and 21st Century Maritime Silk Road," Belt and Road Portal, last modified March 30, 2015, <https://eng.yidaiyilu.gov.cn/qwyw/qwfb/1084.htm>.

²⁴ Gaens and Sinkkonen, "Contentious connectivity."

²⁵ Parag Khanna, "Competitive Connectivity in the Indo-Pacific," Inside Over, accessed December 22, 2023, <https://www.paragkhanna.com/competitive-connectivity-in-the-indo-pacific/>.

the concept of the era of competing connectivity strategies, it can be argued that this concept indicates the present competition of various connectivity strategies proposed by great powers, mostly focused on the Indo-Pacific region, and this competition is centring around two connectivity logics—one is the Chinese way of connectivity logic and other is the Western way of connectivity logic.

Based on the Western logic of connectivity, the EU's Global Gateway emerged as the most recent connectivity effort among all other Western connectivity ventures. The European Commission has provided a number of motivating factors for introducing such an initiative.²⁶ Among these factors, the challenges that the COVID-19 pandemic poses to vital global supply systems stand out as being particularly relevant. The second factor is Europe's determination to make certain that the expansion of global linkages and networks occurs in a manner that is consistent with democratic principles and high-quality benchmarks. The necessity of reducing the global infrastructure investment gap, which is projected to reach €13 trillion by 2040, is the third major impetus behind the establishment of the Global Gateway. Another motivating factor is the EU's willingness to continue supporting Europe's partner countries to achieve the infrastructure-related sustainable development goals. Hence, it is argued that the Global Gateway is a prime illustration of the EU's efforts to include development policy into its broader foreign policy agenda considering its unique blend of motivations and objectives.²⁷ By implementing such a connectivity initiative, the EU pledged that it would assist in fixing the global infrastructure deficit.

Although addressing the global infrastructure gap is the main objective of the EU's Global Gateway, this initiative has been widely interpreted as the EU's response towards China's connectivity drive. The main argument behind this interpretation is that this EU connectivity initiative is founded on democratic values and equal partnerships. Although Europe has a long-standing relationship with China since both are each other's biggest trading partner and are also bound by a comprehensive strategic partnership, there is a growing perception in Europe that the challenges and opportunities China offers to Europe have changed over time. In response to

²⁶ Simone Tagliapietra, "The Global Gateway: a real step towards a stronger Europe in the world," Brugel, accessed December 20, 2023, <https://www.bruegel.org/blog-post/global-gateway-real-step-towards-stronger-europe-world>.

²⁷ Josep Borell, "The Global Gateway, a brand to boost European action worldwide," European Union External Action, last modified December 15, 2022, https://www.ecas.europa.eu/ecas/global-gateway-brand-boost-european%C2%A0action-worldwide_en.

Europe's evolving perception, the new EU strategy on China, introduced in 2016,²⁸ provided the basis of the EU's changed policy of a more realistic, assertive and multi-faceted approach. In this regard, a whole-of-EU approach was also needed for implementing the tools and modalities of the EU engagement with China. Thus, it is observed that the European Commission, in 2019, published the EU-China strategic outlook in which China has been described as "a partner, a competitor and a systemic rival".²⁹ In light of this strategic outlook, the EU has revised its opinion of China, acknowledging China's position from "developing country" to "key global actor" and "leading technological power". The EU believes that as China expands its global influence, particularly in Europe, it must also reinforce its commitment to maintain the rules-based international order and its commitment to openness, non-discrimination, and mutual respect. Moreover, in the area of connectivity, the EU highlighted some of the gaps in China's connectivity strategy which must be addressed as the country moves on with its implementation. To clarify the EU's perception of rules-based and transparent engagement particularly in the connectivity domain, it is notable that the EU also engaged itself with China through the EU-China connectivity platform in 2015,³⁰ where it was agreed to work for transparency, reciprocity and making a level playing field for businesses in the area of transport infrastructure development. Later, it was observed that the EU launched a connectivity strategy for Asia in 2018 to fulfil its objective of a rules-based, sustainable and comprehensive connectivity process. Lastly, the EU came with the recently unveiled Global Gateway which also aims to promote democratic values and norms, transparency and sustainability. This initiative proves the EU's interest in maintaining a rules-based order in the connectivity domain that mainly aligns with the Western logic of connectivity.

However, apart from upholding the Western logic of connectivity in the name of democratic values, norms and transparency, the EU's Global Gateway and other Western connectivity strategies are proving the importance of connectivity in the present world politics. It demonstrates how vitally significant these connectivity initiatives are in the current context of world politics, where they are seen as the

²⁸ "Elements for a new EU strategy on China," *JOIN*, 2016, accessed November 22, 2023, https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/joint_communication_to_the_european_parliament_and_the_council_elements_for_a_new_eu_strategy_on_china.pdf; "EU Strategy on China," Council Conclusions of the European Union, last modified July 18, 2016, <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-11252-2016-INIT/en/pdf>.

²⁹ "EU-China: A strategic outlook," European Commission and HR/VP contribution to the European Council, accessed November 25, 2023, <https://commission.europa.eu/system/files/2019-03/communication-eu-china-a-strategic-outlook.pdf>.

³⁰ "EU-China connectivity platform," European Commission, accessed November 18, 2023, https://transport.ec.europa.eu/transport-themes/international-relations/eu-china-connectivity-platform_en.

latest means of showcasing power and exerting influence.³¹ More precisely in the Indo-Pacific region, using connectivity initiatives as a tool for securing power balance along with maintaining stability of the region is becoming a priority area for the major powers.³² In the case of the EU's Global Gateway, the importance of maintaining a rules-based order and unimpeded trade flows in the Indo-Pacific region was one of the reasons behind the EU's unveiling of its own connectivity strategy. It is pointed out that the Chinese connectivity strategy has impacts on the competition for trade, investments and market access in the Indo-Pacific region.³³ BRI—which is the centrepiece of Chinese connectivity strategy, is hampering European trade and business in the Indo-Pacific through intense competition and limiting access to markets. It is also argued that lack of transparency in bidding and procurement procedures creates such a complicated scenario that even when European companies show interest in participating in BRI projects, they are frequently not able to bid for contracts. There are several larger European companies that have participated in BRI projects, but mostly at subcontractor levels. Therefore, realising that China's connectivity strategy could affect the political, economic, and security of Eurasia and Europe's trade and energy routes in the Indo-Pacific, the EU has unveiled its own recipe for connectivity as a means of safeguarding its economic and security interests in the region.³⁴ As defined by scholars, this initiative could offer an integrated and holistic approach on how the EU's economic diplomacy should operate in an era of great power rivalry,³⁵ therefore, it can be said that the Global Gateway initiative is going to be a different kind of approach where the EU can prove itself as a reliable and trusted partner in addressing the world's infrastructure gap.³⁶ Also, it is expected that this initiative can create strong and sustainable links, not dependencies—between Europe and the world, by bringing more transparent investment and safeguarding countries from falling into the debt trap³⁷ in the current context of competing connectivity strategies where developing countries are vulnerable to becoming victims of such competing strategies.

³¹ Interview with an Academician from the Department of International Relations, University of Dhaka, May 2023.

³² Interview with an Academician from South Asian Institute for Policy and Governance (SIPG), North South University, June 2023.

³³ Garima Mohan, "Europe's response to the Belt and Road Initiative," German Marshall Fund of the United States, accessed November 26, 2023, <https://www.gmfus.org/news/europes-response-belt-and-road-initiative>.

³⁴ Sial and Sol, "The Emperor's new clothes."

³⁵ Raquel Jorge Ricart and Miguel Otero Iglesias, "The Global Gateway: It's not the money, it's strategy," Elcano Royal Institute, accessed December 05, 2023, <https://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/en/commentaries/the-global-gateway-its-not-the-money-its-the-strategy/>.

³⁶ "Statement by President Von der Leyen on the Global Gateway," European Commission, last modified December 01, 2021, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/statement_21_6522.

³⁷ SEIBT, "With its Global Gateway."

3. Prospects for Bangladesh

Based on the above discussion, it can be said that developing countries are considered to be benefitted from the Global Gateway initiative, as it is committed to uphold six principles with the aim of building partnerships rather than dependence. These principles include democratic ideals and high standards, strong governance and transparency, equal partnerships, green and clean collaboration, securing a global supply chain, and stimulating private sector investment.³⁸ This initiative is also in line with the UN Sustainable Development Goals 2030 and the pledges made by the leaders of the G7 nations in regards to values-driven and transparent connectivity efforts. Thus, with the aim of building resilient connections with the world, the Global Gateway initiative is supposed to contribute in key areas such as digital connectivity, climate and energy, transport, health, and education. Developing countries are supposed to get benefits from the Global Gateway projects by improving digital connections, sustainable clean energy, smarter climate resilience, inclusive and safe transport networks, pharmaceutical supply chains for better healthcare, and quality education. Bangladesh can also explore opportunities in this initiative since Bangladesh's position regarding joining any kind of development initiative is clear that it will engage in such initiative which offers development opportunities.³⁹ In this regard, it is expected that the initiative's objective of investing in the key priority areas can bring new possibilities for partnerships between the EU and Bangladesh.⁴⁰ Due to Bangladesh's continued economic growth and rising global stature,⁴¹ the EU is prioritising deepening collaboration with Bangladesh in the areas such as climate change, renewable energy, health, and education.⁴² In this regard, the Global Gateway initiative can serve as an important means of getting major European investment in key sectors of Bangladesh.

3.1 Digital Connectivity

In the realm of digital connectivity, the EU intends to channel its funding through the Global Gateway initiative towards the facilitation of a digital transformation that is compatible with European values and norms. This is supposed to

³⁸ "Global Gateway," European Commission.

³⁹ Interview with Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA), Bangladesh officials in June 2023.

⁴⁰ "EU's new Global Gateway strategy offers new opportunities for Bangladesh-EU ties: Envoys," *The Business Standard*, May 09, 2022.

⁴¹ Porimol Palma, "50 years of Bangladesh-EU ties: EU plans to invest big in Bangladesh," *The Daily Star*, May 09, 2023.

⁴² Palma, "50 years of Bangladesh-EU ties."

happen through deploying digital networks and infrastructures among the EU and its partner countries. Digital infrastructures such as submarine and terrestrial fibre-optic cables, space-based secure communication systems and cloud and data infrastructure will be in focus in this regard. Having environment related concerns in consideration, it is also aimed to use ocean monitoring sensors in the underwater cables and also establish green data centres. It is informed that the EU will invest in these key digital infrastructures by following the “EU toolbox for the cyber security on 5G networks”. This toolbox was published in 2020 with the aim of applying restrictive measures as well as supporting actions to address risks.⁴³ Prior to this, the Council of the EU also adopted the draft council framework for a joint EU Diplomatic Response to Malicious Cyber Activities, which is also known as the “Cyber Diplomacy Toolbox” in 2017.⁴⁴ Moreover, to guarantee privacy and data security, fair and open digital markets, and the right to online anonymity, the EU will provide “digital economy packages” that combine infrastructural investments with country-level assistance.⁴⁵ Additionally, it is also reported that the EU will expand its “Digital for Development (D4D) hub” coverage, which is a new platform for global digital cooperation with the EU.⁴⁶ Thus, it can be expected that the EU may implement a holistic approach to a sustainable and prosperous digital future through the proposed policies and actions under the Global Gateway.

Bangladesh, being an important development partner of the EU, can explore potentials in the area of digital connectivity. Bangladesh’s journey from ‘Digital Bangladesh’ to ‘Smart Bangladesh’ by 2041 requires the implementation of one of the core commitments of using digital means for promoting harmonised and sustainable digitalisation so that society as a whole can benefit from it.⁴⁷ In this regard, collaboration with any regional or global digital connectivity platform can be considered as extra leverage for Bangladesh.⁴⁸ Currently, Bangladesh and the EU

⁴³ “Commission announces next steps on cybersecurity of 5G networks in complement to latest progress report by Member States,” European Commission, last modified June 15, 2023, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_23_3309.

⁴⁴ “The Cyber Diplomacy Toolbox,” accessed November 22, 2023, <https://www.cyber-diplomacy-toolbox.com/#:~:text=The%20toolbox%20includes%20diplomatic%20%22restrictive,against%20member%20states%20in%20cyberspace.>

⁴⁵ “Europe’s Digital Decade: Digital Targets for 2030,” European Commission, accessed November 25, 2023, https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/priorities-2019-2024/europe-fit-digital-age/europes-digital-decade-digital-targets-2030_en.

⁴⁶ “D4D Hub,” accessed November 27, 2023, <https://d4dhub.eu/>.

⁴⁷ Zunaid Ahmed Polok, “Digital Bangladesh: A Story of Transformation, Resilience and Sustainability,” *The Daily Star*, January 16, 2023.

⁴⁸ Interview with a Member of the National Committee of Cyber Security Awareness, Bangladesh (NCCA, B) in July 2023.

signed a cooperation package of €10 million under the Global Gateway initiative for boosting effective digital governance in Bangladesh. The selected project for this cooperation programme is titled, “Effective Governance: accelerating e-government and digital public services in Bangladesh”. The implementation of this project is expected to start in 2024.⁴⁹ Nevertheless, under the auspices of Global Gateway’s investment priority in digital transformation, the EU delegation to Bangladesh is pursuing more partnership opportunities with relevant government offices and other stakeholders for designing blending a financial mechanism (grant and concessional loan) for achieving the last mile digital connectivity.⁵⁰

3.2 *Climate and Sustainable Energy*

The Global Gateway is focusing on the climate and sustainable energy, which is another key priority area of this initiative. In the case of climate, the EU placed this issue a top priority after realising the fact that low and middle-income nations are disproportionately hit by the effects of climate change and biodiversity loss. Hence, the EU aims to invest in both mitigation and climate resilience through its Global Gateway initiative. Bangladesh can also explore potential in advanced technology transfer and data sharing in the area of mitigation and climate risk management.⁵¹ Currently, the EU Delegation to Bangladesh is carrying out a project titled “Finance safety retrofits and environmental upgrades in the country’s ready-made garments sector by providing soft loans to the Readymade Garments (RMG) firms for improving their environmental standards.”⁵²

Regarding sustainable energy, the EU is keen on working with partner countries to facilitate the energy transition and diversify sources of clean energy. In order to accomplish this goal, the EU intends to encourage energy efficiency, renewable energy, renewable hydrogen, and smart grids as well as support regional efforts to integrate their energy systems. Under the auspices of the Global Gateway programme, Bangladesh is going to be one of a few selected countries to have a flagship project focused on renewable energy. In the first Global Gateway forum, Bangladesh and the EU signed a €400 million agreement for renewable energy projects to contribute to a sustainable green transition of Bangladesh’s power sector

⁴⁹ Interview with a Representative from the Delegation of the European Union to Bangladesh, June 2023.

⁵⁰ Interview with a Representative from the Delegation of the European Union to Bangladesh.

⁵¹ Interview with an Academician from the Department of Geography and Environment, University of Dhaka, June 2023.

⁵² Interview with a Representative from the Delegation of the European Union to Bangladesh.

and achieve the country's climate mitigation targets.⁵³ As a preliminary task, the EU in collaboration with the Power Division, Ministry of Power Energy and Mineral Resources conducted a study on "Options for Energy Storage in Bangladesh". This study was conducted within the framework of the Team Europe approach as a part of the Global Gateway initiative. The primary goals of that study were to (i) check existing energy storage technologies and their applicability to the green energy transition in Bangladesh; (ii) assess the state of the grid and the potential role of energy storage in supplementary services; (iii) pinpoint potential sites for energy storage solutions, taking into account varying degrees of renewable energy integration; and (iv) outline the essential steps for an energy storage roadmap for Bangladesh.⁵⁴ Based on that study, the strategic importance of energy storage in Bangladesh's sustainable energy goal was revealed. According to the study's findings, the EU handed over the "energy storage roadmap" to the government of Bangladesh.⁵⁵ It is also reported that the EU has developed an all-inclusive funding package to facilitate Bangladesh's transition to the renewable energy sources. This package will include a joint EU-Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) technical assistance and an EU investment grant which will be combined with European Investment Bank's soft loan for developing a grid scale renewable energy power generation in Bangladesh.⁵⁶ Thus, this development so far indicates Bangladesh's potential in Global Gateway initiative's green energy projects.

3.3 *Transport*

In its third priority area which is the transport sector, the Global Gateway initiative aims to boost investments for creating sustainable, resilient, inclusive and safe transport connectivity. In this regard, the EU aspires to construct transport infrastructure projects that aid partner countries in achieving sustainable development, lowering their greenhouse gas emissions, and expanding their supply chains. By doing so, the EU also aims to build its position as the world's transportation hub. In this context, it is argued that through this initiative, the EU is attempting to become a global player in infrastructure by making its technical, regulatory, environmental and social standards in the infrastructure sector as an international point of reference.⁵⁷

⁵³ "Global Gateway: EU and Bangladesh sign €400 million," European Commission.

⁵⁴ Andy Colthorpe, "EU-funded study highlights benefit of battery storage for Bangladesh," Energy Storage News, June 08, 2023, <https://www.energy-storage.news/eu-funded-study-highlights-benefits-of-battery-storage-for-bangladesh/>.

⁵⁵ "EU Presents Roadmap for Energy Storage in Bangladesh," *The Financial Express*, June 02, 2023.

⁵⁶ Interview with a Representative from the Delegation of the European Union to Bangladesh.

⁵⁷ Alessandro Gili, "Infrastructure: The EU's Global Gateway put to the test," The Chicago Council on Global Affairs, accessed December 22, 2023, https://globalaffairs.org/sites/default/files/2023-03/CIG%20Essay_EU%20Global%20Gateway_Alessandro%20Gili.pdf.

Among Bangladesh’s immediate neighbours, India has already tagged with the Global Gateway initiative to explore potentials in the area of enhancing transport connectivity. It is notable that India signed the “EU-India connectivity partnership” in 2021 during the 15th India-EU Summit with the objective of promoting a transparent, viable, inclusive, sustainable, comprehensive, and rules-based approach to connectivity.⁵⁸ Both the EU and India have reached an agreement to collaborate on the Global Gateway initiative as part of their connectivity partnership.⁵⁹ In this regard, India and the EU decided to focus on three Global Gateway priorities—digital connectivity, climate and energy connectivity, and transport connectivity.⁶⁰ In the area of transport connectivity, both the EU and India agreed to prioritise enhancing connectivity among India’s eastern and north-eastern states (Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Tripura, and Sikkim) and its immediate neighbours (Bangladesh, Bhutan, and Nepal).⁶¹ Therefore, it can be argued that, the EU intends to play a unique role in improving connectivity between India’s north-eastern region and its near neighbours by making investments under the aegis of the Global Gateway initiative. Since Bangladesh is one of the closest neighbours of India’s and is located in the immediate neighbourhood of India’s north-eastern region, it is, therefore, reasonable to anticipate that this sub-region can see development in the Bangladesh-Bhutan-India-Nepal Motor Vehicles Agreement (BBIN-MVA) as well. Bangladesh has prospects for reaping the benefits of the improved transport connectivity in this sub-region.⁶²

3.4 *Healthcare*

As a fourth priority, the Global Gateway aspires to prioritise the safety of supply chains and the advancement of domestic manufacturing in the area of healthcare. It is reported that the EU is going to follow its Health Emergency Preparedness and Response (HERA) for implementing its objectives in the Global Gateway’s healthcare sector.⁶³ In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, HERA was established, and since

⁵⁸ Ankita Dutta, “India-EU 27 Leaders’ Summit 2021: Key Outcomes,” Indian Council of World Affairs, last modified May 25, 2021, https://icwa.in/show_content.php?lang=1&level=3&ls_id=6060&lid=4163.

⁵⁹ “India-EU Connectivity Partnership,” Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, last modified May 08, 2021, https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/33854/IndiaEU_Connectivity_Partnership.

⁶⁰ “India-EU Connectivity Partnership,” Ministry of External Affairs.

⁶¹ Rahul Kumar, “EU looks for a role in connecting north-east with Nepal, Bhutan and Bangladesh,” India Narrative, accessed May 31, 2023, <https://www.indianarrative.com/world-news/eu-looks-for-a-role-in-connecting-north-east-with-nepal-bhutan-and-bangladesh-144292.html>.

⁶² Interview with a Research Director of BISS, September, 2023.

⁶³ Simone Tagliapietra, “The Global Gateway: An Overview,” The Wilson Centre, accessed December 20, 2023, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/global-gateway-overview>.

then, it has become an integral part of European Healthcare.⁶⁴ The EU is currently implementing HERA to address the gap in the EU's health emergency response and preparedness, making it the forefront policy towards public health after its effective implementation during the COVID-19 pandemic. Now, it is reported that the EU will follow HERA policy through Global Gateway's healthcare area for preventing health emergencies in the developing countries.⁶⁵ Hence, through HERA, the EU aims to establish a strong partnership with global partners in order to support international collaboration and assistance for medical countermeasures to meet health emergencies. Moreover, it is the EU's objective to develop vaccine manufacturing capacities in the developing countries. In this regard, it is argued that through the Global Gateway initiative, the EU can facilitate the domestic production of medicine and medical technologies as well as integrate the existing fragmented markets of vaccines. Thus, it can be anticipated that the EU can work closely with global partners through HERA under its Global Gateway initiative to improve global surveillance, make international cooperation and support for medical countermeasures easier, and help low and middle-income countries in building expertise and improve their manufacturing and distribution capabilities.⁶⁶ It is demonstrated that Bangladesh's national healthcare services are still underdeveloped due to poor administrative management such as a lack of proper health workforce planning, weak health services monitoring and accountability, and inconsistent national health policies.⁶⁷ In addition, previous health sector reforms had limited influence on Bangladesh's health system.⁶⁸ Therefore, it is necessary for Bangladesh to build a resilient health system and in this regard, the EU's HERA model can serve as a guiding example for developing countries like Bangladesh.⁶⁹

3.5 Education

The education sector is the fifth priority area of the Global Gateway. In this area, the EU intends to increase its efforts to improve education, particularly through the use of technology, and work with its partners for increasing their collaboration in the areas of research and innovation. In this regard, the EU is committed to increase

⁶⁴ "Health Emergency Preparedness and Response (HERA)," European Commission, accessed December 27, 2023, https://health.ec.europa.eu/health-emergency-preparedness-and-response-hera/overview_en.

⁶⁵ "Health Emergency Preparedness and Response (HERA)," European Commission.

⁶⁶ "Health Emergency Preparedness and Response (HERA)," European Commission.

⁶⁷ Md. Abu Shahen, Md. Rafiqul Islam and Razu Ahmed, "Challenges for Healthcare Services in Bangladesh: An Overview," *IOSR Journal of Nursing and Health Science* 9, no. 1 (2020): 13–24.

⁶⁸ Treasure Udechukwu et al., "The impact of health sector reforms on health system in Bangladesh: A scoping review," *European Journal of Public Health* 31, no. 3 (October 2021).

⁶⁹ Interview with an Academician from the Institute of Health Economics, University of Dhaka, July 2023.

student and faculty mobility and bolstering higher education institutions and mutual learning through exchange programmes in education, training, youth, and sports. Existing initiatives like Erasmus+ and Talent Partnerships make it easier for young professionals and trainees from partner countries to travel to Europe for work and training. The EU hopes to utilise the valuable knowledge it has gained through its educational and scientific exchange programmes in reinforcing global cooperation in the field of education and research. Recently, it is reflected in the EU’s strategy on international cooperation on research and innovation⁷⁰ that the EU is going to focus on a “global approach”⁷¹, through which it can enhance scientific advancement and address global concerns. For implementing this latest strategy, the EU has incorporated the Horizon Europe initiative, which will provide avenues for international, inter-sectoral, and multidisciplinary collaboration and promote interaction among countries with similar values and technological competence. Additionally, the EU seeks to prioritise lifelong education, with an emphasis on empowering women and girls. Like other developing countries, Bangladesh can explore prospects in the education sector under the Global Gateway initiative as this area is going to offer impressive opportunities. It is notable that, after the COVID-19 pandemic, there were direct and indirect impacts on the education status of the vulnerable communities in Bangladesh.⁷² In this regard, students from Bangladesh’s ethnic minorities and other marginalised groups may also get benefit from the EU’s cooperation activities in the education and research sectors.⁷³ In the recently concluded Global Gateway Forum, the EU signed a cooperation agreement of investing €30 million in Bangladesh’s education sector. This investment is going to be implemented through the project, titled “Human capital development programme for Bangladesh”.⁷⁴

Apart from these five key priority areas, Bangladesh is going to receive EU investment for few other notable projects, which will be channelled through the Global Gateway initiative. For the promotion of decent work, the EU will be investing €10 million for the project, titled “Advancing Decent Work in Bangladesh”. A sum of €10 million has been allocated for the project, named “Scaling up green construction,”

⁷⁰ “EU Research and Innovation Strategy 2020–2024,” European Commission, accessed December 20, 2023, https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/strategy/strategy-2020-2024_en.

⁷¹ “Global approach to research and innovation,” European Commission, accessed December 20, 2023, https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/strategy/strategy-2020-2024/europe-world/international-cooperation/global-approach-research-and-innovation_en.

⁷² Debapriya Bhattacharya et al., *New realities in the education sector confronting the disadvantaged communities* (Dhaka: Citizen’s Platform for SDGs, Bangladesh, 2023).

⁷³ Interview with an Academician from the Institute of Education and Research, University of Dhaka, July 2023.

⁷⁴ “Global Gateway: EU and Bangladesh sign €400 million,” European Commission.

in order to facilitate the growth of environment friendly building practices. An additional €10 million will be invested by the EU in the project, titled “Strengthening prevention and response to gender-based violence (GBV) at the public and workplace in Bangladesh” with the purpose of preventing gender-based violence. Hence, the effective implementation of the selected projects for Bangladesh under the Global Gateway may bring diverse possibilities that might propel Bangladesh further on its path towards prosperity.

4. Possible Challenges

While the objective of the Global Gateway initiative appears to be holistic and its focus areas seem crucial to advancing global prosperity and development, the initiative is not without flaws. Being the latest connectivity initiative, which meets all the requirements of an all-inclusive policy initiative, has now been subjected to a wave of criticism in many crucial aspects. These criticisms are shedding light on the possible challenges and difficulties of this initiative which may have negative impacts on the partner countries that can prevent them from attaining the full potential of this latest connectivity endeavour.

The tendency of contemporising the EU in global politics can be considered as a challenge. There is a widespread argument among experts that the primary purpose of the flagship connectivity programme of the EU, known as the Global Gateway, is to contemporise the EU in the context of contemporary geopolitics.⁷⁵ It is posited that the objective of this initiative is to uplift the image of the EU across the world. In this regard, it is widely anticipated that this EU connectivity initiative is simply to make the EU’s response towards the contemporary geopolitics of connectivity.⁷⁶ In relation to this anticipation, it is also argued that the purpose of the Global Gateway initiative is primarily associated with its geostrategic implications, rather than concentrating more on its implications for the EU’s development policy.⁷⁷ Moreover, it is also pointed out that this initiative is mostly built on existing initiatives of the

⁷⁵ Andrea Moreschi, “The EU Global Gateway: The narrow path between relevance and invisibility,” Observer Research Foundation, accessed December 21, 2023, <https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/the-eu-global-gateway/>.

⁷⁶ San Bilal et al., “The EU’s Global Gateway: Groundbreaking Initiative or Smart Rebranding?” Centre for Africa-Europe Relations, December 06, 2021, <https://ecdpm.org/work/the-eus-global-gateway-groundbreaking-initiative-or-smart-rebranding>.

⁷⁷ Mark Furness and Niels Keijzer, “Europe’s Global Gateway: A new geostrategic framework for development policy,” *Briefing Paper 1/2022*, German Development Institute, accessed December 12, 2023, https://www.idos-research.de/uploads/media/BP_1.2022.pdf.

EU including its flagship Team Europe approach.⁷⁸ It is reported that the €300 billion which have been allotted to this initiative are only an assembling of current financial promises made from the budget for the years 2021–2027.⁷⁹ Such focus on generating large-scale investment in the connectivity spectrum is also supposed to give a higher profile to the EU across the world. In addition, some of the investments made by the EU member states will also be rebranded under this Global Gateway banner. The sudden proliferation of such EU programmes under this Global Gateway initiative has created a certain amount of doubt. For that reason, this situation may give an unfavourable impression about the sustainability of this connectivity initiative which may discourage the developing countries from engaging with this initiative in the long run. In this regard, although Bangladesh is enjoying a cordial relation with the EU and hoping to get engaged with Global Gateways’ priority areas more actively, however, the doubt related to contemporising the EU rather than emphasising development may act as a challenge for Bangladesh since attaining development through joining development initiative will be the major reason if Bangladesh engages more under all five areas of the Global Gateway.

Ambiguity and lack of coherence can create another challenge for the existing and aspiring partners of the Global Gateway initiative. It is already conveyed that the initiative will include the Team Europe approach. However, the inclusion of this approach in the governance structure of the Global Gateway initiative received much criticism as well. The Team Europe approach is a multi-level and decentralised approach which was developed as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic.⁸⁰ This approach mainly came up as a result of initial coordination challenges and disagreements that emerged in the process of dealing with the adverse situation caused by the COVID-19 outbreak. Therefore, from the operational point of view, it is suggested that the Team Europe concept has been inadequately incorporated into the long-term strategy of the EU. In addition to this, a significant amount of weight is given to the member states’ opinions and approval for each individual proposal. As a result, it is anticipated that the execution of Global Gateway projects may face difficulties if it follows the ambiguous and less coherent approach used

⁷⁸ Chloe Teevan et al., “The Global Gateway: A recipe for EU Geopolitical Relevance?” *Discussion paper 323*, Centre for Africa-Europe Relations, accessed December 18, 2023, <https://ecdpm.org/application/files/4616/5779/4869/Global-Gateway-recipe-EU-geopolitical-relevance-ECDPM-Discussion-Paper-323-2022.pdf>.

⁷⁹ Moreschi, “The EU Global Gateway.”

⁸⁰ Niels Keijzer et al., “The rise of the Team Europe approach in EU development cooperation: assessing a moving target,” German Development Institute, accessed December 07, 2023, https://www.idos-research.de/uploads/media/DP_22.2021.pdf.

by Team Europe.⁸¹ As a result, such an ambiguous and less cohesive governance structure of the Global Gateway initiative may make this initiative less appealing to the partner countries across the world. As Bangladesh is aspiring to be one of the project recipients under the Global Gateway initiative, it may create a difficult situation for Bangladesh as well to engage meaningfully if the whole initiative suffers any disorganised governance mechanism.

The dilemma about funding may create another challenge for this initiative. The Global Gateway aspires to generate an enormous €300 billion between 2021 and 2027 in response to the world's massive connectivity investment needs. The financial breakdown of the Global Gateway is that, about €135 billion will come from the preexisting "European Fund for Sustainable Development Plus" (EFSD+), another €145 billion will come from "planned investment volumes by European financial and development finance institutions", and additional €18 billion will be made available as grants from the EU external assistance programmes. This kind of blended financing has raised concern about the long-term viability of the initiative's funding capacity. Also, the EU seeks to engage more actively with the private sector in facilitating access to finance through concessional funding and risk mitigation mechanisms. However, there is still a lack of clarity remains regarding the EU's plan to engage the European private sector in this initiative. There is still a lack of clear articulation on the procedures that the EU is supposed to use for involving the private sector and the precise role that the European private sector will play in the process of fund generation. The additional grant funding of €18 billion has also raised concerns regarding its availability.⁸² Such uncertain situation regarding funding may create challenges for developing countries like Bangladesh in attaining meaningful engagement with this initiative.

The real politics inside the EU needs to be considered as a challenge for this initiative. To make this new connectivity initiative meaningful, the member states of the EU need to come on the same board through a concerted effort for bringing both financial resources and political consensus. Some aspects need strong backing and agreement from the EU members in order to move forward, such as highlighting the EU's worth in developing soft infrastructure and the adoption of a more policy-driven and geopolitical approach to the EU investment. To accomplish such objectives, unity among the member states of the EU is essential. However, in reality, the level of

⁸¹ Moreschi, "The EU Global Gateway."

⁸² Mikaela Gavas and Samuel Pleek, "The EU's Global Gateway initiative is not a Groundbreaking Plan for Domination in Global Infrastructure," Centre for Global Development, last modified December 06, 2021, <https://www.cgdev.org/blog/eus-global-gateway-not-groundbreaking-plan-domination-global-infrastructure>.

ownership varies across member states. Certain member states can be sceptical of the efficacy of any given project. Some members can be less eager to put any additional amount of their own resources for any specific project.⁸³ There is always a possibility that members would question the usefulness of a given initiative. Since the Global Gateway initiative aims to represent a united approach of the EU member states for addressing world connectivity deficits, uniting all the members to implement all the proposed projects under the Global Gateway initiative by generating all the proposed funding seems a challenge for the EU. In this regard, countries like Bangladesh may find it as a challenge while engaging with such kind of connectivity initiative.

Then, the consequences of the Russia-Ukraine War can create challenges for this initiative. Although the EU launched its Global Gateway initiative in 2021, no projects were announced until 2023. It is argued that the reason behind the slow progress of this connectivity initiative was the outbreak of the Russia-Ukraine War.⁸⁴ As an immediate consequence, the EU had to suffer from increased fuel prices. The situation got worsened when Russia decided to halt gas exports to some of the EU member states and this situation raised severe concerns related to the region's energy supply. Therefore, the ongoing war between Russia and Ukraine is, without a doubt, a historical turning point for the energy and security policies of the EU. Long-standing energy policy precepts were swiftly reversed as a direct result of that unprecedented war, and the EU is being forced to bear the price of that sudden overhaul. However, to overcome the crisis, the EU took the matter carefully to establish itself capable to reduce dependency on Russian energy. Despite the fact that the EU has been working to lessen its vulnerability, the EU still needs to make additional progress in order to become capable. Therefore, the consequences of the Russia-Ukraine War may have some effects on the EU which can create challenges in implementing the Global Gateway initiative.

Finally, Bangladesh's limitation in bargaining prowess when it comes to obtaining investment might be seen as a particular challenge. After the first Global Gateway Forum, it is seen that Bangladesh mainly received major investment in renewable energy. However, a comparatively small number of investments has also been announced in two other sectors, namely in education and digital connectivity. The rest two areas, namely the healthcare and the transport, however, received no declared investments under the Global Gateway. This demonstrates the country's limited capability of securing essential investments from this type of global initiative.

⁸³ Teevan et al., "The Global Gateway."

⁸⁴ Rizzi and Varvelli, "Opening the Global Gateway."

5. Ways to Achieve Positive Outcomes for Bangladesh

Being a new connectivity endeavour, the Global Gateway initiative has potential downsides which can hamper Bangladesh's prospects in the five key areas of this connectivity initiative. However, as Bangladesh is not a part of its governing system, therefore, the country cannot directly contribute in addressing challenges related to this connectivity initiative. However, the country can follow some strategies to better understand this new initiative as well as avoid any potential challenges while partnering with this initiative in the coming days.

First, before partnering or fully joining any global initiative, there is a need to assess that initiative thoroughly.⁸⁵ Since the Global Gateway initiative is comparatively new, a thorough evaluation of this initiative is important to understand the potential drawbacks and prospects for Bangladesh. As the initiative prioritises five different domains, a preliminary evaluation can be made according to each of these domains. To do so, the relevant ministries and research institutes can team up and contribute in developing such prior assessment reports. It is seen that the European Delegation in Bangladesh in collaboration with the Power Division, Ministry of Power Energy and Mineral Resources has conducted a feasibility study for energy storage in Bangladesh as a part of the Global Gateway initiative in the area of energy. However, there is no further study or assessment that has been conducted by the Ministry itself or any research institute to evaluate the energy area of the Global Gateway initiative in Bangladesh's context. Thus, instead of fully relying on others' assessment reports, it is important to conduct the country's own assessment to evaluate a global initiative critically before getting involved with it in any significant way.

Second, there is a need to explore the potential for becoming a part of the production end of the process as well. For example, in the case of the Bangladeshi Information Technology (IT) sector, the current IT market is valued about US\$1 billion and demonstrated one of the highest growing markets. This development indicates a huge untapped potential in this sector. The human resources in the Bangladeshi IT sector became so capable that is now serving international and domestic clients with goodwill. In this regard, when any global initiative offers digital connectivity packages, Bangladesh needs to assess those offerings and explore opportunities to become a part of the production (e.g., software development and other IT application development) instead of simply being an end user.⁸⁶

⁸⁵ Interview with an Academician from Department of International Relations, University of Dhaka.

⁸⁶ Interview with a Member of the National Committee of Cyber Security Awareness, Bangladesh (NCCA, B).

Third, in the healthcare sector, Bangladesh can explore opportunities to represent the global South in manufacturing medicines and vaccines. The country is developing skilled human resources in this sector and now, it is important to conduct a proper assessment of the Global Gateway initiative's healthcare sector to understand how it will engage with developing countries in manufacturing medicines and vaccines. Most importantly, there is a need to identify potential ways under this new initiative to engage Bangladeshi pharmacists and vaccinologists to represent Bangladeshi knowledge and expertise. Bangladesh is also aspiring to produce vaccines as it is seen that earlier during the COVID-19 upsurge, Bangladeshi pharmaceutical known as Globe Pharma claimed to invent a vaccine named "Bangavax".⁸⁷ Also, Bangladesh is going to have its first vaccine plant since an agreement was signed between a US drug company and a Bangladeshi drug company. In this context, Bangladesh can explore opportunities to have European investment in Bangladesh for establishing a vaccine plant.⁸⁸ These kinds of actions can improve Bangladesh's position in the field of global vaccine production.⁸⁹

Fourth, Bangladesh needs to explore new avenues to reap notable outcomes from the Bangladesh-EU relationships. In this regard, engaging with the Global Gateway initiative may offer potential ground for furthering bilateral relations. Therefore, from a diplomatic point of view, this connectivity initiative needs to be assessed so that Bangladesh could use this initiative as a platform for maintaining a trusted partnership with all the European partners.⁹⁰ Also, this connectivity initiative has the potential to offer prospects beyond the trade, thus, there is a need to identify common ground for engaging with this initiative.

Finally, focusing on developing soft infrastructure is the latest concept of connectivity endeavours. In this regard, the Global Gateway initiative is focusing on building soft infrastructure such as prioritising health, education, energy, and climate. Thus, Bangladesh needs to evaluate its own capability and loopholes for furthering engagement with the EU beyond trade relations and develop strong collaboration in these new areas.

⁸⁷ "Bangladeshi Firm Globe Biotech in race to develop Covid-19 vaccine," *The Financial Express*, July 03, 2020.

⁸⁸ "MoU signed with US company to set up first ever vaccine producing plant in country," *The Business Standard*, June 21, 2023.

⁸⁹ Interview with an Academician from the Institute of Health Economics, University of Dhaka.

⁹⁰ Interview with an Academician from SIPG, NSU.

6. Concluding Remarks

Based on democratic values and equal partnerships, the EU's Global Gateway initiative is considered to be the latest connectivity endeavour among all other Western connectivity plans. The rise of this type of connectivity project also demonstrates how critically important such projects are for projecting power in the current context of geopolitics. By pointing out the loopholes of the Chinese way of connectivity, the EU's Global Gateway initiative, representing the Western logic of connectivity, is trying to portray its capability to be a different kind of approach. With such an objective, the EU is supposed to prove itself as a reliable and trusted partner in addressing the world's infrastructure gap through creating strong and sustainable links between Europe and the world. By bringing more transparent investment, the EU is supposed to protect countries from debt distress as well. Hence, the EU is trying to demonstrate its Global Gateway initiative as a sustainable and transparent connectivity initiative in the current era of competing connectivity strategies which will uplift partner countries' interests and protect them from dependencies.

After assessing the key priority areas of the Global Gateway initiative, it can be said that Bangladesh—being a developing country can also explore prospects. Based on the data from both primary and secondary sources, it is seen that Bangladesh can be benefitted from the Global Gateway projects through better digital connections, sustainable clean energy, smarter efforts for resilient climate, inclusive and safe transport network, and advanced supply chain in the pharmaceutical sector for better healthcare and quality education. However, there are certain challenges associated with this initiative, despite the fact that this initiative is comprehensive and that its priority areas seem vital to improving global development. These challenges are crucial for Bangladesh as these drawbacks can create obstacles for attaining the full prospects of this initiative. However, several suggestions are given in the paper for Bangladesh which can be followed for attaining the full benefits of this initiative. From Bangladesh's point of view, there is a need to conduct a thorough evaluation of this initiative for understanding the probable drawbacks and prospects. Besides, the capability of Bangladeshi human resources in areas such as digital, healthcare and climate, etc. needs to be well-represented in the global platform. In this regard, Bangladesh can explore opportunities to be visibly represented in any such kind of global platform not only as an end user but also as a strong participant in the production side.