



# INTERNATIONAL CAMPAIGN FOR TIBET

## Chinese growing influence in the EU: Implications for EU policy, security and human rights

### Statement by the International Campaign for Tibet Vincent Metten, EU Policy Director

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to thank the Italian Federation for Human Rights, the World Uyghur Congress and Members of the European Parliament for organizing this timely event and for inviting ICT.

The influence strategies and operations presented in this statement have been implemented by the Chinese regime, not by China or the Chinese. What is questioned is neither a population, nor a country, but rather the practices of an authoritarian government, in particular with the rise of power of Xi Jinping in 2012.

The problem, according to historian Frank Dikötter, is that the “CCP remains, structurally, a Leninist one-party state [that tries to undermine] anything and everything opposed to it at home and abroad<sup>1</sup>.”

#### **MERICCS Report**

In February 2018, the Global Public Policy Institute and the Mercator Institute for China Studies (MERICCS) released a report called *Authoritarian Advance: Responding to China's Growing Political Influence in Europe*.<sup>2</sup> This report was for many people an eye-opener on the scope of Chinese influence in Europe, which had been neglected.<sup>3</sup>

The Chinese regime's influence in Europe is driven by two main motivations:

- First, it tries to secure regime stability at home;
- Second, Beijing aims to present its model as competitive and ultimately superior politically and economically.

Driven by these motivations, Beijing pursues three related goals:

- First, Beijing seeks to weaken Western unity, both within Europe and across the Atlantic. This can be illustrated by the platform of cooperation 17+ 1 between China and some European countries launched in 2012 which has now decreased to 14+1 with the withdrawal of the 3 Baltic countries.
- Second, the State-Party pushes hard - including at the UN level - to create a more positive global perception of China's political and economic system as a viable alternative to liberal democracies.

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<sup>1</sup> Frank Dikötter quoted by Clive Hamilton, *Silent Invasion: China's influence in Australia*, Richmond (Victoria), Hardie Grant Books, 2018, p. 276.

<sup>2</sup> [https://merics.org/sites/default/files/2020-04/GPPI\\_MERICCS\\_Authoritarian\\_Advance\\_2018\\_1.pdf](https://merics.org/sites/default/files/2020-04/GPPI_MERICCS_Authoritarian_Advance_2018_1.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> The report states that: “Chinese growing political influencing efforts in Europe and the self-confident promotion of its authoritarian ideals pose a significant challenge to liberal democracy as well as Europe's values and interests.”

- Last but not least, it aims to build global support on specific issues and policy agendas. This includes fostering networks among European politicians, businesses, media, think tanks, and universities, thereby creating layers of active support for Chinese interests.

## **The European Parliament China Friendship Group**

Let me illustrate this third point. In 2019, Czech research center Sinopsis issued a study called *Repurposing democracy - The European Parliament China Friendship Cluster*.<sup>4</sup>

It showed how an informal “China friendship group” in the European Parliament effectively functioned as a proxy for CCP domestic and external propaganda: in China, the presentation of statements by its members as its former president British Nirj Deva helped engineer the perception of a global endorsement of the party-state’s rule; abroad, it conveyed support for CCP initiatives through credible voices.

Several members of this friendship group were invited in 2016 to visit Beijing and Tibet.<sup>5</sup> The invitation from the Chinese People’s Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries promised it would “cover all the relevant expenses for 5 days for the official delegation”, with a programme that offered, besides meetings with senior party and state officials, visits to tourist attractions.

In November 2020, Politico reported that the group had come under fierce scrutiny over concerns that it is too close to Beijing, and could be giving China an edge in ongoing trade talks with Brussels.<sup>6</sup> The group was then suspended at the end of 2020.<sup>7</sup> New rules following Quatargate will in principle make it more difficult for such groups to operate in the future.

## **Germany**

Recently in Germany, the President of domestic intelligence services, Thomas Haldenwang, gave a blunt assessment of the CCP’s ambitions and the threats posed by Beijing for Germany when saying: “Russia is the storm, China is the climate change”. He went on to state: “China develops wide-ranging spying and influencing activities. The political leadership is already using its economic power - which also results from intensive relationships with the German and European economy - to implement political goals”.

The prestigious think tank German Council on Foreign Relations, in a paper on interference into the 2021 German elections, concluded that classic “influence and interference operations of the Communist Party” had been established in the political arena and identified a newly established entity as one of the protagonists, tellingly led by a former Federal Minister, Hans-Peter Friedrich, for the interior and member of parliament, who at the same time held the chair of the Sino-German group in German parliament. A former Federal Minister for defence and runner-up in Federal elections, Rudolf Scharping, heads an influential consultancy and organizes conferences and business exchanges, with participation of prominent CCP officials.

## **China media inserts**

My organization, for example, has campaigned for several years against so-called CCP advertorials in French (in Le Figaro), Belgian (Le Soir) and German media (Handelsblatt, Süddeutsche Zeitung, dpa). We have raised concerns against so-called media dialogues that were only to normalize the nature of such propaganda tools such as Global Times, CGTN or

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<sup>4</sup> *Repurposing democracy - The European Parliament China Friendship Cluster*, Sinopsis, 26 November 2019, [https://sinopsis.cz/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/ep.pdf?fbclid=IwAR3fNjJQZ5oGCPI\\_Ot\\_26JtEAhV1v6sqA3K7kXyer-Sh-INEULVI\\_1z9tlc](https://sinopsis.cz/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/ep.pdf?fbclid=IwAR3fNjJQZ5oGCPI_Ot_26JtEAhV1v6sqA3K7kXyer-Sh-INEULVI_1z9tlc).

<sup>5</sup> MEPs Gai, Deva, Frunzulică, Van Orden, Theocharous, Ní Riada and Toom.

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.politico.eu/article/china-influence-european-parliament-friendship-group/>.

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.politico.eu/article/eu-china-friendship-group-suspended/>.

Xinhua. Over the years, we have been disturbed at the lack of integrity in these important European countries.

### **French Ministry of Armed Forces' report**

Perhaps one of the most detailed and comprehensive public report on Chinese regime influence abroad is the 2021 report issued by IRSEM, the research institute of the French Ministry of Armed Forces entitled "*Chinese influence operation - A machiavellian moment.*"<sup>8</sup>

This 654 pages document states that: "Beijing influence operations have been considerably hardened in recent years and its methods increasingly resemble Moscow's. The Party-State has entered a "Machiavellian moment" in the sense that Beijing now appears to believe that, as Machiavelli wrote in *The Prince*, "it is better to be feared than loved." This evolution shows a "Russification" of Chinese influence operations."

It analyses all the spectrum of Chinese influencing tools. One of them is the use of diasporas with the dual objective of controlling them – so that they do not represent a threat for the Chinese power (Beijing carries out a transnational campaign of repression which, according to the NGO Freedom House, is the "most sophisticated, global, and complete in the world") – and mobilizing them to serve its interests, including via spying activities.

In 2018, a Tibetan man who had arrived in Sweden from Nepal as a refugee in 2002 was convicted of refugee espionage and sentenced to one year and 10 months in prison. An investigation by SÄPO showed that the man had collected information about the family relationships, housing, protest participation, and travel plans of members of the Tibetan community in Sweden and neighbouring countries for China's Ministry of State Security between 2015 and 2017."<sup>9</sup>

Dawa Tsering, the President of the Tibetan community will certainly provide to you additional examples on how Beijing is putting pressure or threatening members of Tibetan communities in Europe.

Please note that Chinese leadership is trying to change the name of Tibet into "Xizang Autonomous Region."<sup>10</sup> 'Xizang' can be roughly translated in English as "western treasure house". This effort is part of a broader campaign by China to "Sinify" Tibet—meaning to make it Chinese. This is clearly intended to eliminate Tibetan as a distinct identity and give an appearance of legitimacy to China's rule over the country.

### **Conclusion**

Ladies and Gentlemen, let me conclude by saying that Chinese influence represents a major threat and danger for our societies.

Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has steadily increased its influence over European business, politics, civil society, and media to further its authoritarian aspirations. Since the 2008 global financial crisis, China has purchased stakes in a variety of EU critical infrastructures, among them airports, telecommunications networks, wind and solar farms, ports, and power grids.

In addition, China is an essential supplier of raw materials, which are vital for the EU's defence sector and for its green and digital agenda. According to China's geologists at least 85% of the PRC's lithium reserves are to be found on the Tibetan plateau, which is described as the

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<sup>8</sup> *Chinese influence operation - A machiavellian moment*, IRSEM, October 2021,

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1AhHevTIIOddtKcRaOI6pkUbZ1oXCOima/view>.

<sup>9</sup> [https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/2022-06/TransnationalRepressionReport2022\\_CaseStudy\\_Sweden\\_FINAL.pdf](https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/2022-06/TransnationalRepressionReport2022_CaseStudy_Sweden_FINAL.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> Xinjiang = new borders

largest lithium deposit in Asia.<sup>11</sup> Beijing's investments in critical infrastructure of EU member states is leading to the risk of overdependence on China, which ultimately poses a threat to national security and global democracy. CCP's influence in the EU is particularly concerning when it comes to its growing campaigns of transnational repression as well as disinformation operations.

Ultimately, the real clash is between the CCP's repressive values and practices, and the freedoms enshrined in the UN's Universal Declaration of Human Rights: the freedom of speech, assembly, religion and belief; freedom from persecution; the right to personal privacy; and equal protection under the law. The CCP rejects each of these, in words or in deeds." In order to counter this influence, Freedom House has highlighted best practices from Sweden, Germany and the UK<sup>12</sup> that could inspire other EUMS and the EU.

The EU and its Member States need to further develop a wide range of measures to counter the influence of Chinese regime in Europe and protect its citizens, including from Tibetan and Uighur origins, against threats and pressure that they are subject to.

Thank you for your attention.

Vincent Metten

### Contact details

Vincent Metten  
EU Policy Director  
International Campaign for Tibet  
11 rue de la Linière, 1060 Brussels, Belgium  
Mail: [vincent.metten@savetibet.eu](mailto:vincent.metten@savetibet.eu)  
Cell: + 32 473 990440

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<sup>11</sup> *Tibet a new frontline of 'white gold rush' in global race for renewable energy*, Turquoise Roof Briefing, October 2023, [https://turquoiseroof.org/white\\_gold\\_rush\\_in\\_tibet/](https://turquoiseroof.org/white_gold_rush_in_tibet/).

<sup>12</sup> [Sweden](#)

- The national security framework expressly recognizes the threat posed by foreign states to individuals, including members of specific diasporas, and that this threat interferes with the exercise of fundamental rights.
- The documentation of "refugee espionage" cases in the security service's annual reports increases public awareness of transnational repression as a distinct threat.
- The criminalization of gathering information about individuals, especially members of diasporas, for the intended benefit of a foreign state provides law enforcement agencies with tools to address the problem of transnational repression directly
- Official recognition that one of the groups most targeted by transnational repression, Uyghurs from China, face collective persecution allows authorities to remove the burden of demonstrating individual persecution during the asylum-seeking process. The issuance of guidance to asylum case officers on other groups that are commonly targeted by transnational repression similarly streamlines the process.

#### [Germany](#)

- Intelligence and law enforcement bodies coordinate to warn and protect targeted individuals.
- Expulsion of diplomats following incidents of transnational repression creates accountability.
- Foreign assistance requests, including for extradition and arrest, require oversight and consultation among multiple government ministries.
- The government invests resources into a migration system that grants legal protection to refugees, including political exiles.

#### [UK](#)

- The national security framework recognizes transnational state threats that include physical threats to individuals, including assassination, forced repatriation, and harassment.
- Law enforcement agencies take proactive protective measures, such as issuing warnings to people who face credible threats against their lives.
- Sanctions and other diplomatic responses create accountability following acts of transnational repression.
- Safeguards in the extradition process, including judicial oversight, help prevent refoulement.